

FEBRUARY EDITION OF DEMOCRACY WATCH

NEWS TITBITS

Politics

Husband drags wife to court over election

A businessman based in Lagos Chief Nze Godwin Ebubeagu Ekenulo has dragged his wife Mrs. Ukachi Nonyerem Ekenulo, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the People Democratic Party (PDP) Imo state chapter, to court over his wife's intention to contest the House of Assembly election in Owerri West Constituency. In a motion filed at the Federal High Court in Owerri, Godwin pleaded with the court for an order of Interlocutory Injunction restraining his estranged wife, Mrs. Ukachi Ekenulo, from parading and presenting herself as the candidate for the Imo state House of Assembly pending the determination of the matter.

According to the Affidavit in support of the motion, the plaintiff, who himself is a chieftain of the PDP in the state stated that his picked the party's nomination without his consent while unlawfully changing her name to Amaechi Ukachi Nonye. He also prayed the court for an order disqualifying his wife from contesting the election into the office of a legislator in the Imo state House of Assembly for Owerri West either as PDP candidate or that of any other political party. While insisting that his 12 year old marriage was still subsisting since it had not been dissolved, hence his wife had no right to change her name to her maiden.

From May 29, I Cease to Be President

President Olusegun Obasanjo has reaffirmed his commitment to hand over power to a democratically elected successor come May 29 this year, saying from that day, he ceased being president of Nigeria. This is contrary to Vice Pre-sident Atiku Abubakar's claim that president Obasanjo may impose a state of emergency on the country with a view to truncating the general elections and extend his tenure in office beyond May 2007, the president on his part said the allegation is baseless. Obasanjo said this in his valedictory

speech at the 8th session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. According to Obasanjo, it is noteworthy that no fewer than sixteen African countries are undergoing the electoral process in 2007, adding, "we in Nigeria are on a steady course of strengthening, deepening and widening the democratic process with general elections coming up in less than three months. "What this means is that come May 29, 2007, the transition process would have brought about a change in administration and personalities at both the Federal and most of the State levels in Nigeria. The direct implication is that from that date, I cease to be President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria," he said. Obasanjo said he looks forward to his retirement when he will to be interacting with African leaders in his "private capacity as a chicken farmer".

Atiku, Ojukwu, others align against PDP

Vice President Atiku Abubakar and the presidential candidate of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Chief Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, recently reached an agreement to form a common front for the purpose of ensuring the sanctity of the 2007 elections. Also in the bid to ensure the success of the general elections is the presidential candidate of the African Democratic Congress (ADC), Professor Pat Utomi, and six political parties namely All Progressive Grand Alliance, Action Congress (AC), All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), Democratic People's Party (DPP), African Democratic Congress (ADC), DFPP among other national organisations. The decision was reached at a meeting convened in Enugu at the instance of Chief Ojukwu where the various groups deliberated on two major issues including "strategy for achieving free, fair and credible elections in 2007, and mechanisms cooperation."

The various parties and organisations at the meeting resolved not to rig elections and vowed to resist the rigging of the elections and reject the outcome of any rigged elections. They asked all law enforcement agencies to live up to their duties in the defence of the constitution and the will of the people. Among members of the various political parties and organisations in attendance were Professor Pat Utomi, Governors Bola Tinubu and Dame Virgy Etiaba of Lagos and Anambra States, Alhaji Lawal Kaita, Dr. Abubakar Rimi, Chief Bisi Akande, Chief Dubem Onyia, Dr. Chudi Nwike, Chief Chuma Nnoruka, Alhaji Yusuf Ali, S.A. Asemota (SAN), Chief Victor Umeh, Chief

Ralph Okey Nwosu, Dr. Okwesilieze Nwodo, Alhaji Sani Shinkafi, Lt. Gen. Jerry Useni, Ambassador Yahaya Kwande, Dr. Mike Ajogwu (SAN), Chief Tom Ikimi, Chief Nnia Nwodo, Dr. Okwy Nwodo and Dr Joe Nwodo.

Adamawa state governor runs from impeachment.

The whereabouts of the governor of Adamawa State, Governor Boni Haruna, is currently unknown just as speculations are rife that plans are in top gear to impeach him any moment from now by state legislators. However, one of the governor's aides said Governor Haruna left Nigeria for medical treatment abroad, while stating that he would return after satisfying his medical needs, although he could not specify when. A member of the House of Representatives from Adamawa State recently confirmed the fact that Boni Haruna's whereabouts is unknown for now.

This development is coming on the heels of intense move by members of the state legislators to ensure the impeachment of the governor. Information from the state has it that 18 out of the 26 members of the state House of Assembly had already agreed to impeach Governor Haruna, while the remaining eight members are currently in the custody of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

Atiku Tells FG to Try Him After Tenure

Vice President, Atiku Abubakar recently told the Federal Government that if it is serious about prosecuting him for abuse of office, it could still try him when he leaves office, as he was not scared of being tried. Atiku spoke through his counsel, Mr. Kola Awodein (SAN) at the Court of Appeal, in a suit where the Federal Government was seeking to challenge an earlier judgment of the Federal High Court that said it has no power to try the Vice President. Awodein told the court that the urgency which the government had attached to the matter was untoward as the case did not require accelerated hearing since Abubakar could still be tried after he leaves office as the Vice President, adding that the Code of Conduct Tribunal has the powers to try any public officer either in office and out of it. While citing the case of the former governor of Kogi state, Prince Abubakar Audu who is being arraigned before the same tribunal as an example.

Governor Bafarawa served impeachment notice.

A faction of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), Sokoto state House of Assembly has served Governor Attahiru Bafarawa notice of impeachment on an 11 count charge of gross misconduct. Deputy Speaker, Honourable Umar Mode Hiliya, said pursuant to section 188 of the 1999 constitution and in compliance with section 188 (2)(b), the Sokoto state Governor, Alhaji Attahiru Bafarawa, has been served with the notice as required by the constitution and that the governor has two weeks to respond to all the allegations against him after which the House will sit deliberate on the next step to follow.

Youths chase out LG boss from office

Recently, hundreds of protesting youths chased the caretaker chairman of the Chanchaga Local Government Area in Niger State, Alhaji Umar Ibrahim Kago out of the council's secretariat. The youth also followed the embattled chairman to his private residence and the state secretariat complex, raining abuses on him. Kago, who was elected chairman of the council area in 2003 was retained by Governor Abdulkadir Kure as caretaker committee chairman when all the 25 local government councils in the state were reconstituted recently.

The irate youths were irked by alleged non-performance of the chairman in the three years he was at the helms of affairs in the local government council. The youth were reported to have said that the seat of chairman was not a traditional title that should be held for life. The Chairman was said to have escaped through the help of the state policemen. Meanwhile other caretaker committee chairmen assumed duties at their respective councils on Monday.

North in confusion over Yar'Adua, Atiku, Buhari

The three geopolitical zones of Northern Nigeria are now in a dilemma over the choice of a presidential candidate for the April polls with the trio of Umar Yar'Adua, Atiku Abubakar and Muhammadu Buhari at the centre of the controversy. Findings revealed that from Kano to Borno and down to Kaduna, the candidature of the trio was a subject of controversy among the Northern political elite, with the situation compounded by the candidature of Governor Attahiru Bafarawa said to be holding sway in the Sultanate

states. Unlike during the 2003 general elections when Buhari took the lion share of the Northern votes the situation is quite different now as there are two others to contend with. Reports show that states in the Northwestern geopolitical zones the situation has changed with Yar'Adua, Abubakar and Bafarawa grabbing part of Buhari's previous base. While Buhari still holds on to Kano and Jigawa, it is gathered that Buhari's hold on the ancient city is being challenged by both Vice President Abubakar and Governor Yar'Adua.

In Katsina State, the popularity of Buhari is reported to be still high despite the Yar'Adua candidature, just as reports from the state showed that the duo of Atiku and Yar'Adua are making inroads.

For the North-East zone comprising Borno, Yobe, Bauchi, Gombe, Taraba and Adamawa, the situation is said to be similar to that of the North-West as the three candidates have also sharply divided the Hausa-Fulani elite in the zone. Meanwhile, the vice president has the upper hand in the zone but his hold is also being threatened by the candidature of both Yar'Adua and Buhari.

The situation in the North Central where the chairman of the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) hails from is reportedly even more confusing. As top leaders of minority tribes, especially in the Middle Belt, are said to be divided over the trio with Chief Solomon Lar leading the pro-Atiku group while Chief Paul Unongo is leading the pro-Yar'Adua group. Sources within the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) told the said that the body could not take any position because the outcome was not predictable. The ACF official said; "the greatest fear we are having now is that the South may decide who wins the presidency for the North."

