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Details of the News

1 China-African Relations:

• Jonathan Visits Zamfara Today

President Goodluck Jonathan will today commission the multi-million naira mineral processing industry in Gusau as part of his one-day official visit to Zamfara.

The Commissioner for Information Alhaji Aliyu Adamu announced this while briefing newsmen yesterday in Gusau. The visit was earlier scheduled for June 1, but was brought forward to ensure the president's physical presence for the event.

The mineral processing factory was initiated in 2009 by Gov. Mahmuda Shinkafi in an effort to provide alternative revenue base and employment opportunities. The project, which was executed under a 60-40 per cent funding ratio between Zamfara Government and its Chinese partners, was expected to create more than 4,000 jobs.

It is also expected to smelt and roll iron as well as process other minerals like gold, zinc and other deposits.

Meanwhile, Gusau is wearing a new look preparatory to the president's visit. The capital has been decorated while potholes on major roads which hitherto constituted menace have been sand filled.

The president, who is expected to leave for Abuja later in the day, will also inspect some ongoing projects embarked upon by the state government. NAN

• General Hospital for Teshie to be ready in October

Work on the 100-bed General Hospital at Teshie is expected to be completed by October this year. President John Evans Atta Mills, cut sod for work to begin on the 10-million-dollar project being financed by Chinese Government in April last year.

Mr Hu Yujie, Counsellor of Economic and Commercial Office at the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Ghana, announced this during a familiarisation tour by Mr Rojo Mettle-Nunoo, Deputy Minister of Health in Accra on Friday. He was accompanied by Nii Nortey Duah, Deputy Minister of Youth and Sports and Member of Parliament for Ledzokuku. Mr Hu said the project being implemented under the Beijing Summit on China-Africa Cooperation, would include a Malaria Research Centre to facilitate research into the disease.

Other facilities are Out-Patient-Department, Radiology Unit with CT and X-ray, two operating theatres, ultrasound, enterscopy, gastroscopy and electro-cardiogram. Mr Hu said in addition to the provision of medical care and other services such as optometry, accident and emergency centres, maternal and child health and physiotherapy, it had a Scientific Herbal Treatment Centre. He noted that the hospital would boost the existing cordial relationship between both countries for the mutual benefit of their peoples. Mr Mettle-Nunoo said government was committed to ensure that health care facilities were provided in all communities for easy access to quality health care delivery. He expressed government's appreciation to the Chinese Government for the project.

- # Govt Throws Out Zisco Bids

GOVERNMENT has thrown out the six bids for its stake in the Redcliff-based Zimbabwe Iron and Steel Company and is now keen to consider new bids from small to medium steel companies.

The losing bidders include ArcelorMittal South Africa, India's Jindhal Steel & Power, Murray & Roberts, Reclamation (South Africa), China Metallurgical Company and Steel Makers which had submitted a joint bid with Sunflag Iron and Steel of India.

Industry and Commerce Minister Welshman Ncube told the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Industry and Commerce that Government had officially communicated this position to the bidders.

"After the bids had been rejected by the Presidency, we then recommended that we close the bids and inform the bidders that none of them had been successful. We obtained Presidential consent to tell bidders that they had not succeeded.

"This we did so that they could reconfigure themselves since we intended to consider new bids. We were also informed that we should consider a medium company that would be sensitive to the needs of our country," he said.

ArcelorMittal and Jindhal Steel & Power, who had been short-listed by an inter-ministerial committee adjudicating on the bid, had their bids thrown out by the Presidency on the grounds that the conglomerates were too big and were likely to dictate terms that suited them.

Minister Ncube said the only option to get Zisco back to normal operation was to get a partner who would inject money to clear the debt.

"The major difficulty in going it alone is the US$228 million debt that is hanging over the company.

"Government is literally broke and has other pressing demands which also need attention.

"On the other hand, borrowing money from financial institutions is a challenge because of the debt problem again.

"Finding a partner who can inject money to clear the debt seems to be the only viable option out of all the options we have," Minister Ncube said.

He, however, pointed out that prospective partners were concerned with the debt, saying some of the debt clearance strategies were "unworkable".

Minister Ncube said his ministry had failed to get US$50 million the company needs to repair the blast furnace and ovens so that it could be operational.

He said Zisco would be operating if Treasury had given his ministry enough money from the Special Drawing Rights.

"We had hoped that we would not get less than US$100 million from the SDR but we only got US$19,5 million which still hasn't been disbursed.

"Zisco has indicated that they want US$50 million to repair blast furnace number four and ovens so that they could start production.

"The problem is that the debt was caused by poor managers who spent US$228 million in repairing the furnace yet they still need US$50 million to complete the repairs," he said.

Minister Ncube said Government was in the process of negotiating with the Germans who are owed US$150 million including interest so that they could restructure the debt.

"Our discussions with the Germans have not produced anything, they are reluctant to restructure the debt or talking to us or the Zisco board.

"It seems they only want to talk to Government if it finds a partner," Minister Ncube said.

Highfield West Member of the House of Assembly Mr Simon Hove (MDC-T) wanted to know to what extent the Zisco board had been involved in finding a partner.

Minister Ncube said: "The board is there to manage and bring the company to full production on behalf of the shareholder.

"Government, as the shareholder, reserves the right to decide who it wants to sell its stake to, but we have been working with the board."

- **Chinese auto group sets out growth stall after surviving 2009 recession**

There were 24 Chinese vehicle brands present in South Africa in February 2008, either trading or in the process of homologation, says Great Wall Motors South Africa (GWM SA) MD **Henri Meistre**. How-ever, following the brutal recession of 2009, only six or seven remain standing.

Homologation refers to the process of certification that a vehicle meets the minimum regulatory standards.

"We started our business in March 2007, so we were ahead of the game by the time the recession hit, unlike other Chinese brands that followed after us. Today, we have a good product and a good footprint," notes Meistre.

GWM SA started with 23 dealers, and now has more than 60.

"We closed five or six dealers during the recession, but now we are again opening some new ones," says Meistre.

GWM SA launched into South Africa on the back of a pick-up range, offering a lower price than competing products.

However, as the Hong Kong-listed Chinese manufacturer continues to evolve its offering to now include sports utility vehicles and passenger cars, GWM SA will follow suit, with a range of new models to hit the local market over the next two years.

At the recent Auto China 2010 Motor Show, in Beijing, GWM made clear its intent to become a serious volume manufacturer by launching 18 different models, including the Voleex, the Haval sports utility vehicle, the Steed pick-up and the Florid Cross.

Further work is to follow, with GWM's investment into research and development to reach close on R5-billion between 2010 and 2015.

With safety a concern among some critics of Chinese vehicles, GWM this year also chased and secured a four-star (out of five) NCAP crash-test rating for the Hover in Australia.

GWM SA's first passenger car already made its debut earlier this year.

The 1,5-ℓ Florid hatchback has "all the bells and whistles", says Meistre. "We are talking air conditioning, spotlights, reverse radar, central locking and so forth."

True to GWM's take on the market, the emphasis is on value, with the 77-kW Florid priced at R110 000.

The Florid will be followed by the Florid Cross, which will be a more muscled version of its namesake.

“There will be a 10% to 12% increase in price, and it should be here by the second half of the year,” notes Meistre.

Another hatchback, the boxy-looking Cool-bear, will be launched in July, and will use the same 1,5-ℓ engine as the Florid.

It will also have a range of features, promises Meistre, and will be priced at around R135 000.

A Coolbear 4 × 4 sports utility vehicle will follow in early 2011.

The Hover sports utility vehicle, already in South Africa, will get a facelift in 2011.

To date, GWM SA has not committed to launching any other models unveiled at Auto China.

Also, any vehicles under consideration for local introduction will in all probability be renamed to better suit the South African palate, adds Meistre.

He says GWM SA is considering bringing the Voleex C10 to South Africa.

This sporty-looking 1, 5-ℓ car will be priced higher than GWM SA’s other passenger car offerings.

The bigger Voleex C50 sedan is also on the list of possible entries into the South African market.

Also under consideration for the local market is the Cowry seven-seater multipurpose vehicle, using a 2-ℓ engine.

There are more than 20 000 GWMs being driven around South Africa today, says Meistre.

“We are selling enough to keep on going – the Florid has certainly helped us with volume. We don’t have enough stock to supply demand at the moment.”

South Africa ranks as one of GWM’s top three export destinations, along with Russia and Australia.

GWM sold 300 000 units last year, of which 30 000 were exported. This year, the goal is to sell 500 000 units and to export 50 000.

The Chinese company has big plans to enter global markets, even though Meistre says the company still has to learn one or two lessons about what more demanding markets abroad expect from a car.

The Chinese manufacturer is already selling cars in Australia and Eastern Europe, as well as Italy, with the UK to follow next year.

“We want to grow with GWM,” states Meistre. “They are aiming for huge numbers. I would imagine it would be possible for us to grow by 10% a year.”

Local manufacture, which will curb import duties, remains a consideration, but is not a viable option until sales volumes trend higher, he adds.

- # Continent 'must rejig resources contracts'

African states should consider renegotiating unfavourable contracts with multinationals to ensure they got a fair return on their natural resources, a joint Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and African Development Bank study urged yesterday.

The growing presence of companies from China and other emerging countries on the continent also gave governments the chance to reap higher rewards from mineral, energy and other resources by putting them to competitive bidding, it said.

"Where multinational firms fail to abide by minimal corporate governance standards in terms of tax contributions, governments should consider renegotiating concessions," the report to the bank's annual meeting argued.

"African states are entitled to receive a fair deal for the exploitation of their natural resources," it noted.

The proposal made in the joint paper was one of several aimed at gradually weaning the continent off foreign aid by boosting tax and other domestic revenues.

The lack of transparency surrounding many resource contracts in Africa and the fact that many of its governments have little experience in negotiating production agreements and tax regimes mean their terms vary wildly.

The report said some African governments were often hesitant to revisit unfavourable contracts and tax arrangements for fear of scaring off investors, but said that was unlikely to happen.

"Multinational enterprises may threaten to leave but they are unlikely to actually abandon the exploitation of mines because of a reasonable rise in taxes or royalties," it said.

Following a sector-wide review of contracts in its lucrative mining sector, the Democratic Republic of Congo has demanded changes to US-listed Freeport-McMoRan's agreement for its Tenke Fungurume copper and cobalt mine.

Guinea's government says Russian aluminium giant Rusal underpaid for its Friguia alumina refinery in 2006 and is seeking $860 million (R6.7 billion) in what it says are unpaid taxes, a claim Rusal disputes.

Ghana has said it wants to double mining royalties, and Sierra Leone hiked royalties in the mining sector late last year.

For new contracts, the report called on governments to take advantage of the growing demand for their resources by emerging economies to get the best deal possible.

Increased Chinese interest "is an opportunity for governments to reap the fiscal rewards of competitive bidding. African states must use this opportunity to generate higher public resources," it said. - Reuters

- # Brazil's Vale to export Mozambican iron ore to China and Oman

Vale Moçambique, a subsidiary of Brazil's Vale group, will annually produce 1 million tonnes of iron concentrate when it begins exploiting mines in the Monapo district of Nampula province, reports the Maputo-based daily Noticias.

Vale Moçambique director Julio Barroso told the newspaper that the company, which specialises in extracting and commercialising ore, had signed contracts to sell iron concentrate to China and Oman.

Effective operations for the deal will get under way in the next four years and Vale Moçambique expects to earn US$100 million exporting iron ore concentrate to those two countries.

Iron deposits located at Evate in Monapo district are sufficient to be exploited for an estimated 28 years, indicate prospecting studies conducted by Vale Moçambique in the last three years.

Vale's Monapo project includes the construction of various infrastructures comprising processing plants, a dam to ensure water supply and an electric power plant, among others. It will employ about 800 workers, 10 percent of them foreigners.

- # Chinese buy control of Wesizwe

UNIOR miner Wesizwe Platinum said yesterday it had secured an $877m (R6,6bn) financing package from Chinese investors, in a deal that will see the investors gaining a majority stake in the company.

The capital injection will also revive Wesizwe's ambition of transforming from an exploration company to a mining company.

Jinchuan Group and China- Africa Development Fund will pay $227,5m for a 51% equity stake and provide $650m in loans to finance Wesizwe's flagship Frischgewaagd-Ledig project, near Sun City in North West. This equates to a subscription price of R2,07 per Wesizwe share.

Plans for the development of the project were put on ice late last year because of the company's failure to secure sufficient funding because of the global credit squeeze and falling prices.

Wesizwe, which transformed itself two years ago into a platinum producer from an exploration company, announced in 2008 that it planned to build the North West mine at a cost of about R5,6bn to produce 350000oz of platinum group metals a year over a life of 35 years.

Late last year, CEO Michael Solomon said the development of the company's core mining project would not start until economic conditions became favourable.

The deal would include equity as well as a debt component, a financial guarantee and a shareholder loan commitment, and an off-take agreement that would guarantee all platinum group metals concentrate sales, Wesizwe said.

The Chinese investors said they had secured a letter of commitment from the China Development Bank for the provision of a $650m project finance facility. The provision of the debt component was conditional on the equity component being concluded. Jinchuan had also undertaken that existing Wesizwe shareholders would not be called upon for any further funding of the project until it reached full production.

In the event of a funding shortfall, Jinchuan has undertaken to provide the funding needed for the project to reach full production via a shareholders' loan to Wesizwe on the same commercial terms as the debt component.

Solomon said the project would be further "de-risked" by this transaction, with the provision of the total financing solution. "The introduction of Jinchuan means that Wesizwe Platinum has secured an experienced mining, financial and technical partner and this transaction also provides Wesizwe … with the financial muscle to enable it to examine future growth opportunities, which is an objective of both Jinchuan and the CADFund," he said.

Wesizwe said it believed the deal represented both compelling value and a strategic proposition for shareholders.

2 Pan-African issues:

- **Africa: 'EU Subsidises Companies Guilty of Illegal Fishing'**

The European Union has for years been paying subsidies to the tune of one billion euro annually to industrial fishing companies based in its member states, including companies that have been caught fishing illegally in African waters.

"The fact that the EU pays subsidies to vessels fishing in African waters is already a problem because, by doing so, European taxpayers are exacerbating poor African people's difficulty to sustain livelihoods," Isabella Loevin, member of the European Parliament's (EP) fisheries committee, told IPS.

"But that the subsidies go to European vessels violating international law is highly embarrassing and immoral," Loevin added.

Fishsubsidy.org, a London-based watchdog group, compared records of 42 court convictions with data on EU fisheries subsidy payments. The study focused on two major EU fishing nations, Spain and France.

Vessels were caught violating national or international laws on fishing in the east central Atlantic Ocean region in African waters where, according to several environmental organisations, illegal fishing is the most rampant in the world.

One prominent beneficiary of EU subsidies is the Spanish fishing company Vidal Armadores, which received at least 2,8 million euros in financial support in 2004 and 2005. In 2004, vessels of Vidal Armadores were caught with some 24 tons of illegally fished patagonian toothfish.

Two years later a U.S. court sentenced the company's owner, Antonio Vidal, to a suspended sentence of four years and a fine of 400,000 dollars.

The EU also paid substantial subsidies to the Mediterranean port of Sète, base of the French blue fin tuna (BFT) purse seiners. This French fleet is considered the largest operating in the Mediterranean Sea, including in Libyan waters. Environmental groups estimate that illegal overfishing of BFT in the Mediterranean has put the species on the brink of extinction.

The Fishsubsidy.org study reveals that 36 law-breaking vessels received more than 13.5 million euro in EU subsidies between 1994 and 2006. Five of the vessels on the list received more than one million euro each in EU subsidies.

The vessels' owners have been convicted of serious infringements ranging from logbook misreporting and capturing fish below the minimum size to the use of illegal fishing gear and exceeding quotas.

Loevin said that the EP has questioned the European Commission (EC) on its subsidy policy for fisheries. "The EC position is that the national governments are responsible to check that their fishing companies receiving subsidies do not break international law."

Jack Thurston, co-founder of Fishsubsidy.org, told IPS that previous studies have shown that many EU fisheries subsidies have directly contributed to the over-fishing of fish stocks. "But our study is the first one that draws the link between subsidies and illegal fishing."

The study gives only "a snapshot of the problem of illegal fishing and the prevalence of EU subsidies being paid to vessels that have been convicted of illegal fishing, or that have gone on to break the law after having received subsidies," Thurston told IPS.

Thurston said that the researchers collected the data "from government websites, press reports and court records. The prosecution information is not centralised and it has never been made public".

"European governments should publish comprehensive lists of convictions for illegal fishing so that we can know who is breaking the law," he urged. "This is the only way to ensure that public money is not going to fishers who break the laws that protect our precious fisheries."

For Loevin there is no doubt that the criminal behaviour of some fishing companies is a sufficient reason to be excluded from European subsidization.

For Western Sahara, the problem extends beyond subsidies. The European Parliament's legal department has concluded that fishing vessels operating under European flags in Western Saharan waters violate international laws.

Under an agreement between the EU and Morocco, European vessels are allowed to fish in Western Sahara's waters. But the EP legal service concluded in a recent study that "the Saharawi population of Western Sahara has never been consulted nor received any benefits from the exploitation of their own rich fisheries resources".

The United Nations (UN) classifies the Western Sahara region as a non-self-governing territory. The territory is under dispute between Morocco and the Polisario Front independence movement, with its Algeria-based Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic government.

According to a UN study of 2002, any economic activities that are not in accordance with the wishes and interests of the people of Western Sahara would be in violation of international law.

In their own analysis, the EP lawyers urged the EC to suspend or amend the EU-Morocco agreement to ensure that "EU-flagged vessels are excluded from the exploitation of the waters of Western Sahara".

The analysis by the EP legal department was originally dated Jul 2009 but it remained under wraps until recently. EU parliamentarians have complained that the EC, in addition

to holding back the findings, ignored the study for it failed to even place the issue on the agenda at the most recent yearly meeting with Morocco's authorities in early Feb 2010.

"The EU places respect for international law at the heart of its foreign policy but has turned a blind eye in the case of Western Sahara," Portuguese member of the EP Miguel Portas told IPS.

"The illegal and unethical EU fishing activities in Western Sahara's waters are nothing short of theft and constitute implicit support for what most countries worldwide regard as an illegal occupation by Morocco in Western Sahara," Portas added.

- ## African Leaders Renewed their Commitment to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

UN Foundation President Timothy E. Wirth Commends African Leaders for their Renewed Commitment to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

This year's Africa Day Commemoration in Washington, D.C. featured a proclamation worthy of world attention. African leaders resident in the U.S. Capitol re-committed to mobilize all of their human, material, and financial resources to achieve the health-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to replenish The Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

I applaud this important commitment as proof that our friends in Africa are making precious resources available to protect the health and future of the continent. As we move into a pivotal period to replenish The Global Fund, such strong leadership and dedicated resources from African nations are more important than ever.

Less than a decade ago, Africa's heads of state signed the Abuja Declaration and committed to the creation of The Global Fund. Over the past decade we have seen how much can be achieved when Africa's leaders work together with the United Nations and the Global Fund. It is a model of a successful public/private partnership and the largest multilateral financing institution in the fight against major diseases on the continent. A powerful example is the commitment to the fight against HIV/AIDS. AIDS-related deaths have decreased by nearly 20 percent due in large part to the increased availability of treatment.

Africa's leaders have proven that, with dedicated resources and strong leadership, they will succeed. If we can continue scaling up successful programs and interventions, by 2015 we can dramatically reduce deaths from AIDS, eliminate malaria, and achieve significant declines in TB mortality. It is more important than ever to fully fund the Global Fund to support Africa's health and further strengthen their leadership and homegrown solutions in achieving the MDGs. Investing in The Global Fund is an investment towards improving the lives of millions, strengthening Africa now and in the future, and ensuring global stability and progress."

- # AU Should End Conflicts in Africa – Museveni

President Yoweri Museveni has said the African Union (AU) must work towards ending armed conflicts in Africa if it is to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

He said while progress had been made in the search for peace, security and stability, there was need for a renewed resolve to end the scourge of conflicts and violence on the continent.

