

Business and Politics in the Muslim World
West African News Monitoring
Weekly Report 112
21, March -27, March 2010
By Mustapha Shafi
Presentation on 31, March 2010

Table of Contents

Headlines	2
Detail of the news	5
China-African Relations	5
Pan-African issues	10
Ghana News	32
Nigeria News	50
Other W/African State News	97

Headlines

1 China-African Relations:

- China reaps reward of Zambia copper investment
- Chinese Gov't Invested U.S.\$7.24 Billion in the Country, Says Envoy
- China Opening Bus Assembly Plant in Cameroon
- China to Cement Grand African Research Plans

2 Pan-African issues:

- Health Officials Using World Cup to Fight Malaria
- Climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro to Raise Awareness about Safe Water
- African viewpoint: Backstabbers
- AFRICA: Rice is nice but not for long
- Illegal Fishing in Guinea's Waters "Worst in the World"
- WEST AFRICA: Stopping the Polio Virus
- Whither African Cotton Producers after Brazil's Success?
- When is water safe?
- West Africa volunteers' scheme launched
- Peace Corps Association Launches 'Africa Rural Connect' to Help Farmers
- Conoil's US\$50 Million Investment in Region Drives Stocks
- US-Africa Command IG Conference Underway
- Africa media hub to ease access to US officials

Ghana:

1. Political News:

- Seizure of Cache of Ammunitions in the North
- Changing the "Rule of Law" To the "Rule of Parties"
- Gov't Should Stop Creating 'Propaganda Jobs' and Focus on Real Job Creation.

2. Economy:

- Laws to ensure accountability in oil revenue attract public attention
- Gov't urged to fight 'galamsey' as it robs the country of royalties and taxes.

3. Energy:

- Oil Curse – Gov't to Ensure Revenue Benefits the Masses
- Ghana, Kosmos Nearing Compromise on Jubilee Sale

4. Environment:

- EU Supports Country's Water Sector with? 402 Million

5. Immigration/Refugee/Idps:

6. Health:

7. Human rights/Gender/Social Issues:

8. Geo-Strategic issues:

Nigeria:

1. Political News:

- Opposition groups demand withdrawal of INEC's election time tables
- Yar'Adua's nephew makes list
- Yar'Adua returns to work next week – Associates
- Buhari-Atiku alliance stalls
- Senate cuts president's power over INEC
- Yar'Adua recovering well –Yuguda
- Analysis: Jonathan makes his mark on Nigeria
- Nigeria leader Goodluck Jonathan 'chooses cabinet'
- Buhari, Tinubu Absent at Mega Summit Parley
- Jonathan selects Nigeria ministers
- Goodluck Jonathan's cabinet choices surprise Nigeria
- Yar'Adua to attend Jumat service
- Emodi may replace Akunyili - ...As Appeal Court sacks Senator
- N/Assembly passes N4.6tn budget for 2010
- Constitution - Senate Set to Pass 35 Amendments
- Electoral reform: Reps differ from Senate
- Jonathan to meet ex-rebel leaders
-

2. Economy:

- Group Proffers Recipe for Economic Crisis
- Lagos aims to be Africa's model megacity
- Investors Back Microfinance Despite Impact of Crisis
- UN backs project to improve cassava processing in Nigeria
- Nigeria to Save N75bn with New Strategy on Rice
- Lagos Sets to Float another N50 Billion Bond for Infrastructure Development

3. Energy:

- Nigeria Ready to Meet Conditions for Nuclear Power Plant
- Nigeria's oil workers demand justice for murdered colleagues

4. Environment:

5. Immigration/Refugee/Idps:

- Nigerians Linked to Al-Qaeda Deported

6. Health:

- Fashola, Commissioners Undergo HIV/AIDS Test

7. Human rights/Gender/social issues:

- Secret killings persist in Jos
- Nigerian Gov't must 'probe killings'
- 164 face charges over massacres
- Nigerian court bans online chat
- Troops avert another crisis in Jos
- N/Delta militants: We are frustrated
- Jos crisis c'ttee submits report to Jonathan
- Jos: Three Injured, Four Arrested in Fresh Fracas
- Jos still wracked by killings
- Nigerian massacre: 207 to be tried
-

8. Geo-Strategic issues:

- Crime: US Partners Nigeria Police on Training, Logistics
- Pirates wound 3 in Turkish ship attack off Nigeria

Other West African States

Benin:

Burkina Faso:

Cameroon:

Cape Verde:

Chad:

Cote d'Ivoire:

- Ivorian peace process in danger.....H1

Gambia:

Guinea- Conakry:

Guinea- Bissau:

Liberia:

Mali:

Niger:

- People in Niger Heading Toward Capital in Search of Food....H7
- 40 hurt in Niger bee attack.....H7
- Niger exiled ex-speaker returns.....H1
- Niger's ousted Tandja is fit.....H1

Senegal:

- Senegal's fishermen fight crisis.....H2.
- Senegalese-origin baker wins coveted best baguette award.....H7
- Block on palm oil imports to Senegal concerns WFP....H7
- Senegal army, rebels clash.....H1

Sierra Leone:

- No Easy Road to Reconciliation: Lansana Fofana.....H7

Togo:

- Togo outlaws protests against elections results.....H1

Details of the News

China-African Relations:

- **China reaps reward of Zambia copper investment**

Around this time last year Zambia, Africa's top copper producer, was feeling the chilling effects of the global economic recession.

A slump in copper prices on the international market and the subsequent closure of mines rendered thousands of people jobless as the government's revenue base shrunk.

Mining forms the country's main economic backbone and accounts for 70% of country's foreign exchange earnings.

Zambia's revenue earnings from copper sales last year tumbled to \$2.9bn (£1.88bn) from \$3.6bn recorded in 2008, representing an 18% decline.

This is despite output increasing by 20% over the same period, according to official statistics.

"We are recovering as a country because we are seeing increased exploration activities," says mines minister Maxwell Mwale.

"Exploration guarantees the future of the mines and a number of our people are being employed."

Rejuvenation

Indeed, there is something of a boom in the mining sector.

The central bank says copper production last year jumped to 675,384 tonnes from 587,125 tonnes the previous year.

At the peak of the recession many western investors either fled or scaled back their presence in the copper belt - leaving the economy hurting.

The departure of the western investors at the height of the recession saw Chinese investors taking up the abandoned positions.

Yet observers argue that Chinese investors were the only people to operate mines on the downturn as their investments were backed and guaranteed by their sponsoring government - China.

Last year alone, China invested over \$400m into Zambia's mining industry.

But as the international climate improves so too have prices.

The mines are now back in business and the copper belt region is once again thriving.

A staggering \$3.6bn beckons in mining-related activities in north-west Zambia.

The Chinese own at least three mining operations in Zambia,

including a 150,000 tonnes-a-year copper smelter that has been developed.

The facility is meant to offer smelting facilities to emerging mines, especially in north-west Zambia.

China controversy

Despite observers viewing China as a country that is just interested in reaping Africa's resources, some local mining entrepreneurs think Chinese investment into the mines is good for Zambia.

"Copper is a long-term cycle. You don't just invest today like you bake bread in the morning and sell in the evening," argues Phesto Musonda, a local mining entrepreneur.

"Who doesn't need China as a long term investment partner? The whole world is focussing on China, including America."

Not everyone is in agreement with Mr Musonda.

Bob Sichinga, a leading business consultant and a former local legislator, argues that investment into Zambia, regardless of its source and nationalities behind it, should also benefit the locals.

"No one should tell us they have come to help Zambia when they have to come to help themselves," he says.

"If anyone is going to make resources available, they ought to get a reward from it and I don't have a problem with that.

"What I have a problem is where that investment doesn't leave any lasting benefit to the country," he says.

He argues that the duty to protect national interests squarely lies on the shoulders of government.

Mr Sichinga is further unhappy that the "Chinese have the poorest" safety record for their employees in the mining sector.

Perhaps his observations are timely because Zambia is on course to produce the anticipated one million tonnes of finished copper cathodes, or plates, by next year.

But the government says it will continue providing a fair investment environment for everyone.

However, mines minister Mr Mwale admits the Chinese have positioned themselves well against their competitors.

"China is resource hungry and at the time we were privatising the mines, they took up the least attractive ones which they have turned around," he says.

He adds that the Chinese have proved to be "our all-weather friends" because when other investors were "fleeing" they re-assured Zambians of their jobs.

Only time will tell if Chinese investment in the mining sector is good for Zambia.

- **Chinese Gov't Invested U.S.\$7.24 Billion in the Country, Says Envoy**

Lagos — The Chinese Government invested \$7.24 billion in different sectors of the Nigerian economy in 2009, Mr Rong Yansong, Commercial Counsellor, Chinese Embassy, said in Enugu.

In a goodwill message at the 21st Enugu International Trade Fair on Friday, Rong listed the sectors to include the free trade zone, energy, agriculture, manufacturing, mining and infrastructure.

He said Chinese investors were still looking for opportunities to get more involved in the Nigerian economy, especially in the area of local content.

"According to our statistics, Chinese companies are employing more than 30,000 Nigerians, which contributes a lot to poverty alleviation in Nigeria," he said.

The counsellor announced that the Standards Organisation of Nigeria and China had signed an agreement on Industrial Products Inspection to ensure that all products exported to Nigeria were thoroughly checked.

He said the Chinese Government would partner with the Enugu State Government on the use of coal deposits for power generation to support local industries.

Rong invited genuine Nigerian businessmen to the world's largest trade fair, Canton Trade Fair, to be attended by more than two million people all over the world.

He promised that the Chinese Government would sponsor Nigerian professionals and officials to different training courses in agriculture, manufacturing, commerce and administration in China.

The envoy said 200 Nigerians had benefited from similar training programmes in the past, while 300 persons would be sponsored this year.

He also announced that the first-ever Chinese Industrial Fair would hold in Abuja from November 22 to 26 in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

- **China Opening Bus Assembly Plant in Cameroon**

China is opening a factory in Cameroon to manufacturer buses for West and Central Africa. China is Africa's third largest trading partner with a ten-fold jump in commercial transactions over the last decade.

The \$500 million factory in Douala is expected to start producing buses by the end of the

year. Joining private investors from China and Cameroon, government officials say it will create hundreds of new jobs, ease transport, and boost Cameroon's economic growth as a source of vehicles for West and Central Africa.

"Relations between the two countries are very friendly, and the place, the location is very good because it is a central seaport for West Africa," said Wu Yue, vice president of China's National Machinery Import and Export Corporation.

The factory will give Cameroonian workers important new skills, according to Zacharia Awanga, the deputy chief of International Development in Cameroon's Ministry of Economy and Planning.

"Engineers from Cameroon will be sent to China to start studying the industry of car assembly. So we will start with bus assembly and from then truck assembly with assembly of tractors and other bigger, heavier engines. This will be provided, and we will go progressively. We will start with the assembly of buses from 70 seaters to seven-seater buses," he said.

The agreement also calls for the delivery of 500 Chinese buses in July for use between and within Cameroonian cities.

Its signing came during a visit by the chairman of China's National Committee of the People's Political Consultative Conference, Jia Qinglin. During talks with President Paul Biya, the two men signed a series of agreements including a \$65 million grant, a \$65 million no-interest loan and the donation of technical equipment to Cameroon's post office.

President Biya says it is a win-win partnership for China and Cameroon that continues a long tradition of cooperation on issues including infrastructure, health, sports, agriculture, and information technology.

President Biya says a new collaboration is now beginning between the two countries as they move to a higher level of cooperation. If this project succeeds, the president says it will help Cameroon become an emerging economy. And Mr. Biya says he is confident it will succeed.

The president says the relationship between China and Cameroon reflects a shared point of view on subjects of international policy.

China has been increasing investment in Africa over the last decade, mostly in mineral and petroleum production. Angola is China's largest source of crude oil.

But Beijing says it is also investing in Africa's people and has boosted bilateral assistance across the continent. Trade with Cameroon which topped just \$2 million 40 years ago now tops \$800 million.

- **China to Cement Grand African Research Plans**

China will flesh out the details of its joint research programme with Africa at a meeting in Beijing next week.

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), which includes 49 African countries, plans to implement several large-scale science and technology projects across Africa in the next three years (see China sets its sights on African research cooperation).

These include the training of 2,000 Africans in agricultural technology; 100 clean-energy projects to tackle climate change and the funding of 100 African postdoctoral students to undertake research in China.

Next week, schedules will be discussed in the hopes of turning these promises into a reality.

"The track record of the Chinese government fulfilling its pledges towards Africa is strong, so I would anticipate the new pledges will be fulfilled," said Jing Gu, a researcher at the non-profit Institute of Development Studies in the United Kingdom.

But others are not so optimistic, questioning whether the collaboration is fair to Africa (see Knowledge for natural resources: a fair exchange?).

"Its real motives are well known: to elbow out all foreign companies and gain access to Africa's resources at cheap prices," said George Ayittey, a Ghanaian economist based in Washington DC, in an online debate sponsored by The Economist magazine in February.

Others question the success of China's past efforts. "China's visibility is very high in trade and business but quite low in science and technology," said Kazhila Chinsebu, a molecular biologist at the University of Namibia. For example, he said, even when African students travel to China to do funded "the calibre of such scientists is very low... Most cannot pass local examinations here in African universities".

"In my mind there are a lot of verbal promises but not much action," said Chris Whiteley, an enzymologist at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa.

Pan-African issues:

- **Health Officials Using World Cup to Fight Malaria**

Health officials are using this year's World Cup in South Africa to help fight malaria.

Health officials are using music and football to boost awareness of preventing malaria, which kills one million Africans each year.

This radio message in Ghana from the group United Against Malaria reminds pregnant women to take their anti-malarial drugs and says all families should sleep under treated bed nets to kick malaria out of Africa.

Nine African football teams are involved in this campaign that hopes to use the excitement surrounding Africa's first World Cup to help reduce malaria deaths, 85 percent of which are children under five years of age.

Christina Vilupti Barrineau is the campaign manager for United Against Malaria. "This campaign is about using football as a catalyst to raise awareness about the disease and raise the awareness that each African can make a difference in ending this disease and footballers like Abedi Pele, like Michael Essien who are using their voices and names. We can reach out across Africa to create a movement that will end this terrible disease," said Barrineau.

Ghana's Football Association is a key partner in the campaign. When it comes to malaria, FA President Kwesi Nyantakyi says footballers are no different from anyone else. "We as managers of football have a huge responsibility to fight malaria otherwise malaria would fight and probably win the fight over us. There are several cases of key players in our clubs and national teams who have failed or have been unable feature in matches because of Malaria," he said.

Tanzanian Football Association chief Leodegar Tenga says the campaign underscores the importance of public health and its impact on the future of football.

"The beauty about football is the fans. You get to the stadium you see the fans, so you need the people to be healthy. Without a healthy public there is no way you could develop. In fact the very existence of football itself depends on how healthy the society is and most importantly, as far as I am concerned, as far as football is concerned and everybody is concerned, malaria unlike AIDS is treatable, preventable and can also be eradicated," he said.

The United Against Malaria campaign awarded Ghana FA President Nyantakyi its own Golden Boot for his personal contribution to fighting the disease. He is hoping it is not the only trophy he raises this year.

"The slogan for this campaign is "victory is in the net." Each time that a goal is scored it is a goal scored against malaria. So any time the Black Stars score a goal, we celebrate our victory against malaria. And the day the Black Stars would lift the prestigious World Cup trophy in South Africa on the 11th of July, we will all be celebrating a new nation against malaria," he said.

Along with hosts South Africa, Africa's first World Cup includes Ghana, Cameroon, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, and Algeria.

- **Climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro to Raise Awareness about Safe Water**

Monday (22nd March) was World Water Day, an annual event to raise awareness about the need for safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene. This year's theme is Clean Water for a Healthy World.

In Washington, World Water Day events continued into Tuesday, as organizers spread the word that “one out of every six people lacks safe drinking water and two out of every five people lack adequate sanitation.”

It's personal

Among those taking part was Grammy-nominated musician Kenna, who's now an American citizen.

“It's personal for me because of my dad. My father, as a child, had been exposed to water borne illness in Ethiopia, where I was born,” he says.

Kenna says his father's brother died of water-borne disease, as did friends and neighbors in Ethiopia.

“It made me study the water crisis as a whole and learning that a billion people don't have clean water, that 50 percent of the reason why people go to hospitals in the world is because of water-borne illnesses and the many different statistics on children dying,” he says.

Kenna says water-borne disease kills more children than HIV, malaria and TB combined.

Water, water everywhere?

“I think in general we take it for granted. We have it in our tap. We can take showers in the morning. We can drink water. We can buy water at our local stores in bottles,” he says.

However, it's different in poor countries.

“The abundance of it in our lives makes it something that we don't necessarily consider in the lives of people around the world,” he says.

Water is now becoming an issue here in the United States, he says. For example, last year, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger ordered action to deal with the state's third consecutive year of drought. He said California must prepare for a possible 4th, 5th and 6th year of drought.

Kenna says the U.S. city where he was raised, Virginia Beach, Virginia, relies on a lake for water.

“There are many, many reasons why we need to focus on (water) as an integral part of our livelihood as human beings and the livelihood of our brothers and sisters around the world,” he says.

Climbing to raise awareness

Kenna organized a climb of Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania to draw attention to water and climate issues. It was called the Summit on the Summit and became the subject of a documentary broadcast on MTV.

“I had climbed Kilimanjaro five years ago and I didn’t make it to the top. So, I had a personal vendetta against the mountain. I thought it might be an interesting way to combine extreme...risk and the idea of reaching the top of one’s life’s mountain,” he says.

Mount Kilimanjaro had been known for its snowy cap. But with warming temperatures, the snow is receding and scientists say it may eventually disappear.

Many people took part in the climb, including entertainers, environmentalists and others.

“We had 45 climbers, 16 guides, 248 porters. And we went at it and we all reached the top of the mountain, which is amazing. But more importantly, we were able to raise awareness. And I think that’s the key to the whole project for us. It was just trying to make noise enough for the world to hear,” he says.

Before the climb, participants visited nearby villages and saw firsthand the importance of clean water, sanitation and hygiene.

- **African viewpoint: Backstabbers**

In our series of viewpoints from African journalists, Zimbabwean filmmaker and columnist Farai Sevenzo warns Africa's paranoid leaders to keep their backs against the wall until April.

The month of March, I am told by those in the know, is the month of the backstabbers.

It was in the middle of March that Julius Caesar found himself too dead to remove the daggers and knives embedded in his back by those he thought he knew and loved.

That 44 BC event, which signalled the bloody end of an emperor, has been pored over by great writers, infinite poets and genius playwrights and simply refuses to remain in the dustbin of ancient history.

That is because backstabbing and betrayal remain a function of all our lives, and our politicians on the great continent are forever on guard against such a possibility.

What could Goodluck Jonathan have been doing when he dissolved his cabinet the other day except to ward off the backstabbing by creating a cabinet that is loyal to him and not to the shadow of the sick man of Abuja?

When the deposed President of Niger, Mamadou Tandja was busy scheming yet another term in office, he made the mistake of looking ahead and failed to watch his back and so the backstabbers struck and a coup consigned him to an early history.

Power and paranoia

All over the continent, our leaders sleep with one eye open against the possibility that their backs will soon become targets.

The stuttering on-off marriage of convenience that is Harare's power-sharing government has so many backs everyone seems to be spinning around in circles in an effort to grow eyes at the back of their heads so they can spot the backstabbers coming.

Power and paranoia are the oxygen these men and women breathe.

And so as the agreement to share power cools and freezes, a man who is on solid ground when it comes to marital experience, South Africa's Jacob Zuma, flies into Harare to sort out this reluctant marriage.

How would he do it, what would be his plan?

His call for the lifting of sanctions had already fallen on deaf ears during his state visit to Britain, where a collective "little Englander" attitude cast doubts over his statesmanship and preferred to pontificate on the innuendo of his personal sleeping arrangements with wives and lovers.

Fight another day

But you do not survive years on Robben Island and wilt when foreigners disapprove of your culture and your right to wed.

Mr Zuma, said the kinder commentators, held his own while monogamous celebrity marriages were crashing all around him.

Surely the marks would be high for a state visit that was impressive and of high impact in a year in which the South Africans would host the World Cup and save their neighbour Zimbabwe from brutal self-harm?

But this being March, someone ought to have told the president that his back was exposed.

A no-confidence vote in President Zuma was called by an opposition party even as he had his back turned, away in Harare, trying to sort out his neighbour's political marriage.

Our president has let us down, said the backstabbers, with his risky sexual behaviour.

The motion was heavily defeated and Mr Zuma lives to fight another day but he should know that backstabbing is an art which needs a great deal of practise and his tormentors will be back.

So much for the rich and powerful and their tender backs.

The many by the few

The betrayal of a president, the yearning for power by junior officers is just the kind of backstabbing rituals we Africa-watchers have come to accept as the norms of our continent's politics.

It is in the very devious nature of politics to accept that a politician will die with a heavily-scarred back.

But it is the betrayals of the many by the few that irk us all the most.

Has the sudden arrival of ministerial cars of German origin taken the sting out of the Movement for Democratic Change?

Who are the weeping women of Jos addressing when they demonstrate - the child-killers or their country's headless government?

Who burned down the last resting place of the Buganda kings and to what end?

Where are the billions of dollars in oil money, in diamond money and why are they not evident on our streets?

By the time March comes around again, we may have lost a few more presidents, someone will have been murdered by a neighbour, and a brother may have stolen your wife. I am keeping my back against the wall until April.

- **AFRICA: Rice is nice but not for long**

DAKAR, 25 March 2010 (IRIN) - The organizers of a week-long African Rice Congress in Bamako, capital of Mali, say African countries can decrease hunger and save millions of dollars if they wean themselves off rice imports and increase local production, but experts favour a "drastic" move away from rice to native grains.

"Rice used to be reserved for special days, like religious holidays, baptisms, weddings [and] popular celebrations. But today, across Mali, rice is prepared [every day] at noon. In Bamako it is worse - there are those who eat it both day and night," Bintou Diallo, the head of a woman's rice-growing cooperative 300km east of Bamako, told IRIN.

Conference organizers estimate that 40 percent of the rice consumed annually in Africa is imported - about 10 million tons - which cost US\$2 billion in 2006.

African countries need to feed the [growing appetite for rice](#) without imports, said Mali's Prime Minister, Modibo Sidibé. "We must reverse the trend. I remain convinced that the salvation of Africa will come from agriculture. Africa can and must feed itself, and export more rice. This will require the adoption of policies to stop [imports]."

Shortcuts

[Import restrictions](#) can be a politically appealing shortcut to boosting local production, but there is no substitute for investment in research, seed production and infrastructure, said Nicholas Minot, a researcher at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), based in Washington DC, US.

"Import tariffs and quotas raise the domestic price of [local] rice, benefiting surplus rice farmers but [hurting] households that buy rice, including almost all urban households and a large number of rural households." Minot cited studies showing how up to 60 percent of rural households in Africa purchased most of their food.

In late 2007, [rising international food prices](#) sparked [food riots](#) throughout Africa.

"It is tempting to think that rice self-sufficiency [from local production] would eliminate the volatility in rice prices because the country will no longer depend on world markets. However, even a country that is self-sufficient in rice experiences price volatility because of weather-related fluctuation in the size of the harvest," Minot cautioned.

Long-term investment could boost the year-round quantity of rice in Africa, providing a cushion during seasonal shortages, he added.

Erratic rains and shorter wet seasons have reduced cereal production across the [Sahel](#), creating earlier-than-normal shortages of food and fodder because the next harvest is still six months away.

Climate change, crop change

Rather than asking how they could become food self-sufficient by growing more rice, countries should explore nutrient-rich local cereals that are under-cultivated because they are harder to harvest and process, Caterina Batello, a crop production and climate change

specialist at the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), told IRIN.

These cereals include teff (*Eragrostis tef*) – a grass bearing small, highly nutritious seeds, primarily found in East Africa – and [fonio](#), a group of wild and domesticated *Digitaria* grass species bearing seeds smaller than couscous found primarily in West Africa.

"[Local biodiversity](#) is good for food security. We need to convince local populations that they are sitting on a treasure - they [farmers] think that outside crops, with more research, will be better for the ecosystem, but this is not the case," Batello said.

Of the cereals grown in Africa, rice consumes the most water. "It is inevitable farmers [in arid ecosystems] will need to move to more sustainable farming because of water shortages and salinated soil [in which accumulated salts hamper food production]."

Maize, wheat, sorghum, millet and fonio consume less water – in descending order – than rice and are better adapted to arid ecosystems because of their ability to resist heat, said Batello.

Revolution

But getting people to think about growing traditional crops like fonio, which need less water, would be a "drastic" change that required wholesale "societal transformation", said Batello. "People do not want to go back when, in actuality, there are good lessons in the past that we can combine with technologies of the future."

