

Internet cable operators seek new routes, alliances

as service wobbles on fibre cut financial services hardest hit

BILL OKONEDO

Following the impact of Thursday's internet service disruptions which extended beyond Nigeria to parts of West, Central and

South Africa, service providers are engaging in frantic efforts to reroute traffic through alternative channels, while moving to repair their ruptured under-sea cable systems.

This is with a view to re-

inforcing and restoring their infrastructure and going back to winning ways in service efficiency and profitability.

Thursday's incident has seen damage to multiple fibre cables on the West Coast of Africa,

including WACS, MainOne, SAT3 and ACE.

Meanwhile, sub-sea cable operators have been moving frantically to restore optimum services. One of the affected operators, Seacom, has issued

a statement indicating efforts to reroute traffic through alternative channels to alleviate congestion.

Seacom is privately owned and operated, allowing it the agility to rapidly tailor-make

and deploy new services, commercial models, and infrastructure in response to customer requirements without the red tape or hidden costs often prevalent

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...that the people may know

Edo govt, police step up effort to rescue kidnapped state PDP chair

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PUBLISHED SINCE MAY 29, 1968

VOL. 45, NO. 822

MONDAY 18TH - THURSDAY 21ST, MARCH 2024.

₦200

No hiding place for killers of military personnel in Delta

as Tinubu grants DHQ, CDS full authority to bring perpetrators to justice More condemnation trails killing

CHUKS OLUIGBO

The killers of men of the Nigerian Army in Delta State last week may be in for the worst nightmare of their lives as the authorities, including President Bola Tinubu, have declared an all-out war to apprehend them and make them face the full wrath of the law.

Officers and men of Operation Delta Safe, including a commanding officer, two majors, one captain, and 12 soldiers deployed to quell a communal crisis in Okuoma community in Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State were on Thursday, March 14, 2024, gruesomely murdered, alongside a civilian.

The Director of Defence Information, Brig. Gen Tukur Gusau, confirmed the incident in a terse statement

issued Friday, saying the incident had been reported to the Delta State government.

The dastardly killing has since attracted severe condemnation, including from President Tinubu; the

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ROTARY INTERNATIONAL: President Bola Tinubu (right), and President of Rotary International, Mr. Goedon McNally when Tinubu received Gordon, his wife and other Rotarias at State House, Abuja.

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INVEST IN EDO

H.E. Godwin Obaseki

- AGRICULTURE
- ENERGY
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- HEALTHCARE
- MINING
- INDUSTRY
- TOURISM

ED STATE GOVERNMENT

Edo govt, police step up effort to rescue kidnapped state PDP chair

● **pledge to spare no resources, solicit citizens' cooperation**

BLESSING IMAGBENIKARO

The Edo State Government and the police in the state are leaving no stone unturned in their intensified efforts to ensure the safe release of the Chairman of the state chapter of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Dr. Tony Aziegbemi.

Aziegbemi was abducted on Friday by gunmen on his way home after a meeting at the Government House in Benin City, the Edo State capital.

The Edo State Commissioner for Communication and Orientation, Hon. Chris Nehikhare, in a statement on Saturday, said the government is working closely with security agencies to ensure Dr Aziegbemi's safe release and return to his family.

"We have also increased surveillance measures across the State to ensure that these criminal activities are quelled and culprits are brought to justice," Nehikhare said.

"We encourage residents to go about their lawful businesses without fear and urge them to call the State emergency numbers 112 or 739 to report all suspicious persons or activities within their environs," he said.

He reassured the public of the government's commitment to protecting the lives and property of Edo residents, saying the government would spare no resources in ensuring that the perpetrators of the dastardly act are apprehended and made to face

the full wrath of the law.

On its part, the Edo State Police Command, following the receipt of the news of Aziegbemi's kidnap, immediately swung into action.

This followed a marching order given by the Commissioner of Police, Funsho Adegboye, to tactical team leaders to conduct a rescue party, in collaboration with vigilante groups and hunters, to rescue the kidnapped Edo PDP Chairman unhurt.

Police Public Relations Of-

ficer, Edo State Police Command, SP Chidi Nwabuzor, who disclosed this in a statement on Saturday made available to journalists in Benin City, said the CP also solicited the cooperation of law-abiding citizens of Edo State and urged them to give information to the police that may lead to the arrest of the perpetrators and the rescue of the victim.

Revealing how Aziegbemi was kidnapped, Nwabuzor said the PDP Chairman, who had earlier attended a meeting at the State Government House, was returning to his house at about 2345hrs (a quarter to midnight) on Friday when the hoodlums numbering six accosted him and his driver close to his house.

"The information of his kidnap was received from his driver, one Joseph Impete, who reported the incident at the New Etete Division, Benin City," Nwabuzor stated.

"The driver who is an eye witness to the horrible incident, reported that on 15/03/2024 the victim of kidnap Dr Tony Aziegbemi attended a meeting

at the Edo State Government House, Benin City and on their way returning back home from the meeting, close to his house six (6) armed men on convoy of two white colour Toyota Corolla saloon car registration number unknown accosted them along Bishop, Dr J.O.E. Edokpolor Boulevard Junction, Off Country Home, Benin City.

"Immediately Dr Tony Aziegbemi jumped out of his ash colour Toyota Prado Jeep for the safety of his dear life, while he the driver also ran out of the vehicle and laid down on the ground, but the hoodlums chased Dr Tony Aziegbemi and threatened to shoot him if he refused to stop, so he stopped and they ceased him, threw inside his Toyota Prado Jeep and took him away to unknown destination," he said.

Meanwhile, PDP candidate for the 2024 Edo State governorship election, Asue Ighodalo, has expressed shock over Aziegbemi's kidnap, urging security agencies to ensure the safe return of the Edo PDP Chairman.



ROTARY INTERNATIONAL:

L-R: Rivers State Governor, Sir Siminalayi Fubara; his wife, Valerie; Bayelsa State Governor, Senator Douye Diri, and a guest, during the funeral service of Fubara's mother-in-law, Late Mrs Adeline Ndalu Jaja (Nee Ohochukwu) at St. Paul's Anglican Church, Opobo, Rivers State.

No hiding place for killers of military personnel...

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Nigerian Senate; the Delta State governor, Sheriff Oborewori, the senator representing Delta Central Senatorial District, Ede Dafinone; presidential candidates of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the 2023 election, Atiku Abubakar; his Labour Party counterpart, Peter Obi; human rights activist, Femi Falana (SAN); the Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (HURIWA), and many more, with each calling for an investigation into the incident and for the arrest and prosecution of the perpetrators.

President Tinubu, in a message on Sunday evening, described the killing as "unprovoked" and "dreadful".

"As the Commander-in-Chief, I join all well-meaning Nigerians and the men and women of our armed forces to mourn and express my profound grief over the needless death of our gallant soldiers," Tinubu said.

"I extend my profound condolences to the families of these fallen soldiers, their colleagues, and their loved ones. The military high command is already responding to this incident. The cowardly offenders responsible for this heinous crime will not go unpunished," he said.

The President said the killing

was a further demonstration of the dangers servicemen and women face in their line of duty.

"I salute their heroism, courage, and uncommon grit and patriotism," Tinubu said.

"As a nation, we must constantly remember and honour all those who have paid the ultimate price to keep our nation safe, strong, and united. The officers and men who died in the Okuama community have joined the pantheon of great men and women who gave their all, with honour, in the service of our fatherland.

"Members of our armed forces are at the heart and core of our nationhood. Any attack on them is a direct attack on our nation. We will not accept this wicked act," he said.

Tinubu said the Defence Headquarters and Chief of Defence Staff have been "granted full authority to bring to justice anybody found to have been responsible for this unconscionable crime against the Nigerian people".

"My government will not relent until we achieve peace and tranquillity in every part of Nigeria," he said.

In a similar vein, the Senate has condemned the gruesome murder of the soldiers, calling for the culprits to be made to face the full consequences of their actions.

The Senate, in a statement on Sunday signed by the Chairman,

Senate Committee on Nigerian Army, Senator Abdulaziz YarAdua, noted that the sacrifices made by the Commanding Officer, three officers, and 12 soldiers during the distressing incident would forever be remembered.

"I wish to commend the swift response of the Chief of Defense Staff in directing an immediate investigation to apprehend those responsible for this heinous crime. It is crucial that justice is served and those behind this criminal act are brought to account for their actions. The Nigerian Army's unwavering focus on upholding peace and security in our nation is a testament to the resilience and dedication of our Armed Forces," the statement said.

"The Senate Committee on the Nigerian Army stands resolutely alongside the Defence Headquarters and the Nigerian Army in seeking justice for the fallen heroes. We shall spare no effort in supporting the necessary investigations and legal processes to ensure that those responsible for this crime face the full consequences of their actions.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with you, the families of the fallen heroes, and the entire Armed Forces as we honour the sacrifice and service of our brave personnel," it said.

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General Christopher Musa, had

earlier ordered the immediate arrest and investigation of the killers of the military personnel, according to a statement by the Director of Defence Information, Brig. Gen Gusau, titled "Situation Report on the Attack and Killing of Military Personnel on Peace Mission By Okuoma Community".

Narrating the sequence of events, Gusau said in the statement, "The troops of 181 Amphibious Battalion, Bomadi Local Government Area of Delta State, while on a peace mission to Okuoma community in Bomadi Local Government Area of Delta State was surrounded by some community youths and killed on Thursday, 14 March 2024.

"The unfortunate incident occurred when the troops responded to a distress call after the communal crisis between the Okuoma and Okoloba communities, both in Delta State.

"The reinforcement team led by the commanding officer was also attacked, leading to the death of the commanding officer, two majors, one captain, and 12 soldiers.

"The CDS, General Christopher Musa, has directed the immediate investigation and arrest of those involved in the heinous crime. The occurrence has been reported to the Delta State government."

Internet cable operators seek..

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

in the industry, the company said in a statement on its website.

MainOne, one of the affected operators and a significant internet provider for Nigerian financial institutions and service providers, has attributed the cable rupture to seismic movement on the floor of the Atlantic Ocean.

"Our preliminary analysis would suggest some form of seismic activity on the seabed resulted in a break to the cable," MainOne said in a statement, adding that it would obtain more data when the cable is retrieved during repair.

MainOne further said it may take up to two weeks to repair the rupture to its undersea cable which disrupted internet services in Nigeria, Ghana, Cote D'Ivoire, Senegal, and other West African and East African countries since Thursday.

It said the process would be as follows: "First identify and assign a vessel, the vessel has to retrieve the necessary spares required for repair, and then sail to the fault location to conduct the repair work. Next, in order to complete the repair, the affected section of the submarine cable will have to be pulled from the seabed onto the ship where it will be spliced by skilled technicians.

"Post repair, joints will be inspected and tested for any defects and then the submarine cable is lowered back to the seabed and guided to a good position. This process might take 1-2 weeks for repairs while about 2-3 weeks of transit time may be required for the vessel to pick up the spares and travel from Europe to West Africa once the vessel is mobilised."

In an update, the company

said actions have been taken to mobilise a vessel to expeditiously repair the cable in the deep ocean.

MainOne said restoration capacity for temporary relief would be made available for customers.

"While we do have some pre-configured restoration capacity on other cable systems, unfortunately, those cable systems are also down currently. We have since acquired capacity on available cable systems, but we have not found readily available capacity to fully restore services to all our customers," it said.

Most hit by the occurrence in Nigeria are telecommunications companies and banks which have experienced service failures and intermittent seizures, manifesting by way of slow speeds and unresponsive connections.

Other victims include entertainment and other streaming services, distance learning businesses, call centres and other remote location heavy bandwidth usage ventures.

Huge volumes of financial transactions have been stalled or stunted over the past few days, with costs and losses yet to be calculated but expected to chalk up significant sums.

Experts say it is expected that all the affected service providers would be taking remedial measures to remain competitive following the cable ruptures, otherwise their market share would be seized by rivals.

Such steps, they say, would include temporary co-operations and contracts with fibre-optic cable systems unaffected by Thursday's undersea ruptures, with a view jump-starting full service to affected areas or creating by-passes to areas suffering loss of service.

NEWS

Middle Belt group to governors: Don't capitulate to FG's demand for grazing lands

RUTH ISIGBE

A Middle Belt group, Middle Belt Patriots, has urged state governors to reject pressure from the Federal Government to cede lands in their states to herders for grazing, adding that yielding to such demands would worsen the security situation in the region and indeed other parts of the country.

This is coming on the heels President Bola Tinubu's call - at the flag-off of the agricultural mechanisation revolution for food security in Minna, Niger State, last week - on governors to give parts of the land in their states to Fulani herders for ranching purposes.

In a statement issued on Saturday and signed by its Director of Media and Strategic Communications, Steven Kefas, Middle Belt Patriots expressed concern over the manner the federal government constantly panders to the interests of the pastoralists at the detriment and displacement of the indigenous populations whose lands and lives are being overrun by the armed ethnic militias affiliated with the herders.

Warning that the people of the Middle Belt would resist any attempt to dispossess them of their God-given heritage, the group described the stance

of the federal government on grazing land as provocative.

"We vehemently condemn and reject the recent directive from the federal government asking state governors to make land available for grazing by Fulani herdsmen," the group said.

"This provocative and ill-advised order shows a shocking disregard for the already tenuous security situation in the Middle Belt region that has been under sustained violent attack by armed Fulani ethnic militias.

"We sternly warn the political leaders, monarchs, and youth/community leaders of the Middle Belt region-Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa, Niger, Kwara, Kogi, and sections of Taraba, Adamawa, Bauchi, Southern Kaduna, and Gombe states to outright disregard and defy this reckless federal directive," it said.

The group warned that "capitulating to these demands and ceding more land for grazers will only fan the flames of the ethnic clashes, further the genocidal massacres, escalate the violent displacement of indigenes from their ancestral lands, and jeopardize the fragile peace in a region that has already suffered immensely".

"The grazing of cattle is a private business enterprise; it leaves more questions than

answers as to why the federal government is deliberately arrogating farmlands to themselves to be handed over to private herders. We forcefully remind the authorities in Abuja that pig farmers in the core northern Sharia states like Kano, Katsina, Zamfara, Kebbi, Jigawa and Sokoto have to struggle, invest and acquire land for their vocations without any such unconstitutional government directives.

"The same should apply to the cattle herders - if they need land for their trade, they

should approach willing farmers and residents to lease or purchase lands for grazing through legitimate means. No farmer or landowner should be forcibly dispossessed of their property," it said.

The Middle Belt Patriots said that in Takum Local Government Area of Taraba State alone, over 200 Kuteb villages have been brutally sacked, with thousands displaced from their homes and ancestral farmlands in a severe humanitarian catastrophe caused by the rampaging herd-

ers and their militias.

"The Kuteb people are traditionally renowned farmers whose agricultural lands and means of livelihood have been completely destroyed by the grazing herds and armed militancy.

"It is an absolute travesty that their cries for security, justice, and succour have fallen on deaf ears, while their land grabbers and tormentors are being rewarded with more official edicts to further dispossess them.

"The government should

put an immediate stop to these illegal land grabs and acts of impunity. The cattle herders are private business operators and should be compelled to lawfully lease, purchase, or negotiate grazing lands with willing landowners instead of having lands forcibly taken from defenseless indigenous populations at gunpoint," it said.

The group said it would resist "these unconscionable measures through all legal and legitimate means at our disposal".

I received N1bn for constituency projects —Ned Nwoko

AGENCY REPORT

The Senator representing Delta North, Ned Nwoko, has disclosed that he attracted N1 billion for constituency projects.

Nwoko disclosed this during a chat with Channels Television's Seun Okinbaloye on 'Mic On Podcast'.

The revelation follows a recent interest in allocations for constituency projects for federal lawmakers in the wake of Jarigbe Agom-Jarigbe's - representing Cross River North - disclosure that some "senior" senators got N500 million for projects.

Jarigbe spoke during the Senate's deliberations on the allegation by Senator Abdul Ningi, who has now been suspended, that the 2024 budget was padded by N3 trillion.

Days after the suspension, when asked if he received as much as N1 billion in allocation, Senator Nwoko said: "Of course I did. But these are projects for my people and that is why I am here."

But he would have preferred that the constituency project allocation to every senator be fixed.

"The way it is done now, you basically rely on your weights

and contacts to see what you can get for your people," Senator Nwoko said.

"Well, it is just the system. Just the system. It is a system in Nigeria... like I said, I'd have preferred a situation where we all know what we are getting - you don't need to lobby for it and it is a standard thing.

"Everyone of the 109 senators from the onset should know what is going on in their particular district and it should be published.

"A better approach would have been for senatorial uniformity. So if they say that everyone should get about N1 billion, so be it. But this way, you rely on your weight and contacts to see what you can get for your people.

"This is not money for us. It is money for projects within our senatorial districts. So if you have roads, water projects, training programmes all aggregate to a certain sum."

The Chief Whip of the Senate, Senator Ali Ndume, who was a guest on Channels Television's Politics Today on Wednesday, said presiding and principal officers got more in constituency project allocation because "some animals are more equal than others".



OBI, OTTI MET WITH STEPHANIE ONUSIRIUKA:

Abia State Governor, Dr. Alex Otti (left); Nigerian Gymnast, Stephanie Onusiriuka (middle), and Presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP) in the 2023 general elections, Mr. Peter Obi, when Obi and Otti met with the gymnast in Abuja.

SERAP demands immediate reinstatement of Senator Ningi • *threatens legal action*

TRACY FOLORUNSHO

Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) has urged the Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, "to immediately reinstate whistleblower Abdul Ningi who was recently suspended from the Senate over his allegations that the lawmakers padded the 2024 budget by irregularly inserting projects worth N3.7 trillion".

Ningi, who represents Bauchi Central at the Senate, was on Tuesday suspended for three months by the Senate for his claims that the 2024 budget was padded which the Senators said was false.

SERAP also urged the senate President to "urgently refer the allegations that lawmakers padded the 2024 budget by irregularly inserting projects

worth N3.7 trillion to appropriate anti-corruption agencies for investigation and prosecution."

The rights group also urged Akpabio "to make a public commitment to discontinue the patently unlawful constituency projects in the next budget cycle."

SERAP, in a letter dated 16 March 2024 and signed by its deputy director, Kolawole Oluwadare, said: "Referring these allegations to appropriate anticorruption agencies would be consistent with the lawmakers' oath of office and the letter and spirit of the Nigerian Constitution 1999 [as amended]."

SERAP said, "What Senator Ningi has done is a positive act of good citizenship. No whistleblower should ever be penalised simply for making a public interest disclosure.

"Without inside information,

corruption is hard to detect, prevent and combat. Rather than suspending Senator Ningi, the Senate ought to have used his allegations as a trigger for addressing the lingering problem of budget padding and corruption in the implementation of constituency projects.

"Referring the allegations to the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) would improve public trust in the ability of the leadership of the Senate to ensure probity and accountability in the budget process."

SERAP said it would be grateful if the recommended measures are taken within seven days of the receipt and/or publication of the letter, otherwise it would consider appropriate legal ac-

tions "to compel you and the Senate to comply with our requests in the public interest".

"By exercising strong and effective leadership in this matter, the National Assembly can show Nigerians that the legislative body is a proper and accountable watchdog that represents and protects the public interest, and is able to hold itself to account in the management of public resources.

"Encouraging whistleblowers to speak up improves public services and strengthens public accountability. Promptly referring the allegations to the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) for investigations and prosecution would serve the public interest," it said.

InsideEdo

Evboro community installs new Odionwere with funfair

TOBORE JEROME

Evboro community situated along Upper Ekenwan Road in Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State, last Thursday, March 14, 2024, installed a new Odionwere, Pa Aikeworo Ikponmwosa, in a carnival-like atmosphere.

The installation event took place at the community traditional house, where all traditional rites were carried out as part of the process of installing a new Odionwere in the presence of the community elders, leaders, and men, women and youths were all gathered to witness the

installation ceremony.

Pa Aikeworo, who is the seventh Odionwere in the history of the community, appreciated His Royal Majesty, Omo N'Oba N'Edo, Uku Akpolokpolor, Oba Ewuare 11, for delivering justice to the community after a long tussle that lasted over three years on who should become the Odionwere of the community, and for giving him the opportunity to be installed as the Odionwere of Evboro community. He prayed for long life and good health for the Oba of Benin, he also used the opportunity to pray for the peace and progress of Evboro community.

Pa Aikeworo stressed that un-

der his leadership as the Odionwere of Evboro community, he will provide quality leadership that will be fair to all, and commended all sons and daughters of the community for their support towards the growth and progress of the community.

In his words, "The instruction from Oba of Benin, Oba Ewuare 11, said the most senior man in the village shall be the Odionwere of the village. Out of everyone in the village I am the most senior man; that is while I am installed as the Odionwere today. Someone else claimed to be the most senior man in the village but when the Palace told him what to do if truly

he is the most senior man he ran away and never came back.

"So, the Palace permitted that I should be installed as the Odionwere of the community and that is what has been done today. So, I feel happy today and I thank my people, the sons and daughters of Evboro, for supporting me throughout this journey. I appreciate every one of them and I pray that better growth and progress will fill this community."

Also speaking at the installation ceremony, Evboro community secretary, Hon. Charles Egharevba, commended His Royal Majesty, Oba Ewuare 11, for giving the go ahead for the most senior man

in the community to be installed as the Odionwere, and described Pa Aikeworo as a very pragmatic, proactive, energetic person who treats everyone with fairness.

Hon. Egharevba stated that Pa Aikeworo is the seventh Odionwere to be installed in the history of the community and that the community has existed for over 200 years since the time of His Royal Majesty, Oba Adolor.

"With profound gratitude to the Almighty God and thankfully to our Royal Monarch, the Oba of Benin, Oba Ewuare 11, who gave the go ahead for the most senior man in the community to be installed as the Odionwere, and today is the rightful day that we are having the ceremony."

He admonished everyone in the community to come together and join hands with the new Odionwere to move the community forward, describing the community as a peace loving and hospitable community to all, irrespective of your origin.

Also, the Okaighele of Evboro community, Imafidon Egharevba, appreciated God Almighty for the installation of Pa Aikeworo as the new Odionwere, and solicited for peace and support for the new Odionwere so as to move the community forward.

"We thank God for a day like this. Today is a happy day for me and every member of this community. We want peace in this village and peace we shall get in this village," he said.

He described the new Odionwere as a man that accommodates everyone, a man full of wisdom that can handle the affairs of the

community.

Similarly, an Elder and Treasurer of Evboro community, Bishop Iyobosa Atoe, commended His Royal Majesty, the Oba of Benin, for graciously granting approval that Pa Aikeworo be installed as the Odionwere of Evboro community, having been without an Odionwere in the community since the past three years.

According to Bishop Atoe, "Today, we are happy that the Oba has graciously granted that Pa Aikeworo Ikponmwonsa becomes the Odionwere of our community. The other Odionwere died three years ago and this new one needed to be installed. Two days ago we were at the Palace, yesterday we got the confirmation and today we are here doing the installation ceremony of our Odionwere. We pray that God will help him so that he reign will bring peace and progress to the community."

He described Pa Aikeworo as a pragmatic, cooperative and a man that has the interest of the people and the community at heart.

