

Business and Politics in the Muslim World

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POLITICS

GHANA

LIBERIA

All Set for 2011 Polls

The National Elections Commission (NEC) has declared that all is now set for the conduct of Liberia's second post war democratic elections following more than two years of rigmarole leading to setting the process on pace.

"...The NEC has commenced the journey on the path to the conduct of free, fair, and transparent Legislative and Presidential Elections in 2011," the Commission's chairman James Fromayan told a news conference last Friday on the occasion of the announcement of the key electoral dates for the conduct of the 2011 elections and the method of apportionment of seats based on the based on the recent joint resolution passed by the National Legislature.

NEC had cried that time was running out for the conduct of the 2011 elections following the National Legislature's failure to set the Threshold in two years after NEC had submitted several electoral bills including the threshold to it.

Following what NEC termed an "unwarranted delay", coupled with wide local and international criticisms, the National Legislature on July 22, 2010 passed a Joint Resolution to retain the 64 seats currently existing at the House of Representatives, instead of setting a new threshold.

The Joint Resolution meanwhile creates nine (9) additional seats to be distributed among the six most populated counties of Montserrado, Bong, Nimba, Lofa, Margibi and Grand Bassa.

"In keeping with its mandate, the National Elections Commission wishes to inform the people of Liberia that with the Joint Resolution already printed into Handbill, the NEC has commenced the journey on the path to the conduct of free, fair, and transparent Legislative and Presidential Elections in 2011," Mr. Fromayan emphasized.

He said the Commission has put in place the necessary mechanism for the delineation of electoral districts across the 15 counties of Liberia, a process that will take place following the voter registration exercise which begins January 2011.

"It is significant to note that the delineation exercise will be consistent with internationally accepted standards and practices," the NEC Chairman assured Liberians.

The distribution of the nine (9) additional seats will be based on the percentage of seats currently occupied by the six most populated counties, Mr. Fromayan indicated.

Under this arrangement, Montserrado County with existing 14 seats will have three additional seats, thereby increasing the number of seats to 17.

Nimba County which currently has seven will be increased to nine; while Bong County with existing six seats will have one additional seat thereby increasing the number of seats to seven.

Grand Bassa, Margibi and Lofa Counties with existing 4 seats each will have one additional seat each, thereby increasing the number of seats to five each, respectively.

"Towards this end, a Voters' Registration plan is being meticulously developed on the basis of geographical planning and harmonized data....We are pleased to announce that the National Voters' Registration Exercise will officially commence on January 10, 2011," the electoral chief disclosed.

He said the voter registration process will be based on the lowest possible geographical/administrative unit, meaning that voters will use the same voters' registration card for subsequent by-elections, as well as, the planned 2013 local government elections, and possibly beyond.

He averred that the NEC will ensure broad base consultation that will enable communities including women and youth groups, civil society organizations, political parties traditional and local leaders the opportunity to offer their views on the pending electoral districting across the country.

"The delineation of electoral boundaries will no longer be immediate but rather take place after the Voters' Registration Exercise," he stated, as a result of the Joint Resolution.

Procurement and delivery of logistics and other essential field preparations for the voter registration exercise are nearing completion, the NEC Chairman disclosed.

He said as the country embark on what he called "this critical path in our post war history," it is a pleasing honor to inform the people of Liberia that the operational plan for the conduct of the 2011 Presidential and General Elections has been produced and ready for implementation.

This landmark accomplishment, he stated, would not have been realized without the immeasurable support of the Government of Liberia and development partners, in particular, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the European Union (EU).

"At this juncture..., the Commission wishes to announce the official release of the 2011 Electoral key dates leading to the conduct of the 2011 Elections which shall be published shortly in our local newspapers and hosted on the Commission's official website," Chairman Fromayan said.

These Electoral key dates (to be published) are however subject to change based on prevailing circumstances at a given time, he said.

The NEC Chairman then emphasized that the successful conduct of the 2011 Elections hold the key to the maintenance of the peace the country and people currently enjoy, and the economic growth and prosperity of the country.

He vowed that the Commission will fully and timely implement the electoral timetable, saying "We wish to reassure the Liberian people and the international community of the commitment of the National Elections Commission to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections in 2011.

NEC Accredits New UP Today

As of today, the Liberia Action Party (LPA), the Liberia Unification Party (LUP) will be no more, meaning that they become an integral part of the Unity Party (UP) in keeping with the merger reached about three months ago.

More besides, the NEC said the decision to certificate the parties stemmed from the screening and verification of the proposal for merger and in keeping with Chapters 7 & 8 of the New Law of 1986.

This is so because the National Elections Commission (NEC) will today accredit the merged UP which also means that the LUP and LAP will cease to exist.

It may be recalled that the three indigenous political institutions agreed to come together under one umbrella as a means of decrowding the electoral field which many believe is still too crowded.

The National Elections Commission (NEC) in a release issued yesterday said it will today Wednesday, August 25, perform the task of issuing a certificate of accreditation to the merged Unity Party (UP) at its 9th Street Headquarters at about 11 a.m.

According to the NEC, the accreditation of the UP comes in the wake of a political merger of the Liberia Action Party (LAP), Liberian Unification Party (LUP) and the Unity Party (UP).

The Commission said it was taking the action because it received an Article of Merger from the three merged parties, requesting it (the Commission) to allow them function as a single full-fledged political party.

The three parties then considered as Liberia's traditional political establishments came to the decision following series of behind-the-scene discussions after which a convention was held in Nimba for the purpose of sealing the merger.

During the convention which the saw the signing the document of merger by representatives of the three parties, several officials who are to run the day to day affairs of the new party were elected and subsequently inducted into office few weeks later.

It is a mere conjecture for anyone as to how the founders of the three parties, peace be to the ashes, LAP, Gabriel Kpolleh, LUP, and Edward B. Kesselly, LAP will be feeling on the day the parties they suffered to establish for their individual political interests will be no more.

'I Have Knowledge'.

As 2011 presidential election encroaches, Mr. George Weah has declared that he is knowledgeable enough, and that with a good team. he can do better than President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in terms of the economy and development.

Speaking in South Africa, the one-time football icon said: "I am knowledgeable. I think I can develop this country with a good team, we can do things better than what Ellen is doing," Weah added. "I am an honest person who wants to see the country prosper. I want to see the people grow. The middle class that is missing in the country is what we want to bring about."

The comments from the leader of the Congress for Democratic Change, taken from an Associated Press story, depict what the writer said rapid transformation from sports outfits to business suits: "The photos of George Weah's football past are rapidly disappearing from the walls of his seaside villa, replaced by mementos of academic achievement and pictures of the Liberian goal scoring great with political figures", he wrote.

AP: Weah, who won the FIFA Player of the Year award in 1995, went into politics in 2005 and ran for president of his native country that year. Although he beat 21 other candidates to win the vote in the first round, he lost to eventual president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in the second round.

Many believe his lack of formal education was the reason for the defeat, and Weah appears determined not to let that undermine his chances in the 2011 election.

"These are ever-since pictures," the 43-year-old Weah said in an interview with The Associated Press in the eastern Paynesville suburb of Monrovia. "I am now in my senior year and by God's help I am graduating from college next July."

Weah received a high school diploma in 2007, and said he has since been studying business administration at DeVry University in Miami. He denied his desire for more education was based on his hope of becoming president, insisting he wants "to improve my potential and because I think it is the right thing to do."

Liberia, which has emerged from years of fighting and unrest following more than a decade of civil war, is plagued by wrecked industries, poor roads and limited electricity even in the capital.

Born and raised in a Monrovia slum, Weah was a star striker for AC Milan and won the top FIFA award while at the Italian club. He also played for Monaco, Paris Saint-Germain, Marseille, Chelsea and Manchester City before going into politics in a country founded and colonized by freed American slaves and nearly torn apart by the civil war started by former president Charles Taylor, who is currently on trial in the Netherlands on charges of murder, rape, sexual enslavement and recruiting child soldiers.

But Weah's lack of knowledge about political activities did not prevent his good showing in the 2005 presidential poll, even if he and his youthful Congress for Democratic Party alleged that ballot-stuffing was one of the reasons he lost.

"We were a young party, organized just four months before the election," Weah said. "Things that were lacking have been put into right perspective."

Since that loss, Weah said he feels his decision to get a higher education has prepared him for future political challenges.

"I was seeking again to go to the convention so that I can run on the people's ticket, and I have been petitioned to run," Weah said before an old-timers football match. "That shows I am running again."

Support for Weah is visible on the faces of many Liberians, including roadside sellers and passers-by -- one of them a university student who argues why the former sportsman is needed as president.

"He's not a Harvard or Cambridge product, but at least he knows the basic things human beings need to survive. He knows that a society of hungry people is doomed," James Kieh said. "And once Weah is able to put these in place, this is one of the things Liberians are yearning for."

For the 2011 election, Weah said he's in consultation for collaboration with other political parties to avoid going out in the second round.

"We want to put him in power because he cares for the youths and common people," 18-year-old local Sekou Kuyon said. "And if he becomes president he will open a football academy for us."

Although Weah now lives on an estate with a giant swimming pool, many Liberians still remember him spending his youth playing football in the slums.

"He is a humanitarian. He's a man who caters to people," said Panpee Wreh, a longtime friend of Weah and youth football coach.

"From the 1960s, when he and I grew up together, I knew he was going to become someone great."

Not everyone agrees.

"I like George Weah but not as Liberia's president," said Maria Cooper, a local businesswoman. "He can be of better service to Liberia by helping to improve football that is today winning fortunes. This is where he belongs."

COTE D'IVOIRE

Ivory Coast election may not resolve its conflict.

The prospect of peace in Ivory Coast after the government announced an election date has left Ivorians cautiously optimistic about the future.

But few are holding their breath after years of delays, and analysts say that badly run polls would not only fail to address the West African nation's divisions over land, power and identity but would also risk worsening them.

On the palm-lined boulevards flanked by skyscrapers that used to be its neighbours' envy, residents complain of how dirty, trash-strewn and run-down Abidjan has become.

They know that only the vote planned for Oct. 31 can end the malaise and reunite the world's top cocoa producer, after a 2002-3 war tore it in two. They also know that if it goes ahead, there is the risk of more trouble.

"When there's peace here and stability, investors will come and put us back on track to development," said trader Marcelin Amian, by a traffic-choked roundabout.

"But is an election necessarily going to solve all our problems? No, I don't think so."

This mix of hope and pessimism has become characteristic of a nation yearning for its prosperous past yet stuck in a quagmire prolonged by squabbling politicians and warlords.

The election aims to end a crisis that cut growth in West Africa's former hub and held back reform of a cocoa sector that supplies 40 percent of the world market but is in decline.

They are five years overdue. Rows over voter identity and rebel disarmament have scuppered half a dozen dates, while President Laurent Gbagbo denies opposition accusations he is deliberately holding back the process to stay in power.

DEEP DIVISIONS

Partisan politics pitting Gbagbo against rivals Henri Konan Bedie and Alassane Ouattara have left scars on a nation still half run by rebels, says Patrick N'Gouan, head of the Ivorian Civil Society Convention.

N'Gouan is sceptical about what the polls can achieve.

"The international community and political elite think with an election all our problems are solved," he says.

"We had them in 1990, 1995 and 2000 and none ended our troubles. They simply brought more political instability."

Slow progress exasperates donors -- especially the United Nations and France, which each run costly peacekeeping operations.

They are keen to see polls, but realise it may not be a cure all and could reignite trouble if results are disputed.

"It depends on how it's handled, on how they make compromises, on how much they have the general interest in mind," U.N. spokesman Hamadoun Toure said.

A programme for temporarily disarming rebels for the duration of the election started this month and is supposed to finish by the end of it, but may not be on time.

TENSIONS SIMMER

Producing a final voter list remains a main hurdle.

Voter registration collapsed into political wrangling in February over names whose Ivorian identity was disputed.

Gbagbo's supporters suspected some were imposters from Burkina Faso and Mali, raising touchy questions about Ivorian nationality that have already caused one war.

Opposition says Gbagbo has sought to remove voters unlikely to elect him, a charge he denies. Gbagbo's party is ostensibly now happier with the list, though it has hardly changed.

"It's hard to have a totally clean list but this will be acceptable," said Affi N'Guessan, Gbagbo's party chief.

"We just need to have trust that the list is not riddled with errors or manipulated by political opponents."

The electoral commission says most names are processed and the mechanism for contesting the remaining ones in court finishes on Thursday. The United Nations has called on politicians to leave it to the judges, but diplomats admit that is unlikely.

"If they're happy with the list, why isn't it out?" said one. "There are lots more excuses to delay if they aren't."

The row over voter lists exposes a deeper one about identity. Ivory Coast has long attracted migrants from arid neighbours Mali and Burkina Faso who came to work cocoa plantations, but land disputes between them have flared since the 1980s.

Populist politicians discriminated between nationals and "foreigners" -- in some cases northern Ivorians with foreign-sounding names -- eventually fuelling the rebellion.

For Burkinabe farmers such as Issouf Belem, in west Ivory Coast, elections are his best hope, although he says he has no intention of seeking Ivorian nationality to vote in them.

"If there are elections and Ivorians could resolve their problems, that would help us foreigners a lot," he said, spreading cocoa beans with his feet on a mat to dry them.

"If they can't, that makes us very afraid."

Ivory Coast's political players

The prospect of peace in Ivory Coast after the government announced an election date has left Ivorians cautiously optimistic about the future.

Following are the main actors in Ivory Coast's prolonged political crisis:

PRESIDENT LAURENT GBAGBO

In power since 2000, Gbagbo's mandate ran out in 2005 but a presidential election has been delayed ever since.

Gbagbo, 65, denies creating obstacles and blames the opposition for delays to the electoral process.

Originally associated with the left, he has emerged as an arch nationalist and his supporters are accused of xenophobic rhetoric towards mostly Muslim migrants from neighbouring Burkina Faso and Mali, sentiments which largely sparked the 2002-3 civil war.

He put Ivory Coast on a collision course with its former colonial master in 2004, when the Ivorian military killed nine French peacekeepers in a bombing and France retaliated by destroying the Ivorian air force. His supporters attacked French expatriates, forcing 8,000 to be evacuated.

Analysts say his attempts to boost his popularity in rebel northern and western zones have had mixed results.

PRIME MINISTER GUILLAUME SORO

Soro, 38, was named leader of rebel group the Patriotic Movement of Ivory Coast (MPCI), after it launched an insurgency against Gbagbo in September 2002. It later joined another rebel group to form the New Forces.

Soro and Gbagbo signed a peace deal in 2007 and Gbagbo appointed Soro prime minister. He has since cast himself as an overseer of the peace process, mediating disputes.

Aides say he keeps his cards close to his chest and never comments on the widely held assumption that he plans to run for the presidency when he is over the minimum age of 40, though his quitting as rebel party chief last month was seen as paving the way for eventually standing.

HENRI KONAN BEDIE

President from 1993 and deposed in a coup in 1999, he is the oldest of the three main presidential candidates. His opposition Ivory Coast Democratic Party (PDCI) accuses Gbagbo of dragging his feet on the elections.

Bedie, 76, is seen as the successor to long-time president Felix Houphouet-Boigny, who died in 1993 after presiding over decades of agricultural export-led economic growth.

He is widely blamed for promoting the nationalistic idea of "Ivorite", designed to exclude recent migrants. Resentment at the notion fuelled the 2002 rebellion.

ALASSANE OUATTARA

A former prime minister under Boigny who gained a reputation for good economic management, Ouattara, 68, later joined the IMF, rising to deputy head.

He is from the mainly Muslim north of Ivory Coast and was excluded from running for alleged Burkinabe origins in the 2000 poll after coup leader Robert Guei tightened the rules to bar anyone whose parents are not both Ivorian.

In the past, Gbagbo has not shied away from insinuating that Ouattara is Burkinabe and has no right to run. Because of ties with France, he has been painted as a French stooge.

The rebels have backed his cause, though he has always denied having any part in the rebellion himself.

Ivory Coast final voter list to be posted Oct 10-12

Ivory Coast's electoral commission said on Wednesday it will post a final voter list between Oct. 10-12 when it unveiled its timetable for an Oct. 31 poll which Ivorians hope will end years of instability.