Plan to impeach OBJ, Atiku still on

Plans to impeach President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku Abubakar "is real and on course," a member of the House of Representatives, Alhaji Shehu Ibn Kagara, has said. Kagara, who is the Deputy Chairman, House Committee on Inter and Intra Party Relations, said in Minna, Niger State, recently that a list of all the impeachable offences committed by the president and his deputy had been compiled and would

soon be sent to the Senate President through the House Leader, Alhaji Abdul Ningi.

Though the legislator declined to disclose the number of offences against the two leaders, he however said Vice President Abubakar was brought into the impeachment saga only recently. According to him, two groups behind the impeachment move had met to harmonise their positions, a development which, he said, had strengthened the execution of the plan. Kagara, who represents Rafi, Shiroro and Munya Federal Constituency, disowned the Senate President, Chief Ken Nnamani, who recently dissociated himself and the upper chamber from the impeachment plot. "Nnamani and Masari are on their own, we elected them and they must do what we ask them to do," the legislator said.

Stay Away from Niger-Delta, Group tells Atiku

The South-South Elements Progressive Union (SSEPU) has advised Action Congress (AC) presidential candidate, Vice President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, to stay away from the Niger Delta area during his campaigns, while stating that the vice president's security can not be guaranteed in the Niger Delta. The group advice came on the heels of statements recently credited to the Vice President that the President Olusegun Obasanjo administration had procured offensive weapons allegedly to exterminate the Niger-Delta people. While adding that they are not ignorant of the difficult political circumstances facing the vice president nor the readiness of some politicians to use the plight of the Niger-Delta as a platform for political advantage even when their action have no positive effect on the continuing plight of our people.



Registration: INEC Officials, Others Dock

Three officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and two others have been docked by the police. They were allegedly caught while engaging in illegal duties at the home of Dr. Saka Balogun, the Chief of Staff to the PDP gubernatorial aspirant in Oyo State, Otunba Adebayo Alao-Akala, in Ogbomosho. The five suspects were caught engaging in illegal registration of prospective voters for the April polls on January 21, 2006.

Both Akala and the aide in whose house the suspects were caught had since denied the act insisting that the action was a media creation. The police however had hectic time having the prosecution of the INEC officials under firm grip as thugs numbering about 150 invaded the court premises partially disrupting proceedings.

It took the intervention of the District Crime Officer, Mr. Shittu Umaru, to control the thugs. He brought reinforcements of armed policemen to the court premises to save journalists and other officials of the court from the irate youths. The accused persons, Gabriel Oyebile (16), Atiba Muyiwa (16), Alausa Saheed (16), Samuel (surname unknown) (24), and Ajadi Oluwapomile were brought before a Chief Magistrates' Court sitting in Ogbomoso by the police in Oyo State. They were accused of carrying out illegal registration of voters in Akala aide residence.

INEC and Senate okays extension of voters' registration

The voters' registration exercise was extended by three days by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). With the extension, the exercise which was to have ended January 30 will now end on Friday, February 2. The extension came on a day the Senate joined the House of Representatives in passing an amendment to the 2006 Electoral Act. Under the amendment, the Senate also empowered INEC to continue with voters' registration till February 14, 60 days before the 2007 general elections are due to kick off nation-wide. The Senate also gave INEC the nod to use the Direct Data Capture (DDC) machines which the House of Representatives' version had sought to outlaw for 2007 polls.

It is not clear whether the INEC's action was informed by the amendment which lacks the force of law until it has been harmonised with the House of Representative's version and endorsed by the President. The electoral body might have taken the decision under Section 11 (1) of the Electoral Act which states that updating the voters' register is a continuous exercise.

Constitutional amendment a must for free, fair and credible elections

Recently, a senior lawyer with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), said free and fair elections will only mean building castles in the air until the constitution is amended to ensure that the

commission is truly independent. The commission's head of legal department, Barr. Oluwale Osaze Uzzi, said the way the commission's chairman is appointed needs to be changed and called into question the commission's independence and funding. Barr. Uzzi added that the organisation has been "considerably weakened" by new legislations and called for urgent constitutional amendments regarding the electoral laws to ensure credible elections in future.

While addressing members of the media recently at Le Meridien Hotel, Barrister Uzzi said: "An examination of the 2006 Act will reveal that there are many other identified areas requiring urgent reform of the electoral process which have not been addressed." The issues that need changing are the composition of the commission, the appointment of the chairman and members of the commission and the funding of the commission.

He further added that the independence of the commission needs to be examined, as well as the time limit for the hearing and determination of election petitions. Meanwhile INEC has forwarded the names of candidates seeking elective offices to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), and the State Security Service (SSS).

INEC shuns 'indicted' politicians' list

As the recent list of politicians branded as 'Corrupt' published by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) continues to cause angry reactions from politicians, political parties, candidates and supporters, the Presidency has denied allegations that it influenced the anti-graft body's advice to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Meanwhile, INEC has disassociated itself from the list, insisting that, rather, it was concentrating on conducting free, fair and credible elections this year.

It would be noted that the anti-graft body recently compiled a list which it tagged as a list of "corrupt Politicians" and sent to all parties requesting that they (the parties) should disqualify all candidates mentioned on the list. However, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has been accused of arrogating undue power to itself and trying to cause confusion in the polity that is capable of truncating democracy in the country, following

its recent indictment of some political aspirants and advice to INEC to bar them from contesting.

April polls: FG places security agencies on red alert

The Federal Government has placed all its security agencies on red alert nationwide while it has also ordered immediate embargo on annual leave of all security personnel in the various services. Presidency sources in Abuja said the action became necessary following unfavorable security reports across the states on the activities of some politicians and ethnic militia groups allegedly threatening to disrupt the forthcoming general election. The source named the states already mapped out as operational centres and they include Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Enugu, Anambra, Abia, Rivers, Bayelsa, Edo, Kano, Kaduna, Plateau, Bauchi and Abuja.

The source revealed that those behind the plot had also reportedly singled out the national headquarters of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Abuja and its state and local government offices for attack should certain candidates be fielded or disqualified by the commission from the elections.

The police high command had directed all the state police commissioners to put their commands on red alert while situation reports in the states should be forwarded to the force headquarters, Abuja, on daily basis. The commissioners of police have also been directed to meet with all stakeholders, including leaders of the various political parties and leaders of thought in their respective states on the need for peace to reign. The commissioners of police are also expected to monitor the activities of all political parties, aspirants, candidates, politicians and various interest groups and report same to the Inspector-General of Police, Mr. Sunday Ehindero. The State Security Service (SSS), Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, Nigeria Customs Service (NSC), Nigeria Immigration Services (NIS) and the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) are not left out of these directives. As only recently, the police impounded seven trailer-loads of assorted weapons which had been moved to Abuja for further investigation.

INEC Dragged to Court over Ballot Boxes

Bedding Holding Ltd, a company which supplied the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) the transparent boxes that were used for the 2003 general elections, has dragged it (INEC) before a Federal High Court sitting in Abuja, over its plan to import transparent ballot boxes worth over N5.4billion. The company (Plaintiff) in the suit, is contending that it is the owner of the Patent Right of the transparent ballot boxes, by virtue of Certificate of Patent Registration No PR: 12994 and Certificate of Industrial Design registration No: 5946. According to the plaintiff, INEC and its chairman, contrary to the provision of the Patent and Design Act, purportedly awarded the contract for making, manufacturing, sale, use and/or otherwise production of 300,000 transparent ballot boxes to Emchai Nig Ltd for the forth coming general elections in April 2007 or thereabout.

Plaintiff further stated that the cost of the 300,000 ballot boxes at N18,250 is N5.575billion, and that INEC, its chairman and Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) have caused 50 per cent of the money to be paid to Emchai Nig. Joined as defendants in the suit are Attorney-General of the Federation, INEC-Chairman, Emchai Nig Ltd, Minister for Commerce, Registrar of Patent, Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) and Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). Meanwhile, the presiding judge in the case, Justice A. Chikere, has granted the plaintiff leave to serve the processes through substituted service.

Corruption

EFCC May Halt Akala's Mandate

The gubernatorial ambition of Oyo State Deputy Governor, Otunba Christopher Adebayo Akala, and his political domineering godfather, Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu recently came under real threat, as Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, said his commission was ready to halt Akala's dream of becoming Oyo state governor. Ribadu's made this statement at a public lecture and colloquium hosted by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), University of Ibadan, barely 48 hours after the Deputy National Chairman of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Chief Olabode George, boasted that there is no going back on the mandate given to Akala.

Akala also stated categorically that he did not need his boss support to win the election during the opening of his campaign secretariat at Ibadan. Ribadu said that his Commission was not ready to be part of the Nigerian system that mystifies politicians. In the lecture titled, "EFCC and the Democratic Reforms and Nigeria; he wondered at the secret behind politics of domination and intimidation of the strongman of Ibadan politics, and submitted, "I will never do anything to help any Adedibu or any Akala. Whatever we do is to the best of our ability and with the fear of God." He debunked growing allegations the anti-graft agency has been selective in its crusade, targeting only perceived enemies of President Olusegun Obasanjo, he declared that his agency embarked on the crusade with the best of intention and sincerity.

Alao Akala in trouble waters

Five top government officials in Oyo State, including the state Accountant-General, Mrs. R. Okeniyi and Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Works and Transport, Mr. Joe Laniyan, have been invited by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Other officers also invited to appear before the anti-graft body in Lagos are the Director of Highways, Director of Fire and Director of Building, all in the Ministry of Works and Transport. Their invitation might not be unconnected with various contract and direct labour jobs awarded by the Adebayo Alao-Akala led government during its 11 months in power.

It would be noted that the state governor, Senator Rashidi Ladoja, upon resumption from his "sabbatical leave," said the state had been bastardized, alleging that state funds had been misappropriated during the 11-month rule of his deputy, Chief Alao-Akala. The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences (ICPC) recently said it was probing Alao-Akala over N1.3 billion education scandal. The scandal was said to pertain to inflation of the cost of 1.8 million primary school Mathematics, English and Science textbooks.

My Husband's Not Corrupt-Titi Abubakar

The Wife of Vice President Atiku Abubakar, Titi Abubakar, recently sprang to her husband's defence saying he is a hard working family man who was being smeared because of his ambition to be president of Nigeria. "My

husband is not corrupt. Anyone who has evidence to the contrary should come forward and prove it," said Hajiya Titi Abubakar. Titi while speaking at her first major public political gathering in support of her husband's candidature as the presidential flag bearer of the Action Congress (AC) in Abuja, said contrary to all opinions, Atiku's persecution is an outcome of his battle against dictatorship. She challenged the president to come forward with proof of evidence of corrupt practices against her husband the vice president. She also ceased the opportunity to pledge her support for Atiku's victories at the polls come April 2007.

And for listing him as one of those unfit to hold public office because of alleged indictment for corruption, the Vice President has instructed his lawyers to immediately sue, in both his personal and official capacity, EFCC Chairman, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, for defamation of his character. Meanwhile, the Federal Government has set up a panel of inquiry to look into the list of the 135 candidates, indicted by the EFCC.

EFCC List: Ndoma-Egba, Ekweremadu Allege Blackmail

The Chairman of the Senate Ad-Hoc Committee on Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF), Senator Victor Ndoma-Egba, SAN, has alleged that reports indicating that his names were removed from the alleged "doctored list" of indicted candidates were part of the grand plot by interested parties to the PTDF probe to blackmail him. His colleague in the Senate and Chairman of the Senate Committee on Federal Character and Inter-Governmental Affairs, Senator Ike Ekweremadu (Enugu West), also alleged blackmail; even as both senators who are lawyers have served notice that they would resort to legal option to clear their names. They were reportedly on the so-called original list compiled by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), which was said to have been submitted to the Presidency, but which was allegedly doctored to remove names of some candidates, including both of them. Ndoma-Egba said the blackmail would fail to distract him and his Senate Ad-Hoc Committee on the PTDF from putting together a thorough and unbiased report, which he said would be submitted to the Senate soonest. He said as a first step, he had challenged the news medium to show incontrovertible evidence of the material particulars showing his culpability in a matter relating to corruption.

EFCC Writes Parties on 130 Corrupt Candidates

Indications has emerged that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has written to political parties, identifying no fewer than 130 candidates considered unfit to hold public offices over alleged corrupt practices Nigeria

A breakdown of the candidates from each party, reveals that the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has the names of 52 of its candidates; All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) 35; the Action Congress (AC) 28; the Peoples Progressive Alliance (PPA) 10; Democratic Peoples Party (DPP) 4; while the Alliance for Democracy (AD) has one of its candidates recommended as unfit for public office. The commission's action is "advisory" and meant to "assist the parties in coming to terms with fielding credible candidates that are electable."

Corruption: Atiku, Tinubu, Kalu Top EFCC List

Action Congress (AC) presidential candidate, Vice President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, and his Progressive Peoples Alliance (PPA) counterpart, Abia State governor Orji Kalu, topped the list of 130 candidates considered unfit to hold public offices over alleged corrupt practices which the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) forwarded to political parties recently. The list, which also has Governor Bola Tinubu of Lagos State who dropped his senatorial interest recently, cuts across six parties and features two governors of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), Ibrahim Shekarau of Kano and Ali Modu Sheriff of Borno State respectively who are both seeking re-election, among seven others on the party's platform.

Other governors seeking to contest the senatorial election that were featured in the EFCC list are; Enugu State Governor, Dr. Chimaroke Nnamani; his Jigawa State counterpart, Alhaji Saminu Turaki in the PDP, as well as Zamfara State Governor, Alhaji Ahmed Sani Yerima. But the Vice President, in a swift response last night, said the Mallam Nuhu Ribadu's commission is only scandalising the names of innocent persons stressing that the list made available to the parties is of no consequence.

Others

Dokubo-Asari in court, vows to resist suppression by govt

Detained leader of the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo-Asari, recently rained fire and brimstone in the Federal

High Court, Abuja, as he named as foes, the judiciary and otherwise during his trial. It would be recalled that Dokubo-Asari is standing trial for treason. The militant's anger was particularly sparked by the prosecution's request that he be barred from appearing in court during his trial due to his alleged unruly behavior. His other grudge was the judge's refusal to query the prosecution on his continued detention in solitary confinement. His outburst in court: You are a stupid old man. The court is toying with my life. Whatever kangaroo trial you are going to do go ahead and do so. Go ahead and exclude me from my own trial. But let me say that whatever pain Obasanjo causes me, I will visit it on whoever participated in causing me the pain. I will turn your joy into sorrow. I know where you live. I know where members of your family live. I have been restraining myself, but when I come after you and your family, your laughter will turn to tears when all you would know is the road to the mortuary." He continued; "This is an evil court; this is a judge from the bottom of hell fire. I will come after you and I will bring you to your knees. I will destroy you. You think Obasanjo can save you when he could not save the expatriates in the Niger Delta. You will see. I know where you live. I know where your family lives", Dokubo-Asari threatened.

The court premises was filled with a mammoth crowd, most of whom were families, friends and supporters of Dokubo-Asari, who had come not just to witness the trial scheduled for 9.00 a.m., but to also witness his release going by speculations by some notable Ijaw leaders who claimed that a deal had been struck with President Olusegun Obasanjo to drop the charge brought against Dokubo-Asari. Their optimism was shaken as Malam Salihu Aliyu Director of Public Prosecution (DPP) served an application on Dokubo's counsel, Mr. Festus Keyamo, praying for leave to bar the presence of the militant leader during his trial due to his unruly behavior to the judge and the court.

2006 Census: Lagos is 17.5m, Not 9.03m

In a recent development, Lagos State government officially reacted to the 2006 Population Census report putting the population figure of the state at 17,553,924, saying the 9.013 million figure declared by the National Population Commission (NPC) was ridiculous. The state says it reject in totality, the 9,013,534 figure allocated to the state in the result released on December 30, 2006 by the NPC, following the Population and Housing

census conducted between 21 and 30 of March 2006. while Making the position of the state government known at a Stakeholders forum/World Press Conference and Public Presentation of a book titled 'The Falsification of Lagos State Census,' held at Muson Centre, Onikan, Governor Bola Tinubu described the result as a "master corruption, which will be contested by the people and government of the state." He described the result as a fundamental hatred to Lagosians saying it is better discarded, while calling NPC to re-conduct the entire exercise. He emphasised that a total re-conduct of the exercise is imperative, noting that there must be an accurate database to enable government plan adequately.

AC writes INEC, demands decision on Atik

The Action Congress (AC) says that it has written to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to come out with its decision on its presidential candidate, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar. The AC, which restated that INEC lacks the power to disqualify any candidate, said that it only wrote INEC so that it could have a proof in its hand. It further added that in the event of INEC failing to clear the Vice President for the race, it would file contempt charges against the commission.

However the party's National Publicity Secretary, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, denied that the party had received a letter from INEC on the non-clearance of Atiku. While adding that if such a letter exists, it would be a big joke.

Buhari: PDP Has Started Rigging April Election

The All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) presidential flag-bearer, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd) has alleged that there was evidence that the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) had begun the process towards rigging the April polls. Buhari, who made this claim while speaking at the start of his campaign, said there was no alternative to removing the current government from power at the April elections. According to Buhari, there are credible reports indicating that in some places the voting has already been concluded and finished with. According to Buhari, there are credible reports indicating that in some places the voting has already been concluded and finished with.

Only courts can clear Atiku — INEC

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) recently made an emphatic statement that only the courts can clear Vice President Atiku Abubakar to contest the forthcoming April polls. Also, the legal battle over the propriety of the VP holding on to office after defecting to the Action Congress (AC) took a new twist recently after the president's lead counsel, Chief Afe Babalola (SAN), wrote to the President of the Court of Appeal, Justice Umaru Abdullahi, to draw the court's attention to an alleged contradiction in the position adopted by lead counsel to Vice President Abubakar, Prof. Ben Nwabueze, in his book, *Constitutional Democracy in Africa*, and his written submission in court.

Contending that Professor Nwabueze's submissions in the book were in agreement with the position of the plaintiffs in the case which is still pending in the Appeal Court, Chief Babalola, argued that, "the submission is in total agreement with our contention that the Vice President, apart from his letter of resignation which is before the court, has in equity constructively resigned, withdrawn or abandoned the President and the sponsoring party." Chief Babalola explained that by the position adopted by Prof. Nwabueze, he had agreed that: "The unity contemplated in the joint ticket of the president and his vice transcends the election; "So long as he remains in office as Vice President, he is not free to oppose in public, decision or action of the President or the Executive Council no matter his personal disagreement with him; Freedom on the part of the Vice President to criticise his President publicly for mismanagement or corruption is certainly not consistent with the loyalty required of him"

Meanwhile, the Action Congress (AC) has accused INEC of surreptitiously submitting itself to be used by the PDP to bar its presidential candidate, Vice President Abubakar, from contesting April's election.

Indictment: How FG Panel Confirmed 35, Cleared 49

Recently, The Panel of Inquiry set up by the Federal Government to review the report of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) indicting some politicians seeking elective offices in the April general elections confirmed the cases against 35 politicians. It also exonerated and dismissed cases against 49 others. This was the high-point of the 73-page report submitted to President Olusegun Obasanjo recently. There are also indications that the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) may have struck an

underhand secret arrangement with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to allow it until February 19 to substitute its gubernatorial candidates whose names were lodged with the Commission after the primaries. Some of the politicians indicted by the Administrative Panel of Inquiry on Reports of Alleged Corrupt Practices of Some Public Officers and Other Persons may have had their bid for elective offices in the April general polls scuttled.

Abia State Governor and Progres-sive Peoples Alliance (PPA), presidential candidate, Orji Uzor Kalu, Lagos State Governor, Senator Bola Tinubu, Governor of Kano State, Ibrahim Shekarau, former Governor of Anambra State, Dr. Chris Ngige, former Minister of Defence, Dr. Rabiu Musa Kwakwa, Speaker of Rivers State House of Assembly, Hon. Chibuke Rotimi Amaechi, former Governor of Kogi State and ANPP guber candidate in the state, Prince Abubakar Audu and Mallam Bello Gwandu and Peter Okocha, ANPP and AC guber candidates for Kogi and Delta States respectively top the list of those who stand indicted by the Panel.

While Governor of Borno State, Ali Modu Sheriff and former Aviation Minister and ANPP gubernatorial candidate in Bauchi, Isa Yuguda topped the list of those who were not indicted. In the case of Sheriff, the panel recommended further and better investigation. Others who were cleared include Dr. Olarenwaju Tejuosho, son of the Osile of Oke-ona in Abeokuta and ANPP senatorial candidate for Ogun Central and Senator Musa Bello, gubernatorial candidate of the Action Congress in Kaduna State. Others who were exonerated or had their cases dismissed were Ibrahim Bapetel, gubernatorial candidate of AC in Adamawa; Ahmed Yusuf, member of Taraba House of Assembly and former Commissioner for Finance in the state; Abubakar Hashidu, AC guber candidate for Gombe State; Hon. Mafinidi; Chris Alozie Akoma, deputy gubernatorial candidate of Progressive People Alliance in Abia State; Ibrahim Hassan Hadeija, guber candidate of ANPP for Jigawa State and chairman of the Ethanol Project in the state; Chief Nimi Barigha Amange; Ikechukwu John Obiorah, PDP senatorial candidate for Anambra State and Kabiru Ibrahim Gaya, senatorial candidate on the platform of ANPP in Kano State. Mean while, PDP did not beat the February 13 deadline given by INEC for the substitution of indicted candidates while AC insist that Vice President Atiku Abubakar remains its presidential candidates.

NLC Gets New President

After a long drawn voting process which lasted 27 hours, Comrade Abdula-waheed Ibrahim Omar of the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) emerged the new President of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC). He secured 927 votes to defeat Comrade Fidelis Edeh of the Nigeria Civil Service Union (NCSU) who got 210 votes. Omar replaced Comrade Adams Oshiomhole who was first elected in 1999 but has now moved on to play partisan politics in which he is seeking election as gubernatorial candidate of the Action Congress (AC) in Edo State. Two deputy national presidents, Mr. Peter Adeyemi, of the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU) and Mr Irabor Onikolease, were returned unopposed. Mr Ayuba Wabba, National President of the Medical Workers and Health Union of Nigeria (MHWUN) was also returned unopposed as Vice President. National presidents of Agricultural Workers union, Abdullahi Bungudu, that of NULGE, Kingsley Ogba and that of the Textile Workers union, Isa Aremu, were elected vice-presidents. Also elected vice-presidents were the national President of the Food and Beverage Workers unions John Onyenemere and the Chairperson of the NLC Women Commission, Hajia Ladi Ilya.

Others are Peter Akpa-tason (NUPENG) as National Trustee; Gidado Hamman (Road Transport Workers), Deputy National Treasurer, while Sadiq Abubakar and Samuel Adeoye of Amalgamated and Construction Unions respectively were elected internal auditors. The post of ex-officio members went to Mrs. Lovina Okoro of the Nurses and Midwives union and Mrs. Coretta Balogun of the Radio and Theatre Workers Union. In his acceptance speech, Omar promised to fight for the liberation of Nigerian workers, whom he said have demonstrated that they are democrats.

Voting commenced at 10.04 p.m on Friday, February 16, 2007 with only 27 of the 29 affiliates being cleared to cast their votes. The process of voting lasted till 9.20 a.m. on Saturday, February 17, 2007 when the 15 new executive members were inaugurated by the NLC General Secretary, Mr. John Odah.

Anambra: Obi Moves to stop Guber Election

The April 14 gubernatorial election in Anambra State maybe under serious threat as the incumbent governor of the state, Mr. Peter Obi has rush to court seeking relief from the court among which are the restoration of the lost part of his tenure while the case was in the election tribunal for almost 36 months. It is gathered that Obi has already filed his case at the Federal High Court, Enugu, seeking to be allowed to spend the statutory four years, which the constitution allows him. While, confirming the matter, the National Chairman of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Sir Victor Umeh, said he was optimistic that victory would come the way of the party, "Because anything otherwise will mean injustice against the 2003 electoral victory of the party in Anambra State."

In the case filed by Onyechi Ikpeazu, a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), Obi is asking the court to determine his true tenure having spent three years at the election tribunal against the PDP gubernatorial candidate in the 2003 poll Dr. Chris Ngige that he eventually won. Obi specifically wants the court to interpret section 180 that deals on tenure of governors in his favour to mean that his four years should start from April 2006 and not May 29, 2003. Section 180 sub section 2 of the 1999 constitution says among others that 'the governor shall vacate his office at the expiration of a period of four years commencing from the date when-(a.) the case of a person first elected as Governor under this constitution, he took the oath of allegiance and oath of office; and (b.) the person last elected to that office took the oath of office of allegiance and oath of office or would, but for his death, have taken such oaths. Both Obi and Mr. Andy Uba are currently flag bearers of the APGA and the PDP respectively in the forthcoming April 2007 poll.

Atiku is finished politically - Buhari

Presidential candidate of All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) Major-General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd) recently made bold to said Vice President Atiku Abubakar was not eligible to contest the 2007 presidential polls following his indictment by an Administrative panel and the subsequent gazetting of the indictment by the Federal Government the former Head of state told a visiting civil society group, Alliance for Credible Election (ACE) in his office that the Atiku would not contest the 2007 Presidential elections because the federal government has "finished" him politically. However, in a swift reaction Vice President Atiku Abubakar fired back at the former military

dictator, saying that he (Buhari) was speaking out of frustration. The Vice President spoke through the spokesman of the Atiku Campaign Organisation, Garba Shehu.

Besides, Buhari warned against rigging of the elections saying Nigerians would not accept a rigged election. He accused the Federal Government of engaging under the table negotiation for some candidates to be pulled out and be substituted even as the submission of names of candidates for the governorship and National Assembly elections close soon.

Obasanjo, PDP senators pushes for extension of handover date

There maybe indications that the Federal Government is on the verge of shifting the hand over date as lawmakers have begun circulating a document to get the signature of their colleagues to make October 1, 2007 the date for handing over of power to an elected president instead of May 29. Meanwhile, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) senators recently entered a second meeting with President Olusegun Obasanjo to push "for the return of the tickets" to aggrieved lawmakers.

Senators led by Senate President Ken Nnamani were said to have frowned at the alleged favouritism showed some political office holders and aspirants whose names "mysteriously" disappeared from the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) list of "indicted" politicians. Two names, that of a state governor from the South-East and deputy governorship candidate, were said to have been named as those who should have faced the Administrative Panel of Enquiry but were mysteriously missing on the list.

Students protest ahead of Senegal vote.

University students blocked a main avenue in the Senegalese capital with boulders and burning tyres yesterday to protest at what they say is neglect by the government, days ahead of presidential elections. President Abdoulaye Wade is widely expected to win a second mandate in the former French colony, the only country in West Africa that has never experienced a coup since its independence, but where discontent among the country's youth is running high. Wade, President Abdoulaye in 80s, clinched on to power in 2000 promising jobs and investment in education. Seven years on, Dakar's main university is chronically under-funded and unemployment is estimated

at over 40 percent, a worrying statistic with half the population aged under 18.

"We haven't received our bursaries for 5 months and yet with the election campaign going on, the authorities are spending billions (of CFA francs)," said Ibrahima Niang, 23, an English student at the Cheikh Anta Diop University. "We don't even have enough to pay for our meals. We've blocked the traffic to make our voices heard," he added.

Atiku remains VP, says Appeal Court

The Court of Appeal sitting in Abuja on has declared that President Atiku Abubakar remains the Vice President of the country and that the mere crossing of party lines does not invalidate his office. The Court of Appeal held that Atiku's change of political party from the PDP, within which he was re-elected with Obasanjo in 2003, was not a breach of the 1999 Federal Republic of Nigeria Constitution. The Court of Appeal Judges in the ruling delivered by the President of the Court of Appeal, Abdullahi Umaru were unanimous in their ruling, insisting that the allegiance of the Vice President should be to the Constitution and not to the President. The judgment which lasted 57 minutes is seen as a landmark judgment since the development is unprecedented in the history of Nigeria. Atiku filed the suit late last year after the Presidency had declared his office vacant, following his defection to the Action Congress (AC), where he was picked as the party's presidential candidate.

Adamawa House in rowdy session over motion to impeach Haruna

Hell was let loose recently at the Adamawa State House of Assembly as members engaged themselves in shouting match over a controversial resolution passed by some of the members directing the Chief-Judge to raise a panel to investigate alleged impeachable offences against Governor Boni Haruna. The controversial resolution was said to have been passed through a voice vote on the directives of the Speaker Abdullahi Abubakar, who himself is under investigation by the operatives of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

Trouble started in the House at exactly 10:18 am, when the Deputy Speaker Mr. Vidiyeno Bamaiyi moved a motion citing section 188 sub-section (3) of

the 1999 Constitution, saying that based on the provisions of the sub-section quoted above, the House can direct the chief judge to constitute a seven-man committee to investigate the alleged impeachable offences leveled against Haruna, without debate. Mr. Yusuf Gambo representing Guyuk constituency raised his hand for the Speaker's recognition for several minutes but he was ignored and the Speaker put Bamaiyi's motion to vote and was adopted in a controversial circumstance. This did not go down well with the pro-Haruna lawmakers who started a protest in the house, which led the Speaker to adjourn the House sitting at a latter date. As the pro-Haruna lawmakers and the anti-Haruna members abandoned their seats and started heading towards the Mace, the Sergeant-At-Arm quickly grabbed it and escaped through the back door of the chambers.

British envoy tasks the court on indicted politicians

The British Government has charged the Federal Government to ensure that the April elections are not only free and fair, but more credible and acceptable than those of 1999 and 2003 which were riddled with controversies. It says as a first step, the Federal Government should allow the law courts to determine the eligibility or otherwise of the politicians indicted for corruption. This position was articulated by its High Commissioner, Richard Gozney, during a courtesy call on the Minister of State for Air Transportation, Chief Femi Fani-Kayode, recently in Abuja. The envoy explained that when the matters are resolved by the law court, all agitation by indicted politicians would cease, since justice would be seen to have been done.

He said Britain was watching Nigeria with sympathy and hoped that the April general elections that will usher in a new civilian government would be free and fair, adding that the road to April elections was "bumpy but will be smoothed before the elections." Gozney attributed the continued upheaval in the regions to lack of confidence of the people in their states and local councils which, according to him, had failed to use the huge derivation from the Federal Government to the benefits of the people.

AC, ANPP, APGA, others plan to stop rigging

A Coalition of political parties comprising the Action Congress (AC), All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), African Democratic Congress (ADC), Peoples

Progressive Alliance (PPA), Democratic Peoples Party (DPP), Prof. Wole Soyinka's Democratic Front for a Peoples Federation, and the Ethnic Nationalities Movement led by Frank Kokori and Chief Solomon Asemota (SAN), recently threatened at a press conference in Abuja to promote "a sustained action" by Nigerians if the parameters for free, fair and credible elections are not put in place. According to the coalition, "the utterances of Mr. President and the actions of the EFCC and INEC totally negate the expectations of free, fair, and credible elections. If all these illegal actions are not reversed, we the political parties and other national organisations working for free, fair and credible elections will resist any rigging of the April 2007 elections and promote a sustained action by the people of Nigeria until the parameters for free, fair and credible elections are in place."

Moreover, it said party agents as well as local and international observers should be allowed to monitor the distribution of election materials while efforts should be made to keep miscreant and thugs, including those dressed in police and army uniforms, away from polling centres.

Burundi rebels hold truce talks

A Large delegation of Burundi's last active rebel group has arrived in the capital, Bujumbura to discuss implementing the cease-fire. It was the biggest group of top Forces for National Liberation (FNL) officials to go to Bujumbura since they took up arms 14 years ago. Hundreds of FNL supporters welcomed the 17-member team at the airport.

The cease-fire was agreed last September but both sides have accused the other of violating it. Some 300,000 people have died during Burundi's conflict. Previous peace talks with the FNL have been held in the Tanzanian city, Dar es Salaam. The FNL had refused to join the monitoring team, demanding immunity on its members. FNL's estimated 3,000 fighters are due to disarm in a process to be supervised by African Union and United Nations.

Rubin Tubirabe who is leading the FNL team, blamed the government for the delay of implementation of the cease-fire agreement.

🇳🇮 This Month's POLITRICKS

Little bites on the nation's cake

Jus as the clock tick and seconds grow into minutes and minutes into hours and hours rolls into days and days into weeks and weeks into months and months to April polls. The election again as it stands seems to be the high

point of event in Nigeria as all Nigerians and the international communities cant help but peep into the affairs of the Federal Government and that of the Political parties. Issues of disagreement arises by the second as the ruling party looks forward to wining the election by all means even if it means it will have to stand unopposed or with little opposition. The opposition on the other hand are aligning to see that the ruling party and all its allies are shown the way out of power.

At this point, it will be interesting to take a trip round the government latest activities via EFCC and the Administrative panel with special focus on the issue of corruption and our political fathers and the indictment list of politicians.

The Federal Government in its desperation to clear the nation of corruption and its antecedents have vowed that no corrupt politician will rule this nation or head a ministry or parastatal. The federal government on its own has taken steps to by putting in place the EFCC and ICPC to monitor corruption from its highest level to its lowest. The commissions on its part have taken steps to ensure that those found wanting in places of trust, honest, integrity and selflessness are brought to book since its formation. Nigerians on their own part and the international community have well this development as a way forward for any nation who want to cross the boder line of poverty.

The EfCC recently published a list of indicted polticians and blacklisted them as corrupt and unfit to rule this God blessed nation called Nigeria, and since the date of that publication, words have been exchanged by the blacklisted politicians, political parties' chieftains, supporters, Nigerians and the federal government and the EFCC and even the international organization have added their voice to appraise the issue on ground, with most people criticizing and blackmailing. The issue of corruption in my opinion is a serious issue that needs to be handled with truth. As it has a direct impact on the integrity of the individuals in question hence thorough investigation needs to be carried out before such list is published. This means that EFcc on its own part ought to have done proper investigation and be satisfied that they are not defamating their victims as this is a serious implication to the EFCC integrity.

The published list as unappealing as it may appear actually indicted our leaders, those we trusted with our heritage, treasury, lives and resources. Those who at one time or the other have ruled this nation in various positions of outhority. The administrative panel set up by the Federal government found some quity and other not while some refused to appear before this panel implying that they are above the law. But on are serious note, some names are missing from that list those favoured by the president are they clean or above the law, likes of Andy Uba, Alao Akala and his godfather Lamidi Adedibu who collects "own share" from any allocation that goes into the state like a state ministry would ordinarily request for, for the running of the it affairs, what ever happened to those politicians names and others who are walking the street with head high laying claims to be heros.

The question one is quick to ask is how much do you need to steal or bite from the nations cake (treasury) before you are indicted. A quick glance at the list of those whose names where not on the list and those cleared shows that they had little bites. Little bites that has ruin our economy and brought hunger, strive, illiteracy, unemployment and death to Nigerians. While those who bite big chunks can not be pardon for taken too much hence have come up with strategies to draw attention to themselves by laying claims to the fact that they are opposition or anti third term that is why they are blacklisted, the question did you bite from the cake, what you bite is not relevant here as long as you had a bite.

The Federal Government and the EFCC are playing double standard on the issue of corruption, if we must clean our nation of corruption, we must start with the Friend's of Mr. President e.g. Chief Bode George. All those who have bitten from the cake should be punished, either big chunks or small chunks corruption is corruption and if we must say a total no to it, then lets start with a capital NO and stop the compromise. **(Seyi Ojo TMG)**

CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN IN 2007 ELECTIONS

As the race towards the 2007 general elections momentum, there is credible fear that the women might not get the comparative representation for elective office in the general election. Before the party primaries, the various parties promised a level playing field to encourage women even went as far as giving out forms free to the interested women politicians. But as usual the same parties ended up shifting the goal post for only the men to score. The party primaries ended with tales of woes for the women. At the PDP presidential primaries at Eagle square on the 16th December, 2006 for instance, the only surviving women representative Dr. Sarah Jubril was shouted down when she requested for a chance to address the delegates as was the case in 1999 and 2003 PDP primaries, all effort to assert for her right was futile. In Lagos Mrs. Hilda Williams's case was a clear case of daylight robbery where her mandate was rudely stripped off her and given to a male, a lot of this ugly trend abound nationwide.

Painful and discouraging as these experiences are, I still believe women should not give up but rather buckle up and take their destiny in their own hands as the men are not in a hurry to relinquish power. I challenge the women to be courageous if they must win this battle. There has to be a follow up of every action and activities of the party before, during and after election to ensure equity and fairness. Take for instance the case of senator Emordi in Anambra who doggedly fought for her stolen mandate which she did not only retrieve from the hands of the 'strong man ' but also followed every step in the last primaries to retain it.

Nigeria is blessed with women of integrity in public sector, Academia, banking, industry and commerce. It is not an over statement if one credits the success of the reforms in the country today to the quality contribution of Dr Okonjo Iweala, Oby Ezekwesili, Dora Akunyili just to mention but a few. The contributions of these women have earned them national accolades and international awards, but to some men back home these achievements mean nothing because the culture does not permit women to lead or direct the affairs of men this was clearly exhibited in Lagos state where a man sued the wife for contesting election instead of the support expected from the husband. If the man didn't have a reason to support the wife he should have at least considered the fight against corruption.

The latest list released by EFCC attest to the patriotic nature of women as the men took the centre stage in the list. Despite all these the women are still not perceived capable to handle the mantle of leadership. The only opportunity given to a female as a deputy governor ended in marginalization which frustrated her out of office. The case of Mrs. Virgy Etiaba former governor of Anambra state was sheer luck, all thanks to the abuse of the rule of law. Though her stay was short, she made an impact. It's on record that she ensured that all debts owed contractors, pensioners and workers in the state were cleared, some new project started and finished right timely. In Ekiti on the other hand, after the impeachment the governor went under ground while his deputy Chief Olujimi held on tightly to her seat until a state of emergency was declared in the state what courage? This

singular act shows how secured this nation will be in the hands of a female. The question is can this be achieved in this country? Can the females ever have the chance to do what they know best to do “sustainability” only time will tell and until that time when the pivotal role women play in the progress of any nation’s development is welcomed in Nigeria politics then we’ll all say it’s a democratic nation.

At the international level women like Dr Ellen Johnson president of Liberia, the German chancellor, Aroyo of Philipines have shown the way in discharging their duties. Take a case of the philipinoes held hostage in the Niger Delta the timely intervention of their president facilitated their release. This calls to mind the case of Tochi Iwuchukwu who was slaughtered like mere animal far away Singapore no female leader would have laid back and watched such inhuman act on an innocent boy. I challenge all women to embrace the courage of these women and take the bull by the horn politically to put an end to this marginalization. While I call on the government and the law makers to create enabling and encouraging environment for women’s active participation in the forthcoming election and beyond.

There should be a deliberate effort to stop this craze of excessive monetization of the political and electioneering process. The application of financial inducement has reached an alarming and incredible level with the men flaunting their ill gotten wealth. The do or die affair and win at all cost syndrome on its part has further empowered political thugs to graduate from armed robbers to assassins and militants which makes most women to recoil back to their shell. But for how long will this continue? The time has come for women to strategize and put these ignoble acts to a stop. The engagement of security services of the police and proactive activities through rallies and media is very important, and finally women politicians should ensure that they have impeccable strength of character, tenacity of purpose, uncommon humility right from home front to gain support from our husbands, admirable conduct consistent and passionate pursuit of public goods as this are the attribute of good leaders and a winning credential for us since it’s crystal clear that we are being marginalized. We have no choice than to fight for our rights

Ego Ashimole
TMG, Programme

THE ILLEGALITY OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT\INEC DISQUALIFICATION OF CANDIDATES

Divergent opinions have been expressed on the question whether the Independent National Electoral Commission has the power to screen or disqualify candidates for election. INEC itself has made conflicting and inconsistent pronouncements on the matter. Of course, double talk has become one of the characteristics of INEC. At one time INEC asserted that it was concentrating on conducting free and fair elections instead of allowing its attention to be distracted by such issues as disqualification of candidates. Later the Commission made a volte-face and purports to have disqualified some candidates. Subsequently, the Federal Government set up a Panel to consider the

indictments by INEC. The indicted candidates were later asked to appear before a panel set up by the Federal Government. The pertinent question is who has the authority to screen or disqualify candidates nominated by political parties for political offices.

There is no doubt that the constitution makes clear provisions for qualifications and eligibility for the elective offices created by the constitution. Such provisions are contained in sections 65, 106, 131 and 177 of the constitution. Sections 66, 107, 137 and 182 of the constitution disqualify certain persons from contesting for elective offices based on some state grounds. However, either by omission or design the constitution is silent on who can disqualify candidates who did not meet the stated qualifications or candidates who ought to be disqualified based on the stated grounds. The Electoral Act 2002 was clear on the matter. It provided that any person who had reasonable grounds to believe that any information given by a candidate in the affidavit is false may petition the Commission or file a suit at the High Court against such person in a State or Federal High Court. The provision requiring report to be made to INEC in such circumstance was omitted in the Electoral Act 2006. Section 32(5) of the Electoral Act 2006 still confers on the court the power to disqualify candidates while section 32(2) and (6) empowers political parties to screen their candidates. It is therefore submitted that INEC lacks the power to screen or disqualify any candidate. In the case of *Ojukwu v Governor State* (1986)1 NWLR (Pt 18) 621 the Supreme Court affirmed that Nigerian is a nation based on the rule of law. According to Obaseki, J.S.C., “The Nigerian Constitution is founded on the rule of law the primary meaning of which is that every thing must be done according to law. It means also that government should be conducted within the framework of recognized rules and principles which restrict discretionary power”. Professor H.W.R. Wade maintained that one of the connotations of the rule of law is that every act of the governmental power i.e. every act which affects the legal rights, duties or liberties of any person, must be shown to have a strictly legal pedigree. (See Administrative Law 8th edn p.20).

On this premise, it becomes pertinent to find out if any law confers either INEC or the Federal Executive Council with the power to screen or disqualify candidates. As stated earlier, neither the constitution nor any ordinary law confers on INEC THE power to screen or disqualify any candidate. The power is vested on the courts and political parties. Consequently since no law confers the power of screening or disqualification of candidates on INEC, it cannot exercise that power.

It must be noted that the above position of the law is unsatisfactory. Because of the protracted and technical nature of the judicial process in Nigeria, courts are not well suited to do the job of screening or disqualification of candidates. The position of the Electoral Act 2006 must however be understood against the background of the lack of independence of INEC. It will be dangerous to confer the power of screening of candidates on an agency like INEC, which is not only dependent on the President but is being manipulated by the Federal Government and the PDP to achieve some political ends. The EFCC, which purports to indict candidates, is also not independent both theoretically and in practice. It may be pertinent to show the composition of the EFCC. By section 2(1) of the EFCC Act 2004 the commission shall consists of the following members: a chairman; the governor of the Central Bank; a representative each of the

ministries of Foreign Affairs, Finance, and Justice; the Chairman, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency; the Director Generals of the National Intelligence Agency and the SSS; the Registrar-General of the Corporate Affairs Commission; the Director-General, Securities and Exchange Commission; the Managing Director, Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation; the Commissioner for Insurance; the Postmaster-General of the Nigerian Postal Service; the Chairman, Nigerian Communications Commission; the Comptroller-General, Nigerian Immigration Service; the Inspector General of Police; four eminent Nigerians with cognate experience in banking, finance, law or accounting. Thus, all the members of the EFCC are appointed by the President without the recommendation of any independent body, and they are answerable to the President. By no stretch of the imagination can the Commission be said to be independent. One is however not trying to undermine the achievements of the Chairman of the Commission, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, who is working under a very tough environment.

In any case, it must be recognized that by section 229 of the constitution, the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy in Chapter II of the constitution is required to be part of the programme of all political parties. And by section 15(5) of the Objectives and Directives the state is required to eradicate all corrupt practices. Consequently, political parties, which are required to eradicate corrupt practices by the constitution, cannot field persons who are genuinely indicted for corruption. However, where they field such candidates, the sanction may not be legal (except where people go to court to challenge the eligibility of such candidates). The sanction is political - loss of the votes of the electorates.

The action of the Federal Government in disqualifying candidates is quite arbitrary and illegal. A competent High Court had ruled in the Fasawe case that no law empowers the EFCC to report to the President or the Federal Executive Council. It therefore constitutes an affront to the rule of law for the Federal Executive Council to purport to disqualify candidates.

Osita Nnamani Ogbu Director, Centre for the Advancement of Democracy and the Rule of Law, Enugu

INEC, EFCC and April 2007

The build up to the emergence of candidates for various positions in the forthcoming general elections billed for April 14 and 21, 2007 is fast gathering momentum. The 50 registered political parties in the country are also gearing up, scheming, crises crossing the Nigeria landscape attracting attention and wooing the Nigerian voters for support.

No doubt, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) an electoral body set up by the Federal Government, charged with the onerous responsibility of conducting elections is also tasking in the euphoria of its readiness to conduct the April elections.

Again, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), is body also set up by the FP to handle financial crimes and other related offences actively involved in the political activities of those vying for positions in the April acid test.

Since its inception, INEC has left no one in doubt about its sincerity, open mindedness and readiness to carry out its task. It has registered 50 political parties in the country to take care of the various ideologies and interests of the Nigerian people. It has also introduced a modern technique of registering voters the Direct Data Capturing (DDC) machines, a system the commission used in the recent voters registration exercise.

The general verdict by the Nigerian electorate on the voters revalidation exercise by INEC can only best be imagined. The huge out-cry on the late arrival of materials and the many technical hiccups associated with DDC machines, inefficiency of officials, inadequate materials among several baskets of problems have made the Nigerian electorates to be apprehensive of the commission and its perceived role in the forth coming elections.

It is against this backdrop that the National Assembly has consistently criticized the exercise and summoned the commission's chairman, Professor Maurice Iwu to appear before it. During the session, the House of Representatives suggested a reversal to manual registration but the INEC boss insisted on the viability of the electronic registration, assuring that the commission is up to the task of conducting a free and fair elections.

The INEC, the chief midwife of the transitional agenda, has of late suffered untold credibility problems as it prepares for the April polls. This, political observers believe is predicated on the suspicion that INEC like EFCC, is a tool of the presidency.

What with its sudden resort to the verification of candidates before elections which was not part of the INEC'S care fully time-lined programmes published towards the end of 2006. Political analysts argue that INEC has no constitutional obligations to screen and determine those fit for electoral contest.

It is against this backdrop that Alhaji Adamu Ciroma, erstwhile Finance Minister collaborated to the above when he said, "in a democracy, there is nothing wrong for opponents stopping unqualified people from contesting or holding public offices by going to court".

However, INEC insists that it has the powers to determine the eligibility of candidates for election .It said "it has no intention of relying on any petition or security reports outside the provisions of the 1999 Constitution which set out the qualifications for elective offices.

Nigerians, both at home in the Diaspora are worried about the activities of INEC. And this is putting the country in the brink of political crisis, the implication of which nobody can fully predict.

It is sad to note that two months to the elections, the party apparatchiks are busy submitting this minute and withdrawing the next minute, lists of candidates to the INEC. As they engage in this game of musical chairs, the names on the lists continue to change.

The implication is that the earlier party primaries conducted by INEC that produced candidates for various political offices are being challenged and names being substituted by the same electoral body that conducted the state and national primaries.

Again, the implication is that rather than going to the grassroots to canvass for votes, many aspirants who have no home based support have relocated to Abuja, in their desperation to safeguard their tickets. At the end of the day, many of those who would fly the parties flags if elections would hold, are not necessarily those produced by the parties. Internal democratic mechanisms, but those whose pockets are deep enough to assuage the greed of party and INEC officials.

It is regrettable that even the little efforts made by the registered voters to choose their leaders have often been frustrated or met untold hitches traceable to both the electoral commission and the political parties.

Cases of manipulation of voter register, harassment of voters, stealing of ballot boxes, falsification of election results, non availability of polling agents and their equipment in designated polling stations etc are synonymous with INEC. This does not augur well for a nation that is yearning for true democracy.

In their 2006 statement in anticipation of this April elections, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) challenged INEC to demonstrate itself to be an impartial umpire whose sole obligation is to serve as an adequate safe guard of the will of the people of the electoral process and its eventual outcome”:

INEC therefore, should not only be said to be transparent, but be seen to be transparent.

Unfortunately, INEC seems not to be encouraging Nigerians to believe in it. For instance, it failed to prosecute Chief Lamidu Adedibu and Alao Akala's aide whom INEC Direct Data Capture machines were found in their houses, carrying out illegal registration.

INEC needs to be above board in its conduct before, during and after elections. This is the only way it can earn the confidence of Nigerians. Anything short of this is a recipe for a failed election in 2007.

That of course takes us to the role of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission led by its chairman, Nuhu Ribadu. It is a fact that Ribadu has taken on the powerful and the powerless, the high and the lowly, the big and the small and even the strong and the weak.

No doubt the EFCC boss has in the discharge of his duties, exhibited uncommon courage, exuded infectious passion and shown a religious dedication to the anti-graft war. In the last three years, he has successfully waged wars against money laundering and cyber crime and 419 and embezzlement of public funds. Through his doggedness, some state governors and other public officers have either been impeached or removed.

But then, this is not without its controversies. Many observers complain about EFCC quick resort to media trial, attacks on notable figures the commission believes are corrupt, a style that has smacks the sharp line between intelligence and politics. Its penchant and blackmail and strong arm tactics whenever it is set to get a public official drowned is what calls for questioning.

Indeed, many observe that EFCC lacks credibility; the even though agency had been doing a nice job. Its credibility question underlies the fact that it has been pooh-poohed as a blackmail weapon President Obasanjo deploys to hound his political opponents, particularly those opposed to the infamous tenure elongation project. A good number of people became victims of this assertion. Vice President Atiku Abubakar has consistently waved this banner since he became a subject of EFCC investigation after falling out with the president. Before Atiku, Orji Kalu (Abia) Ayo Fayose (Ekiti) Joshua Dariye (Plateau) Adolphus Wabara (Senate) and a host of others were trapped by EFCC.

The commission's recent release of list of "investigated and indicted" politicians who are not worthy of holding public office has further erodes its perceived images as the presidency's arm twisting tool.

EFCC seems to be a gam bit of the presidency. In the first place, by allowing the commission to be tied to the apion strings of the presidency contrary to the dictates of he EFFC Act smacks of bad faith and hypocrisy. Even to the most discerning, it can equally well be said that the list could well have been compiled in Aso Rock and handed to the EFCC. The process of compilation and release of the advisory list was completely untidy and therefore fraught with suspicions. There was no evidence of transparency an fairness in how the EFCC arrived at the names of those who made the list and how they made it.

It is sad to note that Ribadu who was quoted to have described the Oyo state deputy governor and governorship candidate of the PDP, Chief Adebayo Akala, as corrupt and unfit for public office, the same Akala's name was outstandingly

missing in the list of those “ investigated and indicted” as submitted to various political parties.

It is instructive to note that of the more than a hundred names on the list, only Atiku has been indicted by an administrative panel. Even then, that indictment is still being challenged in court . It is strange that the EFCC could claim to have investigated and indicted those on the list when none of them has been presented in court and convicted . In any case, if EFCC is so sure of its facts, the noble and right thing to do is to take those on the advisory list to court.

For sure, the handling of the advisory list has added hard knocks on the good work Ribadu is perceived to be doing in EFCC. It is now difficult to explain that the list was not released, if not compiled, for political witch-hunting of perceived opponents.

Nigerians are not surprised because such pettiness and dishonesty and double standards have been the hard work of the Obasanjo administration in the last eight years.

Indeed, Nigerians have come to accept that corruption is a malignant cancer blighting the soul of the country, it is a thing which has bedeviled them endlessly and which they have agreed must be exorcised from our body politic.

However, using the war on corruption to promote certain political interests at the detriment of others is surely a disservice to the teeming populace of the Nigerian community. INEC and EFCC should therefore, rise up to its constitutional obligations to the greater citizenry in-order to move Nigerian forward as we also sail to the April 2007 polls

By Adu Ebe

North Central Zone

Slug 1: Yar’Adua Lauds EFCC

Dateline: Southeast

Amidst widespread allegations that the Nuhu Ribadu-led Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) is a tool for witch hunting, the PDP presidential candidate, Umaru Yar’Adua has promised to strengthen the Commission.

Yar’Adua told journalists in Maiduguri Borno State recently that he was satisfied with the job of the Commission, presently.

According to him “Disrespect for law and order and due process actually is a breakdown of civilization, but the entire human civilization is based on respect for

law and order, and code of human behaviour and conduct which spells out rights and obligations that has to be obeyed”.

Yar'Adua said his administration, if he wins in the April polls, will fight corruption vigorously.

It will be recalled that the Transparency International and other world bodies have rated Nigeria as very high in corruption.

- Adapted with additions loan. The Saturday sun of Feb. 24, 2007. p5

Slug 2: Chief T.A Orji Resurfaces with A bang.

The governorship candidate of the Peoples Progressive Alliance, PPA, in Abia State, Chief T.A Orji today resurfaced in Umuahia, the state capital, with message of hope for his supporters. He had been said to be away on an invitation to Abuja by the Economic and Financial Crime Commission, EFCC.

According to the flag-bearer he is confident of winning in the April polls if the elections are conducted in a free, fair and credible environment.

Hope suddenly appeared restored on many of his supporters' faces that for some days now seemed, according to an observer, “scattered”. Many of them could again be seen pasting new posters of their candidate (Chief T.A. Orji) even as he was addressing the rally at the Aba Road party secretariat.

Meanwhile Chief Ojo Maduekwe, PDP national secretary, has said in Umuahia over the weekend that the plenty of rancour and acrimony in the PDP primaries were a result of the presence of many credible candidates in the party. He however added that these should give way for teamwork now that the primaries are over. (See vanguard, Monday, February 26, 2007. p.11)

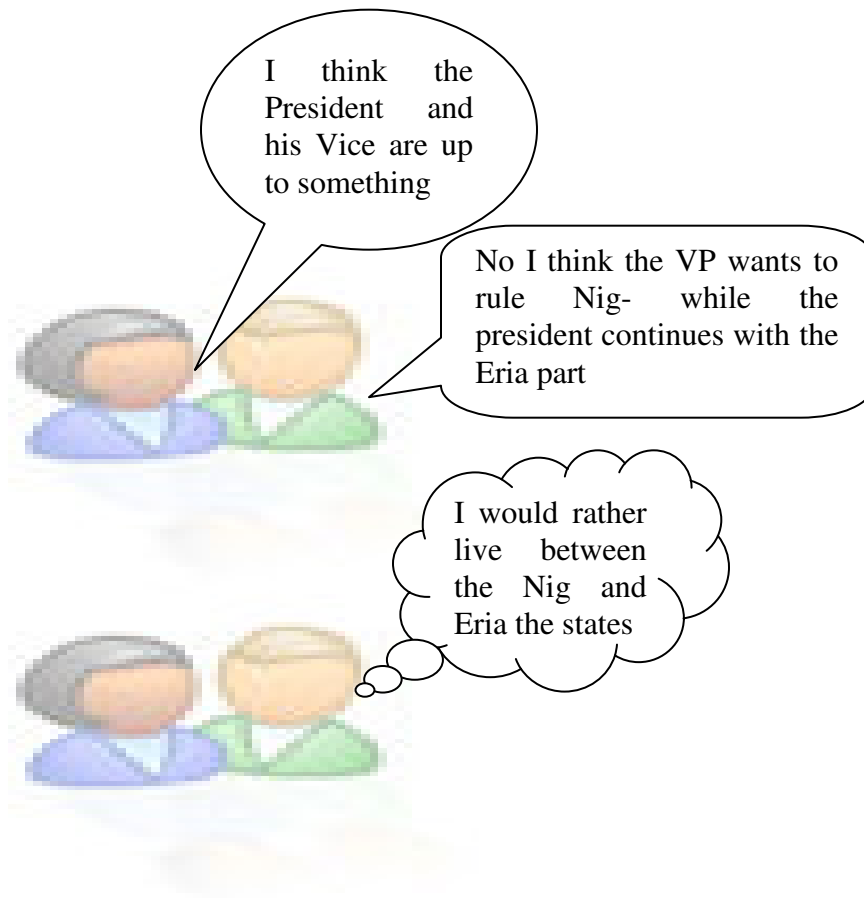
We Country Stori

My country people how una dey, how February dey tak do una, I sure say una dey kampe as I tak dey for here, my people ebi like say na eferi day na im different kind of tings dey happen for dis we ogbonge country, today you hear say baba and assistant baba dey fight ontop of say who chop money pass, tomoro na fight say who no suppose rule us for naija and next tomoro na fight say dem wan buy gun to tak kill oil people. All dis fight na mouth and paper fight, if we no tak time, one day dem go tak style box dem sef befor

we country people korokoro eye. In short mak una wey dey live near aso cave go begin learn how to tak do referee work. Becos he be lik say he dey pain dem say one person chop pass de other person.

My country people oh sometin dey wey dey vex me, de tin be say wey all de women wey dey shout for December tim say dem get sense to rule dis we country, we dem, dey; wetin happen to dem, I no hear dem again oh, abi una dey stil hear from dem, were dem posters abi na for anoda country dem go dey campaign now. Abi na shakara dem com do de time wey dem say don ready to show for aso cave as de 'madam your excellency'. Na wa o, se na brezz blow dem abi na dem liver don quench. De tin be say wetin person no fit do, mak im no let im mouth talk say im fit do, how person go spend dat kind plenti money sake of say im wan show face mak we see say

Jus Joke



Advertorial

This is wishing our wonderful Chairman Mr. Innocent Chukwuma a happy birthday and wedding anniversary this February. May the Lord Almighty continually make your years and marriage a dream come true. We at TMG felicitate with you.

