

Business and Politics in the Muslim World

West African News Monitoring

Weekly Report 132

8 – 14 August, 2010

By John-Paul

Presentation on 18 August, 2010.

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POLITICS

GHANA

Nana Akufo-Addo leads NPP for Election 2012

Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, Presidential Candidate of the main opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) in Election 2008 was on Saturday declared winner of the party's historic Special National Delegates Elections by the Electoral Commission (EC). At the close of 15 hours of voting and counting, Nana Akufo-Addo obtained 83,517 of the total 106,590 valid votes cast, representing about 78.89 per cent; Mr John Alan Kwadwo Kyerematen polled 21,226 votes representing about 19.91 per cent while Mr. Isaac Osei placed distance third with 1,194 votes representing about 1.12 per cent.

Professor Kwabena Frimpong-Boateng followed with 428 votes representing 0.40 per cent; and Mr. John Kwame Kudua obtained only 225 votes representing 0.21 per cent. 426 ballots were rejected. Mr. Albert Kofi Arhin, Director of Elections at the Electoral Commission (EC), who announced the results, formally declared Nana Akufo-Addo, winner amidst wild jubilation which took various forms; tooting of horns, shouting and dancing, by party supporters who had waited anxiously for hours on end for the official results. The declaration is in accordance with Article 12 (7) of the NPP Constitution; .."Where a contestant obtains more than 50 per cent (50%) of the votes cast, he or she shall be the party's Presidential Candidate.

In all, 112,716 delegates made up of representatives from the 229 constituencies, former President and former Vice President, overseas branches, patrons and Members of Parliament of the party voted to elect the flag bearer.

In the party's December 22, 2007 Special National Delegates Congress, Nana Akufo-Addo obtained 1,096 of the total 2,285 valid votes cast, representing about 47.97 per cent; Mr Kyerematen polled 738 votes representing about 32.30 per cent while Former Vice President Alhaji Aliu Mahama placed third with 146 votes representing about 6.39 per cent.

Votes obtained by the other aspirants were; Mr. Yaw Osafo-Maafo, 63 votes representing 2.76 per cent; Mr. Daniel Kweku Botwe, 52 votes representing 2.28 per cent; Papa Owusu Ankomah had 34 votes representing 1.49 per cent, and Mr. Hackman Owusu-Agyeman had 28 votes representing 1.23 per cent.

The rest were: Dr. Kwame Addo Kufuor, 22 votes representing 0.96 per cent; both Professor Mike Oquaye and Mr. Jake Otanka Obetsebi-Lampitey had 20 votes each representing 0.88 per cent; Dr. Kofi Konadu Apraku obtained 19 votes representing 0.83

per cent.

Prof. Frimpong-Boateng had 12 votes representing 0.53 per cent; Mr Boakye Kyeremanteng Agyarko obtained 10 votes representing 0.44 per cent; both Mr. Felix Kwesi Owusu-Adjapong and Mr Kwabena Agyepong had nine votes each, representing 0.39 per cent; Dr. Barfuor Adjei-Barwuah had six votes representing, 0.26 per cent and Dr. Kobina Arthur Kennedy obtained one vote representing 0.04 per cent. Eight votes were rejected.

NPP is set for Election 2012 - Minority Leader

The main opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) on Saturday set the political character for Election 2012, through a historic election of its Flag bearer with an emphatic, peaceful and well-coordinated Special National Delegates Election. For the first time in the political history of Ghana, a party has successfully elected its Presidential candidate through a nation-wide primaries format involving all but two constituencies of the country.

"At long last the battle is over Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo has emerged victorious with about 78.89 per cent of the valid votes cast. It's a victory of NPP, and the democratic journey of regaining power," Mr. Osei Kyei Mensah-Bonsu, Minority Leader stated during the official declaration of the results in Accra.

He urged NPP supporters to put their acts together for a new beginning; "we need to re-group resources both human and material, financial and logistics to fight the biggest battle ahead". Mr. Mensah-Bonsu called for forgiveness of any infractions, insults and attacks during the campaign and considered it as brotherly fight to ensure that the party was united for Election 2012.

Mr. John Owusu Afriyie, NPP General Secretary said the party was at the threshold of history making through setting new processes for engaging and broadening the base of participatory democracy at the grassroots level.

He said the party through its maiden nation-wide election had set a new pace for Ghanaian and African democracy; "this is a credential and achievement that we must all be proud off and contribute towards eventual victory".

Mr. Jake Obetsebi-Lampsey, NPP National Chairman, commended the rank and file for their solidarity and tenacity which had seen the NPP through the dangerous terrain of electing a Flag bearer without any violence before, during and after the elections. He commended the Electoral Commission, Ghana Police Service, Media, National, Regional, Constituency and National Election Committee for their contribution.

NPP urged to strategize with members for victory

Some leading members of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) in the Brong-Ahafo Region on Tuesday stressed the need for the party's hierarchy to identify loyal and committed supporters for effective campaigning to regain power in 2012.

Speaking to the Ghana News Agency in interviews in Sunyani, they said now that the NPP's national congress was over there was the need for all supporters to close their ranks and campaign in tandem with polling station, constituency and regional executives for victory.

Mr. Kwasi Ameyaw-Cheremeh, the Member of Parliament for Sunyani East, said the NPP was more important than any individual and as such petty squabbles and internal bickering should not be entertained among the rank and file of the party.

He expressed appreciation to the party's hierarchy and the five candidates who contested for the party's flagbearership last Saturday for the measures that resulted in transparent, free and fair election.

"This implies that our great party is united and has demonstrated a high sense of maturity and civility in contemporary internal and external partisan politicking", he said.

The MP said the NPP would continue to enjoy such peaceful cohesion that would culminate in victory in 2012, considering the overwhelming victory that Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo received nationwide.

Mr. Ameyaw-Cheremeh said the National Democratic Party (NDC) government had disappointed Ghanaians and was disrupting programmes such as the National Health Insurance Scheme, National Youth and Employment Programme, free maternal care delivery, school feeding programme among others initiated by the previous government.

"The country is witnessing massive corruption and the current government has failed to investigate all those allegations of corruption" he said.

Mr. Alfred Ofori Annye, Regional Secretary of the NPP, appealed to supporters of the party to regard themselves as one family with a common goal and agenda and to intensify the campaign drive to woo more people to join the party.

"Now that the party has been able to make a breakthrough in the national congress, the battle lies between the NPP and NDC as well as other minor parties", he said.

Mr. Kwadwo Asomah-Cheremeh, the Regional Chairman of the party, said the victory of Nana Akuffo-Addo was a victory for all party members.

"In democracy and rule of law there will always be a competition and this does not warrant us to fight among ourselves", he said.

Mr. Asomah-Cheremeh said with the expansion of the Electoral College it meant supporters at the grassroots had taken part in decision making and expressed the hope that they would work hard to ensure success in 2012.

He said the regional, constituency and polling station executives had designed strategies to ensure that the party retained all the 15 parliamentary seats in the Brong-Ahafo Region and to work hard to "capture" five more.

Mr. Richard Kyeremeh, the Deputy Regional Organiser, appealed to supporters and party faithful to refrain from factionalism and channel their financial and physical strengths into the activities and programmes of the NPP.

Mr. Frank Opoku Adjapong, a businessman, who was among the candidates in the regional chairmanship position of the party spoke against complacency on the part of some supporters.

Opening of nominations for Assembly election soon

Opening of nominations for the District Level elections is scheduled for August 28 and 29 throughout the country.

Interested candidates would be required to go for nomination forms from the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Electoral Commission (EC) offices.

The election would be conducted on October 26.

The Kwahu-South District registration supervisor of the EC, Mr. Edward Asare-Addo, said this when he addressed the second ordinary meeting of the Kwahu-South District Assembly at Mpraeso on Thursday.

He said nominations for the unit committee election would also be held on August 25 and 26 where five persons would be elected for every electoral area.

Mr. Addo said interested candidates could paste their posters and undertake house-to-house campaign but would not be allowed to mount platforms since only the EC had the mandate to mount platforms for contesting candidates.

He said the various Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies would soon be dissolved for the election to be conducted.

Govt. Trails Konadu

The Mills administration appears to have declared former President Jerry John Rawlings and his family a security threat, as it mounts 24-hour watch in order to avoid springing surprises on the sitting President whom he cared for from political dimness to political limelight in the face of stiff opposition from party gurus at the time.

According to Sidii Abubakar, a loyalist of the former first couple, the movements of Her

Excellency, Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings are constantly being monitored by personnel of the Bureau of National Investigations (BNI). Sidi, who contested the position of National Youth Organizer and lost to an aide of the President, Mr. Ludwig Hlodze, was answering questions from the Patriot on whether some women who stood on the same platform with the former 1st lady during this year's June 4 celebrations have been arrested by the BNI when he dropped the bomb-shell. "I cannot tell whether some women have been arrested or not," he said in connection with the arrest adding that "her (Nana Konadu) movement is being monitored." Sidi hinted that the intention of the government to trail the former 1st Lady could be borne out of the supposed intentions of Mrs. Rawlings to contest President Mills for the NDC's flag-bearer slot in 2011. "Some of the supporters have also been calling on the woman at the 31st headquarters to publicly declare her intention since they are ready to support her." He disclosed that supporters of the NDC are prevailing on him to convince Mrs. Rawlings to contest the NDC slot when nominations are opened. He went on to state that because of the security consciousness of the former President, Nana Konadu is aware of what is going on. When asked whether they were following her for protection, he said "if it has to do with protection, they would have approached her and sought her consent" stressing that they are trailing her. It would be re-called that deputy editor of pro-NDC tabloid, Daily Post, Livingston Pay Charlie, gave an indication when he spoke on Hot FM, an Accra based radio station that President Mills was rewarding Mr. Rawlings for helping to bring back the NDC administration with the throwing of a security cordon around the ex-President. He said the surveillance mounted on Rawlings was not restricted to Ghana but even when he traveled outside the country, a situation Livingston described as a mark of ingratitude. Livingston, a former Editor of Kwesi Pratt's Insight newspaper, accused Ato Ahwoi, a close confidante of President Mills of being behind the woes of Rawlings.

Political differences weaken democracy-Oguaa MCE

The Mayor of Cape Coast, Mr. Anthony Egyir Aikins, on Thursday, called on Assembly members to set aside their political differences and focus on evolving measures to deepen governance at the grass root level.

He stressed that it was time they worked together by sharing ideas and strategize, to strengthen the nation's weak social infrastructure and deepen democracy at the local level.

Mr. Aikins, who made the call in an address on the state of the metropolis, at the Cape Coast Metropolitan Assembly's sitting, called on all to eschew negative tendencies that undermine the efforts at developing the Metropolis, which include blackmailing others.

He said people should also desist from backbiting others and stressed that apathy, poor attitude to work and the lack of commitment, as well as bootlicking, were retarding the nation's growth, adding that, weak institutional arrangements have given way to a lot of

waste in the system.

He called for a complete overhaul of the metropolis, which he described as "sick" and called on the people to wake up and face the truth, instead of living in its past glories.

The Mayor said there was no need to rush the development process but to appreciate the problems, be circumspect and strategize for effective results, adding that, it was better to do the right thing once and for all, particularly in their quest to build a solid foundation to transform the Metropolis.

He mentioned some of the challenges facing the metropolis, to include the lack of physical infrastructure, youth unemployment, as well as poverty, and expressed concern about the unskilled youth in the area, who are rather, being selective as to the type of job they want to engage in.

He said land has been secured for the construction of a Technology Park and a factory as well as a warehouse for the Coca Cola Bottling Company at Mpeasem, all in its efforts to generate employment in the area.

Mr. Aikins said the Assembly will not tolerate or condone any wrongdoing in the Metropolis and that those who fall foul of the bye-laws will either be prosecuted or dealt with, adding that, it will not politicize its development agenda and processes.

He disclosed that the Assembly qualified for the District Development Fund facility, under the 2008 assessment, and has earned GH¢550,000 to support development projects in the area.

On education, he said plans are underway to supply 1,500 desks and 300 plastic chairs to some second cycle schools in the area and that 61 needy but brilliant students and five trainee nurses have received financial support from the Assembly, saying, a total of GH¢19,913.86 has been spent on their education since January, 2010.

On sanitation, he said the Assembly has taken delivery of 20 refuse containers and has distributed them to about 18 communities and that in collaboration with NADMO, it has undertaken a clean-up exercises in some areas to stem flooding.

The Presiding Member, Nana Kwaku Awuku said the Assembly had chalked major successes in infrastructural development, particularly in the area of education and stressed that there was still more room for improvement.

LIBERIA

'Petition Not Consensus of Nimba People'

Barely two weeks following the celebration of the 163 Independence of Liberia in Nimba County, more than six administrative districts in the County have issued a strongly worded reaction to the petitioning of President Ellen Johnson that took place in the county to contest the 2011 presidential election.

At a joint leadership meeting in Gboa Taylay, Taykpaglay Township, citizens from sixteen communities in Zoegeh Statutory District said the statement made by some individuals in the county for President Sirleaf to run for the second term was not a consensus, political dream or aspiration of the people of Nimba in general.

The citizen groupings from Zoe, Gbao, Gbor and other Clans categorically said the Bahn and Tappita petition statements do not in any way represent the heavily populated constituency of Nimba. The group therefore described the July 26 petition of the Unity Party Standard Bearer as rubbish and a work of people who only seek for what to put in their pockets.

"While it is true that certain individuals serving in the local government administration in Nimba County were paid to prepare the petition just to impose another colonial government on the Liberian people, especially on the Nimba people, It is also necessary for the public to note that the petition did not meet the consensus of the Nimba people as the July 26 was not intended for any political manipulation," the statement stressed.

The citizens argued that the petitioning of President Sirleaf overshadowed the cutting of ribbons to several development projects in the county, something they said politically abused opposition politicians who traveled to Nimba to take part in the celebration.

The citizens called on the public not to believe the government sponsored petition that was underwritten by tax payer's money to mislead people about the political direction of the people of Nimba.

Meanwhile, two Lawmakers of Nimba who recently castigated Senator Prince Johnson for not attending the July 26 Celebration have been condemned by a cross -section of citizens from the county.

Senator Adolphus Dolo and Representative Francis Karway, who are members of the ruling Unity Party said recently that they will not vote for Senator Johnson and would campaign against him, arguing that it was not his time.

These statements have since not gone down well with citizens of the county, who feel it was an act of begging for job from the Unity Party. Some questions many are asking are, "who determines whose time it is to become president of Liberia? Is it Representative Karway or Senator Dolo?"

"Those guys know that they are already out of the Capitol Building, so they are trying to tie their "lappa nose" to that of Ellen for job," a youth leader of Bahn indicated.

Senator Johnson boycotted the recent July 26 Celebration in Nimba due to propaganda ploy designed to match the event aimed at blackmailing and belittling opposition politicians.

SIERRA LEONE

Sierra Leoneans regret focus on Campbell testimony

Sierra Leoneans expressed regret on Wednesday at the spotlight that has been trained on their bloody past by the courtroom appearances of model Naomi Campbell at a war crimes trial last week.

Prosecutors called Campbell to testify in the trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor for war crimes relating to conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

They say Campbell could help shed light on whether Taylor received so-called "blood diamonds" from rebels in Sierra Leone which he used to buy weapons. Taylor denies all charges.

Some Sierra Leoneans say they are sick of the association between their country, Charles Taylor and "blood diamonds".

"The world should stop talking about Charles Taylor," said labourer Abu Sesay. "The case of Naomi Campbell means nothing to me and my family."

Campbell told the U.N-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone she had been given "dirty looking pebbles" after a charity dinner in South Africa in 1997, but did not know if they were diamonds from Taylor.

Her testimony, splashed across the pages of British newspapers, has since been contradicted by actress Mia Farrow, who was also at the dinner hosted by then South African president Nelson Mandela.

In the capital of the former British colony in West Africa, a big-screen TV has been set up publicly so residents can watch proceedings, but it has attracted few viewers.

"The Charles Taylor issue to we Sierra Leoneans is not so important any more, so bringing Naomi Campbell to the court ... is not important," said Ibrahim Jalloh, an economist and lecturer in Freetown.

Lawyer Suliman Sesay said he was too busy with his own cases to pay attention to events in The Hague.

"What some of us are interested in is the outcome of the trial ... but for now I do not have any interest," he said. "Charles Taylor and Naomi Campbell are not important to me."

GUINEA

Guinea presidential run-off set for Sept. 19 –sources

Guinea will hold a run-off presidential election on Sept. 19 aimed at restoring civilian rule to the West African bauxite producing nation.

The date marks a roughly two-month delay to the decisive second round after candidates challenged the results of the initial poll held on June 27.

"The date of the second round of the presidential election has been fixed for Sept. 19, 2010," a government decree read out on state television said.

Guinea has been run by a military junta since the death of President Lansana Conte and a subsequent bloodless coup in December 2008. A government report seen by Reuters late last year said the ensuing turmoil had cut into exports of the aluminium ore bauxite.

The run-off will pit former Prime Minister Cellou Dallein Diallo against veteran opposition leader Alpha Conde.

The rivals differ little in policy proposals and have both said they plan to review billions of dollars worth of mining deals, signed by multinational companies such as Vale and Rio Tinto.

The election is seen as Guinea's best chance of drawing a line under decades of authoritarian rule since independence from France in 1958, and could help cement fragile gains in stability in a region rocked by three civil wars in a decade.

SUPPORT

West Africa's mediator for Guinea, Burkinabe President Blaise Compaore, called last week for the run-off to be scheduled quickly to ensure the election process was not derailed.

Diallo, who won 44 percent of the vote in the first round, has said he is confident of victory in the run-off after signing a deal with third-placed Sidya Toure, who took 13.62 percent of the initial vote.

Conde, meanwhile, took 18.25 percent in first round but has complained he was robbed because the election commission did not send enough voting material to Haute Guinea region, home to many from his Malinke ethnicity.

Conde has since secured the backing of fourth-placed Lansana Kouyate, a move that will further galvanise support from the Malinke which make up 35 percent of Guinea's population.

"We hope that, at this point, all of the dysfunction we've seen will be fixed," Conde said on state television after the announcement of the run-off date.

July 18 was first proposed for the run-off but that slipped as challenges to the first round results were heard, and ultimately rejected, by the Supreme Court.

Some critics have accused Guinea's interim administration, which is headed by Prime Minister Jean Marie Dore and overseen by the military rulers, of trying to prolong its time in power.

Analysts have said the delay could allow the election commission to rectify logistical problems from the first round, but diplomats are eager to see the soldiers return to barracks.

ECONOMY

GHANA

Ghana records 3.3 million metric tons of maritime trade in first quarter

Ghana, in the first quarter of this year, recorded a total of 3,370,757 metric tons of maritime trade.

The total maritime trade consisted of 2,413,711 metric tons of import trade, and 957,046 metric tons of export trade through the Tema and Takoradi Ports.

The statistics are contained in a copy of the April-June 2010 edition of the Shipping Review Journal of the Ghana Shippers' Authority made available to the Ghana News Agency in Tema.

It stated that the figure recorded for the import maritime trade for the first quarter of this year, showed an 18 percent increase over the 2,041,944 recorded for the same period in

2009.

Total export maritime trade for the period, also recorded, a 17 percent increase over 816,102 data for the first quarter of last year.

According to the journal, import cargoes were loaded and discharged at various ports of the world, categorized as the United Kingdom, North America, North Continent, Mediterranean Europe, Far East, and Africa among others.

It indicated that the highest import tonnage of 628,471 metric tons representing 26 percent of the total maritime import trade came into Ghana from the Far East.

The second highest tonnage of 607,078 metric tons representing 25 percent of total import maritime trade were from the North Continent, while 314,539 metric tons representing 13 percent of the total, came in from the Mediterranean Europe.

Two percent of the import tonnage came from the United Kingdom which posted 41,953 metric tons of the imports.

The Authority disclosed in the Journal that a total of 80 shipping lines participated in the carriage of the over three million metric tons maritime cargo.

Out of the 80 shipping lines, 51 handled the over 1.5 million metric tons of Liner Cargo, 14 participated in the Dry Bulk Trade, while the remaining 14 also handled the Liquid Bulk Trade.

Inflation drops to 9.46 per cent in July

The annual inflation rate dropped marginally by 0.6 per cent to close at 9.46 per cent in July, up from 9.52 per cent in June. The drop was the 13th in the series after it peaked at 20.74 per cent in June 2009. This brings the respective monthly change between June and July 2010 to 0.82 per cent, which was lower than 1.57 per cent recorded between May and June 2010.

Dr Grace Bediako, Government Statistician, who released the figures at a press conference in Accra on Wednesday, attributed the trend to declining food prices and prudent fiscal management of the economy.

The food component which, had a weight of 44.91 per cent, dropped to 5.84 per cent in July, up from 6.13 per cent in June. On the other hand, the non-food component, which had a weight of 55.09 per cent, recorded a double digit inflation rate of 11.96 in July as compared to 11.89 during the previous month.

On Regional basis, inflation ranged from 5.55 per cent to 14.94 per cent with the Greater Accra Region recording the highest inflation rate, which stood at 14.94 per cent while Central Region recorded the least inflation of 5.55 per cent. Central, Ashanti, Western,

Eastern and Volta regions recorded inflation rates below the national rate of 9.46 per cent.

Dr Bediako said the recent increase on utility tariffs led to a marginal rise in inflation rate for the housing and utility sector. She said implementation of the Single Spine Salary Structure would help offset some of the effects of inflation as disposable income of consumers would rise.

Dr Bediako said August, September and October generally had lowest inflation rates but could not forecast whether or not such would be the trend for this year.

Vice President calls on banks to further reduce lending rates

Vice President John Dramani Mahama on Wednesday called on banks to further reduce their base and interest rates to allow small and medium enterprises that depend on loans to survive in the commercial competition in the country.

"I am encouraged by your gradual reduction of base and interest rates; we want you to further lower the rates for the enterprises not to suffer undue hardships in their commercial activities."

Vice President Mahama made this call when a delegation from the Standard Chartered Bank called on him to introduce Mr. Kweku Bedu-Addo, new Chief Executive Officer of the Bank and to announce the departure of Mr. Hemen Shah, former Chief Executive at the Castle, Osu.

He also called for a closer collaboration between government and the local banks as that had the potential of catapulting the developing needs of the country in terms of better loan conditions and terms.

"Most of the time, government had to go outside for financial support and I believe that we can get the same support from the local banks to address our numerous developmental challenges."

He gave the assurance that the economy would continue to improve and create an enabling environment for investments and other attractions adding "the economic progress of this country, I must once again state, is not a fluke."

Mr. Bedu-Addo, the in-coming Chief Executive Officer of the bank pledged to partner government in the areas of agriculture, oil and Gas and mineral exploitation in the coming years.

In a similar development, Mr. Seydou Bukari, the Benenois Ambassador to Ghana, also called to bid the government and people of Ghana farewell after five years of diplomatic tour in Ghana.

Vice President Mahama commended the people of Benin for their democratic prowess in organising several general elections without serious disturbances adding "Benin is one of the country's that has gone unnoticed in their democracy."

He wished him well in his next tour to Doha, Qatar.

Mr. Bukari said his first ambassadorial position in Ghana had equipped him adequately to undertake similar positions in other countries adding "85 and I will forever be grateful to Ghanaians for whatever I have become today."

Inflation drops despite increase in government expenditure

Inflation rate for July dropped to a record 9.46 per cent despite the over 50 per cent increase in government expenditure in 2010, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MOFEP) said in Accra on Wednesday.

A statement from the Ministry said inflation reached 18.1 per cent in December 2008 as a result of demand pressures arising from the fiscal expansion stance of the previous government and rising crude oil prices.

It said this led to a build-up of strong inflationary pressures in the economy, which caused the inflation rate to continue to rise in the first half of 2009, reaching an all time high of 20.7 per cent in June.

The statement said the inflation was also fuelled by the weakened domestic currency, which lost more than 30 per cent of its value against the dollar between July 2008 and June 2009.

However, it said since June 2009, the inflation rate had been on a steady decline, reaching 16 per cent in December 2009, and by June this year, the inflation rate had dropped to 9.5 per cent and expected to reach at least seven per cent by December this year.

The statement said the notion that government was holding back payments to creditors which had caused the inflation rate to decline and was also starving commercial banks of cash inflow, thereby making it difficult for the banks to reduce their lending rates was not only false but a complete misrepresentation of the facts.

