

Business and Politics in the Muslim World

West African News Monitoring

Weekly Report 128

11 – 17 July, 2010

By John-Paul

Presentation on 21 July, 2010.

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POLITICS

GHANA

Factionalism could cost NDC in 2012 elections

Council of Elders of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), has been urged to work hard to resolve the differences among the rank and file of the party.

Mr. Joseph Boarle Salifu, Asawasi Constituency Secretary of the NDC, making the call said the party could not afford to lose the 2012 elections as it had worked hard to regain power after eight years in opposition.

"I entreat leaders and activists of our party to eschew factionalism, selfish interests and rather remain united in support of the Professor Atta Mills' Administration otherwise any sort of division could cost the party in the 2012 elections", he told the Ghana News Agency in Kumasi on Sunday.

He indicated that the party had the panacea to Ghana's socio-economic challenges which it had captured in the party's manifesto.

Mr. Salifu said the expectation was that members would bring on board their skills, expertise and knowledge to enable government to succeed in alleviating the plight of the people.

He said, it was about time that the executives at both national and constituency levels strengthened the internal structures to make the party more vibrant to withstand future challenges.

He commended Alhaji Mohammed Muntaka Mubarak, the Member of Parliament (MP) for Asawasi, for donating three motor bikes to the constituency to facilitate the party's activities.

Mr. Salifu said the party had its own internal mechanisms and there was the need therefore for members and sympathizers to adhere to them instead of rushing to the media to seek redress.

38,129 voters registered in Upper West Region

The Electoral Commission (EC) has registered 38,129 people who turned 18 years this year during the Voters Registration Exercise in the Upper West Region, Mr. Mahama Yahaya, Regional Director of EC has said.

He said the Wa Municipality registered the highest figure of 7,595 voters and with 22

challenged cases while the rest of the districts recorded no challenged cases. The Wa West District registered 4,258 voters, Wa East District 3,397 voters and Nadowli District 4,987 voters. Others are Jirapa District, 4,101, Lawra District 6,111, Sissala West District 2,324, Sissala East District 2,974 and Lambussie/Karni District 2,382 voters.

Mr. Yahaya, in an interview with the Ghana News Agency in Wa on Monday, described the registration exercise as successful attributing it to the non- interference by politicians. He said the long queues that were experienced in 2008 during the same exercise were absent, he said, adding: "People are now awakening on to their civic rights and responsibilities and so the Electoral Commission's campaign messages were received with great attention". Mr. Yahaya announced that the Voters Register would be exhibited next month and urged all voters who had registered to visit their polling stations to cross-check their names.

This would offer the various voters the opportunity to know where they would be casting their ballots during the District Assembly Elections, he said. "I want to remind voters that though registration was done at the Electoral Area level, voting would be done at the various polling stations," Mr. Yahaya explained.

Ghana-China celebrate 50-years of diplomatic relations

Ghana and China, on Friday renewed their commitments to further deepening and strengthening the existing warm bilateral ties as well as the expansion of the scope of economic and technical cooperation between them.

Alhaji Muhammad Mumuni, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, and Mr. Zhao Shiren, Counsellor in-charge of Affairs at the Chinese Embassy in Accra, made the commitments on Saturday.

They issued statements on behalf of their respective countries when they jointly opened a photo exhibition and reception in Accra, to celebrate 50-years of Ghana-China diplomatic relations.

The exhibition, co-hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration and the Chinese Embassy in Accra, formed part of activities to celebrate 50-years of Ghana-China diplomatic relations, which was on the theme: "Friendship, Cooperation and Development."

The event that was attended by peoples of both countries and some members of the diplomatic corps, showcased historic photos from present to as far back as 1960s, of some projects as well as government and private sector leaders, who blazed the trail to ensure that diplomatic relations between both countries, remained intact.

Diplomatic relations between Ghana and China started in early 1960s through the instrumentality of Ghana's first President, Dr Kwame Nkrumah.

He undertook three high level official visits to China in 1960, which was reciprocated by the Chinese Premier, Zhou Enlai's visit to Ghana in 1964, a situation which has been maintained and sustained by successive governments of both countries.

Alhaji Mumuni said "Ghana appreciates her unique relationship with China" and that the country was proud to be a privileged partner of China and was also determined to learn from her economic success story.

He said that the Government and people of Ghana were grateful to China for the invaluable assistance she has provided over the years towards Ghana's socio-economic development.

Alhaji Mumuni said that the support was in areas of infrastructural development, technical cooperation, financial assistance and co-operation in agriculture, health and commerce.

He cited the Bui Dam, National Theatre, new Ministry of Defence building as some of the projects China has either undertaken or was executing.

Alhaji Mumuni called on "Chinese businessmen to take advantage of Ghana's Export Free Zone Enclave, the ongoing vast and encouraging oil exploration, excellent sea and air connection and improved infrastructural network to increase their importation of food items, horticultural produce, jewellery, handicraft and wood carvings, chocolate and knock-down furniture from Ghana in order to ensure a fair and balanced trade between our two brotherly countries".

He appealed to Chinese industrialists to help expand and modernize Ghana's air and seaports as well as fund infrastructural projects including those involving water resources and expansion of electrical transmission systems for the mutual benefit of both countries.

Alhaji Mumuni recalled Ghana's active participation in the activities of the Forum on China/Africa Co-operation since its inception.

He said that the outcome of one such fora, which was the China/Africa Action Plan for 2010-2012, would add impetus to the ongoing Chinese projects in Ghana.

Alhaji Mumuni expressed government's appreciation to China for extending scholarships to Ghanaian students to study at higher institutions of learning in China as well as her (China) desire to dispatch to Ghana, Chinese medical team, language teachers and agricultural experts who were playing significant roles in Ghana's socio-economic development.

He anticipated that "the celebration of the 50-years of Ghana/China diplomatic relations would offer us greater opportunities for the two countries to work even closer together both at the bilateral and multilateral levels to herald a defining moment of raising our relationship to a new pedestal in the coming years".

Mr. Shiren called on Ghanaians and Chinese to "always carry on and forward, working to perfect the journey for the sake of our shared destiny. Lets us join hands and work together for a better and closer China-Ghana cooperation and write a new chapter of friendship between our two peoples".

He said peoples of the two countries were galvanized by the bright future awaiting them saying "We know that our mission is yet to be accomplished and the journey cannot only be sustained by what we have achieved. It must be the calling and cause of every Chinese and Ghanaians".

Mr. Shiren said China appreciated Ghana's role and that of other developing countries, which helped China to resume her legitimate seat in the Security Council of the United Nations in 1971.

He said that "these historic moments of mutual support and brotherhood are well remembered today and shall be cherished by us in the future".

Mr. Shiren said the 50-year relations was "a journey of shared commitment that has led us to where we are, a journey of cooperation and mutual trust that has enhanced our bilateral ties, and a journey of brotherly friendship that has imprint in our hearts for now

and for the years to come".

He said China-Ghana bilateral trade exceeded 1.6 billion dollars in 2009, and the number of projects undertaken by Chinese enterprises topped the list in Ghana, amounting to about 400 and expressed China's commitment to do more to bring tangible benefits to the society and the people.

Mr. Shiren said that just as the Black Stars, Ghana's national team has demonstrated, Ghana as a country would surely excel in every aspect of human endeavour in the West African sub-region and the international community at large.

GUINEA

Guinea security forces foil destability plot – PM

Guinean security forces have uncovered a suspected armed plot to destabilise the West African country as it approaches the decisive round of a presidential election, its prime minister said on Saturday.

The world's biggest bauxite exporter is in the process of replacing a military-led government with what would be its first freely elected administration. The first round of voting last month produced no clear winner, and a second round is expected within weeks.

"Certain elements ... are meeting illicitly to arrange and to profit from public demonstrations by provoking disorder," Prime Minister Jean-Marie Dore said on national television.

Those involved dressed in military or police uniform to attempt to deflect suspicion onto the authorities, he said.

"I say to the militants ... that they have already been identified. We know who they are," Dore said.

Army chief Colonel Nouhou Thiam said arrests had been made.

The first round of voting passed peacefully, despite expectations that the army, or supporters of political parties, would cause trouble.

A military junta took power in Guinea in December 2008 after President Lansana Conte died, but in early 2010 the head of the armed forces appointed a transitional government to organise elections, a process backed by the United States, France, the United Nations and European Union among others.

International observers said they were generally satisfied with the conduct of the vote, but second-placed candidate Alpha Conde and third-placed Sidya Toure has challenged the count. The country's highest court is due to pronounce on those appeals on Monday.

Former Prime Minister Cellou Dalein Diallo won the largest share of the vote but failed to take more than 50 percent, leaving him to contest the second round against Conde

ECONOMY

GHANA

Oil Palm is a potential foreign exchange earner - BOPP

Ghana's oil palm sub-sector can generate substantial foreign exchange earnings if greater attention just like cocoa, was accorded to the sector, Mr Samuel Avaala, Estate Manager, Benso Oil Palm Plantation (BOPP) has said.

He said besides foreign exchange, the oil palm sector also contributes immensely to employment creation in the country.

Opening a day's roundtable for smallholder stakeholders from Central and Western Regions at Takoradi, Mr Avaala, therefore, urged players in the industry to take advantage of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) concept to improve on their yields.

The RSPO is a non-profit international multi-stakeholder organization, which main objective is to promote the growth and use of sustainable palm oil through co-operation with the supply chain and open dialogue among its stakeholders.

Stakeholders, including the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Lands Commission as well as representatives from traditional areas, large and medium scale oil palm plantations such as BOPP, Twifo Oil Palm Plantation (TOPP), NORPALM, AYIEM and AMEEN and others operating in the two regions attended the workshop.

Mr Avaala said under the RSPO, a certified farm or farmer could get premium price for its produce and ensure sustainability in terms of the impact on environment to improve yields and productivity and bio-diversity conservation through best practices and economic viability.

The workshop was organised by BOPP, TOPP, NORPALM Ghana Limited and the Ghana Oil Palm Development Corporation and COLANDEF, social land governance NGO based at Takordi on behalf of the Ghana National Interpretation Working Group of the RSPO.

The objective of the workshop was to deepen understanding of RSPO Certification System and its benefits, establish a multi stakeholder support for the RSPO Certification in Ghana and promote the opportunity for all stakeholders to make inputs into the principles and criteria.

Mrs Nana Ama Yirrah, Executive Director of COLANDEF and Mr Charles Mate-Kole of NORPALM, took participants through topics like RSPO principles and criteria on land issues and best practices respectively.

During an open forum, Mr Joseph Ainoo, Presiding Member of Ahanta West District Assembly, said the RSPO is a laudable concept that when embraced by farmers it would help to address some anomalies like pollution of the environment, water bodies, sacred grooves and national monuments.

Mr. Kojo Amankwa, Assistant Farm Manager of Asrifua Farms, Twifo Praso, appealed to government to support oil palm farmers and encourage them to expand their farms through loans and fertilizer subsidy.

Vice President calls on Ghanaian Banks to support oil exploration

Vice President John Dramani Mahama has called on domestic and International Ghanaian Banks to reposition themselves to participate in Ghana's oil exploration expected to begin November this year.

"As financial institutions, you would play a critical role in all kinds of investments in the oil industry and I expect you to do it creditably and professionally for the benefit of the entire nation." Vice President Mahama made this call when he visited the Management and officials of Ghana International Bank at their London Headquarters to familiarize himself with their operations. The visit there also formed part of his official visit to the United Kingdom to participate in the UK-Ghana investment Forum held on July 8 to woo Ghanaian and foreign investors into the country. The Vice President said Ghana's oil exploration earlier scheduled to begin in December this year, could commence in November, one month ahead of scheduled time, due mainly to adequate preparations undertaken so far.

He gave the assurance that government would study all the positive and negative aspects in oil exploitation to avoid the problems experienced by other oil-rich countries in Africa, and called on Banks to offer financial support when necessary for the government to

achieve its goals. "Government has put in place adequate checks and balances that will remove lapses and move the country's economy from a developing economy to an emerging one in the nearest future." Mr Joe Mensah, Managing Director of Ghana International Bank, said his outfit had over the years served as the link between Ghanaian and foreign investors, adding that for the past 50 years, the Bank had been ranked 24th in its own assets and 27th on investment banking by a UK survey on 156 Banks.

He said the bank had risen from the profit margin of 1.4 million Pounds sterling to 11.6 million Pounds sterling since its incorporation in 1957, pledging that the bank was working towards doubling its income from 50 million Pounds sterling to 100 million.

Ghana has opportunities to boost global investment competitiveness

Ghana is one of the more open economies to foreign equity ownership in the Sub-Saharan Africa Region, "Investing Across Borders 2010," a new report by the World Bank says.

The report said all of Ghana's major sectors covered by the "Investing Across Sectors" indicators, with the exception of the primary sectors, are fully open to foreign capital participation.

The equity restrictions in the primary sectors (mining and oil and gas) are stipulated in the Minerals and Mining Act (2006, Act 703), and the Petroleum (Exploration and Production) Law (1994, Act 84). Both Acts mandate a compulsory local participation in investment projects; the Government automatically acquires a minimum equity share of 10% in ventures at no cost.

In addition to these overt legal restrictions on foreign equity ownership, the electricity transmission and distribution sectors are dominated by publicly owned companies, representing a further potential obstacle to foreign investors.

Furthermore, Ghanaian laws specify a minimum investment amount for foreign companies - it is currently set at \$50,000 or the equivalent in goods. Portfolio investments and businesses set up solely for export are exempted from this regulation.

The Report is "the first World Bank Group report to offer objective data on laws and regulations affecting foreign direct investment (FDI) that can be compared across 87 countries. Clear and effective laws and regulations are vital for ensuring best results for host economies, their citizens, and investors".

It said "overly restrictive and obsolete laws were an impediment to FDI and their poor implementation creates additional costs to investment," adding that FDI was critical for countries' development, especially in times of economic crisis.

Launching the Report in Vienna, Austria, Janamitra Devan, Vice President of Financial and Private Sector Development, World Bank Group, said: "FDI brings new and more

committed capital; introduces new technologies and management styles; helps to create jobs and stimulates competition to bring down local prices and improve people's access to goods and services.

"In Angola and Haiti excessive red tape means it can take half a year to establish a subsidiary of a foreign company. In Canada, Georgia, and Rwanda, this can be done in less than a week. Leasing industrial land in Nicaragua and Sierra Leone typically requires half a year as opposed to less than two weeks in Armenia, Republic of Korea, and Sudan. In Pakistan, Philippines, and Sri Lanka it can take up to two years to enforce an arbitration award."

The Report finds that countries that do well on the "Investing Across Borders" indicators also tend to attract more FDI relative to the size of their economies and population. Conversely, countries that score poorly tend to have higher incidence of corruption, higher levels of political risk, and weaker governance structures.

"Investing Across Borders 2010" aims to help countries to develop more competitive business environments by identifying good practices in investment policy design and implementation. It provides indicators examining sector-specific restrictions on foreign equity ownership, the process of starting a foreign business, access to industrial land, and commercial arbitration regimes in 87 countries."

The Report does not measure all aspects of the business environment that matter to investors. For example, it does not measure security, macroeconomic stability, market size and potential, corruption, skill level, or the quality of infrastructure. However, the indicators provide a starting point for governments wanting to improve their global investment competitiveness.

Ghana inflation falls to 9.52% in June

Ghana's inflation for the month of June has hit 9.52%, the Ghana Statistical Service has announced.

This is the 12th consecutive time that the country's inflation has dropped. Inflation for the month of May stood at 10.68% fueling expectations that the Bank of Ghana will cut its policy rate further down from the current 15%. The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the central bank has been meeting since Monday this week to review the economy and to determine a new policy rate to be announced at a press conference on Friday in Accra.

The Vice President John Mahama has said Ghana's economy will hit single digit inflation by September 2010. And the governor of the Bank of Ghana, Kwesi Amissah-Arthur told ghanabusinessnews.com that looking at the trend, the economy was likely to hit single digit much earlier than September.