Elections have been halted repeatedly since 2005. Six election dates have been missed due to rows over voter identity and rebel disarmament after a 2002-3 war divided the West African nation in two, leaving the north in rebel hands.

But so many polls have been missed that Ivorians doubt whether this one will go ahead.

"We have a date fixed for Oct. 31, 2010. We have a timetable and we must stick to it," electoral commission spokesman Bamba Yacouba told a news conference.

Disagreements over who is eligible to vote scuppered the last election. President Laurent Gbagbo's nationalist supporters suspected many were foreigners from Burkina Faso and Mali.

The court process of dealing with challenges to voter registrations is scheduled to end on Thursday.

Yacouba said the timetable for the poll included:

- Finalising the definitive electoral list and validating it, Aug. 27-Sept. 2.
- Printing of electoral cards, Sept. 9-25
- Dispatching of electoral cards and lists to polling stations, Oct. 3-9.
- Posting of electoral lists on polling stations, Oct. 10-12.
- Distribution of electoral cards, Oct. 9-15.

Ivory Coast ready to finalise electoral list

Ivory Coast has completed a key step towards producing a final electoral list, as the period for dealing with challenges to voter registrations closed overnight, an electoral commission spokesman said.

Nicholas Coulibaly said no further legal disputes over the voter register were possible, paving the way for producing a final list for elections already five years overdue.

"The contestation period is finished. From today, we can start to produce the definitive electoral list," he said.

According to its own timetable, the electoral commission must now validate the final electoral list by Sept. 2.

The election is badly needed to restore normality to a nation divided in two by a 2002-3 war, which left it half controlled by rebels.

Urgent reforms to the cocoa sector in the world's top grower hinge on the vote taking place peacefully and delivering a clear, uncontested leader.

The process of contesting names of those who registered to vote in the courts has been long and bitter, with parties accusing each other of trying to manipulate it in their favour.

President Laurent Gbagbo's supporters have called for thousands of names to be scrubbed off the list, suspecting them of being foreign imposters from Burkina Faso and Mali.

The president dissolved the electoral commission in February because of a row with the former chairman, an opposition member, whom he accused of illegally adding names to the list.

That further stalled an election originally meant to happen in 2005. This time, all parties have indicated they are more or less happy with the way the process has gone.

SIERRA LEONE

Sierra Leone replaces police, army chiefs

Sierra Leone's president has replaced the head of his military and police forces ahead of a widely expected government reshuffle.

No reasons were given for the changes at the head of the West African state's security forces, but President Ernest Bai Koroma, who came to power in 2007, has previously said he would assess his team after three years in charge.

Major General Alfred Claude Nelson Williams will be replaced by his former deputy, Major General Robert Yirra Koroma, a statement from the president's office issued on Tuesday said.

Williams had served as armed forces chief for two years, having previously been cleared of accusations he worked with the AFRC rebels during the country's 1991-2002 civil war that killed more than 50,000 people and was depicted in the 2006 film "Blood Diamond".

Inspector General of Police Brima Archa Kamara was sacked earlier in the week and replaced by Francis Munu.

A Freetown-based diplomat said the changes could be part of a broader reshuffle of Koroma's cabinet, which is expected next month to coincide with the third anniversary of Koroma's presidency.

Sierra Leone is hoping to develop its agriculture, mining and tourism sectors and crude oil was discovered off the coast in September 2009, exciting investors who have high hopes for a new multibillion-barrel oil frontier..

But the country sits in an unstable region and is struggling to control corruption in the wake of its civil war.

Sierra Leone is near the bottom of the United Nations' Human Development Index -- a benchmark of life expectancy, literacy and education levels.

Replaced Army Boss Blasts Coup Jibes

Just few days after effecting the biggest shake-up in the ranks of the Sierra Leone Police - with AIG Francis Munu replacing Brima Acha Kamara as Inspector General - President Ernest Bai Koroma yesterday also effected another change, this time in the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces with Maj. Gen. Alfred Claude Nelson Williams being sent on terminal leave and Brigadier Robert Yirra Koroma taking over as Chief of Defence Staff.

At a press conference convened yesterday at the Ministry of Defence headquarters, minister of Defence, Paolo Conteh informed journalists about "the drastic changes" that had taken place in the Army through the orders of the President.

Outgoing CDS, Maj. Gen. Nelson Williams, told journalists that he had no misgivings about what had happened but noted that his name had long been rumored of him involving in a coup and therefore wanted to set the records straight.

In a rather somber mood, Maj. Gen. Williams maintained that he had neither involved in a coup, nor taken part in politics, stressing that he had always been a loyal soldier to his

country, vowing to serve the government of the day. "If my replacement will help contribute to the President's Agenda for Change, so be it," he said.

He added that since joining the Army he had contributed immensely to the development of the force, "alongside other dedicated officers and soldiers, both at national and international levels. "If I have failed in my duties to my country, then posterity will judge me," he said. "Nobody, in my view, will ever hold me accountable for any wrong doing."

Mr. Williams informed newsmen that the incoming Army chief is a friend and will always be friends. Both gallant officers hugged themselves at the end of the briefing with Maj. Gen. wishing his successor success in his office.

Meanwhile, a farewell ceremony for the outgoing Army boss and a reception for newly promoted officers will be planned, according to the minister of Defence, Paolo Conteh.

ECONOMY

GHANA

Ghana Poisons her Investment Climate with ExxonMobil Exit

Our intensive investigations have clearly revealed that four radicals at GNPC have orchestrated a propaganda campaign to lie to Ghanaians that they were buying Kosmos' stake in the Jubilee Field for Ghana. That is a blatant lie. The truth is that these TRAITORS were trying to use backroom deals to use Chinese money to buy the Kosmos stake and resell it to the Chinese in order to pocket a profit. In the end, it is China that would own the Kosmos stake, not Ghana. Ghana Oil Watchdog will always seek the truth and disseminate it to Ghanaians to protect our young energy industry.

What makes Ghana unique is that majority of her citizens still believe in her destiny, and that majority will go to great lengths to pursue that destiny on her behalf. The problem is that the citizenry must be given the accurate information. Given the facts, Ghanaians are some of the most objective human beings and can draw intelligent conclusions. But recently, with the lies and deception that have dominated the media in Ghana, it has become imperative that those with facts assert themselves to counter the sinister campaign by these four radicals at GNPC.

For starters, here are a few facts about Kosmos that Ghanaians must know. Its five principals formed the company specifically for exploration in Ghana. The company came to Ghana because the EO group did an outstanding job of convincing them to invest in Ghana. The company fell in love with Ghanaians when they arrived in Ghana. Kosmos spent over \$30 million just to acquire 3D seismic data, and expended additional millions

to use other unique scientific methods to discover oil in commercial quantities where others had failed in the last 100 years. To date, it has spent over \$1.4 billion in investments. It directly or indirectly employs over 200 Ghanaian workers. Even as the GNPC vilified Kosmos, it continued to pay one-third of Ghana's – yes – Ghana's portion of developmental and production costs because Ghana has no money to pay for those costs.

Kosmos has rebuilt the Takoradi Airport into a commercial one and turned the otherwise sleepy twin city into a thriving metropolis. Because it took the chance on Ghana, today oil related and residual jobs have climbed into almost one million. Holiday Inn, Best Western, Marriot, and Hilton are all in Ghana today because Ghana is now a bona fide oil destination. Many energy companies have relocated their regional operations centers from Lagos to Accra. In short Kosmos and their partners have been a huge blessing to Ghana. Yet today, these four radicals at GNPC have made it their mission to paint Kosmos as a monster to Ghanaians. They will not succeed because truth is not on their side.

Kosmos selected ExxonMobil because it “wanted the best company with a proven track record to handle Ghana's complex deep sea terrain,” according to one Kosmos executive. In fact, given the reality of today's market environment, Ghana needs ExxonMobil more than the other way round. Ghana's oil production, when it gets to its peak of 120,000 bpd, will equal 0.2% of oil production in Africa. In contrast, ExxonMobil controls proven reserves of over 70 billion barrels of oil. ExxonMobil is the number one oil and gas company in the world with the best technical expertise, the biggest financial backing, and the best environmental record. These attributes of ExxonMobil are better equipped, more than any other company, to handle Ghana's complex deep sea terrain to extract the maximum amount of crude oil for the benefit of Ghana. According to industry experts, other less endowed companies leave more crude oil on the ground.

In the area of support to host countries, ExxonMobil is the leader in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). The global oil and gas giant provides “assistance to countries seeking to implement greater transparency and support initiatives such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), the Group of Eight (G-8) Transparency Initiative, and the United Nations Convention Against Corruption. EITI is a unique collaboration between governments, companies, civil society, institutional investors, and international organizations.” (ExxonMobil Corporate Citizen Report of 2009)

Because of the progress made in these areas in Ghana over the past few years, ExxonMobil planned, according to sources speaking on condition of anonymity, to establish a presence in Ghana and use our stable political climate to prove to other developing countries that EITI and massive investment infusion can foster economic and social developments. All these, however, are not to be because the four radicals at GNPC placed the kickbacks they would receive from the Chinese ahead of Ghana's overall interest.

This selfish few, led by Tsatsu Tsikata, wanted anything but transparency. They would rather deal with the Chinese who are notorious for paying under the table. That explains why they fought this deal from the onset and have vowed to keep the best oil and gas company out of Ghana's shores. Their sinister victory represents a great loss to Ghana. They are abusing the trust vested in them by the president and are even undermining some of his decision.

Earlier on, President Mills always deferred anything related to energy to Tsatsu Tsikata until the truth about the latter began to emerge in the Ghanaian media. As more revelations materialized, the president grew more and more suspicious about the man he had trusted for so long. It wasn't until Mills began to listen to other independent voices of authority that he saw the total and more accurate picture of Ghana's energy landscape and the national and global implications of unilateral decisions made under his administration in the last 20 months. To his credit, for the first time, President Mills began to listen to objective analysis of Ghana's energy industry and its prospects from other independent sources.

Consequently, growing suspicious of the motives of these four greedy radicals at GNPC, President Mills assigned decision making to a newly formed committee whose eventual recommendation sought approval of the Kosmos/ExxonMobil Sale and Purchase Agreement (SPA). Dejected and alienated, Tsatsu and his cohorts at GNPC including Kyeretwie Poku, Thomas Manu, Amoah Ntow, and Nii Adjei-Appoye, mounted some of the most sinister media campaign to derail the SPA. So to Mills, the vacation could not have come at a better time. He would use the time away to ponder all aspect of the impasse and make a decision, which is what he planned to do in a prepared speech scheduled for Tuesday August 17, 2010.

Meanwhile, in anticipation of a favorable decision by the president, ExxonMobil had sent a 12-man delegation to Ghana to visit the FPSO to get a head start on its due diligence before the company signs the dotted line to complete the SPA. That is when they ran into the one-man wrecking crew Minister Oteng-Adjei. The Energy Minister barred the team from visiting the FPSO, infuriating ExxonMobil executives. In the end, these final acts by our own officials added to a culmination of a litany of frustrating obstacles that eventually caused ExxonMobil to pull the plug on its SPA with Kosmos Energy.

The vindictiveness and arrogance that have characterized some policy stances of our nation's young energy industry have been more detrimental that Ghanaians can ever imagine. ExxonMobil was ready to purchase Kosmos's stake along with those of Sabre Oil and EO Group, the turn around and loan out the later two stakes to Ghana to bring Ghana's eventual stake to close to 20%. If the staunch opposition launched by these four characters and their master Tsatsu Tsikata was all about Ghana obtaining a significant stake in the Jubilee Field, why would they still oppose this arrangement that results in Ghana owning a significant stake of close to 20%?

For a country still learning the technological aspect of this industry, and not having one pesewa to spend, this would not have been a bad beginning at all. Yet because of reasons

known only to these four radicals and their master Tsatsu Tsikata, they opposed the sale. Now it turns out that they all have formed companies to profit from the oil discovery while attempting to destroy the very entities that toiled to bring it about. For example, StratComm, a company owned by Tsatsu Tsikata's wife is the exclusive owner of a \$25,000 a month Public Relations contract with GNPC via a non-competitive bidding.

Not only has Tsatsu Tsikata been caught allegedly receiving millions of dollars in bribes through his Stratoil, he now has his hand in Ghana Gas Gathering International LLC. This new bilateral effort between Ghana and Trinidad & Tobago has a strange partner – Petro-Africa, a company that shares an office in London with Tsikata's Stratoil.

We may never know the extent of the damage caused by Tsatsu and his henchmen. What we do know is that they are busy lining their pockets as many Ghanaians continue to believe that they have Ghana's interest at heart. And now all of Ghana has to live with the consequences of their actions. As president of Ghana, John Evans Atta Mills has a responsibility to take control of our young energy industry. Previously he did not know the motives of the people he trusted so much. Now he does not have that excuse. The sinister backroom dealings of these radicals at GNPC have been exposed enough. A whole nation waits.

Ghana to gain \$1bn from first phase of gas production

About one billion dollars will be derived from the first phase of the development of the country's gas resources into a viable petro-chemical industry, Vice-President John Mahama has said.

He said the project, which would be done in partnership with the private sector, would create employment opportunities and helps the country to be self-sufficient in electricity generation.

Vice-President Mahama said in view of the policy to develop the country's gas resources, government had entrenched into all petroleum exploration agreements a no-flaring policy to prohibit any flaring of gas, which he said, was also positive for the world environment.

The Vice-President said this when opening the second Graphic Business Roundtable Forum, themed, "Ghana's emerging oil economy: Prospects and challenges" in Accra yesterday.

In December this year, Ghana will join the league of petroleum producing nations, following the announcement in 2007 of the discovery of oil reserves in commercial quantities. Since then more discoveries have been and conservative appraisal of the wells and available statistics based on credible scientific findings indicate that the country holds potentially, about 1.6 billion s of crude oil.

Vice-President Mahama pointed out that the employment that would be generated from the development that of the gas resources would require the right mix of such as

electricians, plumbers, catering and helicopter services.

He said the local content and local participation bill that the government had drafted would ensure that companies that operate in the county's oil and gas industry employ up to 90 per cent of their staff from within Ghana by 2020.

"Where the level of skill does not allow this to happen, the companies will be required to submit a detailed work plan on how they intend to make this local human resource available in Ghana," the Vice-President said, adding, the move was to ensure that the benefits of oil and gas wealth generation remained within the country.

Touching on the issue of transparency and accountability, he said the government would address those concerns through two interventions. First, was the drafting of the Oil Revenue Management Bill to determine what constituted petroleum revenue.

He said the draft proposes the establishment of the Ghana Petroleum Reserves Accounts, made up of the Ghana Petroleum Account and the Ghana Petroleum Fund.

The petroleum account is being proposed as a single destination collection account for all petroleum revenue due to and, collected on behalf of the government, to make it easier to monitor the inflows and outflows of petroleum revenue.

The petroleum fund, on the other hand, is intended as a savings fund for the purposes of smoothening government spending and in the long run, to preserve part of the value of the oil capital while living on the interest.

"It is expected that all petroleum receipts shall be treated as separate accounts to be held at and accounted for, by the Bank of Ghana," Vice-President Mahama stressed.

The government, he said, had also committed to extending the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) to the oil and gas sector to further ensure transparency and good governance in the use of oil and gas revenues.

Mr. Mahama noted that the EITI, currently being applied in the mining industry, encouraged the publication of revenues received by stakeholders, such as the government, the communities and mining companies.

He said Ghana would not thread in the footsteps of the 'Dutch disease' syndrome by reducing spending in other sectors such as agriculture just because of the inflow of petrodollars into the economy, saying, the country was learning from the good practices of Trinidad and Tobago, and Norway.

Vice-President Mahama said the government prioritises the importance of safety and environmental protection. "The lessons of the Gulf of Mexico Oil spill is a signal to us that we must put in a mechanism to closely monitor safety and environmental issues."

He said strategic plans, training, equipment and logistics for the Police Service, Air Force, and Navy were being put in place to prepare the security agencies for the challenge of protecting the country's fledgling oil industry.