"Contrary to what the critics believe in, Government expenditure is rather on the increase," it added.

British High Commissioner to woo UK investors for Ghana

Dr Nicholas Westcott, British High Commissioner, on Friday discussed with government how best development partners from the UK can help facilitate private sector participation in Ghana's development.

This came up when he paid a courtesy call on Mr. Alban S.K. Bagbin, Minister for Water Resources, Works and Housing in Accra.

The visit was to discuss issues of mutual interest in the Water Resources, Works and Housing Ministry with respect to infrastructure development.

Briefing the Ghana News Agency after the meeting, Mr. Bagbin said he used the opportunity to brief the Commissioner on the approval of the STX housing project, which was recently approved by Parliament to construct houses for the security services.

Mr. Bagbin said a delegation of reputable UK investors would visit the country in August for amicable dialogue on the developmental projects.

Veep optimistic of GDP rise over 7%

Vice President John Dramani Mahama on Friday expressed optimism that Ghana's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would rise above seven per cent by the end of this year.

He said government had put in place effective economic measures, which had been demonstrated in the reduction in inflation and bank interest rates, "and I will therefore not be surprised if we hit 7.2 percent GDP by the end of 2010."

Vice President gave this assurance when Claude Maeten the Ambassador and Head of the European Union, paid a courtesy call on him at the Castle, Osu.

He appealed to the EU President to impress upon his management team to consider fulfilling all their economic pledges to developing countries to embark on basic infrastructural development that would qualify them to achieve the Millennium Development Goals of their various countries.

The Vice President commended them for their support over the years even in the face of difficulties like the world economic crunch among others.

Mr. Maeten gave the assurance that EU would continue to support the developing countries to come out of their economic woes adding "the government of Ghana has done well considering the short time you have come to power."

Mr. Gong Jianz Hong, Chinese Ambassador to Ghana, who was also at the Castle to introduce himself, promised to collaborate effectively with Ghana government to achieve the development goals of both countries.

Mr. Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary General, who also paid a courtesy call on the Vice President, currently the Acting President of Ghana, commended government for the development strides the country was enjoying.

CAMEROON

Cameroon oil output slides further to 66,000 bpd

Cameroon's crude oil production averaged about 66,000 barrels per day during the first half of 2010, marking an 11.5 percent drop from the same period a year ago, the state oil company SNH said on Wednesday.

The central African country's oil industry has been in steep decline in recent years as mature fields become tapped out, putting at risk its main source of export revenue.

The government has blamed rising rates of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea for part of the slump in output, adding maritime insecurity has also hampered foreign investment needed to keep production from its offshore fields steady.

Crude production averaged nearly 68,000 bpd in the first quarter and 65,000 bpd in the second quarter, SNH said.

Despite declining output, higher market prices for oil CLc1 boosted revenues to 461.566 billion CFA (\$916 million) from 321.509 billion in the same period of 2009, SNH said.

Cameroon oil output averaged just over 73,000 bpd in 2009, down from 84,000 bpd the year before, and sharply below peaks of 186,000 bpd hit in 1986.

ENVIRONMENT

CAMEROON

Dutch Ship Dumps Toxic Waste off West Africa, Says Govt.

Cameroon's environment minister on Wednesday accused a Dutch ship of dumping toxic waste off the Cameroonian coast. Environmentalists say western firms treat Africa as a "dustbin" for their dangerous waste.

A statement by Environment Minister Pierre Hélé said the government had information that a ship called the NV Nashville was dumping waste off the coast of West Africa, but provided no details of its location or movement.

The minister called on his counterparts in neighbouring countries to be on the lookout for any suspicious vessels.

"Our friends in the west are very dangerous people," ministry official Benoît Bitjocka told AFP news agency.

"They treat Africa like a dustbin."

This is not the first time European ships have dumped waste off the coast of West Africa.

In 2006, toxic material was dumped from the Probo Koala cargo ship in waters off Côte d'Ivoire. According to an Ivorian court, the waste was responsible for killing 17 people, and poisoning thousands.

The company that leased the ship, London-based multinational Trafigura, paid Abidjan 152 million euros in compensation to avoid legal proceedings.

IMMIGRATION/ REFUGEE/ IDPs

GHANA

Ghana and IOM commit to address migration issues

Ghana on Tuesday signed a cooperative agreement with International Organisation for Migration (IOM), to create a platform for IOM to address migration challenges in the country.

Under the agreement, IOM would efficiently and effectively prosecute its agenda of offering support to migrants to and from Ghana to ensure legal migration conforms to objectives of government to secure and protect the rights of citizens.

Alhaji Muhammad Mumuni, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, who initialled for Ghana, said although migration of workers, students and professionals was recognised as the current defining feature of the world, migrants of all categories, were susceptible to the abuse of their rights and privileges due to their status as non-nationals.

He noted that there was still a huge gap between laws that guaranteed the human rights and fundamental freedoms of migrants as against the measures and mechanisms that were put in place by various countries to effectively deliver these rights.

Alhaji Mumuni said government had retooled Ghana's foreign policy objectives to people-centred in line with the 93Better Ghana Agenda".

He said in line with that policy, the work of IOM to ensure the rights of migrants, were safeguarded to be conformed to government's objective, adding that the agreement would bring mutual benefits to both parties.

Ms Dyane Epstein, Chief of Mission of IOM, said the international migration was poised to become the key dimension of both globalisation and development.

She noted that international attention in recent years had turned to migration issues, particularly the need for strong management structures and systems that required a comprehensive approach by stakeholders.

Ms Epstein said IOM in collaboration with stakeholders in Ghana would evolve strategies to address the challenges of migration and seized the opportunities migration provided for economic and social growth.

The IOM started its operations in Ghana in 1987 building the capacity of institutions through the Return of Qualified Nationals programme that enabled highly skilled Ghanaian migrants to contribute to the development of the country.

It has implemented a host of projects and programmes involving both internal and international migration in Ghana and West African sub-region over the past two decades in areas like migration policy, labour migration, migration and development, counter-trafficking and assisted voluntary returns.

HEALTH

GHANA

Mills concerned about the sustainability of NHIS

President John Evans Atta Mills has noted that the 54 per cent of payments made by the National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA) on the cost of medicine for clients is unsustainable.

"This high expenditure on medicines alone poses a major threat to the sustainability of

our National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS)," he said in a speech read on his behalf at the Diamond Jubilee Celebration of the Pharmaceutical Society of Ghana (PSGH) in Kumasi on Thursday.

President Mills, who was represented by Mr Robert Rojo Mettle Nunoo, Deputy Minister of Health, said a monitoring exercise undertaken by the NHIA revealed high prevalence of prescriptions of antibiotics, especially expensive brands of the drug and pain killers.

The highlight of the five-day event was the conferment of an Honorary Fellowship, the highest award of the Society on the Asantehene, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, who is also the Chancellor of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST).

The celebration, being held on the theme: "PSGH at 75: Celebrating the contributions of Pharmacists to National Development" would include an Annual General Meeting and a Dinner Awards ceremony.

President Mills said some pharmacies and chemical sellers' shops have also been involved in fraudulent practices, making it necessary for government to change the current prescription form in use.

"Fortunately, the sixth edition of the Standard Treatment Guidelines and the Essential Medicines List for Ghana are now available.

"I would urge the PSGH to take an active interest in the dissemination of these two documents and to be involved in the orientation of service providers on the use of these documents," the President said.

The two documents have set out the standards for stocking and use of medicines at the various levels of the health care delivery system and for the management of the individual patient.

President Mills asked PSGH to lead the way in making Ghana the centre for the production and export of pharmaceuticals.

"The Pharmaceutical industry is of national strategic importance in all countries and I am determined to ensure that the industry in Ghana will take its rightful place in securing for us all needed essential medicines."

Dr Alexander Dodoo, President of the Society, said the NHIS could not be successful without pharmacists, explaining that the majority of patients and more than 90 per cent of health conditions are managed by the professional body.

The Society, he said, is anxious of the Capitation Policy by the NHIA and called on government for wider consultation with stakeholders before piloting the programme.

"Even though the policy may be well-meaning, it can seriously jeopardise the stable

pharmaceutical environment. and can adversely affect the NHIS. We are willing and ready to work with government to ensure that patients, government and the Health Service get the best as far as medicines are concerned."

Dr Dodoo expressed dissatisfaction that pharmacists are completely ignored in laws promulgated to govern their profession, "while some components do not reflect the views, wishes and essential views of the whole body of Pharmacy".

He said, to meet the global changing trend, every student to be enrolled for Pharmacy course from 2011/2012 academic year, would undertake Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm D) Programme.

The Pharm D Pharmacist would be equipped with competencies to make him or her, an expert in medicines as well as their clients.

Madam Clavenda Bright-Parker, Ambassador at Large and Special Envoy of the President of Liberia, Mrs Ellen Sirleaf Johnson, said new challenges in the treatment of diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis calls for innovative research methods to reverse the trend.

She asked pharmacists to be at the forefront in the fight against counterfeit drugs.

Professor Kwasi Kwafo Adarkwa, out-going Vice-Chancellor of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science Technology (KNUST), expressed the hope that the Society's anniversary would provide the needed platform for deliberations that would streamline pharmaceutical practice in Ghana.

Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, whose conferment attracted cheers, thrilled the crowd with his light-hearted speech that he is an honorary fellow of the PSGH and that nobody could bully him with pharmaceutical terminologies.

The Asantehene spoke against the proliferation of fake drugs in the country and urged pharmacists to lead the crusade against the practice.

A citation that accompanied his conferment described him as an "Ambassador of Peace and Diplomat par excellent," which has brought innovation to the chieftaincy institution.

LIBERIA

Nation Launches National Strategic Framework on HIV-Aids

The National AIDS Commission of Liberia on Thursday, August 5, launched the National HIV and AIDS Strategic Framework 2010-2014 at the Monrovia City Hall. The National Strategic Framework was launched on behalf of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf,

who is also the Chair of the National AIDS Commission, by Dr. Edward McClain, Minister of State for Presidential Affairs.

The National HIV and AIDS Strategic Framework 2010-2014 will provide a framework for efforts aimed at preventing the spread of HIV and mitigating its impact on society. The two main goals of the five-year National Strategic Framework include: containing HIV prevalence among the general population to below 1.5 percent by 2014, and mitigating the impact of the epidemic on the health and wellbeing of persons infected and affected by HIV.

"Those who are HIV positive and have come forward to say we are part of the solution are our heroes," said Dr. McClain. "We must create an environment where we can in earnest contain the spread of HIV at 1.5% and begin reversing it by 2015."

The Liberia Demographic and Health Survey (LDHS) of 2007 shows an HIV rate of 1.5 percent among the general population aged between 15 and 49 indicating a low-level generalized epidemic. However, the HIV rate among women is higher (1.8 percent) than among men (1.2 percent), revealing women's higher vulnerability to HIV infection. Experts have warned that Liberia needs to increase the intensity and coverage of HIV prevention and care efforts to avert an epidemic of Eastern and Southern African proportions.

Speaking on behalf of the UN Family, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Rule of Law, Ms. Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu said "the prevalence of HIV in Liberia may be low. However, HIV steadily marches on, and now, rather than later, is the best time for us to rally behind Liberia in preventing the HIV from spreading. We cannot allow Liberia to suffer such a fate, in addition to the challenges of extreme levels of poverty and unacceptably high levels of sexual and gender based violence."

"I restate the UN system's commitment to supporting the National AIDS Commission's goal of 'Zero Discrimination, Zero new HIV infections and Zero AIDS related deaths' in Liberia," she added.

In special remarks at the launch, Dr. Ben Chirwa, Director General of the National AIDS Council of Zambia, related that "Liberia has 3000 people on HIV treatment. Zambia has 100 times (300,000 people) the number that Liberia has on treatment." Dr. Chirwa, sponsored by UNAIDS to share experiences with the National AIDS Commission of Liberia, said "this is because Zambia was complacent. We thought AIDS was from outside."

Giving the vote of thanks, Dr. Ivan Camanor, National AIDS Commission Executive Director thanked the National Steering Committee of the National AIDS Strategic Framework that has worked on the document for over 3 years for having brought it to a successful conclusion and setting the platform for implementation.

Key activities under the National Strategic Framework will involve improving the coverage and quality of existing prevention, care and treatment services, as well as strengthening the involvement of non-health government sectors, civil society and the private sector in efforts to prevent the spread of HIV and respond to its effects.

The Government and its partners have taken critical steps towards a national and cross-sectoral response to HIV and AIDS in Liberia. A Secretariat for the National AIDS Commission has been established, the National Strategic Framework has been finalized, while a number of other initiatives are underway, including prevention of mother to child transmission efforts, strengthening of blood safety, provision of post-exposure prophylaxis and condoms, and awareness raising.

Other government personalities who participated in the launch were Ministers of Health & Social Welfare, Labor, Gender & Development, Youth & Sports and Education.

SIERRA LEONE

Free Health Care Clocks 100 Days - Still No Minister of Health

Pregnant women and suckling mothers still suffer at the Tongo health post as husbands are urged to pay for services.

The free health care initiative for pregnant women, lactating mothers and children under the age of five was introduced by President Ernest Bai Koroma on the 27th April 2010. The president's intervention in the health care delivery services was a laudable venture as the main objective for its implementation was to reduce the high infant and child mortality rate in the country.

Today marks one hundred days since the scheme was introduced and the deputy Ministry of Health and Sanitation, during the weekly press briefing on Thursday at the Ministry of Information and Communication, lavished praises on President Koroma and members of his ministry for making the scheme a success since it was introduced one hundred days ago.

Koroma however noted that there were still challenges especially in the areas of infrastructure, drug distribution and human resource capacity. He noted that all government hospitals and peripheral health units across the country now have enough essential drugs to take care of suckling mothers and their children.

The free health care service was launched amidst serious controversies among which was the call by medical personnel for improved conditions of service, which the health workers believed should have been considered first before initiating the scheme.

Their anxiety was laid to rest with the intervention of the President, who promised improved conditions with an increment in the health workers' salary structure. Donor partners including UNICEF, the World Bank and other humanitarian organizations, have been frantically working to achieve this goal.

However, the parliamentary oversight committee on health recently paid a working visit to the provincial headquarter towns of Makeni, Bo, Kenema and other areas to assess the free health care service, its challenges and to chart a way forward for the vulnerable people.

Hon. Erick Jumu informed the general public through the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) during an interview from Makeni that it was unfortunate to have discovered that even though government had announced an increment in the salaries of health workers, yet there are health personnel who are not receiving salaries at all.

He said the unavailability of essential drugs was also another problem brought forward by the health workers.

Before the launch of the free health care scheme, Concord Times newspaper assigned its most senior reporters to various regions across the country to do an assessment on the readiness of health facilities, taking into consideration infrastructure and human resource capacity.

We take you back to one of our well investigated stories:

At the Pujehun government hospital like many other hospitals across the country, facilities were grossly inadequate. The hospital is manned by two doctors, the District Medical Officer and the Medical Superintendent; five state enrolled community health nurse; one state registered nurse; one district health sister (DHS); nine nursing aid, 25 volunteers, and other personnel including porters, vaccinators, environmental health officers and security guards who supervise 61 peripheral health units (PHU). These units are located in the 12 chiefdoms making up the Pujehun district: Kpange Kabonde, Makpele, Malen, Barri, Soro Gbeima, Gallinas Peri, Sowa, Pejeh, Kpaka, Mano Sakrmi, Kpange Krim and Yake Mo Kpukumu Krim.

It came out clearly that though a novelty, the free healthcare delivery could pose a huge challenge to the running of the facilities. According to DHS Hawa Kallon, the PHUs should be able to provide basic emergency obstetric and newborn care (BEMoNC).

"This is not yet the case. The hospital has not yet been fully rehabilitated and it is yet to be fully equipped with drugs and instruments. The BEMoNC centers are in Sahn Mallen, Potoru, Gbonolapi, Bumpeh Perri, and Zimmi," Kallon observed, noting that storage facilities for the PHU have not been provided. She said they need ambulances to help bring patients to the hospital as some PHU don't have the BEMoNC services.

But Matron Susan Charles is hopeful. She said the district hospital was preparing to meet the deadline for the free delivery services. She, nonetheless, agreed that the hospital still has major human resource, infrastructural and other constraints to overcome if it were to meet the standards required for the implementation of the imminent free healthcare service.

She cited the issue of non-functional medical facilities, in terms of a functional operating theater; blood bank, the unavailability of safe drug storage facility; no modern water supply system, functional laboratory; no waste disposal and management systems. Nowhere in the hospital, including the operating theater, there is a functional fan or air condition system. Life saving operations is done at risk; no proper record keeping, poor toilet facilities, no kitchen, no technicians and staff are mostly unpaid volunteers.

It was also discovered that all emergency operations are performed on any single day, but only during the three hours that the hospital is provided with electricity by the National Power Authority (NPA). At any other time, due to lack of energy supply, no surgery, not even emergency ones could be performed. The matron admitted that: "This obviously puts the lives of pregnant women with complications and children needing surgery at risk. This situation is unacceptable in the face of the nation's high infant and maternal mortality rates. The hospital lacks any functional vehicles or ambulances."

She also confirmed that drugs are sent by government and the UN child rights agency, Unicef, to the hospital but expressed concerns that operating instrument and surgical instrument are old and worn out.

"There is no oxygen concentrator for the children's and maternity ward. The spacing of the maternity and children's ward is small. Thank God Unicef is building a maternity complex for the hospital," she stated.

Matron Charles said the hospital often receive patients with serious complications including those with ante partum and postpartum hemorrhage, eclamptic fits, pregnancy induce hypertension, obstructed labour, retained placenta and sepsis. There is a poor referral system from the PHUs; this is further complicated by poorly motorable roads. Most of the children are brought in with severe malaria anemia, malnutrition, and diarrhea and vomiting.

She rounded up with a piece of advice for the government ahead of the free health care package for pregnant women, lactating mothers and children under five. She said despite all the challenges, government must put plans in place to rectify the situation and ensure that hospitals across the country meet the minimum required standards to be able to manage the free health care delivery services. It must do everything in its power to recruit more trained and qualified staff and provide them with necessary conditions to serve the people.

Come April 27, this year, President Ernest Bai Koroma will unveil the free healthcare delivery system as part of the goodies marking the country's 49th Independence Day

celebration. In the last two weeks the President conducted a brief tour of major facilities in the country, including Pujehun, to get firsthand impression of the current state of affairs across government hospitals in the provinces. In Pujehun the president admitted that the district was probably the worst hit in terms of facilities and infrastructure. The contractors for the medical store have lagged behind and would certainly miss the April 27 deadline.

Meanwhile, an alternative, or what the government called 'Plan B', was agreed upon for a better condition of services.

HUMAN RIGHTS/ GENDER/ SOCIAL ISSUES

GHANA

Vice President calls for partnership between Ghana and Iran

Vice President John Dramani Mahama on Tuesday called for a partnership between the governments of Ghana and Iran to tap the rich experience of Iran in oil exploration and production. "Considering your immense experience in both on and off-shore oil exploitation, I will suggest that we have an effective partnership that will equip Ghanaians with the technical know-how in oil production."

Vice President Mahama made this suggestion when a delegation of Iranians led by Dr Sadigh Khalilian, Minister for Jihad Agriculture in the Islamic Republic of Iran, called on him at the Castle, Osu, to outline areas of cooperation with Ghana. The delegation is on a two-day visit to Ghana to cement some of their bilateral discussions held years back and to create opportunities for cooperation in Agriculture, Health and Education.

Vice President Mahama commended the Iranian government for sponsoring Ghanaian students in several sectors and called for the expansion and extension of the programme to train more Ghanaians in oil exploration and exploitation to augment the staff engaged in the country's oil exploration.

"The Islamic University in Ghana is one of the landmarks of the Iranian government, which had over the years admitted a lot of students from all religions, and as for the Iran clinic, it has become a household name in Ghana." He also appealed to the Iranian government to help Ghana establish a permanent Hajj Board in view of their vast experience in the organization of such programmes in their country over the years.

Dr Khalilian commended Ghanaians for their 2008 peaceful elections, which he said encouraged them to hold more bilateral discussions for the benefit of both countries. He announced that his government was ready to partner Ghana in the areas of Agriculture,

health, education, roads and energy sectors and invited both the President and the Vice President to visit his country to conclude those agreements tabled on the floor between their leaders. "We are interested in carrying out a number of collaborations with African countries and we really want Ghana to be one of our major partners," he said.

Court discharges Mpiani, Wireko-Brobby over Ghana @ 50

An Accra Fast Track High Court on Tuesday discharged Dr Charles Wireko-Brobby and Kwadwo Okyere Mpiani, two former officials of the defunct Ghana@50 Secretariat of all charges of wilfully causing financial loss to the State.

Dr Wireko-Brobby, aka Tarzan, was the Former Chief Executive Officer of Ghana@50 Secretariat and Mpiani, Chairman of National Planning Committee for Ghana@50.

They were facing four counts of willfully causing financial loss to the State.

They pleaded not guilty and were admitted to GH¢35 million self recognisance bail each.

Mr. Justice Samuel Marful-Sau, a Court of Appeal Judge, sitting with additional responsibility as a High Court judge, in his ruling, upheld the motion of the defence that under Article 280 of the 1992 Constitution, the accused persons were entitled to an appeal at the Court of Appeal because the Ghana@50 Commission of Inquiry had the powers of the High Court.

He said in as much as the State had the right to issue a White Paper on the Commission's Report, the State had elected to make findings of the Commission a judgement of the High Court.

Mr. Justice Marful-Sau said even though the Attorney General had the right to prosecute, it must ensure the due process of the law.

The court said arguments put forward by the prosecution that the accused persons misappropriated Ghana@50 properties at Trassaco Valley were not part of the charges before the court.

He said Article 282 (61)(2a) and (62) of the 1992 Constitution made it unlawful for the prosecution to charge the accused persons, who appeared before the Commission of Enquiry as witnesses with any criminal offence.

Mr. Justice Marful-Sau advised that anytime the State wanted to prosecute people considered to have misappropriated State resources, it could resort to other investigative agencies and not the Commission of Enquiry.

Mr. Anthony Gyambiby, Chief State Attorney, said the ruling confirmed deepening of the rule of law and democracy in Ghana.

Mr. Akoto Ampaw, Counsel for Dr Wireko-Brobby said the ruling was a landmark which would go a long way to enhance legal education in the country.

He said the fear of citizens to appear before Commissions of Enquiries would be dispelled by the ruling.

Mr. Yonni Kulendi, Counsel for Mpiani added his voice to Mr. Akoto Ampaw and said the erudite delivery of the ruling by the judge would serve as a useful guidance for society.

The facts of the case are that Parliament approved 31.80 million dollars, equivalent to GH¢29.31 million, for the celebration of Ghana@50 from January to December 2007 and holding of African Union Summit.

The prosecution said the amount was made up of a first tranche of GH¢18.29 million, which was approved by Parliament on July 20, 2006, and a second tranche, which was a loan of 11.80 million dollars, equivalent to GH¢11.02 million, contracted from the management of Fidelity Bank and approved by Parliament.

It said aside from those sums approved by Parliament, 93 huge sums of money appeared to have been spent on the celebrations", adding that more than a year after the celebrations, many projects remained uncompleted and the government was saddled with huge debts.

The prosecution said it was against that background that the Commission of Enquiry was set up by President John Evans Atta Mills to enquire into activities of Ghana@50 Secretariat and the entire celebration.

The Commission of Enquiry found out that although Parliament had approved GH¢29.31 million for the celebration, GH¢97,776,338.44 was spent on it, out of which GH¢75,569,563.34 was directly spent by the Secretariat and NPC.

"The Secretariat and NPC, therefore, spent about GH¢46,999,563 in excess of the amount of money approved by Parliament for the celebration," the prosecution said.

It further stated that the Commission of Enquiry also found out that contrary to Articles 176 and 178 of the 1992 Constitution, the Secretariat and NPC used all the internally generated funds, totaling GH¢19,352,498.00, without any approval from Parliament.

50% of Brazilian buses for persons with disabilities-Veep

Vice President John Dramani Mahama on Wednesday announced that 50 per cent of buses expected from Brazil would be friendly to persons with disabilities.

He said out of the 200 Brazilian buses expected in October this year, 100 of them would

be fitted with disability facility to make them accessible to physically challenged persons.

"We have already instructed all Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies to comply with the directive of making all public institutions accessible to all persons with disabilities."