"If this scourge is not brought to an end, Africa will not meet the MDGs, as peace is a necessary condition for development," he said. Museveni, in a statement read by foreign affairs minister Sam Kutesa, observed that thousands of people are killed and displaced every year due to armed conflicts.

Livelihoods and wealth, which people have worked hard to accumulate, are wiped out, and infrastructure is destroyed, he added. The more profound loss, Museveni observed, was the destruction of hope, as many children remain uneducated, women get abused and traumatized, and most skilled people abandon their home countries.

"It is within this context that African leaders resolved to declare the year 2010, a year of peace in Africa. While we are still far from realizing this noble aspiration, all efforts should be made to achieve this objective," Museveni stated.

Kutesa was representing Museveni as chief guest at a dinner held to celebrate the 47th Africa Day held at the Speke Resort Munyonyo in Kampala on Tuesday night. The theme for this year's celebration is "Building and maintaining peace through sports in Africa.

Kutesa lit a symbolic torch of peace. A moment of silence was observed for the departed African revolutionary leaders and peace keepers. Several diplomats and government officials attended the function sponsored by Uganda telecom. Abdulbaset Elazzabi, the Uganda telecom boss, said the company was working towards connecting Africa with one network.

The dean of the African Diplomatic Corp, Rajabu H. Gamaha, noted that there were still problems in Darfur in Sudan, Madagascar, Guinea and Niger, while the greatest challenge was Somalia. He commended Uganda and Burundi for contributing to the African Union peace-keeping force. Museveni called for increased support to the African Peace Fund by the member states. He reiterated the importance for member states to extend full cooperation and support to the Africa peace and security architecture to discharge its mandate.

- # Lost Funding Means Lost Lives

As donors retreat from funding HIV and AIDS programmes, years of progress in HIV treatment are under threat and the lives of HIV-positive people are increasingly on the line, according to a new report by the international medical charity, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

Improved access to antiretroviral (ARV) treatment has saved lives, reduced the incidence of tuberculosis (TB) and new HIV infections, and strengthened health systems in many countries hard hit by HIV. But as funding diminishes, these gains are now in jeopardy, says MSF's new report, No Time to Quit: HIV/AIDS Treatment Gap Widening in Africa.

Funding shortages in eight African countries have already led to drug stock-outs, treatment rationing, and the inability of most of the countries to adopt improved ARV regimens advocated by the World Health Organization (WHO), the report noted.

"About 75 percent of HIV funding in developing countries is international - you can't replace that in the short term," said Mit Philips, a health policy analyst at MSF and one of the report's authors.

"Even for South Africa, one of the richest countries in the region, to realise its plans for the fight against HIV it will also have to rely on international assistance."

Donors pull back

The recent decision by the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) to flat-line its funding at 2009 levels and decrease annual budget allocations in coming years, has already led PEPFAR-supported clinics in South Africa to begin turning away patients.

UNITAID, the international drug purchasing facility, is to phase out drug funding, leaving Zimbabwe, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Malawi without funding for costly second-line ARV drugs by 2012.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has started accepting applications for Round 10 of funding but has capped funding levels for the first time - a worrying sign that the donor drought may be far from over.

"A moral betrayal"

Dr Eric Goemaere, MSF Medical Coordinator in South Africa, called donor backtracking a "moral betrayal". "Years ago, countries in this region [southern Africa] were unsure that they could afford treatment, but they were told [by the international community], 'Set ambitious targets, we will follow with the money'," he told IRIN/PlusNews.

"If this funding trend is confirmed, I would call it a moral betrayal ... for patients, who we told to be courageous and face testing because we would provide treatment; for the health staff, who managed to enrol more than four million people on treatment, and who are suddenly told not to enrol patients."

The report predicted that if the downward trend in funding continued, ARVs would become increasingly inaccessible, which would lead to increased rates of mortality and hospitalisation among those living with HIV, and place a strain on already weak health systems.

The report also warned that ARV patients may adopt risky strategies for coping with drug supply shortages, such as sharing pills, thereby increasing the likelihood of widespread drug resistance.

He also enjoined the present administration to address the unanswered questions raised on the sales of Federal Government assets to ascertain whether or not national interest rather than personal greed and nepotism were the corner stone of the exercise.

• Donor Retreat Widens HIV/Aids Treatment Gap in Continent

Backtracking by international donors in funding HIV/AIDS risks undermining years of positive achievements and will cause many more unnecessary deaths, warns humanitarian aid group Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in a new report.

Titled "No time to quit: HIV/AIDS treatment gap widening in Africa", the report builds on analyses made in eight sub-Saharan countries to illustrate how major international funding institutions such as PEPFAR, the World Bank, UNITAID, and donors to the Global Fund have decided to cap, reduce or withdraw their spending on HIV treatment and antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) over the past year and a half.

"How can we give up the fight halfway and pretend that the crisis is over? Nine million people worldwide in need of urgent treatment still lack access to this lifesaving care - two thirds of them in sub-Saharan Africa alone. There is a real risk that many of them will die within the next few years if necessary steps are not taken now. Also, the current donor retreat will prevent more people from accessing treatment and will threaten to undermine all the progress made since the introduction of ARVs" says Dr. Mit Philips, Health Policy Analyst for MSF and one of the authors of the report.

The US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS relief, PEPFAR, reduced its budget for the purchase of ARVs in 2009 and 2010, and also introduced a freeze on its overall HIV/AIDS budget. Other donors, such as UNITAID and the World Bank, have announced reductions over the coming years in the funding for antiretroviral drugs in Malawi, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).
The Global Fund, the largest funding institution in the fight against HIV/AIDS, faces a major funding shortfall. The US, the Netherlands and Ireland have already announced that they will be providing lower contributions to the Global Fund. In 2009-2010, contributions to already approved country grants were reduced by 8-12%.

Overall funding cuts have translated into a reduction in the number of people able to start their ARV treatment, as seen in South Africa and Uganda, and in DRC – where the number of new patients able to start ARV treatment has been cut six-fold. Already fragile health systems will become increasingly strained by an increasing patient load requiring more intensive care.
Drug stock-outs and disruptions in drug supply are already a reality, and will become more frequent if sufficient funding is not made available. MSF has recently been requested by the government and other actors to assist with emergency drug supplies in Malawi, Zimbabwe, DRC, Kenya and Uganda.

If there is reduced funding, then it will mean more people will die, and we will have more orphans. The ones that are positive often need to assist others, like their children. People will lose hope and die. It will be the end. If there are no drugs there is no future" says Catherine Mango, an HIV patient from Kenya.

ARV treatment is lifesaving but also lifelong. This means that the number of patients under treatment increases cumulatively each year, thus requiring incrementally growing and sustainable funding.

"The HIV / AIDS crisis remains a massive emergency that still requires an exceptional response. MSF calls for a sustained and renewed commitment by donors and national governments in the fight against HIV/AIDS, so that this disastrous public health crisis can be addressed appropriately," concludes Dr. Philips.

• President of Ecowas Commission after Visit to Niger

Nigeria — The President of the ECOWAS Commission, His Excellency James Victor Gbeho has commended the military government in Niger for releasing a 12-month transition timetable that will culminate in the inauguration of a civilian President on 1st March 2011.

"This development represents a quantum leap in the journey to constitutional rule, given the concerns expressed recently by ECOWAS and other members of the international community over the duration of the military's stay in power, "he declared on Sunday, 23rd May 2010 at the end of a two-day stakeholder consultation in the country.

During the meetings with key officials of the government, including the head of the military junta, General Djibo Salou, the President further assured the government and people of Niger that ECOWAS will accompany them through this process until and beyond the installation of the new President in March 2011. Moreover, he reminded Nigeriennes of their collective responsibility to contribute towards the success of the transition and the conduct of free, fair and transparent elections. In this regard, he said the Commission will field a needs assessment mission to the country as soon as the new

electoral Commission was installed in order to determine the assistance required for the successful conduct of the elections.

On the food crisis, he reiterated the determination of ECOWAS to provide additional material support to complement the $550,000 dollars already donated to the interim government to procure grains for distribution mostly to the vulnerable citizens in the country. The President was accompanied on the visit by General Abdul salami Abu-Bakr, the Mediator for Niger's political crisis, who was appointed by Heads of State and Government of the region in 2009.

During the visit, they also met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Prime Minister, the President of the Constitutional Court, the President of the Consultative Council, members of the diplomatic corps, representatives of civil society, representatives of political parties and observers.

Nigeria:

1. Political News:

- **POWER STRUGGLE IN PDP - Ogbulafor Sidelined Us, Says Obasanjo - PDP's NWC may be dissolved - Baraje tackles Nnamani**

Former President Olusegun Obasanjo and chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP's) Board of Trustees (BOT) has alleged that his arm of the party was sidelined by the Prince Vincent Ogbulafor-led National Working Committee (NWC) and the National Executive Committee (NEC).

Prince Ogbulafor, the immediate past chairman of the PDP, resigned a fortnight ago after being accused of fraud involving N104 million. He was charged and arraigned before an Abuja high court by the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related Offences Commission (ICPC)

Obasanjo made the allegation against the NWC in his letter to the former Nasarawa state governor, Alhaji Abdullahi Adamu, who resigned as BOT Secretary last week.

Obasanjo, in a letter of acceptance of Adamu's resignation as the board's Secretary dated May 19, 2010, stated that: "After due consultation with the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, H. E. Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, I convey to you the acceptance of your resignation on behalf of the Board of Trustees.

He said "I understand the circumstances that led to your resignation as the Secretary of the BOT. I also believe I was right when, in February 2010, I stopped you from resigning

on the basis of BOT being seemingly ignored and sidelined by the party through its Working Committee and the NEC. I made you to understand then that tough times may not continue forever, but tough people will surely survive tough times. I appreciate your not resigning at that time."

However, a source close to Obasanjo told Sunday Trust in confidence that Adamu was asked to resign because of fresh moves against the NWC as presently constituted.

The source said those accused of one corrupt practices or the other in the NWC may be asked to resign. Some chieftains of the PDP, including some members of the NWC, have been named in the Siemens bribery scandal.

It was gathered, however, that it is the intrigue involved in how the party's NWC will be reconstituted now that Ogbulafor has resigned that is delaying the selection of a new chairman from the South-East. Several names have been forwarded by interest groups as possible national chairman. They include former Senate President, Anyim Pius Anyim, former Governor of Enugu State and ex-PDP National Secretary, Okwesilieze Nwodo, former National Vice-Chairman of the PDP, Chief Nze Fidelis Ozichukwu Chukwu, Senator Ike Nwachukwu, former National Secretary of the party, Chief Bernard Eze.

Meanwhile, Obasanjo said the major task before the PDP in the 2011 general elections is to reclaim states lost to opposition parties in the 2007 elections.

Obasanjo said this in Akure yesterday at the grand reception/rally organised by the party to welcome Mr Jimoh Ibrahim and others into the party.

He added that the party would be repositioned before 2011 to reclaim the lost states.

A chieftain of the PDP and former Anambra state governor Chinwoke Mbadinuju said the delay in choosing the chairman of the PDP did not come from South-East but from the party and the presidency.

According to him, already many names had been published in several newspapers of highly qualified members particularly from Enugu, Ebonyi, Imo and Abia states, and wondered why there are not as many of such candidates from Anambra who presented only two names.

He said, "Be that as it may, the responsibility to choose a chairman was the responsibility of the National Working Committee (NWC) to ratify the person who is identified by the National Executive Committee (NEC).

"And we should not forget the president himself as the leader of the party has a lot to do with the selection of the national chairman whenever the position becomes vacant. So you can easily see where the delay is coming from. The delay is not coming from south-east politicians, but rather it is coming from Abuja between the party's NEC and NWC and the presidency," he added.

Asked why the South-East has failed to produce a single candidate for the chairmanship, the former Anambra governor said that the political leaders in the region have tried their best to produce a consensus candidate but that it failed.

A PDP source from the South-East said the BOT will meet with the South-East leaders on Tuesday to pick new chairman.

Sunday Trust investigation also revealed that there are grand plans by the Obasanjo elements in the PDP to take over the new NWC that would be constituted when the current NWC is dissolved as planned.

This plot is buttressed by the massive movement of 'Obasanjo boys' into the PDP Reform Forum under the leadership of Senator Ken Nnamani, former senate president and Alhaji Aminu Bello Masari, former speaker of the House of Representatives.

Nnamani had earlier asked for the dissolution of the NWC, insisting that the resignation of Ogbulafor was not enough to cleanse the party of the allegations of corruption against it.

But the ruling party has asked Senator Ken Nnamani-led PDP Reform Forum to go and reform itself by re-integrating into their constituencies. PDP National Secretary Alhaji Abubakar Kwau Baraje described their call for the dissolution of the National Working Committee (NWC) as 'ridiculous and frivolous'.

- # Respect Zoning Agreement, Arise Tells PDP

A Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Senator representing Ekiti North Senatorial district of Ekiti State, Chief Ayo Arise, has cautioned the National leadership of the party against encouraging President Goodluk Jonathan to contest the 2011 presidential election.

Arise, who spoke to journalists at his Oye-Ekiti country home, pointed out that if anything could be done with regards Jonathan becoming the president in 2011, the party must organize a special convention to set aside the zoning formula it adopted before encouraging Jonathan to contest.

He disclosed that it would be unfair to the North to encourage President Jonathan to contest when zoning has virtually become a convention within the party.

According to him, the circumstance surrounding the death of the late President Umaru Yar'Adua was pathetic and that the party has to take the accurate action before the agitation for Jonathan's presidency starts to divide the party.
He urged the leadership of the party to see the gentleman arrangement as a way of stabilizing the polity in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, saying zoning could only be dropped, if the PDP National Working Committee(NWC) takes appropriate steps to effect a change.

"We know that the constitution did not recognize the zoning formula adopted by the founding fathers of this party, but it has helped to stabilize the polity and it has become a convention in this country, as other political parties have adopted same.
"As much as the President has the constitutional right to contest in 2011, he is also under moral obligations to adhere to the conventions adopted by the founding fathers of the party."

- # Lagos: Fashola, Assembly Differ on Budget Cuts

Consequent upon a major reduction from the 2010 budget in Lagos State, Governor Babatunde Raji Fashola (SAN), recently sent a supplementary budget of N74.777 billion to the Lagos State House of Assembly to aid the implementation of some provisions in the 2010 Appropriation Law. But after intensive deliberations, the House rejected the supplementary budget.

The year 2010 has not been a bed of roses for Lagos State. This is no thanks to insufficient funds for the execution of vital projects in the state. This problem stemmed from the 9.3 per cent cut from the 2010 Budget by the House of Assembly as well as the rejection of the N74.777 billion supplementary budget by the House. This has generated fears among the general public that the friction between the executive and the legislative in the state may retard growth and development in the state.

These two decisions by the Assembly, according to investigation, have put the administration of Governor Babatunde Raji Fashola (SAN), under tight financial situation since the commencement of 2010 fiscal year. Towards the end of last year, Fashola proposed N429.596 billion appropriation out of which only N389.571 billion was approved by the House.
Consequently, the state Commissioner for Economic Planning and Budget, Mr. Ben Akabueze, raised an alarm, saying the lawmakers' move threatened the core objective of the 2010 budget. This episode compelled Fashola to write a letter to the Speaker of the House, Mr. Adeyemi Ikuforiji, where he sought contingency provisions for unforeseen expenditure and project funding.

In the letter dated March 22, Fashola intimated the House of his decision to evolve a supplementary budgetary proposal to address eight critical and strategic areas. According to him, his decision was premised on the need to consolidate democratic gains in the state and also ensure the completion of the on-going projects that can transform Lagos into Africa's emerging model mega city before the end of the next decade. Fashola therefore sought amendments to the provisions of the 2010 Appropriation Law of the state.

Under the first amendment which bordered on personnel cost, Fashola sought an approval for additional N10 billion to N45.079 billion earlier appropriated. He said the sum was meant to fund approved 15 percent furniture grants for the state public servants, 27.5 percent teachers' salary scale (TSS) allowance, increment in the emolument of health sector personnel and proposed recruitment of new public servants in the state.

Further amendments sought to add N3 billion to the approved N5.5 billion to cater for special expenditure and as well cover over N4 billion outstanding liabilities for the 2009 fiscal year for the unpaid vouchers. This covers a wide range of estimated expenditure relating to tourism development, settlement of various contractors and purchase of vehicles for judges and principal officers of the House, among others.

On works and infrastructure, Fashola made fresh demands for additional N2 billion to the earlier approved N5 billion for the former and N11 billion to the approved N39 billion for the latter. The rationale for the request was said to be predicated on the need to sustain the continuation of the on-going projects being executed by the agencies and equally pay outstanding liabilities that the state government is owing some of its contractors.

Fashola sought N2.78 billion to the approved N1 billion for the funding of the state rice and vegetable projects as well as N32 billion to the approved N54 billion. The request for N32 billion was said to be premised on the need to avert a shortfall in the 2010 budget and also ensure that the budget performs maximally. However, further demands were made that N10 billion be removed from local government intervention fund and N4 billion from the Ministry of Justice to be added to the capital vote of the state judiciary.

For all the amendments sought to the provisions of the 2010 Appropriation Law, Fashola explained why it was expedient for the Assembly to reconsider some of the provisions with a view to making necessary amendments that would enable the state government to discharge its obligations to employees, contractors and other service providers. He urged the House to favourably reconsider all the amendments to the essential services so that the assembly can provide for the people of the state.
The letter read in part: "Subsequent to my assent to the 2010 Appropriation Law, my attention has been directed to some provisions of the law as they affect the state personnel profile and costs, contingency provision for unforeseen expenditure, funding of on-going projects and unpaid vouchers as at December 2009.

"These observations require that the provision in the 2010 Appropriation Law be reconsidered with a view to making necessary amendments to enable the state discharge its obligation to employees, contractors and other service providers to and in particular, to pursue strategic agriculture initiative to stimulate jobs and provide security of food, particularly staples and vegetables in the short to medium term.

"A detailed memo of the Honourable Commissioner for Economic Planning and Budget, Mr. Ben Akabueze, dated March 19, 2010 together with supporting annexure, highlighting the implications of the Appropriation Law, as recently enacted are attached for your consideration. Also attached for your consideration are recommended amendments to the law. I trust that the Assembly will kindly review and effect the proposed amendments in view of manifest benefits they portend," he stated.
Fashola's request for supplementary budgetary provisions, was described as reasonable, considering projects that the governor planned to fund with the budget. But despite Fashola's pleas, the House declined approval, saying rice and vegetable production

project was not reflected in the 2010 Appropriation Bill adding that about N10 billion for personnel cost was not detailed and justified.

As indicated in the report of the House Ad-hoc Committee on Appropriation, the request was also rejected on the ground that the state executive council failed to give a detailed analysis from the affected ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) in order to justify the need for supplementary budget that it sent to it. Hence, the 40-man Assembly threw out the supplementary budget, noting that the request for such amendments should have been brought at the third quarter.
The resolution was based on some critical recommendations contained in the report of the chairman of the committee, Hon. Taiwo Kolawole. As expressed during his presentation, Kolawole observed that the committee "noticed a gap between the approved budget and actual expenditure. The approval for supplementary budget will require detailed analysis and substantive grounds for such budgetary requests".

On his part, Ikuforiji warned the state executive council against incurring debts, adding that the state government "is borrowing too much. Currently, it has a debt profile of N100 billion. I do not think we can encourage this administration to move faster than that simply because we do not have commensurate income to offset the borrowing."
In his reaction, Hon. Rotimi Olowo (Somolou constituency), also threw his weight behind the resolution and challenged the executive to take advantage of other funds in the Ministry of Finance and Federal Government. Olowo cited a case of N244 billion which the Federal Government set aside to boost agricultural development in five states including Lagos adding that the council should tap from the facility to address rice and vegetable productions in the state.

He also cited N1 billion allocated to the state Ministry of Tourism and Inter-Governmental Relations in 2009 which he said "was not accessed throughout the fiscal years. Between January and March 2010, Lagos State Internal Revenue Service (LIRS) raked in about N33.8 billion compared with about of N36.8 billion it generated between the same period in 2009. This shows that revenue generation has not improved, thus borrowing will not serve our best interests now, given the state's striking revenue profile."

Arguments from both sides appeared substantive and tenable. But many believe that the House has the responsibility to incisively look beyond facts and figures contained in the supplementary budget. They also said the House has more responsibilities to carry out an objectively conducted monitoring and evaluation of the on-going projects and as well examine the rationale for additional expenditure that the state executive sought an approval for. The evaluation exercise, it was stated, would avail the legislators of information to determine justification for either approval or disapproval for the supplementary budget.

However, now that the House has declined its approval for the supplementary budget, Fashola's administration is left without options than to confine its spending within the approved N389.571 billion. But this situation, THISDAY learnt, has started having grave

impacts on the strategic sectors of the state. Already, key infrastructure renewal projects have been witnessing major setbacks due to what Akabueze ascribed to the delayed passage of the 2010 Appropriation Law and a significant cut from the budget.

The impacts of the budget cut and the supplementary budget the Assembly rejected penultimate week therefore allegedly portend a tough future for the government and people of the state. But there are hopes that the state may overcome the situation, given the comment of the House that the supplementary proposal should have been initiated at the third quarter when a rigorous budget assessment and performance would have been carried out.

- # Chairmanship Seat: Can PDP Get It Right This Time?

With a new chairman set to emerge, Imam Imam asks whether the PDP will avoid the pitfalls of the past by institutionalising leadership that will stand the test of time

Sarcastically speaking, Nigerians will proudly tell you that the only party that fits the country is the ruling Peoples Democratically Party (PDP). It is, as an ace comedian recently pointed out, "the only party that understands the psyche of the average Nigerian". To him, the PDP moves with all the energy at its disposal to blame external factors for problems inherently internal, "the same way Nigerians blame others for their problems."
While it may seem naïve to simplify the problem of the PDP to such a pedestrian view point, what is not in doubt is the fact that the crisis in the ruling party has a huge significance in the overall assessment of how party politics is played in the country.

One big example of the failure of the party to ensure coherence at the top level is in the number of persons it has turned out as its chairmen in the last 10 years. Though the constitution of the party specifies that an elected chairman will serve for a period of four years, with an option for another four years, the last decade has seen the party churn out five leaders, at about an average of a leader every two years.
PDP's first chairman was the elder statesman and Second Republic Governor of old Plateau State, Chief Solomon Lar. He was given the task of holding forth as chairman after the G18, and later G34, groups of eminent Nigerians opposed to the continuation of military rule, decided to transform into a political party with the aim of midwifing Nigeria's new found democracy. Lar held on to that position until the party held its convention in 1999.

That keenly-contested convention saw the emergence of Chief Barnabas Gemade as the party's National Chairman. He defeated late Chief Sunday Awoniyi to the position. Awoniyi then had the support of the original G18 and G34 members, but lost out in a bitter power tussle when it emerged that the Presidency had the preference of Gemade over him. Barely two years later, Gemade was himself ousted and in his place, Audu Ogbeh was drafted out of political wilderness to become the new chairman.

In 2004, another round of intra-party crisis reared its head. Ogbeh, apparently stuck in the old-fashioned way of party politics, fell out of favour with the new system, and in 2001 was replaced by Dr. Amadu Ali, another returnee to the political scene who has been out of reckoning for a while. Ali was virtually brought in and ratified at the party's 2005 convention.

With the coming of former President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua to office in 2007, many felt that the party needed a breath of fresh air, and with the new dispensation, the garrison-like manner in which PDP conducted its affair gave way to the emergence of Prince Vincent Ogbulafor as the new chairman. The process that brought Ogbulafor to power was kicked by many, who argued that failure to allow internal democracy has been the bane of the party since the return of democracy to the country in 1999. Many predicted that the same consensus arrangement that brought Ogbulafor, will likely sweep him out of office.
In 2008, the Governors' caucus stopped both the former Senate President Anyim Pius Anyim and former Governor of Ebonyi State Dr. Sam Egwu who were the leading contenders to the seat and supported Ogbulafor. The Governors hinged their decision on the fact Anyim and Egwu's candidacy may reenact divisive tendencies within the party. They then brought in Ogbulafor as a dark horse to checkmate the two leading contenders, both of whom had divided the party along the line of pro and anti-Obasanjo groups. The pro-Obasanjo elements lined up behind Egwu while the anti-Obasanjo group supported Anyim.

Two years later, Ogbulafor was forced to resign in another delicate power game reminiscent of the Audu Ogbeh era. This time though, the reason is that of the court case instituted against Ogbulafor by the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) arising from the N104 million fraud allegedly committed while he was Minister in the Presidency under the Obasanjo administration.

And once again, the party has now been forced to begin a search for a new leader. Without doubt, many interest groups within the party have voiced concern at the way Ogbulafor ran the affairs of the party. Many claimed he answers only to the Governors Forum to the detriment of other interest groups. Indication to this fact was further confirmed last weekend when Obasanjo, as the chairman of the party's Board of Trustees (BOT), alleged in a letter that the BOT had been sidelined in the scheme of things by the Ogbulafor-led National Working Committee (NWC).
In a letter of acceptance to the resignation of the former BOT Secretary Abdullahi Adamu who resigned his position last week, Obasanjo stated inter alia: "After due consultation with the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, H. E. Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, I convey to you the acceptance of your resignation on behalf of the Board of Trustees."

In the letter dated May 19, 2010, Obasanjo added: "I understand the circumstances that led to your resignation as the Secretary of the BOT. I also believe I was right when, in February 2010, I stopped you from resigning on the basis of BOT being seemingly ignored and sidelined by the party through its Working Committee and the NEC. I made

you to understand then that tough times may not continue forever, but tough people will surely survive tough times. I appreciate your not resigning at that time."

To others, the general manner in which the PDP has been running its affairs is contrary to the aspirations of the party's founding fathers. In a recent interview with THISDAY in Katsina, former Governor of old Kaduna State Alhaji Lawal Kaita, himself a founding member of the party, said the inefficiency exhibited by party leaders is a cause for concern.

"Honestly, the PDP (has become) a terribly inefficient party, and to me, the present situation within the party is more than inefficiency. I think it is a deliberate plan by some unscrupulous politicians to continue to siphon the resources of this country unchecked that is why they want leaders of their choice at the helm," he added.

To close observers of events in the country's political scene, the intrigues happening in PDP is of great concern to all Nigerians. This is because, apart from the fact that the party has produced the President and majority members of both chambers of the National Assembly, it also controls 28 of the country's 36 states, as such, in one way or another, the destiny of the country is firmly tied to the PDP.

Without doubt, the battle of who succeeds Ogbulafor will be thoroughly scrutinized to see whether the party will abandon its old ways of doing things. Also, whoever emerges as the new chairman will have to contend with powerful forces, many of who are waiting, and observing events on the sideline and likely pounce any time they feel their interests are being trampled upon.

This can be seen from the fact that the current face off in the party started as a quest by the PDP Reform Forum to ensure the enthronement of internal democracy in the party and the separation of the party from the machinery from government. Other demands of the group include independent funding, quality leadership, transparency, accountability and participatory democracy, amongst others. The Forum also cried foul over the alleged expenditure of N500 million in Anambra State without the party conducting any primary election. In specific terms the Forum is called for revisit of the current criteria for election (and selection) of delegates for the party's various congresses.

The Forum, led by former Senate President Ken Nnamani and former Speaker of the House of Reps Aminu Bello Masari, has seen its membership grow to include some persons linked to former President Obasanjo. They are Malam Nasir El-Rufai, Chief Femi Fani Kayode, Akin Oshuntokun among others.

Their agitation has led to the emergence of new faces seeking to lead the party in the next four years. According to reports, so far, the top contenders are former National Secretary of the party Dr. Okwesilieze Nwodo, former National Vice Chairman of the party for South-east, Fidelis Ozichukwu, Senator Anyim Pius Anyim and Major-Gen. Ike Nwachukwu, a former Minister of External Affairs. The National Executive Committee

(NEC) of the PDP to be presided over by President Goodluck Jonathan will meet Today to ratify which of the contenders will lead the party.

The selection of the party chairman has become a knotty issue after the Governors' caucus consisting of the 28 governors who are members of the party were said to have told President Jonathan a week ago to select any candidate from the South-east who he feels comfortable to work with as the leader of the party. This arrangement is also in line with Article 14.5 of the 2009 PDP amended constitution which says, "Where a vacancy occurs in any of the offices of the Party, the Committee shall appoint a substitute from the zone where the officer originated pending the conduct of election to fill the vacancy".

The governors, it was also gathered, advised the President to ensure that the next party chairman is "a man of stature, status and antecedent befitting the chairman of the ruling party in Nigeria."
For now though, analysts have termed the intriguing contest playing out in the party as part of a routine pre-election year stratagem by all interest groups desiring to have a say in what transpires next year. What is not in doubt however is the fact that the need for the party to put its house in order cannot be overemphasized?

To most of its members, some of the ineptitude visited on the party in the past cannot be allowed to continue. But will the powers that be consider the majority decision? The outcome of today's meeting will go a long way in answering that question.

- # Nigeria: Not Yet Uhuru for Democracy

As Nigeria marks another Democracy Day tomorrow, Omololu Ogunmade takes a retrospective look at the state of the country and prospects for the future

Tomorrow, Nigeria will celebrate 11 years of uninterrupted democracy. For many who have keenly watched the trend of events in this past one decade, it has been a moment of mixed feelings. Mixed feelings, because many believe that democracy has finally come to stay in Nigeria, while others lament that the system is still characterized with impunity by most political actors. The highpoint of this perceived impunity was the exploitation of the recent illness of the late President Umaru Yar'Adua by "a cabal" to hold the nation hostage for several months. The demise of Yar'Adua on May 5 this year, has been described as the greatest tragedy of this dispensation.

However, despite the numerous woes bedeviling the system, many believe that this 11 years of democracy is worth celebrating. Reason? For the first time since its independence in 1960, Nigeria has had three successive presidents without any attempt to truncate the system by the military. Today, the country is preparing for another round of general election after three consecutive general elections had been held between 1999 and 2007. Similarly, the successive change of governments witnessed in this past one decade has been viewed as exciting, bearing in mind that it is a development that never was since the inception of constitutional democracy in Nigeria.

In the First Republic, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the first Prime Minister of independent Nigeria, whose party, Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), formed a coalition with the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), never had the opportunity of handing over to another civilian government before that republic was truncated by the January 15, 1966 military coup d'etat.
In the same vein, Nigeria had hardly transited from one tenure to another in the Second Republic, when the military struck again, thus ending the government of the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN), led by President Shehu Shagari.

That government never witnessed any transition to another, before another coup d'etat led by Generals Muhammadu Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon ,was hatched. Similarly, the Third Republic, being midwifed by the military government of General Ibrahim Babangida was aborted when Babangida annulled June 12, 1993 presidential election won by Bashorun MKO Abiola and proceeded to install an Interim National Government (ING), led by Chief Ernest Shonekan, which was eventually overthrown by General Sani Abacha in 1993.

Nevertheless, despite the perceived impunity among politicians, the ongoing dispensation has witnessed the sustenance of various democratic institutions, notably the legislature, which had always been the first institution to be shut down once the military took over the reins of government. But the side effect of the legislative arm of government in this dispensation is the desperation exhibited by candidates for House of Assembly and National Assembly elections. This desperation resulted in widespread electoral malpractices at the poll.

These irregularities were evident in the annulment of the elections of several senators as well as members of the House of Representatives in this tenure. For instance, only recently, the election of Senator Joy Emodi was annulled by both the lower and appeal tribunals over allegations of electoral malpractices by the ex-senator after about three years of legal battles. The appeal court ruled that Senator Alphonsus Igbeke was the bonafide winner of the Anambra North senatorial election. After a high degree of hostility by the senators, Igbeke was eventually sworn in last Tuesday.

It has also been alleged that the lawmakers' sense of commitment to nation building has been paltry as a result of alleged rigging through which many of them secured seats in the legislature. For instance, Nobel Laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka, recently castigated the National Assembly, saying since over 70 percent of them were not elected, it would amount to asking for the moon to expect people-oriented acts from this arm of government.

It is apt to sum up challenges of the system into three, viz: internal undemocratic system within the existing political parties, corruption of the electoral process as well as the abuse of court process. These three predicaments allegedly caused by the inordinate ambitions of politicians have continued to hamper the flow of democratic process.

Besides, the culture of impunity in this past one decade of civil rule, has resulted in the unconstitutional impeachment of three governors by members of the House of Assembly in affected states. Victims of this episode included Senator Rashidi Ladoja, former Governor of Oyo State, who was impeached by 18 of the 32 lawmakers in the House on January 12, 2006, without constituting the required two-third majority to carry out such a constitutional action.

A similar episode was the ouster of the former governor of Plateau State, Chief Joshua Dariye, who was impeached by six of the 24-member House on November 13, 2006, despite a substantive court order which had dissolved the panel of enquiry set up by the House to investigate allegations of corruption against the former governor.
The third episode of the illegal impeachment was witnessed in Anambra State, when incumbent Governor Peter Obi of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), was impeached at 5 am, in contrast with the constitutional schedule of the House's activities on November 2, 2006.

But the exciting aspect of this series of unlawful impeachments, was the prompt intervention of the judiciary which nullified the three impeachments respectively and consequently returned the three victims to serve out their tenures.
Also, a major concern in the polity today is that the country, unlike the case in the previous republics when opposition parties had proportional participation in the system, by winning elections in their areas of strength, this system appears to be tilting towards a one-party state, where the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), is driving to rule the entire 36 states of the federation, despite holding sway in 28 states at the moment.

There is nothing to celebrate yet. Hence, this year's anniversary of democracy has not elicited enthusiasm, much less any elation and bliss from the populace.
The vast majority of Nigerians believe that it is difficult to ascertain whether Nigeria is progressing or retrogressing or perhaps in stagnation. This perception is in view of the rapid collapse of infrastructure across the country, with little or no effort to revamp it as well as the perceived negligence of duty and alleged lackadaisical attitude to work among government functionaries. For instance, despite the billions of naira being budgeted for construction and rehabilitation of roads every year, there's hardly any highway in Nigeria that is motorable. For instance, Shagamu - Ore –Benin Road and Lagos – Ibadan expressway which used to be the delights of travellers now constitute pains and anguish for such travellers as nearly every portion of the roads has collapsed thus constituting traffic snarls at intervals as well as recurrent ghastly motor accidents which claim innocent lives. In the entire six geo-political zones, the story is the same.

Besides, there have been allegations that most Nigerians live below poverty line, thus implying that the 11 years of democracy has not impacted positively on the lives of the masses. This was affirmed by a recent United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, which alleged that an average Nigerian lives on the paltry sum of N150.00 a day, thus affirming that the greatest percentage of Nigerians live in the squalor. Some Nigerians who examine the state of Nigeria in the last 11 years have argued that while the privileged few who benefit from this democracy through elective or appointive positions

have continued to get richer, the poor have continued to be poorer. This is mainly because of insinuations that the Nigerian government has never prepared any welfare package that can shore up the living standard of the people as it is usually the case in the United States and other notable foreign countries.

In the United States, an appreciable sum of money is usually paid to all low income earners every year to enable them upgrade their living standard and simultaneously encourage them to live a more befitting and worthy life. This payment is called Social Security Fund. But reverse is the case in Nigeria where everyone has had to carry his cross without any relief measures.

Also, the advent of democracy has witnessed a more deteriorating state of power supply. In the past two years, power supply has dropped drastically, thus compounding domestic and industrial activities. Despite the recurrent boasts of the government of Yar'Adua to generate 6,000 mega watts of electricity by December 31, last year, the year ended without any visible improvement in power supply. This degree of depravity being witnessed in the power sector compelled Jonathan to announce himself as the Minister of Power upon the constitution of his cabinet in March.

The crisis in power sector in this dispensation has been described as the worst experience in Nigeria so far, as some communities now live in perpetual darkness, while others are in darkness for many months, before sighting electricity again. The lucky ones enjoy power supply on rotational basis. Thus the slogan – three days off, one day on, is now a refrain, compared to power supply in the 70's and 80's, when constant power supply was a daily experience.

As a result of continuous infrastructural decay and protracted energy crisis in the country, major industries which contributed largely to the country's annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP), have begun to take their exit from Nigeria, while others have had to seek solace in Ghana, a neighbouring, yet far smaller country, where citizens enjoy 24 hours of uninterrupted power supply as well as prompt infrastructural provisions.

One of the victims of infrastructural decay in Nigeria is Dunlop, a hitherto tyre manufacturing company, with notable employment capacity. As a result of harsh production environment, Dunlop was forced to halt operations in Nigeria last year and resorted to importing tyres into the country. Consequently, the company which used to have 5,000 employment capacity, was forced to prune its staff strength to 13. At a press conference to debunk rumours that the company relocated to Ghana, management of the company said it did not relocate, but rather forced to shut down its operations in Nigeria because it could no longer afford the huge cost of financing its generators, which was its main source of power. It also said government's policy had not been fair to its operations.

Similarly, information is circulating that Nigeria will soon be dealt yet another major blow as some other giant companies have commenced plans to move its industrial base from the shores of Nigeria to a neigbouring African country. This development has been portrayed as a major setback for Nigeria, which daily grapples with acute unemployment

crisis. It was learnt that Patterson Zochonis (PZ), Unilever Nigeria Plc, Nestle among others, had also at one time or the other considered divesting their operations from Nigeria, citing harsh economic environment as well as unfavourable government policy.

Similarly, educational and health institutions are not fairing better as teachers in both secondary and tertiary institutions have at intervals embarked on strike actions in protest of the decay in educational system as well as government's alleged indifference to teachers' wellbeing.

For the second time within one year for instance, Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) last year, embarked on strike actions to demand for better welfare package. Also, medical practitioners in psychiatric and neurological institutions went on strike several times to protest decay in these institutions and alleged government's insensitivity to staff wellbeing. In the same vein, teachers, electricity workers, judicial workers, Nigeria Police, Nigeria Medical Association (NMA) and innumerable organizations, have embarked on series of strike actions in the past two years. It is on record that never in Nigeria's history, have organizations embarked on incessant strike actions as have been the case in this democratic dispensation.

The list of the crisis confronting Nigeria is endless. It was against this backdrop that former Head of State, Major General Muhammadu Buhari, while assessing Federal Government's performance recently, described it as a failure. Buhari, who spoke while answering questions on British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Hausa Service, raised a number of questions in expression of his worry about government activities as well as the plight of Nigerians.

Buhari wondered why a government which made huge electioneering promises to citizens would find it difficult to deliver on its campaign promises. He added that the adverse effect of the alleged ineffectiveness of the Federal Government was biting hard on the citizenry, insisting that the frustration on the faces of Nigerians are apparent. Buhari, who wondered if the ruling PDP, had a manisfeto, regretted that Nigerians have been deprived of portable drinking water, hospital facilities, good roads, qualitative education, among other desirable social amenities.

"Nigerians are feeling the negative impact of the administration. They have not done what they are supposed to do, but they keep on saying they will do this and that. Does that mean when they were seeking the votes of Nigerians, they were not prepared and ready with the things they intended to do for Nigerians? Don't they have a manifesto? "Is the PDP not having a manifesto with the details of what to do when they are elected? The people are crying; they were promised water to drink, good schools, drugs in hospitals and good roads. But after two years, when these topics are brought to the fore, government will say they are thinking about it. But these thoughts were supposed to have been planned and articulated since," Buhari lamented.

Also speaking on democracy so far in Nigeria, former General Secretary of Afenifere, the pan-Yoruba socio-political organization, Mr. Ayo Opadokun, described the over one

decade of democratic practice in Nigeria as a frustrating and disastrous experience which according to him, calls for sober reflections. Opadokun, whose voice was laden with emotion during a telephone conversation, lamented that this decade of democratic practice runs foul of the expectation of pro-democracy activists who laid down their lives in the struggle for the enthronement of democracy. According to him, the rising spate of abject poverty in the country coupled with alleged misgovernance on the part of Nigerian leaders, have been worsened by the deprivation of Nigerians from their right to make the choice of their leaders through popular elections.

"It is frustrating. It is frustrating than anything else. The struggle for the restoration of democracy wasn't secured on a platter of gold. Therefore, those of us who laid down our lives, our blood and sweat in the campaign for the restoration of democracy in Nigeria are disappointed by the ineptitude of the leadership foisted on the Nigerian nation in the last ten years.

"There is too much of poverty and misgovernance in the land. As a matter of fact, the greatest disaster of our national inadequacy is the fact that the political operators have continued to undermine and frustrate the growth of democracy and democratization. The fact that they have foisted on us a situation where our votes don't count, is a sobering experience," Opadokun lamented.
The former National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) scribe, added that the only hope that lies ahead in the nearest future, is for Nigerians of spirited goodwill to rise up to the challenge of entrenching a valuable system by establishing a virile and resolute alternative political platform that can confront the perceived menace of the ruling PDP.

"The only hope is that Nigerian people should rise to the occasion by refusing to be spectators in the affairs of their country. Nigerians of public goodwill and democrats should mobilize themselves and establish a strong, viable, resilient national political party that can provide a credible alternative against the current disaster called PDP," Opadokun submitted.

However, as imperfect as the ongoing civil rule may be, it has been a marked departure from the trend of events during military regimes, when notable fundamental human rights of the people such as freedom of expression and freedom of the press were violated with impunity. Between 1985 and 1998 for instance, when Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha held sway as dictatorial heads of state, a number of newspaper houses, notably the defunct National Concord as well as The Punch were proscribed, while a number of journalists were killed, brutalized and jailed for daring to write against the tyranny of the military rulers.

The hostile environment created by the military regimes, forced some media platforms like Tell magazine to go underground, while publishing at an unknown locations. But the trend has largely changed in this dispensation. Even though there have been occasional attacks on the media by the government, no media organization has been proscribed, while brutality of journalists in the public has been drastically reduced. However, some

journalists have also been assassinated during this dispensation especially in the last four years.

In the same vein, freedom of expression was anathema during military administrations. Nigerians who dared to utter their opinions against the perceived despotic rule of the moment had their lives on the line. Against this background, members of the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), a pro-democracy platform, were either killed, jailed or attempted to be killed by Abacha's killing squad.

In a nutshell, despite the myriad of inconsistencies prevalent in this system, it is the views of some individuals that the current democratic system is still evolving. It is also the submission of certain political enthusiasts that the instability characterizing the ongoing system might have been largely averted if the First Republic had been allowed to run till date. It is therefore the view of optimists that the impunity prevalent in the current system is the fall out of the military interregnum of the previous years. They therefore expressed optimism that if this dispensation is allowed to run for the next five decades, Nigeria would have attained a measure of stability in the field of democratic practice.

Hopes are also rife that the judiciary has not totally failed in this dispensation. Despite the repeated allegations of bribery and alleged connivance with politicians by judges to stall justice, the judiciary has at different occasions moved to right the wrongs perpetrated by politicians by restoring stolen mandates and jailing some corrupt politicians. Therefore, the perception is that the judiciary is still asserting itself.
Observers then submit that this system is worth given a try especially now that Jonathan has promised to institutionalize electoral reform that can guarantee credible, free and fair election. Can the president therefore salvage the battered state of Nigeria in the next one year?

- # Adesina: I regret Fighting for this Democracy

Former Governor of Oyo State, and one time Secretary of National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) Alhaji Lam Adesina is one of those who fought the military for the restoration of democracy in Nigeria. He spoke to Ademola Adeyemo on the nation's democratic journey so far and the way forward

Nigeria is marking 11 years of democracy on Saturday, as one of the people who fought the military and went to jail for that, what is your assessment of the county's democratic journey so far?
Nigeria's democracy has not found its feet and this is unfortunate, those of us who fought the military for this democracy are now regretting what we did. We expected that those at the helm of affairs will deepen democracy, but they have not. Simple free and fair election we could not organize since 1999 and free and fair election is one of the ingredient of democracy. Except perhaps the 1999 election, all subsequent elections were bastadised. INEC colluded with the party in power to ensure that we have selection and not election and these facts were known to Nigerians and international community. The late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, an honest man admitted that his own election was

flawed, he then set up a committee to reform the electoral process, which was headed by Justice Uwais. Unfortunately, the National Assembly is yet to deliberate on the bill few months to the election.

So, what do you think will happen next year?
It is unbelievable to those of us who believed that Yar'Adua/Goodluck would do well. I am however smelling a rat, it is like the PDP has directed its members in the national assembly to delay the passage of the bill so that 2011 election may not be held under the electoral reform. It is also possible that Jonathan's presidency may be elongated. Any of the two will however throw Nigeria into chaos; failure to enact electoral reform into law will spell doom for Nigeria.

What can be done to avoid such situation?
I want to assure Nigerians that some of us are ready to lay down our lives for democracy in Nigeria. The fight for democracy is permanent in my life, I have suffered persecution, indignity, I have suffered discomfort at a younger age, I am ready to suffer that again so that the coming generation will know true democracy in Nigeria. In the First republic, I was a student of University of Nigeria, Nsukka and a member of the Student Representatives Council (SRC). I was one of those who recommended that Isaac Boro should take former Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa and Head of Government Nnamdi Azikiwe to court over the 1964 Federal election which was hotly disputed especially by UPGA, the case was in court until the military struck in 1966. Since then I have been championing the course of democracy, I was detained several times, I was jailed in Agodi by the military. This is not the democracy we fought for, simply put, what we have now is just civil rule and a semblance of democracy.

I will recommend that in the interest of the people, Jonathan must ensure that we have a democracy like in Ghana and South Africa. We can only achieve this if we allow the electoral reform as recommended by Justice Uwais to be passed into law not later than the end of June this year, also he should appoint a highly respected, honest and patriotic Nigerian to head INEC. He should also cancel the present voters register and order a fresh registration to be done for all Nigerians of voting age before the 2011 election.

What of the problem of corruption as it is affecting the emergence of true democracy?
The issue of corruption is very deep in Nigeria. It has affected every facet of our life, not only in government but also in private sectors, individual homes, everywhere. That is why it is difficult to stamp out corruption in Nigeria unless we have a leader who is ready to stake his life on it. There is cabal everywhere in Nigerian and these people will always frustrate the fight against corruption. These are people who have money to spoil the Nigeria society, they buy votes, they sponsor military coups.

A serious minded leader should move against these people in the interest of Nigeria, as long as they are free, Nigeria will continue to wallow in corruption and ineptitude. Money has affected the emergence of governments adversely in Nigeria. If there are provisions for a free and fair election, it will reduce the influence of money. Nigerians want changes and that must be allowed to occur peacefully and through the ballot box

and the time is 2011. If not, there will be chaos. Nigeria may not be easy to govern again after 2011.

You are a leader of opposition in Oyo State, do you think your party can wrest power from PDP in the state?
The opposition will form the next government in Oyo State. The present government has received over N200billion since its inception in 2007yet there is nothing to show for it, the roads are still bad, education is in shambles, and health facilities are bad. Recently the government promised to upgrade four hospitals but till now nothing was done, it is all promises and promises, those in government have appropriated all the public properties, government quarters were sold to government officials and their cronies. But I can assure you that the incoming government of AC will look into that, we won't allow any government to mortgage the future of our people.

For example, when I was in office as governor, I bought the former Aerodrome land from the federal government for N40 million, which I intended to use to build an international multipurpose shopping mall, but when PDP government got there they shared the land among themselves. The proposed dairy farm at Monatan has been redesigned and converted to a GRA. But I can assure you that they will account for it.
The people of Oyo State are convinced that the PDP government is a failure. The party is the oppressor. They are facing stiff opposition in Oyo State and I can assure you that they are living on borrowed time. In 2011, rigging will not be tolerated in Oyo State or else the state will burn.

But AC also has its own internal problem, there are many aspirants jostling for governorship and other posts, how would the party produce its flagbearers without rancour?
We will conduct transparent primaries to select our candidates, whoever emerged, others have promised to support him or her, AC will right all the wrongs. The aspirants are already talking among themselves. I can assure you that there will be no problem.

- # Police Key to Success of Electoral Reform – Waziri

Alhaji Adamu Maina Waziri is the Minister of Police Affairs. In this interview with Chuks Okocha in Abuja, he speaks on efforts to reform the Police, the zoning of offices in PDP and other sundry issues

The people of Yobe State recently organized a reception for you and a rally for the party, what does that translate into as far as your political ambition is concerned?
Well, I am a politician coming to my home town and it is my duty to formally welcome the decampees from the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) into the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). This is a carefully and deliberately planned program, whereby we have arranged a rally per zone to welcome the decampees, as well as mobilize the PDP members for a grand rally before the end of June in Damaturu, the state capital. This is a deliberate precursor to mobilizing the party for the 2011 elections. I don't see anything different from what will happen whenever I lead an organization of PDP in Potiskum,

Damaturu as well as in Yobe as a whole.
Let me say that the PDP has always maintained an electoral strength in Yobe, that has not been reflected in victories at general elections for reasons that are difficult to explain. But we hope that this time around we will get our acts together and be able to achieve an electoral victory that is commensurate with the strength of the party.

2011 is around the corner and there have been controversies in the PDP about zoning, do you think that there is zoning in the party? and do you think the President can contest?
It is ironic, as this question is put to me by someone from the South -east, because the push for a rotational presidency, based on geo-political zone was put forth by the South-east, during the Abacha Constituent Assembly, when my uncle, Dr. Alex Ekwueme initiated and propagated geo-political zones, which has turned out to be a calculus in the political configuration in Nigeria. The North has always believed that the best person should rule Nigeria, that the vote of the electorate should determine who the President of Nigeria should be. When you really begin to zone and exclude those not favoured by a zone, you are excluding the totality of the talents from that zone. If the President must come from a zone, which is only one-sixth of the total zones in Nigeria, but exclude five of six by acts of commission, self-infliction…yet we are talking of democracy and expect to reap the best of the benefits of democracy. The best benefit of democracy has been exhibited in the United States of America, where Barack Obama overcame all the inhibitions before the ordinary American to contest an election and win. Funny that here in Nigeria we applaud that demonstration of democracy, but when it behooves on us to replicate this in our country, we say 'zoning' or 'no zoning'.

I have refused to be intimidated by the 'minority' status of my ethnic group in Yobe. If I had always allowed my ethnic groups determine my electoral fortune, I will only win election in six out of 174 wards. That is how I have become relevant in the politics of Yobe State. So back to your question, I will say that Nigeria has suffered bouts of bad rulership, but we have also agreed that the best leadership will be able to lead us, deliver in terms of our expectations and requirements exclusive to a country like Nigeria. Therefore, I will like us to overcome this issue. It has served its purpose, seeing that the south has served its eight years and the so-called monopoly of the North has been broken. People should now agree and say, 'let us leave it open, let the best emerge'. Let Nigerians say this is what is best for us, so that the basic tenets of democracy will be upheld and the very best we expect from Nigeria can come from the best to materialize out of a fair process. The truth of the matter is that in the current dispensation, there is no iota of democracy. In a democracy, everyone should be allowed to present himself, so that the people can decide whether he is a good councillor, chairman, senator, governor or not.

Are you supporting the President to contest the forthcoming elections?
I am talking about a situation in which the constitutional rights of President Goodluck Jonathan are guaranteed, as well as the constitutional rights of people like Muhammadu Buhari, Atiku Abubakar, Ibrahim Babangida, Donald Duke and and others. I want a situation in which, if I, Adamu Maina Waziri decided to contest for the presidency, I will have no privileged influence on the decision of the electoral body, and everyone should feel free, because I want the best leader for the country to emerge.

President Goodluck Jonathan has promised free and fair elections in 2011. Currently, there is an electoral reform process going on. As the minister of Police affairs, is there any reform going on in the Police as regards the next general election?
Hand in hand with the electoral reforms is the Police reform, which was conceived and recommended to be implemented by this government. It is therefore important to note that the implementation of the six year reform program which is going to cost N1.6 trillion, commenced during my advent as Minister of Police Affairs. The program entails employment, training, rehabilitation, social support, image rebranding and the likes. It is expected that if the Police are well capacitated, for example in the areas of transportation, efficient communication system, anti-riot control and excellent welfare, and the average Nigerian is enlightened about his role as regards maintenance of law and order, if the media recognizes its duties and avoid creating media-induced impasses between the average Nigerian and the Police man, the Police will come to savour their role and discharge duties responsibly, without fear or favour. If both ends go pari pasu, when the files are released this month, we will commence a vast, aggressive implementation of the reform program, which will mature in six years. I had a talk with the management of the Police and we have agreed that the person who would create and re-create an image for the Policeman is himself. For me, I can only show the way and will soon leave and another person will continue. The reform is a six years program. But if we have a robust implementation in 2010, then the subsequent financial endowment will be a problem we can handle.

I fully know that the collection of N20 (bribes) at the road blocks still persist, but I want to remind the ordinary Nigerian that at these same check points criminals, car-snatchers, ritualists and their likes have been apprehended, but all these have been under reported. Is it because these arrests are not done in such a way that the arrested population does not surpass the population offering N20? I am saying that in conjunction with members of the Fourth Estate, Nigerians can think again about their misconceptions about the Police, and not see every Policeman as a criminal, who does not do his job. I also ensure that I take journalists around to see the kind of Police stations, barracks and conditions in which these people work and live. When you consider this, you have to applaud the Police, that in spite of these deficiencies, they still have will-power to continue.

Talking about 2011 elections, under the circumstances and within the gambit of the reforms, how can the Police be excluded from getting caught in the elections cross-fire between politicians and their agents?
Let me say that there are about 377,000 Policemen (in Nigeria), the first being the IG of Police, who has got about eight DIGs under him, about fifteen or so AIGs, about fifty commissioners and so on. Generally, there are about half a million polling booths in Nigeria. Half a million in one Election Day, there will be about 250,000 polling booths without Policemen. In this light, it might not be very accurate to blame polling booth misfortunes on the Police, because their strength in numbers is insufficient to cover all polling booths. Politicians are those who use the Policemen to rig the elections and are therefore guiltier than the Policemen, because there are politicians in each polling booth. So the perpetrators (of rigging) are politicians. The first remedy therefore, is to start a re-orientation of the politician. Why do I say so? There are also situations in which the

Police have found themselves in a situation of compromise, in terms of fairness, objectivity and impartiality, but in such situations the courts are there to adjudicate if disputes arise. If Nigerians say the election was rigged, and decides to go to court maybe as far as the Supreme Court to contest the election results and the results are being upheld, you should know where to lay your blame, not at the Police's because the court has the ultimate power to determine the results of any election in Nigeria.

You talked about the PDP getting its acts together to be able to win the forthcoming elections. Is it really possible for the PDP in Yobe to emerge victorious considering the crisis within its rank?
Some other parties have won elections in more precarious circumstances, so why can't we? With the likes of Senator Usman Al-Bishir, Hassan Saleh and other contenders, how can't the party pull it off? At the end of the day, there will just be one Governor and a Senator. It has happened before, and we can do it again, in absolute terms. In 2007, the PDP lost the elections with 14,200 votes. As of today, we have received more than 14,200 decampees, so in absolute terms, we should win the elections.

2011 is around the corner, should we expect you to contest the gubernatorial election in your state again?
I have a constitutional right to contest. The party also does have the right (to chose who it wants). But I have contested elections and lost, and I have not had any rest or leisure, since losing them. My first desire is to mobilize the party and widen it, so that elections can be won in 2011, as far as the state is concerned. There are many elections slated for 2011. We have the House of Assembly, the House of Representatives, the Senate and the gubernatorial election. I want to win all of them. I was close to winning those positions, but I will get it right this time.

Isn't that ambitious?
No, it is not. That is what the electoral contest is all about. We are going to contest everything and we are contesting to win. That is the duty of a thorough bred politician. I am not denying the knowledge that as much as it is possible to win, it is possible to lose all these seats, but whichever comes I will take it. That's why I have been in this all my life.

Let us talk about the leadership crisis in the PDP at the national level. Don't you think that the imbroglio will affect your chances in the next general election?
There is a leadership of the PDP, elected in a national congress; some people have come out to say they want electoral reforms. But let us get it clear: what is the content of their desires for electoral reforms? I understand that they want a reform where there will be internal democracy in the PDP. They want an internal democracy that will translate into free elections for all elective posts (within the party) before the elections in 2011. They want a leadership that has got integrity to win the acceptability of Nigerians, such that the candidates of the party will be credible and can win elections. That is what the Reform Group is trying to propagate.

The need for internal democracy in the PDP should be the concern of every Nigerian. Why? Out of the thirty-six states in the Republic, the PDP controls twenty-eight, including the Federal Government. That means the PDP is in control of twenty-nine governments, out of the thirty-seven governments in the federation. Tell me if there is no internal democracy in the PDP, will there be democracy in the country? If the primary elections in the PDP in twenty-eight states are not free and fair, how are you going to have free and fair secondary elections? So, for every Nigerian in Nigeria, whether he is PDP or not, the existence of internal democracy in the PDP is the guarantee of democracy in Nigeria. I am not advocating the overhaul of the leadership of the PDP. No, I am the one advocating that the leadership of the PDP, like that of Nigeria, must guarantee a free and fair primaries, such that the best candidates are selected and put forward for election by the Nigerian electorate for 2011. We must join other well-meaning Nigerians in demanding that the PDP that has got overwhelming, almost near-monopoly of political leadership in Nigeria is geared towards a cause whereby democracy is deepened in this country. If the PDP is allowed to depart from democratic fundamentals to refuse and nourish democracy internally, then the Nigerian democracy is threatened and resultantly, the future of the country will be at stake.

• Credible INEC Chairman 'll Enhance Electoral Reform – Princewill

Action Congress (AC) gubernatorial candidate at the 2007 general election in Rivers State, Prince Tonye Princewill, in this interview with Jaiyeola Andrews, speaks on the reason why he left AC, electoral reform, Niger Delta crisis among other issues. Excerpts:

As a technocrat, what motivated your adventure into politics?
Politics is too important to be left for politicians. Politics affects life. Politics can be positive and it can also be negative. But the option of just sitting down and watching like a pedestrian is inexcusable. In 2003, when I witnessed community crisis and political irresponsibility in my father's kingdom, basically, it was difficult for me to do something ridiculous. I felt it was impossible for me to do something, even though I felt I had to do something. That was how I decided to get involved in politics.
Originally, I was thinking that if I joined PDP, it would be reasonable enough for me to confront what was going on in Rivers State through the platform of PDP. But when I examined the reality on ground in Rivers State, I came to a conclusion very early that if I joined PDP, I wouldn't be able. In fact, the problem that confronted me was an issue of a green snake under a green grass.

So, I wanted to do something different. That was why I had to join AC because I felt it was a potent platform through which I could confront the ruling party. I had had meetings with the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) executive. I had had meetings with several people who offered me the opportunity to join them, but I was attracted to AC because of two reasons.
One, I heard that our friend, Alhaji Abubakar Atiku, was set to join the party and from

what we gathered, he was going to be the presidential candidate of the party and that gave us a significant boost. Secondly, Asiwaju Bola Tinubu was behind it and thirdly, Sergeant Awuse was the party leader in the state.
As a previous gubernatorial candidate and a seasoned politician (Awuse) in the state, I found out that if one wanted to get involved, you needed to play politics with people like that because it would make a huge difference. It could have been any other party like the ANPP but we needed a serious opposition to PDP. That was why I went into politics and I pitched my tent with AC.

You withdrew your petition at the tribunal, was it because Governor Rotimi Amaechi is your friend?
Amaechi and I did not know each other at that time, contrary to speculations. Amaechi wasn't my friend and I didn't know him before the Supreme Court judgment. I only met him on two previous occasions and during those occasions, we merely exchanged hand shakes. He went to see former President Umaru Yar'Adua and he said Amaechi should be sworn in. That was when we had a conversation. Then the maxim, 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend,' came to mind.
For me, it was absolutely clear that we had to do something different in Rivers State. So the status quo no longer applied. I was keen to challenge that status quo. That was why my friend, Amaechi, came on board and it came to me like victory even though we didn't need to go for an election to elect him. That was an opportunity for me to begin to see the kind of change I wanted to see in Rivers State.

