

Business and Politics in the Muslim World
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Headlines

Political News

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Summary

Political news:

- **Guinea-Conakry: 1. Opposition names government's head candidate**

The opposition coalition in Guinea has decided on a name after the military junta opened democratic gates and renewed hopes in the West African state to return to constitutional order.

2. A Guinean lesson for President Yar'Adua

The recent announcement by the convalescing Guinean military leader, Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, to cede full powers to his deputy in order not to jeopardise the interest of the country, especially its transition to civil rule programme scheduled for implementation this year, concluding that the Camara example should be an invaluable lesson for President Umaru Yar'Adua.

- **Nigeria: 1. Cabinet gets 14 days to rule on ailing president**

The High Court in Nigeria on Friday gave the cabinet 14 days to decide if ailing President Umaru Yar'Adua (pictured) is fit to stay in office. An official petitioned the court to have the vice president sworn-in as acting president.

2. 20 Feared Killed in another Jos Riot

The fragile peace in Jos, Plateau State, collapsed last Sunday when another riot broke out in Dutse-Uku quarters in Nasarawa-Gwong area of Jos North local government, leading to the death of at least 20 people and leaving many injured.

3. Jos Riot - 51 Arrested, Streets Deserted

As residents of Jos, Plateau State, count their losses, the police yesterday confirmed that 51 people have been arrested in the violence that broke out Sunday. Commercial activities in the city were also affected following the shutdown of banks and shops.

4. Authorities relax 24-hour curfew after lull in Christian-Muslim violence.

Authorities relaxed a 24-hour curfew in the Nigerian city of Jos on Wednesday after relative calm returned following four days of violent Christian-Muslim clashes that left nearly 300 dead.

5. Resign Now, Obasanjo Tells Yar'Adua

Former President Olusegun Obasanjo has advised President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua to resign because it has become obvious that he could no longer discharge his constitutional responsibility.

- **Liberia: 1. Charles Taylor Denies Allegations That The Liberian Judiciary Was Not Independent Under His Presidency**

As Prosecutors today described Liberia under Charles Taylor's rule as a country in which human rights abuses were rampant and the rule of law was undermined, the former president denied that he was politically interfering with the Liberian judiciary or that human rights abuses were rife under his leadership.

2. Liberian torture victims scarred for life

Five Africans who suffered horrific torture on the orders of the son of former Liberian President Charles Taylor will suffer mental problems for the rest of their lives, a psychologist testified Friday in their lawsuit seeking millions of dollars in damages.

Economical Development:

- **Nigeria: CBN Orders Bank MDs of 10yrs to Quit**

The new banking reforms of the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Mr. Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, has claimed its latest victims, the Managing Directors of

banks who have served or whose 10-yr-tenure would lapse by July 31st 2010, to quit.

- **India to Invest U.S.\$359 Million in 2 Oil Blocks**

India is to invest 359 million dollars in two Nigerian oil blocs, Mr Mahesh Sachdev, the country's High Commissioner to Nigeria, has said. The two blocks, OPL 279 and OPL 285, are being jointly explored by Indian joint venture company of ONGC Videsh and Lakshmi Mittal's Mittal Investments Sarl (MIS), known as ONGC Mittal Energy Ltd, incorporated in Cyprus.

- **Gambia: Iran ready to support Gambia's agricultural development**

The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is supporting the Gambia's agricultural sector by funding a workshop through its Gambia office for Agriculture and Rural Development (IGARD).

- **Trade Minister Presides Over Giepa Bill Validation**

Yusupha Kah, the minister of Trade, Industry and Employment, yesterday presided over a one-day validation workshop of the Gambia Investment and Export Promotion Agency (GIEPA) bill at the conference hall of the Laico Atlantic Hotel in Banjul.

- **Togo: New pan-African rice centre adopted.**

African member countries have taken the historic decision to expand and transform the pan-African Rice Center beyond the West African geographical region.

Health:

- **Ghana: MVI to Develop Malaria Transmission-Blocking Vaccine**

The PATH Malaria Vaccine Initiative (MVI) has announced a new collaboration to initiate the development of a vaccine that may eventually help eliminates and eradicates malaria.

Details of the News

Political news:

- **Guinea-Conakry: Opposition names government's head candidate**

The opposition coalition in Guinea has decided on a name after the military junta opened democratic gates and renewed hopes in the West African state to return to constitutional order.

Reports have said the coalition of political and civil society groups have named a veteran activist Jean-Marie Dore for position of prime minister.

The announcement of the coalition's decision also follows on earlier reports that the wounded military ruler of Guinea, Captain Moussa Dadis Camara vowed to support the smooth return to constitutionality and with the civilians leading the processes.

Capt Camara has since been outside the country after being wounded in an attempted assassination, reportedly by one of his aides.

The opposition candidate, Mr Dore is said to be the leader of the Union for the Progress of Guinea (UPG) and comes from one of the minority ethnic groups of Guinea's Forestiere region, where Capt Camara also originates.

Currently Guinea is run under the interim military chief Sekouba Konate, who is expected to confirm the choice of the opposition coalition.

Guinea was taken over by the military in December 2008 following the death of the long time dictator Lasane Conte, since then, the West African top bauxite producer and exporter has seen crisis after crisis in its administration. The country also came even more under the international spotlight following the massacre of more than 150 civilians during a peaceful protest called by opposition parties at the stadium in the capital.

The UN and other international bodies and human rights groups have since concluded that the crackdown amounted to crimes against humanity.

- **A Guinean lesson for President Yar'Adua**

The recent announcement by the convalescing Guinean military leader, Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, to cede full powers to his deputy in order not to jeopardise the interest of the country, especially its transition to civil rule programme scheduled for implementation this year, concluding that the Camara example should be an invaluable lesson for President Umaru Yar'Adua.

Guinea is not as exactly as important as Nigeria. Its total area is just about 245, 857sq with a population of about 10 million. There is hardly any basis, therefore, to compare it to Nigeria of about 923, 728sq in total area and over 150 million people. However, both are West African countries, both have religious and ethnic configurations which have not been harnessed to ensure strength in diversity and, of course, both lay claims to some mineral deposits, the main driving forces of their individual economies. In Guinea, there is high grade bauxite ore and in Nigeria, crude oil, whose management has fuelled the prosperity of a few privileged persons, but not the vast majority of their populations. That is not the subject of this discourse, however, but the lessons that could be drawn by President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua from the altruistic action of Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, the Guinean military leader, who willingly gave up his authority, last week, due to obvious incapacitation to continue in office.

Captain Camara took over power in Guinea in December 2008 when the country's long-term leader, President Lansana Conte, died. As he sought to gain legitimacy, he promised new elections in 2010, but soon began to rule the country with a vice-like grip, culminating in the mowing down of over 150 defenceless civilians protesting the plan by the military junta to transmute into a civilian government. There were reports of other atrocities, including rape perpetrated by agents of government while the junta turned a blind eye. The United States government was piqued by the blatant abuse of human rights in the country and, along with other international organisations such as the European Union (EU), African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), imposed sanctions on the regime in order to pressure it to toe the path of civilisation. Even with that, there was no let up in the brutal attitude of military, until December last year, when Captain Camara was shot in the head by his personal aide. It was an apparent assassination attempt and he had to be flown to Morocco for urgent surgery. The military leader was in hospital in the Maghreb, until early this month when he was thought to have recovered enough from his bullet wound and transported to Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, to continue his rehabilitation.

While he was away in Morocco, there was growing unease among the populace about his situation, especially the lack of a clearly defined leadership, in spite of the claim by his vice, General Sekouba Konate, to be at the helms of affairs. The planned 2010 election was in jeopardy, even though politicians in the country, like everywhere else, continued their scrambling to position themselves in positions of advantage, unsure whether Captain Camara, who once expressed interest in becoming the next civilian president, would return to office and overturn the apple cart.

These fears were apparently laid to rest last week when he managed to speak for the first time from his base in Ouagadougou and revealed his decision to let full powers pass on to General Konate in his absence so that his second in command could effectively manage the country and its transition to democracy. This is what, until now, President Yar'Adua has refrained from doing, even though he is in a similar condition, or perhaps even worse. From the way he spoke, Captain Camara was obviously not fit to return to his country to continue his rule. He was weak, his voice was shaky and his delivery of his prepared text was sometimes incomprehensible, but the message was clear enough. After about two months in King Faisal Hospital in Saudi Arabia, where he has been undergoing treatment for acute pericarditis, President Yar'Adua spoke in similar

circumstances with Captain Camara's, but stopped short of permitting Vice-President Goodluck Jonathan to assume executive responsibilities. It was his first interview since his exit from the country which, rather than being channeled through the numerous Nigerian news channels, was aired on the the Hausa Service of the BBC, following the opposition's demand for details of his health situation and transfer of power to Dr. Jonathan. Even though it was a relief for many Nigerians to have heard what arguably resembled the voice of the ailing president, his utterances were unhelpful to the much anticipated resolution of the stalemate caused by his long absence from the country as well as his failure to authorise Dr. Jonathan to exercise full executive powers. The majority of the populace was definitely not moved by his speech: "At the moment, I am undergoing treatment, and I'm getting better from the treatment. I hope that, very soon, there will be tremendous progress, which will allow me to get back home. I wish, at this stage, to thank all Nigerians for their prayers for my good health, and for their prayers for the nation", or even the prayers he managed to offer for the success of the Super Eagles in Angola, no matter how desirable.

Like Captain Camara, President Yar'Adua sounded weak and appeared to be forcing words out of his mouth between muffled coughs. From the deductions made possible by the brief interview, it would be safe to conclude that he is in no way near the mental and physical condition that would permit him to return and confront the rigours of the Nigerian presidency. But unlike the Guinea strongman, he was completely silent on the exercise of authority by either himself or Vice-President Jonathan, which only succeeded in fanning further anxiety over a possible constitutional crisis.

One may argue that Nigeria is a constitutional democracy with laid down succession rules. Guinea is not, at least for now. A group of military officers led by Captain Camara imposed themselves on the people as their leaders, without a shot being fired. There are pundits who believe that it is possible that through force of arms, his colleagues may have eased him out to short circuit his expressed ambition to return to power. But Captain Camara has dismissed this notion, as he claimed in his address that the decision to back his vice from exile was not taken under duress. To drive home his point, he urged the citizens to put aside their ethnic differences and support the transition to democracy. Captain Camara went ahead to rule himself out of the presidential election and more significantly, the agreement on the transition programme effectively bars all members of the military junta from contesting the election. From his argument, it did not require his ministers to pass a vote on his capacity to perform before he agreed to step aside. This would be read as a selfless act taken in the best interest of the country. It has won plaudits for the once vilified military strongman, and he could now be well placed to carve a niche for himself in the political history of the country.

In Nigeria, tension is welling up, as it appears to a number of people that since President Yar'Adua is not willing to hand over to Dr. Jonathan, those invested with the responsibility by the constitution to cause a shift in authority are shirking that responsibility for personal interests. The civil society, led by Nobel laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka, is taking to the streets to demand the transfer of power to Vice-President Jonathan. Protests against the perceived vacuum in the presidency are also being organised in major cities of Europe and America, and some concerned individuals and organisations have chosen the path of the judiciary in an attempt to divest President Yar'Adua of power. One court case is asking him to step down, another is questioning

the legality of swearing in of the Chief Justice of Nigeria (CJN) by Justice Idris Kutugi, an outgoing CJN, while a third case seeks to declare President Yar'Adua missing. But all these are music to the ears of President Yar'Adua, his minders and the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), which sees these acts as the shenanigans of an opposition that is desirous of setting agenda for a government it does not control. While the president's men insist that there is no vacuum in government, the party has continued to maintain that Dr. Jonathan is, indeed, exercising full presidential authority and the leaders are happy with him. But cynics say the president, his advisers and PDP need to realise that beyond their pretended display of courage, there is a ticking time bomb which can explode unless the appropriate measures are taken to diffuse it. The Guinea example will more than suffice.

- **Nigeria: Cabinet gets 14 days to rule on ailing president**

The High Court in Nigeria on Friday gave the cabinet 14 days to decide if ailing President Umaru Yar'Adua (pictured) is fit to stay in office. An official petitioned the court to have the vice president sworn-in as acting president.

AFP - The High court in Nigeria on Friday gave the cabinet 14 days to decide if ailing President Umaru Yar'Adua was fit to stay in office.

Judge Dan Abutu directed the cabinet to resolve whether the president, in hospital in Saudi Arabia since November 23, "is incapable of discharging the function of his office."

The ruling came after former lawmaker Farouk Adamu Aliyu petitioned the court to have the vice president sworn-in to act for Yar'Adua until the president is able to return.

The Yar'Adua-appointed cabinet has resisted opposition demands that it take action over the president's absence, insisting that Yar'Adua is in full possession of his faculties.

He has been receiving treatment for an acute heart condition in a Jeddah hospital.

"We will abide by the judgement of the court," Justice Minister Michael Aondoaka told reporters after the ruling.

"The executive council of the federation will within 14 days as directed by the court, consider and pass a resolution on the state of the president's health," he said.

Under the constitution, the cabinet can discharge the president with a two-thirds majority vote.

Nigeria: 20 Feared Killed in another Jos Riot

The fragile peace in Jos, Plateau State, collapsed last Sunday when another riot broke out in Dutse-Uku quarters in Nasarawa-Gwong area of Jos North local government, leading to the death of at least 20 people and leaving many injured.

THISDAY gathered that the state Governor Jonah Jang has imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew to contain the situation. A statement released by the government house read: "after reviewing the security situation along with the state security council, we have directed the observance of 6pm to 6am curfew within Jos metropolis.

"The measure is aimed at nipping in the bud the prevailing security situation in Jos town so that hoodlums will not take advantage of the security breach to molest innocent citizens."

The latest bout of violence occurred following a misunderstanding between two neighbours, one Mr. Garba, a Muslim and the other a Christian who both had their houses burnt during the November 2008 crisis.

THISDAY learnt that they decided to re-build their homes when Garba allegedly encroached on the plot of his Christian neighbour, a development that resulted into a hot argument and then a fight.

The entire quarters re-grouped along religious lines and began a riot that spread to other parts of the city.

Security agencies; heavily armed military personnel and riot policemen were drafted from the Maxwell Kobi Cantonment and Police Headquarters in Jos. The crisis was effectively contained thereby preventing the rioters from taking over the entire city.

As at press time, commercial vehicles had deserted major roads in Jos. Stranded commuters, most of whom were Christians coming back from the church were seen trekking long distances to their homes. Scores of armoured tankers and heavy security road-blocks were mounted in the city coupled with thorough search of the few private vehicles plying the roads.

The state government in a statement by the Commissioner for Information, Mr. Greg Yelong, said: "the police and other security agents are putting the situation under control."

"Government appeals to people to remain calm and report any suspicious movement to the police," the statement added.

Two burnt bodies and a motor-bike were seen around the Jos Central Mosque. Staff of the Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH) also confirmed that at least eight bodies

were brought to the mortuary. The same picture was painted at the Plateau State Specialist Hospital where over 30 wounded patients were on the floor.

Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mr. Moha-mmed Lerama, said: "the situation is being contained. Other residents of the town are advised to remain calm and report any suspicious movement. Anyone who takes the law into his or her hand would be dealt with in accordance with the law. Residents should equally disregard any rumour of crisis in the city."

Meanwhile, the state Police Commissioner, Mr. Greg Ayating, revealed that 35 arrests had been made, five of them in military uniform.

He explained that the extent of houses and churches burnt could not be ascertained as yet and that the police would want to work with definite statistics. But he said the information available to him is that "a hand-full of some Muslim youths without any form of provocation began to attack the Christians worshippers in their places of worship".

Meanwhile, as part of efforts to bring peace to the boiling city of Jos, the Inspector General of Police (IG) Ogbonna Onovo, has ordered the immediate redeployment of four mobile units to quell the crisis.

Speaking on behalf of the IG yesterday evening in Abuja, Deputy Force Public Relations Officer, Mr. Yemi Ajayi, a Chief Superintendent of Police (CSP), said normalcy had since returned to the city.

Ajayi said the cause of the riot was yet to be ascertained, as well as the number of the casualties.

• **Jos Riot - 51 Arrested, Streets Deserted**

As residents of Jos, Plateau State, count their losses, the police yesterday confirmed that 51 people have been arrested in the violence that broke out Sunday. Commercial activities in the city were also affected following the shutdown of banks and shops.

Mayhem was unleashed on Jos after a disagreement between a Muslim and Christian in the Dutse-Uku Quarters of Nasarawa-Gwong, Jos North Local Government Area, with one claiming the other encroached on his land while rebuilding his devastated home.

Earlier reports said at least 20 people were killed but Deputy Force Public Relations Officer, Chief Superintendent of Police (CSP), Mr. Yemi Ajayi, yesterday gave the official figure as 13 with 32 injured.

The official police number of 51 arrests was also at variance with what sources told THISDAY.

It was learnt that 80 people, some disguised as military men in uniforms, were arrested. On interrogation, some of them confessed to coming all the way from Katsina State to fight.

Investigations reveal some of them were miscreants heavily loaded with arms and ammunition. They are currently being detained at the police headquarters in Jos and the crisis has been contained.

THISDAY gathered that the death toll has risen to 26, as six seriously injured persons who were rushed to the hospital on Sunday died in the early hours of yesterday.

"Apart from the additional Mobile police units sent to Jos, our officers and men are on ground to ensure that there is peace and tranquility," said Ajayi.

"Those arrested so far, will be thoroughly investigated and anyone found culpable would be made to face the music. The law is no respecter of any person," he added.

Meanwhile, the state government has condemned statements credited to some Muslim clerics in Abuja which called for the sack of Governor of the state, Jonah Jang.

They argued that such a call should not be made by religious leaders.

The Commissioner for Information, Mr Greg Yenlong, who made the government's position known added that the unfortunate incident where Christians were attacked in their places of worship proved that even the November 2008 crisis was not caused by the local government election as claimed by some residents of the state.

He said it was a premeditated attack aimed at discrediting the government of Jang.

But the Chief Imam of Jos central mosque, Sheik Balarabe Dawud, has appealed to the Muslim Ummah in Jos to be calm.

The Deputy speaker of the Plateau House of Assembly, Alhaji Ibrahim Baba Hassan, also called on youths to eschew acts of violence. Hassan who visited the affected areas yesterday said it is unfortunate that violence broke out barely two months after the last one in November.

The Muslim community in Jos North disclosed that it lost 16 of its members even as the Red Cross confirmed that about 4,000 refugees are scattered in three refuge camps within the city.

In a press statement signed by M. S. Mudi on behalf of Jos North Muslim Ummah, over 150 women and children are in the Central Mosque with another 35 receiving treatments, as a result of the attack by "Christian youths"

Red Cross officials said they are in dire need of relief materials and vehicles to cater for the refugees squatting at the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) camp, St. Michael Catholic Church and the Central Mosque, Auwal Maicibidis.

Also speaking, the man who was at the centre of the storm, Kabiru Mohammed, told newsmen that his house was burnt down in 2008.

He claimed that he brought in labourers to rebuild his home but some Christian youths stormed the site to prevent construction, saying the area is mainly for Christians.

According to him, the case was reported to soldiers in the area. When this was going on, one of the youths went to mobilize others to the scene telling them that some Hausa youths beat him to a state of coma.

The situation spiraled out of control when others invaded the area, he claimed.

- **Authorities relax 24-hour curfew after lull in Christian-Muslim violence.**

Authorities relaxed a 24-hour curfew in the Nigerian city of Jos on Wednesday after relative calm returned following four days of violent Christian-Muslim clashes that left nearly 300 dead.

AFP - Fighting eased on Wednesday in the Nigerian city of Jos after troops deployed to end four days of Christian-Muslim clashes that left nearly 300 dead and sent thousands fleeing.

Authorities relaxed a 24-hour curfew in the city after the reduction in violence, which at least one witness said had included mobs going door-to-door, hacking and shooting those inside.

"The 24-hour curfew has now been relaxed. It will now run from 5:00 pm (1600 GMT) to 10:00 am (0900 GMT)," Ezekiel Dalyop, Plateau State information ministry director general, told AFP by phone from Jos, the state capital.

He said the decision was reached "due to the relative calm and peace that have returned to Jos" -- a flashpoint of religious violence in Nigeria, whose 150 million people are divided almost equally between Christians and Muslims.

Residents and aid agencies confirmed fighting that erupted on Sunday had subsided, even in nearby towns where the violence had spread.

"The situation has eased, fighting has stopped. There is no more burning of houses, but a large number of people have been displaced," said the local Red Cross chief Awwalu Mohammed.

At least 20,000 took refuge in military barracks, churches and mosques after gun- and machete-wielding gangs rampaged across the city on Tuesday.

"The city is calm this evening, no more shootings and no more arsons," resident Lawal Adamu told AFP by phone.

Residents had earlier said the fighting spread overnight to areas on the fringes of Jos.

A witness reported that that violent mobs went house-to-house, and buildings and vehicles were set ablaze in several parts of the city.

"The Christian youths came in large numbers, wielding machetes and firing indiscriminately on the streets," said Rakya Usman, who had been living in an area south of Jos called Dogon Karfe but has since relocated into the city.

"They broke into homes, set them ablaze and attacked residents with their machetes and guns."

UN chief Ban Ki-moon expressed alarm over the clashes and appealed for all sides to use restraint and "seek peaceful solutions to religious and other differences in the country."

Vice President Goodluck Jonathan ordered extra troops into the city late Tuesday but for many, it came too late.

"Today people are counting their losses, many were slaughtered and burnt inside their homes," said a civil rights activist, Shehu Sani, speaking from Jos.

Police Minister Ibrahim Yakubu Lame blamed the clashes "on some highly placed individuals in the society who were exploiting the ignorance and poverty of the people to cause mayhem in the name of religion and ethnicity."

Muslim and Christian leaders, as well as a paramedic, gave tolls of nearly 300 dead but there was no official confirmation.

About 200 bodies had been taken to the central mosque in Jos by late Tuesday, an imam there said. A Christian clergyman said he had counted 65 bodies elsewhere.

Several hundred people have been reported wounded and casualties have filled hospitals. Some clinics were reportedly running out of medical supplies.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) said more than 13,500 people have died in religious or ethnic clashes in Nigeria since the end of military rule in 1999.

Some religious figures said this week's fighting had more to do with social issues than faith.

"The truth of the matter is that this violence has little to do with religion," Matthew Hassan Kukah, vicar-general of Catholic archdiocese in the northern state of Kaduna.

"It's a failure of government to address national integration. It's failure of polity and inability of the political elite to address issues."

Observers said impunity had also contributed to new outbreaks of violence.

"This is not the first outbreak of deadly violence in Jos, but the government has shockingly failed to hold anyone accountable," said HRW researcher Corinne Dufka.

Nigeria's Senate ordered a probe into reports that of the 100 people arrested in Jos, five were caught in full military gear and with military firearms.

In November 2008, hundreds were killed in two days of fighting in Jos triggered by a rumour that a mainly Muslim party had lost a local election to a Christian-dominated party.

• **Resign Now, Obasanjo Tells Yar'Adua**

Former President Olusegun Obasanjo has advised President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua to resign because it has become obvious that he could no longer discharge his constitutional responsibility.

—"If you cannot satisfy yourself, how can you satisfy your family or a nation? And if you cannot satisfy a nation, you can resign, which serves as part of morality, dignity and honour," Obasanjo stated emotionally.

Obasanjo, who is the current chairman of the Board of Trustees of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party, confessed that he knew that Yar'Adua was sick before he supported him for the presidency.

"Let me tell you what you have never heard before, he said. "I knew Yar'Adua was sick. When he was the governor of Katsina State, I demanded for his medical record. He gave me. But I consulted medical experts; they told me that if he is not under diagnosis, after a successful kidney transplant, that he won't have a problem. So, who are you not to accept that?"

Obasanjo was speaking in Abuja yesterday at the 7th Annual Dialogue organized by Media Trust Limited, publishers of the Daily Trust.

The former president conceded that he was not satisfied with Yar'Adua after he slumped at a campaign rally in 2007 and had to be rushed abroad.

"We went campaigning but Yar'Adua and the then Chairman of the PDP, Dr. Ahmadu Ali, broke down at a campaign ground. Ali was not flown abroad, but Yar'Adua was flown abroad. When the rumours broke that he was dead, I picked up my phone and called him. I said, 'Umaru, are you dead?'

He told Nigerians that he was alive. At that time, I thought after a successful kidney transplant he was going to be well."

In response to popular criticism that he imposed Yar'Adua as president in order to get even for Nigerians' rejection of his third term bid, Obasanjo said, "I did not support him because of hatred for Nigeria. Why will I do that after I have put so much in this country? So, you can't blame anybody, neither the president. If people said I deliberately picked someone who was incapacitated, invalid, they are wrong.

"No one picked Yar'Adua so that he will not perform. If I did that out of hatred for this country, God will judge me."

There was a sudden power outage at the venue of the occasion where prominent African leaders gathered, listening to a paper being delivered by the former Deputy Governor of Lagos State, Sen. Kofoworola Bucknor-Akerele, on discrimination against women in politics.

In response to the outage, Obasanjo, however, said that Nigerians should blame those who promised to provide the country with 6,000 megawatts of electricity - meaning the Yar'Adua administration.

He said: "When I assumed office as the civilian president in 1999, the country was not having 1,000 megawatts of electricity. But Chief Bola Ige (the then minister of power) said that we are going to improve the power supply. We were not having enough money because the oil was being sold at 19-20 dollars per barrel.

"When the money started coming, we improved the electricity supply up to the number they are looking for today. It is just lack of maintenance; that is why the country is suffering. So, Nigerians should put the blame where it belongs."

Meanwhile, some notable African women, including a member of the Ghanaian parliament, Ms. Simiah Nkrumah, a former South African first lady who is also a member of the South African parliament, Mrs. Winnie M. Mandela, and Naja'atu Mohammed, expressed dismay on the way and manner the country is being led.

According to Ms. Nkrumah, the frequent crisis in Jos, Plateau State, and the absence of President Yar'Adua from Nigeria had sent negative signals to the international community, adding that Nigeria was faced with institutional challenges.

"We hope the country will retain its peaceful coexistence, for which it was known before. In Ghana, women are given the opportunity to contribute towards the development of the country. I have been called here not because I am the daughter of Kwame Nkrumah, but because of the belief that as Africans we can still move forward through the support of women in politics.

"We need to practise politics of modernisation, sacrifice and dedication as Africans. Most of our African countries are too small to become economically viable as the United States of America and China. But the problem we are facing is bad leadership. I urge the African women to reverse this trend."

Also speaking, the former South African first lady, Mrs. Winnie Mandela, urged the Nigerian government not to allow the vision of the late former first lady, Mrs. Maryam Babangida, to die. She, however, decried the way and manner women are being treated in Africa, stating that they are going to rise and face the challenge.

On her part, the renowned Nigerian politician, Hajiya Naja'atu Mohammed, called on Nigerians to rise against tyranny by mischievous leaders.

"The problem we are facing in this country is total manipulation and greed by some privileged politicians who don't mean well for the people of this country," she said. "Money is being siphoned in billions, no one wants to talk about it. The president is out of the country for over 60 days, nothing has been done about it.

"There is a lot of sexual intimidation whenever a woman is in politics. I am urging the women not to stay out of politics. We must transform this country by coming together in unity. I will never be afraid to condemn bad leadership. 'Ko ka kashe ni, ba ka hana ni Aljanna ba," meaning that even if you succeeded in killing her, you would not be able to stop her from entering paradise.

- **Liberia: Charles Taylor Denies Allegations That The Liberian Judiciary Was Not Independent Under His Presidency**

As Prosecutors today described Liberia under Charles Taylor's rule as a country in which human rights abuses were rampant and the rule of law was undermined, the former president denied that he was politically interfering with the Liberian judiciary or that human rights abuses were rife under his leadership.

As his cross-examination continued into another week, prosecutors have sought to establish that Liberia, under Mr. Taylor's presidency, did not enjoy good governance, with widespread reports of human rights abuse, corruption and political interference with the country's judiciary. Questioning Mr. Taylor about his alleged judicial interference, lead prosecution counsel Brenda Hollis read a report of a conference at which lawyers and other judicial officials made statements that the "Liberian judiciary is rotten." Ms. Hollis quoted two Liberian lawyers who both alleged that there was a "strong influence of the government on the judiciary." She further read portions of the statement made at the conference by the then Chief Justice of Liberia that there was government interference in the judiciary and that the government's financial support to the judiciary was very low.

Mr. Taylor dismissed the allegations as "totally incorrect."

Referring to the report on the conference as read by Ms. Hollis in court today, Mr. Taylor said that "your conclusion of this entire document is ludicrous."

"The judiciary was rotten, I agree with the contents, but I met it this way and I'm trying to fix it. This is a conference where Liberians are trying to solve historical problems," Mr. Taylor said.

In her response, Ms. Hollis asserted that there was nothing mentioned in the statements by the various speakers at the conference that they were referring to historical problems.

"The interference into the judiciary continued during your presidency," Ms. Hollis insisted.

"No it didn't. The alleged interference didn't continue," Mr. Taylor replied.

As Mr. Taylor gave his responses to Ms. Hollis's questions, the lead prosecutor accused Mr. Taylor of using his responses to deliver speeches. To this, Mr. Taylor responded that

"I am not delivering speeches, except you are the audience, so stop referring to my comments as speeches."

During Mr. Taylor's direct examination, he said he brought good governance to Liberia and that he respected the fundamental human rights of his citizens. Prosecutors now seek to establish that Mr. Taylor was not a good president for Liberia. Prosecutors allege that as leader of Liberia's rebel group the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), Mr. Taylor was involved in the commission of atrocities against the people of Liberia and that when he became president of the country in 1997, his system of governance did not reflect a democratic society. Mr. Taylor wanted the same system of governance to be reflected in neighboring countries like Sierra Leone and Liberia and that is why he kept supporting rebel forces in these countries, prosecutors allege. Mr. Taylor has dismissed the prosecution accounts as "untrue."

"You did not act in a way to show the people of Liberia that your new order replaced the old order of violence," Ms. Hollis stated to Mr. Taylor.

"You are totally incorrect," Mr. Taylor responded.

Ms. Taylor also denied Ms. Hollis's assertions that "human rights abuses were rife" during his presidency.

In seeking to demonstrate the dire human rights situation in Liberia under Mr. Taylor's presidency, Ms. Hollis also read portions of a letter written to Mr. Taylor by former United States president Jimmy Carter on November 6 2000, explaining why his human rights organization, The Carter Center for Human Rights, was withdrawing from Liberia.

When first asked whether he was told why the Carter Center was withdrawing from Liberia, Mr. Taylor originally said "I don't know why they pulled out. I was not answerable to the Carter Center. I have great respect for President Carter but I don't know why they pulled out."

Ms. Hollis continued to read the contents of the letter, which indicated that the Carter Center was withdrawing from the country because of the actions of Mr. Taylor's government.

"Because of prevailing conditions and the actions of your government, you have made it difficult for the Carter Center and others to operate within democracy, human rights and

the rule of law. Reports of serious human rights abuses are common, journalists and civil society members are suppressed. Liberia's role in the conflicts in the sub-region has become a destructive one," President Carter was quoted as writing in his November 2000 letter today.

"On reflection, I now see this," Mr. Taylor said.

Mr. Taylor is responding to charges that he was involved in a joint criminal enterprise with RUF rebels in Sierra Leone. Mr. Taylor has denied allegations that he supplied arms and ammunition to the rebels in return for Sierra Leone's blood diamonds and that he helped them plan certain operations during which atrocities such as rape, murder and amputation of civilian arms were committed. From July 14 to November 10, 2009, Mr. Taylor testified in direct-examination as a witness in his own defense.

Mr. Taylor's cross-examination continues tomorrow.

- **Liberian torture victims scarred for life**

Five Africans who suffered horrific torture on the orders of the son of former Liberian President Charles Taylor will suffer mental problems for the rest of their lives, a psychologist testified Friday in their lawsuit seeking millions of dollars in damages.

The five torture victims — who were set on fire, were held in chest-high pits of filthy water and repeatedly sexually assaulted — are suing Taylor's son, Charles McArthur Emmanuel, who is also known as Charles "Chuckie" Taylor Jr. He is serving a 97-year prison sentence for violating U.S. anti-torture laws while he commanded an elite paramilitary unit in his father's war-torn government.

Psychologist Jethro Toomer, who interviewed each of the five victims, said they suffer from long-term post-traumatic stress disorder in addition to numerous scars and physical ailments caused by the torture.

"Once individuals experience trauma of any kind, the individual is never the same. It will last forever, until they die," Toomer testified. "That trauma is unrelenting."

The scope of the physical and mental damage to the five Liberians will figure prominently in the amount of damages they might be awarded by U.S. District Judge Adalberto Jordan, who previously ruled in favor of the victims' lawsuit. It was not immediately clear when Jordan would decide on damages and the five victims have not requested specific amounts.

Closing arguments in the lawsuit were set for Jan. 29.

Emmanuel, a 32-year-old U.S. citizen born in Boston while Taylor was a college student there, acted as his own lawyer and repeatedly questioned Toomer about how he could be sure the victims were telling the truth.

"It's an honor to be before an educated man such as yourself," Emmanuel said at one point. "I'm not the brightest bulb in the bunch."

Emmanuel led President Taylor's Antiterrorist Unit or ATU, which was used to silence opposition and train soldiers, including children, for combat in Liberia's civil war and conflicts in neighboring countries, according to trial testimony. Emmanuel's 2008 conviction was the first and only under a 1994 U.S. law allowing prosecution in this country for torture and atrocities committed overseas.

The elder Taylor is on trial before a United Nations tribunal in The Hague, Netherlands. He is accused of overseeing the murder and rape of thousands of people during neighboring Sierra Leone's 12-year civil war. Taylor denies the charges and blames the U.S. for driving him from power.

Emmanuel was tried in Miami because he flew here after submitting a false application for his passport.

Economical Development:

- **Nigeria:** CBN Orders Bank MDs of 10yrs to Quit

The new banking reforms of the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Mr. Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, has claimed its latest victims, the Managing Directors of banks who have served or whose 10-yr-tenure would lapse by July 31st 2010, to quit.

This is in line with the CBN new regulations which provide for tenured appointments of banks' Managing Directors, fixed for a maximum of two terms of five years, each.

Director, Banking Supervision of the CBN, Dr. Samuel Oni, who announced this at a press briefing in Abuja, yesterday, said the decision which was taken by the Board of the apex bank, on Monday was "to ensure that the banking institutions are not personilaised."

According to him, "all bank MDs who would have served for the period of 10 years by July 31 shall cease to act in that capacity".

Besides, the CBN said that all those who are MDs of banks which are products of either mergers or acquisition in the 2006 consolidation exercise shall have their pre and post merger years of service combined, for the purpose of the new regulations.

CBN directed that all bank boards should immediately review the terms of appointment of their MDs to reflect the new regulations.

All MDs who would have attained the 10-year maximum two-term period by July 31, should immediately start a succession programme to enable a successor emerge on or before the terminal date.

CBN also said that any MD who quits a bank, having attained the 10-year maximum period in a bank shall not be eligible appointment in the same bank or any of its subsidiaries until after three years.

In what the apex bank described as part of its efforts at ensuring good corporate governance in banks, it barred all CBN governors and the MD of the Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporate (NDIC) shall not be eligible for appointment in any bank until after five years of exit.

The same rule applies to directors of the CBN and the NDIC, except that their break period was reduced to three years.

Fielding questions, Dr. Oni explained that it was not compulsory for the tenure of appointment of an MD to be five years, either in the first or second, saying "it could be less".

He added that the regulations could not operate reactively and therefore, past CBN and NDIC officials were not affected but that the CBN expects all such officials to decline offers on moral grounds.

Earlier, at a separate briefing on the first Bankers' Committee meeting in the year, the director announced that the CBN held a meeting with Boards and management of the banks which management were removed last year, towards their successful recapitalization.

He allayed fears that the CBN had special interests in any of the banks being sold to any individuals or groups, as according to him, the apex bank would only play the roles of a facilitator.

"Most of the works have to be done by the boards and the managements of the affected banks. We made it clear to them that CBN will only play the roles of an intermediary. "he said.

Mr. Oni explained that the boards and managements of the banks would drive the process in each bank and that it was indeed in the interest of shareholders to ensure that the recapitalization exercise was successful in all the banks.

According to him, the Friday, last week meeting was indeed to brief the boards and management on the framework for the recapitalization and to resolve any issue or issues that could be inimical to the planned recapitalization, including court cases, instituted by some stakeholders in the affected banks.

He added that the CBN has issued a new Minimum Disclosure guidelines which it expected all banks to comply with, expressing optimism that with the new requirements, the CBN would be in a better position to know the health of each bank, at any given time.

- **India to Invest U.S.\$359 Million in 2 Oil Blocks**

India is to invest 359 million dollars in two Nigerian oil blocs, Mr Mahesh Sachdev, the country's High Commissioner to Nigeria, has said. The two blocks, OPL 279 and OPL 285, are being jointly explored by Indian joint venture company of ONGC Videsh and Lakshmi Mittal's Mittal Investments Sarl (MIS), known as ONGC Mittal Energy Ltd, incorporated in Cyprus.

The exploration for the blocs, which are located in the Gulf of Guinea, is for five years, from 2007 to 2012.

He said that funding of 359 million dollars to ONGC Videsh Ltd, overseas arm, for the execution of the first exploration phase in the two Nigerian deepwater blocks, had been endorsed by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA). He added that the budgeted estimates for the first phase of exploration included signature bonus and acquisition cost.

Also, the envoy said that a Memorandum of Understanding, MoU, had been signed between a Mumbai-based consulting and human resources specialist, Acubes Solutions (ACPL), to offer skills development and enhancement programmes to graduate students in Nigeria. He said the MoU was signed recently in New Delhi by Nigeria's Minister of Labour and Productivity, Mr Adetokunbo kayode, and his Indian counterpart, Mr Mallikarjun Kharge.

Sachdev explained further that the programme had been launched under the employment generation pilot scheme of the Ministry of Labour and Productivity with the objective of training more than 12,000 students in 2011.

"Based on the success of the pilot project, ASPL will suggest short courses to the Ministry to be offered to graduate students in Nigeria so that their employment potential would be enhanced considerably, primarily in the IT and telecom domains," the envoy said.

- **Gambia:** Iran ready to support Gambia's agricultural development

The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is supporting the Gambia's agricultural sector by funding a workshop through its Gambia office for Agriculture and Rural Development (IGARD).

The three-day workshop, which opened Tuesday at the Paradise Suites Hotel in Kololi was meant to capacitate the senior officials of the Ministry of Agriculture particularly personnel of the newly-established Department of Agriculture.

The workshop brought together senior officials of the newly-established Department of Agriculture, and would enhance the ongoing restructuring of the sub-sector. It will help to keep the participants better informed about the restructuring of the Ministry of Agriculture, and familiarise them with the procedures of access and use of public resources. It will also expose participants to the general framework to strategise planning process as well as improve their communication skills.

Declaring the workshop open, Momodou S Kah, the deputy minister of Agriculture, on behalf of the Gambian leader, His Excellency Sheikh Professor Alhaji Dr Yahya AJJ Jammeh expressed gratitude to the Islamic Republic of Iran for the support to his ministry. He said the need for capacity strengthening and improvement cannot be over-emphasised considering the number of personnel in the Ministry of Agriculture, adding that the training is a step in the right direction and also timely.

Kah further described the workshop as a great step that would go a long way towards increasing and improving the management capacity of senior staff and encourage more people to answer to the Gambian leader's back-to-the-land call. He then used the opportunity on behalf of the Gambian leader who is also the minister of Agriculture, to thank the Islamic Republic of Iran office in the Gambia for Rural Development (IGARD) for providing the funds that made the training possible under the auspices of the bilateral cooperation between the governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran and The Gambia.

He urged participants to actively engage themselves in the workshop saying "the knowledge and skills gained during the training should not be kept, but be spread among colleagues for it to be effectively utilised". For his part, Saied Zare, the Iranian ambassador to The Gambia said the Islamic Republic of Iran and The Gambia have had excellent relations for many years. He stressed that the relationship entered a new stage since President Jammeh attended the Islamic Conference Summit in Iran and President Ahmadinejad of Iran attended the African Union Banjul Summit in The Gambia in 2006.

"On November 22 ,2009, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad paid another visit to The Gambia during which the two presidents had very fruitful and constructive discussions with each other and vowed a closer cooperation between the two countries. President Jammeh also stressed that there is no limit to the relations between Tehran and Banjul. Therefore, with the determination of the two leaders, now our duties for enhancement of the bilateral relations have been increased," Ambassador Zare said.

He reiterated Iran's readiness to cooperate with The Gambia in various fields including fisheries, agriculture, investment and in the implementation of different projects. "Iran and The Gambia can even cooperate for food sufficiency," he suggested. Ambassador Zare further pointed out that The Gambia and Iran share many things in common, saying "Iran is very keen in promoting peace and stability at every corner of the world". He then assured the gathering that Iran will spare no effort to maintain friendly and constructive ties with all its friends.

The Iranian diplomat stated that The Gambia has good investment potentials, which he said motivates some Iranians to invest in the country. He revealed that recently, Iran launched some new investment projects in some West African countries and expressed hope that similar projects will be launched in The Gambia soon. He explained that any assistance given by Iran to The Gambia is a duty from one Muslim brother to another. He finally prayed for the prosperity of both countries.

Abdou Karim Sonko, the deputy permanent secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Gambians Abroad on behalf of his minister, confirmed that the government of The Gambia is highly appreciative of the development support being rendered to this country by the government and people of the Islamic Republic of Iran. He expressed Gambia government's keen interest in the approval of the five agricultural projects valued at US\$1 million considered as humanitarian assistance from the government of Iran.

According to him, there is no iota of doubt that this training will go a long way in strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Department of Agriculture in particular. He then assured that his ministry will continue to expand on international development cooperation with other countries to enhance agricultural development. For his part, Ali Asghar Kalbasi Esfahani, the managing director of IGARD expressed delight at the level of participation in the training. According to him, it is the pleasure of the Islamic Republic of Iran office in The Gambia for Agriculture and Rural Development to start its formal activity by funding short courses as the focal point of sustainable development.

He noted that in The Gambia, agriculture is a very sensitive section for promoting macro-economic aspects noting that President Jammeh's back-to-land call is an important strategy for boosting the economy and achieving food self-sufficiency for the country. He then expressed hope that the workshop will bear fruits and be a basic step for accelerating agricultural development of the Gambia.

• **Trade Minister Presides Over Giepa Bill Validation**

Yusupha Kah, the minister of Trade, Industry and Employment, yesterday presided over a one-day validation workshop of the Gambia Investment and Export Promotion Agency (GIEPA) bill at the conference hall of the Laico Atlantic Hotel in Banjul.

The GIEPA Bill will replace the Gambia Investment Promotion and the Free Zones Acts both enacted in 2001 by the National Assembly. These two acts jointly constituted the GaThe new Gambia Investment and Export Promotion Agency Bill, as the name implies, will be responsible for promoting investment and exports of Gambian products as well as provide support for the development of small and medium-sized enterprises in the country. It will also develop a new set of incentives for the promotion and expansion of

industry and development of innovative enterprises to increase and expand the export base of the economy.

The validation, which brought together officials from the Ministries of Trade, Industry and Employment, Energy, Finance and Economic Affairs and other senior government officials, private sector and stakeholders was characterised by presentation of papers on the essence of the new bill and its impact on the Gambia economy, with specific reference to investment and export promotions.

The presentation was preceded by a question and answer session, which led the participants to go through all the pages of the newly-drafted bill to be sent to the Attorney General Chambers and Ministry of Justice for legal advice and to the Office of the President for approval and then to the National Assembly for enactment. Addressing the gathering, Kah stated that the creation of such an institution was long overdue, particularly if The Gambia wants to have a private sector that would respond to the challenges of development in today's highly globalised and competitive business environment.

He recalled that in 2001, The Gambia enacted the Gambia Investment Promotion and the Free Zones Agency Acts to form (GIPFZA) to promote and facilitate both domestic and foreign private investment as well as promote the development of free zones as a strategy to enhance the country's export base. He then stated that the purpose of combining the two acts was geared towards creating a one-stop shop for business approvals without the investors applying or visiting all the relevant institutions. He added that the GIEPA Act provides fiscal and non-fiscal incentives to investors as specified by the special investment certificate and Free Zone License both administered by GIPFZA.

Yaya Kassama, the acting chief executive officer of GIPFZA, highlighted the importance of the new GIEPA Act and its impact on the promotion of investment and export activities in the country, with reference to the need for encouraging growth of macro-finance and SMEs. He hailed the efforts made in the compilation of the two acts into one single act and recalled series of works done leading to the validation workshop.

- **Togo:** New pan-African rice centre adopted

African member countries have taken the historic decision to expand and transform the pan-African Rice Center beyond the west African geographical region.

Recognising the strategic importance of rice for Africa and the effective geographic expansion of the Africa Rice Center - which was constituted as the West Africa Rice Development Association (WARDA) in 1971 - the council of ministers last week concluded the 27th Ordinary Session in Lomé, Togo, to officially change the Center's name to "Africa Rice Center (AfricaRice)" and to no longer refer to it as WARDA.

The Africa Rice Center is an intergovernmental association of African countries with the

Council of Ministers as its highest oversight body. It is also one of the 15 international agricultural research institutes supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

The Council of Ministers Session was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Togo Gilbert Fossoun Hounbo on behalf of the President. "We salute the prominent role that the Africa Rice Center has been playing in our fight against poverty through the intensification of rice research in Africa," stated the Prime Minister.

He also appreciated the efforts made by the governments of the Africa Rice Center member countries and the support of the international donor community.

Kossi Messan Ewovor, Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Republic of Togo, chaired the session, during which a number of key resolutions were made.

"This change reflects current reality. Today our Center is very different from when it was established in 1971 in view of the increase in the number of its member countries from beyond West Africa and the continent-wide adoption of the public goods generated by it," the Council of Ministers declared.

The Council underlined that the pan-African ownership of the Center has increased particularly in the period since 2007 during which six countries from Central, Eastern and Northern Africa joined the Center. As a result, the number of Africa Rice Center member countries went up from 17 in 2006 to 23 in 2009.

It also noted that the Center's technologies and services greatly benefit 34 African countries, including 11 non-member countries.

The Council urged that the unique model of the Africa Rice Center as a pan-African intergovernmental institution be taken into consideration in the context of the ongoing CGIAR reform process, because it is an important asset for the consultative group.

The Council also called for a "Mega-Program on Rice" in the new CGIAR as rice is the fastest growing food staple in Africa and is an engine of economic growth and political stability that can impact on poverty and hunger.

The current session of the Africa Rice Center Council of Ministers was held against the backdrop of the recent food crisis, particularly the rice crisis, which affected several African countries.

The Council commended the Director General and his team for not only assisting the member countries in responding to the rice crisis, but for also alerting them beforehand and recommending strategies to effectively manage such crises in the future.

"In addition to the geographic expansion, the Africa Rice Center has transformed itself in many other ways in terms of its scientific and financial health," the Council of Ministers

remarked.

The minister also took particular note of some of the following signs of change, which are contributing to the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the Center, such the significant increase in the annual member country contribution to the Center, its budget and project funding as well as new dynamic research portfolio addressing major rice challenges in Africa, including the impact of climate change.

Conveying its sincere thanks to the President and the government of Togo for their warm hospitality and the excellent organization of the session, the Council approved The Gambia's assumption of the Council Chairmanship for the next 2 years.

Health:

Ghana: MVI to Develop Malaria Transmission-Blocking Vaccine

Accra — The PATH Malaria Vaccine Initiative (MVI) has announced a new collaboration to initiate the development of a vaccine that may eventually help eliminates and eradicates malaria.

The collaboration with the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (JHSPH) and the Sabin Vaccine Institute (Sabin) marks MVI's first investment in transmission-blocking vaccines (TBVs).

This vaccine approach aims to stop the malaria parasite from developing in the mosquito, effectively blocking transmission of malaria from mosquitoes to humans.

Malaria kills nearly 900,000 people per year, most of them children younger than age five. "The heart-breaking devastation caused by malaria cannot be overstated," according to Dr. Peter Agre, Nobel Laureate and Director of the Johns Hopkins Malaria Research Institute (JHMRI).

"Blocking transmission by novel vaccines may provide the approach needed to stop the epidemic. MVI deserves great credit for supporting potentially exciting research that would otherwise be abandoned due to lack of precedent."

"Although eradication is a very long-term and aspirational goal, we are excited by the potential of transmission-blocking vaccines to significantly limit the spread of malaria infection," noted Dr. Christian Loucq, Director of MVI. "In combination with other interventions, we believe a successful TBV would provide another important tool in the fight against malaria

Over the next 18 months, MVI's partners will collaborate to produce and characterize an antigen that can activate the body's defenses to disrupt the complex human-mosquito transmission cycle of malaria. An antigen is any substance that triggers the immune system to produce antibodies against it.

The development team will identify the optimal conditions needed to manufacture clinical supplies of AnAPN1, a mosquito antigen that appears to play a major role in parasite establishment within the mosquito.

Preliminary field research has shown that antibodies induced by this antigen are capable of blocking transmission of the two deadliest malaria parasites, Plasmodium falciparum and P. vivax. When a mosquito takes blood from a vaccinated person, these antibodies prevent the parasite from attaching to and invading the mosquito's gut.

"The antibodies that we have produced are effective against multiple malaria parasites and, therefore, this antigen may constitute the basis for a future 'universal' or pan-malaria transmission-blocking vaccine." said Dr. Rhoel Dinglasan, lead researcher on this project and faculty member at JHSPH. "This could have a tremendous impact on malaria transmission, even extending beyond those individuals we can reach through a vaccination campaign."

"We look forward to supporting MVI's innovative efforts in the development of transmission-blocking vaccines for malaria," said Dr. Ami Shah Brown, Director of Vaccine Operations for the Sabin Vaccine Institute. "Together with our partners at The George Washington University, we are very excited to utilize our existing vaccine development capabilities and work with MVI and JHSPH to develop the AnAPN1 antigen."

This collaboration-MVI's first project focused on TBVs-reflects MVI's redesigned research and development strategy. The new strategy encompasses a broader outlook on malaria vaccine development and promotes early investment in a variety of approaches that have the potential to reach the malaria community's long-term goal of a vaccine that is at least 80 percent effective against clinical disease for more than four years by 2025. In addition to this, MVI is increasing support for vaccines targeting clinical disease caused by P.vivax, as well as vaccines that could interrupt the cycle of transmission of malaria parasites; two aspects of malaria vaccine development that have historically been poorly funded. These efforts are spurred by a renewed long-term commitment within the malaria community to eradicate the disease.

Editorials:

- **Nigeria: The Earthquake in Haiti**

Haiti, a Latin American country of about 9 million people, had had her share of agony over the years but nothing compares with the monumental catastrophe brought on her by a recent earthquake which is estimated to have killed over 60,00 people. The day started like any other and there was no warning of the impending danger that would change the history of Haiti forever. On Tuesday, January 12, 2010 when Haitians were settling down for business in the New Year at the capital, Port Au Prince, which is the largest city and heavily populated, a 7.0 magnitude quake reduced much of the capital to rubble.

The earthquake has been described by the United Nations as the worst disaster in decades. Haiti is a city already lacking in basic health services. The badly injured survivors roam the streets in search of much needed help. In 1804, Haiti became the first independent nation in Latin America and the only nation ever created as a result of a successful rebellion by slaves. Information about Haiti from Encarta revealed that forests once covered this mountainous land but most of the trees have been cut down, which has

led to soil erosion. Malnutrition is a serious problem in Haiti. So is unemployment. Throughout its history, Haiti has been divided between tiny educated elite, which holds most of the wealth and political power, and a large underclass with little or no power. Today, Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Many Haitians have left their impoverished land for greener pastures abroad. Haiti also has had a long history of political instability under dictators, most notably François Duvalier (a.k.a. Papa Doc) and his son, Baby Doc, who stifled any political opposition.

The above gloomy scenario was the situation of Haiti before the latest calamity descended on the capital at about 4.53pm that fateful Tuesday. Many buildings came down in seconds while many people were buried alive under collapsed buildings and up till now some trapped victims are still crying for help with no hope of being rescued as a result of very slow pace of rescue efforts. Reports have it that about 40,000 bodies have been buried in mass graves while another 100,000 deaths are being estimated. The earthquake that shattered Port-Au-Prince on Tuesday adds yet another layer of distress to the accumulated misery of a people devastated by repeated natural disasters and ingrained corruption. Just two years ago, a series of hurricanes and food price riots crippled reform efforts. It was a gory sight in Haiti where a mass of flesh was mangled and dead bodies littered the streets. Women lost their husbands and vice versa, and children became orphans. Thousands became homeless and were seen leaving the capital in droves because they were afraid of an aftershock effect of the earthquake on the buildings still standing. Though help had started coming but it is not enough. The US sent a lot of relief materials and workers, including about 10,000 troops, to help in rescue efforts. There is looting by criminals who have taken advantage of the situation of anarchy as the parliament building has collapsed and governance and government have also collapsed.

An earthquake is the shaking of the Earth's surface caused by rapid movement of the Earth's rocky outer layer. Earthquakes occur when energy stored within the Earth, usually in the form of strain in rocks, suddenly releases. This energy is transmitted to the surface of the Earth by earthquake waves. The destruction an earthquake causes depends on its magnitude and duration, or the amount of shaking that occurs. A structure's design and the materials used in its construction also affect the amount of damage the structure incurs. Earthquakes vary from small, imperceptible shaking to large shocks felt over thousands of kilometers. Earthquakes can deform the ground, make buildings and other structures collapse, and create tsunamis (large sea waves). Lives may be lost in the resulting destruction. Very large earthquakes, such as the 1964 Alaskan earthquake, which caused millions of dollars in damage, occur worldwide once every few years. Moderate earthquakes, such as the 1989 tremor in Loma Prieta, California, and the 1995 tremor in Kobe, Japan, occur about 20 times a year. Moderate earthquakes also cause millions of dollars in damage and can harm many people. A minor earthquake (called earth tremor) occurred in Ijebu -Ode and Shagamu, Nigeria many years ago but it lasted seconds.

Many people died in Haiti because help was slow in coming, which is evidence of an inept government like that of Nigeria. Heavy equipment to lift the rubble was not available until they were flown in from the United States. This reminded us of a similar

situation when the military Hercules aircraft carrying military officers crashed in Ejigbo a swampy area of Lagos, Nigeria in 1992. Rescue effort was equally impossible for lack of earth moving equipment until a private company came with the equipment.

The lesson for Nigeria is that we should be prepared for a similar natural disaster which may come without warning because a minor earthquake once occurred in Ijebu -Ode and Ibadan South-West Nigeria. But the biggest current political earthquake ravaging the country now is the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and this has been made a joke on the Internet but it is more than a joke. Currently, the PDP had put Nigeria a cul-de-sac as nobody, (except few) knows the whereabouts of Nigeria's ailing President for about 58 days running. To make the matter worse, the Vice -President was not invested with Presidential powers by the President before he travelled out of the country. There are intrigues and high wired power play which would undoubtedly trigger a political earthquake very soon if the situation continues.

If we find ourselves in the situation of Haiti, how prepared are we to face the situation and minimize loss of human lives when we are lacking in basic amenities already? We should stop behaving as if we are not bothered and as if we are immune from earthquakes that rocked Haiti. We should contribute money and materials to help alleviate sufferings in that country like all responsible countries are currently doing even as we prepare for our own earthquake.

Adequate precautions, such as education, emergency planning, and constructing stronger, more flexible, safely designed structures, can limit the loss of life and decrease the damage caused by earthquakes. But are these present in Nigeria?

- **ISLAMIC TERRORISM:** Crisis after crisis has continued to riddle northern Nigeria since 1966 (or as some watchers will say, since the first Kano riots of 1956/58). Some disingenuous and evasive intellectuals have continued to call these riots and killings politically motivated. Others say they are economic. i.e. ethnic Nigerians competing for space and livelihood. But are those what these killings are really about? Are these not jihads? What about Islamic terrorism? May be that is a hot cliché, let's try Sharia! When Moslems determine that they must have a country within a country, organized along religious lines, complete with an exclusionary feudal economic system and Sharia law: where only their religious system prevails to the exclusion of all others. And every non conformist has to be driven away, dispossessed, arsoned, raped, tortured, murdered, etc. What is that? A political ethnic violence? An economic opportunity violence? Let's tell ourselves the truth: when faith compels a man (and nowadays a woman and even a virgin girl) to kill foreigners, his fellow citizens, his brethren, his friends, his own family, and even himself, at the slightest provocation (and sometimes without any provocation), what is that? Ethnic political violence? Economic competition? oh no, not at all. This is Islamic Terrorism!!!!