Farmers may have forgotten, or perhaps never knew how to de-husk the more "neglected" cereals, as FAO calls them. Even if they wanted to sell these crops, there is the problem of markets. "People may not be used to the taste, it will be more expensive than more widely available rice - a whole society must adapt, from decision makers to producers, to processors, to customers," said Batello.

Mariko Fadima Siby, a fonio vendor in Bamako, commented: "People eat fonio but it is more expensive, is harder to process and takes more work, but they know it is nutritious. People never stopped growing it and turn to it during planting season when they have not harvested rice and cannot afford to buy it." She told IRIN that if fonio got as much investment as rice, there would be a market.

Countries would have to move beyond the "limited number of species currently produced" Batello said. "With changing rainfall patterns and temperatures, it is clear there will be a [problem for rice](#) in Africa."

- **Illegal Fishing in Guinea's Waters "Worst in the World"**

BERLIN, Mar 24 (IPS) - Rampant illegal fishing is hitting some of the poorest West African countries the hardest as this practice is globally most rife in the east central Atlantic Ocean area, which covers the territorial waters of some 15 African

countries from Morocco and Mauritania in the north to Angola in the south.

Most affected by illegal fishing are Guinea and Sierra Leone while the majority of ships and companies involved in the illegal fishing navigate under flags from countries such as China, Russia, Indonesia, and Panama but also from the European Union (EU) and other industrialised countries, such as Portugal, Italy and Japan.

Illegal fishing occurs mostly in the eastern central Atlantic region and has increased over the last 10 years, according to the European Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA), an EU body set up to assist African, Caribbean and Pacific countries with information on development.

In general, the total current losses caused by illegal fishing worldwide are estimated at between nine and 24 billion dollars per year. Most estimates put illegal fishing catches at between 11 and 26 million tons of fish, or between 10 and 22 percent of the total fisheries production.

These estimates do not take into account the environmental damage caused by overfishing which has decimated numerous fish species, from tuna to cod fish.

Developing countries are the most at risk from illegal fishing, "with total estimated (illegal) catches in West Africa being 40 percent higher than reported catches", according to the London-based consulting firm MRAG, which describes itself as "promoting sustainable utilisation of natural resources through integrated management policies and practices".

Illegal fishing has been defined as the fishery conducted by national or foreign vessels in waters under the jurisdiction of a sovereign state without the permission of that state's authorities or in contravention of its laws and regulations.

National jurisdictional waters, known as exclusive economic zones (EEZ), consist of a sea area over which a state has special exploration and exploitation rights.

Illegal fishing can also be conducted by vessels flying the flag of states which have ratified international fishery agreements, but which operate in contravention of the conservation and management measures adopted in such agreements.

In yet another report, the British department for international development (DfID) estimated in 2009 that the annual loss due to illegal fishing alone in the EEZ of Guinea is valued at 110 million dollars.

The London-based Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) calls this illegal fishing in the Guinean territorial waters "the worst in Africa", which means it is the worst in the world.

The DfID report also estimated that Guinea loses in excess of 34,000 tons of fish every

year to illegal fishing, including around 10,000 tons of 'bycatch'. Bycatch is the euphemism for the unwanted portion of the catch thrown overboard by fishers.

Officially, Guinean fishers legally catch some 54,000 tons per year. This means that the illegal fishing represents two-thirds of the country's legal recorded catches.

Saskia Richartz, EU oceans policy director for the environmental organisation Greenpeace, told IPS that "these dimensions of illegal fishing should be the most surprising and embarrassing for industrialised countries, since their leaders have over the past 10 years repeatedly pledged to eliminate it by 2004".

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 world leaders agreed to urgently implement national and regional plans of action to effect the Food and Agriculture Organisation's international plan of action "to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing by 2004".

Richartz said that the economic losses caused by illegal fishing for sub-Saharan African countries "amount to at least one billion dollars per year" but international law enforcement against illegal fishing is "non-existent".

"It is easy to launder illegal fishing catches and avoid sanctions because port controls are weak and inconsistent," Richartz added. "There is also a lack of vessel traceability, lack of control over non-fishing vessels, and lack of enforcement with respect to beneficial owners/companies."

Richartz also accused EU members of only paying lip service to the fight against illegal fishing: "Greenpeace has repeatedly observed and documented fishing vessels, nationals and companies from the EU and other developed and developing nations, flouting international agreements where they exist, and fishing with impunity where they do not."

Every year Greenpeace compiles a blacklist from publicly available official registries of vessels and companies suspected of involvement in illegal fishing.

While other blacklists only include vessels and companies from China, Russia, Panama, Tunisia, Indonesia and the like but none from Western Europe and other industrialised nations, Greenpeace's own list cites ships from Portugal, Italy and Japan.

In a number of European fisheries, illegal fishing is thought to account for one-third to one-half of all catches, Heike Baumueller, environment and resource governance researcher at Chatham House, an independent think tank in London, told IPS.

"That will represent over 15 billion dollars of lost catches and over 27,000 lost jobs in fishing and processing industries by 2020," Baumueller told IPS.

In a press released dated Oct 27, 2009, the European Commission estimated that around 10 percent of the region's seafood imports (some 1.7 billion U.S. dollars) could be

illegally sourced.

Some port authorities in European countries have indulged blacklisted vessels and companies. For instance, the EJF calls the Spanish port of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria "the most notorious port of convenience" as it provides services to pirate fishing fleets operating off the coast of West Africa.

Due to the port's status as a free economic zone, companies located at Las Palmas "have a variety of fiscal and customs advantages, many of which facilitate the illegal handling, transport and sale of illegally caught fish," Duncan Copeland of the EJF told IPS.

Las Palmas has been a soft entry point to the enormous European seafood market and the major transport hub for illegal fish heading for other large seafood markets, such as those in East Asia.

- **WEST AFRICA: Stopping the Polio Virus**

The World Health Organization (WHO) and its partners hope to eliminate the circulation of the polio virus in West Africa as soon as June by launching the first round of national synchronized immunization days against the debilitating disease.

Nigeria would be the only country to curb the circulation of the polio-causing virus as late as 2011, according to the WHO.

"We want to curb the wild polio virus in the West African region by the end of June 2010," says Dr Bokar Toure, coordinator of the inter-country team for WHO West Africa.

To ensure a better sweep of the operation that affects more than 85 million children under five in 19 countries in West and Central Africa, including Chad, Central African Republic and Cameroon, the WHO is mobilising more than 400,000 volunteer vaccinators. The WHO is working with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the United Nations Children Fund and Rotary International.

"During this period, there will be many rounds of synchronized vaccinations to cover cross-border populations and movements," Touré told IPS.

According to WHO inter-country team officials, polio eradication hopes are based on positive signs in Nigeria where there were improvements in the level of unvaccinated children who were covered by the programme, and the fact that socio-cultural resistance to vaccination is diminishing thanks to religious and community leaders.

Nigeria remains one of the most affected countries in the world and one of the foci of the epidemic with 388 cases representing 70 percent of polio cases in the sub region. For years, social and cultural constraints have prevented polio vaccination campaigns in the country.

The WHO hopes that rounds of synchronized immunization will fill gaps left by routine immunization sessions which many vaccination-aged people miss.

"It is the role of vaccinators, community health workers to organize the whole vaccination chain so that missed children can finally be vaccinated and we can find those parents who are reluctant (to vaccinate their children)," said Djamila Cabral, the WHO representative in Burkina Faso. She sadly notes a resurgence of polio since 2008 in countries of the sub region, including Burkina Faso.

In Burkina Faso, 15 cases were reported in 2009, the last case was in October 2009, despite six rounds of immunization. According to the WHO, each reported case represents a contamination risk for 200 children.

"We are nearing our goal, but there are still children who don't get vaccinated and we must find all these children and get them vaccinated," Cabral told IPS.

Three million children are covered through vaccination this year in Burkina Faso.

"All three of my children have been vaccinated since the vaccination days began; in our neighbourhood we (a women's group), go door to door to search for all children and help the health workers vaccinate," said Pauline Zampaligré, who lives in Nargin a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Ouagadougou.

"All children in the yard are vaccinated, as a matter of fact we get them vaccinated as soon as the radio and television messages announce the community health worker visits," Aïssata Nonguierma, also from Nargin, told IPS. She said the community's enthusiastic response is due to the discovery a few years ago of a polio case in the area.

According to Dr. Kolonpiaré Apiako of the regional health commission for the south-west region of the country, more children were vaccinated this year than expected. "Of a goal set at 223,118 children expected (to be vaccinated) in the four health districts, we have vaccinated more than 225,000 children, in other words 101 percent," he told IPS.

"We have all the means at our disposal to eradicate polio today. We have the funds, we have the materials, we have the human resources, we have committed political leaders and communities: everything is there for polio to be eradicated from our region," said the Minister of Health of Burkina Faso, Seydou Bouda.

Polio mainly affects children under five. Initial symptoms are fever, fatigue, headache, vomiting, neck stiffness and pain in the limbs. In a few cases, polio causes paralysis, often permanent. Vaccination is the only means of prevention, according to the WHO.

One in 200 infections leads to irreversible paralysis, usually in the legs. Among the paralyzed children, 5 to 10 percent die due to paralysis of respiratory muscles, according to the WHO.

Polio cases have nevertheless declined by over 99 percent between 1998 and 2006, from 350,000 to 1,997 reported cases. In 2008, there were only four countries where polio was still endemic (Afghanistan, India, Nigeria and Pakistan), down from more than 125 in 1988.

Launched in 1988, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative has helped immunize two billion children, reducing the incidence of polio by 99 percent. But the cessation of vaccinations in Nigeria in 2004 has contributed significantly to the resurgence of the disease. In 2009, 1,595 children in 24 countries have been paralyzed after contracting polio.

The WHO is planning at least two synchronized polio immunization days this year. The second round of the first day is planned for late April.

"There are many population movements, countries are very close, very open, so by putting people together (through synchronization) we're able to vaccinate a maximum of people, thereby maximizing the efforts of donors and governments of affected countries," Cabral told IPS.

To ensure the success of national immunization days, the WHO announced training for field officers and expanded immunization programme managers, and capacities building for logistics systems since vaccines require a cold chain.

- **Whither African Cotton Producers after Brazil's Success?**

GENEVA, Mar 23 (IPS) - African cotton-producing countries hope that Brazil's intended retaliation after its success at the World Trade Organization's (WTO) dispute settlement body will have a positive spin-off for them but seem reticent about pursuing a similar course of action against the U.S. for its continued use of subsidies in cotton production.

"True, we don't benefit directly from the WTO ruling," Prosper Vokouma, representative of Burkina Faso to the United Nations in Geneva and coordinator of the C4, told IPS. The C4 is the grouping of four cotton-exporting African countries of which Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Chad are the members. It has helped put the issue of the "white gold" on the WTO agenda.

"But the WTO ruling gives legitimacy to the C4's demands," Vokouma says. "It is a strong criticism of massive and distorting subsidies. The WTO dispute settlement body has confirmed that U.S. subsidies damage other countries' producers because of their impact on world market prices," declares Vokouma.

"We know that the U.S. has a bad conscience regarding this issue. Some 2,500 large farmers share more than three billion dollars between them every year, whereas 20 to 30 million African cotton producers live in misery because the product of their hard work is

not even enough to feed them," explains Vokouma.

Studies by international organisations show that the total abolition of U.S. subsidies would increase the world cotton price by 14 percent. According to the charity Oxfam, this would translate into additional revenue that could feed one million more children per year, or pay the school fees of two million children in West Africa.

"If Brazil can push the U.S. to eliminate its distorting subsidies, it will also indirectly be a victory for the C4 and the other 32 African cotton producing countries, as well as for the WTO and its credibility," Vokouma points out.

If this happens, what is the next step for the C4? "We hope that we can find a solution within the framework of multilateral negotiations but without resorting to the dispute settlement mechanism," admits Vokouma.

"This option would be the last that the C4 would use to show to the world that we don't give up on a grave non-compliance with the rules of international trade. For the time being, we alternate between multilateral negotiations and bilateral contacts with the main stakeholders," he adds.

The C4's response comes after Brazil on Mar 8 published a list of 100 U.S. goods on which it will increase custom duties to a value of 591 million dollars. These goods include tyres, cars, cosmetics, food items, pharmaceuticals and, of course, cotton, on which the increase in duty is almost 100 percent. The increase is due to enter into force within 30 days.

One week later, earlier than originally announced, Brasilia went a step further: it published a list of 21 retaliation measures concerning intellectual property, up to a total value of 238 million dollars. It concerns the suspension – without compensation and for a limited period of time – of the payment of patents on medicines, chemicals and biotechnological products for agriculture.

Payments are also suspended for copyright on music, books and U.S. movies. The Brazilian government set a deadline of 20 days for consultations on these new sanctions.

These steps happened after the WTO's historical decision in the Brazil-U.S. commercial war that has lasted for more than eight years. On Aug 31, 2009, a WTO arbitration panel authorised Brazil to retaliate against the U.S. for an amount lower than what Brasilia had asked for but which is the second highest ever granted.

In return, the panel authorised the adoption of counter-measures in sectors other than goods, namely intellectual property and services.

The WTO allows this kind of "cross-retaliation" only when measures in the same field would do more harm than good to the country concerned – for example, the application of a 100 percent custom duty on products that it badly needs, explains Nicolas Imboden,

director of the Ideas Centre in Geneva.

It is the second time that the WTO has allowed this and, if Brazil puts its threats into action, it would set a precedent in the history of the organisation.

If Brazil does take retaliating steps against intellectual property, this could put pressure on the U.S. government because lobbyists other than cotton producers could try to influence the administration and U.S. congress, according to Imboden whose centre advises the C4 and is an independent organisation assisting low-income countries with integration into the world trading system.

"Taken on its own, the WTO ruling will not change U.S. policy, even though suspending the payment of the patents on medicines could hurt the Americans a lot," says Imboden.

"However, considering the other trade pressures facing the U.S. administration – negotiation of the Doha Round, the threat of new dispute settlements, the budgetary deficit – these sanctions could be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

"The importance of these sanctions is underlined by the fact that the Americans have immediately reacted to the publication of the lists by announcing their intention to travel to Brazil and find a friendly solution. But one has to hope that the Brazilians will stick to their positions," Imboden emphasises.

The Brazilian private sector, which fears a decrease in U.S. investment, is strictly against the sanctions.

The Brazilians and the Americans have announced their intention to negotiate. Imboden doubts that Brazil will attack intellectual property: "Rather, the U.S. will probably pay compensation to Brazil without changing its cotton policy."

It will be a moral victory that puts pressure on the U.S. in the Doha Round talks but the effects could be limited as those negotiations "are not going anywhere", states Imboden. In such a case, the Africans would be the big losers.

- **When is water safe?**

DAKAR, 22 March 2010 (IRIN) - Diarrhea- inducing waterborne microbes often go undetected in parts of the world with the highest rate of under-five deaths from gastrointestinal infection.

According to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), lack of water safety regulations, inter-ministerial coordination and surveillance can paint a deceptively benign portrait of water quality.

"There are different interpretations of water safety among the line ministries [working on water issues], which makes it hard to draw a conclusion about water quality," Rolf

Luyendijk, senior statistician for water and sanitation at UNICEF, told IRIN.

Taps, boreholes, covered wells or springs, as well as rainwater, are considered "improved" and "safe" water sources but they do not guarantee safe drinking water, he said.

"Water from a dug well may not meet microbiological standards and may still be deadly," he told IRIN.

Piped water came close

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), contaminated water contributes to [more than two million deaths](#) from diarrhoea each year, plus millions of other cases of waterborne diseases.

In 2004, UNICEF and WHO piloted rapid water assessments in [Bangladesh](#), China, Ethiopia, India, [Jordan](#), Nicaragua, [Nigeria](#) and [Tajikistan](#), which showed that only piped came close to meeting international guidelines. Other water sources labelled as "improved" were about half-way compliant with the international guidelines.

Luyendijk told IRIN ministries working on water and sanitation need to improve data coordination and water quality surveillance to find out if investments are reaching the neediest.

"There is an enormous amount of money invested in boosting access [to safe water and sanitation] and those improvements have not reached the poorest quintile [20 percent]," he said.

While 84 percent of people living in low-income countries are reported to use improved water sources, eight out of 10 people without access live in rural areas, according to the latest WHO-UNICEF report on water and sanitation coverage.

Water safety plans

Luyendijk cautioned that data should never lead to complacency, citing [Uganda](#) as an example.

"The country has made tremendous improvements, boosting coverage [to improved water sources] in rural areas from 40 to 60 percent between 1990 and 2006. But in absolute numbers, [because of population growth] there are 500,000 more people [in rural areas] without access to safe drinking water," he said. "Relative improvements do not do away with absolute suffering. There is always more we can do. "

WHO recommends countries develop [water safety plans](#) and regulatory agencies to ensure not only safe water access but also water safety.

The [UN Millennium Development Goal for water](#) requires the reduction by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015 but there are no binding global agreements on water safety. WHO has issued [guidelines](#), which governments are encouraged to apply based on their means.

"What good is data without action?" said Luyendijk. "We monitor for action. To know is to act upon... People cannot live without water. But they can also die because of it."

- **West Africa volunteers' scheme launched**

Some 1,000 youths from across West Africa have marched through the streets of the Liberian capital, Monrovia, to launch a new regional volunteer scheme.

The scheme would see youths spend time helping out in areas such as agriculture, health or education in a different country to their own.

The idea is that it would help foster a common identity across Ecowas (Economic Community of West African States).

A pilot scheme will begin in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau.

Organiser Dieudonne Nikiema told the BBC's Network Africa programme that if the pilot in these countries succeeds, it would be extended across the region.

It is modeled on the UN volunteer programme.

He said so far, some \$1m of the total budget of \$5m has been raised.

Ecowas Commission President Victor Gbeho told the launch ceremony that the scheme would also help tackle youth unemployment, which he said had helped fuel the region's conflicts.

The scheme was launched to mark the 20th anniversary of Ecowas peacekeeping operations.

Ecowas troops played a key role in the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

- **Peace Corps Association Launches 'Africa Rural Connect' to Help Farmers**

Program Manager Molly Mattessich says the online network provides an avenue to discuss challenges and solutions in rural agriculture

The U.S. National Peace Corps Association has launched a unique Internet-based program that could revolutionize development planning by emphasizing the bottom-up approach.

The program, “Africa Rural Connect”, is an online global collaboration network where knowledgeable people, including African farmers, work together to communicate and respond to the needs of African farmers.

Molly Mattessich, manager of Africa Rural Connect said the network was started as a way for returned Peace Corps Volunteers, the Diaspora and African farmers to discuss challenges and solutions in rural agriculture.

“We know that people who have lived in Africa have some of the best ideas about agriculture and we thought that getting everybody to talk to one another online would be a great way to figure out some of the most creative, most practical solutions to agricultural problems. And then hopefully eventually we can try to implement some of those solutions,” she said.

Mattessich said since its inception the program has received many great ideas intended to improve the lives of subsistence farmers, mostly women in rural communities of Sub-Saharan African.

“We had a real successful year last year. We received ideas from over 12,000 people from 180 countries, and those ideas ranged from rabbit farming in Kenya to soy milk pasteurization in Ghana. A lot of people discussed issues related to water resources and reducing post-harvest losses,” Mattessich said.

She said Africa Rural Connect is a perfect avenue for ideas for those with interest in the development of Africa.

“A lot of different development agencies are looking for ideas from farmers living in Africa, and we hope to be able to provide resources to implement some of those ideas,” she said.

Mattessich said the bigger idea behind Africa Rural Connect is to encourage a bottom-up approach to agricultural development in Africa.

“We think that people on the ground know what the issues are; they know the resources that they have and we really want to understand and work with the ideas and the parameters that are on the ground...So we really want to offer a platform to the African Diaspora and farmers in Africa to share their thoughts,” Mattessich said.

She said the National Peace Corps Association has launched a new contest this year for ideas and suggestions on ways to improve the lives of subsistence farmers in Africa.

“We’ve just started a new contest for this year and from now through November of 2010 we will be awarding cash prizes to the best ideas. So it’s a great time for anyone with an idea about rural agriculture and how to make it better to post on the Website,” she said.

Mattessich said judges will select the two best ideas and both winners will each receive an award of \$1,000.

She said participants can post their ideas on the Africa Rural Connect Website.

“This contest runs through the end of this year, through November and someone can go to the Internet and the Web address is www.AfricaRuralConnect.org and they can become posting their ideas on that Website,” Mattessich said.

She said even though not every village or town in Africa has Internet, Mattessich hopes that people can hear about the Website and contact their friends or community members with access to the Internet.

“Some of the areas in which we want hear ideas from people include how to improve communication among farmers, and if someone does not have access to the Internet and they think there’s a great to get that access or using cell phone technology, if we can hear that great idea perhaps we may be able to improve online communication in that area,” Mattessich said.

- **Conoil's US\$50 Million Investment in Region Drives Stocks**

Major petroleum products marketer, Conoil Plc, has continued to post impressive performance on the floor of the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE) as investors continue to cash in on the expected favourable returns from the company's investment foray into the lucrative West African oil marketing industry.

Following the increase in its demand, the equity for the second day running this week topped the price gainers' chart as it added N1.1 to close at N40.10 per share at the end of trading on Wednesday. The equity had earlier recorded a growth of N1.90 on Tuesday to close at N39.00 per share.

Stock analysts explained that the current fortune of Conoil's stocks in the market is not unconnected with the \$50million investment drive by the company to establish mega retail outlets in the West African sub-region in a bid to extend its business portfolio and create a platform to diversify its earnings.

"The market is responding to stocks that show the fundamentals for good returns and Conoil is one of them," a stock broker Peter Aletor said, adding, "Investors are still trying to digest the package and I can assure you, by time the full import of the offshore investment drive dawn, more investors will strive to take a position."

"Investors' renewed confidence in the equity is only natural considering the company's pedigree as an organization with a consistent dividend policy," another broker said.

Specifically, Conoil was reported to be targeting West African countries where the downstream petroleum sector is fully deregulated. The company, the report added, has

earmarked about \$50 million (about N7.5 billion) for the offshore retail expansion project where it plans to construct at least five mega stations each in Ghana and Togo under the first phase of the expansion programme.

It would be recalled that for better part of early this month, the investors demand for the stock was on the upward trend, causing the oil marketing company to record 15 per cent capital appreciation of N5.37 growth in three consecutive days.

It would be recalled that Conoil pioneered the construction of new generation fuel retail outlets (dubbed mega stations) in Nigeria, where the outlet is a unique architectural masterpiece fitted with top-class facilities, including high-tech non-space fuel dispensing pumps, to offer variety of services to consumers, comparable to those in Europe and other developed parts of the world.

The offshore investment drive was said to have received the backing of the Nigerian petroleum regulatory authorities, which is in line with the government's oil sector reform plan that seeks to promote the country's indigenous enterprises to be major players in both local and overseas markets.

Conoil's strategic move into the West African market would be in consonance with the Mike Adenuga Group's business strategy of spreading its tentacles beyond Nigeria with the African continent as its ultimate goal.

Adenuga, the Conoil Chairman, has often reiterated the company's determination to set new standards of service delivery, strengthen its capital base to enable it access the real opportunities at home and abroad in order to drive its business to a more profitable level.

Industry analysts are of the view that with Ghana fast transforming into an oil-producing country, that country's downstream petroleum sector is projected to grow significantly and provide opportunities for good returns on investment.

Apart from the offshore investment drive, the company has also put in place strategic expansion programme of its retail network across the country with the aim of increasing turnover from premium motor spirit (petrol) by 60 percent.

Adenuga affirmed during the company's last annual general meeting that Conoil remained committed to maintaining its growth momentum, building value for customers and delivering competitive profitability.

The Chairman also reassured all stakeholders of the will and capability of the company's Board and management to benchmark Conoil against best global standards and practices in order to make it a world-class company that every Nigerian will be proud of.

Conoil he said, had taken steps to consolidate its strength across the businesses by investing in new facilities and developing a new portfolio of excellent brands, supported by effective distribution machinery.

According to him, the company is poised to acquire additional capacity to meet the long-term needs of its growing business.

• **US-Africa Command IG Conference Underway**

THE FIRST United States and Africa command Inspector General (IG) outreach conference started at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) in Accra on Tuesday, to help African military leaders champion standards, performance and also illustrates how the work of the IG system contributes to the fight against crime and corruption.

The conference, which ended yesterday, would provide a platform to discuss IG's missions, principles, organizational structures, operations, challenges and best practices of the system in the various countries.

Col. Ron Baldinger of the US Air Force explained that the IG system as a military commander's tool to instill and maintain accountability as well as professionalism.

It also allowed the military commander to ensure that soldiers and their families got a venue for exposing violations, coupled with wrongdoings, when all other avenues had failed or are unresponsive.

The IG is the means by which a commander can monitor forces for compliance with established standards and policies, he said.

Facilitators of the three-day conference were drawn from both the military and government agencies in the US, France and Sierra Leone, along with members of the 'African Parliamentarians' Network Against Corruption' (APNAC) to share their IG experience with the over 23 countries represented.

After the conference, Col. Baldinger hoped the participants would take away with them the knowledge and best practices of the IG systems.

In his remarks, Commandant of the KAIPTC, Air vice Marshal Christian Edem Dovlo urged all partakers to exchange ideas with both the facilitators and their fellow members.

He linked some of the KAIPTC's core principles and values to the IG, mentioning professionalism, excellence, honesty, integrity and accountability.

Its other function includes the creation of platforms for sharing experience between our armed forces and other regional and international bodies, and we believe that this IG conference will go a long way in satisfying these objectives, he emphasized.

- **Africa media hub to ease access to US officials**

A media hub was opened by the United States in Johannesburg, South Africa, so that the US government message is visible, active and effective in advocating US policies, priorities, and actions with African audiences.

This was disclosed by the Director of the African Regional Media Hub Mary Deane Connors when she visited the corporate headquarters of Media Trust limited in Abuja yesterday.

She said the U.S will ensure that policy makers read papers like Daily Trust, instead of reading foreign papers about Africa because the news might not be accurate, out of lack of understanding.

She said President Barack Obama prioritized relationship with African countries and looks at countries like Nigeria as focus for foreign policy, “not just to make the message out but to ensure that he and his administration officials are hearing what is coming out of Nigeria.”

“What we do is to ensure that you have access to U.S officials about things you need which can be arranged with media in East Africa or South Africa on issues like food security, human trafficking and on continental issues towards election period, democracy, good governance,” she said.

According to her, “If you come to us and say you are working on U.S trade story, and you want high level official to speak on what is happening in U.S., we will connect you with the direct officer who can speak on the matter and if you have somebody in mind we can link you up.”

“We are not promising to link you up with President Obama; if we cannot help you we will be honest and tell you the truth,” she added.

The Deputy Director of Africa Media Hub Wangui E. Muchiri said “When there is a guest from U.S. in Africa, we can help you set up interview. If for instance the guest is in Namibia and you are not in Namibia, and you believe the interview will add relevance to your report, you can do it directly by telephone call or set up the questions and send it to me via e-mail and I will do it for you.”

Ghana:

1. Political News:

• Seizure of Cache of Ammunitions in the North

THE NORTHERN Regional Police Command has refused to succumb to public pressure to name top politicians it claims were behind the recent cache of ammunitions seized from a Bunkpurugu bound vehicle.

It would be recalled that the police in Tamale intercepted a bus travelling from Kumasi to Bunkpurugu with ammunitions concealed under the driver's seat.

The vehicle, which was searched at Datoyili, near Tamale, was found to be carrying 178 rounds of AK 47 ammunition, 80 rounds of pistol bullets and eight bayonets, among others.

Following the interception of the bus, the driver, Abdala Yaro, 28, and his mate, Yennusom Ibrahim, 20, were arrested for unlawful possession of military accoutrements without authority, and were arraigned before court in Tamale.

After the arrest of the driver and his mate, the Police Command publicly stated that it had in its possession the names of some prominent politicians from the region, who were allegedly fueling the importation of the ammunitions, but however declined to put out their names.

This has generated heated debate on radio discussions across the three Northern regions - Northern, Upper East and Upper West.

The arguments of social commentators were that since the police had made public the names of the driver and his mate, they should have equally published the names of the so-called prominent politicians.

Their arguments were monitored by this reporter, who then spoke with the Northern Regional Public Relations Officer of the Police Service, Chief Inspector Ebenezer Tettey.

Mr. Tettey appreciated the public's right to make such a demand, because they wanted those politicians to be named and shamed, but stated categorically that the police also had the responsibility to ensure that no person's reputation was injured unnecessarily. "We are checking and double checking the information we have," he stressed.

He said, as a service, the police was working strictly in accordance with the laws of Ghana, and would not want to be seen to be going against the same laws.

He indicated that the information had been given to other appropriate security agencies, which were also working on it.

To this end, the police would continue to keep those names close to its chest, so they do not impede their investigations.

Meanwhile, Mr. Tettey said the driver and his mate appeared before court last Monday, and pleaded not guilty to two counts of possessing firearms without lawful authority, and possessing military accoutrement without lawful authority.

They were remanded into the Tamale Prison custody, and would reappear in court on March 29, this year, for the trial to begin.

• **Changing the “Rule of Law” To the “Rule of Parties”**

Weep for our country! Weep for the rule of law! Despite the fine words of our constitution and the stirring cadences of our national anthem, we live, not under the “rule of law” but the “rule of parties”.

In the last few weeks, as the Tuobodom-Techiman-Asante crisis has unfolded, we have been reminded, forcefully, that being on the right side of the political or chieftaincy divide, in Ghana, matters more than being on the right side of the law.

Of course, we did not just get to the rule of party. We have been on this ill-fated journey since independence and chieftaincy has been a major but by no means the only catalyst.

Dagbon--- Bawku---Ga Mashie--- Anlo---Bunkpurugu Yunyoo and now Tachiman/Tuobodom, to mention only a handful. These have come to symbolize our adherence, more often than not, to the argument of force rather than the force of argument in our national life. In the name of chieftaincy, periodically, some take the law into their hands, destroy properties and then kill and maim some Ghanaians. Sometimes, while at it, some brag about their connections to the government of the day and how nothing can happen to them despite their violation of our laws and our sense of decency.

Then the usual response happens. The government appeals for restraint. The Peace Council or some group of elders lectures us about the importance of peace. The media reports on what happened in a distorted manner and a few people call for justice and are studiously ignored by our government. We all agonize about what happened and then move on--- to nothing.

Of course, if this indifference of our government to murder and lawlessness should tempt you into doubting the ability of our government to project power, think again. If you are associated with the opposition and make a careless remark about a revered ex-President, you can be arraigned and jailed within hours--- to preserve the public order even while murderers walk the land free!

The basic facts of the Tuobodom-Tachiman-Asante crisis appear not to be in dispute. About two weeks ago, the bodyguards of the Tachimanhene, Osabarima Akumfi Ameyaw, kidnapped the Omanhene of Tuobodom, Nana Baffour Asare II and took him

to the palace of the Tachimanhene where he was tortured before being handed over to the police. Somewhere in the course of this unfortunate incident, the Tachimanhene reportedly bragged that since his party is in power, he could do whatever he wanted and nothing would happen to him. Since then, the Tachimanhene has averred that what happened was not a kidnapping but a citizen's arrest!

After waiting for what he considered a reasonable period for the government to react, the Asantehene, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II reacted in anger. While his anger was understandable, the Asantehene's remarks were not appropriate. In response to the Asantehene's remarks, the government sent a delegation to de-escalate the tension and to promote reconciliation. There were offers of mediation as well as appeals for calm from the Brong Ahafo Regional House of Chiefs, some members of Parliament and some NPP elders. While all this was playing out, the National Security Advisor was speaking to the press. After visiting Manhyia, the Security Chief pledged that the government will deal "with any culpable person in the regrettable incident under review." However, after meeting with the Tachimanhene later, the security capo, according to peacefmonline.com said "of particular concern was the alleged attempted assassination of the Tachimanhene in October, 2008." Really? Why would the alleged assassination attempt of 2008 for which a trial is under way be of particular concern here?

Predictably, regardless of what has been said, there appears to be very little appetite for accountability in this incident. Once again, we have on full display our national penchant for ignoring the facts even when they are staring us in the face.

I will get to the rule of party and its implication but let me draw your attention to a few things.

First, in the government delegation that met both the Asantehene and the Tachimanhene was the General Secretary of the NDC, Mr. Asiedu Nketia. Was this an indication that the government was more interested in the politics of this case than the law and order aspects?

Second, the reactions to this incident from various quarters have been interesting.

The government that had Nana Darkwa arraigned within hours of his unflattering comments about former President Rawlings on grounds of public order has not found it necessary to make arrests in this case involving deaths, kidnappings and threats, while some who reacted with indignation to the government's attempts to muzzle Darkwa are baying for the blood of Ato Kwamena Dadzie, for his unflattering comments about the Asantehene. There is hypocrisy on all sides. If the government was as concerned about security in this crisis as it professed to be after the remarks about President Rawlings, quite a few people ought to be in jail by now. Similarly, if those who stood up to defend Nana Darkwa were consistent, they would be lining up to defend Ato Kwamena now. That he found the Asantehene's comments more disturbing than the kidnapping and murders was indefensible. That however, should not justify threats against him. Freedom

of speech requires that we must occasionally tolerate irresponsible opinion like that of Ato on this issue.

In the flurry of misguided reactions, the one bright light was Dr. Annin who counseled the government to separate criminal activities from chieftaincy issues and punish the perpetrators to serve as a deterrent to others.

In his comments on this issue, the National Security Advisor has underlined how far we have strayed from the rule of law. Said the Brigadier “With the allegation that a chief says “my party is now in power” and so on. Now when a party is in power, the government formed is a government of all the people not a government of the members of that party, all these are hampering the work of the security people” Continuing, the Security Chief said “You have people in the security services—the police, the army some are saying “he is a party man”, “he is not a party man” that shouldn’t happen, that shouldn’t be the case, but unfortunately we are in that kind of situation which we have to find a solution to.” These are profound enough but he was not done. He concluded “People are not doing their work and this is the biggest problem we face at the moment and also you’ve got so much politics as I said earlier, in what we do so that if something happen, people just say this is not our man, this is not our party man. This shouldn’t be the case! If you go wrong, the law shouldn’t have any business in saying that “this is not one of us” he is one of us so the law shouldn’t deal with the person, the law should deal with everybody”

Are we truly a democracy? Do we live under the rule of law?

It is sad that in a government led by a Law Professor, it was left to a soldier and a Security Chief to bemoan the politicization of our institutions and the absence of fairness in the application of our laws. But the Brigadier should have smelled the coffee long ago. The “this is our man syndrome” he decries has been obvious with this government from day one. From the struggle over toilets to the seizure of cars to the targeting of people for prosecution, it has all been about “us and them” for this government. While I concede that this practice has been with us since independence and just worsened under the NDC, I find the strategy of justifying one’s mistakes by referring to the mistakes of others silly. With that attitude, our nation will never move forward.

The question to the Brigadier is “When Sir, are you going to walk your talk? Are you going to wring your hands in agony and yet join or at the least condone the rule of party by the NDC?”

How can we restore the rule of law and respect for our institutions?

First, we MUST end the practice of sacking non-political appointees like service commanders, the IGP and others with every election. When the IGP loses his job because the party that appointed him is out of power, the message to ordinary policemen and women is to tilt to the political winds if they want job security and promotions. We must

appoint these people to fixed terms and make it possible to fire them only for clearly defined cause.

Second, politicians must end the practice of promising that every party member will get a job with victory. There are just not enough jobs and contracts for everybody. We should move to the point where most people work for candidates and parties because they share the vision of the party and/or candidate.

Third, the judiciary and other institutions must stand up for the rule of law. When it takes months to years to get a case before a judge but one can be found to try a panelist associated with the opposition for some childish remarks about a former President, it conveys the unfortunate impression that judges care more about insults to big men than the murder of ordinary people and that our justice is not party-blind.

Fourth, we should separate prosecutorial decisions from politics. The recent pressure on the Attorney General to bring charges against members of the NPP for crimes, real and imagined has harmed the reputation of our justice system and we deserve better.

Finally, as citizens, let support those who expand and respect our freedoms and reject with our thumbs, those who undermine the rule of law.

Those who will undermine our institutions and our laws do not deserve our support.

Thomas Jefferson had it right when he said “The care of human life and happiness, not their destruction, is the first and only legitimate object of good governance.”

Lawyer Mills and his government will do well to heed the words of Lawyer Jefferson.

- **Gov’t Should Stop Creating ‘Propaganda Jobs’ and Focus on Real Job Creation.**

In his State of the Nation address this year, President John Mills admitted that his administration was yet to make any impact in the jobs market but expressed optimism.

“As the measures we took to halt the decline in the economy last year such as lower interest rates and increased credit to the private sector begin to translate into a much more conducive employment generation environment, we expect a turnaround in the jobs market. Meanwhile I have directed all sectors to mainstream job-creation into their programmes and Ministers are required by the middle of the year to produce sector blueprints for the creation of jobs.”

Yet, his Information Ministry has gone as far as to tell Ghanaians that the turn around in the jobs market has already begun in a big way even before the Government’s concerted policy on job creation has been formulated.

On Tuesday night, Paul Adom Otchere hosted Deputy Information Minister Sammy Okudzeto Ablakwa on his *Good Evening Ghana* programme to tell the public about what government was doing in erecting the building blocks of a better Ghana.

1.6 Million Jobs

The discussion predictably narrowed down to a claim made by the Deputy Minister on the front page of the Daily Graphic last Friday that through government policies 1 million 600 thousand employment places “have so far been created for the youth” in Ghana since President Mills took charge last year. This translates into an average of 4,383 new jobs being created daily since January 7 2009.

The Danquah Institute would like to state that these jobs statistics from Government are regrettably inconsistent and irreconcilable with the trend of figures available through government departments other than the Ministry of Information. They therefore appear to have been released for their anticipated propaganda value than any credible attempt to make them reflect anything close to the real situation on the labour market.

Mr Okudzeto Ablakwa said in the *Graphic* interview that the government’s agenda to create jobs was on course, as the Youth-in-Agriculture programme (block farming concept) had so far created 47,000 jobs. He explained that in the road sector, capital intensive interventions which included feeder roads, urban roads and highway contracts had so far generated 950 jobs, while the labour-based segment had generated 555,000 jobs.

Additionally, he stated, the oil and gas sector had so far created 1,000 jobs, ranging from onshore activities, while the Eco Brigade and the Civil Service had engaged 10,000 and 982 people, respectively.

Mr Okudzeto Ablakwa said President Mills, conscious of the massive unemployment situation in the country, had adopted “pragmatic solutions” to solve the problem or “reduce it to the barest minimum” and stressed the need for the collaboration of all towards the achievement of that goal. Details of those ‘pragmatic solutions’ are yet to be made public to those who are at the forefront of creating jobs, the private sector.

1.3 Million Construction Jobs

On TV Tuesday night, Mr Okudzeto Ablakwa went as far as to claim that 1.3 million of the new jobs he claims have been created were in the road sector. How was this possible? He said there were over 180,000 registered contractors working in the road sector and that they have created such new jobs.

1.6 million jobs created in one year. That is a remarkable achievement by any stretch of the imagination, especially in a global recession year like 2009. Moreover, President John Mills has himself admitted that Ghana has also been affected badly by the global recession: “No country has been immune from the world economic meltdown,” he said at his 2010 State of the Nation Address.

More Questions than Answers

While one may be instinctively inclined to see this 1.6 million as a remarkable achievement by an economy that we were told was broke and has been slowly but surely recovering from a recession, the Danquah Institute, however, believes that the 1.6 million employment figure churned out from government deserves a deeper scrutiny from the country and better explanations from Government; it asks more questions than it seeks to answer. For example:

Are these really new jobs that have been created since 2009 in addition to existing jobs?

How many jobs were lost during the same period?

If they are indeed real net gains, how then does Government reconcile the jobs created in the public sector in

2009 with the Breton Wood conditionalities involving a net freeze in public sector employment?

How many jobs were lost in 2008 and previous years?

Is it not time to task and resource the Ghana Statistical Service, probably through the Labour Market Information System (LMIS), to come out with quarterly employment/unemployment figures?

How can Government reconcile these declared remarkable gains in the jobs market with the sluggish domestic economic performance of 2009?

Has Government commissioned any research on the impact of last year's high inflation, high interest rates, low business and consumer confidence, suppressed public sector spending and delayed payments to contractors, etc, on the labour market and if so what were the findings and recommendations?

Would it surprise government to know that 1.6 million new jobs represent the biggest ratio of jobs creation in any country in the world in 2009 and that the figure represents more than a 15% rise in Ghana's estimated total employment rate, including the informal sector?

Is government aware that 1.6 million represents an employment figure higher than the total number of workers in Ghana registered as making statutory contributions to the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT) and if so what have been the efforts to have all these new job entrants captured under the workers' contribution scheme?

We see the 1.6 million jobs creation figure as quaint, unordinary and a very strange claim for any government to make, especially for a year marked by austere fiscal measures to

tackle a sizeable budget deficit and other macroeconomic challenges that the Ghanaian economy was facing.

Comparing Ghana's Employment Claims to South Africa's

It may help to compare Ghana's employment creation claims to that of South Africa, the continent's largest economy. Employment in Africa's biggest economy edged up 0.2%, representing 18,000 new jobs on the quarter in the final three months of 2009 to slightly more than 8.16 million, according to figures released this week from Statistics South Africa.

Yet, in spite of huge expenditure lay out by the country hosting the World Cup this June, a total of 870,000 jobs were lost last year, with 351,000 of that being formal jobs. That 351,000 figure translates into jobs lost of 4.1% from December 2008 to December 2009. Again, South Africa has a working age population (15- to 65-year-olds) of more than 30 million; Ghana has less than half of that number.

Incidentally the two areas which suffered severe job losses in South Africa (manufacturing and construction) did not fair any better in Ghana, too. The NDC had, in the 2009 budget, predicted construction growing by 8%, yet it was the worst performed area in 2009, registering -1% growth, followed by hotels and restaurants, registering a mere 2% growth. These areas which registered the lowest performance last year are the very areas with the capacity to create hundreds of thousands of jobs, both directly and otherwise.

By the 2000 Population and Housing Census, about half of Ghana's population, 9,039,318 Ghanaians, was considered employed or economically active. Also, only 5.9% of them, numbering 533,811 were earning their living in the public sector, with another 258,928 (2.2%) working with parastatals.

Ghana Living Standards Survey

Also, estimates from the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS) indicate that 9.4 million adult Ghanaians aged 15 years and above were economically active in 2006. Based on the 2006 estimated population of Ghana of 22.3 million, Ghana's working population was put at 13.4 million. Out of this, about 3% were estimated to be unemployed (i.e. had no work, available for work and actively looking for work) in the narrow sense, compared to "broad unemployment" rate of 6.4%. The narrow unemployment rate among the youth aged 15-24 was 6.4% as against 13.4% broadly unemployed. In the urban areas, 22.5% of the youth were classified as unemployed in the broader sense compared to 12.8% who fell in the narrow unemployment rate.

What the above estimates show, if they are anything to go by, is that in spite of the population growing by some five million or so and the economy growing from \$4 billion to \$16 billion, Ghana's employment rate grew only very marginally from the 2000 census figure of 9 million to 9.4 million by 2006.

Moreover, what the 2000 figures showed was that 7.3 million (80.3%) of the jobs were within the informal sector, with only 7.8% in the formal private sector and 5.9% in the public sector. With the so-called 1.6 million new jobs not making any inflationary difference to the list of SSNIT contributors, it should be asked whether by any chance it is a deliberate policy by government to further widen the informal sector of the economy. How then does this sit comfortably with Government's focus on expanding the revenue net to raise funds to support its budget?

It is also significant to note that the only area that Government was able to show details of data of jobs created actually paled in significant comparison with jobs created in that same sector in previous years. Government spokespersons have readily showed which regions the 982 public sector jobs were created. But, available data from the Ministry of Employment & Social Welfare indicates that, for example, in December 2004, the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) employed a total of 328,733. This shot up by 8,880 to 328,733 by December 2005. Again, by 2007, the MDAs employed 376,211 people. By December 2008, an additional 26,744 more staff members had been added to the list pushing it up to 402,955. Add subvented agencies and others to it then the figures push up further to 477,736.

What these figures do is to make the 1.6 million job creation claim by Government appear rather curious and *orphanic* in the scheme of things. What the spectacular 2009 job statistics from Government seem to do is to offer the impression that the Mills administration's has a histrionic lack of elementary understanding of labour market fundamentals.

In our comments last November on the 2010 budget read by the Minister of Finance, we said that "based on Government's own projection of a Gross Domestic Product figure of Gh¢21 billion, in dollar terms, Ghana's GDP would be 12.27% lower in 2009 than it was in 2008. Using the prevailing rate of 1\$ to Gh¢1.45, this values the Ghanaian economy of 2009 at US\$14.6 billion, about \$1.8 billion lower than 2008, when the GDP was valued at US\$16.4 billion."

Ghana's Economy Shrank by \$2bn in 2009

In short, the Government is telling us today that the very economy which shrunk by nearly \$2 billion jobs managed somewhat miraculously to create almost an equal number of jobs, 1.6 million at the same time.

Until 2009, for nearly a decade, Ghana's economy witnessed significant, consistent nominal growth in both cedi and dollar terms. What we witnessed last year was a worrying but explainable departure from that trend to a reversal of the situation that prevailed before 2001, at least in dollar terms.

Thus, assuming since 2000, the Ghanaian labour market had been growing by a mere 60% a year of the 1.6 million figure Government is claiming for last year, almost the

entire Ghanaian population, including toddlers, would have by now been enjoying gainful employment.

By the 2009 provisional figures available in 2010 budget, total revenue and grants for the period were 3.5% below target; domestic revenue was 11.3% below target; import revenue was 4.6% lower than anticipated; international trade taxes lower 16.3% lower than target; NHIL was 15.5% lower on target; receipts on non-tax revenue were also lower. Domestic VAT was projected to be 15.2% lower than budget target, and grants and loans targets were also projected to be missed.”

Even looking ahead, total budget for the MDAs for 2010 is a mere 1.9 percentage points higher than what it was in 2009.

There is every indication that current trends in jobs creation are largely seasonal, casual and not ambitious enough for a developing economy in a well-considered hurry. This goes against the NDC campaign promise to shift from “artificial jobs” to sustainable jobs for the youth.

In 2008, John Dramani Mahama, the then running mate to John Evans Atta Mills, stated that if voted into office, the National Democratic Congress would “gradually phase out” the National Youth Employment Programme, which was employing nearly 110,000 Ghanaians at the time. He said this at the Youth Explosion conference organised by the Word Miracle Church International on 11th July 2008 at the Trade Fair Centre at La, Accra.

Government Policy on Employment

Last year, the Mills administration outlined its employment vision as thus: “The government policy on employment is to create and promote productive employment opportunities in all sectors of the economy, with the overarching goal of enabling all persons who are available and willing to work, secure a sustainable livelihood through full productive and freely chosen employment.”

Thus, Government reaffirmed its commitment to the attainment of “full employment” in Ghana by putting every Ghanaian who can work and wants to work to work.

Furthermore, Government has cited the example of the construction sector for evidence of growth in the labour market. “They are very visible for Ghanaians to see,” according to Mr. Okudzeto Ablakwa.

Yet, much of the evidence points to a publicly declared policy of discontinuation of several road construction contracts last year, including some major projects, which severely suppressed that industry into negative growth in 2009.

Whilst we welcome a renewed interest on the part of Government to continue with these projects and initiate some new ones, as well, it would be useful to know the number of

jobs that were lost last year as a result of that suspension fiat before the full implications of any jobs created this and subsequent years could be better appreciated.

The decision by Government earlier in the month to pay road contractors their outstanding arrears, starting with the release of GH¢20 million from the Road Fund as part payment, was positive in reviving and saving jobs. We welcome that, too.

It is, however, recalled that on 4th August 2008, before the Association of Road Contractors (ASROC) Ghana, and the Association of Building and Civil Engineering Contractor of Ghana (ABECEG), the then Presidential Candidate of the NDC, Prof. Mills promised them that an NDC government would not only ensure prompt payment but also pay interest on payment delayed. There has been subsequent silence on the interest payment pledge.

According to the Association of Ghanaian Industries, “The SME sector had several near collapse cases caused by unfair competition, high interest rates and the other challenges” outlined in the AGI business climate survey.

“In addition some exports such as bauxite, exports under AGOA, and manufactured exports were severely affected. In addition the index of the Ghana Stock Exchange, a very good indication of overall corporate performance has declined by about 50%.

“In both cases there is relatively high unemployment, which results in an absence of demand and thus no incentive to produce or manufacture or offer services, and thus the unemployment remains high,” according to the AGI.

Labour Market Information System (LMIS)

During his turn on the ‘Meet the Press’ ministerial series, on Tuesday 18th August, 2009, the then Minister of Employment & Social Welfare, Amoanor Kwao, spoke blithely of plans to get a systematic hold on reliable date on the employment situation in Ghana. He conceded that the problem of inadequate, inaccurate, and diffused labour market statistics has affected effective planning over the years.

He confirmed that the Ministry and its tripartite partners were implementing a Labour Market Information System (LMIS) which began in 2006 to address the challenges. The LMIS, he explained, is basically focused on data collection, processing, analysing and dissemination of Labour Market Information for use by stakeholders. The Ghana Statistical Service is a key partner in this programme.

“A significant feature of the LMIS is the provision of opportunities for job seekers, employers and potential investors to interact via the web. A labour market information system home page has been successfully developed and it is on trial. The website address is www.lmisghana.org.gh,” the Minister said.

What is the current state of the LMIS programme? At least, it is obvious that the website, has made very little impact on the labour market and its menus are yet to be loaded with relevant contents. LMIS statistics on the site indicate merely 55 Job Seekers, 22 Available CVs, 11 Employers and 6 Available Job vacancies.

So far, the evidence is that the Ghanaian economy is struggling with low consumer spending, low production and retail sales, the very factors that hurt jobs while Government attempts to bring down the budget deficit. These difficulties are not resolved by the manufacture of propaganda jobs or the temporary fix of casual labour.

Indeed, President Mills has admitted that “The National Youth Employment Programme and the Youth In Agriculture Programme are only temporary expedients out of what is a major problem of unemployment that we inherited in January last year. “

Ultimately of course, he adds, “the solution lies in skills training and an expansion in the economy to increase the jobs available. We are tackling this in a three-pronged approach of an expansion in the service industry, an expansion and improvement in the manufacturing sector and an expansion of the agro-industrial sector.”

Jobs creation, quality and accessible education and healthcare and a serious and furious attack on poverty are what Ghanaians were made to expect from their government of social democrats.

But, we shall also insist that a free market, respect for contractual obligations and the general observance of an atmosphere which encourages and rewards entrepreneurship and generally boosts investor confidence in our economy prevail for the creation of sustainable jobs.

Within one year, from 2008 to 2009, the Ghana Stock Exchange turned from being the world’s best performing bourse to the world’s worst. That certainly does not encourage investment. Government should focus more on what brings jobs than what propagates phantom jobs.

The author is the Executive Director of the Danquah Institute, an Accra-based liberal policy think tank.

2. Economy:

- **Laws to ensure accountability in oil revenue attract public attention**

Strong laws will stem corruption, enhance transparency and promote effective use of oil resources to enhance development.

These were the views of participants at a forum to solicit ideas on how the country's petroleum resources could be used to spur growth.

According to them, legislations that makes it mandatory for oil companies to report and publish their production figures as well as what had accrued to government would ensure accurate assessment and maximize government's revenue.

The participants included political party representatives, Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives, experts from academia, pupils and heads of government institutions.

The forum is part of a nationwide effort to solicit views from Ghanaians on laws on the management of the oil revenue that would accrue after production begins in the last quarter of this year.

Government revenue from oil is expected to be about 800 million dollars on average per year between 2011 and 2029 based on the country producing 500 million barrels of oil.

Looking at the volumes of inflows, participants suggested the establishment of a regulatory authority to supervise and monitor the activities of the oil companies.

Mr. Benjamin Asante, Lead Geophysics at the Ghana National Petroleum Corporation, said Ghana now has five major fields with prospects of further discoveries.

He said the Jubilee Field, which had been developed and ready for production had about 800 million barrels with an upside potential of 1.5 billion barrels of light sweet crude oil.

About 280 million barrels of oil are expected to be produced at the Jubilee Field, during the first phase of production with daily production of 120,000 barrels.

The local content and participation would ensure that majority of Ghanaians are involved in the oil production activities.

Dr. Joe Amoako-Tuffuor, Advisor to the Minister of Finance and Economic Planning, said the broad consultations were to ensure that Ghana derived maximum benefits from her oil.

He said the consultation was also to establish a revenue management law that is acceptable, will ensure checks and balances and has sufficient safeguards for transparency and accountability.

Nii Armah Ashietey, Greater Accra Regional Minister, said government would draw on the experiences of other oil rich countries, especially in the area of security and environmental management, to deal with any potential threat.

He said it was important that the expected revenue was used to enhance development to the benefit of the present and future generations.

- **Gov't urged to fight 'galamsey' as it robs the country of royalties and taxes.**

The Senior Vice President of AngloGold Ashanti (Ghana), Dr. Toby Bradbury, has reiterated that the government should exercise the political will in fighting illegal mining activities (galamsey), which are dwindling the mining sector's contribution towards economic growth.

He urged the government to provide the people with alternative livelihood skills, seen as an essential tool for the country's development.

According to Dr. Bradbury, the illegal activities of galamsey operators rob the nation of expected royalties and taxes, noting that galamsey leaves an environmental legacy that the country will live with for many, many years, and potentially forever.”

He was speaking at the installation of Prof. Kofi Anyidoho, as the first occupant of the faculty of African Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon, in Accra.

Dr. Bradbury further emphasised that the call had become crucial, because mining activities ought to be carried out in a responsible way, devoid of destroying the environment.

The practice of illegal mining, he continued, posed dangerous threats, with hundreds of operators being killed or maimed each year.

Because it is illegal, the activity and the people involved are closely associated with corruption, he said.

The AngloGold Ashanti Vice President noted that apart from the substantial financial and employment contribution mining provided towards the economic growth of the country, it was equally important to be undertaken by competent people, with the requisite skills in the sector.

Dr. Bradbury added, we are human and mistakes can occur. What is essential is that we learn from our mistakes, improve our skills, and fix the problems. With galamsey, there is no such recourse, and the damage being done today in Ghana, is incalculable.

He hinted that as a result of his outfit's commitment to supporting its Ghanaian employees, some had, since 2005, taken advanced courses in both the country's universities and abroad, citing, 45 employees, who successfully took the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) postgraduate diploma course last year.

3. Energy:

• Oil Curse – Gov't to Ensure Revenue Benefits the Masses

As Ghana prepares to start crude oil production from its Jubilee deepwater oil field in the last quarter of 2010, the government has said it is determined to put measures in the place to avoid squandering oil revenues otherwise known as oil curse.

The Vice-President of the country John Dramani Mahama said that Ghana would not be found in a situation where people would be forced to say "that when they found oil, it turned out to be a curse for them".

He made this statement while delivering the keynote address at the ongoing Ghana Oil Summit tagged: "Ghana Summit; Oil, Gas & the Frontier Province".

He was apparently reacting to comments by some industry operators that the discovery of oil in the country should not be allowed to turn the country into another "Nigeria's Niger Delta".

Mahama said the discovery of oil and gas in commercial quantities has also thrown up the challenge of how the country plans to manage the oil industry and whether it has the necessary legal and institutional frameworks in place.

The vice-president who was represented by the Minister of Energy, Dr. Oteng Adjei, said Ghana is aware of the problem of corruption, mismanagement, underdevelopment, social conflicts and environmental damage in oil-rich countries.

"Ladies and gentlemen, let me assure you, whether it turns out to be a curse is a choice. I assure you the people of Ghana have made a choice and it is simple: we will ensure that the oil turns out to be a blessing to our people and to our friends.

"We will never give room or do anything that will lead this country to be classified as one of those that when they got oil, it turned out to be a curse to them. Never and it is a choice that we pledge to our friends," he said.

One of the lead speakers and Chairman of K-San Law Firm Mr. Charles Owusu Juanah, said Ghana should learn from the experience of Nigeria by ensuring that the oil and gas operation and the relations between industry operators and host communities are free from violence.

"It is very clear that in our neighbouring country Nigeria - in the Niger Delta there are problems of unrest in the oil industry. It will be wise for government not to be complacent. It hasn't started in Ghana yet, but as soon as the oil starts pumping out, it might start when people are disgruntled and the rest of it.

"So, it is better for Ghana not to be a by-stander; to employ those measures so that by the time anything of such happens, I am not saying it is going to happen, by the time anything of such happens, they will be ready to combat it," he said.

He argued that Ghana stands to gain by adhering strictly to the widely recognised International Corporate Social Responsibility (CRS) Performance and Reporting Guidelines.

Juanah charged the government to facilitate efforts to increase the quantity and quality of CRS reporting by the participating oil companies.

But the vice-president assured the operators that the government would create an enabling environment by ensuring transparency and accountability in all spheres of the economy, including oil and gas operations.

"One sure way of implementing this commitment is to sign on to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), which sets the global standard of transparency in the flows of revenue from the country's extractive industries through full publications and verifications of companies' payments and government receipts.

"For now, the Ghana EITI process is restricted to the mining industry. It is my expectation that in the coming months every effort will be made to conclude the process of extending the EITI to the oil sector. Government believes that as a nation, we can benefit immensely from transparency. Transparency improves the investment climate because it provides clear signals to investors and international financial institutions that government is committed to doing what is right and internationally acceptable," the vice-president said.

He said government is reviewing the various legislations and regulations relating to oil and gas exploration and development.

According to him, the executive arm of government would soon send three important bills to the Ghana Parliament - an amendment to the Petroleum Law and a Revenue Management Bill - that will promote good governance and accountability in the petroleum sector.

"I call on all of us to welcome the president's intention to establish an independent body to manage the revenue expected from the country's oil resources to ensure transparency and effective management," he added.

He disclosed that the amendment of the petroleum law provides for the creation of a Petroleum Regulatory Authority (PRA) to oversee industry operations and also for investor friendly environment for domestic as well as international investors.

• Ghana, Kosmos Nearing Compromise on Jubilee Sale

Talks between authorities in Ghana and U.S. oil firm Kosmos over the sale of its stake in the Jubilee oil field are ongoing with expectations that a compromise will be reached, the deputy energy minister said Friday.

"We have been engaged in various mutual discussions with Kosmos and we expect to reach a compromise that would be beneficial to the two parties," Emmanuel Armah-Kofi Buah, told AFP.

Asked whether Kosmos has formally approached the government with plans to shelve the disposal of its stake, the minister said: "As far as I know, government has not received any proposal or approach from Kosmos in this direction."

"We are still seriously having mutual discussions," Armah-Kofi Buah added.

He did not disclose details or give any indications on when an agreement might be reached between the two parties.

The U.S. company had said last year it wanted to sell its stakes in the West Cape Three Points and adjacent Deepwater Tano blocks in the Jubilee field, one of west Africa's largest oil finds in the past decade.

With more than a billion barrels in reserves, the first barrels of crude are expected from the field in the last quarter of the year.

Kosmos has a 30.875% interest in the West Cape Three Points Block and a 18% stake in Deepwater Tano Block in the Gulf of Guinea.

Kosmos Energy's attempt to sell its stake to ExxonMobil was blocked after the state-owned Ghana National Petroleum Corporation raised legal issues with the deal, saying it constituted a breach of an earlier agreement.

4. Environment:

• EU Supports Country's Water Sector with? 402 Million

The Tenth European Development Fund (2008 -2013) has allocated EUR 402 million to Ghana for development, especially for the improvement of the water and sanitation sector. In addition, more than 50% of this amount equivalent to EUR 210 million will be provided through General Budget Support, Mr Kurt Cornelis, Head of Cooperation, Delegation of the European Delegation to Ghana, has revealed.

Currently, he said, only approximately three percent of the Government of Ghana (GoG) budget is allocated to the water and sanitation sector; and that over 90% of the funding to the sector is provided by Development Partners, largely through projects.

Mr. Cornelis, made these disclosures at the launch of the four - day Second Action Oriented Sector - Wide Approach (SWAp) workshop organized by the Water Directorate of the of the Ministry of Water Resources ,Works and Housing in Accra It was under the theme "Deepening the Understanding of the Roles and Responsibilities of the Ghana Water SWAp".

According to him, the SWAp is not just a joint dialogue between the government, technical and financial partners and other sector actors but that it allows government to define and implement its sector programmes.

He further explained that, the SWAp was not just to attract more funding but more critically to increase the impact of investments into the country and improve the management of the water Sector.

Mr. Cornelis said in an effort for the European Union (EU) to meet its commitments under the Paris Delegation and Accra Agenda for Action, the percentage of its aid to be provided through this modality was likely to increase.

Hon Alban Bagbin, the Minister for Water Resources, Works and Housing, indicated that in recognition of the role of water and sanitation as catalyst for socio economic development, government's policy will focus on the effective management and utilization of water as a resource to ensure sustainability; ensuring the availability of acceptable quality and sufficient quantities of water to satisfy the basic requirements of every Ghanaian and providing sufficient sanitation services.

He said it is his expectation that Ghana will learn from the experiences of Uganda, Mozambique and Malawi where the SWAp has successfully been implemented.

He disclosed that in line with the Better Ghana Agenda, government will continue to introduce various reforms and initiatives aimed at improving the performance of the Water and Sanitation sector for the achievement of national and MDG targets. He said these reforms and initiatives have become more necessary if Government is to achieve its targets of 85% coverage for water by 2015.

5. Immigration/Refugee/Idps:

6. Health:

7. Human rights/Gender/Social Issues:

8. Geo-Strategic issues:

Nigeria:

1. Political News:

• Opposition groups demand withdrawal of INEC's election time tables

The federal government has been urged to reject the proposed two time tables released by the Independent national Electoral Commission (INEC) for the coming 2011 general elections and commence the implementation of Justice Lawal Uwais Report with the removal of INEC chairman, Prof Maurice Iwu.

Opposition parties and groups including the national Democratic Movement (NDM), Coalition of Democrats for Electoral reform (CODER), Alliance for Credible Election (ACE), Good Governance Group (3G) and Make Your Votes Count made the call yesterday in Abuja at the end of a one-day stakeholders conference on electoral reform.

The group said that INEC's release of proposed dates of elections depicts the contempt with which Iwu holds Nigerians and its institutions, like the National Assembly which is in the middle of the amendments to the relevant electoral laws.

A communiqué signed by the representatives of the groups, Malam Sule Hamma (NDM), Ayo Opadokun (CODER), Emma Ezeazu (ACE) and Salihu Lukman (3G) also advised the National Assembly to hasten the amendment of the Electoral Act to avoid undermining the electoral reform process.

• Yar'Adua's nephew makes list

President Umaru Yar'adua's nephew Alhaji Murtala Yar'adua ended up yesterday in the list of 25 ministerial nominees sent to the Senate by Acting President Goodluck Jonathan for screening and possible confirmation. Alhaji Murtala is the Tafidan Katsina and eldest son of the president's late senior brother, Major General Shehu Yar'adua.

Daily Trust gathered that 7 of the ministers in the recently dissolved cabinet made it back while 18 others were either fresh faces in the cabinet or were former ministers in Yar'adua's first cabinet, which was reconstituted in 2008.

Ministers in the recently dissolved cabinet who bounced back yesterday include former Minister of Mines and Steel Development Mrs. Diezani Allison Madueke (Bayelsa), former Minister of State for Power Arc. Nuhu Somo Wya (Kaduna), former Minister of State for Petroleum Resources Odein Ajumogobia (Rivers) and former Minister of State for Agriculture, Mrs. Fidelia Akubata Njeze (Enugu).

Also bouncing back were former Attorney General and Minister of Justice Adetokunbo Kayode (Ondo), former Minister of Youth Development Chief Akinlabi Olasunkanmi (Osun) and the former Minister of State for Niger Delta Godsdan Orubebe (Delta).

Apart from Murtala Yar'adua, the new ministerial nominees include Mrs. Josephine Anenih [Anambra], wife of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) chieftain Chief Tony Anenih, and former deputy governor of Nasarawa State, Mr. Labaran Maku.

Others on the list are the Vice Chancellor of Kebbi State University, Prof. M. K. Abubakar; former Managing Director of New Nigerian Newspapers Mr. Ndanusa Alao (Kogi) and Senator Bala Mohammed Duguri (Bauchi).

Also on the list are Mrs. Josephine Tapgun (Plateau), wife of Third Republic governor and former federal minister Chief Fidelis Tapgun; former Bayelsa State Military Administrator, Navy Capt. N. S. Olubolade (Ondo), Chris Ogiewonyi (Edo), Managing Director of Goldman Sachs London Olusegun Olutoyin Aganga (Lagos), Mr. Nduse Essien (Akwa Ibom), Alhaji Umaru Aliyu (Taraba); Alhaji Abubakar Sadiq Mohammed (Gombe), who is the Chief of Staff to Deputy house of Representatives Speaker Usman Bayero Nafada; Suleiman Bello, Chukwuemeka Nwogu (Abia), Bello Adoke (SAN) and Capt. Ernest Odebola. Also on the list is former Minister of National Planning Senator Mohammed Sanusi Daggash, who was removed by President Yar'adua in the first cabinet reshuffle in 2008.

It was learnt yesterday night that political consultations were still on as to the nominations of former House of Representatives Chief Whip Abubakar Bawa Bwari (Niger), former Minister of State for Agriculture Alhaji Adamu Maina Waziri (Yobe) and Rep Terngu Tsegba (Benue) to join the ministerial list.

Senate has decided to postpone its recess by one week to screen and consider the ministerial nominees.

Briefing newsmen shortly after yesterday's plenary session in anticipation of the ministerial list, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Information and Media Senator Ayogu Eze (PDP, Enugu North) said, "We are hoping of getting the list this week, hopefully tomorrow or the day after and then we will take it up next week.

"In anticipation of that and in fulfillment of our obligation and commitment to the people of Nigeria we cut our holiday short by one week, so instead of starting on the 26th our holiday will now start by on the 2nd of April, so we have sacrifice one week to wait for the list and make sure we screen them as soon as they come and make sure that the Acting President has the number ministers and the assistance that he needs to deliver on the work at hand.

"We are staying back specifically to finish the work of this Constitution and then finish the issue of ministerial nominee and we are expecting that will come shortly, tomorrow or after tomorrow."

Meanwhile, state governors continued to troop into the State House yesterday as part of last minute bids to protect the names of their loyalists. About eight governors thronged to the State House in the early hours of yesterday and waited for Jonathan, who came to the office in the afternoon.

A source who confided in our correspondent said, “There presence here is not unconnected to the main issue in town that is the matter of the new ministers whose names are being submitted to the Senate. Of course, no one takes anything for granted and for fear that anything may happen, the governors had to come and ensure the names they submitted are intact.”

According to the source, the acting leader may surprise many of the governors by dropping their choices for his preferred candidates.

The governors who were at the villa yesterday include Mohamed Namadi Sambo of Kaduna, Isa Yuguda of Bauchi, Ibrahim Shema of Katsina, Sullivan Chime of Enugu, Theodore Orji of Abia, Peter Obi of Anambra, Gbenga Daniel of Ogun, Martin Elechi of Ebonyi and Ikedi Ohakim of Imo. While the South East governors met Jonathan as a group, their colleagues from Bauchi, Katsina and Ogun met him separately.

Daily Trust also gathered yesterday from good authority in the presidency that former Speaker of the House of Representative Aminu Bello Masari, former Bauchi State Deputy Governor Mahmud Abdulmalik and Elder Godsdan Orubebe have been nominated by Jonathan as zonal representatives of North-West, North-East and South-South respectively.

In the case of Bauchi, it was gathered that Yuguda was not comfortable with Senator Bala Mohammed Duguri as a nominee from the state.

Duguri, an ANPP senator from Bauchi, was an ally of Yuguda until last year when they parted ways following Yuguda’s decamping to the PDP. Reports say Duguri is being paid with a ministerial appointment for his key role in the elevation of Jonathan to Acting President by the National Assembly.

However, Daily Trust learnt that Shema was also at the Villa to push for one out of the three nominees he submitted. Reports said Shema had nominated his close confidants, the Commissioner for Works Architect Musa Sada, Ali Hussaini Dutsinma, former Group Managing Director of the NNPC Abubakar Lawal Yar’adua and Kabir Saidu Daura. Daura is said to be a close ally of the National Security Adviser, Gen. Aliyu Gusau.

Briefing State House correspondents on behalf of the South East governors, Obi said they were in the Villa to register their concern over lack of Federal Government projects and the rising insecurity in the region.

“The reason why we are here is to discuss about some of the issues bothering the South-East region. You can see that they are peculiar to the South East. One of them is the issue

of erosion. And as you know last year, the Federal Government declared the entire South East a disaster area and promised to intervene which actually formed a committee led by the acting president. That was one of the reasons why we are here. The other issue is that of the second Niger Bridge. The second Niger Bridge, as you know built several years ago is collapsing. The ministry of works, the Senate and House committees on works and the contractors handling the projects has said that the bridge is not safe and there is an urgent need to start the construction of the second Niger Bridge. And again the issue of security. As you know most of the governors in the south east are spending fortunes to keep the police and other security agencies but we found out that the hoodlums' firepower is more than that of the police."

• **Yar'Adua returns to work next week – Associates**

The on-going scramble for positions in a soon to be reconstituted Federal cabinet could shortly hit a brick wall because President Umaru Yar'Adua intends to resume duties in his office next week, a top source close to the ailing president told Daily Trust yesterday. However, another family source separately told Daily Trust that Yar'Adua will be fit to resume work by the end of next month.

According to the top sources, Yar'Adua intends to make a national radio and television broadcast to signal his resumption of work as early as Monday or Wednesday next week. They said Yar'Adua may not write a letter to the National Assembly intimating it of his return because he did not transmit a letter before he proceeded on medical vacation, even though his spokesman later said Yar'Adua recognized Dr. Goodluck Jonathan as the Acting President.

Both sources said Yar'Adua has made much progress physically since his return to the country late last month, and that his remaining medical problem now is speech-related. The sources said the ailing president now walks around the house and also around the garden, where there are many birds and animals.

They said Yar'Adua brought a speech therapist with him from the Saudi Arabian hospital and the doctor has been working since then to improve his speech. Both sources said he has made progress in his speech. One of the sources told Daily Trust that Yar'Adua return to the country last month was "premature," and that he was brought back before he finished his therapy "for political reasons."

In the last two weeks, Daily Trust learnt that Yar'Adua received several visiting family members, close friends, some political associates, some state governors and also some personal staff, even though he has not yet met with Acting President Goodluck Jonathan. Jonathan and his wife, Dame Patience, however visited the residence and they met with Hajia Turai Yar'Adua.

The sources said Yar'Adua's seclusion since his return to the country was ordered by the Saudi doctors because he suffered a severe infection while at the Saudi hospital when he received some visitors. The people who have been able to meet with him after his return,

the sources said, were made to go through some disinfecting chambers before they were ushered into his presence. Those procedures have ended now, the sources said.

According to our sources, Yar'Adua is not happy with the Acting President for sacking his aides, instituting a probe of his regime's contract awards and dissolving his council of ministers. It is therefore likely that his resumption of work would severely upstage the on-going selection of new ministers by the Acting President.

Yar'Adua first left the country for medical treatment in Saudi Arabia on November 21, last year and returned to the country after 93 days. While he was away, the National Assembly adopted a unanimous resolution in early February to recognise the Vice President as Acting President, despite Yar'adua's failure to transmit a letter of medical vacation in line with Section 145 of the 1999 Constitution.

Since Yar'adua's return to the country, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan has continued to run the country and has carried out many far-reaching political measures, including dissolving the Federal cabinet last Wednesday.

• **Buhari-Atiku alliance stalls**

The political alliance of top opposition politicians made up of General Muhammadu Buhari, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, former Sokoto State governor Attahiru Bafarawa and former Lagos State governor Bola Ahmed Tinubu may be heading for the rocks as a fresh dispute has emerged over the proposed new platform.

The alliance had proposed to adopt as its collective platform a modified Action Congress (AC) which was expected retain only its logo, the broom and lose other identities like the name, the headquarters building, the elected officials from the ward to the national levels and to have a new membership register.

However, a source said the last National Executive Committee meeting of the AC in Benin, Edo State, took an extreme position that will make it difficult for any member of the group, Buhari's Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) and Bafarawa's Democratic Peoples Party (DPP) to agree to the merger.

A source at the meeting said AC pointedly said it will not subject itself to the changes being proposed. The proposal to adopt a 'modified AC' was said to have been reached after the party argued that it has two governors, several members of the National Assembly as well as dozens of state legislators who would be subjected to litigation should they move to another party.

The idea of registering a new party was jettisoned because the alliance said it did not want to be rubbished by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). It cited as example of the length of time and the rigours that Buhari's allies took to get the CPC registered.

Only last week, General Muhammadu Buhari announced that he had formally joined the CPC and would accept to run for the presidency on its platform if the party gives him the chance. He also said on a BBC Hausa programme at the weekend that no politician who has a case to answer in court would be given the chance to contest in the party.

Further indications that the alliance is shaky came up yesterday when the trio of Buhari, Tinubu and Bafarawa were absent at a one day conference on Electoral Reform organised by the National Democratic Movement (NDM) in collaboration with the Coalition of Democrats for Electoral Reforms (CODER) and other civil society organisations at the Sheraton Hotel in Abuja.

Atiku Abubakar, who was expected to chair the event, arrived at the venue at 10 am prompt only to see that there were very few participants present and who did not include his co principals in the movement. He left shortly after he arrived at the venue.

However, the meeting was finally held with representatives of the leaders such as Alhaji Sule Yahaya Hamma, Senator Lawal Shuaibu, Senator Olorunimbe Mamora and Dr. Usman Bugaje in attendance. They respectively represented Buhari, Bafarawa, Tinubu and Atiku.

When contacted, a source in the alliance who preferred not to be named dismissed suggestions that the NDM alliance was collapsing. He said the new mega party will emerge at the end of this month after the next meeting of the group at the Sheraton Hotel on March 30.

When asked why the top leaders boycotted yesterday's event, the source said General Buhari had sought special permission to be absent because he is billed to give out his niece's hand in marriage at his home town of Daura in Katsina State this Saturday.

On Bafarawa's absence, he said the former governor was in Kano on Sunday to commiserate with the victims of the fire that gutted the Kantin Kwari market. He said even though Bafarawa was billed to return to Abuja on Sunday in order to attend the NDM meeting on Monday morning, he was held up in Kano by his hosts and a Freedom Radio programme that he participated in.

"When he saw that it was late and considering the circumstances surrounding him, he decided to postpone the journey for reasons of his personal security," the source said, adding however that the former governor had called to express his apology.

• Senate cuts president's power over INEC

The Senate has moved to adopt an amendment to Section 160 of the 1999 Constitution to remove the power of president to control activities of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

The Senate will today vote on the recommendations of the Senator Ike Ekweremadu led-Senate Committee on Review of the Constitution (SCRC) which recommends political and financial autonomy for INEC.

Voting on the recommendations could not be taken yesterday due to absence of several senators from the consideration session while the Constitution requires two-third majority votes, or 73 senators, in favour of each recommendation to pass as amendment.

During the clause by clause consideration yesterday, Senate adopted that Section 162 be amended to read “(1) Subject to subsection (2) of this section, any of the bodies may with the approval of the President , by rules otherwise regulate its own procedure or confer powers and impose duties on any officer or authority for the purpose of discharging its function, provided that in the case of INEC, its powers to make its own rules or otherwise regulate its own procedure shall not be subject to the approval of the President.”

The committee has also recommended financial autonomy for INEC as the body has now been listed along with the National Assembly, State Houses of Assembly and the Judiciary as institutions to get first line charge from the Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF) of the federation.

Senator Ekweremadu said the provision is to ensure the integrity of the INEC chairman.

The Senate also has lined an amendment to prohibit chairman and members of INEC from being card carrying members of political parties.

The Senate will also vote on amendment to Section 65 (2a) of the Constitution, making tertiary education the minimum qualification to stand for election in the country.

• Yar’Adua recovering well –Yuguda

Bauchi State Governor Isa Yuguda yesterday urged Nigerians not to foreclose President Umaru Musa Yar’adua’s return to power saying the president is recovering well and will soon bounce back.

Yuguda, who was at the State House Abuja to meet with Acting President Goodluck Jonathan, spoke with journalists after his one hour meeting with Jonathan.

The Bauchi governor was one of eight governors who met with Jonathan in connection with the list of new ministers.

Yuguda, who is Yar’adua’s son-in-law, however, did not whether he had contact with the ailing president.

Asked whether he has seen the president, he said “President is recovering well.”

President Yar’adua has not been seen in public since he left for Saudi Arabia in

November 23, 2009 and after his return into the country about a month ago.

On his expectation on the new cabinet, Yuguda said he expects the acting president to select a team that can drive the economy as fast as possible.

“I will expect him to select a team that can drive the economy as fast as possible so that we can refocus and ensure that we are on course as far as vision 2020 is concerned”

He said the government is moving ahead with the programme of President Yar’adua.

Yuguda also described the suggestion by Libyan President’s Muammar Gaddafi for Nigeria to be divided, as a big joke made out of ignorance.

He said frontline African leaders, like Gaddafi, who was chairman of AU, should study the countries that are in the continent and understand such countries better before making “such outrageous comments.”

• **Analysis: Jonathan makes his mark on Nigeria**

Nothing is more dangerous for Nigeria than a leader without control.

That is the view of a number of analysts, who say acting President Goodluck Jonathan's decision to dismiss the entire cabinet was necessary to assert his authority.

When the national assembly appointed Mr Jonathan to be acting leader just over a month ago, few people believed the former biologist had the political clout to get a grip on the fractious government in the wake of a protracted power vacuum left when President Umaru Yar'Adua went to Saudi Arabia for medical treatment.

But his decision to purge the entire cabinet and start afresh was designed "to inject fresh blood and bring even greater vigour to governance", according to Mr Jonathan's spokesman, Ima Niboro.

He told [ThisDay](#) newspaper: "It is part of a larger strategy to frontally confront the core challenges that face the nation at this critical moment of our history."

Political analyst Aderemi Oyewumi agrees.

"Jonathan acted now because he feels more comfortable politically. He feels in a more solid position, and he has to have people he can trust," says Mr Oyewumi.

"Remember, he has got to deal with real problems like electoral reform, corruption and the amnesty in the Niger Delta which looks like it is unravelling and so on."

Time running out?

But there are also risks associated with such a wholesale turnover of the political establishment.

Mr Yar'Adua returned in the middle of the night last month, raising fears that his inner circle of aides, led by his wife Turai, would fight to maintain their influence and undermine Mr Jonathan.

That remains a possibility, particularly given this latest move to consolidate power.

Mr Jonathan does not have much time. Even under the best circumstances, the business of appointing a cabinet in Nigeria is a fraught calculus.

The president needs to balance the competing interests of the states - under the constitution each of the 36 states must have at least one representative in the 42-member cabinet.

He must also find politically competent individuals and honour traditions that give key posts to certain regions.

Even then, the names have to be approved by the senate in a confirmation process that can throw up its own political challenges.

Mr Yar'Adua took two months to name the cabinet that has just been dismissed; Mr Jonathan has perhaps a few weeks before the power vacuum becomes a problem, according to a number of analysts.

He also has to move fast to achieve anything significant during what is left of the current administration.

On Tuesday, the Nigerian Electoral Commission announced that the next presidential election will take place on either 22 January or 23 April.

That gives about a year to establish his political reputation in readiness for what many assume will be a run for the presidency proper - either in this coming election, or in 2015.

More legal rows

But there is a potential problem: it is not clear whether Mr Jonathan has the authority to toss out the entire cabinet in the first place.

"It's neither legitimate nor constitutional," says analyst Usman Mohammed.

"Goodluck Jonathan was elected vice to Yar'Adua, who has the mandate as president. He has no political mandate to take these kinds of decisions.

"The National Assembly has only placed him in a caretaker role, so I'm not sure he has the power to make such comprehensive changes under the constitution either.

"What happens if Yar'Adua gets well enough to go back to his job?"

But lawyer Bamidele Aturu sees no problem with the constitution.

"The National Assembly represents the will of the people, and as such it made the decision to confer all the powers of the presidency on Goodluck Jonathan," he says.

Even so, there is still a chance that Mr Jonathan's political opponents and Mr Yar'Adua's supporters will challenge the move in court and delay any attempt to replace the cabinet.

Mr Oyewumi believes that would be a mistake.

"The public is not concerned about constitutional niceties. They just want someone in charge who can get a confident grip on all our problems," he says.

"The current situation is not good for the country, and we can't afford to waste time."

• **Nigeria leader Goodluck Jonathan 'chooses cabinet'**

Nigeria's acting President Goodluck Jonathan has nominated a list of ministers, sources say, a week after he sacked his entire cabinet.

Parliamentary sources said Mr Jonathan had forwarded his nominees to the Senate for their consideration.

Finalising cabinet choices could take weeks, amid jockeying for position among the country's many rival interest groups and regions.

Mr Jonathan is acting leader in place of the ailing President Umaru Yar'Adua.

He sacked the cabinet in what analysts say was an attempt to replace Yar'Adua loyalists with his own choices.

Some reports suggested that the list he had given to the Senate included the names only of those ministers from the previous cabinet that he wanted to retain.

Other reports said he had provided a complete list of cabinet nominees.

Officials have not yet commented on the reports, but the Senate is expected to make an announcement on Wednesday.

Mr Jonathan is battling to fill a power vacuum that has been plaguing Nigerian politics since Mr Yar'Adua went to Saudi Arabia for medical treatment in November last year.

The president recently returned to Nigeria, but he has still not been seen in public since he fell ill.

Mr Jonathan was installed as acting president on 9 February after weeks of legal wrangling and widespread street protests by Nigerians demanding clarity on who was running the country.

Since then, he has been faced with an outbreak of communal violence in the central city of Jos and a renewed campaign by militants in the oil-rich Niger Delta.

• **Buhari, Tinubu Absent at Mega Summit Parley**

Abuja — The plan to float a mega political party to checkmate the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the 2011 general election may have fallen apart as proponents of the envisioned big party were not at the scheduled meeting of the group yesterday in Abuja.

A one-day conference on Electoral Reforms organized by the opposition National Democratic Movement (NDM) in collaboration with Coalition of Defenders of Election Reforms (CODER), Alliance for Credible Elections (ACE) and the Good Governance Group (3G) failed to take off because of the absence of the key stakeholders namely Major-General Muhammadu Buhari, former Governors Attahiru Bafarawa and Asiwaju Bola Tinubu.

Buhari's close associate, Dr. Sule Hamman, said the former head of state excused himself as he was attending another function. Even the staff of Sheraton Hotel, Abuja, venue of the meeting, claimed they were not aware that a meeting of the group would hold at the hotel.

However, former vice-president and 2007 presidential candidate of the Action Congress (AC), Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, who incidentally was the chairman of the event, arrived the Sheraton Hotel at 10am only to meet an empty hall.

It was not clear if the venue itself had been paid for contrary to the arrangement allegedly made with a former state governor. **THISDAY** gathered that the conference was called to chart a way forward for the nation in view of the "crisis in the Presidency".

But the opposition politicians only succeeded in manifesting the crisis within their ranks. According to sources close to the opposition, the NDM, AC, Democratic Peoples Party (DPP) and Mega Party Summit Movement had been trying to come together to provide an alternative platform to the PDP.

It was further gathered that matters were made worse when the AC, which the opposition political parties adopted as their new platform, was accepted on the condition that they would change everything about themselves - the name, the headquarters building, the

elected officials from ward to the national level and have a new membership register. Only the logo - the famous broom - was conceded to the party.

But at the last National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting in Benin, AC took a seeming extreme position on the issues, making it difficult for any of the groups to merge with it.

Sources stated that AC pointedly told the other stakeholders that it would not subject itself to these changes. And to make matters worse, Buhari had since joined the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), which ticket he told the BBC last weekend he was ready to accept if offered.

Buhari said the formation of CPC was based on his initiative.

The source said: "As things are, the MSM are proceeding to set up their own party and may probably align with the Labour Party."

Meanwhile, a statement by the Media Assistant to the mega summit, Obafemi Olubori, said following a draft of the summit programme released last week during the Mega Summit-Labour harmonization parley in Benin, Edo State by Prof. Pat Utomi-led Technical Committee, the summit session on electoral reform would be led by the leadership of Labour, which has already done extensive advocacy work on the subject.

According to the statement, "The draft programme also tentatively listed Chief Anthony Enahoro, Alhaji Maitama Sule, Chief Edwin Clark, Alhaji Lateef Jakande, Dim Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, Chief Ayo Adebajo, Dr. Tunji Braithwaite, Alhaji Balarabe Musa, Chief Olu Falae among other 18 elder statesmen and former leaders of the country expected to play key roles at the historic summit, which has been postponed twice."

Olubori said the summit organizers had also initiated consultations with some international political icons and progressive governors with a view to requesting them to give keynote and goodwill messages at the summit.

The summit is designed to host about 300 eminent stakeholders from key sectors, political parties and the Diasporas. The theme of the summit is "Nigeria at 50: Peoples' Democratic Change."

• **Jonathan selects Nigeria ministers**

Goodluck Jonathan, Nigeria's acting president, has selected 18 ministers to be the first members of his cabinet.

The list has been sent to senate on Tuesday for approval as political uncertainty continues in the country following Jonathan sacking all members of the federal cabinet last week.

"The list of the ministerial nominees was forwarded to the senate today," a parliamentary source said on condition of anonymity, without elucidating further.

A different government member said: "The list he sent to the senate has 18 names, all of them ministers from the old cabinet dissolved last week."

A senate source confirmed that the house has received the list.

The new nominees are expected to appear before the senate which will screen and confirm them ahead of their inauguration.

Political instability abounds in Nigeria, where Jonathan took temporary power in early February from Umaru Yar'Adua, the president.

Yar'Adua is ill with a heart condition and was in Saudi Arabia receiving treatment for months, leading to calls within Nigeria that he has left an unconstitutional power vacuum.

• **Goodluck Jonathan's cabinet choices surprise Nigeria**

Nigeria's senate has named 33 ministerial nominees submitted by acting leader Goodluck Jonathan a week after he sacked the cabinet.

Mr. Jonathan included some surprise names, such as Olusegun Aganga, a UK-based Goldman Sachs banker.

The list, which still needs to be approved by the Senate, contained just nine ministers from the former cabinet.

Mr. Jonathan has taken over as acting leader while President Umaru Yar'Adua recovers from a serious illness.

Mr. Yar'Adua was taken to hospital in Saudi Arabia last November and, although he has now returned to Nigeria, he has not been seen in public since.

Mr. Jonathan is battling to fill a power vacuum that has been plaguing Nigerian politics since Mr Yar'Adua fell ill.

Legal wrangling

The list of nominees is not expected to be the complete membership of the new cabinet - Mr Jonathan is expected to propose more names later.

But the current list does include one of Mr Yar'Adua's nephews, Alhaji Mutallab Yar'Adua, who has not held public office before.

Analysts say including him in the cabinet may be an attempt to groom him for higher office.

Meanwhile, Goldman Sachs confirmed that Mr Aganga, one of the bank's managing directors, had accepted an offer to be considered for a ministerial post.

The firm said he had spent his career in the private sector and had not previously held public office.

Media reports say he is tipped to become finance minister.

Mr Jonathan's choices have to balance the interests of 36 states and a wide range of interest groups, and approval of the new cabinet could take weeks.

Political analyst Reuben Abati told the BBC's Focus on Africa programme that Mr Jonathan was sending a message that he is in charge.

The manoeuvring also showed that Mr Jonathan wants to run for president, he said.

But the ruling PDP alternates its leadership between northerners and southerners and recently announced that it would field a northerner in the presidential election next year - in effect ruling out Mr Jonathan, who is from the south.

Mr Jonathan was installed as acting president on 9 February after weeks of legal wrangling and widespread street protests by Nigerians demanding clarity on who was running the country.

Since then, he has been faced with an outbreak of communal violence in the central city of Jos and a renewed campaign by militants in the oil-rich Niger Delta.

• **Yar'Adua to attend Jumat service**

Politicians of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) have expressed anxiety over plans by loyalists to ailing President Umaru Yar'Adua to bring him to the Friday Jumat service today.

Party officials said it is disturbing that this is coming three days before the Senate begins the screening of ministerial nominees on Monday. They also question the choice of a religious occasion for Mr. Yar'Adua's re-emergence in public.

One source said, "if the President would be coming out four months after his absence, it ought not to be at a religious event because that will send the wrong signal."

Mr. Yar'Adua, a Muslim from Kastina State participated in the weekly Jumat service at the National Mosque located at the Central business district in Abuja until his illness kept him from public view.

The ailing President was flown out of the country on the 23rd of November 2009 to Saudi Arabia for a heart condition and has since been out of public view.

Last week, two national dailies claimed that plans were afoot for the ailing president to make a public outing this week.

Top presidency and PDP officials confirmed to NEXT last night, that the planned outing has being fixed for today's Friday prayers.

"The idea is to achieve maximum political impact and a religious approval" a PDP official said last night.

The PDP chairman; Vincent Ogbulafor, the speaker; Dimeji Bankole and a few other officials were in a closed-door meeting regarding the development, and the mood at the meeting, a knowledgeable source told NEXT, was "celebratory and bubbling."

The National Assembly, on the 9th of February, 2010 declared the Vice President Goodluck Jonathan as the Acting President based on the 'Doctrine of Necessity' because the ailing president failed to hand over the reins of power to his vice before his departure as recommend by the constitution.

After much outcry and protest from civil societies and series of litigations on the lacuna in the nation's presidency, the ailing president was sneaked into the country in the early hours of 26th of February, 2010, days after his Vice was declared the Acting President

The Acting President dissolved the Cabinet of ministers appointed by the ailing President last week and had just sent a list of Ministerial nominees to the Senate for screening. Mr Yar'Adua's return to public life could cause uncertainty in the polity.

• Emodi may replace Akunyili - ...As Appeal Court sacks Senator

Within hours after the Court of Appeal, Enugu Division threw Mrs. Joy Emodi out of the Senate, several senators commenced a campaign for Acting President Goodluck Jonathan to nominate her as a minister to replace the controversial former Minister of Information and Communication Prof. Dora Akunyili, who is one of the nine former ministers already nominated for reappointment. Emodi, like Akunyili, is from Anambra State.

The Court of Appeal had ruled yesterday that Mrs. Joy Emodi, who is a Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) member, was not the Senator duly-elected to represent Anambra North senatorial district. The Court, led by Justice Ola Kayode Ariwola, unanimously ruled that Mr. Alphonsus Uba Igbeke of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) was the authentic winner of the seat in the April 28, 2007 election.

A reliable source at the Senate told Daily Trust that many senators are determined that Mrs. Akunyili will not return to the Federal Executive Council. They said the Acting President should either drop her nomination or they will ensure that she fails at the Senate screening. As soon as Emodi lost her Senate seat yesterday, they cashed in on it and proposed her as a replacement.

The Election Petition tribunal had earlier returned Emodi as winner of the 2007 election, but Igbeke appealed the ruling on the grounds that she was not duly elected by a majority of lawful votes cast at the election and that her return was invalid by reason of substantial non-compliance with the Electoral Act, 2006. He said he polled the majority of lawful votes cast at the election and ought to have been declared winner of the election.

He said there was no election in all the polling units/booths in Onitsha South and Ayamelum local government areas of Anambra North Senatorial District on April 28, 2007 and that all the votes credited to all the candidates at the polling units in both Onitsha South and Ayamelum LGAs be set aside and nullified.

According to him, election held in only five out of seven LGAs of Anambra East, Anambra West, Ogbaru, Onitsha North and Oyi LGAs of Anambra North Senatorial District but the electoral body did not collate the results of all the wards and LGA collation centres but proceeded to award arbitrary figures to the candidates not related to the votes cast at the election as declared by the Presiding Officers, and that they went ahead to return Emodi as the winner of the election.

He said that the non-conduct of the election in the two LGAs of Onitsha South and Ayamelum due to non-supply and distribution of election materials in these areas did not materially affect the result of the election, going by the total registered voters.

The Court agreed with him and directed the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to withdraw the Certificate of Return issued to Emodi and return same immediately to Igbeke.

Reacting to the judgment, counsel to Senator Emodi, Hipo Onwuegbuka, said as a lawyer, he accepted the judgment since the Court of Appeal is the final arbiter. Also speaking, counsel to Igbeke, Gozie Obi described the judgment as sound, saying though justice had been done, it took a fairly long time in coming. On his part, Igbeke expressed happiness at the judgment and said it showed that the judiciary is the last hope of the common man.

Speaking to Daily Trust on condition of anonymity last night, a senator said, "Several of us have resolved that Akunyili would not be allowed to return to the cabinet which she helped destabilise by her unguarded utterances before the dissolution of the FEC. We have started working to ensure that she is replaced by Senator Emodi who is also from Anambra state."

The senator said Akunyili's nomination is bound to face stiff opposition due to her comments in the wake of the political logjam caused by the illness of President Umaru Musa Yar'adua.

"She made comments unbecoming of a public officer. If you could remember, she was called to order by several highly placed individuals and institutions in the country, including the House of Representatives. Such a person should not be allowed to return to the cabinet," the senator said.

Daily Trust learnt that the senators have resolved after a meeting to push the proposal forward by convincing Senate President David Mark to support the replacement of Akunyili with Emodi.

The senators, according to our source, have resolved that should their bid for the replacement of Akunyili fail, "We will stand as opposition to her nomination during the screening and we will ensure that she is disqualified."

It was also gathered that lobbying has been intensified by former National Planning Minister Senator Sanusi Daggash to persuade senators to support his confirmation during the screening hearing.

"We have suggested to him (Daggash) that he must try to approach every senator because there is problem. There are senators that are bent on disqualifying him because of the problems he had with the Senate when he was minister. If you observe, his name was even booed by senators when it was announced," a source said.

Prof. Akunyili presented a memo to the last FEC seeking to declare President Umaru Musa Yar'adua incapacitated and she severally accused some of her colleagues of being part of a "cabal" standing between then Vice President Goodluck Jonathan and full presidential powers.

Her comments attracted condemnations from many quarters, including the PDP national leadership, the National Governors Forum and the House of Representatives. She was later sacked when Jonathan dissolved the FEC, only to resurface among the 33 nominees whose names have been sent to the Senate for confirmation, the process for which begins on Monday.

• N/Assembly passes N4.6tn budget for 2010

The National Assembly yesterday approved a budget of N4.608 trillion for the 2010 fiscal year with an increase of N530 billion to the N4.079 trillion proposed by the executive arm.

Presenting the budget report, Chairman Senate Committee on Appropriation Senator Iyiola Omisore said the delay in passage of the budget was largely due to increases made by the executive to the original proposal.

He said executive arm made increase of the sum of N336bn during consideration of the budget saying “We therefore advise that the executive should complete their work on time and minimize further submission after presentation of the initial proposal. For instance, we received the last correspondence for adjustment on March 8.”

Omisore said both chambers of the National Assembly has harmonised the budget adding “The Bill we are presenting today is harmonized with the House of Representatives. Within the past three months, most of our sub-committees worked with their House counterparts to come up with acceptable figures.”

The House of Representatives also passed the same version of the budget thereby making it an Act of the National Assembly awaiting presidential assent.

Breakdown of the budget shows that Net Retained Revenue is N3.086 trillion, Aggregate Expenditure N4.608 trillion, Statutory Transfers N180.2 billion, Debt Service N497 billion, Non Debt Recurrent N2.077 trillion, Capital Expenditure N1.853 trillion and the budget deficit is N1.521 trillion.

On capital expenditure, the Ministry of Works, Housing and Urban Development is to receive highest grant of N211.231 billion followed by the Ministry of Power is to receive the highest allocation of N189.783 billion.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources gets N149.9 billion, the Federal Capital Territory Administration N138.360 billion, Ministry of Transport gets N127. 548 billion and the Ministry of Education is allocated N97.208 billion.

Other big spending ministries on the capital side include Ministry of Niger Delta with N90.908 billion, Ministry of Police Affairs N80.371 billion, Ministry of Defence N74.378 billion, Aviation Ministry N71.310 billion, Ministry of Health N67.277 billion, Office of the Security Adviser N65.686 billion and the Environment Ministry which is allocated N26.124 billion.

The huge spenders on the recurrent (non-debt) side of the budget are; the Ministry of Defence with allocation of N217.340 billion, followed by the Ministry of Education with N198.084 billion while Police Formation and Commands got N191.428 billion.

Other ministries with huge recurrent expenditures include, the Ministry of Health N112.722 billion, Interior Ministry N81.567 billion, Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) N45.962 billion, Ministry of Youth Development N43.213 billion and the Niger Delta Ministry with allocation of N41.458 billion.

Key macroeconomic assumptions and parameters on which the 2010 budget is predicated are; Benchmark for Crude Oil \$67 USD per barrel, Crude Oil Production of 2.350 million barrels per day, Joint Venture Cash Calls of \$7 billion USD, Gross Domestic Product is put at 5.47 percent, Inflation Rate is put at 11.2 percent with an Exchange Rate of N150 to \$1 USD.

The Financing Items in the budget are to come from proceeds of Sale of Government Property N9.56 billion, Privatisation Proceeds N107.208 billion, Net FGN's Consolidated share of the proposed Excess Crude Account (ECA) N309.13 billion, FGN share of signature bonus N132.312 billion, International bonds N75 billion and Domestic Borrowing N897.3 billion.

The budget also provides for N27 billion as payment for local debts owed to 698 verified contractors and 4931 unverified contractors to be verified. The United Bank for Africa Development (UBA) will also get N5 billion as repayment of loan for the Save Tower Project in the aviation sector.

National Assembly also approved N123.486 billion as Capital Supplementation for some major ongoing projects under Quick Win projects and Millennium Development Goals (MDG) projects.

The Appropriation Act as passed provides that "The Accountant General of the Federation shall forward to the National Assembly full details of funds released to the government agencies immediately such funds are released." President Umaru Musa Yar'adua had through his Special Adviser on National Assembly Matters; Senator Mohammed Abba Aji laid a budget proposal of N4.079 trillion to the National Assembly on November 24, 2009.

- **Constitution - Senate Set to Pass 35 Amendments**

Abuja — The Senate voted yesterday, by two-thirds majority, to approve independent candidature to liberalise the political space. It also approved the removal of panel indictment as basis for disqualifying candidates from election.

Among other amendments, the senators specifically approved the deletion of Section 66 (h) of the 1999 Constitution on disqualification from contesting election to the National Assembly on the basis of indictment by a Judicial Commission of Inquiry or an Administrative Panel of Inquiry or a Tribunal for embezzlement or fraud.

The passage of the 35 proposed amendments to the constitution by way of third reading, however, suffered a set-back as a result of the omission of the amendment to Section 109 in the report of the AdHoc Committee on the Review of the Constitution.

The section has to do with defection to other parties in the state and national assemblies.

If not for the observation of Bassey Ewa-Henshaw (PDP, Cross River South), the Senate would have passed the proposed amendments as contained in a Bill for an Act to Alter the Provisions of the 1999 Constitution and for Other Matters Connected Thereto 2010.

Senate President David Mark (PDP, Benue South) had to shelve the third reading (reading of the Bill's long title signifying passage) till today after the proposed

amendment to Section 109 on tenure of members of the state Houses of Assembly would have been taken through the process of voting.

Attempts by the Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee and Deputy Senate President Ike Ekweremadu (PDP, Enugu West) to have the amendment treated "mutatis mutandis" ("the necessary changes having been made") with Section 68 on tenure of seat of members of the National Assembly failed.

The new Section 68, which was amended by a vote of 75 (in support) to 18 (against), is aimed at liberalising the political space and maintaining the fundamental right to freedom of association. Mark insisted that the proposed amendment to Section 109 would have to be voted on by the Senate.

He also took the observation by Joel Danlami (PDP, Taraba South) that the independence of the judiciary should be captured in the explanatory memorandum to the bill.

The memorandum, as passed yesterday by a vote of 75 (in support) and one (against), reads: "The Bill seeks to amend the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, to among others, provide for independent candidate in elections, guarantee administrative and financial independence of the INEC and ensure the non elongation of the term of office of elected official beyond the required constitutional term."

Mark directed that the Ad-Hoc Committee should bring the fundamental omission of proposed Section 109 and the observation to the explanatory memorandum to the floor today for legislative remedy consequent upon which the Upper House would now vote to pass the amendments.

Other amendments passed are in respect of clauses providing for time to dispense with election petitions and litigations, which as provided in Section 76 (2), states that "the date mentioned on subsection (1) of this Section shall not be earlier than 150 days and not later than ninety days before the date on which the House stands dissolved, or where the election is to fill a vacancy occurring more than three months before such a date, not later than one month after the vacancy occurred."

The clause which is "mutatis mutandis" with Section 116 on time of elections to the House of Assembly was passed by a vote of 92 (in favour) and nil against.

In addition, the Senate, by a vote of 94 in support and none against approved the insertion of a new subsection in Section 121 to cater for the financial independence of the Houses of Assembly and the judiciary of states.

It also passed by a vote of 89 for and three against proposed amendments to Section 131 to provide for the independent candidate and raising the standard of qualification to make the legislature to evaluate issues in the developing world.

Consequently, the minimum educational qualification for all elective position is tertiary education certificate. On tenure of office of president in Section 135, the Senate passed by a vote of 88 in favour and two against the proposed insertion of a new subparagraph c to avoid elongation of tenure of office of the President as provided in the Constitution.

It reads: "In the calculation of the four year term, where a re-election has taken place and the person earlier sworn in wins the re-election, the time spent in the office before the date the election was annulled, shall be taken into account."

Section 156 as amended guarantees the political independence of the INEC as it bars the chair or members from being members of political parties; while Section 160, as amended, is to guarantee the administrative independence of the Commission.

Once the Senate passes the proposed amendments today, the House of Representatives would be expected to concur and the Bill would be sent to the State Legislatures for their approval. A clean copy will then be sent to the Acting President for his assent.

• Electoral reform: Reprs differ from Senate

The House of Representatives ad-hoc committee on the review of the 1999 constitution yesterday presented its report to the House in which it differed with amendments that have been adopted by the Senate.

While the Senate okayed the cross-carpeting of candidates from one political party to another, the House recommended that where persons are expelled by their parties, they shall retain their seat provided they do not join any party.

In the report which was presented by the chairman of the committee and Deputy Speaker, Rep Usman Bayero Nafada (PDP, Gombe State), the committee recommended that "where a person is expelled by his political party, he shall retain his seat provided that he does not join any political party".

The committee also recommended amended sections 145 and 190 of the constitution on election periods, saying they "have altered from a maximum of sixty days to a minimum of thirty days before the expiration of the term of office of the last holder of that office to a minimum of 120 days and a maximum of 150 days before the expiration of the term of office of the last holder of that office".

On the selection of INEC body, the committee suggested for the post of deputy chairman who shall not be of the same gender with the chairman.

It said: "the third schedule on the Federal Executive bodies is altered in paragraph 14 dealing with the Independent National Electoral Commission to: make provisions for the post of deputy chairman who shall not be of same gender with the chairman; contain additional qualification of possessing commensurate professional, administrative and

academic experience for the members of INEC”.

On the delivery of the judgment by an election tribunal, the committee recommended 120 days from the date of filing of the petition. It stipulated 60 days within which an appeal from a decision of an election tribunal or court shall be heard and disposed of from the date of the delivery of judgement of the tribunal.

The committee proposed disposition of all election petitions as conditional precedent to assumption of office by any person elected.

• **Jonathan to meet ex-rebel leaders**

Abuja - Nigerian Acting President Goodluck Jonathan will meet former rebel leaders from the oil-producing Niger Delta on Friday, hoping to get a federal amnesty programme back on track.

"The meeting is to assure former militants of the commitment of the government to the post-amnesty programme and the development of the Niger Delta region," a presidency source said on Wednesday.

Little progress has been made in implementing the amnesty programme, the most comprehensive peace effort in the Niger Delta for years, since President Umaru Yar'Adua fell seriously ill last November.

Recent militant attacks have threatened to undermine the peace process further and prolong the unrest, which has kept Nigeria from pumping much more than two thirds of its 3 million barrels per day oil capacity.

Jonathan, who took over executive powers last month in Yar'Adua's absence, has made restoring peace in the Niger Delta a top priority.

The presidency source said Friday's gathering would be with only key former rebel leaders, but Jonathan would probably hold further meetings.

Hundreds of rebels surrendered their arms last year in return for clemency, a monthly stipend, education and job opportunities. But money and training for the former rebels have been repeatedly delayed.

Earlier this month the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (Mend) set off two bombs outside a government building in the oil city of Warri as officials met for talks about implementing the terms of the amnesty.

The attack raised fears of a renewed campaign of violence by Nigeria's most prominent militant group.

2. Economy:

• Group Proffers Recipe for Economic Crisis

A group known as The New Restoration Team in River State has identified four major areas that have consistently posed a problem to the nation's economy. These, they said, include the power sector, the implementation of the Post Amnesty programme, the electoral reform and the oil and gas sector.

For the Acting President Goodluck Jonathan to write his name in gold, the New Restoration Team suggested that it is imperative for him to declare a state of emergency in these areas and proffer immediate solution.

In a statement issued and signed by the National Publicity Secretary, Jerry Needam, yesterday, the group, while congratulating the Acting President on the mature way he has been handling State affairs since the absence of President Musa Yar'Adua, said to further endear himself to Nigerians, Jonathan has to personally intervene in these critical areas mentioned.

"If for instance, the masses are provided with regular supply of power and petroleum products at an affordable price, the political landscape will be less hot for good and smooth governance," the statement added.

Furthermore, the Team has given the Acting President a pat on the back on the issue of electoral reform which recommendations he has sent to the National Assembly unedited, saying that this is a bold step to eliminating the political cankerworm that has eaten so deep into the nation's fabric and hoped that the earlier it is addressed the better for the entire country.

In the interim, the team also wants Acting President Jonathan to use his good office to attend once and for all the issue of militancy in the Niger Delta by ensuring that the Post-Amnesty Programmes are carried out to its logical conclusion and speedily too, and wishes the Acting President success in the days ahead as he tackles the tortuous issues of leadership bothering the nation.

• Lagos aims to be Africa's model megacity

Lagos is the financial heart of Nigeria - the most populous nation in Africa, and it is a teeming tangle of humanity and enterprise.

The economy of Lagos state is thought to be worth around \$33bn, despite the chronic overcrowding, crumbling infrastructure and hellish traffic.

Expansion continues at a breakneck speed and part of the expansion plans for Lagos include an ambitious new city within a city.

The Eko Atlantic project promises to turn Lagos into a hugely important financial powerhouse.

Under construction

Enormous quantities of rock are poured into the sea to build what is already being called the great wall of Lagos.

A mile and a half out in the Atlantic ocean, the city is taking a stand against the sea. Lagos is creating a seven kilometre long wall to hold back the waves.

For more than 100 years the sea has been eating away the shoreline of Victoria island in Lagos - some ten metres disappear every year.

Now Lagos has what it hopes is a permanent solution to the problem of erosion.

The idea is to claw back the lost land and build a new, futuristic city on it. It is to be called Eko Atlantic City.

Every day some 90 trucks arrive weighed down by granite mined from the neighbouring city of Abeokuta and the wall is advancing some seven or eight metres a day.

Tackling overcrowding

Prince Adesegun Oniru, in charge of waterfront development, says the project was put together to protect Lagos because everything was gradually eroding away.

"Population growth within Lagos is always a problem," he says, "We have 18 million people that reside in Lagos State so you need projects like this to draw people away from the centre and spread them to areas like this."

Lagos is overpopulated and thousands more people flood into the city every month.

Rental prices for accommodation are some of the highest on the continent.

The new city within a city will offer residents constant power and water, good roads and a light rail system to whisk them around a financial centre reminiscent of Manhattan in New York.

Four hundred thousand people will live and work in the new city, but first they will have to build it.

Engineering project

It is a big job to reverse, in just a few years, what nature has taken decades to do.

"You need some huge dredging vessels. The vessels we are employing are some of the largest in the world," says David Frame, the lead engineer on Eko Atlantic City project.

The giant dredgers from China pump 400,000 tonnes of sand a day into the space between the shore and the wall.

Eko Atlantic City will need as much sand as the Palm One project in Dubai.

Lessons from Dubai

Prince Adesegun Oniru believes Lagos has much to learn from Dubai's troubles.

"The first lesson to learn as far as I am concerned, is not to saturate the market," he says.

"Finish a particular area completely and then move on to another - the moral is: don't saturate the market with too much property."

A project this size has never been seen in west Africa before.

Lagos has big ambitions to go with its big population. It wants to become Africa's model megacity.

• Investors Back Microfinance Despite Impact of Crisis

World markets have been volatile in the wake of the global financial crisis, but investors showed nearly unshakeable faith in the microfinance sector during 2009, driving equity valuations higher even as asset quality and profitability at microfinance institutions (MFIs) deteriorated.

A new report by CGAP and investment bank, JP Morgan, shows that MFI equity valuations continued to rise across all regions last year, with MFIs in the private equity market trading at a median of 2.1 times their book value - a 62 per cent increase since 2007.

"There's no doubt the crisis did have an impact on MFIs, and a significant one, so the strength in equity valuations is a surprise," says CGAP's Xavier Reille, a co-author of the report.

Although most investors have focused on microfinance blue chips with strong management, good asset quality, and diversified funding structure, Reille cautions that some valuations - particularly in the Indian market - might be outstripping fundamentals. Indian MFIs comprised 30% of all microfinance equity transactions in the 2009 CGAP dataset, and their equity valuations are trading at six times book value - three times the global median.

Interest in the Indian microfinance equity market - and the broader MFI market - will likely intensify further in 2010 with the impending initial public offering by the country's largest microfinance institution, SKS.

The relative youth of the microfinance equity market means there are few established performance benchmarks, making assessments difficult.

However, the CGAP/JP Morgan report is bridging this gap by drawing on the analysis of 200 private equity transactions between 2005 and 2009 and trading information on eight publicly-listed low-income financial institutions to assess the strong performance of the microfinance equity market.

Judging by the performance of publicly-traded low-income financial institutions, the most comparable listed vehicles to MFIs, investors are bullish on emerging market financial institutions serving low-income populations.

These stocks have strongly outperformed emerging market banks (as measured by the MSCI Emerging Markets Bank Index) and by the end of 2009, had rebounded to pre-crisis levels or new historical peaks.

Despite the strength in equity valuations, the microfinance sector is undoubtedly feeling the impact of the crisis more severely than at any time since the depths of the Asian financial crisis in the mid-nineties.

The CGAP/JP Morgan report shows that portfolio quality began to deteriorate rapidly after January 2009, with past due loans over 30 days jumping to a median of 4.7 per cent from 2.2 per cent over the first five months of 2009, although it has moderated since then and so far remained stable.

The effects of the downturn were far from uniform however, with MFIs in South Asia and South America showing few signs of impact, while others in Central America, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia were more affected. However, most MFIs have been well-positioned to sustain the downturn and their equity base remains strong at nearly 20 per cent of total assets.

• UN backs project to improve cassava processing in Nigeria

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization ([UNIDO](#)), Japan and a Nigerian cassava processing group today signed an agreement to support a project to improve cassava processing in a bid to enhance the quality and value of food in the African country.

UNIDO will facilitate the collaboration arrangement between the Japanese Government and Ifelodun Cassava Processing, a non-governmental organization, and provide

technical assistance in the implementation of the project. The NGO received a grant of \$97,023 from Japan while about \$100,000 will be contributed by UNIDO.

“We hope that this project, funded by the Government of Japan and supported by UNIDO, will contribute to community development in Oyo state,” said Shigeru Hamano, Japan’s deputy ambassador to Nigeria.

“UNIDO’s role is to provide smallholder processors with the technical support that will enhance large output and good quality of product to help them meet international standards. The components to be provided under the funding include cassava processing equipment such as graters, flash dryer, hammer mill and a borehole,” said UNIDO’s national programme officer in Nigeria, Reuben Bamidele.

• Nigeria to Save N75bn with New Strategy on Rice

Nigeria is expected to save about \$500 million annually - that is, N75 billion - when the Federal Government implements a major strategy that has been designed to triple domestic rice production. The strategy is also expected to improve indigenous processing capacity as well as enhance the marketability of rice grown and processed.

The strategy, called the National Rice Development Strategy (NRDS), will be launched on Monday in Minna, Niger State, where Governor Babangida Aliyu will present it to the public.

NRDS is to be launched in Niger State because it is the highest rice producing state in the country.

NRDS outlines the plan for transforming the production, processing and packaging of rice, which is a food item of choice for most households in rural and urban Nigeria.

When faithfully executed, the strategy, which aims to increase rice production in Nigeria from 3.4 million tonnes to 12.85 million tonnes within a decade, an increase of nearly 300 per cent, should save the country the more than \$500 million expended on rice importation annually, as well as impact positively on food security, job creation, balance of trade, poverty reduction and national productivity.

Commenting, Director of Agro-processing and Marketing, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources, Moses Adewuyi, said: “Now we have a holistic strategy for harnessing the potentials of a multi-billion sector for the benefit of our people and our country. This strategy focuses on all points of the rice value-chain and provides the missing link for the development of this vital sector.”

According to the strategy document, Nigeria’s annual rice demand is estimated at 5 million tonnes, out of which only about 2.2 million tonnes is produced locally. The annual rice supply gap of 2.79 million tonnes (or 56 per cent of demand) is bridged by

importation. Nigeria is the highest importer of rice in Africa and the second highest in the world.

Nigeria, however, has huge but untapped potential for rice production and processing, says the strategy document. According to the NRDS, only 39 per cent of the 4.6 million hectares of land suitable for rice production is under cultivation; less than 50, 000 hectares of the estimated 3.14 million hectares of irrigable land is used for rice; and, on the average, less than half of the total amount of rice paddies grown in the country is processed.

To address these gaps and ramp up rice production and processing in Nigeria in a sustainable manner, the NRDS is prioritising three areas of intervention: 1. Post-harvest handling and processing; 2. Land and irrigation development and paddy production; and 3. Seed development and other production inputs.

Under processing and marketing, the strategy is to support the establishment of modern rice processing mills “that will deliver high quality parboiled milled rice that can compete favourably in both domestic and export markets.” Also, there are plans for surveys to generate data for effective planning; conduct training for scientists, extension workers and farmers on latest techniques and best practices; focus on development of standards and grades for quality assurance as well as undertake advocacy and branding of domestic rice “to convince Nigerian consumers that the domestic rice industry can deliver commodity that is comparable to imported rice.”

In the second priority area, the strategy is to expand land under cultivation for rice through clearing of more land, increase of farm power and mechanisation, and the introduction of public -private partnership for better management of under-utilised irrigation schemes in 26 states and of 11 river basin authorities.

For seed production and input development, the strategy will be to subsidise and increase access to quality inputs, provide support to research institutes to produce breeder, foundation and certified seeds, introduce hybrid and high-yield rice varieties, and make chemicals and fertilizers available and affordable to boost rice production. In addition to all these, the NRDS advocates for the creation of a better policy environment for rice sector development. The plan is expected to be funded by the Nigerian government and its development partners.

NRDS was developed from a workshop organized last year by the National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA) to harness the contributions of all stakeholders on how to transform the rice sub-sector. The workshop was sponsored by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), with representation from other development partners, including the World Bank, USAID, World Food Programme, AfDB, UNDP, and NEPAD.

The strategy document was produced as part of the plan to double rice production in Africa in ten years. This is an initiative of the Coalition for Africa Rice Development (CARD), which was launched at the Tokyo International Conference on African

Development (TICAD 4) in May 2008. Twelve countries, including Nigeria , were selected to participate in the pilot phase and were expected to kick-start the process with the production of a national roadmap for rice development.

NRDS has been hailed by development partners and recommended as a model for other participating countries.

• Lagos Sets to Float another N50 Billion Bond for Infrastructure Development.

Governor Babatunde Fashola of Lagos State has disclosed that the second phase of N50 billion out of the N275 billion fixed rate bond will be out for prospective investors.

The second tranche or Series 2 of the State's Fixed Rate Bond is the second part of the Bond issued by the State under its N275 billion Debt Issuance Programme which was first launched in 2008. It has a seven-year life span, 2010 - 2017. The first tranche has a span of five years which expires in 2013.

Disclosing this at the investors forum, Fashola said that the measure to float the second bond was based on the success of the first bond which according to him was over - subscribed.

He reiterated that 75.54 percent of the proceeds from the sale of the Bonds would be used to finance on-going infrastructural projects while 24.46 percent would go for the refinancing of outstanding loans.

"The second tranche will help us to keep that confidence and sustain the hope by continuing the many pending projects embarked upon by the state."

He stated that the proceeds from the sale of the bonds would be used to finance the construction of more roads, schools, hospitals, water supply, jetties and further help to complete the Lagos-Badagry expressway, light rail project, Lekki-Ikoyi Bridge among others.

The further said it would be used to create more jobs for the youths and help to put the state in a position to compete for global opportunities.

Fashola stressed that the judicious application of the proceeds from the first tranche has helped to keep local construction companies in business that have been able to employ over hundreds of thousands of youths, keep children in schools and also improve the standard of living in the state.

Fashola continued: "The micro economic impact are being measured in the roads we have financed which is improving travel time, it is evident in the children and women hospital as three of them now give us 300 more bed space to ensure that women and children do

not die at child birth, in recently commissioned water projects that have added over 50 million gallons of water to the supply, new classroom blocks, delivery of desk and chairs for teachers and students as a commitment to develop a human capital resources for state's future."

Also speaking, the Commissioner for Finance, Mr. Rotimi Oyekan said that the bond will mature by 2017 but the state government will ensure that there is a secondary market for any investor that wanted to sell his or her bond to have the opportunity of doing so.

The Commissioner further explained, "This second tranche issuance is a NGN50 billion seven-year Fixed Rate Bond with a coupon band of 13 percent to 14.5 percent". The first tranche had a coupon of 13 percent.

Oyekan who said the bond will be subscribed to at the rate of N1, 000 per unit further explained that the interest and redemption payments are to be funded directly and solely from the State Government's Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) as, according to him, "The enabling law requires that 15 percent of IGR be credited to the Consolidated Debt Service Account (CDSA)".

"A sinking fund will be created and funded from the CDSA. The Sinking Fund is managed by Trustees who will pay Bondholders as and when due" the Commissioner said pointing out that the State has not issued an Irrevocable Standing Payment Order (IPSO) for Series 2 Bonds.

He listed the key transformational projects which, according to him, are central to the successful implementation of the 10-Point Agenda of the State Government to include, Lagos Urban Rail Mass Transit (LRMT) Scheme (Iddo to Ijoko via Okokomaiko and Marina), which he said will introduce a Rail System to be used by an estimated 500, 000 passengers per day, Lekki Free Trade Zone, Lekki-Ikoyi Bridge and Expansion of Lagos-Badagry Expressway.

Answering a question by one of the investors during the question and answer session, Oyekan explained that as in the first tranche, the State has appointed 16 primary dealers for the purpose of the programme pointing out they provide market for bondholders, who may at any time before the expiration of the bond, decide to dispose of them.

They include Access Bank Plc, Bank PHB, First Bank, Zenith Bank, Stanbic IBTC Bank, UBA Plc, Skye Bank and FCMB among others.

Earlier in his welcome remarks, the Managing Partner -Chapel Hill Advisory Partners, Limited, Mr. Bolaji Balogun, expressed delight that the State Governor, Mr. Babatunde Fashola (SAN), "has been working very hard and delivering quantifiable results".

He declared, "The attendance given to this event today in spite of the short notice, is a testimony of the confidence we have in the transformation of the State", adding that the

second tranche of the Bond, though was delayed in coming, is welcome particularly at this time by the partners.

Also present at the occasion were representatives of the Joint Financial Adviser/Issuing Houses, members of the State Executive Council, Captains of Industry, investors and top government functionaries.

3. Energy:

• Nigeria Ready to Meet Conditions for Nuclear Power Plant

The Federal Government yesterday gave a firm commitment on the country's intention to comply with all international requirements necessary for a safe implementation of a nuclear power programme.

Nigeria's expression of commitment came on the heels of an assurance by the United States of America that it would back an African bid to acquire nuclear power plant.

Special Adviser to the President on Petroleum Matters and the Alternate Chairman of the Board of the Nigerian Nuclear Regulatory Authority, Dr. Emmanuel Egboga who spoke at the commencement of a four-day nuclear executive workshop in Abuja, said government sees the introduction of nuclear power technology as a major option in its quest for long term national energy security and the achievement of the ambition to become one of the top 20 economies of the world.

He said the country is in dire need of opportunities to improve its electricity generation capabilities, which at present is at its lowest ebb, with per capita electricity consumption rate of 136KWh/capita as against 563KWh by other African countries. Egboga said government is pursuing a programme of accelerated expansion of the country's power generation infrastructure with nuclear power programme as an important aspect of the plan.

"The nuclear workshop by the Forum for Nuclear Regulatory Bodies in Africa (FNBA) and the NNRA offers yet another opportunity to reiterate the federal government avowed commitment to comply with and implement all international requirements necessary for a safe nuclear power programme", he said.

According to the Presidential aid, NNRA has the primary mandate to perform all necessary functions that would enable the country meet its national and international safety obligations in the peaceful applications of nuclear energy a

Speaking on the progress made so far in actualising the nuclear ambition, Egboga said a draft bill on national nuclear power sitting regulations has now passed the second reading

at the National Assembly which is intended to further provide safety guards on nuclear energy operation.

The US ambassador to Nigeria Robin Sanders, said her country is providing technical and scientific support to African partners through the International energy Agency (IAEA) and by working with such agencies as the NNRA and the Nigerian Atomic Energy Commission (NAEC) .

"The United States government is pleased that African countries have come together to create the forum of nuclear regulatory bodies in Africa to exchange ideas and experiences in building their nuclear legislative and regulatory capacity"

Sanders said President Obama will be hosting a nuclear security summit in Washington D.C. in April where heads of state will be considering ways of ensuring global nuclear security.

She said nuclear technology is an important element in the mix of power generation sources that countries are exploring boost their electricity capacity, adding that it requires long-term planning and development as well as a huge investment out-lay to successfully execute the programme.

The ambassador spoke of the need to guard against the risks involved in the application of nuclear technology and the importance of making sure that nuclear material does not fall into wrong hands.

The Director-General of NNRA, Mr. Shamusdeen Elegba explained that the objectives of the workshop include, serving as a platform for fostering regional cooperation, exchange of expertise and opportunity for mutual support and coordination of regional initiatives.

• Nigeria's oil workers demand justice for murdered colleagues

Nigeria's main oil workers' union has given the government two weeks to find the killers of two colleagues kidnapped in the restive oil hub of the Niger Delta ten days ago. The Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association (Pengassan) says the government faces grave consequences if it fails to meet their demands.

In a statement on Tuesday, Pengassan called for full investigation of the murders and the prosecution of those responsible within 14 days, failing which the group threatened "to take whatever action deemed appropriate to oblige government to fish out the culprits".

This was one murder too many, says Pengassan representative Peter Essene, a former president of the association, who now heads the umbrella Nigeria Trade Union Congress.

He has called on Nigerian police to change the way they conduct criminal investigations.

"We need to have data and fingerprints from people," he told RFI, adding that "we need to move beyond from just fighting criminals to preventive measures".

Such measures are currently seriously lacking, Essene says, adding that "a serious reform" is needed.

Two employees of a subsidiary of the state-run Nigerian National Petroleum (NNPC) were seized by unknown men on 13 March. Their bodies were discovered on Saturday in southern Delta state.

The oil-rich Niger Delta has been rocked by three years of violent attacks by militants and ransom seekers targeting oil workers and their families.

The violence has pushed down crude production in the world's eighth largest producer to 1.5 million barrels a day, from a peak of 2.6 million barrels at the start of 2006.

4. Environment:

5. Immigration/Refugee/Idps:

- **Nigerians Linked to Al-Qaeda Deported**

The two Nigerian students-- Abdulsalam Luqman and Abdullahi Bolajoko Uthman, who were arrested by Malaysian authorities in January for alleged connections to al-Qaeda have been deported back to Nigeria Accused of being associates of Farouk AbdulMutallab, who is currently standing trial in US for the attempted bombing of s Detroit airline last Christmas, the two men were deported about two weeks ago after being arrested and held under the Internal Securities Acts (ISA) 1960.

Spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Ozo Nwobu in a text message sent to THISDAY yesterday morning said the men were deported to Nigeria on 13th of March, 2010.

It is however not clear what arrangements the Federal Government had with the Malaysian authorities which allowed for the deportation of the students although Permanent Secretary of the Ministry, Dr. Martin Ohomoibhi had stated at a recent press conference that Nigeria had 'very friendly relations' with Malaysia. He had stated at the briefing last Wednesday that he was not aware of the status of the two men, but promised to make their status available to newsmen.

6. Health:

- **Fashola, Commissioners Undergo HIV/AIDS Test**

Lagos State Governor Babatunde Raji Fashola (SAN) yesterday led some members of the State Executive Council to undergo free HIV/AIDS screening carried out in the Governor's Office in Alausa, Ikeja, Lagos.

THISDAY however learnt that some commissioners and special advisers tactically declined to undergo the test when Fashola declared that the exercise was optional and not mandatory.

It was gathered that some aides jokingly refused the screening and stayed behind and made fun of their colleagues who offered to take the risk and opt for the test after the governor had entered the makeshift tent on the governor's office, at about 12: noon.

Though the aides neither refused nor show sign of compliance before leaving the EXCO Chamber, some commissioners and special advisers at the makeshift refused to enter the tent when it was their turn, thus teasing those who underwent the exercise.

Speaking after he went through the exercise yesterday, Fashola urged Lagos indigenes and residents to undergo the HIV/AIDS screening provided free in all government hospitals across the state.

He added that knowing one's status at the ongoing free tests in public hospitals would help to improve the health and general medical life of citizens.

According to him, knowing one's status does not amount to death sentence since government has put in place measures to treat those tested positive free."

Urging the residents to be vigilant on the killer diseases, the governor said his government has put in place clear and uncommon measures to treat whoever is tested positive freely.

added that the motive of the exercise was to enable the EXCO members know their status, and also convince residents on the need to come out and make use of the opportunity.

He said it would also serve as a good opportunity for those at the corridor of power to show leadership by example, adding that members of the state House of Assembly have undergone the test.

According to him, the essence is based on our belief that members of the EXCO should know what their status is and we also believe that if the leaders come out and get tested the people will know that it is a good thing and they will take advantage of it.

“The exercise is going on freely across various state Hospitals and primary health centers in the state. We have public service announcement that we go out to let people know that testing positive is not the end of the world.

“Before now, people used to be afraid of the screening, but there are treatments available and the test is confidential. Besides there are laws now that the state has enacted to protect those living with HIV,” he explained.

7. Human rights/Gender/social issues:

- **Secret killings persist in Jos**

The spate of secret killings in the restive city of Jos, Plateau State continued yesterday with the discovery of the corpse of city resident Adamu Haruna Abubakar, who was abducted by unknown persons last Friday. Adamu was last seen when he left their house to attend Juma’at prayers. His corpse was found by family members yesterday at the Plateau Hospital mortuary. Adamu was 25 years old and unmarried.

Hajiya Khadija, who is an official of Jama’atu Nasril Islam and chairperson of Hausa Fulani Muslim Women Peace Forum in Plateau State, said the killing of Adamu was part of the ongoing secret killings in some parts of Jos North.

She said at the Jamaatu Nasril Islam office in Jos that they have so far recorded 23 people killed and another 58 people missing between March 8 and 21, excluding the people who were injured due to the secret attacks in different parts of Jos North alone. Secret killings have been going on in Jos since soldiers intervened to stop the crises of January 17-19, she said.

Hajiya Khadija faulted the relaxation of curfew by the state government, saying peace is yet to return to the state. She blamed the deployment of policemen to replace soldiers in many parts of the state as responsible for the escalation of the secret killings.

The chairperson also said “the most unfortunate thing is that no arrest has been made in respect of the secret killings despite the fact that sometimes it was the security operatives who will inform us to go and evacuate the corpse in some places.”

Police Public Relations officer ASP Mohammed Lerama advised the relatives of Adamu to lodge a formal complaint to the Police over the incident for proper investigation in order to bring the perpetrators to book. On the secret killings, Lerama said, “we don’t have the data of the secret killings but Police are aware of the secret killings in the town that was the reason why the state Police commissioner Mr Ikechukwu Aduba summoned religious and community leaders to discuss over the incident today, Wednesday, in order to appeal to their communities to avoid vengeance and reprisal attacks so that peace will return to Jos.”

Also speaking, Assistant Director of Army Public Relations Lieutenant Colonel Galadima Shekari said he didn't have access to the data on the secret killings until commanders in the field supply them.

- **Nigerian Gov't must 'probe killings'**

Lagos - Nigeria's white-collar oil workers union on Tuesday protested the murder of two colleagues in the restive oil hub of the Niger Delta and gave the government two weeks to hunt down the killers.

"We have issued a 14-day ultimatum to government and the security agencies to fish out the killers of two of our members," said Bayo Olowosile, secretary of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association (PENGASSAN).

The duo, staff of a subsidiary of the state-run Nigerian National Petroleum (NNPC), were seized by unknown men on March 13.

Their bodies were found on Saturday in southern Delta State, Olowosile said.

"PENGASSAN ...calls for full investigation of this cruel murder and the resultant prosecution of those responsible within 14 days failing which our association may be compelled to take whatever action deemed appropriate to oblige government to fish out the culprits," he said.

In February 2009, the union threatened to call a strike to protest the rising wave of killings and kidnappings of oil workers in the region, but the action never took off after government promises to address their grievances.

For more than three years, the Niger Delta, home to Nigeria's multi-billion-dollar oil and gas industry, has been rocked by violent attacks and kidnappings targeting oil companies, workers and their families.

Some are carried out by militants claiming to be fighting for a fairer share of the region's oil wealth for local people, others by criminal gangs out to make ransom money.

A government amnesty deal saw a brief lull in violence and kidnappings until the end of January when a leading rebel group called off its ceasefire it declared last year.

The surge in violent attacks slashed crude production in the world's eighth largest producer to 1.5 million barrels a day, from a peak of 2.6 million at the start of 2006.

- **164 face charges over massacres**

Lagos – A Nigerian police spokesperson says 164 people will be charged with a variety of offences, including terrorism, for their suspected roles in the slaughter of more than 200 people in central Nigeria this month.

Spokesperson Emmanuel Ojukwu says 41 suspects will be charged with terrorism for their alleged role in the March 7 massacres in villages south of the regional capital of Jos. If convicted they face possible life in prison.

Ojukwu says others will be charged with illegally holding firearms, rioting and other offenses.

The fighting crosses religious lines but often also involves politics, economics and land.

Mostly Christians died in the March 7 slaughter.

January rioting in the region left more than 300 people, most Muslims, dead.

- **Nigerian court bans online chat**

Kano - A Nigerian Islamic Sharia court has banned Twitter and Facebook debates on the country's first wrist amputation for theft, according to court papers seen by AFP on Tuesday.

The Magajin Gari Sharia court in the northern city of Kaduna on Monday ordered the Civil Rights Congress (CRC), one of the country's leading rights groups, to suspend its Twitter and Facebook online debates on the amputation, which was carried out in 2000.

The court granted an interim injunction "restraining the respondents either by themselves or their agents... from opening a chat forum on Facebook, Twitter, or any blog for the purpose of the debate on the amputation of Malam Buba Bello Jangebe," said the order.

Jangebe was the first person to have had his right wrist amputated on the orders of a Sharia court in Zamfara State, a year after 12 northern Nigerian states adopted the strict Islamic penal code.

The order followed a suit filed on Friday by the Association of Muslim Brotherhood of Nigeria, a pro-Sharia group based in the northern political capital of Kaduna, which argued that Internet forums would be used as "a mockery of the Sharia system as negative issues will be discussed".

In the wake of the interim injunction, the case is set for hearing on Monday.

The head of the CRC, Shehu Sani, confirmed to AFP that he was served with the court papers on Monday.

"We opened the blog, the Facebook and Twitter chats 10 days ago to serve as a platform for which Nigerians could air their opinions on Sharia law as a whole and the justification or otherwise of the amputation of the hand of Malam Buba Bello Jangebe," Sani said on the phone from Kaduna.

Out of Nigeria's 36 states, 12 re-adopted a strict version of Sharia in 1999 nearly a century after it had been abandoned.

Zamfara state in the predominantly Muslim north of Nigeria pioneered the move after the country returned to civilian rule following 15 years of military dictatorship.

- **Troops avert another crisis in Jos**

Troops of the Special Task Force (STF) on the Jos Crisis, have averted renewed violence in Bukuru, Jos, Donald Oji, a brigadier general and the leader of the task force said in a statement on Thursday.

According to him, three persons, including the Divisional Police Officer of 'B' Division, Bukuru, were injured, while four suspects were arrested during the aborted violence.

He stated that the incident, which started about 5.30pm, involved two persons who started fighting after a game of football, and later developed to a situation in which youth started blocking the major roads and attacking passers-by.

Guerrilla attacks

Residents of some of villages have also complained of guerrilla attacks on individuals in their villages, with some children missing and dead bodies being found in hidden places.

Confirming the development, the state commissioner of information, Gregory Yenlong, said, "In the last two weeks, not less than 20 people have been killed in selective killings."

The dead and missing were mostly street hawkers, commuter drivers, and those that work outdoors till , some residents confirmed.

According to Mr. Oji, "While we continue to perform our lawful duties, we also appeal to parents and elders to reciprocate our gesture of restraint by admonishing their youths in this dangerous path of perpetrating violence, which they have resorted to."

The task force said in the statement that it is exercising restraint not to bring the necessary force to bear on the undisciplined.

While urging the general public to go about their normal businesses without any fear, it assured that the STF was well-positioned to protect them. It added that the STF had also

on Wednesday, assisted the Fan Community in Barkin Lad Council Area to recover their cows that were rustled in the early hours of that day. The STF said five cows were recovered, while efforts were still on to recover the remaining 25. It said troops responded to a distress call by community leaders and arrested two people in connection with the incident.

The statement also emphasised that the STF was on the alert to restore normalcy in Jos and its environs.

A spokesperson for the Hausa Community, Muhammad Sani Mudi, had told a foreign media organisation that, "We now live in fear, as a result of killings in the city, which makes it difficult for us to move about freely. We have lost 23 members to such secret killings in the past two weeks, while 58 others are still missing."

The police spokesperson, Emmanuel Ojukwu, in an interview with NEXT earlier in the week, had said that 41 people would be charged for murder, while others arrested will face different charges based on what their interrogation reveals.

- **N/Delta militants: We are frustrated**

Ahead of today's scheduled meeting between Acting President Goodluck Jonathan and stakeholders from the restive Niger Delta region, leaders of the militant groups said they are gradually losing patience over unkept amnesty promises, placing the deal at risk of coming off track.

Ailing President Umaru Yar'Adua last year granted thousands of "militants" an unconditional pardon. By October, some 20,000 had laid down their arms amid pomp and promises for training, jobs and cash. Five months on, some of the former fighters claim the programme has lost steam.

"They promised a lot... employment, good living," Gospel Tamouno aka JP, a former commander of a unit of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the most outspoken of all armed groups, told AFP. "Nobody is happy, but the youths are still waiting and hoping".

He however added, "Some have patience but some might not have. The impatient ones are the ones forming the revolution," said Tamouna in reference to a new armed group, the Joint Revolutionary Council (JRC), which has recently laid claim to a wave of attacks on oil pipelines.

Yar'Adua's absence due to ill health is widely cited as the reason for stalling the exercise.

"I was surprised. I have never seen a Nigerian president with such ideas. He (Yar'adua) has done the greatest thing of granting a presidential amnesty for the Niger Delta youths," Tamouno said.

He said hundreds of militant groups operating in the delta had embraced the amnesty, not a mean feat. “It’s not easy to bring people from the creeks. Some of them had never seen a car, but today they are happy, they can walk freely on the streets even if still in poverty,” said a clean-shaven Tamouno, dressed in a dark suit and sitting in a hotel lobby in the oil city of Warri.

Newspapers reported this week that a training exercise for 20,192 former fighters at three rehabilitation centres in Rivers and Delta States have been placed on hold until a new government is in place.

Just before the cabinet dissolution, a minister said Acting President Jonathan had set aside eight billion naira (around 53 million dollars) for the post amnesty programme.

The disarmed militants get a monthly stipend equivalent to around 400 dollars, but some complain that have been left out of the payouts list.

On Tuesday, hundreds of militants staged street protests at nonpayment of promised payouts in Edo State.

“The danger is that people can come (up) with other names and ...as leaders (we) cannot control them,” Tamouno said. “They are people ... who have been neglected under the amnesty”.

He said if the militants submitted 10,000 rifles under the amnesty, it is possible there are 30,000 others out there which could be turned to use “if they (government) don’t follow the original plans”.

“There is no sea or stream in Abuja, but they build bridges all over the place. We need such bridges all over the Niger Delta”.

Acting President Jonathan is expected to meet militant leaders in Abuja today.

- **Jos crisis c’ttee submits report to Jonathan**

The Chief Solomon Lar-led 15-member presidential advisory committee on the January 17 sectarian violence in Jos, Plateau State, yesterday submitted its interim report to Acting President Goodluck Jonathan at the Presidential Villa, Abuja.

Receiving the report, Jonathan vowed to take “crucial steps to stem the tide of grievance and intractable violence in Jos and environs.”

Governor Jonah Jang of Plateau State, who also met with Jonathan separately after the presentation of the report, said he was in Abuja to brief the acting president on security situation in the state.

Jang said the state government has started talking to various groups; particularly Fulani “who have been living here for so many years,” describing them as his age-long neighbours.

Recalling his childhood experience with Fulani, Jang said “I can assure you that I was born in a neighbourhood of the Fulanis. The neighbour of my father was a Fulani man and I grew up with his children and even went to attend to his cows, and if you look at my age now, around 66, then you would understand how long the Fulanis have lived around the Berom and other indigenes of Plateau State.

He said the government would do everything to ensure that all outsiders coming in to create disharmony do not succeed, adding that as Nigerians “we must be able to live together.”

Meanwhile, Jonathan, in a statement by his spokesman Ima Niboro said the acting president thanked the committee for hard work and expressed hope that its final report would provide practical and workable solutions to the Jos crisis.

Earlier, Chief Lar informed the acting president that the full report would be ready soon, explaining that the committee still requires the input of certain critical segments to finalise the document.

Jonathan set up the committee in February during a consultative meeting at the State House, Abuja following the crisis that left over 300 hundred dead.

- **Jos: Three Injured, Four Arrested in Fresh Fracas**

At least three people, including the Divisional Police Officer in charged of ‘B’ Division in Bukuru, Jos, South Local Government Area of Plateau State, were severely injured in a fresh fracas that involved youth of the area following a fight that erupted after a football match.

This is coming as Plateau State Governor, Jonah Jang expressed optimism that given the reinforcement of security in the State as well as the desire of the citizens to embrace one another peace will soon return to the State. Jang who expressed this assurance while speaking to State House Correspondents after a meeting with the Acting President Goodluck Jonathan at the Presidential Villa Abuja vowed to leave no stones unturned in his efforts to restore peace and reunite the people of the State.

A statement by Brigadier-General, Donald Oji, for Commander of the Special Task Force, Jos, said “the violence started at about 5;30 pm, involving some youths after the games of Football, and led to a blockade of roads and assault on passersby, three people were injured in the process, including the DPO of “B” Division, Bukuru. Four people were also arrested in connection with the breach of peace”.

The statement further appealed to the public, especially youth to desist from taking laws into their hands, “We appeal to the public, especially the youths to desist from taking

laws into their hands and causing breaches of peace, we also appeal to parents and elders to reciprocate our gesture of restraints by admonishing their youths on this dangerous path of perpetrating violence which they have resorted to’.

STF also warned that people should note that it is only exercising restraint and not that it cannot bring the necessary force to bear on them. It therefore urged the general public to go about their business without fear as the STF is well-positioned to protect them.

The STF also said it has assisted the Fan Community, in Barikin Ladi local government area to recover their cows that were rustled in the early hours of yesterday, where about five cows were recovered while efforts are still on to recover the remaining 25.

It said the assistance of the troops was prompted by distress calls received from the community leaders. It said two people have been arrested in connection with the incident. It reassured the people that STF is determined to restore normalcy in all the areas in the state.

Jang spoke as the Solomon Lar-led Presidential Advisory Committee on Jos crisis set up in January this year submitted its interim report to Jonathan in the Presidential Villa, Abuja yesterday.

“I believe that with the additional forces sent in for deployment in all the various localities to ensure that lives and property are protected, peace will be achieved. As you know you can win a war, but you cannot win peace, not easily.

“Everything is being done to ensure that peace returns to Plateau State. We have started talking to various groups; particularly the Fulanis who have been living here (Plateau) for so many years”, he assured, adding “I cannot leave behind this kind of Plateau State as governor,” the governor said.

While reminiscing on his early lives in Plateau, Jang said, “I was born in a neighbourhood of the Fulanis. The neighbour of my father was a Fulani man and I grew up with his children and even went to tend his cows, and if you look at my age now, around 66, then you would understand how long the Fulanis have lived around the Berom and other indigenes of Plateau State.

Meanwhile, a statement from the office of the Spokesman of the Acting President said Jonathan while receiving the interim report assured that the Federal Government was determined to formulate crucial next steps to stem the tide of grievance and intractable violence in Jos and environs.

It said Jonathan, expressed concern over the resurgent crisis in the area and declared that “we just cannot continue like this”. He noted that the area is going through a period of aggression and lawlessness which the Federal Government is determined to bring to an end.

The Acting President was reported to have thanked the committee for hard work and commitment, and expressed hope that its final report would provide practical and workable solutions to the Jos crisis.

Earlier, chairman of the committee, Chief Solomon Lar, informed the Acting President that the full report would be ready soon, explaining that the committee still required the input of certain critical segments to finalise the document.

He commended the Federal Government for its open determination to put an end to the crisis in Jos, which he said is caused by years of mutual suspicion and mistrust among the people in the area.

- **Jos still wracked by killings**

Despite tightened security in the restive Nigerian city of Jos following recent sectarian massacres, a wave of revenge killings has claimed the lives of both Muslims and Christians.

The tension is so marked that inhabitants find it difficult to venture out in some parts of the central city, which lies on the fault line between the Muslim-majority north and the mainly Christian south.

"We now live in fear as a result of killings in the city, which makes it difficult for us to move about freely," Muhammad Sani Mudi, spokesperson of the Hausa community of Muslims in Jos said.

"We have lost 23 members to such secret killings in the past two weeks, while 58 others are still missing," he said late on Tuesday.

On Tuesday, 25-year old student Adamu Haruna became the latest victim of the violence, said Hausa spokesperson Mudi. He disappeared on the way to Friday prayers.

"He was last seen on Friday when he left his home for the central mosque," Mudi said on phone from Jos. His body, disfigured with machete cuts, was discovered at a city morgue, he added.

Silent killings

The dead and missing were mostly street sellers, newspaper vendors and drivers of motorcycle taxis, Mudi said.

But the same fear gripped the other side of the sectarian divide.

Donald Maiyaki, a Jos resident, said: "Everybody lives in fear in Jos due to these silent killings going on.

"I know of two Christian teenage students separately kidnapped in the past week. They are still missing".

Information commissioner of Plateau State, Gregory Yenlong, confirmed the problem.

"In the last two weeks not less than 20 people have been killed in selective killings," he said.

Nigeria's acting president Goodluck Jonathan deployed troops in Jos after the clashes in January, which left more than 300 mainly Muslims dead.

Reprisal attacks

For a while, the troop presence brought a semblance of peace.

But earlier this month, in apparent reprisal attacks, Muslim Fulani herdsmen went on a killing spree in raids on Christian villages.

And although police say around 100 people were killed, state government officials have insisted that at least 500 ethnic Beroms perished in the attacks.

Plateau State police chief Ikechukwu Aduba has acknowledged the current tensions.

"The city has been polarised," he said recently.

"There are areas where a Christian will enter and Muslims will kill him and there are areas where a Muslim will enter and Christians will kill him.

"This is inimical to peaceful coexistence," he added.

"The police is aware of the secret killings in the city but we don't have data on the toll," Plateau police spokesperson Mohammed Lerama said.

Most effective solution

But efforts were underway to get religious leaders to work towards a lasting peace.

The troops are still visible in Jos, but the experts say it has only quelled the more overt, large-scale violence.

"The presence of troops has forced the warring factions to stop fighting openly but mutual animosity and resentment are still high and each faction stealthily strikes at the other ... when it gets the chance," said Markus Kefas, a specialist at a private security agency.

"The troops can only patrol the major streets of the city and these killings are carried out in the recesses," he said.

Just last week the authorities relaxed by three hours a dusk-to-dawn curfew imposed on the city in the wake of the violence, arguing that the security situation had improved.

But Mudi said easing the curfew was a mistake, as it only gave the killers more cover.

For Kefas however, the curfew had no bearing on the problem, as most of the new wave of killings had happened in broad daylight.

"Therefore with or without curfew people bearing such animosity and resentment will carry out such attacks if they get the chance," said Kefas.

The most effective solution, he said, would in the end be genuine reconciliation.

But he warned: "The fear is that if these killings continue, there is the tendency of eruption of violence even with the presence of troops."

- **Nigerian massacre: 207 to be tried**

Lagos - Police in Nigeria's central city of Jos are planning for a speedy trial of 207 suspects arrested over recent large scale slaughter of Christian villagers, a spokesperson said.

Plateau State police spokesperson Mohammed Lerama told AFP on the phone from Jos that arrangements were under way "to enable us begin the prosecution of about 200 suspects".

"We hope to go to court this week," he said.

Lerama said a total of 207 suspects were picked up following the butchering of hundreds of villagers - mainly women and children - near Jos in two incidents this month.

"Forty-nine Fulani herdsmen arrested following the March 7 attack will be charged with homicide and terrorism," he said, adding that an additional seven Fulani would face similar charges over a second bout of killings on March 17.

A group of 151 ethnic and mainly Christian Beroms would face charges of illegal possession of firearms, disturbance of public peace, unlawful assembly and destruction of property, he said.

Federal police on Sunday said 164 people had been arrested over the massacre with 49 of them to be charged with terrorism and arson while 121 face multiple offences of unlawful possession of firearms, rioting, arson and assault with the intent to cause grievous harm.

Police say more than 100 people were killed with machetes, while government officials insist more than 500 were massacred by the nomadic Fulani.

Police also said 213 suspects have already been charged with various offences connected to the violence in January, when mostly Muslims were killed, and were being held in various prisons across the country.

8. Geo-Strategic issues:

- **Crime: US Partners Nigeria Police on Training, Logistics**

United States Ambassador to Nigeria, Ms. Robin Sanders has said that the US government will assist the Nigeria Police Force in training its personnel in areas of community policing and combat training with a view to curtailing civil disturbances experienced in certain parts of the country in recent times.

Sanders, who led five members of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom on a courtesy visit to the Inspector General of Police (IGP), Ogbonna Onovo, also said the US government would provide equipment and logistics to the police as a way of supporting the Force in combating crime in Nigeria.

While thanking the visit US Ambassador and her entourage for finding out time to visit the Nigeria Police in spite of their tight schedule, Onovo expressed the willingness of the Nigeria Police Force and the country as a whole to collaborate with the US government in any area of training, which is aimed at building the capacity of the personnel with a view to enhance proactive policing.

The IGP, through the Ambassador, thanked the United States Government for the cordial relationship between the two countries and called for deeper cooperation especially in the areas of crime prevention and control.

the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission {EFCC} on tuesday arrested three commissioners and six local government chairmen in Kogi state.

They were arrested in Lokoja at the affected local government council offices and moved to Abuja.

Commission's spokesperson, Mr. Femi Babafemi confirmed the arrest. Over N3 billion public funds belonging to the local governments were allegedly embezzled by the officials.

Members of the state executive council arrested included Commissioner of Agriculture, Samuel Abiodun Ojo, his Finance counterpart, Stephen Olorunfemi and T.J Faniyi who mans the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs.

The arrested council bosses included Yagba East L.G, Obaro Kayode, Ogori Magongo L.G, Gabriel Dauda, Okene L.G, Yahaya Abubakar, Yagba West L.G, Stephen Asala, Adavi L.G, Ahmed Raji and former caretaker chairman of Adavi L.G, Enesi Suleiman Jimoh.

THISDAY gathered that all the suspects were being detained. THISDAY further gathered that the suspects were alleged to have been sharing the funds accruable to the local

government councils in recent past, with numerous petitions reportedly leading to their investigation and subsequent arrest.

A source at the Commission's Headquarters, Abuja, told THISDAY that with the suspects being detained, the EFCC's operatives must have concluded all investigation into the allegations against them and the arrest might be preparatory to their arraignment in court.

- **Pirates wound 3 in Turkish ship attack off Nigeria**

Sea pirates off the shores of Nigeria attacked a Turkish flagged ship, Ozay-5, wounding two Turks and one Nigerian who were part of the crew.

In a written press release, the Turkish Undersecretariat of Maritime Affairs said Friday that Ozay-5 was attacked on Thursday night by at least eight sea pirates.

The pirates seized all cash money, mobile telephones and other valuable items in the ship.

The pirates and the crew members began fighting with each other when a crew member pushed the alarm button of the ship.

The sea pirates left the ship after spraying bullets on the personnel saloon. There were no major injuries or mass property damage in the ship.

The injured crew members have been taken to a hospital in Lagos, Nigeria. Their injuries were not life threatening.

Other West African States

Benin:

Burkina Faso:

Cameroon:

Cape Verde:

Chad:

Cote d'Ivoire:

- **Ivorian peace process in danger.....H1**

Abidjan - Supporters of Ivory Coast's President Laurent Gbagbo on Tuesday said the peace process was in danger after former rebels refused to tie disarmament to an election date.

"Disarmament and reunification are non-negotiable. The peace process in Ivory Coast is in danger, it is at risk of becoming biased," said the leader of the so-called Patriots, Charles Ble Goude.

"We're going to struggle for disarmament and the reunification of the nation calmly but firmly," Ble Goude told AFP by telephone while touring the divided west African country ahead of elections planned for "late April-early May".

On Monday, the former rebel New Forces (FN), led by Prime Minister Guillaume Soro, refused to link the disarmament of their troops to the organisation of the vote, which is being mediated by Burkina Faso's President Blaise Compaore.

Demobilisation

"Disarmament has never been linked to the organisation of the presidential election and has thus never been a condition for its organisation," FN spokesperson Affousy Bamba said, despite the terms of a 2008 peace pact.

He told a news conference that the "process of disarmament, demobilisation and (social) reinsertion will continue after the presidential election".

Ivory Coast has been divided in two since a foiled coup against Gbagbo in September 2002, after which the rebels took control of the northern half of the cocoa-rich country.

Gbagbo has been in power for 10 years, but his mandate expired in 2005, and successive internationally mediated bids to organise an election foundered six times. Few in Ivory Coast believe that it will be possible to organise one by the latest planned date, but Soro has said he wants a poll by June.

Ble Goude accused Soro of wanting to be "prime minister in Abidjan and head of state in Bouake", the central stronghold of the FN.

"This situation could rebound on him. I wish he would be more courageous and clarify his position," Ble Goude said, adding that "we can't continue to develop a parallel economy (in the north) and make believe that we are heading for peace."

Signed at the end of 2008, the last peace accord, which was a complement to a political agreement signed in Ouagadougou a year earlier, stipulates that the disarmament of FN elements who have not been incorporated into mixed brigades or demobilised should be complete at the latest two months before the presidential election.

Gambia:

Guinea- Conakry:

Guinea- Bissau:

Liberia:

Mali:

- **Mali Women Push for Girls Education.....H7**

Institutions like the United Nations and World Bank are increasing their attention on girls education, but in countries like the West African nation of Mali only about half of all girls are enrolled in school. There are efforts by local people in rural Mali to make sure girls get an education.

Bintou Kassambara is 26 years old and lives in a town called Dioro, 150 kilometers from Mali's capital, Bamako. She started primary school much later than other children. She was 20 years old when she was in seventh grade and her family pulled her out of school.

Kassambara says her father engaged her to a cousin, an uneducated young man she did not love. She says even if she did love him, she was not ready to get married, so she ran away.

Kassambara says she did not want to stop studying in order to get married. She says she had passed a group of farmers looking at a notice. Out of all 12 people there Kassambara was the only one who could read, so she told them what the notice said.

After that, Kassambara says she realized how practical and important it is to get an

education. She is not the only one in Dioro to learn that lesson.

The Benkadi Women's Association is working to get girls to attend school. According to the United Nations, 56 percent of Malian girls are enrolled in primary school, but for boys in Mali the number is 70 percent.

Assan Diakite says the association often has to give the mothers money to send their daughters to school, because sometimes they don't even have enough to buy a notebook. Plus, they leave their daughters at home to help with house work.

The Benkadi Women's Association raises money by buying rice, onions and tomatoes when they are in season and the price is low. The members dry and preserve the food until the crops go out of season and the price rises. They sell the food at a profit at the local market.

Benkadi Women's Association member Mariam Coulibaly says you can see the difference between educated and uneducated families in town. When you visit a family with an educated mother, everything is orderly and clean in the house, and there is food to eat. But she says, in an uneducated household, everything is chaotic and dirty. Belongings are everywhere and the children are wandering around like wild animals. Coulibaly says that is because they have not learned that poor hygiene can make you sick.

It is late afternoon and a teacher at the Dioro Primary School gives a lesson on sanitation to a seventh-grade class.

The 50 children in the classroom sit in groups at wooden tables, following the teacher as he paces down the aisles. They snap their fingers and even jump out of their seats when they know the answer.

But in this classroom in Dioro, there are plenty of girls. The women's association's activities have paid off, according to the vice president of Benkadi and the principal of the primary school, Sitan Coulibaly. She says there are more girls than boys enrolled in her school.

Twelve years ago when the women's association started working, only five to seven percent of all the students at the school were girls, but today that number is 57 percent.

Across town from the school, Bintou Kassambara is up on her flat roof drying rice in the hot sun, moving her hands over the coarse grain. Next Kassambara will cook the rice and take it to the village next door, where three times a week she walks up and down the lanes, selling it to hungry villagers.

Kassambara says she cannot continue studying anymore because she has a daughter, and she has to take care of her mother, who cannot work. She also says her father was afraid if she kept studying she might not be faithful to her husband.

Kassambara continues with her chores, washing the pots and spoons with two buckets of water in her yard. She still has a few hours before her six-year old daughter comes home from kindergarten.

Kassambara says she regrets not being able to go to secondary school. She says her daughter will finish school before marriage. She will not let her child make the same mistake.

Niger:

- **People in Niger Heading Toward Capital in Search of Food....H7**

Relief officials say nearly 60 percent of families in Niger are facing food shortages because of poor rains. Some people are now leaving their villages, heading toward the capital in search of food.

In the village of Begorou Tondo, people are loading their possessions on to donkey carts for the 100-kilometer walk to the capital looking for food.

This young woman says there is simply nothing left to eat at home.

She says her family has no choice but to eat the leaves of plants growing on the side of the road, because there is nothing left to eat. They have no food, she says, and her parents have not received help from anyone.

Village chief Nouhou Senou says poor rains ruined this year's crops.

Senou says this year; people in Begorou Tondo harvested nothing, so they all have to rely on God. The village has big problems, he says, the famine is really here.

Last year's poor rains are also hurting people who live off cattle. Prime Minister Mahamadou Danda says livestock production is down 16 million tons because of a shortage of grazing. Cereal production for animals is 13 percent lower than 2008.

Cattle herder El Hadj Abdoulaye Saleh says people have no choice but to sell off livestock they can no longer feed.

Saleh says everything relies on rain. Shepherds do not want to get rid of their cattle but they have to. It is not because they want to.

The United Nations says at least 200,000 children in Niger face severe acute malnutrition requiring hospital treatment. Niger's government says more than 45,000 cases were recorded by the middle of March. That is double last year's figure.

Dr. Hamidou Hamadou is chief of epidemiology at Tera Hospital. He says they are averaging about 20 cases of severe acute malnutrition each week.

Niger needs \$123 million in international assistance to meet food shortages. The country's new military rulers have spoken publicly about the risk of famine since taking charge in a coup last month. That is a clear break from the approach of former president Mamadou Tandja.

But the instability that food shortages can bring in any society could disrupt Niger's plans for new elections once politicians agree on a new constitution to replace laws President Tandja used to give himself another three years in office.

Across the Sahel, the United Nations estimates that poor farmers in Niger, Chad, and northeastern Mali will likely need food assistance at least through the early harvests in August.

- **40 hurt in Niger bee attack.....H7**

Niamey - Angry bees attacked villagers in southwestern Niger after being disturbed on Monday, putting more than 40 badly-stung residents in hospital and killing some of their animals, private radio Anfani reported.

The bees swarmed into Dake-Garka village after a gust of wind broke the tree branch which had held their nest for more than half a century, sending panic-stricken people fleeing into the bush, the radio said.

More than 40 villagers, including 14 children, were admitted to emergency wards of the regional hospital in Birni-N'Konni, it said.

A horse and a donkey died of stings while 95 goats and sheep were left paralysed.

"They felt aggressed by us and they riposted," village head Chaibou Abdoukarim told Anfani.

Hours after the invasion, many residents were still afraid to return to their homes, besieged by bees, he said.

- **Niger exiled ex-speaker returns.....H1**

Niamey - The former speaker of Niger's parliament, Mahamane Ousmane, has returned to Niamey after eight months of exile in Nigeria, a source close to him said on Thursday.

"He arrived discreetly on Wednesday evening on a commercial flight from Abudja (the Nigerian capital)," Ali Souley told AFP.

Ousmane was head of the parliament until it was dissolved last May by then president Mamadou Tandja because it opposed his desperate efforts to obtain an extension of his mandate, due to expire last December 22.

In 1993, Ousmane became the west African country's first democratically elected president, but he was overthrown by the army in 1996 after a chaotic political alignment with his then prime minister Hama Amadou.

The staunch support of Ousmane's Democratic and Social Convention (CDS), helped Tandja to be elected in 1999 and 2004, but last year Tandja took a series of widely contested steps to remain in power.

He dissolved the independent national electoral commission as well as parliament, and then staged a constitutional referendum in August, which gave him three more years in power.

But these steps led to his downfall in a military coup last February 18.

The junta, which has vowed to restore democracy in the deeply poor but uranium-rich country, has announced that all exiled opponents of the toppled regime can return home "without problems".

Amadou, who also served as prime minister under Tandja, has been living in exile for about a year now.

He left Niger in April 2009 after he was granted bail. He had been detained for 10 months in Niger's maximum security prison for the alleged embezzlement of public funds.

Amadou, once thought a likely candidate to be Tandja's successor, has said the charges against him are a "machination" to keep him out of the political race.

- **Niger's ousted Tandja is fit.....H1**

Niamey - Former Niger leader Mamadou Tandja, under arrest since being toppled in a coup last month, is in "good shape", an AU envoy said on Wednesday after visiting him.

"I wanted to meet president Tandja, I was allowed to see him. I found him in good shape," Albert Tevoedjre said in remarks cited by the local media.

"I could talk with him. I think his situation is that of a political prisoner whose rights are respected," he added.

Tandja was ousted on February 18 in a military coup by a junta that has vowed to pave the way for a return to democracy.

The AU wants Tandja, held in the capital Niamey, to be freed. The pan-African body's peace and security chief Ramtane Lamamra has said the fate of the 71-year-old ex-president is "a constant source of preoccupation for the AU".

Tevoedjre was early this month named AU special envoy to Niger to help give impetus to efforts to resolve the crisis after the coup.

According to Niger's state television, Tevoedjre arrived in Niamey on Monday and met military junta chief Major Salou Djibo.

"I am happy that the chief of the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy (CSR) and all those around him have reaffirmed their commitment to move towards a constitutional democracy as soon as possible," Tevoedjre told reporters.

The military rulers said Tandja was being detained "for security reasons" in a presidential building where he is allowed access to his doctor.

The junta, which has constituted a cabinet, has promised a short transition and a rapid return to civil rule.

Senegal:

- **Senegal's fishermen fight crisis.....H2**

Wherever you go in Senegal, fish is always on the menu.

But not only is it an important part of the diet here - it's a crucial way of people making a living.

In the small town of Kayar, 60km from the capital, Dakar, fishing is what people know best.

It's a family thing: fishing has sustained generations of townspeople.

But the very industry that has kept the town afloat for countless years is in danger of sinking.

Catches are dramatically down.

Many fingers here are being pointed at the big, sophisticated foreign boats which are allowed to fish in Senegalese waters.

The government says it has taken steps to address these concerns and has cut down the number of European boats permitted to a mere handful.

But that reassurance cuts little ice here.

Fish shortage

Abdoul Aziz Dieng has fished all his adult life. Now, though, things look grim.

"There is a real shortage of fish," he says.

"All our revenues come from fish. If there is a shortage, it affects all areas of everyday life. Things are very hard and I don't have enough money to look after my family."

It's not just the men who haul the fish out of the sea who are hurting. The women who dry and smoke the fish are also suffering.

Codou Diop represents them. She says there has been a real reduction in activity because of the shortage of fish.

Not so long ago, they used to sell hundreds of boxes of fish, but now they only sell a few.

That has reduced the income for the entire town, so people have less money to spend on dried fish.

Infrastructure problems

But the industry has more than just foreign ships to worry about. Despite the shortage of fish, it has an increasing abundance of fishermen.

People have flocked to towns such as Kayar to escape hard times in other sectors, like agriculture.

And then there is the poor infrastructure. Many people cannot afford the refrigeration or transport necessary to sell their fish in more lucrative urban markets.

So, paradoxically, some fishermen actually have to throw fish away - at a time when they are struggling to catch them in the first place.

Self-help

Hard times mean hard measures are required. So the industry is busy reorganising itself.

This includes putting weekly limits on the number of times people can set out to sea.

Abdoulaye Diop represents fishermen throughout the country and says the industry is acting to save itself.

"We have decided to manage the resources and organise ourselves," he says.

So they have introduced a fishing rota. People can only fish a few days a week.

Abdoulaye Diop says they do not want to waste resources and that it is the industry's responsibility to manage what they get from the sea.

So there are also self-imposed limits on the age and size of fish which may be caught.

The industry hopes these measures will help see them through turbulent times.

The future of the next generation could ride on their success.

- **Senegalese-origin baker wins coveted best baguette award.....H7**

The best baguette in Paris can be found on Montmartre's rue des Abbesses – and it's made by a 33-year-old of Senegalese origin. Djibril Bodian won the coveted annual prize for baking the best traditional French loaf in Paris on Monday.

Bodian, who works at the *Grenier à Pain* shop in the historic Paris neighbourhood, beat 162 other contestants at a tasting at the bakers' and patissiers' professional headquarters in central Paris.

The competition was stiff and the rules strict. Twenty-two baguettes were disqualified for not conforming to the jury's criteria – the loaves must be delivered before 1pm, be between 50 and 70cm in length and weigh between 240 and 340 grammes.

The baguettes are judged according to taste, smell, crustiness, appearance and the quality of the airholes, which are a crucial element in traditional baguettes.

The *baguette de tradition* is legally defined in France. A 1993 decree stipulated that it must be made with flour, water and salt, but allowed the addition of very small quantities of bean or soya flour and malt.

For all the pride in bread heritage, there was innovation in this year's contest. Five members of the public who had applied by internet were added to the jury, otherwise made up of bakery professionals.

The prize is worth 4,000 euros but the money is just one advantage of winning. The winning shop's business is likely to treble and Bodian's boss will probably have to take on more staff.

And, as the ultimate honour, he will become the official supplier to President Nicolas Sarkozy, delivering 15-20 baguettes every day to the Elysée Palace.

Bodian's immigrant origins have prompted some facetious remarks about the government's "national identity" policy on certain websites.

- **Block on palm oil imports to Senegal concerns WFP....H7**

DAKAR (AlertNet) - A vital World Food Programme (WFP) project to feed more than 400,000 vulnerable Senegalese will be delayed after local authorities blocked imports of half a million metric tonnes of refined palm oil, a WFP official said.

The Senegalese government ordered a shipment of the oil to be held at port, saying the acidity levels of the palm oil were too high.

New Senegalese regulations ban imports of palm oil with acidity levels of 30 percent and higher for health reasons.

"We have approached the authorities to try and sort it out and we are yet to know what decision they are taking but it looks like we may fail to get this food out of the port," Biennu Djossa, WFP country director for Senegal, told AlertNet in an interview.

"It will delay our programme and will take the cost of the operation to levels that should never have been reached," he added.

The shipment, part of an aid programme funded by the European Union (EU), may eventually be sent back.

The palm oil is part of a food-for-work initiative for 200,000 vulnerable people in rural areas.

The aim is to give the food in exchange for people's participation in community projects to promote group farming, crop diversification, reforestation, irrigation and flood resistance.

The oil was also destined for pregnant and lactating women (about 180,000 people) as compensation for lost time at work in order to attend training sessions on good nutritional, hygienic and sanitary practices.

Palm oil is an important but expensive part of local diets and its inclusion in the food projects is designed to generate interest and participation amongst the local communities.

If the oil is not released, part of the \$15 million E.U.-sponsored programme in Senegal, which is a targeted response to the food crisis affecting many developing countries, will be disrupted.

It will also put some families at risk of food scarcity during the imminent lean season - the months between the exhaustion of household stocks and the new harvest - when the food aid was scheduled to be distributed.

HIT BY FOOD PRICE HIKES

Senegal, which imports over 60 percent of its food, was badly hit by the international food price hikes in 2008, leading to streets protests.

Although it is not among the Sahelian countries that are threatened by severe food shortages this year, aid agencies say it is not completely out of danger.

Djossa added it would be "impossible" for any importer to reach the acidity targets set by the Senegalese government. But he stressed the oil imported was fit for human consumption, complied with international standards and was particularly nutritive for the target population as it is fortified in vitamins A and D.

"It is a pity that it can't get out of the port," Djossa said in his Dakar office.

The new regulation on palm oil imports was signed in September, after the WFP had ordered its consignment from Malaysia, he said.

The WFP wants the Senegalese authorities to consider a transition period to enable importers to comply with the regulation, especially as they allowed in a first shipment of 344,000 metric tonnes of the same oil in January this year.

"I should not lose hope, I think we will be able to convince them that all the papers are there to certify that this oil is good for human consumption. Will this be sufficient? I don't know?" Djossa said.

- **Senegal army, rebels clash.....H1**

Kolda - The Senegalese army and suspected separatist rebels clashed on Monday in the country's restive southern Camamance province, according to a military source.

"This morning, they (the military) learned of the presence of armed elements in the area. Soldiers in place in Sareyoba went to the area to check," the source added on condition of anonymity.

"The people (rebels) opened fire on them and they responded. There was an exchange of fire but calm quickly returned."

The incident happened 30km south of Kolda, a town to the east of Ziguinchor and near the border with Guinea-Bissau. No casualties were immediately reported.

The army's public relation's service was not available to comment.

Since Thursday, three soldiers have been killed and nine injured during operations against the rebels in the south of Ziguinchor, the biggest city in Casamance, which is separated from the rest of Senegal by the Gambia.

The poor region has been ravaged by conflict between government forces and separatist rebels since 1982.

A peace accord signed in 2004 eased tensions, but clashes have increased in the past six months leading to both military and civilian deaths.

The Senegalese army has been conducting operations for several days to clear out rebel bases.

Sierra Leone:

- **No Easy Road to Reconciliation: Lansana Fofana.....H7**

FREETOWN, Mar 25 (IPS) - Former child soldier Komba Gbondo maimed and killed many people from his hometown, and the 25-year-old is still too terrified to return.

Gbondo was 13 when Revolutionary United Front (RUF) fighters invaded his home town of Tombodu, in the eastern district of Kono and forcefully recruited and conscripted dozens of able-bodied men and boys, into their ranks.

For four years Gbondo was part of what was known as the "Small Boys Unit" – a death squad of underage boys who terrorised and killed civilians, including many people from his village.

"I killed and amputated the limbs of many people, but I was not alone. We were drugged and given gun powder which emboldened us and made us commit all those horrific crimes. I regret my actions today but I am still afraid to go back to my village for fear that my victims or their relatives might kill me," Gbondo says.

A Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was set up immediately after the conflict ended, but Gbondo's testimony is but one of many clear indications that eight years on, Sierra Leone's reconciliation process is faltering.

Forty-five year old Margaret Sesay watched as her husband was murdered in front of her. "I know the guy who killed him and he is right now here in Freetown, but he can't dare go back to the village. I think people like these should be taken to the communities and made to confess their deeds and ask for forgiveness. That way the nation will reconcile itself."

But Bishop Joseph Humper, the chairman of the TRC, is pessimistic about the implementation of the Commission's recommendations.

"My fear is that the country might slip into war or conflict if reconciliation is not given the due attention it deserves," Humper says.

The TRC recommended in 2004 that government distribute copies of its report, findings and recommendations throughout the country.

A children's version was printed, audio tapes made and songs composed in local languages to spread the message contained in the TRC report, but these failed to reach the communities which were badly affected by the conflict. Many think government has not been pro-active in disseminating this.

Many Sierra Leoneans are troubled to see that instead of reconciling former combatants with their communities, the presidency has recruited some of the most notorious ex-fighters into the security services, with some working as close-protection bodyguards to the president, his vice-president and other senior state functionaries, says Steven Kamara, a civil society activist.

"I think it was wrong for the government to re-arm these former killers," remarks Ishmail Conteh. "Seeing them in uniforms and wielding guns reminds one of the dark days of conflict. I can even recognise some of these former rebel commanders parading behind the president. This is in no way helping national reconciliation."

Conteh lost his child and cousin in the eastern town of Koidu when rebels captured the area in 1998. He is now a businessman based in Freetown.

Popular concern is further stoked by the fact that state security personnel have been involved in a string of politically-motivated acts of violence since elections three years ago, says Jacob Jusu-Saffa, the secretary-general of the main opposition Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). Jusu-Saffa adds that there are fears that there will be violence during the 2012 presidential and general elections.

Information and Communication Minister Ibrahim Ben Kargbo dismisses these fears as exaggerated.

"Those security guys have been retrained and made to be more professional. If anything, they are now being kept busy so that they stay away from violence," he says.

Kargbo says the president is a leading advocate of reconciliation. "I think the president has national reconciliation close to his heart and he expresses this whenever he meets the people."

James Kamara, a construction worker whose sister was abducted – never to be seen again – when rebels invaded Freetown in January 1999 is one of many who feel this is not enough.

"Reconciliation is a difficult process," he says. "The government has to take the initiative and bring the people together. They have to go to the towns and villages and bring victims and perpetrators together, to tell their stories and embrace each other."

Kamara, whose also lost his son during the rebel invasion, says government should set up a task force that will go to communities and help reconcile people.

The lack of initiative by government prompted the non-governmental organisation "Fambul Tok" (meaning "dialogue between the people" in Krio) to take the initiative and launch its own reconciliation initiative in 2008.

Fambul Tok's executive director, John Caulker, a former member of the TRC working committee, says: "We have waited for too long but nothing seems to be working practically. The nation is still bitterly divided, families are torn apart and tension is still mounting in the communities. This is why we have stepped in to help heal the wounds of war." Fambul Tok has reconciled hundreds of communities.

"We have covered more than 50 chiefdoms and hundreds of communities in various parts of the country's east and south. We bring together victims and perpetrators under big trees in the villages and allow them to tell their stories. This has worked in all instances of our campaign. We also organise football matches in the communities where victims and perpetrators take part. It is incredible how these people embrace each other and get on with their lives," Caulker says.

Togo: Togo outlaws protests against elections results.....H1

LOME (Reuters) - Togo's government outlawed on Friday further demonstrations against the results of a March 4 presidential election, which opposition leaders say was rigged to favour the incumbent.

The decree came a day ahead of a scheduled opposition rally in the seaside capital of Lome, escalating tensions in the West African state whose election had been widely seen as a test for regional democracy.

"In order to preserve peace and security, all demonstrations contesting the results of the March 4 presidential election are strictly prohibited on national territory," a press release issued by Togo's security ministry said.

Official results showed Togo's incumbent President Faure Gnassingbe won more than 60 percent of the vote and international observers said the poll appeared generally free and fair.

The election was seen as an opportunity for West African democracy after a series of recent regional setbacks including a military coup in Niger and violent protests against poll delays in Ivory Coast.

Togolese security forces killed some 500 people following the country's last presidential election in 2005, but a parliamentary vote two years later was peaceful and led to a resumption of international aid.

Demonstrations in Togo since the March 4 election have so far been mostly peaceful, though security forces used tear gas to disperse demonstrators earlier this week, injuring 30, according to the main opposition group UFC.

"We will maintain our rally in Lome scheduled for Saturday," a UFC official told Reuters on condition anonymity.

Togo is near the bottom of the United Nations human development index, and its economy relies heavily on production of phosphate, coffee, cocoa and cotton.