Mr. Mahama was reported by the Ghana News Agency (GNA) as saying that the drop in inflation and the stability of the national currency, the cedi are due to the “prudent economic management of the government that included 30% cut-backs on government expenditure.”

The Bank of Ghana also predicted a GDP growth of above 20% by 2011 following commercial production of oil in the country by December 2010. Ghana’s GDP growth was projected to be within the levels of 5% to 5.7% in 2010.

Finance Minister hails achievement in reduction in inflation rate

The inflation rate fell for the 12th consecutive month in June to 9.52 per cent from 10.68 per cent in May, the Government Statistician said on Wednesday.

The rate, which is the lowest since April 2007, has been helped mainly by declining food prices, Dr Grace Bediako said at a briefing in Accra.

The food and non-alcoholic beverages group has been recording single digit inflation rate since January 2010, falling from 9.08 per cent to 4.69 per cent in May 2010 increased to 6.13 per cent in June 2010.

The non-food inflation rate, on the other hand, though declining had been recording double digit inflation rates.

Inflation rates in the regions ranged from 0.98 per cent in Eastern Region to 17.22 per cent in Brong Ahafo Region. Eastern, Greater Accra, Ashanti and Northern Regions recorded inflation rates below the national rate of 9.52 per cent.

Dr Bediako said increased wages would not necessarily push up prices in the short-term, falling short of forecasting another decline in the rate in July.

"The trend we have seen is the decline and our hope is that whatever factors are responsible are maintained. However, the statistical service is not in any strong position to say it would come down," she said.

In a statement, Finance Minister, Dr Kwabena Duffuor, has described the single digit inflation rate as refreshing news and said the stabilisation programme was on course and all targets set were within reach in just about 18 months of President Mills' administration.

"The success of our counter inflation policy has been exceptional and has surpassed expectation. This is a major achievement that brings widespread economic benefits because inflation distorts resource allocation in the economy, hurts the poorest members of the society, creates uncertainty and arbitrarily redistributes income and wealth".

"Again it undermines macroeconomic stability and makes sustained rapid growth impossible to achieve. As a result, getting to an inflation rate of 9.52 per cent is an impressive turn around in such a short time," Dr Duffuor said.

He said the chronic fiscal imbalances of 2008 resulted in persistent inflation over the last two years therefore, bringing the fiscal situation under control had been essential to the success of the counter inflationary policy and the macroeconomic stability that Ghanaians were currently enjoying.

"Government is therefore committed to implementing policies that would ensure a lowering of domestic interest rate and reduction in exchange rate volatility so as to enhance business confidence," the Finance Minister added.

Dr Duffuor said government's objectives of gradually moving to an overall fiscal balance would also help to strengthen the macroeconomic policy framework and free resources for essential infrastructure and other programmes.

"It is therefore important that we focus on the target we have set for ourselves in the 2010 Growth and Stability Budget," Dr Duffuor said.

SIERRA LEONE

African Minerals in \$1.5 Billion Strategic Investment

African Minerals (AML), with significant iron ore and base metal interests in Sierra Leone, has reached an agreement with its Chinese partner Shandong Iron & Steel Group (SISG) Co Limited to hit a strategic investment of \$1.5 billion.

The business is in respect of AML's flagship iron ore project at Tonkolili district in the north and related infrastructure projects which valued at approximately US\$6 billion. According to a July 13 Regulatory News Service announcement, the company's official news channel, the investment is accompanied by an off-take agreement for a total of up to 10 metric tonnes per annum of iron ore at discounted prices.

"Funding enables AML to improve its strategic implementation of Phase I and II of the project, allowing introduction of an all-rail transport and logistics solution instead of the originally intended combined haul road and rail system and allowing uninterrupted year-round shipment, unaffected by the wet season," the announcement stated.

In return for providing funding, SISG may elect, at the closing of each stage of the funding, to receive either iron ore production - paying all allocated production costs, royalties and taxes - or a dividend (if paid), in each case corresponding to SISG's percentage ownership of the project.

Meanwhile, extension of the rail system is expected to be complete by the third quarter of 2011, enabling delivery of first ore to Pepel Port in the fourth quarter of 2011.

The investment will enable an overall increase in Phase I hematite production from 8 to 10 metric tonnes per annum about the same period. It will also speed up delivery of Phase II implementation of 25 metric tonnes per annum of hematite production capacity now expected by end of 2012.

Executive Chairman of African Minerals, Frank Timis, welcomed the investment.

"African Minerals welcomes the investment of SISG, one of the world's largest steel mills. When completed, this strategic investment will enable us to accelerate the development of Tonkolili," Timis said.

"Our partnership provides AML's shareholders with significant funding for the project, accelerating its delivery, and it provides SISG with a long term supply of iron ore and a 25% interest in what we believe is a world class project that has many opportunities for future expansion. The new partnership will also bring great benefits to our hosts, the people of Sierra Leone."

HEALTH

SIERRA LEONE

Minister Extends Health Care to Pademba Prison

Deputy Minister of health and sanitation has extended the free health care services to inmates of the Pademba road maximum prison.

Mohamed Daudis Koroma said the reason for extending the free medication to inmates was because of the poor health facilities in the prison, adding, "This will help inmates to get better medication."

"It has always been the dream of my ministry to extend the free healthcare delivery to inmates at the Pademba prison. My recent visit to the prison was to assess the healthcare facilities currently in place there, especially for pregnant women and lactating mothers and see how they will benefit from the free medication," he said.

Koroma revealed that free drugs and other equipment have already been presented to the prison clinic and that he was very pleased with the work done by prison officers. "We think one way to help inmates in the prison is to first address the issue of poor healthcare facility. We want female prisoners to also benefit from the free medication," he noted.

HUMAN RIGHTS/ GENDER/ SOCIAL ISSUES

GHANA

Government asks PURC, utility companies to consider consumers' concerns

Government on Saturday urged the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC) and the utility companies to consider legitimate concerns raised by organised labour and manufacturers about the recently implemented utility tariffs.

A statement signed by Mr. John Tia Akologu, Minister of information, and copied GNA, urged the PURC, to especially take a second look at the increases applied to the non-residential and commercial consumers' category.

"The increases applied to these categories can have the adverse effect of derailing government's efforts of strengthening and growing the small and medium enterprises (SME) sector", it added.

The statement said that government was convinced that among other things, there may be an urgent need for the re-classification of the non-residential and commercial class in order to separate SMEs including hair dressing salons, carpentry shops, small scale engineering workshops from large scale commercial and service enterprises.

It asked PURC and the utility companies to look into complaints from a category of pre-paid residential consumers, "who allege that they are experiencing a more than commensurate increase in the cost of electricity credit purchased from Electricity Company of Ghana vendors."

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Ghanaian troops in Cote d'Ivoire commended

Brigadier General Hidayat Rehman, Sector East Commander of United Nations Operations in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI), has commended personnel of Ghana Battalion 13 (GHANBATT 13) for excelling in their duties especially in long range patrols and protecting humanitarian organisations. In addition, for the professional manner in which they escorted examination papers and provided security for United Nations officials and other NGOs working in Cote d'Ivoire.

Brig-Gen. Hidayat, a Pakistani, was on a two-day working visit to GHANBATT 13 Headquarters in Bondoukou close to the Sampa border from Friday, July 9-10. He said

though personnel of GHANBATT 13 had just taken over from the previous battalion, he had confidence they would succeed, and described Ghana's role in peacekeeping in Cote d'Ivoire as remarkable.

However, Brig-Gen. Hidayat cautioned them about the pending Cote d'Ivoire elections and the need for prior election scouting. He advised them to be very observant in their daily patrols and report any unusual occurrences. He also called on all the officers and men to be of good behaviour in order not to dent the image of Ghana and take good care of themselves to avoid mishaps. Brig-Gen. Hidayat recalled a situation that the Pakistan Battalion in UNOCI had lost three soldiers within the past years. He commended Ghana's Senior National Team, Black Stars for their exploits in the just-ended World Cup Tournament in South Africa and hoped the Ghanaian contingent would lift the Inter-Continent UNOCI football competition slated Monday July 19 - Thursday 22, in Bouake. Brig-Gen. Hidayat presented some footballs to the personnel. They held a Guard of Honour for Mr. Abou Moussa, Principal Deputy Special Representative of UN Secretary General (PDSRSG) of UNOCI.

GTUC urges government to suspend implementation of new tariffs

Mr. Kofi Asamoah, Secretary General of Ghana Trades Union Congress (GTUC), on Monday called on government to suspend implementation of the new utility tariffs pending the outcome of the review exercise.

He pointed out that the tariffs announced by the Public Utility Regulatory Commission (PURC) were imposing unbearable hardships on households and businesses. Mr. Asamoah made the call at a press conference organised by GTUC in Accra.

He said as government and other stakeholders had identified several mistakes in the module used by the PURC to arrive at the increases which raised further doubts about the basis for the tariff increases, government would have to suspend the new tariffs in order not to make Ghanaians suffer the detrimental effects.

"The GTUC demands a comprehensive review of the tariffs covering all categories of consumers including residential, non-residential and consumer services, which deserved equal attention," he said. However, Mr. Asamoah noted that GTUC was not against tariff increments but rather against the magnitude of the increase. He said this had a growing tendency for government agencies to increase tariffs and other charges with absolutely no regard for the prevailing low levels of income in the country. "We expect the new tariffs to be commensurate with the income levels of Ghanaians," he said.

Mr. Asamoah said the assertion by PURC that lifeline residential users consumed between 0 to 50 units of electricity was not true; adding that previous adjustment of

utility tariffs had pegged lifeline consumption at a maximum of 150 units.

He reiterated GTUC's position to continue to oppose vehemently the magnitude of the increases in tariffs until the outcome of the review. Mr. Asamoah assured all working people of Ghana that leadership of GTUC would follow closely the review process to ensure that the outcome was realistic and reasonable.

He urged them to continue wearing the red bands until the tariffs were reviewed downwards.

Ghanaians asked to avoid conflict and confusion

Vice President John Dramani Mahama, on Friday appealed to Ghanaians to avoid practices that could result in conflicts, confusion, disaffection and destruction, to ensure national development.

"We must all subscribe to all the principles that will help us bridge and forge durable partnerships towards the accomplishment of the common goals of peace security and stability as important elements for the growth and prosperity of any nation", he said.

Vice President Mahama made the call in a speech read on his behalf at the commemoration of this year's Nelson Mandela International Day for Freedom, Justice and Democracy, in Accra on Saturday.

The programme was organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration in collaboration with the United Nations General Assembly.

It was to recognise the support and the efforts of Mr. Nelson Mandela, Former President of South towards Africa's struggle for liberation, unity as well as his outstanding contributions to the creation of a non-racial South Africa.

The Vice President said that the history of Mr. Mandela represented a common victory for justice, peace and human dignity to all Africans.

Vice President Mahama called on Ghanaians to emulate Mr Mandela through peaceful but resolute efforts to promote justice, fairness and equality in the country and the world.

"The essence of this day must equally inspire us to imbibe the virtues of remaining peaceful and seeking amicable solution to problems that confront us. The history of Mr. Mandela should therefore, reinforce our collective belief in justice and strengthen our confidence in the nobility of the human soul and sustain all our hopes for a glorious life for all" he said.

Vice President Mahama noted that Mr. Mandela's dedication to the service of humanity

in the fields of conflict resolution, racial relations, gender equality, rights of children and reconciliation were values that would forever be cherished throughout the world.

The Vice President also saluted Mr. Mandela for his contribution to the promotion of democracy and culture of peace.

Madam Anli Von Maltitz, South African High Commissioner to Ghana, said the occasion had offered the world the platform to honour and celebrate the life, values and achievements of Mr Nelson Mandela, who struggled to ensure justice and freedom for his people.

She asked citizens of countries all over the world to become self determined and to take charge of their own destiny as Mandela's life portrayed.

Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, the UN Secretary-General, in a speech read on his behalf, described Mr. Nelson Mandela as an inspiration to people, an achievement that was not backed by money or power.

The UN Secretary-General said that Mr. Mandela's accomplishments came at a great personal cost to himself and his family, adding that his sacrifice did not only benefit his own nation but made the world a better place for all people.

In November last year, the UN declared 18th July as Nelson Mandela International Day, to be observed annually in recognition of his contributions to the culture of peace, freedom, human rights and race relations.

This year's celebration would also mark the 92nd birthday of the former anti-apartheid leader.

Women in Dormaa target 2010 for action

A group of women attending a leadership training workshop at Dormaa Ahenkro have indicated the readiness of women in the two Dormaa districts to actively participate in the forthcoming district level elections.

They, therefore, appealed to their respective assemblies, traditional authorities, NGOs, identifiable groups, the youth and other women for the needed support during the build-up to the elections.

The participants included queen mothers, select prominent women from both districts and assembly members from the two assemblies.

The forum was jointly organised by ACTIONAID Ghana and the Dormaa Traditional Healers and Birth Attendants Association, a Dormaa based NGO.

It was aimed at enhancing the confidence of women in the two districts to actively participate in the decision-making process at the local level.

Topics treated included, "Legality of women's participation in governance," "Fundamental Rights of Women" and "International Laws regulating the Rights of Women and the Vulnerable in Society."

Opening the workshop, Vincent Oppong Asamoah, Dormaa Municipal Chief Executive, acknowledged the positive contributions of women in the national developmental process since independence, saying they needed to be given adequate representation at all levels in decision making.

"Men have been at the forefront of decision-making in the country for more than 50 years and I have the conviction that it is time for women to also share in, if not assume total control of the country for us to see how far they can take us," he said.

Taking the participants through "Civil and Political Rights of Women," Freeman Ndor, Dormaa Municipal Director of the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, (CHRAJ) said Ghana's 1992 Constitution as well as many national and international treaties and conventions provided women with the rights and protection to vote and be voted for.

He noted that society in its bid to perpetuate unacceptable customary practices to further dissuade women from occupying respectable positions, usually tended to attack the morals of aspiring female politicians rather than facing the real issues of the contest.

Mr. Ndor described as unacceptable the Ghanaian habit of capitalizing on women's non-marriage and barrenness as the basis for judging their civic and political capabilities, adding, women possessed numerous other qualities that must be taken into account.

Mr. John Aba, an ACTIONAID programme officer, took the participants through basic challenges confronting women in their fight for gender balance, including obsolete customs and traditional practices that rendered women perpetually subservient to men.

He defined who a leader was, what constituted leadership qualities and how women could uplift their confidence status and assume leadership roles at all levels of society.

Nana Brafo Ababio, 53, the only male participant and a second year Junior High School pupil, appealed to women to encourage their girls to be serious with their education to enhance their leadership qualities.

Mahama Salaam, programme director of DOTHEBAA, deplored the abysmal representation of women in the past two district assembly elections in the Dormaa districts and proposed that the rank and file of the two districts must for once dedicate their votes to the cause of women this year.

He announced that as part of his organization's support for prospective female assembly women this year, it had begun mobilizing interested females to be trained in how to market themselves for the assembly elections in October.

Don't treat children's rights from a welfare perspective alone - RAINS

The Regional Advisory Information and Network Systems (RAINS) an NGO involved in the welfare and protection of children, has advocated for a "Rights Based Approach" to addressing issues concerning children.

The NGO observed that although the Children's Act, Act 560, provides the statutory framework for the protection and orderly development of children, the full meaning had not been given to its provisions as well as provisions in other legislations.

Mr. Bakari Nyari, Vice-Chairman of the Board of Trustees of RAINS, made the call at a regional stakeholders workshop on "Child rights and trafficking," organized by RAINS in collaboration with the Department of Children in Tamale, on Friday.

He said RAINS, after several years of work with children, had come to the realization that a rights-based approach to the development of children represented a viable and sustainable option for giving expression to the real intent of Act 560.

He said that approach highlights the need to directly and meaningfully involve children in issues affecting them adding; "since issues affecting children are rightly human rights issues, we need to depart from treating them from a welfare perspective."

He said stakeholders in child rights, therefore, had the obligation to demonstrate responsibly that children were not objects of charity seeking help and compassion from society; "instead they are individuals who are entitled to protection and society must seek to provide the necessary environment to ensure their orderly development to serve as good citizens in society."

Mr. Nyari observed that there was still widespread ignorance of the law and as a result child rights were often tagged as acts of insubordination and alien concepts while in some communities there were deep rooted negative practices often enveloped as "culture".

He said there was, therefore, the need for stakeholders on children's rights to identify ways in which they could achieve a proper balance between traditional beliefs and laws so as to be able to deal with the cultural abuses of children, especially in the rural areas.

Madam Mariama Fuseine, Program Coordinator of RAINS, said the NGO had over the years been responding to the needs of children by ensuring that thousands of them were enrolled and retained in school.

She said they were also supporting local communities to deal with issues that involving child abuse and deprivation in the communities.

Mr. Moses Bukari Mabengba, Northern Regional Minister, in a speech read for him, said government had established the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit, of the Police to help curb child abuse and neglect in society.

He said the government had also put in place social intervention measures such as the Capitation Grant, the school feeding programme and the provision of the free school uniform to ensure that children were enrolled and retained in school.

We Received Gifts and Not Bribes from STX - Abongo

...Delegation of NPP & NDC Members "Sold" Ghana For US\$2,600?

The former Minister of Water Resources, Works and Housing, Hon. Albert Abongo has denied categorically that a 12-member government delegation that signed the STX Korea housing deal on behalf of the country in 2009 were bribed with US\$2,600 by the Korean company.

Hon. Albert Abongo said members of the delegation merely received gifts from the Korean company which cannot be termed as inducement. He says the gifts could not have compromised their judgments in respect of the STX housing deal.

The Mail newspaper on Thursday July 15 quoted 'a source' as alleging that the delegation that signed the STX Korea housing deal were induced with a sum of US\$2,600 each for "shopping" by the Korean company.

The report further stated that each member of the delegation which included the Minority Leader, Mr. Osei Kyei Mensah-Bonsu and Mrs. Cecelia Dapaah from the opposition benches took the US\$2,600 bribe with the exception of a businessman, who refused the bribe.

However in an interview on the Citi Breakfast Show on Thursday July 15, Hon Albert Abongo dismissed the report describing it as a complete fabrication. He revealed that what they took were only gifts and not bribes to induce them.

"As the story goes, that we took some money is not the case, we were given gifts and those gifts if I can remember, my gifts included some souvenirs of their company, some flags, I was also given a watch and I think I was given a camera too for us to be able to take pictures if I wanted...and I don't think that these are basically things that can compromise a high government delegation like ours".

According to the former Minister of Water Resources Works and Housing, the story cannot be true because the Minority Leader Osei Kyei Mensah-Bonsu was not part of his delegation but a later delegation which travelled to Korea separately and added that he cannot vouch for that delegation.

"Infact even the story mentions the minority leader but the minority leader was not in our delegation. Another delegation I understand went again and that was headed by the now Minister of Water Resources, Works and Housing, Hon Alban Bagbin and that delegation had the minority leader in and some members from the other side of the house".

The Ghana government deal with the STX Korea would see the latter building units of housing in the country worth US\$10 billion. The project involves the building of 200,000 homes in Ghana by 2015.

Meanwhile President John Evans Atta Mills has directed that the Supplier's Credit Financing Agreement that generated unending debate in Parliament on Wednesday be withdrawn and sent to a Joint Ministerial Committee for a re-look.

Mr. Alban Sumana Bagbin, Minister of Water Resources Works and Housing, who announced the directive, said President Mills took note of the concerns The Minority raised and had referred the issue to the Committee to take a second look at the whole Agreement.

Mills directs withdrawal of STX deal from Parliament

President John Evans Atta Mills has directed that the Supplier's Credit Financing Agreement that generated unending debate in Parliament on Wednesday be withdrawn and sent to a Joint Ministerial Committee for a re-look.

Mr. Alban Sumana Bagbin, Minister of Water Resources Works and Housing, who announced the directive, said President Mills took note of the concerns The Minority raised and had referred the issue to the Committee to take a second look at the whole Agreement.

The Minority had raised concerns about the off-taker agreement and other relevant documents, which they argued were shrouded in secrecy because they were not made available to Members of Parliament.

Mr. Edward Doe Adjaho, First Deputy Speaker, who was in the seat for the Speaker, Mrs Joyce Bamford-Addo, suspended debates in favour of the Minority to impress upon the Ministry of Finance to furnish all Members with the off-taker agreement document.

The Minority also demanded that with the Ministry of Finance alone handling the loan agreement was not good enough and suggested that the Ministry of Water Resources Works and Housing and the Attorney-General and the Ministry of Justice should be involved for proper due diligence to be done on the agreement.

Mr. Bagbin said President Mills commended both sides of the House for their support and commitment and cautioned against partisanship in the debates.

Mr. Cletus Apul Avoka, The Majority Leader, said the further discussion on the agreement would address the issue of regulations and law.

He noted that the move was the Government's demonstration of transparency, adding "this is a listening government."

"It takes humility and courage to be able to go back for things forgotten," he said, and assured Ghanaians for that matter the Security Services, who were beneficiaries of the package, that the Project was not shelved but would be refined to their advantage.

Mr. Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu, The Minority Leader, said: "I am encouraged that we have reached where we are in this matter," adding; "good counsel has prevailed.

"Nobody is against this bold declaration of intent, especially housing the Security Services, knowing well their situation," he said.

He said, "I hope by this gesture the Majority will listen and not be allergic to criticism looking at the manner in which the Majority Leader rejected issues the Minority raised".

He entreated the House to work together and to create the right environment for a smoother take off of the Project.

Mr. Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu called on the Joint Committee working on the agreement to approach it holistically and to consider issues especially the unit cost of the houses and other relevant issues.

Mr. James Klutse Avedzi, Chairman of the Finance Committee, said the motion was being withdrawn because of the concerns raised by The Minority and not because the Committee did not do a good job.

He called on Members of the Joint Committee, who would be working on the Agreement to give their maximum support.

The Government of Ghana and the STX Engineering Company and Construction Limited are entering into Supplier's Credits Financing Agreement, which when completed would provide 30,000 housing units for the security service at a cost of US\$1,525,443.468.00.

LIBERIA

Tension Clouds National Muslim Council

The Union of Islamic Citizens of Liberia in Collaboration with the Concern Muslim of Liberia has demonstrated against the leadership of Sheik Kafumba Konneh for what the group termed as election fraud, Corruption and misapplication of funds that were intended for Liberian Muslims.

The protest which was held on Saturday, July 10, 2010 at the UMIL Headquarters in Sinkor brought together a group of aggrieved Muslims who demanded that the Supreme

Court place an injunction on the induction of the officers elect of the National Muslim Council of Liberia (NMCL).

The Group's spokesman, Sam M. Kabbah , accused the Kafumba Konneh leadership of said they were staging a demonstrating as a protest against Kafumba Konneh for corruptions against Muslims and Imams in the country, and has undermined the progress of Islam in Liberia.

Mr. Kabbah also presented documents he claimed were records depicting corruption, misapplication of funds and other forms of acts that the origination's current leadership was carrying on and as a result of this , he said, the group had no other alternative but to ask the Supreme Court to put an injunction on the pending induction of the NMCL's Officers elect.

Narrating further, Mr. Kabbah claimed that he has in his possession other important documents indicating series of financial transactions carried out between Kafumba Konneh's leadership and the Islamic Development Bank from Saudi Arabia during Dr. Amos Sawyer's Administration.

He alleged that over US\$560, 00 were misappropriated by Sheik Kafumba Konneh during the Interim period.

Mr. Kabbah, lamenting further on his mounting allegations levied against the NMCL's current leadership, revealed that some relief items sent by Islamic Organizations for Liberian Muslims and Christians as well, were never delivered to them neither did they benefited from those moneys he claimed were fully delivered to Sheik Konneh.

He alleged that the second phase of the money received by Sheik Konneh amounted to, to (US\$ 172,000) one hundred and seven-two thousand United States Dollars that came for the Muslim Congress School which he claimed, vanished and at the end of the 2003 war another amount of (US\$ 100,000) one hundred thousand of United States Dollars also came and was misapplied.

Mr. Kabbah averred that currently there is a prohibition before the Supreme Court of Liberia for a stay order to be placed on the induction of Skeik. Konneh and other officers elect because, he claimed, the April 31, 2012 elections was also marked by fraud and other mal-practices.

He alleged that Mr.Konneh was only able to bring most of his kinsmen which is the Mandingos group over here to take part or take full control of the elections, but leaving out others from Margibi, Bassa, Sinoe, Rivercess and Maryland Counties out of the elections process.

Meanwhile, Sheik Kafumba Konneh when contacted at his Clay Street residence for his response on the allegations levied against him refuted the allegation and called on his accusers to prove their case.

The Chairman Elect of the National Muslim Council of Liberia, Sheik Kafumba Konneh, in his rebutter against the aggrieved party, said those who are making allegations against him and other members of the Council were confused and misguided and don't know where they are heading.

However, Sheik acknowledged that the Supreme Court has invited him and his accusers on many occasions for hearing into their complaints filed, but that they have failed to so far proof any of the claims made against his leadership and vowed that the inauguration will go on as long as the executive meeting was over

Rebel Leader Testifies About Ivorian Government's Support To The RUF, Says Decision To Keep A Sierra Leonean Rebel Commander In Liberia Was Taken By West African Leaders, Not Charles Taylor Alone

In his second week on the witness stand, a former Sierra Leonean rebel leader convicted of mass crimes during Sierra Leone's brutal 11-year conflict pointed away from Mr. Taylor when speaking about support provided to his forces by outsiders. This week, the witness said that the Ivorian government helped his rebel group much more than the former Liberian president in terms of housing for his troops, and those West African leaders – not Mr. Taylor acting unilaterally — decided to remove one of his rebel colleagues from Sierra Leone when he became a hindrance to the country's peace process.

On Monday, Issa Hassan Sesay, former interim leader of Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel group told the court that from 1996 to around 2000, the Ivorian government provided housing facilities where RUF leader Foday Sankoh was based together with his special adviser David Kallon and an RUF radio operator Memunatu Deen.

Prosecutors have long maintained that Mr. Taylor supported and controlled the RUF rebels during the conflict in Sierra Leone, including the provision of a guesthouse in the Liberian capital, Monrovia, sometime in the late 1990s. The guesthouse, according to prosecutors, served as a residence for RUF commanders when they brought diamonds to Liberia for Mr. Taylor to exchange for arms and ammunition. Mr. Taylor himself has admitted that sometime in the late 1990s, he indeed provided a guesthouse for the RUF in Monrovia – but it was solely to facilitate meetings geared towards bringing the conflict in Sierra Leone to an end. On Monday, Mr. Sesay testified that another government – the Ivorian one – was far more supportive to the RUF than Mr. Taylor was, at least in terms of places for his rebel forces to stay.

“Mr. Sesay, what was the distinction between the assistance provided by the Government of Ivory Coast to the RUF and the assistance provided by the Government of Liberia?” Mr. Taylor's lead defense lawyer, Courtenay Griffiths, asked Mr. Sesay.

“Well, the Ivorian government provided housing for the RUF from 1996, so they provided accommodation for a longer period than the Liberian government,” Mr. Sesay responded.

He said that the RUF maintained the residence in Ivory Coast until the year 2000.

When asked about which RUF officials occupied the house in Ivory Coast, Mr. Sesay explained that “it was Mr. Sankoh who was there, but when they arrested Mr. Sankoh in Nigeria, his adviser Pa Kallon was there.

“When they both [Sankoh and Kallon] returned to Sierra Leone in 1999, Mr. Sankoh’s wife Josephine Tengbeh was there up to 2000 with some wounded soldiers,” Mr. Sesay said.

Was there a radio operator based at those premises from 1996 to 2000?” Mr. Griffiths asked Mr. Sesay.

“It did not go up to 2000 — but up to 1998 an operator was there and it was that operator who left and moved to Liberia,” Mr. Sesay said. “She was Memunatu Deen.”

He added that Ms. Deen returned to Sierra Leone at some point in 1998, but that during the signing of the peace agreement between the Sierra Leonean government and the RUF in Togo in 1999, she was again deployed at the guesthouse in Abidjan. She was subsequently relocated to the RUF guesthouse in Monrovia, Mr. Sesay said.

As prosecutors have alleged that Mr. Taylor served as the main source of support for the RUF, defense lawyers now seek to establish that the RUF received assistance from several other sources, including foreign governments and West African peacekeepers. In Mr. Sesay’s testimony, he has pointed out that the RUF did not receive assistance from Mr. Taylor but rather from officials in Burkina Faso who supplied them with arms and ammunition, and Ivory Coast where he says that housing was provided to the RUF leadership.

Mr. Sesay also on Monday testified about diamonds that were given to him in 1998 and which went missing while he was in Liberia. According to prosecutors, Mr. Sesay had taken these diamonds to Mr. Taylor in Liberia — an account which Mr. Sesay has denied. The former RUF leader has said that he was on transit in Liberia on his way to Burkina Faso where the diamonds were to be used to purchase arms and ammunition. He explained that RUF commander, Sam Bockarie, instructed Ms. Deen to pick up Mr. Sesay in Sierra Leone and take him to Liberia to meet RUF associate, Ibrahim Bah. Mr. Bah was to eventually take Mr. Sesay to Burkina Faso where the diamonds were to be delivered and arms and ammunition collected, Mr. Sesay said on Monday. (Prosecutors allege that Mr. Bah was a close associate of Mr. Taylor).

“She [Memunatu Deen] was instructed by Bockarie to come to Kailahun. The purpose for her to come when Bockarie called her was to take me to meet Ibrahim Bah. Ibrahim Bah was to meet us in Monrovia so that we can go to Burkina Faso,” Mr. Sesay.

The diamonds eventually went missing in Monrovia and were never given to Mr. Bah, Mr. Sesay said.

Mr. Sesay refuted suggestions that the diamonds were to be taken to Mr. Taylor, saying that if that were to be the case, he would not have taken several days carrying the diamonds in Monrovia when they eventually went missing.

On Tuesday, Mr. Sesay told the court that atrocities committed during the 11-year conflict in Sierra Leone increased when the RUF teamed up with disgruntled members the Sierra Leone armed forces after a 1997 military coup in Sierra Leone.

In May 1997, members of the Sierra Leone army overthrew the elected government of Sierra Leone and formed the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC). The soldiers invited RUF rebels and together, the two groups formed a junta regime which ruled Sierra Leone from May 1997 to February 1998 when they were forcefully removed from the country's capital Freetown. As the two groups withdrew to the country's hinterland, they committed atrocities, culminating in the infamous rebel invasion of Freetown in January 1999, an attack which Mr. Sesay has said was undertaken solely by the AFRC with no RUF involvement. As Mr. Sesay continued his testimony on Tuesday, he told the court that the massive increase in the commission of atrocities took place because the RUF joined up with the AFRC. These atrocities, Mr. Sesay said were committed mainly by the AFRC soldiers who had themselves become a rebel faction in the country. Mr. Sesay explained to the court the kinds of crimes that were committed once the AFRC joined forces with the RUF.

“Well, we are talking about amputations, burning down of houses, killing of civilians, and those were the practices they did upto the time they entered Freetown,” Mr. Sesay said.

“And when they entered Freetown, they continued the same practice, they captured people forcefully, they asked them to carry their loads for them, they amputated civilians, burned and killed civilians, burnt down police stations, killed police men, such things,” he added.

Prosecutors alleged that the Mr. Taylor was involved in a joint criminal enterprise with both the RUF and AFRC rebels and that it was in pursuit of such a common plan that the rebel forces invaded Freetown in January 1999. Prosecutors say that while the rebel forces were in Freetown in 1999, the high command of the RUF gave regular updates of their activities to Mr. Taylor and his Director of Special Security Services (SSS) Benjamin Yeaten, both of whom allegedly congratulated the rebels for their success in invading the country's capital. Mr. Taylor has denied these allegations. According to Mr. Sesay, when the AFRC forces invaded Freetown in 1999, they did not communicate with RUF commanders until they got into Freetown and needed extra help from the RUF, a help which Mr. Sesay said never came in.

The AFRC, Mr. Sesay said, held a grudge against the RUF leadership because they believed “we were responsible for their being driven from Freetown because they said if we had reinforced them, they wouldn't have driven them from Freetown.”

On Wednesday, Mr. Sesay said that the decision to relocate a fellow RUF commander Sam Bockarie from Sierra Leone to Liberia in 1999 to promote peace in the war-torn country was not taken by Mr. Taylor alone, but rather by West African leaders acting jointly.

Mr. Sesay explained that after the RUF signed a peace agreement with the Sierra Leonean government in 1999, Mr. Bockarie, who was one of the rebels' top commanders, resisted disarmament. Mr. Bockarie then moved to Liberia. According to Mr. Sesay, a meeting in of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) leaders – including Nigeria's former president, Olusegun Obasanjo — decided it was best for Mr. Bockarie to stay in Liberia as he had become a hindrance to the peace process in Sierra Leone. This information was told to Mr. Sesay, he said, by the rebels' then leader, Mr. Sankoh.

In his statements to the Special Court on Wednesday, and consistent with his testimony since taking the witness stand last week, Mr. Sesay continued to distance Mr. Taylor from the Sierra Leonean rebel group — and from prosecution charges that the former Liberian president controlled the RUF and its actions.

“He [Sankoh] went to Monrovia and they had a meeting about Sam Bockarie's issue and that himself, president Taylor, president Obasanjo of Nigeria attended that meeting and they decided, because Sam Bockarie was an obstacle in respect of the Lome Peace Accord, Sam Bockarie should stay in Liberia and Foday Sankoh should implement the peace process,” Mr. Sesay told the court.

“Was the decision for Sam Bockarie to go to Liberia made by Charles Taylor alone as alleged by this prosecution?” Mr. Griffiths asked Mr. Sesay.

“No, it was not Charles Taylor's singular decision,” Mr. Sesay responded. “Obasanjo was involved in the decision for Bockarie to stay in Monrovia, including Mr. Sankoh,”

When asked whether Mr. Bockarie had gone to Liberia “on the invitation of Charles Taylor,” Mr. Sesay said “No.”

“Sam Bockarie went there because he had a quarrel with Mr. Sankoh. He knew that what he was doing was a bad thing that is why he left to go to Liberia because he knew that if we had met him, we would have disciplined him,” Mr. Sesay said.

Mr. Sesay also explained that when Mr. Sankoh was arrested in May 2000, after having ordered RUF fighters to abduct United Nations peacekeepers in Sierra Leone, Mr. Taylor sent his Director of Special Security Services (SSS) Benjamin Yeaten to invite Mr. Sesay to a meeting with him (Taylor) in Liberia. Mr. Sesay said that upon arriving in Monrovia, Mr. Taylor was very angry about the action of the RUF.

“He [Taylor] looked very angry,” Mr. Sesay told the court.

“He [Taylor] said if Foday Sankoh and I thought that we can fight the UN — He said that other people will be thinking now, like America and Britain, they will be thinking now that this is the handy work of Charles Taylor but as long as God almighty knows that my hands are clean,” Mr. Sesay continued.

He said Mr. Taylor informed him that he had received a mandate from West African leaders that “he should talk to the RUF to facilitate the release of the peacekeepers.”

Prosecutors allege that since Mr. Taylor was in control of the RUF, he used his powers over the rebels to secure the release of the peacekeepers. Mr. Taylor has insisted that he was only acting on the instructions of other West African leaders. Mr. Sesay, as he testified on Wednesday, supported Mr. Taylor’s position.

“Was he [Taylor] talking to you because he was in control of the RUF or because he had a mandate from the guarantors of the peace process,” Mr. Griffiths asked Mr. Sesay.

“He talked to me because he had mandate from the guarantors but he was not controlling the RUF. RUF was under the control of Mr. Sankoh,” Mr. Sesay said.

The witness said that his meeting with Mr. Taylor after the abduction of the UN peacekeepers was the first time he had spoken to or met with the former president.

On Thursday and Friday, the court took early adjournments because Mr. Taylor’s defense counsel Mr. Griffiths was indisposed and could not be present in court. The court also commenced a one week judicial recess on Friday in accordance with the Special Court for Sierra Leone’s judicial calendar which indicates that the court will observe a one week summer recess from July 19 to 23 2010.

Also in court on Friday, it was established that the much anticipated appearance by British Supermodel Naomi Campbell may no longer take place on the July 29, 2010. Prosecution counsel Nicholas Koumjian informed the judges that the Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) had received a call from representatives of Ms. Campbell that they wanted her appearance to be rescheduled. The representatives are supposed to communicate with the court in writing indicating when exactly Ms. Campbell will appear. Mr. Koumjian, however, stated that the rescheduled date will not be very far from the originally scheduled July 29 date and that in any case, the testimonies of Ms. Campbell, along with her friend Mia Farrow and former agent Carole White will be heard before the former RUF leader Mr. Sesay concludes his testimony.

Business and Politics in the Muslim World
West African News Monitoring
Weekly Report 128
11, July 2010-17, July 2010
By Mustapha Shafi
Presented on 21, July 2010

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Details of the News

1 China-African Relations:

- **Angola: Chinese Eximbank Announces New Loan**

The Angolan head of State, José Eduardo dos Santos received on Friday in audience the chairperson of Eximbank from China, Li Rougu from whom he got guarantees of a new funding for the programme of national reconstruction.

At the end of the meeting at the Presidential Palace, Li Rougu did not reveal to journalists the amount of the loan but assured that China will continue to contribute to the building of infrastructures in the country.

"The Eximbank will grant loan to the reconstruction of Angola," said Li Rougu reaffirming China's participation in the process of national reconstruction.

The executive of Eximbank considered the cooperation with the Ministry of Finance as very good because the ongoing projects are feasible.

- **Nigeria: China Imports Yam from the Country**

FEDERAL Government has disclosed that China has ordered for 200,000 tonnes of yam from Nigerian farmers with a resolve towards standardizing the produce for international market.

Executive Director/CEO of Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC), David Adulugba, in a statement in Abuja disclosed that his council alongside the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) has plans to establish more Common Facility Centres (CFCs) across the country as a means of increasing the basket of exportable products from Nigeria.

Adulugba who spoke when a delegation of the UNIDO led by Masayeshi Matsushita paid him a courtesy visit in his office, pointed out that one of such CFCs initiative will soon be established in Kano to take care of leather and garment production.

Adding that such centre will also be established in other states of the federation that have potentials for exportation of other commodities, the NEPC boss said that already, arrangements have been concluded to establish a CFC in Kano State that will cater for leather products and textile.

According to him "there is a large market for yams produce in Benue State. We have received orders for 200, 000 tonnes from China". However, Adulugba noted that in order to meet the requisite standard for yam export in the international market, there is need for a conditioning centre, a CFC, to cater for storage, quality, packaging and phyto-sanitary requirements.

On the sustainability of the centres, he said that the concept and mode of operation will be restructured to make it more sustainable without depending on government or UNIDO intervention funding. "These projects should be market driven and not politically motivated," he added.

UNIDO representative in Nigeria and leader of the delegation, Masayeshi Matsushita said UNIDO was willing to partner with the council in the provision of machineries for the centres as well as capacity building for the entrepreneurs in order to improve the quality of products exported from Nigeria.

On the CFC in Aba, Matsushita said the goal of the UNIDO is to make the facility a centre of excellence in garment and footwear production in Nigeria.

However, he stated that there was the need to make these centres commercially viable in order to sustain it, adding that, UNIDO was willing to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with NEPC towards the realisation of these projects as well as provide technical assistance in other areas that will aid industrialization in Nigeria.

The NEPC initiative on CFCs first came on stream with the establishment of a CFC in Aba on leather and leather products in Abia State by NEPC in collaboration with UNIDO, the Abia State Government and the Federal Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The centre which was commissioned in 2008 provides specialized facilities such as quality control, in-process and product check, tool-room facilities, advice and services in quality certification, packaging and labeling to over 11, 000 small scale enterprises.

● **Chinese Investment in Africa: Good Deals or Bad?**

Back home for a few days after weeks of travel, mainly South Africa & Namibia, including some research, and a lot of the World Cup... I've been offline a lot, and haven't been posting much.

I just read a draft paper by two US-based economists who use Chinese FDI data to analyze determinants of Chinese investment in Africa. I've already posted here on the problems with using Chinese official FDI data. (Derek Scissors at American Heritage Foundation, who hosts the China Global Investment Tracker, commented recently on a different set of challenges raised for those who try and track investments by using media reports: "An accurate assessment, however, is confounded by widespread credulity regarding Chinese investment. Although global media trumpet supposedly "gigantic"

Chinese deals, such reports can be based on disinformation spread by host country governments.")

But the paper by the two economists reminded me of another issue. They state as a "fact" that Chinese companies will pay significantly inflated prices in order to get access to resources, citing a 2006 article in African Affairs -- Jędrzej G. Frynas and Manuel Paulo, 2006, "A New Scramble for African Oil? Historical, Political, and Business Perspectives," African Affairs, 106, 423, 229 – 251 -- as their source for this "fact". But at the same time, others worry that Chinese banks & companies are not giving African countries good deals (see for example, a comment on China's huge Congo deal).

Where does most of the evidence lie? Are Chinese companies consistently paying inflated prices? Or are they "ripping African countries off"? Has behavior changed over time? If it varies, why and how? I don't have the answers to this -- informed comments, evidence & analysis are welcome.

• **African Minerals in \$1.5 billion deal with Shandong**

African Minerals has sealed a second investment deal with a Chinese group for its flagship iron ore project in Sierra Leone, selling a 25 percent stake to Shandong Iron & Steel for \$1.5 billion.

In January, the London-listed company inked a 153 million pounds (\$229 million) deal with the China Railway Materials Commercial Corporation -- one of the country's largest steel trading companies -- to help fund the first stage of the Tonkolili project.

News of the latest deal, which involves a three-stage investment and an agreement for Shandong to buy 10 million tonnes of iron ore per year at discounted prices, sent shares soaring 19.5 percent by 09:14 SA time.

"When completed, this strategic investment will enable us to accelerate the development of Tonkolili," Executive Chairman Frank Timis said in a statement on Tuesday.

The investment will allow the firm to boost production from the first phase of the project to 10 million tonnes a year from 8 million tonnes, the firm said.

It will also speed up the launch of the second phase to the fourth quarter of 2012.

The new funds will allow an improvement in the planned infrastructure so that all transport will be on rail, instead of a mix with road haulage.

This means that there will be "uninterrupted year-round shipment, unaffected by the wet season", the company said.

• **Sino-African Relations: The Journey so far**

China and Africa enjoy a long history of friendship built on a solid foundation. Sharing similar historical experiences, China and Africa have all along sympathized with and supported each other in the struggle for national liberation and forged a profound friendship.

The founding of the People's Republic of China and the independence of African countries ushered in a new era in China-Africa relations. Over half a century, the two sides have enjoyed close political ties, frequent high-level visits and people-to-people contacts. The bilateral trade and economic cooperation have grown rapidly; cooperation in other fields yielded good results; and consultation and coordination in international affairs been intensified. China has provided assistance to the best of its ability to African countries, while the latter have also rendered strong support to China on many occasions.

Sincerity and friendship, equality and mutual benefit, solidarity and cooperation, and common development – are the principles guiding China-Africa exchange and cooperation and the driving force of the lasting China-Africa relations.

Chinese Leaders on China-Africa Ties

In November 2009 Premier Wen Jiabao announced eight new measures the Chinese government will take to strengthen China-Africa cooperation in the next three years: Premier Wen put forward the development roadmap and key areas of China-Africa relations under the new circumstances and announced eight new measures for China-Africa cooperation, involving agriculture, environmental protection, investment promotion, debt relief, market access expansion, climate change, health care and education.

In February 2009 President Hu Jintao visited five African and Asian nations and delivered a key-note speech during his visit to Tanzania: He underlined that China is ready to make joint efforts with African countries in the following key areas:

First, strengthen solidarity and mutual assistance to jointly meet the challenge of the international financial crisis;

Second, enhance mutual trust and cement the political foundation for traditional friendship;

Third, raise the level of practical economic and trade cooperation on the basis of equality and mutual benefit;

Fourth, expand people-to-people exchanges and deepen cultural cooperation;

Fifth, work closely together and strengthen coordination in international affairs;

Sixth, enhance coordination and jointly promote the further development of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation.

In May 2007 the Annual Meeting of the African Development Bank kicked off and Premier Wen Jiabao addressed the opening ceremony.

In May 2007, Wu Bangguo made a three-point proposal for strengthening the cooperation among Chinese and African enterprises: firstly, give priority to the key areas; secondly, develop innovative models; and thirdly, improve the environment.

In February 2007, President Hu Jintao delivered a key-note speech entitled "Enhance China-Africa Unity and Cooperation to Build a Harmonious World" at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. Hu stressed that China and Africa are major forces to promote world peace and development. To renew the traditional friendship, expand practical cooperation and forge a new all-round China-Africa strategic partnership are the shared desire of our two peoples and requested by our times. We must sustain the momentum of this trend by maintaining sincere friendship, treating each other as equals and working closely to promote mutually beneficial cooperation and common development, and thus elevate China-Africa friendship and cooperation to a higher level.

Hu Jintao expressed his hopes for Chinese-funded enterprises in Africa, asking them to adhere to their missions and serve the overall interests; to give priority to credibility and quality; and promote harmony for the benefit of the people.

In November 2006, Hu Jintao said that sincere friendship provides a solid foundation for reinforcing China-Africa friendly ties. Treating each other as equals is crucial for ensuring mutual trust and support, which is the driving force behind the ever-growing China-Africa cooperation; as common development is the shared aspirations of the Chinese and African peoples.

Hu Jintao also said the Chinese Government will take eight steps to forge a new type of China-Africa strategic partnership and strengthen cooperation in more areas at a higher level.

President Hu Jintao declares China will strengthen cooperation with African countries in five fields to enhance the new type of China-Africa strategic partnership,

In November 2006, Premier Wen made a five-point proposal on upgrading the level of China-Africa cooperation in all aspects: first, expand the size of China-Africa trade; second, increase cooperation in investment; third, upgrade assistance to Africa; fourth, promote cooperation between the business communities; fifth, increase assistance to African human resources development.

In June 2006, Premier Wen Jiabao addressed the opening ceremony of China-South Africa Business Cooperation Forum: He stressed that China-Africa relationship is one of the cornerstones of Chinese diplomacy and a long-term strategic choice of China to

consolidate and develop the friendly cooperation with African countries. The Chinese government will continue to follow the principles of sincerity, friendship, equality, mutual benefit and common development, adhere to political equality and mutual trust, promote economic mutual benefit and win-win cooperation, strengthen cultural, educational and social exchanges, collaborate closely in international affairs and join hands with African countries to build and push forward a new type of strategic partnership between China and Africa.

In June 2006, Premier Wen Jiabao held a press conference in Egypt and gave a full exposition and composed a poem on the Chinese government's policies to Africa.

In April 2006, President Hu Jintao presented a five-point proposal on promoting a new type of China-Africa strategic partnership: strengthen political mutual trust; expand win-win economic cooperation; increase cultural interaction; strengthen security cooperation; and maintain close coordination in international affairs.

In December 2003, Premier Wen put forward a four-point proposal on Sino-African relations.

China-Africa Bilateral Relations - "All-Weather Friendship"

Political exchanges

China, as the largest developing country in the world, follows the path of peaceful development and pursues an independent foreign policy of peace. China stands ready to develop friendly relations and cooperation with all countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence so as to contribute to peace, stability and common prosperity in the world.

Economic and trade cooperation

China and Africa's economies are highly complementary with great potential for cooperation. The Chinese Government has always advocated the development of economic and trade relations with African countries on the basis of "equality and mutual benefit, emphasizing on practical results in diversified forms for common development". China has three focal points in developing economic and trade relations with Africa: firstly, to adopt measures to facilitate African commodities' access to Chinese market, with a view to actively expand the export of African commodities to China; secondly, to combine aid with technical cooperation, focusing on building development capacity; thirdly, to help train technicians and management professionals. Sino-African trade has experienced a rapid growth in recent years at an average annual rate of 32% since topping the 10-billion-U.S.-dollars-mark in 2000, reaching 106.8 billion U.S. dollars in 2008. Meanwhile, exports from African countries, such as energy, raw materials and manufactured products, have also started entering the Chinese market in large quantities.

50 years of the Sino-African trade development has made significant and brilliant achievements and China is about to introduce a set of new measures for Sino-African economic and trade cooperation. Representative of the Chinese government believe that China-Africa economic cooperation is transparent, open and mutually beneficial. The two sides are pushing forward bilateral economic and trade cooperation to strengthen the economic and trade ties.

A Summary of Sino-African Economic and Trade Cooperation in New Century

Aid to Africa

As always, the Chinese government provides the beneficiary countries with sincere assistance for their economic development, never attaches any political strings, or interferes in internal affairs, or harms any third country's interests. Figures from the Ministry of Commerce show that China has provided about 900 aid projects so far to over 50 countries in Africa, involving such sectors as agriculture, livestock farming, fishery, textile industry, water conservancy, power, communications, transportation, and food processing. The scale of China's assistance to Africa has doubled from year 2006 to the end of 2009.

China has also helped Africa train a large number of professionals in various sectors and reduced or relieved the debts of 33 heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC). China has sent more than 17,000 medical professionals successively since sending the first medical team to Africa in 1963.

China has also granted duty-free treatment to goods from the least developed African countries to give African commodities access to the Chinese market.

In assistance to Africa's science and technology capacity building, the "China-Africa Science and Technology Partnership" was launched in November 2009, aiming at enhancing the China-Africa cooperation in science and technology.

President Hu Jintao reaffirmed during his visit to Africa in February 2009 that although China is facing its own difficulties, it would earnestly implement the aid commitments set on the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. In this hard time, China and Africa should support each other with better cooperation and overcome difficulties.

Friendly exchanges

By the end of 2005, China and African countries had signed a total of 65 cultural agreements and implemented 151 cultural exchange programs. In the past 5 years, more than 20 government cultural delegations from over 10 African countries have visited China, and China has signed 22 project implementation programs under the cultural agreements with 17 African countries, representing one-fifth of the total contracts signed in the past five decades. In addition, China and Africa are having extensive exchanges

and cooperation in areas such as cultural worker and professional training and exchanges, sports, film and television industry, press and book publishing.

China-Africa Cooperation Forum

The Forum on China-Africa Co-operation is a platform established by China and friendly African countries for collective consultation and dialogue and a cooperation mechanism between developing countries, which falls into the category of South-South cooperation. A Ministerial meeting of the Forum is held every three years.

The origin and development of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

First anniversary of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

The first Ministerial Meeting (October 2000)

The Second Ministerial Meeting (December 2003)

The Beijing Summit & the Third Ministerial Meeting (November 2006)

The Fourth Ministerial Meeting (November 2009)

China-Africa Bilateral Documents

Sharm el-Sheikh Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation - Sharm el-Sheikh Action Plan (2010-2012) (November 2009)

Joint Communiqué of the Ministerial Political Consultations between China and Africa (September 26, 2007) and Declaration of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation - Beijing Action Plan (2007-2009) (November 2006)

China's African Policy Paper (January 2006) and the FOCAC Addis Ababa Action Plan (2004-2006)

The Programme for China-Africa Cooperation in Economic and Social Development and (October 12, 2000) and Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (October 12, 2000)

China-Africa Bilateral Exchanges

Late 1963 to early 1964, Premier Zhou Enlai's visit to 10 African countries set the opening chapter of new China-Africa relations in the diplomatic history of the New

China. During this visit, Zhou Enlai proposed the five principles for China-Africa relation development and the eight principles of China's foreign economic and technical assistance, laying a solid foundation for the long-term friendly cooperation between China and Africa.

Outgoing visits:

President Hu Jintao's visit to Saudi Arabia and four African nations (February 2009)

President Hu Jintao's visit to eight African nations (January 30 - February 10, 2007)

President Hu Jintao's visit to four Asian and African nations (April 2006)

President Hu Jintao visited Egypt, Gabon and other nations (January 2004)

Chairman Wu Bangguo's visit to five African nations (November 2008)

Chairman Wu Bangguo's visit to Morocco (September 2005)

Chairman Wu Bangguo's visit to four African nations (October 2004)

Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to Egypt (November 2009)

Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to seven African nations (June 2006)

Jia Qinglin's visit to three African nations (March 2010)

Jia Qinglin's visit to four African nations (April 2007)

Li Changchun's visit to five nations in Western Asia North Africa (March 2008)

Zhou Yongkang's to visit to Sudan and South Africa (November 2009)

Incoming visits:

February 2010, Zambian President's visit to China

September 2009, Central African President's visit to China

September 2009, visit by Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, to China

May 2009, visit by the President of Sierra Leone to China

December 2008, the Angolan President's visit to China

May 2007, visit by Rwandan President Paul Kagame

November 2006, visit by South African President Thabo Mbeki

November 2006, visit by Seychelles President James Michel

November 2006, visit by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak

November 2006, visit by Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika

October 2006, visit by Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf

June 2006, visit by Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade

February 2006, visit by Togolese President Faure Gnassingbé

2 Pan-African issues:

- **Africa's untold story is of a booming continent and a growing middle class**

Images of war, poverty and famine are being replaced by expanding economies and a new global potential. Ten years ago the Economist pulled no punches in a cover story about Africa with its headline: "The hopeless continent." Now Africa is leading the way with a "spectacular" recovery from the global recession thanks to decades of market reform and strong trade ties with China, the African Development Bank's (ADB) chief economist said last week.

Mthuli Ncube, predicted a growth rate of 4.5% for the continent's economies this year. The bank expects more than 5% growth next year, then a return to the average of about 6% Africa enjoyed between 2003 and 2008 before the recession bit.

"Africa is leading, believe it or not, global economic recovery in the sense of being such a strongly recovering zone compared, for instance, to Europe or the US," Ncube told the Observer. "If you look at the ranking, it's China, India, then Africa and then Brazil. That is the untold story about Africa."

He predicted that China will double its investment in Africa in the next few years, with the establishment of manufacturing parks likely to be the next big development: "At the moment East Africa is the shining zone: Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Tanzania. These are countries that basically rely on agriculture and services."

The Ethiopian famine that inspired Bob Geldof's Live Aid concert 25 years ago this week was the defining image of a war-torn continent, eternally hungry, helpless and dependent on foreign aid. But the ADB is the latest voice to argue that Africa is poised to become a serious global player. Many argue that, after failed socialist experiments, it is now embracing capitalism and reaping the rewards.

A report last month from consulting firm McKinsey & Company concluded that "global business cannot afford to ignore the potential" of Africa and lauded its governments for acting in recent years "to end political conflicts, improve macroeconomic conditions and create better business climates".

Africa has huge mineral reserves, underexploited farmland and a booming young population. Trade and foreign investment have increased fourfold in a decade. Numerous problems, including entrenched poverty, political instability and an Aids epidemic, still cast a shadow, but Ncube estimates that one in three Africans is now part of a burgeoning middle class: "We do worry about the bottom of the pyramid in Africa, but there's something to be said about the middle of the pyramid. We say very little about the African middle class.

"These are your consumers and they want the same things. They want mobile phones, they want to travel, and they want to send their children to the best schools. The issue now is capacity to live out and achieve those aspirations."

From hopeless to hopeful continent, symbolized perhaps by the first African World Cup that ends today. But there is still a very long way to go.

• **Iran and Israel take their tussle to Africa**

Arch foes Iran and Israel have taken their diplomatic rivalry to Africa, courting the continent with everything from trade to security ties in their search for support in the United Nations. Both nations are sending politicians and business leaders across the continent to forge or revive contacts, clinching a string of deals ranging from arms and agriculture to promises of dams, oil and protection.

Although not on the scale of the Cold War-era rivalries that saw Russia and the U.S. fight proxy wars in Africa, analysts say the continent is increasingly important to Iran and Israel and believe countries will take what is on offer from both sides.

"The main battleground is the U.N., where Africa's 53 votes can really add up," said Eurasia Group's Philippe de Pontet.

"This isn't likely to take the form of an auction-like bidding contest, but increased financial diplomacy by both the suitors, including targeted investments and aid projects designed to curry favor," de Pontet added.

In June, the United Nations Security Council adopted a fourth round of sanctions on Iran over its refusal to suspend nuclear work, which Iran says is peaceful but Western countries believe is cover for a weapons program.

The 15-member Security Council includes three African states -- Gabon, Nigeria and Uganda, which all supported the sanctions.

Last week Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was in Nigeria, which is hosting the summit of D8 developing nations and also holds the rotating presidency of the Security Council. Nigeria is also Israel's top Africa client for defense exports.

Ahmadinejad says Africa is a foreign policy priority and has been a frequent visitor to the continent in the last 18 months.

Before Nigeria, he was in Mali, where Iran is meant to be building a hydroelectric dam. Ahead of a recent U.N. vote, he was in Uganda, dangling offers of oil and refining capacity.

He has also been a regular visitor to Senegal, which he calls Iran's "Gateway to Africa," and where an Iranian-built factory has churned out thousands of bright yellow taxis.

VOTES AT THE UN

"Iran is really using some of these African nations to balance its increasing isolation and, drawing from that, access markets. Africa is a fertile ground," said Sanam Vakil at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies.

"It is not necessarily a successful strategy. But the Iranians are pragmatic. It is an insurance policy that may some day pay off," she added.

Despite failing to win support from the three African U.S. Security Council members in June's sanctions vote, Ahmadinejad has been feted from Senegal to Zimbabwe and Iran has secured support for its nuclear program from some African countries.

Israel, too, has launched a charm offensive.

Once admired by African nations as a post-colonial success after its 1948 founding, Israel was cut off from dealings with many African countries after its 1967 occupation of land now sought by Palestinians.

In the highest profile visit in decades, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman and a batch of businessmen went on a five-nation tour of Africa in September last year, looking to drum up diplomatic support and business deals.

In terms of aid, the government touts its expertise in health and farming arid lands. Israeli businessmen also work in mining, security and telecommunications across the continent.

"(It is) a battle to constrain operations or groups that can be harbored and used against them," Mark Schroeder, director of Sub-Saharan Africa analysis at Stratfor, a global intelligence company, said of Israel's activity in Africa.

In East Africa, Israel worries about Islamists in Somalia. In the West its concerns include the large Lebanese trading community which may make contributions to the militant group Hezbollah back home.

WHO TO STAND WITH?

Jack Rosen, head of the American Jewish Congress, who lobbies African leaders, said neither Israel nor the United States took the threat posed by Iran in Africa seriously enough.

"We don't want to see it become a breeding ground (for extremism), so Iran is a problem," he told Reuters by telephone.

He said Africans voting for sanctions was a clear sign that leaders understood the limitations of standing with Iran, and the importance of a future with Israel and the United States.

Despite their diplomatic push, Iran and Israel still fall well behind other countries in terms of trade with Africa.

Israeli exports to Africa last year totaled just over \$1 billion and imports were around \$1.5 billion. The semi-official Fars news agency said Iran's non-oil exports to Africa in the last nine months of 2009 came to around \$230 million.

By contrast, African trade with China is over \$100 billion per year. Brazil's exports to Africa were \$8.7 billion in 2009.

A number of Iran's projects, like the much-vaunted hydro project and a tractor plan in Mali, have failed to materialize, or been overtaken by Chinese and Indian rivals.

Vakil said Cold War comparisons were an overstatement, and played into Iranian rhetoric. Some nations, like South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya, happily court both sides.

Citing what she called the "weakness and isolation" of both Israel and Iran, Sanusha Naidu of the South Africa-based Fahamu social justice network said the wider issue was whether it would be Africa's countries or merely their elites that would benefit.

"The question is how African nations capitalize from this."

Nigeria:

1. Political News:

- **Babangida Campaign Takes Delivery of 500 Cars**

500 more expected in days, the campaign machinery of former military President Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida is set to take the nation by storm.

A few days ago, the IBB Presidential Campaign Organisation took delivery of 500 vehicles consisting of 250 Prado jeeps and 250 Toyota Camry saloon cars, Leadership Sunday has learnt. The cars are now parked at a location in Abuja, said a source close to the campaign group. Leadership Sunday was also told that the last batch of 500 vehicles (250 Prado jeeps and 250 Camry cars) will be added to the lot, making a total of 1, 000 vehicles.

General Babangida, who was the country's leader between 1985 and 1993, has indicated his desire to contest the presidential election on the platform of the PDP. He has also been a vociferous advocate of the PDP zoning policy: the party had zoned the presidency to the North after Olusegun Obasanjo's eight years. Obasanjo was succeeded by Umaru Musa Yar'Adua who died on May 5, this year, and Dr Goodluck Jonathan took over according to the dictates of the Nigerian constitution. Some members of the PDP, including General Babangida, insist that the PDP should maintain the zoning arrangement for the 2011 elections.

President Jonathan's supporters, including the recently selected national chairman of the ruling party, Dr Okwesilieze Nwodo, have maintained that the zoning arrangement is not sacrosanct, especially after the force majeure (Yar'Adua's death) that changed the bargain. Other likely aspirants within the PDP include General Aliyu Gusau (rtd), the current national security adviser; former Vice-president Atiku Abubakar; Dr Bukola Saraki, governor of Kwara State; and Alhaji Danjuma Goje, governor of Gombe State.

The PDP governors obviously hold the key to the party's ticket. But it is doubtful if all of them will support the same candidate during the primaries. Another source close to the IBB presidential Campaign told Leadership Sunday that, if it becomes clear that General Babangida will not get the PDP ticket, he and his supporters will move en masse into another party, probably the ANPP.

- **Entire Nation's Soaked in Corruption - CJN**

The Chief Justice of Nigeria, CJN, Justice Aloysius Katsina-Alu, yesterday, in Abuja, declared that the entire nation was presently soaked in corruption and that the judiciary sector is not exempted.

Although he did not expatiate on his position, he, however, said the deep corruption noticeable in each cardinal sector of the polity is a microcosmic representation of what is happening in the entire country.

Justice Katsina-Alu dropped the bombshell yesterday during the swearing-in of eight newly appointed justices for the high courts of the Federal Capital Territory inside the biggest court room of the Supreme Court of Nigeria.

His observation, yesterday about the pervasiveness of corruption in the entire country, though an open secret, yesterday came as a shock to many, particularly serving justices present on the occasion.

But the number one judicial officer in the federation added yesterday that there was hope for the judiciary, saying that the National Judicial Council, NJC, was ever ready to flush out all the crooks presently sitting on the bench and those who have similar evil intention but being admitted mistakenly into the bench.

His brief comments made, extempore, immediately after the swearing-in ceremony of the new high judges yesterday reads: "Today marks another milestone in the history of judiciary. The task before you is important, daunting, enormous and demanding.

"Corruption is now a national malaise. It is a monster that has eaten deep into the fabric of the society and the judiciary is not isolated.

"As judicial officers, temptations will come your way. But the ability to withstand the temptation will stand you out. But if you fall victim, the National Judicial Council, NJC, will not spare you."

Indeed, the Chief Justice of Nigeria (CJN) was not the first to make such shocking revelation.

Vanguard recalls that more than ten years before President Jonathan Goodluck assumed office as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Nigerian judiciary had been diagnosed sick owing largely to corruption.

The malady in the justice system was so pronounced at the time that it gave not only the right thinking Nigerians the reason to worry but also the successive military governments which largely contributed to the woes of the third arm of government.

The regime of President Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida was the first government that made a serious attempt to purge the system.

Specifically, the military government set up a panel to look into the problems being facing the judiciary with a view to proffering solutions to them.

But all his efforts became a mere dream as the committee he convoked to handle the assignment never sat.

But the satanically corrupt regime of General Sani Abacha succeeded where the Babangida led government failed as it got the consent of one of the best jurists in the world and former justice of the Supreme Court, Justice Kayode Esho to head the panel that would probe the rot in the sector and proffer a clinical solution to it.

The Kayode Esho panel which gathered evidence from across the Federation indicted more than two dozens of the serving judicial officers in the country and found them unfit to remain on the bench for reasons ranging from ineptitude, low productivity, incompetence to involvement in monumental corruption.

The panel consequently recommended both short term and long term measures to tackle the problems identified.

As part of the short term measure, it recommended compulsory retirement or and outright dismissal from the bench for the indicted judicial officers on the bench then depending on the nature of the offences established against them.

As a long term approach, Esho panel suggested, among other things, the setting up of a body to be called Judicial Performance Commission (JPC) now (NJC) to act as watch dog of the judiciary.

The commission, according to the Esho Panel recommendation, is to deal with the multiple issues of appointment, discipline and remuneration of judges from the high court to the Supreme Court; the issue of the judiciary being self accounting; the issue of corruption in the judiciary and the problem of court congestion.

The Esho panel report which recommendations later became a public knowledge was seen by many stakeholders in the justice administration as the only solution to arrest the rot in the justice sector.

The report though gathered dust on the table of late Gen Abacha which set up Esho panel, General Abdulsalami Abubakar Administration, in 1997, incorporated some of its recommendations into the 1999 Constitution authored by a military cabal and foisted on Nigerians as the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999.

Specifically, section 153 of the said 1999 constitution created the National Judicial Council (NJC) with statutory powers to hire and fire erring judicial officers, among other roles it empowered it to discharge.

As soon as President Olusegun Obasanjo recovered from the heat of legal fireworks provoked by election petitions maintained against his emergence as president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1999, he went for the full report of the Esho Panel and referred it to the National Judicial Council (NJC) for necessary action.

He was of the view that no ailing sector of the nation would recover from its ill health except the rot in the judiciary was first fixed.

And upon receipt of the report, the NJC under the able leadership of Justice Muhammad Lawal Uwais (now retired) set up a Review Committee headed by Hon. Justice Bolarinwa Babalakin, (Rtd), also a former justice of the Supreme Court, to study it and make recommendations.

At the end of its assignment, the NJC moved and there was an unprecedented cyclone in the third arm of government as not less than 28 serving judicial officers who were yet to clock their statutory retirement age were swept off the bench.

The decision of the council forced the remaining crooked ones on the bench to change attitude to work.

• **Halliburton - 50 Lawyers Sue EFCC Over Obasanjo**

Fifty legal practitioners and anti-corruption crusaders yesterday filed a suit in the Federal High Court, Abuja Judicial Division, asking it to compel the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to investigate former president Olusegun Obasanjo and others for their alleged involvement in the Halliburton bribery scandal.

The suit which was brought by exparte motion was filed by Barr. Yahaya Mohammed on behalf of 49 other lawyers as plaintiffs and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission as the respondent.

The lawyers prayed the court to grant leave to them for an order of mandamus to compel EFCC to investigate others who were fingered in the Halliburton scandal.

The former president late Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, the lawyers said, among their grounds of application, constituted an administrative panel to look into the Halliburton bribery scandal sometime in 2008.

"The panel was headed by the then Inspector General of Police, Mr. Mike Okiro, and has the chairman of EFCC, representatives of the National Security Adviser and State Security Service (SSS) and Director General of Nigeria intelligence Agency as members".

That the panel invited all those suspected to have a hand in one way or another in the matter including Olusegun Obasanjo, but somehow, Obasanjo deliberately and doggedly refused to honour the invitation of the panel up to this time.

Among the grounds of reliefs sought, the legal practitioners said include the fact that "the panel submitted an Interim Report to former president Yar'Adua sometime in May 2009".

• **Northern Summit Wants Four More Years for Jonathan**

A new dimension has been added to the debate on President Goodluck Jonathan's alleged 2011 presidential aspiration and the contentious zoning of the presidency to the North.

A group of Northern leaders and politicians led by former Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Chairman Chief Solomon Lar yesterday rose from its Northern Political Summit with a resolution that the President's alleged plan to contest the 2011 presidential poll should be seen as a continuation of his joint presidential ticket with late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua till 2015.

As such, according to the leaders, the death of President Yar'Adua does not invalidate the joint ticket which won the 2007 presidential election.

But the summit's resolution provided another opportunity for engagement by the pro and anti-zoning elements in the North: the group of Northern leaders canvassing the retention of zoning for the 2011 election has restated the reasons for its support of zoning and power rotation.

The group coming under the aegis of Northern Leaders Forum has former military President Ibrahim Babangida and former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar among others as members.

In a 12-point statement released in Abuja by Mallam Bashir Ibrahim Yusuf, the forum argued that the retention of the PDP zoning arrangement is the guarantee for the stability of the country and assurance that all ethnic groups in the country, including ethnic minorities, will have a fair share of power.

Expectedly, the Kaduna summit by the Lar group believed to be pro-Jonathan was boycotted by prominent Northern politicians like Babangida, Atiku, General Muhammadu Buhari, Mallam Adamu Ciroma, General Yakubu Gowon, former President Shehu Shagari, General Aliyu Gusau, General Abdusalami Abubakar and former Senate President Iyorchia Ayu among others.

Reading the communiqué of the summit, which took place at the Conference Hall of Kaduna International Trade Fair, the Chairman of the Organizing Committee, Prof. Jerry Gana, the Northern political summit said the Yar'Adua/Jonathan joint presidential ticket in 2007 is still valid.

The communiqué said: "The Presidency of Alhaji Umaru Yar'Adua and President Goodluck Jonathan is an inseparable ticket and therefore the demise of one does not invalidate the privileges of the remaining beneficiary or the ticket.

"The summit proceeded to call on the leadership of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) as follows: to allow the supremacy of the Nigerian constitution to guide the conduct and

the guidelines and regulations for the presidential primaries to elect our presidential candidate.

"In the circumstances, the most viable option is to ensure indeed that the conduct of the presidential primaries that the best candidate as already expressed by the gathering is given the opportunity to run for the office of the President."

Equally in the communiqué, the leaders expressed their strong desire for a credible election and called on the Independent National Electoral Commission and its new Chairman, Prof. Attahiru Jega, to ensure adequate preparation for credible and transparent 2011 election.

In this regard, they called on the Federal Government to ensure an early release of funds to INEC for the 2011 election.

The summit noted the backwardness of the North in the area of economic development and resolved to hold a Northern economic summit to address the underdevelopment of the region.

Earlier in his speech, one of the Co-Chairman of the summit, Lar, said zoning was adopted in 1999 by the party as a temporal measure to address the circumstances of June 12, 1993, stating, "as one of the founding fathers of the PDP, I remember clearly the basic considerations behind zoning and the interim nature of its application. Zoning was never meant to be a permanent feature of our democracy."

Another co-chairman, Ambassador Hassan Adamu (Wakinlin Adamawa), said for the sake of unity and stability of Nigeria, the North should allow other parts of the country to contest the presidential election.

Adamu said the North should develop an agenda for the next president, whoever he is, explaining that in a democratic setting, dialogue and superior argument should be supreme.

His views were adopted by the third co-chairman, Ambassador Shehu Malami, who also said newspaper report that quoted him as saying the 2011 general election should be shifted is incorrect.

He said that his major concern is that the North should be developed, saying, "Our purpose is that the North should be developed and spearhead whatever is necessary for the peace and unity of Nigeria."

Gana in his opening address said zoning was adopted by PDP to address the crisis that followed the annulment of the June 12, 1993 election, stating that, "so far, this policy has worked fairly well to stabilize our polity and to straighten our democracy."

But he said the death of President Yar'Adua was beyond human control, which generated a network of weighty matters arising thereof.

Kaduna State Governor Patrick Yakowa in his welcome address said the meeting should look beyond one parameter with regards to power sharing and power rotation in Nigeria .

Yakowa said: "Whatever we would do should be in the contest of the constitution which is supreme over all other arrangements that would be made or might have been made at some points.

"Many countries of the world are fast reviewing their positions with a view to being first class player in the globalization arrangement, where the dreams of late Martin Luther King of looking forward to some day of being in a nation, where his little children would be judged by the content of their character and not the colour of their skin."

The North-central zone said in a position presented by former PDP Chairman, Chief Barnabas Gemade, that Yar'Adua's death should by no means invalidate the joint ticket given to the Yar'Adua/Jonathan presidency, as the demise of one should not affect the other.

In this regard, he said the Yar'Adua/Jonathan ticket is subsisting till 2015 as the death of Yar'Adua does not stop Jonathan from enjoying the benefit of the ticket.

Also, the North-east position read by Alhaji Kaulaha Aliyu, a member of PDP Board of Trustees, said with the ascendancy of President Jonathan should go beyond 2011 and called on PDP to internally resolve the zoning crisis.

Senator Ibrahim Ida who spoke for the North-west went philosophical, saying power belongs to God and He alone gives power to whosoever He wants.

He cautioned against people dissipating energy on the issue of zoning, quoting Benjamin Isreal who once said, "What we did not expect really happens, as everything belongs to God".

The summit was attended by former Kogi State Governor Abubakar Audu, former Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja Minister of State Solomon Ewuga, former Sport Minister Damishi Sango, FCT Minister Bala Mohammed and Minister of State for Information Labaran Maku who moderated the occasion.

Minister of Water Resources Obadiah Ando, former Minister of State (Health) Gabriel Aduku, former Chief of Army Staff General Ishaya Bamaïyi, former Chief of Army Staff General Salihu Ibrahim, former Minister of Industry Fidelis Tapgun, former Plateau Governor Joshua Dariye, Senator Abubakar Sodangi, former Speaker of the House of Representatives Salisu Buhari, Senator John Washpam, Senator Isaiah Balat, Senator Paul Wampana, Senator Iya Abubakar, Chief Mike Aaondakaa, Sarah Jubril, Ibrahim

Kashim Imma, Ambassador Bugudu Hirse, General Lawrence Onoja, Col. Bala Mande, Senator Wail Jebril among others also attended the summit.

The statement by the Ayu group listed 25 prominent political leaders including Babangida, Atiku, Ayu, Ciroma, former PDP Chairman Audu Ogbeh and Alhaji Bello Kirfi as members of the forum.

They marshaled arguments in favour of the retention of zoning and warned that its abandonment could have significant consequences for the stability of the polity because it has been embraced in all levels of government.

While arguing that its mission is not to stop President Jonathan from contesting the 2011 elections as it is being portrayed, the forum posits that it is out to safeguard "the system of equity and fairness, which will give all Nigerians a sense of belonging.

"It is our view that the system of zoning and rotation will secure every Nigerian the opportunity to access political power and thus engender peaceful coexistence of the various components of the country," the group said.

While noting that the demand for zoning emanated from the Southern part of the country prior to 1999, the forum said it was regrettable that the nation is sliding back to its pre-1999 situation whereby a deliberate and dangerous propaganda is being deployed to confuse Nigerians about which section of the country can produce the nation's next president.

"This was an issue, which has long been resolved, leading to the emergence of Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo and Umaru Musa 'Yar'adua in 1999 and 2007 respectively. Some of us have played a key role in ensuring that a Southerner has emerged President of Nigeria in 1999. We did this, not just as Northerners, but more importantly, as Nigerians who remain convinced that the only way to stabilize this country is to continue to give and take."

On the argument that zoning is not provided for in the 1999 Constitution, the forum argues there is no section of the constitution that outlaws zoning and rotation.

"There is also no provision in that constitution that prevents political leaders from going into special arrangements to share power, ensure equity and stabilize the polity. We also believe that every segment of Nigeria is endowed with qualified and competent leaders able to face the challenge of providing high quality service at different levels of public life," the group said.

- **Whichever way, north would dump zoning –Nafada**

The north too would have equally insisted on retaining power in spite of any agreement, if it was in the circumstance that the south finds itself today following the death of President Umaru Musa Yar'adua and the ascension of Dr Goodluck

Jonathan as the president of Nigeria, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, Usman Bayero Nafada, has said.

Nafada who made this known at the Northern Political Summit which held in Kaduna on Thursday, advised northerners, especially members of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party(PDP), to address ``the exigencies of the reality that we have found ourselves following the death of President Yar'adua.``

According to him, the present arrangement seems to be unfavourable to northerners because one of their own who was elected president passed away not long after a protracted illness.

The deputy speaker advised those who are pro and anti zoning to watch their utterances in view of the sensitivity of the issue, adding that ``what they should pay attention to is to build the nation and its democracy.” Nafada enjoined those who are arguing that there was a gentleman’s agreement on power rotation to “be more political and to view things from the perspective of faith and fate.”

Nafada also said that the north has a very important role to play in order to conserve the peace and unity of Nigeria. “There is no price that is too much to pay; much more has been paid in the past,” he added. According to him, the north will continue to be the shock absorber of the Nigerian federation regardless of what anyone will say.

In his welcome address, Governor Patrick Yakowa said the organizers had earlier briefed the Northern Governors’ Forum on their position and the Forum advised that more discussions be held ``on all matters concerning the unity and progress of northern states within the context of a united Nigeria.`` He said the summit was part of this wider consultations.

- **Sambo Links National Development to Security**

Vice-President, Namadi Sambo, has said security of lives and property of every Nigerian was a critical ingredient of national development. Sambo said this at the State House in Abuja during the inaugural meeting of the Interim Implementation Committee on Police Reform.

He further said the administration had taken the issue of security as one of its cardinal objectives with a view to safeguarding the lives and property of Nigerians.

A statement issued by the Office of his Senior Special Assistant (Media) quoted him to have disclosed that “the administration inherited a Nigeria Police Force which has suffered neglect over the years and replete with formidable problems and obstacles which include but not limited to the capacity of its men, the quality and standard of its operational equipment, manual and procedure.”

Sambo said “aside from the obsolete and inadequate equipment, the condition of its welfare and the image of the police have deteriorated considerably.”

According to him, “it has become imperative for government to initiate reform of the Nigeria Police which is the arrow head organization for the realization of the internal security.”

He said the Federal Government inaugurated a Presidential Committee to reform the Police on January 8, 2008 and to reposition it to be fully functional and capable of meeting its constitutional mandate.

Sambo added that it was also to make it up-to-date with the emerging challenges of the need to policing the nation’s urban and rural communities.

He also stated that the Committee, which concluded its meeting in April 2008, had made far reaching recommendations.

According to him, “one of the recommendation is the provision of N2.8 trillion which was reviewed to N1.6 trillion, to revamp the Force over a period of five years” and which, he said, had now been reviewed to six years.

“The meeting today (yesterday) marks a watershed in the practical demonstration of the commitment of the Federal Government to genuine reform and transformation of the Nigeria police,” the Vice President stated.

He said the meeting discussed plans to rebuild the Police Staff College, Jos and the Police Academy in Wudil, Kano State, in order to “enhance training which is central to good policing.”

On the issue of kidnapping, he underscored the need to acquire tracking equipment for the Police and other gadgets to assist it to curb crime in the country.

The Vice-President, according to the statement, solicited the support of the all stakeholders, including State Governors, Local Government personnel and the private sector as well as traditional rulers, in the effort to reposition the Nigeria Police to the required standard.

Minister of Police Affairs, Adamu Maina Waziri, had in his remarks, and said the purpose of the reform of the Nigeria Police was to raise the efficiency of the Force.

He said the reform would entail changing the orientation of the Police to improve quality of service, increase use of scientific methods in policing to enhance the quality of evidence and investigation, the purchase of security and communications equipment to improve overall efficiency of the Police.

• **Police, Customs Pledge Partnership on Crime**

Area Controller of Customs, Lagos State, Mohammed Suleiman Bawa, has promised to tighten security at the Seme border in order to curb criminal activities. However, he called on the Commissioner of Police Lagos State, Mr. Marvel Akpoyibo, to give them the benefit of information before any action so that their men would understand each other.

Speaking yesterday during a courtesy call on the Lagos State Police Command at Ikeja, Bawa said: "This expressway to Cotonou is very important to the nation and movement there is highly delicate. It is an operational area that needs many services."

He further pledged that they would be responsible to the society.

In his response, Akpoyibo said: "We believe in the philosophy of partnership. The custom department was part of the Nigeria Police Force until it was severed. So we have to maintain the cord and unity. We see ourselves as one with your challenges and success as ours too."

The commissioner further noted: "We have emphasised on anti illegal roadblocks on that road. The President has been worried about this trend and it is necessary to ensure free flow of traffic along that area."

He called for a symbiotic collaboration to help each group realise their dreams, adding: "We must synergise and network together to realise our dreams."

• 2011: Nigerians Must Decide Credible Elections, Says US

First Secretary for Political Affairs, Embassy of the United States of America (USA), Mr. Jeffery Salaiz, yesterday reminded the Nigerian electorate that the responsibility for free, fair and credible elections in 2011 rests with them and not his country.

"Many ask what the U.S will do to make sure that Nigeria experiences free and credible elections," he said. "But the reality is that it is not up to us, US; it is up to the Nigerian people to have free, fair and credible elections."

Salaiz stated this in a meeting convened by the Youth Synergy Meeting to discuss the Road to 2011 organized by Youth Action Initiative Africa.

He said the U.S., like the Nigerian people, wants a situation in which whoever wins the elections truly represents the choice of the electorate.

"I am heartened that this forum represents the interest of Nigerian youths as they determine the direction and future of this country," he said, adding that the United States recognises that a representative government, well-functioning markets, and a robust civil society, including the vital role of youths are essential elements of a free nation.

Salaiz said the U S would appreciate that all states ensured that the rights to freedom of expression and association were both respected and defended.

Acknowledging the role youths play in politics, he said the American system had learned the importance of engaging that segment of the society.

He said the votes of the youths helped President Barack Obama become the first African American President.

2. Economy:

- **Nigeria state oil firm NNPC insolvent, says minister**

Nigeria's state oil firm is insolvent, unable to pay debts of \$5bn (£3.3bn), a government minister has said. Junior Finance Minister Remi Babalola said the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation had asked for help to cover its debts and fund its operations. But the NNPC denied the claim and said the government was not paying its own debts to the firm.

The company controls more than half of oil assets in Nigeria - one of the world's biggest exporters.

"NNPC is insolvent as current liabilities exceeded current assets by 754bn naira (\$5bn; £3.3bn)," Mr Babalola said at a government finance meeting.

He said the NNPC owed about \$3bn (£2bn) to Nigeria's Federation Account, which distributes oil money to varying levels of the country's government.

Oil accounts for about 85% of Nigeria's government revenues.

Subsidized petrol

The NNPC rejected Mr Babalola's claim and said it was able to meet its financial obligations.

"We cannot be classified as insolvent when we have healthy cash flow and we can pay for our crude and product import obligations," said NNPC spokesman Levi Ajuonuma.

He said the Nigerian government owed the company more than \$7bn (£4.6bn) in subsidies "which if reimbursed would enable the NNPC to offset the... debt being owed the Federation Account Allocation Committee".

The NNPC is plagued by mismanagement and corruption, says the BBC's Caroline Duffield in Lagos. Although Nigeria is a major crude oil producer, it must buy almost all

the petroleum products it uses on the international market because its own refineries are insufficient and dilapidated.

The NNPC buys refined petrol at international prices and sells it on to local marketeers at a big discount because Nigerians see cheap petrol as their birthright, says our correspondent.

The cost of capping petrol prices at just 65 naira (\$0.44; £0.29) a litre is reportedly at least \$4bn (£2.6bn) a year. Correspondents say the subsidy also fuels smuggling and corruption. Previous attempts to increase petrol prices have led to massive strikes and a government U-turn.

In May, China agreed a \$23bn (£15bn) deal to build four new oil refineries in Nigeria.

President Goodluck Jonathan has promised to tackle corruption in the oil industry. He has sacked some officials from the NNPC and ordered an audit of the firm's accounts.

There is also legislation currently before the parliament which would bring sweeping reforms to Nigeria's oil and gas industry.

• **NNPC Not Bankrupt, Says FG**

The Federal Government yesterday faulted the claim that the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) was insolvent. Minister of State for Finance, Mr. Remi Babalola had said NNPC owed debts the federation account N450 billion.

Babalola, referring to a letter from NNPC group managing director, Mr. Austin Oniwon, said: "NNPC is insolvent as current liabilities exceed current assets... NNPC is incapable of repaying the N450 billion owed to the Federation Account unless it is reimbursed the N1.156 trillion (in subsidies) it has requested from the Federal Ministry of Finance."

NNPC had clarified its position, saying it was not insolvent.

But there were indications yesterday that the FEC might have taken Babalola to task on his reported claim of insolvency of the NNPC.

Minister of Information and Communications, Professor Dora Akunyili, and the Minister of Finance, Mr. Olusegun Aganga, who briefed State House correspondents said that the NNPC was not insolvent and stressed that it was still strong enough to carry on with its statutory obligations.

Specifically, Akunyili said: "From the Auditor's Account, it is a going concern and does not have solvency issue as a corporation. Therefore categorically, NNPC is not insolvent.

“Given the nature of the NNPC, there are regular transactions between Federal Government and NNPC; and, as a result, there are always outstanding balances between the Corporation and the Federal Government.”

On his part, Aganga explained that there were so many transactions between the Federal Government and the NNPC and tried to present pictures that could be gleaned from the various transaction balances.

According to him, “We have so many different transactions between the NNPC and the Federal Government. In some form of the balances, it maybe a daily balance and, in another, it may be a trade balance, you need to make all of these things up.

“What you saw yesterday (Tuesday) was just balances arising from two types of transactions that we have made and that was the point they were trying to make yesterday.

“So, it is incomplete and it doesn’t give you the complete picture; once reconciliation is done, payment goes back and forth, between the two entities.

“The payment to NNPC we made is done regularly but as you know NNPC is a great concern (which) is involved in all the joint ventures we have in the country; it is involved with all International Oil Companies (IOCs). We still have all the wells and all other parastatals related to the NNPC.”

Responding to question on how soon the NNPC would offset the balances, Aganga said: “If you are worried about NNPC, that is a different matter; you are aware that there is a forensic audit that the president asked us to undertake and that is happening now and if you ask when it will be out, I will say that it is roughly going to be about eight weeks.”

- **N1.15tr Debt Crippling NNPC, Says GMD, But we’re not insolvent’FG, states, LGs share N413bn**

Group Managing Director of the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), Mr Austin Oniwon, has said that the corporation is unable to pay the N450 billion debt it owes the federation account partly because its current liabilities surpass its assets by N754 billion as at December 31, 2008.

But the corporation quickly moved yesterday to quell suggestions by the Minister of State for Finance, Mr. Remi Babalola that it was insolvent, maintaining that it is being owed fuel subsidy arrears of N1.156 trillion by the Federal Government.

If reimbursed, the NNPC said it would enable the corporation offset the N450 billion debts being owed the Federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC).

But revenue amounting to N413.277 billion was yesterday distributed among the federal, state and local governments for the month of June in spite of NNPC's indebtedness to FAAC.

NNPC's financial position was contained in a letter signed by Oniwon and addressed to the Chairman of FAAC last Monday, in response to a letter from the committee demanding that the corporation provide a repayment plan for the debt at FAAC's monthly meeting held yesterday.

Speaking at the meeting, Babalola said: "The distributable Statutory Revenue for the month is N361.25 billion, which shows an increase of N21.119 billion or 6.21 per cent compared to that of May 2010. The increase was attributable to improved production as a result of re-opening of Trans Forcados, EA Terminals and Nembe Creek trunks line as well as Force Majeure lifted in Brass Terminal."

The minister said President Goodluck Jonathan had directed the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) to, henceforth; generate monthly oil production statistics for reconciliation in the second month after the month of data gathering.

This directive, he explained, had become necessary to address the problem of recoveries for overpayment and underpayment to state from the 13 per cent derivation computation due to the lateness in the release of derivation indices.

"Furthermore, Mr. President has also directed that the Revenue Mobilisation, Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) should ensure that the figures so generated are used for the computation and sent to the Federal Ministry of Finance for revenue allocation by the third month following the initial month of data generation," he said.

According to the minister, other reasons given by NNPC for defaulting in payment of debts include the fact that it is facing financial difficulties evidenced by, among other things, the inability to pay for domestic crude as and when due, and delays in settling bills for fuel import.

He also said that NNPC's financial difficulties stemmed from disequilibrium between cost and cash inflow streams and that the corporation is owed substantial amounts as unreimbursed subsidy on petroleum products.

Additional reasons provided for its failure to meet its obligation was that the corporation is spending increasing sums of money in repairing/replacing vandalised assets and is suffering from products loss arising therefrom.

On what action the committee has decided to take against NNPC and the claim that the corporation is being owed by the Federal Government, Babalola said: "It was resolved that we should write to the presidency to find a solution to how NNPC will pay the federation account - that was the position of FAAC for that matter: we don't even know we owe them any money, so I can't talk of how the job of the ministry of finance is to

find finance, so there shouldn't be any problem if we owe them: but the one that is important is for NNPC to actually pay the money that they've agreed they owe the federation account because we have not audited it - we have not verified it. Until when that is done, that is when we can say that we owe them."

NNPC yesterday said contrary to the statement credited to Babalola that the NNPC is insolvent; the management of the corporation was canvassing strong arguments to the contrary.

Group General Manager Group Public Affairs of the corporation, Dr. Levi Ajuonuma, stated that NNPC was not incapable of meeting its financial obligations to its partners and stakeholders.

"We cannot be classified as insolvent when we have a healthy cash flow and we can pay for our crude and product importation obligations. While it is true that the national indebtedness to the NNPC is putting pressure on our operations, nonetheless we are able to meet all our obligations. We therefore cannot be said to be insolvent," Ajuonuma stated.

He said that the NNPC would continue to play its central role of ensuring steady and efficient supply of petroleum products throughout the country and urged Nigerians and its Joint Venture Partners to remain calm.

Meanwhile, the Accountant-General of the Federation, Alhaji Ibrahim Dankwambo, said yesterday that the Excess Crude Account (foreign) stood at \$3.54 billion while the Excess Crude Account (domestic) is valued at N50.9 billion.

"And in addition to that, the sum of N75 billion went into the excess revenue account. What resulted to the increase in the amount we are sharing is that while we maintain the N365 billion shared to the federation account, there was an increase in VAT. The Value Added Tax increased from what we shared last month and that is the increase," he said.

- **NSE Presidency: Court Summons Dangote, Onyiuke, Igbinosun over Contempt Charges**

For his continuing claim to the Nigeria Stock Exchange (NSE) presidency contrary to a court order nullifying his election, a Federal High Court in Lagos yesterday ordered business mogul and Chairman Dangote Group, Alhaji Aliko Dangote, to appear before it to answer contempt charges preferred against him by some aggrieved shareholders of African Petroleum.

Also to appear with him on July 22, 2010 to show why they should not be committed to prison are the Director General of NSE, Prof Ndi Okereke-Onyiuke and Secretary to the Council of NSE, Mrs. Josephine Igbinosun.

Justice J. T. Tsoho, who made the order while ruling on the application brought by the AP's shareholders also ordered a substituted service of the order together with the accompanied processes on the respondents through a publication in two national newspapers.

It will be recalled that Justice Lambo Akanbi had in his ruling on March 12, 2010 nullified Dangote's election as NSE's president for disobeying the order of the court ordering that parties in the suit maintain status quo following a suit filed by some aggrieved shareholders of AP.

The latest order by the court followed a motion ex-parte dated July 6, and filed on July 7, by counsel to the AP shareholders, Onyebuchi Aniakor.

In the application, which was supported by an affidavit sworn to by one Adeleke Adebayo the defendants averred that on March 12, 2010, the court pursuant to the plaintiffs' application to that effect made an order nullifying, vacating and setting aside all steps taken by the NSE purporting to elect Dangote as President of the NSE

The plaintiffs also averred that notwithstanding that the said order was made in the presence of the parties and their counsel, and the certified true copy served by a bailiff of the court, the defendants have failed to respect the order of the court.

They said rather than comply with the said order, Dangote has continued to parade himself and has actively been encouraged, by Okereke and Onyiuke Igbinosun, to parade himself as President of NSE.

According to them, since the delivery of the said order, Dangote has continued to attend and preside over the meetings, proceedings, business and affairs of the council of NSE.

They further averred that on Friday, July 2, 2010, Dangote was reported in the national dailies not only to have presided over the meeting of the Council of NSE of Tuesday, June 29, 2010, but equally in company of Okereke-Onyiuke proceeded to receive the Governor of Bayelsa State in NSE's Council Chambers as President of NSE on Wednesday, June 30, 2010.

They argued that the conduct of the respondents was disrespectful of the court and amounted to contempt of court. According to them, it was in the substantial interest of justice that each of the respondents is committed to prison until they purge themselves of their contemptuous conduct.

- **Air Nigeria Clears Debts with Banks, Pays N38bn Begins expansion of operations**

Air Nigeria (formerly Virgin Nigeria Airways) announced yesterday that it has cleared all debts it owed banks and is now poised to expand operations, targeting to carry 10,000 passengers daily in its domestic operations.

The chairman of the airline, Jimoh Ibrahim, who acquired the airline about two months ago, made this known in a press conference yesterday in Lagos saying the major domestic carrier would no more be referred to as debt-ridden because it has cleared all its debts with the banks.

Ibrahim, made available a letter of non-indebtedness from the UBA, which it owed \$237 million (about N37 billion), which stated as follows, “We acknowledge receipt of the payment instruction of \$237, 000, 000. 00 (two hundred and thirty-seven million US dollars only) in respect of the indebtedness of Virgin Nigeria Airways conveyed to us by your letter to debit NICON Group of Companies with the sum of \$237, 000, 000. 00 (two hundred and thirty-seven million US dollars only) and credit same amount to loan account of Virgin Nigeria Airways with the bank”.

The letter also said that in accordance “with your instruction, we hereby confirm that we have debited your account for the sum of \$237, 000, 000. 00 and credited same amount to Virgin Nigeria Airways account with UBA Plc...We hereby confirm that VNA is no longer indebted to UBA Plc and will send to you a bank statement soon of the account of VNA showing nil balance on the loan.”

About a month ago, Air Nigeria offset the debt it owed Guaranty Trust Bank Plc (GTBank) which amount to \$6.5 million (about N1 billion) which cleared the airline with the debt that prompted the bank to drag the airline to court and with the clearance of the debt the suit was also withdrawn by the bank.

In an interview with the Chairman of Air Nigeria, Ibrahim said, “At the beginning VNA was referred to as debt-ridden airline, but today we have made a turn-around. We have six aircraft, up from two aircraft that were available at the time we acquired the airline. We have paid GTB and got a letter of discharge and last Friday we got a handshake and discharge letter from our debts to UBA.”

Ibrahim said with the coming of new aircraft Air Nigeria would begin to dominate Nigeria’s airspace as the management of the airline would continue to ensure the safety and the comfort of its passengers in all its operations.

“As it is today, we have six aircraft and we are expected to have 12 by October 2010 and government should now have to expand its facilities at the airports.”

He said in spite of the turn around the airline has not sacked anybody since it was acquired , noting that the airline would not sack any member of staff, except those found to be fraudulent.

Ibrahim also remarked that although the airline has cleared its debts with the banks, it is also inclined to borrow, “because debt is important to business and there must be debt for a business to grow. So as we have paid this debt we shall take another one. Debt is a sinequanone to continuing business.”

The Air Nigeria Chairman said that it was because the new owner of the airline has credibility that it was able to acquire new aircraft through lease on credit.

“The airline we leased was on credit because we are credit worthy. If we don’t have credibility we will not be able to lease aircraft on credit.”

In its expansion programme, Ibrahim said on the domestic market the airline would introduce new routes in the northern and eastern parts of the country and on international operations it would start Lagos-London and Lagos-New York routes before end of year and acquire state-of-the-art aircraft for these international routes.

“My major pride will be the day I will land Air Nigeria aircraft in London and New York,” Ibrahim quipped enthusiastically.

He said although the airline still owe debts to aviation parastatals but all current debts that accrue are paid off immediately; that it was the old debts the airline owed before it was acquired that was still debited to it and this would be liquidated soon.

3. Energy:

- **Sinopec Hits First Oil in Niger Delta**

China oil giant, Sinopec, has struck oil in its first exploration well drilled in Nigeria's Block 137, previously owned by Canadian oil giant, Addax Petroleum. According to Reuters report, the Udele-3 well of Block 137, in the Niger Delta, was the first exploration well Sinopec drilled in Nigeria this year after its acquisition of Swiss oil and gas explorer Addax almost a year ago.

The report quoted China PetroChemical News, Sinopec's in-house newspaper as saying that the well intercepted an oil column of 45.9 metres and flowed 3365 barrels of oil and 28,300 cubic metres of gas per day during test.

Last June, Sinopec set out to acquire Addax for \$7.24 billion to gain access to oil assets in West Africa and Iraq.

The acquisition was sealed at CA\$52.80 per share on June 24, Sinopec said in a statement, without commenting on the total value of the offer.

Following the acquisition, the boards of directors of Addax Petroleum were replaced by nominees of Sinopec International, with Addax's chief Jean Claude Gandur remaining as a director of Addax Petroleum.

Pollution and militancy have driven fishermen away from the creeks of the Niger Delta.

Addax holds assets in Nigeria, Cameroon and Gabon with a combined 538 million barrels of proven and probable oil reserves as of the end of last year. The company's crude output stood at 134,700 barrels per day in the first quarter of this year.

Until recently, Sinopec, Asia's largest refiner by capacity, has relied heavily on oil refining and marketing for its earnings. Sinopec imports more than 70 per cent of the crude oil run through its refineries, which has exposed it to heavy losses in past years as it wasn't able to recoup surging crude-oil costs in full from consumers.

To broaden its earnings base and go overseas, the refiner is actively seeking overseas investments in oil and gas resources as part of its expansion plan. Sinopec said in August it had set up a unit to review overseas acquisition opportunities including assets in Angola, Russia, Kazakhstan and Australia now held by China Petrochemical.

"Through this overseas asset acquisition, Sinopec not only obtains a large-scaled overseas oil and gas asset, but also attains and absorbs relevant experiences in human resource, management system and business operation in overseas upstream operations," Reuters quoted the company Secretary Chen Ge as saying recently.

"The transaction will help improve the financial performance of Sinopec and maximize the long-term investment value for the shareholders," he added.

- **Electricity: Nigeria Records 400mscf Shortfall in Gas Supply, Partial risk guarantee to solve gas supply problem under way**

The Federal Government said yesterday that Nigeria was currently recording a shortfall of about 400 million standard cubic feet (scf) per month in gas supply for electricity generation. This is because of the about 1.2 billion scf it requires on a monthly basis to generate adequate electricity, it produces only about 800 million scf.

The 800 million scf of gas supply, the government however pointed out, "tallied" with the level of electricity currently generated for Nigerians.

But the figure is lower than the one billion scf given, last May, by the Minister of Petroleum Resources, Mrs. Dieziani Allison-Madueke, as the level of gas supply available for electricity generation when she visited members of the Senate and House of Representatives Joint Commi-ttees on Gas Resources.

The government put the level of electricity generation at between 3,500 megawatts (MW) and 3,700megawatts as at yesterday.

Minister of State, Power, Nuhu Wya, who disclosed this while fielding questions from newsmen shortly after the opening of a Stakeholders' Forum/Workshop on Partial Risk

Guarantee yesterday in Abuja, however said the ministry was working closely with the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and international oil companies (IOCs) as well as the World Bank to establish a commercial framework- a Partial Risk Guarantee (PRG), that will ensure adequate and continuous gas supply for electricity generation.

“In accordance with our programme, we will need about 1.2billion scf of gas on a monthly basis to generate enough electricity in the country. We are currently getting about 800million scf, which is tallying with our production capacity at the moment. And we are working very closely with NNPC and international oil companies and the World Bank. With the commercial framework put in place, that is, the Partial Risk Guarantee, suppliers will be assured of payment for gas supplied. We are also rehabilitating our plants and coming up with the new plants of the NIPP. These plants are being put together so that when this gas is coming in at the correct time, the plants are being put on stream,” he said.

Wya noted that the Federal Government was already implementing a gas supply agreement with Pan Ocean Company with a view to boosting the level supply.

“That is one of the exciting moment of the power sector where a proper commercial agreement was signed to ensure that both parties play their own role as at when due. If we do not take up the gas, we will have to pay for it and if they don’t supply the gas, they will have to pay for the loss in power. So this is something that is very good for the nation and it works all over the world,” he added.

Wya said, what the Federal Government was striving to achieve, in the interim, was to sustain the available gas supply for electricity generation.

According to him, “we are ensuring that Gas is available to the plants that are working and we are making sure that the power that is generated is being distributed in a sustainable manner so that we have less of system collapses and less of disruption in the power supply. The little we are getting we are distributing it in a sustainable manner and we are recording steady growth in generation.”

Senior Energy Specialist, World Bank, Mr. Erik Fernstrom, who also spoke, submitted that, “the power problem in the country is difficult to solve because is a link of different chains of interlinked centre of activities.”

Given this scenario, he added: “What this project wants to address is upstream issues, meaning- how we get the fuel to run the power plants? And how do you make sure that the companies that running the power plants get enough funding from the clients to be able to pay for the fuel in a sustainable manner?”

Fernstrom said the World Bank was working with the Federal Government on a guarantee programme that ensures the payment liability of the PHCN toward the gas supplier, which are essentially the oil companies.

Essentially, he disclosed that, “the contribution of the World Bank is on three levels: One is the provision of partial risk guarantee which backs up the payment liability of the PHCN and minimizes the contingent liability that government will have to incur. Secondly, it also provides the needed transmission investment to make sure that power generated is able to flow. The third one is that it commits the bank to a deeper involvement to serve as broker between the suppliers and the buyers.”

4. Environment:

5. Immigration/Refugee/Idps:

6. Health:

7. Human rights/Gender/social issues:

- **Jos Crisis: Military Task Force Convicts Five**

Five members of the military Special Task Force (STF) who are on peace keeping mission in Plateau State have been given various jail sentences for offenses committed while on duty. These offences include manslaughter, theft, assaults, house breaking and failure to perform military duties.

The convicts were given sentences ranging from demotion in ranks, severe reprimand, and dismissal regiment, among others; all subject to confirmation from appropriate superior authorities.

The Court Martial, which was inaugurated on the May 4, 2010, was headed by Colonel Okpeke Abel as the President and Lieutenant Colonel Benard Okorie, as the Judge advocate. Members include Wing commander, Azubuike Opara, Colonel Daniel Bagudu, Lieutenant Colonel Effiong Ekpeyong, Commodore Ezekiel Contori Gekan, among others.

Okpeke while charging the members during the inauguration had said “the Court Martial is a court of discipline, honour and justice. I enjoin you all members of the martial to see the task as a challenge and a test of integrity, to ensure that justice is done without fear or favour. So you must take the assignment seriously and do it to the best of your ability”.

It took a period of six weeks of trial at the Barracks before the sentences were passed on with the five men gaining from the aid of their counsels from the Legal Aid Counsels of Nigeria argued their cases in order to absolve themselves from the various offenses.

The Judge said “This court was inaugurated on the 4th of May, 2010 to try reported offenses committed by the members of the STF. The court goes into substantial not technical justice to ensure every evidence is analyzed and sentences passed based on fairness.

“Five accused persons were arraigned on different offenses committed between February and March, 2010 in Jos North and Mangu local government areas, in the first case, two persons were jointly charged, the second, one person singly charged while the third case has two people also jointly charged and the sentences are binding on all those jointly charged”.

- **FG to Sponsor 13,000 Ex-Militants to Tertiary Institutions**

No fewer than 13,000 ex-militants would be sponsored by the Federal Government through the Ministry of the Niger Delta Affairs to various tertiary institutions both in Nigeria and abroad in pursuance of the post –amnesty programme of the Federal Government.

Minister for Niger Delta, Elder Godsdan Orubebe, disclosed this in Akure, Ondo State capital at an interactive session with journalists after the inspection of the Skill Acquisition Centre being constructed by the ministry to train ex-militants.

The centre, which is located at Agadagba Obon in Ese-Odo Local Government area of the state, is one of the nine centers being constructed across the nine Niger Delta states. Orubebe, accompanied by the Minister of State in the ministry, Mr Sam Odey, said the sponsoring of the ex-militants would be in batches, stating that 20,000 ex-militants registered with the Federal Government within the amnesty period.

He explained that the last protest by some youths on Lokoja–Abuja road were done by those ex-militants who came to surrender their arms and registered after the expiration of the deadline stipulated by the Federal Government, noting that they were outside the 20,000 registered.

However, Orubebe implored those ex-militants including those ones that registered after the expiration period to be patient with the ministry, promising that all of them would be taken care of.

8. Geo-Strategic issues:

Other West African States

Cape Verde:

Chad:

Gambia:

- **Globacom Gets Operating Licence in Gambia...H3**

Barely four months after it was awarded an operating licence in Senegal, Globacom has received another license that will enable it to operate in The Gambia. Globacom in a statement made available to THISDAY disclosed that the latest licence approval was presented to the company in Banjul, Gambia, on Monday by the Secretary General of the Government of the country Dr. Njogou BAH.

Globacom also disclosed that the Gambian licence is the sixth the company has so far won in Africa. It now has operating licenses in Nigeria, Ghana, Benin Republic and Cote d'Ivoire. The company started operations in Nigeria in August, 2003, and in Benin in June 2008. It has also concluded plans to roll out services in Ghana.

The statement disclosed that the country's Minister of Information, Communication and Technology, Alhaji A. Cham and his Foreign Affairs counterpart, Hon. Momodou Tangara were in attendance at the presentation of the approval.

The Gambian President, Yahaya Jammeh, was later said to have received the Globacom delegation which included the Executive Director, Human Resources, Mr. Adewale Sangowawa and Head of New Markets, Mr. Olayinka Olafimihan.

Sangowawa, who according to the statement received the approval on behalf of the company's Chairman, Otunba Mike Adenuga Jr (CON), said the licence would enable Globacom to stimulate world class services in the country.

The licence will also allow Globacom to land its gigantic trans-Atlantic submarine cable, Glo 1, in the West African country with opportunities to extend the infrastructure to neighbouring countries.

It also gives the company the right to carry traffic for major operators, the government and wholesale customers in Gambia.

Globacom emphasised that with this development, the people of Gambia have now been positioned to be part of the telecommunications revolution which Globacom is bringing to Africa.

Sangowawa stressed that “The new licence adds impetus to our desire to provide the West African sub-region an excellent communication network and a cost-effective voice, data, video and e-commerce services.

“It underscores our resolve to build for Africa a network that will provide the most comprehensive international communication services to bridge the digital divide between Africa and the rest of the World.

The people of Gambia are expected to enjoy very competitive international calling rates and cheaper and more reliable voice, internet and data services with the coming of Globacom into the country.”

Guinea- Bissau:

Mali:

- **More aid needed for the north....H7**

Aid agencies are struggling to meet the food and water needs of people and their livestock in drought-hit Mali, with potentially "catastrophic gaps" in the humanitarian response, according to Oxfam's country head, Gilles Marion.

Some 258,000 people are in need of urgent assistance in Mali, according to the government-led early warning mechanism (SAP), with a further 371,000 at risk, following poor rains across the Sahel region.

There are severe acute malnutrition rates of 19 percent in some pockets of the northeast, according to Oxfam. Meanwhile, 40 percent of cattle in the north are sick or dead and a further 30 percent at risk of disease or death, according to food security analysts FEWSNET. Eight out of 10 people in northern Mali raise and breed cattle to survive.

"There will be a catastrophe if more people do not respond," Marion told reporters at a press conference in the Senegalese capital, Dakar.

The World Food Programme, Food and Agriculture Organization, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Oxfam, are some of the main actors responding to the crisis in Gao and Kidal.

Oxfam has US\$6 million - from the UK government, British public, the European Union humanitarian aid office (ECHO) and the US Agency for International Development - to help pastoralists in the north feed their animals, or to use as vouchers to spend on household priorities, whether food, water, animal fodder or medical care.

ICRC has distributed food and seeds to 97,000 people in the north, are buying up thousands of cattle at pre-crisis prices, and are putting cash injections into the economy to try to stabilize prices.

The government has subsidized cereals and animal fodder since April, and distributed 7,000 tons of food to 23 communes; a further 2,600 tons of grain are on their way. It is also sending 1,100 tons of animal feed to Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu, but "this is not nearly enough to meet all the livestock needs, and some at-risk communes will not receive grain," Madeleine Diallo Ba at the Agriculture Ministry in the capital, Bamako, told IRIN.

She is in urgent talks with the World Food Programme (WFP), the European Union and Japan to see if they can release rapid funding to enable the government to procure more.

WFP head Alice-Martin Dahirou told IRIN there are enough actors in place but not enough money. "The region is well-served by several NGOs and local associations who could do the job if resources were put at their disposal to support the government services." She added: "It is difficult to determine at this time the additional number of people who need support, in the absence of a comprehensive analysis of the situation."

Fragmented response

The quality of the aid response in the north is being compromised because it is not well-coordinated, said Marion, who called on the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to fulfil this function. Food Commissioner Lansry Nana Yaya Haidara agreed: "Agencies are intervening, but in a fragmented way. We want all partners to start working together towards common goals - that is the only that way we can get tangible results on the ground," he told IRIN.

Noel Tsekouras, deputy head of OCHA in West and Central Africa, told IRIN: "OCHA had a presence in Mali from 2005 but was forced to discontinue in 2008 due to financial constraints. As mentioned by Oxfam, there may be a need for the UN to reinforce the cooperation among the key [response] stakeholders."

On the financial front, some "encouraging" headway has been made, he said, with emergency activities under way and US\$1.5 million provided by the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). However, only 23 percent of the \$8.8 million requested by Mali under the West Africa appeal has been funded. "Without more resources, it will be difficult to tackle the acute vulnerabilities being reported," he told IRIN.

"The priority at this point is to assist the government in coordination, and to scale up the response. However, it remains the responsibility of the government to facilitate the short-term response and tackle the longer-term structural causes," said OCHA's Tsekouras.

Crisis "silent", "slow"

The slow response is partly linked to it being a slow-developing crisis, said Marion.

An aid analyst who preferred anonymity agreed, saying UN agencies are very development-focused in Mali, which makes them sluggish when intervening in humanitarian crises.

Mali may also have been eclipsed by the scale of the food security crises in neighbouring Niger and Chad, which between them have nine million people unable to access adequate food.

But the number of people and animals at risk in Mali is significant, and cannot be overlooked, said Marion. "This is a dynamic, creative and adaptable population - we need to help them now and help them avoid further crises down the line."

Mauritania :

Niger:

Sénégal:

- **Wade Denies His Son Would 'Inherit' the Presidency...H1**

Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade denied on Thursday that he was grooming his son Karim to step into his shoes. Karim, 41, was given a ministerial position in May and is considered a close presidential advisor to his 84-year-old father.

"I have no intention of putting my son in my place before I go," Wade told Europe 1 radio. "But he is free to stand elections when he wants to," he added.

Wade called the allegation "offensive to Senegalese people."

Wade has been in office since 2000, and has already declared his candidacy for president in 2012.

Senegalese opposition claims that elder Wade is setting up his son to take his position.

Tensions between Senegal and France are at a high after French ambassador Jean-Christophe Rufin was recalled from his post in Dakar.

Rufin stepped down two weeks ago after he called the elder Wade's desire to run again for president as "odd" because of his advanced age. He had also reportedly criticised a recent aid package to Senegal.