

News Titbits

CJN swears in members of the Election Petition Tribunal

The first batch of election tribunal members have been sworn in by the Chief Justice of Nigeria Justice I.L Kutigi while warning the 59 Chairmen and members to desist from corruption or face disciplinary measure. He said in the past judges have been accused of corruption hence anyone caught in the act will not be spared by the National Judicial Council as he will be made to face the full wrath of the law. He also urged the chairmen and members to hear tribunal cases expeditiously so as to reduce the backlog of cases associated with previous tribunal.

The second and the third batches will be sworn in March 28 and march 2, 2007 respectively.

Senate panel indicts Atiku over PTDF, chides Obasanjo

After five months of deliberating on the activities of the Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF), a Senate Ad-hoc Committee has said that Vice President Atiku Abubakar "abused his office by aiding and abetting the diversion of public funds in the sums of \$125 million and \$20 million, approved for specific projects, to deposits in banks, some of which were fraudulently converted as loans to NDTV, Mofas Shipping Company Limited and Transvari Services Limited and should be sanctioned for any offences disclosed."

According to the Senate committee, contrary to Atiku's claim, the preponderance of evidence showed that the Vice President had business relationship with his close friend, Otunba Oyewole Fasawe. He not only lent money, N300 million, to him for the purpose of lease of NDTV headquarters, there was also evidence that PTDF funds were used to finance the NDTV/i-Gate deal which also involved the famous U.S. congressman, William Jefferson.

The Senate committee exonerated Globacom owner, Mike Adenuga and his telecommunications company. Though PTDF placed funds with Equatorial Trust Bank in which Adenuga has interest, contrary to EFCC report, that PTDF funds were used to pay for Globacom's GSM license, "there was no evidence of any lending relationship between ETB and Globacom.

The committee however noted that placements in banks were made without compliance with Section 9 of the Finance (Control and Management) Act," noting that "the issue of funds placement is not whether or not funds were lost as is being argued but whether or not the funds were utilized for the purpose for which they were meant in the first place." It then concluded: "The funds were not utilized for the purpose for which they were approved."

On Obasanjo, the report says: "In respect of some projects commenced by PTDF in 2006, particularly the Establishment of African Institute of Science and Technology in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Incorporation of Galaxy Backbone PLC and, Purchase of Computers for Civil Servants under the Computer for all Nigerians Initiative (CANI) for which Mr. President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, gave approval and subsequently obtained the ratification of the Federal Executive Council, laudable as they may seem, these were outside the mandate of the PTDF as provided for in Section 2 of the enabling Act". It adds: "The President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, and the Federal Executive Council acted in disregard of the law establishing the PTDF. Though the ratification by the Federal Executive Council may mitigate this breach of the law, it however does not absolve the President and the Federal Executive Council."

The report therefore recommended that the President be advised to adhere strictly to the provisions of the law establishing the PTDF at all times in either approving projects, expenditure of funds or howsoever. It further recommended that projects, which are outside the purview and contemplation of Section 2 of the PTDF Act, should not receive any further funding from the PTDF, adding that such projects be verified and evaluated.

Atiku faults panel's report, says it's hatchet job

Vice President Atiku Abubakar has condemned the Senate committee's report as a hatchet job, which largely ignored evidence provided before it. According to Atiku, the greater evidence of the panel's bias was that in spite of the abundance of evidence against President Olusegun Obasanjo, "the committee merely recommended that the President should be advised to follow due process."

In a statement by the Atiku Campaign Organization, the Vice President insisted that the three critical issues are whether the approval of the Federal Executive Council (FEC) was needed for the placement of the PTDF funds; whether any money was lost in the investment of PTDF money in ETB and TIB and whether there was any material link between the Vice President and the PTDF funds. According to Atiku, the evidence before the committee confirmed that as at December 2006, "over N19 billion of PTDF money was invested in banks and there was no single evidence that FEC approval was secured for it. This is a confirmation that the investment in TIB and ETB did not require a FEC approval, the transactions passed through the Auditor-General's office as required by law. The conclusion of the committee therefore is inconsistent with the facts at its disposal."

Presidency lauds panel's report

In a swift reaction, the President lauded the Senate ad-hoc committee report on the Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF). It also commended the Senate for its oversight functions. Senior Special Assistant (SSA) on Media and Publicity to President Olusegun Obasanjo, Mrs. Remi Oyo, however said the projects for which the President was chided were actually approved by the Federal Executive Council (FEC) and were indeed laudable ones.

She added: "However, it is important to clarify that with reference to the Africa Institute, the allocation was for the Gulf of Guinea Institute in the scheme. And this was for training of manpower development in the petroleum sector and therefore was in line with the Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF) mandate. This, according to her, was also the case with the allocation to the Petroleum Training Institute in Warri "which also falls under the purview of the PTDF". Above all, she said the Presidency was full of praises for the Senate for doing a thorough job.

U.S. Chief warns of crisis in Nigeria

The director of U.S. intelligence recently warned of instability in Nigeria amid concern that outgoing President Olusegun Obasanjo is manipulating the political process ahead of April's elections. Mike McConnell, who laid out global threats facing the United States for a Senate committee, said that unrest in Africa's most populous country could spill into neighboring countries. While emphasizing that the April 21 presidential elections would lead to Nigeria's first civilian-to-civilian transfer of power since independence from Britain in 1960. McConnell repeated concerns raised by his predecessor, John Negroponte, last month about democratic transition in a country of 140 million that is infamous for graft and corruption, electoral and otherwise.



Chief Mrs. Hadiza Ibrahim

Obasanjo holds me an apology – Hadiza Ibrahim, former PDP presidential aspirant

Chief Mrs. Hadiza Ibrahim, proprietress of Hadiza motors, lost her bid to rule Nigeria. She was among the presidential aspirants of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) who did not make it to Eagle Square. Her ambition was cut short by “the powers that be”, she says and for this, “Obasanjo must apologise to me and seek forgiveness.”

She said she is still bitter that the PDP leadership asked some of the aspirants to back out of the contest without any explanation. According to her, the PDP chairman, Amadu Ali, only called them to a meeting and ordered them to back out, that Yar’Adua was the party’s choice.

INEC will Conduct Elections in All States

Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Prof. Maurice Iwu has restated the determination of the commission to conduct the April general elections in

all the states of the federation. In a veiled reference to the statement credited to Governor Peter Obi of Anambra State that there would be no governorship elections in the state, the INEC chairman reaffirmed the constitutional duty of the commission to conduct elections in all states of the federation. He also said the commission would not indulge in political statements.

Obi had earlier said there would be no governorship elections in Anambra State in view of section 180 subsections 2 of the constitution which, in his own words, provides that the tenure of a president and governor is for a period of four years from the date of the oath of allegiance. Iwu also gave insight into why the commission did not accept any list of candidates from the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), stating that it was in accordance with a Federal High Court Judgment which restrained the commission from dealing with either of the factional chairman of the party pending the outcome of suit before it.

101 LGs Squandered N1.6tr – Ribadu

Chairman of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, has accused 101 local governments in the country of squandering more than N1.6 trillion allocated to them since 1999. Ribadu, who spoke while declaring open a workshop on transparency and accountability in local governments at EFCC training school, Abuja, lamented that most local governments have not justified the confidence reposed in them as trustees of the peoples' money.

According to him, all over rural Nigeria are evidence of neglect, while the gloom and desolation in the land did not match the huge resources allocated to local governments. He said; "The budgets of some countries in Africa such as Niger Republic did not amount to what the 101 councils were getting, yet things were working despite their operating leaner purses," Ribadu said. The workshop, organised by EFCC and the Association of Local Governments in Nigeria (ALGON), was attended by functionaries from 101 councils representing six states and six geo-political zones. Ribadu said the manner Nigerians got wealth brought them insecurity instead of protection.

I'll lay down my life to fight corruption

Chairman, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, says he is ready to lay down his life to prosecute corrupt politicians, with a call on all Nigerians to support him in the crusade. Ribadu, who declared that the Commission would ensure that corrupt politicians seeking elective political offices are not allowed to feed on the nation's resources, said it is high time Nigerians rose up to the challenge to stop corrupt political office seekers. Speaking in Ile-Ife, at a lecture organised by the Justice Chambers of Faculty of Law, Obafemi Awolowo University, in honour of Professor Gabriel Olawoyin, the EFCC boss said there is no hope for the nation as long as corrupt individuals are allowed to move freely.

In the lecture titled, "Rethinking Democracy: Corruption and the Rule of Law in Nigeria," Ribadu said "the nation would continue to plunge into economic mess as long as you allow crooks and gangsters to lead this country. So, we need to rise up and stop them. This nation belongs to all of us and no individual or group of persons can hold us to ransom," he said. Ribadu, while denying the allegation of selective justice leveled against the Commission, said it was unfortunate that those making the allegation were hunted by their past deeds. Ribadu then charged all Nigerians to take the bull by the horn in ensuring that corruption is reduced to its barest minimum.

Court Affirms EFCC's Power to Probe States

The Supreme Court has affirmed the power of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to investigate state governments and threw out a suit filed by the Abia State Government challenging the powers of the Commission to probe the state over financial crimes. Seven members of the panel, including the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Idris Kutigi, held that a dispute between EFCC and Abia State failed the definition of what a dispute between a state and the Federal Government should be. The court further held that Section 232 (1) of the 1999 Constitution, which conferred jurisdiction on the court to hear cases of disputes between two states and a state and the Federal Government, did not permit a state to sue EFCC directly at the Supreme Court. The court also held that EFCC was a body corporate and that anyone who had any complaint against the commission should sue it directly at the appropriate high court.

Justice Samuel Onnoghen who delivered the lead judgment said: "There is no single complaint against the 1st Defendant (the Attorney General of the Federation) in this action." All the complaints are against the activities of the EFCC or its agents in the exercise of the functions conferred on the organization by law.

Buhari urge Nigerians to mobilize against rigging

The Presidential candidate of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), Major General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd) has urged Nigerians to mobilize themselves to ensure that the 2007 general elections are free and fair. Buhari who was speaking at the South-South Zonal rally of the ANPP in Calabar recently said the state of hopelessness Nigerians have found themselves derives from the incompetence exhibited by the PDP led Federal Government in handling the affairs of the nation. According to him, "You know very well, in 2003 there were no elections in most of the South. In 12 to 15 states there were no elections. It is going to be different this year. We are suggesting to you to organize a Relay System where you monitor your votes from the polling both to the announcement of the final results. "If you allow thieves to rig elections by stealing your votes you will continue to suffer. It is up to the youths to organize themselves to protect their votes and ensure that the winners of elections are declared at every polling unit," he said.

Buhari also called on the Police and other security agencies in the country to work for the people of this country during the elections and not for any particular individual or group to ensure free and fair 2007 general elections in the country.

No Atiku, no election - AC warns

The Action Congress (AC), has threatened that any attempt by INEC, acting under orders from the presidency, to illegally bar its presidential candidate, Vice President Atiku Abubakar, from contesting April's elections could put the polls in jeopardy. In a statement signed and issued by its national publicity secretary, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, the party added that, "this is not just the resolution of our party, the Action Congress, but that of millions of Nigerians who desire a free, fair and credible elections and the creation of a level playing field for all candidates," it added.

AC lambasted INEC chairman, Maurice Iwu, whom it termed a puppet and a man without courage, of seeking to plunge Nigerian into a deep crisis by dancing to the tunes of the anarchists who would do everything to truncate the forthcoming polls so they could realise their objective of self-perpetuation in office.

In a swift reaction, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) said it would not make any further comments regarding Atiku's case since it was still pending in court. INEC Commissioner in charge of Information, Dr. Muhammed Jumare, said he will not make any comments on the matter.

Obasanjo Launches Re-designed Currencies

President Olusegun Obasanjo recently launched the redesigned naira notes and new coins, with a charge to Nigerians to handle them with as much care and respect as that given to the national flag. The notes are the N5, N10, N20 and N50 denominations while the coins come in 50 kobo, N1, and N2 denominations. The President who condemned the acts of spraying and stepping on currency notes at social functions, expressed admiration for the plastic (polymer substrate) material used for the new notes, hoping it would encourage government's clean note policy. He commended the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) for using the three major languages on the notes as that has made the currency truly Nigerian but hoped the law would in future allow the use of more languages. Obasanjo also hailed the use of the portrait of a renown female traditional potter, the late Ladi Kwali, on one of the notes, saying "I salute the CBN for celebrating a woman on our currency" and appealed to Nigerians to accept and use the new coins and notes. Speaking at the formal launch, Governor of CBN, Prof. Charles Soludo, who presented the new coins and notes to the President and members of the Federal Executive Council (FEC), disclosed that they were produced at half the previous production costs and conform with international best practices like other world currencies.

Court stops Boni impeachment

A high court in Yola has nullified the entire impeachment proceedings begun by the Adamawa State House of Assembly against Governor Boni Haruna. The House had February given an impeachment notice to the governor through a proxy and ordered through a voice vote, the state chief judge, Justice Bamari Bansi, to set up a seven-member panel to investigate the governor. But the governor, who was on sick

leave abroad when the impeachment notice was given, challenged the action of the legislators at the Yola high court. His team of lawyers led by Rickey Tarfa (SAN), argued successfully that the House was wrong to have served the governor by proxy and that the other members of the House were not served with the notice as provided for in section 188 of the 1999 constitution.

In its judgment delivered by Justice Nathan Musa said the procedure taken by the House was in clear breach of Section 188 of the 1999 constitution. The court therefore declared that the entire impeachment process begun by the House was “unconstitutional, null and void”. It also set aside all the steps taken so far by the House in respect of the impeachment proceedings and restrained them perpetually from continuing with anything related to it. Meanwhile the Speaker of the House, Abubakar Abdullahi has said they would appeal against the judgment.

EFCC arraigns Kalu, others on money laundering charges

Governor of Abia State, Chief Orji Uzor Kalu has been arraigned before a Federal High Court in Lagos on charges of money laundering and diversion of funds. The Executive Governor of Abia State and five other officials were alleged to have laundered and diverted the sum of N2.7 billion through Slok Nigeria Ltd, a front company. The suit which was instituted by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission [EFCC] was brought before Justice Tijani Abubakar of the Federal High court in Lagos.

The five Abia state officials include the former Chief of Staff to the Governor, Chief Theodore Amaefule Orji, former state commissioner for Finance, Mr. Moses Agoh, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of local government, Elder S.O Iheke, former Director of Finance and Supply, Government House, Mr. James Udeogu and one Nnanna Uzor and Kalu's mother Eunice Uzor Kalu who has fled the country

Nnamani seeks review of constitution to check defection

Senate President Ken Nnamani recently made a case for the amendment of the Constitution of the Federal Republic to accommodate a clause to check defection of elected leaders like the President or the deputy. He said this while on the hot seat program at the Nite Shift Coliseum in Lagos where he was the Guest, Nnamani picked holes in the constitution, which he said required urgent overhauling. He said; "Anybody who says the amendment of the Nigerian Constitution is not due, is making a mistake, our constitution requires some panel-beating; there is no question about that... the issue of criss-crossing and people jumping from one party to another is because of the way our constitution is crafted ... I don't think our constitution ever anticipated that there will be a situation when the president and his deputy will be in opposing party." Nnamani however said that this review could not be done in the life of the present National Assembly.

The Senate leader however did not foreclose impeachment of either the President or his deputy. He said this would however be based on the recommendation of the House,

adding: "What we are now dealing with is what we call general principles and merits of the report. At the end of that very debate, we will take the recommendations one by one and see whether the recommendations flow effectively and efficiently from the findings

PTDF: Senate Plots Against Obasanjo, Atiku

There were strong indications that a vote of no confidence may be moved against President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku Abubakar midway into the Senate debate on the report of its Ad-Hoc Committee on Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF). The motion may be consequent on the "clear direction" that the facts of the PTDF reports have indicated as well as the expected rigorous debate by Senators for or against the recommendations on the President and the Vice President.

There are fears that aggrieved Senator Arthur Nzeribe, who is seeking his re-election ticket for Imo West Senatorial zone on the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) might cash in on the mood of the Senate to move it. He had served notice that he would move a vote of no confidence motion and impeachment against unnamed persons which he kept in abeyance.

Presidency Denies Doctoring EFCC List

The Presidency has replied Senate President Ken Nnamani over his remarks on the floor of the Senate alleging that the involvement of the Presidency in the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) advisory list on corrupt politicians has created a moral challenge on the Commission to justify its independence. In the reaction, which was contained in a letter signed by the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), Chief Ufot Ekaette, the Presidency said there was never a manipulation or politicisation of the list submitted by the EFCC.

The Senate President had then said, "It is a clear abuse of its mandate for the EFCC to submit its list of indicted candidates to the Presidency for consideration or review". He then urged Senators to take special interest in how the EFCC discharges its mandate, expressing worry that there was credible evidence that the EFCC independence is being eroded. Nnamani also moved for the amendment of Section 3 (2) of the EFCC Act, which in his view weakens the independence of the Agency and makes it liable for manipulation by political office holders.

Yar'Adua ill, flown to Germany

Presidential hopeful and governor of Katsina State, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, was has been flown to Germany for medical attention, following what was generally described as a "sudden degeneration of health." Yar'Adua, candidate of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) for the coming presidential election, was flown in an air ambulance from the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja, at about 8.30 p.m. He had reportedly developed a health problem during the party's campaign in Benin City,

Edo State, after which construction giant, Julius Berger, was contacted to make arrangement for his flight abroad.

The state of health of the governor had been subject of much speculation, right from when he emerged the presidential candidate of the ruling party late last year. Yar'Adua had, however, denied the rumour and, in fact challenged his critics to a game of squash.

President Olusegun Obasanjo had also denied the speculation which he attributed to opposition parties. But what started as a mere speculation all over the country yesterday was confirmed as reality when PDP had to admit its candidate was having health problems.

Wabara opt for revenge: **Obasanjo, Atiku Should Face Trial**

After hours of rigorous and exhaustive debate on the report of the Senate Ad-Hoc Committee on Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF), the Senate finally set up a seven-member Review Committee to complete and fill up the gaps in the report. 44 Senators contributed to the debate, while the Senate had to extend its sitting beyond 2 p.m. to conclude. The Senate gave the Review Committee a week to turn in its report. But as one of the major contributors, former Senate President, Senator Adolphus Wabara (Abia State), in an emotion-laden speech, said both President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku Abubakar should be made to refund monies that were expended through their irregular approvals and be prosecuted thereafter.

Police Restrict Buhari, Cancel Approved Rallies

The Nigeria Police Commands in Nasarawa, Bauchi, Gombe and Plateau States have cancelled campaign rallies earlier granted the presidential candidate of the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), Major General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd). The campaign rallies of the ANPP presidential candidate in Bauchi State were also restricted to only two streets - Wunti Road and Azare Road in Bauchi town even as the police insisted that Buhari must fly into the state with an aircraft or helicopter and not by road. These were disclosed to newsmen in Abuja by the Secretary to the ANPP Presidential Campaign Organization, Eng. Buba Galadima. He said the explanation of the police was that if he should go to the state by road, the crowd of supporters that follow him could cause security breach. In a particular instance, he said, the Bauchi State Commissioner of Police wrote to the party stating that Buhari's movement in the state must be restricted to only Wunti Road leading to the Emir of Bauchi's palace and Azare Road leading to the campaign venue at the Bauchi stadium. In the letter from the Bauchi State Police Command, the police declared the ANPP presidential flag-bearer a persona non grata in any other street in the state.

The Buhari campaign team recently met with the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and assured of religious tolerance, as Sharia would not be a national religion if voted into power.

Utomi raises five million-man anti-rigging squad



The Presidential candidate of the African Democratic Congress, Prof. Pat Utomi, has said that his party is mobilizing a five million-man anti-rigging volunteer squad to monitor the forthcoming general election against possible rigging. He said this while addressing party leaders and supporters in Abuja recently where his running mate, Alhaji Ibrahim Usman, was formally presented to the public.

Utomi said rigging, which had characterized elections in Nigeria, should be checked by Nigerians by ensuring that all votes were counted on Election Day. He noted that the volunteer force would be made up of youths around the country, who would collaborate with civil society organizations to police all the polling stations in the country.

Senate Moves to Ensure April Polls

Following recent uncertainties over the April polls, about three weeks after passing the Electoral Act Amendment Bill 2007 and in preparatory to transmitting it to President Olusegun Obasanjo for his assent, the Senate declared that it has decided to consider further amendments to the Electoral Act, 2006. The Senate, which made its position known after a one-hour closed-door session, said it would do everything possible within the ambit of the law and its powers to ensure that the forthcoming general elections hold as scheduled. The planned amendment of the Electoral Act is coming on the heels of the rumoured death of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Presidential candidate, Governor Musa Yar'Adua and the suggestion that if it was true, INEC might capitalize on Section 37 (1) of the act to postpone the April polls.

The subsection, which affects all other levels of elections, reads: "If at the time for the delivery of nomination papers and before the commencement of the poll, a nominated candidate dies, the Chief Electoral Commissioner or the Resident Electoral Commissioner shall, being satisfied of the fact of the death, countermand the poll in which the deceased candidate was to participate and the commission shall appoint some other convenient date for the election."

Appeal Court voids Dariye's impeachment

The judiciary again has proved that it is capable of stabilizing our nations young democracy as it gave another landmark judgment on the impeachment of Governor Joshua Dariye of Plateau state when the Court of Appeal sitting in Jos declared null and voided the impeachment of the Plateau State Governor, Chief Joshua Chibi Dariye, on November 13, last year by six members of the House led by Mr. Mike Dapianlong. The court ordered the reinstatement of Dariye, with all rights and privileges of the office.

Justice Zainab Adamu Bulkachuwa, who delivered the lead judgment, faulted all the processes of the impeachment. She noted that the former Speaker, Mr. Simon Lalong, and his deputy, Alhaji Zumunta Musa, were never removed from office before their seats were declared vacant by the Speaker protempore who wrote to the Chief Judge of the state, Justice Lazarus Dakyen, to set up a seven-man panel to investigate allegations of gross misconduct leveled against the governor. Justice Bulkachuwa held that before any Speaker or his deputy could be removed from office, it must be a resolution of the House, pointing out that the Speaker protempore must also be appointed by resolution. The court also held that the purported notice of allegations of gross misconduct against the governor was not properly served. Again, the notice of impeachment signed by 10 members was neither dated nor recorded as served on the governor. The court also held that the notice was not signed by the two-thirds of the total number of the members of the House. Hence the whole process contravenes section 188 of the Constitution.

Dariye is thus on the way to joining his colleagues in Oyo and Anambra states, Rashidi Ladoja and Peter Obi, as governors whose controversial removal by the legislature have been overturned by the courts. The state government, now headed by Dariye's deputy, Michael Bot-Mang, has, however, announced that it would challenge the judgment at the Supreme Court.

Atiku writes Assembly, EU, others over INEC's threat

Going by report from The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) declaring that the Vice President remained barred in spite of a court judgment that the commission had no such powers. Vice President Atiku Abubakar has taken his agitation to ensure that he is not barred from contesting for president in the coming general elections to the National Assembly. He has also forwarded his complaints to the international community, particularly the United States, (U.S.) the United Kingdom (U.K.) and the European Union (E.U.).

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) recently declared that the Vice President remained barred in spite of a court judgment that the commission had no such powers. The Vice President in a letter to Senate President, Ken Nnamani, seeks the upper chamber's intervention in what he termed a contrived crisis that could lead to a shift of the elections and the May 29 handover date. A copy of the letter was forwarded to the House of Representatives Speaker Aminu Bello Masari and the embassies of the U.S., U.K., and E.U. in Nigeria.

Meanwhile, the Vice President has initiated contempt proceedings against the INEC chairman, Maurice Iwu.

Kalu not disqualified – INEC chairman

Few weeks to the general elections, the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Professor Maurice Iwu, has confirmed that Abia State governor and presidential candidate of the Progressive Peoples Alliance (PPA), Dr. Orji Uzor Kalu,

would be cleared by his commission. The disclosure came at a time the INEC boss insists that the disqualification of former Anambra state governor and Action Congress (AC) governorship candidate in the state, Dr. Chris Ngige and Anambra State governor and members of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Mr. Peter Obi, was a constitutional matter and irreversible.

Prof. Iwu also explained that INEC had never claimed to have power to disqualify any candidate, while arguing that those who would be barred from contesting the elections were those who fall into the group specified by the constitution and the court of law. According to him, the constitution has provided certain qualifications for those aspiring to lead at various levels and the ineligibility of those who fall short of the qualification, insisting that it is purely on the basis of this that some candidates were cleared and others disqualified.

Police ban political rallies in Sokoto

The police in Sokoto have banned all political rallies in the state indefinitely after two days of violence rocked the state. The commissioner of police Alhaji Saidu Daya announced the ban during a radio and television broadcast recently. Alh Daya said: “This is necessary to forestall peace in the state as a result of two days political thuggery in the state capital which led to the destruction of property worth millions of naira.”

Fighting broke out between supporters of the ruling Democratic Peoples Party (DPP) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The Commissioner said 12 suspects were arrested in a truck conveying PDP supporters while 10 DPP thugs were also arrested in Shagari for vandalizing PDP offices. The commissioner debunked accusations that he was siding the ruling PDP and called on political parties to be fair to the police “which is there to serve and protect all citizens”.

Many injured in Kano PDP/ANPP clash

Another clash between supporters of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) in Bichi local government area of Kano state has left many injured and several vehicles destroyed. Police confirmed the incident saying the situation has been contained. Shops were closed while houses were locked as the clashes lasted several hours throwing the town into confusion. Teargases were used by the police to disperse the rioters while many policemen sustained injuries.

The incident was caused by a disagreement between followers of the ANPP and PDP gubernatorial candidates. Governor Ibrahim Shekarau was in the town to launch his campaigns when the incident occurred while several people sustained various degrees of injuries including the council’s divisional police officer and some security agents. Over 100 policemen have been placed 24 hours guard on the family house of the PDP gubernatorial candidate after the incidence led to most parts of the house damaged and his family were immediately removed from the house.

Election: Atiku remains barred, insists INEC

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on has foreclosed the possibility of Vice President Atiku Abubakar contesting the April 21 presidential election. According to the electoral body, the vice president, who is the Action Congress (AC) presidential flag bearer will not make the list of cleared candidates the commission will release. INEC Commissioner and Head of the Information Committee, Philip Umeadi, a lawyer, told newsmen at a media parley in Abuja that as far as the commission was concerned, Atiku remained indicted just as some others and therefore, stands barred by the constitution from contesting the election. while adding that the onus is on Atiku to get reprieve from the court, promising that INEC would obey any court order to that effect.

On why the commission is appealing the court ruling that it had no power to disqualify candidates for elections, Umeadi maintained that it had no interest whatsoever other than for clear interpretation of the role of INEC when the court said that INEC, as a body, could screen and verify claims but cannot disqualify candidates.

However, the vice president has warned that Nigeria is heading for anarchy if the INEC does not stop flouting court orders on the issue of disqualification of candidates for next month's elections. In a statement by the Atiku Campaign Organization, the vice president argues that INEC's position was a clear affront on the judiciary as, "a Federal High Court sitting in Abuja had resolved all the issues on the powers of INEC to disqualify candidates from the election."

Election: INEC orders 400 million ballot papers

To avoid shortage of ballot papers during the April general elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has signed a contract for the printing of 400 million balloting papers. Disclosing this to a worried House of Representatives at a recent meeting with the House members, Hon Amisu Shira, Chairman of the Electoral Committee said that the contract, though awarded to the Nigerian Security Printing and Minting Company, the actual printing would be handled by a foreign based company.

The cheering news did not impress members of the House who insisted that INEC Chairman, Professor Maurice Iwu be invited to shed more lights on the printing of ballot papers and other serious issues that are casting doubts on the preparations of INEC for free, fair and credible elections. Apart from Iwu, Minister of Finance and the Accountant General of the Federation were also summoned to shed lights on the level of financing towards the general elections. Prof. Iwu, when he appears would brief the House on why he disobeyed court ruling on disqualification of candidates.

Atiku not on INEC's list goes to court again

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was true to its words as it formally released the list of the cleared candidates for the April 21 presidential elections without the name of Vice President Atiku Abubakar, who is the flag bearer of the Action Congress (AC). The AC and Abubakar, has however filed an action at the Federal High

Court, Abuja, to challenge INEC's action. Meanwhile, the party, also in a press statement warned the electoral commission not to plunge Nigeria into the kind of crisis that a similar action created in Cote d'Ivoire, where a presidential candidate, Alhassan Quattarra, was denied a right to contest.

Altogether, the names of 24 presidential candidates and their running mates were released by INEC. The commission also made a turnaround about its commitments to obey any court order asking it to include any candidate in the list. INEC said that it would contest any such rulings, which, according to it, would in fact be ineffectual, as it would be given outside the period it provided for the substitution of candidates' names. It added that obeying every court order at this point in time would distract its logistical arrangements.

Senate curbs President's power to remove EFCC boss, others

Drastic situation needs drastic change as the Senate moves to curb the president's powers to remove the Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) by an amendment bill to amend the EFCC Act. One of the profound amendments to the Act is the removal of the powers of the President to sack the EFCC chairman or any member of the commission without the consent of the Senate. Section 3(2) of the new bill stipulates that "the chairman or any member of the commission may only be removed by the President acting on the address supported by two-thirds majority of the Senate for inability to discharge the functions of the office or for misconduct."

The Upper House also amended section 43 of the Act, which prescribed that "the Attorney-General of the Federation may make rules or regulations with respect to the exercise to any of the duties, functions or powers of the EFCC." The amendment now reads: "Without prejudice to the provision of section 174 of the Constitution in the exercise of its functions, the commission shall not be subjected to direction or control of any authority or persons". Section 6(d) was also amended by the Senate to ensure that henceforth, the EFCC would not confiscate people's property without an order of the law courts to that effect.

The amendment may equally be cheery news to persons that will be found guilty of terrorist acts as section 15 of the original Act was reviewed to reduce the punishment of terrorist acts from life imprisonment to seven years jail term.

6 Govs, 755 candidates cleared for senatorial polls

Six serving governors were among the 761 candidates cleared by the Independent National Electoral Commission for the senatorial election next month. The governors are Mr. Goerge Akume of Benue state, who is running for the Benue North West senatorial district, Adamu Muazu of Bauchi for Bauchi South, Chimaroke Nnamani of Enugu State for Enugu East, and Mohammed Markarfi of Kaduna for Kaduna North.

Others are Adamu Aliero of Kebbi State formerly of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) but now in the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), cleared to contest the Kebbi

Central Senatorial seat and Alhaji Saminu Turaki of Jigawa, also formerly of ANPP but now of PDP, was cleared to contest the Jigawa South-West senatorial district. Elder Ugbesia Odion, former governorship aspirant of PDP in Edo, sailed through to contest the senatorial seat in the state. State by state analysis showed that Kwara topped the list with 32 senatorial candidates and Adamawa and Akwa Ibom with the lowest of 12 candidates.

We're Ready – SSS, Police

The Senate recently reassured the nation that the State Security Service (SSS) and the police had assured it that they are fully prepared to ensure violence-free elections come next month. The Senate rose from a three-hour closed session with top brass of the SSS, led by its Director General, Colonel Kayode Are (rtd) and the police, represented by all Deputy Inspectors General of Police (DIGs), with DIG Ogbonnaya Onovo leading the team.

Briefing correspondents at the end of the session, Deputy Senate Leader and Vice Chairman of the Senate Committee on Media and Public Affairs, Senator Jonathan Silas Zwingina, said the SSS and the police gave a detailed briefing to the Senate in respect of their security preparations for the April elections.



Tinubu, Fashola escape gun attack

Two persons were feared killed and many others injured at an election rally in Lagos where Governor Bola Ahmed Tinubu and the Action Congress (AC) governorship candidate in the state, Barrister Babatunde Fashola (SAN) had to be whisked away by security agents. A policeman attached to the governor was reportedly shot in the head. Several vehicles were destroyed and a number of shops were also torched in the mayhem caused by suspected political thugs, who invaded the open playing ground opposite the Alesh Hotel, Ajah, venue of the AC rally. Governor Tinubu has promptly blamed his political opponents for the mayhem, vowing to bring the perpetrators of the violence to book.

An eye witness informed that the hoodlums, numbering about a hundred, had invaded the venue, brandishing various weapons of war, including guns, machetes, broken bottles, and charms while shooting sporadically. The situation severely paralyzed business activities around Ajah area and policemen drafted to the scene had to release several canisters of tear gas to disperse the hoodlums, forcing several supporters of the party to flee the scene abruptly.

Shun corruption, CJ warns judges

The Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Idris Legbo Kutigi has said that the President Olusegun Obasanjo led administration has placed enormous responsibility on the judiciary including making judges more vulnerable to corruption. The Chief Justice of Nigeria who spoke recently at a refresher course for judges and kadis, held in Abuja warned judges to be careful in their dealings with politicians so as not to be used by politicians to satisfy their whims and caprices as the general elections approaches.

Also speaking at the event, the Administrator of NJI, Justice Timothy Oyeyipo also told the judges and kadis to strive to maintain good conduct, compartment and decorum. According to him, “you will do well to remember that Nigeria’s democracy is still young and developing and we all know the challenges that lie ahead. Judicial officers must therefore be adequately equipped for the job” He added that it is a good thing that the Code of Conduct for judicial officers of the Federal Republic of Nigeria would serve as a guide for the judges and kadis to do their work.

NDP goes to court to stop elections

The National Democratic Party (NDP) says it will file court papers to stop the April elections because of “the electoral commission’s gross ill preparedness.” NDP’s National Chairman, Kassim Afegbua, said that the elections cannot hold on “faulty ground”, while noting that the voters register was not ready 28 days to the election in conformity with the nation’s constitution. According to him, the elections should be “altogether postponed to stop a situation where the PDP would manipulate the process and get re-elected.”

Meanwhile, INEC Spokesperson, Segun Adeogun, however dared the party to go ahead with its action, saying that it would not affect the scheduled elections. Adeogun said: “Everyone is free to go to court but this will not derail the transition. We shall have the election according to the timetable.” Governorship election is scheduled for April 14, while the presidential election will hold on the 21st. But the NDP is contending that the absence of the voters register, 28 days to the election makes the exercise “unconstitutional.” NDP among other things, is asking the court to clarify the issues surrounding the commission’s readiness to conduct a “legally binding election”, even as it insists that the court must declare null and void, the registration exercise which took place between December 15 and February 2.

Bauchi city of political giants

Bauchi state is gradually becoming a political battle ground. The gubernatorial campaign in the state has taken a dangerous dimension with the two giant candidates engaging in a fight to finish. Supporters of the two notable candidates, Mallam Isa Yuguda of the All Nigeria Peoples Party [ANPP] and Alhaji Mohammed Nadada Umar of the ruling People’s Democratic Party [PDP], have engaged themselves in mudslinging, intimidation and physical attacks – all in an effort to woo voters to the respective sides of their candidates in the forthcoming general elections.

Mallam Isa Yuguda was a minister of state for transport before he was rewarded with the full portfolio of Aviation Ministry after the controversial 2003 general elections. Mohammed Nadada Umar on his part was Secretary to the Bauchi State Government from the inception of the current democratic regime until August last year when he resigned to contest for the governorship position.

However, as the campaign gradually reaches its peak, the political fortunes of Mallam Isa Yuguda may be brightened by the popularity of General Buhari, while Muhammad Nadada's success may largely depend on the performance of Governor Mu'azu and the apparent unity in their party.

Nothing will stop election – Iwu

nothing will stop next month's election from holding on the scheduled date says the Chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Prof. Maurice Iwu recently when he appeared before the House Committee on Electoral Matters headed by Alhaji Hamisu Shira. The Commission also expressed its determination to reverse the inclusion of Governor Orji Uzor Kalu's name on the list of cleared election candidates.

The INEC Chairman said that the commission is ready to conduct election on April 14 for the position of Governors and members of the State House of Assembly in 36 states of the federation. He added that INEC would also conduct election to the office of President and National Assembly seats on April 21, adding that the commission is not anticipating any last minute hitches that will mar the election. He further added that for the first time INEC has established a Logistics Centre where storage facilities have been acquired and installed to handle electoral matters. INEC boss said that six zonal stores have been constructed in the geo-political zones of the country to avoid the hiccups experienced in 2003 when electoral materials did not arrive on time.

...and yet another clash as 10 lives, 30 houses touched in Benue

Ten persons were feared killed 10 villages 30 houses razed down across Benue State recently when violence erupted between supporters of the Action Congress (AC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The Police Public Relations Officer, Samuel Jinadu said that seven persons have been arrested in connection with the crisis. He said that investigations have begun into the mayhem.

Trouble started when an argument ensued between supporters of PDP and AC at a popular bar in Sati Village of Kusuv Council over the senatorial contest involving Governor George Akume of the PDP and Dr. Azeze Lim of AC for the Benue North West Senatorial District. The argument degenerated into a fight, leading to the death of a popular PDP youth known as Aondowase whose death brought the state into a stand still as there was a free for all fight between the PDP supporters and members of the AC.

INEC forecloses substitution of candidates

Political parties seeking to substitute disqualified candidates with fresh names should perish the thought, chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Professor Maurice Iwu, declared recently when he appeared before the joint committee of the House of Representatives on electoral matters, appropriation and finance, he said that the time for such substitution is now officially over.

The INEC chief, who commended affected candidates who had resorted to the court to seek redress, said that if however, the cases were resolved before the elections; the litigants could go to the election tribunals after the election. Iwu, who said no court order had been served on the commission before the closing of the nomination exercise, also said that INEC complied with orders given before the expiration of the period allowed for substitution, but not after the period.

Prepare to head interim govt, opposition parties tell Nnamani

Representatives of eight major opposition parties recently paid a courtesy call on the Senate President, Ken Nnamani, asking him to be prepared to take over power as an Interim President, in the event that the April general elections could not hold as a result of on-going court cases. The eight parties, including of that of Alhaji Atiku Abubakar's Action Congress (AC); Professor Pat Utomi's Africa Democratic Congress (ADC); Gen. Muhammadu Buhari's All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP); and Chief Orji Uzor Kalu's Progressive Peoples Alliance (PPA). Others are Dim Chukuwemeka Odimegu Ojukwu's All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA); Alhaji Attahiru Bafarawa's Democratic Peoples Party (DPP); Habu Fari's National Democratic Party (NDP); Franklin Akintola's Democratic Front for a Peoples Federation (DFPF), as well as Prof. Solomon Asemota led Ethnic Nationalities Movement (a socio-cultural group).

They told the Senate president in plain terms "be prepared to take over in an interim government during which you conduct a free and fair election for this country." The parties asked the National Assembly to facilitate the urgent removal of the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission, Professor Maurice Iwu, from office.

PDP, AC supporters clash in Osogbo

Unspecified numbers of persons were reportedly injured in Osogbo, Osun state capital as supporters of the Action Congress (AC) clashed with those of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) at Ita Olookan area of the city. A quick intervention by the police, however, doused the tension as the rioters were dispatched while a detachment of mobile policemen was stationed at Oja-Oba/Ita-Olookan area to forestall further breakdown of law and order. Though there were different accounts of what caused the skirmishes, information has it that the clash lasted for about 30 minutes during which the entire area was thrown into commotion as people ran in different directions for safety.

In the melee, vehicles belonging to the clashing political parties were also smashed while many passers- by were wounded in their bid to escape from the scene. An account of the incident blamed the clash on an alleged blockage of the AC campaign convoy that was heading towards Ilesa for its rally by two PDP buses, while another account claimed that

it was the convoy that overtook the PDP vehicles, asking them to leave the road, a situation which led to the clash. It was further learnt that while the AC was taking its campaign to Ilesa, the PDP was also going to Iperindo in Atakumosa Local Government Area and were apparently bound to take the same route out of Osogbo. While the skirmishes lasted, dangerous weapons such as catapult, clubs, stones and sticks were freely used by the rioters. Confirming the incident, the state police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mr Joshua Olayemi (ASP) said the situation has been put under control adding that one person in mobile police uniform has been arrested in connection with the clash.

Ekiti: PDP chieftain wants emergency rule extended

A chieftain of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Ekiti State, Chief Ishola Filani has advocated an extension of the state of emergency in the State, saying the state would descend into chaos and anarchy if the emergency rule was lifted in April. Filani also foreclosed the possibility of the state's former governor, Mr Ayo Fayose returning to power, saying Fayose was gone for good. Filani, who lost the PDP governorship ticket in the state last December, said there would be chaos in Ekiti if the emergency rule was lifted next month, as there would be confusion over who should take over the governor's seat.

ACROSS AFRICA

Wade seeks re-election as Senegal holds presidential polls

Some five million Senegalese voters recently balloted to choose a new president from 15 candidates seeking a mandate from the electorate. The polls, which started as early as 8 a.m. (GMT) throughout the nation were reportedly peaceful without any major incident. . Voting ended at 18 hours GMT and early results could be available.

About 4.9 million of Senegal's roughly 12 million people were registered to vote, said Election Commissioner Issa Sall. More than 12,000 polling stations were setup nationwide for the Senegal's first election using an electronic voting identification system based on fingerprint and retina recognition.

President Abdoulaye Wade who gained power from Abdou Diouf in 2000 in a similar exercise of franchise is seeking a second term mandate of five year term. He faces stiff competition from two of his former Prime ministers, Moustapha Niase and Idrassa Seck. Other serious contenders are Ousmane Tanor Dieng of the Socialist Party and, most significantly, Abdoulaye Bathily and Landing Savan? Who supported Wade against Diouf in the 2000 poll. Campaigns for the election began on February 4 and climaxed recently with massive rallies in Dakar a stronghold of Idrassa Seck

Wade, 80, is a decade older than the oldest of his 14 rivals has been criticised for pursuing glitzy building projects that some say benefit the capital's cosmopolitan elite while doing little to ease the problem of unemployed youth.

Zimbabwe to maintain ban on political rallies

President Robert Mugabe's government will maintain a ban on political rallies and protests in the capital, Harare, for as long as there is a "breakdown of law and order", state media reported recently. Zimbabwe recently imposed a three-month ban on all rallies and demonstrations in many of Harare's volatile poor townships, following clashes between police and opposition supporters.

The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the main opposition party in the southern African nation, has condemned the decision, likening it to a state of emergency, and is challenging it in court. But the country's justice minister, Patrick Chinamasa, told legislators that the ban would remain in force. Analysts say Mugabe's government faces growing dissent in the face of a deepening economic crisis, marked by inflation of almost 1,600 percent, the highest in the world, and chronic shortages of food, fuel and foreign currency.

Zimbabwe arrests opposition leaders before rally against Mugabe

Top Zimbabwean opposition activists were recently detained near the venue of a planned rally against President Robert Mugabe's government in Harare. This is coming as Mugabe has reiterated his determination to run for re-election for the sixth consecutive term in 2008 during parliamentary and presidential elections to be held simultaneously next year.

Mugabe, who has ruled Zimbabwe with an iron fist since the country attained independence from Britain in 1980, has bowed down to public pressure to hold elections in 2008 instead of 2010. The 83-year old Mugabe says he will contest for a five-year presidential term.

A spokesman for the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) confirmed that their leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, was arrested near the venue. Tsvangirai was arrested after police thwarted a rally planned by the anti-government coalition, Save Zimbabwe Campaign, by sealing off the venue in the Highfields Township, close to the Machipisa mall.

Mauritania presidential frontrunner gets poll boost

The frontrunner in Mauritania's presidential vote, Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi, has received a boost to his chances by obtaining the support of a top defeated first round contender. Former Central Bank Governor Zeine Ould Zeidane, who came third in the inconclusive March 11 first round poll in the Saharan Islamic state, announced recently that he was backing Abdallahi in the March 25 run-off.

In what are being hailed as the freest elections ever held in Mauritania, Abdallahi, a 68-year-old economist who has served as a minister in past administrations, will face veteran opposition campaigner Ahmed Ould Daddah, 64.

The new civilian president to be elected will take over from an outgoing military junta which is handing over power 19 months after a bloodless coup that toppled authoritarian President Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya. Abdallahi, who is widely seen as having the backing of the outgoing junta and of Taya's former supporters, finished ahead in the first round with nearly 25 percent of the votes. His closet rival Daddah won nearly 21 percent. Zeidane gained just over 15 percent, but no candidate won the more than 50 percent required to win in the first round.

Zimbabwe arraigns Tsvangirai, others

With fresh slit on his head and limping, a visibly bruised Zimbabwe's opposition leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, arrested recently during a political rally, has been arraigned in court. He appeared in court alongside about 50 other activists, many of who had parts of their body bandaged as a result of injuries sustained when they were badly beaten in custody after arrest at an opposition rally. Tsvangirai, leader of the Movement for Democratic Change, rode in the back of a large open police truck with at least 20 other opposition activists to the court in central Harare.

Meanwhile international community has condemned the arrests, detention and reported assault on some opposition leaders in Zimbabwe. Meanwhile, the country's main opposition leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, recently underwent a brain scan and his lawyer said he might have suffered a skull fracture and internal bleeding as a result of police beatings. Tsvangirai was moved to a high care unit at a hospital, said lawyer Tafadza Mugabe.

"The world community again has been shown that the regime of Robert Mugabe is ruthless and repressive and creates only suffering for the people of Zimbabwe," said United States (U.S.) Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. The European Union (EU), in a statement, has condemned what it called "the ongoing violent suppression of the freedom of opinion and of assembly, as well as of other fundamental rights." South Africa's Foreign Affairs, Deputy Minister Aziz Pahad, said he was deeply concerned about reports as well as the deteriorating political and economic

Tsvangirai, 54, and other opposition figures were arrested at a prayer meeting recently in the latest crackdown on dissent by President Robert Mugabe's security forces and political supporters. At a brief court appearance at a Magistrate Court, Tsvangirai's right eye was swollen and closed, and his head partly shaved to reveal crudely stitched gashes.

Ex-minister, Abdallahi, wins Mauritania's presidential poll

In a contest believed to be the country's fairest since independence in 1960, a former cabinet minister has emerged as winner of Mauritania's presidential election. Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi polled 53 per cent of the ballots cast in a recent run-off, against 47 per cent for opposition leader Ahmed Ould Daddah, according to the results announced by the country's Interior ministry. The election capped the restoration of civilian rule after a 2005 coup, according to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The military junta of the former French colony was banned from contesting. Previous elections were dismissed as being rigged in favour of the ruling party candidates.

The ballot, in which 1.1 million people were eligible to vote, marks the final stage of a programme to restore civilian rule. Abdallahi gained most votes in the first round two weeks ago but failed to get the 50 per cent needed for victory. Abdallahi, 68, was supported by a coalition of 18 groups previously loyal to the regime of the ousted authoritarian leader, President Maaoya Sid'Ahmed Ould Taya.

Mauritania is an ethnically diverse mix of Arabic-speaking Moors and black Africans. The large Black Moor populations are current and former slaves of the fairer-skinned ruling elite, the White Moors. With newly-discovered oil wealth, Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi's priority should be to deliver growth and prosperity to what has been one of the poorest nations on earth. Another will be to strive for national unity in a country whose complex population mix of Arabs and sub-Saharan Africans has caused conflict in the past.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Cultists and militants threaten elections in Rivers

By Dan Udo

Elections slated for April this year may not hold in Rivers as a result of renewed cult attacks, which have left many dead and several property destroyed. Apparently jostling for supremacy, the cult groups which had gone into hibernation shortly after the 2003 elections have returned to the street in full force to dislodge their rivals and take a comfortable position in the state ahead of the polls. Although the ruling Peoples Democratic Party has often been accused of being instrumental to the emergence of the groups in many parts of the state and the Niger Delta, it is evident that the cultists have defied party lines and are fighting for their survival. In Ogoni which has been ravaged by years of 'wars' which took the lives of many of the heroes of the Ogoni revolution, two communities are embroiled in a war of attrition that has so far claimed no fewer than 50 persons and led to the destruction of over 500 houses. The combatants are camped in Mogho and Bodo both in Gokana Local Government Area of the state. While some claim that the fighting in Mogho and Bodo was triggered off by a communal crisis, others believe that the activities of cult groups and their sponsors were responsible for the mayhem in the community. The fighting started as a normal communal disagreement over the killing of a 62-year-old woman from Bodo in a farm near Mogho. Rather than report to the police the killing of the woman, the Bodo natives resorted to the revenge of the death by attacking their Mogho brothers and the destruction of their houses. By the time the attack died down, several houses in Mogho had been brought down and

thousands others sent away from their homes by the combatants. In Port Harcourt, cultists engaged themselves openly in the Diobu area of the state and created a state of anarchy and uncertainty for about three days all in a bid to gain superiority over their rivals. The two cult groups that engaged themselves in street fight for over three days left behind over 20 persons at the end of their onslaught. Reacting to the attacks in Ogoni, the Chairman of Gokana LGA, Mr. Fred Kpakol, called on the police and other security agents to take immediate steps to arrest and prosecute the masterminds of the cult attacks on Mogho so as to bring to an end the dastardly acts in the area. Speaking after conducting journalists round the affected area, Kpakol said it was disturbing that the cultists had often been left off the hook to attack and destroy without any reprimand from the authorities. The LG chairman warned that election might not take place in the state if the cultists were not arrested and punished by the relevant agencies in the state. He said that it was disturbing that despite several reports to the security agents in the state nothing had been done to check the operations of cultists. Rivers State Governor, Dr. Peter Odili, who visited Mogho and Bodo in company with the Rivers State Police Commissioner, Mr. Felix Ogbaudu, expressed disappointment with the way the elders of the Ogoni community allowed the youths to destroy the community without calling them to order. Odili said, "I am disappointed by your conduct and we feel ashamed that community values and tradition had broken down here." With the emergence of several cult groups in the state and the threats to peace and security, several parties in the state are worried about the safety of their men in the forthcoming elections. They are quick to remember the attack on the convoy of the National Democratic Party, NDP, by cultists on their way to Ogu/Bolu LGA to campaign for Chamberlin Oyigbo who was the governorship candidate of the party in the 2003 election. They are also afraid that the ruling party which is not willing to shift an inch for other parties, after failing the people for eight years, may be working with the cultist to undo them. The activities of cultists in the state may also be responsible for the inability of opposition candidates to start any serious campaign in the state a few months to the election. At a PDP rally in Eleme on Tuesday March 6, 2007, the Chairman of the ruling PDP in Rivers State, Mr. Uche Secondus, challenged opposition parties in the state to come and campaign as the PDP was doing instead of resorting to recruiting militants to ensure their victory at the polls. Secondus who is known as 'total chairman' in the state did not however name the parties involved in the recruitment of cultists and militants to secure victory at the polls. But as events stand in the state, it would be impossible to conduct any credible, free and fair election in Rivers State unless something urgent is done to check the activities of cultist and militants in the state. But the worry is that the police appear to have been overtaken by the militants. They may not want to challenge the militants having lost their men, arms and vehicles to the militants in a major confrontation with them in the last week of January this year leading to the destruction of the Central Police Station in Port Harcourt and the release of over 200 suspects from police cells in the state. The sooner the police act to stop the cultists the better it would be for the schedule elections in the state.

NORTH EAST AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE.

By Yakoob Habib

Barely a few days to the April 2007 general elections in Nigeria, the Northeast geopolitical zone appears to be boiling due to political violence. Out of the six states of the zone, comprising Gombe, Bauchi, Yobe, Maiduguri, Taraba and Adamawa, virtually all has had its own share of this violence as elections draw nearer. Indeed that of Gombe and Bauchi, Yobe seems to be more notorious. In Bauchi state, a couple of weeks ago, there was a bloody clash between the supporters of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) in the state, which left some casualties in its trail. In the month of February, in the same state, a school teacher was beaten to death, by suspected political thugs, who reportedly mistook him for a police officer. According to the Police Public Relations Officer, Alhassan Guga, the thugs were armed with clubs and machetes and beat the man to death at the Nasarawa –Jahun quateres in Bauchi state, because they thought he was an officer drafted to arrest them. In Gombe state, early this month, violence had broken out after the former governor of the state, Abubakar Hashidu, launched his 2007 gubernatorial campaign under the platform of the Democratic Peoples Party (DPP). Though Hashidu was arrested, along with some 23 others by the police, who claimed he had some questions to answer, he had seen been released. In Yobe state, the supporters of Senator Usman Albishir launched an attack on some ANPP chieftains, over their candidate's disqualification by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). They alleged that their candidate was schemed out. Though there are yet reported cases of political violence, in some of the other states of the zone, political violence is latent. The northeast has a total voting population of 9,299,443 after the north central and southwest, according to the recent result released by INEC. And this is very significant, as the phenomenon is capable of affecting the status of the general election. Political violence is a recurring decimal in the country's political system, stemming it or obliterating it in this current political journey has become a sine qua non. Happily, there seems to be some hope at the other end of the tunnel, as the security agencies and even some politicians are signifying interest to deal with the cankerworm.

The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) in Bauchi state, for instance, was so much disturbed about the spate of political violence in the state that it warned the politicians against fomenting troubles.

Speaking on Wednesday in Bauchi at the NLC's state delegate conference, the state chairman of the congress, Ibrahim Zwal, advised politicians to resort to issue-based campaign rather than violence.

"Never in the history of the state have we experienced a marked and naked display of political violence and killings than this time," the NLC boss lamented. The police in these states have warned that they were prepared to deal ruthlessly with those who violate the peace of the state. Other police bosses in the states are also battle ready for the political thugs and Good news also came from Gombe state as gubernatorial candidates of the All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), Action Congress (AC) and DPP in the state have signed up a memorandum of understanding to ensure peaceful polls. The parties candidates, which include Musa Muhammed of AC, Jamilu Ishaiaku Gwamna of the ANPP and Abubakar Hashidu of the DPP, also agreed to make this possible by not engaging in verbal assaults and recriminations against themselves. "It has become desirable and expedient for the gubernatorial candidates of the AC, ANPP ad the DPP to work together to prevent the elections from being marred by violence, thuggery", they

stated. Coming from a clique, that is critical to the peaceful conduct of election, this is cheering news indeed. However, how realistic, the several declarations to halt political and electoral violence would be, remains to be seen. It is important to state that the people of the north east, and in fact the whole nation is waiting for each zone to conduct itself in the best peaceful means in this coming elections.

NACOREV takes campaign against electoral violence to South-South From Port Harcourt

Media Associate

Date: March 27, 2007

The war against electoral violence being spearheaded by a non-governmental group in the country, National Campaign on the Reduction of Electoral Violence, was launched in the South-South zone on Wednesday, March 27, 2007. The launching which was held at the Landmark Hotel in Port Harcourt, was attended by civil society organizations drawn from the six states of the region and featured the presentation of campaign materials, such as stickers, pamphlets, hand bands and badges with the NACOREV inscriptions. Programme Officer for Idassa, Mr. Chukwuma Ezeala, who opened discussion on the campaign, said the task was simply to take the message of conducting a violent-free polls next month and save Nigerians the agony of both structural and psychological violence. Ezeala drew the attention of Nigerians to the fact that the country had always been plagued by the problem of transiting from one civilian to another civilian administration and pleaded that the April polls should be done without rancour. Addressing the gathering, the Executive Director of the Port Harcourt-based Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, Mr. Anyakwee Nsirimovu, blamed governors and other top politicians in the Niger Delta region for the increasing violence and political intolerance that had been prevalent in the region since 1999. Nsirimovu pointed out that it was the political leaders who were responsible for the arming of youths with sophisticated weapons to fight and eliminate their opponents so as to remain in power. The IHRHL boss noted, "The drivers of political violence are not the poor people of the Niger Delta but those who stole the mandate of the people in 1999 and 2003 because they did not allow a free and fair election to be conducted in the area. "These are the people who buy and stockpile arms and give them to idle persons variously called militants and thugs depending on who is using them and for what purpose." The NACOREV South-South Zonal Coordinator, Ms. Damka Pueba, said the programme would take them to all the tertiary institutions in the region while the team would also hold meeting with youth and women groups on how to stop electoral violence. The project is being supported by the British Department for International Development. Nigerian is holding its election to elect a new president, governors and lawmakers for both the national assembly and the state houses of assembly on between April 14 and 21 2007. Tension is already mounting in most of the state because of the use of thugs by some of the political parties to attack their opponents during campaign rallies. Such attacks have been reported in Kwara, Ogun, Lagos, Ekiti and Oyo states.

INEC Boss Replies Tsav on DDC Machines.

Benue: Resident Electoral Commissioner of the Independent National Electoral Commission Benue State, Barrister Austin Okojie, has described as false, baseless and unfounded, the allegations that the Commission has released some of its Direct Data capture machines (DDC) to the state government in an attempt to rig the April elections.

Reacting to a petition written by a retired police Commissioner, Alhaji Abubakar Tsav to the national chairman of the Commission, Prof. Manrice Iwu, the State Commissioner told Journalists in his office that all the one thousand and sixteen DDC machines sent to the state during the revalidation of voters exercise were still intact.

The resident Commissioner debunked claims by Tsav that it was the commissions machines that were used in the just concluded staff audit / screening exercise of that state government.

He further explained that since the assumed duties in the state as the resident electoral commission he had never met Alhaji Tsav and advised him to always investigate his facts before coming up with allegations.

Barrister Okojie later conducted journalists round the store where the DDC Machines were being kept assuring that “as far as I am concerned, all the machines we used for the registration exercise were in our possession”.

POLITICAL CLASHES CLAIM 10 LIVES IN BENUE

At least not fewer than 10 persons were feared killed across ten village in Buruku Local Government of the State when violence erupted between supporters of the Action Congress (AC) and The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

The Police Public Relations Officer, Samuel Jinadu said that seven persons have been arrested in connection with the crisis.

Trouble had reportedly erupted when an argument ensued between supporters of AC and PDP at a popular bar in Sati village of Kusuv Council over the senatorial contest involving Governor Geore Akume of the PDP and Dr. Azeze Zim of AC for the Benue North West Senatorial District.

The argument resulted into a fight, leading to the death of a popular PDP youth known as Aondowase.

Eye witnessed said the body of the slain youth to the local government headquarters where suspected supporters of PDP went on rampage, during down houses of person suspected to be members of AC and in the process killed five persons. The crisis soon spread to 10 villages with supporters of both parties launching reprisal attacks indiscriminately.

Benue Police Command confirmed the violence through its PRO Mr. Samuel Jinadu but declined to comment on the number of casualties.

AC, ANPP, others canvas Iwu's removal.

Abuja; A coalition of political parties, including All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) the Action Congress (AC) and others, have petitioned the National Assembly asking it to remove INEC Chairman Prof. Manrice Iwu.

Their grouse is alleged shoddy preparation for the April polls and purported concluded plot by the chairman to rig the elections in favour of the Peoples Democratic Party.

The aggrieved political parties which submitted the petition to senate president Ken Nnamani in his office said they were united under the umbrella of Eight Political Parties and National Organisation Working for free, fair and credible elections.

The coalition's spokesman, Solomon Asemota (SAN), reading the petition entitled 2007 General Elections Under threat, observed that with the way INEC was handling the

preparations for the polls, it had become clear that it was not yet ready to conduct credible elections.

TMG tasks INEC

“Front load your problems and challenges to the Nigerian people

by Adu Ebe

For the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to earn the confidence of the Nigerian people and the political class, it must confine itself to the mandate given to it by the constitution and the electoral Act, 2006.

TMG chair, Innocent Chukwuma started this while presenting the 2007 master Trainer Manual for Training of Nigerian Election observers produced by the transition monitoring group.

Mr. Chukwuma said the 2007 elections will define the character, completion and direction of the democratic experiment in Nigeria, pointing out that the elections will also show whether the Nigerian people and the leadership are truly committed to enthroning a political culture supportive of democracy and its ideals.

He said the April elections is an acid test for the political class which will show whether the political class have learnt sufficient lessons in democratic practice after eight years trial and error.

He further said that the elections will define Nigeria’s standing within the African continent and in the community of democratic nations said “failure of Nigerian democracy will have far reaching implications for st.

He warned that “ failure of Nigerian democracy will have for reaching implications for stability and progress in the surrounding West African Countries “adding that “ it will also affect Nigeria’s leadership role in Africa”.

Mr. Chukuma described the forth coming April elections as both a Nigerian election and an election with African and international flavour.

He said since elections is fundamental to the practice and sustenance of democracy candidates and political parties must adhere to laid down rules and regulations for the conduct of campaigns and elections. He warned that short cutting constitutional and electoral guidelines will only lead to loss of confidence in the system and the break down of law and order.

Mr. Chukwuma charged INEC to at all times “front load its problems and challenges to the Nigerian people”, pointing out that Nigeria is a developing society that is suspicious of authority and unless provided with credible and comprehensive information on the activities of government and its agencies, rumour hungering and speculation will take the place of concrete facts and reality.

He said his organization, TMG has embarked on elaborate programme of civil and voter education under which framework, communities are being mobilized to defend the sanctity of their votes.

TMG according to Mr. Chukwuma will monitor all the strands of elections that will be conducted on the 14th and 21 of April 2007 and issue preliminary and final reports of its findings.

He assured that TMG will continue to act professionally and ethically in domestic election monitoring and observation.

TMG NEWS

Plateau: The Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) has spelt out necessary criteria for election monitoring observers during the forth coming general elections.

In a two-day training of trainers (TDT) workshop on the 2007 general elections observation exercise held at Nana country Home Hotel, Tndun Wada, Jos, the

organization said all observers must show willingness and or commitment to observe the elections without bias.

Other criteria listed by TMG are ability to read and write, honesty, physically fit and an observer must be a citizen of Nigeria. The workshop which was supported by the United Nations Development and joint Donor Basket fund (JDBF) was attended by member NGOS, Human Rights and Civil Society organizations in the North central zone.

Earlier, the National Coordinator of the TMG, Mafel Ade urged participants to take their training seriously as they would have a step down training in their various states.

She urged them to engage credible observers who will monitor the elections without interfering in the election process.

She said TMG is expected to recruit and train 1,650 observers within the North central zone. According to Mabel Ade, Benue has 280, with Niger 275, Nassarawa and FCT have 206 and 190 respectively while Kwara 204, Kogi 235 and Plateau, 260.

Among the facilitators during the workshop are UNDP election expert, John Kofi Larvie, zone co-coordinator of TMG, North central, Barrister Rommy Molm, UNDP CSO liaison assistant, Joseph Ajegwu and TMG Angela.

Mabel,

Please find attached further materials for Democracywatch. The first article may be good as editorial material or position article. The third is culled material from the same author. I hope you have been getting the others I sent physically.

Dr Greene Eleagu.

(1)

VIOLATING OF ELECTORAL ACT 2006

Section 103(2) of the electoral act 2006 states that “No candidate or political party shall use resources, apparatus and media to the advantage or disadvantage of any political party or candidate”.

It is common sight across Nigeria since the electioneering campaigns began that incumbent governors, senators, House members and even the president and his vice have been using their paraphernalia of office in their campaigns. The retinue of police and other staff that they carry are paid from the tax payer’s money.

We also notice that the jeeps and other vehicles and even the presidential jets belong to the government. Were these apparatus to be evenly made available to all the contestants it may then violate the spirit of the contest which is predicated on fair play and equal opportunities.

It has also been observed that in many states, places and cases prayers grounds are used for partisan political campaigns. This runs foul of section 97(3) of the Electoral Act 2006.

In Ebonyi state as in some other states non-PDP parties have no access to the stadium at Abakaliki for their rallies. They have been settling for the premises of the people club. Again this runs contrary to section 103(2)

We also find disbursing the lack of issue-based campaigns. For instance it was reported that the AC went to town in Lagos state with its broom sweeping Lagos as PDP concluded its rallies there. We believe there could have been better ways the AC will go about cleaning the filth of Lagos than appearing to cast aspersions on the PDP. Again section 97(3) frowns at such.

Indeed for us to have credible elections we must all learn to respect the rule of law.

(2)

HOW TO ASSESS CREDIBLE ELECTION IN NIGERIA

BY

FRANK EHURU

CODSBEC foundation

Community development for social and behaviour change

19 Nwaturuocha Street Ikenegbu Layout Owerri

e-mail: cosbee2@yahoo.co.uk

phone: 08037166272

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's presidential, legislative and gubernatorial elections scheduled for 2007 have the potential to be a huge landmark in the history and development of democracy in the country, as they will be the first time one administration reaches its constitutionally mandated term limit and must hand over to a successor.

The elections of March/April 2003 saw Nigeria clear the hurdle of two successive elected governments for the first time in its history: However current President Olusegun Obasanjo must step down in 2007, making the establishment of a successor elected administration in that year even more of a potential landmark.

But just as observers agree that the 2003 polls were in many places marred by fraud and violence, the 2007 polls also contain huge potential to go badly off-track; to become not a milestone in democratic consolidation, but instead one marked by malpractice, injustice, criminality, violence, human rights abuses and increased instability. Already, at least less than 2 months before polling, there is a clear trend towards negative developments oriented towards the 2007 elections.

While commonplace assertions that Nigeria faces imminent violent break-up are wide of the mark, I strongly believe that if current tendencies towards abuses of democratic procedure are not stopped, and the approach to elections is not characterized by a greater degree of law-abiding and constructive action by key stakeholders, the upcoming polls could become the source of serious abuses, instability and fatalities.

The greatest danger is not associated directly with national polls or polling days, although it is a sad likelihood that such occasions will see their share of abuses and violence, both spontaneous and organized. Indeed, the aftermath of the 2003 polls has shown that the legacy of electoral malpractice can become a permanently destabilising factor, as for example the Anambra political terrorism.

FACTORS THAT CAN MAR CREDIBLE ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

• Will There Be an Election in 2007?

Some months back, there are gathering fears that elections may not in fact take place at all. Such fears were substantiated by constitutional drafts prepared by senior figures in the ruling party which proposed fundamental changes to allow the incumbent administration to remain in power for two additional years. Such changes would not only have provoked a huge hike in political tensions - given the already evident popular opposition to such an agenda - but would have denigrated the constitution and encourage political actors to consider themselves above the rule of law. Thank you to all Nigerians, the civil society and especially the Nnamani led senate for a job well done. We all know that their can never be good governance if it is not participatory.

• INEC Independence :

Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is misnamed. The body is constitutionally a unit under the Federal Executive (Presidency), which also controls its staffing and finances, making INEC's operations ultimately subject to the control of a party which can be assumed to be highly interested in the outcome of the elections. Despite complaints that in 2003 some senior staff were thought to be partisan political appointees, and that the late release of funding to INEC clearly compromised the Commission's administrative and logistical capacity, nothing substantial has been done to redress these fundamental problems. If there is I am yet to know.

- **Electoral Law:**

The legal codes governing political processes in Nigeria are ill-defined and often contradictory. The Citizen's Forum for Constitutional Reform (CFCR) has identified a number of currently problematic issues which need to be addressed in the forthcoming and much-delayed legislative initiatives to streamline electoral laws. These include exclusion of independent candidates, disenfranchisement of the many Nigerians who are living in Diaspora or who are members of the security forces, and the rules which permit functionaries of political parties to take up position in INEC.

- **Party Funding:**

Although INEC has a legal responsibility to audit the accounts of political parties on an annual basis, it has not previously been fulfilling this duty. This and other issues surrounding party funding remain extremely murky. Disagreements between powerful 'godfather' party flinders and candidates have led to destructive political crises in various parts of the country since the last polls. Meanwhile legal restrictions on electoral spending and contributions from outside the country remain unrealistic, consequently meaning that almost all parties break the law in this respect.

- **Electronic Voting and Transparency:**

INEC and the Nigerian Government state that they remain determined to utilise a complex and expensive new system of voting using electronic booths in 2007, claiming that this will prevent-rigging and aid collection of results. Yet civil society groups have reiterated in a series of consultations that the multi-million dollar system would be unsuitable and inadvisable, given not only the country's extremely poor electricity supplies, but the impossibility of independently observing and confirming results gathered in such a manner, the ease with which such results could be altered at the data collection stage, and the consequent general distrust the wider public has indicated in such a system.

- **Election Observation:**

Recent indications that INEC intends to limit the presence of foreign monitoring and observation groups are highly worrying. While the widest and most effective monitoring has been undertaken by domestic groups, such as the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) and the ecumenical Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC), it is undeniable that foreign national, multilateral and non-governmental observer groups play an essential role in bringing to bear comparative experience, and more importantly in the wider international system, by testifying as to the credibility of an election as measured by international norms and standards.

- **Internal Party Democracy:**

No political system based on parties can be expected to function in a democratic manner if the parties which underpin it are themselves undemocratic. Yet the current situation in Nigeria is that internal party primaries are frequently decided using bribery, thuggery, and subversions of procedure. The local government and state-level congresses of the

ruling People's Democratic Party have already been characterized by rigging of internal votes using methods as varied and crude as preferential distribution of party membership cards and the holding of duplicate polls. The more powerful the party, the more intense the competition for positions becomes, and there have already been assassinations of candidates aspiring for positions in the local structures of the nationally ruling party.

• **Gender Imbalances:**

Women are massively underrepresented in Nigerian political structures, comprising only 6.6% in the lower House of Representatives and 3.8% of the 103 Senators. CDD's 2004 study Women, Marginalisation and Politics in Nigeria 'concluded that, for those not lifted to public prominence as the spouse or dependent of a powerful male politician, structures remain extremely prejudiced and opportunities for women to enter politics are extremely limited.

• **Registration:**

The problem of underage, repeat and other fraudulent voting has been compounded by the lack of satisfactory voter registration, and the short time-frame allotted for such exercises.

• **Census:**

The accurate compilation of a voter register also relies on the efficient and accurate execution of the forthcoming National Population and Housing Census, scheduled for March 2006. Such exercises have previously been extremely problematic in Nigeria .

• **Logistics and Administrative Arrangements:**

The inadequate provision of electoral materials and the inadequate arrangements made for their timely & secure storage delivery was a huge issue in previous elections. On top of this it is also important that those materials provided, such as ballot papers, be easy to use for a population comprising a large proportion of people who are functionally illiterate. Delays to the electoral processes increase the likelihood of mistakes and inefficiency. Administrative inefficiency not only unfairly denies citizens the opportunity to exercise their right to vote, it increase suspicions of foul play in an already tense political atmosphere.

• **Impunity for Offenders:**

Political actors and other rights transgressors in Nigeria continue to commit frauds, abuses and acts of violence buoyed up by the knowledge that, as very few such offences are successfully prosecuted even in the rare instances when they are brought to court, they can expect to enjoy almost complete impunity for their actions. More usual is that beyond an initial police intervention, politically-related crimes and human rights abuses are simply not investigated.

IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVED AND CREDIBLE ELECTION IN NIGERIA

- **Extensions and Third-Termism:**

Not only Nigeria 's President, but also other leading figures in the political establishment should make it publicly and repeatedly clear that changing the laws on length of tenure in a way which will directly benefit themselves is not a consideration.

- **INEC Independence :**

The Independent National Electoral Commission should be reformed to make it worthy of the name - it should be placed on a statutory footing as an independent organ of the Nigerian state, and as such should have a dedicated and protected funding stream. Appointments to the body should be based on a more transparent and broad-based body process.

- **Electoral Laws:**

During the forthcoming streamlining of electoral laws into a single document, all provisions should have been revised on the basis of wide consultations, with the aim of closing loopholes, clearing up contradictions and eliminating unfair or discriminatory practices entrenched in current legislation.

- **Party Primaries:**

In order to defuse the dangerous tension around competition for internal party positions, and to allow political parties themselves to become more equitable and representative bodies, Nigerian political parties should allow non-partisan monitoring of internal selection and election procedures.

- **Representation of Women:**

Proportional representation of women in the body politic should be ensured by making quota provisions on a regional, party or percentage of total seats basis, as has been enacted in many other countries across Africa and the world.

- **Youth Representation:**

The simplest and most obviously satisfactory approach might be for national and state legislatures to adopt binding rules stipulating a certain number of seats reserved for representatives under a certain age, or for political parties to be encouraged to make similar rules dictating that a certain percentage of their candidates be under a given age.

How the International Community Can Make a Difference

- The international community can make a big difference to the conduct and outcomes of Nigeria 's 2007 elections by using all available channels to reiterate that real reforms and improvements are structural, not personality-driven. The Nigerian governments international partners should impress upon it that constitutional reform efforts should be about a legacy of lasting improvements, not the perpetuation of narrow interests, agendas and ambitions.

- Representatives of both developed-world and other African nations should also remind the Abuja government that as a regional leader, Nigeria has the power to set trends for other countries too; and that therefore what happens in Nigeria in the run-up to 2007 will have implications for the rest of the continent.
- The international community can also help by strongly encouraging Nigeria 's government to publicly and unequivocally disown plans to greatly reduce the number of foreign monitors during the elections, as highlighted in previous CDD advocacy efforts.
- Donor nations should make it clear that, as the quality, credibility and legitimacy of any government depends on the process which produces it, the conduct of the 2007 electoral process will have a major impact in determining future levels of aid disbursements made directly to the Nigerian government.
- As a matter of related importance for tackling the enormity of corruption-related electoral malpractices in Nigeria , the international community should be more proactive in combating money-laundering in international financial centres.
- Development partners should encourage Nigeria 's government to reassess the electronic voting initiative as regards its desirability, practicality and cost-effectiveness. If the government remains determined to use electronic voting, partners should support efforts at ensuring free and fair elections by providing technical support to INEC on the effective use of electronic voting systems, and support election observation groups in training in methods to detect ringing when electronic processes of voting and collation are used of evaluating the accuracy of the census figures.
- The international community should support Nigerian NGOs and civil society groups that will carry out intensive civic education and public enlightenment towards the elections.
- International election observation bodies should review their participation in Nigerian political processes to ensure that their observations cover the whole electoral cycle in some form, not just a short period around polling. Equally, when dealing specifically with the polling process, it is important that they should make their interim statements widely available to the public as soon as possible after the conclusion of voting, in order to prevent the watering down of their findings through misrepresentation, as has happened before.
- International observer groups and representatives should express interest in extending their observations to the internal elections held by political parties.
- Donors should also increase aid, both funding and technical assistance, to domestic observer groups who have been by far the most effective monitors of electoral processes in Nigeria . This should include both support for mass observation of the 2007 polls, and also for long-term engagement and monitoring of the full electoral cycle.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it is yet another opportunity for us all to enshrine democratic principles, values and practices in our polity as this is the only legacy posterity can inherit from us all.

May God bless the federal republic of Nigeria , may God continue to grant us the members of the civil society the courage to speak out at all times towards ensuring justice and equity in our country.

Thank you.

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DEMOCRATIC LICENSE

BY OKEY NWELUE Esq(Culled from Pooular Voice 28-03-07)

OBASANJO'S LABOUR OF LOVE

The statement credited to our foremost statesmen. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo that he is prepared to die for Nigeria goes to show how much this man loves this country. I have not seen anybody that would graciously sacrifice his blood because of another person in this contemporary society; even my own father couldn't have done so for me.

According to the Bible, it was only Jesus Christ that gave his life for the atonement of the sins of man, which led to his cruxification on the cross of Calvary . He loved us so much that he denied himself all the pleasure in heaven and came down to salvage mankind. Yet we still do not believe in Him or have peace with Him.

Our own Dear president has openly told the world that he is ready to sacrifice his own blood for Nigeria to move forward or for his reform agenda to continue.

One begins to wonder why Mr. President badly wants this reform programme to continue when the impact is only felt within the corridors of power. The pertinent question we should ask the president is, whether he thinks he is Mr. Know all? He believes so much in this theory called reform without the collective impact on the nation.

The reform agenda, is it not this one that has left us leave our doors and windows wide open in the night because locking same would definitely put us in trouble when the real owners come knocking.

By May 29, 2007, Nigeria would be celebrating eight years of uninterrupted power supply, despite the fact that the government had not put any kobo to the power sector.

One American Dollar is currently at par with one naira both in the Bank and at the parallel market. Fuel pump prize goes as little as pure water change. We no longer have queue at the filling stations and for eight years pump prize had remained the same.

Our medical doctors, nurses, judiciary and even organized labour have ceased the incessant threat of embarking on strikes. The rule of law is obeyed completely even before judgments are delivered. The Honorable Federal Attorney General would issue the statements to obey courts orders.

Our network of roads ranks the best in the whole world of Africa . Money allotted to road construction are closely monitored and implemented to the latter.

All the political parties have equal opportunities for purposes of free and fair general elections come 2007.

Even the forthcoming elections has been declared a do or die affair. Oh what a lovely and caring president you are.

Please help me ask the president what our forty billion dollars doing in Swiss Bank. Probably, one may suggest that States and Local Government allocation should henceforth be stopped and be deposited in our foreign reserve for westerners to begin to realize that we have arrived.

Reform, Reform, oh yes, yet the impact of reforms are felt everywhere even the beggars on the street are being reformed.

Our beloved father in Aso Rock, we appreciate your unflinching love for your nations and the need to sustain your vision, but please let us have our way in deciding our own future. Nigeria is a complex place to be, and to me no one man's idea could be more important that the over one hundred and twenty million (120m) Nigerians living.

Please our dear father and president, we love you more than you love this nation, and we pray you go home alive by May 29, 2007 and save Nigeria from unrest.

Your labour of love indeed!

This Month's Politricks

The "Presidential" Campaign Manager

It is yet the end of another month as the nation Nigeria moves towards its general elections, activities in the air shows that the elections is only a stone throw to its destination. The nation is bubbling with political activities as political parties are really determined to scuffle power from the incumbent or rivalry political parties which are too numerous for an average Nigerian to remember by names. Daily political campaigns on television channels, Radio stations and Billboards shows the seriousness with which politicians are hungry for power at all level. From the State House of Assembly to the Presidency, politicians are ready and willing to do anything for the sake power and for this cause all other activities ranging from personal business, official duties, marital obligations, states and national obligations have been kept on hold till after the elections and this our 'Honorable President' is not left out.

Nigerians of like minds in recent times have watched with dismay as President Olusegun Obasanjo moves round the nation with the campaign train of the People Democratic Party (PDP) presidential candidates Alhaji Musa Yar'Adua and governorship candidates of all the 36 states of the Federation while abandoning the National obligations placed on him by the citizens of Nigeria since 2003. The president now goes from state to state campaigning for Alhaji Musa Yar'Adua with so much vigor that leaves no one in doubt that president Obasanjo has something at stake if PDP loses this election. The question now is what has Obasanjo to loose if PDP loses this election. The President should take a leave from the United State whose election is also around the corner and candidate contesting various offices are now campaigning to get the votes of the United States citizens and George W Bush is not all over the place with the Republican Party's candidates.

Obasanjo should stop these misplaced priorities and retrace his steps and return the honour due to the president's Office back to it. The president should stop this act of disrespect and focus on the nation that gave him the mandate which place him in the place of power and authority in the first instance. Or on the alternative, resign and accept the job of a campaign manager to Yar'Adua and all PDP candidates contesting for various offices, and return all the salaries and allowances Nigeria has been paying him right from the day INEC lifted the band on election campaigns. The President should stop this act of disloyalty to the Nigerian people and focus on the growth of the nation in these remaining months of his reign in office. He should remember that Nigerians are still hungry and HIV/AIDS is still spreading like wide fire because of poverty, unemployment is still ravaging its youth thereby encouraging crimes and insecurity. The President should leave Nigerians alone to do their thing; Nigerians know the right and the best candidates to vote for.

OLUWASEYI OJO (TMG)

WE COUNTRY STORI

Oya mak we go vote

My country people una dooo o, how una dey? Se una body dey kampe for inside cloth as my own tak dey for here. How una dey tak see dis we country now wey election don tanda gidiga for we domot so, se una dey put ear for ground dey hear all de tins wey dey commot for dem dis we politicians mouth sak of say dem wan mak we vote for dem. I hea say some politician say dem go put air condition for we road, dem go give us salary even if we no work and dem go even give us food even wen we no hungry dem go put am for we mouth. I even hear say some people dey throwey money lik sand sand, mak we for vote for dem. My country people, mak una open una eyes oh, if dem dis kind people win election, na dem back we go dey see, we no go see dem breaklight again becos dem don see wetin dem dey fine. De tins wey dem no fit do naim dem dey say dem go do, how air condition go dey we road, na inside house naim he dey dey no be for road, dem dey lie bcos dem tink say we no sabi any tin, even if we no sabi, mak we tell dem say we get pikin wey sabi, mak we no vote becos of de small small coins wey dem dey give us, na big money dem go thief wen dem reach de place and dat time we no go fit talk bcos dem go say dem don give us we own share for inside de money wey dem dey thief.

My people, mak we shine we eye well well befor we vote for any body, mak we no vote lie lie and thief thief people for any office, mak we vote only those people wey we no say go do us better wen dem don reach there, mak we no vote for person wey be our brother but wey we no say na barawo. Mak we know say we pikin dem go swear for us if we pour sandsand for dem gari. As dem dey come mak una dey ask dem question say how dem go tak do all de tins wey dem say dem go do. Anyhow ebi, una go dey hear my voice for April, mak una mak sure say una vote o, mak una no let dem thief una vote. Mak una tanda for where una vote so dat dem no go do una ojoro. Na stil me una sista, 'Seyi Ojo dey say, all de enemy of we country go quench if dem no change.

Ojo Oluwaseyi (TMG)

FOR THE RECORDS



Transition Monitoring Group

Block B, Flat 2, Ogun Court, Gaduwa Estate Apo - Abuja

P.O. Box 11312 Garki, Abuja- Nigeria. Tel: 234 (9) 6705240, 6702409

Email: tmg_ng@yahoo.com, tmgabuja@yahoo.com, tmg@tmgnigeria.org,

Website: www.tmgngigeria.org

PRESS RELEASE

Prof. Maurice Iwu
Chairman, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)
INEC headquarters
Abuja

Dear Sir,

REQUEST FOR A MEETING WITH YOUR COMMISSION

I am writing on behalf of the Coordinating Committee of the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) to request for a meeting with your Commission at your earliest convenient date.

The meeting has become necessary to enable us clear any misconceptions your Commission may have against the TMG's plans to observe the April General Elections and to bring to your notice the harassment and intimidation of our members across the 36 states of Nigeria and Abuja by men of the State Security Services (SSS) allegedly on the instructions of your Commission. The meeting would also afford us an opportunity to find out when to expect accreditation badges we applied for to enable us observe the elections as we have barely 11 days to commencement of the elections.

It may interest you to know Mr. Chairman that reports reaching our national headquarters from our member organizations indicate that teams of operatives of the States Security Services (SSS) have been visiting their offices across the six geographical zones of the country demanding to know their sources of funding, motives for wanting to observe the elections, registration certificates and other intimidating questions and conducts that we never experienced under previous elections in Nigeria, including the 1999 elections, which were presided over by the military.

We look forward to hearing from you and ultimately meeting you at your earliest convenient date.

Best regards,

Innocent Chukwuma
Chairman
Transition Monitoring Group

PRESS STATEMENT

The attention of the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) has been drawn to a campaign of Calumny and character defamation launched against it over the weekend by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in a futile but desperate attempt to prevent the TMG and other domestic election observer groups from monitoring the April general elections in Nigeria .

INEC had on Saturday, March 24, 2007 circulated to the media information to the effect that member organizations of the TMG and Alliance for Credible Elections were at war with each other over distribution of three hundred million Naira allegedly given to them by Vice President Atiku Abubakar to disrupt the April elections if he was not allowed to contest. We wish to state that this allegation is not only laughable, baseless and Irresponsible, but also highly unbecoming of a public institution entrusted with the historical task of organizing elections at a period Nigeria cannot afford an electoral crisis with all its destabilizing consequences. It is the latest in the well known efforts of the Prof. Iwu led INEC to prevent credible domestic monitors from taking part in the elections having tried unsuccessfully to float a parallel coalition of fictitious groups under the name of National Solidarity Network. We advice INEC to pay more attention to its core function areas, which it has so far woefully failed to carry out. These are:

- Producing and publicly displaying comprehensive voters register so that registered voters can cross-check whether their names are correctly entered and are placed in the neighborhoods where they would want to vote;
- Recruiting and training the over half a million ad hoc staff it needs to conduct the elections so that we would not have a repeat of the 2003 situation where many of them did not know what they were expected to do.
- Producing and distributing electoral guidelines to all role players in the April general elections including domestic observer groups;
- Printing of ballot papers and boxes and distributing them to the 120, 000 polling booths that would be used for the elections.
- Creating awareness among the electorate on how it plans to conduct the elections, whether the voters register (when it is produced) will be electronically verified before voting or manually done.
- Improving the very low public confidence on its ability under Prof. Maurice to conduct credible elections come April 2007.

The TMG through support from UNDP and European Union will be deploying 10, 000 observers across the 36 states of Nigeria and Abuja in each of the two strands of elections scheduled in April. We are also coordinating with other domestic elections observer groups in the use of common checklists, issuing of joint preliminary statements and data management.

Innocent Chukwuma
Chairman

The 2007 Elections: Dispersing the Climate of Fear, Silence and Intimidation

Press Conference addressed by the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) on the 29th day of March 2007 in Kaduna, Nigeria

In the last three days, operatives of the State Security Service (SSS), acting on the promptings and directives of the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission, Professor Maurice Iwu have swarmed the offices of the member organizations of the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) in all the states of the federation harassing, intimidating and threatening them. Some of the operatives are demanding the Registration Certificates of the member groups and organizations, their membership strength and sources of funding. Some of the operatives claim that the Chairman of INEC directed them to screen and verify the credentials of member organizations of TMG before TMG can be given accreditation to monitor the 2007 elections. These insidious maneuvers, threats, arm-twisting, and intimidation are propelled, directed and funded by the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission who is on a vendetta mission against genuine domestic election monitors. The Chairman and his cronies have in the past tried to infiltrate the TMG and failed. They tried to muzzle and intimidate the leadership of the TMG and failed. They formed domestic election monitoring groups to compete with the TMG but their outfits could not take off the ground. They sponsored and continue to sponsor attacks on the TMG and the Alliance for Credible Elections (ACE-Nigeria) but the Nigerian people have essentially ignored these attacks based on their knowledge of the TMG and ACE-Nigeria. Having failed in its plan A mission, the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission has resorted to the use of the State Security Service in a most vicious and unpatriotic attempt to screen out the TMG from monitoring the 2007 elections. The Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) pioneered independent domestic election monitoring in Nigeria. It has monitored elections in Nigeria since 1999 and issued credible reports that have been used by election management agencies locally and internationally. . The TMG has the pedigree, the experience and expertise in election monitoring and observation. The leadership of the TMG has observed elections in other countries on behalf of the Commonwealth, ECOWAS, NDI, the Carter Center and other international election observers Since 1999 the member organizations of TMG have never applied for accreditation individually. The National Secretariat of the TMG has always applied for accreditation on behalf of its members. This is exactly what the TMG has done for the 2007 elections. The Justice, Development and Peace Commission did the same thing. The Nigerian Bar Association did the same thing and international

election observers did the same thing. It is only the TMG and the Alliance for Credible Elections that the Chairman of the Commission is using the State Security Service to harass and intimidate on flimsy and dubious grounds and considerations. The TMG as an organization is not really surprised at the actions of the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission. At a meeting he called in his office on Wednesday the 28th day of March, 2007 he threatened to “de-masquerade the masquerade” while his State Security Service counterpart at the meeting insisted that the more than 230 member organizations of the TMG must apply for accreditation individually and submit their registration certificates, membership strength and sources of funding. This latest attack and the mean attempt to exclude the TMG from monitoring the 2007 elections is a function of the refusal of the leadership of the TMG to play the minion in relation to the shoddy preparations for the 2007 elections. The TMG has creatively, constructively and patriotically engaged the electoral process. We have pointed the way to genuine and credible elections. We have offered suggestions on how to instill confidence in the electoral process. We have tried unsuccessfully to collaborate and work in tandem with INEC but have been rebuffed by the Chairman. Rather, the Chairman has been fishing and scouting for turn coats in civil society that will sing his praises. He found some and is using them to form shadowy and phantom domestic election observer groups. He has also been projecting these fraudulent groups as the face of civil society in Nigeria. The position of the TMG in relation to the shoddy preparations and empty rhetoric’s of the Chairman is clear. The TMG would continue to engage the electoral process through a process of offering constructive and patriotic suggestions on how to instill confidence in the process and enabling Nigerians to have credible elections. The TMG will continue to mobilize the Nigerian people and empowering them on the need to protect their mandate and deny election riggers a platform to anchor. The TMG will deploy over 10,000 monitors to monitor all aspects of the 2007 elections and issue reports that are factual and credible. It will also offer concrete suggestions and make proposals on institutional reforms that will enable genuine electoral management agencies conduct credible elections in Nigeria. The members of the TMG are resolved that the 2007 elections must take place and must be seen to be credible. To this end, the TMG and its member organizations will not swallow the bait of the leadership of the Commission to derail the 2007 election through the provocation of critical sectors of the Nigerian society into taking actions that can stall the elections. The TMG is firmly convinced that the optimism of the Chairman of the Commission to conduct free, fair and transparent

elections is not grounded on reality and is principally based on empty rhetoric. Most Nigerians do not have faith in the ability and capacity of INEC to deliver credible elections as the leadership of INEC is acting on the instructions of forces outside the Commission and these forces are bent on instituting a one party state in Nigeria. The TMG will under no circumstance demobilize its forces and become subservient to the leadership of the Independent National Electoral Commission. That will entail a big disservice to the people of Nigeria. The TMG derives its principal source of funds to monitor the 2007 elections from the Joint Donor Basket managed by the UNDP. The Independent National Electoral Commission draws from these funds and the amount received by the TMG is a matter of common knowledge and can be obtained from the offices of the UNDP and even INEC. The Transition Monitoring Group has therefore: Directed all its member groups and organizations in all the States of the Federation not to submit their certificates, membership list and sources of funding to the State Security Service. All enquires and queries from the State Security Service should be directed to the leadership of the TMG at the Zonal and national levels. The Independent National Electoral Commission must come out of the closet and explain to the Nigerian people its grouse with the TMG rather than hiding behind the State Security Service to achieve its aim of intimidating member organizations of the Transition Monitoring Group. The Transition Monitoring Group and other domestic election monitors have a constitutional and patriotic right and duty to monitor and observe the 2007 elections with or without accreditation by INEC. It is the patriotic responsibility of every Nigerian to make sure that those entrusted with the conduct of elections perform their functions in accordance with the law and the constitution. There are too many incidents and booby traps threatening the security of Nigeria and the 2007 elections and the State Security Service must direct its attention to them. These include the shoddy preparations for the elections; the serial disobedience of court orders by the leadership of INEC; the use of state resource for electioneering campaign by the Federal and State Governments; the hawking of electoral violence by the Federal and State Governments and the activities of militant groups in the Niger Delta. The Independent Electoral Commission must confine itself to its constitutional and statutory mandate and functions rather than opening up avenues of controversy, dissention and acrimony that can threaten the smooth conduct of the 2007 elections. The Independent National Electoral Commission must bow to the rule of law and due process by obeying court orders and decisions and stop the unwholesome resort to dubious interpretation of the law and empty declarations about enforceable and

unenforceable orders. The State Security Service must resist the temptation of buying into the personal war of the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission with genuine civil society groups and organizations. The Chairman wants to cover his electoral incompetence and shoddy preparations for the 2007 elections and that is why he wants all genuine domestic election monitors out of the polling stations on Election Day. The Transition Monitoring Group is a public trust and will continue to work assiduously in the service of the people of Nigeria by ensuring that elections at all levels are genuine and credible. The TMG will continue to engage the Electoral Management Agency, which is a creation of the Constitution and the law, and not the personal agency of an individual or group of persons. The Nigerian people will confer mandate and legitimacy only on candidates that come to power on the genuine votes of the people and not through electoral subterfuge.

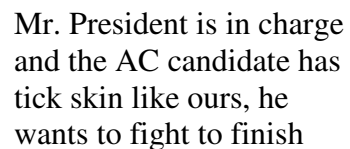
Thank you.

Festus Okoye Esq.

Coordinator North West Zone (TMG)

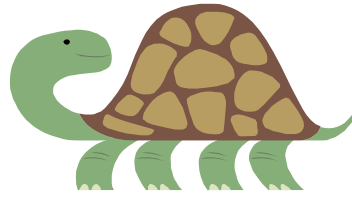
March 29, 2007

JUS JOKE



Mr. President is in charge
and the AC candidate has
tick skin like ours, he
wants to fight to finish

What do you think about
INEC disqualification of
AC presidential
candidate?



ADVERTORIALS

Hurray its Chibuike Mb (TMG's program Officer) month, and the whole TMG family is wishing him a happy birthday and prosperous years ahead in life.