Shortly after the installation of Pa Aikeworo Ikponmwonsa as the new Odionwere of Evboro community, members of the community had a swell time dancing, singing, eating, and drinking and were full of praise for having an Odionwere that has eluded them for three years.

Oba gha tor kpere... Ise

Caption: The new Odionwere, Pa Aikeworo Ikponmwonsa, flanked by elders, women, and youths of Evboro community, immediately after undergoing the traditional rites.



TRADITIONAL RITES:

The new Odionwere, Pa Aikeworo Ikponmwonsa, flanked by elders, women, and youths of Evboro community, immediately after undergoing the traditional rites.

SkillUp Naija to empower 50,000 young minds to Edo Teens' Enterprise Campaign

EUBALDUS ENAHORO

In a revolutionary bid to reshape the narrative and future of students in Edo State that will be graduating from secondary school by August this year and other creative young minds on the street, SkillUp Naija, an empowerment organization, has unveiled the Edo Teens' Enterprise Campaign (EDOTEC-Project Catch them young).

A statement issued by Dr. Kenneth Oti for SkillUp Naija noted that the initiative is set to empower 50,000 young Edo sons and daughters with the "Skills to Wealth: An Entrepreneur's Manual" and provide them with an exclusive six-month mentorship programme, propelling them towards becoming active entrepreneurs.

According to Oti, the pioneer sponsor of this groundbreaking project is none other than Dr. Charles Osazuwa, founder and head pastor of Rock of Ages Christian Assembly International (RACAI). Dr.

Charles Osazuwa will kickstart the campaign by gifting the first 200 copies of the "Skills to Wealth" book. His commitment to empowering the youth underscores the importance of providing tangible tools for self-sufficiency.

"The grand patron of EDOTEC-Project Catch them young, Chief Sam Igbe, the Iyase of Benin Kingdom, extends his love and support to the sons and daughters of Edo through this transformative initiative. Chief Sam Igbe recognizes the potential within the youth and believes that EDOTEC will serve as a catalyst for positive change, unlocking opportunities that will uplift Edo State.

"Edo State, like many regions, faces challenges that threaten the very fabric of its future. The pressing issues of cultism and money rituals, masquerading as online fraud (aka yahoo yahoo), pose a significant threat to the dreams and aspirations of the Edo youth. EDOTEC boldly offers the immediate solution, providing a platform for skill

acquisition and development, mentorship, and entrepreneurial empowerment to counteract these threats," he said.

He noted that, "EDOTEC activities are lined up to refocus and reposition our youth starting with those about leaving Secondary School in other to catch them young. Such activities which include Skills Acquisition & Development, SHAPE/Personality Test, En-

trepreneurship Induction, Problems/Solutions Orientation, Presentation Training & Challenge, Pitching and Exhibition Challenge, Enterprise Street Test, etc., will be carried out on-site and online in all the 18 Local Government Areas, starting will Oredo.

"The event flag-off for the Edo Teens' Enterprise Campaign is scheduled for May 3rd, 2024, at the Benson Ida-

hosa University Convocation Hall, University Way, off Upper Adesuwu Road, GRA, Benin City, commencing at 10am. This occasion marks the beginning of a transformative journey for thousands of young minds eager to break free from the shackles of limited opportunities. EDOTEC aims to refocus the vision of Edo young minds from restive vices and quick-wealth-scheme mindset

to more resourceful ventures with her bold mission of catching them young."

Dr. Oti further noted that, SkillUp Naija, in its commitment to inclusive development, ensures that EDOTEC operations and activities will span across all 18 Local Government Areas of Edo State. The grassroots approach aims to reach every corner of the state, leaving no teenager behind and fostering a culture of entrepreneurship from the grassroots up.

"The visionaries behind EDOTEC, Dr. Charles Osazuwa and Chief Sam Igbe, call on all well-meaning Edolites to rally behind SkillUp Naija and support this unparalleled initiative. The goal is not merely to empower individuals but to unleash an army of young entrepreneurs who will, in turn, drive the economic landscape of Edo State towards prosperity. For participation, email: info@skillupnaija.com, website: www.skillupnaija.com/edocraft," according to the statement.



CHIEF IGBE



DR. OSAZUWA

Ascend Int' Model visits the Nigerian Observer on excursion

OMI OMAGE

The pupils of Ascend International Model School were warmly received during their excursion to the Nigerian Observer on Tuesday, March 5.

The exercise was undertaken by the Primary One to Five pupils of the school, who were accompanied by their school proprietress and some of the staff members, and were warmly received by the Managing Editor/Ag. Managing Director of the Nigerian Observer, Mr. Osa Victor Obayagbona.

The pupils were given a lecture on the workings and processes of news production – from content creation to newspaper production – by the Ag. Managing Director. The pupils were given access to see the different sections of the Nigerian Observer, ranging from the Newsroom to the printing presses, and all the different sections of the media house.

The children were then taken to the newsroom where they were taught how news was being processed: Journalists brought news, rewrite it,

and polished it, and they were sent to the print media to be published.

The children were excited to walk around the building and many were happy to be given the privilege to see some devices they had not come in contact with before, like the Web Machine for newspaper production; the Speed Master Machine for the production of all kinds of books, and the Large Format Machine for the production of banners of any size.

At the printing press they were taught that the printing press has three units that make up a complete press for production. The first point of contact is the pre-press, the press, and the post-press.

At the pre-press is where the process of assembling and editing such as a book, newspaper, magazine, or Journal, and mounting and plate making is done.

While the post press is where the main printing is done the plates are being exported to the machine for print. This is where all print jobs are taken for cutting, collating, packaging, folding, trimming, etc.

The children saw the ultra-modern x74 Speed Master printing machine, which is used for printing calendars, brochures, magazines, posters, newsletters, souvenirs, pamphlets, books, memo pads, and more.

Lastly, they were told that the Large Format press produces precision quality jobs of all sizes on flex material, SAV, window graphics, vehicle branding, T-shirt, facecaps, and more.

The pupils, having learnt

a lot, could attest to the fact that the excursion was indeed a wonderful experience as the excursion has made a significant impact on their lives.

While expressing gratitude, the proprietress and some of the staff of the school ex-

pressed their appreciation to the Nigerian Observer for their time and patience in educating the students, as the Ag. Managing Director said that the Nigerian Observer is always a good place to bring students to learn.



EXCURSION:

Pupils and staff of Ascend Int' Model School with Ag. Managing Director of *The Nigerian Observer* newspaper, during the school's visit on excursion to *The Nigerian Observer's* compound.

PHOTO BY SAVIOUR MATHIAS

NAPS bestows award on EIRS chairman

BERNADETTE IDALU

The National Association of Postgraduate Students (NAPS), University of Benin, Edo State, has conferred an award of excellence on Hon. John Osagie Inegbedion, chairman, Taskforce on Internally Generated Revenue, Edo State Internal Revenue Service (EIRS).

The conferment of the award, which took place on March 11, 2024, during the association's 2024 Web Summit with the theme: "Skill Acquisition, Recipe for a Successful Career," held at the Professor Festus Iyayi's Hall, Faculty of Management Sciences.

Receiving the award on behalf of the EIRS boss, head of Corporate Communications, EIRS, Mr. Eboigbe Courage, while addressing the literati, commended the organizers of the award ceremony for their

careful selection and recognition of the awardee.

He stated, "The selection of Hon Inegbedion by the students' body demonstrates clearly the fact that he is a thorough bred professional committed to the development of Edo State via driving an efficient and transparent revenue administration process."

He observed that the award will spur him to sustain his positive track record while charging the students to be worthy citizens of the country, ambassadors of the university and the association by joining hands in the development of the society wherever they find themselves through payments of their taxes when economically engaged.

Speaking on the idea behind the awards, President of NAPS, Dr. Chris Ovie, informed that the Post Graduate Students Award is presented to dis-

tinguished alumnus and non alumnus of the University of Benin that have achieved extraordinary progress in their chosen career and have impacted society and humanity in general.

"The nomination/selection process was opened to the university community through a credible and transparent process," he said.

Earlier, during his presentation titled, 'Strategies for Business Growth', Dr Godstime Ikhu-Omoregbe, defined strategy as steps or plans put in place in order to be different from others which should be applied due to business competitiveness. He told students and participants that by presenting at the one day web summit, they would be able to embrace the positive use of artificial intelligence as a business strategy if they must strive in business.

ESIPO commends Oredo LGA for unveiling investment facilitation desk

urges other LGAs to emulate

ABDULLAH ABDUL-KADIR

Edo State Investment Promotion Office (ESIPO) - Ease of Doing Business Secretariat has hailed the groundbreaking move by the Oredo Local Government Area Chairman, Dr. Tom Obaseki, who recently unveiled an investment facilitation desk, a first-of-its-kind initiative in the state and country.

According to the Managing Director of ESIPO, Kelvin Uwaibi, this initiative is a game-changer, boosting investment in Oredo Local Government Area while fostering a business-friendly relationship with investors and businesses.

Uwaibi noted: "The desk will act as a central point for businesses, addressing their concerns and enhancing the collaboration in streamlining the investment process.

"This, in turn, is expected to attract more capital and create a thriving business environment within the local government area.

"We are urging other local government areas (LGAs) to follow Oredo's lead. This initiative aligns perfectly with the state's goal of achieving widespread economic prosperity"

The chairman of Oredo Local Government Council, Dr Tom Obaseki in his presentation emphasized the council's commitment to providing leadership and essential services to its residents. He acknowledged the crucial role investment plays in development, surpassing what can be achieved solely through Internally Generated Revenue (IGR).

The chairman noted: "The Oredo Business Support and Investment Facilitation Office signifies a shift towards

attracting capital, creating a sustainable path for growth that goes beyond traditional IGR strategies. This innovative approach positions Oredo as a prime destination for businesses thereby attracting more resources."

He added that the Oredo Business Support and Facilitation Office has three components. Viz: Oredo Social Environmental Impact Initiative, Oredo Investment and Development Company, and Oredo Business Support and Investment Facilitation Office.

The unveiling meeting which was held at the council's secretariat in Edo South was attended by members of the Oredo Local Government Council's executives and Edo State Investment Promotion Office (ESIPO) team, and stakeholders from the business community.

Gov. Obaseki appoints Hon. Abubakar, Alhaji Enabulele Edo' 2024 Amir-UI-Hajj

EUBALDUS ENAHORO

Edo State Governor, Mr. Godwin Obaseki has appointed the Commissioner for Youth and Humanitarian Affairs, Hon. Zubairu Dada Abubakar and the Chief of Imam of Benin Central Mosque, Alhaji Fatai Enabulele as Edo State 2024 Amir-UI-Hajj to oversee the welfare of the state Muslim Pilgrims who will perform this year's Hajj in Saudi Arabia.

Presenting the letters of ap-

pointment on behalf of the governor, the chairman, Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board, Sheikh Ibrahim Oyarekhua congratulated them for the appointment, noting that they will be saddled with responsibility of ensuring the success of the 2024 Hajj.

According to him, the 2024 Amir-UI-Hajj should see the appointment not just from His Excellency, but from Allah to ensure the success of the Hajj and to ensure that the Muslims benefit from the good governance of Governor

Obaseki. No doubt your choice is not a wrong one based on your experiences and the trust bestowed on you by the government.

"There is no doubt that this year's choice is not a wrong one because the governor has seen your performance and believes in your experience which you will bring to bear when the Hajj begins

The Commissioner for Youth and Humanitarian Affairs, Hon. Zubairu Abubakar expressed appreciation to the Governor for

the appointment and called for prayers for the governor to finish well and strong, as well as to have a worthy successor.

"This is the month of peace and we must use the month to pray for peace for the nation and the state. The governor has been very mindful of the Muslims in the state, that is why we have to pray for the country and the state, even while we are in Saudi Arabia," he said.

The Chief Imam of Benin Central Mosque, Alhaji Fatai

Enabulele said the Muslims in the state are very satisfied with what Governor Obaseki is doing for the Muslims in the state, adding that, last year the governor made sure forty persons performed the Hajj. he has been very generous, even in secret and we are seeing the magnificent edifice under construction at the Hajj camp in Benin city by the state government today.

He also thanked the Commissioner for Youth and Humanitarian Affairs, Hon Zubai-

ru Abubakar for his truthfulness and promoting the interest of Muslims across the state.

The chairman Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board, Sheikh Ibrahim Oyarekhua led the 2024 Amir-UI-Hajj in inspection of the Hajj camp being built by Edo state government and he disclosed that a seventy five years old building was demolished to begin the second phase of the Hajj camp while the phase one was commissioned by Governor Godwin Obaseki September 2020.

South-SouthReport

Bayelsa health sector: Govt to give facelift to NDUTH as deputy governor commissions MDCAN secretariat

PHILIP EKE
YENAGOA

Deputy Governor of Bayelsa State, Senator Lawrence Ewruhjakpo, has said the present administration would give more attention to the state-owned Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital (NDUTH), Okolobiri, in its second term agenda.

Senator Ewruhjakpo stated this, on Tuesday, at the commissioning ceremony of the secretariat of the Medical and Dental Consultants' Association of Nigeria (MDCAN) at the NDUTH, Okolobiri, in Yenagoa Local Government Area of the state.

Speaking as special guest of honour at the ceremony, Senator Ewruhjakpo noted that the teaching hospital means a lot to the government and people of the state and therefore would be given more facelift within the limits of available resources.

Justifying the importance of completing inherited unfinished projects, he identified failure to do so on the part of most leaders in both public and private sectors as a major cause of underdevelopment in the country.

Senator Ewruhjakpo commended the chairman and members of MDCAN, NDUTH Okolobiri branch for collaborating effectively with the management of the hospital and urged them to sustain the gesture.

Describing the project as unprecedented in the history of the state-owned teaching hospital, he gave kudos to the

current MDCAN executive members for successfully completing the Legacy House project inherited from their predecessors.

The Deputy Governor, who later embarked on a tour around the newly inaugurated secretariat and other facilities at the NDUTH, urged other unions to borrow a leaf from the medical and dental consultants' association.

According to him, the state government was ready to collaborate with critical stakeholders to build more facilities to meet the infrastructural needs of the state-owned tertiary health institution to improve the well-being of the people.

"The Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital is very important to us because it is not just providing health services, but it's also a training facility for medium level health manpower. So, we are poised to do more for this hospital.

"I commend the Medical and Dental Consultants' Association of Nigeria (MDCAN) and the management of the NDUTH for building this edifice.

"We need this kind of collaboration with the NDUTH management and other well-meaning stakeholders to build more facilities and structures for the hospital.

"This building project is unprecedented as far as the NDUTH is concerned. I want to commend Dr. Sambo and his team for continuing with this project they inherited to its completion which we are

commissioning today," he said.

Earlier in his welcome address, the Chief Medical Director, Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital, Okolobiri, Prof. Dimie Ogoina, disclosed that the MDCAN Secretariat was funded through monthly contributions from salaries of its members.

Prof. Ogoina, who thanked

the Governor Diri-led administration for its efforts towards improved healthcare delivery in the state, appealed to the state government to acquire more land, reconstruct the perimeter fencing and build other critical infrastructure for the hospital.

Also speaking, the chairman of the NDUTH branch of MDCAN, Dr. Sambo Biobelete,

expressed gratitude to Senator Ewruhjakpo for finding time to commission the project, noting that it will add more value to service delivery at the teaching hospital.

According to Dr. Sambo, the project which houses a laboratory, consulting rooms, a conference hall and library, among others, will serve a dual pur-

pose as MDCAN Secretariat as well as HIV/AIDS counselling and testing centre.

In his remarks, the chairman of the occasion, Dr. Godbless Oyinke, saluted MDCAN for successfully completing the project, and called on the state government to urgently address the pressing needs of the teaching hospital.



UNIDEL FOUNDER'S DAY CELEBRATION:

Mrs Stella Chiemeke Vice Chancellor (l); Sir Monday Onyeme, Deputy Governor (m); Dr Ebenezer Onyeagwu, CEO, Zenith Bank (r), and other academic/management staff at UNIDEL Founder's Day Celebration in Agbor, Delta State.

Oborevwoori places premium on indigenous languages

AJUWA VICTOR

Governor of Delta State, Rt. Hon. Sheriff Oborevwoori has called on parents to ensure that their children learn and speak their indigenous languages.

Governor Oborevwoori gave the charge during the second edition of UNIDEL Founder's Day Celebration and one million naira fundraising for Ika Language and Cultural Research Centre.

The governor, who was represented at the event by his deputy, Sir Monday Onyeme, said various languages are facing threat of extinction.

"It is my pleasure to address this gathering as we celebrate the second Founder's Day of this young and very promising university. In less than three years of existence, the University of Delta Agbor is steadily building a reputation for crea-

tivity and academic excellence.

"I am particularly impressed by the initiative to establish an Ika Language and Cultural Research Centre. This is highly commendable because nationally, our various indigenous languages are facing threat of extinction," according to the governor.

The governor noted that the establishment of Ika Language and Cultural Research Centre is a wake-up call for all to ensure that children are made to learn and speak their indigenous dialects.

The governor assured the management of UNIDEL of its readiness to develop the Language and Cultural Research Centre.

The chairman of the occasion, Mr Chiedu Ebie, appreciated the management of UNIDEL for finding him worthy to chair the occasion, and assured the management of his quest

to give all necessary support for the growth of the citadel of learning.

The Vice Chancellor of UNIDEL, Professor Stella Chiemeke in her speech stated that the Founder's Day Celebration of the University is a yearly event organized to remember and honour founding fathers and mothers who worked assiduously to see the university come to fruition, transforming the land into a thriving centre of academic excellence, innovation and research.

Prof. Chiemeke paid gratitude to the governor for giving priority attention to the institution, especially the tarring of internal roads in the campus, which ensures a conducive and safe environment for learning and growth.

The Vice Chancellor, while acknowledging the governor's continued dedication to education, appealed to him to

humbly provide furnishing of a 500-seater lecture theatre and classrooms at Owa-Alero Campus, furnishing of a new library at Owa-Alero Campus, construction and furnishing of the main auditorium, science equipment and furnishing of central science laboratory.

The Vice Chancellor also commended the Oki Community, Abavo Clan Union, the Obi of Mbiri, and his kingdom for their commitment and contributions towards the growth of the institution.

On achievements, Prof. Chiemeke stated that in her competence, commitment, and courage has led the University of Delta Agbor to achieve remarkable progress.

She disclosed that in the area of infrastructure, the university parades state-of-the-art facilities and resources such as lecture classrooms with interactive boards, well-equipped

engineering workshops, a wonderful Entrepreneur Development Training Centre and beautiful lecture theatres.

She further stated that institution has got full accreditation of 74 academic programmes. Other achievements include the presence of the university website, a learning management system, and a portal system.

In a Founder's Day lecture delivered by Dr Ebenezer Onyeagwu, CEO, Zenith Bank, on 'Transforming Potential into Prosperity: Harnessing Nigeria's Youthful Population for Economic Growth and National Renaissance', the economic expert x-rayed graphically Nigeria's Population Vs Economic Growth rates, the economic realities of Nigerian youths, challenges facing Nigerian youths, consequences of underdevelopment of youthful human capital, understanding the democratic dividend, strategies

for harnessing youth potential as well as youth involvement in national development.

The university management gave an award of recognition to Dr Ifeanyi Arthur Okowa, Dr Ebenezer Onyeagwu, and Governor Oborevwoori Sheriff for their immense contributions towards the speedy growth of the institution.

The high point of the event was fundraising and grand breaking/foundation laying of the Ika Language and Cultural Research Centre performed by the governor.

Dignitaries at the event were the secretary to the state government, Dr Kingsley Emu, Hon. Victor Nwokolo, Hon. Chukwuyem Okoh, Mr Charles Aniagwu, the Speaker represented by Mr Charles Emetulu, Hon. Maryln Okowa-Daramola, captains of the banking industry, traditional rulers, and a host of others.

Food security: A'lbom partners Bertola Tools to fast track affordable mechanize farming

VICTOR AKAN

The ARISE Agenda of Governor Umo Eno prioritize agriculture before industrialization in Akwa Ibom State. This is carefully chosen to address the current food crisis and inflation that have put many Nigerians in dire conditions. Also, agriculture is believed to drive youth employment faster to curtail the high unemployment ratio attributed to the oil rich state.

In a recent move to actualize her tall dream, the Akwa

Ibom State government indicated her readiness to partner Bertola Machine Tools Limited to enhance food production in the state through mechanized farming.

The state governor, Umo Eno, made this known when he visited the company's Uyo office at Ifa Atai, Airport Road, on a facility tour and inspection of purpose-built machines and tools for agricultural activities.

He affirmed that at a time when the state government, as part of its agricultural revolution drive towards ensuring

food sufficiency in the state was planning to set up equipment leasing services to make some basic machines available and accessible for farmers, Bertola would be a dependable partner.

The governor commended the consistency of Bertola Machine Tools Limited in the equipment and machinery industry and for maintaining its trademark of integrity in its dealings across the nation over the years.

He directed the Commissioner for Agriculture, Dr Offiong Offor, and her Works and Fire Service counterpart, Professor

Eno Ibanga, to draw up modalities for government partnership with the company to avail farmers in the state machines for basic farm operations.

"As part of our agricultural revolution, we are setting up an equipment leasing company to provide and support farmers in Akwa Ibom. That is why we are here.

"We are talking about agricultural revolution, and if someone has what we want to achieve this vision, we need to patronize and support him," he stated.

The Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Ber-

tola Machine Tools Limited, Evangelist Albert Inyang, who showed the governor around the facilities, lauded the honest intentions of Governor Eno for Akwa Ibom people, which he said, has been clearly demonstrated in his pursuit of live-touching projects and programmes.

While commending the governor's commitment to agriculture, Evangelist Inyang said his company will be delighted to partner government to avail the state of the supply of agro-based machines, training

of technicians to operate the machines as well as fabricating some light tools to enhance farming activities.

While the agricultural dreams of the state government is appreciated by most farmers, some farmers warned against giving services to political farmers, prevention of greedy middlemen and profiteers in government parastatals. The farmers claimed that past governments' lofty agricultural programmes failed because of insensitivity and inadequate monitoring.



INSPECTION OF PURPOSE-BUILT MACHINES:

Akwa Ibom State Governor, Umo Eno (m); Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Bertola Machine Tools Limited, Evangelist Albert Inyang (l), and state officials when the governor visited the company's Uyo office at Ifa Atai, Airport Road, on a facility tour and inspection of purpose-built machines and tools for agricultural activities.

NDDC to partner Bayelsa, Delta for link bridge

PHILIP EKE

For the Ijaws in Bayelsa and Delta states who do not yet have access through motorable roads linking them, succour would soon come to them as the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) is to partner the two states to construct a link bridge to join them with their kits and kins.

This revelation was made known by the Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer of the NDDC, Dr. Samuel Ogbuku, during a civic reception in honour of the Minister of State Petroleum Resources (Oil), Senator Heineken Lokpobiri and four others in Ekeremor Town in the Ekeremor Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

According to the MD/CEO, "We are going to partner with the Bayelsa and Delta State governments to link the two states."

He commended the people of Ekeremor for honouring their sons and daughters, stressing that the honour would encourage others to put in their best to develop the community. Dr. Ogbuku also noted that

the NDDC would work with Bayelsa State government to construct the Ekeremor Agge axis of the Sagbama Ekeremor road project.

The civic reception was attended by the Bayelsa State Governor Senator Douye Diri, Delta State Governor Sheriff Oborevwori, the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Nyesom Wike, among others.

In his address, the Bayelsa State governor stressed that the time for politicking was over and urged the people, irrespective of political differences, to rally round his administration to accelerate the pace of development.

Senator Diri, who expressed gratitude to President Bola Tinubu for appointing illustrious sons and a daughter of the state into various positions of trust in his administration, also appreciated the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory and former governor of Rivers State, Nyesom Wike, for his role in the appointment of Senator Lokpobiri as minister.

He said: "This is not the time for PDP (People's Democratic Party) or APC (All Progressives

Congress). Politics is over. It is time for governance. We do not have party differences in Bayelsa but what we have is the development of our state and Nigeria at large. Let us jettison petty jealousies and join hands to develop our state so that it will grow from strength to strength.

"The persons appointed have what it takes to represent Bayelsa. Under Senator Lokpobiri as Minister of State for Petroleum Resources, we will see a different kind of representation. We need to partner with the NDDC and the Delta State government to build a bridge across both states.

"We need to also partner with the NDDC to take the Ekeremor Road to Agge. We need this road infrastructure for easy movement of our people."

The governor also assured that the construction work on the Nembe-Brass road in Bayelsa East Senatorial District will continue and said the Federal Government has indicated interest in the project.

"On behalf of the government and people of Bayelsa State, I thank President Bola Tinubu for making these ap-

pointments possible. Aside from God and the president, I also thank the FCT Minister, Nyesom Wike, for contributing to the appointment of Senator Lokpobiri as minister."

In his remarks, chairman of the occasion, a former Director-General of the Department of State Services (DSS), Mr. Matthew Seiyefa, also thanked President Tinubu for the appointment of sons and a daughter of Ekeremor.

Mr Seiyefa, who is also Pro-Chancellor of the state-owned Niger Delta University, said it was heartwarming that Ekeremor alone produced two Senior Advocates of Nigeria that by dint of hardwork and perseverance attained the highest level in the legal profession.

Also delivering his solidarity message, the Pere of Tuomo Kingdom and retired Supreme Court Justice, King Francis Tabai, urged the youths to see the celebrants as source of inspiration by taking their education seriously, saying without education, they would not have been celebrating the successes achieved by Lokpobiri and others.

Delta approves over N674m for students' bursary

AJUWA VICTOR

Delta State Executive Council (EXCO) has approved the payment of over N674,000,000 as bursary to students of its origin for the 2022/2023 academic session.

The approval was part of the decisions reached at the State Executive Council meeting presided over by Governor Sheriff Oborevwori.

Briefing journalists at the end of the meeting, the state Commissioner for Information, Dr Ifeanyi Osuoza, said Exco also approved phase two procurement of medical equipment for 20 general hospitals across the state.

He listed the hospitals to include: General hospitals at Obiaruku, Abraka, Ekpan, Owa-Alero, Okwe, Koko, Orerokpe, Otu-Jeremi, Burutu, Abavo, Owa-Oyibu, Issele-Uku, Ibusa, Aviara, Onicha-Olona, Ofagbe, Aboh, Ashaka, Kiagbodo and Eku Baptist Government Hospital.

Osuoza, who was flanked by the Commissioner for Works (Rural and Riverine Roads), Mr. Charles Aniagwu, his Higher Education counterpart, Professor Nyerovwo Tonukari, the Commissioner for Health, Dr. Joseph Onojaeme, and the Chief Press Secretary to the Governor, Sir Festus Ahon, said Exco also approved compensation for the construction of flyover at Enerhen Junction to First Marine Gate.

He said: "We just finished Exco meeting and some approvals have been given to some vital projects. The Exco has approved the release of funds for 2022/2023 payment of Students Assistance Scheme, otherwise known as Bursary.

"There is approval for the upward review of the contract for the procurement of medical equipment at 20 General Hospitals in Delta State. There is an upward variation of the contract for the remodelling of the uncompleted library building of the Basic Clinical building for the College of Health Sciences, Oghara, Ethiope West Local Government Area.

"There is also approval for the compensation of buildings that will be affected by the con-

struction of the flyover bridge from Enerhen Junction, Effurun to Marine Gate, Warri in Uvwie and Warri South local government areas, respectively."

Explaining further on the bursary payment, the Commissioner for Works (Rural and Riverine Roads), Mr Charles Aniagwu said, "On the hardship in the land, the reason the governor is very much interested in this is because when parents are looking for money, they need the money to take care of their children, pay school fees and provide basic necessities.

"As a government, we believe that if we are able to give some funds to these students, that way we have also been able to help their parents. Any student that you make this money available to now, at least, for that month and maybe the next, will not ask his or her parents for money to buy one book or feed.

"So, we are not just approving the bursary for our students for nothing. If we are able to reach out to as many as over 30,100 students of Delta State origin, you will know the number of households the government has been able to reach out to through this form of palliative.

"As an administration, you will notice a number of things we have mentioned here that we are doing in the health sector. It is also with a view to ensuring that our people have access to medical facilities and that they are able to reach out.

"Once we are able to put the hospitals in good shape and they are functional, it means that the funds that are available to you, even when we did not give it to you by cash, that as a government, we have also provided in that area.

"If we give you money and the hospitals are not functional, you will discover that you are not going to eat the money. After all, they say the value of money is what money can buy.

"So, we are providing you those things that you need money to buy; helping you solve that challenge so that, at the end of the day, we are mitigating the excruciating conditions that we have found ourselves in.

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Mindless attacks on the military

The military, particularly the Nigerian Army, as well as other right-thinking and law-abiding countrymen and women, are mourning the death of an Army Colonel, two Majors, one Captain, and 12 other soldiers who lost their lives last Thursday, March 14, in sad and gruesome circumstances in Delta State.

It was gathered that the military personnel had responded to a distress call following a communal clash between the Okuama and Okoloba communities in Delta State.

Confirming the incident in a statement on Saturday, Acting Director of Defence Information, Brigadier General Tukur Gusau, said the victims were surrounded by some community youths when troops of the 181 Amphibious Battalion were on a peace mission in the Bomadi Local Government Area of the state. He said the unfortunate incident occurred in the periphery of Okuama and Okoloba communities. The reinforcement team, led by the commanding officer, was also attacked, leading to the death of the commanding officer, two majors, one captain, and 12 soldiers.

The defence spokesman said the incident has been reported to the Delta State Government and that the Chief of Defence Staff has directed that the culprits be unmasked. He also reiterated the commitment of the military to its mandate of maintaining peace and security in various parts of the country.

Some suspects have reportedly been arrested in connection with the incident, which is cheering news.

We commiserate wholeheartedly with the Nigerian Army on the mindless murder of its worthy officers and men in the line of duty and appeal to them to maintain calm and due process in the pursuit of the matter going forward. We likewise condole with the families and loved ones of our fallen heroes.

We observe that this occurrence is one too many and that an end needs to be put to such lawless and savage conduct.

Having said that, it is good to note that an investigation is underway and civil and military authorities have been notified and would be participating or carried along in the investigation to ensure thoroughness, due process, maturity and justice in the proceedings.

This sad development raises some pertinent issues, though. Perhaps first of these is the need to address the pervasive use of psychotropic drugs among our youth, particularly in low-income areas such as the remote areas of the Niger Delta.

There have been concerns raised, including by the Delta State governor, Sheriff Oborewori, about escalating levels of illicit drug use and addiction around the country and in the Niger Delta. It is difficult to conceive that sober and right-thinking individuals would contemplate such a heinous crime.

Then there is the role and duty of parents and community leaders in nurturing and mentoring the youth on the value of patriotism, peace and civil conduct. It would seem that not enough of this is being done, or that there may be some impediment to the process of parenting and mentoring and this needs to be investigated and addressed.

It has also been said, time and again, that one source of the restiveness among the youth in the Niger Delta, as in other areas, has to do with lack of education or an insufficiency of it, as well as a failure to skill the youth in artisanal vocations to enable them to be self-sustaining and reasonably comfortable and stable.

There is also the matter of the pervasive shortage of infrastructure such as electricity, potable water, roads and so on, which set the framework for the envisioning and pursuit of stability and the individual's best self.

There is likewise the much-talked-about insincerity and misgovernance at base local levels which exacerbate poverty, distrust and despondency.

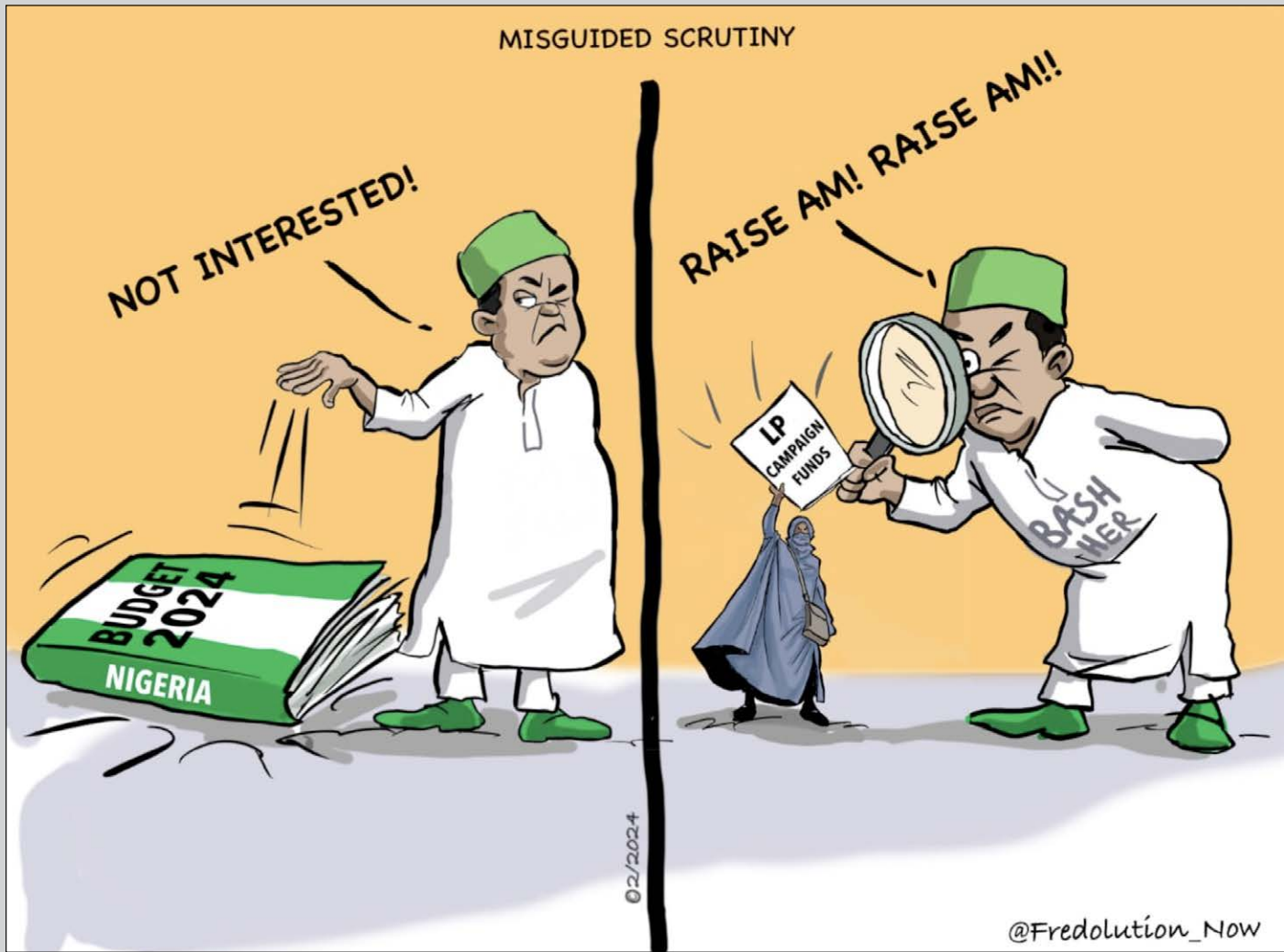
All of these challenges need to be addressed with sincerity, focus and resolve to smoothen the strains, misgivings and misconduct that they generate so we can have a better society.

On a final note, we once again condole with the military and thank them heartily for the great sacrifices they have pledged and are often called to make so that the Nigerian nation can have a chance at peace and prosperity.

The Nigerian Observer

Cartoon Corner

...that the people may know



Six leadership clarity questions for organizational health



HAPPY WORKSPACE
by **OLAYINKA OPAEYE**
A WELL-BEING SPECIALIST AND
CORPORATE WELLNESS STRATEGIST

“We recently employed four members of staff in my office. Two weeks in, I noticed it was just one of them working. For others, I would have to ask what they were doing, why they had not brought requests in, or why I hadn’t received an update on a particular instruction. After several follow-ups, I realized they were just here to pass the time for monthly pay. So, I took the initiative to have a one-on-one performance review with them to reinforce clarity. To my amazement, one of them sent her resignation letter the following day and stopped coming to work. Even though I was shocked, I hoped it would make the other two sit up. After back-and-forth on their lagging deliverables yet again, I advised them to make the call. What can I do to avoid this type of experience again?”

This case is interesting on multiple fronts. First, it’s the first stressful workplace scenario from an employer posted here. Secondly, the employer did everything by the book but was still somewhat hoodwinked by these new intakes that were not ready to work. Also, this case has brought up a discouraging situation that business owners often face in Nigeria.

Interestingly, the business owner cut his losses in such a short time without any infringement. Even though the company size made it easy

to quickly detect the ‘sit back’ agenda of the three employees, he stayed on top of things through regular check-ins. The way everything panned out gave him an upper hand and a vantage position to handle the situation. Moreover, such experience becomes very handy for future reference when making judgment calls. The core winning acts in this scenario were clear leadership and expectations.

Surprisingly, this psychosocial factor that safeguards mental health in the workplace also serves as the bedrock for organizational health. When management fails to address this critical issue in a workplace, a party or both get cheated out of time and other resources. Clear leadership stems from the following six major questions:

What do we do? – Although it is easier to box this question into the organization’s vision and mission but it carries more weight when management thinks critically about why everyone must be at work. This question seeks to know why the company exists and why it opens its doors for business daily.

How do we behave? – Organizational behaviour, work ethics, values, and culture are the go-to areas to answer this question. Answering this question prompts an exercise that leads to a well-defined organizational

culture that aligns with the business’ core values.

Why are we here? – The purpose question is arguably the most important, and here is why. Most businesses started small with probably just a client or two at a time. At this point, making money could easily be the reason for being in business. It is also possible for it all to start without knowing the why. However, over time, it is critical to pinpoint the ‘real why’ which must be beyond money or personal reasons. A business purpose should identify at least a problem it’s

solving that defines its position in the grand scheme of things.

How will we succeed? – This question brings out goals to achieve the company’s vision and the strategies to adopt for success. Adequately answering them enables easy identification of competitive advantages that set an organization apart. In the process, a unique value proposition gets unraveled and honed to break new ground.

Who does what and where? – The combined question informs the organizational structure. It defines the company’s organogram and the mar-

ket/industry in which the business operates. It also reveals possibilities for business expansion, talent prospects, and overall growth initiatives. It sets the stage for accountability as all employees have clearly defined roles with job responsibilities.

What is most important? – It’s necessary for a business or its units to have a rallying cry or focal point for a maximum of two weeks. The focal point ensures the resolution of pressing issues, the emergence of growth opportunities, and the rejigging of business models to meet present realities.

Please note that it is not enough to have all these questions answered. Employees must be reminded of them, severally over time, for internalization to occur. Studies have shown that it takes an average individual about seven times to hear something before it sticks. Moreover, management must model what they seek to achieve and not pay lip service to expectations alone. Human beings learn more when they watch someone do certain things than when told what to do.

CALL TO ACTION

Kindly send your stressful work scenarios for analysis to oopaeye@gmail.com.

Opaeye, a wellbeing specialist and corporate wellness strategist, writes from Lagos

Who does what and where? – The combined question informs the organizational structure. It defines the company’s organogram and the market/industry in which the business operates. It also reveals possibilities for business expansion, talent prospects, and overall growth initiatives. It sets the stage for accountability as all employees have clearly defined roles with job responsibilities.

Stop calling every politician a leader - they aren’t as they’ve been disappointing us

ISAAC ASABOR

Does being a politician automatically make anyone a leader? The foregoing question that prefaces this piece you are about to read has been a nagging and obsessive question posed to no one, in particular, by this writer. It is not an exaggeration to say that joining politics and thus becoming a politician in Nigeria seems to be comparatively easier than joining any other area of human endeavour as it offers free entry and free exit opportunities to many Nigerians; even as the minimum education required to be in the field is the West African School Certificate.

However, while it is not compulsory to possess a higher education requirement to become a politician, most successful politicians hold a minimum of a bachelor’s degree, and some of them get their start at the lowest level of community politics and involvement, and this more often than not provides them with a useful experience that they can add to their political resume. There is no denying the fact that not a few politicians today got involved in politics through local initiatives by volunteering for a local campaign, even in rural areas, and joining a chapter of their chosen political parties. Thus, becoming an active member of their local political affairs has helped not a few of them to get noticed by politicians, and by that established their passion and willingness to put forth time and effort for

the great good of society.

In fact, besides the foregoing requirements that can in this context be said to be virtuous, it is obvious enough for one to say that the cliché “Politics is a dirty game” is often used to describe how rugged the landscape of politics is. This expression often describes politics as a free-for-all fight where everything is considered fair game in the quest for power. In this part of the world, not a few politicians are known to be notorious for various shady practices. For instance, during campaigning and election season, politicians and their aides take to the streets to canvass votes using different tactics. Based on this, it is easy to conclude that politics is a dirty game.

Against the backdrop of the foregoing, it is germane to ask, “What Defines Good Political Leadership?” “Does Being A Politician Automatically Makes Anyone A Leader?” The questions no doubt are crucial in this context as it is crystal clear that Nigeria, since 1999, when it transitioned to a democratic system of government, has been brimming with ambitious political leaders, but sadly very few matchups to the traits of good leadership. Many political leaders in the country appear to be severely lacking in some of the most essential qualities of a good leader, such as integrity and accountability. It is no coincidence that the word “politician” has many negative connotations. However, experience tells us that there is only a handful that comes near to the prin-

ciples of leadership and shows strong indicators of a successful political leader.

Without a doubt, this view could not have been expressed at a better time than now, particularly as not a few politicians variously holding sway across local, state, and federal governments are clueless, and seem to lack the understanding of what governance entails. Again, this view could not have been expressed at a better time than now as political leaders are vital, particularly as they determine the allocation of power and money through governmental policies, establish partnerships with other stakeholders, and make decisions that can have a major impact on a nation’s well-being and its citizens.

Political leadership requires a leader to focus on a constituency’s long-term betterment, above and beyond any short-term personal gains. Thus, strong political leadership requires a mixture of charm and honesty, and the capacity to evaluate a circumstance and make a judgment based on what will be better for the majority. Above all, leadership in a democratic system needs statesmanship compared to just becoming a ‘politician’, which implies possessing the honesty and ability to stand up for what is fair, even though it means resigning from a government post or losing an election.

Then, “What makes a good political leader?” The answer to the foregoing question cannot be farfetched as a person with good political leadership

skills will prove to be a successful leader who can easily distinguish between success and failure. A successful leader has a visionary dream and understands how to turn his visions into success stories in the modern world. Let’s look at some of the skills required to be successful in political leadership.

Also, given the fact that a leader is a good communicator, then, it is expedient to reiteratively ask, “Does being a politician automatically makes anyone it to be a good communicator? Without resorting to denigrating our political elites, it is not an exaggeration to say that not a few of them lack what it takes to communicate their vision clearly to Nigerians and tell them where they are, and where they intend to go, in terms of governance. To put it simply, as most politicians have been unable to effectively communicate their message to the people, it is beginning to dawn on us that they are not good leaders. It is not erroneous to opine that words can get people motivated and make them do the unimaginable, and if our leaders supposedly called political leaders were making effective use of them, they would have been achieving better results

Another factor that distinguishes a politician from a leader is that a leader is honest. Honesty, no doubt, is an element that makes for a strong leader. How does a political leader demand integrity from his or her supporters when such quality is neglected? Without a doubt, leaders excel because they

hold to their basic principles and convictions, and that would not be possible without ethics. Again, a leader is a decision-maker. A leader should be capable of making the right decision at the right time. Leaders take actions that have a huge effect on people. A leader should think long and hard before making a decision but stand by it once the decision is made. In a similar vein, it is expedient to opine that a leader must be able to inspire others. Perhaps the toughest thing a leader to do is convince people to follow them. This will only be done by providing a clear example and encouraging the followers. We look up to them when the going gets tough and see how they. Leaders should think optimistically, and their positive attitude should be evident in their actions. A leader should keep cool under strain and retain a degree of encouragement. If he or she excels in inspiring the people, they will comfortably resolve every obstacle now and in the future. Given the fact that not all politicians are leaders, it is expedient we stop calling every politician a leader. The majority of them are not, they have at each passing political dispensation disappointed us.

Asabor is a civil servant and writes from Benin City.

Infrastructure, education and Abia State examples

It is a pedestrian knowledge that Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Kashim Shettima, some weeks ago inaugurated the 188-megawatt Geometric Power Plant in Aba, Abia State, to accelerate power supply to industrial clusters in the region.

The power plant is a private sector driven initiative and described as the first and biggest integrated electricity facility in Nigeria, located in the Osisioma Industrial Area of the south-eastern state, and it is understood that Aba Power Limited Electric, a new electricity distribution company (Disco), will take electricity from the plant and supply it to nine local government areas — out of 17 — in Abia State.

While this feat is celebrated, what appears very interesting is the remark by the state governor that “When he first saw the proposal for Geometric Integrated Power Plant, he knew that he had to be involved immediately because, if just 50 percent of what had been proposed could be achieved, the industrial output from this great city and its environs would triple and millions of new jobs will be created directly and indirectly in the short to medium term. The success of the power project will send a clear signal to local and international investors that Aba is open for businesses.”

Indeed, while the state governor's decision to associate with the initiative and his laudable efforts in other sectors, particularly as infrastructural provisions in the state remain commendable, this piece believed and still believes that Governor Alex Otti's recent allocation of 20 percent of the state's 2024 annual budget to the education sector remains a positive development in the country that deserves our collective praise.

Aside from demonstrating a government's unwavering commitment to elevating these crucial sectors to their utmost potential, ultimately benefiting our citizens, allocating 20 percent and 15 percent of the state's 2024 annual budget to education and health, respectively, marks a historic milestone in Nigeria's budgeting.

The facts are there and speak for itself. Successive administrations at both state and federal levels have done very little when it comes to funding education. These have led to multi-faceted challenges that confront us today.

Take as an illustration, a particular report in 2013, described as mind-numbing the awareness that about 10.5 million Nigerian children of school age are not enrolled in schools. Out of this number, the report explained that, about 9 million are children of beggars, fishermen and other less privileged people in the society.

Again, in 2018, a survey showed that the population of out-of-school children in Nigeria had risen from 10.5 million to 13.2 million, the highest in the world.

The survey says something else; there is still a huge number of those who are in school, but are learning nothing, noting that schooling does not always lead to learning. In Nigeria, there are more non-learners in school than out of school, it concluded.

A similar study expressed worry that with the nation's current population of about 200 million, 45 percent of which are below 15 years, there is a huge demand for learning opportunities translating into increased enrolment. This has created challenges in ensuring quality education since resources are spread more thinly, resulting in more than 100 pupils for one teacher in most of the public primary and secondary schools in the country.

Basically, there exist in my opinion about three major troubling realities that characterize the situation as a crisis.

First is the awareness that Nigeria is not in short supply of policy measures and laws to ensure that no child is left behind in education. Yet, the number keeps swelling each year. As argued elsewhere, there is free and compulsory primary and junior secondary education to cater for children aged five to 14 years.

To explain this point, the Universal Basic Education Act 2004 is the legal framework that provides for compulsory, free and universal basic education of

all children of primary and junior secondary school age in the country. There is also the Child Rights Act, which reinforces this as a basic human right by prescribing schooling up to junior secondary school.

UBEC intervention funds as we know are focused on collaboration with other state actors towards improving access to basic education and reducing Nigeria's out-of-school children. The budgetary allocation for education for example in 2020 is N671.07 billion constituting 6.7%. Of the N671.07 billion allocated to the Federal Ministry of education, the sum includes the statutory transfer allocated to the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), which is N111.79 billion.

Yet, most of the states cannot draw from this fund as a result of their (states) inability to provide the counterpart funding.

So, of what benefit is the fund?

It was such encumbrance I presume, that some years ago, prompted the Ekiti State Governor, Dr. Kayode Fayemi, to call on the Federal Government to remove counterpart funding as part of basic requirements for states to access Federal Government funding of Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC).

The second factor fuelling out of school challenge in Nigeria stems from the awareness that despite the Universal Declaration of education as a fundamental human right for everyone and this right was further detailed in the Convention against Discrimination in Education, Nigerian government, particularly the northern governors, failed to turn more of their energies in, or focus their creativity on the useful things that will translate to empowerment of the people.

They made policies that views education as very narrow and restricted.

Presently, what Nigeria needs is a restless determination to make the idea of governance a reality. At this critical point of our nationhood, Federal and State governors must draw a lesson from Abia state government. They need to do this work-and in doing the work, stimulate their people particularly the



UTOMI'S NOTE

JEROME-MARIO CHIJOKE UTOMI
A SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE ADVOCATE

youths to learn and acquire higher levels of skills and techniques for economic independence.

There are certain technical steps that must be taken.

First, it is time to recognize that any nation desirous of securing the future of its people must invest in education. This is more urgent in the north where it is agreed that historical underdevelopment in Western education is responsible, more than the diversity in religious loyalties, for the social imbalance between the region and the south.

Similarly, the hour has come for state governors in Nigeria to adopt and support the 2030 sustainable agenda - a United Nations initiative and successor programme to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) - with a collection of 17 global goals formulated among other aims to promote and cater for people, peace, planet, and poverty. And has at its centre; partnership and collaboration, ecosystem thinking, co-creation and alignment of various intervention efforts by the public and private sectors and civil society.

The reason for this assertion is barefaced.

Few years ago, it was reported that Mathew Hassan Kukah - a well-informed, self-contained and quietly influential Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Sokoto, had during a four-day workshop tagged “Interfaith Dialogue and Engagement” for Christians and Muslims in Minna, Niger State, that the Kukah Centre (TKC) promised to introduce skill acquisition centres in the Northern part of the country where about 10 million Almajiri children will acquire vocations of their choice.

For sure, with the slow economic but high population growth in Nigeria,

particularly in the north, such a programme would have been an effective tool to fighting unemployment and consolidating economic growth. But for yet to be identified reason(s), no governor from the north bought into that opening provided or encouraged their youth to access such opportunity.

Regardless of what others may say, it is in the interest of the government to educate its people on different skills that create jobs for the youths as a formidable way of curbing crime and reducing threatening insecurity in the country. It should be done not merely for political consideration but from the views of national development and sustenance of our democracy and the best place to start from is adequate funding of education sector and deliberate effort to drastically reduce the number of our school children.

When this is achieved, it will in turn bring about sustained peace; result in improved hygiene and medical care, greater educational opportunities. Like Abia state, other state governments are hereby enjoined by this piece to embark on aggressive education of their people, ensuring its compulsion to a certain level.

To catalyze this process, a shift in action is important as ‘we cannot solve our socio-economic challenges with the same thinking we used when we created it’. The governors need to bring a change in leadership paradigm by switching over to a leadership style that is capable of making successful decisions built on a higher quality of information.

Jerome-Mario is the programme coordinator (Media and Public Policy), Social and Economic Justice Advocacy (SEJA)

Curbing the bane of child abuse in Edo

LINDA OKWORI

According to Wikipedia, Child abuse includes both acts of commission and omission on the part of parents or caregivers that cause actual or threatened harm to a child. Some health professionals and authors consider neglect as part of the definition of abuse, while others do not; this is because the harm may have been unintentional or because the caregivers did not understand the severity of the problem, which may have been as a result of cultural beliefs about how to raise a child.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines child abuse and child maltreatment as “all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.” The WHO also says, “Violence against children includes all forms of violence against people under 18 years old, whether perpetrated by parents or other caregivers, peers, romantic partners, or strangers.”

We have several forms of child abuse

such as physical abuse, which is the intentional use of physical force against the child that results in or has a high likelihood of resulting to harm for the child's health, survival, development, or dignity. This includes hitting, beating, kicking, shaking, biting, strangling, scalding, burning, poisoning, and suffocating. Much physical violence against children in the home is inflicted with the object of punishing.

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a form of child abuse in which an adult or older adolescent abuses a child for sexual stimulation. Sexual abuse refers to the participation of a child in a sexual act aimed towards the physical gratification or the financial profit of the person committing the act. Forms of CSA include asking or pressuring a child to engage in sexual activities (regardless of the outcome), indecent exposure of the genitals to a child, displaying pornography to a child, actual sexual contact with a child, physical contact with the child's genitals, viewing of the child's genitalia without physical contact, or using a child to produce child pornography. Selling the sexual services of children may be viewed and treated as child abuse rather than simple incarceration.

Psychological abuse: In The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) defined it as: spurning, terrorizing, isolating, exploiting, corrupting, denying emotional responsiveness, or neglect” or “A repeated pattern of caregiver behavior or extreme incident(s) that convey to children that they are worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered or only of value in meeting another's needs” (Wikipedia.com)

One of the fundamental domestic problems in Edo State is that child labour and child neglect is still highly practiced without any hope of restitution. Children are known to engage in one form of work or the other, especially within the family. In the urban areas, children between the age of eight years and 15 are seen hawking or engaged in one form of labour or the other, hence, exposing them to danger.

The situation of most children in Edo State remains critical due to the unique factors of their socio-economic, cultural, traditional and developmental circumstances. Poor households need money the family can earn in order to take care of the family. As a result, children are compelled by circumstances beyond their control to contribute to family in-

come. In the long run, working children are disadvantaged in several ways due to their involvement in all sorts of hazardous works, which affect their education, health and development process.

Majority of parents in Edo State believe that children are helpers both economically and for other purposes and this has brought many families into producing many children especially in the Nigerian agrarian society. This belief has become well accepted in the thinking that few or no attempt has been made to question its validity. Hence, children are victims of ignorance and barbaric cultural practices.

A lot of studies have carefully emphasized that abused or neglected children on the average score lower on cognitive measures and demonstrate poorer school achievement than their non-abused peers of similar socioeconomic backgrounds (Projectreserve.com).

In Nigeria, child abuse is recognized as a criminal offence with several laws backing the rights of the Nigerian child.

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended): The Constitution being the grundnorm of the Nigerian legal order designs the foundation upon which every other do-

mestic anti-child-trafficking law rests. The pertinent sections thereof are sections 17, 34, and 42. A combined reading of the above-stated sections forbids trafficking in persons, including children. The sections guarantee the ideals of freedom, equity, and justice. It also provides against slavery and forced labor or compulsory labor, sexual exploitation and deprivation of personal liberty of Nigerians. The provision of Section 46 of the Constitution permits anyone whose rights, as guaranteed by these provisions, have been violated to challenge such violation in the High Court of a State.

The Child Rights Act of 2003 is a Federal Law that provides wide-ranging protection for the rights of children in Nigeria. It covers various aspects of child protection, including provisions against child trafficking and abuse. The Act outlaws child trafficking and imposes severe punishments on offenders. This Act also sets out the rights and responsibilities of a child in Nigeria and provides for a system of child justice administration and the care and supervision of a child, among other things. Since its enactment in 2003, the Act has been adopted in 23 states including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and Edo State.

NEPL/Seplat Energy kick-off free eye care initiative

UYIOSA ISAAC

The NEPL/Seplat Energy JV has kicked off the 2024 edition of the Eye Can See initiative, one of its flagship Corporate Social Investments (CSI) in Benin City, the Edo State capital. The event, which took place at the Palace of the Oba of Benin, is designed to provide

free optical treatment at all levels to members of the communities within NEPL/SEPLAT operational communities.

The programme is targeted at men, women and children with eye problems and aims to ensure the provision of free eye care, visual aid and surgical treatment for Cataract, as well as reduce cases of permanent loss

of vision.

The initiative also provides free reading glasses, treats other related eye problems, educates patients on ways to care for the eyes and how to detect Glaucoma and also educates patients on lifestyle changes required to

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DMO to auction N450bn bonds March 18

TELIAT SULE

The Debt Management Office (DMO) will on March 18 2024(today) auction N450 billion worth of bonds with the settlement date slated for March 20, 2024. The bonds comprise a new 3-year N150 billion FGN March 2027.

The second bond is the N150 billion FGN Feb 2031 with a coupon rate of 18.50 percent due 2031. It is a 7-year reopen-

ing bond. The third is the N150 billion FGN Feb 2034 ten-year reopening bond having a coupon rate of 19 percent.

According to the offer document, the minimum subscription is N50,001,000 and in multiples of N1,000 thereafter.

“For Re-openings of previously issued bonds, (where the coupon is already set), successful bidders will pay a price corresponding to the yield-to-maturity bid that clears the

volume being auctioned, plus any accrued interest on the instrument,” DMO stated.

Appraising the offer in respect of the previous bond auctions, Meristem Securities said it anticipated rising trend in rates across all the instruments.

“At the last Primary Market Auction (PMA) held in February 2024, the DMO introduced

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Presidential initiatives push company income tax, VAT revenues to N9trn in 2023

TELIAT SULE

Reforms introduced by the Federal Government of Nigeria towards generating significant revenue through taxes have started to pay off as the country realised N4.9 trillion revenue from the Company Income Tax (CIT) in 2023 confirming that those initiatives are worthwhile. That amounted to an increase of 73 percent over N2.83 trillion realised in 2022.

A case in point is the setting up of the Presidential Committee on Fiscal Policy and Tax Reforms headed by Taiwo Oyedele, a tax guru from PwC.

On a quarter-on-quarter basis, Nigeria realised N469 billion CIT revenue in Q1 2023; N1.55 trillion in Q2 2023; N1.75 trillion in Q3 2023, and N1.13 trillion in Q4 2023.

In the same manner, Nigeria generated N3.64 trillion from Value Added Tax (VAT), an increase of 44.9 percent over N2.51 trillion realised in 2022. This comprises N2.1 trillion local VAT and N1.54 trillion foreign VAT, according to the data provided by the nation's data agency, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

Concerning company income tax, higher revenue from the manufacturing, telecommunications, as well as financial and insurance sub sectors was responsible for the increased company income tax in 2023.

CIT from the manufacturing sub sector hit N626.42 billion

in 2023 compared to N468.60 billion in 2022, representing 33.7 percent during the period. This amounted to an increase of N157.82 billion in just a financial year. Information and communications generated the second highest amount of CIT to the tune of N466.56 billion representing an increase of 28.8 percent when compared with N362.26 billion realised in 2022.

CIT from the financial and insurance sub-sector amounted to N458.85 billion in 2023, representing an increase of 119.6 percent or N249.92 billion over the previous year's tax revenue from this sector.

Mining and quarrying sub sector occupied the fourth position in terms of CIT revenue to the tune of N235.16 billion in 2023 compared to N141.58 billion in the previous year. In other words, the increase was 66.1 percent or a gain of N93.58 billion during the period.

CIT from the public administration, defence, and compulsory social security generated N130.59 billion in 2023 as against N95.40 billion in 2022. Also, wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles earned the nation N114.97 billion as CIT revenue in 2023 compared to N60.06 billion in 2022.

It should be noted that Nigeria has intensified efforts to increase revenue by blocking leakages and reducing tax avoidance. Many initiatives have gone into this including the setting up

of the presidential committee on tax, headed by Taiwo Oyedele, farmer senior partner at PwC Nigeria.

One of the initiatives is to generate revenue while reducing the burden on the low-income earners in the country.

“Engaging the public in fiscal policy reforms is crucial, so we seize every opportunity to share our plans, and our thought process, provide clarifications and

address areas of concern, all in the public interest.

“Currently, we have over 60 taxes, levies and charges across the 3 levels of government with state and local governments administering 46 taxes and levies, including road taxes, motor park levies, truck, canoe, wheelbarrow and cart fees etc. There are even more unauthorised taxes all disproportionately affecting small businesses including petty

traders, hawkers, artisans, truckers, cart pushers, okada riders and other transporters.

“The associated costs are inevitably passed on to consumers, mostly low-income earners. The players also have to contend with the unorthodox means of collection and harassment from untrained “revenue collectors” on highways, markets, streets while there is very little to show for the revenues collected,” Taiwo

Oyedele said recently.

All but one activity category recorded an increase in CIT revenue generated in 2023. The odd one out is the water supply, waste management and remediation subsector which recorded N1.54 billion as CIT revenue, amounting to a decline of 15.2 percent when compared to N1.82 billion

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Business&Economy

The Nigerian
Observer
...that the people may know

MainOne Cable cut disrupts Nigerian banking, internet activities

GOODNESS OYEDUN

A major internet provider for most Nigerian commercial banks and internet service providers (ISPs), MainOne, suffered a submarine cut on Thursday, which disrupted most banking activities and other internet connected activities in the country.

Preliminary findings and further investigations revealed that the fault occurred due to an external incident that resulted in a cut on the submarine cable system, in the Atlantic Ocean offshore Cote D'Ivoire, along the coast of West Africa.

MainOne says that it has

started the process of restoring services to some of its customers and that the repair process for its damaged submarine cable may take up to five weeks. The company disclosed this in a statement on Friday following a fault experienced on its network on Thursday.

"Earlier Thursday March 14, 2024, we experienced a fault on the MainOne network. Based on preliminary findings, the fault resulted from an incident on our submarine cable system, offshore the coast of West Africa, that has also affected other cable systems and is disrupting international connectivity and internet services across West Africa.

"We are working with cable systems that are not affected by this incident or previous outages to secure restoration of capacity and our technical team is working assiduously to begin the restoration of services, subject to availability of capacity and service configuration specifics," MainOne said.

It added that, "This process might take 1-2 weeks for repairs while about 2-3 weeks of transit time may be required for the vessel to pick up the spares and travel from Europe to West Africa once the vessel is mobilized. We have restored services to some customers and are actively working on restoring services to others via capacity acquired on available cable systems.

"The estimated repair time is

for our submarine cable fault to be fixed, to enable our services to become fully restored, and independently supply capacity to our customers."

This break affected most customers of major banks from accessing their bank apps. The cable outages affected several ISPs and cloud service providers and also reduced the quality of voice calls.

MainOne has a maintenance agreement with Atlantic Cable Maintenance and Repair Agreement to provide repair services for the submarine cable.

In repairing the cable they stated, "First, identify and assign a vessel, the vessel has to retrieve the necessary spares required for repair, and then sail to the fault location to conduct the repair work.

"Next, in order to complete

the repair, the affected section of the submarine cable will have to be pulled from the seabed onto the ship where it will be spliced by skilled technicians. Post repair, joints will be inspected and tested for any defects, and then the submarine cable is lowered back to the seabed and guided to a good position."

According to MainOne, its cable is very well protected as can be seen from the number of incidences on their cable system since inception in 2010.

"We have taken a lead in West Africa in championing the International Cable Protection Committee (ICPC), and organizing submarine cable owners' associations in Nigeria and Ghana, which promote awareness of the strategic benefits of submarine

cables and proactive regulations and measures to minimize submarine cable damage.

"We are very optimistic that our cable will be repaired as planned and services fully restored so that we can continue to operate with continued integrity of the submarine cable," MainOne stated.

MainOne's Global Internet Transit (GIT) is a carrier grade service that offers optimized internet connectivity to businesses, Internet Service Providers (ISPs), and telecom operators, with their unique Autonomous System Number (ASN). It is a company that provides access to the internet. They provide this access through multiple means, including dial-up, DSL, cable, wireless and fiber-optic connections.

Presidential initiatives push company...

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generated in 2022.

Local CIT amounted to N2.51 trillion, an increase of 49.5 percent over N1.68 trillion realised in 2022, while the nation earned N2.38 trillion from foreign CIT payments, amounting to 107.4 percent rise over N1.15 trillion realised in 2022.

In terms of contribution to VAT revenue in 2023, the manufacturing sector at N578.39

billion generated the most VAT revenue. It was followed by the information and communication sub sector from where the nation earned N412.30 billion, while N260.04 billion was generated from the mining and quarrying subs sector.

And financial and insurance activities, N215.78 billion, as well as public administration and defence, N180.91 billion completed the top five VAT generating sectors in 2023.

NEPL/Seplat Energy kick-off free...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 11

reduce the rates of hypertension and diabetes.

In his welcome address, the Managing Director, Seplat West Limited, Ayodele Olatunde, who was represented by the Base Manager, Western Assets, Emmanuel Otokhine, thanked the Edo State Health Management Board and other partners, who have supported the programme over the years.

He assured that, "Seplat and our JV Partner are committed to continuing this programme and all we ask is that you continue to cooperate with us, to take advantage of the opportunities that this programme offers and also spread the news to let others also enjoy the benefits of the programme."

For his part, the Corporate Communications Manager, NNPC Exploration and Production Limited (NEPL) Alhaji Dahiru Abubakar, represented by the Community Liaison Officer, Faith Otinor, said, "It is our pleasure as an organisation in partnership with Seplat, to roll out the "Eye Can See" optical care program for the community. Over the years, we have partnered with highly reputable medical practitioners who have proven themselves in the field of optical care to deploy this program and we pledge our undiminished collaboration towards human and capital development in Edo State."

Also, while commending the Seplat Energy JV for its com-

mitment to positively impacting lives through the Eye Can See initiative, Chief Isaac Oghafua, the Oyeoba of Benin, affirmed that, "Seplat has made significant strides in improving community health and the people living in our community have felt their impact. The Palace is always happy when this programme happens because our own family members within and outside the palace have directly benefited from the initiative."

The Eye Can See initiative which commenced 12 years ago, has delivered over 96,000 eye treatments, dispensed over 45,000 reading glasses and performed more than 4,000 surgeries. The current programme is projected to Screen 6,000 persons, perform 350 Surgeries and dispense 5,000 Reading Glasses across various communities.

The Seplat Energy JV collaborates with reputable medical practitioners and organisations, including the Family Health Outreach Association and the Medical Women Association of Nigeria, to deliver the Eye Can See Programme, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 3, which is designed to deliver good health and wellbeing, to ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing of all at all ages.

One of the beneficiaries of the ongoing programme, Florence Ayewoh, expressed joy that she could see well again. "I am really grateful to Seplat for making me see well again. May God bless all of you and those who sent you to come."



SEPLAT -EYE CAN SEE PROGRAMME 2024:

L-R: Mildred Medinus, Broadcast Media Advisor, NEPL; Chief Victor Osa Uzamere, Obadolaye of Benin; Emmanuel Otokhine, Base Manager, Western Asset, Seplat Energy; Esther Icha, Manager, Corporate Social Investment, Seplat Energy; Faith Otinor, Community Liaison Officer, NEPL and Chief Uyi Okungbowa, Ogua of Benin at the NEPL/Seplat Energy JV "Eye Can See" programme held on Wednesday March 13, 2024 at the Oba of Benin Palace, Edo State.

Zubaida Umar makes history as first female DG of NEMA

CHIDERA DUMBIRI

President Bola Tinubu has officially appointed Zubaida Umar as the Director-General of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), making her the first woman to hold this prestigious position. This con-

firmation marks a significant milestone in Umar's illustrious career and underscores the government's commitment to promoting gender diversity and excellence in leadership roles.

A statement released by the Special Adviser to the President on Media and Publicity

highlighted Umar's extensive qualifications and accomplishments. She is a distinguished member of both the Chartered Institute of Bankers and the Institute of Credit Administration, showcasing her expertise in financial management and administration.

Umar's previous role as the

Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services at the Federal Mortgage Bank (FMB) showcased her strategic vision and leadership capabilities. She played an important role in modernizing and transforming the bank into a technologically

CONTINUES ON PG 14»

DMO to auction N450bn bonds March...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 11

two new instruments – FEB 31, and FEB 34, offering a total of NGN2.50trn (NGN1.25trn on each instrument). Due to the higher offer amount, the PMA saw higher investor participation as subscription more than tripled, printing at NGN1.90trn (vs NGN604.56bn at the previous auction in January).

"Also, the amount allotted was significantly higher as it rose to NGN1.49trn (vs NGN418.20bn in January). However, the bid-

to-cover ratio fell to 1.27x from 1.45x in January, reflecting a higher allotment amount compared to the last auction. Consequently, the marginal rates on Feb-31 and Feb-34 printed at 18.50% and 19.00% respectively.

"In the upcoming auction, we anticipate an uptrend in rates across the offered instruments. We expect the recent upward adjustment (400bps) in the Monetary Policy Rate (MPR) by the Central Bank further to spur investors' demand for higher rate at the auction," Meristem Securities said.

In terms of valuation and bid rates, the securities outfit estimated FGN Feb 2031 at a fair value of N99.94 with an implied yield of 18.50 percent and advised bid rates between 18.50 percent and 19.50 percent.

The fair value of FGN Feb 2034 is put at N99.59 and an implied yield of 19.08 percent and advised bid rates between 19 percent and 21 percent.

Also, while not stating the fair value and implied yield for FGN March 2027, the advised bid rates for it are put at between 17.50 percent and 19 percent.

A bond is a fixed-income debt instrument issued by the government (federal or state government) or corporate institutions with a definite date of maturity and a fixed interest payment (known as a coupon) payable either semi-annually or annually. Unlike equities, bonds are issued with a guarantee of the initial investment and can have tenors as long as 20 years. A treasury note refers to a government bond instrument with a term to maturity of 1 to 10 years while a treasury bond has a maturity of 10 years and above.

Benin Airport launches modern automated parking system for seamless travel experience

HAPPY OSAGIE

In a bid to enhance travellers' convenience and streamline parking operations, Benin Airport has unveiled its cutting-edge automated parking system. This innovative technology promises a seamless travel experience for passengers, marking a significant milestone in the airport's modernization efforts.

Gone are the days of circling parking lots in search of a spot or enduring long wait time for valet services. With

the newly introduced automated parking system, travellers can now enjoy hassle-free parking at the touch of a button. Equipped with state-of-the-art robotics and advanced sensor technology, the system efficiently manages vehicle storage and retrieval, maximizing parking space utilization and minimizing wait times.

The automated parking system operates through a user-friendly interface, allowing passengers to easily drop off their vehicles and retrieve them upon their return. Utilizing a

combination of sensors and computer algorithms, the system carefully manoeuvres vehicles into designated parking spaces, ensuring optimal use of available space while maintaining safety standards.

Security is also a top priority with this new system, as it provides enhanced surveillance and monitoring capabilities to safeguard parked vehicles. With 24/7 monitoring and secure access controls, travellers can have peace of mind knowing that their vehicles are safe.

Moreover, the implemen-

tation of the automated parking system aligns with Benin Airport's commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship. By optimizing parking space utilization and reducing the need for additional infrastructure, the system contributes to the airport's efforts to minimize its carbon footprint and promote eco-friendly practices.

The introduction of this state-of-the-art technology underscores Benin Airport's dedication to delivering a world-class travel experience for its

passengers. With the automated parking system in place, travellers can look forward to smoother arrivals and departures, free from the stress and inconvenience often associated with parking.

As airports around the world continue to embrace automation and innovation, Benin Airport sets a shining example with its investment in cutting-edge technology. The automated parking system not only enhances efficiency and convenience but also sets the stage for future advancements in airport operations and passenger services.

The launch of the automated parking system at Benin Airport marks a significant step forward in the airport's quest for excellence. By prioritizing passenger comfort, security, and sustainability, Benin Airport reaffirms its position as a leading hub for air travel in the region.

However, passengers have expressed concerns over automated parking fees at the Airport. While the introduction of the state-of-the-art automated parking system at Benin Airport was intended to streamline parking operations and enhance travellers' convenience, some passengers are expressing concerns over what they perceive as an additional financial burden.

A growing number of passengers have voiced complaints regarding the fees associated with using the automated parking service. Many argued that the introduction of this technology felt more like a means of collecting money from them rather than providing a genuine solution to parking challenges.

In response to recent concerns raised by passengers regarding the introduction of automated parking systems and

associated fees at Benin Airport, airport authorities have initiated a comprehensive awareness campaign aimed at informing travellers about the new technology and its implications.

Recognizing the importance of clear communication and transparency, airport officials have taken proactive measures to educate passengers about the automated parking system and the fees involved. The awareness campaign includes a variety of outreach efforts, such as signage installations, informational brochures, and digital announcements throughout the airport premises.

Airport officials have also leveraged digital platforms, such as the airport website, Nigeria Observer website and newspaper as well as other social media channels, to disseminate information and engage with passengers in real-time. Regular updates and reminders are shared to ensure that travellers are continuously informed about the automated parking system and any updates to fee structures or policies.

Through collaborative efforts between airport authorities, staff, and passengers, the transition to automated parking is expected to proceed smoothly, with minimal disruption and confusion.

As the awareness campaign continues to unfold, airport officials remain committed to listening to passenger feedback and making adjustments as necessary to improve the overall travel experience. By prioritizing communication and education, Benin Airport sets a precedent for other airports seeking to implement innovative technologies while maintaining passenger satisfaction and convenience.



FEED THE HUNGRY:

L-R: Edo State Governor, Mr. Godwin Obaseki; Chief Imam of Benin Central Mosque, Alhaji Fatai Enabulele, Chairman, Edo State Muslim Pilgrims' Welfare Board (MPWB), Sheikh Ibrahim Oyarekhua, at the flag-off of "Feed the Hungry" initiative, with Muslim community leaders, in Benin City.

AfDB advocates for an end to resource-backed Loans

OLUTOLA FAWEHINMI

Akinwumi Adesina, the head of the African Development Bank, has reiterated the urgent need to terminate loans linked to Africa's vast natural resources. He made this call amidst growing concerns over the detrimental effects of such loans, particularly those facilitated by deals with China, which have raised significant apprehensions regarding pricing complexities and the potential for exploitation.

Adesina emphasized the inherent challenges associated with pricing natural resources for long-term loan contracts, citing the difficulty in accurately determining their value. He pointed out that while linking future revenue from resource exports to loan repayments is often promoted as a means to secure financing for infrastructure projects, it frequently leads to non-transparent and exploitative arrangements. Adesina highlighted the power disparity in negotiations, with lenders typically dictating terms to cash-strapped African nations, resulting in asymmetric, non-transparent,

and incorrectly priced loans.

"These are the reasons I say Africa should put an end to natural resource-backed loans," he pointed to a bank initiative that helps "countries renegotiate those loans that are asymmetric, not transparent and wrongly priced," Adesina said.

The shift towards renewable energy and electric vehicles has exacerbated the situation, driving an increased demand for critical minerals. This demand has led to the proliferation of loans tied to natural resources, including a significant China-Congo deal that solidifies Beijing's position in the global supply chain for electric vehicles. The deal taps into Congo's vast reserves of cobalt, a mineral essential for lithium-ion batteries, further amplifying concerns over exploitation and economic dependency.

Adesina stressed the adverse effects of such loans on sustainable debt management, as countries often struggle to repay them using income from critical sectors of their economies. He cited examples such as Chad's financial crisis following an oil-backed loan, which

left the country using most of its oil proceeds to service its debt. In response, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) insisted on renegotiating natural resource-backed loans for countries like Angola and the Republic of Congo to mitigate the economic fallout.

At least 11 African countries have secured billions of dollars in loans backed by natural resources since the early 2000s, with China emerging as the primary source of funding, followed by Western commodity traders and banks. Adesina dismissed assertions of fixation on any specific country but stressed the importance of negotiation, planning, and debt management capacity at the country level.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has maintained that Beijing operates with transparency and openness in its relations with Africa. However, concerns persist, particularly in Congo, where efforts to review a 2008 infrastructure-for-minerals agreement with China have been met with resistance. The agreement grants Chinese firms a substantial stake in joint

ventures for copper and cobalt, prompting calls for a reassessment of its terms to ensure equitable benefits for Congo.

"It is not about one country or the other; any country can exploit when you don't know what you are doing," he said, adding, "The capacity to negotiate at the country level, the capacity to plan, the capacity for debt management is very important."

In response to these challenges, Adesina unveiled the African Development Bank's Alliance for Green Infrastructure in Africa, a groundbreaking initiative aimed at mobilizing \$10 billion to finance sustainable infrastructure projects. The initiative seeks to prioritize "bankable" projects in the energy and transport sectors, potentially reducing reliance on problematic financing tied to natural resources.

The African Development Bank's initiative signifies a crucial step towards sustainable development, aiming to mitigate the allure of loans linked to natural resources and foster equitable and environmentally friendly infrastructure development across the continent.

Latest road transport fare data as at mid-March 2024

HAPPY OSAGIE

When it comes to traveling from Benin City to other parts of Nigeria, travelers have several options to consider. Among the prominent transport companies servicing major routes from Benin City are God is Good Motors, Faith Motors, and Big Joe Motors, among others.

GOD IS GOOD MOTORS:

Known for its reliable services and comfortable rides, God is Good Motors offers routes from Benin to Lagos and Abuja. Traveling to Lagos with this reputable company comes at a cost of N22,800, while the journey to Abuja attracts N27,300. Despite the higher fares, passengers can expect quality service and amenities during their journey.

FAITH MOTORS

For budget-conscious travelers, Faith Motors provides affordable options, although with some trade-offs. A trip from Benin to Abuja with Faith Motors costs N18,000, but it is worth noting that this option does not include air conditioning.

On the other hand, travelers heading to Enugu can take advantage of the N9,000 fare, making it an attractive choice for those prioritizing cost over comfort.

BIG JOE MOTORS

With competitive pricing and a reputation for reliability, Big Joe Motors is another popular choice for travelers departing from Benin. Travelers heading to Abuja can expect to pay N21,300 for the journey, which offers a balance between affordability and service quality.

Business & Economy

The Nigerian
Observer
...that the people may know

SEC hikes crypto exchange platforms' fees to N150m

CHIDERA DUMBIRI

Nigeria's Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has proposed a significant amendment to the registration fees for platforms offering crypto exchange services in the country. The proposed increase would raise the registration fee from N30 million (\$18,620) to N150 million (\$93,000), meaning a substantial jump in costs for operators in this sub sector.

The SEC's decision, as reported by CoinTelegraph, stems from a drive to enhance regulatory clarity and responsiveness to feedback from industry stakeholders, particularly in

light of the recent engagements with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). This move comes after the SEC's initial rollout of rules and guidelines for all crypto and digital assets service providers in May 2022. Now, on Friday, March 15th, 2024, the SEC has put forth a fresh amendment to further refine these regulations.

Under the proposed new guidelines, digital asset exchanges, offering platforms, and custodians will face increased financial obligations. The application fee is set to rise from N100,000 (\$62) to N300,000 (\$186), while the processing fee will surge from N300,000 (\$186) to N1million (\$620). The registration

fee will experience a staggering 400% increase, climbing from N30 million naira (\$18,620) to N150 million (\$93,102).

Another notable change introduced by the SEC is the renaming of the rules and guidelines from "New Rules on Issuance, Offering Platforms and Custody of Digital Assets"

to "Rules on Digital Assets Issuance, Offering Platforms, Exchange, and Custody."

The SEC emphasised that these amendments are designed to provide clarity and incorporate valuable input from stakeholders, aligning with recent discussions and insights gained from engagements with the

CBN. These developments occur amidst the recent tensions between the Nigerian authorities and major crypto exchange platforms, such as Binance.

The accusation leveled against Binance of manipulating Nigeria's local currency, the Naira, led to a dispute between the platform and the Nigerian authori-

ties, resulting in the detention of two Binance executives invited to the country for resolution. Additionally, Nigeria's decision to allow the Naira to trade freely in June 2023, abandoning its longstanding currency peg, has triggered economic challenges, including soaring inflation and currency devaluation.

Ogun, Germany partner to enhance food security, renewable energy

NAOMI EWANSIHA

The Ogun State Government and the German Missions have embarked on a collaborative partnership in a move aimed at bolstering food security and advancing renewable energy initiatives in the country. This alliance, spearheaded by Consul General Weert Borner from the German Embassy, signifies an important step towards sustainable development and economic growth in the region.

Consul General Borner, during a courtesy visit to Governor Dapo Abiodun in Abeokuta, highlighted the key areas of co-operation between Germany and Ogun State. Emphasizing the importance of agricultural enhancement, Borner expressed Germany's commitment to supporting Ogun State in revolutionizing its agricultural sector. This collaboration seeks to implement innovative farming techniques, promote sustainability, and facilitate environmentally friendly agricultural practices. Moreover, the partnership aims to bolster food production capabilities, thereby contributing to Nigeria's overall food security objectives.

"The two major areas we want to focus in increasing cooperation between Ogun State and Germany is the agricultural sector; meaning better production, better methods of agriculture, plus making agriculture more sustainable and environment friendly and of course, supporting Ogun State in food security for all of Nigeria. The second area is the energy transition to improve the buildup of renewable energy and the grid development in Nigeria," General Borner stated.

Governor Dapo Abiodun, in his response, highlighted the significance of the partnership in achieving the state's ambitious agricultural goals. He articulated the state government's intention to facilitate mechanized farming through strategic collaborations with the German government. Abiodun emphasized the need for modernized farming techniques and infrastructure sup-

port to empower small-scale farmers and enhance overall agricultural productivity in the state. With a clear focus on becoming a key player in Nigeria's food production landscape, the governor reiterated his administration's dedication to realizing this vision within a 12-month timeframe.

"We are looking for partners in the area of merchandised farming and providing tractors and other forms of mechanized farming techniques that will help us in achieving our plan. In the last few days, we have been deliberating on how to ensure that we contribute our quota to the food security agenda of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

"We believe that we can easily be the bread basket of this nation and we are devising new strategies to achieve the objective in the shortest time. We have an ambitious plan of ensuring that in the next 12 months, this becomes easily visible across the state. We welcome partners that will assist us in that part," Governor Dapo Abiodun said.

The collaboration between Ogun State and Germany extends beyond agriculture, encompassing the crucial realm of renewable energy transition. Consul General Borner outlined Germany's commitment to facilitating the development of renewable energy sources and improving grid infrastructure in Nigeria. This strategic alignment with Ogun State underscores the shared objective of transitioning towards sustainable energy solutions, thereby mitigating environmental impact and promoting energy security across the region.

The significance of this partnership resonates not only within Ogun State but also on a national scale. By leveraging Germany's expertise and resources, Ogun State aims to position itself as a leading contributor to Nigeria's food security agenda. Through the adoption of modern farming techniques, provision of necessary infrastructure, and strategic collaborations, the state is poised to emerge as a pivotal hub for agricultural innovation and production.



OREDO BUSINESS SUPPORT AND INVESTMENT FACILITATION OFFICE:

Dr Tom Obaseki, Executive Chairman, Oredo Local Government Area (5th Left); Kelvin Uwaibi, Managing Director ESIPO (6th left); and executive members of Oredo Local Government Area, during the recent Unveiling of the Oredo Business Support and Investment Facilitation Office at the Oredo Local Government Council in Edo South.

IFAD discloses Nigeria's leading role in W/ Africa's agricultural development

NAOMI EWANSIHA

The Associate Vice President of the Programme Management Department for the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Dr. Donal Brown unveiled Nigeria's pivotal position in agricultural initiatives within West Africa. Speaking at the Federal Government-IFAD Open House and Exhibition Fair, Dr. Brown highlighted that Nigeria boasts the largest portfolio in West Africa and the second largest across the entire continent.

Since 1985, IFAD has invested a substantial sum totaling \$317.6 million in ten projects and programmes within Nigeria, benefiting over 3.7 million households. Notably, these initiatives have significantly impacted rural communities, with an emphasis on improving livelihoods and ensuring food security.

Key projects such as the Value Chain Development Programme (VCDP) in the Niger Delta, Livelihood Improvement Family Enterprises in the Niger Delta (LIFE-ND), Special

Agro-Industrial Processing Zones (SAPZ), and Non-Sovereign Private Sector Operation (NSO) and Grants have played pivotal roles in transforming rural landscapes.

Dr. Brown reiterated IFAD's commitment to reducing rural poverty and fostering profitable smallholder agribusinesses in Nigeria. He emphasized the organization's collaborative efforts with the Nigerian government in developing agricultural value chains, enhancing community-driven development, and promoting financial inclusion for rural households.

Dr. Fatima Aliyu, the National Project Coordinator for IFAD-VCDP, shed light on the organization's achievements since its inception in Nigeria in 1985. Dr. Aliyu highlighted IFAD's role in improving the incomes of rural households and smallholder farmers, thereby ensuring sustainable production, processing, and marketing of staple crops such as rice and cassava.

With Nigeria's population standing as the largest in Africa, at about 200 million inhabitants,

and a significant portion residing in the rural areas, agricultural development remains paramount for economic growth and poverty alleviation. Dr. Brown's visit to Nigeria aims to further strengthen the partnership between IFAD and the Nigerian government in advancing food security initiatives. Dr. Brown expressed IFAD's commitment to assessing existing projects and exploring avenues for future collaboration.

In his response, Sen. Abubakar Kyari, the Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, expressed gratitude for IFAD's support in enhancing food security and applauded the successful implementation of key projects such as LIFE-ND, VCDP Additional Financing (AF), and SAPZ Programme. He emphasized the importance of continued collaboration, highlighting upcoming initiatives such as the approval of extensions and additional financing to further bolster agricultural development in Nigeria.

"The smooth implementation of the Livelihood Improvement Family Enterprise – Niger Delta

(LIFE-ND), Value Chain Development Programme (VCDP) Additional Financing (AF) and Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zone (SAPZ) Program underscores the unique quality of our strategic partnership.

"It is my strong belief that some of the next steps in the implementation of LIFE-ND, which include the approval of a one-year extension, request for \$20m additional Financing (AF) and preparation of LIFE-ND phase 2 will be given accelerated attention.

"I would also like to appeal for the release of a \$5m ASAP grant to VCDP for climate change adaptation as well as the approval of the request for a two-year extension to enable the programme to improve on its disbursement status," Senator Kyari stated.

The meeting concluded with a mutual commitment to accelerating efforts towards sustainable agricultural development, underscoring the significance of IFAD's partnership in Nigeria's journey towards food security and rural prosperity.

Zubaida Umar makes history as first female...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 13

advanced institution, setting a new standard for mortgage and financial services providers.

President Tinubu expressed confidence in Umar's ability to bring much-needed financial discipline and oper-

ational efficiency to NEMA. He emphasised the importance of transforming NEMA into a proactive and performance-driven organization, particularly in response to the challenges posed by climate change and the increasing frequency of emergencies.

Zubaida Umar's academic background is equally impressive, with degrees from renowned institutions such as the Robert Gordon University's Business School and Ahmadu Bello University. Her expertise spans over two decades in the corporate sector, where

she has earned a reputation for excellence and innovation.

Prior to her role at FMB, Umar served at the Debt Management Office (DMO) from 2001 to 2006, contributing significantly to Nigeria's financial stability by managing domestic and foreign debts effectively.

ThePolity

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Oronsaye report and today's reality

● **Will implementation substantially reduce cost of governance?**

TOBORE JEROME AND
VICTORY OKONJO

Despite the Oronsaye report being submitted as far back as 2012 to the then President Goodluck Jonathan administration, the report has recently sparked extensive debate in Nigeria.

The Oronsaye Report, calling for the restructuring and rationalization of Federal Government agencies, has yet to be implemented after over a decade. Officially known as the Report of the Presidential Committee on Restructuring and Rationalisation of Federal Government Parastatals, Commissions and Agencies, the report has, for many years, gathered dust on the shelves of policymakers, with its recommendations largely ignored. Considering the current socioeconomic situation in the country, the need for reform has become increasingly apparent as Nigeria grapples with economic challenges and the inefficiencies of an overbloated public sector.

After so many years, the recent endorsement of the report by President Bola Tinubu has reignited discussions on the report's implementation. Tinubu's commitment to adopt the report's recommendations could mark a significant shift in Nigeria's approach to governance. By consolidating agencies with overlapping functions and eliminating unnecessary parastatals, the government hopes to foster a more efficient, transparent, and accountable system that can drive the nation towards sustainable development.

The Minister of Information and National Orientation, Mohammed Idris, while speaking to State House Correspondents after a Federal Executive Council meeting in Abuja, described the President's move to adopt the recommendations of the report as "a very bold move" and revealed that a number of agencies, commissions and departments would be scrapped as a result.

"Some have been merged, while others have been subsumed. Others, of course, have also been moved from some ministries to others where government feels they will operate better," Idris explained.

"The Pension Transition Arrangement Directorate has been scrapped. The National Senior Secondary School Education Commission is also being looked at with the aim to modify some of its processes and a final decision on that will be taken," he said.

Other agencies, commissions and parastatals affected by the approval of the FEC meeting of 26th February 2024 are as follows:

AGENCIES TO BE MERGED

National Agency for the Control of Aids (NACA) to be merged under the Centre for Disease Control in Federal Ministry of Health; National Emergency Agency (NEMA) to be merged with National Commission Refugee, Migra-



JONATHAN



ORONSAYE



TINUBU

tion and Internally Displaced persons [NCFRMI]; Directorate of Technical Cooperation in Africa (DTCA) to be merged with Directorate of Technical Aid (DTAC) and to function as a department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Infrastructure Concession and Regulatory Commission (ICRC) to be merged with Bureau for Public Enterprise (BPE); Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC) to be merged with Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC); National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure (NASeni) to be merged with National Centre for Agriculture Mechanization (NCAM) and Project Development Institute (PRODA); National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA) to be merged with National Centre for Genetic Resources and Biotechnology (NACGRAB); National Institute for Leather Science Technology (NILEST) to be merged with National Institute for Chemical Technology (NARICT); Nomadic Education Commission (NEC) to be merged with National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult Education and Non Formal Education; Federal Radio Corporation (FRCN) to be merged with Voice of Nigeria (VON); National Commission for Museums and Monuments to be merged with National Gallery of Arts; National Theatre to be merged with National Troupe of Nigeria; National Metallurgical Development Centre (NMDC) to be merged with National Metallurgical Training Institute (NMTI); Nigerian Army University (NAUB) to be merged Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA); and Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT) to be merged Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA).

”
The Pension Transition Arrangement Directorate has been scrapped. The National Senior Secondary School Education Commission is also being looked at with the aim to modify some of its processes and a final decision on that will be taken

AGENCIES TO BE SUBSUMED

Service Compact with all Nigerians (SERVICOM) to be subsumed to function as a department under Bureau for Public Service Reforms (BPSR); Border Communities Development Agency (BCDA) to be subsumed to function as a department under the National Boundary Commission (NBC); National Salaries, Income and

Wages Commission (NSIWC) to be subsumed into Revenue Mobilization & Fiscal Allocation Commission (RMAFC); Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution to be subsumed under Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA); Public Complaints Commission (PCC) to be subsumed under National Human Rights Commission (NHRC); Nigerian Institute for Trypanosomiasis (NITR) to be subsumed into Institute of Veterinary Research (VOM); Nigerian Natural Medicine Development Agency (NNMDA) to be subsumed under the National Institute of Pharmaceutical Research and Development (NIPRD); National Intelligence Agency Pension Commission to be subsumed under the administration of Nigerian Pension Commission (Pen-Com); and Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) to be subsumed as a department in the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Creative Economy.

AGENCIES TO BE RELOCATED

Niger Delta Power Holding Company (NDPHC) to be relocated to Ministry of Power; National Agricultural Land Development Agency (NALDA) to be relocated to the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security; National Blood Service Commission to be converted into an Agency and relocated to the Federal Ministry of Health; and Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM) to be converted into an Agency and transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

DELAYED IMPLEMENTATION

Several factors have contributed to the delay in implementing the Oronsaye Report. Political will, or the

lack thereof, has been a significant hurdle. Successive administrations have shown reluctance to take on the sweeping changes proposed, likely due to the potential backlash from affected stakeholders and the fear of job losses. Additionally, bureaucratic inertia and vested interests within the government have impeded progress, as many officials stand to lose power or influence should the report's recommendations be adopted.

These issues were loosely alluded to in a post on X by GreenPressNGR, saying, "The report's comprehensive recommendations seem likely to be faced with resistance, particularly within the political elite circles, where the preservation of redundant agencies serves as a bargaining chip for maintaining the status quo and safeguarding political appointments. This resistance underscores the entrenched interests within the National Assembly, where lawmakers wield significant power in shaping bureaucratic structures."

As a corollary, it is safe to say that the move to restructure the system based on the findings of the Oronsaye Report may have latent effects such as the potential displacement of numerous employees and the shake-up of established power structures. While this can possibly reduce redundancy, improve efficiency, and cut costs, its implementation has generally been considered by most pundits as a politically sensitive issue.

IS THE REPORT IN TUNE WITH TODAY'S REALITY?

There are also concerns about the

CONTINUES ON PG 16»

Soludo and the road to Dubai-Taiwan

IFEANYI CHUKWU AFUBA

Expectedly, the anniversary tradition of Nigeria's democracy has spurred proclamation of achievements of the Charles Soludo administration. In various media, exploits of the present Anambra State Government in security, economic growth, infrastructure, social welfare, environment and industrialisation were being propagated as the administration approached its second anniversary on March 17, 2024.

But in the world of Anambra's adversarial politics, the typical response of Professor Charles Soludo's sworn critics to the administration's two-year achievements is "where's the Dubai-Taiwan?"

Soludo in his 2021 manifesto pledged to turn Anambra into a "destination African Dubai-Taiwan" after four years as Governor. It's only mid term for the administration, so, why the severe assessment? Given the transitional impact in the life of a new government, even four years would be inadequate for a path-breaking mission of governance.

Foremost among the detractors are the partisan activists - members or supporters of other political parties or governorship aspirants. Their concern is to create a sense of public disaffection for the Governor, and thus, brighten the chances of their own candidates. The APGA members of this group are peeved that they did not secure appointments in a government they laboured for its election. In their moments of self-revelation, this branch of Soludo bashers tell you that politics is about interest; that they have a duty to protect their own interests.

The next group of naysayers are those who have been affected by the disruptive changes occasioned by the Dubai-Taiwan journey. Traders ply-



SOLUDO

ing their wares along the roads and streets have been displaced. Structures defiantly erected on waterways, public spaces and on designated green areas are being brought down. Illegal revenue collectors, touts and other beneficiaries of corrupt systems are reeling from effects of international best practices now at work. Who actually expects them to applaud their sacking?

And there are those who conceive of Dubai-Taiwan only in the literal sense. Their understanding of the concept is limited only to the idea of

glittering structures. Where are the skyscrapers? Where are the criss-crossing networks of flyovers? Where are the swinging cable trains, the underground rail services, the blazing night lights? A remarkable thing in this assessment is that though uninformed, it's an honest consideration. Those who hold this strict modernisation concept of Dubai-Taiwan do not appear to be motivated by any other ulterior motives. And they are not an insignificant number.

Perhaps, this is a shortcoming of the Soludo school in the inauguration

follow-up. A conversation with the public on the thrust of the manifesto was needed at some point or alongside the implementation. And the assumption of an impending city-state of gold and dazzling lights is likely to persist especially with the push of re-election politics.

Yes, up to a point, the vision of Dubai-Taiwan is about iron and steel. The dearth of standard infrastructural outlay in our states makes structural transformation an imperative in the development journey. Soludo's Anambra State is no exception. Indeed, the second pillar of the 2021 manifesto was captioned Economic Transformation & Infrastructure. Housing, Agriculture, Works are some of the sectors included here. It's notable that the mid-term score card of the administration shows 400 kilometres of stone-base roads. Ekwulobia and Awka flyovers, housing estates, urban water schemes, power generation and agro-chain projects are at various stages of execution. But while these and other sectoral capital projects captured in documentaries are commendable, their eventual completion would not in themselves be the marks of Dubai-Taiwan.

It would make little sense for anyone to seek to make Anambra State a metropolitan power without requisite economic base. A country's profile is largely about the strength of its economy. Consequently, Soludo's African Dubai-Taiwan mission is first and foremost about economic engineering. It's about creating the conditions for economic growth. Economic prosperity, under competent leadership, would translate to influence and fame.

And we find that economic transformation is at the core of the government's programme. Soludo is obsessed with the task of creating hundreds of youth millionaires every year. Some 4,200 youths have been

trained in two productive skills and empowered with N2bn seed grant. Another 20,000 have acquired digital skills under the Solution Innovation District. A mixed use industrial city is underway at Ogboji to stimulate large-scale industrial complexes. If these entrepreneurial strategies succeed, the state would be set on a course of economic boom.

Related to the requirement of a thriving economy is the factor of leadership. Every development success story is traceable to the intervention of great leadership. Some may find his sense of political administration somewhat aloof, but there's no doubt that Professor Charles Soludo is brilliant and decisive in running the affairs of Anambra State. It's remarkable that the government has not taken any loan in two years. Equally notable is the 70 per cent capital expenditure ratio of the 2024 budget in a system where recurrent expenditure dominates state and national budgets. In two years of his leadership, Soludo has insisted that laws and regulations are not made for formality sake but must be upheld for the good of society. Now, residents are gradually taking to cleaning their environment, vendors keeping away from the roads.

In a word, then, the Dubai-Taiwan destination is of a productive and prosperous society, disciplined and liveable. But while many indices indicate appreciable progress on the journey, the administration should make conscious efforts to carry more citizens along by listening and being more responsive to the voice of the people. There is need to evolve a more considerate taxation policy for small and medium businesses, especially in these hard times. The administration will also do well to intensify civility training for and supervision of the various enforcement teams as they engage with the public.

Oronsaye report and today's reality

«CONTINUED FROM PG 15

report being outdated and out of tune with reality. A member of the House of Representatives, Mr Kama Nkemkanma, has noted that the recommendations in the report may not reflect the present realities in the country, hence may not address the cost of governance as envisaged some years back.

The lawmaker said the report "may be described as outdated, especially because of how dynamic society, the economy, polity, technology, and all facets of our national life have been".

He added that "contrary to the assumption that the full implementation of the report would reduce the cost of governance, with the current realities, the full implementation of the report will not substantially reduce the cost of governance as it does not reflect the current situation in the Public Service of the Federation".

Similarly, human rights lawyer, Femi Falana SAN, has faulted the implementation of the Steve Oronsaye report, describing as outdated the 12-year old report recommending the merger of government agencies and commissions.

In a statement on 27 February, Falana said contrary to the belief in official circles, the report won't "substantially reduce the enormous costs of

governance in the country as it does not reflect the current situation in the public service".

However, Falana said, "No doubt, the implementation of some of the recommendations of the Panel will take appreciable time as the merger of certain bodies requires constitutional amendments or repeal of a number of statutes.

"The 800-page report of the Steve Oronsaye Panel recommended the reduction of statutory agencies from 263 to 161, scrapping 38 agencies, merging 52, and reverting 14 to departments in different ministries.

"Since the Goodluck Jonathan administration produced a White Paper on the Steve Oronsaye Report in 2014, the Federal Government has created more ministries, departments and agencies.

"Whereas the Report recommended the reduction of 263 agencies to 151, the number of ministries, departments and agencies has increased to 1,316. Even the current administration has increased the number of ministries and created new agencies. To that extent, the Steve Oronsaye Report is completely outdated.

"However, in implementing the Oronsaye Report the Federal Government should ensure that the crisis of insecurity is not compounded

through the retrenchment of hundreds of thousands of workers.

"Instead of downsizing the public service the Federal Government should ensure that the two houses of the National Assembly are merged while the number of Ministers, Special Advisers, Senior Special Assistants and Special Assistants is significantly reduced."

A VISION FOR A LEANER GOVERNMENT

The report was written by Steve Oronsaye, whose tenure as the Head of Service was marked by significant administrative reforms aimed at streamlining government operations.

However, his arrest in 2015 on charges of fraud and money laundering cast a shadow over his previous work. These allegations pointed to misappropriation of funds and abuse of office, suggesting a betrayal of public trust.

The timing of Oronsaye's arrest, closely following the submission of this report, raised questions about the motivations behind the legal action. Following his acquittal and release, some observers have wondered whether those charges were conveniently timed to undermine the credibility of his findings and to silence a potentially disruptive voice in the bureaucracy.

Oronsaye's spokesperson during the whole debacle, Mr. Walter Duru, famously described the case as a witch-hunt. At the time, he said, "Time will tell because he will surely be vindicated. This is a witch-hunt and this is because of his role in the passage of some very critical bills, especially the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Centre Bill which seeks to grant operational autonomy to the NFIU which is still under the control of the EFCC.

"The Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Bill 2016 is coming up for a second reading at the Senate on Wednesday (today). Is it coincidental that he was invited by the EFCC a day ahead of the hearing? Is it also coincidental that the last time he was invited was a day before the Senate hearing on the NFIU Bill? So, they are just trying to intimidate him."

Furthermore, many pundits believe that the substance of the recommendations stands on its own merit. They assert that the report's conclusions are the result of collective expertise and thorough analysis, not the influence of one individual, which means that the recommendations should be assessed based on their potential impact and effectiveness in addressing the issues at hand. Thus, dismissing the report solely due to Oronsaye's

legal challenges would be a disservice to the diligent work of the committee and the valuable insights the report offers.

The success of the intended reforms will be contingent upon the government's resolve to enforce these changes rigorously. This includes overcoming resistance from vested interests that benefit from the status quo, as well as ensuring that the reforms are not reversed or diluted over time.

Moreover, the long-term impact of the Oronsaye Report hinges on the government's commitment to maintaining these reforms amidst political and social pressures. It requires a cultural shift within the government machinery to prioritize efficiency and accountability. Only with sustained political will can the potential savings from the report translate into actual reductions in the cost of governance.

The stakes are high, and the outcomes are uncertain. The Oronsaye Report is not just a collection of recommendations; it is a vision for a leaner, more agile government. It challenges the status quo, proposing a paradigm shift in the way public institutions operate. As the clock ticks, the people of Nigeria wait to see if their leaders will take decisive action or if hesitation will lead to another missed opportunity.

Ighodalo Choice 2024: Diaspora group roots for PDP candidate

EUBALDUS ENAHORO

The Ighodalo Choice 2024 is a concept borne out of a strong desire by the duo of Dr. Peter Uwai-bi and Barrister Nicholas Omhenke to chart the course of a new governmental direction for the advancement of socio-economic agro-technologically based developmental research programmes.

The diasporas/national members of Ighodalo Choice 2024 strongly believe in the notion that success must be driven and anchored on the course of good governance, designed to provide economic stability and propel the much-needed auspicious ground for unrestricted growth. It is therefore their feverish hope that the rest of our people become favourably inclined to support this course anchored on voting and believing in Barr Asue Ighodalo an accomplished versatile administrator.

According to the group, in the period Governor Godwin Obaseki has been in office, they have noticed an overwhelming reception at the sheer will of the man to drive targeted reforms especially to reform, modernise and digitalise the state civil service to the envy of other state governments.

The state under Obaseki's watch, the group said, has impacted a special guide to attract both national and international investments opportunities by establishing a special office, ESIPO, to facilitate and expedite projects implementation.

The Obaseki government has successfully addressed the insecurity that once plagued the state, by empowering the people's vigilante groups which have, no doubt, hard-nosed the crime rate in the state.

"The Obaseki government has relentlessly pursued areas that invariably alienate food problems, by encouraging farming and providing farmlands to farmers, while boosting production



UWAIBI



OMHENKE

growth of cassava in the state to over 200-million tonnes yearly. Other food items like rice, plantain, yam have all noticed realistic raised production levels," the group said.

It also applauded the high educational standards of teachers and pupils monitored by the introduction of Edo-BEST.

The group further stated that Edo State is enjoying better electricity supply and the innovative Business Process and Outsourcing (BPO) and the Information Technology Outsourcing (ITO) introduced by the government have created job opportunities for the young people.

"Pensioners are not left out in these state reforms as they are now enjoying their regular payments

without any form of bureaucratic red tapes. Obaseki has done extremely well. Voters should be mindful of who their elected leaders should be.

"To maintain a robust economic growth, voters must elect men of high selfless administrative capacity, with the ambitious drive to uplift and improve the living standards of its people," the group said.

It commended the PDP for selecting Dr. Ighodalo, an admirable candidate of resounding resume with a renowned reputation for delivering on set goals and campaign promises.

"As Edo people, this is the time to reignite the pursuits of our noble objectives. The promises of our past leaders have turned out to be nothing more than a mere hocus-pocus, a deceptive

brouhaha," it said.

The group described Barr Ighodalo as a result-based man of high mental discernment with an adduced commitment to exceptional leadership and who is poised to tackle and eradicate the menace of corruption, erase sectional preferences, favouritism and clannishness, with the determination to run a government of inclusiveness.

No doubt, Nigerians in diaspora are invaluable to the political dispensation at home. Nigerians in diaspora went overseas only to equip themselves with relevant training and experiences necessary to develop their home state. Most of them in diaspora have had to stay back endlessly because the political climate in Nigeria is still very rough, turbulent and unsettled.

Diaspora's therefore continue to disseminate funds to friends and families back home in Nigeria, to enable them cope with the severe hardship they may be experiencing at home and to enlighten them to distant themselves from money-induced political votes.

As the 2024 governorship election gradually draws close, INEC, the election umpire, and the security agencies are expected to rearrange and reposition their departmental security apparatuses to enable them combat any unexpected disastrous eventualities.

"We in the diaspora will invite international electioneering observers to monitor the entire process of the elections. Elections are conducted to entrench democratic norms and principles. Instead of strengthening the democratic processes we are ceaselessly being bamboozled by this silly APC government captions of fight against corruption, a comic slogan used to capitulate and misdirect the minds of the vulnerable people," the group said.

One of the founding coordinators of the group, Barr. Omhenke, stated that in all, PDP, which is the dominant political party in the state, demonstrated and maintained maximum professionalism in the conduct of its primaries, while the likes of APC and LP were merely pretentious.

"APC is largely dependent on the massive rigging efforts that will be signalled from the central APC government of 'Emi lo kan'. The Labour Party is posting one of Tinubu's APC stooges to destabilise the party in Edo State," he said.

The chief coordinator of the group, Dr Uwai-bi, said the only choice in the race to Edo Government House in 2024 is the unmistakable PDP golden boy, Dr Ighodalo, whose antecedents have strongly endeared him to the hearts of the Edo voting public.

WE HAVE A GOOD STORY TO TELL... Cost of Living Crisis: Our interventions

CHRIS OSA NEHIKHARE

Nigeria is currently facing the worst cost of living crisis in decades, with inflation on the rise and the burden on households and businesses soaring heavily. The trigger is the "Subsidy is Gone" declaration which ushered in the President Bola Ahmed Tinubu-led administration on May 29, 2023. This shot up the cost of petrol with a spill-over effect on other goods and services including food, cooking gas, and transportation, among others.

While several States still grapple, contemplating their next moves, Governor Godwin Obaseki has taken proactive measures, implementing policies and strategies to reduce the pains and ameliorate the sufferings that Edo people face due to the current realities, in furtherance of the government's commitment to the welfare and well-being of residents of the State.

At the onset, when it became clear that Nigeria's economy was going to take a beating, months before it became apparent to many that Nigeria's economy was heading south, the Edo State Government increased the minimum wage paid to its workers from the recommended N30,000 national minimum wage to N40,000.

It is on record that Edo State pays the highest minimum wage in the country.



NEHIKHARE

While a more sustainable strategy to tackle the cost of living crisis was being put in place, the Edo State Government introduced a three-day work week for its civil and public servants below level 14 as well as for basic school and senior secondary school children. This experimental policy of a three-day work week strengthened our EdoBEST@Home initiative to allow for more virtu-

al classrooms, thereby reducing the cost of commuting for parents, teachers and pupils.

To reduce the cost of transportation for workers, students, and businesses, Governor Obaseki in September 2023 introduced the free transport service which has so far benefitted over 2.3 million residents since its launch.

The scheme which covers both inter

and intra-city services operated by the State-owned Edo City Transport Services (ECTS) has so far saved commuters over N1bn which would have been expended on transport costs if they were to pay for the services. These savings, the commuters say, are now used for more urgent and pressing needs, like food and rent.

Recognizing the importance of agriculture in stabilizing food prices and enhancing food security, Governor Obaseki has sustained investment in the agricultural sector, supporting farmers in the State with inputs for production and other incentives.

The government has also given out tonnes of maize, rice and other food items to vulnerable residents in the State, including orphanages, Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), as well as religious organizations and civil society groups, among others.

The Edo State Government under the leadership of Governor Obaseki also recently launched the operation "Feed the Hungry Initiative", committing N1 billion monthly to the programme set up to feed the poor and vulnerable residents, as part of measures to cushion the effects of the economic pains on the people of the State. This programme, which is novel, has been driven and coordinated by the churches and other religious organizations.

The government is assisting and supporting several Muslim groups across the 18 local government areas of the State during the Ramadan fasting period with food and other items.

Our government is also prioritizing the health and welfare of older citizens of the State and has boarded all pensioners to the State's Health Insurance Scheme, thereby reducing out-of-pocket expenditure for the elderly persons. This is as the gratuities of these pensioners are being paid to push cash back into their pockets. Of course, the pensioners are paid like clockwork monthly.

This is amid other ongoing efforts at improving the living conditions of residents in the State, including infrastructural development, and other measures to empower and improve the business environment.

There's no gainsaying the fact that Governor Obaseki is leading the way in ameliorating the impact of the cost of living crisis in the Country. His dedication to the welfare of Edo people, his passion for improving their livelihoods, and his commitment to progressive governance is unprecedented.

In Edo, we have a good story to tell!!!

Nehikhare is the Edo State Commissioner for Communication and Orientation.

Technology

• ICT • Startups • Telecoms • Devcoms • Blockchain • Cloud

African internet outage caused by seismic movement, says MainOne

BILL OKONEDO
WITH AGENCY REPORTS

MainOne Cable Company Limited, owners of one of three undersea fibre-optic cables which were ruptured in the Atlantic Ocean last Thursday, disrupting internet services to Nigeria and Ghana, among other African countries, says the mishap was caused by an “external incident” and not human activity.

The Nigerian Observer had on Friday reported experts as saying that the incident could have been caused by sabotage, a dragging ship anchor, or seismic movement on the ocean floor.

The major internet outage affected West and Central Africa on Thursday, with operators of multiple subsea cables reporting failures.

“Our preliminary analysis would suggest some form of seismic activity on the seabed resulted in a break to the cable”, MainOne said in a statement, adding that it would obtain more data when the cable is retrieved during repair.

“Given the distance from land, and the cable depth of about 3 kms (1.86 miles) at the point of fault, any kind of human activity – ship anchors, fishing, drilling etc has been immediately ruled out”, MainOne said in a statement, according to a report by Reuters News Agency.

MainOne has a presence in Nigeria, Ghana and Cote D’Ivoire, according to its website.

Damage to at least three subsea cables off the West Coast of Africa on Thursday, disrupted internet services in Nigeria, Ghana and other countries across the continent.

Telecommunications subscribers and bank users were stranded for hours as the disruption paralysed digital transactions and internet communications and service to affected areas is still functioning in fits and starts.

Some commercial banks affected by the undersea cable damage are now advising their customers to use alternative channels as mobile apps and internet banking services have remained epileptic.

First City Monument Bank (FCMB) in a message to its customers on Friday urged them to use its ATMs and POS channels to carry out their transactions. According to the bank, the internet disruption has affected all its electronic transaction channels, including mobile apps.

In a similar message to its customers, Zenith Bank also acknowledged challenges in performing transactions with its Internet Banking Platform and Mobile Banking App, Narimetrics reports.

It is however, important to note that not all the banks are affected by the undersea cable damage, as some of them are on connectivity providers not touched by the cut.

According to one of the world’s leading financial news organisations, Bloomberg, the West Africa Cable System, MainOne and ACE sea cables — arteries for telecommunications data — were all affected on Thursday.

According to data from internet analysis firms including NetBlocks, Kentik and Cloudflare, the cut triggered outages and connectivity issues for mobile operators and internet service providers across the West African sub-region.

In a statement, telecommunications company, MTN Nigeria, explained that the network outage experienced by its subscribers was as a “result of damage to international undersea cables across East & West Africa”.

“The repair process is ongoing to resolve the situation as soon as possible. Please look out for further updates,” the company said.

The company had also linked network outage experienced by its subscribers for the major part of February 28, 2024 on “multiple fibre cuts”.

“Live network data show a major disruption to Internet connectivity in and around West and Central Africa,” Internet monitoring firm NetBlocks said. “The incident affects networks supplying telecoms via subsea cables to multiple countries and operators.”

MyBroadband reports the

downtime is being caused by multiple outages on undersea cables near Abidjan in Côte d’Ivoire.

The SAT-3/West Africa Cable System (WACS), the Africa Coast to Europe (ACE), and other cables are affected. The outage started around 12:30 on Thursday, 14 March 2024.

“Multiple undersea cable failures between South Africa and Europe are currently impacting South Africa’s network providers, including Vodacom,” a Vodacom spokesperson told TechCentral.

Seacom has also reportedly confirmed to TC that the WACS cable has been affected.

Microsoft reported network latency issues in its South Africa North and South Africa West locations.

Starting at 10:30 UTC on 14 Mar 2024, customers using Azure Services in South Africa North and South Africa West may experience increased network latency or packet drops when accessing their resources,” the company said.

“We have determined that

multiple fiber cables on the West Coast of Africa — WACS, MainOne, SAT3, ACE — have been impacted which reduced total capacity supporting our Regions in South Africa,” Microsoft said in an update. “In addition to these cable impacts, the on-going cable cuts in the Red Sea — EIG, Seacom, AAE-1 — are also impacting capacity on the East Coast of Africa. This combination of incidents has impacted all Africa capacity – including other Cloud providers and public Internet as well.”

Other impacted customers include Mweb, Openserve, Seacom, Telkom, Vodacom, Vumatel, and Vox. Microsoft customer payment provider Yoco is also facing issues, as is service provider ISSC Group.

“Certain customers are currently experiencing intermittent connectivity issues due to multiple undersea cable failures affecting SA’s network providers, including us,” Vodacom said. “We apologize for any inconvenience caused.”



MTN boosts 4G footprint to 81.5%

UYIOSA ISAAC

MTN Nigeria Communication Company has grown its 4G network penetration to encompass 81.5 per cent of the population from 79.1 per cent recorded in December 2022.

MTN made this known in its recently released 2023 audited financial statement.

This indicates that 81.5 per cent of the country’s regions and people can access 4G connectivity provided by MTN. The company has stated its commitment to advancing connectivity with a substantial investment in network coverage and capacity.

4G is the fourth generation of mobile phone technology, following 2G and 3G. 2G technology was suitable for making calls and sending text messages, while 3G makes it possible to access the internet more effectively through your mobile phone. 4G makes it easier to access the internet on your mobile, tablet or laptop.

MTN declared that the 4G network played a pivotal role as a key driver in enhancing data services, facilitating a surge in smartphone penetration.

The penetration rate rose to 55.6 per cent, a 3.1 percentage point year-on-year increase.

“Our 4G network now cov-

ers 81.5 per cent of the population, up from 79.1 per cent in December 2022, and 5G at 11.3 per cent. On the back of these initiatives, smartphone penetration rose to 55.6 per cent (up 3.1pp YoY), underpinning data usage (GB per user) growth of 29.1 per cent to 8.6GB.

“As a result, we recorded a 44.9 per cent growth in data traffic, with the 4G network accounting for 81.8 per cent of the total traffic (up 0.6pp YoY) and 5G at 5.2 per cent,” the company noted in the report.

The telecom company said it boosted home broadband penetration to meet the growing demands of digital adoption.

In 2023, MTN successfully added over 800,000 subscribers to its home broadband services, surpassing the two million subscriber milestone.

“We expanded home broadband penetration to support the growing use cases for digital adoption, leveraging our 5G fixed wireless access devices, mobile broadband solutions, and fibre-to-the-home connectivity.

“We added over 800,000 subscribers in 2023, bringing our home broadband subscribers to over 2 million. Our infrastructural strength, technology mix, and partnerships position us to capture a significant share of market opportunities,” the telco stated.

Apple reaches \$490 million settlement over CEO Cook’s China sales comments

NAOMI EMOVON
WITH AGENCY REPORTS

Apple has agreed to pay \$490 million to settle a class-action lawsuit that alleged Chief Executive Tim Cook defrauded shareholders by concealing falling demand for iPhones in China.

A preliminary settlement was filed on Friday with the

U.S. District Court in Oakland, California, and requires approval by U.S. District Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers, Reuters reports.

It stemmed from Apple’s unexpected announcement on Jan. 2, 2019 that the iPhone maker would slash its quarterly revenue forecast by up to \$9 billion, blaming U.S.-China trade tensions.

Cook had told investors on a Nov. 1, 2018, analyst call that although Apple faced sales pressure in markets such as Brazil, India, Russia and Turkey, where currencies had weakened, “I would not put China in that category.”

Apple told suppliers a few days later to curb production.

The lowered revenue forecast was Apple’s first since the

iPhone’s launch in 2007. Shares of Apple fell 10% the next day, wiping out \$74 billion of market value.

Apple and its lawyers did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the ruling.

The Cupertino, California-based company denied liability, but settled to avoid the cost and distraction of litigation, court papers show.

Shawn Williams, a partner at Robbins Geller Rudman & Dowd representing the shareholders, called the settlement an “outstanding result” for the class.

The settlement covers investors who bought Apple shares in the two months between Cook’s comments and the revenue forecast.

Apple posted \$97 billion of

net income in its latest fiscal year, and its payout equals a little under two days of profit.

Last June, Rogers refused to dismiss the lawsuit.

She found it plausible to believe Cook had been discussing Apple’s sales outlook and not currency changes, and said Apple knew China’s economy was slowing and demand could fall.

Education

• Primary Education • Secondary Education • Tertiary Education

Nosakhare Model Educational Centre recounts excursion visit with excitement

OMI OMAGE

In line with ensuring students engagement in extra-curricular activities and interaction with real-time experiences, students of the Nosakhare Model Educational Centre had an excursion visit to The Nigerian Observer on February 28.

The excursion, led by the school's principal and some staff, was undertaken by the school's Senior Secondary Class 3 students.

The Managing Editor/Ag. Managing Director of The Nigerian Observer, Mr. Osa Victor Obayagbona, warmly welcomed the students and staff members of the school and took them on a

guided tour around the facilities within the establishment.

He gave them lectures on the workings and processes of news production – from content creation to newspaper production.

The students were given access to see the different sections of The Nigerian Observer, including the printing presses. They were then taken to the newsroom where they were taught how news is being processed: Reporters gather news and submit to editors who then edit the news, or rewrite if need be, send the news to page planners who lay out the pages before they are then sent to the press for printing as a newspaper.

Obayagbona explained the purpose of The Nigerian Observer as being geared towards providing information to the general public “that the people may know”, which is the slogan of the newspaper. He also explained the roles of some of the sections, machinery involved in print production and the stages of news publication.

The students were given the privilege to see some devices they had not come in contact with before, like the web machine for newspaper production; the speed master machine for the production of all kinds of books, and the large format machine for the production of banners of any size.

At the printing press they were taught that the printing press has three units that make up a complete press for production – the pre-press, the press, and the post-press.

In addition, the visiting students saw the ultra-modern x74 speed master printing machine, which is used for printing calendars, brochures, magazines, posters, newsletters, souvenirs, pamphlets, books, memo pads, and more.

Lastly, they were informed that the large format press produces precision quality jobs of all sizes on flex material, SAV, window graphics, vehicle branding, T-shirt, fez caps, and more.

The principal of the school,

Mr. Edos expressed his appreciation to The Nigerian Observer for the time and patience in educating the students, describing the establishment as a good place to bring students to learn.

According to Mr. Edos, the decision to embark on the excursion to The Nigerian Observer is in line with showcasing the world of journalism to the students, especially since it is a government-owned establishment, so as to enable them understand the operations of the organization.

“We have been seeing things and the children are very excited because they are abreast with the movement of journalism and how all those media that they normally see outside, how news are being processed before they finally get to the consumers that will read them after being produced,” the Principal said.

“I decided to come to The Nigerian Observer because it is a state-owned establishment, and because we know the government of this state is working.

“You see what he has done here, and sometime ago, when it was still there, the former Observer, I personally have been there before, I know what I saw. But with what I saw in this present administration, I felt it will be necessary my students visit this place, so that they will know what is happening in this particular establishment,” Edos remarked.

The principal further applauded the accomplishments of the Edo State Governor, Godwin Obaseki, in revamping the establishment, providing the enabling environment and ensuring com-

petent personnel man its affairs.

“We also chose this place above other places because we believe that Governor Godwin Obaseki is working. We see and hear of his laudable developmental projects on the social media, television and the internet. We have seen the personnel at The Nigerian Observer, they are capable people and they are all doing their jobs very well.

“The student have learnt a lot and can attest to the fact that the excursion is indeed a wonderful experience as the excursion has made a significant impact on their lives,” he further said.

Some of the students, while speaking, expressed their gratitude to the management of their school for holding the excursion for them, and to the management of The Nigerian Observer for granting them audience.

The head boy of the school, Master Egbegbe, described the whole experience as exciting, being an avenue to witness things firsthand.

“I have been craving for an opportunity like this to get the experience of seeing the process, the complexity of making a newspaper, or newspaper publication like this.

“I am honoured and happy to be here today. I also saw the machines, and we like to be part of this great establishment,” he said.

Speaking on his part, a student of the school, Nosa Osayimwen, described the experience as thrilling, noting that the various machines seen during the tour were not what he actually expected.

“So far, this is the best I have ever seen,” Osayimwen said.



EXCURSION:

Staff and students of Nosakhare Model Educational Centre with Ag. Managing Director and staff of The Nigerian Observer newspaper, during the school's visit on excursion to The Nigerian Observer.

PHOTO BY SAVIOUR MATHIAS

Inomwan Foundation School holds 2024 inter-house sports competition

GOODNESS OYEDUNE

On Friday, 8th March 2024, the main bowl of the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium was buzzing with excitement as the third edition of the Inomwan Foundation School's Inter-house Sports Competition took place. This highly anticipated event brought together students and pupils from different houses, each assigned a vibrant colour and beautiful numeclature: Red (Atiti) House, Green (Aigbe) House, Brown (Abbe) House, Blue (Eniye) House, Purple (Otasowie) House, and Yellow (Osahon) House to compete for medals and trophies in range of athletics and academic activities.

The principal of the school, Isaac Taiye Imasuen kicked off the event with a welcome speech, expressing gratitude to

the parents for their immense support, and to the management of the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium for granting the school the privilege to use the facility.

The proprietor of the school, His Eminence, General (Dr) Godwin Osagie Abbe (rtd) CFR, also gave an opening remark, acknowledging the efforts of the state government in the educational sector of the state. He thanked the parents for entrusting the academic training of their children to the school.

The competition started with march past, a display of unity and team spirit as each house showcased their unique choreography and synchronized movements. The atmosphere was electrified as the pupils and students proudly represented their houses, adorned in their respective colours, while the crowd cheered them on.

Next up were the athletic events, which included 50-meter sack race, 100-meter race, 200-meter race, and 4x100-meter relay race. The participants displayed exceptional speed, agility and determination, pushing themselves beyond limits to secure victory for their houses.

Students from invited schools were involved in relay race, while parents participated in the 100 - meter-race to add fun and colour to the event. The cheers from the crowd echoed throughout the stadium, creating an atmosphere of fierce competition and camaraderies.

Prior to the grand finale at the stadium, the students had engaged in mind stimulating activities in the school premises for over two weeks. The indoor academic activities, such as Whot card, scrabble, table tennis and chess were in full swing. These

events showcased the students' intellectual prowess and strategic thinking, as they battle it out for top positions. The concentration and focus exhibited by the participants were truly commendable.

As the day progressed, the excitement reached its zenith during the trophy presentation ceremony. The winners, with beaming smiles on their faces, proudly stepped onto the podium to receive their well-deserved accolades for their houses. The cheers and applause from their fellow students, teachers and parents filled the air, creating an atmosphere of celebration and achievement.

Aigbe's House lifted the trophy for march past, Abbe's House received the trophy for football, while Eniye's House won the trophy meant for male Badminton.

Otasowie's House got the trophy for Volleyball, just as Aig-

be's House received the trophy meant for female Badminton.

In the end, Aigbe's House emerged the overall winner of the inter-house sports competition, carting away two trophies from the event. Atiti's House emerged second, while Osahon's House took third position. The dignitaries present at the occasion to add prestige and vigour included the wife of the speaker, Edo State House of Assembly, the representative of Edo State Sports Council, and others.

The Inomwan Foundation School's third edition of the inter-house sports competition was not only a day of sports but also a celebration of the students' dedication, teamwork and academic excellence. It served as a reminder of the importance of nurturing both physical and mental abilities, promoting a holistic approach to education.

The event concluded with a sense of fulfillment and pride as the pupils and students left the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium with memories that would last a lifetime. The Inomwan Foundation School had once again succeeded in fostering a spirit of healthy competition, sportsmanship, and academic growth among pupils and students.

As the sun set on this memorable day, March 8, 2024, the pupils and students, including teachers and parents returned to their respective houses, carrying with them the lessons learned, friendship forged, and determination to excel in all aspects of their lives. The third edition of the Inomwan Foundation School's inter-house sports competition had truly been a resounding success, leaving a lasting impact on the pupils and students and the entire school community.

Sports

● Football ● Athletics ● Gulf ● Basketball ● Tennis ● Boxing

Who the cap fits, as search for Super Eagles head coach attracts domestic candidates

IKPONMWOSA ODIGIE

Amid the anticipation and fervor surrounding the Nigeria Football Federation's (NFF) quest to appoint a new head coach for the illustrious Super Eagles, a captivating array of contenders has emerged.

With the departure of Portuguese tactician Jose Peseyro after the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations, where he steered the team to the runner-up spot, the stage is set for a new leader to guide the three-time African champions to further glory.

Following Peseyro's departure and the expiration of his contract, the NFF opened the doors for applications, igniting a surge of interest from both domestic talents and seasoned

international figures.

Ten candidates submitted their bids for the prestigious role, each bringing a unique blend of experience, vision, and ambition to the table.

This search for the next helmsman of the Super Eagles comes at a pivotal point, as the nation's football enthusiasts eagerly await the announcement of the 27th manager to lead the team.

From the historic era of the Red Devils to the modern-day Super Eagles, the coaches who have graced the touchline have left an indelible mark on Nigerian football history, shaping the team's identity and success over the decades.

With a rich list of candidates ranging from former national team stars to promising coaching talents, the Super Eagles'

coaching saga promises intrigue, anticipation, and the dawn of a new era in Nigerian football.

Domestic contenders for the next helmsman of the Super Eagles include:

Sunday Oliseh:

Oliseh's previous tenure with the national team was marked by both success and controversy, making his candidacy a mixed bag. As a player, he had a distinguished career, notably winning the 1994 AFCON and playing for top European clubs. As a coach, his achievements include leading Nigeria to the 2016 African Nations Championship quarter-finals.

Finidi George:

Currently serving as interim coach for the Super Eagles,

Finidi George's familiarity with the team and recent success with Enyimba FC positions him as a strong candidate. As a player, he was part of the iconic Ajax team that won the UEFA Champions League in 1995.

Emmanuel Amunike:

Endorsed by esteemed coach Jo Bonfrere, Amunike's success as both a player and a coach, including leading Nigeria's U-17 team to World Cup glory in 2015, makes him a frontrunner for the role. As a player, he won the AFCON in 1994 and represented top clubs in Europe.

Samson Siasia: Siasia's candidacy is hampered by his current FIFA ban, limiting his immediate prospects. However, his past achievements, including leading Nigeria's U-20 team



to a silver medal in the 2005 FIFA World Youth Championship, cannot be overlooked.

Sylvanus Okpala:

Okpala's experience as both a player and an assistant coach, including winning the AFCON in 1980 and 2013, respectively, adds weight to his candidacy. However, his lack of recent coaching credentials might affect his chances.

Michael Nsien:

Nsien's coaching career, though promising, is still in its early stages, with his current role as head coach of the United States U-19 team. His achievements as a player include representing Nigeria at the youth level and playing professionally in the United States.

Daniel Amokachi:

Likelihood - Low. Amokachi's past involvement with the Super Eagles, including assisting Stephen Keshi during the 2013 AFCON victory, adds to his credentials. However, his coaching

experience since then has been relatively limited, reducing his likelihood of securing the role.

Makinwa:

Makinwa's extensive playing experience in Europe, Africa, and Asia, coupled with his coaching credentials and UEFA Pro badge, make him a credible candidate. His knowledge of the Nigerian domestic league could work in his favor.

As the NFF deliberates on the crucial decision of selecting the 27th manager to steer the Super Eagles, football enthusiasts across the country await anxiously the announcement, knowing that the chosen candidate will inherit a legacy built by the likes of Jack Finch, who laid the foundation for Nigerian football decades ago.

In this era of transition, where the Super Eagles seek to reclaim their former glory, the selection of the next head coach carries immense significance, symbolizing not just a change in leadership, but a new chapter in Nigerian football history.

Siasia reveals why he can't be Super Eagles Coach

PRINCESS NZEREM

Former Super Eagles striker and coach, Samson Siasia, has vehemently refuted rumours linking him to the vacant position of Super Eagles coach.

This is contrary to several reports that Samson Siasia was among the list of Nigerian coaches who applied for the vacant national team position.

Recall that the 56-year-old Siasia first became the coach of the national team after Lars Lagerback's departure in 2010, and faced dismissal after failing to secure qualification for the AFCON 2012 tournament.

He also became the coach of the team in 2016 before he took the U-23 team to the 2016 Olympics where he helped the



Nigerian team to win Silver in the Beijing Olympics.

Siasia was banned after being found guilty of accepting an offer to receive bribes to alter the outcome of matches. Despite claiming that he was

innocent, he has obeyed the ban for almost five years.

However, the five-year ban is set to end in August 2024, meaning he cannot work within the sports sector until then prompting speculation that

he might succeed Jose Peseyro after the Portuguese's contract with the Super Eagles expired.

In an Interview with Complete Sports, Siasia stated that he cannot be in the running for the job, because of his suspension by FIFA.

"I did not apply for the Super Eagles coaching job because I know FIFA has yet to lift the suspension on me.

"I don't know where those who reported that I applied got their story from.

"It's common sense, I cannot be suspended and be applying for a job.

"I know I would not even be considered for it," the silver medal-winning coach with Nigeria's Olympic team at the Beijing Olympics told Complete Sports.

Injury woe continues: Awoniyi sets to miss international friendly again

ADOLOR OKOEGUALE

According to a report from the City Ground, the home of the English Premier League side Nottingham Forest, Nigeria's Super Eagles striker Taiwo Awoniyi is injured again.

Awoniyi who was expected to play against Luton Town on Saturday, could not as it was announced hours before the game that the Nigerian international had sustained an injury and would not be able to play.

Awoniyi missed the 2023 African Cup of Nations in Ivory Coast due to injury, and consistent injury has limited his appearances for the national team.

Though he recovered to play some games for his club before

the end of the AFCON tournament, he was however ruled out before the start of the competition.

According to reports, Awoniyi's injury will keep him sidelined for several games, including the upcoming Super Eagles international friendlies against the Black Stars of Ghana and the Eagles of Mali later this month in Morocco.



Eagles goalkeeper, Okoye clinches Player of the Month Honours at Udinese

ADOLOR OKOEGUALE

Maduka Okoye, the Nigerian goalkeeper, has recently achieved a significant milestone in his football career by being awarded Udinese's Player of the Month for February.

He was presented with the award before Udinese's 2-0 loss at home to Torino on Saturday.

This recognition follows a remarkable resurgence in his football career after facing challenges that led to him losing his positions in both his club and national teams.

Following a critical mistake by the 24-year-old Nigerian goalkeeper during the 2021 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) in Cameroon, he has struggled to maintain his starting position in the team, resulting in his inability to secure the first-

choice spot.

Things got more complicated for Maduka Okoye when former Super Eagles boss Jose Peseyro, didn't invite him for the just concluded 2023 AFCON in Ivory Coast, in which Chippa United goalkeeper, Stanley Nwabali made his name and grabbed the team's first spot.

As he was struggling with the national team, Okoye was also struggling in Europe as he couldn't get enough game time at Championship side, Watford.

His lack of game time forced him to move to Udinese on August 24, 2023. Initially, Okoye couldn't make the first team at the Italian side until last January.

Okoye's best month at the club came in February 2024 in which he helped the struggling

team to win two games, draw once, and suffer one defeat. The Nigerian out-of-favour goalkeeper kept two clean sheets in the said month.

With his impressive form,

the 24-year-old is expected to be in line for a return to the Eagles, where Stanley Nwabali cemented his place as No. 1 after his heroics at the recent Africa Cup of Nations.



FIFA Ranking: Falcons drop two places globally, still Africa's No.1

ADOLOR OKOEGUALE

Nine-time African champions, Super Falcons of Nigeria, have fallen two spots in the latest

FIFA Women's World ranking. The first FIFA ranking of the women's national teams for 2024 was officially released by the world football governing body with the Super Falcons experiencing a dis-

appointing downward slide.

Super Falcons, Africa's most successful female team, dropped two spots from 32nd to 34th position in the world but maintained their lead in the continent

Nigeria are followed by reigning African champions, South Africa who moved one place up the world rankings to 51st.

Morocco are third on the continent while occupying position

58 in the world. The Copper Queens of Zambia moved an impressive five spots to position 65.

Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Tunisia, Mali, and Equatorial Guinea complete the list of Af-

rica's top 10 teams.

Meanwhile, world champions, Spain retained their spot at the summit in the global rankings, followed by England, France, and USA.

Tennis: We are working on reviving Ogbe Hard Court, grassroots tennis championships – Yussuf Alli

EDWARD OSEGHE AND KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

As the Elo Jackson International Veteran Tennis Tournament South-South 2024 climaxed in Benin City, the Executive Chairman, Edo State Sports Commission, Olympian Yussuf Alli stated that

his commission is working out plans and programmes towards the revival of Ogbe Hard Court and grassroots tennis championships that will be beneficial to young athletes in Edo State.

The Edo Sports Commission boss made the commitment on Friday, March 15, in his remark during the opening ceremony of

the second edition of the Elo Jackson International Veteran Tennis Tournament at the Samuel Ogbe-mudia Stadium in Benin City.

Alli urged the Executive Board of the Edo State Tennis Association and other stakeholders to explore the opportunities the just concluded International Veteran Tennis Tournament provides to galvanize support for the commission, as plans are underway regarding the reviving of the Ogbe Hard Court and grassroots tennis championships in Edo State.

While congratulating the hosts and participants at the Elo Jackson Veteran Tennis Tournament which ended on Saturday, March 16, Alli said: "It is a very good idea, and I think this is the first time we are having it here and hopefully it will be an annual thing.



Chukwuemeka rescues Chelsea from Leicester shock to reach FA Cup semi-finals

EDWARD OSEGHE

Carney Chukwuemeka rescued Chelsea with a stoppage-time strike that inspired a 4-2 win over 10-man Leicester in an FA Cup quarter-final thriller at Stamford Bridge in London on Sunday.

Amid a riotous atmosphere, Mauricio Pochettino's side were fortunate to survive a stirring fightback from Championship

promotion chasers Leicester.

Chukwuemeka netted in the closing minutes to save Chelsea from the embarrassment of being forced into extra-time.

Noni Madueke added Chelsea's fourth to ensure the angry fans who booed Pochettino in the second half were silenced, at least for now.

For the sixth time in the last eight years, the Blues have advanced to the last four in the FA Cup.



Tennis: Novak Djokovic pulls out of 2024 Miami Open

PRINCESS NZEREM

World Number 1 men's tennis player, Novak Djokovic has announced that he would be withdrawing from the 2024 Miami Open, citing the need to balance his "private and professional schedule."

Djokovic's announcement on Saturday on his social media accounts follows his 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 defeat to 123rd-ranked Luca Nardi on Monday last week in the third round of the Indian Wells.

"At this stage of my career, I'm balancing my private and professional schedule. I'm sorry that I won't experience some of the best and most passionate fans in the world," Djokovic wrote.

Nardi, who is ranked number 123, became the low-

est-ranked player to beat Djokovic in a Grand Slam or ATP Masters 1000 level event, surpassing number 122, Kevin Anderson in 2008 in Miami.

Djokovic is 8-2 on the season but has not earned a title yet. He remains the No. 1 ranked player and has said in the past that he would play fewer tournaments

as he gets older. He also is very focused on medaling at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

"Novak is looking at the bigger picture...focusing on the red clay season, then Wimbledon, and then back to Paris for the Olympic Games again on clay," ESPN's Patrick McEnroe told Adam Zagoria of Forbes.



Ligue 1: Nice defeats Lens as Strasbourg score first win of 2024

PRINCESS NZEREM

Nice have ended a six-match losing streak in grand style with a 3-1 victory at last season's French League runners-up Lens.

The result moved Nice to fourth position in Ligue 1, a

point above their hosts, who could not convert the numerous chances they had on Saturday.

The match which was played at Stade Bollaert-Delelis home to Lens had the visiting team stealing the show with Nice's Forward Terem Moffi scoring twice

for the visitors, with Khephren Thuram adding Nice's other goal.

Elye Wahi scored the consolation goal for Lens with 15 minutes left to the end of the game.

Dutch striker Emmanuel Emegha scored twice as Strasbourg ended an eight-game winless streak by beating strug-

gling Nantes 3-1.

Emegha has been one of the shining stars of the season, with seven goals in 22 matches.

His Brace on Saturday gave Strasbourg their first League win in 2024 and moved them up to 12th place, six points above the relegation zone.

African Games: Brume, Usoro set to clash as athletics event kicks off

● as Enoch charges Nigeria's contingent to keep chase of Egypt

MARY OGWUCHE

In track and field at the 13th African Games, the women's long jump event promises to captivate an African audience, with fierce competition for the gold medal anticipated among three Nigerian athletes.

As the 2023 African Games progress this week, excitement mounts for a spectacular showcase of athleticism, especially within the track and field competitions, and Nigeria, boasting a strong team of 54 athletes, is positioned to leave a notable mark at the games unfolding in Accra.

At the forefront for Nigeria stands Tobiloba Amusan, the current world record holder in the 100m hurdles. Amusan's unparalleled supremacy in the region is poised to continue as she endeavours to strengthen her lasting impact on African athletics.

Ese Brume, another stand-out athlete, will be aiming to reclaim her title as the ruler of the African long jump. Joining them are other esteemed athletes including Ruth Usoro and Favour Ofili, forming a formidable lineup that promises to dazzle spectators and rivals alike. Other equally highly talented athletes also make up the Nigerian list, BSN Sports reports.

On the men's side, Enoch Adegoke, Seye Ogunlewe, Alaba Akintola, Ezekiel Nathaniel, Samson Nathaniel, and Chukwuebuka Enekwechi are among the top contenders ready to showcase their prowess on the track and field.

Adding to the excitement, the Minister for Sports Development, Senator John Owan Enoch, is in Ghana to support and cheer on the Nigerian contingent. Senator Enoch expressed his confidence in the team's ability to make Nigeria proud, urging them to maintain their pursuit of excellence and dominance, particularly over rivals like Egypt.

"I am charging the entire contingent to keep the chase on Egypt, and steer clear of the others behind them," Senator Enoch stated. "I am sure in



athletics, our athletes will bring their A-game and show their dominance."

In addition to supporting the athletics team, Senator Enoch is present in Ghana to support

and cheer other athletes competing in other events. His support underscores the nation's commitment to sports development and excellence on the continental stage.

CLASSIFIED

PUBLIC NOTICE

That my name is **GBADAMOSI OISAMAYE GIDEON** and that **LATE INSPR IKPEFUA ESTHER (DECEASED)** was my mother. That before her demised, her surname (IKPEFUA) has not been change to my father's name (GBADAMOSI) officially. That the said **LATE INSPR IKPEFUA ESTHER** died on the 17th day of November, 2023 in Edo State, as a result of a brief illness. The general public and all concerned authorities should take note.

OSEMWENKHAIE

I, formerly known and addressed as **MISS OSEMWENKHAIE ELIZABETH** now wish to be known and addressed **MRS ELIZABETH IMUENTINYAN OSASU-EBENEZER**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

OSABO

That **AIWORO FAGUSTINE** and **AIWORO FAGUSTINE OSABO** is one and the same person. Henceforth, I wish to be known and addressed as **AIWORO FAGUSTINE OSABO**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

OMOAREBUN

That I wish to add **OMOAREBUN** to the names on my BVN which is **ISEGHOEDE DAVID**. Henceforth, I wish to be known and addressed as **ISEGHOEDE OMOAREBUN DAVID**. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

FAVOUR

I, formerly known and addressed as **OKH FAVOUR** now wish to be known and addressed as **GODSPOWER FAVOUR**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

AKARA

I, formerly known and addressed as **MISS PATIENCE MARIA AKARA** now wish to be known and addressed as **MRS PATIENCE MARIA OLIHA**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

UHUNMWANGHO

That my name was wrongly captured in my BVN as **UHUNMWANGHO OMOGIEVA GODWIN** instead of **UHUNMWANGHO OMOGIEVA GODWIN**. My full and correct name is **UHUNMWANGHO OMOGIEVA GODWIN**. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

OSAFAMEN

I, formerly known and addressed as **OSAFAMEN EMMANUEL PAULET** now wish to be known and addressed as **OKE IYORE PAULET**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

TUBOBELEM

I, formerly known and addressed as **TUBOBELEM ESTHER LAWSON** now wish to be known and addressed as **ESTHER LAWSON AGHAHOWA**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

ERIBO

That **JEKINS ERIBO** and **LASON JEKINS** is one and the same person. Henceforth, I wish to be known and addressed as **LASON JEKINS**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

SPACE FOR SALE

THE MondayInterview

FG and states need synergy to attract foreign investments —ESIPO MD

KELVIN UWAIBI is the pioneer head of the Edo State Investment Promotion Office (ESIPO). In this interview with OSA VICTOR and TELIAT SULE, UWAIBI enumerates the achievements of his agency and calls for synergy between the federal and sub-national governments in order to attract the desired level of foreign investments into the country: Excerpts:

What mandate were you given and how much have you achieved from inception to date?

Interesting, I will say for the Edo State Investment Promotion Office (ESIPO), the office was established in January 2018, with the mandate to facilitate investments. It is for us to ensure that the business environment is enabled, so that investors that want to come into Edo State have seamless experience, whether to set up micro, small and medium enterprises. Right now, we are focusing on the made in Edo goods and we could also add services in that regard.

To the other question on how far we have gone, for those that know us very well, we don't count ourselves as though we have achieved a lot because whatever achievement we have done is based on collaborative efforts because what we do really is to facilitate. So, it has been a team effort and when I say a team effort, I mean all the MDAs in the state and we all work together as a team. So, whatever achievements we have achieved in the last few years of the inception of the agency are not our achievements alone. I can say that clearly, it has been more of synergy, more of teamwork and collaboration.

Could you please give us on an annual basis, the amounts of investments ESIPO has facilitated and the sectors where those investments were concentrated?

In the last 7 years, we have been able to attract about \$2.5 billion in several sectors. The way investment works, is not something you just say, oh, you know what, I talked to an investor this morning, let's say we are in March, and by April the investment came in, it doesn't work that way.

Some investors that we wooed about four years ago like the Asian investors, they take between 12 to 24 months before they respond and can even be longer than that. Investors from the West, they do a lot of due process that we call due diligence to ensure that the occasion is right for them to come in.

You know they look at data to ensure that they can have a return on their investment. So, Edo State and thanks to His Excellency, Governor Godwin Obaseki, we have been able to show the state as a preferred destination by making sure that those indices that the investors will examine are readily available. We are working to ensure that power is stable. For example, power is a major challenge for investors. I don't need to tell us the power situation right now in the state but we have been able to address that to some extent.

Then we talk about infrastructure, especially the roads. I really don't need to tell you the situation we are having right now on roads. As a state, we will do our part but it is not just about Edo, it is about how we translate that to the Federal Government. I think it is very important when we talk about investment attraction. It is just the recent policy from the federal government that expatriates should pay a certain amount, about \$10,000.

Meanwhile, executive expatriates are different from technicians. They are not on the same salary scale. So, when we are talking about investments, while some sub-nationals are doing their best to attract investments, we will still need a whole lot of support from the Federal Government. I think we should actually look at it in a holistic manner, say, categorically that some investors are already telling me that I don't know how to keep it up.

Imagine an investor that will need 20 expatriates maybe at the beginning, for example you want to start a manufacturing company and the machine they are bringing, people don't know how to operate it here meaning you will bring your full expatriates to make sure for the next 12 to 24 months before you start to trickle down in terms of capacity building for the local employees.

Without even mincing words, if that policy remains in the next 12 months, the voice we are trying to avoid will be more because we are going to do more importation now. Most of the factories do import substitution by virtue of the products they provide and I think that it is important that we also in our own little economic way try to talk to the Federal Government. The Federal Government sometimes makes decisions without involving us at the sub national to actually understand that this is where the investments are located.



Edo State does not feature among the top states attracting capital importation based on the data released by the National Bureau of Statistics. For the purpose of clarity, could you please highlight the types of investments that came into Edo State?

What we do is direct investment. I have always been of the school of thought and I think I have shared it with my colleagues in the investment space that the way we presently calculate the

investment attraction or Foreign Direct Investment is through what we call the capital importation certificate. I don't want to use the word outdated; I think the way we have AI today, the way we have ChatGPT is the same way I will say there are other ways that we can look at foreign direct investments because I will give an example.

Nowadays, most of the investors no longer use the banks when they do not get their forex in there. What is the reason for capital importation? It is that when I want to take my funds out, you will allow me to take it out through the banks. But you will agree with me that for the last 12 months, they have had difficulty getting their funds out because some have found alternative channels to get their funds out.

That is why recently the CBN came out with a lot of policy reforms on forex. So, what used to work doesn't work anymore. They try to attract diaspora for example as of 2017, the diaspora remitted about \$22 billion and Edo is big on that also. A quarter of that fraction came to Edo State and it was used for construction and consumption.

Now going back to what you said, after the Covid-19, we looked at it and said FDI would be difficult because countries were shutting down. Countries didn't want anybody to even take anything out of their countries. Supplies were low on medical supplies and it dawned on us and we said we couldn't continue to say we were looking for FDIs. We changed our focus to Direct Domestic Investments (DDIs).

So, we came up with the strategy that we were going to be more focused on 70% DDIs and 30% FDIs. What we are saying is that most of the investments attracted into Edo State were direct domestic investments. One of the initiatives is that we have the After Care Department. What the department does is to look at existing businesses in terms of what they are doing and show them the data on areas that can expand into.

For instance, the business that came in, in less than 2, to 3 years they have started opening branches within the state. They would have taken those new openings to other states. But we were able to show them the potential of Edo State and that is why we are ex-

“ executive expatriates are different from technicians. They are not on the same salary scale. So, when we are talking about investments, while some sub-nationals are doing their best to attract investments, we will still need a whole lot of support from the Federal Government. I think we should actually look at it in a holistic manner, say, categorically that some investors are already telling me that I don't know how to keep it up.

THE **MondayInterview**

panding. It is easier to get an existing business to come in than for you to get a new business to come in and that is exactly what we have done. So, when you talk about the various statistics of capturing investment inflows into the country, we have called them and said we need to start to be creative about the way we look at some of those metrics.

Those traditional ways to calculate FDIs, do you know the funds that go through the alternative markets? But the funds that go through the alternative market are more than what goes through the traditional market.

For us, we still need to understand the thinking of the investors. In my opinion, one of the things that investors look at very well is integrity, trust and policy consistency. You don't want a situation where when I come in, and in less than 90 days, there are changes to that policy. That's what we call policy summersault.

If you do a policy summersault to any type of investor, the investor will take their time to invest. They really want to look at the business environment. They look at the political, legal, environmental and all of that and they also speak to themselves, especially the foreign investors who are already in the country.

That is why for us at ESIPO it is very key to see that investors that are in Edo are happy. One of the meetings we held recently we actually discussed about the private sector. His Excellency did that two weeks ago by calling the businesses, manufacturers to find out what the situation was like. Once the investor knows that you truly care about their business, they will come and that is why you will still see some investors coming into Edo.

Based on your many interactions with investors, what challenges do businesses encounter and what steps you are taking to address those challenges?

One of their first priorities is land or building. They need to be in a location and they need to secure that location. That process of securing the location is very important and like you rightly mentioned, the Edo State Geographical Information System (EdoGIS), we work very closely with the GIS since inception, and the agency has been able to bring a lot of sanity into the system.

Another point they raised is the political will. They need to see that the government is intentional to their issues in terms of policies. We quickly forget that in 2017, one of the things we did was to prohibit community development associations (CDAs). That part you are seeing in GIS, it is based on the strength of the policy that GIS was able to move in and they are providing the kind of services they are providing now and nobody is able to cause problems for investors. The law was strengthened in 2021, and 2022. Right now, you cannot illegally go into another person's property, there is a law to that, and there are sanctions to that. So, that has boosted the confidence of investors and businesses when it comes to doing business in Edo State.

If you do things that are not right in the business environment, there are consequences for it and that is what Edo under the current administration has been able to achieve through law and order. Before any investor goes into any community now, they come to the government. We engage the communities unlike when you just go into any community and you don't know what to expect.

One of the mandates is working with our sister agencies, such as the ministries of business, trade and cooperatives, skills development among others. Our aim is to ensure that the MSMEs are investor ready. I will give you a clear example. While ESIPO was on the field, we noticed that when large business investors came in and they wanted some services, we found out that our MSMEs could not provide those services not because they were not skilled enough but just because they did not have that capacity. They ended up going to some other locations to get some other MSMEs that had the capacity. So, we are dealing with that presently to ensure that they can use local vendors. We want a situation when a new investor comes in, he can use local vendors to take up their auxiliary services.

Your agency thrives on partnership. You have partners like the German GZI. How has this partnership created jobs in the few years of the existence of ESIPO?

The good thing about partnership is that it doesn't just come. I will give you some partners we work with such as GIZ, UNDP, FCDO, and IDH among others. All of these partners did their due assessment to find out how to work with the agency and if it is going to produce the desired outcome. Edo has been able to be at their top in terms of credibility and actually delivering what we say we want to deliver.

Now, speaking about the interventions which the partners have given to Edo, it is enormous in the sense that if an investor knows that you are dealing with a particular partner, that alone can attract that investment because they know that for those partners to deal with you, they know you are credible. So, the credibility they bring to the table is not quantifiable. We are talking about numbers; but I know that the numbers are over 100,000 in terms of job creation.

Now, how does job creation happen? An investor comes in and employs like 50 persons and that's job creation. Again, there is what we call self-employment which is also like a job creation. So, if I train you to be a fashion designer and you open your fashion house and employ 5 persons, you have already created jobs. Usually, when we say we are going to create 200,000 jobs most people thought we are going to employ 200,000 civil servants, but that



was not what we meant.

The idea was to boost the economy to that extent where you can have other people or you can absorb a certain number of persons in terms of giving them jobs. We have seen it severally and let's say in 2020 for example working with GIZ, we scaled up in

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terms of technology advancement for businesses where we taught them digital skills to about 445 businesses.

Going back to the records, we see how those businesses have been able to scale up and some have been able to get extra hands and employ more people. And just that skills saved a lot of businesses because there was a time nobody could go out so they could use these skills to actually sell online. As I said, the kind of collaboration with foreign partners cannot be quantified because they actually bring a lot to the table by just being able to partner with us.

Of the investments ESIPO has attracted into Edo, which of them has given the state the most benefits?

You know the benefits come in different ways. If you talk about agriculture, it has a backward integration and some agricultural products we have are medium and long term. But if you talk about retail trade, it is sort of medium term because you have to speak about getting infrastructure but you see the impact immediately. Some retail shops immediately opened; they got about 300 persons immediately on board. Most of the manufacturing would have expanded.

For me really, you can say agriculture. It brings about trade also, access to the market. There are certain products right now that are meant for the international market. But we cannot even take them to the international market because we need it more here. That is the import substitution I am talking about. The more we are able to ensure that more of our people are able to go into agriculture in a commercial way the better. Then, we will now talk about agro processing which is also something we are also working towards because we have to balance it.

With all that is going on in Edo State in my opinion, we are on a very right track. You have to be able to take ourselves away from cosmetics. Unfortunately, sometimes those that may not mean well can come up with cosmetics. Cosmetics, what I mean, we want to see a building coming up but somebody needs to service that building. At least, health centres for example, you build a health center it is just fine. There are no doctors in there, nurses, materials are not in there, but you come and commission it. That's not what we want to be doing.

Human capital development is something that is key for us and that is part of our principles in ESIPO. When you are coming as an investor, you should be able to tell us the numbers of jobs you are bringing, you should be able to tell us the numbers of people you are going to take from our own end in terms of Edo State. It is our responsibility to make sure that those people have the skills and capacity.

If you are going to make an investment in Edo, we must see how Edo people can benefit from that investment. But Edo people need to be very ready also to tap the benefits because it is not an emotional investment, it is for profit. It can be an impact investment but oftentimes it is for profit. So, we need to be business-like in this regard.

Investments are important. I will give you an example like Fiber Optics. How do I quantify the importance of the fiber on the internet when today we have young people from Edo that can easily be doing a lot of coding, trading and can earn money from the US, Canada, Australia or while they are in Edo State?

As a government, I believe we need to create that enabling environment and get investors to invest in fiber optics. In doing that, I have to make sure that I create that market for them because if you put about \$1 million in fiber optics and you have just 10 people using it, do the maths, the facility will be underutilised. Yes, most of the investments we are doing are impact investments, while others like retail are going to get quick wins that we can see.

I just wanted to find out if between now and say before this current administration hands over, perhaps maybe they have some projects in the pipeline that people should be aware of.

Because of investors' confidentiality, I try not to mention names. Like we talked about earlier, there are two refineries, and we are expecting another 2 refineries in the pipeline. Last time you heard about an automobile company in Benin. So, we have all of these companies coming in. It is that some of them don't want to be mentioned. One thing I know we have done excellently well is collaboration.

We have also been able to show that Edo is that preferred destination for investments.

What we now need is the support of the Federal Government because when FG makes a certain policy we don't have control over it as it has a trickle down effect on sub nationals.

One way, you are trying to attract investment, the other way, your other team is doing something that doesn't promote investment. So, we need to do that balancing act very quickly. If we do it, it will benefit not just Edo State but all the 36 sub-national governments.

The more you encourage sub nationals by way of your policies, the more investments you will have. To be more sincere, in the present economic landscape, we need to be more investor friendly. We need to have more friendly investment policies at the central, very important.

It is difficult to see a country that is still growing in terms of GDP that the country is not doing well. But what we now need to do now is to trickle down to make a positive impact on the common man on the street.

The investments we are attracting must show some positive effect on the man on the street.

THE NEWS WORLD FROM AROUND WITH **MICHAEL OVIENMHADA**

The Nigerian Observer ...that the people may know

A little bit more salt, a little bit more Vladimir

OLUWATOSIN OGUNJUYIGBE

Not since the dreadful days of Josef Stalin who ruled the Soviet Union for 31 years has any Russian leader mesmerized the Russian populace with such a vice-like grip on their lives as Vladimir Putin has done since 1999. Josef Stalin never took prisoners. He caused 53 million people to disappear to preserve his power. Vladimir is not as bad as that. Think of Don Corleone of the Godfather fame and think of Vladimir. A total stranger walks up to you and pricks you with a substance. A plane drops from the sky. A bullet-ridden body is found in a car park in a remote town in Spain. A critic falls in his own Yacht and breaks his neck. Yup.

Actually, if you ask me, Vladimir whose Slavic name speaks to a man of 'great power' has been trying to modernize Russia, but he has received little cooperation from the West. For the West to make money which is the reward of capitalism, it must create an enemy. A unipolar world without enemies is an unprofitable business proposition for the West. To Vladimir Putin's credit, he tried to get his country to join NATO in 2000. He asked that his country be allowed to join without the stringent conditions normally applicable. He was turned down. However, NATO entered into some form of agreement with Russia to cooperate on security matters. The West broke terms of the agreement by bombing Yugoslavia during the Civil War that eventually fractured the country. Russia was not treated as an equal. Putin did not like it. He went on to do his own thing. He invaded the country of Georgia (a country next door to Russia) in 2008. He took Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. He also went into Syria to complicate matters for the West. Basically, he set out to irritate the West. In a vicarious way, this is the kind of irritation the West craves to paint Russia with a broad brush, create the threat of an enemy, build more killing machines, and make more money.

In many ways, casting aside the evils of communism as it was practiced in the 1900s, the East has been more beneficial to African countries in matters of infrastructure development. We can begin to count, but let's leave it there.

In the last three days, elections have begun in Russia. Putin is running again and he will win. There's no opposition the way we know it elsewhere. He will take office again officially this week for the next 6 years. He's still a young man at 71, even by Western standards considering that Biden is 81 and Trump is 78. Imagine for one minute if these were African presidents running in their 80s, we would be getting high-level delegations coming to threaten us with sanctions for fielding old men!!! So much



for a tale of two worlds—the world of the rich and powerful countries who operate by a different set of rules, versus the rest of us—struggling countries who have so badly mismanaged our countries that we often go cap-in-hand to ask for money that we already have, deposited in their banks—our stolen patrimony. That is the lot of Africa. That is the burden of Africa. Go Putin!!!!

The latest threat to Africa is the LGBTQ phenomenon. African countries are being threatened with sanctions, withholding of loans, etc if they do not embrace new LGBTQ laws. Ghana is the latest victim in this game of intimidation. Considering that it took hundreds of years for America to allow slaves to be free; considering that it took another 100 years to allow Black people to vote; considering that it took over 200 years to allow women to vote, I just wonder why they cannot give African countries another 200 years to evolve and embrace LGBTQ laws! I thought what was sauce for the goose was also great sauce for the gander? Oh, sorry, we are a struggling country. I almost forgot. Any wonder why everyone is looking to China? The Chinese don't care whom you choose to marry. The people just want to do business.

Imagine if the West knew the true definition of fairness—if Haiti would have remained so impoverished being the oldest independent black populated country, and especially, sitting in the Western Hemisphere. These folks

beat up France in a war they did not ask for. France went on to beg their Western friends to impose a blockade on Haiti. Haiti was forced to pay reparations to France for whooping them. Meanwhile, descendants of slaves are still waiting for reparations. The matter is not even being discussed. Does anyone dream of the day Nigeria will be a great nation that does not take instructions from anyone? Now, Haiti is in turmoil as bandits are about to take over the country. The West will "rally" to send "help" to a country that ordinarily should have been a prosperous haven, had they not meddled with their destiny.

Gaza burns still.

The war in Ukraine grinds on.

Inflation in Nigeria continues to send more people into poverty as the Nigerian Senate that should be coming up with solutions to alleviate poverty is embroiled in a national embarrassment of budget padding. Stealing.

When I wrote last week, I asked the question: What was Fani Willis, the prosecutor in Trump's election case in Georgia thinking, dating a prosecutor whom she hired on the case? Well, the Judge has ruled. I think he was being very lenient in his ruling by giving the option of either the District Attorney stepping down from the case or having the lead prosecutor step down. Gratuitously, Nathan Wade, the lover boy has sent in his resignation. Fani Willis is going into this big battle now like a wounded lion on the one hand and like a weakened gladiator on the

other. I will be surprised if this matter is settled for the Trump side. She's given them a weapon, and they will milk it to the hilt. In the Judge's ruling he wrote, among other things, that the testimony given by Nathan Wade, the Prosecutor, emitted "an odor of mendacity." That's a euphemism for untruthfulness. A lie.

Again, last week, I wrote that the PDP would do well to hire a steady, peaceful, competent, dutiful, and highly skilled political mind such as Osarodion Ogie, the current SSG of the Obaseki government to pair with Asue Ighodalo, a man who by himself comes into this high stakes political game with impeccable credentials. This is a dream team that the opposition may not have the common sense to match because of matters of ego.

Travel with me into the minds of the opposition right now, this minute. The mantle of leadership of the opposition has fallen into the hands of Pastor Osagie Ize-Iyamu with the choice of Senator Monday Okpebholo. This temporary dethronement of Comrade Oshiomhole is an unacceptable situation to Oshiomhole. So, if you were in Oshiomhole's shoes, what would you do? Would you fold your hands and let the faction that produced the top of the ticket also produce the deputy? This is where I talk about common sense versus ego. Earlier this past weekend, there was a big buzz that Hon. Ogbeide-Ihama had been chosen to be deputy to Okpebholo. This choice, according to close watchers,

could have the potential of giving the PDP a big fight. We will find out in a few days which virtue prevails: common sense or the ego.

On three sad notes, firstly, over 300 students kidnapped in the North remain in captivity. Their captors are asking for the nation's entire budget to set their captives free. It looks like they are taking a cue from the Senate. When will the state take charge of our security again? Secondly, the Edo State Chairman of the PDP, Dr. Tony Aziegbemi, has been kidnapped. We know that Fulani herdsmen do not come into the city to take captives. Is this a political hit? Will Edo State drift into dark territory over politics? We pray for his safe return.

In Delta State, a community feud has erupted, eating up our gallant soldiers who were sent on a peace mission. This is a sad development, ominous echoes of days gone by in Odi. What is it about us that makes us so vicious? Have we as a people lost total respect for the uniform? May God comfort the families of men of the Armed Forces who have been affected by this dastardly act.

God bless Edo State, and may God bless Nigeria.

Ovienmhada, author, poet, playwright & public affairs commentator, can be reached via omeeky@hotmail.com.