I was happy to see an end to the Peter Odili era which symbolized absence of infrastructure and complete absence of public utility that was critical to the well being of our state. For me, it was not a battle of 'it must be me.' I didn't go into politics because I wanted to be governor. I went into politics because I wanted change and I thought I could effect that change if I was the governor. As the Supreme Court judgement came, it became clear to me that it could no longer be a battle worth fighting because what we wanted to do was being done by the new leadership that we had in the state.
I think the principle of change is what I live for and I will continue to fight for it and that change must come to my people and that change must come.

What is your next line of action?
It is a very interesting road that we travel through but many people may not understand when you come from the kind of background that I come from. The option for me becomes wider and the beauty of it is that you do not need to take desperate decisions that you can be thoughtful about. What you need to do is to be calculative in what you do, but if you are desperate, you may end up taking decisions in a hurry and I cannot do that.
I knew what led to Atiku leaving AC because I was there. I was a member of the Board of Trustees of the opposition movement. As a member, I was in a room with General Muhammadu Buhari, Asiwaju Tinubu, Alhaji Attahiru Bafarawa, Chiefs Tom Ikimi and Olu Falae, Pat Utomi and so on.
The heads of the opposition movement were in the room. We were strategizing, planning and sharing ideologies. So, I witnessed what went wrong. I witnessed Atiku's frustration. He was the chairman of that board and I saw the frustration which resulted in different

people going different ways. I was one of those who advised him to leave and I knew the prospect for me because AC was no longer alright. When we decided to support Amaechi's government, the leadership of AC was against it. The leadership of AC said we should continue with the petition at the tribunal. So, I said that was a wrong thing to do. I told them that Ameachi's emergence was a blessing to the state, compared to Odili's era. I told them that we could not continue to oppose people's interest because the people had to drive the policies. I told them that the policy of non-engagement to PDP in this case had to be set aside.

Many people disagreed with me but as time went on, they started to come around. It was only Atiku that said it publicly that 'what Princewill is doing with Amaechi in Rivers State is acceptable because I will not stay in Abuja and tell Princewill what to do. If he was responsible enough to be our gubernatorial candidate in 2007, we will find him enough to trust his judgement, so, he was the only one that came out publicly to support me. Some sections of the party believe till date that I decided to support Amaechi because of money. If I truly wanted money, I would have pursued my case at the tribunal that would lead to another election which would have made me the governor. So, it has never been me and my personal interest, but the interest of the state and many people saw it. But you don't need to search too far for an evidence on what I'm really pursuing. My personal agenda has always been about the people of the community and region.

So, it was very easy for me to bring them together. I brought them together to look at issues because Asari-Dokubo was not particularly happy about Amaechi's riverine agenda. He felt Amaachi was not doing enough to develop riverine communities and the state is basically divided between the riverine and upland areas. He was telling the governor to show more interest in the riverine areas. People in that area want to see neigbours reclaiming their land. If you come from one area particularly to compensate another area it is then you can say you have really balanced things up.

What do you think is the solution to the problem of Niger Delta?
We are going to have an over night scenario. For me, whatever we are going to do will be in stages. I think the Niger Delta Technical Committee's report, whose White Paper we have not even seen, is the beginning of that solution. The committee that was set up by the Yar' Adua administration was subtitled in December 2008 and till date, we have not heard anything.
if we start to operate with that report, we will have the beginning of it. We should not expect the problem of Niger Delta to end overnight, not even because the number one citizen of the country comes from that area. I think we should take it in stages. It is like a super tanker that cannot be turned around. I think it is going to take time, but I believe we all have to build confidence in all the parties and when we do that, the opportunity to make things happen will definitely increase. The amnesty that was given was not in our recommendation.

We learnt that you were the one that brokered truce between Dokubo-Asari, Amaechi and Alabo Edi Abari I of Kalabari kingdom. How did you succeed in doing this?
I think all of them discovered that I liked to speak the truth because I speak the truth from

my heart. Therefore, they respected me and I think if I say there was the need to sit down and talk, I think there were chances that they would listen. So that was what we did. As for me, my responsibility is to ensure the state moves forward and I think I find it easy to speak the truth when state interest is concerned than when my personal interest is the matter. So, for me, it was so easy to talk to them about state interest.
It was made in a context which has not been implemented. That context, if implemented and the technical committee's report is also implemented, we will see an opportunity for a trouble-free Niger Delta.

What kind of voting system do you think can be adopted in Nigeria in order to have a free and fair election?
To be honest with you, the voting system is not the problem, but individuals who manage it. Whether we do open secret ballot or option A4, the fact remains that it has been demonstrated and proven that it is individuals that are running the system; that determine whether the system works or not. I just came in from the United Kingdom and in UK, open secret ballot system was used in the last election. You drop your vote in the ballot box and walk out and somebody who was not a member of any of the political parties would ask you about your address, just to know if you had voted and if you had not, they would come over to your house to tell you that you had not voted. But this does not happen in Nigeria.

The saddest thing is that we are talking about the system of voting, while we are not even talking about the voters themselves. How could you have had Bob Marley, Mike Tyson and Muhammed Ali in a voters' register and nobody is disturbed about this. The only thing I think we should do in this country is to appoint somebody that is credible to head the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). People that surround him must also be credible. I think we should talk less about the voting system and more about voters and even more about the referee or the umpire that is going to manage the process.

What is your view on electoral reform?
I think it is a good idea, but again that can be likened to a system of voting because it is more about the people behind it. If electoral reform means that we are going to have a credible independent INEC Chairman, I think then that we would have started to arrange something that makes sense. Even within the Nigerian system, we have had our success. It means that despite the broken system, we can still put in place credible processes. If that happens, then we can walk away from the darkness of the past so that we can see brighter future. We will be 50 in the next few months and it is unfortunate that we have nothing to show for it.

- # Fix Retirement Age for Politicians'

Governor Theodore Orji of Abia State has urged Nigerian politicians to consider leaving the stage when the ovation is loudest, instead of strutting on the political turf until death.
According to him, the need for age limit in politics becomes imperative because

politics as currently practiced in Nigeria remains a profession without retirement age.

Orji made the call at the weekend during a prayer meeting with the state chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).
He said a situation where old politicians would continue to be in the political arena, deprives vibrant young people with brilliant ideas the opportunity of contributing their quota to national development.

He said that sanity would prevail in the nation's polity, when the older generation makes way for young leaders to emerge thereby removing unnecessary friction in the contest for power between the old and the young.
He urged Christian leaders to embrace politics instead of staying on the sideline, adding that politics was not the preserve of a particular group of people. "When decent men and women play politics the game would become decent too," he added.
Orji said Christian leaders in Nigeria should take a cue from Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, who was actively involved in politics of his nation and helped in no small measure to end apartheid and has continued to engage politicians for the purpose of enthroning good governance in post-apartheid South Africa.

He also asked leaders of CAN to help him in seeking the favour of God as he considers his re-election bid.
Earlier, the immediate past chairman of CAN in Abia, Arch Bishop Rogers Uwadi urged Governor Orji to be courageous in pursuing his ambition assuring that the Church would remain behind him.
He said clerics have always contributed to socio-economic transformation in such areas as education, industrialization and running of orphanages.

- # ...It Has No Place in Constitution'

As the debate on whether President Goodluck Jonathan should be allowed to contest the 2011 presidential election rages, a pressure group, Voice of Imo People, has called for end to zoning, saying the idea is baseless, faulty and lacks merit.

In a statement issued in Lagos by Barrister Gerald Okorie on behalf of the organization, the group which questioned the standing of the zoning system in the PDP constitution, said the actual position of the purported arrangement in the constitution is not clear.

"The question now is whether actually there is anything like zoning in the PDP constitution and what is the right interpretation of the zoning if at all such existed in the constitution," the group stated.
Quoting Article 72c of the PDP constitution, the group noted that PDP did not recognize the principle of zoning and power rotation, saying President Goodluck Jonathan should be allowed to contest next year's polls because it is his fundamental right to do so.

“Is it possible for President Jonathan to step down and contest as Vice President and wait for the time when PDP will zone it to his region before he will contest for the presidency? “The presidency is not a traditional institution that will be kept for somebody until his time is mature. Such ugly arrangement has no precedence in world history and we cannot start such a clumsy disposition in Nigeria,” the statement said.

- # Abuja’s New Power Broker

With the Goodluck Jonathan presidency getting set to consolidate its position and prepare for a possible tough battle in 2011, it has emerged that four leading groups are battling among themselves to control the president. Their calculation, according to sources, will see their influence extend beyond next year when the president is expected to have a new mandate; following his expected re-election in the forthcoming election.

Already, the four groups have been waging discreet war among themselves to have Jonathan's attention, while at the same time seeking ways to ensure that their preferred candidates get strategic postings under the new dispensation.

Checks in the presidency indicate that the new men who will shape the corridors of power are from varied generations, educational backgrounds, professions, religions, geo-political zones and political ideology.

The four leading groups are headed by former President Olusegun Obasanjo, former Minister of Defense General Theophilus Danjuma, ijaw elder statesman Chief Edwin Clarke and the Nigerian Governors' Forum. The four groups have literarily sharpened their negotiation skills, deployed their extensive reach, and are playing high-wired politics in order to get the attention of the President.

Nigerians have known the President almost since 2005 when he hit the limelight as the deputy governor of Bayelsa State, who was elevated to the gubernatorial seat after then governor Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, was impeached by the legislators. In that period, they have seen him climb up to become Vice President, Acting President and now President.

However, in this period of his fast rise in the political sphere, what Nigerians do not know are his close advisers, confidants and strategists whose counsel, thoughts, ideas and opinions will no doubt shape the policies, programmes and plans which the President may unfold in moving the nation forward.

While it is not yet clear how considerable their influence may be on the new President, what is certain however is that their advices will be relied upon mainly by the President to help him actualise his plans for the country.

So far, sources indicate that the President has been playing a delicate balancing act, giving attention to all the groups while at the same time maintaining semblance of neutrality to their demands.

All the groups have so far had their favoured candidates in positions of power. The Governors Forum has one of its own in Namadi Sambo as the Vice President, the Minister of Water Resources, Dr. Obadiah Ando is believed to be the choice of Danjuma while the recent reshufflement made at the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) "has the input of Clarke," a source said.

First in the list of members of the Jonathan inner circle is Obasanjo. The former President became close to Jonathan in 2005 after he engineered the impeachment of ex-Bayelsa governor Alamieyeseigha. Since then the two men had been very close. It is on record that Obasanjo was also instrumental to the selection of Jonathan as running mate to former President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, who was then PDP presidential candidate in the 2007 elections. Obasanjo had publicly called on Yar'Adua "to do the right thing in view of his failing health", a euphemism for him to resign and allow Jonathan take over as president. No doubt, Jonathan will relies on the former four-star general who is the chairman, PDP Board of trustees to rein-in the party behind him and to have a firm grip of the military.

Importantly, Obasanjo is seen as the force behind the emergence of the PDP Reform Group, whose demands for internal democracy within the ruling the party led to the outster of Vincent Ogbulafor from his seat as the national chairman of the PDP. How Obasanjo succeeded in having considerable influence over members of the group is surprising, because the group's leading figures are people whose antecedents do not fall in line with Obasanjo's in the past. However, with a common desire to whittle the influence of Governors within the PDP, the Reform Group and Obasanjo found a common ground, and today, they are one of the most influential pressure groups within the PDP.

Chief Edwin Clarke, a distinguished nationalist, is a prominent Ijaw National Leader who served as Information Minister during the military administration of Yakubu Gowon. His recent most visible public function was when he led the Delta State delegation to the National Conference on Political Reforms during the Obasanjo regime.

A great champion of the Niger Delta cause, Clarke had a career in the public service spanning over two decades, serving, among others, as Commissioner for Education and Finance in the defunct Bendel State. He was also the first Pro-chancellor of the Universities of Benin in Edo State and Federal University of Technology, Minna, Niger State. In the Second Republic, he served as an elected Senator of the federal republic on the platform of the defunct ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN).

Though it is not yet clear how he and President Jonathan met, he is believed to have the ear of the President especially on issues relating to the Niger Delta. Clarke is a veteran

when it comes to Niger Delta issues, as such Jonathan may rely on his advice and counseling on that regard, some observers pointed out.

For both Clarke and Obasanjo, it is believed that their main area of concern for now is to ensure that Jonathan succeeds in 2011. While the battle to control the PDP is seen more or less as Obasanjo's script in his effort to clear the coast for Jonathan, Clarke's experience will come handy when it comes to mobilizing the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria for the battle to get Jonathan elected in 2011. His vast network of friends in the North, South-east and South-west will be relied upon in effort to tilt the balance in Jonathan's favour.

Lt. General T. Y. Danjuma (rtd.) is also a crucial adviser to Jonathan on policy formulation and personnel sourcing. Danjuma, alongside members of the Presidential Advisory Committee (PAC), have also been helpful in advising on what should be the focus of the government in terms of programme to be implemented in the next one year.

As for the Governors Forum, their activities have been more visible than that of the other groups. Since 2005, the governors have had a considerable influence over what transpires in the presidency. Their weight of pressure has today ensured that the President and the Vice President were former governors. And in the calculation of many, having to break their hold on power may take longer than anticipated.

Apart from the Vice President who is believed to be their choice for the position following the elevation of Jonathan to the number one position, a closer look at the current members of the Federal Executive Council shows that many ministers are direct nominees of the governors.

Their power is derived from the control they have over vast state resources, as well as the near monopoly they enjoy over who becomes a delegate to the next party convention. Of all the three groups, the Governors Forum is believed to be directly in control of who becomes the PDP's candidate in next year's polls.

However, some opposition figures have kicked against the influence of the groups, calling it a dangerous precedence meant to deprive Nigerians of the services they deserve from the new President.

Speaking to THISDAY on influence of such groups in power circles, former Director General of the Nationa Security Organisation (NSO) Alhaji Umaru Shinkafi said the entire battle to control the presidency, in the brazen manner in which it is being carried out at the moment, portends a great danger for the polity.

"The pervasive influence of cliques, cabals, kitchen cabinets and what have you, on constitutional governance, is not ideal for a young democracy like ours. I think it is compounded by the fact that this government has elevated the practice by inaugurating a body of advisers completely unknown to the constitution existing peripasu with those that

are known to the constitution. Not even that, but inaugurating that body and giving it terms of reference.

"Public opinion has expressed lots of anxiety about this situation. The anxiety is even more horrifying in the sense that it was done when a cabinet was in place. It also does not alter the anxiety because this body of advisers comprises people of tested ideas and tested experience.

"So the inability of our democracy to stand on its own, to resort to subterranean arrangement of governance is what is worrisome. I think it is understandable when Military regimes stage coups and the plotters constitute a junta which guides the policy underlining the change, but in a democracy where a political party produces candidate for presidential office in a properly constituted convention, and elections were held and a winner emerged, it is painful to see this winner, or a team that he has put together in accordance with the constitution, subordinated to a cabal whose voice is louder and more influential than that of the team constitutionally put together to help the person elected to run the country," he said.

Shinkafi, who holds the traditional title of Marafan Sokoto, said what we should lay emphasis on now, "is to work assiduously to consolidate on the little achievements made", and at the same time exploring other alternative ideas. "The PDP, being the ruling the party, must continue to reform itself because it presents the best vehicle needed to reform the entire country."

Also speaking, frontline opposition leader Balarabe Musa said as far as he can tell, the activities of the groups are clear acts of mischief, and advised President Jonathan to distant himself from them "or he is bound to fail."

Speaking with THISDAY, Musa said while the three other groups may have a genuine intention to properly advise Jonathan, "Obasanjo is only interested in being a king maker to every leader in the country, apparently to cover his track."

"Without doubt, Obasanjo is terrible as a political leader. So it is clear that Jonathan must distant himself from the man or he is bound to fail even before the end of the present tenure. The Governors have today become the most powerful and most important political pressure group in the country. My hope is that Nigerians will expose them for what they are, and allow our democratic space to move forward."

While many like Musa have voiced their displeasure at the existence of such powerful groups, Nigerians fear that they should not constitute themselves into cabal as witnessed with the former regime of late Yar'Adua.

- **Political parties should discard zoning; it affects merit -Okpara**

What do you make of the raging controversy surrounding the reported aspiration of President Goodluck Jonathan to become elected president next year against the zoning arrangement of his party?

First of all, the National Union of Political Parties has said that President Jonathan or any other Nigerian who is eligible based on the 1999 constitution is free to run for the office of the President irrespective of where the person comes from. As a fact, we called on all political parties to do away with zoning. Zoning affects merit. Political parties should elect their best members through the nomination process called primary election and aspirants should be free to come from any part of the country. People should not be disqualified from election because of who their father is or where their mother comes from or what religion they practise. People should freely express their aspirations as the superior laws of the land allow. For this reason, the NUPP decided that everybody, including Dr Goodluck Jonathan, should participate in the 2011 elections as they may wish.

Many people feel the PDP zoning arrangement is already there and its rejection now could upset not just the PDP but the polity as a whole, PDP being the nation's dominant party.

No. Zoning was introduced at a time when it was felt that a certain section of the country needed it to calm nerves, but we have overgrown that now. It is time to celebrate merit and support anyone coming from any part of the country.

Do you realize that as an Igbo man, you could be affected directly? The Igbo generally hope that if the North is allowed to hold onto the presidency till 2015 in the spirit of the zoning arrangement, the other two geopolitical regions of the south would let the South East, the Igbo, produce the president in 2015.

It doesn't have to be so. I initiated the Obama Nigeria in the countdown to the American election that produced Barack Obama as the president because of the ideals which the Obama candidacy represented. Obama is of a black minority group who got the support of the more than 80 percent of the White in America to become his party's candidate and then the nation's president. We should advance with America; after all it is their model of democracy we are practising. It is time for Nigeria to discard the inhibitions of tribe and religion and move forward.

Apart from your belief in electoral freedom, what has President Jonathan done to win your support?

Here is a highly educated man who is also very humble. He has never been known to seek power desperately. He has never printed a paper for any election. Fate has always helped him. He has always been called into the offices he has held. The antecedents are well known now. If God would have him continue as president through the 2011 elections, let him be.

What is your mind on the similarly controversial two-party system that nearly tore the House of Representatives apart?

It's retrogressive even to think that a nation of over 140 million people could be satisfied with two parties when much smaller countries like Niger Republic have multi-party structure with political parties in excess of five. The former military President Ibrahim Babangida tried two parties: the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) and built offices for them in each of the country's 774 local government areas, but that system produced nothing. As for the recent bill seeking two parties, the House of Representatives did justice to it by killing it.

But lots of the members of the House supported the bill passionately.

Some people fear that if they go into election on the tickets of minority parties they may lose. They want a situation that will leave them with a strong opposition party with a high possibility of electoral success. But I look at it that political parties should be formed based on ideology of something to offer that will confer popularity on the party. You shouldn't form a party because of another party. What these people want is PDP and another party, which is not good for democracy.

You have just become chairman of the National Union of Political Parties (NUPP). What is it really about, because there is also the Conference of Nigerian Political Parties (CNPP).

The NUPP was formed in 2006 as an umbrella of many political parties. It is not mainly for opposition. I was elected president of the union for one year. I was called on earlier this month to lead the union once again for one year. It's a one-year tenure. Some political parties which are not in the mainstream CNPP are in the NUPP. Some are in the CNPP but still also belong to the NUPP.

The former governor of Kaduna State Namadi Sambo has just become the nation's vice president amidst worries by many Nigerians that he faces daunting challenges posed by development needs of the country. What do you think?

I had my fears when the nation faced the uncertainty of who the vice president would be. This was because we had a situation not far back when our president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo and his vice, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar could not see eye to eye. But I relaxed when the lot fell on Sambo to become the vice president. Sambo is like Goodluck Jonathan in many respects. He is a man with vast experience, a man who is an authority in his chosen field: architecture, and a man who is well-read but is not unduly ambitious. I have confidence in his performance. He will make a good pair with President Jonathan. They will reign in harmony and they will succeed in leading the country.

What specific areas of development do you wish to see a change in as the two go about their duties?

The president decided to personally lead development efforts in power supply. It shows that he is unhappy and wants to make a difference. I want to see serious transformation of the power sector. We have had more than enough of unreliable power supply. Manufacturing needs to grow. It should be the mainstay of our economy. We cannot achieve economic development without a solid industrial base and we cannot have such a base without regular power supply. Then, there is the Niger Delta. Our late President Umaru Yar'Adua did very well with the Niger Delta. Jonathan can surpass that and he should surpass it. He has to continue the amnesty programme and improve on it where necessary. I want the government also to sit up to electoral reform. We all know that electoral reform is a major challenge. Government knows the expectations of Nigerians on credible elections and I want to believe that Jonathan and other top government officials will do all that should be done to give the nation an electoral system that they can be proud of.

Right now, the question is who the next chairman of the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) should be after Jonathan removed Professor Maurice Iwu last month. Many are even saying the president should not be the one to appoint the next INEC chairman

I think that matter is settled that the president should appoint the INEC chairman. Some people commenting on the Uwais ERC report don't know what it recommends. Even when the NJC (National Judicial Council) appoints or nominates the INEC chairman based on Uwais recommendation, who appoints the head of the NJC himself? In my own thinking, the president should just confirm the appointment of the present acting chairman of the Commission (Mr Solomon Soyebi) and cut the story short. Having been in INEC for so long and headed the commission's offices in many states, the acting chairman possesses the necessary experience to deliver improved elections. We have less than a year to the 2011 elections and we need an umpire who is familiar with elections and who knows improvements that Nigerians expect.

- # Ribadu Returns June 6

Former Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, would return to Nigeria on June 6, this year, after spending one year, five months and three days on self exile. He fled the country on January 3, 2009 after complaining of "serious" threats to his life.

Ribadu's counsel, Mr. Femi Falana confirmed his client's planned return to THISDAY yesterday on telephone and said that the former EFCC boss' "final return to Nigeria is on Sunday, June 6."

Falana, also said that Ribadu's return would be heralded by an honorary doctorate degree in law that would be conferred on him, the same day, by Babcock University, Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State. The university is owned by the Seventh Day Adventist Church.
As a prelude to his eventual return, the Federal government few weeks ago dropped

charges of non-declaration of assets it was pursuing against Ribadu at the Code of Conduct Tribunal without giving reasons for its action.
The government also went ahead four days ago to re-instate him as an Assistant Inspector-General of Police (AIG) and also retired him on the same rank, with effect from December 22, 2008.
Ribadu was in 2007 removed as EFCC Chairman after he fell out with the "powers that be," and was replaced by Mrs. Farida Waziri.

He was asked to proceed to the Nigeria Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) in Kuru, Jos. However, towards the end of his course, he was ordered to revert to the former rank of DCP. But at the completion of the course, he was not issued a certificate, and was forcibly dragged out of the graduation hall on account that he was not supposed to have attended the course in the first place.
However, a special ceremony was organised for him and his NIPSS certificate awarded to him following the insistence of the then Vice-President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, who was also chairman of the institution's board.
Following his purported demotion, he was then posted to Benin City, Edo State. However, he defied the authorities by not showing up at his new posting.

Subsequently, he went into exile. He then proceeded to challenge his demotion from the rank of an AIG to a DCP by the PSC.
In a motion exparte filed before Justice Mustapha Abdullahi of the Federal High Court in Ikoyi, Lagos, Ribadu had said: "I fear for my safety and consequently seek the protection of the court as a matter, of utmost urgency."
While he was in exile, the then Justice Constance Momoh-led three-man Code of Conduct Tribunal issued a bench warrant against him for failing to honour its invitation.

In September last year, Ribadu sneaked into the country in a dramatic fashion to pay homage condolences to the Fawehinmi over the death of Chief Gani Fawehinmi. He even went to the mortuary to pay his respects to the human rights activist.
Since then he has been doing the circus of delivering speeches and attending international conferences. He was invited to appear before the Congressional Committee on Foreign Relations.

- # We will Extradite Ibori – EFCC

THE Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, yesterday said it was doing everything possible to extradite the former Governor of Delta State, Chief James Ibori, to Nigeria to face corruption charges.

The anti-graft agency's spokesman, Femi Babafemi, who said this while reacting to reports that Chief Ibori was seeking asylum in Dubai in the United Arab Emirate said: "We are doing everything possible to get him back home to face charges against him. For example, our operatives are still in Dubai working in conjunction with the Metropolitan Police towards bringing him to book."

On the asylum twist to the development, Babafemi said: "If it is about certain reports today (yesterday), you know we don't work based on speculations, we deal with hard facts."

Some un-named influential Nigerians were said to be working on securing political asylum for the ex-governor arrested on May 12 in the UAE capital

The government of Britain at whose instance Ibori was arrested in Dubai had sought his extradition to face money laundering charges.

However, the ex-governor, through his lawyers sought the intervention of the court and was granted bail while the British request was being considered.

Tony Eluemunor, spokesman of the former Delta State governor, confirmed then that Ibori was arrested in the Gulf country at the instance of the British government which was prosecuting some of his associates - Udoamaka Okoronkwo (nee Onuigbo); his sister, Christie Ibie-Ibori, and a former aide, Adebimpe Pogoson - in London on money laundering charges.

It is not clear when Ibori got to Dubai. Apparently, he sneaked out of Nigeria in the face of manhunt for him by operatives of the EFCC and the Police.

He had failed to respond to EFCC summons for questioning over allegations of fraud and diversion of state funds to the tune of N44 billion during his time as Governor of Delta State.

Having failed to respond to the summons and even forcefully resisting arrest, Ibori was declared wanted and an international arrest warrant issued through Interpol.

• 2011 - Jonathan Won't Run – Mark

Senate president, David Mark, yesterday allayed fears that President Goodluck Jonathan will run in the 2011 presidential election, saying he is certain Jonathan will respect the zoning arrangement of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

Meanwhile, Northern Elders warned President Jonathan against allowing himself fall into the temptation of running for the office against the zoning formular.

They insisted that he dare not attempt it, even as the forum advised Mark to prevail on the president to respect zoning which favours the north to produce the presidential candidate for 2011 on the PDP platform.

The elders in a meeting yesterday with the senate president urged the president to uphold the principles of federal character and zoning in the forthcoming election,

The group spoke against the backdrop of alleged secrete plot by some politicians make Jonathan PDP flag bearer in the 2011 presidential election.
But the senate president told the forum that president Jonathan would not only uphold the constitution, but would not do any thing that would under mind the sanctity of his office.

He said that the president would be mindful of the diverse nature of the country.

Senator Mark noted that Jonathan who ran a joint ticket with late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua has always emphasized on the principle of the rule of law as his guide.

Mark specifically allayed the fears being expressed in some quarters that President Jonathan may not uphold the principle of Federal Character or zoning arrangement in appointment or election into public offices.

The President of the Senate added that National Assembly and the Senate in particular will continue to be guided by the constitution and rule of law, saying, "We shall do everything within the ambits of the law for the utmost interest of Nigeria and Nigerians".

He urged Nigerians to see the nation beyond ethnic or regional consideration because, "We are all binded by a common purpose and mission as one indivisible country with a common heritage.

"As Elders, we must be nationalistic and open minded in our views and actions so that we can correct the younger generation from deviating".

He admitted that the introduction of Federal Character principle in employment and appointment of citizens into public offices is a worthy development adding that, "Federal Character principle is good but should not be at the expense of merit".

Leader of the delegation, Alhaji Bello Kirfi had earlier in his mission statement enjoined the President of the Senate to prevail on the incumbent President not to jettison the principle of Federal Character and zoning in the forthcoming general elections in order to preserve the harmony and unity of the federating units of the country.

Kirfi urged the present administration to pursue to logical conclusion electoral reforms that would guarantee credible elections in 2011.

EFCC Re-arrests, Detains 5 Oyo Officials over N8.2bn

After being released for lack of evidence, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) yesterday re-arrested five officials of the Oyo State government over alleged diversion of N8.2 billion local government funds. The officials had been granted bail on Wednesday by the anti-graft agency.

The officials, according to the agency, were put in custody of the commission following fresh indictment against them in the fraud investigation.

Those re-arrested were the Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs Mr. Hosea Agboola; Chairman, Association of Local Governments of Nigeria (ALGON) Mr. Ojo Ademola Obafemi; the state Accountant-General Mrs. Florence Okeniyi; Commissioner for Works, Alhaji Muslim Oyedemi; and a consultant, Mr. Olufemi Babalola Ademola.

EFCC's Head of Media and Publicity, Mr. Femi Babafemi, confirmed to THISDAY that they were detained after fresh indictment.
The anti-graft agency had earlier invited all the 33 local government chairmen in the state in connection with various petitions on the mismanagement of council funds through the state Joint Account Committee.

For the allegation of mismanagement of the local governments' fund, the local government chairmen had claimed that the money was not paid into their local government accounts.

They said the money was only promised but not released to their councils.
After the preliminary investigations on the 33 council chairmen, the EFCC operatives had left them off the hook due to lack of evidence against them.

Further investigations, according to a source at the EFCC had indicted the state SSG, as he was alleged to have diverted the money into his private account, after he had made it public that the money had been released to the local councils account.
Each of the 33 local governments in the state was made to contribute N250 million for the tarrying of a five-kilometre road in their domains, a move that provoked outrage in the state.

FG, US Sign Free Polls, Anti-Corruption Pact

Nigeria and the United States yesterday signed a pact to fight corruption and also see to the conduct of free and fair elections in 2011.

Visiting US Under-Secretary of State for Global Affairs Maria Otero said collaboration in these areas would help the country defeat corruption at all levels - ministries, departments and agencies.

She spoke after the US and Nigeria rounded off a two-day consultation under the US-Nigeria Bi-national Commission Agreement that was signed last month in Washington, D.C.

The Solicitor General of the Federation who is also the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Justice Ahmed Yola signed for Nigeria while Otero signed for the US.

A joint statement issued yesterday said both countries are committed to building the capacity of anti-crime institutions as well as their agents and personnel in the country.

These include the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), the police and the justice ministry.
The role of US would be in the area of training and provision of technical assistance.

The meetings of the last two days effectively launched the working group meeting on good governance, transparency and integrity which recognized the need to fight corruption as a way of promoting growth in the economy.

"The government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was committed to combating corruption and all forms of economic crimes in Nigeria and to collaborate with the United States to advance investigations and prosecutions of suspects.

"To this end, the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has requested technical assistance and training for investigators and prosecutors of corruption and other economic crime cases," the communiqué said.

"We are committed to partnering on combating corruption and ending the culture of impunity," Otero said in a separate statement issued by the US embassy in Abuja on the joint communiqué.

"We will strengthen the capacity of Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies, including EFCC. To support Nigeria's anti-war efforts, we will build on existing training and assistance.

"The issue of corruption in Nigeria has been present for a long time," Otero said, responding to a reporter's question.
Also responding to a reporter's observation that the country's rating had improved in recent years going by reports of Transparent International (TI), Otero said this may be so but that TI had consistently been rating the country as one of the most corrupt in the world.

After being questioned by a reporter over assurances and guarantee of outcomes of the activities of the working group, Otero said the participation of high-level Nigerian officials including the solicitor general, foreign minister and the meeting with President Goodluck Jonathan showed that her mission and the activities of the commission are serious undertakings.

Another key element involved the organization of a free and fair election in 2011 where the US will be involved in the provision of logistics including technical assistance and training of security agencies and staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and critical training of personnel.

"This commission represents the valued and strategic relationship between our countries," the US statement said. "I am confident that the work we did together in today's working group sessions will strengthen and deepen the partnership between our two nations. In our discussion today we addressed a range of issues to strengthen the democratic institutions necessary to hold free, fair, and transparent elections in 2011 and combat corruption plaguing Nigeria's progress," it added.

The working group programme received the inputs of the Nigerian civil society, private sector and state officials.
Nigeria and the US plan to meet in Washington, DC, in the months to come to review the progress made towards the country's preparation for the elections.
Another meeting is scheduled for June 10-11 in Washington, DC to launch another working group on energy and investment.
Nigeria and US had in April signed a Bi-national Commission Agreement. One of the focal points of the agreement is the ongoing electoral reform and next year's general election. At the signing ceremony, both countries had resolved to set up four working groups to address specific bilateral issues.

These include: Good Governance, Transparency, and Integrity; Energy and Investment; Food Security and Agriculture; Niger Delta and Regional Security Cooperation.

The two countries also resolved that the Good Governance, Transparency, and Integrity working groups would be launched first because of the preparations and reforms necessary to ensure that 2011 elections are free, fair, and transparent.

Meanwhile, US Assistant Secretary, Bureau of African Affairs, Johnnie Carson, in a speech delivered at the African Diplomatic Corp's Celebration of Africa Day at Ritz Carlton Hotel, Washington DC. Claimed that Nigeria has not yet implemented the necessary reforms to hold good elections next year.

Carson argued that some countries on the continent are drifting back towards authoritarianism.
He said that Ghana, Mali, Senegal, South Africa and Benin Republic have done well with regard to democracy.

INEC Officials' be Credible, Says Jonathan

•Electoral offences tribunal to be set up, Mark assures on reform

President Goodluck Jonathan has said that only people with integrity and proven track records would be appointed into the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) ahead of the 2011 general election.
He disclosed that an electoral offences tribunal would be established to try electoral crimes.

Also, Senate President David Mark assured that there would be electoral reforms before 2011.

Their statements come a day after the United States urged the Nigerian government to take steps that would ensure free and fair elections next year.

Several Nigerians have also called on the government to implement the Justice Muhammed Uwais report on electoral reforms.
The president spoke yesterday during a meeting he held with a US delegation led by the Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs Maria Otero at the State House.

Mark made the determination of the Senate leadership known when he met with State House correspondents after a visit to Jonathan at the Presidential Villa, Abuja.

“If you alter results, that is forgery, it is criminal and the offender must be made to pay for the crime. If you snatch ballot papers, that is stealing and there is a penalty

attached,” the president declared.

"In the next election, there will be no cheating. Every vote must count and we are totally committed to this. Winning elections is not the issue, but the process must be credible, free and fair," he added.

The President who noted that the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) is the dominant party argued that elections must be known to have been fairly won by the ruling party.

“PDP is the dominant party. Even at that, we must ensure that things are done properly and so people can be convinced that we won fair and square,” he said.

The President said Nigeria could conduct fairly acceptable elections with the present laws but that enforcement is needed. He argued that if the laws that require that results be announced at polling units are carried out and party agents have a copy, it would ensure credibility.

The Under-Secretary who was accompanied by the United States Ambassador to Nigeria Robin Sanders said that her delegation is in Nigeria to attend the first Nigeria-US Bi-national Commission meeting.

Otero commended the administration’s commitment to electoral reforms, while pledging her country’s readiness to provide funding and training to INEC in the build-up to the general election.

On his part, Mark explained that whatever reform that is put in place would guide the conduct of next year's general election.
The two chambers of the National Assembly are in the last lap of passing the Electoral Reform Bill as well as the amendments to some aspects of the 1999 Constitution.

Mark told newsmen that the lawmakers are as anxious as other Nigerians about the electoral reform exercise, which he said many believe, would help build a more credible electoral process in the country.

The Senate president stressed that lawmakers are the ones directly affected by the reforms and are therefore working hard to make sure it comes to pass.

On whether the 11th anniversary of the Democracy Day coming up tomorrow is worth celebrating, the Senate president said it is, stressing that "even if it is one day, the main fact that we are entrenching democracy and democracy really has come to stay that on its own is worth celebrating".

He said that although the country might not have a perfect system, it is certainly laying a foundation for the future.
He however assured Nigerians that the operators of the system at various levels of government would "work very very hard on it, the legislature, the executive and the judiciary".

He said the Senate leadership was at the State House to commiserate with the President on the death of his former boss President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and also to congratulate him on his assumption of office as President, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

Also, Mark listed the creation of more sates as a priority in the current effort to amend the 1999 Constitution.
He said the creation of more states would address the imbalances in the federal structure and ultimately meet the yearnings and aspirations of the citizens.

This, according to him, informed the decision by the National Assembly to give the item (creation of states) a priority attention in the review of the 1999 Constitution.

A statement by his Chief Press Secretary Paul Mumeh said the agitation for state creation is "right, legitimate and desirable".
Mark, according to the statement, disclosed these when he received separate delegations from Amana State Creation Movement from the present Adamawa State and Savannh State Creation Movement from the present Borno State.

He said he was optimistic that barring any unforeseen circumstances, the National Assembly would create more states.
According to him, "there is no reason why a democratic administration cannot create state. We are ready to break the jinx this time around and create more states under this democratic arrangement."

He told advocates of state creation that the demand should not, in any way, create disaffection or disharmony between them and their neighbours.

Leader of the Amana State Creation Movement Dr. Bala Takaya said successive administrations had created states and left Amana out of the equation, saying, “under this democracy, we are sure our demand would be met.”

Leader of the Savannah State Creation Movement Paul Bassil noted that the state being proposed out of the present Borno State “is endowed with human and material resources that are capable of sustaining the state if created”.

AC Asks Jonathan to Reform INEC Now

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The Action Congress, AC, has called on President Goodluck Jonathan to urgently and comprehensively reform the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, as part of an expected electoral reform ahead of the 2011 general elections.

In a statement issued in Lagos, yesterday, by its National Publicity Secretary, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, the party said the call has become necessary in view of the ongoing mess at INEC, where the loyalists of its former chair, Professor Maurice Iwu, have continued to put in place booby traps that could ruin next year's elections.

"Commissioners Solomon Soyebi, who is INEC's interim chair; Victor Chukwuani and the commission's secretary, Abdullahi Kaugama, are daily carrying out Iwu's directives at INEC. There is no decision they have taken since Iwu left that did not have his (Iwu's) imprimatur.
They consult with him (Iwu) on a daily basis. Iwu remains in charge at INEC, and this is a bad omen for the 2011 polls," it said.

AC also said the ongoing recruitment of 6,000 workers for INEC is another area in which the commission is being compromised ahead of the polls.

"Those being recruited are those sanctioned by Iwu. The idea is to use them to discredit next year's elections to such an extent that the former INEC chair will be made to look like a saint, despite organising what has been widely acknowledged as the worst elections in Nigeria's history," the party said.

It therefore urged President Jonathan to take a four-pronged action, urgently, to convince Nigerians and the international community that he is indeed committed to leaving a legacy of free, fair and credible polls next year.

"Firstly, the President must clear the rump of Iwu from INEC. Commissioners Soyebi and Chukwuani as well as Kaugama are leprous fingers of INEC's tainted hand under Maurice Iwu, and they must by excised.

"Secondly, President Jonathan must immediately stop the ongoing recruitment exercise at INEC until a reformed INEC is in place to avoid the hiring of compromised hands.

"Thirdly, the President must move speedily to appoint a credible, courageous, capable and neutral person as the chair of INEC. Such a person must be supported by equally credible and decent Commissioners.

"Finally, President Jonathan must direct INEC to immediately begin the compilation of a fresh voter's register to be used for next year's poll. This is the most basic pillar upon which credible polls can be built. There is no existing credible electoral register anywhere in the country presently," AC said.

The party also called for a probe of Iwu's tenure at INEC, especially what happened to the huge funds approved by the government for a credible voter's register.

"It is an open secret that the existing electoral register is a sham. Therefore, it is necessary to find out how INEC managed to make a mess of the register despite collecting huge funds for that purpose," it said.

AC expressed deep concern that apart from Iwu's sack, President Jonathan has not taken any concrete action to back up his much-trumpeted claim that his administration will organise successful elections next year.

"Nothing has been done to kick-start the process of electoral reform, without which Nigerian cannot have free, fair and credible polls. With elections only a few months away, President Jonathan has not said what he plans to do with the much-acclaimed Uwais panel report that many believe to be the basis of the reform."Time is running out, Mr. President, and the time to act is NOW!" the party said.

- # My Success Depends On National Assembly, Says Jonathan

PRESIDENT Goodluck Jonathan, yesterday, said that the success of his Administration "would depend on the cooperation of the National Assembly."

This came as the United States declared that whether President Jonathan decided to run in next year's presidential elections or not, such a decision cannot influence the conduct of free and fair election by Nigeria.

President Jonathan who spoke while receiving a delegation of the Senate led by the Senate President, David Mark, at the State House, commended the support and cooperation his Administration had been receiving from the National Assembly.

Jonathan recognizes NASS' relevance

Jonathan while noting that the cooperation of the three arms of government was crucial to delivering dividends of democracy to Nigerians, urged continued support from the

legislature especially in the areas of the budget, the management of the economy, cutting down on costs, blocking areas of wastage and getting "value for money spent."

He told the Senate team: "Many speculated that Nigeria was going to split, but you proved them wrong," adding that President Yar'Adua "meant well for Nigeria and Africa."

The President also thanked the National Assembly for the speedy clearance given to Vice President Namadi Sambo.

Senator Mark said the visit was based on a resolution of the Senate during the valedictory session in honour of the late President, to the effect that delegations be sent to Katsina to commiserate with the Yar'Adua family, and another to console President Jonathan, the Federal Executive Council, FEC, and the Nigerian people.

Fielding questions from reporters, Senator Mark said: "What I can assure you is that we will have the electoral reform in place; we will have the new Act in place before the 2011 elections.

And the reform will come. Whatever reform we put in place will be used for the 2011 elections. We are anxious about that too. We are equally concerned about a credible election everyone else in this country, we are the ones directly affected by the reforms. So we are working very hard to get it in place."

On whether democracy was worth celebrating in Nigeria, the Senate President said: "Even if it is one day, the main fact is that we are entrenching democracy and democracy really has come to stay. That on its own is worth celebrating. We are building it up we might not get everything perfectly right now, eleven years is a short period in a life of a nation.

"The important thing is that we are laying a very solid foundation and we must be able to build on it and we must continue to at least applaud ourselves. It does not really matter how small the gains are, if you want to encourage a child who is in school if he passes a little bit you encourage him so that he can pass better and try and work harder. But we are going to work very hard on it, the legislature, the executive and the judiciary."

'No going back on free elections'

Meantime, President Goodluck Jonathan yesterday reaffirmed the commitment of his Administration to ensure free and fair elections next year.

The President said during an audience granted a United States delegation led by the Under-Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs, Maria Otero, at the State House: "In the next election, there will be no cheating. Every vote must count and we are totally committed to this. Winning elections is not the issue, but the process must be credible, free and fair."

The Under-Secretary who was accompanied by the United States Ambassador to Nigeria, Robin Sanders, said her delegation was in Nigeria to attend the first Nigeria-US Bi-national Commission meeting.

Ms Otero also commended the current Administration's commitment to electoral reforms, while pledging her country's readiness to provide funding and training to INEC in the build-up to the general elections.
The US also stated that the controversy surrounding whether Jonathan would contest the election or not was unnecessary as the President had the constitutional right to run for the election so long as the conduct of the exercise was seen to be free and fair.

- # Senators Okay Jumbo Pay for National Assembly Workers

EVEN before the committee set up by the Federal Government to review the salary of federal civil servants complete its assignment, the Senate, yesterday, approved a 100 per cent salary increase for workers of the National Assembly, to be implemented over eight years.

The increment which followed the submission of the report of the Senate Committee on Establishment and Public Services will lead to an increase in the wage bill of the National Assembly to N11,040,598,314.

By the proposed pay package, the minimum salary earner in the National Assembly would go home with N32,034.66 per month while a fresh university graduate would earn N104,984.40.

Assistant directors and directors are to earn N359,922.64 and N437,644.58 respectively, while clerks of Senate and Reps would earn N1,153,512.42 per month. As for legislative aides, special assistants on GL.14 are to earn 437,693.68 per month.

Labour kicks
President-general of the Trade Union Congress, TUC, Comrade Esele described the pay raise approved for National Assembly workers as "good" but warned that failure to extend it to workers in other sectors would be resisted by organized labour.

Comrade Esele told Vanguard, yesterday: "It is our expectation that it will go down to everybody. It is our expectation that this will flow from top to bottom. Any attempt not to make it flow will be resisted by organized labour.

"We know that the National Assembly members have also increased their pay though they are denying it."

The Nigeria Labour Congress, NLC, General Secretary, Comrade John Odah, said the pay rise granted National Assembly workers was a far cry from what the legislators awarded to themselves.

He said: "Our principle is that workers should be paid different wages. The wage increase falls within that context. Though the relativity between the Senators and the House of Representatives salary and their paid staff are outrageously wide and would need much more to breach this".

Comrade Odah said: "Given what the Senators and the House of Representatives had awarded themselves as pay rise, the Assembly workers' wage increase is belated and not commensurate with what they have awarded themselves."

Implementation schedule

The implementation of the new salary structure was, however, subject to harmonization of the Senate and the House of Representatives versions by a committee to be selected by the two houses.

The report of the committee which was presented by Senator Mohammed Ahmad showed an increase of N1.9 billion above the total current payroll cost of N2.7 billion to bring the total proposed payroll cost to N4.6 billion for National Assembly core staff, while the total cost for the National Assembly Service Commission was expected to rise to N437million, from its current figure of N277Million.

The cost of paying legislative aides to members of the National Assembly when the increment became effective would be N6 billion from the present bill of N3.5billion.

While 50 per cent of the figures were to be implemented as soon as the increase became effective, the balance would be spread over a period of eight years in the following ratio: 20 per cent after two years, 15 per cent after four years and 15 per cent after two years respectively.

The report which was first presented to the Senate on Tuesday saw the senators arguing that the National Assembly was an independent arm of government whose legislative staff were peculiar by dint of their nature of work.

Senators who spoke on the new salary structure argued that staff of the National Assembly worked extra hours than their contemporaries in the public service and deserved special encouragement.

- **Only Implementation of Uwais Report Can Guarantee Credible Elections in 2011 - Oshiomhole's Aide**

FOR a free, fair and credible election in 2011, Nigerians have been told to demand for the full implementation of the Justice Muhammad Uwais Panel Report of Electoral Reforms.

The Senior Special Assistant to Governor Adams Oshiomhole on Policy and Strategy, Mr. Taiwo Akerele gave this advice in Benin Sunday at a press conference to herald the launching of one man one vote campaign in Akoko-Edo Local government Council this weekend.

He said only the qualified personnel and head of the Independent national Electoral Commission [INEC], appointed by National Judicial Council with input from the people can guarantee a free, fair and credible election next year.

Besides, Mr. Akerele added that the role of security agencies cannot be over emphasized, adding "if the police id corrupt or compromised, we cannot guarantee a credible poll. Nigerians must campaign for police reforms before electoral reforms."

"For elections to be free and fair, the Nigerian Police must show leadership and non-partisan posture. If this is achieved, we would have recorded a milestone towards a credible electoral process in the country."

Mr. Akerele also called on Nigerians to be security conscious during and after elections in their voting domains, just as he called on the electorate to report strange, unauthorized movement of persons, suspected thugs, and illegal movement of arms among others to the police, traditional rulers and other security agencies.

Stressing that economic empowerment was the key to genuine elections, the Senior Special Assistant to Oshiomhole called on government at all levels to put in place strong macro and micro-economic framework for the empowerment of its citizens.

"It is near impossible for Nigeria to achieve a corrupt free electoral process if our people do not have economic freedom. The tendency for people to collect token from politicians in Nigeria is high due to prevailing economic conditions. We must create employment for our young people; we must pay pension, gratuity and salaries as at when due among others".

On why Akoko-Edo was taking the led in the one man one vote rally, he said that since 1999, votes in the local government have never really counted as a result of the roles of godfathers and lack of awareness amongst the people.

He noted that it was in Akoko-Edo that godfatherism in Edo State was defeated during the August 2009 bye-election into the State House of Assembly, insisting that it therefore became imperative for the campaign to be flagged-off in the area.

- # PDP Meets over Chairmanship Position

AS the Board of Trustees, BoT, of the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP meets today, the issue penciled down for discussion is who replaces Prince Vincent Eze Ogbulafor, who resigned penultimate week as the National Chairman of the Party.

Vanguard gathered that some members of the BoT have started arriving Abuja for the meeting, though some claimed that they were not officially informed, adding that they read about the meeting in the newspapers.

Cancels NEC meeeting

However, the National Working Committee, NWC, of the party through a text message by the National Publicity Secretary, Professor Rufai Ahmed Alkali cancelled the proposed National Executive Committee, NEC meeting that was to hold tomorrow.

According to Alkali, "our attention has been drawn to speculations in the media of a purported meeting of the National Executive Committee of the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, tomorrow. We wish to state categorically that no such meeting has been called for or scheduled by the leadership of our great party.

"We wish to inform all our members nationwide that we shall formally communicate and announce any meeting of NEC through the normal channels when such a date is fixed. This clarification has become necessary in view of the frequent calls we have been receiving and to clear any doubts and anxiety which the false and misleading information has been causing."

Chairmanship aspirants swell
Meanwhile, the number of aspirants for the position of National Chairman of the Party has swelled to about eight as there appears to be new faces interested in the position, though there are already favoured ones against the backdrop that some of the governors, the South-East ones are already rooting for some.

The list include former governor of Enugu State and ex-National Secretary of the PDP, Dr. Okwesilieze Nwodo who is said be having the support of his governor, Sullivan Chime and some other governors outside the South-East geopolitical zone of the country; former National Vice Chairman, South-East, Nze Fidelis Ozichukwu, who is said to be having the backing of former President Olusegun Obasanjo and that of Imo State governor, Ikedi Ohakim and former Senate President, Anyim Pius Anyim.

2. Economy:

Fertiliser scarcity: Farmers go in search of animal droppings

In Nasarawa, one of the states which prides itself as the food basket of the nation, this year's harvest which will begin by the approach of the dry season, is at risk of being poor as farmers have continued to wait without end for fertilizer.

Farming is a noble occupation among the Nasarawa people, with the farming community making over 70 percent of the state's total population. But it is done mostly at the subsistence level as farmers have over the years, yearned for incentives with only promises without government's appreciable action. This is made worse by the perennial unavailability of the essential farm input, the fertilizer. In years past, farmers in the state have had bitter experience in the hands of government as tonnes of fertilizer procured for sale in the state had always ended in the hands of unscrupulous politicians of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) hierarchy which members are hardly farmers.

The experience of last year is still fresh in the minds of farmers. Like the current year, farmers in Nasarawa State waited endlessly for the arrival of government fertilizer. It came, after all, mid-way into the cropping season, but instead of sales at the subsidized rates, the commodity was sold at rates far too exorbitant for them to afford. The commodity was solely in the hands of politicians who got allocations from government stores and then sell to retail businessmen.

Instead of government stores, the commodity was openly sold at street corners, motor parks and shops. The diversion attracted widespread outcry, but government looked the other way and the perpetrators gloated at the expense of farmers who had no option than to turn to the traditional practice of manure. The harvests that followed were all poor.

This time too, the harvests are at the risk of being miserable. Although the state government has outlined several approaches to develop agriculture in the state, one of which is the initiation of the Badakoshi Agricultural Loan Scheme, the absence of fertilizer at this time when crop planting has started has thrown a cloud of doubt on the commitment of the administration of Governor Aliyu Akwe Doma, to lift the sector from neglect where it has been.

The first phase of the Bada-koshi, Hausa for "to be well fed", is in top gear as 456 farmers and farmer groups across the state have ploughed the N530 million loan secured for them by the state government, into various farming projects. The scheme which is planned to run for five years, (2009–2014) is aimed at providing the platform for accelerated and coordinated growth in the agricultural sector and to consolidate the state's position as a leading producer of food in the country.

This scheme which Doma declared as a legacy he intends to bequeath, is expected to lead to the attainment of increased agricultural production by at least 70 percent by the year 2014. The scheme avails farmers the opportunity to access 52 tractors out of the 107 procured under Public Private Partnership (PPP) arrangement involving the federal and state governments and Afcott Nigeria Limited. The agricultural development programme is complemented by the roadmap to provide an international market for yam produced in the state with the on going efforts to condition yam for export under the programme called "Pepa Yam Export".

The return of manure in Nasarawa

But all the noble initiatives are at the risk of being paled to insignificance by the absence of fertilizer. Farmers are not looking the way of government again; they have perfected the collection of animal dung which they had abandoned decades ago.

Farmers spoken to in Adudu area of Obi local government area said they have just realized that waiting for fertilizer will end them up like last year. “So we have decided to return to manure,” said one Dogara, a farmer who said he is already harvesting a maize farm which he nurtured with cattle dung.

“I collected the droppings from around the area and applied at the roots of the crops. The crops did well, though not as much as fertilizer would have made it,” he said.

One who owns a farm across Amba stream in Lafia told Sunday Trust that he has no strength and finance to go after government fertilizer. “Already, I am harvesting my maize which I nurtured with manure from animal dung. I am not going to wait for government to bring the highly politicized fertilizer,” James Amba, said.

He said one of the methods to nurture farms without fertilizer is the use of compost manure which is made at the time of tilling the soil. “We make the heaps with grass and leaves collected inside them. They rot and nurture any crop you plant there,” he added. It could be recalled that the traditional ruler of Adudu, Alhaji Mohammed Abdullahi, had once advised the state government to give priority to farmers in Adudu in the provision of fertilizer, saying the area has contributed well to Governor Aliyu Akwe Doma’s agricultural development programme especially in terms of food security and generation of export crops including Pepa Yam which government exported last year to the UK.

Information commissioner in the state, Mamman Alakayi, did not pick his calls for reactions, just as he did not reply a text message sent.

How Kano farmers weather the storm

Due to the scarcity and high cost of modern fertilizer, small scale farmers in Kano State have resorted to the use of locally produced manure on their farms. The local manure is in various forms, including human faeces, animal droppings, decomposed garbage and ashes of burnt grasses and stub of farm stalks. Such manures are obtained free of charge from heaps of garbage scattered all over the state.

Malam Sa’idu Unguwar Gaya Mai Jakai, said he resorted to the use of manure five years ago when he realized that fertilizer was not forthcoming and almost inaccessible to peasant farmers. He disclosed that local farmers have no access to fertilizer because there is a huge selfish interest in the distribution of the all-important farm input.

In terms of farm yield, he said there is not much difference when compared to the use of fertilizer. He said the most important thing is the rainfall, saying if the rain is consistent, the farm yield will not differ.

On the question of where he gets the manure, Sa'idu said he is getting his supply from dung which he packs over time and also from ashes got from burnt plant roots. He added that his farm requires at least 10 bags of fertilizer which he said he can hardly afford.

Another farmer, Malam Umar Tokarawa, said when fertilizer became inaccessible to farmers, he lost hope of ever using it. For the past nine years, he has been using only manure on his farm.

He uses manure gathered from animal droppings and other sources of manure which according to him, are cheaper than the fertilizer. "I have now realized that manure can still be relevant and effective. For the nine years I have been using manure, I have not recorded any poor harvest," he concluded.
On the type of crops that local manure is applied on, the farmer said it can be applied on almost all grains. He however, disclosed that local manure is good on vegetables, especially cabbage, lettuce, spinach and pepper.

In Kogi, Politicization of fertilizer distribution compels use of manure

Farmers in Kogi State say they resorted to using manure owing to what they described as politicization of fertilizer distribution by the state government.
According to many of the farmers who spoke to our correspondent, each time government is distributing fertilizer to farmers in the state, only those perceived to be members of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), their relations and friends are the beneficiaries.

"It is very unfortunate that the distribution of fertilizer could be politicized in the state. If you are not a member of the PDP or you don't have people there to speak for you, forget about getting fertilizers. That is the situation we have found ourselves in the state. At times, they don't even allow you to know when they are distributing fertilizer. That is why many of us who are helpless in this regard don't bother looking up to government. We fertilize our farmlands on our own. We have basically resorted to the use of manure as an alternative, and it has been an interesting experience for us. If you take your time to sample the opinion of farmers in this state, I am sure that many of them will tell you that using local manure has been more beneficial than using fertilizer," said Alhaji Basheer Akano, a farmer in Lokoja.

Another farmer, Mallam Kabiru Muhammed, said he has been able to explore the filthy condition of Lokoja metropolis to fertilize his farmland. How? He explains: "We all know that Lokoja is a very dirty place. You see heaps of refuse and garbage almost everywhere. I'm used to packing some of these heaps to my farmland. All that is required is just to allow the garbage to decay and then mix it with the farmland. I have practised it and it has proven to be a very good source of local manure. It has helped me in planting yams, cassava and vegetable. Each time I am conveying my farm products to the market; many people think that I have access to fertilizer. Let government hold on to its fertilizer. I am comfortable using manure. At least, people had been farming successfully before the advent of fertilizer."

For Mr Abdullahi Yusuf, another farmer in Lokoja, cow dung is a veritable means of putting the farmland in its proper shape. He says that for the past 15 years, he has been visiting cattle herdsmen who supply him cow dung. “I usually spread cow dung on my farmland. This is what I have been doing since 1995 and I have no regret doing so. I have bumper harvests. Getting cow dung from cattle herdsmen does not cost much. It is a waste product to them and they are always willing to sell it to interested farmers like myself at a very cheap rate. It is cheaper and easier to get it than the fertilizer. I have discovered that it is more effective than the so-called fertilizer. Basically, I depend on cattle dung for planting grain crops like maize, guinea corn, and other sort of crops.”

Nigeria’s businessmen are mixing pasta for GDP

With the growing consumption of pasta, there is no doubt that the food has become a household name among all and sundry. For instance, in Europe, it has contributed in no small measure to lifting many out of extreme starvation while African countries too have joined the bandwagon of countries with high consumption of the product in recent time.

Pasta is an Italian word for paste, referring to the combination of flour and water. It is a term that encompasses the many forms and shapes it comes in.

Its consumption in the country traverses age, class and even religion. Experts say pasta production in the country is another veritable non-oil revenue source for government that desires exponential growth in the nation’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Only last year, sale of pasta in the country grew by 19 percent to reach N90.7billion. Dried pasta accounted for most pasta sold in Nigeria.

Little wonder, entrants into the pasta sector have grown within the last 20 years in the country. Leading players in Nigerian pasta market include: Dangote Group, Golden Pasta Company Limited, Maruchanluc and Unilever.

The Dangote Group’s pasta production business commenced in June 2000 at NPA Ikorodu Terminal in Lagos. The Dangote Pasta Plant, which today has an installed capacity of 10 million cases (100,000 metric tonnes), started business with a single production line churning out two million cases of spaghetti of 10kg per case.

The factory is currently being expanded in order to meet the increasing demand within Nigeria and export to neighbouring West African countries. The pasta production business was operated as a division of DIL until January 2006 when it was spun-off as Dangote Pasta Plc and is now a subsidiary of Dangote Flour Mills.

Last month, the nation’s pasta market was bolstered following the entrance of the indigenous conglomerate, BUA Group into pasta production in Nigeria.

Executive Chairman of BUA Group, Alhaji AbdulSamad Rabiu, said having identified the instrumentality of pasta as a food item in the fight against the hunger scourge currently ravaging the globe, the company has invested $50 million to set up a factory that will produce Semolina and Pasta.

Speaking while conducting journalists round the site of the new investment in the Kirikiri area of Lagos, the Group Chief Operating Officer of the company, Mr. Chimaobi Madukwe, said all was set to conclude the entire project by October, 2010.

Madukwe said pasta producers in the country are insufficient and its market is still virgin. He said of the 150 million Nigerians, not up to 20 percent have pasta as a staple in their daily meal schedule.
According to him, the project is crystallizing around the vision of the Executive Chairman, Rabiu, to build a proudly Nigerian manufacturing conglomerate.

He said his company's foray into pasta production will swell its consumption and patronage in the country. Giving details of the new investment in pasta production, Madukwe said the factory stands on a 1.5 hectare land space, which comprises a 5,000 tonnes capacity silo, a semolina production line and two lines for the production of pasta.

According to him, there is also a vast space for the temporary storage of finished products before they are channelled to the various markets across the country.
He disclosed that the new business that will hire about a thousand workers, skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled on completion, will also on completion, provide indirect employment and stir economic activities for not less than 50,000 people, ranging from food vendors to distributors and from drivers to other ancillary service providers.

From a 5,000 capacity wheat silo, he said, the factory will turn out 360 tonnes of Semolina and 240 tonnes of pasta daily. It will be powered by four power plants, fired with natural gas.

He stated that there is also a massive water treatment plant to supply the entire factory with wholesome water to ensure that the food product meets all national and international food safety standards.

He said BUA hired renowned Italian company, FAVA, to carry out its pasta project, whose steel structure was imported from Turkey.

Experts believe that the company's incursion will swell pasta market following its staggering investment in the real sector of the economy in recent time.

They however stressed the need for government to provide the enabling environment for more investors to coast in the sector.

According to Mr Omiyale Rasheed, an industrialist, the incursion of BUA Group into the pasta sector will go a long way to eradicate poverty and give revenue to government.

Omiyale said the increasing job opportunities created by the pasta market has a ripple effect on the economy and will go a long way to bolster the GDP.

Another industrialist, Mr Samson Sunday, said BUA's diversification into pasta production is a substantial investment which will not only benefit the sector but also impact on Nigerians.

He however challenged the company to be innovative in the choice of its pasta production.

• Sweden, Finland to commence waste business in Nigeria

Two Nordic countries, Sweden and Finland, are exploring opportunities for green businesses in Nigeria, as part of efforts to step up their trade and investment promotion activities in Nigeria.

The Cleantech or Green business involves bringing in technologies that will help in managing Nigeria's environment to gain commercial value.

Lauri Voionmaa, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Finland, Nigeria, and Efraim Gómez, First Secretary of the Embassy of Sweden, in Abuja, said Nigeria is ripe for introduction of clean technology business, adding that it is worrisome that Nigeria, up till this moment, treats wastes as wastages, instead of commodities with economic value.

The two countries said they have recently paid a visit to Cross River State which, according to them, will host the pilot stage of the project, based on the fact finding mission.

Mr. Voionmaa said: "Finland and Sweden are global leaders in clean and green technology, and champions of sustainable and competitive economies. They are vocal in the global climate change debate, pursuing ambitious emission cuts, comprehensive assistance in adaptation schemes, and timely forestry measures. Cross River State has made a name for itself, in and outside of Nigeria, for its dedication to environmental issues - protecting and turning its natural endowments into vehicles for responsible economic development.

"Cross River and us Nordics are a perfect match. The opportunities for Green business between us are abundant. I look forward to explore how we can tap into the huge potentials in clean technology, green knowledge management, and ICT for climate change."

Waste to energy

Their plan is to use Cross River State as the springboard for the numerous activities they plan to embark on in this regard in Nigeria.

“We want to see how our business can go straight into efforts of Cross River State, not only on the government side, but also on the private sector level; but we have not concluded exploration. We are looking at various aspects of Cross River State economy like waste management,” said Mr. Voionmaa.

The representative of the two Nordic countries said they are convinced that with the new technology they plan to bring in, about 6kilowatt of electricity will be generated from wastes collected in the state.

Nordic countries are versed in waste management, because waste is a commodity that they have learnt to turn into energy, according to Mr. Gomez, who added that Cross River can be self sustaining on waste if they can convert it to energy.

“For a city of the size of Cross River, we are certainly going to produce 6 to 7 megawatt of electricity from waste management,” he said.

“There is huge potential for waste management in Nigeria. Ordinarily, in Nigeria, waste is disposed as waste, treated as something annoying, but it can be actually useful, for fuels. The next step is we have to report back to our countries and for a preliminary assessment. That will depend on the next discussions.”

Apart from introduction of high technology, there will be capacity building and cooperation with Nigerian universities for technology transfer.

Nigerian president, Goodluck Jonathan, visited Finland and Sweden in May 2009, together with representatives of the Nigerian business community and in company of John Odey, Minister of Environment.

Also, Minister for Foreign Trade of Finland, Pave Väyrynen, visited Nigeria in March 2010 and the Swedish Vice Minister for Trade, Gunnar Wieslander, made similar visit to Nigeria in 2009. Both led large business delegations, representing experts in energy, environment, and information and communication technology.

3. Energy:
4. Environment:
5. Immigration/Refugee/Idps:

Cocaine smuggling' Nigerian politician held in Lagos

A Nigerian politician has been arrested on suspicion of smuggling cocaine at Lagos airport.

Nigerian drug enforcement officials say Eme Zuru Ayortor swallowed nearly two kilograms of cocaine (4.4 lbs) in order to fund his election campaign.

Police say body scanners revealed the contents of his stomach as he attempted to board a flight to Frankfurt.

Mr Ayortor, aged 52, is running in the election to the local House of Assembly in Edo state.

'Wider network'

Officers from Nigeria's drug law enforcement agency say they recovered 100 parcels of cocaine from the politician's stomach at Lagos' Murtala Mohammed International Airport.

It is understood that Mr Ayortor told officers he needed the money - because his last election campaign, in 2007, bankrupted him.

He was arrested two weeks ago - police are now at the end of their investigation.

They believe Mr Ayortor is part of a wider network.

"The quantity of cocaine we recovered is large," one officer told the BBC. "We believe it may not be his first attempt to smuggle drugs."

Mr Ayortor, a qualified pharmacist, studied at the University of Wisconsin in the US.

Politicians in Nigeria raise large amounts of money at election time: much of it goes on bribing election officials and paying gangs of young men to intimidate voters.

Last month, customs officers at the same airport seized a consignment of military uniforms which they linked to politicians preparing for elections next year.

Nigeria is a major transit route for drugs - from South America and Asia - to the US and Europe. More than 300 tonnes of narcotics were seized in the country last year.

Drugs law enforcement officers in Lagos have only four police sniffer dogs to monitor the airports, land borders and a massive seaport. They privately complain they need many more sniffer dogs to do their work properly.

6. Health:
U.S., Nation Partner on HIV/Aids Vaccine

In line with its new thinking in bilateral relations with Nigeria, the United States government said yesterday it was embarking on a joint HIV/AIDS vaccine research effort.

Speaking while inspecting a medical centre at the Mogadishu Cantonment in Abuja, the US Deputy Secretary of State, Jacob Lew, said the two countries would collaborate with other researchers across the world in a bid to halt the high prevalence rate of the pandemic which presently afflicts 360,000 civilians and about 11,000 military personnel in Nigeria.

He said the two countries were in the process of fostering what he described as "smart planning and smart thinking" in its reinvigorated bi-lateral relations.

"That research for an HIV vaccine is in partnership with our colleagues in Nigeria and the United States and multiple researchers all over the world. Nigeria is playing a central role in that pursuit and it is something to be very proud of", he said.

Secretary Lew expressed satisfaction with the state of the research center which he said covered a broad range of diagnostic and clinical objectives and an effective model of reaching out to communities and bringing back reports to ensure reliable results in addition to expanding capability to the 26 other sites across the country.

"It is really quite an inspirational tour. The work that has been done here is very impressive. We have seen state of the art equipment and a coordinated programme", he noted.

In his remarks, Minister of State for Defence, Murtala Yar'Adua, said Federal Government was fully committed to the research project and would continue to support its implementation.

"We are supporting it. You can see most of the work on ground. You can see the infrastructure already in place and we will continue to support it", he said.

7. Human rights/Gender/social issues: Fresh Tension Ruptures in Jos

President Goodluck Jonathan cuts the tape to commission a road named after him by Gombe State government. With him from left is Gov. Ibrahim Gaidam of Yobe State, Gov. Danjuma Goje of Gombe Stte and Minister of Works, Sen. Mohammed Dagash during the Pre

5 feared killed 'About three persons are feared killed in Jos city, Plateau State, following reports of the death of three Fulani headsmen in Barkin Ladi Local Government Area last Saturday evening. A backlash yesterday led to the death of another two.

However, the state Commissioner for Information Gregory Yelong said from his own investigation, "the three Fulani men who were looking for their missing cows had hired three soldiers as usual to escort them to the village of Tusung. I have confirmed that the soldiers hired by the Fulani were not the ones on duty in the area; they were hired from a different place by the Fulani."

This development caused a lot of tension in the entire capital city, with unconfirmed reports indicating that some innocent persons lost their lives when Hausa youths protested around Zololo junction and Angwan Rukuba wards in the city of Jos.

But the Special Military Task Force in a press statement signed by Lt.-Col. Kingsley Umoh said, "On Saturday 22nd May 2010 at about 1pm, three herdsmen complained at a special task force location that their cows, earlier declared missing, had been seen somewhere in Fan district of Barkin Ladi.

"Based on the complaints, three soldiers were detailed to contact the local chief of the area overt the matter. On arrival at Tusung, they were informed that the chief was not around.

"The soldiers and the herdsmen heading back to their location were attacked by a mob from Tusung and adjoining villages. The mob numbering about 500 including women and children armed with cutlasses, bows and arrows, spiked clubs, axe, shot guns with two of them wielding two AK 47 rifles inflicted serious bodily injuries on the soldiers and abducted the three headsmen.

"Reinforcement was sent in and later discovered the mutilated bodies of the herdsmen in shallow grave with their genitals removed at a location of about 500 metres away from the point of abduction. The perpetrators of this crime who are locals fled Tusung and surrounding villages. Efforts are ongoing to trace their ring leaders.

"The incidents make it the sixth time military personnel on duty were attacked unprovoked. The task force will like to seize this opportunity to reiterate its warning that no effort would be spared to bring the full weight of the law to bear on any person or group of persons that attacking soldiers on lawful duty.
"The general public is advised not to take law into its hands and any suspected persons in military uniform should be reported to security agents. The task force wishes to reiterate its commitment to safety of lives and property in the state. All law-abiding citizens should go about their lawful activities without fear of harassment while criminality under any guise will not be tolerated."

However, the Plateau State government responding to the incident said the soldiers were so economical with the truth of the matter.

"The villagers on sensing that the soldiers are on hired job quickly disarmed them and handed over their weapon to the real soldiers on duty in the area," Yelong said, while

urging the public to disregard the position of the military as regards the true situation in Barkin Ladi and advised people to go about their normal businesses.

Eye-witnesses confirmed that the demonstration at Nasarawa, Dutse Ukwu, Angwa Rukuba, Bauchi road and the environs as a result of the incident at Tusung in which two persons feared dead.

Sani Mudi, another eye-witness, said what led to tension in the Hausa-dominated area was because tension rose when people in the area saw the corpse of the three herdsmen being taken to the burial ground.

Mudi confirmed that the special task force had earlier released the corpse on request to be buried in accord with Islamic rites of passage.

Women Protest Against Agency's Quiz of Yarima

Two different women groups have protested against the quizzing of Senator Ahmad Sani Yarima over his marriage to an under-aged Egyptian girl.

The protesters stormed the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and Other Related Matters (NAPTIP) yesterday saying Yarima should be left alone because he did nothing wrong.

Hajiya Fatti Dahiru who spoke on behalf of the first group said the attack on Yarima is an attack against Islam and Hausa-Fulani culture.

She said she married at the age of 9 and stayed with her mother in law for 4 years before consummating the marriage with her husband like most of the women protesters.

The second group led by President of the widows and less-privileged empowerment association Abuja, Mrs Rita Audu said Yarima has been the benefactor of widows in the country right from when he was governor of Zamfara State till now.

She said the moral bankruptcy in the society today makes it a good thing for girls to marry very early.

The women carried placards with messages like 'Leave Yarima Alone', 'Do not deny us our Islamic rights', 'Yarima friend of widows', etc.

Executive Secretary of NAPTIP Barrister Simon Egede thanked the women for the civil way they behaved and made their request known.

He however said that it is the National Assembly that makes laws and the agency is just enforcing it. He advised the women to address their grievances to the National Assembly which enacted the Child Rights Act and the NAPTIP Act.

While promising to look into the issue, Egede asked the women to take their case to the National Assembly if they want the law to be repealed or abrogated.

Niger Delta militant backs Nigeria's Goodluck Jonathan

A former Niger Delta militant has said Nigeria's President Goodluck Jonathan is the best person to solve the crisis in the oil-producing region.

Victor Ebokawe, also known as General Boyloaf, told the BBC that, because President Jonathan is from the region, he understands its problems.

Mr Ebokawe also said that Mr Jonathan should contest next year's elections.

Militants have carried out attacks which have cost Nigeria millions in lost oil revenue over the years.

Last year, thousands of militants laid down their arms in return for promises of training and jobs.

But this programme showed signs of started to unravel during the power vacuum while former President Umaru Yar'Adua was sick.

He died earlier this month and Mr Jonathan was sworn in as president to replace him.

On Friday, President Jonathan visited the Niger Delta and said coordination of the amnesty should be improved.

Mr Ebokawe, a leader of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta who said he has spoken to Mr Jonathan, believes the Niger Delta's leaders will be patient with the president as he tries to implement the amnesty.

Mr Jonathan has not said whether he wants to contest next year's polls and the governing People's Democratic Party (PDP) has said its candidate will be from the north, not a southerner like him.

"Nothing is going to stop him. He cannot tell us that he will not run," Mr Ebokawe told the BBC's Network Africa programme.

"The presidency of Nigeria is not the birth right of a particular region," he said.

"[Mr Jonathan] is a man who is ready to rule Nigeria as one Nigeria."

The militants say they are campaigning for more of Nigeria's oil wealth to be used to benefit local people but analysts say many attacks and kidnappings of oil workers are carried out by criminals trying to extract ransom payments.

8. Geo-Strategic issues:

Other West African States

Cape Verde:

Chad:

- **Visiting Chad, UN Aid Chief Urges Continued Protection of Civilians in East**

Chadian forces must ensure security in the troubled east of the country so that aid workers can continue to assist the region's vast population of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), the United Nations relief chief said today as he began an official visit to the African nation.

Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes traveled to the Ouaddaï region at the start of a four-day visit to Chad aimed at getting a first-hand look at the situation facing refugees, IDPs and host communities, who are plagued by both insecurity and drought.

Mr. Holmes toured the Bredjing refugee camp near the border with Sudan's Darfur region, held talks with the governor of the Ouaddaï region and met with aid workers based in the area, according to a press release issued by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The UN Mission in the Central African Republic (CAR) and Chad, known as MINURCAT, could soon withdraw its military component from Chad in response to a request from the Government that it assume full responsibility for protecting civilians in the east of its territory. Earlier this month the Security Council extended the mission's mandate by two weeks while it considers various options.

Mr. Holmes said today that aid workers may need to prepare for a situation where they operate in eastern Chad - which has been prone to both banditry and conflict between rebels and Government forces - without the protection of MINURCAT's international force.

"I trust that continued and improved security will be ensured by Government security forces in eastern Chad so that civilians will be protected and humanitarians can continue to help people in need," he said.

An estimated 341,000 refugees currently live in Chad, with most based in the east or south, close to the borders with Sudan and the CAR. Another 1,100 Central Africans arrived last month seeking shelter. Chad's east and south is also home to 170,000 IDPs and 35,000 returnees.

At Bredjing camp, which houses about 33,000 refugees, Mr. Holmes - who is also UN Emergency Relief Coordinator - noted that while basic services are being provided, many residents are becoming demoralized from living in a camp for so long.
"Political solutions are urgently needed on the other side of the border to enable the refugees to return safely to Darfur. Meanwhile, we also need to do more to support host communities where there are camps.

- # Country Reassures UN on Protection of Civilians After Peacekeepers Withdraw

Chadian President Idriss Déby today reiterated assurances that his Government will take responsibility to protect civilians, including the humanitarian community, as the United Nations prepares to end its peacekeeping mission there by the end of the year.

In a meeting with Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes in N'Djamena a day after the Security Council voted to end the UN mission in Chad and the Central African Republic (MINURCAT) in line with his request, Mr. Déby emphasized the need for support from the international community as the Government assumes this responsibility.

During a four-day visit, Mr. Holmes visited a region of eastern Chad where tens of thousands of people have been displaced by inter-communal fighting and a spill-over of the conflict from the Darfur region of neighbouring Sudan, and another in western Chad where he saw the impact of food insecurity and malnutrition first hand.

Today Mr. Holmes and Mr. Déby stressed that more needs to be done in the west to put into place a better response despite initial efforts by the Government and the humanitarian community.

In a unanimously adopted resolution yesterday, the Council ordered that the military component of MINURCAT be reduced from its current 3,300 troops to 2,200 military personnel - 1,900 in Chad and 300 in the CAR - by 15 July. Withdrawal of the remaining troops will begin on 15 October, and all military and civilian personnel are to be withdrawn by 31 December.

The mission was set up over two years ago amid increasing unrest in eastern Chad, which hosts at least 250,000 refugees from Darfur and 180,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) driven from their homes by inter-communal unrest.

But with new agreements on border security between Chad and Sudan, and with the Chadian Government stating that MINURCAT was not strong enough to provide complete security, the Government said in February it felt it was better for Chadian forces to take over.

Earlier this month Mr. Holmes said he was "extremely worried" about the potential impact of a withdrawal on the civilians that the UN has been trying to help in eastern Chad but added "We will have to deal with the situation as we find it."

Today Mr. Holmes and Mr. Déby agreed that people cannot return to their homes unless the situation is secure, with the President highlighting the need to de-mine areas of potential return. They also agreed on the need to tackle structural problems such as basic services, including the provision of potable water, and to ensure an appropriate return package for potential returnees.

Mr. Holmes later today left Chad for Sudan, his fifth official visit to Africa's largest country, to assess conditions in the south, which is scheduled to hold a referendum on independence early next year as part of a 2005 peace accord that ended 20 years of civil war with the northern-based national Government. He will also visit war-torn Darfur and confer with the Government in Khartoum, the capital.

Lack of Funding Threatens Relief Efforts in Country, Warns UN Agency
The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) warned today that a lack of funding is threatening its emergency operations in Chad, where two million people are at risk of hunger.

Drought and pest infestation has slashed food production in the country, with cereal production estimated to have dropped 34 per cent compared to 2008, according to FAO.

The agency's emergency operations expert, Fatouma Seid, said FAO has only been able to mobilize $2 million of the $11.8 million it requested last November for agricultural emergency operations in Chad as part of a UN inter-agency appeal.

"It means FAO will only be distributing 360 of the 11,286 tons of seeds we had been planning to issue to farmers for their next harvest," she said. "We'd aimed to distribute 6,000 tons of animal feed too, but can only manage 413 tons."

FAO's Global Information and Early Warning System on food and agriculture said last week that the food situation is deeply worrying in parts of the Sahel where more than 10 million people are at risk of hunger.

A death rate of about 31 per cent for cattle was reported last year in western and central areas of Chad while significant livestock deaths were occurring in some parts of Mali.

The situation is particularly serious in neighbouring Niger, where some 2.7 million people will need food aid this year while an additional 5.1 million people in the country were considered at risk of food insecurity.

FAO has raised about $14.5 million for Niger, where emergency relief operations include Government sales of subsidized cereals, comprehensive feeding by UNICEF and WFP, and the distribution of animal feed, seeds and fertilizer by FAO.
"Donors are afraid of a repetition of the 2005 food crisis in Niger, when many people starved to death," Ms. Seid stated.

"In comparison, there's less awareness of what's happening in Chad, although the situation there is just as critical."

UN relief chief John Holmes is today wrapping up his assessment of the current challenges in Chad, including food security and malnutrition. The Emergency Relief Coordinator then heads to neighbouring Sudan to get a first-hand look at the humanitarian situation there, especially in the strife-torn region of Darfur.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), some $3.7 billion - or 36 per cent of the overall requirement of $10 billion - has been contributed in response to the 20 consolidated appeals launched for 2010.

These resources meant the humanitarian system could respond to new emergencies - notably in Haiti which amounted to one-third of all appeal funding to date this year - and to continue meeting urgent needs in protracted crises, OCHA's Elisabeth Byrs told reporters in Geneva.

While grateful for the continued generosity of donors, especially in light of the impact of the global financial crisis on governments' humanitarian budgets, she stressed the importance of additional contributions given the significant funding shortfalls for a number of appeals.

Of the 20 appeals, 14 are currently funded below 40 per cent of requirements, with some barely reaching 20 per cent - such as those for Yemen, the occupied Palestinian territory, Guatemala and several West Africa appeals.

Gambia:
Guinea- Bissau:
Mali:
Mauritania :
Niger:
Sénégal: