

Edo targets improved telemedicine, primary healthcare delivery with fibre optic Internet infrastructure

TRACY OHOVWORE

Edo State is looking to improve primary healthcare delivery and telemedicine with the spread of fibre optic internet infrastructure across the 18 local government areas of the state.

The Edo State Head of Service, Dr. Anthony Okungbowa, stated this in his remarks at a telemedicine workshop held in Benin City with the theme "Delivering Value in Primary Health Care: The Role of Telemedicine". Okungbowa said with fibre

optic connection across the 18 local government areas in Edo State, primary healthcare centres can leverage access to the internet to improve delivery of quality healthcare. "Through telemedicine we can actually harness the power of technology to overcome

the barriers that have plagued our primary healthcare system. With the advent of telecommunication networks, video conferences, mobile applications, medical advice, consultations diagnosis can be delivered remotely reaching those in need regardless of

the geographical limitations," Okungbowa said. "The novel initiative is made possible by His Excellency with the connection of fibre optics across the 18 local government areas in Edo State. This not only saves time and resources but also ensures

quality healthcare services are readily available even in the most remote areas," he said. On his part, the Commissioner for Health, Dr. Samuel Alli, said the Governor Godwin Obaseki-led admin-

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...that the people may know

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PUBLISHED SINCE MAY 29, 1968 | VOL. 45, NO. 833 | MONDAY 8TH - THURSDAY 11TH, APRIL 2024. ₦200

New national ID to boost micro loans, consumer credit, financial inclusion

as NIMC appoints Lagos-based SecureID as first manufacturer

BILL OKONEDO AND TELIAT SULE

The upscaled National Identity Card in the works by the Federal

Government throws up prospects of boosting micro loans administered in the country, as well as consumer credit through the reduction of default rate. It also displays the

instrumentation to strengthen identity verification and reduce financial crimes committed under false pretext. Also, with the centralised registry, the nation will benefit

in terms of higher productivity occasioned by reduced loss of man-hours from frequent data capturing from government institutions such as for telecoms, Bank Verification

Number (BVN), INEC, among others, The Nigerian Observer analysis shows.

The new identification project was announced by the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC), which stated that only registered citizens and legal residents with the NIN will be eligible to request the card.

NIMC also announced it has appointed SecureID, a Lagos-based company, as first manufacturer of National Domestic Card Scheme, AfriGo Card, an innovative identity solution with payment functionality for all types of social and financial services.

"The Federal Government of Nigeria, through the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) in collaboration with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the Nigeria Inter-bank Settlement System (NIBSS), has launched an innovative identity solution with payment functionality for all types of social and financial services to be powered by AfriGO, a national domestic card scheme," NIMC said in a statement at the weekend.

"The National ID card, lay-

ered with verifiable National Identity features, is backed by the NIMC Act No. 23 of 2007, which mandates NIMC to enroll and issue a General Multi-purpose card (GMPC) to Nigerians and legal residents. This card will address the demand for physical identification enabling cardholders prove their identity, access government and private social services, facilitate financial inclusion for disenfranchised Nigerians, empower citizens, as well as encourage increased participation in nation-building," it said.

Nigerians have longed for a centralised system such as the new project proposed by the Federal Government to save them from the difficulties and cost in time they face during frequent and multiple registrations as demanded by the authorities.

Elaborating on the features of the card, NIMC said the card, which will be produced to ICAO standards, will be useful for payment, loan administration, promotion of financial inclusion and give citizens access to government's social services.

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EID AL-FITR CELEBRATION:

President Bola Tinubu inspecting the military parade, with him is Governor of Lagos State, Mr. Babajide Sanwo-Olu (left), and others, during the President's arrival at the Mohammed Murtala International Airport, Ikeja, Lagos ahead of the Eid al-Fitr celebration, on Sunday, 07 April 2024.

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# FG declares Tuesday, Wednesday public holidays for Eid El-Fitr

● **as Sultan directs Muslims to look for new moon on Monday**

RUTH ISIGBE

The Federal Government has declared Tuesday, 9th April, and Wednesday, 10th April 2024, as public holidays to mark this year's

Muslim Eid El-Fitr celebration.

The Minister of Interior, Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo, disclosed this in a statement signed by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry, Aishetu Ndayako.

The minister also congratulated all Muslim faithful on the

successful completion of the Ramadan fast and urged Nigerians to continue in the spirit of unity in order to improve and achieve peace and oneness in the country.

"The Minister of Interior, Dr Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo, who made the declaration on behalf of the Federal Government, congratulates all Muslim Ummah for the successful completion of the fasting in the

holy month of Ramadan," the statement said.

"Dr Tunji-Ojo calls on Muslim Ummah to imbibe and practice the virtues that entail kindness, love, tolerance, peace, good neighbourliness, compassion as exemplified by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him).

"He urged Nigerians to continue in the spirit of unity in order to improve and achieve peace and oneness in the country.

"The Minister wishes all Muslim Ummah a happy Eid-el-Fitr celebration and prays that the peace, blessings and favour of Allah be with everyone and our Great Nation," it said.

Meanwhile, the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar, has urged Muslims faithful in the country to start looking for the new moon of Shawwal 1445 AH on Monday.

The Sultan gave the directive

in a statement issued on Sunday through the Chairman, Advisory Committee on Religious Affairs, Sultanate Council, Sokoto, Prof. Sambo Wali Junaidu.

"This is to inform the Muslim Ummah that Monday 8th April, 2024 which is equivalent to 29th day of Ramadan 1445AH shall be the day to look for the new moon of Shawwal 1445AH," the statement said.

"Muslims are therefore requested to start looking for the new moon of Shawwal 1445AH on Monday and report its sighting to the nearest district or village head for onward communication to His Eminence, Alhaji Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar, CFR, mni, the Sultan of Sokoto," it said.

When sighted on Monday, that would bring to an end the month long Ramadan fast by Muslim faithful in the country which commenced on 11th March 2024.



**INSPECTION:**

Delta State Commissioner for Works, Rural and Riverine Roads, Mr. Charles Aniagwu (middle), during the inspection of completed and ongoing projects in Okpe and Ughelli North Local Government Areas.

## DHQ confirms lieutenant killed, 4 soldiers wounded in ambush by terrorists

● **as troops neutralize six terrorists**

The Defence Headquarters (DHQ) on Sunday confirmed that one of its officers, A. S. Maidawa, a lieutenant, was killed while four other soldiers were wounded in an ambush by terrorists that occurred along Buratai-Buni Gari Road, Biu Local Government Area of Borno State.

The Director, Defence Media Operations, Major-General

Edward Buba, who disclosed this in a statement made available to Defence Correspondents in Abuja, said the incident occurred on 5 April 24 at about 0935hrs.

"During the encounter, troops lost a Lieutenant that was killed in action while 4 personnel were wounded in action and receiving treatment," the statement said.

He said the terrorists exploited the forest area and the bad road network to launch the ambush, but the soldiers repelled the attack and reportedly killed some of the terrorists.

"Troops reinforcement pursued the terrorists to their hideout within the Timbuktu Triangle and made contact during which the troops neutralized six of them and the re-

maining terrorists ran in disarray," it said.

The statement further said the troops recovered assorted weapons from the bandits comprising five AK 47 rifles and 103 rounds of the 7.62mm special ammunition.

It added that the troops had begun a hunt of the remaining terrorists that fled the firefight.

## New national ID to boost micro loans, consumer...

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"Cardholders will also be able to use the cards as debit or prepaid cards by linking same to bank accounts of their choice. The card shall enable eligible persons especially those financially excluded from social and financial services have access to multiple government intervention programmes," NIMC said.

Additional features, according to the statement, include travel, health insurance information, microloans, agriculture, food stamps, transport, and energy subsidies, among others.

In terms of the likely impact on micro loans, there is still a huge market unmet by the existing players because the loan

requests of the people in need of such services fall below the tickets of commercial banks in Nigeria.

"With an estimated 39.9% of the adult population excluded from financial services and about 40.1% of the Nigerian populace living below the poverty level, the demand for microfinance services has maintained an upward trajectory over the last five years," Agosto & Co stated in a report, adding that the demand for micro loans is driven by a high prevalence of economically active poor population, the low literacy level, and the relatively high level of financial exclusion.

The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) estimated that about 103 million Nigerians

were multidimensionally poor in 2022, and with food inflation high at 37.9 per cent, the World Bank has warned that more Nigerians would slip into poverty.

A 2023 survey conducted by the Enhancing Financial Innovation and Access (EFInA) found poverty as the major driver of financial exclusion, with the northern parts of the country the most financially excluded.

"EFInA's A2F 2023 survey reports that poverty is a major driver of financial exclusion. Nearly 50% of unbanked adults have no financial account because they have no, little, or irregular income," the body stated.

According to the survey, 33.9 million adult Nigerians

or 32 per cent were financially excluded.

Not too long ago, the Federal Government introduced Tradermoni to provide microfinance loans and other support services to the financially excluded. Other empowerment schemes of this nature include the soft loans for rice farmers in the country. Notwithstanding, the new scheme is set to bring the best out of micro loan administration in the country.

As of the end of March 2024, there were 61.16 million Bank Verification Numbers (BVNs) in the country, up from 59.9 million as of December 2023. An average adult Nigerian has about two to three bank accounts, requiring the use of multiple ATM cards.

## NWFL adjusts match schedule ahead Eid-El-Fitr celebration

The Nigeria Women Football League (NWFL) has announced the postponement of matches in the league ahead of the Eld-El-Fitr celebration.

A statement by the league body said that matchweeks 13 and 14 of the NWFL Premiership were postponed to April 17th and April 24th respectively.

"This decision comes in light of the upcoming Eld-El-Fitr celebration, marking the end of Ramadan.

"In a letter addressed to all clubs, the Chief Operating Of-

ficer, Modupe Shabi, explained that the rescheduling was necessary as Matchweek 13,

originally slated for April 10th, coincides with the Eld-El-Fitr celebration.

"The NWFL values the observance of religious holidays and seeks to ensure that both players, officials and fans can fully participate in this significant event.

"We express our gratitude to all clubs, stakeholders and fans for their continued cooperation and understanding in this matter."

## Italian Serie A: Osimhen ends goal drought in Napoli victory

After many games without scoring, Nigeria's Super Eagles forward Victor Osimhen finally ended his goal drought in Napoli's victory over Monza.

Osimhen just recovered from an injury that denied him the opportunity to represent Nigeria in the double-header international friendly game against Ghana and Mali.

The Italian champions confronted Monza on Sunday af-

ternoon and secured a 2-4 win.

It was the host who netted the opening goal in the 9th minute through Duric before Osimhen restored parity in the 55th minute.

Politano put Napoli ahead 2 minutes later Zienlinski made it 1-3 in the 61st minute and Colpani reduced the deficit for the host a minute later.

Raspadori sealed the game in the 68th minute and earned Napoli a well-deserved 2-4 win.

## Edo targets improved telemedicine, primary health...

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istration has continued to reposition primary healthcare centres through strategic interventions.

"In the last two years, we have renovated over 50 facilities and we have also deployed personnel there with the goal that at least there should be

one primary healthcare centre functional per each ward. We have a template; we have the design," the commissioner said.

"We do not want us to begin to view primary healthcare centres as clinics for poor people and for rural dwellers. It is for everyone who needs the services," he said.



## NEWS

# Budget padding: SERAP fulfils threat, sues Akpabio over failure to recall Ningi

TOBORE JEROME

The Socioeconomic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) has made good its threat as it has dragged Senate President Godswill Akpabio to court for failing to recall the senator representing Bauchi Central, Abdul Ningi.

SERAP also sued Akpabio for failing “to refer the alleged N3.7 trillion budget padding to appropriate anti-corruption agencies for investigation and prosecution”.

Akpabio was sued for himself and on behalf of all members of the Nigerian Senate.

In a post on its X (formerly Twitter) handle on Sunday morning, SERAP said, “BREAKING: We’ve sued the Senate President, Mr Godswill Akpabio over the failure to recall whistleblower Abdul Ningi, and to refer the alleged N3.7 trillion budget padding to the EFCC and ICPC for investigation and prosecution.”

Ningi was slammed with a three-month suspension by the Senate on March 12, 2024 after he alleged that the 2024 national budget was padded to the tune N3.7 trillion.

Ningi, in an interview with BBC Hausa, had alleged that the budget passed by the National Assembly for the 2024 fiscal year was N25 trillion while the one being implemented by the Presidency was N28.7 trillion.

On March 16, SERAP wrote to Senate President Akpabio urging him “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”.

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 further urged Akpabio “to make a public commitment to discontinue the patently unlawful constituency projects in the next budget cycle”.

“Referring these allegations to appropriate anti-corruption agencies would be consistent with the lawmakers’ oath of office and the letter and spirit of the Nigerian Constitution 1999 [as amended],” SERAP said in the letter signed by its deputy director, Kolawole Oluwadare.

It said it would be grateful if the recommended measures were taken within seven days of the receipt and/or publication of the letter, otherwise it would consider appropriate legal actions “to compel you and

the Senate to comply with our requests in the public interest”.

“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.

The Nigerian Observer checks showed that the suit against Akpabio was filed on Friday, April 5 at the Federal High Court, Abuja, by SERAP’s lawyers, Oluwadare (who doubles as the organisation’s deputy director) and Mrs Adelanke Aremo.

Part of the suit marked FHC/ABJ/CS/452/2024 said, “It is in the public interest and the interest of justice to grant this application. No whistleblower should ever be penalised simply for making a public interest disclosure.”

SERAP is seeking “an order of mandamus to direct and compel Mr. Akpabio to refer the alleged N3.7 trillion budget padding to appropriate anti-corruption agencies for investigation and prosecution of suspected perpetrators.”

“An order of mandamus to direct and compel Mr Akpabio to immediately take steps to ensure the reinstatement of whistleblower Abdul Ningi who was suspended from the Senate over his allegations that the lawmakers padded

the 2024 budget by irregularly inserting projects worth N3.7 trillion.

“An order of mandamus to direct and compel Mr. Akpabio to put in place transparency and accountability mechanisms to ensure that the trillions of Naira budgeted for constituency projects are not embezzled, misappropriated, or diverted into private pockets”.

Akpabio’s lawyer, Umeh Kalu (SAN), had, however, in response to an earlier letter by human rights lawyer, Femi Falana (SAN), requesting Akpabio to lift Ningi’s suspension, said that the decision and resolution to suspend Ningi was that of the Senate sitting in plenary and not that of his client, Akpabio.

## Electricity Tariff Hike: Power Ministry, NERC forcing Nigerians to pay for inefficiency –Afenifere

The pan-Yoruba socio-cultural organization, Afenifere, has decried the 300 percent hike in electricity tariff in the country, saying that the development would cause businesses to shrink and also make nonsense of the efforts by the federal government at boosting the economy as businesses will shrink.

It particularly noted that one of the reasons given for the hike in electricity tariff was an increase in the price of gas being purchased by electricity generation companies (Gencos) from \$2.18 to \$2.42 as announced by the Nigerian Midstream and Downstream Regulatory Authority (NMDPRA).

Afenifere stressed that a simple arithmetic showed that the percentage of gas increase is not the same as the one announced for electricity tariff which is over 200%, adding that it was clear that rather than exploring ways to reduce the cost of producing energy thereby reducing the pains of Nigerians, the relevant government agencies are more interested in passing the price of their inefficiency on the people.

The organisation noted that for instance, an increase in the cost of gas was used as the reason for the hike in electricity tariff.

Accordingly, the pan-Yoruba cultural group called on “state governments to as a matter of necessity, expedite action in establishing their electricity power plants since they now have the power to do so”.

These were contained in a statement by Comrade Jare Ajayi, National Publicity Sec-

retary of Afenifere, in which it noted that as recent as Thursday, April 4, 2024, President Ahmed Bola Tinubu while hosting some members of the business sector in Aso Rock Villa, underscored the role that private sector plays in an economy.

Afenifere therefore wondered how businesses could flourish as desired by President Tinubu when the amount to be paid per kilowatt hour (kWh) of electricity jumped from N68 to N225 just within 24 hours of its announcement.

The Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC) on Wednesday, April 4, 2024, announced that electricity consumers on Band A would begin to pay N225 per kilowatt hour as against the N68 they were paying.

Musliu Oseni, the Vice Chairman of NERC who made the announcement, said that only those enjoying 20 hours of electricity supply or more (out of 24 hours a day) were affected by this increase.

Afenifere faulted the position of NERC, stressing that it was erroneous to state that only those who are direct enrollees in a particular Band utilize the power being supplied through that band.

It said; “For instance, a Band A consumer is likely to have people in his/her household or place of work where the power is being consumed. This means that if 1.5 million is the figure the government has as enrollees on Band A, the number of people who depend on the power coming therefrom would be about five times that figure.”



FUNERAL SERVICE:

Senate President, Senator Godswill Akpabio (right), when he attended the funeral service in honour of a former member of the Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly Late Hon Akanimo Ernest Edet, in Etim Ekpo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

## Save Okuama and Okoloba communities, Niger Delta students beg Tinubu

GOODLUCK NWABOR

National President of the Niger Delta Students’ Union Government (NIDSUG), Comr. Scott Ogunseri, has pleaded with President Bola Ahmed Tinubu to rise up and halt the disorder ravaging Okuama and Okoloba communities in Delta State.

Ogunseri made the plea on Saturday during a press conference at the union’s national secretariat.

He decried the current situation in the communities, saying school children were the most affected as they can no longer go to school.

“I plead with the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Federal Republic of Nigeria, Sen. Bola Ahmed Tunubu, to rise up to the occasion and save the people of Okuama and Okoloba Communities in Delta State and allow the students in certificate classes to participate in the forthcoming national examinations that are knocking at the door,” Ogunseri said.

“The ongoing disorder has really affected the school children who share a bigger portion of the current sufferings in their land. They have been at home for ages now due to discombobulation present in these communities.”

“Mr, President, an elder can’t be in the house and the pregnant nanny goat gives on its tether. Please rise up, Okuama and Okoloba Communities are on fire. The academic community is witnessing a major setback amidst this current harsh situation ravaging the society. I

believe the President is a father figure and a man of integrity who loves his children genuinely, notwithstanding their shortcomings. Please intervene in this situation, because the load is becoming heavier on him that carries it,” he said.

Ogunseri said farmers, market men and women, civil servants and other societal growth contributors were indoors, with nothing to cater for themselves and their families, adding that if the situation was not well managed, it could lead to insecurity and threaten national integration.

“Our children instead of being in school learning, have recently developed a hobby of chasing rats and lizards at home due to the recent clampdown in Okuama and Okoloba communities. The development of

every society starts with the education of the youth. If these children do not soldier academically with their mates in other neighbouring states, it will cause another disrepair in the academic calendar of most schools cum the students’ academic journey,” he said.

A 400 level student of Mass Communication in the University of Benin, Dagbo Olaegbe, said the current situation has thrown up a lot of challenges for his Ijaw people in Okuama and Okoloba communities as it has “caused a standstill to the development in the community”.

He implored the Tinubu administration, through the Minister of Defence, “to put a halt to the precarious moment ravaging the people of Okuama and Okoloba”.



# InsideEdo

## Alleged war of attrition: Save us from Inspector Terry Eboigbe – Evbuomoma people cry out

The people of Evbuomoma Village in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area of Edo State have cried out over an alleged war of attrition being waged against them by one police inspector, Terry Eboigbe Osakpamwan (a.k.a 'Smally SARS') and his gang.

Evbuomoma Village for some time now was said to have consistently been under the siege of unending violence and attack of the Police Inspector Terry Eboigbe-led gang, making life unbearable for them.

Led by Pa. Gabriel Iguobaro, the people cried out at a media briefing held in the village on Tuesday, April 2, 2024.

Allegedly, Terry Eboigbe was the assistant Okaighele of the village (youth head) but has super imposed himself as the substantive Okaighele, using his powers and authority derived from being a police officer.

This he uses arbitrarily and now sees himself as above the laws of the land as he unilaterally imposed his stooge, one Otote as the Odionwere (village head), whereas, the rightful and most elderly person, Pa. Gabriel Iguobaro, is still alive.

According to Pa. Iguobaro, in the past three years the people of Evbuomoma village have not known peace due to the uncontrolled criminal activities of the said Terry Eboigbe, Eghosa Edokpolor (aka Obodo) and his gang. Often, they would invade the village with guns and other dangerous weapons, shooting indiscriminately.

In the series of invasions, scores of persons have been lost, many maimed and valuable properties worth millions of naira destroyed. All in a bid to dethrone the substantive



PA GABRIEL IGUOBARO

Okaighele, Enoghayin Campaign, and impose himself.

In spite of being a police officer who is supposed to be the keeper of the law, the said Terry Eboigbe is now a government unto himself forcing the people of Evbuomoma to submit to his whims and caprices or get punished their own way, it was said.

Also speaking, Prince Etionosa Avenbua Eresoyen, the Enogie's first son, corroborated the narrative of Pa. Iguobaro.

According to Eresoyen, it all began in the year 2021, when Terry Eboigbe demanded that the substantive Okaighele, Enoghayin Campaign should begin to give him some good sum of money as a form of royalty or something unpleasant will happen.

"Before we knew it, Terry Eboigbe (Smally SARS), Eghosa Edokpolor (Obodo) led

a group of armed gang to unleash terror on us, scores of persons lost their lives, many sustained various degrees of injury and properties worth millions of naira were destroyed."

In the same vein, just about a fortnight ago, while he, Prince Eresoyen was celebrating the birth of his new born baby, the said gang members again attacked the Enogie's palace.

In this attack, while shooting indiscriminately as usual, many valuable properties were vandalized, including a car set ablaze.

"At about 8:45pm they attacked us at the palace of the Enogie while celebrating the birth of my new born baby. They set ablaze a car belonging to one of my cousins and my car also was vandalized as they were shooting indiscriminately."

Allegedly, they said Terry Eboigbe was behind all the atrocities perpetrated against the people of Evbuomoma.

With false allegations, the substantive Okaighele, Enoghayin Campaign was arrested and sent to police detention, Prince Eresoyen said, saying, "Terry Eboigbe arranged for Okaighele Enoghayin Campaign to be arrested by the police and put in detention for some time but was later vindicated."

The said Police Inspector allegedly also unilaterally without the consent of the Enogie and people installed one Otote as Odionwere in Evbuomoma Village.

As he uses one Emmanuel Aigbogun who is not a native of Evbuomoma to push all manner of false information on the social media about the village and the people.

"Whereas, Emmanuel Aigbogun knows nothing about Evbuomoma Village and the people.

"We appeal that the state government and the Police should help us beg him to stay clear from what concerns Evbuomoma; we want peace in our community."

"Police Inspector Terry Eboigbe Osakpamwan a.k.a Small SARS and his gang are on our neck," Prince Eresoyen cried!

He however said petitions about the situation and asking for the intervention of the Police have been sent to the Assistant Inspector General of Police, Zone 5, Benin City, the DSS and all other relevant security authorities.

Tired of the situation, the people passionately appeal to all security agencies, the Edo State government, and HRM Oba Ewuare II to urgently

come to their aid.

Joining forces with the menfolk in the protest against the alleged nefarious activities of Terry Eboigbe and his gang was Madam Roseline Idubor Iguobaro.

Efforts to reach the alleged Terry Eboigbe who is said to

have been transferred to Abuja for reaction was not successful, and on his part Emmanuel Aigbogun denied knowing Terry Eboigbe and that he is not from Evbuomoma Village, he does not know anything happening there as at the time of filing in this story.

### Police commence investigation into missing Delta varsity student in Edo

MIKE OSAROGIAGBON

Edo State Police Command has launched an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the sudden disappearance of a 19-year-old 200-level female undergraduate of Delta State University, Abraka Campus.

Faith Omudon had left home for a farm at Uguhon/Uwemo village in Orhionmwon Local Government Area of Edo State on March 30, 2024, but did not return as all efforts to trace her proved abortive.

The Public Relations Officer, Edo State Police Command, SP Chidi Nwabuzor, disclosed this in a press release made available to our correspondent in Benin City, weekend.

"Faith Omudon 'f' is 19 years old, an undergraduate of Delta State University. Dark in complexion, about 5ft tall, without tribal marks, speaks Ika and English languages fluently.

"Any person with useful information about her whereabouts should please contact the nearest police station. Call the GSM No 08069903936, 09061855533 or Police Control Room phone numbers; 08037646272 and 08077773721," it said.

Meanwhile, fear has continued to grip residents of Iru Egbede Community in Orhionmwon Local Government Area of Edo State where Faith Omudon reportedly disappeared.

Narrating his ordeal, father of missing Faith, Mr. Edward said the incident occurred during the Iru National Conference.

"We usually have the conference at this time of the year. We were seated inside the community hall when we heard loud wailing outside that my daughter was missing.

"She had left for the farm earlier that morning with a motorbike taking her breakfast with her," he said.

Corroborating his story, the head of the village vigilante group, Ikpoba Johnbull, said as soon as the news of the girl's disappearance broke that evening, he and his men followed the girl's mother to the farm.

"We immediately mobilised and combed the area up to Izighiri and Uwumuwe, two neighbouring villages, but could not find any trace of her.

"We only found the leftovers in her flask. We informed our neighbouring vigilante groups as we spent that night inside the bushes, but there was no result.

"We then advised Omodon to formally report a case of missing person at the Abudu Police Division," he explained.

The National Youth chairman of the community, Mr Donald Egboko, who lamented that his people were depressed and devastated over their missing daughter, appealed to security agencies to help bring her back.

Checks by our correspondent at the State Police Command headquarters in Benin City, revealed that operatives of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) have initiated a high profile investigative team to unravel what happened and possibly rescue the missing girl.



MISSING FAITH OMODON

LUCKY EFESÉ

Access Bank, weekend, held its usual customers' engagement forum to chart a way forward for consolidation of the bank/customers relationship among the Access family.

In her opening remarks, the deputy managing director, Access Bank, Chizoma Okoli, thanked all the customers of Access family for honouring the invitations to the forum despite their tight schedules, maintaining that the forum was to connect with them to achieve the desired results in terms of banking transactions.

Okoli said Access Bank had remained a potent bank in the country, which has values and makes life easier for its customers, saying the bank does not take customers for granted. She said that Edo and of

## Access Bank holds customers' engagement forum in Benin City

● **customers mean every single thing to us, says DMD**

course the South South region had remained critical zones for thriving businesses, especially in view of their numerical strength.

The DMD noted that Access Bank had 14 branches across Africa countries and eight branches in America and Europe.

Okoli, who reiterated the bank's resolves to continually satisfy its customers in the areas of service delivery to meet with their yearnings and aspirations, appealed to them to keep faith with the bank, emphasising some challenges could arise in the course of carrying out transactions but that it is working to give maximum satisfactions to the customers, which

was the purpose of the forum.

In a related development, the Group Head, Consumers Banking, Access Bank, Njideka Esomeju, pointed out that the event was more than just banking and that it was customers' engagement/experience aimed at understanding the bank as well as the bank knowing its customers and their plights.

She explained that it was an activity carried out across the country as they go to different states and regions to familiarise with the customers and not just Benin City alone.

In the same vein, the regional director, branch banking, Access Bank, Oluropo Olanre-

waju, submitted that the forum was intentionally fixed for Benin City because of the special nature it has for the bank, noting the Benin zone covers Edo, Delta and Bayelsa states.

He said further that it was a special package to get feedback from customers of Access family, just as he had said it would further cement the already existing relationship between the customers and the bank.

High point of the event was the presentation of operational scope areas like hydrogen POS, Access pension and coronation insurance, among others, for ease of reference as well as gift items to customers.



# Federal University Lokoja visits Edo University Uzairue

LAMAI CASSIUS

## ● *commends state-of-the-art infrastructure*

The Federal University Lokoja has visited the Edo State University Uzairue to understand the set up in the Engineering and Medical academic programmes in which the university is constantly commended by renowned regulatory institutions in Nigeria, and also to establish enduring partnership with the university.

The leader of the delegation, Professor Mike Ogirima, Provost, College of Medical

Sciences, Federal University Lokoja, said they were sent to the university by their Vice Chancellor, Professor Olayemi Durotimi Akinwumi to familiarize themselves with the environment and to carry out on-the-spot assessment of the university's structures and facilities.

During the guided tour of the university, the team was shown a slide presentation of the Anatomage used for virtual dissection, medical labo-

ratories and the technological advances by the Ag. Provost, College of Medical Sciences, Dr. Atoe Kenneth.

Other areas visited include the Engineering workshops and laboratories, the farmhouse and the state-of-the-art E-library of the university.

At the end of the tour, Prof. Mike Ogirima, who was amazed by the structures and facilities on ground, said Edo State University Uzairue is one of the leading universities in

Nigeria.

Prof. Ogirima commended the founding fathers of the University for their Visionary Mindsets towards the establishment of such a world-class citadel of learning with up-to-date facilities.

He equally thanked the governing council, Vice Chancellor and the management team for maintaining such high quality educational standards.

On his part, Dean, Faculty of Engineering, Federal Uni-

versity Lokoja, Prof. Samuel Abejide stated that he was not only impressed by the level of practicals being done by the students in the university, but he was also surprised with the state-of-the-art technological equipment in both faculty of Engineering and the College of Medical Sciences, saying he look forward to fruitful partnership with the Edo State University Uzairue.

In his response, the Vice Chancellor, Engr. Prof. Emmanuel Aluyor appreciated the Vice Chancellor of Federal University Lokoja, Prof. Olayemi Akinwumi for send-

ing a high power delegation to Edo State University Uzairue to understand the structures and enduring partnership.

Prof. Aluyor reiterated the university's readiness to collaborate with the Federal University Lokoja and also to avail them any assistance wherever and whenever necessary.

While promising to cherish the hand of friendship from the Federal University Lokoja for many years to come, however, thanked the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Akinwumi and the delegation for holding Edo State University Uzairue in high esteem.



### VISITED THE EDO UNIVERSITY:

Vice Chancellor, Engr. Prof. Emmanuel Aluyor (m) of Edo State University Uzairue with a delegation from Federal University Lokoja, led by Professor Mike Ogirima, Provost, College of Medical Sciences, Federal University Lokoja, who visited the Edo University for partnership.

## Edo family demands justice over son's death

IDAHOA MUSA

## ● *denies attacking accused's family*

The family of the late Douglas Osunde of Benin City, Edo State, has cried out to relevant authorities seeking justice over the sudden death of their son.

Douglas Osunde was said to have died while working for one Blessing Uwadiae as a building apprentice in Benin City.

The family also denied attacking members of the Uwadiae family of Ugo Niyekhoronmwon Community in Orhionmwon Local Government Area of the state over the death of Douglas.

Father of the deceased, Tony Osunde, who blamed the builder for the death of his son, accused him of being negligent in his work which, according to him, led to a pillar falling on his son.

"I am the father of the late Douglas who was an apprentice to one Blessing Uwadiae, a builder in Benin City. It is true that my son is dead," Mr. Osunde said.

"According to his boss then, while they were working in the

site, one of the pillars in the building fell on Douglas, leading to him being rushed to the hospital, before he eventually died."

The Uwadiae family had earlier alleged that each time their family members visited Benin City; they faced attacks from people they believed were from Osunde's family over the death of Douglas.

Speaking with newsmen in Benin City recently, a member of the family, Uwadiae Edorodion, claimed that his family members were attacked again recently. He alleged that one Mr Osadebamwen, his younger brother, was severely injured by hoodlums he suspected to

be from their accusers' family, adding that the victim was receiving treatment at a hospital in Benin City.

But reacting to the allegations, Tony Osunde said while the family believes that Blessing was to blame for the death of their son, "we want to categorically state here that we have never attacked his family members over the death of our son."

Osunde said upon confirmation of the death of his son, he immediately notified the police of the incident.

He said he began to suspect foul play when his son's boss, whom he said went to the bank to get money for the treatment, did not return to the hospital

after the confirmation that his son was dead.

"This act of Douglas' boss triggered our reactions because we don't believe that the pillar fell naturally on our son," he alleged.

Osunde demanded justice for his late son, whom he said left behind a son and a wife, calling on the security agencies to arrest and prosecute their suspect over the death of Douglas.

"I am calling for justice for my son who painfully left behind a son and wife. We will continue to demand justice for his soul and until this is achieved, we will not rest," he said.

## Obaseki lauds Olayiwola's commitment to upholding justice

The Edo State Governor, Mr. Godwin Obaseki, has felicitated with lawyer and philanthropist, Afolabi Olayiwola, SAN, on his birthday, extolling his commitment to upholding justice and equity in society.

In a statement, the governor said: "I heartily felicitate with celebrated lawyer and philanthropist, Afolabi Olayiwola, SAN, as you add another year today.

"A hardworking and diligent legal practitioner, you

have distinguished yourself over the years by virtue of your dedication and commitment to upholding justice and equity in the course of your illustrious career.

The governor added: "Firebrand and meticulous,

you have continued to gain admirers by the virtue of your philanthropic gestures and antecedents in fighting for the rights of the downtrodden.

"I celebrate your impactful work and commitment to

ensuring a sane and equitable society, where the rule of law is respected.

"As you celebrate today, I pray that God grants you many more years in good health to continue your impactful work in society."

## Inclusivity: Edo to procure CNG buses fitted with ramps

EMMANUEL IKHENEBO

As part of arrangement to capture persons living with disabilities (PWDs) in the ongoing free bus scheme implemented by Governor Godwin Obaseki to cushion the effect of fuel subsidy removal on Edo people, the state government has disclosed that some of the additional buses already ordered would come with ramps for easy access for physically challenged persons on wheelchairs.

The managing director, Edo State Transport Authority (ESTA), Edugie Agbonlahor, made the disclosure on Thursday, on the sideline of the close out meeting of the Resilient-Net project of the Edo Disability Forum (EDF) powered by National Democratic Institute (NDI).

Agbonlahor, who was represented by the agency's director of transport planning, George Aghahowa, reiterated the state government's commitment to the welfare of Edo PWDs hence the procurement of new buses for all inclusive transportation scheme.

"Right now we are in the process of procuring additional 50 units of CNG buses, brown new ones, which are going to be added to the present fleet. That will now make more buses available for the people and what we have thought of at the end of the day is that by the time these buses are coming, we have given specification to the people that is going to handle it that some of these buses should come with ramps; to be accessible to physically challenged, especially those on

wheelchairs," Aghahowa said.

Earlier, the EDF convener, Melody Omosah Esq, called for a sustainable approach to tackling the socioeconomic challenges faced by the PWDs, especially in emergency situations as the post-subsidy regime.

According to Omosah, the state already has a disability law that can only be implemented through a disability commission to further guarantee their social security and inclusion at any given time.

"It is the demand of the (Edo Disability) forum that the commission be inaugurated before the end of this administration," Omosah said.

On her part, the commissioner for social development and gender issues Christabel Omoh Ekwu, assured the forum that government is "working hard to fully consider and incorporate" PWDs in its scheme of things, especially in the operation 'Feed the Hungry' Initiative recently launched by Governor Obaseki as part of efforts to cushion the impacts of current economic hardship on the people.

"We're also working very hard to see that the disability commission comes to bear and very soon that will be happening," Ekwu assured.

Highlight of the close out meeting was the X-ray by NDI of the strategies adopted by the forum in the course of their findings as well as recommendations to government in the course of their visits to ministries, departments and agencies to advocate for inclusive governance.



# South-SouthReport

## MDCN approves Bayelsa Medical University MBBS programme ● as Governor assures of more infrastructure for institution

PHILIP EKE, YENAGOA

Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN), the body saddled with the responsibility of approving medical programmes in Nigerian universities, has accredited the Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) programme at the state-owned Bayelsa Medical University.

The approval enables the medical students in the university to participate in Part One of the MBBS examination.

The MDCN Deputy Registrar, Dr. Nnaemeka Nwakanma, who led an 11-man delegation on a two-day inspection and accreditation visit to the university, disclosed this when the team visited Governor Douye Diri at the Government House in Yenagoa.

According to a press statement by Daniel Alabrah, Chief Press Secretary to Governor of Bayelsa State, Dr. Nwakanma, who expressed satisfaction with the progress of the young medical institution, also stated that the MDCN had increased the

MBBS admission quota per session from 50 to 100 students.

He added that following the accreditation, BMU would be listed in the World Directory of Medical Schools.

He lauded the state government and the BMU for their efforts in raising the standard of the institution.

He described as commendable the ownership and funding of two medical schools by the Bayelsa government and urged the government to among other requests revive the BMU teaching hospital project, provide buses for the institution, continue to employ qualified manpower, build more laboratories as well as complete the satellite campus at Sampou.

The MDCN top official equally commended Governor Diri for the visible developmental strides of his administration, particularly in the area of infrastructure.

Responding, Governor Douye Diri thanked the council for its dispassionate assessment of the institution and the administration, saying he was deter-

mined to fulfil the mandate of people of the state.

Senator Diri assured that more projects will be executed in the university and that the issues raised by the council will be addressed before its next visit.

He also hailed the MDCN for setting a high standard for medical schools in Nigeria, saying their efforts have made it possible for Nigeria to graduate qual-

ity medical personnel that were highly sought after in the world.

He said: "We thank you for the visit. We are encouraged by your kind words that will spur us to do more. I have listened to you and can assure you that the issues raised that need our attention will be attended to before your next visit."

"Let me also use this medium to again advocate for true feder-

alism in Nigeria where states pay royalties to the Federal Government and not the way it is done currently where the centre determines what the states get. If federalism is properly practised, our state can do more for our people."

Other members of the MDCN delegation were Prof. B. Jiburum, Prof. Sanusi Ode, Prof. Blessing Idinfe and Prof.

S. Alayemi. The team also had Prof. B. Afolayan, Prof. Nuhu Dakurm, Prof. Yusuf Haruna and Prof. M. Jamoa as well as Mrs. Ayobami Ismail and Bello Misbahu, both of the MDCN Medical Education Unit.

The BMU Vice Chancellor, Prof. Ebitimitula Etebu was accompanied by the Registrar, Dr. Felicia Akusu, during the courtesy visit.



**INSPECTION AND ACCREDITATION VISIT:**

Governor Douye Diri of Bayelsa State (m), with MDCN Deputy Registrar, Dr. Nnaemeka Nwakanma (immediate left of the governor), who led an 11-man delegation on a two-day inspection and accreditation visit to the Bayelsa Medical University, visited Government House in Yenagoa.

## Oba Palace voids Ukpera village installation

The Oba of Benin Palace has voided the purported installation of Pa Aigbe Osarenkhoe as the Odionwere (head) of Ukpera village in Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State.

The Obazelu of Benin, Chief Osaro Idah, gave the ruling in an effort to stabilize and preserve Benin customs and tradition in the area after listening to submissions by parties in the dispute last week Thursday.

The Peace and Conflict Resolution Committee of Oba Palace ruling was a response to the deposition by Enogie of the vil-

lage, Ogieayevbona Igbinenikaro, who accused Pa Osarenkhoe of committing the act.

But Pa Osarenkhoe, who was present in the Palace, insisted that he obtained due permission from the Enogie before the alleged installation, for which he was summoned by the Palace where he attempted to seek temporal respite.

Accordingly, Pa Osarenkhoe was restrained from parading himself as the Odionwere of the village forthwith — for not seeking the Palace approval, which is the mandatory traditional standard procedure in Benin.

## Cross River shall be richest state in the world —Olumba Obu

PATRICK ABANG, CALABAR

His Holiness Olumba Olumba Obu, the spiritual leader of Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, has declared that Cross River State shall soon become the richest state in the world.

Addressing a crowd of faithfuls inside UJ Esuene Stadium Calabar at the end of Easter event tagged 'Divine Assurance of Christhood,' Olumba Obu

said, "The innumerable natural resources in the state are more than those of the world."

He also declared that as a result of the great wealth available in the state, it shall become the epicentre of global pilgrimage for all religions in the world.

According to him, the 'glory of Jerusalem' has moved to the state, adding that she has become the ideal abode of the Almighty Father.

The spiritual leader was moved to make the declarations in appreciation of what he called kind gestures from the state governor to the people of the state, saying, "I hereby pronounce peace, good health, success and progress upon Governor Bassey Otu. The governor shall attract great heavenly blessings upon the state."

Therefore, the governor is advised to introduce activities

to engender peace, harmony and love among all Cross Riverians and the world. This is because you are chosen by God to experience the glory of God in this era.

"Time is coming when Cross River State shall be the epicentre of pilgrimage for all religions in the world. Cross River shall be the richest state on earth due to the vast natural mineral resources beneath their land."

## Bayelsa LG poll designed to favour PDP candidates —Eradiri

PHILIP EKE, YENAGOA

Bayelsa State Labour Party (LP) governorship candidate, Engr. Udengs Eradiri, has decried the ongoing local government electoral process in the state ahead of Saturday's poll, describing it as undemocratic and shameful.

Eradiri lamented that the entire electoral process was fraught with high-handedness, corrupt practices, and others designed to favour candidates of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), with results already predetermined by the Bayelsa State Independent Electoral Commission (BYSIEC).

He said it was not surprising

that members of the PDP were all over the streets boasting publicly that the results of the yet-to-be-conducted poll had been written to allow only the candidates of their party to sweep the entire positions.

Eradiri, a former commissioner for youth and later environment, in a statement in Yenagoa made available to the press, said the state governor had allowed everything he complained about ahead of the just-concluded governorship election in the state to characterise the LG poll scheduled for Saturday.

His words: "From a compromised Bayelsa State Electoral Commission to a process de-

signed to favour only the ruling PDP, the local government electoral process in Bayelsa State is laughable, non-competitive and undemocratic and will surely become a scam, a sham, and a charade.

"These governors manipulate local government administrations in their various states by compromising the grassroots elections to deny the people genuine representations.

"They plant their goons as chairmen and councillors after agreeing a sharing formula of resources accruing to local government. So, instead of being an independent tier of government, the local government has become an appendage of

the state governor, an extension of his office.

"This flagrant abuse of the constitution by governors has gone on unchallenged for a long time contributing to entrenching poverty at the grassroots. The overbearing influence of governors on our local government has rendered an important tier of government impotent and unable to deliver its constitutional mandate."

Eradiri wondered why governors like Diri could not muster the political will to initiate local government electoral reforms, but would constantly and loudly call for the reforms of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC),

especially whenever their party was not in control at the centre.

The former president of the Ijaw Youths Council (IYC) Worldwide recalled that a former Governor of Kaduna State, Mallam Nasir el-Rufai, once reformed the local government election in his state, introduced electronic voting that created a level playing field that allowed the opposition PDP to win some local government areas.

Eradiri said it was high time the National Assembly and the President came to the rescue of local government administration by removing the greedy grip of governors from it.

He called for a total overhaul of the section of the con-

stitution establishing the local government to remove aspects promoting undue influence of local government by governors.

He urged the National Assembly to amend the law establishing local government administration to allow the INEC to conduct elections for vacant positions.

"Until the people are allowed to freely elect their leaders at the grassroots, the local government will continue to serve only the interests of governors and not those of the people. And until local government is restructured to play its functions, the growth and development of this country will continue to slow down," he said.



# Gov. Otu to construct 10 new roads in Cross River

## ● challenges DMO over fresh borrowing

PATRICK ABANG, CALABAR

Cross River State Commissioner for Works and Infrastructure, Ankpo Pius, says the state is set to commence the construction of 10 new roads across the state.

The Commissioner stated this in his office during interactions with journalists on Wednesday.

According to the Commissioner, the Bassey Edet Out-led administration met poor road infrastructure and is desirous in taking the state back to recognising.

He said the administration has so far completed a number of road infrastructure across the state in Calabar Municipal Council and other parts, saying, as we speak there is ongoing road infrastructure

across the state. In the Northern Senatorial District, for instance, the road to the deputy governor area was impassable and many others.

He revealed that construction will soon commence on the Adiabo-Ikoneto Road by the Bassey Otu administration, noting that the legacy projects of Senator Ben Ayade's administration would be completed. In May, the administration would commission Cargo Airport while work at the Bakassi Deep Seaport would also commence.

Meanwhile, Governor Otu has denied neither taking nor signing any fresh loan, either domestic or foreign, since the inception of his administration on May 29, 2023, till date.

The governor's reaction follows the worrisome figures

presented on the spreadsheet of the Debt Management Office (DMO) and posted on their website.

Speaking through his Chief Press Secretary, Nsa Gill, Governor Otu wondered how the Debt Management Office arrived at N220.2 billion as the domestic debt profile of Cross River State as of December 2023, up from N204.04 billion posted for the state as of June 30, 2023.

The difference in the figures, subtracting N204 billion from N220.2 billion is the purported N16.2 billion reported as a fresh domestic loan allegedly obtained by Governor Bassey Otu's administration. "This is not true," the government stated.

"There's no record in the annals of the state government

that suggests that fresh borrowing was undertaken; since the inception of the present administration till date; both domestic and foreign debt.

"We challenge any person, including the DMO, who has evidence of any fresh loan taken under the administration of Governor Bassey Otu to make that Public," the Governor's spokesman said.

He noted that fresh loans take processes, including seeking legislative approvals, and "the governor has not signed nor taken in a fresh loan on behalf of the state."

He quoted the governor also as saying, "Anyone in doubt of our position can make findings with the state legislature and even to the DMO. I have taken up the matter with the DMO and they have denied knowl-

edge of any fresh loan under the current administration."

The Chief Press Secretary said Governor Otu frowns at the misinformation portraying fresh borrowing and demands scrutiny of the figures posted by the DMO.

"It is also pertinent that the media and the general public understand that the dynamics of DMO debt profile spreadsheets include the principal amount plus interest over time as well as other variables that may have been made available to the DMO; such as judgement debts, contract debts, garnishee orders, etc. In this case, Cross River State government vehemently rebukes any interest calculation or any surreptitious calculation that portrays the government to have increased her domes-

tic debt profile by borrowing N16.2 billion within June 2023 to December 2023. And taking foreign debt amounting to \$57.9 million within the same period.

"We would like to reiterate that Senator Bassey Edet Otu's 'People First' administration has promised the good people of Cross River State a very financially responsible leadership and will not borrow except for very critical and fiscally responsible reasons in line with the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2007.

"Moreso, the governor has directed the Commissioner for Finance in the state to take up the DMO on the figures and ensure clear explanations are given on the published figures which are untrue and unacceptable," he said.



### OKUAMA KILLINGS ENQUIRY:

Delta Governor, Rt Hon Sheriff Oborevwori (l), addressing members of the Board of Enquiry on the Okuama Killings led by the chairman, Air Vice Marshal David Ajayi (2nd l on the row); Commander, 63 Brigade, Asaba, Brg. General Unachukwu Uzochukwu (1st on the row) at Government House Annex, Warri, weekend. Pix: Enarusai Bripin.

# Gov. Fubara says fake PDP list can't stand

## ● as seven Ahoada East councillors declare their support

ELIZABETH AGBOGBULEM, PORT HARCOURT

Rivers State Governor, Sir Siminalayi Fubara, has declared the purported list of People's Democratic Party (PDP) Caretaker Committee members for the state, circulating in the national and social media, as fake.

Governor Fubara said the list is a handiwork of cheap publicity seekers and agents of crisis, who should know that their imagination will not stand.

The Governor explained that the national leadership of the party had met recently and agreed that in states where the tenure of PDP Executives had expired should continue to maintain the officers as caretakers for the next three months.

That decision, Governor Fubara clarified, which awaits ratification by the National Ex-

ecutive Council (NEC) did not approve that new names should be added to the already existing number of officers, or any substituting officer(s) removed.

"I know that a lot of you saw something flying in the social media, dailies. Let me brief you, we had a meeting and we agreed that, not just in Rivers State, but in all the states affected, that the Executive Councils (of PDP) should be extended for three months.

"This extension is not meant to bring in new names. The extension also did not say that you are working without the authority of the Governor. So, for those lists that you saw and those ones altered, I can assure you that they are not going to stand."

Governor Fubara pointed out that: "For record purposes, so that you will understand, we also agreed that there is going to be a NEC meeting on the 18th of this month (April) that should ratify

that decision.

"So, what you are seeing is the handiwork of desperate people who like media publicity. In fact, empty drums make loudest noise. So, don't bother about anything. Nothing is happening."

Governor Fubara alluded to the fear that has come upon his detractors given the warning he issued a day ago that he will surprise those who dare him, and vowed to continue to make them feel restless.

The Governor said Rivers State remains a very important state to protect, which is why his administration chose the path of peace in order to engender progress, saying, "You can see how restless they have been since I made just one statement, yesterday. We will continue to make them restless."

"They won't know where we are coming from. We will also continue to hit them hard the way we hit them, yesterday. So,

those of you who were worried when you saw those lists that were flying, go and rest, nothing is happening."

Commenting on the Port Harcourt International Automobile Spare Parts Trading and Commercial Centre project, Governor Fubara said he was delighted to make another significant impact on strategic governance in the state.

He emphasised that the project was evidence of his genuine interest in the wellbeing of Rivers people, and the desire to promote growth, not because of any personal or business interest.

The governor explained that when he assumed office, the initial partners of the project were invited, and after extensive discussion and the reasons they gave for the delay, it was decided to relieve them of the job.

He clarified that the former project partners had been paid off before GOSH Project Lim-

ited, was engaged, adding that they have no reason not to deliver on schedule.

The governor said, "We are not just coming here to flag-off the project, we want to see it completed in reality. That is what we stand for. Not coming to flag-off, and tomorrow, it doesn't work, and it is stalled. We are not part of that. We are not into show business. We are not here to dance. We are here to work, and you will see it.

"We are a government that believes in the well-being and growth of our State genuinely. Not because we own any business around here, not because we have shops that we intend renting here, but we seek the growth of Rivers State."

He advised the project partners to ensure that every commitment is made for the successful delivery of the project on schedule, noting, "We have done everything that we need to do. We have settled the initial partners who defaulted. So, you don't have any issue going on with this project. It is a mark of our level of commitment to our dear people. The community will need your support."

"At the time that this centre will be properly put in place, it will change the economic status of this environment. People will be employed, businesses will thrive, and for those of you that are landlords, you will have more tenants and you will also increase your house rents."

In his address, the acting administrator of Greater Port Harcourt City Development Authority, Dr. Tonte Davies, said the groundbreaking that signalled commencement of construction of the project marks a significant milestone in furthering the interest and welfare of Rivers people.

The project, when completed, Dr Davies enthused, will end the era of indiscriminate conduct of auto mechanics' activities in parts of the state because there will be a one-stop shop to accommodate all operations.

"Today's event is very unique

in the sense that it reaffirms the interest of your government in the welfare of its citizens. For us in Greater Port Harcourt City Development Authority, the 20,000 housing units development, and now, this International Automobile Spare Parts Trading and Commercial Centre is a significant historic moment," he said.

Providing a description of the project, the CEO of GOSH Projects Limited, Mr Okoh Jeff, said there are 10,000 locked-up shops, 25 banking facilities, 25 brand plaza, 50 industrial warehouses, 10,000 car parks, and mega filling stations.

There are also ultramodern shopping complex, ultramodern mechanic complex, hotel facilities, export and import trading facilities, while the project will be completed in 36 months.

Also, in a continued solidarity, the leader of Ahoada East Legislative Assembly, Rt. Hon. ThankGod Bernard Unwhe and seven other councillors have declared their support and loyalty to the Rivers State Governor, Sir Siminalayi Fubara.

By their action, the councillors, representing eight electoral wards in the 13-ward LGA, have finally joined to declare total support and commitment to mobilise their supporters to key into the governor's policies and programmes to advance good governance in the state.

All eight councillors were elected on the platform of the PDP and were also top leaders of the Grassroots Development Initiative (GDI) before they took the decision to join and rally behind the SIMplified Movement in the interest of the state.

The eight councillors made their position known during a crucial meeting presided over by the Chief of Staff to the Governor, Dr Edison Ehie, at Government House, Port Harcourt, on Wednesday evening.

They affirmed that the councillors have pledged allegiance and loyalty to the Chief Executive Officer of the state, Sir Siminalayi Fubara.



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NERC, DisCos and the integrity of bills

Efficiency, integrity, transparency and the enforcement of rules are facilities that make for peace of mind, ease of life, confidence and hope that measured goals can be attained in any setting. These attributes can also foster trust, a sense of belonging, loyalty and patriotism within a society.

Where these are lacking, bit by bit, cracks occur, which over time lead to despondency and a sense of alienation in a society. The latter scenario is not the desire of any cohesive or would-be cohesive group or society.

So, it was cheery news last week when the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC) slapped a hefty fine of N200 million on the Abuja Electricity Distribution Plc (AEDC) for the organisation's failure to comply with regulatory directives regarding tariff billing.

NERC had found that the AEDC had been applying the new tariff indiscriminately across all customer bands, in what the commission called a "flagrant breach" of the prescribed customer band classifications outlined in its directives. This action,

which directly contravenes the regulatory framework designed to ensure equitable billing practices, prompted NERC to take swift enforcement action.

In addition to the substantial fine imposed on AEDC, the Commission has directed the electricity distributor to take immediate corrective measures, as the AEDC has been ordered to reimburse all customers falling within Bands B, C, D, and E who were billed above the allowed customer categories/tariff bands specified in the order.

Furthermore, affected customers are entitled to receive the balance of customer tokens they would have been entitled to, at the applicable rates. These token reimbursements are to be issued to the affected customers no later than April 11, 2024.

The NERC's directive also requires AEDC to provide evidence of compliance with the reimbursement directives by April 12, 2024, saying that failure to adhere to these directives could result in further regulatory action.

The Commission then reiterated its commitment to safeguard-

ing consumer rights and ensuring equitable practices within Nigeria's electricity sector.

This was not an isolated case. Weeks earlier, on Monday, February 12, the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC) had cause to commend NERC for its action against eleven Electricity Distribution Companies (DisCos) for non-compliance with the capping of estimated bills for unmetered customers.

The FCCPC stated that the decisive measure aligned with its mandate as outlined in the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Act (FCCPA) 2018, particularly Section 17 (s), which empowers the Commission to protect consumers from obnoxious practices or unscrupulous exploitation by companies, firms, trade associations or individuals, and to demand redress on their behalf.

It is heartwarming to see NERC more consistently act out its avowed commitment to safeguard metered and unmetered customers from arbitrary billing by DisCos. The capping regulation was a significant step

towards ensuring fairer treatment for those without meters.

NERC is encouraged to consider even stronger measures to deter future violations. This could include increased financial penalties as in the recent case, as well as stricter enforcement mechanisms, and even the revocation of operating licenses for persistent offenders.

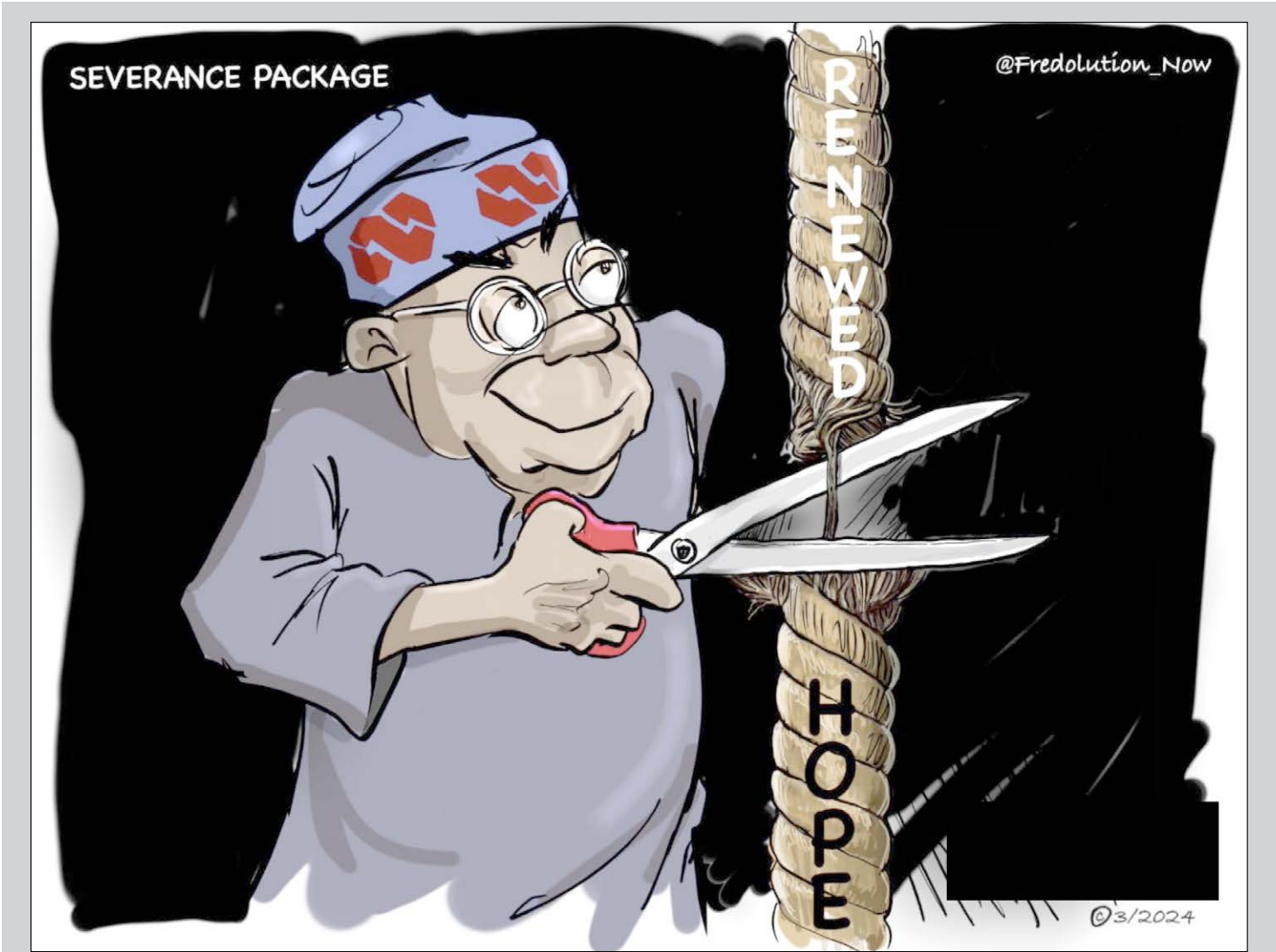
We observe that the FCCPC also, has reiterated its unwavering commitment to ensuring a better deal for electricity consumers in Nigeria. Apart from its routine resolution of electricity consumer complaints, the commission has pledged to continue to organise electricity consumer platforms across the country. These platforms have provided invaluable opportunities for consumers to voice their complaints and receive instant responses and redress from DisCos and regulators, including the FCCPC over time.

As has been stated by the FCCPC, fundamental reforms are necessary to address the systemic challenges facing the power sector, including metering gaps, billing malpractices, and inadequate customer service.

The Nigerian Observer

Cartoon Corner

...that the people may know





## Six golden rules for starting with Why



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

A few days ago, I got to the office late for an appointment. Clients were already waiting, and so was the thick atmosphere that I could cut with a knife. While I was attending to one of them, I learned that the other lady almost left because she didn't feel the right vibe from the therapist she met on duty. However, by the end of their sessions, the client, who almost walked away, was ready to book another session in a couple of days. You may wonder what made her change her mind so drastically that she was willing to book another session that soon.

In his book titled - Start With Why, Simon Sinek explained this is the most profound way that all leaders, entrepreneurs, and investors should pay attention to. Using the human brain to explain his golden circle, he clarified the reasons every organization should know their WHY and market their products from that standpoint. At a conference, Sinek revealed that the Wright Brothers, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, and Apple appealed to the limbic system of the human brain first and the neocortex last to record such success they did. As he would rightly say, "People don't buy what you do but

why you do it. The goal is not to hire people but to have people who believe in what you believe in."

In the summer of 1963, two hundred and fifty thousand people turned up at the

Washington Mall to hear Dr. King speak. This era had no email or website to check for time and date. There wasn't even a publicized invitation in the media, yet 25 percent of the crowd was made up of white people who showed up because they believed in his dream, too. Dr. Martin Luther King's dream was to see human-created laws aligned with God's rules for justice and fairness prevail in America.

According to Sinek, Dr. King wasn't the best orator or the only activist in the pre-civil rights era. He didn't go about America telling people what to do or how to change the country; it was just about why he was having the movement, which was a huge success. The same holds true for Apple today, or how else would one explain people staying in the queue for six hours to buy a device that they could get off the shelf in a few weeks?

It was all about hitting the point on the innovation curve by letting people

know why you are in business.

So here are six golden rules for starting with why, in my opinion:

**Know your why:** Knowing your why is critical to differentiating your products and services, creating a niche, and appealing to customers from that standpoint, which guarantees trust and loyalty. Please note that making money or being profitable is an outcome of what you do and not why you are in business. Hence, your why should not be about you or benefit alone; it must be for the greater good.

**Be hands-on:** As a business leader, you must be highly skilled and hands-on to the point that you can roll up your sleeves to join in the work if need be. A leading leader doesn't only give instructions but must also carry out such instructions. So, how do you do this if you are not hands-on?

**Get involved:** Being hands-on is not enough, as getting involved daily with check-ins, encouraging openness, and becoming accessible are just a few ways to be involved in workplace activities. A Dangote Cement distributor said something profound about the chairman that stood out the most for him in the company. He said he could reach out to Alhaji Dangote directly, and he would pick up the call and mention his name. And if Alhaji was very busy, he would excuse himself with a promise to return the call, and he always did. That is how involved the wealthiest man in Africa is

in his business.

**Over-communicate your why:** As the visionary or founder, you only know and

appreciate why you are in business the most. Telling your employees once or twice will not cut it; more than having it as a creed on your office walls may be needed, too.

Therefore, a systematic way of over-communicating the why at every opportunity, such as through meetings, newsletters, posters, workshops, and digital platforms, is required.

No matter how gifted your employees are, they will unknowingly de-market your products or services if they are not as passionate.

**Be fair and patient:** It's often advised that change must be communicated at least seven times so an average individual can get used to it. If this holds, we can imagine how much patience is required to see employees become as passionate as you are about your reasons. Coaching, training, explaining, and learning must be a continuum if the attitude is right. Also, being seen as fair and understanding toward everyone is essential.

**Groom a successor:** Being the only one passionate about the why is riskier and more challenging. While everyone else is still trying to figure it out, it's crucial to identify a person or two who can easily step into your shoes just in case anything happens. The civil rights movement wouldn't have achieved so much after Dr.

King's death if there weren't capable hands to keep his dreams and hopes alive. Succession is essential for continuity, and just like Frances Frei said, "Leadership is about making others better as a result of your presence and making sure that impact lasts in your absence."

**Call to action**

If you would like to book a session with me to discover your WHY, please email [oopaleye@gmail.com](mailto:oopaleye@gmail.com).

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

## Out-of-school children in Nigeria: Matters arising

JOE EJIOFOR

The term out-of-school is an inclusive concept that is associated with the non-attendance of school age children due to some established reason or factor. UNESCO defines it as the number of children and young people in the official age range for the given level of education who are not enrolled in pre-primary, primary, secondary or higher level of education. In a 2022 UNESCO report, the global number of out-of-school children has risen by 6 million since 2021 and now totals 250 million. The increase in figure, according to the global education monitoring group, is as a result of the continuing stagnation of education across the world.

In Nigeria, out-of-school children are a significant issue that poses challenges to both the children and the country as a whole. In the same UNESCO report mentioned above, there are approximately close to 20 million Nigerians of its approximately 200 million population that are not enrolled in school. This amount to about 20 percent of Nigeria's entire population and more than the overall population of the Gambia, Togo, Liberia and Gabon put together. Globally, Nigeria ranks third among countries with the highest number of out-of-school children, behind only India and Pakistan.

There are various reasons why

children in Nigeria are out of school, including poverty, cultural practices, insecurity, lack of infrastructure, and inadequate funding for education. It is estimated that one in every five of the world's out-of-school children reside in Nigeria. UNICEF identified several factors, including poverty, insecurity cultural practices, gender inequality, among others, as responsible for the rising figure.

Poverty is a major factor that contributes to the high number of out-of-school children in Nigeria. It plays a significant role in keeping millions of children and youths out of the school environment. Many families, especially those in rural areas cannot afford the cost of education, including school fees, uniforms, books, and transportation. As a result of this factor, children are forced to stay at home and miss out on educational opportunities. Most of them end up in the street engaging in menial activities.

Gender inequality is also a major factor that affects children's access to education in Nigeria. Girls are often kept out of school due to cultural beliefs and practices that prioritize boy's education. Some communities prioritize early marriage of girls over education, leading to high dropout rates. This and other cultural beliefs devalue formal education, leading to low enrollment rates in schools, especially in the rural areas of the country.

Insecurity in Nigeria has also af-

fects children's access to education. From north to south, insecurity pervades the nation's space. Boko Haram, a terrorist group, has targeted schools in the North East leading to the closure of many educational institutions and creating a climate of fear that deters students from attending school. Schools have been targets of attack, and children and their teachers abducted and killed by the mindless terrorists. The Chibok and Dapchi abductions comes to mind. It is the same scenario in the North West where increase in the activities of Bandits has led to the closure of schools. This is also not different from what is happening in the South East where the activities of IPOB and unknown gunmen have created fear in the mind of the people leading to school children staying away from the classrooms. In some part of the south west, kidnapping reign supreme. The South South and North Central geo-political zones are also not free from the insecurity that clouded the whole nation

Infrastructure problems in schools are also a factor. It not only affects academic performance but also infringe on the right to education, safety, and health of both learner and teachers. Lack of infrastructure, like we have in schools located in rural areas contributes to the high number of out-of-school children in Nigeria. In some rural areas, children travel long distances to reach the nearest school,

which can be dangerous and costly. Additionally, some of these rural schools lack basic amenities like classrooms, desks, and toilets, making it difficult for children to learn in a conducive environment.

Funding is pivotal to improving access to education. It is essential to ensure that all students have access to quality education at all levels. However, this becomes a problem where there are inadequate funding for the provision of physical and instructional facilities. The implication of this is, it will lead to declining enrolment of pupils and students. Inadequate funding is therefore a key issue that affects the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria. A situation where the government continues to allocate a low percentage of its budget to education will lead to a lack of resources for schools and teachers. This will consequently results to poor quality education, and a lack of motivation for children to attend school.

The government through the implementation of different education reforms have continue to make efforts to address the issue of out-of-school children in Nigeria. Implementations of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme and the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult, and Non-Formal Education are some of such initiatives. However, more needs to be done to ensure that every child in the country has

access to quality education. Also civil society organisations and the international community have critical roles to play in addressing the issue of out-of-school children in Nigeria through working in partnership with the federal, state and local government by building schools, providing support, resources and advocacy to improve the quality of education for all children.

The issue of out-of-school children in Nigeria is a complex and pressing challenge that requires a multi-faceted and coordinated effort from all stakeholders to address. This includes addressing poverty through targeted interventions, raising awareness about the importance of education, improving infrastructure and security in conflict-affected areas, and increasing funding for education. By working together, government, civil society, and other stakeholders can help ensure that all children in Nigeria have access to quality education and a brighter future.

*Ejiofor is a Deputy Registrar with Yaba College of Technology, Lagos*



## Transformative power of NDDC Board and Management

This piece was inspired by a recent statement credited to Barr. Chiedu Ebie, chairman of Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), made to a delegation of Concerned Agbor Citizens (CAC), who were in his Agbor residence to congratulate him on his appointment as well as thank him for the thousands of streetlights that he influenced, which currently dots urban and rural communities in Agbor, Ika South Local Government Area of Delta State.

In the referenced declaration, Ebie said in parts: my first task is to ensure that I work harmoniously with the managing director of the commission. We will not be in the news for the wrong reasons.

"I must be frank with you; I am getting a richer understanding of my community. This has further exposed me to the nuances and complexities among us. I know your expectations from me. I will exceed these benchmarks with your support and prayers. I will always remain dedicated to this job the same way I did in all my past appointments and will always ensure that I do not betray the confidence reposed on me. This, I assure you."

Essentially, while the visits by the concerned citizens may have come and gone, Ebie's insight as captured above explains some silent but salient points. It paints the picture of an authentic personality leading the present board and management of NDDC to rediscover the secret for creating lasting value for the region. His words exposed how his personal humility as the head of the governing board amply sets the stage for the ongoing peace and harmony presently enjoyed at NDDC and engineers the ongoing infrastructural and human capital development in the Niger Delta region.

Even as this transformative leadership prowess in the region is celebrated, this piece must however, underline that the NDDC Chairman's current disposition and burning desire to exceed expectations and make NDDC under his watch not be in the news for the wrong reasons neither came as a surprise nor appears in any way newsy.

The reason is not far-fetched.

Aside from a veiled admission by Niger Deltans of goodwill that Ebie is leading a governing body that firmly recognizes that it is their duty to serve Niger Delta communities and embrace its aspirations, both now and in the future, by assuring the people economic growth, education, health, security, stability, comfort, leisure opportunities and freedom in ways that will allow for the most conducive atmosphere to achieve the targets that will guarantee our welfare and a bright future, Ebie, for those that knows him, is an individual with an understanding that as humans, we must live with the consciousness that every good effort and sincere contribution towards the development of mankind must be vigorously pursued without reserve.

As a former Commissioner of Primary and Basic Education as well as Secretary to the Delta State government, he demonstrated this fact to the fullest. He creatively and seamlessly managed different people with different experiences, assumptions, values, belief and habits to their work. And provided direction, protection, orientation, managed conflicts, shaped norms and laced with emotional capacity to tolerate uncertainty, frustrations and pains and raised tough questions without getting anxious himself.

He firmly understands that as a public office holder, he is watched closely, that people are noting every move they make, that their followers are learning a great deal about them and what they really believe in as opposed to what they say. What the award explains is that people's support is the greatest asset public office holders and civil servants enjoy.

Essentially, the current happening at NDDC has again confirmed as true the words of Lee Kuen Yew, former and pioneer Prime Minister of Singapore, that we need good people to have good government, for however good the system of government maybe, bad leaders will bring harm to their people.

Away from the recent commentary by the board Chairman, there

are even more compelling reasons to believe that good public leadership qualities domicile in their family.

In my recent but similar essay, I captured an expression by a public affairs analyst where it among other remarks, noted that Chiedu Ebie had an uncle, Mr. Fortune Ebie who was one of the founding architects of modern Nigeria, literally speaking. Mr. Fortune Ebie was the Director of the Federal Housing Authority who planned and executed the building of what still today is the biggest Housing Estate in Nigeria, the FESTAC Housing Estate in Lagos, Nigeria. Fortune Ebie was the head of the FHA with Brigadier Olu Obasanjo as Minister of Works and Housing and delivered a housing estate that remains even after a half century, the pride of the black man. It was showcased during the First World and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977 and it brought admiration to Nigeria from the rest of the world.

This argument makes more meaning when one commits to mind the fact that Barr. Chiedu Ebie is the son of late Prof. John C. Ebie, pioneer Chief Medical Director (CMD) of the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH), who passed on to eternal glory some years ago, after showcasing sterling public leadership attributes as head of the health institution established in May 1973.

Also heartening and a fact the entire Niger Deltans should be proud of is the awareness that the Chairman is not alone in this quest for development of the region via quality delivery of projects. He is ably supported by the agencies management team and board members. They view themselves as Generals in the Army of Nigeria Delta development.

As an illustration, the Rivers State representative on the NDDC Board, Tony Okocha, during a recent interactive session with stakeholders and contractors at the commission's State Office in Port Harcourt, the Rivers State capital, reportedly enjoined contractors executing projects for the agency to return to their various sites and ensure that they meet the



### UTOMI'S NOTE

**JEROME-MARIO CHIJOKE UTOMI**  
A SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE ADVOCATE

required standards for quality jobs, as there will be no payment for sub-standard jobs.

Okocha, who insisted that contractors who fail to meet the required specifications would not be paid for the projects, also added that the commission would execute projects and programmes in line with the Renewed Hope Agenda of the President Bola Tinubu-led administration that means well for the people of the Niger Delta region. "I am coming to your sites with my team of competent engineers to assess the work you are doing and if we find the work to be sub-standard, you will have yourself to blame as the current NDDC Board will not compromise on standards."

This transformative ideas and idles that characterizes the board and managements actions and inactions in the past few months have further postured as deserving the call by the Former/pioneer Chairman of the interventionist agency, Chief Onyema Ugo Chukwu, while delivering goodwill message at the recently held retreat in Akwa Ibom state, on the Federal Government and the Minister of Environment to allow the current board and management complete their tenure as 'there were signs of new things happening in NDDC.

Appealing to the Federal Government and the Minister of Niger Delta Development to allow the present NDDC Board to complete its tenure, the elder statesman emphasized on the imperative of amending the NDDC Act to provide for an overlap in the tenure of the members of the Board that ensures continuity.

"The lack of continuity has been a serious problem and a drawback to the development of the Niger Delta region. amending the NDDC Act to stagger the tenure of board members and key officials would indeed help ensure continuity and stability within

the organization".

This, according to him, could be achieved by implementing a system where the tenure of members is set at four years, while the Chairman, Managing Director/CEO and Executive Directors serve for five years. This approach would help maintain a level of institutional knowledge and experience within the NDDC, as well as provide a smooth transition of leadership over time. By incorporating these provisions, the NDDC can foster long-term strategic planning and consistent leadership, ultimately contributing to the effective execution of its mandate and objectives." He concluded.

For me, this needs to be done not for political reasons but for the survival of our democracy and development of the region. Niger Deltans must on their part support the ongoing efforts by the board and management to bring a total infrastructural and human capital development of the region to fruition-a responsibility which has taken the nation too long a period to complete.

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

## Unraveling Nigeria's challenges: A call for unity and reform

SHAMA EZEKIEL

In the heart of Africa lies Nigeria, a nation rich in culture, resources, and diversity. However, beneath its vibrant surface, Nigeria grapples with a multitude of challenges that threaten its stability and progress. From political instability and economic inequality to ethnic tensions and security threats, the issues facing Nigeria are complex and deeply entrenched. As the country stands at a crossroads, it is imperative to address these issues with urgency and determination to pave the way for a brighter future.

One of the foremost challenges plaguing Nigeria is political instability. Corruption, electoral malpractice, and governance failures have eroded trust in the government and hindered

democratic progress. The cycle of impunity must be broken through transparent governance, robust institutions, and accountability mechanisms that hold leaders accountable for their actions.

Economic inequality remains a pressing issue, with a significant portion of the population living below the poverty line despite Nigeria's vast oil wealth. High unemployment rates, inadequate infrastructure, and unequal distribution of resources exacerbate socioeconomic disparities, leaving many Nigerians marginalized and disenfranchised. To address this, policies promoting inclusive growth, job creation, and equitable access to education and healthcare are essential.

Ethnic and religious tensions have

long plagued Nigeria, fueling conflicts and undermining national cohesion. The country's diverse population is both a source of strength and a potential fault line, requiring careful management and dialogue to foster unity and understanding. Embracing diversity as a source of strength rather than division is crucial for building a more inclusive and harmonious society.

Security threats, including insurgency, terrorism, and communal violence, pose significant challenges to Nigeria's stability and development. Boko Haram's insurgency in the northeast, clashes between herders and farmers, and separatist movements in the southeast are just some of the conflicts that demand urgent attention and a comprehensive approach to peacebuilding and conflict

resolution.

Environmental degradation and climate change further compound Nigeria's challenges, threatening livelihoods, food security, and natural resources. Mitigating the impact of climate change requires sustainable development strategies, investment in renewable energy, and measures to protect ecosystems and biodiversity.

Despite these daunting challenges, Nigeria possesses immense potential for growth and prosperity. By addressing the root causes of its problems and embracing reforms that promote transparency, inclusivity, and sustainable development, Nigeria can overcome its challenges and emerge as a beacon of hope and progress in Africa.

However, achieving this vision

requires concerted efforts from government, civil society, the private sector, and citizens alike. It demands a commitment to national unity, social justice, and the rule of law. Only through collective action and a shared sense of purpose can Nigeria unlock its full potential and chart a path to a brighter future for all its people. As the world looks to Nigeria, the time for decisive action is now.

*Ezekiel wites from Mass Communication Department Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic Bauchi*



# Foreign equity investors increase stake in February 2024

TELIAT SULE

Foreign equity investors increased their stake in the nation's capital market in February 2024 partly due to the affordability of Nigerian stocks as a result of naira devaluation and strategic positioning ahead of the dividend season which commences in

April.

According to the data provided by the Nigerian Exchange Group (NGX), foreign investors injected N65.81 billion into the NGX accounting for 18.39 percent of the total equity investment in February. In January of this year, foreign equity traders invested N53.11 billion or 8.15 percent of the

total amount invested in January. The amount invested in February by foreign equity traders represented a 23.9 percent increase over their transactions in January of this year.

Domestic investors continued their dominance on the

CONTINUES ON PG 12»

# March Flight Performance: Air Peace leads as Ibom Air navigates challenges

HAPPY OSAGIE

In March 2024, Air Peace achieved a commendable schedule reliability of 98 percent, demonstrating its commitment to delivering consistent service to its passengers. However, its on-time performance stood at 77 percent, indicating room for improvement in ensuring timely

departures and arrivals.

Sharing on its official X handle, out of the 2,759 flights scheduled, 2,700 were successfully operated. While 600 flights experienced delays and 122 were rescheduled, and with 30 flight cancellations. Despite these challenges, its on-time performance and schedule reliability improved by 7 percent and 2 percent respectively

compared to February 2024.

Various factors contributed to flight disruptions, including bird strikes, adverse weather conditions, and unscheduled maintenance. Despite these challenges, the airline remains dedicated to providing seamless connectivity to its valued

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# BUA Foods shows resilience, posts N112bn profit in 2023 •sugar division contributes 58%

TELIAT SULE

In spite of the economic headwinds of 2023, characterised by policy changes on the part of the new central government, in particular, the removal of petroleum subsidy and naira float, which resulted in high inflation, BUA Foods, maker of sugar, flour, paster and rice, had a very good outing in the year that just ended, as it re-

corded impressive results.

Gross revenue in 2023, rose by 74 percent to N729.44 billion, up from N418. 34 billion in 2022. Gross profit was up by 96 percent to N260.46 billion in 2023, compared to N132.79 billion the firm realised in 2022. That was despite the 64 percent increase in the firm's cost of sales, which hit N468.98 billion last year, up from N285.56 billion in the

year before.

Effectively, BUA Foods' gross margin, which is gross profit expressed as a percentage of gross revenue, increased to 35.7 percent, compared to 31.7 percent in the year before. What this metric means is that out of every N100 revenue BUA Foods generated, N35.70 amounted to gross profit in 2023 as against N31.70 in 2022.

Confirming the impact of

the inflationary trend in the country last year, selling and distribution expenses rose by 110 percent to N29.85 billion, from N14.19 billion in 2022.

Total operating expenses increased by 43 percent to N47.06 billion as against N32.92 billion in 2022. The firm recorded an operating profit of N206.32 billion last year, representing 75 percent increase over N117.49 billion

in the previous year.

Finance cost skyrocketed by 1,031 percent to N98.18 billion, a manifestation of the impact of Nigeria's high interest rate regime on the players in the real sector. In 2022, BUA Foods' finance cost was just N8.68 billion.

Commenting on the 2023 performance of the firm, Engineer Ayodele Abioye, managing director of BUA Foods, attributed the impressive results to their ingenious expansion efforts executed by the company.

He said: "2023 witnessed a very challenging operating environment characterized by macroeconomic headwinds. We were able to navigate these challenges leveraging our unique strategic business model to deliver a strong performance as the top line grew by as much as 74%, with gross profit leaping by 96% while total assets increased significantly. This is a reaffirmation of our commitment to drive shareholder value underpinned by our unique capabilities as a strong, diversified and scalable food business.

"Expansion efforts across all frontiers continues to crystallize in supporting growth as we accelerate our strategy to become a leading food brand on the continent. We continue to drive efficiency through our integrated supply chain system by leveraging economies of

scale in alignment with market expansion efforts towards fulfilling the increasing demand of customers."

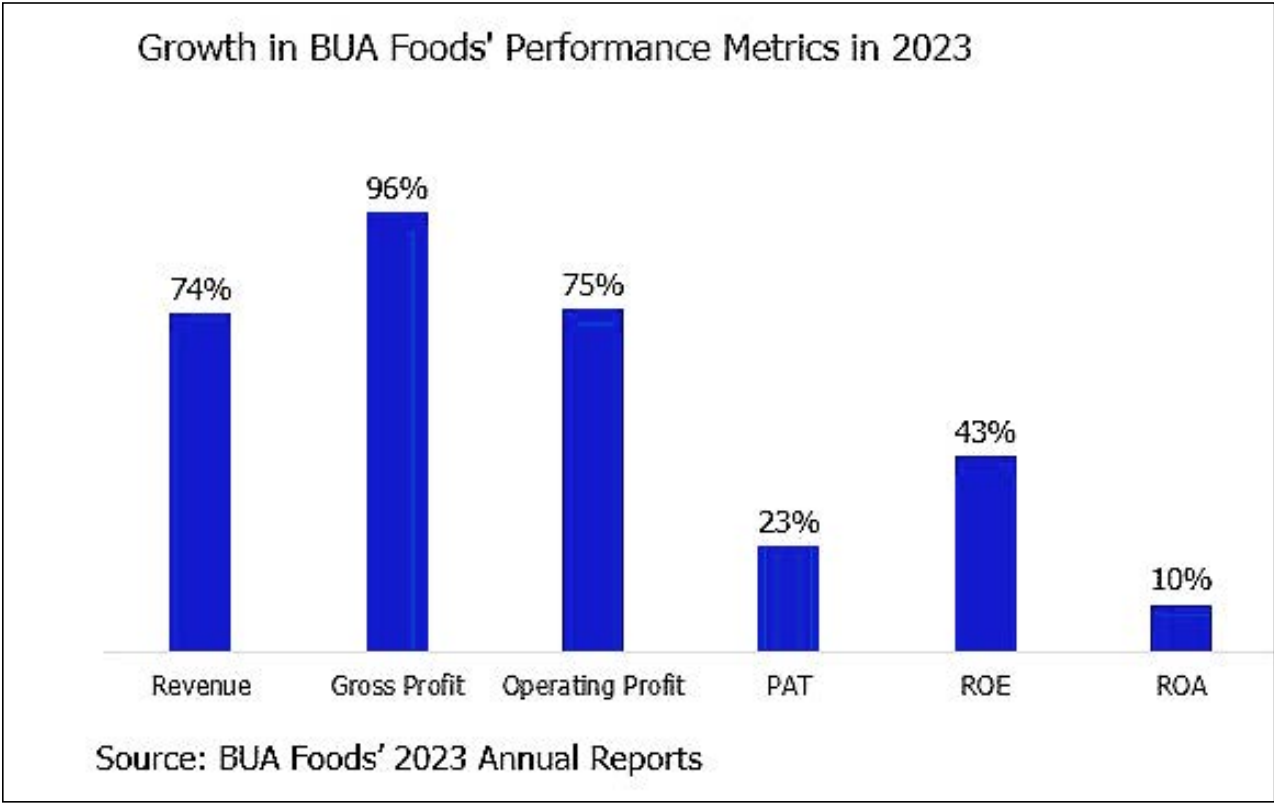
Profit after tax for the period rose to N112.09 billion, which amounted to an increase of 23 percent over N91.34 billion realised in 2022.

The sugar segment of the company contributed 58 percent of the company's revenue; flour segment, 30 percent; pasta segment, 12 percent while the budding rice segment contributed the rest.

"The rice division debuted in 2023 contributing marginally to revenue. A total of N2.1 billion was generated from its operations. The challenges in the paddy supply chain for rice production affected the plans for full commercialisation, however, we are working with local farmers to bolster the effectiveness of the paddy supplies and optimize operations in 2024," BUA Foods said.

In 2024 and beyond, the company is hopeful it will create long term value for its shareholders.

"Looking ahead, we remain committed to unlocking opportunities for sustained and improved business performance while being confident in our strategic plans for the year 2024. Creating long-term value for all stakeholders is an imperative, even as we stay true to our creed of nourishing lives," Abioye added.



NGX ACQUIRES  
STAKE IN ETHIOPIA'S  
EMERGING SECURITIES  
EXCHANGE

-Pg 12

NACCIMA HAILS TINUBU,  
ALLEN ONYEMA, KEYAMO  
ON AIR PEACE'S  
INAUGURAL FLIGHT TO  
LONDON

-Pg 13

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT  
SPENDS N2.9 TRILLION  
ON ELECTRICITY  
SUBSIDY, SAYS ADELABU

-Pg 13

AZMAN  
AIR SOARS  
RESUMES  
FLIGHT  
OPERATIONS

-Pg 14



# NGX acquires stake in Ethiopia's Emerging Securities Exchange

OLUTOLA FAWEHINMI

The Nigerian Exchange Group (NGX) has acquired an undisclosed stake in Ethiopia's inaugural securities exchange, marking a significant development in the fundraising efforts that have surpassed expectations.

The Ethiopian Securities Exchange (ESX) aimed to raise \$11.07 million last year to kick-start operations, aligning with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's broader agenda to modernise and liberalise the economy.

"We are delighted to have exceeded our capital raise target and are encouraged by the strong investor confidence in the long-term prospects of both ESX," stated Tilahun Kassahun, Chief Executive of ESX.

In the ESX ownership structure, the Ethiopian gov-

ernment, through Ethiopian Investment Holdings (EIH) and its subsidiaries including Ethio telecom and Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, will retain a 25% stake, while private and institutional investors will collectively hold a 75% stake.

NGX Group, alongside FSD Africa and the Trade and Development Bank Group (TDB), has emerged as a key institutional investor, injecting capital into ESX to facilitate its operationalization. These strategic foreign investments are essential in transferring technical expertise, best practices, and fostering long-term strategic partnerships.

"Strategic foreign investments by TDB, FSD Africa, and [the] NGX Group are particularly important in allowing the transfer of technical know-how and best practices as well

as other areas of long-term strategic value that we will explore," Kassahun said.

With NGX's extensive experience as one of Africa's largest securities exchanges boasting a market capitalization of ₦58.66 trillion (\$41.8 billion), ESX stands to benefit from technical support in structuring the exchange, refining trading regula-

tions, and marketing strategies. The collaboration has already yielded tangible outcomes, including the development of a comprehensive rule book to govern ESX's operations.

Moreover, ESX successfully concluded its fundraising campaign with commitments from domestic investors, including 16 local banks, 12

insurance firms, and 17 private entities. The exchange is poised to launch later this year, thereby enhancing Ethiopia's attractiveness to foreign investors and stimulating economic growth in the populous Horn of Africa nation.

While Prime Minister Ahmed's administration has made strides in liberalising

Ethiopia's economy, state control remains prevalent, limiting private sector participation. Notably, the absence of investment banks underscores the reliance on commercial banks for capital raising endeavours, signaling the need for further reforms to foster a more diverse and dynamic financial ecosystem.

## Eterna announces Abiola Lukman as MD/CEO

OLUTOLA FAWEHINMI

The board of directors at Eterna Plc has officially announced the appointment of Abiola Lukman Lawal to the esteemed position of Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer, effective from the 15th of April, 2024.

Lawal's appointment is subject to the forthcoming ratification by the shareholders at the upcoming Annual General Meeting of the company. In light of this development, the board extends its gratitude to the outgoing Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer, Benjamin Nwaezeigwe, who officially tendered his resignation effective from the 8th of April, 2024.

"The Board also announced the resignation of Benjamin Nwaezeigwe as Managing Director / Chief Executive Officer of Eterna Plc effective 8th April 2024. This is to inform Nigerian Exchange Limited (NGX) and the investing public of the resignation of Benjamin Nwaezeigwe as Managing Di-

rector/Chief Executive Officer of Eterna Plc effective 8th April 2024," Mandella Gokus the company secretary said.

In acknowledging Nwaezeigwe's tenure, the board recognizes his two-year service to Eterna Plc, citing his notable contributions to the company's growth and operations during his leadership.

"Mr. Lawal succeeds Mr. Benjamin Nwaezeigwe, who served the company for two (2) years prior to his resignation. The Board appreciates Mr. Nwaezeigwe for his significant contributions to the Company while he was Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer," Mandella said.

Transitioning to Lawal, the announcement provides a comprehensive profile outlining his extensive professional background and accomplishments. With over twenty-five years of executive leadership experience in both local and international capacities, Lawal brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to his new role.

## Foreign equity investors increase...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 11

Nigerian bourse as they invested ₦598.41 billion in January 2024, amounting to 91.85 percent of the total transactions, and ₦292.07 billion in February representing 81.61 percent of the total transactions.

The total amount invested in February by both foreign and domestic equity traders, which was ₦357.88 billion, represented a decline of 45.07 percent when compared to ₦651.52 billion invested in January 2024.

The reason for decline is not far-fetched. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), while pri-

oritising inflation moderation, hiked the Policy Monetary Rate (MPR), which is the nation's benchmark interest rate to 22.75 percent in February up from 17.5 percent in December 2023.

The noticeable decline is partly due to the rate hike by the CBN as investors sought better yielding assets in the fixed income market, and partly due to seasonal variation in the sense that the total amount invested in February 2023 which was ₦188.91 billion was lower than ₦195.10 billion invested in January 2023. The same pattern was repeated between January and February 2022.



**AWARD FOR IMPACTFUL SERVICE:**

Oscar Onyema (L), former GMD/CEO, NGX Group, receiving an award for his 13 years of impactful service to the capital market.

## Dangote Cement, BUA Foods, NAHCO, others announce 2023 final dividends

TELIAT SULE

Dangote Cement and BUA Foods have joined other listed companies that have announced their final dividends for the year ended 31 December 2023. According to the statement released by the cement giant, the board of directors of Dangote Cement has proposed ₦30 per share as the final dividend for shareholders whose names appear in the register of members on or before April 15, 2024.

"By Friday, May 31, 2024, dividends will be paid electronically

to shareholders whose names appear in the Register of Members as of Monday, April 15, 2024, and who have completed the e-dividend registration and mandated the Registrar to pay their dividends directly into their bank accounts," Dangote Cement said.

In a similar development, the board of directors of BUA Foods has recommended ₦5.50 per share as the final dividend that will be paid to shareholders whose names appear in the register of members as at August 23, 2024.

"On 26th September 2024, dividends will be paid electronically to shareholders whose names appear on the Register of Members as at 23rd August 2024 and who have completed the e-dividend registration and mandated the Registrar to pay their dividends directly into their Bank accounts," BUA Foods said.

The Nigerian Aviation Handling Company (NAHCO) has also recommended ₦2.54 per share as its final dividend for shareholders whose names appear in the register of members

on or before May 10, 2024 while payment will be made on May 24, 2024.

Berger Paints will be paying its shareholders ₦0.80 per share as the final dividend, subject to shareholders having their names on the register of members on or before April 16, 2024. Payment will be made on May 14, 2024.

The Nigerian Infrastructure Debt Fund has recommended ₦4.23 per unit for unitholders whose names appear in the register of unitholders as at the close of business on April 12, 2024. Payment date is April 19, 2024.

## March Flight Performance: Air Peace leads as Ibom Air...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 11

customers and committed to enhancing its service delivery.

Also, Ibom Air provided a comprehensive overview of its operational performance on its official X handle, reflecting the airline's commitment to transparency and accountability. The scorecard for the month highlights key metrics crucial to assessing the airline's efficiency and reliability.

On the scheduled flight, the airline had a total of 745 flights scheduled for the month, outlining the extent of its opera-

tional commitments and service offerings to passengers. And out of the scheduled 745 flights, Ibom Air successfully operated 719 flights, indicating a high level of service delivery in fulfilling its flight schedules.

During March 2024, Ibom Air experienced delays in 141 flights. While delays are inevitable in the aviation industry due to various factors, the airline is dedicated to minimizing disruptions and enhancing punctuality.

A total of 218 flights were rescheduled by Ibom Air in March. Rescheduling flights allow the airline to efficient-

ly manage its operations and accommodate unforeseen circumstances while prioritizing passenger safety and comfort.

Despite the airline's efforts to maintain operational integrity, 26 flights were canceled during the month. Canceling flights is a decision taken with utmost consideration for passenger welfare and safety, often due to unavoidable circumstances beyond the airline's control.

Ibom Air achieved a scheduled reliability rate of 67% in March. While this indicates a significant portion of flights operated as planned, there is a continuous effort to improve

operational efficiency and minimize disruptions.

With an on-time performance of 80%, Ibom Air demonstrated its commitment to ensuring timely departures and arrivals, enhancing passenger satisfaction and overall travel experience.

As Ibom Air progresses, it remains steadfast in its dedication to providing safe, reliable, and customer-centric air travel services. The airline continually evaluates its performance metrics to identify areas for improvement, ensuring that passengers can trust Ibom Air for their travel needs.



# NACCIMA hails Tinubu, Allen Onyema, Keyamo on Air Peace's inaugural flight to London

The National President of the Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA), Dele Oye Esq., has congratulated President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Minister of Aviation and Aerospace Development, Festus Keyamo and Chairman and CEO of Air Peace, Allen Onyema, for the successful inaugural Air Peace flight from Lagos to London.

In a statement, Oye said the milestone not only signifies the resurgence of Nigerian enterprise on an international scale but also heralds a new era of competitive and accessible air travel for Nigerians.

The statement reads: "On behalf of the Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA), I hereby extend our most profound commendation and

heartfelt congratulations to Mr. Allen Onyema, the Chairman and CEO of Air Peace, the industrious management and staff of the airline, the Honourable Minister of Aviation and Aerospace Development, Mr. Festus Keyamo (SAN), His Excellency President Bola Ahmed Tinubu GCFR, and the resilient people of Nigeria on the triumphant launch of the inaugural Air Peace flight from Lagos to London.

"This momentous occasion not only signifies the resurgence of Nigerian enterprise on an international scale but also heralds a new era of competitive and accessible air travel for Nigerians. It is a testament to the indomitable spirit of the Nigerian entrepreneur, epitomized by Air Peace's valiant entry into a route that has long been dominated by foreign carriers.

"Through this bold move,

Air Peace has not only made travel more affordable but has also instilled pride in our national identity by ensuring our youth-rich creative and culinary heritage graces the skies."

He added, "We salute the courage and perseverance of Air Peace, which mirrors the very ethos of NACCIMA, where public-private partnerships foster victories for the greater public good. This achievement reminds us of the transformative impact that Nigerian businesses can have, as was the case when Globacom revolutionized billing in the telecoms industry, compelling international players to adopt per-second billing."

Noting the role of government as a regulator in driving business growth, Oye added, "In light of the interview by the CEO of Air Peace on Arise TV News, detailing the challenges faced with both local regulators and British authorities, it is clear that the support of our government is crucial. It is with great anticipation that we embrace the promises made by the Honourable Minister of Aviation to confront any future obstructions with

'fire for fire'.

"We urge a thorough investigation into the claims of economic sabotage, ensuring that such hindrances are met with justice, for they impede not just Air Peace, but the progress of our nation."

He further stated, "We extend our felicitations to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu GCFR, the Honourable Minister of Aviation and Aerospace Development, the Hon Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Minister of Industry Trade and Investment, and the indomitable team at Air Peace. Your collective efforts have paved the way for Nigerian travelers to soar anew, freed from the shackles of prohibitive fares and limited choices.

"NACCIMA celebrates this landmark achievement with pride and great expectations for the future. We stand in solidarity with all Nigerian enterprises, and businesses advocating for policies and environments that enable the blossoming of indigenous. Together, we will continue to strive for excellence, bolster our economy, and enhance the welfare of every Nigerian."



## LONDON TO LAGOS:

Commissioner for Tourism, Arts and Culture, Mrs. Toke Benson-Awoyinka (right), Ms. Pelumi Nubi (second right); her mother, Bukola and Special Adviser to the Governor on Tourism, Arts and Culture, Mr. Idris Aregbe (left), during the arrival of Ms. Nubi, who drove from London to Lagos received by the Lagos government officials at the Seme Border, Badagry, Lagos, on Sunday, 07 April 2024.

## Federal Government spends N2.9 trillion on electricity subsidy, says Adelabu

GOODNESS OYEDUN

In a recent Ministerial Briefing held in Abuja, the Minister of Power, Dr. Adebayo Adelabu, revealed that the Federal Government has invested a staggering N2.9 trillion in electricity subsidy. Despite the increase in tariff for Band A customers, the government continues to subsidize 75% of electricity supply in Nigeria.

Adelabu emphasized that the government remains committed to its pro-poor power policy, subsidizing no less than 67% of the cost of producing, transmitting, and distributing electricity in the country, to ensure affordable and accessible electricity for all Nigerians.

The Minister shed light on the importance of achieving operational sustainability for power operators, highlighting the need for cost recovery and the potential for profit. Adelabu reiterated the government's commitment to supporting the power sector and its determination not to withdraw 100% of the subsidy on electricity.

"The investment of N2.9 tril-

lion in electricity subsidy showcases the government's dedication to improving the power infrastructure and ensuring reliable access to electricity for all Nigerians" he added.

According to him, when a business can't cover its costs, its sustainability becomes uncertain. In the case of the power sector, cost recovery can be achieved through either commercial pricing or subsidized pricing.

Commercial pricing involves transferring the entire cost of producing power, along with profits, to consumers. On the other hand, subsidized pricing, like the current approach in Nigeria, involves the government shouldering a significant portion of the cost.

Adelabu highlighted that maintaining the full subsidy regime is no longer sustainable, especially when there are competing needs in other sectors that also require attention.

"It's important to consider the limited resources available to the government. By removing the subsidy, it is believed that local investments in the power sector will improve and foreign inves-

tors will be attracted," he said.

Minister Adelabu pointed out the limited impact of the tariff adjustment as it affects around 15% of electricity customers in Nigeria, which is about 1.5 million people. And even with the increase, the cost per kilowatt is more than 50% cheaper than alternative power sources.

"The average cost is alternative to diesel or fuel because you have to purchase the generator, fuel it and service it from time to time," he stated.

The new tariff category which will provide 20 hours of power supply to consumers has 481 feeders classified as Batch A, the minister disclosed.

He added that liquidity and pricing have indeed been major issues in the power sector. By implementing the right pricing, it can stimulate competition and attract more investment to the industry. The tariff review aligns with the government's goal of maintaining a subsidized pricing regime in the short term while gradually transitioning to a fully cost-reflective tariff over a period of three years.

To Adelabu, the government

is sensitive to the challenges faced by the people and has taken steps to avoid a sudden removal of subsidies in the power sector, similar to what was done in the oil and gas sector. This approach allows for a more gradual transition and ensures that the impact on consumers is considered.

The power sector being on the exclusive list meant that only the Federal Government had the authority to invest in it. However, with the signing of the Power Sector Act, the government has decentralized the sector. The decentralization of the power sector opens up opportunities for investment from various stakeholders, not just the federal government.

The Minister of Information and National Orientation, Mohammed Idris, who is the host of the meeting, mentioned that the tariff review is a strategic step towards creating a better electricity sector. He reassured Nigerians that any misconceptions and concerns about the review are understandable, but the goal is to make the sector more sustainable, efficient, and fair for everyone.

## NERC fines AEDC N200m for overcharging customers

GOODNESS OYEDUN

Following the new tariff order by the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC), Abuja Electricity Distribution Plc (AEDC) has violated the April 2024 Multi-Year Tariff Order and has been fined a sum of N200 million for non-compliance with the supplementary order. This was made known to the public through a press release on Friday April, 2024.

The AEDC failed to comply with the prescribed customer band classifications for the tariff billing. They had applied the new tariff to all customer bands, contrary to the order, which was designed to ensure fair billing practices.

The Vice Chairman of the NERC, Musiliu Oseni, previously stated that the current review of the end user tariffs would not affect all other customers under the Band B to E-service categories, representing 85% of the customer population, leaving the band A customers which represents 15% of the population as the end users of the new tariff.

Following the AEDC violation to this order, it has been mandated to reimburse all customers in Bands B, C, D and E respectively that were billed above the allowed customer categories/tariff bands provided in the order.

"Pay the sum of

₦200,000,000.00 (Two Hundred Million Naira) as a fine for the flagrant breach of the Commission's Order," the statement reads.

They are also to reimburse through the provision of the balance of customer tokens that the affected customers would be entitled to receive at the applicable rates and all token reimbursements shall be issued to the affected customers by 11 April 2024.

The action by the commission underscores its commitment to protecting consumer rights and ensuring equitable practices within Nigeria's electricity sector. By enforcing strict penalties and ensuring refunds for affected customers, the NERC sends a strong message that such practices will not be tolerated.

According to AEDC, the wrong charges occurred due to a system glitch caused by the reclassification of some Band A customers who have now been downgraded to B due to the number of hours of electricity supply enjoyed over the past few weeks.

Fair and transparent billing practices are crucial in the electricity sector. Instances of overcharging not only burden customers financially but also erode trust in the utility providers. It is essential for DisCos to prioritize accurate metering, precise billing, and responsive customer service.



# Azman Air Soars resumes flight operations

HAPPY OSAGIE

After a brief hiatus, Azman Air, one of Nigeria's leading airlines, has resumed operations, bringing relief to passengers and industry stakeholders alike. Following a temporary suspension by the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) in March, the airline has undergone rigorous safety audits and compli-

ance checks to ensure its fleet's airworthiness and adherence to regulatory standards.

"We are delighted to kick-start our renewed experience with efficient, comfortable, and reliable services between Kano, Lagos, and Abuja," Azman Air said.

Azman Air is thrilled to announce the resumption of its services between the cities of Kano, Lagos, and Abuja. After

a brief pause, the airline is back with a renewed commitment to providing its passengers with exceptional travel experiences characterized by efficiency, comfort, and reliability.

The resumption of Azman Air's flights comes with heightened safety measures and renewed commitment to customer satisfaction. Passengers can expect enhanced protocols in place.

Despite facing challenges in the past, Azman Air aims to rebuild trust and regain its reputation as a reliable and safe airline. With a focus on transparency and accountability, the airline pledges to prioritize passenger safety above all else.

As air travel gradually rebounds from the impacts of the global pandemic, the return of Azman Air to the skies signals a positive step forward for Ni-

geria's aviation sector. With its renewed operations, the airline aims to once again connect passengers to their destinations, fostering economic growth and mobility across the region.

As we embark on this new chapter, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to our loyal passengers for their continued support and trust in Azman Air. We are excited to welcome you back on board and look

forward to serving you on your journey between Kano, Lagos, and Abuja.

Passengers can look forward to convenient flight options, competitive fares, and attentive customer service as Azman Air resumes its operations. As the airline navigates the challenges ahead, it remains committed to delivering a seamless and enjoyable travel experience for all passengers.

## NALDA empowers farmers nationwide, enhances food security

NAOMI EWANSIHA

The National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA) in a concerted effort to enhance food security and alleviate the impact of global food shortages, has embarked on a nationwide initiative distributing crucial agricultural inputs to farmers in Abia, Kebbi, and Yobe states. This ambitious programme aims to empower farmers, optimize crop cultivation, and ultimately increase food production across the nation.

Amidst a backdrop of global resources and escalating food prices, NALDA's intervention seeks to equip farmers with the necessary tools and resources to bolster agricultural output. The distribution of high-grade fertilizers, herbicides, and improved seeds, including maize and rice varieties tailored to local conditions, emphasizes NALDA's commitment to enhancing agricultural productivity.

In Abia State, beneficiaries from diverse backgrounds, including those nominated by the state government and various farmers' associations, converged at the NALDA Institute of Agribusiness and Entrepreneurship in a ceremony marked by enthusiasm and anticipation. Led by the Executive Secretary of NALDA, Prince Paul Ikonke, the distribution event served as a tangible manifestation of the government's pledge to support smallholder farmers.

Addressing the assembled farmers, Prince Paul Ikonke emphasized the pivotal role of agriculture in ensuring food self-sufficiency and reducing the cost of living for ordinary Nigerians. He reiterated President Bola Tinubu's commitment to promoting agricultural development and emphasized the imperative of cultivating vast hectares of land to meet the nation's growing food demands.

"The essence of what we're doing here today is to ensure Nigerians understand the importance of farming, make sure we produce what we eat and reduce the price of food in the market. We are expecting nothing less than 340 hectares to be cultivated by these farmers," he said.

Expressions of gratitude ech-

oed throughout the gathering as beneficiaries, including Azeezat Jimoh, the Women Leader of the Yoruba community in Abia State, and Habibu Aliyu, a seasoned rice farmer from Kebbi State, conveyed their appreciation for the government's timely intervention. Their testimonials underscored the transformative impact of NALDA's empowerment programme on rural livelihoods and agricultural productivity.

In Kebbi State, the distribution exercise was characterized by the participation of local officials such as Honourable Manir Abubakar, Chairman of the Ngaski Local Government Area, who commended NALDA for its proactive stance in supporting farmers. Emphasizing the importance of utilizing the distributed inputs for farming purposes, he urged beneficiaries to maximize the potential of the resources provided.

Meanwhile, in Yobe State the NALDA team led by Director of Finance, Suleiman Lawal, engaged beneficiaries in comprehensive training sessions aimed at optimizing the use of agricultural inputs for maximum yield. Against the backdrop of President Tinubu's declaration of a state of emergency on food, NALDA's empowerment programme represents a crucial step towards achieving food sufficiency and mitigating the adverse effects of rising food prices. As the distribution of agricultural inputs continues to unfold nationwide, stakeholders remain optimistic about the programme's potential to transform Nigeria's agricultural landscape.



### NIGERIAN ARMY CIVIC QUARTERLY MEDIA CHAT:

Chairman, Delta State Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Comrade Churchill Oyowe (left), receiving a souvenir from the Army, presented by the Army Chief of Civil-Military Affairs, Major General Nosakhare Ugbo, during the Nigerian Army Civic Quarterly Media Chat for the First Quarter of 2024, in Asaba.

## Kogi State Governor pledges agricultural investment for food security

NAOMI EWANSIHA

The Governor of Kogi State, Ahmed Usman Ododo, in a bid to ensure food security for the citizens of Kogi State, has announced plans for significant investment in agriculture. The governor made this commitment while hosting leaders of the Muslim community in Kogi State for the breaking of the Ramadan fast at the Government House in Lokoja.

Governor Ododo emphasized the importance of addressing the prevailing economic challenges and affirmed his administration's dedication

to investing heavily in agriculture. This initiative aligns with the Renewed Hope Agenda championed by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

The governor's pledge to invest in agriculture signals a proactive approach towards addressing food security challenges in Kogi State. With unity, compassion, and support from the populace, Governor Ododo aims to steer the state towards prosperity and development, in alignment with the principles of Ramadan.

Governor Ahmed Usman Ododo's announcement of significant investment in agriculture carries profound impli-

cations for the future of Kogi State. His commitment reflects a strategic response to ensure food security and bolster the state's agricultural sector. By prioritizing agricultural development, Governor Ododo signals a proactive stance towards addressing pressing socio-economic concerns, aligning with the broader vision of the Renewed Hope Agenda spearheaded by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

The governor's pledge to invest in agriculture is not only to address the immediate food security concerns but also lays the groundwork for sustainable economic growth and

development. By harnessing the state's agricultural potential, Governor Ododo aims to create opportunities for employment, enhance rural livelihoods, and stimulate overall economic prosperity.

This strategy aligns with the aspirations of the populace for tangible improvements in their quality of life and highlights the government's commitment to inclusive and equitable development. With a focus on unity, compassion, and collaboration, his administration seeks to navigate the challenges facing Kogi State while charting a path towards a more prosperous future.

## Edo rolls out manpower devt scheme for oil palm sector

### ● calls for applicants

The Edo State Government through the Edo State Oil Palm Programme (ESOPP) has called for applicants for its manpower development scheme aimed at growing a new crop of workers in its expansive oil plantation sector.

In a statement, Acting Team Lead, ESOPP, Churchill Oboh said the scheme is a collaboration between ESOPP, oil palm producers and the Edo State College of Agriculture and

Natural Sciences.

According to him, "We are looking for people who are passionate about sustainable agriculture. The scheme is to train those who want to become experts in sustainable agriculture."

"The Edo State Oil Palm Programme (ESOPP) in collaboration with Oil Palm Producers and the Edo State College of Agriculture and Natural Resources presents an opportunity for people to participate

in the Manpower Development Scheme.

"We are offering comprehensive training, hands-on experience, and job placement for the role of Junior Plantation Operative."

On the qualifications required for the scheme, the Acting Registrar, Edo State College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Monday Owie said, "You need a minimum of a Senior Secondary School Cer-

tificate, with at least four credits including English Language and Mathematics. Experience in oil palm plantation is an added advantage. The candidates should be physically fit and not more than 35 years old."

"To apply, interested candidates are expected to pay a non-refundable fee of 3,000 Naira to: Bank Name: Edo State College of Agric and Natural Resources; Account Number: 1229030737; Account Name:

Zenith Bank and upload a clear proof of payment, recent passport photograph, CV, and educational certificates."

He added, "Kindly visit <https://ecanr.edostate.gov.ng> for more details. Application closes on the 21st of April 2024. Successful applicants will be sponsored for the 6-month training programme. For inquiries, contact our helpline at +2347039314405 or +2347054849945."



# The Polity

• Policy • Legislation • Enforcement

## PDP chieftain calls for a united party ahead Edo guber poll

**...commends Obaseki, declares support for Ighodalo**

IDAHOUSA MUSA

A chieftain of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Edo State, Elder Patrick Oriekhoe, has called for unity in the party ahead of the September 21, 2024 gubernatorial election in the state.

He made the call on Friday while fielding questions from journalists in Benin City, the Edo State capital.

According to the Be-

nin-born politician, no meaningful development will occur in a rancorous environment, hence the need for the two factions in the party to be united in order to be more formidable for the election.

"We cannot go into this election with a divided house as that will not augur well for our party, the PDP. We need to go into the election as a united house," he said.

While commending the state governor, Mr. Godwin

Obaseki, for his giant strides in the past over seven years in Edo State, the influential politician said the PDP governorship candidate, Dr. Asue Ighodalo, would bring more development to the people if voted as governor of the state.

He appealed to members of the PDP in the state and Edo people in general to support the candidate with proven capacity and achievements which, according to him, Dr. Ighodalo represents.

Speaking on his philanthropic activities, Oriekhoe disclosed that his foundation, Pat Oriekhoe Foundation, would be empowering no fewer than 100 Edo residents with skill acquisitions and start-up capital.

He said the empowerment programme which commenced in May last year would be concluded in June 2024, adding that the next set of empowerment is scheduled to commence in August this year.



**65TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION:**

L-R: Imo State governor, Hope Uzodimma; wife of late former Oyo State governor, Dr Florence Ajumobi, and wife of Imo State governor, Chioma Uzodimma, at the 65th birthday celebration of Mrs. Ajumobi in Lagos.

## Veteran labour leaders demand Abure, Ajaero's resignation amid leadership tussle

BLESSING IMAGBENIKARO

In reaction to the ongoing leadership battle between the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Labour Party, a group of retired workers under the banner of Lagos Assembly of Labour Veterans and Trade Unionists has issued a fervent call for the resignation of the National Chairman of the Labour Party, Julius Abure, and NLC President, Joe Ajaero, citing their prolonged leadership struggle and alleged neglect of workers' interests.

The group, led by former NLC Vice President, Isah Ti-

jani, expressed deep concern over what it deemed the failure of Ajaero and Abure to effectively address critical issues affecting Nigerian workers.

Speaking on behalf of the retired workers during a press briefing in Lagos, Tijjani lamented Abure and Ajaero's preoccupation with internal power struggles, which he believes have detracted from their primary duty of advocating for workers' rights.

"The disconcerting aspects of this unfortunate situation is the resultant callous and complete abandonment of the constitutional duties and core

responsibilities duly bestowed upon these leaders," Tijjani said.

He also criticized the leaders for their perceived neglect of pressing issues such as the withdrawal of petroleum subsidy, devaluation of the national currency, and increases in electricity tariffs.

The erstwhile NLC Vice President also pointed out the impact of these policies on workers.

"As the prospect to escape from the grip of multi-dimensional poverty dims for the masses, the space to impose more burdens on the working class continues to be fully oc-

cupied by harsher economic policies," he said.

The Assembly of Labour Veterans and Trade Unionists also cited alleged cases of financial recklessness within the Labour Party leadership, further fuelling the demand for Abure's resignation.

While emphasizing the need for swift action, Tijjani said, "The abysmal failure of the leaders of the Labour unions and the Labour Party to provide credible challenges to these anti-people policies are indeed sufficient basis for Nigerian workers to demand their resignation, without any further delay."

## Edo 2024: Labour Party deputy gov candidate, Alufokhai, debunks allegation of false documentation

BLESSING IMAGBENIKARO  
WITH AGENCY REPORT

The deputy governorship candidate of the Labour Party for the September 21 gubernatorial election in Edo State, Oluyinka Faith Alufokhai, has debunked the rumour making the rounds that she submitted a false document to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

Recall that INEC recently published the list of governorship and deputy governorship candidates for the election. The list displayed at the INEC office in Benin City and across the LGA offices of the commission contained particulars of candidates and their political parties in line with Section 29(3) of the Electoral Act 2022 which requires the electoral body to publish particulars of candidates for public scrutiny.

Information on Alufokhai's form EC9 as displayed by INEC indicates that she may have submitted a false document to the commission.

On page 2 of her affidavit sworn at the Epe Division of the High Court on March 22,

2024, Alufokhai stated that she was born on May 18, 1981 in Imo State. Yet on page 4 of the same affidavit, she claimed that she obtained her First School Leaving Certificate in 1981, the same year she was born.

In her reaction, Alufokhai said the discrepancy noticed in her date of birth and her First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) is a typographical error.

She said that her date of birth is May 18, 1981, and that her FSLC was obtained in 1989.

"My date of birth is 18/05/1981. My FSLC was obtained in 1989. So for my date of birth and FSLC to bear the same year, that's a typographical error as you can see," she said in a message to SaharaReporters.

Meanwhile, the leadership of the Labour Party in Edo State reportedly summoned an emergency meeting with the party's governorship candidate, Olumide Akpata, and his running mate, Alufokhai, over concerns that some of the information contained in their forms EC9 submitted to INEC may have been false and capable of jeopardising their candidacies.

## My govt inherited N192.2bn debt, but we've paid off some, says Otti

RUTH ISIGBE

Abia State governor, Alex Otti, said on Friday that his administration inherited N192.2bn debt from his predecessor, Okezie Ikpeazu.

He said Ikpeazu, on his part, inherited N34.5bn from his predecessor, Theodore Orji.

Otti disclosed this during an interaction with journalists in Umuahia, the Abia State capital.

He said, however, that some of the debts have been paid off as they are with high-interest rates, adding, "It is tough, but we have to do it. We manage our expenses well and are able to live."

Otti also expressed delight that the state did not feature in the list of debtor states recently released by the Debt Management Office (DMO).

"Opposition said we borrowed N148bn, and we debunked it. We will borrow when the need arises, but for now, we are managing," Otti said.

"I have been consistent with the cost of governance and managing. Borrowing money is not bad, but what you do with the money you borrowed. Where the money for projects I am doing in the state is coming from is my secret. We have been able to manage and cut costs. We are doing financial engineering," he said.

As regards payment of pension arrears, the governor said, "We had promised last year to pay off the pension arrears but are saddled with a difficult verification exercise that ended a few weeks ago."

"All pensions have been paid as of last Thursday. All the arrears have been taken away. These pensioners who would have been begging for money are now feeding by themselves."

"So, we have returned power to these pensioners. 12,500 of them were paid. Going forward, 100% of their entitlement will be paid as and when due. We have always paid 100% salaries. Never again will we have a backlog of pensions, some of which date back to 2014."

Otti expressed gladness that work was ongoing at all the local government areas headquarters in the state, stating that 90 per cent of the headquarters were in dilapidation stage following neglect by previous administrations.

On the issue of alleged hijack of local government funds, he said, "LG funds can't be hijacked under my watch. The LGAs are working. It is impossible to hijack the funds under me. Soon, salary arrears of parastatals will be paid as they have been keyed in."



# United States of Nigeria as a restructuring strategy

TRACY FOLORUNSHO

Restructuring, a hot-button issue in the Nigerian polity that does not look like it is going away any time soon, came back on the frontburner after the President of African Development Bank (AfDB), Akinwumi Adesina, proposed renaming the country from the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) to the United States of Nigeria (USN).

Adesina made the suggestion in a lecture delivered as part of his acknowledgment of the 2024 Obafemi Awolowo Prize for Leadership on Wednesday, March 6.

Speaking under the theme “Making a New Nigeria: Welfarist Policies and People-Centred Development”, Adesina, while advocating for significant changes, suggested that renaming the country to the ‘United States of Nigeria’ would shift the dynamics between the states and Abuja. He proposed that under this framework, the states would assume a pivotal role while the central authority would offer support rather than exerting dominance.

“With good governance, better accountability systems, and zero tolerance for corruption, more economically stronger constituent states would emerge! We would unleash massive wealth across the states. A New Nigeria would arise!” he said.

While the nomenclature may be new, the idea behind it is what many political analysts have been echoing, that restructuring Nigeria was the only way to see a drastic improvement in the country.

## WHAT UNITED STATES OF NIGERIA IMPLIES

The Nigerian system of government and the US system are similar but have some major differences. For instance, the US has an Electoral College system and practices state autonomy, where each state relates with the other as independent entities.

To adopt this system, Nigeria would need to grant more autonomy and powers to its states, similar to the degree of autonomy enjoyed by individual states in the United States. This could involve devolving certain responsibilities such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure to the states, allowing them greater control over their own affairs which in turn will lead to state development. It would give the governorship position in each Nigerian state more prominence and authority. States would interact with each other as sovereign entities, engaging in interstate cooperation, negotiations, and agreements on matters of mutual interest such as trade, security, and infrastructure development.

Nigeria would need to adopt principles of true fiscal federalism, whereby states have greater control over their finances and revenue generation. This could involve granting states more authority to collect taxes, manage their budgets, and allocate resources according to their own priorities.

States would need to draft and adopt their own law taking a cue from the country’s constitution. These laws would outline the structure of state government, the division of powers, and the rights of citizens within each state. They would operate alongside the federal constitution, providing additional layers of governance and legal framework at the state level.

Adopting the US system of state government would decentralize power, enhance local governance, and



promote greater accountability and responsiveness to the needs of Nigerian citizens at the state level.

However, it would require significant institutional reforms, a rethink of the constitution and a shift in the political culture to effectively implement such changes.

Developing the resources of each state in Nigeria could have significant benefits if Nigeria were to adopt a system similar to the United States.

## SOME NIGERIAN STATES AND THEIR COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE

Virtually every state in Nigeria is blessed with numerous natural and mineral resources which, if properly utilized, would place each on a higher pedestal of development for the overall betterment of the country and its citizens.

### LAGOS

With its strategic location, vibrant economy, and port facilities, Lagos State could focus on further developing its financial services, trade, and transportation sectors. This could create more job opportunities, attract investment, and improve infrastructure, leading to a higher standard of living for its residents. Also, with the Dangote Refinery, Lagos State will also be a beneficiary of the oil and gas industry.

### EDO

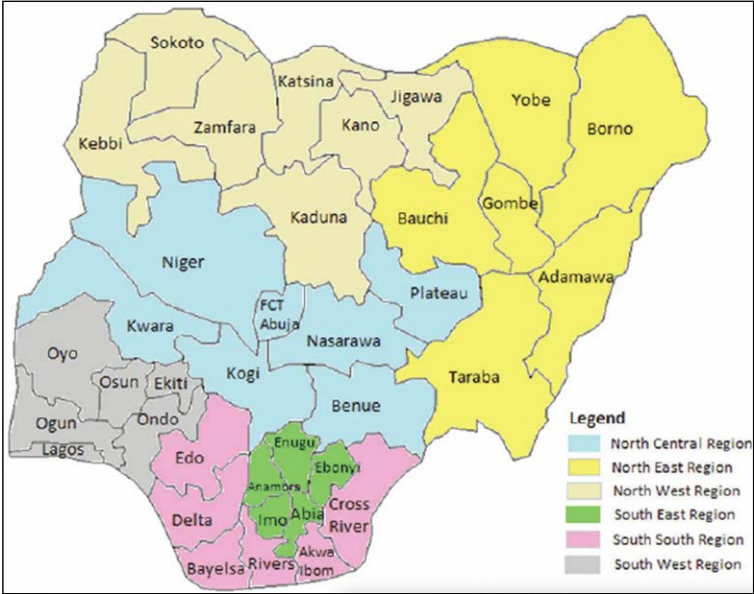
Edo State, known for its cultural heritage, is rich in agricultural resources, such as oil palm. The state is also blessed with mineral deposits such as bitumen, clay dolomite, phosphate, glass-sand, gold, gypsum, iron-ore, lignite, limestone, marble, and oil and gas. The reforms of the Governor Godwin Obaseki-led administration in the last over seven years have taken the state to a new pedestal of development, but the state stands the chance of realising its full potential faster if it is allowed to harness these natural resources on its own and further open up for more investments.

### KANO

Known for its agricultural potential, Kano State could prioritize modernizing its farming techniques, investing in agribusiness, and expanding its food processing industry. This could increase food security, reduce poverty, and stimulate economic growth, benefitting both rural and urban populations.

### RIVERS

Rich in natural resources, particularly



oil and gas, Rivers State could invest in infrastructure for petroleum refining, petrochemicals, and other related industries. This could create employment opportunities, boost government revenue, and support the development of ancillary services, improving quality of life for its citizens.

### OGUN

With Ogun State’s fertile land and its proximity to Lagos, the state could focus on industrialization, manufacturing, and technology-based industries. Developing these sectors could attract investors, create jobs, and promote innovation, ultimately raising the living standards of its residents.

### CROSS RIVER

Blessed with diverse ecosystems, Cross River State could invest in ecotourism, agriculture, and renewable energy projects. This could stimulate economic growth, preserve biodiversity, and empower local communities through sustainable development initiatives.

### AKWA IBOM

Akwa Ibom State is known for its oil and gas reserves. As such, the state could invest in refining capacity, petrochemicals, and alternative energy sources such as solar and wind power. This diversification could create employment opportunities, boost revenue generation, and promote sustainable development in the state.

### OYO

With its fertile land and favourable climate, Oyo State could focus on agricul-

ture, agro-processing, and food manufacturing. By modernizing farming practices, improving infrastructure, and supporting small-scale farmers, Oyo State could enhance food security, increase income levels, and stimulate rural development.

### ENUGU

Rich in coal deposits and other mineral resources, Enugu State could prioritize the development of its mining sector, as well as invest in manufacturing and industrialization. This could create employment opportunities, attract investment, and drive economic growth, particularly in rural areas.

### DELTA

Another oil-rich state, Delta State could leverage its natural resources to develop downstream industries such as petroleum refining, petrochemicals, and fertilizer production. This could create value-added products, generate revenue, and foster economic diversification, reducing the state’s reliance on oil revenue.

### KADUNA

With its strategic location and solid infrastructure, Kaduna State could become a hub for manufacturing, logistics, and transportation. By attracting investment in these sectors, Kaduna State could create employment opportunities, stimulate economic growth, and improve connectivity within the region.

### BAYELSA

Bayelsa, another oil-producing state, is also rich in marine resources. The state could focus on leveraging these marine

resources for fishing, aquaculture, and marine tourism. This could create livelihood opportunities for coastal communities, diversify the economy, and promote sustainable use of natural resources.

### IMO

With its educated workforce and potential for technology and innovation, Imo State could prioritize investments in information technology, software development, and digital services. This could attract tech companies, create high-paying jobs, and position Imo State as a technology hub in Nigeria.

### KWARA

Known for its agricultural potential and central location, Kwara State could invest in agribusiness, food processing, and agricultural logistics. By improving access to markets and enhancing value chains, Kwara State could increase agricultural productivity, create employment opportunities, and boost rural development.

### SOKOTO

Sokoto State is rich in agricultural resources, including cotton, millet, sorghum, and livestock. It also has mineral deposits such as gold and limestone. Investing in irrigation schemes and modern farming techniques would increase agricultural productivity and food security. Promoting value-added processing industries and improving access to markets would create employment and boost incomes, improving the well-being of the Sokoto people.

### KATSINA

Katsina State is one of the leading agricultural producers in Nigeria, with crops such as millet, sorghum, maize, and cowpeas. It also has mineral deposits, including kaolin and gypsum. Investing in agricultural infrastructure, such as irrigation systems and storage facilities, would increase productivity and reduce post-harvest losses. Supporting agro-processing industries and providing access to credit and markets would create jobs and improve livelihoods for the people of Katsina State.

### NIGER

Niger State is endowed with agricultural resources, including millet, sorghum, rice, and livestock, as well as mineral deposits such as gold, limestone, and gypsum. Developing irrigation schemes and modernizing agriculture would boost productivity and food security. Expanding mining operations and supporting value-added processing industries would create employment opportunities and stimulate economic growth, benefitting the people of Niger State.

### OSUN

With abundant mineral resources and a strong cultural heritage, Osun State could focus on mining, tourism, and cultural industries. This could stimulate economic growth, preserve historical sites, and create jobs in sectors such as hospitality, arts, and crafts.

### EKITI

With its fertile soil and suitable climate, Ekiti State could prioritize agricultural development, particularly in high-value crops such as cocoa, cashew, and vegetables. By supporting smallholder farmers, promoting agricultural research, and improving market access, Ekiti State could enhance food security, increase rural incomes, and reduce poverty.

### FINAL WORD

Developing these sectors as a comparative advantage in each of these states could unlock their full economic potential, lead to infrastructural development, create employment opportunities, and improve the quality of life for their residents as well as attract investors.



<div>The Nigerian Observer</div> <div>...That the people may know</div>					ADVERTISEMENT RATES (PRINT)					
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FULL PAGE	517,344	556,145	369,500	397,213	325,150	349,536	665,156	715,043	443,440	476,698
13 X 4	369,500	397,213	295,600	317,770	206,938	222,458	443,500	476,763	369,550	397,266
10 X 4	340,000	365,500	273,500	294,013	177,400	190,705	370,000	397,750	295,600	317,770
HALF PAGE	295,600	317,770	236,500	254,238	147,800	158,885	340,000	365,500	273,450	293,959
10 X 3	221,700	238,328	147,800	158,885	118,300	127,173	266,000	285,950	251,300	270,148
13 X2	206,900	222,418	133,000	142,925	103,500	111,263	221,800	238,435	147,810	158,896
QUARTER PAGE	192,150	206,561	118,250	127,119	88,690	95,342	236,500	254,238	133,000	142,975
CENTER SPREAD	1,356,968	1,466,992						B/W	1,148,181	1,241,276
HALF CENTER	991,590	1,071,989						B/W	887,272	959,212
FRONT PAGE POSITIONS					OTHER SIZES					EFFECTIVE FROM FEBRUARY 1, 2023
PRODUCTS		PUBLIC NOTICE		SIZES	PUBLIC NOTICE		PRODUCTS			
RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)		RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)		
FP 6X2	89,800	96,535	105,450	113,359	6 X 2	60,640	65,188	49,140	52,826	
FP 5X2	81,100	87,183	97,300	104,598	5 X 2	51,950	55,846	42,120	45,279	
FP 4X2	73,000	78,475	80,700	86,753	4 X 2	45,260	48,655	34,400	36,980	
FP 3X2	64,870	69,735	73,000	78,475	3 X 2	30,900	33,218	26,600	28,595	
FP 2X2	59,000	63,425	64,900	69,768	2 X 2	18,680	20,081	15,600	16,770	
SPECIAL POSITIONS					2 X 1	12,400	13,330	7,415	7,971	
SIZES	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	CAC	38,000	40,850			
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STRIP INSIDE	88,600	95,245	118,250	127,119	LOOSE INSERTS: N40 PER SHEET MINIMUM ORDER: 5000 COPIES HANDLING CHARGES: N40,000 PER 1000 COPIES NEWSPAPER DIMENSION: 14.5” X 10.5”					
SPECIAL PAGES					CHANGE OF NAME					
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BACK PAGE	ADD 60% SURCHARGE									
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# Technology

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## FG to launch new National ID Card with payment and social service functions

BILL OKONEDO

The Federal Government of Nigeria, through the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) in collaboration with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the Nigeria Inter-bank Settlement System (NIBSS), is to launch an innovative identity solution with payment functionality for all types of social and financial services to be powered by AfriGO, a National domestic card scheme.

The National ID card, layered with verifiable National Identity features, is backed by the NIMC Act No. 23 of 2007, which mandates NIMC to enroll and issue a General Multipurpose card (GMPC) to Nigerians and legal residents. This card will address the demand for physical identification enabling cardholders prove their identity, access government and private social services, facilitate financial inclusion for disenfranchised Nigerians, empower citizens, as well as encourage increased participation in nation-building.

This information was disclosed in a statement by Kayode Adegoke, Head of Corporate

Communications at NIMC.

Adegoke said only registered citizens and legal residents with the National Identification Number (NIN) will be eligible to request the card. The card, which will be produced according to ICAO standards, is positioned as the country's default national identity card.

In addition to this functionality, cardholders will also be able to use the cards as debit or prepaid cards by linking same to bank accounts of their choice. The card shall enable eligible persons especially those financially excluded from social and financial services have access to multiple government interventions programs.

In line with data protection regulation and public interest, NIMC remains committed to protecting cardholders' personal data and will ensure compliance with international standards on data security protocols as security features that protect the confidentiality and safety of users' information.

The card will have a machine-readable Zone (MRZ) in conformation with ICAO for e-passport information and bear an issue date and docu-

ment number also in line with ICAO standard.

Additional features include travel, health insurance information, microloans, agriculture, food stamps, transport, and energy subsidies, etc.

It will also carry Nigeria's

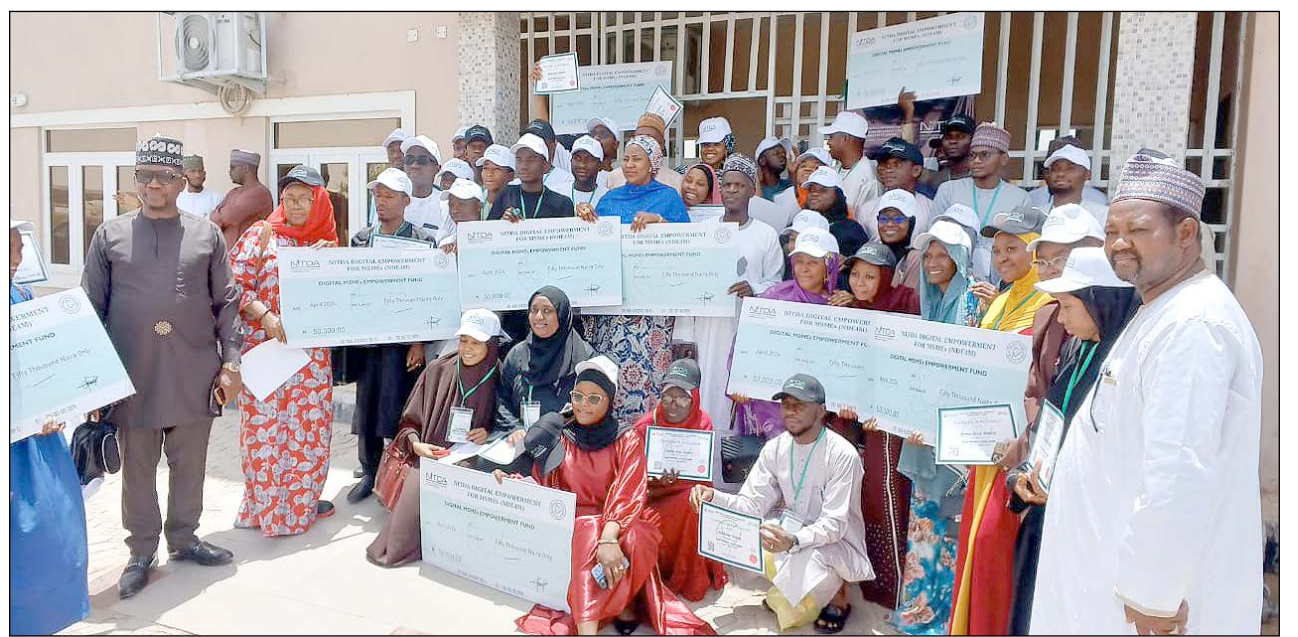
quick response code (NQR) containing the national identification number and biometric authentication, such as fingerprint and pictures, as the primary medium for identity verification through the data on the card chip.

The card will further have offline capability that allows transactions in areas with limited network coverage or zero infrastructure connectivity.

It will also function as a debit and prepaid card, catering to both banked and unbanked

individuals.

Request for cards by registered citizens and legal residents will be made available online at any commercial bank, various agencies or agents participating in multiple programs and/or any NIMC offices nationwide.



**BOOSTING MSMEs' DIGITAL SKILLS:**

At the closing ceremony of a 3-day training aimed to boost MSMEs' digital skills for business improvement, to "Accelerate diversification through industrialisation, digitisation, creative arts, manufacturing and innovation" organised by NITDA in Katsina State.

## Nigeria can develop AI and power sector together, says Tijani

NAAOMI EMOVON WITH AGENCY REPORTS

Osun Tijani, Nigeria's Minister of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy, says the country does not need to neglect innovations in the Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other sectors until the power sector is stabilised.

Tijani is of the view that both sectors can progress side by side.

Following the government's announcement that a National Artificial Intelligence Strategy Workshop which will be held in Abuja will be taking place from April 15th to 18th 2024, it was met with mixed reactions from Nigerians, especially those who believe that the government should focus more on enhancing

the power sector than AI.

In an interview with Arise News on Friday, Tijani said: "There is no good thinking person that will suggest that it is impossible for you to prioritise Artificial Intelligence, for you to prioritise media, for you to prioritise education until you fix power. I don't think that's done anywhere in the world."

The digital economy minister, responding to those who are of the view that the country should focus more on the Power sector in order to be able to fully implement the use of AI, said, "I think it's understandable. Every Nigerian would like to see improvement in every aspect of our society which is absolutely understandable."

"But in the same spirit, if

you look in my response to that question, not only do we need to justify that we can actually do AI whilst we are also trying to ensure we improve on power situation in the country, the reality is also, historically if we wanted to wait until we fix AI, there won't be a business like ARISE."

He added: "We require energy to do so many things. Can the current situation be better? Yes. Is the government doing hard work to get this done or not? Absolutely yes. But at the same time, we can't say we will not continue to develop different aspects of our society until one particular thing is fixed. If that's the case, there won't be connectivity today, there won't be a telecommunications sector which relies heavily on power to be able

to power base stations and all the activities that people enjoy."

He further explained that the full implementation and understanding of AI could help the government to build other sectors, saying, "As we continue to improve on this aspect, we have to ensure that we're not leaving the difficult things that we must also do undone."

"I think we have to do these things side-by-side. And Artificial Intelligence, more than anything, actually offers that opportunity for us to start to imagine how we can actually develop on those areas where productivity level is quite low because it gives us the data set that we can use to optimise the way we are allocating our resources in those areas of our sectors."

## Edo boosts telemedicine, healthcare delivery with fibre optic infrastructure

NAAOMI EMOVON

The Edo State Head of Service, Dr. Anthony Okunbowa, says the spread of fibre optic internet infrastructure across the 18 local government areas of the state will improve primary healthcare and telemedicine.

In his remarks during telemedicine workshop held in Benin City, with the theme, "Delivering Value in Primary Health Care: The Role of Telemedicine, the Head of Service, said with fiber optic connection across the 18 Local Government areas in Edo State, primary healthcare centres can leverage access to the internet to improve delivery of quality healthcare.

He said, "Through telemedicine we can actually harness the power of technology to overcome the barriers that have plagued our primary healthcare system. With the advent of telecommunication networks, video conferences, mobile applications, medical advice, consultations, diagnosis can be delivered remotely, reaching

those in need, regardless of the geographical limitations.

"The novel initiative is made possible by his Excellency with the connection of fiber optics across the 18 Local Government areas in Edo State. This not only saves time and resources but also ensures quality healthcare services are readily available even in the most remote areas."

For his part, the Commissioner for Health, Dr. Samuel Alli, said the Governor Godwin Obaseki-led administration has continued to reposition primary healthcare centers through strategic interventions.

He noted: "In the last two years, we have renovated over 50 facilities and we have also deployed personnel there with the goal that at least there should be one primary healthcare centre functional per ward. We have a template; we have the design."

"We do not want to begin to view primary healthcare centres as clinics for poor people and for rural dwellers. It is for everyone who needs the services."

## NITDA issues QR code scam alert

UYIOSA ISAAC

Nigeria's National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) has issued an alert to the public to be cautious when scanning QR codes, stating that it has observed a rise in fraudulent activities carried out by scammers.

An advisory posted by NITDA on its official X account warns of

a rising trend of malicious actors exploiting QR codes for various fraudulent schemes, including phishing scams, payment fraud, data theft, and identity theft.

QR codes, commonly recognised as machine-readable codes composed of black and white squares, are typically used for storing Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) or other information accessible by smartphone cameras.

The advisory serves as a reminder for users to remain vigilant and implement necessary precautions before scanning QR codes to mitigate the risk of falling victim to cyber scams.

Part of the advisory noted, "QR codes, while fast and convenient for quick access to information and actions, have unfortunately become a tool exploited by scammers for fraudulent ac-

tivities. These activities take various forms and are designed to lure unsuspecting users into scanning them.

"The implications of these codes on users vary, depending on the approach taken by the Scammer Impact QR codes, which can be exploited by malicious actors to deceive unsuspecting users and perpetrate fraudulent activities."



# 120 researchers to brainstorm on framework for AI adoption in Nigeria

UYIOSA ISAAC

The Federal Government says it is bringing together 120 Nigerian researchers and startups, including other stakeholders in the Artificial Intelligence (AI) space to develop a concept for AI adoption in the country.

Bosun Tijani, Minister of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy, said the experts would come up with the concept at the National Artificial Intelligence Strategy Workshop scheduled to hold from April 15th to 18th, 2024 in Abuja.

Tijani said the resulting strategy from the session would help government to deliver the priorities and implementation approach towards improving lives and growing the nation's economy through the application of AI.

He said coming up with a strategy framework would be a significant step in the country's

AI journey. He further highlighted his efforts to harness the benefits of AI for national development since he came into office last year:

"One of the earliest initiatives from the start of my term in office was to properly define and outline a comprehensive Artificial Intelligence Strategy for Nigeria.

"The need to coordinate and harness the power of AI for national development is a critical element in our journey toward the use of technology to accelerate productivity in our country.

"AI offers us the opportunity to leverage technology to solve some of our most complex and urgent challenges in education, agriculture, healthcare and so much more.

"Recognising the incredible depth of talent of Nigerian descent scattered all over the world working in the field of AI, we very quickly looked to identify

some of these leading researchers and started to engage them in a number of our initiatives.

"From the National Artificial Intelligence Research Scheme (NAIRS) to the Fourth Industrial Revolution Technology Application (4IRTA) project, we have worked with these talented academics and entrepreneurs towards the mainstreaming of the application of AI in our everyday lives."

Having laid the foundation through other initiatives highlighted, Tijani said the next phase for the country is to have a strategy framework in place.

"As a next phase of these collaborations, I am pleased to confirm that we will be hosting the National Artificial Intelligence Strategy Workshop from April 15th to 18th, 2024 in Abuja.

"The workshop will develop a co-created framework for a multi-year strategy and action plan for the research, application, and

adoption of AI in Nigeria.

"Participants at the workshop will include 120 of Nigeria's leading researchers and startups in AI. We are also grateful for the support from several other partner organisations who will be joining us in Abuja.

"It is my belief that the resulting strategy will help us deliver the priorities and implementation approach towards improving lives and growing our economy through the application of AI," the Minister stated.

In December last year, the Minister announced that the Ministry in its bid to make Nigeria a global leader in Artificial Intelligence, had identified over 6,000 AI researchers who are of Nigerian descent and based in several parts of the world.

According to him, these researchers will be instrumental to the country's new drive to deploy AI in every sector of the economy and for job creation.

## Glo subscriber wins N12m with N50 in Glo-WinWise

A lucky Glo subscriber, Ogunyankinnu Damilare has won twelve million naira with a paltry N50 in the Glo-WinWise lottery games promoted by Whispa Konnect in collaboration with telecommunications company, Globacom.

Management of Whispa Konnect led by the Chief Executive Officer, Igbene Oritsetimeyin presented the lucky winner with a Twelve Million Naira cheque at a mini ceremony in Lagos to affirm the credibility of the Glo-WinWise lottery games.

According to Igbene, Whispa Konnect is redeeming its statutory pledge and commitment of rewarding players accordingly with their deserved prizes without compromise.

"Today, we are presenting a Twelve Million Naira cheque to our Glo-WinWise jackpot winner, Mr. Ogunyankinnu Damilare as part of our commitment to upholding trust and transparency. The Glo/MTN-WinWise games are simple to play by dialing \*20144# with a huge cash and gifts rewards assured," Igbene stated.

He further said, "currently, there are over 90,000 players on the platform of the Glo/MTN-WinWise games who have continuously won cash and great prizes.

For his part, Damilare thanked Whispa Konnect, operators of Glo-WinWise lottery games for making it hassle-free in playing and redeeming prizes won without challenges.

He said, "I sincerely didn't believe that I have won Twelve Million Naira in just a few minutes of playing and in less than three days I have been notified to pick-up my winning cheque. It is incredible."

## FG partners US firm on cloud technology

The Federal Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation has inked an agreement with Afri-Tech United, a tech consulting firm based in the United States.

The collaboration aims to spearhead a transformative cloud migration initiative within the country.

The lead partner at Afri-Tech United and a Nigerian IT expert based in the US, Jacob Uwah, revealed this partnership in a statement.

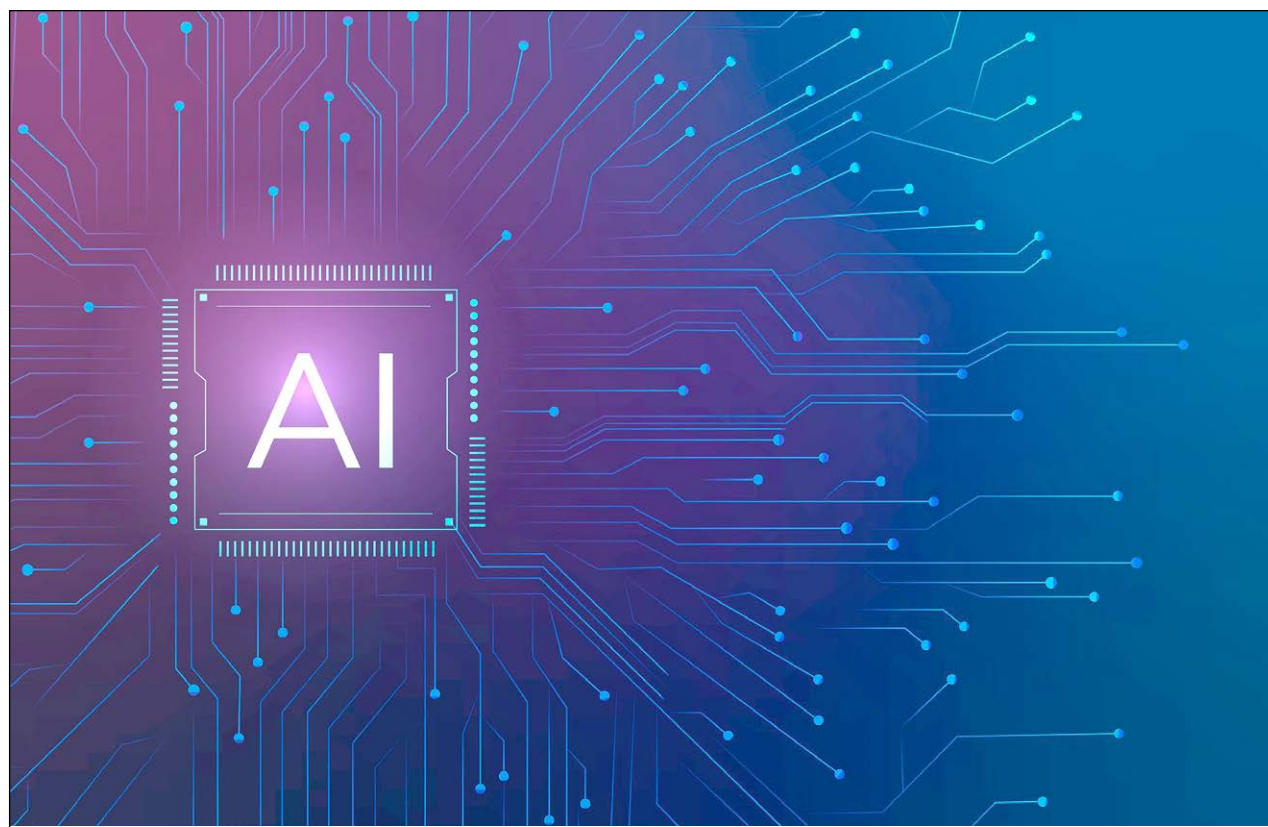
He highlighted that the strategic alliance was geared towards the development of a Master Cloud Platform, poised to propel

Nigeria into a realm of heightened cyber sophistication and global technological leadership.

Uwah said that the Minister of Science, Technology, and Innovation, Uche Nnaji, dedicated several months to deliberating the optimal approach for Nigeria's groundbreaking technological transformation with the Afri-Tech United team.

He noted that the partnership led to the design of the framework for the Master Cloud Platform.

"This project is a testament to the power of collaboration, paving the way for a new era of cyber excellence," he said.



## Adenia secures \$470m for fintech investment

Adenia Partners Ltd., a private equity firm specialising in investments across Africa has announced the closing of its latest fund, Adenia Africa Fund, with a total capital raise of \$470m.

Adenia says the funding will be strategically deployed in high-growth sectors such as fintech, telecommunications, healthcare, and others, supporting innovative businesses that are poised to make a significant impact in their respective markets.

This fund represents Adenia's largest Africa-focused fund to date, with new investors including Norfund AS, the US International Development Finance Corp., and Canada's Findev Inc., according to the company.

The Adenia fund has received backing from Africa's largest fund manager, the Public Investment Corp. Ltd., which manages approximately 2.6 trillion rand (\$138bn) in South African government-employee pension assets, as well as from pension funds in Ghana and Kenya.

The Managing Director of Adenia, Alexis Caude, noted that this marks the firm's fifth fund, with an increased average equity check size of about \$40m for its investment targets.

Speaking on the Fund's focus and the condition for the investment, Caude said, "In time, we have moved to the larger economies on the continent, where we see businesses that fit the criteria that we want

for our transactions.

"We only make investments in businesses where we can take a controlling stake—between 51 per cent to 100 per cent – so that we can be in the driver's seat."

"Africa-focused private equity managers need to provide investors with returns and exit options. Adenia seeks net returns of at least 15 per cent in hard currency and takes a controlling stake in businesses to be able to dictate exit timing.

"The environment is not easy in Africa with really high interest rates. Making returns is difficult, with the currencies depreciating. Exits are complicated in Africa, which is why we believe in taking a controlling stake in businesses—this makes

it easier to attract strategic investors," Caude noted.

With two decades of experience operating on the continent, Adenia faces competition from established players such as Alterra Capital Partners Ltd., which emerged from Carlyle Group Inc., and Helios Investment Partners LLP.

Currently, Adenia is actively involved in a carve-out deal with Air Liquide SA, encompassing 12 African operations. Additionally, the firm has made investments in South Africa and has expanded its presence by inaugurating an office in Lagos, Nigeria.

"We have expanded our presence to Nigeria; while it's a challenging place, it's a large economy," Caude said.

### CLASSIFIED

#### EDOSOMWAN

I, formerly known and addressed as **EDOSOMWAN DESMOND** now wish to be known and addressed as **EDOSOMWAN MIRACLE**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

#### UFUOMA

That I wish to remove **UNURHORO** from my names **RITA UFUOMA UNURHORO-OKOSI**. Henceforth, I wish to be known and addressed as **RITA UFUOMA OKOSI**. **RITA** (first name), **UFUOMA** (middle) and **OKOSI** (surname). All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities should take note.

#### ISIBOR

I, formerly known and addressed as **ERHABOR ISIBOR STEPHEN** now wish to be known and addressed as **IRABOR ISIBOR**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

#### ONYEMA

That my name was wrongly captured on my **BANK ACCOUNT** as **ONYEMA .V. NNEKA** instead of **ONYEMA VALENTINA NNEKA**. My correct and complete name is **ONYEMA VALENTINA NNEKA**. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

#### IYOH

That I wish to add **OMORUYI** to my names **IYOH PATIENCE**. Henceforth, I wish to be known and addressed as **IYOH OMORUYI PATIENCE**. **IYOH OMORUYI** is my surname, **PATIENCE** is my first name. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities should take note.

#### CYNTHIA

I, formerly known and addressed as **CYNTHIA OGBEIDE-IHAMA** now wish to be known and addressed as **CYNTHIA INNOCENT**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

#### OMOSIGHO

I, formerly known and addressed as **OLADELE OMOSIGHO EMMANUEL** now wish to be known and addressed as **OLADELE OMOSIGHO OGUNGBE**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

#### OKPALAIKE

That my name was wrongly captured on my BVN as **OKPALAIKE CHIDI MARTINS** instead of **OKPALAIKE CHIDIEBERE MARTINS**. My full and correct name is **OKPALAIKE CHIDIEBERE MARTINS**. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

#### OGHASEGBE

I, formerly known and addressed as **MISS UWAGUE OGHASEGBE** now wish to be known and addressed as **MRS OGHASEGBE UGONO**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.

#### OSASUMWEN

I, formerly known and addressed as **EWIKA OSASUMWEN JOE** now wish to be known and addressed as **UWAGBOE OSASUMWEN JOE**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks and the general public should take note.



# CampusGist

## NID-SUG visits, unveils union's project to Edo Chief of Staff

GOODLUCK NWABOR

The executives of the Niger Delta Students' Union Government led by the National President, Comr. Scott Ogunseri, on Wednesday, 3rd April 2024 paid a

courtesy visit to the Chief of Staff to Edo State Governor, Osaigbovo Iyoha.

During the visit, the National President unveiled to the Chief of Staff the achievements recorded since his assumption of office as the 9th President of

the Union five months ago.

He also applauded the Chief of Staff, whom he described as a strong pillar of support during the recent NID-SUG national leadership elections, while also reaffirming his commitment to fos-

tering a favourable relationship between the students and their leaders in Edo State.

"The Niger Delta is the fourth largest region in the country Nigeria, which from time immemorial has been blessed with human and natural resour-

ces by the universe. In a bid to foster development, peace and cordial relationship in the region, the leadership of NID-SUG thought it best to bridge the gap between the students in Niger Delta and their leaders," said Comr. Ogunseri.

"Since the inception of my administration, we've trained scores of students in Bayelsa and Cross River States in skills like driving, baking, etc, and also executed series of seminars in Edo, Cross River, Rivers, Bayelsa, etc, on leadership and politics. Now, it is time to bring home what we have done in other states. We have made plans to execute a free driving school training for all indigenes studying in different institutions in Edo State, which would encourage skills acquisition and reduce the level of crime and social vices in the country due to poverty and unemployment," he said.

The National President further pleaded with the Edo State Government led by Governor Godwin Obaseki to partner with the union to facilitate the flow of projects for the Niger Delta students.

"We are making plans to visit the office of the governor soon,

but we still beg you, my Chief, to help us pass the message to the governor that we need partnership from his office so as to enhance the free flow of our projects from the students.

"Over 600 undergraduates have equally applied for this initiative, and we need supports from the Edo State Government, so as to put subscribe for more vehicles that could cater for these plans," Ogunseri stated.

In his response, the Chief of Staff commended Ogunseri and his entourage for their continuous efforts in contributing to the development of the Niger Delta region and the nation at large.

"The youths of this nation should strive by all means to take back their country through peaceful political participation and other methods of national engagement," Iyoha said.

"The illiterates of this 21st century are not men who cannot read or write, but those who have only one skill. This is an era where people multitask to earn a living, and not causing disorder in the society," he said.

He assured the students that the message they sent to the governor would surely get to him.



### A COURTESY VISIT:

Chief of Staff to Edo State Governor, Osaigbovo Iyoha (3rd right); NID-SUG National President, Scott Ogunseri (2nd right), and other executives of NID-SUG, during a courtesy visit to the Chief of Staff in his office in Benin.

## UNILAG VC receives London-Lagos solo driver, Pelumi Nubi

The Vice-Chancellor, University of Lagos, Akoka, Prof. Folasade Ogunsola, on Sunday received the London-Lagos solo driver, Pelumi Nubi, on the campus.

Nubi, a travel content creator, embarked on her solo trip in a car on January 30, 2024 and arrived at the Nigeria-Benin Republic border on Sunday morning.

28-year-old Nubi's father, Timothy Nubi, is a Professor in the Department of Estate Management, UNILAG, and the Founder/National Coordinator, Ideal Habitat Initiative.

Ogunsola described Nubi's feat as the resilience of an average Nigerian.

"I welcome everyone and Pelumi the woman with the indomitable spirit. For Pelumi to live London and spend hours on the road, she went through 17 countries. She embodies the Nigerian spirit. She is the second person to do it," Ogunsola at the reception in UNILAG.

"Nigerians are courageous. She was not afraid of racism and things that might be on the way. I want all of us here to know that there is nothing you cannot do. All that is stopping you is in your mind.

"Queen Amina of Zaria took to war and conquered, Captain Chinyere Kalu was the first female pilot, among others. Pelumi has shown us that when the going gets tough, the tough gets going. Pelumi, we are proud of you!" she said.

## #UNIBEN MACSA Dinner '24: A night with potful of activities

CHIDINMA KALU AND  
PRAISE EMUHOWO

Stevik Event Centre in Benin City came alive recently as the graduating class of 2023 in Mass Communication Students' Association (MACSA) hosted a dinner tagged "El Casino".

The well-attended dinner kick-started with the national anthem and address of welcome by the outgoing MACSA President, Comr. Ogunniyi Oluwarotimi Paul. The Presidential Merit Award and Certificate of Awards cum Service followed, where those who had served the association diligently were awarded by the President.

The crowning moment of the night came with the highly anticipated Mr. and Miss MACSA Beauty Pageantry. The event introduced a new category, Mr and Miss Photogenic, which was bagged by contestants 2 and 3, Emmanuel Godwin Norman and Godwin God'sgift. The crowd erupted in cheers as contestant 2, known by his stage name D'Authority, won the crown of Mr MACSA, while contestant 8, Chidiebere Udokwu, was crowned Miss MACSA.

Among the prizes awarded to the winners were a cash prize of N40,000, luxurious bed spreads and exquisite body sprays, adding to the excitement of the evening.

The event continued into the night with a lively after-party, where guests danced and celebrated until the early hours of the day, marking the UNIBEN MACSA Dinner '24 as a success filled with glitz, glamour and unforgettable memories.

The Director of Socials, MACSA UNIBEN, Comr. Ijale Isaac Marvellous, popularly known by his pen name Chase Tunner, in a cross section with MACSA Ekehuan Watch Reporters, disclosed his feelings over the smooth flow of the event till the end.

"Everyone had fun and was happy about the event. My expectations were met more than I expected," he said.

He equally revealed the financial, security and other challenges encountered while planning for the event. He advised his successors to ensure they embrace transparency and be ready to meet the expectations of the students while in office.

Winner of Mr MACSA Pageant, Emmanuel Godwin Norman, appreciated his supporters and the association for crowning him Mr MACSA 2024. He pledged his readiness to encourage and inspire whoever comes to him for a piece of advice towards achieving whatever they aim at.

Also expressing her feelings on winning the highly coveted Miss MACSA '24, Chidiebere Udokwu said, "I feel quite elated because it was not an easy race till the end. I know on countless occasions I was discouraged, but with the encouragement I got from

those around me, I felt motivated and I did it till the end. I feel really good and grateful for the support from my fans. I want to say a very big thank you for helping me bring the crown home," she said.

A 200 level student, Aifuwa Eshoe, said she was satisfied with how the event went.

"The dinner night was a splendid one, although they did not start on time. To me, everything went well," she said.



NEWLY CROWNED MR AND MISS MACSA '24



# Education

● Primary Education ● Secondary Education ● Tertiary Education

## Green Park Academy Montessori visits *The Nigerian Observer* on excursion

OMI OMAGE

In line with its vision to become a centre for quality education directed at preparing future leaders in government, industry, academics and the professions, the management of Green Park Academy, Benin City, owned by Mr Overy K. Cletus (HOS), on Thursday, March 28, 2024 took the Pre-Montessori to Basic 5 pupils of the school on an excursion to *The Nigerian Observer* on Airport Road, Benin City, Edo State capital.

The excursion was undertaken to expose the pupils to the processes of newspaper production.

The pupils were accompanied by some staff members of the school, including Mrs Otoikhila Mercy, Mrs Jennifer Donnis, Mrs Blessing Omosuyi, and Mrs Ese Ufuoma.

The pupils and staff were warmly received by the Managing Editor/Ag. Managing Director of *The Nigerian Observer*, Mr. Osa Victor Obayagbona, who gave the pupils a lecture on the processes of newspaper production, from news idea generation to the time the newspaper hits the newsstands.

Mr. Obayagbona said *The Nigerian Observer* stands for truth and aims to educate, entertain, and disseminate information. He said the newspaper believes in balanced reportage of news, both local and international, and covers several beats such as politics, education, business and economy, lifestyle, aviation, health and environment, entertainment, religion, sports, among others.

The Ag. Managing Director explained to the pupils that to be a journalist, studying Mass Communication is a great advantage. However, those who did not study Mass Communication in the university can still make good journalists if they have the passion, but they have to put their heads down to learn the rudiments of the profession.

The pupils were given access to see the different sections of *The Nigerian Observer*, including the newsroom, which harbours both journalists and graphics designers/page planners, the printing presses, and other sections.

In the newsroom, Mr. Obayagbona taught the pupils how news is processed, from when journalists submit the reports to the last stage of production, which is

printing and collation.

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, the children 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.

The pre-press is where the process of assembling and editing a newspaper, magazine,

journal, or book, etc take place, while the post-press is where the main printing is done. The plates prepared at the pre-press are exported to the machine for print. This is also where all print jobs are taken for cutting, collating, packaging, folding, trimming, etc.

The children saw the ultra-modern x74 Speed Mas-

ter printing machine, which is used for printing calendars, brochures, magazines, posters, newsletters, souvenirs, pamphlets, books, memo pads, and more. They were also taught 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.



**EXCURSION:**

Pupils and staff of Green Park Academy Montessori, Benin City, during an excursion to *The Nigerian Observer* Newspaper, Airport Road, Benin City, on Thursday, March 28, 2024.

## OrphanHub empowers orphans, less privileged youths in Edo with digital skills

VICTORY OKONJO

In a significant stride towards empowering the orphaned and less privileged youths of Edo State, the OrphanHub training programme was launched on Tuesday, April 2nd, 2024.

The event, which held at the Edo State Innovative Hub, marked the beginning of a three-week journey designed to impart essential digital skills to orphans and underprivileged youths within the community.

The brainchild of a National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) member, Emmanuel Nnaemeka Vitus, as part of his personal Community Development Service (CDS) programme, OrphanHub aims to equip participants with the digital prowess necessary for thriving in contemporary Nigerian society. Vitus, inspired by a childhood friend's struggles, envisions a future where no child is left to the mercy of the streets due to a lack of support and opportunities.

"This idea came to me two years ago while I was in the university," Vitus recalls. "I still remember one of my childhood friends who is an orphan. His parents died when he was still

very young. I remember this guy went through a lot, and because he had no one to support him, he started to follow the wrong crowd. I don't want other children to suffer the same fate as my friend, because if my friend had an opportunity like this, he wouldn't be out in the streets without anything."

The curriculum is comprehensive, covering social media management, freelancing, digital marketing, video editing,

photography, videography, among other skills. These are the tools that Emmanuel Bright, another NYSC member and volunteer, believes are crucial for the youth to contribute positively to society.

"The world is growing in terms of digital and technological advancements, and having this privilege as an orphan to learn these important skills is very good because it will help them develop themselves and

their abilities in a way that will profit the society," says Bright.

The excitement among the beneficiaries is palpable.

"I'm really, really excited. It's not every day that we get this kind of opportunity," says one participant, reflecting the general sentiment.

Another adds, "Most of the things we want to do here, I don't know anything about it, so I can't say much, but I'm expecting to learn new things."



**ORPHANS RECEIVE DIGITAL SKILLS:**

A cross-section of orphans receiving a lecture from the convener, OrphanHub, Emmanuel Nnaemeka Vitus, at the Edo Innovative Hub, Benin City.

## EDO State University Uzairue promotes 19 academic staff to professorial cadre

OMI OMAGE

The Management of Edo State University Uzairue has announced the promotion of 19 academic staff members of the university to the rank of Professors and Associate Professors.

The Vice Chancellor, Engr. Prof. Emmanuel Aluyor, who made this known during the senate meeting held recently at the University Senate Chamber on behalf of the Governing Council, said the approval of the promotions came after the various academic staff scaled through the external assessment carried out by the University.

A breakdown shows that the academic staff promoted to Professorial cadre include Dr. Vincent Kenechi Abanihi, Department of Electrical/Electronic Engineering (promoted posthumously), Dr. Isreal Uzuazor Siloko, Department of Mathematics, Dr. Moses Anthony Ugbenyen, Department of Biochemistry, Dr. Samuel Adinoyi Seriki, Department of Physiology, and Dr. Abayomi Joshua Jegede, Department of Comput-

er Science.

Those promoted to Associate Professors are Dr. Joshua Ojo Nehinbe, Department of Computer Science, Engr. Dr. Henry Eriakoude Amhenrior, Department of Electrical/Electronic Engineering, Dr. Simon Ejokema Imoisi, Department of Public and International Law, Dr. Braimoh Abdullahi Ikharo, Department of Computer Engineering, Dr. Fredrick Ogbeide, Department of Political Science, Dr. Ehis Taiwo Omoluabi, Department of Business Administration, Dr. Oseremen Ebhote, Department of Business Administration, Dr. Wilfred O. Olley, Department of Mass Communication, Rev. Fr. Dr. Peter Egielewa, Department of Mass Communication, Dr. Kenneth Kennedy Adama, Department of Chemical Engineering, Dr. Daniel Aliu, Department of Computer Engineering, Dr. (Mrs.) Marian Onwude Agbugui, Department of Biological Sciences, Dr. Sunday Eghosare Omosuwa, Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology, and Dr. Friday Emeakpor Ogbetere, Department of Medicine & Surgery.



# Interview

## Poor parenting is a major challenge in today's educational space –Cradle Schools Proprietress

*Pastor Mrs. Josephine Omoikhe Atibi-Brown is proprietress of the British Council and Microsoft-approved Cradle Group of Primary and Secondary Montessori Schools in Benin City, the Edo State capital. In this interview with The Nigerian Observer's EDWARD OSEGHE, BILL OKONEDO and JUSTICE TOBORE, Pastor Atibi-Brown affirms that her schools emphasise morality, sciences, life skills, and citizenship, as well as engage the parents in child-raising skills. Excerpts:*

**What's your background and how did you conceive the model and framework for a school of such academic and moral quality with testimonies flying here and there?**

Thank you very much. I was born in 1974, 4th of July, at Igarra General Hospital, in Akoko Edo. My grandparent, my grandma was a church leader in the Anglican Church. I was told that when my grandmother saw me for the first time, she said I was so beautiful, she said this is the child I have been waiting for and she named me Omoikhe.

As I was growing up, when I was about six years old, there was a corper (National Youth Service Corps member) who was assigned to my village. My mum was a teacher, my dad was working in the Ministry of Works. My dad was a draughtsman. My parents were very open to youth corps, welcoming, assisting, and accommodating them. When this corper came to serve, she became like a family friend in our home. She came from Lagos and when she finished her youth service, she needed to go back. She said she would like to go back with a child from here. My uncle had to approve for me to go, and upon making inquiries, my uncle found out that the corper's father and himself had been classmates in Oyo College, which made it easy. That's how I went to Lagos. I started staying with my auntie - the youth corper - I call her my auntie till today. I was six years old and I stayed with her for eleven years. I had my primary and secondary education in Lagos. My auntie's elder sister's husband was a director of medical services in the Railways in Lagos. We used to go to her house and it was a very beautiful place. They had horses, they had so many things that were interesting to children. I was inspired and I used to say to myself that when I grew up, I would like to be like that. Seeing all those beautiful things growing up, I developed an industrious and aspirational mindset. My first exposure to work ethics and entrepreneurship came from my grandma.

Let me go back a little. It was when my mum had us that she started going to school, that's higher school. She went to this school in Abudu, Teacher's Training College, Abudu here in Edo State. Most of the time when she was going to school, she would take us to stay with her mum, that's my grandma. My grandma used to make 'oja', that strip of woven cloth with which women tie their babies to their backs. That was her trade. She would spin the yarn and weave the cloth. Soon, I was helping her spin the yarn of wool and before long, I also learnt to weave the cloth and I was still just a little child. At that early age, I was engaged in a craft and already earning my own little money from weaving 'oja' under the direction of my grandma.

When I moved to Lagos, this mindset of entrepreneurship came in handy. In Lagos, during holidays, I would just package the piles of old newspapers that were taking space in the house and sell them to traders. I was making money.

With my new family, my auntie in Lagos, we used to go to Ikoyi Club. It was a nice and inspir-



● PASTOR OMOIKHE  
ATIBI-BROWN

**“We teach them the word of God. Subjects we teach in this school include character building, honesty, selflessness, and empathy, because if you look at our world today, people don't have empathy anymore, it's all about me and myself. We teach how to have empathy and feelings for others. Integrity is very important and those are some of the things that we teach these children.”**

ing place. I started telling myself, I can do this, I can be excellent, the only thing I needed to do was to be very studious, face my studies, and ensure I came out remarkably well. That's how I wrote my WAEC once and passed. My aunt's immediate elder sister was a chartered accountant working with KPMG. That aroused my interest that I would like to be an accountant.

I first went to Auchi Polytechnic. I did Accountancy and then I changed to the university. In the university, I did Accounting and Finance. I went to Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. I graduated in 1999. Immediately I went for youth service but I got married that year. I was still serving when I got married. So immediately I finished. I had started writing my ICAN exams but I didn't finish. That's how I started this school.

Growing up, my parents and my grandparents were very religious people. My grandmother was a church leader. We grew up attending church, the Anglican Church. And there has always been this desire in my heart that I want to live a righteous life and want to live for God. I had all these thoughts about how I could fulfill my purpose, why am I here in the world? In secondary school, I started reading Christian religious books. From there, I learnt that God sent people to this world for a purpose. Before I left secondary school, I became born again. That is how I entered into the high institution. I was about 17 years old when I joined Believers Loveworld, aka Christ Embassy. That's how the story started. So, I got married knowing fully well that I didn't like to be idle. I enrolled for my ICAN, and I enrolled for my master's. On getting married, I suspended further academic pursuits to raise a family.

One day, I think after I had had my two daughters, I travelled to the UK for a holiday and I attended our church back in London, Christ Embassy Croydon. The pastor then said I should preach. Then we were already pastoring a church in Christ Embassy, my husband and I. I preached on giving. Why is it very important for someone to give? That day, when I slept, I heard a voice say, 'You taught my people the right thing', and then showed me a very vast field. Like when you have a farm, it can be so green when it's raining. Someone came up from the farm and handed me an envelope in the dream and said the business you wanted to do, go and do it. When I woke up, I couldn't comprehend it. But in that dream, I heard a voice telling me, you taught my people the right thing. I'm going to bless you.

When I came back from the UK, my husband came to pick us up from Lagos. We were driving back to Benin and he said, you have been saying you want to do business, I will support you. It was that dream. That's how I started a daycare. Then I said I wanted to do something about children. I just want to do something. I couldn't comprehend it. I said, but I just want to do something.

I was brought up with moral training. I found out that if you give children the right environment, they can strive, they can do well. I went to meet our pastor, Pastor Joy Amenkhiena about my interest in working with children and she



## Interview

further encouraged me to do a daycare. I went around Benin City, at least within GRA, to see the kind of daycares they already had. Then I told myself, I'm going to do something different.

That's how we got here. I had a lot of support from my husband. That's how we started on September 10, 2006. It was a small daycare, one child came, then another one came and before I knew it, we were ten. It was just a daycare.

One day, a friend of mine came and said, you can do a school. But I didn't study education. I studied to become an accountant. Where would I start from? I don't like to do anything sub-standard. Then we started here in 2006. This was now 2008. I didn't have a laptop, all those things were just coming in gradually. My husband had a laptop, but I only had access to it on Sundays. Then I would go online. I was checking how to train children and set up a school. In the process, I came across a site where they said they could do Montessori training online. You get a diploma and then come to India for training, like an internship. They said to register would cost \$300. I said, okay, let me try. From the small money I had been able to gather, I converted to \$300. I then transferred the money to them. When I transferred the money, I didn't hear from them again.

My husband said he hoped it wasn't Internet fraud. I slept. When I slept, I had a dream that the people would call me the following day. That was exactly what happened in real life. The next day they sent me an email saying that I could now start the programme and later go to Dubai for the internship. That was how I started my Montessori journey.

I started the programme, and went for practicals in India, Mumbai. I went to Dubai. That was 2008. That's how I got my diploma in Montessori Education and I was able to know what to do. That's how we started. Montessori is an education philosophy and practice that fosters rigorous, self-motivated growth for children and adolescents in all areas of their development, to nurture each child's natural desire for knowledge, understanding, and respect.

When it comes to excellence, this story will not be complete without the man of God, Pastor Chris Oyakhilome. First and foremost, what propelled me to start the school was the teaching of industry and excellence from Pastor Chris. He would always say, 'Look for a human need and meet it, and be the best at it'.

I started asking myself, what is that human need in Benin? Growing up in Lagos, my aunt's children went to very good highbrow schools, and my auntie was living in Ebute Meta in the Railway Compound. Her kids went to St. Saviours, and then the other ones went to Corona. Those were the two top-of-the-range schools then in Lagos, Corona and St. Saviours. I realised there were no schools of such standard in Benin, and this was like a growing state. And you had a lot of young people who wanted their children to go to very standard schools. That spurred me on to set up a school of very good standards academically and morally. After the Montessori programme, God opened other doors for me to be able to meet companies where I could buy Montessori materials online from China. I started ordering materials and I kept on going for training.

I went for a PGD in Education at the National Teachers Institute. When I finished that, I did a Masters in Education, then I did a Masters in Counseling Psychology. One day we got a quit notice after ten years of being in this location. That was in 2016. The owner of this place had sold the property without telling us after we had been here for ten years. I prayed to God. Then it happened that my husband and I travelled to Lagos and on our way back, I got to know that the new owner of the property housing our school was on the same flight with us.

He was pointed out to me and I approached him, identified myself, and told him we would need a lease extension on the property and he agreed. Not long after, I was moved to go to him again and ask if he would sell the property to us. He laughed and surprisingly, he agreed. That was how we demolished the bungalow and started building the structure you see here today, little by little.

**So how many pupils do you have?**



**“**  
*I think parenting is a major challenge today in the educational space and people don't know it. Looking back on our time, and then parents of today, our parents were willing to make sacrifices to ensure you read your books, to instill Godly fear into you. There are certain things you can't do when you think about your parents.*

Right now, we have more than 500 pupils. Then we also have the secondary school at Limit Road. We started the secondary school in October 2020. Presently there are up to 200 students there, in just barely three years we started.

**What are the ethos, your distinguishing character, and guiding beliefs?**

Growing up, one thing my parents taught us from Sunday School was that a good name is better than silver and gold. Let me just digress a little, we have never advertised this school. The academic, moral, and civic standards that we impart and uphold reflect in our pupils and are transmitted from mouth to mouth by their parents and others who come into contact with them.

We teach them the word of God. Subjects we teach in this school include character building, honesty, selflessness, and empathy, because if you look at our world today, people don't have empathy anymore, it's all about me and myself. We teach how to have empathy and feelings for others. Integrity is very important and those are some of the things that we teach these children.

The academic excellence too. I told you I have never cheated. We do what we are supposed to do. We teach them and we found out that the children are coming out academically and morally sound and the parents can attest to that. I teach them to know they are royalty and that there is a way a royal person should behave.

We teach them to be excellent. Children model what they see more than what you teach them, so we ensure the school is neat, and when they come

into the environment, they cannot just comply and follow, seeing the environment.

**It's been said that children tend to have difficulties grasping the sciences. Do you key into the STEM system which emphasises science, technology, engineering, and mathematics?**

This is a STEM-based school. Every year we have a STEM fair where we look out for a need, like Pastor Chris will always say, look out for a need and meet it. We look for where we have gaps, and teach the children and then they will carry out experiments. In one of our previous STEM fairs, we had a particular class, that had an integrated project the school even won the Bournvita Award for that. We want to present it online, we have over five thousand students going in for that and we were among the best students that came in for that entry.

The school is not just locally or nationally approved, the school is approved by the British Council. This school is a British school. We are members of the British Council Board. You know for them to approve you, there are criteria you must meet, especially your sciences. They had to come from Lagos to inspect our school and they saw that we have a STEM curriculum. This year, two of our teachers were nominated to attend the Seplat events for science teachers and they did so well.

**What's your technology input?**

For us, in almost all the classes, we have smart boards. This school is accredited by Microsoft. We have labs, we have two ICT labs where the children are introduced to Microsoft. It's an academy within an academy. When students come in, teachers start teaching them Word and Excel and when they get to a certain level, they write Microsoft certification exams. There is a Microsoft exam students are writing this May for certification. We have the lab there, we have all the ICT teachers.

Then coming to the classroom, everything is online. The older students don't copy notes, we send it to them, we have a school portal, and the students have laptops and to come into the school the students must have a laptop. The notes are sent to the students during the holidays, assignments are done online and we do virtual classes also. The teacher can go online and put it on the video link and the children can go there and watch. The next phase of technology is that we want to have a virtual school where you can pay anywhere in the world and join our virtual class.

**What challenges have you faced and how have you surmounted them?**

We have some challenges. Let me first start by saying that I think parenting is a major challenge today in the educational space and people don't know it. Looking back on our time, and then parents of today, our parents were willing to make sacrifices to ensure you read your books, to instill Godly fear into you. There are certain things you can't do when you think about your parents.

**Do you find that in educating the children you also have to educate the parents?**

Exactly. We have found out that in educating the students, we have to educate the parents. What we do here in the school is that from time to time, this term alone, we have organised two seminars for the parents. Normally we organise seminars for the parents when we find out there's any gap. Now this time we found out that the girls are doing better than most of the boys academically. The management team sat down and said, what is the basic issue? And we found out that those house chores you give to girls make the girl-child responsible, and because of that, the same attitude is put into their academic work. We had to have a meeting to tell the parents to engage the boy-child.

**How do you recruit?**

I found out that most times people who didn't study education don't have a passion for it. I go for a lot of training, and my staff do the same. In our recruitment, first and foremost, we don't just recruit people. We normally will go for people who studied education because they would have got at least some training in education.



# SPORTS

## Investing in Nigerian coaching talent amid Super Eagles managerial puzzle

Nigerian football fans will not be quick to forget how Jose Pesiero-led Super Eagles found themselves in a grueling battle against Cote d'Ivoire on the night of February 11th, 2024.

For 24 of the 90-minute final, the Super Eagles maintained a lead until a revitalized Ivorian team surged, overpowering the Nigerian side and eventually equalizing.

It was a reminder of the consequences of overuse and tactical decisions, as Pesiero's reliance on the 3-4-3 formation left the team with tired legs in the crucial moments of the match.

This defeat prompted a widespread reflection among Nigerian football faithfuls, signaling a need for change at the helm.

Yet, it reignited the age-old debate that has lingered for



generations: should the Super Eagles opt for a foreign coach or a Nigerian coach?

The loss underscored the potential risks of foreign leadership. Pesiero, despite his experience and pedigree, faced criticism for his tactical choices and squad management.

The reliance on a plethora of star players in a demanding formation ultimately backfired, leaving the team vulnerable

and fatigued when it mattered the most.

For some, this served as a cautionary tale for trusting in foreign expertise without consideration for the unique dynamics of Nigerian football.

Only a few African teams evoke as much fervor and excitement as the Super Eagles of Nigeria. With a rich history steeped in both triumph and adversity, the Super Eagles

symbolize the hopes and aspirations of a nation passionate about the beautiful game.

That's why it can be one of the most sought-after jobs by coaches either foreign or Nigerian but this job comes with its never-ending complexities.

While exploring Nigeria's coaching dilemma, Score Nigeria noted the merits and demerits of foreign or indigenous coaching systems and the quest for a winning formula that will propel the Super Eagles to greater heights.

The allure of a foreign coach for the Super Eagles lies in their perceived expertise, tactical acumen, and exposure to diverse footballing cultures.

Coaches from abroad often bring with them a wealth of experience garnered from managing teams across various leagues and continents.

## Athletic Bilbao win Copa Del Rey, defeat Mallorca 4-2 on penalties

OKOEGUALE ADOLOR

Athletic Bilbao broke free from a streak of six consecutive Copa Del Rey final losses by clinching a thrilling penalty shootout victory over Mallorca, marking a triumphant end to their 40-year silverware drought.

Securing their 24th Copa Del Rey title, their first since 1984, Alex Berenguer's crucial penalty sealed a 4-2 win in the shootout in Seville. The sold-out La Cartuja stadium witnessed jubilant celebrations as Athletic put an end to their recent heartbreak in the competition, notably suffering two final defeats in 2021 within a short span of time.

Dani Rodriguez fired Mallorca - 15th in La Liga - ahead in the 21st minute after Athletic failed to clear from a corner.

Athletic, striving for a top-four La Liga placement under ex-Barcelona coach Ernesto Valverde, had an equalizer disallowed just before halftime

as Nico Williams' goal was deemed offside.

However, Oihan Sancet leveled the score shortly after the break, curling in a shot after Williams' recovered possession and set him up.

Neither team managed to secure a victory, with Williams unable to score in the second half of extra time, while Mallorca's Muriqi had his header saved by Athletic's goalkeeper Agirrezabala.

Mallorca, who competed in Spain's third tier, as recently as 2018, sought their second Copa Del Rey title after winning in 2003. In the shootout, Agirrezabala, 23, saved Morlanes' penalty, and Radonjic missed, while Athletic's first four penalty takers all scored.

Only Barcelona, with 31 titles, have won the trophy more times than Athletic, Spain's fourth-oldest club, which maintains a unique philosophy of exclusively fielding local players

## Taking stand against racism: Football's collective efforts for change

IKPONMWOSA ODIGIE

In the world of football, where unity and sportsmanship are celebrated, racism remains a persistent



stain that tarnishes the beauty of the game.

Despite efforts to eradicate it, racial discrimination continues to plague players both on and off the field, leaving scars

that extend beyond the confines of the pitch.

Raheem Sterling, renowned for his electrifying pace and skill, has become a prominent voice against racism in football. Recounting his experiences, Sterling has bravely shared instances of facing racial slurs and discriminatory treatment, shedding light on the pervasive nature of racism within the sport.

Inspite the adversity, Sterling remains steadfast in his commitment to combatting racism, leveraging his platform to advocate for change and empower others to speak out.

Mario Balotelli, known for his fiery talent and unapologetic demeanor, has been a target of racial abuse throughout his career. From enduring derogatory chants to facing online vitriol, Balotelli's journey has been marred by the venom of racism. Undeterred,

he has emerged as a vocal critic, denouncing discrimination and calling for greater accountability within the footballing community.

In a defiant act of resistance, Dani Alves famously responded to a banana being thrown onto the pitch by calmly picking it up and taking a bite before continuing to play. Alves' bold stance served as a powerful rebuke to the perpetrators of racism, sparking global dialogue and underscoring the need for collective action to combat discrimination.

Recently, Moussa Marega made headlines when he walked off the pitch in protest against racial abuse from opposing fans. Marega's bold gesture sent shockwaves through the footballing world, reigniting discussions about the prevalence of racism and the urgent need for systemic change.

## Doma United's Osayi Kingdom seals move to Nordic FC

Doma United goalkeeper, Kingdom Osayi has sealed a move to Swedish side, Nordic FC.

Osayi will team up with his new club in the summer

The youngster was in the stands during Doma United's clash with Plateau United at the

New Jos Stadium on Saturday.

Plateau United defeated the Savannah Tigers 4-0 in the game.

The goalie kept seven clean sheets in the first half of the season.

Osayi won the NPFL Player of the Month for November.



## Anthony Joshua predicts outcome of Tyson vs Paul exhibition fight

ADOLOR OKOEGUALE

Jake Paul has been backed by Anthony Joshua to beat Mike Tyson this summer

The influencer-turned-boxer is set to face his most significant challenge on July 20, as he squares off against the heavyweight legend at the AT&T Stadium in Texas. This monumental crossover fight will be broadcast live on Netflix.

Tyson will be 58 by the time the exhibition bout comes around, with Paul his junior by some 31 years.

Former two-time unified world heavyweight champion

Joshua predicts that the age difference will play a crucial role when the two men face off in Arlington. Additionally, he expressed his support for the controversial rise of influencer boxing.

"He [Tyson] is older now," the Briton said on his upcoming appearance on the Jonathan Ross Show, being broadcast on ITV1 on Saturday night. "I pray that he comes out healthy.

"I think Jake Paul will wins because of youth - that's the only thing... I personally think he is really good. I think the boxing hardcores, they don't like it because they think, 'Why are they disrespecting our sport?"

ADOLOR OKOEGUALE

In an intriguing turn of events, the Super Eagles of Nigeria are poised for an exciting encounter against neighboring Benin in the 2026 World Cup qualifiers. However, the match will not be held on Benin's home soil.

This was after CAF ruled that the stadiums in Benin are sub-standard which has led to this match being relocated to a neutral venue.

Benin Republic have now

## 2026 World Cup qualifiers: New venue announced for Super Eagles vs Benin showdown

been forced to go to Ivory Coast to play their first two matches as part of the qualifiers for the FIFA 2026 World Cup including that against the Super Eagles of Nigeria

The World Cup qualifier will be played between June 3 and 11.

Before the monumental clash with Benin, the Super Eagles must first navigate a

challenging encounter against South Africa on June 3. Currently trailing in third place in Group C, every moment on the field is pivotal for Nigeria as they strive to ascend to the top.

With Rwanda setting the pace, closely trailed by South Africa, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, and Benin, the competition is fierce. Yet, with Nigeria's sights firmly set on victory, the jour-

ney to World Cup glory promises thrills, spills, and nail-biting moments.

The upcoming match presents numerous intriguing aspects, including the presence of former Nigeria coach Ger not Rohr now at the helm for Benin. This factor alone adds an extra layer of intensity to what promises to be a fiercely contested encounter.