The Vice President announced these when officials of the National Council on Persons with Disability and their counterparts from the University of Manitoba and Canadian Centre for Disability Studies, both from Canada, called on him at the Castle, Osu, to announce their collaborations with partners.

He said the constitution of the National Council on persons with disabilities was the beginning of the educational programmes that would help to redress their challenges as public institutions noting that the transport system still lacked facilities for them.

Vice President Mahama expressed displeasure at the way persons with disabilities were being discriminated against in society.

"You realize that even in a family, if somebody's education will have to be sacrificed then it is always persons with disabilities instead of others, who have other opportunities, than the physically challenged."

He gave the assurance that government would do everything possible to make persons with disabilities to enjoy better facilities in public entities.

Dr Michael Baffoe, Leader of the Canadian delegation announced that they would use Ghana as their continental hub because of the country's democratic credentials and political stability.

He said apart from signing some agreements with the University of Ghana and other partners in Ghana, they would continue to support Ghanaian students engaged in social activities to articulate the views and actions of social organizations.

Government rolls out plan for take-off of STX housing project

The Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing has rolled-out an elaborate plan to facilitate what sector Minister, Alban Bagbin, calls "a smooth take off of the STX Housing Project nationwide".

It comes just a week after Parliament approved three important agreements covering the project, namely: The Off-take Agreement between the Government of Ghana and STX Engineering and Construction Ghana Ltd., the Joint Venture Agreement between the Government of Ghana, STX Engineering and Construction Ghana Ltd. and Home Finance Company Ltd., as well as the Suppliers' Credit Agreement between the Government of Ghana and STX Engineering and Construction Ghana Ltd.

At a representative stakeholders' meeting on Tuesday, August 10, 2010 "key decisions were taken on various aspects of the 1.5 billion dollar project, which will provide 30,000 Housing units for the nation's security services countrywide."

For instance, the meeting approved a "detailed plan for the setting up of a special purpose company - which will be the Project Company in line with the STX Housing Agreement approved by Parliament on Tuesday August 3, 2010 - to execute the entire project."

A government statement released on Wednesday and signed by Honourable Alban Bagbin said, "The location of the sites of the houses and the number of housing units to be built on each designated site, were firmed-up". The meeting also "discussed and validated" the designs and drawings of the houses submitted by the College of Architecture and Planning, consultants to STX Engineering and Construction Ghana Ltd.

"Having put these plans in place for the smooth take-off of the biggest ever housing project for our security personnel, who are in dire need of houses, it is my hope that the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning will, within the shortest possible time, execute the Suppliers' Credit Agreement between the Government of Ghana and STX

Engineering and Construction Ghana Ltd. for the project to begin."

At the meeting, the College of Architecture and Engineering, consultants for STX Ghana presented a comprehensive plan of execution on the project.

"Per the plan of the consultants, the Tesano Police Training School will be the first to host the construction of the first 1,980 housing units to be built by STX Engineering and Construction Ghana Ltd.," Hon Bagbin said.

"The Ministry has therefore started arrangements to move police personnel occupying old structures on the sites earmarked for the project to allow for smooth construction works to begin in the coming months."

The meeting, which took place at the Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing was attended by representatives of STX Engineering and Construction Ghana Ltd., the Ghana Police Service, the Ghana Armed Forces, the Ghana Real Estates Developers Association (GREDA), Home Finance Company (HFC) Ltd, State Housing Company (SHC), and the Architecture and Engineering Services Ltd. Also present was the Registrar of the Institute of Architects was also at the meeting.

The Inspector General of Police, Paul Tawiah Quaye, led the delegation from the Police Service. GREDA President, Dr. Alex Tweneboa represented his association, while Managing Director, Asare Akuffo represented the HFC. The State Housing Company was represented by its Managing Director, Mr. Mark Nii Akwei Ankrah while the Chief Executive Officer of STX Engineering and Construction Ghana Ltd, B.K. Asamoah led his company's delegation, with the Minister chairing the discussions.

Do not jeopardize the lives of residents - Veep tells contractors

Vice President John Dramani Mahama on Friday cautioned road contractors against activities that could jeopardize the lives of residents along the roads they work on.

"I want to sound a word of caution to all road contractors along the highways in the city, for the sake of the health of residents, to water the roads on daily basis to avoid dust."

Vice President Mahama gave this caution when he commissioned the Mile 7 Interchange Bridge between Achimota and Ofankor in Accra.

The GH¢14.5 million 380-metre long bridge is meant to avoid the Accra-Nsawam traffic congestion at the Mile 7 Junction.

With the commissioning, the Nsawam-Accra lane of the road would now be opened to traffic as part of the city traffic management plan.

Vice President Mahama said government had advertised for the bidding process of the Awoshie-Pokuase road to further ease traffic congestion on the Accra-Nsawam road, while the Dansoman major roads were receiving major rehabilitation.

He said a total of 58 kilometres of roads in the Tema-Ashaiman-Kpone areas, which had not received any major rehabilitation since independence, were under construction.

The Vice President, who also inspected the Tema Motorway, called on the authorities to clear all trees along the road and to replace them with flower species.

He said the presence of the trees could endanger the lives of motorists in case of any accident.

"I want you to replace the trees with small species that would serve as flowers to beautify our only motorway in the country."

At the Fiesta Royale Hotel-Legon by-pass, the Vice President announced that government would do everything possible to ease the high level of congestion in the city and urged all road users to respect road signs to avoid congestion.

Mr. Joe Gidisu, Minister for Roads and Highways, promised to construct more roads in the country to facilitate the movement of people all over the country.

He said government would continue to source money to complete and to embark on other road projects to make roads motor able.

Nii Armah Ashietey, Greater Accra Minister, said government was committed to constructing roads that would have over 50-year lifespan.

LIBERIA

Women Leaders Meet to Review Progress

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf hosted a one-day Women's Leadership Retreat in Paynesville on Saturday, and challenged Liberian women to assume leadership roles at all levels. The President said she would support the principle of women competing with men and taking up elected positions at various levels, including leadership roles in political parties in the country.

"We want to see women in politics at all levels. It is not just for President. We are talking about going down there, taking county leadership, political party leadership at the county level, at the district level, community levels and standing out in your communities," the President urged more than hundred women from all levels of Liberian society.

According to an Executive Mansion release, the Liberian leader noted that it would be difficult for women to make an impact in competitive leadership positions if they have not demonstrated their potential at the entry levels of national leadership, particularly at the local levels.

President Johnson Sirleaf spoke Saturday, August 7, at a Retreat, the theme of which was "Women and Leadership: Our Time to Lead." The workshop, held at the Samuel K. Doe Sports Complex, identified gains made by women leaders in society and the challenges they face, and offered recommendations to overcome the challenges.

The Liberian leader urged the participants to ensure that the vision of the interactive forum should be one which would ensure that every young girl, at birth, should know that she can be whatever she wants to be without any political, legal, or social barriers. "To achieve that, we all have to work on all the issues raised here at the forum. You identified the challenges, the opportunities; what we need now is to turn them into specific strategies, time-bound roadmap, toward the achievement of specific identified goals," the President pointed out.

Participants at the retreat, moderated by Madam Leymah Gbowee, Executive Director of the Women in Peace and Security Network-Africa, identified achievements in women's leadership, over the last five years, in the provision of basic social services, including pipe-borne water, electricity, roads, shelter for the vulnerable, and a steady increase in the availability of locally grown foods on the Liberian market.

Participants also discussed the economic standing of women in Liberian society, as well as improvement in peace and security, but were quick to caution Government to ensure that women are empowered to compete with men in areas ranging from land ownership to employment based on gender equity.

The full-day event brought together prominent women leaders, among them: Montserrado County Superintendent Grace Kpan; Cllr. Yvette Chesson-Wureh, of the Angie Brooks International Center; Madam Maureen Parker, Executive Member of the National Oil Company of Liberia; Madam Mama Tumbay, Head of the Traditional Women of Liberia; Dr. Evelyn Kandakai, Executive Director of the Liberia Educational Trust (LET); Mrs. Amelia Ward, former Planning Minister of Liberia; Gender Minister Varbah Gayflor; Agriculture Minister Dr. Florence Chenoweth; Foreign Minister Olubanke King-Akerele; Mrs. Theresa Leigh-Sherman, Head of the Liberia National Red Cross Society; and Maryland County Senator Gloria Scott, among others.

BHP Billiton Grades Country

BHP Billiton, the world's largest diversified natural resources company said it is here in Liberia to create a world class iron ore cluster that will benefit the country and its people.

This message was delivered through a video shown at the First Fridays Liberia networking event at the Kendeja Hotel on Friday evening. The event was a business forum sponsored by Lone Star Communication in collaboration with other partners including the Kendeja Hotel.

BHP Billiton's Superintendent for Corporate and Commercial Services, Mark Richards, delivered brief introductory remarks before the video was played for about 100 people gathered at the Kendeja.

He indicated that BHP Billiton is in Liberia looking to create a world class iron ore business similar to what the company has done in Western Australia.

In a brief interview with the New Republic following the video, Mr. Richards noted that BHP Billiton has been in Liberia since 2005, with exploration licenses in the Nimba, Bong, Margibi and Grand Bassa Counties.

He stated that up to 400 Liberians have been employed at one time and close to 90% of their workforce are Liberians, with the potential to employ more as they move from one stage of exploration to another.

"We are very happy with the kind of progress we are making towards our vision of a world class iron ore business here in Liberia," Richards added. He said they are impressed with the quality of the people, the spirit and the enthusiasm with which they approach their jobs and learning the culture of BHP Billiton.

Asked to comment on the First Friday Liberia event, Mr. Richards said the business forum had been a great event, adding there is lots of positive energy as it is evident by the number of great people that thronged the occasion at the Robert L. Johnson Hotel Villa and Resort.

The video shown at First Fridays Liberia explained that BHP Billiton has been working with communities in the areas where it has been doing exploration work, which is what BHP Billiton does in countries where it operates, like Australia and Mozambique. In recent times in Liberia, it reconstructed three Palava Huts in Sanniquellie, Nimba County.

The Palava Huts represent the three West African leaders-Liberia's William V. S. Tubman, Guinea's Ahmed Sekou Toure and Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah who met in that city to form the Organization of African Unity (now African Union).

BHP Billiton has also donated books and teaching materials to schools in Liberia. In 2009, it reconstructed the Todee Mission School which was dedicated by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

USAID RBHS Program Presents to Stakeholders

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded "Rebuilding Basic Health Services (RBHS)" program recently hosted stakeholders in an all-day conference, at the Rib House.

The objectives of the day were to explain current and future program priorities as well as present data on the objectives, successes, and challenges. Stakeholders were also encouraged to provide their feedback on the direction the program is taking.

Stakeholders invited to attend the conference included representatives of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MOHSW), other Government agencies, USAID, RBHS implementing partners, and RBHS collaborating partners. Of particular interest during the conference was the presentation of RBHS' preliminary data that paints a picture of where RBHS is successful.

Although RBHS Chief of Party Rick Brennan was careful to stress that the data from the last quarter (April-June 2010) is preliminary pending verification, the presentation is cause for celebration. The data is gathered from the 105 health facilities supported by the RBHS program in seven counties, and on the administrative level, RBHS points to the increase in timely reporting from the health centers, and the number of facilities where staff is paid on time.

When the program started in July 2009 less than 30% of the RBHS supported facilities reported statistics back to RBHS in a timely manner, compared to over 80% now. In the same timeframe the number of facilities where staff members are being paid on time has risen from just under 50% to a full 100%.

More importantly for the Liberians who depend on the health facilities are the data showing increases in delivery of health services. Family planning has been a major success story, with RBHS supported facilities seeing a 201% increase in Family Planning counseling since July 2008. Also supporting the family planning efforts of Liberians are

the 62% increase of couple years protection available at health facilities (a measure of the availability of contraceptives).

Moreover, Liberian mothers have embraced the RBHS supported health facilities wholeheartedly and as a result there has been a 134% increase in the treatment to prevent malaria during pregnancy (ITP2), a 134% increase in the number of mothers who visit the health facilities the recommended four times during pregnancy, and an 81% increase in the number of baby-deliveries at health facilities instead of at home. Lastly thanks to the efforts of RBHS, the MoHSW awarded River Gee County the title of "Most Improved County" at the recent National Health Review for increasing its score in the MoHSW Accreditation Survey from 44% to 86%.

The US Agency for International Development funds the \$52 million RBHS program. The program supports 105 MoHSW health facilities, providing health services to an estimated 1,030,000 Liberians. The 105 facilities are concentrated in Bomi, Bong, Grand Cape Mount, Lofa, Montserrado, Nimba, and River Gee counties.

Mia Farrow and Carole White Contradict Naomi Campbell's Testimony, Issa Sesay's Cross-Examination Begins.

The much anticipated testimonies of three celebrity witnesses were concluded this week with Hollywood actress Mia Farrow and modeling agent Carole White both contradicting the evidence of supermodel Naomi Campbell about allegations that Charles Taylor gave the supermodel rough diamonds in South Africa in 1997. This week also saw the conclusion of the direct examination and the commencement of the cross-examination of Mr. Taylor's 19th witness, Issa Hassan Sesay.

Last week, Ms. Campbell herself testified about the incident that happened in South Africa, telling the judges in The Hague that two men had knocked on her door in the middle of the night, gave her a pouch, and said, "A gift for you." When she opened the pouch the following morning, she discovered that it contained "dirty-looking stones," which she later gave to Jeremy Ratcliffe, the head on the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund. When she told Ms. Farrow and Ms. White about the incident at breakfast, one of the two ladies suggested that the diamonds must have come from Mr. Taylor, an assumption that she also came to make, she said.

On Monday, both Ms. Farrow and Ms. White testified that Ms. Campbell's account of the incident was not correct.

First to testify was Ms. Farrow, who explained that the morning after they had all attended the star-studded dinner that was hosted by Nelson Mandela, she was at breakfast when Ms. Campbell approached her with excitement and told her that Mr. Taylor had sent her "a huge diamond" while she was asleep the previous night. Ms. Farrow said Ms. Campbell went on to say she was going to donate the diamond to the Nelson Mandela Children's Charity Fund.

“She [Ms. Campbell] said at night, some men had knocked at her door and there were two men that were sent by Charles Taylor, and they had given her a huge diamond and that she was going to donate it to Mr. Mandela’s charity,” Ms. Farrow told the court.

“As I recall it, she was quite excited,” she added.

Ms. Farrow said she was never shown the diamond. When asked a direct question as to whether she was the one who had told Ms. Campbell that the diamonds must have been from Mr. Taylor, Ms. Farrow said, “Absolutely not...Naomi Campbell said that diamonds were from Charles Taylor.”

Under cross-examination, defense lawyers tried to establish that Ms. Farrow had difficulty recollecting different things, that her testimony did not only contradict that of Ms. Campbell but also contradicts the statements made by Ms. White to prosecutors, and that as an activist involved in issues relating to Africa, such as Darfur, she had a motive of working against African leaders she perceived to be oppressing their people.

Defense counsel for Mr. Taylor, Morris Anyah, in cross-examining Ms. Farrow pointed out that while she was testifying that the gift given to Ms. Campbell was a “huge diamond,” Ms. Campbell herself who received the said gift had testified that there were “two to three small dirty-looking stones,” and that Ms. White in her statement to prosecutors had said there were about five pieces of diamonds.

In her response to these points, Ms. Farrow said, “I didn’t see the diamond or diamond, I can only tell you what Naomi Campbell said.”

Mr. Anyah also read a BBC Africa news article that quoted Mr. Jeremy Ractcliffe, the former head of the Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund to whom Ms. Campbell had handed the diamonds, stating “three small uncut diamonds were given to me by Naomi Campbell.”

“Three persons referring to diamonds in the plural...they were small in size,” Mr. Anyah told Ms. Farrow.

“Do you stand by your recollection that what you heard Naomi Campbell say was that this was a huge size diamond?” Mr. Anyah asked Ms. Farrow.

“That is what I recall. The other persons saw the diamonds...I can only recall what Ms. Campbell said,” Ms. Farrow responded.

“What Naomi Campbell said that morning, to the best of my recollection, she said a large diamond,” she added.

As Ms. Farrow concluded her testimony, Ms. Campbell’s former agent Mr. White commenced her evidence during which she not only contradicted Ms. Campbell’s account, but also contradicted several portions of Ms. Farrow’s testimony.

According to Ms. White, while they were all having dinner at Mr. Mandela's residence in September 1997, Mr. Taylor and Ms. Campbell "were being charming to each other...mildly flirting...they were just being affable."

Ms. White told the court that during the said company between Mr. Taylor and Ms. Campbell, the supermodel informed her (White) with excitement that Mr. Taylor had promised to send her diamonds.

"Naomi was very excited and said, 'Oh he is going to give me some diamonds,'" Ms. White said.

Ms. White also explained how Mr. Taylor and Ms. Campbell discussed that two men would enter the guesthouse with the diamonds and hand them over to Ms. Campbell. At night, she said that herself and Ms. Campbell were anxiously waiting for the two men to show up with the diamonds, but when they waited longer than expected, they decided to go to bed.

According to Ms. White, when the men eventually arrived, she was the one who first woke up to receive them before she woke Ms. Campbell up.

"[I] heard some clinking noises on my window...I opened the window and there were two guys standing on the ground...'we [the two men] have something for Ms. Campbell'...and I told them to wait. I went to Ms. Campbell's room and told her that the men were here," she explained.

When the men came into the house, Ms. White said, "they took out a scruffy piece of paper and gave it to Ms. Campbell...she opened it and showed them to me. They were quite disappointing because they were not shiny."

Contrary to Ms. Campbell's testimony that there were three pieces of diamonds in the pouch and Ms. Farrow's account that she had been informed of a "huge diamond," Ms. White told the court that she believed there were five to six pieces of diamonds in the piece of paper.

Under cross-examination by lead counsel for Mr. Taylor, Courtenay Griffiths, he pointed out that Ms. White had a breach of contract lawsuit against Ms. Campbell, and she wanted to use this story to destroy her (Ms. Campbell).

"You have a very powerful motive for lying about Ms. Campbell," Mr. Griffiths put to Ms. White.

"I suggest...that you don't come to this court with clean hands...your motive for lying...is to provide yourself with ammunition for use against her in the lawsuit," Mr. Griffiths said.

Ms. White responded that this was not the case and that the issue of blood diamonds had nothing to do with a civil matter that she had to settle in court with Ms. Campbell.

Ms. White was also confronted with materials printed from the social networking site Facebook under the page of one Annie Wilshaw, who is an employee of Ms. White's modeling agency. On this Facebook page, Ms. Wilshaw displayed photographs of a party that was hosted by Ms. White on the Thursday that Mr. Campbell testified and then titled the pictures "blood diamond night." Subsequent comments which followed the photograph included "this is a big inconvenience for me" (a line stated by Ms. Campbell in her testimony). It was followed by "it will be when Carole arrives at The Hague and ruins your tale on Monday."

Ms. White responded that the pictures were from a party to open a new modeling house, and she was not aware that her employees had made such comments about the event.

On Tuesday, defense lawyers concluded the cross-examination of Ms. White, during which she said that she has not told lies about this incident.

"I have known this story since 1997 and it's, you know, quite an amazing story...however, when I was told by my lawyer that Charles Taylor had been in The Hague in a war crimes trial, I realized it was very serious and the blood diamond issue had a big bearing on the case and it was my duty to tell my story, it happened 13 years ago, I haven't lied and it is a true story," Ms. White told the court.

As Mr. Griffiths cross-examined Ms. White, he questioned Ms. White's account that while at the dinner table with Mr. Mandela and his guests, Mr. Taylor and Ms. Campbell had been "mildly flirting" with each other.

"This flirtation between Mr. Taylor and Naomi Campbell is a figment of your imagination. You've made that up," Mr. Griffiths put to Ms. White.

In her response, Ms. White said, "I haven't made it up."

Mr. Griffiths also read portions of Ms. White's statement that was made to prosecutors prior to her testimony in court. According to Mr. Griffiths, there were several inconsistencies between Ms. White's written statement and that of her oral testimony and that Ms. White had embellished her account with several lies.

"I suggest you've embellished this account with a number of blatant lies," Mr. Griffiths said.

The witness denied Mr. Griffith's assertion.

Mr. Griffiths also pointed out that in her written statement to prosecutors, Ms. White had stated that she "heard Mr. Taylor tell Ms. Campbell that he was going to send her diamonds."

When asked whether she indeed heard Mr. Taylor say so, Ms. White told the court that it was Ms. Campbell who said so. When Mr. Taylor overheard Ms. Campbell, the former president nodded in agreement.

“When Naomi Campbell leaned back to tell me that Mr. Taylor was going to send her diamonds...he [Taylor] was definitely acquiescing,” Ms. White said.

“He [Taylor] nodded that he was going to send her diamonds. I didn’t hear the words..I don’t recall..he was nodding in agreement,” she added.

White also told the court that the diamonds were delivered in a scruffy piece of paper and that it was Ms. Campbell who put them in a pouch the following morning. She said that she was present when Ms. Campbell gave the diamonds to Mr. Ratcliffe saying that the diamonds had been given to her by Mr. Taylor.

On Wednesday, the court returned to normal hearings with a continuation of the testimony of Mr. Sesay, the former interim leader of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel group.

Mr. Sesay told the court on Wednesday that allegations of the RUF capturing materials from United Nations peacekeepers in Sierra Leone and sending such materials to Mr. Taylor are false.

In May 2000, as Sierra Leone was getting ready to disarm thousands of rebel fighters, RUF rebels took hundreds of UN peacekeepers hostage and seized several materials including arms, ammunition, vehicles, and communication equipment from the peacekeepers. RUF leader, Foday Sankoh, was arrested by the government of Sierra Leone and Issa Hassan Sesay, after a meeting with Mr. Taylor in Liberia, facilitated the release of the peacekeepers. Mr. Sesay eventually became interim leader of the RUF.

In 2008, a witness who claimed to have been working within Mr. Taylor’s security apparatus in Liberia, testified for the prosecution and told the court that on Mr. Taylor’s instructions, the heavy artillery weapons that were seized from the UN peacekeepers were taken to Liberia by Mr. Sesay, and the weapons were used to provide security for Mr. Taylor. Mr. Sesay described this account as false. According to Mr. Sesay, all materials that were seized from the peacekeepers were given back to the UN in Sierra Leone.

“That did not happen...I did not send any artillery pieces to Mr. Taylor in Liberia,” Mr. Sesay told the court.

“I did not give any instruction to take any UNAMSIL [United Nations Missions in Sierra Leone] weapon to Mr. Taylor in Liberia. The weapons that were captured from them were handed back to the UN before disarmament,” he added.

Mr. Sesay further denied prosecution evidence that he provided some help through the transfer of weapons from Sierra Leone to Liberia's Special Security Services (SSS) Director, Benjamin Yeaten, who was mobilizing forces to attack Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) rebels. At the time LURD rebels were threatening to unseat Mr. Taylor's government in Liberia. TFI-375, the witness who testified about this incident claimed that he was present and saw the weapons being handed from Mr. Sesay to Mr. Yeaten.

When talking about the support that Mr. Taylor and his forces allegedly gave to the RUF in Sierra Leone, TFI-375 told the court in 2008 that he was very close to Mr. Yeaten and that he was personally involved in transporting arms and ammunition for rebel forces in Sierra Leone. Mr. Sesay denied this claim, telling the court that he only had contact with Mr. Yeaten in 2000 and at that time, RUF forces were no longer fighting in Sierra Leone.

"During this time when I was in contact with Benjamin Yeaten, the war was not continuing in Sierra Leone, and I did not have any arms dealings with Benjamin Yeaten," Mr. Sesay said.

"I did not have anybody that was bringing arms and ammunition for me from Benjamin Yeaten, that is not true," he added.

Witness TFI-375 also told the court that when the RUF arrested the peacekeepers in 2000, it was Mr. Sesay who first contacted Mr. Yeaten to seek advice from Mr. Taylor on how to handle the situation. Mr. Sesay said that this never happened.

"That's a lie, I did not talk to Benjamin Yeaten on satellite phone, and I did not send a radio message to Benjamin Yeaten after the capture of the UN peacekeepers," Mr. Sesay said.

According to Mr. Sesay, after the capture of the UN peacekeepers, Mr. Taylor sent Mr. Yeaten to invite him to Liberia where they discussed the release of the peacekeepers. If he had communicated with Mr. Yeaten by satellite phone or radio, there would have been no need for Mr. Taylor to send Mr. Yeaten to fetch him with a helicopter, he said.

On Thursday, Mr. Griffiths concluded the direct-examination of Mr. Sesay, paving the way for prosecutors to commence the cross-examination of the witness.

As he concluded the direct examination of Mr. Sesay, Mr. Griffiths, asked the witness whether he has anything to gain by coming to The Hague to testify for Mr. Taylor.

"I don't have anything to gain," Mr. Sesay told the court.

"My decision to come here is because I was sitting in my detention and listening to the radio and hearing people say lies about me just because I disarmed the RUF, so I decided to come here and testify. I have nothing to gain," he added.

As his cross-examination started, prosecution counsel conducting Mr. Sesay's cross-examination, Nicholas Koumjian, immediately went to the testimony that Mr. Sesay gave as a witness in his own defense during his trial before the Special Court for Sierra Leone in Freetown. Mr. Koumjian focused on the arms and ammunition that were bought and used by the RUF to attack the diamond rich town of Kono in December 1998.

The issue of who provided arms for the December 1998 attack on Kono has been widely discussed in this trial. According to prosecution witnesses, with Mr. Taylor's assistance, RUF rebels travelled to Burkina Faso, where they obtained the arms and ammunition needed for the attack. The aircraft that transported the arms and ammunition for the mission landed at Roberts International Airport (RIA) in Liberia before they were transported to Sierra Leone. A particular RUF member, who claimed to have been involved in transporting these materials from Burkina Faso, testified for the prosecution in 2008 and told the court that they met with Mr. Taylor at his Executive Mansion in Liberia. During this meeting, they discussed the operation to obtain the arms in Burkian Faso.

Mr. Sesay in his testimony this month has told the court that these pieces of evidence are false. According to Mr. Sesay, the arms and ammunition used for the attack on Kono were purchased from United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO) rebels in Lofa County, Liberia.

However, under cross-examination today, Mr. Koumjian pointed out that Mr. Sesay's account in his testimony for Mr. Taylor differs from what he said when he testified on behalf of himself before the Special Court for Sierra Leone in Freetown in 2007. During his 2007 trial, Mr. Sesay gave testimony that supported the evidence of prosecution witnesses. In 2007, he testified that the ammunition used for the attack on Kono was obtained from Burkina Faso by Mr. Bockarie. When confronted with the contradiction, Mr. Sesay said that at the time he testified on behalf himself in 2007, he could not recall all these issues. He has only now been able to recall what happened, he said. Mr. Koumjian put to him that he was lying because he wanted to protect Mr. Taylor.

"Because you yourself testified in 2007...that the ammunition came from Burkina Faso and you are lying to this Trial Chamber about it, trying to protect Charles Taylor for his responsibility for the terrible things that happened in 1998 and 1999 in Sierra Leone, isn't that true...you testified under oath in 2007 the ammunition came from Burkina Faso. That was the truth. Were you telling the truth in 2007 or were you lying?" Mr. Koumjian asked Mr. Sesay.

"I said when after I had testified, when I was reading the transcript, I realized that the account I had given was not the right account," Mr. Sesay responded.

On Friday, Mr. Koumjian asked Mr. Sesay to account to the people of Sierra Leone what the RUF did with the country's diamond and whether the war in Sierra Leone was about diamonds.

When asked whether “the war in Sierra Leone was a war about diamonds,” Mr. Sesay said, “No.”

“It was not a war about diamonds because from 1991 to 1997, the RUF was not occupying diamond areas,” Mr. Sesay said.

When asked whether this situation changed after 1997, Mr. Sesay again said, “No.”

“If it was a war about diamonds, I wouldn’t have disarmed in the diamond areas...” he added.

Mr. Koumjian read a portion of a November 2000 newspaper, which quoted Mr. Taylor as saying, “Yes, I think that the war in Sierra Leone is a war about diamonds but not for Liberia to take those diamonds.”

In response to this statement, Mr. Sesay said, “I wouldn’t agree because the war in Sierra Leone was not about diamonds.”

When Mr. Sesay was asked to account to the people of Sierra Leone what he did with the country’s diamonds, Mr. Sesay explained that he sold the diamonds and the proceeds were used to take care of RUF members, who were also Sierra Leoneans.

“The diamonds that I got I used to sell and used the money to take care of the RUF...The RUF soldiers that I took care of, they were Sierra Leoneans,” he said.

In response to a question as to the number of “stones” [diamonds] that he received while he was in control of the RUF, Mr. Sesay said, “I can’t remember the exact number of stones I received.”

He also said that he cannot recall the exact amount of money that he obtained from the sale of the diamonds that were mined by the RUF.

“You can’t account because the bulk of the diamonds went to Charles Taylor, isn’t it,” Mr. Koumjian put to Mr. Sesay.

“Well, as far as money was concerned, the diamonds I used to receive I used to sell, I did not give diamonds to Mr. Taylor,” Mr. Sesay responded.

Prosecutors allege that the RUF subjected civilians in diamond mining towns to forced labor in order to work as miners. Some of these civilians were killed when they could not work as miners, prosecutors allege. It is further alleged that the diamonds, once mined, were taken to Mr. Taylor in Liberia by RUF commanders, including Mr. Sesay. Mr. Taylor has denied receiving diamonds from RUF rebels, and in his testimony as a defense witness for Mr. Taylor, Mr. Sesay has also denied taking diamonds to Mr. Taylor in Liberia.

Prosecutors also noted today that Mr. Sesay himself and RUF commander Sam Bockarie looked at Mr. Taylor as a father figure in their lives, and Mr. Taylor took them to be his sons. Prosecutors highlighted the crimes committed by Mr. Bockarie in Sierra Leone and his public pronouncements about being a “ruthless commander.” Even with, such pronouncements and reports of Mr. Bockarie’s atrocities in Sierra Leone, Mr. Taylor still took him to be his son, Mr. Koumjian said in court.

Mr. Koumjian read a portion of Mr. Taylor’s testimony in which the former Liberian president told the court how he liked Mr. Bockarie after he was confronted with evidence that he ordered the execution of Mr. Bockarie.

“I never wanted that boy dead; I liked him like a son. I never wanted him dead. I never would have handed him to Kabbah [former Sierra Leonean president]...I loved that boy,” Mr. Taylor said in 2009.

“That’s what Charles Taylor said about Sam Bockarie, the man who did all this evil and threatened a campaign of evil to kill all living things,” Mr. Koumjian said after reading the statement.

“Well, I don’t know, that is what Charles Taylor said, that was his opinion,” Mr. Sesay responded.

Mr. Koumjian also pointed out that when Mr. Bockarie left the RUF and relocated to Liberia, Mr. Taylor gave him a huge salary because of the relationship that existed between them.

“Sam Bockarie had a salary of 1000 USD a month when the average Liberian is living on less than one USD a day...that’s how a father treats a son,” Mr. Koumjian said.

Mr. Sesay responded that he never knew that Mr. Bockarie was receiving 1000 USD per month while in Liberia

COTE D’IVOIRE

Ivorian cocoa farmers battle disease at season end

Sheltered from the tropical rain by a dense cocoa forest, three Ivorian farmers sit by a pile of cocoa pods and slice them open. More than half of them are rotting with black fungus.

Tipping the beans from the yellow, healthy pods into one bag and those from the disease-ridden ones into another, they lament that heavy rain this year has spread the rot.

"See all those black pods?" said Kouman N'Guttia, holding up a shrivelled specimen and cutting it open to reveal an inside so decayed he had to throw it out.

"When they're like this, we lose out. We wonder why, despite our careful husbandry, we still got black pod," the farmer told Reuters in the west's coastal area of Sassandra.

Farmers in the west of Ivory Coast, the world's top cocoa growing nation, have battled black pod fungus for weeks after heavy rains brought the damp conditions in which it thrives.

Exceptional rain has largely boosted Ivory Coast's 2009/10 harvest and enabled arrivals to ports this season to almost keep par with last year's level, despite long-term structural decline due to ageing trees.

But it has also brought sickness such as black pod and the viral swollen shoot disease, hurting quality and in some cases rendering the beans unsellable. Farmers have also found it tough to dry their beans properly in wet weather.

Farms visited by Reuters all had trees with black pods growing alongside healthy ripe yellow or unripe green ones.

"PESTS WORSE"

In villages near Ivory Coast's cocoa trading port of San Pedro, which rivals the main commercial city Abidjan as the world's top raw cocoa export point, farmers grumble about lack of government support to rid their crops of pests.

"We just don't know what to do about it. We need an engineer to find a solution ... the pests are worse than before," said N'Guttia, pausing to eat steamed yams off a banana leaf and sip palm wine from a hollowed out pod.

The markets are watching the end of the 2009/10 Ivorian cocoa crop, which gives way to the new season in October, to see whether it can exceed last season's 1.22 million tonnes. Exporters say it is unlikely to top 1.2 million.

Destruction of yields by pests and disease may tip the balance.

As cocoa planters panic about pests, Deki Adama Ouattara's shop for agricultural inputs flourishes.

"Since March, we've sold a lot of treatments for black pod," he said from a kiosk selling pesticides and fertilisers.

Poor farming practices are to blame for the worsening disease, said cooperative manager Christian Kre. Farmers are not spacing their cocoa trees enough or cutting off branches to let in sunlight and lower the humidity, plus trees are too old.

Government plans to reform the cocoa sector have been held up by a political crisis, which only long-delayed elections, currently scheduled for Oct. 31, can resolve.

Ivory Coast has some of the lowest yields of any growing country, less than 500 kg per hectare against 2 tonnes in Indonesia and 1.5 tonnes in Ghana. Rainforests are destroyed as farmers clear ever more forest just to keep output stable.

"We destroyed 2 million hectares of forest in just over two decades for nothing," Kre said. In that time cultivated area has expanded fivefold, he said, but output has grown by only 50 percent.

SIERRA LEONE

Parliament Quizzes London Mining Company

The parliamentary oversight committee on mines yesterday summoned the London Mining company Sierra Leone Limited to give an update on the company's activities.

The committee raised concern over the alleged selling of shares to a Chinese company, noting that such a deal would encourage the idea of bringing in expatriates at the expense of qualified Sierra Leoneans. The committee expressed that concession was given to the company on the pretext that experienced Sierra Leoneans would be employed.

The managing director of London Mining, David E. Keili said they appreciate parliament for the agreement it ratified last year, adding that the company was not sold. The manager director maintained that the tailings they met at Marampa, when processed, would be exported at 1.5 million tons a year and that the tailings will last up to eight years.

He said London Mining also has plans to start mining for the primary ore and that they need the sum of eight hundred million dollars to continue the project. However, the committee said they were there to see that the interest of Sierra Leoneans was protected and that they wouldn't like to see the company folding up and going away, or expatriates coming to take key positions when there are qualified Sierra Leoneans.

Sierra Leone bans agents from booking haj

Sierra Leone has banned private agents from organising the Muslim pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia in a move to prevent travelers being stranded abroad by agents who take money without booking flights.

A law passed this week says anyone wishing to make the annual trip to Mecca has to make arrangements with a newly-established government body rather than private firms.

The Haj pilgrimage is a once-in-a-lifetime requirement for able-bodied Muslims.

"The decision taken by the government was due to the fact that Muslim pilgrims have been stranded ... at various international airports," the ministry of social welfare said in a statement on Wednesday.

Islamic groups in the West African country, where around 60 percent of its 5 million population are Muslim, said the government was intruding into religious affairs.

"We do not see any reason why government should be involved in Muslim arrangements ... we condemn the move and ask the government to withdraw its suspension," said Alhaji Ibrahim Silla of the Alpha Muslim group.

Haj falls in November this year, while Thursday marks the start of Ramadan in Sierra Leone and many other countries, a month of fasting shared by Muslims worldwide.

"The government should have spoken to all agents and addressed its concern about agents who fail to fulfill their obligations, and tried to solve it through dialogue," said Alieu Bakarr, an imam in Freetown.

"This rushed decision means the government is interfering in religious matters," he said.

Business and Politics in the Muslim World
West African News Monitoring
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08, Aug 2010-14, Aug 2010
By Mustapha Shafi
Presented on 18, August 2010

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- PDP Trustees to Retain Yar'Adua/Jonathan 'Ticket'
- Jonathan: Police Underfunding, Cause of Insecurity (FG approves N79bn for Police reform)
- Present Credible Candidates for 2011, Jonathan Tells PDP
- AC Renamed ACN amidst Stampede
- Zoning: PDP Caucus Seeks Wider Consultation
- Jonathan Seeks N'Assembly's Nod for \$4.4bn Loan
- 2011: Uncertainty over Atiku's Presidential Candidacy
- Electoral Act Delays 2011 Poll Timetable
- Jonathan's Fate Now Hanging, Says Ayu
- 2011/2015: South-east, North Reach Agreement on Zoning
- IBB Pleads for Al-Mustapha's Release
- Mark: Constitution Amendment, a Promise Kept
- IBB: I'd Do Only One Term

2. Economy

- NSE's 9-Month Accounts Show N2.2bn Loss
- Stock Market Sheds N173bn in 3 Days

3. Energy:

- Nigeria plans \$3.5 bln "supergrid" to end power woes
- Nigeria Loses \$5m Daily from Crude Oil Lifting

4. Environment:

- N'Delta: FG Signs JV Agreement to Clean Up Oil Waste
- Nigeria Threatened by Cholera Outbreak in Cameroon

5. Immigration/Refugee/Idps:

- Cocaine: NDLEA Arraigns Taiwanese, Others to Court
- Security Agencies Impound Vaccines Imported from S' Africa
- Nigeria Installs Full Body Scanners at Airports

6. Health:

7. Human rights/Gender/social issues:

- Nigerian Appointed into UN Group against Global Poverty
- Neglect of Rural Areas, Cause of Increasing Insecurity

8. Geo-Strategic issues:

- India's ONGC-Mittal Plans 180,000bpd Refinery in Nigeria
- S' Korea to Expand Trade with Nigeria

Other West African States

Cape Verde:

Chad:

- UN pleads for humanitarian access to Darfur camp...H7
- Armed men kidnap two Darfur peacekeepers.....H7

Gambia:

Guinea- Bissau:

Mali:

Mauritania :

Niger:

- A crisis, not (yet) a catastrophe....H7
- Chasing after pastoralists with truckloads of aid....H7

Sénégal:

Details of the News

1 . China-African Relations: Zambia, Chinese firms to build \$1.5 bln power plant

Zambia, Africa's largest copper producer, signed an agreement on Friday with two Chinese companies to build a 600 megawatts plant expected to cost \$1.5 billion, Finance Minister Situmbeko Musokotwane said.

Musokotwane said the construction of the Kafue Gorge Lower power project in southern Zambia, would start around April next year, with initial financing of \$1 billion expected to come from the Chinese.

Regular power outages, partly due to ageing equipment, in the southern African country, which has had no major investments to raise power generation capacity for decades, has previously forced it to import power from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to keep the mines running.

Copper mining is Zambia's economic lifeline.

Musokotwane said a new joint venture company, to be formed by state power utility Zesco and China's Sino-Hydro Company and the China Africa Development Fund, will borrow the initial funding of \$1 billion from China to start the project.

"This project will also get contribution from the equity partners to get to the full project cost of \$1.5 billion," he told journalists.

BUILD, OPERATE AND TRANSFER

Musokotwane said the new company would sign a power purchase agreement with Zesco by April 2011 to facilitate the investments into the plant.

He said the new joint venture company would borrow funds on its own without the government being part to the new debt and also operate the new power plant for sometime.

"Once this company is formed, it will build, operate and transfer the power station (to the government) after the equity partners recoup their investments," Musokotwane said.

Energy Minister Kenneth Konga said at the same briefing that Sino-Hydro Company and China Africa Development Fund would likely submit a technical and financial proposal by January 2011 after Zambia and the Chinese signed a separate agreement on the roadmap for construction of the plant.

Konga separately said the project, expected to create about 2,000 jobs would be completed by mid-2016.

According to the government, Zambia currently generates 1,800 MW, with peak power demand estimated at 1,600 MW, but forecasts power demand to rise sharply in the coming years.

Konga said new investments at a nickel mine, and two other major copper developments would see the 200 MW power buffers being outstripped soon.

China takes more aid money for aids and malaria than African countries

China has been accused of exploiting a global fund set up to fight Aids, malaria and tuberculosis. The country is the fourth largest recipient, despite becoming the world's second largest economy.

A former US official, in charge of setting up the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria disclosed that China received more than severely deprived African nations.

It was given three times as much to fight Aids and malaria than South Africa, one of the worst-affected countries.

As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and global economic powerhouse, China's contributions lagged far behind its peers. It made contributions of \$16 million (£10 million) to the fund, but received \$1 billion in payouts. The United States pledged \$6.5 billion and Britain gave \$2.2 billion.

“China has aggressively pursued Global Fund grants and has continued to win significant amounts with every passing year,” Jack Chow, the lead US negotiator in the founding of the fund, told Foreign Policy magazine. “Any grants that China wins reduce the remaining money available for all eligible countries.

“China has won malaria grants totaling \$149 million in a country where only 38 deaths from the illness were reported last year. That is more money than the Democratic Republic of Congo, which reported nearly 25,000 malaria deaths in the same period.

“The \$1 billion awarded to China could have been used by the poorest countries to distribute 67 million anti-malarial bed nets, 4.5 million curative tuberculosis treatments or nearly two million courses of anti-retroviral therapy for Aids patients — equivalent to all those living with the disease in Kenya.”

China has been eligible for the money because its enormous population means that its per capita income, the key criteria in assessing grants, remains on the level of countries such as Bolivia and Cameroon.

Mr. Chow said the fund was set up eight years ago to fight three of the world's deadliest diseases. "We imagined the bulk of the money ending up in places like Lesotho, Haiti and Uganda, where these diseases have reached crisis levels," he said. Instead, China had "exploited" the set-up to win more aid grants than 29 African countries. Only India, Ethiopia and Tanzania received more of the overall \$19 billion than China.

"How did China ever become eligible for grants in the first place? In short, because of a loophole," said Mr. Chow, who added that other countries were afraid of the repercussions if they opposed the payouts. "It would risk incurring Beijing's diplomatic wrath."

He said the system undermined efforts to get \$20 billion of new funding for 2011-2013, which was already threatened by the economic climate.

Andrew Mitchell, the International Development Secretary, said: "UK money should be spent helping the poorest people in the poorest countries."

The Foreign Office called on China to take a bigger share of the aid burden. "With economic development comes international responsibilities and we look to China to play her part in addressing international challenges," said a spokesman.

Chinese state media said there had been a "dramatic rise" in malaria cases in the first half of the year and the country was doing its best to eliminate the disease by 2020.

The fund said it had asked China for more help. "The Chinese told me they would think about it," said Michel Kazatchkine, its executive director.

Invest in Africa: A Great Leap Forward

After he finished addressing the Symposium on Chinese Private Enterprises Investing in Africa held at the Beijing Workers' Home on July 27, Liu Hao, Deputy Director General of the International Cooperation Department of the National Development Bank, left the scene before the end of the event. Many business representatives attending the symposium followed and surrounded him at the entrance. Liu's business cards soon ran out.

Desperate Need for Modernization

One impression the majority of the participating companies mentioned about Africa is that "the relative lagging behind of the economic and social development." As for the extent of the underdevelopment, "Some peddlers sell things not by weight, but by piece or stack. Even a nail is not available on some markets." For most African countries in urgent need of improvement of productivity and living standards, their markets are in a state of underdevelopment.

With the advance of economic reforms in African countries, a huge potential for development is increasingly emerging. According to the assessment of The World Bank, the current investment environment in Africa is the best in history. The Western countries and many international organizations are generally optimistic about its prospect in economic development.

Cao Zongming, Deputy Director General of the Department of African Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, commented that peace and development were seemed to be the main trend in Africa at present. The situation has also been gradually improved in countries like Nigeria and Sudan.

Economic integration has been gradually strengthened in some regions, as the establishment of the United States of Africa being a long-term goal for Africa. Currently, regional organizations have been set up in East and West Africa, which have largely facilitated trade between the member states.

Africa is rich in resources and has the advantage of a latecomer. It has the world's 10% of oil, 40% of gold, and 80% to 90% of chromium reserves, while being very rich in other mineral resources. For agriculture, Africa has 60% of the world's undeveloped arable land.

It is learned that Africa now invests 45 billion dollars a year in infrastructure construction, accounting for 5% of its GDP. The current inflation rate has declined and external debt reduced by one fourth.

Some countries are considered very promising and could be Africa's next emerging economies, for example, South Africa, Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Botswana among others. Some economists believe Africa will be entering a period of rapid development after the financial crisis, appearing to be the new bright-spot in global economy after Asia and Latin America.

At present, the African market is in strong demand for investment. According to the World Urbanization Prospects Report 2009 issued by the United Nations, the African urban population will increase from the current 413 million to 570 million in 2020, and the proportion of its population in the world total from 40% to nearly 60%.

Africa is in the process of industrialization and urbanization. Generally speaking, every country has targeted infrastructure, energy, mineral resources as priorities of development. They emphasize on national industrial development, people's livelihood improvement, being in urgent need of technological and development expertise.

Of course, concerning investing in Africa, the shortcomings in the (investment) environment cannot be overlooked. Cao Zongming observed that the situation remains volatile in some areas of Africa, such as the civil war in Somalia.

Law and order is poor shape and crimes are rampant in some countries. At the same time, Africa is relatively weak in the economic foundation and has some outstanding structural problems.

For example, many countries suffer the "single-product" trade and industrial structures, as some countries have to rely on only one or two export commodities in foreign trade.

Investment Will Be Theme

The 2010 World Cup is destined to bring South Africa into spotlight. However, prior to that, Africa has already attracted the attention of the world for having quietly become an investment destination. According to the data, the world investment in Africa reached 82 billion dollars in 2008.

Many economies also develop friendly relations with Africa in forms of holding forums. In addition to China, many other economies have held African Forums in recent years, such as the United States, European Union, France, Japan, Turkey, Iran and Brazil.

Sino-African trade cooperation has gone through 50 years, during which China and African countries have established profound friendship. On the China-Africa Forum Summit held in Beijing in 2006, Chinese President Hu Jintao announced that the Chinese government would adopt eight measures to promote the development of new China-Africa strategic partnership, and boost cooperation in a larger, broader and higher level. Since then, trade cooperation between China and Africa has seen "a great leap forward".

"China-Africa bilateral trade volume was 10 billion dollars in 2000, and reached 206.8 billion dollars in 2008, averaging an annual growth rate of 33.5%. At present, China has become the largest trading partner of Africa," says He Song, Director of the Division of Coordination of the Department of West Asia and Africa Affairs, Ministry of Commerce. Chinese enterprises accomplished contract projects in Africa worth of 96.6 billion dollars by the end of 2009.

On the other hand, along with rapid growth of the bilateral trade, China-Africa economic and trade relations will surely enter into a new investment based stage. Lu Chengqing, Vice President of China-Africa Development Fund, thinks that trade alone is hard to sustain the local economies, and fundamentally satisfies the needs for African resources and markets for the Chinese economic development.

Lu Chengqing believes, judging from China's national conditions, the country is, first of all, facing the tasks of urbanization, industrial structure readjustment and upgrading as well as industrialization and informationization, which will be the basic driving force of the future economic growth and internal momentum for development.

Secondly, urbanization is connected with downstream sectors of social field development like employment and livelihood, and upstream sectors of raw materials like resources and energy. Moreover, the industrial development cannot do without market expansion.

Products and equipment export and production capacity transfer for industrial restructuring all need to be achieved through direct overseas investment.

He says, "In order to overcome the resource and energy bottleneck, Chinese enterprises have to "go global", and acquire the rights of extraction and a bigger say for resources through international investment. That is one of the elements of Chinese enterprises' "internationalization". A large proportion of the resources yet to be explored and found is in Africa."

Lu Chengqing believes, compared to the developed countries, there are the advantages of low threshold, high return and great potential for Chinese enterprises to go to Africa.

Although the Chinese companies are still faced with competition from the giant international companies in Africa, they have obvious comparative advantages, like more applicable technologies and more competitive pricing and management. He thinks that Africa can be Chinese enterprises' "training ground" for going global.

Private Sector's Drive in Africa.

"I inspected several countries in East Africa. They have sound natural environment, with the average annual temperature from 16 to 28 degrees Celsius. 70% of the popular program Animal World aired by the China Central Television is shot there," said the manager of Hebei Shangzhen Fiber Co., Ltd.

His company is mainly engaged in the machine making industry. Africa's rich mineral resources and aquatic products have aroused his interest, with the "low land costs and friendly local residents who asked us to do training for them".

He Song says the global financial crisis has weakened the investment of Western countries in Africa, and created good opportunities for China. The private enterprises have made themselves into a new force of the Chinese business presence in Africa with propriety, flexibility and adaptability.

He believes some Chinese private enterprises have started planning their development with an international perspective, and more tend to make themselves multinational.

In addition, many African countries have launched and offered preferential measures to improve the environment for foreign investors in order to enhance their sustainable development capacity and make effort to attract investment that has also created better conditions for Chinese private enterprises.

It is reported that there are 35 million registered private enterprises in China in 2009, with registered capital over RMB12.6 trillion yuan. The private sector is flourishing with vitality and an important part of China's national economy.

The private enterprises have also shown courage and determination in adopting the "Go Global" Strategy. At present, there are about 1600 Chinese enterprises operating in Africa, of which only 100 are state-owned, with all the rest being privately owned.

"The return from investment in Africa is rather high," a private company manager told the reporter. He knows that many companies simply do not do any project with a less than 30% profit margin. He believes that the prospect for investment in Africa is good and he is currently conducting a feasibility study for investing in Africa for his business.

He told the reporter that China supports private enterprises to invest in Africa and offers tax rebate incentives to equipment export, while the State Development Bank and China-Africa Development Fund also provide some financing support and endorsement.

It is learned that the China-Africa Development Fund has made investments in 35 projects, with more than 5 billion dollars in the projects of cooperation. Of which funds have been allocated to 20 projects that have formulated 340 million dollars of investment assets. Another 40 projects are being cultivated as follow-up measures.

The Chinese are everywhere; even in the farthest backwaters of Africa, the Chinese are moving in

DEEP in Lesotho's arid, starkly beautiful eastern highlands, Mokhotlong is the remotest town in one of Africa's poorer countries. Not until the 1950s could you reach it on a proper road. But its isolation has not sealed it off from global economic forces.

On the main street, the petrol station is Chinese-owned. Next to it stands the Hui Hua supermarket. Then comes the Hua Tai ironmonger and the Ji Li Lai general store. Farther down the road is the Fu Zhong hardware and furniture wholesaler.

It is one of four enterprises owned by Chen Juo-feng, who is only 22. Business is good, he says, much better than in China: "I want to stay here for ever." Mr Chen started off with just one shop when he came to Lesotho four years ago from Fujian, a coastal province that has provided many Chinese emigrants through the ages; 172 other members of Mr Chen's family are scattered across Lesotho, too.

Several hours' drive away, on a hill outside the capital, Maseru, a symbol of another side to China's burgeoning relations with Africa is almost finished: a new parliament building paid for by the Chinese government and built by Chinese companies.

Is it odd that a Communist state should pay for a multiparty legislature? "What they are interested in is the economy," says a parliamentary employee. "Even if it was military rule they would build whatever they want to build."

The Chinese government has long been accused of ignoring human rights and other issues in its quest to embrace governments and secure resources in a modern scramble for

Africa. As it happens, Lesotho is ranked as “partly free” by Freedom House, an American think-tank that monitors democratic performance worldwide. Lesotho’s most recent general election, three years ago, was marred by a row over the allocation of its 120 seats. The country has had a string of crises and coups since independence in 1966.

The Southern African Development Community, a 15-country regional club, even intervened militarily in 1998, sending troops from South Africa and Botswana to put down a coup. Now it is getting more stable. But last year some rebels tried to shoot the prime minister. Many people vehemently accuse the authorities of doing little to improve their lot.

An enclave of barely 2m people entirely surrounded by South Africa, Lesotho has little on paper to interest China. It exports water and people, both to South Africa. Its biggest industry, textiles, is largely owned by firms from Taiwan. Building the parliament may show a desire on the part of China’s government to be seen in Africa as treating all countries equally and not ignoring those that lack resources.

Chinese traders such as Mr Chen, in Mokhotlong and elsewhere, seem entirely divorced from geopolitics. But in the longer run it is their presence rather than their government that may have the bigger impact. No one knows how large the Chinese diaspora in Africa is; some say it is already a million-strong. And Chinese influence may in the end be wielded more by the demography of the new settlers than by state-owned corporations or politicians.

2 Pan-African issues:

AFRICA: Adaptation strategy hit parade

Crops that mature faster and are tolerant of more frequent and intense droughts top the list of how most countries adapt their food production to climate change, says a new paper.

The discussion paper, led by Jonathan Makau Nzuma from the University of Nairobi and produced by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), looked at adaptation in agriculture in 10 sub-Saharan countries: Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

The paper lists 26 adaptation strategies - two of which are common to all 10 countries, and five that are common to more than five countries - and reviews what progress has been made in adapting to erratic weather patterns.

The authors hope the findings will feed into and enhance the attempts of African countries to get financial and technical assistance at the ongoing global climate change talks under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The paper was also prompted by a need to get a better understanding of the countries' National Action Plans for Adaptation, "whether they contained actionable items, how comparable they were across countries, and...[if] there was any potential for regional cooperation," said Gerald Nelson, a senior research fellow at IFPRI and one of the authors of the paper.

"Given the history of civil conflicts in at least half of the countries," it was sometimes difficult to get crop and livestock data from all the countries, the authors noted, yet they managed to collect adequate data from every country.

All the countries had built adaptation strategies into their development plans, and most countries were already implementing some of the strategies.

Here are the top seven strategies:

- 1 Develop drought-tolerant and early-maturing crop varieties
2. Look at new and renewable energy resources such as solar power
3. Use small dams to harvest rainwater
4. Cross-breed to produce hardier species; reduce the number of livestock overall by sale or slaughter
5. Conserve pastureland by designating no-grazing areas, and keeping smaller livestock like sheep and goats
6. Conserving and restoring vegetation in degraded areas
7. Developing Integrated Disease Surveillance Response systems and emergency preparedness to prevent mitigate and respond to agricultural epidemics

Africa prospects lure investors, but are they ready?

Africa offers among the world's best investment prospects as emerging markets grow ever more important, although its economies risk being destabilized by the slew of capital they stand to attract in coming years.

Energy-producing continental giant Nigeria was identified as a top pick by some of the most influential figures in emerging markets finance who spoke to the Reuters Emerging Markets Summit in Sao Paulo last week.

Africa withstood the financial crisis better than many predicted, and the region's economic growth is forecast at 4.75 percent in 2010. Next year, half of the world's 10 fastest growing economies are expected to be in Africa, and it is now attracting more than just the most intrepid investors.

"The latent interest in Africa is enormous," said Stephen Jennings, chief executive of Russian investment bank Renaissance Capital, speaking to the Reuters meeting by video link from Moscow.

"Before the crisis there were probably 40 people or groups establishing Africa funds. In 3-4 years you'll have 100 Africa funds and the biggest one won't be \$2 billion, it'll be \$20 billion."

Fund tracker EPFR reports 43 consecutive weeks of net inflows to Africa equities funds, reaching \$484 million in the first half of 2010 -- nearly double those to India over the same period.

Africa's advocates say the inflows stand to accelerate rapidly as a dearth of attractive returns in the developed world pulls investors in while a more stable political and economic environment indicates diminishing risks.

MSCI's index of Africa countries outside South Africa .DMI8600000P, though well off its year highs, is still up nearly 8 percent in 2010. The S&P 500 .SPX is more than 8 percent down.

BRIC LINKS

A shift of global economic power to emerging giants such as Brazil, Russia, India and China -- known collectively as the BRICs -- benefits Africa as surging economies seek its resources and push up commodity prices and investment.

Brazil, Russia and India still trail China, which last year became Africa's biggest trade partner, but they have been rapidly expanding trade and putting more money into Africa. "What's absolutely striking is how much change there's been between the BRIC countries and Africa," said Jacko Maree, chief executive of South Africa's Standard Bank, which is Africa's biggest. "We like to think that the whole story has only just begun."

Brazilian firms with a large African presence may soon issue bonds in South African rand to seize on growing interest, said Standard Bank's chief executive in the Americas, Eduardo Centola.

NIGERIA TOP PICK

Nigeria's market of about 140 million people -- nearly three times bigger than South Africa's -- as well as its energy resources and bigger, more liquid markets, makes it the top choice for many eyeing Africa.

On the Goldman Sachs' growth-environment index, which measures a mixture of economic and social development indicators, Nigeria's score has nearly doubled over the past decade.

"If it were to show the same increase in its growth-environment score over the next decade, many investors will look back and say why the hell didn't I invest in Nigeria," said Goldman Sachs' global head of economic research Jim O'Neill, who coined the term BRICs.

Ethiopia and Rwanda are among the smaller African economies seen as promising. They show how previously ignored countries scarred by war are emerging as possible investment magnets alongside those such as Ghana, a relatively stable democracy which is soon to become an oil producer.

There are risks, though, with concerns over political stability even in bigger economies such as Nigeria and Kenya.

Africa experts underline the fact that new mineral riches have rarely been shared widely, and suggest reliance on such income for national coffers could discourage establishing tax bases that would put states on a sounder footing.

"Where I think the real caution has to come in is the quality of the growth," said Patrick Smith of the Africa Confidential newsletter. "It would be pretty silly to say success is certain."

A big influx of investment funds could in itself pose a problem for African countries less prepared to cope than those in other rapidly growing regions that have felt the pain of such flows in the past.

"Africa has no experience of huge capital inflows," said Renaissance's Jennings. "Under the scenario I'm painting, the capital inflows will be way above and beyond the ability of those countries to absorb them."

Most African countries have small, illiquid markets and little financial infrastructure, raising the chances of economic distortions and asset bubbles that could lead to currency crises and long-term damage.

"People look at how certain African economies have been getting their act together and there is a risk you will get significant capital inflows," said Mohamed El-Erian, chief executive of PIMCO, the world's largest bond investor. "That will provide quite a challenge to policy makers."

Sambo: 'Only Africans Can Solve Their Problems'

Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire have stressed the need for African countries to find African solutions to their developmental challenges. Vice President Mohammed Namadi Sambo disclosed this Saturday, while speaking to newsmen in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, after a closed door meeting he had with President Laurent Gbagbo of the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire, at the Palais Presidential (Presidential Palace).

Sambo was in Cote d'Ivoire to extend the felicitations of President Goodluck Jonathan and Nigerians to the people of that country as they celebrate their golden jubilee anniversary, as well as to further bolster the cooperation and brotherly relations both countries have enjoyed over the years.

He said both countries find it imperative for African countries to cooperate among themselves to overcome all the developmental challenges facing them.

“We discussed the need to use this important occasion of our 50 years anniversary to add more cooperation between the ECOWAS countries and to from now onwards ensure the source of African solution to improve our socio-economic status and build our sub-region,” Sambo said, adding that President Gbagbo used the occasion to “call on Nigeria to be used as a pad for cooperation and development in the West African sub-region.”

On whether there is cause for African countries to celebrate their 50 years anniversary considering the huge developmental challenges most of them are facing, Sambo said the celebrations offer the opportunity for countries to meet, reflect and chart a new direction so that “we can transform our society and drive away poverty among our people.”

High points of the celebration was the parade of friendly nations' flags including that of Nigeria; the parade by the wives of military and paramilitary personnel and that of a crop of 50 youths representing the next 50 years of that country and also the conferment of national honours on some deserving Ivorien citizens and foreign nationals.

Sambo was accompanied by the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Idi Hong, Special Adviser to the Vice President on Special Duties, Senator Isaiah Balat and other top government functionaries.

AU to Establish African Space Agency

The African Union has commenced a process that would lead to the setting up of a regional space agency. The agency, to be known as the African Space Agency, would focus on the development of common space policy for the continent.

In a communique issued at the end of the third African Union conference of Ministers in charge of Communications and Information Technologies held in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, member countries agreed to conduct a feasibility study on the establishment of the African Space Agency, It said this would be done taking into account existing initiatives and develop an African space policy in cooperation with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and REC.

The AU Ministers conference also agreed to work jointly with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa to finalise action on the draft convention on cyber legislation and support its implementation in member-states.

Another major decision taken by the ministers is to set up the structure and modalities for the implementation of the project.

The communiqué said the AU would liaise with the International Telecommunications Union and with all development partners to continue activities on harmonization of policy and regulations in Africa based on the platform created by HIPSSA project.

The conference resolved to integrate the NEPAD e-Africa Commission governance into the governance structure of CITMC and to provide support to member states in implementing the e-Post programme in cooperation with stakeholders.

Jonathan had said during the opening of the conference that a lot still needs to be done by Africa to bridge the knowledge and technology gap between it and the rest of the developed world if it must achieve rapid and sustained economic, social and human development.

"Our information and communication technology strategies and policies as well as regulatory frameworks still need to be harmonized to enable us reap the full benefits of this development", he said.

He told the gathering comprising of delegates from African Union member countries that the next focus must be the development and application of broadband and improvement in internet services to accelerate development in areas of national security, e-governance, tele-medicine, public safety and education.

Nigeria:

1. Political News:

2011: Ribadu, Oshiomhole, Tinubu in Game Changer

The dynamics of the 2011 presidential race may be heading for a dramatic shuffling as the opposition puts its act together, with former chairman of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, now in the fray.

THISDAY checks revealed that there are serious consultations currently going on to pair Ribadu with Edo State Governor Adams Oshiomhole on the presidential ticket of the newly branded Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN).

Former governor of Lagos State, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, is expected to become the National Chairman of the party in the emerging calculations to tackle the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) which has been in power since 1999.

The ACN strategists, THISDAY learnt, have ruled out working with any of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar and Gen. Muhammadu Buhari as a presidential candidate because “they represent the old order”.

Buhari was military head of state from 1983 to 1985 while Babangida ruled as military president from 1985 to 1993 before “stepping aside”. Atiku was vice-president to former President Olusegun Obasanjo from 1999 to 2007. All three are currently in the race.

“There should be a new thinking. We need new leadership in the country. Mr. Barack Obama became President of the United States at 48. The Prime Minister of UK, David Cameron, is 44. His deputy, Nick Clegg, is 43. The President of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev, is 44.

That is the new spirit. The world will not take us seriously if we continue to present leaders from the generation of (Hosni) Mubarak and (Robert) Mugabe,” a senior party official told the newspaper last night.

The aim of ACN is to transform the polity and change the way things are done in Nigeria, the official further said, emphasising the fact that Ribadu is 49 years old and is respected both nationally and internationally as the new face of leadership in the country.

Sources close to the Ribadu, Oshiomhole and Tinubu said nothing has been finalised yet as “things are still crystallising” and it would be premature “to reach any conclusion”.

“Ribadu has not even joined the party yet, so we cannot be discussing the possibility of him becoming our candidate,” another senior official of the party said. “If he joins today, all things are possible. Our doors are open to all.”

Governor Olusegun Mimiko of Ondo State, who belongs to the Labour Party (LP), is said to be well disposed to the idea and is ready to work with all progressive-minded politicians to form a major movement across the country for the actualisation of “the dream”.

Ribadu himself has made some extensive visits to politicians in Southern Nigeria in what is seen as consultative meetings.

Commenting on the development last night, Oshiomhole refused to rule it out, but said he was more concerned with “delivering the goods” to the people of his state and freeing them from the stranglehold of godfathers.

“I’m focussed on Edo State . I don’t want to be distracted by the talk of presidential race. We are focussed on how to use Edo money to develop the state rather than give our resources to godfathers as was being done in the past,” he said.

AC on Monday changed its name to ACN to give it a national outlook. Party chairman Chief Bisi Akande said the move was informed by relentless attempts by the PDP to

whittle down the relevance of all opposition parties and consequently turn Nigeria into a one-party state.

He narrated how the PDP allegedly infiltrated the Progressive Peoples Alliance (PPA) and brought its governments in Abia and Imo states to its knees, adding that PDP also hijacked the governments of the ANPP in Bauchi and Zamfara by manipulating the defection of the governors from their original platforms to the PDP.

According to him, the ruling ANPP in Kano State today is lonely because the PDP has opted to use the ANPP government in Borno as “the nemesis for ANPP government in Kano State”.

PDP Trustees to Retain Yar’Adua/Jonathan ‘Ticket’

The Board of Trustees (BoT) of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) may at its meeting today stick to the late Umaru Musa Yar’Adua/Goodluck Jonathan ticket till 2015.

The meeting is one of the crunch parleys fixed for this week by the PDP leadership. The National Caucus meeting holds tomorrow.

THISDAY learnt that the PDP leadership may have finally resolved to review its controversial zoning formula in such a way that would favour the South-south geopolitical zone where President Goodluck Jonathan comes from.

Checks by the newspaper yesterday revealed that the party leadership has seen the need to reinforce the zoning arrangement in clearer terms and re-formalise the power rotation policy.

The Presidency last night, however, distanced itself from a purported plot by some pro-zoning canvassers to pressurize President Goodluck Jonathan to rig the 2011 election.

A newspaper had quoted the publicity secretary of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) as alleging that the president is “under pressure to give assurance to those canvassing zoning that he must rig the elections in favour of the PDP so as to protect the interest of the clique and ensure that (General Muhammadu) Buhari does not win the presidential vote”.

On the PDP crunch meetings, a source close to the BoT of the party said the party leaders are canvassing a review of the zoning formula so that the incumbent from the South-south could take the slot and govern the country between 2011 and 2015.

The source said with Jonathan as the incumbent president, the position of the party’s constitution and established convention in PDP allow him to take another shot at the office if he has not exhausted the two terms allowable under the country’s constitution.

According to the source, the argument is also that President Jonathan is best suited to resolve the North/South dichotomy question as he can only contest for the presidency for one more term.

The source said: “The Constitution allows a person to be sworn in twice into executive positions, either as president or governor and since Jonathan was sworn-in first on May 6, 2010, that would count as his first term. He can only be sworn into office only one more time and he would have completed his constitutionally allowed two terms of office. That should then ensure that power reverts to the North in 2015.”

This position, the source said, is “informed by constitutional order, which prescribes that the Vice- President would take over when the President dies in office”.

It was gathered that leaders of the party have agreed in separate discussions on the need to marry the constitutional reality with the positions of the party and the current Nigerian reality.

“The reality on ground is that the PDP can best win the presidency in 2011 by presenting the incumbent, who has something to show the people in terms of commitment to national growth and resolving the power problem”, the source said, adding: “Since the zoning arrangement was altered by divine intervention, we have to abide by that and review the formula in favour of the South-south. It then means that the South-south would retain the slot till 2015, when it (power) would revert to the North”.

Another member of the party’s inner caucus insisted that the PDP has to now reinforce the zoning formula to take care of eventualities such that occurred when President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua died in office.

“What we need to do now is to clearly state the succession order in the PDP constitution and that when an incumbent dies, the zoning arrangement would be reversed in favour of the Vice President or deputy governor as the case may be,” the source said.

It was gathered that the view had become widespread within the party’s top hierarchy by the weekend.

A source said that President Jonathan is best suited to resolve the North/South dichotomy question as he can only contest for the presidency for one more term.

He also said that the need to ensure that the people of Niger Delta where Jonathan comes from have a sense of belonging in the governance of Nigeria so as to maintain the stability of the country is also one of the other factors working in Jonathan’s favour.

Meanwhile, in a press statement last night, Presidential Spokesman Ima Niboro said the claim that the President was planning to rig the 2011 poll is “outrightly false and even illogical”, describing it as “an attempt to pre-judge the forthcoming elections before the

fact and we would have ignored it but for the high premium the President places on conducting free, fair and credible elections in 2011”.

He explained that the President is under no pressure whatsoever over the 2011 election”, adding that he has made it clear that there will be credible elections next year, and has so far taken decisive steps to actualise this vision.

Niboro’s statement read in part: “The President has appointed a leadership for the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, which has been hailed locally and internationally. He has given unequivocal support to the agency in its search for the most viable strategy to achieve excellent delivery of the next elections, and has told INEC leadership publicly that no one has “tied their hands”, and therefore “there is no excuse for failure.

“We find it strange for anyone to be talking about rigging at this time of our political evolution, for those days are gone... they are dead and buried! The President urges all Nigerians to join hands with INEC to ensure that in the next elections, our votes count. Nigerians must speak with one voice and defend their votes.

“It is a new day. Let us forge ahead with new hope, a new vision and a new way of doing things”.

Jonathan: Police Underfunding, Cause of Insecurity (FG approves N79bn for Police reform)

President Goodluck Jonathan yesterday blamed insecurity problems in the country on long years of underfunding of the Nigeria Police, thereby debarring them from performing their constitutional roles effectively.

As part of police reformation currently going on, the President said Federal Government has approved N79 billion as its contribution towards the N1.5 Trillion M. D. Yusuf-led committee proposed for the reform to the Nigeria Police to kick start the recommendation.

The President, who was represented by Vice President Namadi Sambo, at a one-day retreat organized by Police High Command and Ministry of Police Affairs in Abuja, said it was high time Nigerians took stock and review “where we are coming from, consider where we are and project on where we intend to be”.

He said in an attempt to reverse this trend and give Nigerians a sense of security, the present administration had earlier initiated the Police Reform Programme, where the Federal, States, and Local Councils as well as public and private organizations should contribute immensely for the actualization of the reform.

In his words: “Federal Government attaches great importance to security of life and property. We are therefore committed towards fulfilling our obligations with regards to this project. In realization of these challenges, this administration recognized that a critical overhaul of the Nigeria Police has become necessary and long overdue and decided to set up the M. D. Yusuf Committee to study the police, identify its problems and make recommendations.

It is no longer news that government has since accepted those recommendations and is currently implementing them.

“In accepting the recommendations of the M. D. Yusuf committee, the federal government also accepted the cost implication of this reform, which will last for a total of six years and involves expenditures of well over N1.5 trillion. Admittedly, this figure is above the capacity of the federal government to unilaterally provide, hence a dynamic funding option was adopted. This option calls for multi-tier funding arrangement in which the federal and state governments, including the organised private sector will contribute. Consequently, the federal government decided to avail the Ministry of Police Affairs its own share of the contribution in 2010, which amounts to N79 billion in order to jump start the reform process”.

The President recommended more sophisticated way of fighting crimes with the high speed of advancement of technology, stating that crimes has taken a new dimension and should be tackled with the same speed.

“New forms of crimes are evolving with frightening speed due to advancement in technology. Criminals are exploiting this development to perpetrate crime. We are now living in a world without borders, which made it more accessible by rapid transportation, the internet, mobile phones and satellite communication systems. This means that criminal syndicates are now transnational and require a different partnership approach to resolve.

“The Police must therefore change its operational strategy to reflect modern trends. Issues like mass raiding of civilians and arbitrary arrest and detentions beyond constitutionally defined limits must be done away with to sustain democratic policing. The Nigeria Police must embrace modern scientific policing to augment its already commendable community policing initiative.”

He also called for reorientation of personnel and enjoined them to be accountable to the government.

Concerning infrastructure and logistics for the police, the President said the police would be totally and completely rekkitted with more aircrafts, vehicles, communications gadgets, as well as weapons, investigation and forensic equipment.

He also promised that new police stations, barracks, colleges, and hospitals will be built, while existing buildings would be renovated and furnished to taste.

Present Credible Candidates for 2011, Jonathan Tells PDP

President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan Monday in Abuja called on the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to present credible candidates that can win convincingly in the 2011 general elections.

Speaking at a meeting with PDP stakeholders from Kano State, Jonathan said that he was fully convinced that with its undisputed status as the biggest party in Nigeria, nothing could stand in the way of a convincing PDP victory in the elections if all its members set aside current differences and unite to work for its success.

According to a statement issued by O.J. Abuah for Special Adviser to the President (Media), Ima Niboro, the president commended the leadership and members of the Kano State Branch of the PDP for having overcome recent internal crises to work together for victory in the elections.

“I am glad that you are coming together. It is our intention that every vote must count in the next elections and as long as we are more, we should win. But we must work very hard, and present credible candidates who will win clearly and legitimately,” President Jonathan told the stakeholders led by former Kano State Governor, Alhaji Rabiu Kwankwaso.

On developmental issues raised by the stakeholders, President Jonathan said that the Federal Government was already taking action to complete irrigation projects in Kano State which were abandoned under previous administrations.

The President said that the Federal Government will also consider the feasibility of installing turbines at the Tiga and Challawa Dams to boost electricity supply to Kano, especially its industrial estates.

The State Chairman of the Party, Barrister Faruq Iya and former Kano State Deputy Governor, Dr. Abdullahi Umar Ganduje who spoke on behalf of the delegation, pledged the “unflinching support and loyalty” of the Kano State PDP to President Jonathan and Vice President Namadi Sambo.

They said that the party was grateful for projects which had been initiated in the state by the Federal Government and affirmed their commitment to working diligently for a PDP victory in Kano in next year’s elections.

AC Renamed ACN amidst Stampede

The Action Congress (AC) yesterday changed its name to the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) in its quest to assume a national outlook - but the convention was marred by ugly scenes. The name change which was the offshoot of the fusion of

other political parties with the AC, took place at the party's national convention in Lagos.

The convention was monitored by national commissioners of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

However, it was marred with tragedy as thousands of the party's supporters pulled down the gate of the Lagos Television, Ikeja, venue of the event in an attempt to gain entrance, resulting in stampede.

In the process, two persons were feared dead while 20 others were severely injured.

But Lagos State Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Mr. Opeyemi Bamidele, denied the allegation of any death, saying the party leadership chose LTV as the venue of the event because it expected only delegates.

Some of the victims who sustained varying degrees of injuries lay on the floor gasping for breath, while others were groping for medical assistance. When some were apparently unconscious and dying, they were rushed to the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTECH) in an ambulance with registration number LA156A08.

It was however, announced before the end of the convention that the victims were responding well to treatment and no life had been lost despite beliefs to the contrary.

While declaring the convention open, National Chairman of the party, Chief Bisi Akande, disclosed that ACN was a fusion of the Democratic Peoples Party (DPP), a faction of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) tagged the Integrity Group, and some leaders of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) who were disenchanted with happenings in the PDP.

The party also amended some sections of its constitution to reflect a new name, motto, slogan, flag, symbol, representation at the party's congresses as well as disciplinary measures.

While article 2.2 of the party was amended to reflect the change of AC to ACN, article 2.3 was amended to reflect the change of the party's motto from justice, peace and progress to justice, peace and prosperity. In the same vein, the convention amended article 2.4 of the constitution to reflect a change from "democracy forever" to "democracy for justice".

Also, article 2.5 of the party's constitution which spelt out the colour of the party as green, white and black was amended to now reflect green, white, blue and black colours, while article 2.6 containing the symbol of the party was also amended.

By the new amendment to this section, the symbol of the party will now be a hand holding a broom with the inscription of ACN on the hand and the abbreviations also embossed on the party's flag.

However, whereas the leadership of the party had moved a motion to amend article 7.1.2 of the party to the effect that "there shall be two delegates to every congress of the party from each of ward, one of which must be a woman", the motion was defeated by a counter motion by former governor of Anambra State, Dr. Chris Ngige, and supported by his Lagos State counterpart, Senator Bola Tinubu, that the delegates shall be three to include a man, woman and a youth. The convention also amended article 7.1.8 B of the Constitution to the effect that only the NEC of the party shall possess the power to dissolve any organ of the party.

Explaining the rationale behind the name change, Akande said the move was informed by relentless attempts by the PDP to whittle down the relevance of all opposition parties and consequently turn Nigeria into a one party state.

He narrated how the PDP allegedly infiltrated the Progressive Peoples Alliance (PPA) and brought its governments in Abia and Imo states to its knees, adding that PDP also hijacked the governments of the ANPP in Bauchi and Zamfara by manipulating the defection of the governors from their original platforms to the PDP.

Zoning: PDP Caucus Seeks Wider Consultation

The National Caucus of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) met on Monday night with a resolution that President Goodluck Jonathan should seek wider consultation if he is interested in contesting the 2011 presidential poll.

And in Kaduna, the Northern socio-cultural group, the Arewa Consult-ative Forum (ACF), rose from the emergency joint meeting with its Board of Trustees (BOT) and declared support for the retention of the zoning arrangement of the PDP which could rule out Jonathan from the race.

But Nigeria's High Comm-issioner to South Africa, Brig-Gen. Buba Marwa (rtd), has warned that although the ultimate decision on zoning lies with the PDP, "the abrogation of anyone's right to vie for the [presidential] seat could be problematic".

The National Caucus meeting, which had Jonathan in attendance, approved the amendment of the PDP constitution as regards the status of automatic delegates, in line with the new electoral act. The new law says all unelected public officers seeking to vote at the national convention and state congresses must be elected.

However, the caucus failed to approve the amendment of the party's constitution to remove zoning after a heated argument between the pro- and anti-zoning members of the caucus, with Chief Tony Anenih and Mallam Adamu Ciroma reportedly close to exchanging blows.

THISDAY checks revealed that approval was denied for the amendment of section 7 (2) (2) and the preamble 2 (c) of the party constitution, with a resolution that the party should embark on wider consultation before any decision is taken.

Contrary to reports that the National Caucus of the party's meeting would hold today, the meeting took place on Monday night at the Presidential Villa. It was presided over by the National Chairman, Dr. Okwesileze Nwodo, and members of the National Working Committee (NWC), Senate President David Mark and the principal officers of the Senate in attendance.

Also in attendance were the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Rt. Hon. Dimeji Bankole, and the principal officers.

According to sources at the meeting, the National Legal Adviser of the party, Chief Olusola Oke, briefed the meeting on the imperatives of amendment of the party constitution.

He said it is not possible for the PDP constitution to limit any one from contesting any election, since Nigeria's constitution has guaranteed all Nigerians the choice and chance of contesting any election.

The National Caucus of the party, like the Board of Trustees (BoT), is merely advisory. It did not give the anticipated approval.

Meanwhile, the ACF meeting in Kaduna was not attended by key members against zoning, notably the Chairman of the forum, Gen. I. B. M. Haruna. The issue had polarised the body at its last meeting as it was unable to come up with a decision.

In a communiqué issued yesterday at the end of the meeting which was presided over by the Chairman of the BoT, Gen. Jeremiah Useni (rtd), the ACF urged all political parties and public organisations to continue to uphold the practice of zoning in the interest of social justice, equity, fairness and stability of a united Nigeria.

Those who attended the meeting included former intelligence chief, Brig-Gen. Halilu Akilu (rtd), former governor of Kaduna State, Alhaji Lawal Kaita, former governor of Katsina State, Alhaji Saidu Barda, former military administrator of Kaduna State, Gen. Bagudu Maman (rtd), former Vice Chancellor of the University of Jos, Prof. Para Mallum, Alhaji Abu Gidado, Gen. Mohammed Wushishi (rtd) and Alhaji Magaji Danbata.

In Pretoria, Marwa said: "The [zoning] decision ultimately rests with the PDP on the zoning issue but when one's constitutional right to run for the office is abrogated, it is more problematic.

"It is therefore in the interest of peace and stability that even President Goodluck Jonathan's right to contest is not abrogated."

“Let us test everybody’s popularity with the electorate,” Marwa said, noting that the electorate was the ultimate decider on who rules the country.

He said that Nigerians had in a survey shown that they were more concerned in a leader who can deliver than where he comes from.

“I can show you a survey on a poll conducted where Nigerians were asked where they want their President to come from: whether North West, North East, North Central, South West, South East, South South or anywhere.

“In the scientific poll, the majority voted for ‘anywhere’ and the truth is that Nigerians really do not care which zone produces the President but are more interested in the person,” he said.

Jonathan Seeks N’Assembly’s Nod for \$4.4bn Loan

President Goodluck Jonathan is seeking the approval of the National Assembly to take \$4.427 billion external loan to finance “critical infrastructure” in the country. And in a renewed effort to address the epileptic power supply in the country, President Jonathan has approved the construction of a new national supergrid to complement the aging 330/132kv transmission infrastructure in the country.

Meanwhile, President Jonathan will on August 26, 2010 present a new roadmap for the reformation of the country’s power sector to the private sector.

In a letter to Senate President David Mark and read on the floor of the Senate, President Jonathan sought for \$4.4 billion external loan, explaining that the National Assembly had earlier given its nod for the Federal Government to obtain an initial sum of \$1,854.71 million from International Development Association (IDA), being component of the negotiated projects.

The borrowing plan, he said, was “segmented for purposes of comprehension into three broad categories namely: projects that had been negotiated and those that were being appraised as well as the pipeline projects/programmes”.

Jonathan said: “The sum total for the negotiated projects stood at \$1,854.71 billion and that of the appraised projects was \$1.073.2 million while \$2,415 billion represented the sum of the pipeline projects. The three categories of projects come to a total of \$5.242 billion.

“In consideration of the 2010 budget in conjunction with the aforementioned borrowing plan, the National Assembly graciously approved only the International Development Association component of the negotiated projects in the sum of \$915 million out of \$1,854.71, leaving a balance of \$939.71 for negotiated projects, \$1,073.2 million for appraised projects and \$2,415 billion for pipeline projects. The entire balance now remaining for National Assembly’s approval is \$4,427.91.”

The President noted that the approval of the outstanding 2010 external borrowing plan would enable the administration to fast track “the provision of critical infrastructure, which the country is in dire need of to jump-start the engine of economic growth and improve the living standards of the citizens”.

He said further: “It is pertinent to add that the proposed loans are highly concessionary credit facilities, which the country needs to access in order to develop our infrastructure and create employment opportunities.

“I have directed the honourable minister of finance to effectively monitor the various projects to ensure that the funds are judiciously utilized and that there is value for money.

“In furtherance of my directive, the ministry held a country portfolio review with the participation of all donor agencies, the 36 states and FCT in Abuja from 8th – 9th July 2010 and has also begun the implementation of the borrowing guidelines as agreed with the National Assembly.

“Considering the huge infrastructure deficit currently being experienced in the country and the enormous financial resources required to fill the gap coupled with the budgetary provisions without resources to external borrowings, I implore the Senate to reconsider the 2010 Borrowing plan with a view to approving the entire package to enable us engage in the negotiations and completion of the requirements for accessing the funds.”

Special Adviser to the President on Media and Publicity Ima Niboro said the new 700 KV supergrid, which will be completed in four years at a projected cost of \$3.5 billion, will transmit power across vast distances that are beyond the capacity of the existing 330/132KV grid.

According to Niboro in a statement last night, the President, who granted the approval at the weekly meeting of the Presidential Action Committee (PAC) on Power which he chairs, also directed that the project be funded as a federal asset with additional financing from private investors and international finance and development agencies.

“The supergrid, which will run along the same route as the existing 330/132KV grid will also address Nigeria’s future energy challenges including transition to more sustainable energy sources, reduction of power loss per transmitted megawatt and improving power voltage profiles across the country,” he said.

As the country grapples with inadequate power supply, experts said with the existing generation and Federal Government’s projections, there is bound to be supply shortfall, which will persist if modern transmission infrastructure that is commensurate with the projected growth is not put in place.

According to these experts, despite the increasing demand for electricity, the country has continued to rely on the 330/132kv introduced in the early 1960’s, leading to decreasing transmission capacity and power loss.

Niboro said the main advantage of the 700 KV supergrid over the existing 330/132 KV grid was that it would significantly reduce the huge amount of power currently lost in transmission.

“Without the supergrid, the quantum of power lost in transmission will continue to increase as more power progressively becomes available for evacuation from new and rehabilitated generating stations. Periodic systemic failures will also become more frequent,” he said.

The Presidential Task Force on Power (PTFP) had projected that Nigeria’s available generation capacity would rise to 6,939 megawatts by April next year and 14,019 megawatts by December 2013.

Meanwhile, the President will on Thursday, August 26, 2010 in Lagos present a new roadmap for the reformation of Nigeria’s power sector to the country’s private sector.

Niboro said President Jonathan would seize the opportunity of the event to acquaint members of the private sector with fresh investment opportunities inherent in the power sector reform programme and invite greater private sector support for the programme.

2011: Uncertainty over Atiku’s Presidential Candidacy

Dark clouds now hover over former Vice President Atiku Abubakar’s presidential ambition following a statement yesterday by the Peoples Democratic Party that he was not among returnees/new members granted waiver to contest for any of its tickets.

Surprisingly, Governor Theodore Orji of Abia State who is yet to confirm his speculated return to the PDP was on the list of new members granted waivers to contest for its gubernatorial ticket in Abia State.

Atiku in a statement yesterday said he was entitled to the waiver given to returnees to contest based on the recommendation of the party’s National Reconciliation Committee led by former Vice President, Alex Ekwueme

It would be recalled that Atiku returned to the PDP last year after almost three years of romance with the Action Congress on whose platform he contested the 2007 presidential election.

By the PDP constitution, returnees to the party will lose their seniority and privileges conferred by previous seniority and will have to wait for at least two years before they can contest for any elective post.

Again, Article 8.9 of the same constitution says, “persons who desire to rejoin the party after leaving it shall, unless exempted by the National Working Committee be placed on probation for a period of not less than a year.”

But returnees can be granted waivers on these conditions by the national secretariat of the party, based on recommendations of state chapters.

However, Atiku's name is yet to be forwarded to the national secretariat of the party from his state because of the factional crisis rocking Adamawa PDP. The Meden Teneke-led faction which Atiku belongs to is not recognized by the national secretariat of the PDP.

The National Publicity Secretary of PDP, Prof. Ahmed Alkali who briefed newsmen on the outcome of its 52nd NEC meeting yesterday regarding waivers said the party deals with issues before it and that Atiku's case on the issue of waiver had not come up before it.

As a result, Atiku's name was conspicuously missing on the list of those granted waivers to contest the primary election at the various levels of the party released yesterday by the PDP and Alkali said if the former vice president's case was presented, "it will be treated."

The PDP is also in doubt as to whether Atiku has completed the process of returning to the party in conformity with its laid down guidelines.

Alkali said when the former vice president came into the PDP secretariat last year and formally told the leadership of the party that he was returning to the party with all his supporters, "he was asked to go back to his ward and register because that is the elementary thing and then the process can start from there."

The PDP national publicity secretary continued: "He (Atiku) indeed brought a document showing the names of the people who came along with him and signed the document and said they were returning unconditionally. When he left, we invited you (press) to come and see the former national chairman, Vincent Ogbulafor so that he could tell you why Atiku came into his office.

"As Ogbulafor said, the party cannot reject any person coming back to the party. No party worth its salt can do that. But what the former national chairman said, and that is the position of the party is that we do not have card here to give to members. So, he was asked to go back."

Alkali said Ogbulafor's statement meant that Atiku should go back and continue with the process of healing and reconciliation, "a kind of fence mending involving him and all the stakeholders in Adamawa State."

He said since that time, there had been formal consultations and discussions involving Atiku and PDP stakeholders in Adamawa State and that the stakeholders have forwarded reports to the PDP secretariat.

Alkali said: "This is the usual thing in politics; there's nothing unusual about it. And so, by the time they sort this out, Atiku will also be treated like any other person who has

come back to the party; he will be given the waiver to be qualified as a bonafide member of the party.

“So, I think the issues are very clear. No matter what we have done here, all these cases that you see of people being cleared were first done at the relevant level before they got to the national secretariat; this is the situation on the ground and I cannot see why there should be any controversy.”

PDP in Adamawa State is torn into two factions. The one loyal to the former vice president is led by Meden Teneke and the Governor Muritala Nyako faction is led by Mijinyawa Kugama.

The former vice president claimed that he had registered in his Jada ward with the faction led by Teneke. But in a swift reaction, the Mijinyawa Kugama’s faction claimed that they were not aware that Atiku had returned to the PDP.

Kugama said that as far as the party was concerned, the former vice president was still a member of the Action Congress.

Also, the National Secretary of PDP, Abubakar Baraje, speaking on the Adamawa PDP crisis said that his record as the national secretary shows that Kagama Mijinyanwa was still the chairman of PDP in the state.

Atiku in the statement sent by his media aide said: “Atiku Abubakar, Turaki Adamawa is entitled to a waiver like all other returnees to the Peoples Democratic Party. The Turaki, who has since returned to the PDP having been duly registered in his Jada 11 ward of Jada Local Government Area Adamawa State, like many others sought expression in AC as a result of being excluded from a party he helped found.”

“But the leadership of the ruling party seeing the necessity to woo back these valuable members constituted the National Reconciliation Committee led by former Vice President, Dr. Alex Ekwueme.”

The former vice president said the Ekwueme committee recommended in its report that "the membership revalidation exercise should be revisited to allow for unfettered and unconditional return of all members of the party and access to new members.

He said this recommendation was adopted and included in the white paper from the National Working Committee to the National Executive Committee of the party in "Recommendation 9" (pp.5).”

Atiku continued: “For the avoidance of doubt, please refer to the minutes of the 42nd NEC meeting of the party held November 23, 2007 at the Wadata Plaza wherein the White Paper sent in by the NWC for consideration was adopted and is listed as Approval 1 (pp.7). We do not believe that the party is adopting a different sort of rules in the waiver for Atiku and his associates.

“We believe that the PDP will make a proper announcement on the issue when it deems fit, as we have been repeatedly assured.”The list of returnees/new members of the PDP granted waivers to contest include Senator Suleiman Nazif Gamawa (Bauchi State); Umar Kumaila and Alhaji Mohammed Goni (Borno State); Governor T. A Orji along with the members of the Abia State House of Assembly; Senator Uche Chukwumerije; Iheanacho Obioma; Umeh Kalu, Uzo Azubuiké and Aro Aronsi.

The following members from Yobe State were also granted waivers: Senator Usman Albishir, Senator Lawan Jalo Zarami, Zakariya Galadima, Tijani Zanna, Zakariya John, Jonga Hassan Jonga, Hassan Abba Abdullahi, Kakumi Musa, Sherif Abdullah, Mustapha Bolibe, Hajiya Adama Adamu, Ngurnoma Maidala and Sani A. Idi.

Electoral Act Delays 2011 Poll Timetable

The much-awaited guidelines and timetable for the 2011 general election cannot be released now because the amended 2006 Electoral Act is yet to be signed into law, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) said yesterday, same day its budget was passed by the House of Representatives after an initial delay.

In a statement signed by the Chief Press Secretary to the INEC Chairman, Mr. Kayode Idowu, he said: “This clarification is to correct media reports that the Chairman of the Commission, Prof. Attahiru Jega, had said the guidelines would be issued on or before the end of December.

“What the Chairman did say was that preparations were ongoing in anticipation of the Electoral Act, following which details of the timetable would be unfolded by the Commission.”

Idowu said that by the draft law, certification of the voters’ register should be concluded by December 9, just in time for the elections expected to hold in January.

According to the statement, “The election timetable/guidelines are statutorily dependent on provisions of the Electoral Act, which is yet in the legislative mill. The Commission hereby reassures the public that immediately the Electoral Act which stipulates the time frame for the electoral process is signed into law by the President, it will issue the necessary timetable/guidelines for the upcoming elections.”

The House of Representatives yesterday received, considered and adopted the Report of the Joint Committee on Appropriation and Finance on the supplementary appropriation in respect of INEC.

It however deferred the activation of the new provision in the First Amendment to the 1999 Constitution which stipulates that INEC should receive its funding directly from the federal treasury on the basis of first line charge.

Like the Senate did on Tuesday, the House approved the issue from the Consolidated Revenue Fund of the Federation the total sum of N87.7 billion to enable the electoral body produce a new voter register and conduct the 2011 general elections.

But the budget did not sail through without some protests from some lawmakers who still believed that some of the proposals were rather bogus and should have been trimmed.

The House had on Wednesday failed to give speedy passage to the budget bill following a series of criticisms from a number of lawmakers who argued that the quantum of funds being requested by INEC was too much to be approved in a hurry.

Deputy Speaker of the House, Hon. Usman Bayero Nafada, who presided over the Committee of Supply for the consideration of the budget, said the new constitutional provision which requires that INEC gets its funding on first line charge like the Judiciary and other independent government bodies cannot be activated now because the National Assembly bureaucracy was yet to gazette the recent amendments made to the 1999 Constitution.

According to Nafada, it would be safer for the National Assembly to put on hold the first line charge constitutional provision in respect of INEC until the amendment to the 1999 Constitution has been gazetted and copies of the new Constitution made available for anyone who wanted to refer to it.

The position of the House on the issue immediately sparked off another controversy on the validity of the constitution review process undertaken by the National Assembly.

In the course of passing the budget some lawmakers argued that since the National Assembly has already proclaimed the Constitution First Amendment Bill into an Act of the Parliament, INEC ought to begin to enjoy financial autonomy beginning with the N87.7 billion supplementary budget.

At a news conference shortly after the plenary, Chairman House Committee on Media and Publicity, Hon. Esemey Eyiboh, explained that the decision of the House to defer the constitutional right of INEC to financial autonomy was not an admission that the Constitution Review process was inconclusive.

According to Eyiboh, the non-availability of the Constitution does not take away the validity and subsisting nature of the amendments. He argued that the decision does not take away the fact that the First Amendment to the 1999 Constitution took effect from the date the House adopted the resolutions transmitted by the State Houses of Assembly to the National Assembly on the amendments.

Meanwhile, Chairman of the House Committee on electoral Matters, Hon. Musa Sarkin, Adar has given reasons for the approval of the N87.7 billion supplementary budget.

Adar who addressed the media alongside Eyiboh said the burden of conducting a credible election within a short time frame necessitated the approval of the staggering amount of N74 billion in respect of the new voters register. According to him, both the Senate and the House were not comfortable with the proposals made by Jega but succumbed to the demands considering the implications of not approving the budget early.

“Both the Senate and the House are very mindful of the figures presented; we were not very comfortable with those figures but because of the exigency of time we have approved it. If we had a period of one year to the next elections, we may not have approved the N74 billion for the voter registration exercise. There is no time and INEC must acquire 120,000 Direct Data Capture (DDC) machines for the 120,000 polling units that we have across the federation, therefore the money allocated to them is justifiable.

“There is no way we can avoid it. If we want to avoid it then elections must be postponed to another date instead of the January 2011 and we are not ready for such a shift in election time table,” Adar said.

Meanwhile, the Federal Character Commission (FCC) has asked INEC to respect the federal character principles in all its appointments and recruitments.

Speaking during a courtesy call to INEC, Chairman of the Judiciary Committee of FCC, Lekan Okoi, told INEC commissioners that the electoral body had failed to respect federal character in past appointments.

In his reaction, Jega promised that INEC shall be guided by the federal character principle in all its future appointments and recruitment exercise in line with provision of the law.

He pledged to study records of past appointments made by the commission with a view to correcting any imbalance that might have been created.

Jonathan's Fate Now Hanging, Says Ayu

The decision by the national executive committee of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to retain the contentious zoning policy and at the same time give President Goodluck Jonathan the nod to contest next year's polls has 'left the president's fate hanging on the balance', according to former Senate President Iorchia Ayu.

He said rather than help the cause of Jonathan's supporters who said he has the right to contest, the decision is a victory for pro-zoning elements in the country. Speaking with THISDAY in an interview in Lagos yesterday, Ayu said the PDP NEC's decision has also proven that the era of imperial tendencies from party leaders was gone.

He said though the decision was ambiguous in all respect, it has opened up the political space and all aspirants in the party will now have a sense of belonging.

“The NEC decision will ensure a level playing field for all aspirants. It also shows that the president and some party leaders cannot impose their wills on the majority of party members.

“The decision will no doubt make the forthcoming primaries very interesting. The good thing is that all aspirants will be assured of fairness.

““Ultimately, the zoning principle we initiated at the foundation stage of the party to give all Nigerians a sense of belonging has been retained. Zoning is the best decision for the party and the sure way to ensure electoral success next year,” he added.

Meanwhile, more facts have continued to emerge as to the possible reason why the PDP adopted a middle ground approach on the contentious zoning controversy.

THISDAY checks show that many state chapters of the party, through their various state governors, have highlighted the potential confusion that may arise at state levels if the policy is discarded.

Further checks reveal that majority of governors from the North have intimated the party of the rising tension in their various states due to zoning debate, and suggested that the policy be retained.

One of the governors of the North West states told THISDAY that the tension in the region, occasioned by inflammatory remarks from anti zoning persons like EK Clark, played a huge part in killing the anti zoning agitation.

"Clark's remarks at various times were provocative and insulting. Many of our people felt he has over stepped the boundaries of civilised debate. Clarke especially hardened the position of many of our colleagues who felt slighted by the tone of the debate," he added.

2011/2015: South-east, North Reach Agreement on Zoning

Ahead of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting to amend the party's constitution to remove zoning and rotation of public offices from the party's constitution, the pro-zoning Northern Elders and Leaders Forum (NPEF) yesterday met with key leaders of the Southeast, where it was agreed that zoning should remain a feature of the Nigeria's political system.

The meeting which was attended by who is who in the Southeast has the following Igbo politicians in attendance; former governor of old Anambra State, Jim Nwobodo; former Senate President, Chief Ken Nnamani; former Health Minister, Prof. ABC Nwosu; Senator Uche Chukwumerije; former Chairman of Police Service Commission, Chief Simon Okeke; former governor of old Anambra State, Dr. Chukwuemeka Ezeife; former governor of Ebonyi State, Dr. Sam Egwu; former Minister of State for Foreign Affairs,

Chief Dubem Onyia, former Minister of Health, Dr. Tim Menakaye, and Senator Ben Obi, among others.

The following attended the meeting from the North: former military president, General Ibrahim Babangida; former vice-president, Atiku Abubakar; former Minister of Finance, Mallam Adamu Ciroma, Alhaji Tanko Yakassai, former Inspector General of Police, Gambo Jimeta; former Senate President, Iyorchia Ayu; former National Chairman of PDP, Chief Audu Ogbah, Senator Jubril Aminu, and Prof. Ango Abdullahi, among others.

The meeting in a communiqué signed by Bashir Yusufu Ibrahim said that both the Northern Elders and Leaders Forum and the South-East support the retention of zoning and that the South-east would support the north to complete the remaining part of the late President Umaru Yar'Adua's tenure.

Equally, the meeting pledged to support the South-east to produce the next President by 2015.

This position of the meeting of the South-east elders and Northern Elders and Leaders Forum is a departure from the position of the South-east governors that no Igbo son or daughter will contest the 2011 presidential election.

The South-east members at the meeting complained of betrayal by the northern politicians, especially the treatment meted out to former Vice President, Dr. Alex Ekwueme.

To ensure that there would be no further betrayal, the meeting agreed to put in writing the agreement reached at their meeting.

Meanwhile, Chief Edwin Clark yesterday stated that there was nothing like zoning in PDP, as it was done to please the Yorubas.

“As you are aware of the fact that the National Chairman of PDP, Mr. Okwesilieze Nwodo has made it very clear to everyone of us that zoning which started in 1999 with PDP has been breached and is dead

“The present PDP National Chairman is a man of honour and integrity. He has made it very clear to every member of PDP that zoning which started in 1999 is dead .This is because in 2003, the former Vice President, Atiku Abubarkar, who was next to Obasanjo, challenged him,” he said.

“He wanted to take over from Obasanjo after four years .If there was zoning for eight years for Obasanjo, Atiku would not have been the one to challenge him. In fact, he mobilized most of governors from the South-South including James Ibori; Diepreye Alamieyeseigha and Lucky Igbinedion to fight Obasanjo.

“In fact, Obasanjo and the wife almost went down on his knees to plead with Atiku to leave him alone to continue. Even Obasanjo’s late wife, Stella, who was very close to us, called me on phone to appeal to the South-South governors at that time.

“If there was zoning, that shouldn’t have happened .When Atiku Abubarkar withdrew, then Abubakar Rimi continued with his Presidential ambition. At that time, Gemade was the Chairman of the PDP while Rimi was a governor and senior member of the PDP.

“They paid for their forms, the party collected their forms and they contested against Obasanjo. So, if the Presidency was zoned that time, PDP would have refunded their money, sanctioned them or even prevent them from contesting .But this never happened.

“In 2007, the issue of zoning was not there. It was done in 1999 to please the Yorubas. That was why Obasanjo, immediately he came out from prison, was made the choice of the people of the North”.In a statement by his campaign group, the his official website, www.voteibb.org, the former president, who is seeking the nomination of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), hopes to use this portal to engage the voter on issue-based political discussions.

The statement said, “Visitors to the www.voteibb.org site will find IBB, as he is fondly called, giving a video welcome address. The website answers frequently asked questions about Babangida and his political ambitions.

“Babangida is pioneering a new aspect of online campaigning and voter interactivity by personally responding to voters via web video and building personal relationships through this web portal. His online strategic team quoted the dynamic leader as raising the bar in social interaction that has never before been done in Nigeria in a platform such as this, and credited the leader with his candid openness and readiness to reach out to all voters. “The www.voteIbb.org was launched on Monday, August 9, 2010”, the statement said.

IBB Pleads for Al-Mustapha’s Release

Former Military President, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida has appealed to the Federal Government to release former Chief Security Officer to the late Head of State, Gen. Sani Abacha, Major Hamza Al-Mustapha who has been in detention for the past 12 years.

Babangida, in an interview with the Hausa Service of the Voice of America (VOA) monitored yesterday in Kaduna said Al-Mustapha and three others standing trial before a Lagos Federal High Court have not been treated fairly having been kept behind bars for such a long time without justice.

“I know him; I have worked with him and I believe and I have said, they have not been fair to him by leaving him in detention for the past 12 years. I am among those calling on the government to released him, this is because on all the crime he might have

committed, for the past 12 years it was not known? Then there is no justice. I am among those pleading and I hope he will be released. I am begging this government.

“They (government) interrogated him, gathered what they wanted to gather on him and decided to drag him to a judge. So you see it was not our government. It is only what comes out that we see, but the truth is that 12 years is too much,” Babangida said.

Major Al-Mustapha has been standing trial with three others for allegedly attempting to murder The Guardian Newspapers publisher, Alex Ibru among other charge.

The three others include James Danbaba, a former Commissioner of Police in Lagos State, former Military Administrator of Zamfara, Col. Jibril Bala Yakubu, and Rabo Lawal.

Mark: Constitution Amendment, a Promise Kept

Mark: Constitution Amendment, a Promise Kept, Senate President David Mark has said with the conclusion of the first amendment to the 1999 Constitution, the National Assembly has fulfilled one of the cardinal promises made to Nigerians at its inauguration in 2007.

Mark who made the statement while addressing the 125 participants of the National Defence College (NDC), Abuja Course 18 graduates and their directing staff in Abuja weekend, said the constitution amendment concentrated on electoral reform “because it would form the basis for free, fair and credible elections Nigerians are yearning for”.

The constitution amendment process was concluded late July when the 36 state legislatures turned in their resolutions on the 50 clauses of the 1999 Constitution earlier approved for amendment by the National Assembly.

In all, 29 of those clauses scaled through and most of them dwell on electoral reform. Mark noted that with the successful amendment, the 2011 elections would meet the expectations of Nigerians.

The Senate President advocated the upgrading of the National Defence College (NDC), to National Defence University of Nigeria, saying the achievement of the college and its academic curriculum which meet global standards have equipped the institution to be upgraded to a university status. He said the institution should be a research centre of excellence in defence and security matters in Africa.

Mark also suggested that that the current one year compulsory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme be expanded to a two—year programme “to further inculcate the attitude of moral, national values and overall discipline in public and private lives of Nigerians”.

The first one year of the NYSC, he said, should be devoted to military training, discipline, national interest, values and inculcation of patriotism, ideals of nationhood and development, adding that the three weeks of orientation programme is grossly inadequate. He said, "I believe that when we get our national interest and values right with proper discipline among the youths and commitment to our fatherland, ingredients needed for national survival, the malaise in our society would have been erased".

IBB: I'd Do Only One Term

Former military president, General Ibrahim Babangida, has said categorically that if elected president in 2011, he will not seek a second term in office.

Babangida who ruled the country as military president for eight years from 1985 to 1993 said his intention to run for the office of President Come 2011 is only for one term.

He also said after one-term in 2011, it would be his desire to see that power moves from the North to the South-east to demonstrate the full integration of the Igbo into the mainstream of the country, pointing out that, which is the only way to put an end completely to the 30 months civil war.

The unstated problem about zoning, which is tearing the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) apart, is what happens in 2015.

If the North, which is insisting that power should revert back to it to complete its two terms truncated by the death of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, gets back to power in 2011, what is the guarantee that it would not insist on another term.

And what is also the guarantee that President Goodluck Jonathan, for whom those canvassing that zoning be jettisoned are rooting, will also do just one term if given the opportunity.

But the former president, who spoke to **THISDAY** in a telephone interview yesterday in Minna, said he is aware that the North has one term left after the demise of late President Yar'Adua, stating that he is not interested in remaining as president beyond 2015 if given the mandate.

Babangida added that his intention to spend one term as president if elected is to further reinforce the zoning idea and allow other parts of the country have a fair share of the topmost office.

The former president is one of the Northern leaders pushing for the retention of PDP zoning arrangement under which they insist power should return to the North by 2011.

PDP National Executive Committee (NEC) is meeting today in Abuja to take a decision on zoning and other crucial issues.

“In 2015, I will love to see that an Igbo man becomes President of this country so that it will fully put an end to the civil war matter and fully integrate them into Nigeria. After the civil war, they need to completely feel like Nigerians,” he said.

Babangida said his advocacy for zoning is not a war against President Goodluck Jonathan but a crusade for equity, justice and fair play as well as peace and unity, which General Yakubu Gowon fought to keep the country together.

He said: “When we were advocating for zoning, it was not because anyone had or has anything against our President Jonathan but we were advocating for zoning to maintain equity, justice and fair play in the country”

Babangida further stated that the idea of zoning, which has been causing uproar in the country in recent times, would only be complete after an Igbo man becomes the president of Nigeria in 2015.

“If we must make every one believe that he belongs to this country, then it is after an Igbo man has been given the opportunity of being president in 2015 to complete the programme of fighting for the unity of this country by General Gowon,” he added.

2. Economy:

NSE’s 9-Month Accounts Show N2.2bn Loss

Fresh facts have emerged on the financial position of Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE) showing that it recorded a loss of N2.723 billion as at September 30, 2009, according to information from the management accounts obtained by THISDAY yesterday.

SEC last week removed Prof. Ndi Okereke-Onyiuke over allegations of financial infractions and replaced her with Mr. Emmanue Ikhazoboh as the Interim Administrator.

The Director-General of SEC, Ms Arunma Oteh, said last Thursday that the commission would launch a probe into financials of the exchange to ascertain the veracity of the allegations.

The management account of NSE for the nine months ended September showed a loss of N2.723 billion.

According to the accounts, while the exchange recorded an income of N2.176 billion, its total expenditure was N4.9 billion leading to a loss of N2.723 billion.

The NSE had expected an income of N5.849 billion for the period but ended with only N2.176 billion. The highest income of N882 million was realised from transaction levy. This was followed by N628 million made from annual listing fees, while N280 million

came from entrance levy. Also, the exchange made N207 million from interest on fixed deposit and N113 million from sundry income.

However, the NSE expended N1.225 billion on salaries and allowances, N582 million on contribution to gratuity and pension fund, N488 million on depreciation and N468 million on market development expenses.

Apart from N468 million expended on market development, the NSE spent N379 million on office/equipment/automate trading system/central securities depository. Business travel (overseas) consumed N217 million, business travel Abuja N56.3 million and local travel N56.6 million. A total of N208 million was spent on public enlightenment, while N189 million was expended on staff training and development among others.

Business mogul Alhaji Aliko Dangote had in a petition to SEC alleged that the NSE was insolvent as was unable to meet its financial obligations. But the exchange denied the allegations, despite Dangote's insistence of the financial crunch at the NSE.

To prevent the situation from snowballing into a major crisis, SEC intervened last week by removing Okereke-Onyiuke and Dangote.

Meanwhile, Oteh confirmed yesterday that about 260 individuals and corporate organisations operating in the stock market will soon be arraigned before the Investments and Securities Tribunal (IST) over their alleged involvement in stock manipulation, insider dealings and other sharp practices at the capital market.

The allegations came on the heels of the crash at the stock market in the wake of the global economic meltdown during which the value of the stock market fell from a peak of about N12 trillion in March, 2008 to rock bottom of N5.5 trillion within eight months.

Oteh confirmed the planned prosecution of offenders at a meeting with members of the House of Representatives Committee on Capital Market. The decision to prosecute the offending individuals and organisations, Oteh said, followed a series of complaints from investors about sharp practices that took place at the stock market.

Chairman, House Committee on Capital Market and Institutions, Hon. Umar Jubril, said the meeting with SEC became necessary following the sweeping changes made by SEC on the leadership of the Nigeria stock Exchange.

Before the closed door session, Oteh explained that SEC as the regulator of the capital market took some drastic decisions recently on the Stock Exchange because it cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the various abnormalities taking place at the market, particularly when its core mandate is to protect the investors and the interest of the general public.

The SEC boss disclosed that a lot of Nigerians were severely affected by the crash because over the last few years a number of them invested in shares and stocks.

According to her, more than seven million investors who invested in the market directly lost their investments due to this unprecedented crash, a situation that exposed the fragility in investors' confidence.

Stock Market Sheds N173bn in 3 Days

Value of equities at the stock market has plunged by N173 billion or 2.7 per cent in the last three days as efforts by the Interim Administrator appointed by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to stabilise the stock market, Mr. Emmanuel Ikhazoboh, are yet to yield the desired results.

The decline in market came amid strong indications that the interim administrator has effected some minor changes at the top management level of the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE).

The value of equities as measured by the market capitalisation of the NSE dipped from N6.295 trillion last Monday to close at N6.122 trillion yesterday, a development operators linked to panic sale by investors who are still watching the unfolding events at the NSE.

The apex capital market regulator last Thursday appointed Ikhazoboh to oversee the affairs of the NSE following the sacking of its former Director-General, Prof. Ndi Okereke-Onyiuke, after her face-off with business mogul Alhaji Aliko Dangote.

The face-off led to allegations of financial impropriety against Okereke-Onyiuke by Dangote. In an apparent move to prevent the crisis from degenerating, SEC intervened last Wednesday by removing the DG and appointing Ikhazoboh until a new chief executive is recruited.

On assumption of office last Thursday, Ikhazoboh said: "My responsibility is an interim one and it is to ensure that we stop the slide, ensure that integrity is restored to the market place and ensure that the back office is put back into shape."

The market recorded marginal growth in the first days after the intervention. However, the slide began last Monday despite a second meeting he had with the stockbrokers on the trading floor on that same day.

On that day, Ikhazoboh appealed to stockbrokers for cooperation, promising that he would do everything in his power to return the market to growth.

He stated that he is working on measures aimed at restoring investors' confidence to the market adding that the measures require concerted effort to bring them to fruition. He tasked the brokers to take the good news to the investors.

However, NSE shed N33 billion on that same day and went down with another N63 billion on Tuesday before shedding N77 billion yesterday to bring the total decline in three days to N173 billion.

Stockbrokers said the decline is expected as some investors are yet to come to terms with the happenings at the exchange.

“The slide is a sign that investors are still very much apprehensive of the uncertainty that normally follow changes like this. The changes may lead to positivity on the long run but there are always initial reactions that will definitely dictate the direction of the market,” a senior stockbroker said.

According to the broker, when investors begin to see the clear direction of the regulatory agency, they will react positively. He added that the decline in the prices of equities is even an opportunity to buy more shares that have strong fundamentals.

Meanwhile, there are indications that Ikhazoboh has moved some top management staff of the exchange. It was gathered that the some General Managers were asked to swap their positions. However, NSE spokesman, Mr. Sola Oni, denied the report.

3. Energy:

Nigeria plans \$3.5 bln "supergrid" to end power woes

Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan on Tuesday announced plans for a \$3.5 billion national electricity grid to be jointly financed with the private sector and development agencies.

The presidency said the new "supergrid" would be completed within four years and would boost Nigeria's generating capacity to over 14,000 megawatts (MW) by the end of December 2013.

The project aims to end chronic power shortages which are a major brake on economic growth in Africa's most populous nation, and which force businesses and those who can afford them to rely on expensive diesel generators for power.

"Without the supergrid, the quantum of power lost in transmission will continue to increase ... Periodic systemic failures will also become more frequent," Jonathan's office said in a statement.

Successive presidents have pledged to boost Nigeria's power generation -- which regularly plunges to well below its 3,000 MW capacity due to poor maintenance and mismanagement -- but little concrete progress has been made.

Jonathan has not yet said whether he plans to stand in elections due next January but his administration's policy announcements -- including his pledges on power -- have led many Nigerians to expect that he will.

A presidential task force met with independent power producers in the capital Abuja last month and agreed to establish a framework to make private power generation for the national grid commercially viable within weeks.

The presidency said on Tuesday Jonathan would meet with the private sector in the commercial hub Lagos later this month to "present a new roadmap for the reformation" of the power sector.

His administration has already promised to privatize generation and distribution next year.

Foreign investors including large power companies stand ready to invest billions of dollars in Nigeria's power sector if government is able to sort out the regulatory framework, a senior infrastructure financier said last month.

Development institutions such as the World Bank and African Development Bank are also ready to provide debt financing if regulatory concerns can be overcome, industry experts say.

Nigeria Loses \$5m Daily from Crude Oil Lifting

The Nigerian Content Development and Monitoring Board (NCDMB) yesterday lamented that the nation was losing over \$5 million daily- that is, N750 million daily, from the non-participation of Nigerians in the lifting of crude oil in the nation's oil industry.

Executive Secretary of NCDMB, Engr. Ernest Nwakpa said this yesterday in Yenagoa, Bayelsa at Workshop for the Media on the reporting local content issues, to mark 100 days of the Board.

Nwakpa said crude oil lifting was one critical aspect of the oil industry that Nigerians could easily participate in.

According to him, one of the key areas of implementation of the Nigerian Content Act is that, "first and exclusively consideration" is given to "Nigerian indigenous companies that demonstrate ownership of equipment and capacity in crude lifting, downstream and ownership of marine vessels, tools and equipment used for performing work in Nigeria."

Nwakpa urged Nigerians to use the opportunity provided by the Act to invest in all aspect of the industry as it guaranteed a greater participation of Nigerians in the oil industry.

“This law is a major opportunity to resurge our national economic development, create employment, develop local industrial and technological capacity growth, douse the tensions in the Niger Delta by integrating the inhabitants of the oil producing communities into the mainstream of industry activities.”

As for the support of the executive, the NCDMB boss stated that, “we have the unalloyed backing of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (GCFR), the Honourable Minister of Petroleum, Mrs. Deziani Alison-Madueke and the government to fully implement the laws and begin to show dividends to Nigerians.”

He however pointed out that, a major gap is the continued absence of commitment and resolve on the part of Nigerians in key positions of authority within the industry to insist that we collectively and consistently abide by the provisions of this law and make it count. “If we don’t insist, the foreigners won’t help us with compliance,” he added.

Earlier, during a presentation, General Manager, Capacity Building, NCDMB

Engr. Taiwo Elegba said the Federal Government planned to grow the nation’s crude oil reserves to an estimated level of about 40billion barrels by 2015 with production capacity targeted to hit about 2.5 million barrels of oil per day (mbpd) by the same year.

To him, the national aspiration for oil and gas is robust as “It balances the focus on two key levers production capacity / revenue growth and specific aspiration to link the industry with the domestic economy.”

Elegba also said, for gas, there is currently proven reserves of 182 tonnes cubit feet of gas, which puts Nigeria as world’s seventh largest. He however added that, gas utilization potential stood at over 20billion cubit feet per day.

Besides, Elegba revealed that, over \$500 million per year will be spent on engineering design projects in the oil sector within the next five years

Likewise, he gave a figure of over \$8 billion per year as an amount earmarked for fabrication scope in the upstream for the next five years as he stated that, about \$25bn will be spent on procurement of materials in the same period of time.

Speaking on the Petroleum Industry Bill presently with the National Assembly, Elegba expressed the hope of passing it very soon, saying, “When signed into law, PIB will stimulate investments and opportunities.”

More importantly, he added that, “the Nigerian Content Act will ensure that these investments are domiciled and bring benefits to Nigerians.”

4. Environment:

N'Delta: FG Signs JV Agreement to Clean Up Oil Waste

The Federal Government yesterday signed a Joint Venture Agreement with Messrs Titan Projects Nigeria Limited and the Rivers State government for the provision of Integrated Waste Management Services for the Oil and Gas Industry operations in the Niger Delta.

The project is intended to provide a well-researched, modern and flexible state-of-the-art integrated solution to the remediation and management of hydrocarbon impacted or generated waste streams from oil prospecting, exploration and production activities in the Niger Delta.

As part of the deliverables of the joint venture initiative, the project would provide complete environmental remediation services from characterisation and planning to selection and implementation of treatment technologies.

Under the tripartite agreement, the Federal Government would facilitate the patronage of the investor's technology and services by ministries, agencies and multinational oil firms operating in the Niger Delta region.

The government would also grant approval for a five-year tax moratorium period to the investor (Titan Projects) as incentive for the execution of the clean up project.

As a means of further facilitating the process, the government would in conjunction with the Rivers State government set up a technical committee comprising representatives of relevant ministries and agencies, host communities and oil companies.

In this same vein, Rivers State is obligated under the agreement to provide the investor land and basic infrastructure to site their facilities on the condition that if the company fails to utilize the land within two years, it will revert to the state government.

For the investing company, government expects it to provide along with its foreign technical partners landfill the soil and treat the hazardous waste in such a manner as to provide lasting remediation of the imparted site.

The company would also provide waste storage facilities, logistics and handling equipment as well as a modern laboratory to deal with pre and post treatment analysis of waste streams.

Another major part of the investor's engagement is to conduct analysis and implementation of metering technology in the oil and gas fields in the Niger Delta.

Speaking during the signing of the agreement, the Minister of Environment, Mr. John Odeh, said: "This event is part of the administration's commitment to improve the

welfare of our people and convert prevailing challenges and exploits into opportunities.”

Odeh lamented that the problem of managing the wastes generated in the oil and gas industry had been a major concern to the Federal Government and the people of Niger Delta, adding that the issue had remained intractable in spite of individual efforts from some private companies in proffering solutions to it.

The minister said the proposed project would include customized thermal treatment, remediation of polluted soil and groundwater, management of drill cuttings and mud, oil tank cleaning and material recovery as well as sanitary landfills.

He said the Federal Ministry of Environment and the Investment Division of NNPC initiated the joint venture project by inviting Messrs Titan Projects Nigeria Limited for discussion and technical presentation in 2009 after which the investor was requested to introduce the proposal to the Ministry of Environment.

According to the minister, given the increasing oil prospecting activities in the country’s continental shelf and deep offshore, there is a need for proactive measures to stem the persistent problem of wastes generated from oil industry operations.

The Deputy High Commissioner of Canada in Nigeria, Mr. Jim Corty, said what happened during the recent oil spill incident in the American gulf should serve to re-echo the damage of oil waste on the environment.

Nigeria Threatened by Cholera Outbreak in Cameroon

Nigeria and other countries bordering Northern Cameroon - hit by cholera outbreak - are at the risk of the disease, the United Nations warned yesterday.

The current outbreak in Cameroon, which began in May, has now recorded more than 2,000 confirmed cases, with fatality rate of over 13 per cent, which is considered extremely high. The outbreak has already claimed at least 155 lives.

This area, which share borders with Nigeria, Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR), is home to an estimated 5 million people and has relatively little clean water or proper sanitation, while the situation has been made worse by extensive flooding in the past months.

A statement issued in New York yesterday said "four months into this outbreak we are facing the very real possibility of cholera spreading to neighbouring regions and countries."

The statement said that women and children are especially vulnerable as the outbreak spreads from its current base in Cameroon’s extreme North and North regions.

Already, five UN humanitarian agencies are rushing medical supplies and other materials to northern Cameroon. Cholera drugs, oral rehydration salts, hygiene kits, surgical gloves, family water kits and educational materials are among the items that had been dispatched.

The statement said UNICEF is working with the World Health Organisation, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Food Programme and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as well as government ministries and the Red Cross, to bring relief to people in need, particularly women and children.

5. Immigration/Refugee/Idps:

Cocaine: NDLEA Arraigns Taiwanese, Others to Court

National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) has announced that it would tomorrow arraign three accused persons in connection with 450kg cocaine seizure at the Tin Can Island Port, Lagos few weeks ago.

The accused: Fong Chui Sen (Taiwanese), Wang Richard, (Chinese) and the Nigerian, Inua Mohammed would be arraigned at court 12, Federal High Court annex Ikoyi tomorrow for their involvement in bringing the illicit drug to the country.

Spokesman of the agency, Mitchell Ofoyeju, said in a statement that NDLEA was also determined to unmask others suspected to be the drug barons in the country.

“All the accused are to appear before Justice O. E. Abang of the Federal High Court, Ikoyi Lagos on a four count charge relating to unlawful importation and conspiracy. The accused, Fong Chui Sen (Taiwanese), Wang Richard, (Chinese) and a Nigerian, Inua Mohammed may be arraigned at court 12, Federal High Court annex Ikoyi.”

The CEO of the agency, Ahmadu Giade said the agency has conducted excellent investigation on the matter.

“On our part, we have conducted a thorough investigation and we have a watertight case. Diligent prosecution by our legal team shall be the icing on the cake” the NDLEA boss stated.

Giade promised to expose more drug barons and pointed out that one of the accused had been confirmed to be a Taiwanese.

“Like the arrest of these accused persons, Nigerians should expect more from us in line with my operational promise to expose drug barons as no one dealing in drug will go unpunished”.

He also stated that drug businesses though covertly done have serious consequences on the society, adding that such transactions adversely affect society in many ways, noting that it is one of the factors that give rise to money laundering.

“Illicit drug transactions affect the public in so many ways. Apart from increasing insecurity, drugs leads to money laundering and could adversely undermine legitimate businesses. We must unite in fighting against drug trafficking and abuse. The love for money is attracting more people into the criminal act, but one sure way of tackling the problem is to increase the penal sanctions” Giade urged.

Ofoyeju disclosed that count 1 states that, Fong Chui Sen and Wang Richard male adults, between the months of March and July 2010 at Ibadan and Kano, Nigeria, without lawful authority conspired to import 450.400 kg of cocaine into Nigeria from Republic of Chile and thereby committed an offence contrary to and punishable under section 14 (b) of the NDLEA Act, CAP N30 Laws of the Federation 2004.

Security Agencies Impound Vaccines Imported from S’Africa

Security agencies have impounded 400 doses of African Horse Sickness Vaccine allegedly believed to have been illegally imported into the country from South Africa by the Lagos Polo Club.

Investigations revealed that the vaccines arrived in the country last Friday aboard South Africa Airways and were immediately intercepted by officials of Nigerian Agricultural Quarantine Services (NAQS) with the assistance of the security agencies at the Murtala Mohammed International Airport (MMIA) Ikeja, Lagos.

The decision to impound the vaccines was borne out of the fact that the Federal Government had earlier placed a ban on the importation of animal vaccines due to the experience of the country in the recent past about animal disease that was afflicting humans.

It was discovered that such vaccines rather than protect animals due to poor handling had turned round to cause havoc by causing them to be sick due to poor cold chain and also affecting human population who keep them as domestic animals.

During an interactive session with the Head, NAQS, Dr. Abiodun Akinjo, he alleged that the importers of the vaccine did not obtain valid papers from the appropriate authority before bringing it in.

This according to him does not mean that the government does not approve the importation of animal vaccine but due process must be followed.

The Animal Disease Act 10 of 1988 expects any importer of animal vaccines to obtain approval from the Federal Department of Livestock in the Federal Ministry of

Agriculture And Natural Resources, and only veterinary doctors should administer animal vaccine.

Akinjo said investigations were on to get to the root of the source and those behind the illegal importation.

Nigeria Installs Full Body Scanners at Airports

The training of local staff has commenced to handle full body scanners acquired following the Christmas day bomb attempt by Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab even as Air Marshals from the United States now guard flights coming in and out of Nigeria.

“Full-body scanners have been installed at Nigeria’s four international airports and are being used selectively,” the Director-General of Nigeria Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), Mr. Harold Demuren, said at a joint press briefing with the United States ambassador to Nigeria, Dr. Robin Renée Sanders in Lagos yesterday.

Demuren said training is ongoing for officers with the goal of having the scanners which have been installed at Murtala Mohammed International Airport in Lagos and Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport in Abuja operating 24 hours a day.

For the time being, the machines have not been installed at similar airports in Kano and Port Harcourt.

“We want to make our airports extremely unfriendly to terrorists...explosive detection equipment are already being used and full body pat-downs for international passengers will not allow such to happens again.” Demuren said.

He disclosed that ten of such scanners which create a 3-D image of passengers’ shape have been acquired by the government.

Ambassador Sanders said that Nigeria should be commended for the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority’s successful completion of Federal Aviation Administration [FAA] assistance program in preparation for the Aviation Safety Assessment [IASA] audit.

She posited also that although there is still more job to be done in the sector, it is important to celebrate the tremendous progress and success of the government in making the nation’s air travel the safest it has ever been.

Sanders who would be leaving Nigeria soon congratulated the NCAA for its historical issuance of Air Operator Certification [AOC] to Arik Air Limited on July 12, this year. She however said that Nigerian aviation sector has not been able to obtain Category 1 status the way other developed countries have.

Responding to her comment, Demuren said “security challenge is a global one. It is not only an American issue; it is not the Netherland issue, and not Nigerian issue but a global one. So, the war on terror must be total”.

Demuren promised that the December 20th December 2009 bomb incident, with security measures being put in place by the NCAA, will never happen again, saying that body scanners have been made available in all he major airports in the country with the provision of ten scanners by the Federal Government.

While recounting on Abdulmutallab’s bomb case, which resulted in Nigeria in being included in the global terror list by the United States, Demuren said that on the fateful day, the equipment available at the Lagos Airports are those that could only detect metals, but that now all the international airport in the country have automatic detecting systems at different four stages before boarding flight to another country.

6. Health:

7. Human rights/Gender/social issues:

Nigerian Appointed into UN Group against Global Poverty

United Nations Secretary General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, has announced a 21-member High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability, which included a Nigerian, Hajiya Amina Zubair, who is the Adviser to the President on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The 21-member panel, which is to be co-chaired by President Tarja Halonen and South African President Jacob Zuma, is saddled with the responsibility of finding ways to lift people out of poverty while tackling climate change and ensuring that economic development is environmentally friendly.

Announcing the panel to UN correspondents in New York yesterday, Ki-moon said “we need a new blueprint for a more livable, prosperous and sustainable future for all”, adding, “I have asked the panel to think big.”

Ki-moon said he expects the panel to come up with practical solutions to address the institutional and financial arrangements necessary to put a new scheme into practice, as well as tackle the intertwined challenges posed by poverty, hunger, water and energy security.

The high-level panel, which brings together representatives from government, the private sector and civil society in countries rich and poor, is made up of former Prime Ministers

Gro Harlem Brundtland (Norway), Han Seung-soo (Republic of Korea), Yukio Hatoyama (Japan), Luisa Dias Diogo (Mozambique), and Kevin Rudd (Australia).

Also included are Barbadian Prime Minister David Thompson, United Arab Emirates Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdallah Bin Zayid Al Nahayan, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan, Switzerland's Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey, United States' Permanent Representative to the UN, Susan Rice, Chair of the board of the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), Lawrence Balsillie, and Aide to the Russian President on climate change, Alexander Bedritsky.

Others on the panel are current and former environment ministers of three countries. They are Jairam Ramesh of India, Julia Carabias of Mexico and Cristina Narbona Ruiz of Spain, as well as Connie Hedegaard, who is the European Union's Commissioner for Climate Change, and Director of the China Meteorological Administration, Zheng Guogang.

The new body is expected to deliver its final report by the end of next year, ahead of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development scheduled for 2012, as well as annual conferences of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Neglect of Rural Areas, Cause of Increasing Insecurity

An aspirant into the House of Representative in Anambra State, Mr. Okwy Erike, has said the neglect of rural areas in the country is the major cause of the increasing criminality in the country.

Erike, who is seeking the ticket of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) to represent Awka North/Awka South Federal Constituency, declared this during an interactive session with newsmen in Lagos yesterday.

According to him, there is urgent need for governments at all levels to shift attention to issues affecting the rural areas.

“The poverty level in rural Nigeria is almost at zero and this has driven many young men in the rural areas to crime. It is not very difficult to bring succour to the rural areas. Projects that will provide employment and ensure that all rural Nigeria are connected to power will go a long way to change the situation of the rural areas,” he said.

Erike, who contested for the House of Representatives seat in 2007 under the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), also lamented alleged ineffective representation of his people by those who had been past representatives of his constituency.

“It breaks my heart to behold the abject poverty in my area with no roads, pipe borne water and other amenities needed to make life worthwhile.

“My first consideration is to impact on the lives of the people in rural areas of Anambra State through provision of adequate infrastructure. I would touch the people's lives and use personal means to provide them some basic amenities,” he said.

8. Geo-Strategic issues:

India's ONGC-Mittal Plans 180,000bpd Refinery in Nigeria

Indian Energy giant, ONGC Mittal Energy Ltd (OMEL) has concluded plans to build a 180,000 barrel per day capacity refinery in Nigeria.

India's Oil Minister, Murli Deora, who disclosed this yesterday, said a steering committee set up by the OMEL to identify economically viable projects in Africa nations approved the refinery project in January to export petroleum products using Nigerian crude as a feed stock.

OMEL, a joint venture of state-run Oil and Natural Gas Corp. (ONGC) and the Mittal was awarded two Oil Prospecting Licences (OPLs 279 and 285) during the 2005 oil licensing round after the company showed commitment to invest \$6 billion in the downstream petroleum sector.

In April last year, the Indian firm got the approval of the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) to build the refinery. Reuters quoted India's Oil Minister as saying the steering committee approved a plan to carry out a detailed feasibility study on the project.

One of the blocks won by the joint venture was said to be the relinquished portion of the OPL 246, which was a subject of legal battle between the former Defence Minister, Lt-General Theophilus Danjuma (rtd) and the Federal Government. Notwithstanding the delay in the release of the oil blocks owing to the court case, the company was said to have remained committed to building a Greenfield Refinery in Nigeria.

Managing Director, Mittal Investments, and Mr. Sudhir Maheshwari had in June last year announced the commencement of the first phase of hydrocarbon exploration in the deepwater block, OPL 285.

He said the second well would be drilled this year. "The first rig is to go down in the block in August (last year). The joint venture plans to drill one well during this calendar year and the second in the next calendar", the Hindu Business Line had quoted Maheshwari as saying.

He stated that the OMEL's steering committee and the working committee of NNPC approved the refinery as OMEL's preferred downstream commitment. OMEL is in constant discussion with NNPC regarding its downstream commitment. It has carried out

a pre-feasibility study for a grass root refinery by engaging a reputed international consultant, he said.

He revealed that the corporation had conducted due diligence and visited two refineries organised by OMEL, adding,"OMEL is keen to carry out the downstream obligation in earnest.

Unilaterally, OMEL cannot move forward for implementation of the project without the support of NNPC through its Steering Committee". He said the company paid a signature bonus of \$50 million for OPL-285 and \$75 million for OPL-279.

The OPL-285 is also a deepwater block, where OMEL, through OMEL Energy Nigeria, holds 64.33 per cent participating interest and operatorship. The other partners in the block are EMO, a Nigerian company (10 per cent) TOTAL (25.67 per cent interest).

S’Korea to Expand Trade with Nigeria

The Republic of South Korea, has expressed the need to expand trade with Nigeria, which was drastically affected by the global economic meltdown, just as it plans to double her Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Africa by 2012.

Seeking to play active role in the global socio-economic development and maintain cordial relations with African countries, South Korea’s ODA to Africa peaked at \$100 million in 2009 with a promise to double it by 2012.

Speaking to five African journalists from major media in Nigeria, Egypt, Congo DRC, Tanzania, and Ivory Coast in Seoul, the Deputy Director General, African and Middle Eastern Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of South Korea, Mr. Lee Wook-heon said that the main objective of President Lee Myung-bak is ‘Global Korea’ as a major player in the global socio-economic development.

Wook-heon said Korea as a former colonised power and once one of the poorest countries in the world, shared a lot in common with Africa and developing countries and seeks to share her developmental experience with Africa.

He said that since four years, Africa has gained the attention of South Korea, which culminated in Korean-African Relations in 2006 to be held every three years, to promote ODA.

Part of this increased cordial relationship is the exchange and training of expertise between Korea and African countries with 1000 Koreans and 5000 African experts involved in the field of agriculture, Information, and Communication Technology (ICT) fields.

“The government intends to increase trade volume with Nigeria and Africa because Korean investment in Africa is very important. Korean companies are seeking ways to make investment in Africa, increase the trade volume and aid African development.

Explaining further, he said that Africa's 2% share of Korea's trade volume is relatively small to the global trade volume of the world's 12th largest economy and is seeking ways to address the situation.

Concerning Nigeria, the Second Secretary, Africa Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Republic of Korea, Miss Kim Hye-Mi said that trade with Nigeria peaked in 2008 to over \$2.6 billion but reduced significantly the following year in 2009 to slightly over \$1 billion due to the global economic meltdown.

Hye-Mi said that expansion of trade and strong socio-economic ties with Nigeria is very important to Korea and noted that the main export items like propylene, polyether, automobile and import items like natural gas, butane, and propane will be further consolidated.

She said that South Korea will use the opportunity as the first non-G8 country to host the G-20 Summit to pursue the course of developing countries like Nigeria and said that there are more than 1000 Korean investors in Nigeria for increased bilateral relations.

"Because Korea has gone through the process of development, increasing 640 times over the period of 40 years after the Korean war. So we are obliged to lead discussion at G-20 meeting to include those that affect the developing countries", she said.

Other West African States

Cape Verde:

Chad:

**UN pleads for humanitarian access to Darfur
Camp...H7**

The U.N. humanitarian chief on Friday urged Sudanese authorities to allow humanitarian aid workers into a Darfur refugee camp that they have been prevented from entering for nearly two weeks.

Aid agencies have been barred from the Kalma Camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Sudan's conflict-torn western Darfur region since August 2 due to a stand-off between international peacekeepers and Khartoum.

"I am extremely concerned about the welfare of the IDPs at Kalma camp, to whom we have not been able to deliver relief for 13 days," U.N. humanitarian chief John Holmes said in a statement.

"Deliveries of food and fuel for water pumps have for example not been possible," he said. "Sanitation is also a major concern as it is the middle of the rainy season. Many thousands of IDPs from Kalma remain unaccounted for."

The reason for the standoff is that Khartoum is demanding U.N.-African Union peacekeepers in Darfur (UNAMID) hand over six Darfuris accused by Khartoum of instigating clashes in South Darfur's Kalma Camp in late July that killed at least five people.

UNAMID has refused to do so without seeing evidence of their crimes and guarantees that they will have a fair trial.

"If access is not urgently restored, the situation risks deteriorating rapidly," Holmes said.

Kalma was home to 100,000 Darfuris who fled their homes during rampages of rape, murder and looting by militia in Sudan's remote west. The Sudanese government has had no presence in Kalma -- Darfur's most volatile camp -- for years because of hostile residents.

Many residents have fled Kalma due to the recent violence, but the United Nations estimates that some 50,000 refugees remain in the camp.

Mostly non-Arab rebels took up arms in Darfur seven years ago, accusing Khartoum of neglect. A counter-insurgency campaign drove more than 2 million from their homes to miserable camps, sparking one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

The United Nations says as many 300,000 people have died in Darfur since 2003. Sudan blames Western media for exaggerating the conflict and the death toll, which it puts at 10,000.

Armed men kidnap two Darfur peacekeepers....H7

Armed men abducted two U.N.-African Union (UNAMID) peacekeepers in Sudan's Darfur region on Saturday in the biggest town Nyala, the mission said.

"Two police advisers...got abducted about 100 metres (yards) from their accommodation in Nyala," UNAMID spokesman Chris Cychmanick said, adding that three gunmen in a car took them away.

An American woman working for the charity Samaritan's Purse was kidnapped almost three months ago near Nyala and remains in captivity.

Abductions of foreign workers in Sudan's violent west began in March 2009, after the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for President Omar Hassan al-Bashir for war crimes in Darfur.

The kidnappings have severely restricted the world's largest aid operation, with most foreign staff moved back to the main towns from more remote and needy areas.

The kidnappings have become a new business in Darfur with tribal leaders reporting that handsome government ransoms were paid for some hostages, fuelling the abductions. Khartoum denies paying any ransom money.

Mostly young men from Arab tribes have been abducting the foreigners. Sudan has failed to prosecute anyone, despite promises to do so.

Mostly non-Arab rebels took up arms in early 2003 accusing Khartoum of neglect. A brutal counter-insurgency campaign drove some 2 million people from their homes to miserable camps, sparking one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

The United Nations estimates some 300,000 have died in Darfur.

Gambia:

Guinea- Bissau:

Mali:

Mauritania :

Niger:

A crisis, not (yet) a catastrophe.....H7

Although Niger is facing a severe food crisis, early large-scale responses have so far helped prevent a rapid deterioration in the nutritional state of children.

"We managed to avoid the worst until now," said the coordinator of Niger's early warning system, Harouna Hamani. "Even though the population is suffering and rates of malnutrition are very high, it could have been catastrophic without early interventions."

Almost 17 percent of under-five children are malnourished and nearly half of Niger's 15.2 million people are at risk of hunger after harvests failed in 2009, the government said.

Distributions of fortified flour, oil and sugar to children under two years old, backed by the UN and several NGOs, have been taking place since May in areas where rates of

acute malnutrition are above the emergency threshold of 15 percent set by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The supplementary rations are meant to prevent more children from becoming malnourished, said Rachid Boumnijel, food security manager for Irish NGO Concern in Tahoua region, central Niger.

The NGO has also focused on strengthening the capacity of 10,000 families to cope with the crisis and feed their children by giving them cash and, in some cases, seeds, and on treating malnutrition.

Since April, Concern's team of 330 volunteers has been dispatched to villages in Tahoua and Illela departments, in Tahoua region, to find children with signs of malnutrition and refer them to the nearest medical facility.

"We started as soon as we saw that the situation was going to be difficult," said Boumnijel. "Our goal was to limit the number of cases of severely malnourished children, and we have been able to keep the situation under control."

The organization has been supporting the treatment of acute malnutrition in several health centres, and a recent survey indicated that prevalence of this condition in the area Concern covers is now below WHO's emergency threshold.

"The situation this year is much worse than in 2005, but the response is much better," said Eric-Alain Ategbo, nutrition manager at the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

"Since then, efforts have been made to increase the capacity of national structures. Now Niger is one of the countries on the continent with the highest number of facilities for the treatment of malnutrition."

Clinics have treated nearly 150,000 severely malnourished children since the beginning of 2010, and 6,000 to 7,000 new cases are reported every week, according to the UN.

Variable access and quality

Yet this positive picture is not always consistent, nor is access to quality healthcare and assistance. Saratou Mahamadou had to walk for half a day with severely malnourished 16-month-old Rachida on her back to reach the health centre in Moghem village, in Tahoua region.

"Only 44 percent of the population lives within a distance of 10 km or less from a health centre," said Adamou Ousseme, regional director of public health in Tahoua.

He noted that outreach efforts in districts not supported by an NGO were inadequate. "The number of cases increases when there is a partner [organization supporting the public structures], since an active identification [of malnourished children] takes place.

Elsewhere, children may die at home - if they don't come to the hospital, we have no way of knowing."

UNICEF's public health consultant in Tahoua, Pacifique Kitanina Fuoto, said more than a third of the region's health centres were not receiving such support and had limited capacity.

Pockets of insecurity are also limiting the ability of NGOs to assess and respond to needs, said Modibo Traoré, head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Niger. "Movements are limited in northern Tahoua, Tillabéri and Agadez regions. Areas may be left out, which has an impact on the quality of care offered."

Underestimations by the government and the UN mean not all disadvantaged infants received supplementary rations, but the number of children has now been revised from half a million to more than 900,000, said UNICEF's Ategbo.

In Bagga village, home to 5,000 people, only 100 of the many children in need of help received the ration. "In the end, we had to do a draw to select them," said its chief, Idrissa Dayabou.

Difficult months ahead

Tahoua Public Health director Ousseini warned that the situation could worsen, as malnutrition usually peaked in August and September, before the harvest.

The start of the rainy season – when families begin planting - could lead to a deterioration of the nutritional state of children, because parents were likely to wait for longer before seeking medical care, said Manuel Lopez Iglesias, head of mission at Médecins Sans Frontières-Spain, which works in two departments in Tahoua.

"People think malnutrition is normal and tend to wait until a child is really sick," he said. "We have to push people to go to health centres, especially when they are busy cultivating their fields."

Chasing after pastoralists with truckloads of aid....H7

Parts of sparsely populated and arid eastern Niger, north of the city of Diffa, are strewn with putrid dead cows: Pastoralists travelled great distances to find food and water for their animals but in the end had to watch their most prized assets die.

Two years of erratic rain have led to severe shortages of fodder, cereals and water. In 2009, only a third of the required amount of hay grew, meaning there was insufficient fodder, according to a national household survey of food security by Niger's Early Warning System.

In Diffa region, more than a third of cattle might be dead by now, said the director of pastoral development at the Ministry of Livestock and Animal Husbandry, Haido Abdul Malik. This is especially dramatic in a region where, according to the authorities, 90 percent of the population relies on livestock for survival.

Pastoralists who have lived through recurrent droughts say they have never seen such a bad situation, not even during the prolonged drought of 1968-1974 which killed a third of all livestock.

“This is worse than anything we have known. The whole of Niger is hungry,” said stockbreeder Amadou Aouta. Half the country’s population is affected by food insecurity, according to the UN.

“I had enough cows, goats and sheep to look after my family. Now, I have nothing and I will have to rely on my two children,” said a 70-year-old man who lost all his cattle. He hopes his children can find some unskilled work.

For the first time since the beginning of the crisis, Aouta and 63 other nomadic families in Yoberou are receiving food aid. A group of women waiting for their ration of 100kg of cereals from international NGO CARE said the worst thing now was hunger. “We have nothing left to sell to buy cereals,” said one.

Some 60 tons of food will be distributed to nomadic pastoralists who have hardly received any support until now.

Unusual operation

The operation is unusual: The authorities, CARE and Niger’s Association for the Revival of Breeding (AREN) have been driving through remote areas with truckloads of food in search of vulnerable families. “We are heading to places where there are no villages. We are mostly targeting people who are on the move,” said Amadou Adamou, in charge of the CARE caravan.

The operation was launched after aid organizations and the authorities visited the region in July and returned saying it was probably too late to save the cattle, but there was still time to save people.

They had hoped to bring along animal fodder, a medical team and money to buy weakened cattle at higher than the current market price, “but not all partners were willing to quickly change their methods,” said the head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Diffa, Sylvain Musafiri.

Assisting nomadic communities is a challenge. “They are far from urban centres, it is expensive to bring aid to remote areas, and it is difficult to reach people who keep moving,” said CARE regional coordinator Ali Salé. “This is a population that is not accounted for in local censuses. We are used to organizing distributions in villages and not in temporary settlements.”

Constant movement also makes it difficult for malnourished nomadic children to get regular treatment over several weeks. “They go when they need to find some grazing land. They usually leave before the end of the treatment, once their condition has improved,” said Abdulaziz Kimba Garba from Bilabrim health centre, near the Chadian border.

Stockbreeders’ children have traditionally been less affected by malnutrition, as they have access to milk, according to Save the Children UK’s household economic surveys. This may not be true this year. “Dying cattle will not produce milk. When there is no milk, nomadic children are left with little to eat,” said AREN’s regional coordinator, Hassan Ardo Ido.

Bilibrim’s small health centre has received several malnourished nomadic children since April. With more than 22 percent of its children under five acutely malnourished, Diffa has the highest rate of malnutrition in the country, according to a government survey in July.

Late response

More should have been done earlier, but “people react only when they start seeing dead cattle,” said OCHA’s Musafiri.

In April, AREN suggested that in order to limit losses, animal fodder should be placed along corridors used by the pastoralists, “but little was done,” said AREN’s Hassan Ardo Ido.

The crisis was anticipated as early as the end of 2009, but the political situation made it difficult to call for help, said the Livestock Ministry’s Abdul Malik. “Even after the coup [of February 2010], donors had to assess where the new authorities were heading and the authorities had to officially call for help. We had to wait until April or May for support to come. It was already [too] late.”

“This year showed us that we can lose everything,” said the chief of Nguelbeyli (2,000 inhabitants), Lamido Moumouni Kabori.

He said weakened animals could recover in a month, but families who have lost most of their cattle have little to fall back on, as normal reproduction will not grow back the herds. “People are now wondering what the future will hold. We cannot rely on stockbreeding any more.”

Sénégal: