

Business and Politics in the Muslim World
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By Mustapha Shafi
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Details of the News

China-African Relations:

Pan-African issues:

- **Urgent law enforcement action needed to deal with illegal ivory trade in Africa and Asia.**

A new analysis of elephant trade data has indicated that urgent law enforcement action by governments in Central and West Africa and South-east Asia is crucial to addressing the illicit ivory trade.

Detailed regional summaries of the data held in the Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS), the world's largest database on ivory seizures, highlight the failure of law enforcement in key elephant range States facing an increasing threat from organised crime and the presence of unregulated markets.

The re-analysis comes as 175 governments meet in Qatar for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species in Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), where they will consider ivory trade issues.

"It's clearer than ever that governance shortfalls and weak enforcement allow illicit ivory trade to go unchecked in West and Central Africa and in South-East Asia, where large domestic ivory markets openly sell ivory illegally," said Tom Milliken of TRAFFIC, who undertook the ETIS analysis.

"What's needed is urgent action by government enforcement agencies in these regions and strong collaboration with counterparts in Asia where many of the current seizures are being made," he added.

"If there was adequate political will, a commitment to law enforcement would shut down the illegal markets and check corruption. That isn't happening," Milliken said.

"Until this strengthened law enforcement happens, ivory will continue to leak out of Africa," said Elisabeth McLellan, Species Manager, WWF International.

"We're not talking small-time smugglers here, we're talking hardened, organized criminal gangs," McLellan said.

ETIS is compiled by TRAFFIC on behalf of CITES, and comprises more than 15,400 ivory seizure cases compiled over the last 21 years.

The re-analysis of the data was made by region rather than by country, and was carried out to align the data with MIKE (Monitoring the Illegal Killing of

Elephants), another of the ITES tools used to monitor poaching, which also shows that the Central African region is losing the most elephants. (ANI)

- **African nations at loggerheads over auction of ivory stockpiles**

Tanzania and Zambia are seeking permission to sell off their stockpiles to Japan and China

It is the most divisive environmental issue in Africa. Last week the temperature in the already heated debate over whether to allow ivory sales rose sharply as Tanzania and Zambia sought permission to sell their stockpiles to Japan and China. The request was made at a conference on the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites), which opened a two-week meeting in Qatar last week. The move is being opposed by 23 other African countries, which argue that the legal trade will stimulate poaching of elephants.

The worldwide trade in ivory has been banned since 1989, but several one-off sales of stockpiled tusks have been allowed on condition that the proceeds were spent on conservation. The last auctions occurred in 2008, when South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe sold 108 tonnes of ivory to Japan and China. At the time, the elephant population in the four countries topped 312,000, with the numbers increasing.

Tanzania and Zambia want to lower their protection status, which would enable governments legally to sell 112 tonnes of ivory. Zambia argues that its stockpiles, which consist mainly of tusks from animals that died naturally, are too costly to maintain, and says the \$1m it raises will be spent on improving elephant strongholds.

A counter-proposal has been launched by seven African countries including Mali and Tanzania's northern neighbour, Kenya, which prohibits hunting and culling. The countries are seeking a 20-year moratorium on all sales of stockpiled ivory. Kenya argues that the special sales in 2008 expanded the international market for ivory and stimulated demand, contributing to a sharp rise in the number of elephants killed in the country. This position is supported by the International Fund for Animal Welfare, which says any official sale will boost trade in illegal ivory.

But Traffic, an organisation that collects data on ivory smuggling and elephant killings, disagrees, saying there is no evidence of a link between previous stockpile sales and a rise in poaching. A decision is expected at the coming Cites meeting.

- **African Union acts against Madagascar's Andry Rajoelina**

The African Union has put sanctions on Madagascar's leader Andry Rajoelina, after he failed to meet a deadline to set up a unity government.

Mr Rajoelina and 108 of his backers will face travel restrictions and have any foreign assets frozen, the AU said.

The organisation wants to force Mr Rajoelina, a former DJ who seized power a year ago, back into negotiations.

For the past year, the country has been in turmoil with street protests by Mr Rajoelina's opponents and supporters.

"We believe that the sanctions are the way that will help the authorities to come back to the virtues of dialogue and negotiation," said AU security commissioner Ramtane Lamamra.

"I hope they will have the effect of nurturing wisdom. No unilateral party is capable of solving the crisis by itself."

Former President Marc Ravalomanana, who was overthrown after weeks of violent protests last year, urged his successor to resume talks.

"I hope that these targeted sanctions will spur Andry Rajoelina into cooperating with the international community and that they serve as a wake-up call," said Mr Ravalomanana, who is in exile in South Africa.

But a member of Mr Rajoelina's government, Evariste Marson, told the AFP news agency that the sanctions would have "no effect".

In December, Mr Rajoelina abandoned a peace deal he had signed up to by unilaterally appointing a military prime minister.

The decision sparked violent protests outside the national assembly in the capital, Antananarivo.

- **Africa: Continent Needs Proactive Action on Climate Change, Expert Says**

A three-day climate change conference being held in Accra, Ghana, ends on Thursday. It was organized by the Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance and representatives from more than 30 countries are attending, according to the Ghana News Agency. Despite many meetings on the issue, African nations need to better coordinate their efforts to combat climate change, says *Youba Sokona*, executive secretary of the Sahara and Sahel Observatory based in Tunis. In an interview with AllAfrica's Cindy Shiner, Sokona says that only by being proactive can Africa hope to deal effectively with the fallout from global warming.

Climate change is predicted to have devastating effects across Africa and erode already fragile livelihoods. How do you see the impact?

It's a bit difficult to give a clear and precise response to this question because there are limited studies in the region related to climate. There is a general view... that the continent will be affected because of the level of poverty of the people – that is the social element. And then we also have a large fragile ecosystem in the region ... If you combine

the two different aspects – the fragility of most of the agro-ecosystem in the region and the poverty and the level of development – there is general agreement and consensus that the region will be heavily affected by climate [change].

Can you talk about any ideas or solutions coming out of Africa to confront climate change and avert a disaster?

If something happens we are reacting rather than having a proactive attitude, particularly in the case of the Sahel. We can deal with those issues only if we have in place operational infrastructure and that will help us to anticipate. With technology and knowledge we can have a clear indication when certain events will occur and it will be possible to take urgent action.

Unfortunately, the concentration is not on those different aspects. It's a bit difficult to say what needs to be done because we are also lacking adequate institutional infrastructure at the national or regional level. I believe those are the kind of problems we are facing.

Maybe [by focusing on] a more specific aspect we can outline what needs to be done. Then in the region also we have a lot of plans and initiatives that are completely disconnected. I'm just reviewing [now] an adaptation plan for West Africa that [is being] discussed in Accra for West African countries, which is completely disconnected with the plans adopted by the African ministers of environment in Nairobi last year. There's no reference [to] that document. We can go on and go on and go on about those different aspects.

So why is there a disconnection? Are the problems somehow different?

No, it's not because the problems are different. It's because of the fragmentation of initiatives and because also those initiatives have been [taken] by different entities. Maybe in the case of West Africa they have been taken by some of the donors who wanted to have some connection with West Africa but who don't know what has already been done at the regional level. This is common. [Within] the same countries we've found the same thing.

And then we are not building on what has already been done or what already exists. And each initiative is disconnected [from] the others so that will not help [us to find]... an adequate solution to the problem. We know the problems and they are clear and then you take any document, any report, you will find exactly the same – it's written differently. But we know the problems, and we have some indication what needs to be done but how that can be done – this is a critical issue and a critical element.

And so you're saying this is counterproductive.

For sure it's to a large extent counterproductive.

But I thought one of the positive things is that Africa had a unified position going into the Copenhagen climate change talks?

This is a completely different level of action because negotiation is a policy and political aspect. Negotiation is one aspect and then actions are another aspect. This is where the problem lies and this is also reflected at the global level.

Copenhagen has been exceptional because for the first time we had 119 heads of state. But in terms of actions nothing is happening really at the global level as well as on the continent. The unified position has to be backed by a concise and clear action plan, a clear indication of what needs to be done, how that needs to be done and how much that will cost.

So how do you reach that point?

This is the homework that is not yet done. We have a number of talk shows, seminars in Africa but if you want to know what has been done concretely, what documents exist, what work has been done by institutions you will find that very limited. My point is to insist more on concrete action and then to have adequate institutions rather than conferences, seminars and talks on different aspects.

What is happening in West Africa this week?

They will adopt the Action Plan for Adaptation [to climate change]. A comprehensive framework for adaptation was defined by the African ministers of environment in Johannesburg in 2008. There's no reference [to] this [West African] document. And then if you look at all issues related to the costing of adaptation it's broad. We have no clear indication and no clear idea how much money we need for adaptation and how that will be spent, on which aspect that will be spent.

So what would you suggest?

I would suggest that there is a need for starting some homework and then doing an adequate analysis of those aspects. We have a clear indication of the problems, the magnitude of those problems. Then we have to... say, ok, if we think that we have to move from reaction to much more proactive and anticipatory action... do we have those different elements in place? If yes, let us work on [them], if not, let us try to put them in place.

And then to have some sort of sequential approach. If there is some urgent element [that] needs to be done within the next five years, [let us] have adequate planning and then pull the resources together ... all kinds of resources. We are really lacking adequate institutions in the region to take on board those various challenges, which will be ongoing, which cannot be adequately addressed in a piecemeal approach.

Is there any particular country or region that has started to build these institutions you speak of or taken steps forward?

I have heard now for three years UNECA [United Nations Economic Commission for Africa] talking about the African climate policy center. It has not yet come as a reality. It's not in place. Those kinds of initiatives should have been taken long ago in the different regions. If we do have a number of those centers, that will help to support the key policymakers who are actually convinced that climate is a real problem...

In the [1970s] we had some key institutions. None of those institutions have been operational. The African Center for Renewable Energy – that was located in Burundi – a continent-wide institution. In West Africa we used to have a regional center for renewable energy in Bamako. Four billion CFA invested for infrastructure, eight billion for equipment. The institution never functioned.

Is there a way of integrating climate change adaptation with the development agenda?

You cannot disconnect climate issues and development... Let us start with development and how we will make our development agenda resilient to climate first and then what are the preconditions for that? And then being at local, national and regional level, I think this will be for me the adequate approach.

And we have more opportunity than other regions because we have limited investment that needs to be protected. Our future is open to absorb any new ideas.

You mean, for example, clean energy?

Yes, because our energy infrastructure is not yet in place. We are not locked into any energy system. That means that we [in Africa] have many more options than others have. Because [developed]... countries, they cannot renew their infrastructure until the end of the lifecycle of those infrastructures, while in Africa the infrastructure is not yet in place. It could be a clean energy pathway. In order to put it in place you need some basic and adequate infrastructure and policy. Regarding energy, particularly renewable [energy], we need to have implementable policies.

- **Africa's child refugees**

Cape Town - With a plate in her hand, she slowly follows behind others in a queue until her turn to be served comes. Potatoes and beans are the day's menu. Her mind seems far away as she doesn't join in the chats and giggles that other young girls of her age are engaged in. Moments later, she wraps herself with a blanket, one of the hundreds that an aid group donated a few weeks ago. In no time, she is sleeping soundly only to wake up the following morning to face the same routine of life in a refugee camp.

Anita (not real name) is one amongst thousands of Africa's young children who have been unfortunate to have their lives "messed up" at a tender age. She was only six years old when her parents were killed in an ambush in the Democratic Republic of Congo's Goma district. She had to join other villagers who survived the attack as they fled their homes for refuge in neighbouring Congo Brazzaville. Life for her has not been better and she faces a bleak future.

Recent years have seen a surge in the number of child refugees or displaced children as conflicts and wars continue to ravage various parts of the African continent. Somalia, for example, has civilians fleeing their homes almost daily as they fear endless battles between Islamist insurgents and the government backed forces.

The Democratic Republic of Congo has also seen an influx in the number of refugees as fighting remains intense with tribal clashes also forcing thousands to flee their homes. And now with the Darfur truce deal signed in Sudan recently, it

can only be hoped that life returns to normal in that region, which for years has contributed immensely to the number of Africa's refugees.

In southern Africa, it is South Africa which has become home to refugees from a number of politically and economically unstable nations such as Zimbabwe.

Arduous expedition

Stephen Blight, chief of Child Protection for the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) in South Africa, told News24 that the country had over the past years experienced a growing influx of migrant children from neighbouring countries, many of whom arrived unaccompanied by parents or caregivers.

"In the past year, this has become an acute problem, creating an extraordinary situation for South African social services and other government departments to address. The highest concentration of unaccompanied migrant children can be found in the Musina border area and Gauteng province," said Blight.

Of particular concern could be the risks that these children face on the move, particularly as they cross the border illegally through bushes and across the river.

"Not only are there physical threats due to the arduous expedition, children also constantly report being attacked, robbed and subjected to other forms of violence, often by criminal gangs," said Blight.

He said girls were particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation. Statistics released by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF – Doctors without Borders) reveal that from April to September 2009, 84 cases of gender based violence for counselling were recorded of which only two were formally reported to the police.

Of these cases, 40% were gang rapes. Blight said this represented only a fraction of actual cases as the levels of abuse were high in this area with cases of armed threats also being reported from time to time.

Limited resources

Blight said South Africa, under its Children's Act 2005 regarded children on the move as "children in need of care and protection". However, "implementation capacities have been overstretched in responding to high rates of violence against children and the huge burden of caring for orphans and vulnerable children in a context of HIV/Aids".

He also said although it was the duty of the state to co-ordinate the registration of these children and put necessary systems in place to trace their families, it had become impossible to meet these obligations due to limited resources.

At a special summit for refugees held in Kampala, Uganda last year, African Union member states undertook to enhance the protection of civilians in situations of armed conflict, based on international humanitarian law, taking particular note of the special needs of women and children.

In a statement sent to News24, the AU indicated that a commission had been put in place with a goal to ensure that the IDP (Internally Displaced People) Convention was ratified and came into force by 2011.

“The Commission has initiated a roadmap under the theme “commitment to action”, to move the agenda on forced displacement beyond Kampala special Summit. A draft plan is being finalised through an inclusive consultative process, involving partners. The plan serves to implement measures recommended by the Special Summit in addressing forced displacement on the continent,” the AU stated.

Lack of personal security

The AU noted that member state experts and ministries in charge of refugees were expected to consider the plan in May after which it (the plan) would be submitted to a July ordinary summit for adoption.

The organisation indicated some of the challenges faced by displaced children as they remained at risk of sexual violence and exploitation.

“More than any other group, children – whether displaced within their own country or forced across international borders - are the most exposed, particularly to violence and exploitation. A number of factors combine to heighten their protection risks. Chief among them is a lack of personal security whether living in camps, collective centres or with host families,” the statement revealed.

The AU condemned the continued displacement of people in Africa as a result of conflicts as these often resulted in the forced recruitment of children – both boys and girls – by armed groups and even national military forces.

“The reality is that many children, who constitute the future of Africa, have lost their lives or suffered traumatic and irreparable physical and psychological injuries as a result of conscription into fighting forces. Many grow up without education as a result.”

Survival sex

“All of Africa’s children, including refugee children, should be enabled to reap the long-term benefits of education. Education is the key to the future, not only for an individual child but the continent as a whole. Africa’s leaders must resolve

that children have no place in war in accordance with the spirit of the African Youth Charter of 2 July 2006 and the AU Policy of Access to Post primary Education for victims of forced displacement in Africa,” the AU noted.

What has also come to be an issue are reports that some women refugees are turning into prostitution probably to solicit money to eke a living. Such are devastating reports as the children living in refugee camps are there to watch these things happen.

“In many displacement situations, the absence of livelihoods pushes women and children into survival sex as the only means to provide for themselves. Often they are deprived of food, water, education, health care and other essentials. Poverty and the inability to access basic services may also compel women and children, especially girls to exchange sex for food or other necessities,” the AU stated.

The organisation said it was unfortunate that in most circumstances such dynamics led to early or forced marriages and to other forms of exploitation and abuse.

“In many cases, children drop out of school and grow up without education as they focus on the more immediate needs including finding food and staying alive as well as minding the welfare of their younger siblings. They are forced into adulthood or experience the different natural stages of child development. Although many children have shown resilience under such circumstances, their adverse experiences will have long-term consequences in their lives,” the AU said.

Statistics reveal that there are 17 million refugees and displaced across the African continent.

- **West Africa enters int’l organic food market**

Consumers in Europe and America are willing to pay extra for trusted quality organic food products. Now, a new project helps thousands of farmers in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Senegal and Sierra Leone to enter this lucrative market.

Some 5,000 West African farmers are already reaping the rewards from a new scheme aimed at helping them export produce to the growing organic food market in the industrialised world.

The US\$ 2.4 million UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) project funded by Germany has helped farmers in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Senegal and Sierra Leone to meet the necessary certification and adapt to the required methods to grow and sell organic products, FAO reported today.

FAO noted that the organic and fair trade market in developed countries is expected to grow by about five to 10 percent per year over the next three years, offering new opportunities for smallholder farmers in poor countries. But so far, West Africa has not been able to capitalise on this market due to lacking institutions to oversee certificates.

Entering the market not only requires a conversion period from conventional to organic agriculture – including changes from production and harvesting to packaging, certification and marketing – during which farmers incur higher costs resulting from new techniques without initially benefiting from the higher prices associated with the organic label.

"Some farmer groups had never exported products before – at best they offered them to the local market at a low price," said FAO trade economist Pascal Liu. "Most of them had a very low level of institutional capability, technical capacity and financial resources. Now most of the groups have legal status, meet regularly, keep records and are now made up of 'real members' who pay dues," added Mr Liu.

As a result of the improved structure and organisation farmer groups are now in the position to draw up and negotiate contracts with an exporter, with some pineapple growers from Ghana and Cameroon seeing their exports growing despite the economic crisis.

"One group in Cameroon, for example, not only found a buyer for their organic pineapples, but thanks to the cost analysis we did with them, they were also able to negotiate better terms with their long-term conventional buyer," said Cora Dankers, an FAO project officer.

In Ghana, on the other hand, some 30 small-scale pineapple farmers managed to increase their sales from 26 to 116 tonnes, after having obtained organic certification.

The project focused on all stages of the supply chain from production, harvesting and packaging to certification and marketing. The vital part of the project was to pay for the costly certification in the conversion period and to support better hygienic conditions to comply with high international quality standards.

"The project helped local farmers who normally expect direct financial help from institutions to adopt a more proactive attitude. Their economic situation and self-esteem has definitely improved because they can now sell their products on international markets at much better prices - something they could not even dream about only three years ago," Mr Liu said.

FAO said that the German-backed project had also resulted in a rise in living conditions and food security as the additional income is generally spent on food,

clothing, school fees and medical bills.

In addition, the project had led to new jobs in the production of certified products as well as supportive services, and the new organic production methods have also been adopted by farmers who are not members of the producer groups.

Ghana:

1. Political News:

- **President Mills sends high powered delegation to Asantehene**

A high-powered government delegation on Tuesday met with the Asantehene, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II at his Manhyia Palace as efforts to calm the mounting tension between the Asante Kingdom and the Techimanhene gathered momentum.

This came barely 24 hours after the Asantehene had publicly expressed anger at the abduction and subsequent shabby treatment of the Omanhene of Tuobodom by the chief of Techiman and called for decisive action by the Government.

The atmosphere at Manhyia as the delegation and the Asante King were locked in discussions behind closed doors was tensed with a crowd of muscular looking young men chanting war songs.

Brigadier Nunoo Mensah, (Rtd), the National Security Advisor, who led the delegation told newsmen that the meeting went well, saying, they had had fruitful discussions.

He said he was confident that the Asantehene would exercise restraint and appealed to Asanteman to sustain the peace.

The National Security Advisor said he has every reason to believe that Otumfuo Osei Tutu would ensure that peace prevailed.

He vowed that full investigations would be conducted into the matter and that the law would take its course.

The Asantehene conveyed his appreciation to the Government for the intervention.

He said although the Asante nation was built through wars, the situation has now changed and that the focus presently was on peace-building and development.

The Ashanti Regional Security Council had earlier in the day also met with the Asantehene.

An irate group of young men had in the afternoon stormed the Kajetia Lorry Terminal in Kumasi to prevent Techiman-bound vehicles from operating there.

Techiman and Tuobodom fought fierce gun battle on Friday, March 5, resulting in three deaths, and four others, who were critically wounded, including a policeman.

This was sparked off by the alleged abduction of the Tuobodomhene, Nana Asare Baffour, and some of his elders at the orders of the Techimanhene, whilst attending court hearing at Wenchi.

The delegation is expected to travel to Sunyani.

GNA

- **Panicking BA Chiefs to Meet Otumfuo**

Sunyani — A high-powered delegation of Ashanti chiefs and lawyers stormed the Sunyani Magistrate Court 'B' yesterday, in solidarity with the Tuobodomhene, Nana Baffour Asare III, who was allegedly kidnapped by the Techimanhene, Oseadeeyo Akumfi Ameyaw IV, at Wenchi recently.

Nana Asare Baffour III has been charged with attempted murder, together with his Secretary, Mr. Samuel Agyei Boahen, over an alleged attempt to assassinate Oseadeeyo Akumfi Ameyaw, when the latter was on his way to Tuobodom to celebrate a festival about two years ago.

Nana Obiri Boahen, Counsel for Nana Baffour Asare, was joined by colleague legal practitioners from Kumasi, including Lawyer Yaw Boafo, Owusu Sekyere and Marianne Agyemang Gyasi Jahari, to beef up the legal team.

The delegation of chiefs were led by Nana Osei Agyemang Tiatua, Dwansahene, Nana Sarfo Kantanka, Ankobeahene of Tanoso, Nana Oppong Frenyam, Adankragyamhene, Nana Baffour Botuakwa II, successor to the famous Baffour Akoto, and Ohene Nana Owusu Apiasa, Adubinsu Kesehene.

Despite the heavy presence of lawyers and chiefs, the case could still not proceed, because the docket on the case had still not been returned from the Attorney General's Department.

Again, contrary to the court's order, during the last sittings, for the prosecutor to present all prosecution witnesses in court, none of them was sighted in court yesterday. The Court has therefore adjourned the case to April 29, this year.

BA chiefs to meet Otumfuo

Meanwhile, barely 24 hours after the Asantehene, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, threatened to kidnap the Techimanhene, Oseadeeyo Akumfi Ameyaw IV, and deal with him over the treatment he meted out to the Paramount Chief of Tuobodom, Nana Asare Baffour III, the

Brong Ahafo Regional House of Chiefs has decided to intervene in the matter, by seeking audience with the occupant of the Golden Stool.

The President of the Brong-Ahafo Regional House of Chiefs, Osaahene Kwaku Aterkyi, who described the recent development at Tuobodom, which led to the death of innocent persons, as unfortunate, disclosed in a telephone interview with The Chronicle yesterday that the House had agreed to seek audience with Otumfuo, on how best the matter could be resolved.

According to Osaahene Aterkyi, after reflecting on the ongoing saga, the house had collectively agreed that a small committee be constituted to meet the Asantehene, on how best the protracted chieftaincy dispute could be resolved.

Osaahene Aterkyi disclosed that as a member of the Asanteman Council, he, together with other members, would do everything possible to have the matter resolved, saying, "I am already in Kumasi to attend the Asanteman Council's meeting tomorrow, after which I will meet with Otumfuo to decide on the date the committee members will meet him at the Manhyia Palace.

He noted that the people of Tuobodom cannot continue to suffer from the protracted chieftaincy dispute any longer, and that violence must give way to dialogue.

Osaahene Aterkyi, who is the Paramount Chief of Kukuom in the Asunafo South District, further said all members of the house had all expressed their willingness to find lasting peace for Tuobodom and the entire region.

When asked whether the Techimanhene was aware of the move to visit Otumfuo over the dispute, Osaahene Aterkyi said the House, as a body, was to seek peace in the region, and would do everything within its jurisdiction to achieve that. Read Otumfuo's reaction to the whole fracas on our centre pages.

National security meets Otumfuo

At at press time last night, reports reaching us from Kumasi, indicated that a National Security delegation, led by Brigadier General Nunoo-Mensah (rtd), Security Advisor to the President, were at the Manhyia Palace at behest of President Mills to meet Otumfuo, to discuss how best they could ensure peace in the area.

The Chronicle sources in government indicate that the President was very much concerned about the threat issued by Otumfuo yesterday - to kidnap the Techimanhene and deal with him as he did to the Tuobodomhene, who owes allegiance to the Golden Stool.

The National Security delegation, which also included Dr. Christine Amoako Nuamah of the Office of the President, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) General Secretary, Asiedu Nketiah, Ashanti Regional Minister, Mr. Kofi Opoku Manu, Alhaji Collins

Dauda, Minister of Lands and Natural Resources among others, met Otumfuo behind closed doors. Details of the discussions were not known at the time of going to press.

The Chronicle, however, learnt that the delegation would move to Techiman, today (Wednesday), to hold similar discussions with the Techimanhene.

Meanwhile, the Brong-Ahafo Regional Security Council has beefed up security in and around Techiman.

Youth groups from both Kumasi and Techiman were chanting war songs over the development. Unconfirmed reports alleged that some groups of machomen went to the Techiman station at Kejetia to prevent vehicles from loading passengers and goods to Techiman.

- **Kwesi Pratt Cautions Asantehene**

The Managing Editor of the Insight newspaper, Kwesi Pratt Jnr, has waded into the Tuobodomanhene / Techimanhene / Asantehene fray by issuing a rather terse note of caution to the Asantehene asking him to be circumspect in his utterances.

Mr. Pratt strongly believes that much as the action by the Techimanhene, Oseadeeyo Ameyaw Akumfi IV, deserves outright condemnation, the statement by the Asantehene was unbecoming of a great king, who is highly regarded in the country, more so when he is mediating in the Dagbon Chieftaincy dispute.

According to him, the action by the two statesmen has desecrated the chieftaincy institution in the country.

“It’s about time our chiefs were made to understand that Ghana does not belong to them...those days of the “ahenfie” police....severing off people’s heads for wronging a king are past...We are in 2010...Our chiefs, should permit me to say, reason carefully before taking decisions,” he crossly said.

On Friday, March 5th, some unidentified heavily built men alighted from a white Ford bus with registration number AW 2873 Z, and in Rambo style, kidnapped the Chief of Tuobododom, Nana Asare Baffour II, who owes allegiance to the Asantehene, and sent him to the Techimanhene’s palace, where he was allegedly physically assaulted.

The incident occurred while the Wenchi High Court was sitting.

The inaction by the police and the lack of proactiveness by the Brong Ahafo Regional House of Chiefs in settling the dispute incurred the displeasure of Otumfuo Osei Tutu.

The visibly angry 16th occupant of the Golden Stool, at the press conference yesterday questioned why the actions of the Techimanhene have not received outright condemnation and the rather long silence over the issue by the appropriate quarters.

The Asantehene thereby issued an ultimatum to government to make its position clear and threatened that, should the appropriate agencies fail to call the Techimanhene to order, he (the Asantehene) will “arrest him just as a hawk grabs a hen, if the Techimanhene dares travel through Kumasi.”

But speaking on Peace FM’s “Kokrokoo”, Mr. Pratt lashed out at the Asantehene calling his pronouncements reckless which could endanger the lives of the two ethnic groups in particular, and Ghanaians in general.

“Kwami, I believe Otumfuo stills heads the Eminent Committee of Chiefs mediating in the Dagbon crisis...he is sitting on the committee advising the Dagombas,...he should rather advice himself, its important...the statement he made threatening the Techimanhene...what will be the consequences for both Asantes and the people of Techiman....my goodness, what is this?” an exasperated Pratt said.

The Insight Managing Editor was equally uncharitable to the Techimanhene censuring him for his role in the kidnapping of the Tuobodomhene, Nana Asare Baffour II.

“And this Techimanhene, what is his problem?...This is a serious matter...How can send macho men to arrest someone who you think has wronged you? You bring him to your palace, strip him naked and **subject** him to severe beatings...Is that how we want to live in this country?” he questioned.

Mr. Pratt was however, quick to add that he was in tandem with the statement made by the Asantehene that state institutions must be allowed to work and the law made to take its course.

“It does not matter whether you are Otumfuo or whatever...it does not matter whether you are the President..., from today to go...anyone who flouts the law must be brought to **book** and dealt with accordingly by the law,” he said.

Kwesi Pratt told Kwami Sefa-Kayi, host of the morning show programme. He recalled the instance where he and other colleague journalists were warned never to step foot in Kumasi after making certain comments about the Asantehene. Kwesi Pratt said.

He added that our traditional rulers should refrain from acts that will unnecessarily raise tension in the country.

“Ghana is a constitutionally democratic and Republic country...Our chiefs should think of Ghana first...when they do all this and it degenerates itself a battle, in the final analysis, the ordinary Ghanaian will bear the brunt of all this...the tax payer’s money will be used to engage the services of security personnel to bring peace in the area...indeed we’re tired of them,” Kwesi Pratt said.

- **I Never Kidnapped Tuobodom Chief**

THE OMANHENE of the Techiman Traditional Area, Nana Oseadeyo Akumfi Ameyaw, has flatly denied ever ordering 'macho' men to kidnap the chief of Tuobodom, Nana Baffour Asare II.

Oseadeyo was speaking at a meeting with a high-powered government delegation led by the National Security Adviser, Brigadier (Rtd) Nunoo Mensah, and the Techiman Traditional Council at the Omanhene's palace on March 17, 2010.

All the chiefs were clad in funeral attire to signify the seriousness of the situation. The government delegation was made up of Dr. Oteng Adjei, Alhaji Collins Dauda, Kwadwo Nyamekye Marfo, Asiedu Nketia, and Christiana Amoako-Nuamah.

The group had earlier met with the Asantehene on the same Tuobodom issue.

Narrating his side of the story to the delegation, the Techiman Omanhene said on October 8 2008, at about 2pm, he and his entourage were on their way to Tuobodom to celebrate the Fofie Festival with one of his sub-chiefs when his convoy was ambushed.

He said several gunshots were fired at the convoy, causing many of his people to sustain serious injuries.

He stated it was later learnt that the surprise attack was organized by Nana Baffour Asare II, who claims to be the Omanhene of Tuobodom.

According to Nana Oseadeyo, he reported the matter to the police and provided the names of the alleged gunmen, but sadly no one was arrested nearly two years after the incident took place.

Continuing, Oseadeyo said some Good Samaritans from Techiman spotted Nana Baffour Asare II and arrested him. When he was brought before the Techiman Omanhene, he ordered that Nana Baffour be handed over to the police since the case had already been reported.

Nana Oseadeyo blamed the media for misrepresenting the case instead of investigating to find out the truth. He was of the view that if indeed Nana Baffour Asare II was kidnapped and beaten up as the media portrayed, why is he (Nana Baffour Asare II) standing trial at a Sunyani Magistrate Court for attempting to assassinate him (Techimanhene).

Nana Oseadeyo Akumfi Ameyaw seized the opportunity to appeal to the media to be circumspect in their reportage of the Tuobodom issue since any further misrepresentation could disturb the peace.

On the statement made by the Asantehene that President Mills should choose between him and the Techimanhene, Oseadeyo said the statement was unfortunate since there is

nothing like choosing between one chief and another.

According to him, President Mills is the Head of State of Ghana, not the ruler of a particular dynasty or kingdom.

He however advised the President to choose Ghana instead of any group of persons or any individual for that matter.

Nana Oseadeyo was also not happy about information claiming that he said since his government is in power, he can do whatever he likes.

He said when the NPP was in power, he had cordial relations with ex-President Kufuor and his government because they did their best to develop Techiman.

Similarly, he will never hesitate to throw his weight behind President Mills and his team since they all wish Techiman well.

Referring to lies that are being peddled by some people who have some interest in the Tuobodom case, he said similar stories were told during the olden days by one Baffoe Pim, leading to the Techiman and Ashanti war. He therefore warned responsible parties to be cautious.

Responding to the chief's comment, Brigadier Nunoo Mensah explained that the stories they heard at the Castle and the Asantehene's palace are very different from the Techimanhene's account.

According to him, now that they have heard his side of the story, they will give their report to the President, promising that an amicable settlement will be made to bring peace to the area.

- **Alhaji Sorogho commends ministry for sending a delegation to India**

Alhaji Amadu Sorogho, Chairman of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Trade, Industry and Tourism, on Thursday commended the Ministry of Trade and Industry for sending a 50-member business delegation to participate in the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Conclave.

Alhaji Sorogho who is also Member of Parliament (MP) for Madina Abokobi, said the conclave did not only serve as an eye-opener to the Ghanaian business community, but also created a springboard on which the community could move out to vigorously pursue the growing demands of Ghanaians.

Speaking in an interview with the Ghana News Agency (GNA) after attending a three-day conclave, Alhaji Sorogho said out of the 500 African delegates in the conclave,

Ghana represented 10 per cent by sending 50 delegates and called on the business community to make maximum use of the partnership.

The Ghanaian delegation was made up of Government officials, officials of the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Private Business community domiciled in Ghana with subsidiary companies in other countries.

He said the fact that some India Companies had expressed interest to do business with their Ghanaian counterparts in the areas of oil and gas, fertilizer production, irrigation and setting up of automobile plants in the country was ample demonstration of the usefulness of the conclave in India.

The MP appealed to the Ministry of Trade and Industry to consider sending more of the Parliamentary select committee members in subsequent conclaves to help whip up their enthusiasm to serve their constituents better.

From George-Ramsey Benamba, GNA Special Correspondent in New Delhi, India

2. Economy:

- **Ahanta farmers demand compensation for confiscated lands**

Some farmers in Princess Town and Egyambra in the Ahanta West District have appealed for governmental support towards the payment of compensation for lands acquired for oil-related projects.

They say their lands, acquired in 2008, should be immediately returned to them if their compensation cannot be paid soon.

Speaking to the Ghana News Agency in separate interviews, representatives of the communities said their farmlands were leased to Cirrus Energy and Soroma Capital Limited and though they were yet to be paid, they had been stopped from cropping on them.

We were told that construction would start soon after acquisition but that has not happened yet, they said.

Pumpuni and Akwereboanda communities were slated for re-location to pave way for the construction of an Oil Refinery on a 300-acre land, while Princess Town has offered 598 acres to Soroma Capital for a golf park, an air strip and a five star hotel. Egyambra would house a harbour.

A visit by the GNA to these communities showed that no constructional works had begun in the affected communities and the farmers, youth and opinion leaders expressed their displeasure at the state of affairs.

Speaking to the Ghana News Agency (GNA) at Egyambra, Mr. George

Yalley, a representative of the youth, said most people were going through severe hardships.

Most of the people, he said, had migrated to Azani, Abura Ahanta, Agona Nkwanta and other surrounding towns to enable them to make ends meet.

Mr. Yalley said it would be better for them if Cirrus released their lands for them to resume their farming activities because it appeared the projects would not take off soon.

Safohene Kwesi Nyenko, an elder of the Pumpuni Community, told the GNA that their hopes for a new life in the resettlement community were dying gradually.

He said they were promised schools, a community centre, alternative livelihood projects, among others, but as of March now, the new site had not been demarcated neither had any work begun.

Mr. Jones Amoah, District Chief Executive for Ahanta West, in an interview, noted with concern the undue delay in starting the proposed projects for the communities.

The continual delays are affecting our farmers and many of them could become a burden on society, he added.

Mr. Amoah said he was surprised after two years, no project had started yet the farmers had also been stopped from working on the lands.

Mr. Amoah said the Ahanta West Assembly would provide an independent valuer to assist in ensuring that the farmers get their due share of the compensation.

He appealed to all organisations that had secured lands in the Ahanta area to get their documents rectified by the assembly to prevent conflicts and land litigation in the future.

Mr. Amoah again advised those who had secured lands but were no longer interested to return them to their original owners.

Source: GNA - [Ghana News Agency](#)

- **Nation's Interest Rate Highest in Africa**

Accra — In 2004 the Bank of Ghana (BoG) directed all commercial banks in the country, to abolish and in some instances reduce, what it described as unfair bank charges and fees being charged by the various commercial banks operating in the country.

The directive also required the banks to bridge the gap between lending and savings rates. The BoG's directive was described at the time by sections of the Ghanaian public as a feeble attempt to clear a mess it has created through its own ineffective supervision of the banks. Some bankers Public Agenda interviewed at the time, expressed the view that the BoG's directive, like the several that had preceded it, will only be another whirlwind that subsides just as quickly as it swirls. Six years on, the BoG has been urged to conduct a thorough investigation into the high lending rate charged by banks in Ghana as against low deposit rates, suggesting that a major anomaly that the 2004 directive had sought to cure still persists.

Speaking at a forum on interest rates, an Economist, Prof Cletus Dordunoo, observed that, it is difficult to find reasons for Ghana's high lending rate as against very low deposit rate. According to him the wide spread is incomprehensible. He described the situation as unfair, arguing that, the banks are the only ones benefiting, leaving the poor masses to languish in poverty.

"The spread between lending rate and deposit rate in Ghana has been widening over the years and has earned Ghana the reputation of having the highest lending rate in sub-Sahara African," Prof. Dordunoo disclosed.

He noted that, the situation accounts for the slow growth rate of the economy, as private businesses are unable to borrow at the current interest rate to expand their businesses so as to create employment to absorb the unemployed masses.

The forum, organised by Citi FM, an Accra-based radio station, was under the theme, "The Interest Rate Debate, Dancing to Whose Tune?" It attracted participants from the public service, the private sector and the banking sector.

Prof. Dordunoo recalled that whereas European countries and the US reduced their rates in order to absorb the shocks during the financial crunch, noting with regret that Ghana rather increased its rates creating a rather difficult situation for businesses.

He urged government to use other measures rather than monetary instruments to control inflation since monetary instruments end up aggravating the situation.

Prof. Dordunoo revealed that the banking population of Ghana is about 15% to 20% and regretted that many Ghanaians do not save with the banks because of the low interest returns.

He explained interest rate to mean the cost incurred when one borrows money from the bank, non-banking institution or a person.

Mr. Fiifi Kwetey, the Deputy Minister of Finance and Economic Planning, revealed that at a meeting between government and the banks to deliberate on the issue, the banks claimed that challenges such as treasury bill rate, default in payments, high overhead cost, and inflation among others, account for the high interest rates they charge.

"But their major problem was the rate of the treasury bills. Lenders to banks will not accept anything less than the treasury bill rates and sometimes more". Last week the treasury bill rate dropped from 25% to 16% giving course for hope that interest rates will come down.

He explained that, the effect of high interest rates on agriculture which within the Ghanaian context is the largest employer is debilitating. The low income that characterize the agricultural sector, in his view, makes the sector unattractive to lending, especially during periods of interest rate surges, and this he said stifles growth in the agricultural sector.

Mr. Kwetey urged banking institutions to create more facilities and opportunities to promote the Agricultural sector. He explained that the demands for collateral as well as the high interest rates charged on loans scare the poor farmers from accessing credit and this impact negatively on the agricultural sector.

The Managing, Director of Zenith Bank, Mr. Dan Asiedu argued that proper identification will help drop the high rate of default which is a major problem for the banks. He hoped the on-going National Identification Scheme would reduce default in loan payment to the barest minimum.

With regards to the private sector, he mentioned that most of the small scale and medium enterprises are not well organised, for example in the areas of documentation, record keeping and planning. He lamented that such imprudent practices are not innovative to encourage the banks to assist them financially.

Some participants at the forum wondered why government should borrow at a high rate to develop the nation and not about 5% rate. In response, Hon. Fiifi Kwetey said government does not generate enough funds from taxes and therefore has to borrow more funds for development, at a rate that will encourage the general public to invest in government bonds.

In an interview with a private entrepreneur, Mr. Jem Mensah, he suggested that government should force banks to reduce the lending rates and increase the deposit rate.

He alleged the banks are reaping off the poor mass to pay their staff with fat salaries. "If the interest rate should drop, the banks would have to lay off some of their workers because they have set certain standards for themselves they have to keep".

He claimed the overheads of the banks are very huge because of the fat salaries, the car loans, the building loans and other loans that they offer their staff, and which will not permit them to reduce the interest rate.

Touching on the deposit rate, he alleged only the rich few who are able to lend money to the banks are able to determine the rate of interest on their money, but the poor man who saves only a fraction of his salary rather loses.

Ghana's interest rate currently ranges between 23.5% and 41.6% compared with an average rate of 3.18% in the developed countries, 3.34% for Asia's emerging economies and an estimated 14% for sub-Saharan African countries.

The Minister of Finance and Economic Planning, Dr. Kwabena Duffuor, assured government will engage banks in the country to deliberate on an acceptable interest rate structure that will provide a platform for competition among banks.

The minister said his Ministry was currently using moral suasion to encourage the commercial banks to respond to the diminishing inflationary expectation and the reduction in the prime rate by reducing their lending rate.

However, he said the moral suasion has its own limitation, especially in a deregulated-interest rate environment.

The claim that, the bane of BoG has been its ineffective supervision of the commercial banks is pervasive. Experts say the situation constitutes a carte blanche for the banks, and this is exactly what has led to the intransigence on the part of the banks to BoG's promptings, and the Ministry's moral suasion.

The wake-up call to the BoG, according to some participants, is to be up and doing, and to ensure that the commercial banks do not constitute themselves into cartels, ripping off customers, and putting very little back into the economy

3. Energy:

- **Ministers visit Ahafo mines of Newmont Ghana Gold Limited**

Mr Kwame Ofofu-Ampofo, Eastern Regional Minister has advised mining companies to organize periodic training programmes for their unskilled workforce to help build their capacity to cope with work.

He said this would enable the youth in the areas to feel and develop a sense of ownership and to play their respective roles to enhance the operations of the mining companies.

Mr Ofofu-Ampofo gave the advice when the regional ministers attending the second regional minister conference in Sunyani visited the plant site of the Ahafo mine of Newmont Ghana Gold Limited.

The Ministers also visited the Ghana Nuts Limited at Hansua in the Techiman Municipality to acquaint themselves with the operations of the companies.

Mr Ofofu-Ampofo said it was important for mining companies to strengthen their coordination by providing affected communities of the mine with updated information about their activities.

He entreated the management of Newmont to adhere to the company's mandatory social responsibilities, especially in the areas of resettlements and payment of compensation, among others, to ensure that they live in unity with the local people.

Mr Ofofu-Ampofo said now that Newmont had obtained another lease to mine in the Eastern region, there was the need for the company to strengthen its relationship with the local communities in the area, to avert any possibility of communal clashes between mining companies and local communities.

Mr Moses Mabenga, Northern Regional Minister disclosed that the region was bestowed with abundant minerals resources, especially gold, which could be tapped for accelerated development.

He appealed to Newmont to consider mining in the region and help improve on the lives of the people.

Mr Gordon Manford, Acting General Manager of the Ahafo mine said Newmont had spent 1 billion dollars as capital investment in Ghana and had also paid 42.3 million dollars as royalties.

He said a total of 3.9 million dollars had also been paid into the Ahafo development foundation for sustainable development projects in the local communities.

Mr Manford mentioned resettlement of communities, speculative buildings and crops, illegal mining activities and high expectations of local communities for employment, as some of the major challenges that confronted the company.

At the Ghana Nuts Limited, a commodity trader in Soya, groundnuts, cashew, Shea nuts and Sesame to Europe, United Kingdom, Japan and Indian, Mr. Prince Obeng Asante, Deputy Managing Director took the Ministers through the operations of the company.

He said the company's biggest assets was its workforce and appealed to the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development to support the company in its Shea nuts projects, especially by protecting it from foreign competition.

Mr Mark Owen Woyongo, Upper East Regional Minister noted that Shea nuts and cotton production were the main occupation of farmers in the region but expressed regret that they lacked ready market, which had hindered their growth for a long period.

He appealed to the Ghana Nuts Limited to establish linkages with the Upper East Regional Coordinating Council and the various district and municipal assemblies, to enable farmers in the region to feed the company with the required cotton and Shea nuts for exports.

GNA

4. Environment:

- **Massive Jatropha Farming Threatens Food Security**

A study conducted by Action Aid Ghana (AAG) and FoodSPAN in four regions in Ghana has revealed that the production of biofuel is fast affecting food crop farmers in the regions.

The study indicated that due to unavailability of comprehensive policy on biofuel production in the country, its production was having adverse effect on food security, environment, human rights and in general, livelihoods of the affected communities.

The study, which was conducted in the last quarter of last year (2009) covered 12 communities namely; Bredi Camp, Myomoase, Fawoman (all in the Brong Ahafo Region), Dukusen and Afrisre (in the Ashanti Region) and Agomeda in Greater Accra.

The rest include; Adidome, Tordzino, Lolito, Dedukorpe (in the Volta region) and Gomoa Adenten and Baifikrom in the Central region.

According to the report, what was worse was that in most cases the companies involved in the production of the biofuel import labour from outside the communities where production sites were located, and "there

were drastic lay-offs as the project progressed from land preparation and planting stages."

It observed that the companies were undertaking large scale plantation farms of mainly jatropha production with the smallest farm covering about 75 acres.

The companies engaged in jatropha production were Kimminic Estates Ltd. in the Brong Ahafo Region, Scanfuel Limited in Ashanti Region and Afram Basin and Gold Star Bio-Diesel Farm Limited in the Volta and Central Regions.

"Generally, fertile arable lands suitable for crop production were being used for jatropha production except in the Volta region. Biofuel production projects were characterized by extensive use of weedicides, example Sunphosate with possible pollution of water bodies," it stressed.

It observed that the large scale production also involved the use of heavy machinery resulting in wanton destruction of forest, vegetative cover, biodiversity and economic trees including dawadawa and shea-tress, citing Dukusen in the Afram Basin as a clear example.

In Bredi Camp, a farmer named Mageed bemoaned that his life and that of other community members have been adversely affected as they no longer have land to produce maize, cassava and yam, adding that they were neither consulted by the Omanhene of the area nor the biofuel company before they took over the land, and that they have not been compensated for the displacement.

However, the report recommended for an urgent need for the government and all other stakeholders to discuss the issue of land grabbing for biofuel production objectively and come up with policies that would spell out modalities for biofuel production in the country since food insecurity, destruction of biodiversity and violation of human rights were imminent if not properly handled.

The Project Officer of General Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU), Mr. Joseph Owusu Osei told The Chronicle in an interview that due to the energy crisis the world over, there is a shift to bioproduction, hence countries like Russia, the US and China have moved to Ghana to acquire large tracts of lands in the country.

He said the activities of the multinational companies have left a lot to be desired.

He noted that they would present a policy paper to the Parliamentary select committee on Food and Agriculture on March 25th 2010 on what steps to take to combat the situation.

5. Immigration/Refugee/Idps:

6. Health:

- **Bart-Plange calls on the private sector to help bridge the ITN gap**

Dr. Constance Bart-Plange, Programme Manager of Malaria Control Programme, Ghana, on Thursday called on the private sector to assist in bridging the gap of 6.4 million bed nets.

She said though people were buying the Insecticide Treated Nets (ITNs) its usage had been a challenge, adding, "Many have bought the nets but are not using them hence, the high increase in reported Malaria cases."

Dr. Bart-Plange made the call at a press briefing in Accra as part of a three-day meeting by the United Against Malaria (UAM), a partnership of football teams, heroes, celebrities, health and advocacy organizations, governments and corporations united ahead of the 2010 World Cup to be held in South Africa in July to win the fight against Malaria.

She noted that reports from the World Health Organisation (WHO) indicated that in 2008, 33 per cent of households owned an ITN and only 19 per cent of children under five slept under an ITN the night before.

The Programme Manager who outlined the numerous attempts in fighting and rolling back malaria said 2015 had been set to achieve 75 per cent roll back malaria, adding, "Though ambitious, we will achieve it with the support of stakeholders and new technologies coming up".

She called for the intensification of the campaign on the use of bed nets and explained that the programme was collaborating with the chemical sellers to train them on the dispensation and administering of the new malaria medicines to avoid misuse and development of complications.

Malaria is a devastating disease even though it is entirely treatable and preventable. Half of the world population, 3.3 billion people, are at risk of contracting Malaria and there are nearly one million deaths each year.

The disease disproportionately affects people on the African continent but concentrated efforts have reduced malaria deaths by more than 50 per cent in Eritrea, Rwanda, and Zambia.

Dr. Bart-Plange noted that a comprehensive approach, including the use of mosquito nets, indoor residual spraying, and effective medicines like artemisinin-based combination therapies, could help African countries effectively tackle Malaria within their borders and across the continent to meet the UN goal of ending malaria deaths by 2015.

Dr. George Kwadwo Amofa, Deputy Director-General of Ghana Health Service (GHS) explained the four key principles in choosing the malaria medicine, which in the beginning generated confusion due to misinformation.

The principles were to have scientific and chemical evidence, systematic study, scaling up impact, use of multiple interventions and community based approach.

He stated the goals and objectives of UAM with special focus on the partnership and urged journalists to help in the campaign.

Mr. Leodegar Tenga, President of Tanzania Football Association and Edgar Watson, Chief Executive Officer of Federation of Uganda Football Association respectively lauded the initiative of UAM and said many footballers on many occasions could not feature in various matches "simply because they have been knocked down by malaria".

They pledged their support in the fight to ensure that Malaria, the deadly illness, which could be treated and prevented, was eliminated.

UAM honoured the National Soccer team, the Black Stars for their skills in scoring against malaria.

Mr. Kwasi Nyantakyi, President of Ghana Football Association (GFA) was awarded the UAM "Golden Boot" for his exemplary leadership in The GFA's recent international triumphs included winning the FIFA Under 20 World Cup in October 2009, qualifying for this year's FIFA World Cup and reaching the finals of the Africa Cup of Nations held in Angola in January, this year.

In addition to their success on the football field, the national team has been busy raising awareness about the prevention and treatment of Malaria, in partnership with Voices for a Malaria Free Future and the National Malaria Control Program.

Available statistics indicated that there were 3.2 million cases of Malaria in Ghana in 2008, down from 8.3 million in 2006 thanks to a concerted effort by the government and its international partners.

To reach the goal of universal coverage of Malaria prevention and treatment and to end preventable deaths from the disease by 2015, an additional 6.3 million insecticide-treated mosquito nets must be distributed across the country by the end of 2010.

If this is achieved Ghana would be well on its way to ending preventable deaths and moving closer to achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, a commitment by the UN to establish peace and a healthy global economy by focusing on

major issues like poverty, children's health, empowerment of women and girls, sustainable environment, disease, and development.

The UAM campaign is using the FIFA World Cup to raise awareness and drive action in tackling a disease that kills an African child every 30 seconds.

Soccer legends like Fredrick Kanoute, Kolo Toure and Seydou Keita have put their names to public service announcements on behalf of the campaign and the national football associations of Angola, Ethiopia, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia have also demonstrated their support for ending Malaria.

GNA

- **New Wells Boost School Attendance, Improve Public Health**

Villagers in Zukpuri Traditional Area had poor access to potable water supply and very low sanitation conditions. In the dry season, women and children often spend over three hours daily looking for water from the Black Volta River, located some 4 kilometres away. Past attempts to combat waterborne diarrheal and guinea worm disease by advising people to sieve and boil water before drinking were unsuccessful due to deeply entrenched spiritual and cultural beliefs.

As part of UNDP's Community Water Initiative in Zukpuri, 10 young men and women received training in well drilling, pump testing, water quality testing and community water management. The group quickly enlisted the help of other community members, and the community appointed well caretakers and committees to ensure the wells were maintained.

When it was discovered that people who drank water from the wells and boiling water were not getting sick, in less than a year 65 percent of the villagers began drinking from the wells. Because of reduced illness rates and more time to devote to other activities, school attendance rates increased from 25 percent to 95 percent. With the clean water, women were able to produce higher quality Shea butter, a key economic activity for the community.

Other communities requested the UNDP-trained villagers of Zukpuri to help them establish wells. In response, the local government now gives contracts to the group to construct hand pump wells, creating employment for 30 young people. The group has now constructed more than 30 wells in 16 communities, providing more than 26,000 people with access to safe supplies of water.

7. Human rights/Gender/Social Issues:

- **Exploitation - Stumbling Block to Global Development**

The world is a wonderful place to live in, but not so wonderful and not so sweet, and will never be, as long as there exists exploitation of man by man. It is about time people begin to forget about the dream of the world becoming a better place to live in someday. It is about time the world accepts the unchanging situation, and forgets about the most influential people claiming to have the wellbeing of the people at heart.

Surely, the rich will always be richer, and the poor poorer, as exploitation will be a never-ending affliction in the life of mankind. Leaders of the world, organisation and institutions which the world looks up to, never reciprocate the good deeds that people under them show to them.

Their lack of selflessness leads them into always taking advantage of the position they hold, by taking certain decisions and actions at the expense of the welfare of the people. One can call it human nature. However, it is rather greed, lack of compassion, insensitivity, and the inability to empathise with people.

Economic hardship might never come to an end, as each passing day the act of exploitation intensifies in the economies of the world. This time around, these acts of exploitation exist in every part of the world, but it is sad that its intensity is rooted in Africa, some parts of South America, and Asia. What are governments doing? What are leaders/heads of companies, organisations and institutions doing? Guess there is nothing they can do, as they are the very culprits of the exploitation of people of this world.

Exploitation

According to Wikipedia Website exploitation is the act of using something in an unjust or cruel manner. It as well refers to the act of using another person's labour without offering them adequate compensation. In political economy, economics, and sociology, exploitation involves a persistent social relationship in which certain persons are being mistreated, or unfairly used for the benefit of others.

This corresponds to one ethical conception of exploitation, that is, the treatment of human beings as a mere means to an end, or as mere "objects". In different terms, "exploitation" refers to the use of people as a resource, with little or no consideration of their well-being. This can be in the form of taking something off a person or group that rightfully belongs to them, directly or indirectly forcing somebody to work, and using somebody against his will, or without his consent or knowledge.

Exploitation in Ghana

In Ghana exploitation is very common in various workplaces as the lack of job opportunities makes employers exploit employees. With the existing minimum wage in the country, some employers pay their workers way below that, even though the minimum wage itself is not enough to sustain one's livelihood. In spite of the frequency in the increase of the price of goods and services, employers refuse to honour the loyalty

of their workers. The difficulty in obtaining a job puts scare into the hearts and minds of the people, so they never dare to agitate or complain.

For the brave ones who are able to go forward and make complaints, they always end up losing their jobs. People are always forced to work in such conditions of exploitation, as they have no means to take care of their families. Not long ago, some workers of the Golden Tulip hotel in Accra went on a demonstration over the issue of them not being paid well. Some complained that despite their over 15 years of working with the hotel, the management had never increased their salaries in a deserving way. According to them, the annoying aspect was that the management was refusing to pay them their bonuses for the year, while the workers believe they are the backbone of the hotel, and that it cannot do without their services, therefore they deserve better.

The government, being one of the main culprits of exploitation, has resulted in the people not having the interest of taking good care of government institutions, organisations and workplaces. The government's exploitation is evident in the service conditions of doctors, nurses and teachers. It's refusal to give to doctors, nurses and teachers what is due them, leads to their frequent undertaking of strikes and demonstrations.

It is expected that as these professionals hold the future of the nation, the government is supposed to treat them with respect and dignity, and not exploit them. It is sad that to note that this situation always lead to brain drain in the country, while doctors and nurses are gradually leaving the country for a better working conditions in the developed countries, teachers on the other hand, always go back to school to change their profession, resulting in the youth losing interest in the teaching profession.

Child exploitation

Child exploitation is witnessed on the streets of all the regions in the country. Children are exploited, either by parents or guardians for income to feed the family. Some parents, instead of taking care of the home, by way of trading to finance the child going to school, they prefer to make the child trade and bring income to the family, instead of vice versa. Children of school going age get an even worse form of exploitation when they are sent far away from their homes.

Sometimes, parents, with the intention of giving their children a better life, send them out to people they feel they can trust, to give them kind of life they are not able to give them. It is sad that these children only end up being exploited, maltreated, and forced to engage in all kinds of tedious and menial activities beyond their capabilities. As one thing leads to another, children who are unable to stand the stress of such situations run away and end up becoming street children.

In some cases, parents, for their own selfish means, deliberately give their children out for money, according to a report in the National Times newspaper on the 9th march, 2010, on child labour in the Kete-Krachie District of the Volta Region, children under 15

years are used on the Volta Lake for fishing. They swim deep into the lake to disentangle nets, scoop water out of the canoes, and are made to work like adults.

These children were sold for GH¢30, GH¢50, GH¢100 depending on the number of years they will be working with their masters. One of these children got his eyes damaged when disentangling a net in the lake. They work from dawn to midnight, have to sleep with their eyes open, in order to monitor the fish they catch, and sell them the next day. They have no place to go, since they live on an island.

Exploitation in the mining towns of Ghana

Mining companies, for which the government forcibly takes people's land for them to mine to generate revenue for the country, always tend to exploit the indigenes of the land. These mining companies destroy farmlands of the people without any deserving compensation; their livelihood is also taken from them, which in the end, makes them fall into poverty. The company which is supposed to give employment to people, sometimes lays them off, and picks just a few natives, employ the majority of their people from outside the country, and give them better working condition.

Some residents of Prestea complain about them having not been paid their severance allowances by a mining company they worked with, after they were laid off when a new management came in. According to them, the issue was taken to court, and was fortunately ruled in their favour. In spite of the court ruling, the leaders of the company still refuse to give to them what is their due.

The world will never be a better place, as long as there exists exploitation. The G-8 summit for decisions for a better world, the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) targets will be hard to achieve, if the governments, leaders/heads of institutions and workplaces, are not willing to give to their followers and employees what is due them.

- **Use African-Indian Partnership to fight Poverty and Hunger**

Vice President John Dramani Mahama on Monday advised African leaders participating in the Confederation of Indian Industry, EXIM Bank business conclave in New Delhi, India, to use the opportunity to fight hunger, poverty and diseases.

"Africa's relationship with India can be traced back from colonization when we were engaged in wars of freedom and other struggles to free ourselves from our colonial masters, and since then, our partnership has been growing much stronger."

Vice President Mahama was addressing the opening session of the sixth Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) at New Delhi, India.

The three-day conference themed: "Developing Synergies; Creating a Vision," is organised and sponsored by CII in collaboration with the Export and Import (EXIM) Bank of India and the Government of India.

It attracted about one thousand participants, made up of Presidents, Vice Presidents, Ministers of State, Government and Private Business Officials from India and the African Continent.

The major levels of engagement and partnerships would be focused on education, Food and Agriculture, Skills and Capacity Development, Health and poverty alleviation among participating countries.

The Vice President indicated that they could fight hunger, poverty and disease by embarking on massive infrastructural development including health facilities, schools, roads and drawing workable agricultural programmes throughout the African continent.

"By providing health facilities, we can help train health personnel to provide services, whereas schools can also turn out professionals with roads and agriculture providing jobs and food security respectively."

He said India had over the years improved tremendously in Agriculture, Telecommunication and other Industrial activities because of their commitment to achieving such goals, and appealed to participating African countries to use the opportunity offered by India to build the capacities of their professionals in the same direction.

"Africa's time has come, and this is the time for us to take advantage of opportunities here to grow and realize our future development dreams and aspirations in our various countries," he said.

Mr Anand Sharma, India's Minister for Commerce and Industry, said the partnership between India and Africa had the ultimate aim of eradicating malnutrition, pandemics, poverty and to promote quality education, good health and food sufficiency in participating countries.

To achieve these, he announced that India was currently sponsoring 15,000 African Students in various fields of development to go back to their various countries to support their development programmes.

"The Government of India is collaborating with African countries to double sponsorship to African students in our country to learn more on telecommunication, automobile and other Industrial and Vocational Training programmes," he added

Mr S.M. Krishna, Indian Minister for External Affairs, announced that the Indian Government would soon establish 19 institutions in Africa which would cover the areas

of Information Technology, Education and Planning, Vocational Training Institutes, Human Settlement, Rehabilitation and skills training programmes for professionals.

He said the Indian Pan-African eNetwork project which had begun in some African countries, would soon be extended to 47 more countries in the coming years and called on beneficiary African Counties to embrace the programme to facilitate communication in their countries.

- **FEAR GRIPS ACCRA RESIDENTS AS RITUAL KILLERS SEEM UNSTOPPABLE**

The number of ritual killings in the Accra metropolis is worrying and should not be taken lightly. An explanation from the police that there have not been any arrests yet because of the uncooperative attitude of the public makes matters even more frightening.

Meanwhile, people are dying and something ought to be done immediately to unravel these mysterious deaths that threw this country into a state of fear before the 2000 presidential and parliamentary elections.

It is difficult to understand why people take deliberate decisions to kill their fellow human beings so they could become better off in life. And for those who kill their own family members, it shows you how far selfish individuals are prepared to go in their quest for material things especially money.

Since society does not want to know how people come by their wealth but will accord them high places, the get-rich-quick mentality shall continue to be the order of the day. What kind of teachings do our religious leaders give to the people they claim to be leading?

The incidence of ritual killings gets high when elections are approaching as were linked to 2000, 2004 and 2008. Can the police put pieces together to find out why we should be experiencing such incidents when 2010 is still far away? Has it got anything to do with the polling stations and constituency executive elections the two main political parties are engaged in now?

While it is true that the police can be very effective with information from the public, we are currently caught up in web for which something drastic has to be done. The perpetrators of these acts will intensify their diabolical activities if they are convinced that the public are delaying in providing relevant information to the police to carry out its investigative work with the necessary urgency it requires.

The police must be proactive even if the public is not playing their part as expected of them. They should send their men and women into the communities to mingle with residents during day and night. People at very high risk are traders who wake up at dawn to go to the markets, the predominantly female population who attend all-night sessions

and various categories of workers who leave home early for work because of transportation problems.

The preachers at worship centers' should educate their members to move in groups. Husbands must accompany their wives to nearby lorry stations –this is a sacrifice in the interest of the couple and entire family. Remember, the wicked plans and carries out his plans meticulously. I have often asked myself if parents care about their children these days.

How caring are they when they allow young children sometimes as young as six years old to travel on their own to school? Everyone should be vigilant in their residential areas and parents must desist from sending children on errands at odd times.

I am making a special appeal to those who have servants in their homes. Please show a little kindness to such people who are working for you because of poverty. If you would not under a circumstance send your own child out because it is either too early in the morning or too late in the night, why are you doing that the poor servant?

Travelers who enter the city at dawn should wait at the various stations until probably 5.00 a.m. before embarking on their activities. Moving in pairs with known faces would help.

As the police wait for public information to enable them unravel the mysterious deaths that have come back to haunt us, let human rights organizations, women groups, civil society, the media, religious organizations and individuals , come together with once voice to compel government to give maximum protection to Ghanaians.

The political parties in this country have devoted portions of their manifestoes to human rights and the rule of law. A time has come for us to hold them to their words. At the forefront of this must surely be the NDC which is the ruling party. Is the government not aware of what is happening to the citizens? Now is the time for it to take action.

Parties who find themselves in opposition should equally dust their manifestoes and offer solutions to the problem. And this is where some of us feel very bad because Ghana has no national policies on issues affecting the people. Instead of having a national security policy, the ruling government would have nothing to do with qualified Ghanaians who do not belong to the NDC. At best, they see security experts in other parties and other organizations as security threats.

The history of ritual murders in Ghana dates back to the colonial period. Within the next few months, we shall celebrate our 53rd anniversary of self-rule. We have enough experts in this country to assist the government of the day to stop ritual murders with whatever undertone be it political, economic, social or religious.

We should not import expertise from outside when so much money has gone into the training of our own countrymen but whose services we are not tapping because of political inexpediency.

The recent ritual murders pose a major challenge to the Ministry of the Interior, National Security and the security advisers to President Mills. Ghanaians demand rapid results and it would be disastrous move slowly for the number to increase. The government must open its arms to embrace ideas from all sections of society.

8. Geo-Strategic issues:

- **Cote d'Ivoire lays claim to Ghana's oil**

A major crude oil-induced border dispute could break out between Ghana and neighbouring Ivory Coast, if immediate steps are not taken to enter into appropriate negotiations to redefine the international boundary between the two West African nations.

Ghana's Western neighbor Ivory Coast is reportedly laying claims to portions of the huge oil wealth in the deep waters of the Western Region.

In a move to save the situation, Ghana has begun an urgent move to pass a new law that seeks to establish the Ghana Boundary Commission to undertake negotiations to determine and demarcate Ghana's land boundaries and de-limit Ghana's maritime boundaries.

Parliament has therefore been tasked to race against **time** to pass the Ghana Boundary Commission Bill under a certificate of urgency.

Speaking exclusively to CitiNews Parliamentary Correspondent Richard Sky, the Minister for Lands and Forestry, Hon Collins Dauda, who laid the bill before Parliament, said Government is doing everything possible to avoid a full-blown international dispute with the nation's Western neighbour.

“There is a critical need for us to put in place a commission that would **lead** the negotiation for our maritime and land boundaries with our neighbours...there are international laws and United Nations conventions that need to be respected. It is as if of the claim you can take over the area like that...in these matters you begin with negotiations...as soon as we put our commission in place then we have the mandate to meet with our counterpart as to the de-limitations of our maritime boundary”.

The news of Ivory Coast's claim to parts of Ghana's oil fields comes just days after United **States** operator Vanco struck oil in the deep-water Dzata-1 well, off Ghana's Cape Three Points near Ivory Coast, further boosting the oil wealth in Ghana's booming offshore Tano basin.

However the Hon Collins Dauda said he is confident Ghana and Ivory Coast will be able

to resolve the matter without any conflict due to the good relations between the two countries.

Nigeria:

1. Political News:

- **Critical Time for Nigeria's Future**

The new round of violence in Jos, tragically similar to unrest there in the past and once again misinterpreted as primarily a Muslim-Christian dispute, was exacerbated by the central government's failure to effectively intervene. Indeed, there has scarcely been a functioning central government in Nigeria since President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua was hospitalized in Saudi Arabia in late November. He has not been seen in public since then, and although no one in government openly acknowledges it, he is in a coma, according to knowledgeable sources who requested anonymity.

Yar'Adua was flown back home in the early hours of February 24, landing in a remote area of the partly blacked out Abuja airport like "a thief in the night," as a Nigerian newspaper put it. Still, Nigerians hoped that his return might end their time in limbo one way or another.

It did not. While Yar'Adua was hospitalized in Saudi Arabia, numerous government delegations had gone to Jeddah to ascertain the state of his health. All, however, had been rebuffed by Turai Yar'Adua, his formidable wife. Finally, after some 90 days of this fruitless minuet, the Senate passed a resolution stating that Vice President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan should become "acting president."

Many Nigerians welcomed that; so did the international community, even though the solution had no basis in law.

Then, while President Yar'Adua lay in his generator-powered intensive care ambulance parked by the presidential villa, still unseen by the vice president, or anyone outside his own tiny circle, it seemed that the legal end of his presidency was in sight. Either two-thirds of the Executive Council (the cabinet) would vote to start the process of declaring him incapacitated or the National Assembly would begin impeachment proceedings. Neither, however, happened.

Instead, political maneuvering continued while Jonathan, as acting president, took a few steps of his own. In one, he replaced the attorney-general, Michael Aondoakaa, a member of what Nigerians called "the cabal" led by Yar'Adua's wife. But Jonathan, the former

governor of Bayelsa State in the Niger Delta, was unwilling or unable to go further, unsure of support from the Senate.

But he did appoint a Presidential Advisory Council (PAC) made up of 26 heavyweight Nigerians with long public and private sector experience. Chairing it is retired Lt. General T.Y. Danjuma, a veteran of several previous governments.

Speaking at the PAC's inauguration on March 4, he urged Jonathan to "act quickly and aggressively" in four areas: implementation of the agreed upon measures in Yar'Adua's Niger Delta amnesty; restoring momentum to the fight against corruption, and, linked to that, electoral reform before the 2011 elections. Danjuma also urged Jonathan to address the critical lack of electrical power.

Throughout the nearly 11 years of Nigeria's supposed democracy, nothing has more greatly undermined Nigerians' way of life than what they call "the culture of impunity." Political figures steal as they choose and pay gangs of unemployed youths to intimidate voters, while hired assassins and other criminals go unpunished. In a February 10 letter to Acting President Jonathan, Human Rights Watch urged him "to take meaningful steps to address the impunity that underscores...Nigeria's very pressing human rights problems."

This leads us to the cycle of killing in Jos. Its underlying causes are economic and political, not religious or ethnic. In the most recent crisis in which hundreds of people were killed or injured - death estimates range from the police's 109 to Human Rights Watch's "at least 200" to press reports of 500 - the lack of an effective central government was evident.

Who could insure law and order and protect the population? A state of emergency should have been declared months ago. Until the latest violence, impunity reigned in Jos; only now have there been arrests. Nigerians want to see trials and convictions. Justice for the victims of the January attacks is also vital for lasting peace.

Outbursts of violence occur elsewhere in Nigeria, but in Jos in Plateau State the tragedy seems more poignant. This was a peaceful, pleasant part of the country where Nigerians of varied backgrounds had lived harmoniously for decades.

But the frighteningly rapid southern advance of the Sahara Desert and the shrinkage of Lake Chad in the last 30 years have increased pressure on the grazing lands that are key to the lives of nomads in northern Nigeria. Most of the country's cattle are found there. At the same time, agricultural patterns are changing from shifting cultivation to more clearly defined plots.

Compounding the problem is the population growth in farming areas where Muslim Fulani herders have long moved with their cattle as the seasons changed. Farmers can be Christian Berom or Angas or Tarok in Plateau State or Muslim Hausa living outside Jos. They can be Muslim Hausa, Kanuri or Nupe or something else in other states. Religion is irrelevant. Competition for land is heightened, but seldom does it descend into Jos-scale violence.

The pernicious concept of "indigenes" of a state (or city or town) makes matters worse. There are indigenes, while others are "settlers" who can be excluded from school or land ownership or from holding government positions, even if they have lived in the same area for generations and are, often, successful traders. Politicians exploit this, and then, using religion, stoke anger further.

Many Muslim Nigerians, condemning all the killings without exception, note the difference in international reaction to the recent deaths when the victims were Christian Berom and those in January when they were Muslim Hausa and Fulani. They say that only Human Rights Watch has given equal coverage, with equal condemnation.

Meanwhile public pressure to legitimize a Jonathan presidency is mounting. General Muhammadu Buhari, opposition candidate for the presidency in 2003 and 2007, who challenged both elections but lost at the Supreme Court, spoke for many Nigerians when, calling for Yar'Adua's impeachment, he said: "Adopting extra-constitutional measures has not addressed the problem. If it had, we would not have been subjected to [the] raging debates and controversy going on."

He was alluding to the behind-the-scenes plotting. The Yar'Adua "cabal," for example, wants to continue the status quo indefinitely, although a family feud has erupted over dynastic succession: Which son-in-law (two of Yar'Adua's daughters are married to sitting governors) should contend for the presidency in 2011? The state governors, speaking through their unofficial Governors' Forum, supported making Jonathan "acting president," but will not support anything further.

The People's Democratic Party (PDP), Nigeria's dominant party, insists that the next president must be from the north, continuing their non-constitutional arrangement that alternates the presidency between north and south for eight years each. The PDP governors also want one of their own to be the next presidential candidate but they can't agree on which one.

Meanwhile, the national legislators, overwhelmingly PDP, are firmly opposed to having any governor as the next presidential candidate. Most share with the governors, though, a fear of electoral reform: One Nigerian exclaimed, when asked about an estimate that 70 per cent of those "elected" didn't win or even have an election, "Tell me someone who *was* elected!"

Also, former president Obasanjo, who, Nigerians repeatedly say, "created this mess," has been active behind the scenes. Indeed, one early concern about having a Jonathan presidency was that it could bring back Obasanjo's influence. Jonathan has, however, been powerfully warned against that.

And surfacing again are the ambitions of a former military head of state, General Ibrahim Babangida. Nigerians hold IBB, as he is known, responsible for two calamities: first, in the 1980s, his "Structural Adjustment Program," which destroyed Nigeria's middle class and further impoverished the general population; and second, the annulment of the presidential election of 1993, which they believe could have brought them genuine democracy. Speculation about IBB intensified when Jonathan appointed retired Lt.

General Aliyu Mohammed Gusau as his national security adviser. He and IBB have been close for decades. Gusau held the same position for six years under Obasanjo and has his own political ambitions, too.

Furthermore, the Niger Delta, Jonathan's home territory, is becoming restive. Recent days have seen two explosions, targeting Agip and Shell installations. At the same time, any arrangement that does not give Jonathan presidential powers is unacceptable there and could spur calls to break up the country.

And so the uncertainty and the tension continue and there is only a semblance of a functioning federal government. Although an apparent consensus is emerging in Abuja to allow the acting president to exercise full presidential powers, the coming weeks will be critical for Nigeria's future.

- **Explosion in Nigeria after militants issue bomb threat**

An explosion was reported at a government building hosting amnesty talks in the southern Nigeria oil town of Warri Monday, after militants issued a bomb threat.

The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) said in an e-mailed statement that its operatives had planted three bombs in the compound of the building and would detonate the first device at 11.30 am (1030 GMT).

The group gave only 30 minutes notice of their intention to detonate the device and allow evacuation.

Reports said that the device went off near a hall where a conference to discussing last year's government amnesty for oil militants was underway.

It was not immediately clear if there were any casualties.

MEND spokesman Jomo Gbomo said that the group would release details of when the other two bombs would be detonated and warned this was the beginning of a new onslaught.

'In the coming days, we will carry out a number of attacks against installations and oil companies across the Niger Delta,' he said.

The attack is the first MEND action in almost five months, after the group called a ceasefire in response to the amnesty.

MEND says it is fighting for a share of oil revenue for Niger Delta residents, who complain that multinational oil companies have ruined their agriculture and fishing livelihoods and caused environmental damage in the deltas creeks.

- **Explosions shake amnesty talks in Nigeria**

Two car bombs shook a government building hosting amnesty talks in the southern Nigeria oil town Warri Monday; minutes after militants issued a bomb threat.

The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) said in an emailed statement prior to the detonations that its operatives had planted three bombs in the compound of the building.

MEND has rejected a government amnesty aimed at ending years of unrest and sabotage in the oil-producing Niger Delta.

Local government officials said that two cars exploded outside the compound, shattering the windows of the building. No injuries were reported.

The group gave only 30 minutes notice of their intention to detonate the bomb and allow evacuation.

Several state governors were attending the conference, which was organized by the Vanguard newspaper group and aimed at discussing the post-amnesty environment.

MEND spokesman Jomo Gbomo warned this was the beginning of a new onslaught.

'In the coming days, we will carry out a number of attacks against installations and oil companies across the Niger Delta,' he said in a statement.

MEND says it is fighting for a share of oil revenue for Niger Delta residents, who complain that multinational oil companies have ruined their agriculture and fishing livelihoods and caused environmental damage in the deltas creeks.

Attacks by militant groups had slashed Nigeria's oil production by around a quarter from 2006 levels, allowing Angola to overtake it as Africa's biggest oil producer.

- **Nigerian main militant group to announce action soon**

Nigeria's main militant group operating in the oil rich Niger Delta region said it will be making an important time related announcement about 11 a.m. local time on Monday.

Jomo Gbomo, the group spokesman updated this in a statement reaching here.

"The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) will be making an important time related announcement about 11 hours Nigerian time," the statement said.

The group has been known for carrying out attacks on international oil companies in the Niger Delta, engaging in actions including sabotage, theft, property destruction, guerilla warfare and kidnapping.

- **Delta Blames ‘External Forces’ for Blasts**

Dokubo-Asari alleges Okah’s involvement: Amid frenzied efforts by the authorities of the various security agencies in the state to put their fingers on the real reason for the Warri bomb explosions on Monday, the Delta State Government yesterday accused some criminally minded “external forces” outside the state of perpetrating the dastardly act.

The Delta Waterways Security Committee (DWSC) announced this at the end of an emergency meeting on Wednesday to review the bomb explosions near the Government House Annexe, Warri, noting that the position was advised by preliminary investigations it conducted following the incident.

The DWSC is the arrowhead of the Uduaghan administration’s Peace and Security item on its three-point agenda that also include Human Capital Development and Infrastructure Development.

The government reaffirmed its faith in the potency of peaceful dialogue in resolving the burning issues regarding the development of the Niger-Delta, stressing that the state government would not be distracted from its committed pursuit of the betterment of the people of the state.

The committee, in the statement by its Secretary, Mr. Patrick Origho, condemned in strong terms the detonation of the bombs near the venue of the dialogue designed to fast-track the whole post-amnesty programme in the Niger-Delta region. It warned those behind the act to “steer clear” of Delta State, saying the state would not accommodate belligerent groups intent on turning the state into a battle group for settling scores.

“The Committee wholesomely denounces the detonation of the said explosives by criminals, which led to the abortion of dialogue that was designed to address the challenges of the post-amnesty programme and chart a way forward”, the statement said. The statement further said: “Preliminary investigations by the Committee have revealed that the criminal act was perpetrated by external forces outside Delta State and the Committee seizes this opportunity to ask the hoodlums to steer clear of the state.

“The post-amnesty program is a laudable national initiative of the Federal Government and militants, whether ex or otherwise, who have scores to settle with themselves over the acceptance of amnesty and implementation of the program should not turn Delta state to a battleground.”

In a related development, the Dokubo-Asari Foundation has said alleged that the leader of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND), Mr. Henry Okah, is the brain behind the detonation of the bombs, which aborted the Post-Amnesty Dialogue organized for the nine Niger-Delta states.

The group further alleged that Okah it was who introduced the criminal element like kidnapping into the genuine struggle for justice in the Niger-Delta, saying the MEND leader could not honestly claim to love the people of the region.

The spokesman for the Alhaji Dokubo-Asari led “Niger-Delta Volunteer Force and People Salvation Front”, Comrade Rex Anighoro, said in a statement yesterday that only the real enemies of the region could have planned, and indeed disrupt the dialogue sponsored by the Delta State Government.

The statement explained that the Dokubo-Assari Foundation decided to take active part in the truncated dialogue simply to demonstrate to all and sundry its strong belief in dialogue and genuine peace in the Niger-Delta.

According to the online statement sent to THISDAY in Warri, the Foundation said: “Despite our rejection of the Amnesty Programme and obvious preference for Sovereign National Conference and/or Niger-Delta Republic, we decided to be at the dialogue to show to both our friends and enemies that we are not against dialogue and genuine peace in the region.

“This attack, which was perpetrated by Mr. Henry Okah and his brother Charles Okah, was done to attract petty relevance and attempt to stage a comeback into a struggle, which he destroyed with his introduction of kidnapping and other criminal activities.

“Henry Okah has shown clearly with this attack that the lives of the people never meant anything to him nor does he show respect to Niger Deltans. Henry Okah is not only a mercenary, a gun runner and a reactionary force and has never been in the Niger Delta Struggle.

“How could anyone attack the gathering with respected and well known Niger Delta activists and leaders, irrespective of their beliefs and leaning; people like Joseph Evah, Ann Kio Briggs, Mike Igini, Tony Uranta, Pat Utomi and Akpo Mudiaga-Odje?”

Meanwhile, Warri and adjoining areas like Effurun have continued to witness an unprecedented build-up of security, in the aftermath of the explosions near the venue of the inconclusive post-amnesty conference, tagged, “Restoring Hope in the Niger-Delta.”

- **Nigerian acting president dissolves cabinet**

Nigerian Acting Goodluck Jonathan has dissolved the Federal Executive Council (FEC) as part of efforts to rejuvenate his government, a competent source told Xinhua on Wednesday in the country's capital city Abuja.

The measure was designed to reposition and strengthen the administration for enhanced effectiveness in service delivery, the source added.

At the end of the meeting of the Federal Executive Council, Jonathan thanked the outgoing ministers for their services to the nation since the inception of the present administration, wishing them well in their future endeavors.

The source has earlier told Xinhua Jonathan is set to announce a minor cabinet reshuffle, noting that some ministers might be out of job after Wednesday's meeting of the Executive Council of the Federation.

The Nigerian National Assembly on Feb. 9 empowered Vice President Jonathan to take over for ill President Umaru Yar'Adua.

The decision of the House of Representatives came after the Senate endorsed a motion to empower Jonathan as acting president in the absence of Yar 'Adua.

The acting president has been under pressure to sack ministers who are not loyal to his administration as acting president.

On Feb. 10, he ordered the replacement of the country's former Minister of Justice Michael Aondoakaa after presiding over the council meeting. Jonathan also on March 8 appointed Aliyu Gusau as a new security adviser.

Retired Lt.-Gen. Gusau took the position from Sarki Mukhtar. The new national security adviser held the same position for former President Olusegun Obasanjo.

The following day Jonathan made a formal request to the Senate to appoint five new special advisers a day after he appointed a new National Security Adviser.

In a letter to the Senate, the acting president said the appointments are to compliment the exigencies of his new office and the jobs that it brought forward.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, was without President Yar'Adua for 93 days due to illness and this has raised serious anxieties locally and internationally about the state of Nigeria's progress.

The president returned to the country on Feb. 24, 93 days after his departure to Saudi Arabia to attend to his failing health.

The absence of the ailing Nigerian leader is said to be creating a confidence crisis in the economy, as prospective investors are not willing to take on the additional risk of not knowing what will become of their investments thereafter.

Yar' Adua left the country on Nov. 23 last year to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in search of a solution to his intractable medical condition.

Three days after his departure, it was announced that Yar'Adua was suffering from acute pericarditis, a condition characterized by the inflammation of the coverings of the heart.

There were concerns that matters requiring urgent attention of the president could suffer in his absence.

The concerns were intensified by an acute lack of information on his health and his failure to formally handover to Vice President Jonathan, as prescribed by the constitution. Worried by the lack of information on the president and the uncertainty about his health and date of return, many prominent Nigerians called for his resignation.

- **Nigeria committed to credible elections**

Nigerian Acting President Goodluck Jonathan on Tuesday restated the administration's determination to ensure electoral integrity in the country in 2011.

Jonathan made this known in Abuja at the opening of a three-day National Stakeholders Conference organized by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) ahead of the 2011 general elections.

The acting president was represented on the occasion by the country's Minister of Justice Adetokunbo Kayode.

Jonathan said electoral integrity could be achieved by projecting the right attitude and providing the enabling environment for acceptable elections.

"First of many steps on this journey is leading by example by projecting the right attitude and providing the enabling environment for acceptable elections, whenever opportunity presented itself," he told his audience.

According to him, ensuring electoral integrity is a major challenge out of many challenges confronting the nation.

He suggested credible elections as the fuel needed for the vehicle of democracy to run without halt.

The acting president promised that his administration would provide INEC unwavering support in the prosecution of all electoral offenders without any exceptions. He believed such a move would serve as deterrent against corrupt elements who viewed politics as a wrestling ground.

However, Jonathan commended INEC and its technical partner, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) for what he described as an initiative to ensure electoral development and justice in Nigeria.

Nigeria's INEC said on Tuesday that the next presidential election of the country will be held on Jan. 22, 2011 or April 23, 2011.

Professor Maurice Iwu, INEC's chairman, announced this at a stakeholder's conference holding in Abuja.

- **Ghaddafi Wants Nigeria Divided to Stop Bloodshed**

Libyan President Muammar Ghaddafi has voiced his opinion on ways the conflict between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria could be solved: the division of the country into two nations.

But a controversial Ugandan scholar, Professor Mahmoud Mamdani of Columbia University, United States, has said the federal character principle enshrined in the Nigerian constitution is responsible for the conflicts.

Ghaddafi cited the example of India and Pakistan, where according to him, partition saved many lives.

The Libyan leader was speaking to students in his country, while Mamdani spoke at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), Lagos, during an event marking the birthday of the founding president of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) Odi Ofeimun.

Splitting Nigeria “would stop the bloodshed and burning of places of worship”, Libyan State News Agency Jana quoted him as saying. An unidentified senior Nigerian diplomat said he was not taking the suggestion seriously.

Hundreds of people have died in communal violence in villages around the central Nigerian city of Jos this year. Last year, Ghaddafi called for Switzerland to be abolished and for its land to be divided between Italy, Germany and France. Although the violence in Northern Nigeria generally takes place between Muslim and Christian communities, the underlying causes are a complex mix of political, social and economic grievances.

Ghaddafi, who was the immediate past head of the African Union (AU), characterised the Jos violence as a “deep conflict of religious nature” caused by the federal state, “which was made and imposed by the British in spite of the people’s resistance to it.”

He described the partition of India as a “historic, radical solution” which saved the lives of “millions of Hindus and Muslims”.

Mamdani urged the Nigerian government to take a second look at its federal character system which tends to make it difficult for citizens not born in an area of the country to get federal positions allocated to those born within the same area.

His lecture’s topic was “Sudan and Congo: What Lessons for Nigeria?”

He criticised the part of the Nigerian Constitution which states that the makeup of key federal institutions such as the civil service, the army and the universities must reflect the federal character of the country.

He said it is possible that the provision of federal character was adopted as a form of affirmative action for those parts of the country which had lagged behind in educational and social development during the colonial period and that its purpose was to ensure them fair representation in key federal institutions, one proportional to their weight in the population.

“The question I have in mind does not concern motive, but consequence, whether the unintended consequences of this provision – its costs – may have come to outweigh its intended benefits for Nigeria,” he said.

According to him, the federal character principle has extended the colonial principal of Native Authority to key institutions in the federal state.

“Its unintended effect has been to turn federal citizenship into an extension of ethnically-defined membership of Native Authorities, and thereby undermine it. By dividing Nigerian citizens into ‘indigenes’ and ‘non-indigenes’ – not of Nigeria but of individual states – for purposes of participation in national institutions, it has disenfranchised a

growing number of Nigerian citizens, those who do not live in the states where they and their fathers were born," he said.

He said the simple fact that Nigeria is increasingly integrated into a global economy and has been the subject of market reforms, has intensified the contradiction between the market and the state as currently organized in the country.

"The tendency of the market economy is to move more and more strata of the population away from the locality where they were born. This includes both rich and poor Nigerians: on the one hand, businessmen, industrialists, and professionals, and on the other, unemployed workers and landless peasants," he argued.

He added that the state system, in contrast, disenfranchises precisely those who move. "The state system penalizes those the economy dynamizes. The least dynamic sectors of the population respond to this situation by calling for a defence of their 'customary' rights, and the most dynamic rally around the principle of a 'national' citizenship.

One lesson of Congo and Sudan is that it may be time to rethink the legacy of both the colonial past and the reforms you undertook to end the civil war," he concluded. Mamdani's views during Idi Amin's era in Uganda had earned him banishment from the country. He thereafter lived as a refugee in Britain.

- **Gaddafi: "Split Nigeria into two nations"**

The Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in a speech to African student in Tripoli said Nigeria should be split into two nations; one Muslim and one Christian. "Nothing" else could "stop the bloodshed," Mr. Gaddafi warned.

Excerpts from the Libyan leaders' speech were published by the state-controlled news agency 'JANA' today. Mr. Gaddafi was speaking to a "gathering of students, some of them from Nigeria," yesterday.

In the speech, he compared the current situation in Nigeria to that on the Indian sub-continent "before 1945, when massacres by Muslims and Hindus ended only after" the former British colony was split into Pakistan and India. The Libyan leader said, "though the solution was painful, it prevented the Hindus and Muslims in the sub-continent killing from one another."

He went on calling the current "appalling situation in Nigeria," which recently experienced yet another massacre, a product of the British colonization. A federal republic had been "imposed on the country" by the British, "despite the resistance of the population," Mr. Gaddafi was quoted as saying.

The conflict in Nigeria was too deeply rooted "to be treated with laws, police and courts," he went on. Accordingly, the Libyan leader warned that "nothing can stop the bloodshed and burning of houses of God, whether they be mosques or churches," except than the creation of separate Muslim and a Christian states.

The borders inherited by the colonisers have been declared sacro-saint by the African Union (AU), which fears the opening of a Pandora's box if separatists are allowed to draw new borders according to ethnic or religious lines. Several West African nations share the Muslim north and Christian south divide with Nigeria, including Cameroon, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.

Colonel Gaddafi was the political leader of the African Union until 31 January, when Malawi President Bingu wa Mutharika.

- **Nigeria recalls Libya ambassador in Gaddafi row**

Nigeria has recalled its ambassador to Libya after leader Muammar Gaddafi suggested Nigeria be divided into two states - one Christian and one Muslim.

The foreign ministry said the Libyan leader's statement was "irresponsible". Earlier in the week a senator had called Col Gaddafi a "mad man".

Col Gaddafi had suggested the split to prevent any more bloodshed between rival groups in central Nigeria.

Hundreds have died this year in ethnic and religious violence around Jos.

Although the violence in Nigeria generally takes place between Muslim and Christian communities, the underlying causes are a complex mix of political, social and economic grievances.

Nigeria is roughly split between its largely Muslim north, and a Christian-dominated south.

In a statement, the foreign ministry said it was recalling its Tripoli ambassador for "urgent negotiations" because of the "irresponsible utterances of Colonel Gaddafi".

"His theatrics and grandstanding at every auspicious occasion have become too numerous to recount," said the statement.

Col Gaddafi, until recently head of the African Union, praised the partition of India in 1947 as the kind of "historic, radical solution" that could benefit Nigeria.

Splitting India in 1947 caused a breakdown of law and order in which at least 200,000 people died. Some estimates say one million people were killed.

About 12 million people were left homeless and thousands were raped.

An attempt by the Igbo people of south-eastern Nigeria to secede in 1967 sparked a war which left more than one million people dead.

- **Makinde Flays Ghaddafi over Call for Nigeria's Break-Up**

Reactions have continued to trail the comments of the Libyan leader, Muammar Ghaddafi which called for the division of the Nigerian State as a solution to the frequent religious crisis being witnessed in the country.

The latest of such condemnations is from the Prelate, Methodist Church Nigeria, His Eminence Dr. Sunday Ola Makinde, CON who described Ghadafi's comments not only as unfortunate and regrettable but an unguarded and uninformed statement that needs to be disregarded in its entirety.

In a release made available to THISDAY by the Church's Head of Media and Communications, Rev. Oladapo Daramola, Makinde called on Ghadafi to leave Nigeria alone and stop 'barking' at her unity.

"Ghadafi's comments is not only an affront on the people of Nigeria but an insult and a worthless attempt to rubbush the sweat and blood of the founding fathers of this great Nation who did not only envision a one and indivisible nation state but did everything to guarantee the oneness of the entity called Nigeria as they eschewed tribalism and never politicized religion", the prelate said.

Makinde said further that the likes of Sir Ahmadu Bello, Tafawa Balewa, Sir Michael Okpara, Nnamdi Azikiwe , Chief Obafemi Awolowo amongst others provided quality leadership, vision and direction for the prosperity and advancement of this nation.

He said however that the Military through their incessant incursions and religious intolerance mainly in some states in Northern Nigeria been promoted by few extremists and bigots obviously acting on these type of comments from Ghadafi and other sponsors of terrorism around the world as seen in the Abdul Mutallab case and his link to the notorious Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaeda, have been the nation's major setbacks.

The cleric said that the only reason why religious crisis seem to be challenging the unity of this country in whatever form or shape has to do with the lack of political will on the part of the Federal Government and other security agencies to tackle and deal decisively with the perpetrators of this internal terrorism.

"The entire population of Moslems and Christians in this country have not shown any sign or say that they cannot peacefully co-exists, but the mad actions of a few religious fundamentalists who claim to be fighting 'God's war' which has gone on unchecked is what the government needs to take seriously and bring to an end", he said.

Adding, "It is unfortunate that a man like Ghadafi, who under his watch Nigerians living in Libya and doing legitimate businesses were killed, maimed and driven out like chickens and has yet to apologise formally for those acts of terrorism of monumental proportion could still have the moral conscience to poke his nose into the affairs of the same Nigeria. What was his achievement as leader of the Africa Union apart from empty talks?", Makinde noted.

He therefore urged Ghadafi to keep his political philosophy which combines socialist and Islamic theories and rejects parliamentary democracy and political parties to himself.

“Is it not cynical for anyone to suggest that disintegration would resolve ethno-religious crisis when we have on record series of attacks launched on Moslem faithfuls by fellow Moslems (extremists). The Shiites and the Sunnis in many Moslem communities are always in crisis because the fundamentalists do not want peace. Why are Moslems and Christians in the South not in crisis? I wish to put on record once again, that any attempt to Islamise Nigeria will fail. What should be done at this moment is for justice to be done because life is sacrosanct and no one has the right to take another man’s life”.

He urged further that the perpetrators of all the carnage that was witnessed in Jos, Plateau State should be brought to book, while all the Churches and Mosques that were burnt and destroyed should adequately be compensated, adding, “Nigeria belongs to everybody and not a section of the country.”

- **Jonathan: Votes Will Count in 2011**

- **INEC rolls out election timetable • Mark rules out electronic voting**

From Acting President Goodluck Jonathan has come an assurance that votes must count in the 2011 general election so that Nigerian democracy can survive.

This comes as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) yesterday released two timetables for the presidential poll - January 22, 2011 if the 1999 Constitution and the 2006 Electoral Act are amended or April 23, 2011 if they are not.

Also, Senate President David Mark has ruled out the use of electronic voting machine for the election.

Jonathan said the vexed issue of godfatherism and other negative practices in the country would not be allowed to scuttle the government’s attempt to conduct free and fair elections.

The Acting President who was represented by the Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Prince Adetokunbo Kayode (SAN), at the National Conference for Stakeholders in the Electoral Process said only credible polls in 2011 could placate Nigerians who are “not happy with our elections”.

“The promise I make to you today (yesterday) is that we will do all within our powers to promote open, fair and transparent election. This government will insist on electoral justice and there is no going back on that,” Jonathan said.

The Acting President while acknowledging that poorly conducted elections had continued to affect the image of the country said Nigeria is on the cusp of advancing its democracy.

“As a major international player, the issue of electoral integrity continues to interfere with the true image of our international influence and standing in the fact that Nigeria is a democracy with all the relevant democratic institutions,” he said.

He said the ongoing electoral reforms in the country would enhance the credibility of Nigeria’s leadership and set the right example in the African continent.

Noting that INEC “is one institution that holds the key that unlocks the door of accountable leadership,” the Acting President said: “We must do the right thing so that INEC will in no time be given respect and admiration.”

According to him, godfatherism and the penchant for rigging and winning at all costs would become history in order to attract credible people into the electoral process.

“We have come to a point where we must all agree that the elections in our country must not continue to be a breeding ground for godfatherism, anger and frustration. I believe that with free and fair election... a wider full of credible candidates will be attracted into the political process and ideas with ethnicity, indigenes, settlers, religious affinity and other factors that promote the rule of democracy,” he said.

The Acting President stated that electoral reform does not stop at the passage of enabling laws by the National Assembly, but involves a concerted effort by all stakeholders to ensure that the reforms actually take root.

“To me, electoral reform is a process that must not stop with the National Assembly passing the now needed laws alone, it continues even after the needed laws have been passed and it is our everyday conduct of the actions that affects the operation of our democracy. It is important that we all put in every effort to execute and ensure that every party comes into the political process with the right attitude,” he said.

To this end, the Acting President said he would soon be convening a meeting of all the political parties to build confidence into the electoral process including promoting credible elections. He, however, said that the task of holding an election that Nigerians will all be proud of is “enormous” and charged INEC to rise up to the challenge.

“Our gathering today (yesterday) is to prepare the ground for the new dawn. The task is enormous. The preparation for the coming election is as important as the attention we must pay to the electorate who elections are meant to serve,” he said while urging “eligible Nigerians to register as voters, file out in large numbers at every election to vote and encourage others to vote as well.”

He said for the nation to realise its envisaged goals of unity and development, politics must be all embracing to attract persons with credible pedigree.

“Politics in our country must be advancing and actualizing the dream of our union, we must all bring our big ideas into politics. Politics must be for all. I encourage men and women of credible pedigree to come and play politics with the idea in order to expedite our development and unity at all level,” he said.

Meanwhile, the election timetable rolled out by INEC shows that the presidential poll will take place on January 22, 2011 or April 23, 2011. INEC Chairman, Prof. Maurice Iwu, said the two timetables are provisional, as they are dependent on the amendments of the 1999 Constitution and the 2006 Electoral Act.

For the governorship and the state Houses of Assembly elections, January 15, 2011 or April 16 2011 have been picked depending on whether or not the constitution and Electoral Act are amended.

According to Iwu, the National Assembly election would hold January 8, 2011 or April 9 2011. If the constitutional amendment succeeds, the conduct of primary elections for all positions will take place between May 2 and July 31, 2010 or August 2 and October 30, 2010.

The issuance of notice of election is expected to take place on August 2, 2010 if the amendments of the constitution are made, but if not, it will take place November 1, 2010.

Collection of forms for all elections will take place between August 23 and September 14, 2010 or November 20, 2010 and December 8, 2010, while the last date for the submission of all collected forms is September 20, 2010 for the National Assembly, September 27, 2010 for governorship and state Houses Assembly and presidential October 4, 2010, but if there is no amendment, then, the date for the submission of forms for the National Assembly will be December 7, 2010; governorship and state Houses of Assembly is on December 14, 2010 and presidential is December 21, 2010.

The dates for the publication of personal particulars of candidates are as follows: National Assembly (September 27, 2010), governorship and state Houses of Assembly (October 4, 2010) and the presidential (October 11, 2010) or National Assembly (December 14, 2010), governorship and state Houses of Assembly (December 21, 2010) and presidential (December 28, 2010).

According to the timetable, the display of voters' register of purposes of claims and objections would take place between October 18 and 30, 2010 or December 28, 2010 and January 11, 2011.

Campaigns are expected to commence October 9, 2010 if the constitution is amended, but if not, commences January 8, 2011. The last day for the withdrawal by candidates are as follows: National Assembly (October 28, 2010), governorship and state Houses of Assembly (November 4, 2010) and presidential (November 11, 2010) or National Assembly (January 28, 2011), governorship and state Houses of Assembly (February 4, 2011) and presidential (February 11, 2011).

Time for the publication of the official voters' register is November 4, 2010 or February 8, 2011.

The last day for the substitution of candidates if the constitution is amended is November 4, 2010 for the National Assembly, November 11, 2010 for governorship and state Houses of Assembly and for presidential, November 18, 2010, but if not amended is as follows: National Assembly (February 8, 2011), governorship and state Houses of Assembly (February 15, 2011) and presidential (February 22, 2011).

The dates for publication of personal data of candidates are: National Assembly (November 19, 2010), governorship and state Houses of Assembly (November 25, 2010) and presidential (December 2, 2010) or February 15, 2011 for National Assembly,

February 22, 2011 for governorship and state Houses of Assembly and for presidential, March 1, 2011.

Collection of nomination forms for all elections, if the constitution is amended is November 2, 2010, but if not the date of collection of the nomination forms is February 9, 2011.

The date for the submission of forms for all elections is November 22 to 29, 2010 or February 16 to 22, 2011, while the last date for the collection of nomination forms is between November 22 to 29, 2010 or February 24, 2011.

The last day for the submission of nomination forms is November 23, 2010 or February 28, 2011. The dates for the publication of nominated candidates are December 7, 2010 for National Assembly; December 14, 2010 for governorship and state Houses of Assembly and December 21, 2010 for presidential or March 8, 2011 for National Assembly, March 15, 2011 for governorship and state Houses of Assembly and for presidential, March 22, 2011.

Publication for the notice of election for all elections is December 23, 2010 or March 25, 2011.

The dates for the submission of names of agents to the Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) are as follows: National Assembly (December 31, 2010), governorship and state Houses of Assembly (January 7, 2011) and presidential election (January 14, 2011) or National Assembly (April 8, 2011), governorship and state Houses of Assembly April 15, 2011) and presidential (April 15, 2011).

The last day of campaigns if the constitution is amended are as follows: National Assembly (January 7, 2011), governorship and state Houses of Assembly (January 14, 2011) and presidential (January 21, 2011), but if not amended, the dates are as follows: April 8, 2011 for National Assembly; April 15, 2011 for governorship and state Houses of Assembly and April 22, 2011 for presidential.

All run-off elections are to be held seven days after the announcement of the result of the respective elections. The INEC chairman called for internal democracy within the political parties, noting that it does not augur well for the system if candidates are changed at will by the parties.

He said the issue of fake ballot papers would be eliminated by customising them according to states while votes would be counted at the end of the polls in every polling centre.

“The votes will be counted at the end of the polls in every polling centre. The Commission is by this rule committed to eliminating the possibility of those miracles that had been known to happen in the past between polling centres and collation points,” he said.

The Senate President represented by the Senate INEC Committee Chairman, Isiaka Adeleke, said the National Assembly had ruled out the use of the electronic voters’ register for the 2011 polls. Mark, who tactically absolved INEC of some of the electoral

fraud, blamed the political class for the snatching of ballot boxes and other electoral fraud that had characterised the conduct of the nation's polls.

The Governors of Edo State Adams Oshiomhole and Imo State Ikedi Ohakim commended INEC for its reforms and blamed the political class for most of the electoral offences recorded during elections.

But Oshiomhole decried the practice whereby the President appoints the chairman of the commission, saying that is far from reform.

- **Lagos Court Halts Probe of Fashola**

Lagos State Governor Babatunde Fashola (SAN) got a breather of sort yesterday in respect of the probe of allegations of financial impropriety levelled against him.

Justice Habeeb Abiru of an Ikorodu High Court restrained the state House of Assembly from proceeding with the planned probe of the allegations against the governor.

According to the judge, the lawmakers "either by themselves or their agents and privies are restrained from proceeding with or acting on the resolution of January 28, 2010, directing the investigation of allegations of financial impropriety levelled against the governor without the resolution having been first published in its journal or in an official gazette of the state government".

A group which called itself "The True Face of Lagos" had in an advertorial published in a national newspaper on January 28, 2010 alleged that Fashola engaged in diversion of funds without due approval and indiscriminate award of contracts.

Among others, the group accused the governor of spending N1.5 billion of unappropriated fund on the demolition of Oshodi and jacking up the LASU-Iba Road contract awarded by the former Governor Bola Tinubu government for N6.2 billion to N10 billion less than two weeks after he took over.

Justice Abiru said the setting up of a six-man committee to investigate the allegations against the governor and some members of the House without first publishing the resolution in its journal or gazette was unconstitutional and illegal.

Citing authorities to buttress his submission, the judge said the House breached the provisions of Section 128(1) of the 1999 Constitution in the implementation of its power to direct investigation into financial impropriety levelled against the governor.

He, however, noted that the court would reject the invitation to interpret the provisions of Section 128 (2) (a) and (b) of the constitution, saying to do so would be to remove one of the major checks and balances provided for in the constitution for the enhancement of good governance in the country.

He faulted the action of the House for acting on bare allegations published in the advertorial by a group, which he described as faceless instead of a petition addressed directly to the assembly.

The judge said though the court was not teaching the lawmakers how to do their jobs, it was only raising questions that the members could take into consideration in similar situations in future.

Justice Abiru lambasted the lawmakers, saying their actions in setting up the committee to investigate the allegations amounted to mere wasting of the tax-payers' money and the time meant to be used for making laws for the good people of Lagos.

He said the setting up of the six-man panel to investigate the allegations against Fashola was a fundamental violation of the principles of natural justice and described the assembly's move as unconstitutional, unlawful, illegal, malicious and of no effect whatsoever.

Justice Abiru said: "The whole brouhaha leading up to this case was predicated on an advertorial published in the Punch Newspaper of January 28, 2010 by an unidentified and unidentifiable group called 'The True Face of Lagos' wherein several allegations of financial impropriety were levelled against the Executive and Legislative arms of the Lagos State government; the advertorial was Exhibit RA 1.

"The group that made the publication was faceless without any known address or location other than email address and no documents were published in the advertorial to support any of the allegations. They were bare allegations and above all the allegations were not contained in a petition addressed directly to the House of Assembly but published advertorial.

"The group, 'The True Face of Lagos', had not hitherto been known for or associated with the struggle for good governance and probity in government expenditure in Nigeria.

Yet, the House decided to set up a committee, expending tax payers' money and the time meant to be used for making laws for the good of the people of Lagos State to investigate the allegations without stating any cogent reason in the House proceeding for that day, why it deemed the allegations important enough to direct that they be investigated.

"Does this mean that if tomorrow another advertorial comes out from another faceless group accusing members of the House of collecting bribes from an agency of government, for example, and shirking in their constitutional responsibilities, another committee will be set up to investigate same? What if another advertorial comes out the next day and another a week thereafter? What then happen to the business of law-making? And it is this that has caused so much unpleasant ripples within the polity. Something definitely is not right."

A Lagos-based journalist and human rights activist, Mr. Richard Akinnola, had approached the court to stop the state House of Assembly from investigating allegations of financial impropriety levelled against it and the governor.

The lawmakers through their counsel had filed a preliminary objection, stating that Akinnola had no locus standi to institute the suit.

In the advertorial, where it detailed the allegations against Fashola, the True Face of Lagos said: “The helicopter deal was a big fraud – the helicopter was not built for any kind of emergency evacuation, rescue or to even combat fire. Over N5bn has been spent on the two helicopters and the seal of Lagos State is not on it. It is not in Lagos but the Niger Delta making money for some private people in government.

“The BRF government recklessly increased and paid over 60 per cent increase on the LASU-IBA Road awarded by the Bola Tinubu government for N6.2bn, but was jacked up to N10b less than two weeks after BRF came on board.

“Also, the Tinubu administration awarded the construction of City Hall for N2.3bn. BRF only changed the floor tiles to marble tiles and increased the contract sum to N5.2bn. The project was increased by 126 per cent.”

Meanwhile, the group has since come out to publicly own up to making the allegations. The Leader of the group, Mr. Adebayo Adeshina, led Dr. Tunde George and Mr. Kasali Martins to the assembly last month, where he said the governor should be investigated over the allegations.

Adeshina, who addressed the lawmakers on behalf of the group, however, absolved the state assembly members of any financial impropriety, saying the group erred by accusing them of taking a bribe of N20 million each without confirming the allegation.

• **Jonathan Shocked Us, Say Ex-Ministers**

The shock and consternation that greeted Wednesday’s dissolution of the federal cabinet was yet to wear out yesterday as the former ministers began handing over to the permanent secretaries in their ministries and PDP backs cabinet dissolution.

Former minister of interior Shettima Mustapha and his minister of state Ademola Seriki said the dissolution of the Executive Council of the Federation (EXCOF) was sudden and unexpected.

For some other ex-ministers, it was a different kettle of fish like former Federal Capital Territory (FCT) minister Adamu Aliero and his ex-minister of state Chuka Odum who seemed united in their last day in office.

Ex-minister of defence and chairman of the Presidential Committee on the Amnesty Programme, Major-Gen. Godwin Abbe, apologized to his former staff for occasionally shouting at them while in office.

Meanwhile, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has said Acting President Goodluck Jonathan duly consulted it and received its blessing before the dissolution of the cabinet and is satisfied with the action.

“We are satisfied; we are very, very satisfied with the dissolution,” the party’s National Chairman Vincent Ogbulafor said.

Jonathan dissolved the 42-member EXCOF three days ago in a bid to reinvigorate the council that had been badly divided.

He gave no reasons for the dissolution, but Special Assistant to the Acting President on Media Ima Niboro said the move was to inject fresh blood and bring greater vigour to governance.

Speaking in Abuja when they handed over to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Interior, Mrs. Dere Awosika, the two former henchmen in the ministry said their sack took them unawares.

Mustapha said the council was shocked beyond words because the acting president never gave them any prior notice or briefing before dissolving the council.

“Since the man did not give us any notice, he only announced it yesterday, you can say he took us unawares, you can call it unexpected, whatever you want to call it,” he said.

On his stewardship, he noted that since he became a minister for the first time 20 years ago, he had learnt a lot of lessons especially in this dispensation where he served first as minister of defence before he was redeployed to the Ministry of Interior by ailing President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua.

Ogbulafor, who fielded questions from State House correspondents when he came to consult with Jonathan at the Presidential Villa, said being a PDP government, there was no way the acting president would have embarked on such a major decision without the knowledge of the party.

The PDP chairman also hinted that the party would play very critical role in the reconstitution of the cabinet.

Meanwhile, the dissolution of the cabinet has brought some ministers together as one.

On their last day of performing official functions together, the two ministers in charge of FCT admitted for the first time that they had differences, but that it was for the betterment of the city.

Odum, who spoke first, said every appointment is to serve and the change is good for democracy.

Aliero, who was FCT minister, said in the 15 months they were in office, they had revived abandoned projects with some already completed, done about 20 per cent of Abuja Light Rail awarded at \$840 million, funded projects in the territory via the Public Private Partnership (PPP) and raised Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) to N3.5 billion as against N500 million.

He also said in their 15 months in office, the administration was able to make remarkable impact in the health, education, security and transportation sectors as well as construction of roads and opening up of new districts.

Abbe apologised to the staff of the ministry for occasionally shouting at them during the course of work, blaming it on work pressure.

Abbe alongside his former minister of state, Alhaji Abdulrahman Adamu, at the handing over ceremony conducted at the Ship House said the nine months he was at the helms of affairs at the ministry brought to fore limitations of the Defence sector.

Pressed to throw more light on this, he merely said the office carried with it heavy pressure, especially his job as chairman of the Post-Amnesty programme. “I was happy and grateful to the ministry for the way we handled the disarmament process especially. I was happy because no shot was fired to bring about the disarmament as directed by President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua,” he said.

Former minister and minister of state for Education, Dr. Sam Egwu and Hajiya Aishatu Jibril Dukku, who also handed over the affairs of the ministry to the Permanent Secretary, Prof. Oladapo Afolabi, said the ministry should continue to strive hard to meet the challenges facing the sector by implementing the Roadmap for the Education, which he formulated within three months of his appointment.

Egwu said the focus should be on improving access to quality basic and secondary education, repositioning tertiary education to be globally competitive, as well as improving quality, access and standards of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) at formal and informal levels.

Egwu spent exactly one year and three months in office, while Dukku was there for two years and nine months.

- **New Cabinet: Don’t Succumb to Govs’ Dictates, AC Tells Jonathan**

The Action Congress (AC), has advised Acting President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan not to succumb to the dictates of the Governors’ Forum or other selfish interests in reconstituting his cabinet, but to pick men and women who can make an appreciable impact in a short time.

In a statement issued in Abuja yesterday by its National Publicity Secretary, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, the party said if Jonathan gives such interests, especially the Governors’ Forum, a free hand to nominate candidates for ministerial posts, he would get ministers whose loyalty will be to the governors, rather than to the country first and himself.

It also advised the Acting President not to hesitate to use technocrats, if necessary, in order for his administration to impact positively on the lives of the long-suffering Nigerian people.

AC reminded Jonathan that the absence of visionary leadership at the very top was part of the problems that hobbled the dissolved federal cabinet, which ranks very high on the list of under-achieving federal executive councils in the history of the nation.

The party said the dissolution of the cabinet was long overdue, describing its members as a band of unpatriotic people who put narrow and parochial interests above the national interest.

The dissolved cabinet failed when it mattered most: when a courageous act was needed to break a logjam that rattled Nigeria to its very foundation and threatened its fledgling democracy.

“It was the ministers’ lack of courage, flimsy loyalty and downright selfishness that eventually left the FEC divided, thus paving the way for it to fall like a pack of cards,” it said.

AC reiterated its earlier assertion that the key areas in which the Acting President can lift the veil of despondency across the country are electoral reform, power and energy as well as the Niger Delta issue.

“Of all this, we make bold to say that electoral reform is the most important, in that it will help set the stage for the emergence of a truly-elected government, which will act in the interest of the people, rather than a cabal of riggers.

“Once votes are made to count and committed and worthy leaders are elected on the basis of their own abilities and capabilities, other problems - including those of power, insecurity, unemployment and skewed distribution of resources - can then be tackled with genuine gusto,” the party said.

- **Jonathan mulls over new cabinet**

Lagos - Nigeria's acting president Goodluck Jonathan was in consultations on Thursday over a new government, a day after he asserted his authority and dissolved the cabinet he acquired from his ailing predecessor.

Naming a new government in Nigeria usually takes weeks - but given that elections are due in less than one year, observers said a fresh government could emerge in a matter of days, subject to senate approval.

Jonathan's spokesperson Ima Niboro said Wednesday's cabinet dissolution was designed "to inject fresh blood and bring even greater vigour to governance".

"It is part of a larger strategy to frontally confront the core challenges that face the nation at this critical moment of our history," added Niboro, quoted in the newspaper ThisDay.

Sources said Jonathan had already started consultations prior to Wednesday, and that he appeared to have the backing of some powerful figures in the country.

Clearance of the nominees

Most of the prior 42-member cabinet are expected to be retained, however, sources in the presidency said.

"More than half will come back and we are expecting it (the new government) next week," a presidential source said, adding the appointment has to be fast-tracked as Jonathan tenure is left with less than a year.

"Remember there is no vice-president, and he (Jonathan) needs a government to support him and there is not much time left for this government," the source said.

Jonathan "is in talks already with the leadership of the senate so that it can expedite the clearance of the nominees", said the source.

He might even submit a proposed list to senators by week's end.

"Today is going to be key since it is the last day of the National Assembly sitting (this week). Therefore, it is going to be key in determining whether he may send a list," said Tolu Ogunlesi, a columnist with a Nigerian daily, Next.

Legal challenges

"I am sure he will not want a vacuum ...and he wants to fill the vacuum immediately. Power vacuums are a cause for concern in Nigeria. I don't think he wants to see vacuums exploited by all sorts of forces."

The cabinet appointed by ailing President Umaru Yar'Adua has been divided since he was taken ill in November and travelled abroad for treatment.

Jonathan's decision to dissolve the government of Africa's most populous nation comes at a tense time following Muslim-Christian violence in the north and renewed unrest in the oil-rich Niger Delta in the south.

Observers said Jonathan could face legal challenges from some of the ministers in the dissolved cabinet, especially those aligned to Yar'Adua.

But the move would allow Jonathan, 52, to appoint his own team rather than rely on Yar'Adua allies, thus giving him a stronger hold on power.

- **AU must probe Libya – Nigeria**

Abuja - The Nigerian parliament passed a motion late on Thursday urging the government to order an investigation by the African Union into whether Libya was supplying "infiltrators" to destabilize the country.

Nigeria recalled its ambassador to Libya and questioned whether the north African country was sponsoring violence after Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi said Nigeria should split along religious lines.

"The insensitive and oftentimes irresponsible utterances of Colonel Gaddafi, his theatrics and grandstanding at every auspicious occasion have become too numerous to recount. These have diminished his status and credibility as a leader to be taken seriously," the Nigerian Foreign Ministry said.

"His comments on the crisis in Jos, Plateau state, are most unacceptable and unbecoming of any leader who claims to advocate and champion the cause of African integration and unity."

The Nigerian Foreign Ministry said it had recalled Ambassador Isah Mohammed for urgent consultations after Gaddafi's comments, which come as Nigeria tries to contain violent clashes between Muslim and Christian gangs which have killed hundreds of people around the central city of Jos.

Hacked to death

Gaddafi said in a speech to students this week that the Jos crisis was a "deep conflict of religious nature" and suggested splitting Nigeria along religious lines "would stop bloodshed and burning of places of worship", according to the BBC.

He praised the example of India and Pakistan, where he said partition had saved many lives.

Nigeria's Plateau State, of which Jos is the capital, lies at the crossroads of the predominantly Muslim north and mostly Christian south in the centre of Africa's most populous nation, a region known as the "Middle Belt".

Fierce competition for control of fertile farmlands between Christian and animist indigenous groups and Muslim settlers from the north, as well as political rivalries, have repeatedly triggered unrest in the region over the past decade.

Days of clashes in January and attacks in recent weeks in which villagers have been hacked to death with machetes have left hundreds of people dead, leading to worldwide condemnation.

"(We) call on the federal Government to request the African Union to order an independent investigation ... and ascertain if there is a relationship between (Gaddafi's) comment and the primary sources of the supply of infiltrators who come to fight

Nigerians in their homeland," parliament's motion said.

Political crisis

Nigeria frequently blames militants from neighbouring countries for violence in its centre and north but there is no independent evidence of foreign involvement.

The Jos unrest has put Nigeria in the international spotlight as it also struggles with a political crisis triggered by the prolonged illness of ailing President Umaru Yar'Adua, and the risk of resurgent violence in its oil-producing Niger Delta.

Acting President Goodluck Jonathan sacked the cabinet on Wednesday in a bid to consolidate his authority, deepening the immediate political uncertainty.

Gaddafi, who was until recently the head of the African Union, has frequently stirred controversy in his dealings with sub-Saharan Africa.

He has long championed a "United States of Africa" but many south of the Sahara question his ambitions, saying his vision of a unified continent includes him being in charge of it.

Libya has also been in dispute with western nations. This week it patched up a row with the United States caused when a US official made caustic remarks about a speech by Gaddafi.

A dispute between Libya and Switzerland deepened last month when Gaddafi called for a "jihad" against Switzerland.

Tripoli has been locked in a row with the Swiss since July 2008 when police in Geneva arrested one of the Libyan leader's sons, Hannibal, on charges - which were later dropped - of mistreating two domestic employees.

- **Jonathan to choose new cabinet**

Abuja - Nigerian Acting President Goodluck Jonathan will send a list of ministerial nominees for Senate approval by early next week and is likely to reappoint around half the cabinet, a presidency source said on Thursday.

"Twenty of the ministers will certainly come back," the source said, adding that the outgoing Minister of State for Petroleum, Odein Ajumogobia, was likely to be chosen as the new oil minister of the OPEC member country.

The source also said outgoing Defence Minister Godwin Abbe, who has been leading implementation of an amnesty in the restive oil-producing Niger Delta, was likely to be reappointed to continue work on the programme.

Jonathan dissolved the cabinet on Wednesday in a bid to consolidate his authority at the helm of Africa's most populous nation. He assumed executive powers in early February during a prolonged absence abroad of ailing President Umaru Yar'Adua.

The surprise cabinet move heightened immediate uncertainty in the oil-producing nation of 140 million people, leaving civil servants in charge of ministries until new ministers are screened and approved.

But the step could allow Jonathan to move ahead more quickly with his own team on his stated priorities - including electoral reforms, fighting corruption, implementing the Niger Delta amnesty and delivering reliable electricity supplies.

Former Information Minister Dora Akunyili, the only cabinet member to criticise openly those around Yar'Adua for the handling of his absence, was likely to be made Minister for the Federal Capital Territory, the source said.

- **Nigeria slams Gaddafi**

Lagos - The speaker of Nigeria's senate has described Libya's leader Muammar Gaddafi as a 'mad man' after he suggested splitting the country between the Christian and Muslim communities to end sectarian violence.

Responding to a point raised by a lawmaker in the upper house of parliament, David Mark said Gaddafi's comments were hardly worth dignifying with a response.

"With all due respect, why do you want to give a mad man that level of publicity?" Mark was quoted as saying in several local dailies on Thursday.

"A mad man who said the same thing about England ... and he said the same thing about every other country and then you want to give him any prominence at all," said Mark.

"Truly, in my candid opinion, I don't think he deserves our attention."

The immediate past chairman of the African Union (AU), Gaddafi proposed earlier this week that Nigeria should follow the partition model of Pakistan, which was born in 1947 after the Muslim minority of predominantly Hindu India founded their own homeland.

'Best international comment'

Gaddafi suggested that a Christian homeland in the south could have Lagos as its capital while a Muslim homeland in the north would have Abuja as its principal city.

He said the two communities should peacefully agree to share Nigeria's oil and other natural wealth.

A militant group in the restive oil producing region of the Niger Delta hailed Gaddafi for his suggestion.

"We think this is the best international comment on Nigeria so far and we salute the courage of the brother leader," said the Joint Revolutionary Council in a statement.

Several hundreds of people were killed in the past two weeks in sectarian violence in Nigeria's central Plateau State.

Plateau State, with Jos as its capital, is the de facto buffer between the predominantly Muslim north and the largely Christian and animist south.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, is divided almost in the middle between the two faiths.

2. Economy:

3. Energy:

4. Environment:

5. Immigration/Refugee/Idps:

6. Health:

7. Human rights/Gender/social issues:

• 75m Nigerians Lack Potable Water'

Recent report compiled by the Joint Monitoring Project (JMP) unit of the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene and made available by WaterAid International, Nigeria has revealed that over 75 million and 98 million Nigerians lack access to quality water and sanitation respectively.

The figures released indicated that Nigeria is actually on a downward trend in its pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) targets for access to safe drinking water by 2010 with the 50 per cent access in 1990 reversed to 47% in 2006, while access to improved sanitation is abysmally at 30 per cent.

The Acting Country Rep, WaterAid International, Nigeria, Dr. Oji Ogbureke represented by the Head, Finance and Administration, Mr. Peter Maduoma, yesterday in Abuja, at the Media Advisory Campaign to join record-breaking queue to bring sanitation and water for all, said that government and other stakeholders should embark on a sustainable programme aimed at achieving access to quality water, sanitation and hygiene for Nigerians.

Ogbureke said that the theme for the 2010 World Water Day; "Clean Water for a Healthy World", should be used to draw attention to the importance of quality water to the nation,

adding that access to improved water, sanitation, and hygiene is the tripod upon which a sustainable healthy world can be attained.

Speaking on the World's Longest Toilet Queue, the Head, Governance, WaterAid, Nigeria, Juanita During said that the campaign which will take place at Wuse Market Premises, Abuja on March 20, 2010 was to symbolically present the fact that a lot of people do not have access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene.

During said that the queue will see tens of thousands of people in over 55 countries queue for the toilet to draw attention to the fact that 4,000 children die every year because of lack of access to sanitation and safe water.

She urged policy makers to take action on issues of water and sanitation, and other stakeholders to lobby government and other International Development Partners to review their support by ensuring that their aid is better targeted towards the world's poorest and most vulnerable communities.

- **Nigeria violence: Security blamed**

Jos - Muslim herdsmen disguised as soldiers butchered and then burned around a dozen Christians on Wednesday in Nigeria, close to the site of a recent sectarian massacre, officials and witnesses said.

Most of the victims of the raid on a village in the Riyom region of Plateau state were women and children, state radio reported, as locals accused the security forces of failing to act quickly enough to prevent the slaughter.

A reporter at the scene of the carnage said that he had counted 12 bodies which bore deep machete cuts and had been partially burned. The state information commissioner put the overall toll at 13.

"I can confirm that 13 people have died while six others have been critically injured," Information Commissioner Gregory Yenlong said.

Those wounded were now being treated at a missionary hospital in Vom, near the state capital Jos, he added.

Half a dozen homes had also been torched by the gang of killers, said the reporter. Surviving residents could be seen crying and wailing in grief.

'Help came too late'

Police spokesperson Lerama Mohammed said the pre-dawn attack was believed to have been carried out by members of the mainly Muslim Fulani ethnic group which was behind another massacre in Plateau earlier this month.

"We received reports of an overnight attack on Riyom by people suspected to be Fulani herdsmen," Mohammed said. "Our men are already there to assess the casualty and the situation."

Simon Wapmok, chairman of the local municipality, was quoted as saying by Plateau state-owned radio that he alerted the police and military authorities about the attack which took place around 01:30, but that help came too late.

The attackers were said to be dressed in army camouflage when they stormed Riyom as residents were asleep, said the radio.

State police commissioner Ikechukwu Aduba visited the village on Wednesday morning and assured residents of their safety in the wake of the attack.

Aduba said 50 police and military personnel had been deployed to beef up security in Riyom.

On March 7 herdsmen from the mainly Muslim Fulani ethnic group launched an overnight attack on three mainly Christian Berom villages. Police say 109 people were killed in that attack although other officials put the figure at over 500.

Spiraling feud

The rampaging nomads slaughtered their victims, mostly women and children, in the dead of the night.

Some residents said the killings on March 7 were part of a spiraling feud between the Fulani, who are nomads, and Berom, who are farmers, which had been sparked by the theft of cattle, rather than for religious motives.

Previous violence in and around Jos has claimed several thousand lives.

The city lies on the dividing line between the Christian majority south and the mostly Muslim north.

There have been outbreaks of violence every few years since 2001, and some commentators attributed the March 7 slaughter to revenge for the killings of Muslims by Christians in January.

Analysts and critics have accused authorities of fostering a culture of impunity by failing to punish those arrested over previous attacks in Jos.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, is divided almost in the middle between the two faiths.

8. Geo-Strategic issues:

Other West African States

Benin:

Burkina Faso:

Cameroon:

- **Cameroon hit hard by brain drain.....H5**

Cameroonian emigrants stream into neighbouring Gulf of Guinea countries, Europe and the US, mostly representing the country's most educated citizens. Far more Cameroonian medics now work abroad than in Cameroon.

A migration profile of Cameroon released today by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) shows that current migration flows continue to be mostly internal from the countryside to the cities, with increasing numbers of skilled and unskilled Cameroonians emigrating to neighbouring countries and beyond to Europe and to the United States.

According to the report, Cameroonian emigrants were estimated to number 170,363 in 2007. France, with 38,530 migrants, remains a preferred destination, followed by Gabon (30,216), Nigeria (16,980) and the United States (12,835).

Cameroon's Ministry of External Relations estimates that up to 300,000 Cameroonians lived in the Gulf of Guinea states between 2000 and 2004, essentially because they belong to the same ethnic groups and geographical area, but also because immigration is mostly unbureaucratic in neighbour countries.

"Migration from Cameroon continues to contribute to the brain drain," the IOM report warns. According to the Organisation for Economic C-operation and Development (OSCE), 42.3 percent of the 57,050 Cameroonians working in Europe are highly qualified.

According to the Cameroon Medical Association, 4,200 Cameroonian doctors, mostly specialists, are working abroad. Only 800 - that is 1 for 10,000 to 20,000 inhabitants - are left in the cities, with 1 for 40,000 to 50,000 practising in the rural areas.

The study notes that the majority are long-term migrants, with 40 percent residing in their country of emigration for ten years or more and 16 percent for a period of between five to ten years.

But also Cameroon is destination for skilled and unskilled immigrants from neighbour

countries. The IOM study underlines "the fact that Cameroon's political stability and socio-economic potential remains relatively attractive to migrants from neighbouring countries, such as the Central African Republic, Chad, Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria."

Meanwhile, emigrants are also a source of revenue for Cameroon. Remittances sent by Cameroonian migrants have increased from an estimated US\$ 11 million in 2000, to US\$ 103 million in 2004 to a record high of US\$ 167 million in 2008, which represents 0.8 percent of the country's GDP.

"Remittances are used to pay for medical care, school fees, rent or for the purchase of consumer goods," the report notes. It adds that these transfers "stimulate the country's economic activity by replacing credit and other financing methods and facilitating the initiation of projects and other income-generating activities."

Furthermore, the report finds that the increase in the transfer of funds has led to the expansion of the banking system and the multiplication of banks and money transfer companies, thus generating thousands of jobs.

Cape Verde:

Chad:

Cote d'Ivoire:

Gambia:

- **Gambia charges over 'plot to oust Jammeh'.....H1**

A group of senior military officials and businessmen have been charged with trying to overthrow Gambian President Yahya Jammeh, the government says.

A Justice Ministry statement said the group had "conspired to stage a coup d'etat and overthrow the president".

Mr Jammeh himself came to power after a bloodless coup in 1994.

His critics recently expressed concern over a wave of arrests of senior officials - some of whom have been in jail for months without charge.

Gambian newspapers reported that the men are being accused of bringing in weapons and mercenaries to support their coup attempt.

The BBC's Tidiane Sy says it is not the first time that army officers have been accused of plotting against the president.

In 2006, another group of military men were accused of trying to overthrow his government, and Banjul accused Senegal of taking part in that plot.

In recent years, Mr Jammeh has publicly threatened to kill gay people and rights workers. And last month the government expelled the envoy of the UN's children charity, Unicef.

Guinea- Conakry:

- **Guinea Interim Military Leader Will Not Run in June Elections...H1**

Newspaper editor Mamadou Dian Balde says General Konate's decision was due largely to international pressure

In Guinea, interim military leader General Sekouba Konate has said he will not run in upcoming June presidential elections.

He also said over the weekend that leading members of the transitional government cannot stand in the June 27 elections.

Mamadou Dian Balde, editor of the *Independent* newspaper in Guinea's capital, Conakry said leading political party figures have welcomed General Sekouba's decision.

"The reaction about this announcement is positive because the leaders of the strong political parties are not in this (transitional) government because they knew that if you are minister or a prime minister you will not be a candidate," he said.

Balde said General Konate's decision not to stand in the June elections was due largely to pressure from the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States and the country's civil society.

"The pressure from the international community and from what happened on 28 September 2009 when military men killed civilians at the stadium is why Sekouba is trying to organize elections and give the power to civilians," Balde said.

He said the political parties will participate in the scheduled June 27 presidential elections because they want to put the eras of military governments in Guinea behind them.

"The political parties will participate to the elections on June 27 because they want to change the situation by this election. They are ready to see the military people going back to the barracks. Guinea people don't like military man in power now after Lansana Conte, Moussa Dadis Camara, and now Sekouba Konate," he said.

Balde said the June elections would be free and transparent because for the first time in many decades a military person would not be running for president in Guinea.

"I think the elections will be a fair election. There will be a transparent election because the organizer (the electoral commission) won't try to support one candidate against the other like if Sekouba Konate for instance was candidate," he said.

General Konate warned soldiers over the weekend that he will not allow the military to undermine plans for a return to constitutional rule.

He said he will not hesitate to wipe out anyone who would use ethnicity to disrupt Guinea's democratization process.

Guinea- Bissau:

Liberia:

Mali:

- **Reporter offered child slaves.....H7**

Working undercover to reveal the extent of forced child labour in Côte d'Ivoire's cocoa industry, a Danish journalist openly was offered to buy as many children as he wanted for €200 each in Mali.

Miki Mistrati, a reporter at the Danish daily 'Extra Bladet', went undercover in Côte d'Ivoire and Mali, claiming to own a cocoa plantation, to investigate whether any progress had been made in reducing child labour and forced labour in the cocoa industry.

He was shocked to find out how openly the traffic in children was in the region. In several places, he easily came in contact with people willing to "sell children" for his imaginary cocoa plantation.

'Extra Bladet' reports that at one occasion, an agent picked up a larger number of children at a bus station in Mali. Mr Mistrati was offered to pick the children he wanted.

"Just tell me how many you will need. My brother will gather them for you," the Danish reporter was told. The price was set at around €200 for each child slave, reportedly "far above the market price," 'Extra Bladet' reports.

The reporter also was assisted by a Danish television crew, documenting "how children as young as 8 years old are sold and smuggled over the border to Côte d'Ivoire to work on cocoa plantations. The children are brought in from neighbouring countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger," according to the Danish state broadcaster 'DR'.

'DR' is airing a documentary based on these recordings this evening. The film includes interviews with four boys, aging between 10 and 12, smuggled from Burkina Faso to a cocoa plantation near Abidjan. The boys do not speak the local language, are denied access to school, left to sleep and fed only once a day.

The use of child and slave labour in the Ivorian cocoa industry has been well known for a long time. A 2004 report by a US government agency concludes that over 100,000 children are involved in worst forms of child labour in the West African country.

Earlier revelations and scandals caused the international cocoa and chocolate industry to launch a widely publicised strategy in 2001, which aimed at making the industry child labour free by 2005. Under much less publicity, the industry later downgraded its aim to reduce the use of child labour by 50 percent within 2008. Recent research indicate even this aim was not met.

The Ivorian police reports it has been left mostly alone in its efforts to fight child slavery in the country. In a series of raids against cocoa plantations since 2006, police have liberated around 350 children, some as young as 6 years, and arrested 48 traffickers.

Authorities admit these numbers are only a drop in the ocean.

Niger:

- **55 malnourished kids die.....H7**

Niamey - At least 55 children have died of malnutrition in Niger since the beginning of this year out of 45 525 cases recorded, officials said on Friday.

"There were some 45 525 cases of malnutrition, of which 55 deaths were already recorded in 2010", the ministerial council said in a statement on official media.

"With the efforts made by the state and those of development partners, it was hoped that the situation would have been rapidly overcome," it said.

Niger, one of the world's poorest nations, is facing a grave food crisis. The food deficit is due to crop failure brought about by erratic rains in this vast country.

Prime Minister Mahamadou Danda had last March 10 appealed for massive emergency aid from the international community to avert a food crisis that threatens more than half of the population of the arid West African country.

Emergency appeal

"To the national and international community, I want to launch an emergency appeal for massive support to the enormous efforts Niger is making to cope with famine," Danda told foreign aid agencies at the time.

Some 58% of Niger's 15.2 million people face "severe or moderate" food shortages, said Danda who was appointed prime minister by a military junta that ousted President Mamadou Tandja in February.

Danda said his government wanted to focus its emergency action on areas where "vulnerable" households have no more than 10 days of food stocks. Next harvests are not expected before September.

He outlined a detailed disaster management plan involving promotional sales and free distribution of cereals.

In 2005, some 3.2 million people in Niger were hit by famine after their crops were ravaged by locusts and a drought. Mass starvation was avoided with the help of the international community.

- **Niger needs \$123m in food aid.....H7**

Niamey - Niger needs \$123 million in international aid to combat the risk of food shortages this year, the country's prime minister said on Wednesday.

Niger's military leadership, which seized power in the uranium-exporting nation in a coup last month, has made a break from the policy of deposed President Mamadou Tandja by publicly addressing the risk of famine, a taboo subject under Tandja.

The international community is pressing Niger, which appointed a largely civilian transitional government last week, to organise elections, but humanitarians warn that food shortages could create even more instability and derail that process.

"Niger needs huge international support to deal with the situation," Prime Minister Mahamodou Danda said on Wednesday.

"I'd like to launch an appeal to help the efforts made by Niger to address famine, and to arrive at sustainable self-sufficiency in food," he said.

The total cost would be 89 billion CFA francs (\$185m), of which almost 30 billion francs was already available, he said.

Since the February putsch, Niger's military rulers have accepted United Nations estimates that at least 200 000 children face severe acute malnutrition, a condition that requires hospital treatment.

Moderate to severe food insecurity - a spectrum that runs from foregoing meals to malnutrition - could affect almost 8 million people, or around 60% of Niger's population, Danda said.

- **Niger junta demonstrates reform will....H1**

The putschists of Niger so far are living up to their promises to re-establish democracy in the country. Having announced junta members will not be eligible candidates for elections, Niger's new leaders have now engaged civil society in talks.

The Nigerien public is still generally happy with and confident in the new military leadership. Even the junta's approach to a surfacing famine in the country is strongly applauded as a contrast to ex-President Mamadou Tandja's handling of earlier food crises.

Having registered a rapidly increasing food insecurity due to drought, the Niger junta issued an international famine warning with an appeal for food aid. The Nigerien independent weekly 'La Griffé' hailed the junta for "breaking with Tandja's taboo system," referring to the ex-President's repeated denials of food insecurity. "Who would have thought this to be possible," the newspaper comments junta leader Salou Djibo's pronouncing of the word "famine". Under President Tandja, this could have sent the

squadron leader to jail, it adds.

While the junta still is widely popular in Niger, the international community has its doubts. The African Union (AU) and Western donors demand the junta to release still detained ex-President Tandja, a move proving difficult as an exile home for Mr Tandja still has to be found.

More important, the AU says it is now time to announce the duration of the transition period and present a timetable for elections. Only this could prove the junta's termination to restore the constitutional order.

But the junta has already given strong proof it is serious when it comes to the democratic transition process. Last week, junta leader Djibo decreed that members of the ruling Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy (CSR) would be banned from presenting their candidacy at the upcoming elections. It was a clear message to fellow junta members not to start thinking about holding on to power.

Regarding a timetable for transition, the junta holds it is too soon. Mr Djibo says this must be up to the yet-to-be Advisory Council. The council is to be set up by representatives of political parties, trade unions, associations and civil society. This council must be given the time to engage all stakeholder and parts of society, thus deciding how long the junta is needed in power, according to the junta leader.

In Niger, most agree with this point of view. Nigerien media are supportive, mostly saying the Advisory Council must be given time. There is a fear that a too short transition period only will allow the old structures under ex-President Tandja to reclaim power.

The junta has already taken steps to form the council. Yesterday, junta leader Djibo met with representatives of trade unions and civil society in Niamey. There, he invited civil society to come up with "analyses and proposals regarding the conduct of the transition process." In an open debate, demands were presented Mr Djibo to pay workers outstanding salaries include women in government and renegotiate mining contracts, among others.

The Nigerien press so far has published mostly positive articles about the ruling junta, mostly due to editors' relief over the fall of the Tandja regime. A real test about press freedom in the new Niger has yet to be produced, but so far freedom of expression seems to be largely respected and media refer freely to foreign condemnation of the coup. Expressions by potential opposition groups at this stage, however, are mostly directed at establishing a working relationship with the new rulers.

But there have been setbacks. Yesterday, Mr Tandja's former spokesman and Information Minister, Moctar Kassoum, was arrested for having publically demanded the release of the detained ex-President. The Tandja issue has become the new taboo in Niger - not a good sign.

Senegal:

- **Two soldiers killed in Senegal.....H1**

Dakar - Two Senegalese soldiers were killed and two others injured during a clash with suspected separatist rebels in the southern province of Casamance, an army spokesperson said on Tuesday.

"There is one dead, a non-commissioned officer, and five injured from the army" in the attack on Thursday on the positions of the Casamance Movement of Democratic Forces (MFDC) in the south of the country which has been gripped by an armed rebellion since 1982.

The incident in one of the West African country's top tourist zones occurred on Monday evening next to the village of Baraf when a patrolling army unit clashed with suspected rebels of the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC).

The Senegalese army dropped bombs and shells on the positions of the separatist movement, around the villages of Kassana and Mamatorro, some 10Km from Ziguinchor, the main city in the Casamance.

"After the bombardment, troops progressed and were hit by strong resistance" from presumed MFDC rebels, the same source explained.

"During that incident with an armed group we lost two soldiers and two others were injured," Senegal's army spokesperson Ousmane Sar told Reuters. He declined to say if any of the suspected rebels were killed or captured.

The MFDC has waged a low-level insurgency over the past two decades in the region, which also produces grain, demanding independence from the capital Dakar.

Last October, six soldiers were killed during an ambush by suspected MFDC rebels near the border with Guinea Bissau.

The rebel movement has accused the central government of neglecting Casamance and numerous peace deals have failed to secure lasting calm for the region.

In the last six months, clashes have increased between the army and rebels, leading to both military and civilian deaths.

Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade said on Friday he was in the process of holding talks with separatist chiefs. In an interview with Radio France International he said some of the rebels "wanted peace".

"I am holding talks with the principals. Is it better to continue this dialogue, which is difficult because there are cultural aspects, or to take the army and destroy everything? I choose dialogue," said Wade.

It was not known how many in the rebel camp, if any, were killed or injured.

- **Women campaigns against genital mutilation successful.....H7**

Female genital mutilation is a barbarous custom, according to the beliefs of most Westerners, but many African Muslims charge that the women who have been working for the last 15 years to eradicate the practice from 28 countries of the continent have betrayed their culture. African women are now finding alternative ways to fight the practice without attacking local cultures.

- I can't blame my mother or my grandmother for having mutilated me. They thought they were doing it for my own good, said Fatou Waggeh, of Gambia, this week at an international conference against female genital mutilation, held in the Italian capital.

This so-called "circumcision," practiced in some Islamic cultures consists of cutting out, usually without anaesthesia, the clitoris, labia and vulva of the woman, leaving an orifice for the menstrual flow and urine to pass through, and, supposedly, "to augment male pleasure." This type of genital mutilation is known as infibulation or Pharaonic circumcision, and is typical of Muslim populations in the Horn of Africa.

It must be noted, though, that female genital mutilation (FGM) is not a Muslim practice, and that it is heavily practiced in traditionally Christian countries such as Ethiopia and Kenya and in areas with traditional African religions. Most Muslims do not practice FGM.

The Association of Italian Women for Development (AIDOS) organised the conference in Rome, which was presided by European Parliament Deputy Emma Bonino, and served to launch a campaign for the United Nations General Assembly to take up the matter of female genital mutilation during its 2002 sessions.

Of Muslim women in Gambia, 70 percent have been mutilated. The World Health Organisation (WHO) calculates that 100 to 130 million women throughout Africa have been subjected to the practice, and two million girls and adolescents are mutilated each year. "There have been billions of women if one takes into account that it is an extremely old practice, mentioned by Herodotus in the fifth century before Christ," pointed out Nerina Boschiero, professor of International Law at the University of Verona, in Italy.

- I was a victim at 15, said Gambian Fatou Waggeh. "That same day I began to help others and I forgot about my own feelings." Now she is the director of the Banjul Foundation for Women's Health Research.

A different story was heard from Kady Koita, of Senegal, the youngest of the African activists taking part in this week's conference. "They circumcised me at age seven, along with other girls. We stood in line and each one went in. They hadn't told me it would happen that day, but I knew it would happen, and it didn't turn out to be traumatic," Koita told IPS.

- Later, when at age 20 I began to reflect, I felt an immense hate, she stated. "They had cut off part of my body, and I had already done the same to two of my three daughters. I had to get rid of the hate. Hate poisons you and prevents you from doing something positive, for yourself and for others. And no one and nothing can ever give me back my mutilated sex." Koita, who lives in France, is head of the European Network to Prevent Female Genital Mutilation.

Prevalence of FGM in Africa- Society does not exist in a vacuum; it is based on a culture that defines ways of life and gives meaning to identity. An African woman is expected not to argue, not even with her husband, Waggeh explained. "A family will dedicate its income from an entire year to the circumcision ceremony, which transforms a girl into a woman. Everyone believes this - the elders prepare you for that day."

- Others think about religious reasons, but the Koran doesn't say anything about it, she continued. "An uncircumcised woman is marginalized and will never marry. So how can she refuse?" she said, underscoring the challenges each African Muslim woman faces. The midwives who perform the operation are powerful and greatly feared. "We weren't allowed to see their faces and we were told that they were crocodiles," Waggeh now laughs.

Men, though they are unaware of it, are behind the origins of the practice, which gives them power. They initially refuse to take about the question, and the people are fearful of losing their culture, she pointed out. "Culture is dynamic and one has to know how to find the space. We can't move a mountain, but we must find the road to get around it, to find a way to tell the elders that they are wrong," Waggeh said.

- We must not put up with violence in marriage or the discrimination that men make us suffer, but to do so we have to find a way to make ourselves understood, commented Koita, who uses videos of the mutilation operations as a weapon in her battle against the practice.

When men see the video, "they cover their faces; they are horrified and can't believe it. They inevitably think about their daughters. Some are ashamed. They have no idea about this because only women participate in the ceremony," explained the activist. "Men don't even know what the female sex is like, they have never seen it, either whole or mutilated, because Muslim couples never remove their clothes," said Koita.

Most women don't know themselves either, pointed out Waggeh. "They don't look at themselves, they don't know how they are made, why they menstruate, what the clitoris

does, how the sexes interact. So we organised health classes, and it is exciting to see how women discover what is happening with their bodies."

As for women the women who perform the female genital mutilations, the activists recognise they must provide them with alternatives for training and power within the community. "We toured the whole continent and interviewed 200 circumcisers. When they agreed, we gave them the role of health promoters. They put aside their knives and razor blades and we teach them a trade that responds to their economic needs, or we obtain a small fund in order to initiate some sort of activity. That is how we were able to create the Association of Former Circumcisers," Waggeh reported.

They also discussed the Koran, the sacred book of Islam, with religious and political leaders of the towns and villages. In many cases they were able to win over these "elders" to their cause, and now they are involved in efforts to explain to the public the perversity of the practice. "There is a great deal of ignorance. That is what our action is about, that is our battle," Waggeh said.

But they are waging it carefully, trying to avoid leaving a hole in a community's culture because the "circumcision" has largely served as a rite of initiation. "We maintain the ceremony, the celebration, but without mutilations, and we are seeing, happily, that this is what is occurring, more and more," she said.

At the conference, there was a moment when all ears turned to Leila Sheik, executive director of the Association of Women Journalists in Tanzania, who said: "I have not been mutilated. I am from a town near Zanzibar where they have even written poems dedicated to the beauty of the clitoris."

Sierra Leone:

- **S Leone mine cave-in kills 200.....H3**

At least 200 people were killed when a trench collapsed at an unofficial gold mine in Sierra Leone, the West African country's ministry of mineral resources said on Friday.

The accident occurred in the south of the country, about 290km from the capital, Freetown.

"Over 200 artisanal gold miners were killed when a ... trench dug by the miners collapsed," a ministry spokesperson said.

Informal, or artisanal, gold mining is common in mineral-bearing African countries.

The miners usually have no professional training or equipment and often dig by hand, and accidents are frequent at the sites, which do not meet safety standards found at professionally engineered mines.

Togo:

- **Togo court confirms Gnassingbe win....H1**

Lome - Togo's Constitutional Court on Thursday in Lome confirmed the re-election of President Faure Gnassingbe in the March 4 polls, whose provisional results were contested by the opposition.

"Faure Gnassingbe, having obtained the highest number of votes, should be declared president of the Republic," the president of the Constitutional Court, Aboudou Assouma, announced at a public ceremony.

"This proclamation is definite, and brings to an end all the electoral processes," he stated.

Gnassingbe, 43, who came to power in 2005 after the death of his father, General Gnassingbe Eyadema, who ruled Togo with an iron hand for 38 years, won 60.88% of votes cast during the March 4 polls, the court said.

- **Protest over Gnassingbe's return.....H1**

Lome - Thousands of opposition supporters took to the streets of Togo's capital on Saturday to protest against the re-election of President Faure Gnassingbe, with his opponent claiming the vote was stolen.

His main rival in the March 4 poll, Jean-Pierre Fabre, led the peaceful protest along with other officials from the opposition Union of Forces for Change (UFC).

Fabre has rejected the results showing Gnassingbe, whose father General Gnassingbe Eyadema ruled the West African nation with an iron fist for 38 years until his death in 2005, won with 61% of the vote.

Fabre claims to have won between 55% and 60%.

Placards carried by protesters read "Enough is enough", "Let us save democracy" and "Togo people, free yourselves".

The opposition has staged several recent protests to denounce the poll results, which were confirmed on Thursday by the Constitutional Court.

Peaceful vote

Fabre took 34% of the vote, the court said.

The vote was peaceful, unlike the 2005 poll when hundreds were killed in clashes, and was seen as a test of democratic progress in the nation of 6.5 million people, though some observers expressed doubts over the election.

The head of West African bloc Ecowas has congratulated Gnassingbe on his re-election and the opposition for the peaceful polls, the body said on Saturday.

During a one-day official visit to Togo, James Victor Gbeho held "extensive" talks with Gnassingbe on "matters associated with the conduct of the election and its aftermath," Ecowas said in a statement.

Although aspects of the election have been criticized, Gbeho said, it was the consensus of the international community, including Ecowas, that the presidential election had been free and fair.