Vice- President Mahama said the theme of the forum was appropriate, timely and topical in view of Ghana's oil and gas discovery.

Ibrahim Awal, Managing Director of Graphic Communications Group Limited, said the company deemed it fit to set the oil and gas agenda for national discourse and added that the outcome of discussions would be presented to the government to help shape oil and gas policy in the country.

Government to hedge purchase of crude oil

The Government has decided to hedge the purchase of the country's crude Oil on the world market.

This follows recommendations by a Cabinet Committee charged to work out arrangements for the hedging of the country's crude oil purchases.

The Petroleum Price Risk Management Programme set to commence next month could see the government insure the purchase of six million barrels of crude oil over the next 6 to 12 months.

This is expected to insulate the country from crude oil price volatility on the international market.

It will also ensure that the country doesn't pay beyond a fixed maximum price for fuel over a period.

The Government will spend between 30 and 60 million dollars to finance the whole arrangement and is also hoping to use proceeds from the three-year cedi denominated bond to fund the program.

LIBERIA

Government Signs Up Chevron as Oil Exploration Partner

Moving closer to joining the growing ranks of African oil producers, Liberia has selected one of the world's largest oil companies as lead partner to explore potential offshore reserves. The announcement puts the spotlight on President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's pledge that Liberia will use its natural resources for growth and development and avoid the pitfalls that have plagued many oil- and mineral-rich nations.

The government said a statement on Friday that a three-year exploration agreement with the Chevron Corporation involving three deep-water concessions in Liberian waters "has been approved by the Executive and submitted to the Legislature for consideration and ratification."

"We are delighted to welcome Chevron as a partner for Liberia to explore our oil and gas assets," Johnson Sirleaf said in the Executive Mansion statement. "Energy is one of my top priorities, and with Chevron's technical skills we will be able to build our own capacity in the sector making a meaningful contribution to economic growth and job creation. A Chevron spokesman, Scott Walker, confirmed to AllAfrica "that an agreement to explore three deepwater concessions in Liberia has been submitted to the Legislature for ratification." Additional information will be provided when the process is concluded, he said.

"This is a crucial partnership for Liberia," she said in an apparent appeal to the legislative branch to act promptly so exploration can begin before the end of the year. She said Chevron would bring to the country not only an important investment but also "the latest technologies, best practices in transparency and efficiencies, and an excellent record of community and social responsibility."

But ratification may not come easily. Many legislators have been less-than-eager to support the popular president's ambitious agenda, and political tensions are on the rise as the country moves towards elections in October 2011. Johnson Sirleaf, who is seeking a second term, is likely to be opposed by several contenders, including George Weah, the soccer star who was lost in a 2005 run-off in the country's first elections following 25 years of disruption and civil war.

Following a visit to the United States in May, Johnson Sirleaf said she had met Chevron executives to encourage the oil giant "to come and do business," which she said "will send a big signal" that Liberia is a place investors should take seriously. Negotiations continued in Monrovia between a team of senior Chevron officials and the Liberian leader and her advisers.

The Executive Mansion statement called the agreement "a further vote of confidence in the country's future" and cited other major investors who have committed to projects in the country, including ArcelorMittal, Firestone, BHP Billiton, Sime Darby, Anadarko Petroleum, China Union and Golden Veroleum, an Indonesian firm which this month approved a \$1.6 billion palm oil deal.

The statement also pointed to the September 5 launch by Delta Airlines of service between Atlanta and Monrovia - "the first direct flights from the U.S. to Monrovia in 20 years." The flight, which will also stop in Accra, will operate on a 215-seat Boeing 767-300ER aircraft, Delta has said. The service had been scheduled to begin in June 2009 but was delayed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security pending completion of upgrades at Roberts International Airport outside the capital, Monrovia.

Since taking office in 2006, Johnson Sirleaf has made the fight against corruption a cornerstone of her platform. In a May 2010 AllAfrica interview, she called corruption "systemic" in Liberia and said: "The only way to solve it is to take it from under the carpet and deal with it." She expressed confidence that the country is "moving in the right direction and that, in a few years, we'll solve this problem."

Chevron currently has major operations in Africa's two largest oil producing nations, Nigeria and Angola, and also is engaged in exploration and production in Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo.

Exploration in Liberia to date has been carried out by the U.S.-based independent producer Anadarko and UK-based Oranto, which operates in Nigeria and has interests in several other West African countries. Seismic data produced by Oranto from two offshore blocks showed prospects for sufficient undersea petroleum reserves to interest a big player like Chevron.

Liberia sits at the western edge of the Gulf of Guinea, which extends along the coast to Nigeria, a major producer since the 1960s. Oil prospects have risen for Liberia's neighbors to the east, including Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana, where production is slated to begin later this year in a large offshore field called Jubilee.

Advances in both exploration and production techniques have opened the way for expanded oil and gas production across Africa. According to a U.S. Geologic Survey Fact Sheet issued in February, there have been more than 275 new fields discovered in West Africa since 2000.

Country Braces for Huge investment

As Liberia celebrates US\$4.8 billion Dollars debt waiver couple with the improvement of its investment climate propelled by the UP led administration, another multi-million dollar company, SFR, a lubricant oil company, has expressed interest in doing business in the country.

The lubricant company, SFR, through its Executive Director Gerald G. S. Okai, yesterday disclosed to the Analyst that his group will be investing millions of dollars in the country; a move he said will help boost the nation's shattered economy.

Narrating his plans further, Mr. Okai revealed that he was in the country to establish link for his enterprise and other group of companies in the United States who have plans to set up companies in the country and consequently, he added, his next step was to provide training for distributors and agents and produce qualify persons who will assume the management function of his company. In line with his training objectives, he said, his entity will be employing about fifty Liberians during the initial stages.

“I was basically sent here to be able to establish link for most of the major companies in America who want to establish businesses in Liberia. During my three months stay in the country, I will be serving as a custodian for them in Liberia to be able to get their products on the market and as a result, we will be training distributors and agents and other qualify personnel to help manage the company,” he revealed.

He also claimed that his group, the SFR, produces 32 different kinds of brands of lubricant oil that will help accelerate the speed of motor vehicles plying the various highways and streets in the country. For instance, he narrated, the company will produce engine oil for heavy duty machines such as caterpillars, yellow machines, dump-trucks, front loaders and other smaller vehicles and that it will enhance the country’s car industry. The company when fully established in the country, he said, will be in the business of exporting finish products to neighboring countries and other African states.

Mr. Okai who is an international trade development specialist, expressed his delight about the country’s improve security condition, something he said will encourage a lot of companies in America to come and invest their businesses in Liberia. With such a huge investment coming into the country, he averred, big companies like Mittal Steel, China Union, BRE and the car industry in Liberia will no longer have to worry about importing engine oil in the country because, he said, the group was capable of supplying the country and other countries in the sub-region with standard products and quality services that would enhance the smooth operations of vehicles as well as extending their durability.

However, his only disappointment in the country he pointed was the poor handling of law enforcement, something he said was incumbent upon every Liberian to improve other than relying on government alone. He said since entering into the country he has seen too many persons behaving loose in the traffic, describing such action as dangerous for the law enforcement process. He said it was particularly important for the country to address the issue of upholding the rule of law because, he claimed, every investor entering the country would want to see his or her investment protected.

Nonetheless, he was very quick to hasten in commending Madam Sirleaf and the UP Led government for the tremendous progress it continues to make in bring development to the country. Mr. said almost everywhere he went he saw that Liberians were determined in taking their nation forward and that it was now time that he and others contribute their quota towards the rebuilding of their common partrimony.

CAMEROON

Mining - Cameroon, China Cooperation Intensifies

Chinese Ambassador in Cameroon, Xue Jinwei, yesterday held discussions with Badel Ndanga Ndinga.

Cameroon and China are devising new ways of partnership through which industrialisation and particularly the mining sector could receive a boost for the mutual benefits of both countries. This was the focus of discussions yesterday between the Chinese Ambassador to Cameroon, Xue Jinwei, and Cameroon's Minister of Industries, Mines and Technological Development, Badel Ndanga Ndinga. This was during a courtesy visit paid the Minister by the Chinese diplomat.

Speaking to the press after the conclave with Mr. Ndanga Ndinga, Xue Jinwei said although his visit was for courtesy, it equally gave him and the Minister the opportunity to chat new ways of Cameroon/China partnership. "We discussed cooperation between our two countries and particularly in the industrial and mining sectors", he said. Against a backdrop of plans to effectively take giant mining projects off the ground, following the Head of State's announcement during his end-of-year address to the nation on December 31, 2010, the Chinese diplomat said industrialisation and mining are levers to any sustainable economic development. Partnering in these sectors, he added, will not only cement the already existing cordial ties between Cameroon and China, but will also accelerate economic development. "We have projects in these sectors under study and there are many opportunities for cooperation given that we are pursuing the same goal", Mr. Xue Jinwei said, stressing that they are projects in iron exploration and construction of assembly plants. All these, he said, to accompany government in its vision of making Cameroon an emerging economy by 2035.

The Chinese are piloting industrial and mining projects in the country notably the Bamenda automobile assembly plant through its consortium; China General Technology Group Holding Company Ltd (GENENTECH) and the Mongmamel (Kribi) iron ore exploration.

ENERGY

SIERRA LEONE

VRA Signs MoU with Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone has requested the Volta River Authority (VRA) and GRIDCo to rehabilitate its power system and train personnel to meet its manpower needs.

Consequently, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the government and the Sierra Leonean government at a ceremony in Accra yesterday.

The Minister of Energy, Dr Joe Oteng Adjei signed on behalf of the government while the Sierra Leonean Minister of Energy and Water Resources, Prof. Ogunlade R. Davidson signed on behalf of his government.

Dr Adjei pledged the government's commitment to adhere to the terms of the agreement and also ensure that the needed support was offered to Sierra Leone.

He said the collaboration between the two countries had demonstrated that Africa had moved into a new era where member countries shared what they have together.

Prof. Davidson thanked the government for the understanding to offer support to revamp their energy sector.

Earlier, Prof. Davidson led a delegation from Sierra Leone to tour the Tema Thermal Power Plant (TTPP) at Kpone near Tema to familiarise themselves with the operations there.

A Deputy Minister of Energy, Alhaji Inusah Fuseini, conducted the team on the tour at the TTPP

During the tour, the Operations Manager of the TTPP, Mr Edward Kenzo, who briefed the team on the operations of the VRA at the site, said the VRA generated 80 megawatts, 126 megawatts and 50 megawatts respectively at stations one, two and three of the Authority.

He explained that during day time power generated was not as high as in the evening due to the increasing demand at that time.

Prof. Davidson said Sierra Leone had asked for technical support for the operation and maintenance of its 50 megawatts Bumbuna Hydro Power Plant that was inaugurated in November 2009.

He said Sierra Leone was in the process of developing an adequate standby electricity capacity for its capital city.

In that connection the country was considering the construction of a 100-megawatt plant.

HEALTH

GHANA

USAID supports Ghana Health Service with \$ 4 million

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has drawn up a four-year programme during which it would assist the Ghana Health Service (GHS) in three regions.

About 40 million dollars is expected to be spent on the programme in the Western,

Central and Greater Accra regions that are being used for the four-year pilot project, Dr Divine K. Atupra, Maternal and Child Health Specialist of the Focus Region Health Project (FRHP), told the Ghana News Agency on Wednesday in Takoradi.

Dr Atupra was leading his colleagues of the FRHP, an affiliate organization with the USAID, to present the first batch of medical materials made up of medical models, family planning, child birth protocols and training materials to the Western Regional Health Directorate in Sekondi.

The items included birth stimulators, norplant arms, replacement skins, Zoe FPs, educators and books.

Mad Susan Wright, Deputy Chief/Senior Advisor of USAID, Ghana, explained that the project would focus on Family Planning, Childbirth and Safe Motherhood.

Mad Wright said the Central and Greater Accra regions' Health Directorates had received their share of the items.

Dr Mrs. Linda Vanoto, the Western Regional Director of Health Services, lauded the USAID for the donation and said they would enhance training of health personnel.

She said the items would be distributed to all health institutions in the district to enable the personnel and nurses make reference to them when in doubt to ensure quality services.

CAMEROON

UN Aid Agencies Responding to Cholera Outbreak

An outbreak of cholera in the three neighbouring West African countries of Cameroon, Nigeria and Niger has infected nearly 4,000 people and killed more than 260 others since May, the United Nations health agency reported today, blaming the epidemic on poor hygiene and inadequate access to clean water.

Northern Cameroon, where more than 2,800 cases - including more than 200 deaths - have been reported, is the worst affected area in the Lake Chad Basin, according to the UN World Health Organization (WHO).

In Nigeria, some 830 cases and 30 deaths have been reported, while 240 cases and 16 deaths have occurred in Niger.

"We know that cholera is [a] food-borne disease. Food that has been in contact with contaminated water is, of course, at high risk of transmitting cholera to people," said Claire-Lise Chaignat, WHO's cholera coordinator. "Good food hygiene is actually very important for preventing the disease from spreading," she told UN Radio.

Ms. Chaignat said WHO and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) were working together to combat the cholera epidemic, providing those affected with oral rehydration salts to prevent deaths related to diarrhoea, distributing chlorine for water treatment and carrying out health education campaigns.

HUMAN RIGHTS/ GENDER/ SOCIAL ISSUES

LIBERIA

Action on TRC Recommendations Expected This Week

President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf will this week submit a report to the National Legislature on the implementation and recommendations of the controversial Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

According to the Executive Mansion, a number of civil society groups constituted by the President to review the TRC report and suggest a way forward have now submitted their report to the President

Executive Mansion: "The President is keen to ensure that a report to the National Legislature on the TRC report contains v issues for the lawmakers' consideration. Once the legislators receive the document, more details will be provided to the public."

The TRC recommended that a thirty years ban be imposed on the president from holding public office because of their role in the war. Under Article 10, Section 48 of the TRC act, the president is to report to the national legislature within three months after receiving the TRC report and on a quarterly basis after the implementation of the commission.

Govt., ADB to Sign New Grant for Development

A six-man high level delegation from the African Development Bank (ADB) will pay an official visit to Liberia beginning today (Wednesday August 25, 2010) to hold discussions on the Banks' continuing support to Liberia's development.

The Vice President for the Bank Dr. Kamal El Kheshen heads the delegation.

Dr. El Kheshen oversees the implementation of the ADB's Fragile State Facility, the Governance, Economic and Financial Reforms Department as well as the Agriculture and Agro-Industries Department.

The objective of the visit is to hold high level consultations with the Government of Liberia regarding the Bank's program assistance to Liberia including funds provided under the Fragile State Facility (FSF).

During the visit, Dr. El Kheshen and delegation will also identify possible areas of new assistance to the country in the future. Liberia is the first among the group of countries benefiting from the FSF Program that the ADB Vice President will visit.

In a communication addressed to Finance Minister Augustine Kpehe Ngafuan, the ADB said its decision to send a delegation to Liberia is based on the country's sustained progress achieved in implementing a successful arrears clearance program that paved the way for full debt relief under HIPC and the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative.

The ADB also cited Liberia's strong commitment to sound macroeconomic management, progress made in rebuilding Public Financial Management systems and in implementing poverty reduction programs.

While in Liberia, the ADB Vice President will sign a grant agreement with the Government of Liberia.

Dr. El Kheshen will also pay a site visit to the White Plains Water Treatment Plant, hold meetings with the Minister of Finance and his Deputies including actors from the Aid Management Unit and the Project Financial Management Unit of the Ministry of Finance.

The six man ADB delegation will also hold consultations with the Ministries of Public Works and Planning, according to a release from the Minister of Finance.

Meetings will also be held with the US Ambassador, World Bank Country Manager and European Union Resident Representative.

Before departing the country, the ADB delegation will pay a courtesy call on President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf at the Executive Mansion to brief her on the outcome of their four-day visit to Liberia.

The Bank is currently supporting several programs in Liberia valued at a little over one hundred million United States Dollars.

Some of the programs include infrastructure, agriculture, public financial management reform and labor based public works projects.

The ADB has already signed two grant agreements with Liberia covering the restoration of water to Monrovia and three regional cities (Kakata, Buchanan and Zwedru) that totals 40 million United States Dollars.

The African Development Bank is to also fund the rehabilitation of the Fish Town - Harper highway with a grant of a little over 20 United States million dollars.

As Issa Sesay Concludes His Testimony, Liberian Radio Operator Takes the Witness Stand

Convicted former interim leader of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel group, Issa Hassan Sesay this week concluded his testimony as Charles Taylor 19th defense witness, during which he not only apologised to the people of Sierra Leone for his role in the Sierra Leonean conflict, but also told Special Court for Sierra Leone judges in The Hague that he did not use the RUF to fight Mr. Taylor's enemies in Liberia and Guinea and that his motivation to testify for Mr. Taylor is not because he expects that the former Liberian president if acquitted will use political influence to free him from his 52 year jail sentence. A former Liberian radio operator also commenced his testimony this week as Mr. Taylor's 20 defense witness.

Mr. Sesay took time off his 52 years jail sentence from a Rwandan jail– having being convicted by Special Court for Sierra Leone judges in Freetown for his role in the Sierra Leonean conflict–to testify for Mr. Taylor in The Hague. Having spent several weeks testifying about the RUF's activities during the conflict in Sierra Leone and refuting prosecution allegations that Mr. Taylor provided support to the RUF, Mr. Sesay on Friday used his closing comments to apologise to the people of Sierra Leone.

“I say sorry to the people of Sierra Leone and I'm appealing to the people of Sierra Leone, especially the victims, who lost their loved ones, those whose arms were amputated, those whose properties were destroyed, I'm appealing to them that what happened during the war was not good for Sierra Leone, but it has happened. I'm just appealing to them,” Mr. Sesay said on Friday.

He added that “I say sorry to the people of Sierra Leone and I'm appealing to the people of Sierra Leone, especially the victims, who lost their loved ones, those whose arms were amputated, those whose properties were destroyed, I'm appealing to them that what happened during the war was not good for Sierra Leone, but it has happened. I'm just appealing to them.”

Mr. Sesay concluded his statement that “I'm just pleading with them in the name of God for them to forgive me and forget. We are all Sierra Leoneans.”

Mr. Sesay also gave his reason for testifying in The Hague when asked whether he was “here to set the records straight for Charles Taylor.”

“Well, i am here to give my own true side of the story of what i know. That's why i am here,” he said.

When asked to tell the judges what his motivation for testifying for Mr. Taylor was, Mr. Sesay said that “it was because I used to hear on radio [UN Radio] when my colleague RUF were coming here to say things against me... And they were saying that the way Issa left [RUF leader] Mr. Sankoh in jail and disarmed the RUF, we too would prosecute

him until he dies in jail. I heard my colleagues saying a lot about Issa, things that Issa didn't do."

"So when Mr. Taylor's lawyers told my lawyers that they would need me as a witness, I said: Well, the lies in this case are too much. Let me too go there and give my own account. My colleague RUFs want to destroy me because they are saying that the person who had their future, that is Mr. Sankoh, I had betrayed Mr. Sankoh, so they were going to make sure that Issa dies in prison. So that was why I came here," Mr. Sesay added.

This statement from Mr. Sesay prompted a response from the Presiding Judge of the Trial Chamber Justice Julia Sebutinde that "But, Mr. Sesay, this is not your trial. So whatever you say here has no bearing on the sentence that you are serving. I don't understand that kind of reasoning. How does this clear your name? This is Mr. Taylor's trial, not yours."

"Yes, my Lord. I know that it is not my trial, but it is for people, those who are following up on the Court, for them to know my own part of the story, because a lot of things that they said against me here are not true," Mr. Sesay replied to the presiding judge's comment.

Earlier on Monday, prosecutors showed Mr. Sesay a letter that Mr. Taylor presented to the court as part of the documents obtained from his presidential archives while he was president of Liberia. The letter, which was signed in the name of "Essa Seasay", was tendered in evidence by Mr. Taylor on August 18, 2009 during his testimony as a witness in his own defense. Mr. Taylor told the court that he had received the said letter from "Issa Sesay", who by then was the most senior commander in the RUF after the group's main leader, Foday Sankoh, had been arrested following the abduction of UN peacekeepers by the RUF in May 2000.

In the letter, the RUF complained about attacks from the UN, the arrest of their leader Mr. Sankoh, and the violations of the Lome Peace Accord by the government of Sierra Leone. The letter called for Mr. Taylor's involvement in leading the peace process in Sierra Leone under the banner of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

When he testified in August 2009, Mr. Taylor told the court that "this is the letter from General Issa Sesay."

On Monday, prosecution counsel Nicholas Koumjian showed Mr. Sesay the same letter, which was purportedly written by him and addressed to Mr. Taylor. Mr. Sesay told the court that he did not write such a letter to Mr. Taylor. Upon his denial, Mr. Koumjian suggested that the letter could have been written in Mr. Sesay's name by Mr. Taylor's men.

"It is obvious that if this was in the archive of Charles Taylor, then it is written by Charles Taylor's men as the demands of the RUF... This is a letter that was written on

your behalf by Charles Taylor's people. He was using you as a puppet, correct?" Mr. Koumjian put to Mr. Sesay.

"Nobody was using me. ECOWAS only used me to disarm the RUF, but the Liberian government did not use me," Mr. Sesay responded.

The letter, according to Mr. Taylor, was sent to him by Mr. Sesay after the RUF had abducted UN Peacekeepers and for which he (Taylor) had received a mandate from ECOWAS leaders to get the peacekeepers released. Mr. Sesay said that when he negotiated the release of the peacekeepers with Mr. Taylor, he did not put forward any preconditions.

When asked whether Mr. Taylor had told him that his colleagues (West African leaders) had promised to make him Chairman of ECOWAS if he facilitated the release of the peacekeepers, Mr. Sesay said Mr. Taylor never told him that.

"He [Taylor] said to you that he can become ECOWAS Chairman and he'll help you," Mr. Koumjian put to Mr. Sesay.

"No. He did not tell me that," Mr. Sesay responded.

When asked why he had taken the peacekeepers to Liberia before releasing them, when in fact, the UN peacekeeping mission was based in Sierra Leone, Mr. Sesay said, "I got the contact from Monrovia. If I had got the contact in Sierra Leone, I would have released them in Sierra Leone."

"He [Taylor] told me to take them to Liberia, that's why I took them to Foya and the helicopter took them to Monrovia," he added.

Mr. Koumjian also accused Mr. Sesay of contradicting himself by testifying that he had gone to Monrovia only once in May 2000 during the negotiations for the release of the peacekeepers. According to prosecution witnesses, Mr. Sesay visited Mr. Taylor twice in May 2000 – the first visit to negotiate the release of the peacekeepers and the second visit to take the peacekeepers to Liberia for their release. On the second trip, Mr. Sesay allegedly returned to Sierra Leone with a consignment of arms and ammunition, which according to prosecution witnesses were given to him by Mr. Taylor.

When Mr. Taylor testified in his own defense, he told the court that Mr. Sesay had only visited him once in May 2000 and that was when he negotiated the release of the peacekeepers. When the peacekeepers were finally released, Mr. Sesay did not return to Monrovia, Mr. Taylor said. Mr. Sesay in his present testimony corroborated Mr. Taylor's account that he only visited Monrovia once in May. Mr. Sesay told the court in The Hague that when he took the peacekeepers to Liberia, he only stopped at Foya while a helicopter took the peacekeepers to Monrovia.

However, in his testimony in his own trial before the Special Court for Sierra Leone in Freetown, Mr. Sesay told the court that he had gone to Monrovia two times in May 2000, the first time to negotiate the release of the peacekeepers and the second time to meet with Mr. Taylor after the peacekeepers had been released.

When this contradiction was put to him today, Mr. Sesay said, “Well, I recall that when I went with the UN, I stopped in Foya.”

“If I did say that I went to Monrovia, now I recall that I stopped at Foya,” he added.

On Tuesday, as Mr. Sesay was not available in court to continue his testimony due to a dental appointment that he had to honour with a dentist in The Hague, defense lawyers brought in his place Mr. Taylor’s 20th witness, a Liberian national who also sought to distance Mr. Taylor from the activities of the RUF in Sierra Leone.

The witness, who worked as a radio operator in the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) rebel group and later in Mr. Taylor’s Executive Mansion under the Special Security Services (SSS) division, is testifying with partial protective measures and is only identified by the pseudonym DCT-008. On Tuesday, he told the court about the communications that took place between the radio station installed at the residence of Benjamin Yeaten, who was Director of the SSS, and RUF commander Sam Bockarie’s radio station installed at the RUF headquarters in Buedu, eastern Sierra Leone. The witness told the court that Mr. Taylor did not know about the contact and friendship that existed between Mr. Yeaten and Mr. Bockarie.

Several prosecution witnesses, including former RUF radio operators, have testified about radio communications between Mr. Bockarie and Mr. Yeaten. These communications were facilitated through Mr. Bockarie’s radio operator called Sellay and a radio operator named Sunlight, who operated a radio at Mr. Yeaten’s residence in Liberia, prosecution witnesses have said. They further told the court that Mr. Taylor had knowledge of these contacts, and it was through Mr. Yeaten that Mr. Taylor facilitated most of his communications and assistance to RUF commanders. On Tuesday, the witness, a former radio operator in Liberia, said this was not the case.

Explaining the nature of the radio contact that took place between Mr. Yeaten and the RUF, the witness told the court that “while Sunlight was operating the radio at the SSS Director’s residence...one day, Samson came along with...Daniel Tamba, also called Jungle.”

“Samson introduced Daniel Tamba to Sunlight saying the Chief [Yeaten] said I should bring this fellow to you so he can call Sierra Leone. He is a member of the RUF and he is one of [RUF leader Foday] Sankoh’s boys...Jungle gave a piece of paper to Sunlight with a call sign for the RUF operator Sellay.”

Samson, the witness said, was a former NPFL fighter, who was also one of the officers working under Mr. Yeaten in the SSS.

According to DCT-008, “[Samson] also said he had taken Jungle to the Executive Mansion for Jungle to communicate with the RUF in Sierra Leone.”

He said that Samson had been working with another radio operator at the Executive Mansion called William Jimmy, who helped them communicate secretly with the RUF in Sierra Leone.

“Samson said they were hiding it and the [Liberian] government did not know about it, not even the president,” the witness said.

When Sunlight discussed this with Mr. Yeaten, the SSS Director gave his consent to the contact with the RUF, telling Sunlight that nobody knew of such relationship that he had with the RUF.

“After the communication, when Benjamin Yeaten came home that evening, Sunlight told Benjamin Yeaten that Samson brought Jungle here so that Sunlight will connect him to Sierra Leone, and then Benjamin Yeaten told Sunlight that I have a friend in Sierra Leone and you should allow him to communicate with Sierra Leone anytime they come here,” the witness explained.

“Later, I got to know that [the friend] was Sam Bockarie,” he added.

When asked whether “Charles Taylor [was] aware of this,” the witness said, “No.”

“Charles Taylor did not know because Benjamin Yeaten told Sunlight that what I have told you should be kept to yourself and you must not share it with any other government radio operator...because this relationship between Sam Bockarie and myself, the president does not know about it and you should keep it to yourself,” the witness explained.

The witness said Mr. Yeaten added in his discussion with Sunlight that “if this information gets to anyone and the president knows about it, he will deal with me and I’ll be finished.”

“That’s how I came to know that the president did not know about it,” he said.

When asked about the nature of the friendship that existed between Mr. Yeaten and Mr. Bockarie, the witness said, “The friendship was so cordial, they were very close.

In response to allegations that RUF commanders, including Mr. Bockarie, made regular trips to Liberia and returned with arms and ammunition to Sierra Leone and that members of Mr. Taylor’s security apparatus had close links with RUF commanders, Mr. Taylor has told the court that as president of Liberia, he could not have known all the things that members of his security forces or his government did. These men could have had independent relationships or arms trade with the RUF without his knowledge, Mr. Taylor has stated.

When he resumed his testimony on Wednesday after being absent in court on Tuesday, Mr. Sesay told the court that the RUF did not fight battles for Mr. Taylor in neighboring Guinea and Liberia.

Prosecutors have alleged that Mr. Taylor had control over RUF) rebels and from this position of authority, prosecutors say, Mr. Taylor sent RUF rebels to attack a rebel force in his own country – the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) – which was threatening to unseat his government and helping to dislodge the government of former president, Lansana Conte, in neighboring Guinea. Despite an ongoing disarmament process in Sierra Leone at the time, arms and ammunition for these operations were allegedly given to the RUF by Mr. Yeaten, Mr. Taylor’s SSS Director, who was commanding troops against LURD rebels in Lofa County, Liberia. Mr. Taylor has denied these allegations.

“Benjamin Yeaten provided the RUF with ammunition to launch these attacks in Guinea and Lofa in Liberia,” prosecution counsel Mr. Koumjian asserted on Wednesday.

“No, Benjamin Yeaten did not give me ammunition and I did not send the RUF to fight in Guinea and Liberia,” Mr. Sesay responded.

In 2008, prosecution witnesses told Special Court for Sierra Leone judges in The Hague that they were part of the RUF fighting force sent to fight in Guinea and Liberia. Mr. Taylor gave orders to Mr. Sesay for the RUF to attack these countries and Mr. Sesay in turn mobilized RUF fighters to cross the Sierra Leonean border into the two countries, the witnesses told the court in 2008.

“Issa Sesay said Charles Taylor informed him that we should give him ground in Guinea so at the time of the disarmament in Sierra Leone, we’ll shift some of the ammunition to Guinea for safe keeping...from there, Issa arranged transportation to Liberia, we met Benjamin Yeaten and he said guys we should get ready for the operation,” one of the prosecution witnesses was quoted as having said in 2008.

“You as interim leader of the RUF were battling the enemies of Charles Taylor in both Liberia and Guinea,” Mr. Koumjian confronted Mr. Sesay.

“I did not fight the enemies of Charles Taylor,” Mr. Sesay said

Mr. Sesay explained that RUF fighters who fought in Liberia could have done so on their own accord, not on any instructions from the RUF leadership.

“The RUF [fighters] who went there did so on their own accord,” Mr. Sesay said, prompting a question from Mr. Koumjian as to whether Mr. Sesay was confirming that RUF fighters did indeed cross into neighboring Liberia.

“What I mean, when I asked them [RUF] to disarm, the Vanguard [original RUF fighters trained in Liberia] who refused, crossed over to Liberia. Even Superman [a Liberian RUF

commander] went over to Liberia, but to say that I organized men to go over to Liberia, no,” Mr. Sesay said.

On the RUF cross-border attacks in Guinea, Mr. Sesay also insisted that “Mr. Taylor did not give me any operation to attack Guinea.”

“There were cross-border attacks which the Guineans launched and the RUF was repelling them...The Guineans were launching long range missiles which were landing in RUF controlled territories,” he added.

Mr. Sesay also refuted claims that former rebel fighter, Daniel Tamba (otherwise known as “Jungle”), was a member of Mr. Taylor’s SSS assigned to the RUF as Mr. Taylor’s official representative. Several prosecution witnesses have testified that Jungle was Mr. Taylor’s representative to the RUF who moved between Sierra Leone and Liberia with diamonds from RUF rebels to Mr. Taylor, and arms and ammunition from Mr. Taylor to the RUF. Mr. Sesay has dismissed these claims as lies, saying that when Jungle crossed from NPFL territory into Sierra Leone in the early 1990s, he joined the RUF and remained with the Sierra Leonean rebel group until the time of the disarmament in the country.

“As far as I know, Jungle was not an SSS, he was a member of the RUF,” Mr. Sesay told the court.

Mr. Koumjian displayed a list containing the names of SSS members who were assigned to the Executive Mansion as part of Mr. Taylor’s “Presidential Advance Team” and the 9th name on the said list was that of “Daniel Tamba” (Jungle). Mr. Koumjian also displayed a photograph of persons in military fatigue and Mr. Sesay identified the two visible persons in the photograph as SSS Director Mr. Yeaten and Jungle.

When put to him that “[Jungle] was the liaison between Charles Taylor and the RUF,” Mr. Sesay said: “No, Jungle was with the RUF for a long time, he was not a middleman.”

On Thursday, Mr. Sesay told the court that he did not know and does not believe that Mr. Taylor sent men to kill him while he was trying to disarm rebel forces in Sierra Leone. Mr. Sesay also dismissed suggestions that he is testifying for Mr. Taylor because he hopes that the former Liberian president, if acquitted, will help free him from his 52 years jail sentence in Rwanda.

Mr. Koumjian in concluding Mr. Sesay’s cross-examination on Thursday put to the witness that it was Mr. Taylor’s practice to execute people with whom he had disagreements and so when Mr. Sesay decided to disarm the RUF in Sierra Leone much to Mr. Taylor’s disagreement, the former Liberian president sent men to kill him inside Sierra Leone. Mr. Sesay dismissed this suggestion as false.

“Charles Taylor was unhappy with your decision to cooperate with the United Nations and at some point he sent men to kill you, did you know that?” Mr. Koumjian asked Mr. Sesay.

“No,” Mr. Sesay said. “I did not know that, i did not hear that and i don’t believe that Charles Taylor wanted to hill me because Charles Taylor was one of those encouraging me to disarm.”

Mr. Koumjian read from a March 12 2008 evidence of former NPFL fighter Joseph Zig Zag Marzah who told the court that Mr. Taylor had ordered him to executed Mr. Sesay.

“...I crossed over to Pendembu in the Kailahun District to wait for Issa [Sesay] to execute him under the directive of my leader Charles Taylor. Later he [Taylor] called me and said he had already sent for Issa to go and receive ammos in Buedu and for him to come and pass through me to Buedu and then I will follow him to get him, but Issa never returned. I spent almost two weeks in Kailahun and later he told me that, “The man has gone. He will no longer receive supplies from me.”” Mr. Marzah told the court in March 2008.

“This man is telling lies,” Mr. Sesay responded when confronted with Mr. Marzah’s statement.

Mr. Koumjian put to Mr. Sesay that since Mr. Taylor did not want the RUF to disarm, that was why he suggested that Mr. Bockarie, the former RUF commander who had left Sierra Leone for Liberia be made to rejoin the RUF. When Mr. Sesay realised Mr. Taylor’s plot, he never returned to see the former Liberian president again, Mr. Koumjian said.

“If he [Bockarie] would have returned, you would have been killed...you told Charles Taylor you wanted to go and consult your colleagues and never returned to see Charles Taylor again,” Mr. Koumjian put to Mr. Sesay.

In response, Mr. Sesay said that “I told him that the problem was between Sam Bockarie and Mr. Sankoh, that i’ll have to go and consult my colleagues. Since then, he did not call me again and i did not return to see him.”

Mr. Koumjian also pointed to Mr. Sesay that the reason for his testimony on Mr. Taylor’s behalf is because he hopes that an acquitted Mr. Taylor will use political power to get him out of jail, having already started a 52 year jail term after being convicted for his role in the Sierra Leonean conflict. Mr. Sesay denied this suggestion, telling the court that his only hope for getting out of jail rests on God and the people of Sierra Leone.

“You have the hope that if Charles Taylor is released, he’ll help you get political release from prison. If Charles Taylor is released, he’ll help you get out of jail, correct?” Mr. Koumjian asked Mr. Sesay.

“No my Lord. Mr. Taylor is not a Sierra Leonean and so he has no influence in Sierra Leone. It is the people of Sierra Leone who will appeal to the Government of Sierra Leone for my release or the international community who know what i did for peace in Sierra Leone,” Mr. Sesay responded.

As Mr. Sesay was headed back to his Rwandan jail having officially finished his evidence on Friday, defense lawyers recalled Mr. Taylor’s 20th defense witness, DCT-008 who told the court on Tuesday that members of Mr. Taylor’s security apparatus, including SSS Director Mr. Yeaten had dealings with RUF commanders without Mr. Taylor’s knowledge.

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Details of the News

1 . China-African Relations:

- **China must recognize referendum result to retain oil assets - south Sudan's minister:**

The only way for China to retain its millions-worth of oil assets in Sudan is to cultivate a “strong” relationship with the semi-autonomous region of south Sudan and recognize the outcome of a referendum due in January 2011 on the region’s possible independence, south Sudan official said in statements to Bloomberg.

Dr. Anne Itto, head of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement-Southern Sector, addresses reporters at a press conference Wednesday, April 14, 2010 in Juba, (AP) South Sudan, whose population mostly follows Christianity and traditional beliefs, is due to hold a referendum in January 2011 to decide whether to remain united with the Arab-dominated north Sudan or secede to form the world’s newest nation.

The region has been enjoying autonomous rule since 2005 when north and south Sudan signed a peace deal that ended decades of civil war fueled by ethnicity, religion and coveted natural resources.

Most of Sudan’s estimated 6 billion barrels of oil reserves lies along the tentative borders between the north and the south. The country currently produces 470,000 barrels of crude oil per day of which Chinese companies are the biggest explorers and receivers.

Anne Itto, south Sudan’s minister of agriculture, told reporters yesterday in the region’s capital Juba upon returning from China that the Chinese government fears that its assets in Sudan’s oil would be “a waster” if the south opts for secession.

“A lot of wild rumors have been getting to them, that if the south separates, there will be insecurity, and if there is insecurity, their assets worth billions of dollars in the form of pipelines and so on will have been a waste,” she said.

Itto, who is also the deputy secretary-general of the SPLM, the ruling party in south Sudan, said that she had told Chinese officials that “if they want to protect their assets, the only way is to develop a very strong relationship with the government of Southern Sudan, respect the outcome of the referendum, and then we will be doing business.”

The minister said that China was interested in expanding oil exploration to more blocks. She further announced that a senior delegation from the Chinese Communist Party would visit the region in early October to try to “bridge the gap.”

Expressing admiration for China’s model of providing development for growing economies, Itto said “whether anybody likes it or not, China is providing leadership in the

development of developing countries,” adding that the Chinese are “stepping up. They are funding, particularly in the area of agriculture and exploration of natural resources.”

On August 19, 2010, Sudan signed a \$30 million deal with small Finnish company Fenno Caledonian to explore Block 10 in the north east of the country. Sudan says it hopes to produce 600,000 barrels per day by 2011.

• **Direct Flights to Link Maputo and Shanghai**

As from next year the Mozambican capital Maputo and the Chinese city Shanghai will be linked by direct flights, an initiative that is hoped to boost and accelerate trade between the two countries.

This was disclosed in Maputo on Friday by Cao Hougru, head of a Chinese business delegation that is visiting Mozambique to seek investment opportunities.

China is clearly interested in the implementation of this venture that has been approved by the Civil Aviation Institute of China.

According to Cao, Beijing is just waiting for the reply from the Mozambican Transport and Communications Ministry to start operating this route, and two Chinese airlines companies have already shown their interest.

‘I think it’s just a matter of procedures, but if there are no unforeseen obstacles the flights may start at the beginning of next year,’ said Cao, speaking to reporters at the end of a meeting with the Mozambican Prime Minister, Aires Ali

The Chinese delegation is visiting Mozambique in response to an invitation made by Prime Minister Aires Ali earlier this year, during his visit to that Asian country where he held several meetings with the local business community.

The Chinese delegation includes over a dozen of businessmen working in the areas of energy, finance, mining and agro-processing, among others.

Citing the financial sector as an example, Cao said that Chinese businessmen have already expressed their interest to open an investment bank in Mozambique to finance mega-projects.

China is also interested in the development of energy resources, including the construction of dams and coal mining, due to the existing large deposits in Mozambique.

• **Chinese Business People to Invest U.S. \$13 Billion**

A delegation of Chinese business people from Shanghai announced in Maputo on Thursday that they intend to invest 13 billion US dollars in a number of projects in Mozambique over the next five years.

The Mozambican Government and the Chinese investors signed two memorandums of understanding (MoU), which lay the basis for the implantation of these projects.

Planning and Development Minister Aiuba Cuereneia and the head of the Chinese delegation, Cao Hongru, signed the MoU.

The projects include an industrial park and a car assembly plant. Another project is a "China Town", to be built in Catembe municipality across the Maputo Bay from the capital, to accommodate Chinese and Mozambicans.

Speaking during the ceremony, Cao Hongru said that "these two memorandums are the result of the visit of the Mozambican Prime minister, Aires Ali, to China last June, when he invited Chinese businesspeople to invest in Mozambique".

"We will start by investing one billion US dollars. We will definitely reach our goal," stressed Cao Hongru, who is also the chairman of the board of the China Tong Jian Investment company in Shanghai.

For Cuereneia the installation of the industrial park will reduce both the level of unemployment and the price of goods in the local market, by cutting down imports.

On the occasion, Cao Hongru said that Chinese businesspeople are prepared to immediately invest one billion dollars, and establish direct flights linking Maputo and Shanghai to boost trade and tourism between the two countries.

Cao Hongru believes that, with direct flights, over a million Chinese tourists could visit Mozambique annually.

The Chinese delegation includes over a dozen of businessmen working in the field of energy, finance, mining and agro-processing.

2 Pan-African issues:

- **Improving aid performance through geo-coded maps**

A just-launched geo-coded global map outlining how much individual donors have given to which aid projects and where, will highlight aid gaps, imbalances and

duplication, and through this, improve donor coordination, says aid monitoring group AidData.

The AidData country maps currently give details of 1,200 development projects in 42 countries - currently all by the World Bank or African Development Bank. AidData, which developed the maps with Uppsala University's conflict data programme, is pushing more donors to come on board.

A search will show, for instance, that US\$643 million has been given to boost education in Uganda since 2002. Bill Anderson, a data standards and systems analyst for Aid Info, an NGO that pushes aid transparency, told IRIN: "Geo-coding aid is a huge step forward as it can enable civil society and local authorities in recipient countries to see what aid is being sent to their area, and whether it has been delivered."

It can also help recipient governments with better sectoral planning, he said.

Geo-coding is also being applied in the humanitarian aid sector, said Anderson, with NGO network Interaction undertaking aid maps of the Haiti response, though he pointed out that the speed of humanitarian response can make it difficult to provide up-to-date, accurate mapping.

Even in the development sector it is difficult to provide complete, accurate maps as donor reporting of geographical aid spread is not yet uniformly reported, says Aid Data staff member Alena Stern on her blog. "If I wanted to determine where within Uganda these projects are located, I would face a much more difficult task."

The World Bank is starting to standardize this information, and the UK Department for International Development is now considering it, said Anderson.

● **Sub-Saharan Africa Is Speeding Towards Affluence**

Africa is heading towards a bright economic future, according to a new book co-authored by the former director of the French state agency for economic cooperation and released recently in Paris.

In the book "Le temps de l'Afrique" ("The African Age"), Jean-Michel Severino, until last April director of the French state agency for economic cooperation, and his co-author Olivier Ray argue that sub-Saharan Africa has started the new millennium under far better economic and social circumstances than generally assumed.

To support their thesis that "Africa is rushing towards affluence", as Severino put it in an interview, the authors use the most recent economic and social data, showing rapid economic growth, high investment and sinking poverty.

"The vision that we in Europe have of Africa -- of a continent frozen in poverty and disease -- is simply wrong," Severino declared. "On the contrary, today's sub-Saharan Africa is a region of high economic growth, with numerous business opportunities. Sub-Saharan Africa is now a high speed train rushing towards affluence and prosperity."

Severino recalled that since the beginning of the century, the sub-Saharan African economy "has grown by a yearly average rate of 5.5 percent, against only 1.35 percent in the euro zone".

Severino quoted a recent study by the U.S. National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), which shows that African poverty "is falling rapidly".

The NBER paper, by economist Xavier Sala-i-Martin and his research assistant Maxim Pinkovskiy, predicts that if "the present trends continue, the millennium development goal of halving the proportion of people with incomes less than one dollar a day will be achieved" by 2015.

"We are not nursing dangerous illusions about Africa," Severino told IPS.

All regional indicators, from demographic growth to foreign investments, from urbanisation to participation in international trade, aided by political stability, support the thesis that Africa is steadily moving towards prosperity.

Severino explained that the demographic evolution in the region is now marked by a simultaneous fall in the birth rate and a more moderate population growth.

"By the year 2050, Africa will count some two billion inhabitants, with 60 percent of them living in cities," Severino said. "Such a conjunction of urbanisation and demographic growth has historically always led to development, by improving productivity, by creating large markets, by stimulating domestic demand, with positive spill-over effects for the countryside."

Severino calls this "the demographic dividend" and adds it to the considerable improvement in African state finances, due to the massive writing off of foreign debts and to increases in tax revenues.

Investment too, both state and private, has been steadily growing since the mid-1990s. High prices of commodities and raw materials further help to consolidate this strongly growing collective African economy.

In addition, Africa possesses a significant energy potential. "Africa exploits less than seven percent of its hydroelectric potential. The continent also disposes of a large energy potential in wind, sun, biomass and other renewable resources, practically untouched," he said.

Severino also considered the People's Republic of China's growing economic investments and links with sub-Saharan Africa as another indicator substantiating the thesis of the region's economic take-off.

At the same time, Severino noticed no single African economic model, strictly speaking. "But there are several common factors, such as political stability, sound public finances, investments in infrastructure and relatively high rates of savings and investments."

Severino cautioned that climate change constitutes a major threat for Africa: "The inter-tropical zones are going to be the most affected by climate change. Because the region is very poor, its vulnerability to climate change is even higher."

Rain patterns have already changed, leading to people remarking that "there is no rainy season anymore". Such changes damage agriculture. In addition, climate change can increase deforestation, with skyrocketing mitigation costs, Severino added.

Some French commentators and economic analysts have praised "Le temps de l'Afrique" as "the most passionate book on Africa published (in France) in recent years" and as "offering an innovating view on Africa".

Other analysts adopt a more critical stance on the book's optimistic diagnosis.

Bakary Traoré, researcher at the Development Centre of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, regretted that the book "does not refer to the consequences of the global economic crisis on African development, or to the challenge of bewildered youth that continues to suffer educational deficits and the consequences of atomised societies."

Similarly, Traoré regretted that the "absence of a welfare state and the inadequacy of political debate allow religion to take on a crucial role in public questions beyond its pure confessional function". Such subjects, Traoré said, are not discussed in "Le temps de l'Afrique".

Traoré underlined that Severino's analysis offers an "updated reading of the changes taking place in Africa at the moment, and points to the powerful endogenous factors contributing to economic growth.

"However, Severino and Ray ignore essential questions shaping Africa's future: The permanent crisis in education; the management of Africa's strategic market of agriculture; the use of the fiscal and savings resources of the region; and the quality of social protection and assistance."

All these factors, Traoré said, must be analyzed in depth to conceive "sound public policies that could transform the present momentum in the region into a steady force to drive African development".

• Can Africa break its 'resource curse'?

Many African countries are blessed with oil and mineral wealth that has the potential to transform their economies. But historically, those resources have often been more of a curse than a blessing.

There are numerous examples of African nations where the discovery of natural resources has been followed by economic instability, conflict and environmental damage. So common is the phenomenon that it even has its own name -- the "resource curse."

Michael T. Klare is a professor of peace and world security studies at Hampshire College in Massachusetts, United States, and the author of the books "Resource Wars" and "Blood and Oil."

He told CNN, "Resource curse to me applies specifically to poor countries that don't have a lot of sources of wealth to begin with; then there's a discovery of a major resource -- oil or copper or gold -- that suddenly becomes a major source of wealth for that country.

It leads to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few.

"Theoretically the development of that resource could produce great wealth for that nation, but historically it leads to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few -- those who monopolize the collection of rents from the mining or the drilling for oil -- and the exclusion of the majority from any benefit."

The result, said Klare, is repressive governments that cling to power, so they can monopolize the collection of resource wealth, and an impoverished population -- a recipe for conflict.

The resource curse is by no means limited to Africa, but the continent has produced some examples of the curse at its most destructive.

Government forces and armed groups have vied for control of resources, with the proceeds from their sale funding more weapons, which prolongs the violence.

Bloody conflicts in DR Congo, Liberia, Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone have all been partly funded by the sale of blood diamonds.

Klare explained violence can also come about when minority groups in a resource-rich area feel excluded from political power and the wealth generated by a resource. Sometimes, separatist groups try to claim ownership of the land where that resource originates -- such as in Angola's oil-rich Cabinda region.

As well as promoting conflict, extracting minerals and oil can also have a devastating environmental impact, such as in Nigeria's Delta region, the site of more than 6,800 recorded oil spills.

But resources can have a less obvious, more insidious effect on a country. Klare said resource-rich countries often become overly dependent on a single resource, to the detriment of the rest of the economy.

Equally, newly-found resource wealth can lead to corruption and cronyism. Nigeria is a prime example, where the country's own corruption agency estimates between \$300 billion to \$400 billion of oil money has been stolen or wasted over the last 50 years.

But there are exceptions in Africa that show resources needn't be a curse. Botswana, with its diamond wealth, and mineral-rich Ghana have both managed to benefit from their natural resources.

Paul Collier is a professor of economics and director of the center for the study of African economies at Oxford University, and an advisor to the IMF and World Bank.

He told CNN Botswana had benefited from having good leadership, a functioning democracy, and a competent civil service from the time its diamond-wealth was discovered in the 1960s.

Video: Uganda's burgeoning oil industry

He added that if a country is to avoid the "resource curse" it must build an informed civil society that is aware of the kind of issues involved.

"There's no substitute for building a critical mass of informed citizens," he said.

"It doesn't have to be everybody -- sometimes just 10,000 people, but it doesn't mean just get a good finance minister -- it has to be a bigger group than one or two technocrats.

"It means building informed elite of ministers, civil servants, business people and civil society organizations."

To that end, Collier has helped set up the Natural Resource Charter, a website and 12-point plan aimed at helping the governments and citizens of resource-rich countries use those resources wisely.

As African countries discover new resource wealth -- such as recent oil finds in Uganda and off the coast of Ghana -- Collier believes they can learn from the continent's past mistakes.

"What's hopeful is people are much more aware of the issues," he said.

He gave the example of Angola, whose enormous oil wealth still has the potential to benefit the entire population.

"The stakes are enormous in Angola," he told CNN.

"Whether the present generation of children, by the time they're adults, will be living in an upper-middle income society, like [oil-rich] Malaysia, or whether they'll be living in a country that's stuck in levels like DR Congo and Nigeria -- that's what's at stake.

"Angola doesn't have to be run by a bunch of suits; it just needs to be run by a bunch of people who are concerned by their own children's future."

Nigeria:

1. Political News:

- **IBB Wanted to Rule for Life, Says Atiku**

Former vice-president Atiku Abubakar yesterday alleged that the inordinate ambition of General Ibrahim Babangida to remain in office "indefinitely" was the primary reason he annulled the June 12, 1993 presidential election won by Bashorun MKO Abiola.

Atiku was speaking in Lagos at the presentation of a book, "Dairy of a Debacle: Tracking Nigeria's Democratic Transition (1989-1994)", written by celebrated journalist and columnist, Dr. Olatunji Dare, on the June 12 crisis.

The former vice-president also said Major Gen. Shehu Musa Yar'Adua (rtd) predicted that the elections would be annulled by the Babangida administration.

The June 12 election is still regarded by many as one of the most credible in the nation's history.

Former Lagos State Governor, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, buttressed the position of Atiku, saying that from the steps, actions and statements of Babangida, "he was not willing to quit office [and this] led to the June 12 1993 crisis".

Atiku said many Nigerians did not trust the Babangida administration to accept the outcome of the election.

The ex-vice president said before the Social Democratic Party (SDP) presidential primaries, Northern and Southern delegates met in Kaduna and decided to vote for Abiola.

"Our calculation was that after the election, Abiola would be the presidential candidate and I his running mate. There was confusion in Jos because what we sat down in Kaduna to discuss was not agreed upon in Jos. I called Shehu to come and settle the impasse.

"He came to Jos and said we should vote for Abiola. His position was that the West voted for him (Yar'Adua) in the SDP primaries and there was need to pay back. He said if either Babagana Kingibe or I emerged, Babangida would most likely annul the elections and if he did, the North could not protest. But if Abiola emerged, the South-west would lead a protest and chase the military out of power.

"That was how we elected Abiola in the second ballot and Abiola won gallantly at the general election. But Babangida annulled the elections. We protested and then drove out the military from power," Atiku said.

He commended the courage of Abiola in his fight for his mandate, adding that Abiola "paid an ultimate price for Nigeria's democracy".

Speaking at the presentation, Tinubu said the occasion afforded the opportunity to remember the debt of gratitude the nation owes Abiola, saying democracy would still have remained a mirage in the country if not for his death.

Tinubu, who was the chief presenter, lamented that many who have benefited from the struggle for June 12 to get to political positions and yet turned blind eye to the efforts by the late Abiola. He said the author who was never a beneficiary still stood for the struggle.

Tinubu also disclosed that it was very clear from "the steps, actions and statements of General Ibrahim Babangida that he was not willing to quit office which led to the June 12 1993 crisis. [The book] will refresh the memory of many and illuminate on the roles played by gladiators of that era that later robbed Nigerians the opportunity of having entrenched democracy as far back as 1993."

He recounted how one of the grand beneficiaries "whom the Almighty saved from the hang man's noose" and who later became president "did not even want to hear Abiola's name not even talk of honouring him. Yet, they reaped bountifully from his toil and still wanted more than his entitlement but for public outrage and vigilance".

He was believed to be referring to former President Olusegun Obasanjo.

In his remarks, the erstwhile chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, dismissed insinuations by some South-west political leaders that the annulment of June 12 elections was the handiwork of the North, revealing that the election was annulled "by a tiny few".

He said: "That is the biggest lie of the century. All Nigerians voted for Abiola including the Northerners. It was the work of a few people who robbed 14 million voters of their franchise. I was in the police force back then and I knew what happened. We almost lost Nigeria in 1993."

According to him, "Abiola gave us hope. It was so real. Some of us wanted to go that direction. Nigeria is in dire need of such true leadership who would stand for what is right and preserve the struggle of our heroes past."

Other dignitaries at the book presentation included Lagos State Governor Babatunde Raji Fashola (SAN), former Lagos State military governor, Rear Admiral Ndubuisi Kanu, Chairman of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), Chief Bisi Akande, Speaker of the Lagos State House of Assembly, Hon. Adeyemi Ikuforiji, Chairman of the House Committee on Diaspora, Hon. Abike Dabiri Erewa, Chief Dr. Molade Okoya Thomas, Engr. Rauf Aregbesola and Dr. Kayode Fayemi.

• **2011 - Dokpesi Heads IBB Campaign**

Kanti Bello, Oyovbaire, Bibi Farouk, others make list, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB) rtd, yesterday announced the chairman of Daar Communications, owner of African Independent Television (AIT) and Ray Power FM, Chief Raymond Dokpesi to head his campaign team in furtherance of his 2011 presidential aspiration under the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

In a press statement signed by his director of media and communications, Prince Kassim Afegbua, Dokpesi heads the campaign team with Senator Kanti Bello as deputy director general.

Others are Alhaji Sadu Ilu, director of security and intelligence; Prof. ABC Nwosu, director of research and planning; Prof Sam Oyovbaire, director of policy and strategy, and Mrs. Remi Adiukwu-Bakare, director of women affairs, Alhaji Farouk Bibi-Farouk will act as director of youth affairs, while Alhaji Shehu Musa Gadam and Hon. Musa Elayo will act as directors of contact and mobilisation and legal services respectively.

According to the statement, "The comprehensive list of the zonal and state coordinators will be announced in due course."

The formal declaration ceremony according to Afegbua will take place in Abuja between 14 and 15 September, 2010, where IBB is expected to unveil his blueprint to members of the public.

• **Jonathan's Campaign Group Chairman Kidnapped**

A gang of four armed men last Friday night kidnapped the son of first Republic Prime Minister, Dr Jhailil Tafawa Balewa in Abuja. Dr. Jhailil is also the leader of one of the Goodluck Jonathan 2011 campaign groups.

The Kidnappers who are still keeping the medical doctor turned politician in their hideout as at the time of filing this report are said to be demanding a ransom of N100m.

According to sources close to the Balewa family, the kidnappers stormed his 29, Ashirk Jarma Street residence in the Jabi area of Abuja at about 7pm all armed with action rifles and took him away after seizing their mobile phones, even as his wife, Mrs Afsat Tafawa Balewa, daughter of one time Premier of Western Region, Chief Samuel Akintola, pleaded with her husband's abductors.

Dr Jhailil Tafawa Balewa said to be a close friend of President Goodluck Jonathan, has been working with a non-political Pressure Group, "GOODLUCK NAKOWA" (GOODLUCK FOR ALL) to drum support for the President to contest the 2011 Presidential elections. He had also led the group to Lagos last Wednesday to interface with Journalists ahead of its formal launch in Abuja September, 8.

Dr Jhalil Tafawa Balewa was said to have purchased his air tickets that Friday, ready to lead the Goodluck Na kowa Group to put up a show at Umuahia, where the State Governor Orji was defecting to the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

Although efforts to reach the National Secretary of the GoodLuck Na Kowa Group, Mallam Mohammed Bala Abdullahi failed as he was said to have probably gone to the Umuahia Jamboree of the PDP, sources close to the group confirmed that their National Chairman Dr Jhailil Tafawa Balewa had been kidnapped and the kidnappers are demanding 100 million naira ransom.

The source disclosed to LEADERSHIP SUNDAY that the kidnappers gained entrance into the house due to lapses on the part of the security men who allowed them in with out proper scrutiny.

"They immediately ordered everyone to lie face down and so we could not see their faces", he said. He disclosed that the kidnappers took away some money before fleeing with Dr. Jhailil. He disclosed that the kidnappers demanded for N100m, pointing out that the motive for the kidnap could be economic. The source said everything was being done to get the Jhailil released.

FCT police PRO Mr. jimoh Moshood said he was yet to get any details of the kidnap.

• **Voters Registration: INEC May Partner NIGCOMSAT**

Indications that an indigenous company may be among those to be awarded the multi-billion Direct Data Capture Machine to be used in the compilation of fresh voters' register emerged yesterday when the Chairman, Independent National Electoral Commission, Prof. Attahiru Jega was tested with the DDCM machine of the Nigerian Communication Satellite at the National Headquarters of the Agency in Abuja.

Though an impressed INEC Chairman, Jega, whose biometric data was captured by the DDCM of NIGCOMSAT, refused to comment on the competence of the machine for the voters' register.

The Director-General of the NIGCOMSAT, Engr. Ahmed Rufai, had sometime ago visited the INEC chairman and introduced the machines as capable of handling the INEC voters' register.

To confirm the competence, the INEC Chairman and members of the commission undertook a walking visit to the headquarters of the agency.

During the visit, Jega had at the presentation, stated that the commission will consider partnering with NIGCOMSAT as one of the reliable agencies trying to work with INEC to midwife credible, free and fair elections in 2011.

At the occasion, the INEC chairman said the commission would partner all stakeholders, government agencies, including the NIGCOMSAT to enable the nation to have a credible election in 2011.

“We in INEC realized that for us to achieve the goal of free, fair and credible elections in this country, we need to partner with all stakeholders and all government agencies that have something credible to offer because that is the best way to guarantee access and to ensure the attainment of a defined goal and certainly we consider you as a very credible partner and we look forward to exploring avenues of establishing and strengthening this partnership.

“Many Nigerians like us in the INEC do not know the enormity of the good work that you have done for this country; your presentation was very clear about your establishment over a very short period of time and just by looking at what you have achieved over this period, it is very, very clear what vast potential exist in term of how you can help develop our country's potential not just in information technology but other several ranges of technologies related areas,” Jega said.

The INEC chairman said he was pleased with what he has seen and that his other commissioners are also please. “I want to commend you for a very good work and I want to assure you that in whatever way we can partner together in the interest of this country we will be willing to do so.”

Earlier, the Managing Director of NIGCOMSAT, Engineer Ahmed Rufai explained to the INEC boss that they have manufactured a Network Supporting Video and Voice Polling that would help the INEC to monitor the election both from state and INEC headquarters.

He also said that NIGCOMSAT has 150 engineers that would be able to train and help INEC officials to manipulate the machines that would ensure that the elections are free.

According to him, while the local governments elections would be monitored in the state headquarters through cameras planted at the polling units, the INEC headquarters would be able to monitor through satellite devices that would help beam the activities of the states to the headquarter directly.

Rufai displayed to Jega how NIGCOMSAT would be able to assist the commission on the e-register process that would be carried out by the INEC if given the go-ahead to do so.

He however did not state the cost, adding that they would get to that stage when INEC will give them the go-ahead.

Other voting machine inspected by the INEC chairman, were voters verification process machine and voters authentication/voting process machine.

• **Murder Attempt on Otedola - Two Arrested**

Two persons, Celestine Ononobi, and Moses Oluremi, have been arrested in connection with the recent trapping of the chairman of African Petroleum (AP), Mr. Femi Otedola, and six others in the executive lift at the AP Plaza, Lagos Island, Lagos.

The inspector-general of police, Mr. Ogbonna Onovo, made this known to newsmen in a press briefing at the Force Headquarters, yesterday in Abuja.

The duo, who are maintenance staff of AP, the inspector-general said, were arrested following findings of preliminary investigations and technical report from three technical elevator engineers indicating that the lift had been tampered with.

The case which had been previously handled by the Lagos State police command, the deputy inspector-general of police (DIG), operations, Mr. John Hamza Ahmadu, who represented the police boss said the inspector general has directed that the case be taken over by the Force Criminal Investigation Department (FCID).

This, Ahmadu said, was to ensure diligent and discreet investigation and called on the public to assist the police with useful information that will enable it unravel the crime.

On the motive of the suspects, he said, it was yet to be ascertained, noting that investigations was ongoing and the extent of involvement of the suspects would be ascertained on completion.

LEADERSHIP checks, however, revealed that the case was transferred following conflicting report on the case, especially as it concerned the claim that the incident was due to power fluctuation.

This was found to be unlikely as the complex was not connected to the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) at the time but was powered by a 625KVA generator which was not prone to power fluctuation.

Investigations also revealed that the safety control switch on the executive lift was pressed down at the time and was believed to have been responsible for hooking the lift after it took off.

It was further discovered that the said switch was lifted by yet to be ascertained persons, one month after the incident supposedly to complicate investigation, even as the lift was said to have been working without hitch after the switch was lifted.

The lift which is maintained by Otis, an indigenous lift supply and maintenance company, is also said to be under surveillance and strict security, lending credence to the possible involvement of AP staff as well as experienced engineers or technicians.

The suspects, police said, were yet to accept involvement in the crime, while efforts continue to resolve the crime and bring the culprits to book.

On completion of investigation, the suspects are to face charges of conspiracy and attempted murder.

It would be recalled that on April 5, 2010, Otedola alongside six others, believed to be directors of AP, had been ushered into the executive lift on their way to attend an emergency meeting of the company's board where crucial decisions affecting the company were to be taken.

The company chairman and his team were, however, trapped in the lift as soon as they entered and were said to have stayed there for over two hours before they were rescued, thus averting tragedy.

• **South West PDP Govs Set to Endorse Jonathan**

All is now set for the endorsement of President Goodluck Jonathan for the 2011 presidential election by governors of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the south west zone of the country.

Sources told LEADERSHIP last night that the South-west zonal leaders' meeting taking place in Ibadan, Oyo State tomorrow would be used by the zone to declare support for President Jonathan's ambition.

Former President Olusegun Obasanjo, who is also the chairman of the Board of Trustees (BoT) of the party, had been in the forefront of those campaigning for Jonathan to continue in office beyond 2011. He met recently with the four state governors from the party in Abeokuta, Ogun State recently, where he canvassed support for Jonathan. He

also spoke of the need for the zone to speak with one voice in picking its presidential candidate.

Though it was gathered that two of the PDP governors, Olagunsoye Oyinlola of Osun State and Adebayo Alao-Akala of Oyo State were in a dilemma as to who to support between Jonathan and the former military President, Ibrahim Babangida, pressures have been mounted on them to support President Jonathan's ambition.

Oyinlola's predicament, LEADERSHIP gathered, was due to his relationship with Babangida while they were in the military. Alao-Akala, a retired police officer also enjoys chummy relationship with Babangida.

Already, the governor of the old Oyo State, Dr. Omololu Olunloyo, and Afenifere leader, Chief Reuben Fazoranti, have endorsed the president's ambition.

Olunloyo said that the best way to compensate the minority people of Niger Delta was to allow Jonathan to contest as well as win the 2011 election.

He said it would be quite unfair to deny Jonathan, who is the representative of his people from the South-South, the opportunity to rule this country in 2011 after ruining their land with exploration of oil.

Chief Fazoranti also said that nobody should prevent President Jonathan from contesting in the election as it was his right to complete the tenure of the late President Umar Yar'Adua.

"President Jonathan is entitled to contest. I do not believe in this zoning arrangement; it would not produce the best for the country. President Jonathan is entitled to his ambition, he is a citizen of this country and nobody should deprive him of his right to contest," he said.

As a leader of a socio-political group, he was asked if his group had the same opinion with him. Chief Fazoranti said he was speaking for himself, though the opinion of the group was not different from his.

Tomorrow's meeting will be a medium of taking a final decision on who the zone should back for the 2011 general elections.

• Aspirant Advises IBB, Buhari, Atiku on Presidential Race

An aspirant on the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) for Isa/Sabonbirni Federal Constituency in the House of Representatives, Alhaji Yusuf Abdullahi Turakinisa has called on former President, Ibrahim Babangida, Gen

Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar to forget the 2011 presidential elections and give way for new breed politicians in the North, saying their era is now over.

Speaking to THISDAY in Sokoto at the weekend, Turakinisa said that the trio should forget about the presidency and give room to young politicians in the region with new ideas to transform the country.

He lamented that the old politicians have failed Nigerians in the past and will not take the country to the Promised Land in the 21st century, pointing out that such recycled politicians will not move the nation forward.

According to him, Nigerians are in dire need of purposeful leadership that will transform the country from the current economic backwardness and as such requires new way of thinking to bring the country out of the current economic quagmire.

“As you aware, we are tired of these old politicians because Nigerians are in need of fresh blood of fresh ideas and new crop of young leaders that have what it takes to eradicate mass poverty bedeviling majority of the citizenry and also move the country to the next level,” he said.

The former chairman of Isa Local Government Council stressed the need for the emergence of president from the current crop of governors to ensure strict adherence to the zoning arrangement of the party.

“Let the governors decide among themselves to elect a credible and transparent leader that will transform the economy and also meet the yearnings and aspirations of Nigerians,” he averred.

The aspirant called on politicians in the country to shun politics of bitterness and violence to ensure credible and peaceful polls in 2011.

He stressed that prospective candidates should focus on issues and their vision for the electorate and should desist from heating the polity by casting aspersions on their political opponents.

Turankinisa therefore, appealed to Nigerians to give INEC the necessary support to ensure credible and transparent election in 2011.

• Jonathan Appoints Dalhatu Tafida Campaign Director

President Goodluck Jonathan has appointed Nigeria’s High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Dr. Dalhatu Tafida, as the Director of his campaign – on a day his Special Adviser on National Assembly matters, Senator Muham-med Abba-Aji, announced that he would declare after the Ramadan fasting in September.

Former military president Gen. Ibrahim Babangida has, meanwhile, appointed the CEO of Daar Communications which owns AIT and Ray Power broadcast stations, Dr. Raymond Dokpesi, as the Director-General of his campaign organisation.

The president had at the weekend announced to a group of about 100 politicians from Northern Nigeria that he would join the presidential race, thereby putting paid to speculations that he would not run.

A source told THISDAY from the UK last night that Tafida, a physician, has accepted to be the Director of Campaign of the president.

Tafida was personal physician to President Shehu Shagari in the Second Republic and was also Senate Leader under former President Olusegun Obasanjo. He hails from Wusasa in Kaduna State.

Under the Option A4 system of picking presidential candidates, Tafida defeated former head of state, General Yakubu Gowon, on the platform of the National Republican Convention (NRC) to end Gowon's dream in the 1992 presidential primaries of the party.

Abba-Aji said yesterday that the president will officially declare his intention in respect of the 2011 election after the Muslim fasting.

Speaking to journalists under the aegis of Friends of Jonathan, Abba-Aji said: "The President will certainly run and he will declare after Ramadan. He is fasting along with us. He is right now fasting.

"This is not something that he started now; he started it since he moved to Abuja as Vice-President. Because of this he is holding on. But as soon as the Ramadan is over, he will declare for the presidency.

"There is no doubt about that. We will take a convenient date after the Sallah and you will be duly notified. Don't believe those who are saying president won't run. Don't believe them. The president will run. It is the desire of every politician to aspire to the highest level."

THISDAY, however, learnt the president has asked the committee working on the declaration to pick between September 14 and 15 for the much-awaited event.

Jonathan was said to have shifted the date to the second week of September to coincide with the end of Ramadan fast, which may be September 11 or 12.

"It is true that Jonathan is fasting with his Muslim brothers and sisters. The Ramadan fast may end by September 12. He has therefore, advised the committee preparing for the event.

- **INEC Considers Jan 8 for Presidential Election**

Barring last minute adjustments, the forthcoming Presidential and National Assembly elections are to hold on January 8, 2011, THISDAY can reveal.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has also fixed January 15, 2011 for the governorship and state house of assembly polls.

But the dates are tentative, according to INEC sources who said last night in Abuja that the commission's lawyers were still looking through the draft timetable in order to come up with the guidelines.

However, it is assumed that since President Goodluck Jonathan has signed into law the new Electoral Act, which derived some of its provisions from the amended constitution, it means the new constitution has become operational.

THISDAY also gathered that the electoral body has fixed September 11 to October 30 this year as the date for all the political parties to conduct their congresses and conventions to pick candidates for all elective offices.

All campaigns, according to the commission, are expected to commence by October 10 this year.

In the meantime, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) governors who met on Tuesday night in Abuja remain divided over the 2011 presidential poll and President Jonathan's reported ambition.

But Cross River State Governor Liyel Imoke told some journalists last night in Calabar, the state capital, that the state chief executives in the South-south remain united behind the President's aspiration.

He said at the Abuja meeting, the PDP governors expressed their support for the Jonathan administration and wanted the President to unfold his plan for 2011 before they declare their stand.

President Jonathan, THISDAY learnt, is expected to meet state governors in Lagos today in continuation of his consultations on his political future.

He is expected to use his visit to Lagos where he would announce his roadmap for the power sector to confer with the governors on strategic issues regarding the future of Nigeria.

The meeting by PDP governors failed to adopt a common position on who to support for the party's presidential primaries as there was no consensus among them.

This came as the party's National Chairman Dr. Okwesilieze Nwodo held an all-night meeting with PDP chairmen in all the 36 states and Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

Other members of the National Working Committee (NWC) of the party were unaware of the all-night meeting.

At the meeting of the PDP governors held at the Kwara State Governor's Lodge and presided over by Kwara State Governor Bukola Saraki and Chairman of the PDP Governors' Forum commenced at about 10 pm.

THISDAY gathered that the meeting discussed the outcome of their meeting with President Jonathan earlier on Tuesday at about 5 pm, where the President intimated them of his desire to seek nomination as the presidential candidate of PDP.

After the meeting, the PDP governors retired to another meeting at the Kwara State Governor's lodge to take a position.

According to a source at the meeting, all the South-south governors spoke in favour of President Jonathan contesting.

Also, the South-west governors spoke solidly in favour of the President contesting the 2011 presidential election.

The only opposition, THISDAY gathered, was from some Northern governors, as the ten governors that had earlier insisted that zoning should be retained, maintained their position.

At a point at the meeting, the PDP governors asked Saraki to tell them whether he has an interest in contesting at the presidential primaries of the party.

But it was gathered that the Kwara state governor was non-committal in his response.

A source said the governors decided to ask Saraki to state his position because of his opposition to the presidential aspiration of President Jonathan.

The governors of Kebbi, Zamfara, Bauchi and Katsina it was gathered were at the forefront of those opposing the aspiration of President Jonathan.

According to a source, "this is understandable, because they were the same group that insisted on zoning when we met to take a position on the same matter in Kaduna last month."

After the meeting, which came to an end at about 1.15 am, some of the governors who belong to an inner caucus went for another meeting that lasted over thirty minutes.

This time around, members of the inner caucus of the PDP governors' forum that went for an extra meeting included governors of Delta, Bauchi, Kebbi, Kwara and Katsina.

THISDAY learnt that Governors Jonah Jang and Gabriel Suswam of Plateau and Benue states strongly championed the cause of Jonathan for the presidency in 2011.

It was as a result of the strong division among the PDP governors that they were unable to issue a communiqué

2. Economy:

• NSE Probe: Top Official Suspended Indefinitely

The forensic investigations into the financials of Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE) may have claimed its first casualty, as the Assistant General Manager in charge of Management Services, which includes Administration and others, (names withheld) has been placed on an indefinite suspension.

The AGM was said to be among the top level recruitments made by the former Director-General, Prof. Ndi Okereke-Onyiuke, before her exit. Although the Interim Administrator of the NSE, Mr. Emmanuel Ikazoboh, had last Tuesday denied any major shake-up at the Exchange, market sources told THISDAY that the former head of administration was suspended; hence another official was moved in to head that department for now.

However, sources said that the suspension of the top official may not be unconnected with the investigations into the financials of the Exchange especially with regards to some administrative expenses.

“If you look at some of the expenditure as contained in the management accounts made public in the press in the last weeks, you will notice that so much was spent on areas such as staff training, business travels among others. When such issues are being looked into, it will not be proper for the head of that department to be around,” a source said.

Financials of NSE showed that in 2008, salaries and allowances of the staff hit N3.33 billion as against a budgeted N1.58 billion, more than 100 per cent increase. But the figures dropped to N1.62 billion in 2009. In three years, the NSE expended N1.167 billion on staff training/development and N2.52 billion on business travels; a development some operators said did not show prudence in a period that market was experiencing a downturn.

Apart from appointing Ikazoboh as the Interim Administrator, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) appointed the law firm Aluko & Oyebo and the accounting firm KPMG, to jointly investigate the allegations of financial mismanagement at the NSE.

“Given the broad allegations, the Independent Investigators have gathered a multi disciplinary team of lawyers, accountants, auditors, stockbrokers, and investigators.”

They will be documenting the allegations with respect to three broad areas that relate to Governance, Management, and Malfeasance. On the Governance allegations, the Independent Investigation will examine the oversight provided by the Council of the Exchange.

“On the Management allegations, the Independent Investigation will examine the allegations of financial mismanagement level against the Exchange. On the Malfeasance track, the Independent Investigation will examine the allegations related to mismanagement and maladministration by staff and beneficiaries of the Nigerian Stock Exchange,” SEC said.

According to the apex regulatory body for the nation’s capital market, the investigations would include, but will not be limited to reviewing the financial management processes and the methodology for expenditure, reviewing the procurement processes to identify deviations from applicable policy, reviewing the robustness of controls and benchmarking these procedures.

“For the financial years 2007, 2008, and 2009, the Independent Investigators will undertake detailed verification to determine whether there were any irregularities. Any irregularities identified will be documented and the possibility of collusion among the various parties will be explored,” SEC explained.

• **NSE Cap Dips by N115bn**

The market capitalisation of equities dipped by N115 billion or 1.9 per cent yesterday as the stock market extended its losses for the third day running.

The capitalisation, which measures the value of equities listed in the market, fell from N6.108 trillion to N5.992 trillion, while the NSE All-Share Index went down by 1.9 per cent from 24,976.65 to close at 24,503.61.

Market operators had attributed the bearish trend in the market to sale pressure from investors who are off-loading shares to meet their financial obligations.

“Ordinarily, the corporate actions by companies in recent times ought to sway the market to the bulls’ territory but many investors are selling to get cash in order to meet their financial obligations. Some investors are going on vacation, while others are getting set for their children’s school fees,” a stockbroker said.

The bears were in total control of the market as 57 stocks lost value compared with only 16 that appreciated. Conoil Plc, which is yet to release its 2009 audited results, led the price losers with N2 to close at N45 per share. PZ Cussons Nigeria Plc trailed with a loss of N1.64 to close at N36.50 per share. Benue Cement Company Plc and Cadbury Nigeria Plc shed N1.50 and N1.44 respectively, just as Flour Mills Nigeria Plc, Lafarge Cement WAPCO Nigeria Plc and Oando declined by N1.07, N01.00 and N0.99 in that order.

Other top price losers included: Dangote Flour Mills Nigeria Plc (N0.91); UAC of Nigeria Plc (N0.90); UACN Property Development Company Plc (N0.88); Dangote Sugar Refinery Plc (N0.82); Okomu Oil Palm Plc (N0.78); Guaranty Trust Bank Plc (N0.72); First Bank of Nigeria Plc (N0.60); Nigerian Aviation Handling Company Plc, United Bank for Africa Plc (N0.49 each); National Salt Company of Nigeria Plc (N0.38); International Breweries Plc (N0.36); Diamond Bank Plc (N0.35); Skye Bank Plc (N0.33) and Access Bank Plc (N0.23).

On the other hand, Guinness Nigeria Plc led the price gainers with N2.12 to close at N167.12 per share. Nigerian Bottling Company Plc trailed with a gain of N1.84 to close at N38.64, while Longman Nigeria Plc, Ashaka Cement Plc, Union Bank of Nigeria Plc and Spring Bank Plc chalked up N0.30, N0.29, N0.05, and N0.04 respectively.

However, trading volume rose from 249.275 million shares worth N1.656 billion exchanged in 5,680 deals the previous day to 304.1 million shares valued at N2.639 billion transacted in 6,844 deals yesterday.

The banking sub-sector remained the most active with 158.783 million shares worth N1.275 billion in 3,837 deals. Zenith Bank Plc led the sub-sector with 25.787 million shares valued at N346.079 million exchanged in 541 deals.

• **Plans New Tariff to Protect Local Industries**

The Federal Government is now working on a new tariff regime to protect local industries in the country, Minister of State for Commerce and Industry, Josephine Tapgun has said.

Tapgun who was on tour of some local manufacturing concerns in Anambra state said at the premises in Juhel Pharmaceutical Company, Ltd, Awka, where she visited at the weekend, that the new measures when on stream will encourage local industries to grow with a lot of patronage from Nigerians.

Towards this end, the Federal Government, she said, had established a special committee which she heads to go round the country and find out the problems of industrialists with a view to finding a way of assisting them.

The measures when introduced, according to the Minister, may not be an end in themselves as they may not completely reduce the cost of production, but Tapgun said that what is needed is patience as this will point the way forward.

“By the time we encourage and patronize these industries, there will be expansion and more people would be employed. Government has already made some concessions for manufacturers. The items may not completely reduce the cost of production, but they are a step forward. The present government is interested in promoting or encouraging indigenous manufacturers in order to help them grow and thereby create jobs and give meaning to the local content initiative”, she said.

Managing Director of Juhel Pharmaceuticals, Mrs. Ukamaka Okoye told the visiting Minister that her company with a staff strength of about 600 in Awka and 1,500 in Enugu is capable of meeting the market demands of the company's products which include water for injection, Jugyl (metronidazole) and Cipro J (Ciprofloxacin) infusions and solicited the help of the federal government to help put policies in place to discourage parallel importation of these products.

An investment like theirs, she said needed support beyond the state government and solicited federal government support in the area of stable power supply as the 70,000 litres of diesel expended on the two giant generating sets in her company exerts negative impact on the cost of production.

“Constant power supply will help us save costs, and we appeal to the government to look into this”, she said.

Earlier, the Anambra State Governor, Mr. Peter Obi had told the visiting Minister that his administration was looking inwards to encourage manufacturing and reduce dependence on oil.

He described Juhel as the largest Pharmaceutical industry in Africa and urged the federal government to make it compulsory for Nigerian government officials to make use of local products as a path to growth and greatness. He also expressed delight at federal government's interest to boost local content in industries.

• **NACCIMA Decries High Interest Rate Burden**

The National Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA) has lamented the high interest rate charged on credit in the country.

The President, NACCIMA, Dr. Simon Okolo, warned that the Federal Government's effort to improve the economy and raise the people's standard of living may never be realised if the high bank lending interest rates, that have denied businessmen venture capital, is not brought down to a single digit regime.

Okolo was reacting to a statement credited to the Central Bank Governor, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, at the 38th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) citing inadequate funding, inadequate infrastructure, poor investment climate, political instability to mention a few as problems bedevilling the real sector in the country.

He explained that problems recited by the CBN Governor still subsist, and that the final nail in the coffin of investment and industrial growth in the country has been the raging high lending banks interest rates that have denied investors venture capital to execute their businesses.

“If there is venture capital in the system investors in the country might even begin to see Nigeria’s infrastructure nightmare as an investment opportunity to begin to invest in road construction and rehabilitation, rail roads, electric power generation and distribution and the like” he said.

He made it clear that the ranging bank lending interest rate today hover between 22 and 30 per cent in Nigeria, and is the single most destructive item that has stifled businesses and stymied industrial growth in the country.

“It is difficult in Nigeria to obtain bank loans to establish a business due to high bank lending interest rates, for whoever does so is automatically in debt even before the business concern starts production, and may even be taken over by the fund lending bank eventually” he said.

The President, who is also a member of the Presidential Advisory Council (PAC) and Chairman D8 Business summit said the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) can help lower the interest rate and provide venture capital to Nigerians in a more conventional way if it can perform its core functions of maintenance of price stability in the economy, as contained in the CBN ACT 2007.

According to him, this will have the dramatic effect of lowering the country’s raging high lending interest rate to a single digit regime as obtained in other industrialised nations, and lower the stifling inflationary trend in the economy even as it will be salutary to the Naira exchange rate.

He wondered why the CBN has failed for the past twenty years to muster the will power to perform this core function to save the nation from ruin instead of beating about the bush.

“Nigeria today is bogged down with high unemployment that should not have been there in the first place, since the existence of venture capital in the system will hasten investment and job creation in the private sector, as well as absorb the teeming unemployed workforce,” Okolo maintained.

He urged the CBN to return to the drawing board and put its acts together and perform its price modulation activities in the economy to stimulate economic growth in the country. He made it clear that while government takes steps to engender power sector reforms and rehabilitation of the real system and other decayed infrastructure, the CBN should close the gap by ensuring the stifling inflation and high bank lending interest rates crippling the economy is brought down considerably.

Okolo noted recent efforts of the CBN to provide funds of floundering sectors of the economy, manufacturing inclusive, and affirmed that while CBN stimulus funds might be a temporary funding strategy for the economy, the apex bank should not lose sight of the need for low bank lending interest rate that will make venture capital available for investment and growth of the economy.

This, according to him, has always been a permanent lending structure for the real sector across the globe; being a strategy that ensures rapid growth of both the lender and the borrower in the economy generally.

• **Cocoa Export: Stakeholders Task Govt on Global Rejection**

Amidst current efforts by the Federal Government at diversifying the economy and foreign exchange earnings through promotion of non-oil exports, stakeholders in the cocoa industry have called on government to speed up the adoption of global gap method entrenching best agricultural practice that would stem the tide of rejection of Nigeria's cocoa abroad.

To them, government can do this by creating a specific Agency to oversee the regulation of the use of chemicals on cocoa, as well as ensure enforcement of the law on banned ones.

The call was made recently in Lagos, at a one-day stakeholders' forum on 'Cocoa Export Development in Nigeria', organized by the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC).

According to the Director/Zonal Controller (South) of NEPC, Mr. Olumide Ibrahim, "the forum with the theme 'Nigeria's Cocoa Industry: Raising the Stakes', aimed to bring together stakeholders in Nigeria's cocoa industry with a view to examine the problems of the sector; in order to come up with recommendations that would enable the federal government address the various issues at stake.

He noted that the problems facing Nigeria's cocoa sector are enormous and therefore, require collective and concerted efforts to save it (the sector).

Ibrahim expressed regret at the displacement of Nigeria as a leading producer and exporter of cocoa in the world by smaller African countries like Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana among others in production, quality and export.

He said Nigeria's cocoa used to be a major foreign exchange earner, when it enjoyed premium price in the international market, besides the leading position she occupied in the production of commodity in the world, stressing that the forum is an interventionist strategy to step up cocoa production and export as it remains vital to the Council's non-oil export promotion drive.

"This interactive session coming a day after that held in Ondo, will not only provide an excellent opportunity for stakeholders to interact and generate ideas that will lead to solving the several problems bedeviling the cocoa product sector in Nigeria, it will also guide us in our quest to catch up on the latest developments, current issues and trends in global cocoa industry, with a view to formulating strategies and actions to support the development of cocoa production and export in Nigeria", he stated.

He, therefore, enjoined participants to come up with contributions and suggestions that would move the cocoa production sector in Nigeria forward.

“We should not orchestrate our differences as farmers, growers, merchants and processors. We should instead forge a common front to tackle the problems at hand in the overall interest of all”, he concluded. In a communiqué

3. Energy:

- **We Will Hands off Power Sector Soon – Jonathan**

Promises uninterrupted supply by 2012 CBN releases N130b intervention fund President Goodluck Jonathan has assured that Nigerians should expect stable electricity supply by December 2012.

Jonathan who disclosed this yesterday in Lagos while unveiling his administration's roadmap for the power sector also announced the intention of the government to de-emphasize government hold on the sector.

The president said his administration was committed towards evolving a robust private/public driven power sector that would meet the desire of the country to be among top 10 countries of the world by the year 2020.

"We are in the process of commissioning some projects executed by Independent Power Project (IPP), International Oil Companies and companies that have the capacity for bulk production of electricity. These plants will begin production between now and December 2012/2013.

"Government will provide incentives that will encourage private sector to invest in power generation. Electricity can only expand if privatization is encouraged," Jonathan submitted.

He also announced a new lease of life for the striking workers of the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), saying that government would soon pay their N57 billion monetization and other entitlements.

He stated that efforts were ongoing to pay all outstanding arrears, gratuity and pension of PHCN workers before the end of the year that would add value to the lives of the workers of the power company.

He said government would soon hands off power generation and distribution in order to allow the private sector to fully participate in the power sector.

According to the president, government would still retain its hold on transmission which would be managed by the private sector.

The president said his administration planned to set up bulk purchasing company that would buy the power generating companies just as he implored the workers of PHCN to key into the ongoing reform in the sector.

Jonathan said the Federal Government had reconstituted the board of Nigeria Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC) to position it for effective service.

He said the name of the chairman of the commission who had similar credentials with the present Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) chairman would be sent to the National Assembly on Monday.

"I also took part to select the chairman and he has the same pedestal with INEC chairman. We decided to do so because we need a revolution in the power sector," he added.

The president further announced plans to commission 5000MW plants expected to begin production in 2012 and 2013, adding that government would provide them with credit financing to build their power plant.

On tariff, Jonathan said energy tariff in the country was the lowest in the West African sub- region, adding that it would be adjusted soon in line with government determination.

He assured Nigerians that the new tariff would be done in a way that it would not affect ordinary Nigerians.

Meanwhile, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) has released operating guidelines for accessing N300 billion intervention fund for power and aviation projects.

The guidelines posted to the CBN website yesterday said that the major thrust of the fund was to fast-track the development of electric power projects, especially in the identified industrial clusters in the country as well as provide leverage for additional private sector investments in the power and aviation sectors.

It was also designed to speed up the development of the aviation sector of the nation's economy by improving the terms of credit to airlines and serve as a credit enhancement instrument to improve the financial position of the deposit money banks.

Listing criteria for accessing the fund for the power projects, it said that any corporate entity, duly registered in the country, involved in electricity power supply value chain that includes power generation, transmission, distribution and associated services shall be eligible to access the fund.

The apex bank however pointed out that the eligible projects could be promoted by private or public sector sponsors (or a combination of both) but must be structured either as profit-oriented business or a public service, provided that contracted cash-flows or financing support exist to ensure repayment of principal and interest, as well as long-term viability.

It stated that any Airline duly incorporated under the Companies and Allied Matters Act of 1990 and operating in the country would have the right to apply for fund. The apex bank further said that the fund would be used for financing new power projects, refinancing of existing loans, refinancing of existing leases (power and airlines), and as a working capital for existing power and airlines projects only.

The participating institutions, according to the guideline, include all deposit money banks and Development Finance Institutions (DFIs) excluding the Bank of Industry (BOI).

Stating the modalities for funding of the project it said that the Power Intervention Fund (PIF) facility shall not be more than 70 percent of the total cost of the project while the tenor PIF loans shall have a tenor of 10 - 15 years as determined by the project's cash flow profile and working capital facility shall be of one year duration with provision for roll-over but not more than five years.

The guidelines stated that BOI shall act as the managing agent of the fund and issue debenture covering the funds to be invested by CBN while the Africa Finance Corporation (AFC) would serve as technical adviser to the fund.

It further said that participating banks would grant credit facilities to eligible companies at an interest rate of seven per cent annually. Present requests under the fund based on normal business consideration exercising due diligence and ensure timely disbursement of funds to approved projects.

The apex bank, however, said that the fund would provide refinancing up to 60 per cent of the loans granted to an airline subject to a maximum of N5 billion per project while the tenor of refinancing shall be 10 - 15 years and shall be determined by the supporting cash-flow profile.

Other conditions applicable to both power and airline projects include, the fund would be administered at an "all-in" interest rate/ charge of seven percent per annum payable on quarterly basis.

Specifically, it said the managing agent (BOI) shall be entitled to a one percent management fee and the banks, six percent while in the event of default in loan repayment (principal and interest), the PB shall have the right to charge commercial interest rate on the amount in default. Any PB that fails to disburse received funds to the borrower in accordance with the provisions of these guidelines shall be subject to a penalty that shall be decided by the CBN.

• Jonathan to Eliminate Power Outage By 2012

PRESIDENT Goodluck Ebele Jonathan said, yesterday, he planned to eliminate constant power outage in the country by 2012 through the introduction of 'revolutionary' policies to tackle the plethora of challenges bedeviling the sector.

The president's aspiration was unveiled in Lagos at the launch of the Power Sector Road Map, the execution of which he said, would be fast-tracked to create numerous employment opportunities, while also revamping the nation's ailing economy.

President Jonathan who said: "We need a revolution in the power sector," also stated that his administration had identified most of the bottlenecks impeding efficient and effective electricity supply in the country.

He noted: "By God's grace, by December 2012, Nigeria will not only celebrate one day of uninterrupted electricity supply but we would celebrate one week, one month and so on of uninterrupted electricity supply."

President Jonathan, however, believed that this will only be possible through the support of the various stakeholders, who are currently being engaged in constructive discussions on sustainable ways out of the current power quagmire.

New policies

Parts of the revolutionary policies the President enunciated include:

- * The construction of what he described as "a super transmission network of 7000 Kilovolts, the procurement and design will commence next year." This is in acknowledgement of the current weakness in electricity infrastructure, which frustrates the evacuation of electricity from the plants to the homes of Nigerians through the national grid.

- * Review of current tariff structure on the grounds that Nigeria's current structure is the lowest and needs to be reviewed to encourage fresh investments, while not unmindful of the purchasing power of the masses

- * Generation of additional 5000mega watts within the next three years from new and existing independent power plants

- * Active and serious exploitation of hydro, nuclear and coal power, especially coal in states like Gombe, Enugu, Kogi and Benue states in the next two years, which will be more private-sector driven

- * Privatization of generation and distribution, while government retains transmission for strategic reasons

* Constitution of two presidential committees on power and the reconstitution of the board and membership of the National Electricity Regulatory Commission, NERC, whose names have been forwarded to the National Assembly for approval

Power challenges

The president said his assessment of the issues affecting the sector over the past few years, revealed that "the sector's challenge to effective electricity delivery in Nigeria include the absence of sustained policies and deliberately deploying long term power development strategy, the absence of and low implementation of reforms to fast track all issues pertaining to the power sector."

The President who was flanked by ministers, advisers and state governors, said Government was convinced that "it is only by constructively engaging the private sector as partners in this journey of national transformation that we can be assured of success."

President Jonathan with Lagos State Governor Babatunde Fashola at the event

He added that constant power outages are perhaps the greatest paradox of life in Nigeria, which despite producing more than two million barrels per day of crude oil, relied on diesel generators to power everything from phone chargers to luxury hotels.

Powerful vested interests

World Bank country director, Onno Ruhl, who noted that successive governments had tried to fix the power problems, stressed that powerful vested interest such as billionaire tycoons who import diesel and generators, and the chronic mismanagement of state-run utilities frustrated progress in the sector.

He said: "This roadmap brings us to a point where we finally have a realistic plan that is actually technically, commercially sound, in terms of the role of the private sector, the role of government. The question is, will all the partners behind it actually rally around it and implement it ... If it gets implemented, it will deliver results."

Ruhl noted that fighting the graft and mismanagement that had hobbled the sector will be more of a political test than laying out plans, adding that in the challenges to reform listed by ministers and officials, the issue of corruption was conspicuous by its absence.

Finance Minister, Olusegun Aganga, said: "If there is anything that unites Nigerians, it is a desire for power, electricity," adding that his ministry was focused on creating the right environment to attract investment as quickly as possible.

He said the nation had the world's seventh_largest natural gas reserves and planned to use them as the source for improving power supply.

Petroleum Minister, Diezani Allison_Madueke, said gas supply to the power sector was already at an all_time high but estimated that demand from domestic energy producers would rise to 3 billion cubic feet per day by 2015 from around 800 million now.

She said that President Jonathan had already announced plans for a \$3.5 billion transmission "supergrid" to be jointly financed with the private sector, while the privatisation agency had said it was seeking core investors for 11 state_run electricity distribution firms.

Bomb Disposal squad at the airport during Jonathan's visit to Lagos yesterday.

Allison-Madueke said some of the firms in highly populated and relatively developed areas such as Lagos were likely to attract significant interest from foreign investors, potentially triggering bidding wars, adding that others in less-developed areas and with greater infrastructure challenges may be less attractive.

\$12bn investment in energy, transportation

In another development, Vice President Namadi Sambo said the Federal Government has invested \$12 billion in tackling the problem of power supply and the resuscitation of the nation's rail transportation system.

Sambo, who was addressing members of the Nigerian community in Bujumbura, shortly after the inauguration of President Pierre Nkurunziza of Burundi, said the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan was doing everything within its power to reduce the problem of poverty in the country.

Vice President Sambo said: "The administration of President Goodluck Jonathan is doing everything to ensure that we drive out poverty from Nigeria, and also transform our society and improve our economy," adding that the emphasis of the government was to address the power supply problem in the country decisively.

He said: "We are doing a lot in the real sector; we are doing a lot in the power sector to ensure that power supply is being addressed with all the seriousness it deserves. The government is investing over \$10 billion in the generation, transmission and distribution of power so as to attract direct foreign investors in the sector."

The Vice President stated that government would continue to give emphasis on medium and large power plants as well as coal power plants for generation of electricity supply in country. Stressing that the government was putting a lot of efforts in developing our transport system, Sambo said: "Our old railway system is now brought back to use and new railway is being built. Over N2 billion is being invested in this area."

Earlier, the Head of Nigerian Mission in Burundi, Mr. Sheidu Momoh, had said that the few Nigerians residing in the country had been contributing positively to the development of the country. He called on the Federal Government to take advantage of the return of

peace in Burundi to acquire permanent structures for the Nigerian Embassy in the country.

4. Environment:

• Senate Slams Abuja over Waste Mgt

Chairman of the Senate Committee on Environment, Senator Grace Bent has expressed dissatisfaction over the performance of waste managers in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

She made her mind known at the weekend, when she led other members of the committee on an oversight tour of the various dump sites scattered around the satellite towns bordering the federal capital and neighbouring Nasarawa State.

“You people are just blowing grammar on this issue,” the senator told officials of the Abuja Environmental Protection Board (AEPB) who were trying to give excuses for their inadequacies, adding: “If the Federal Capital Territory is like this, what will become of other states?”

She ordered that all waste dumpsites located within municipalities in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) be relocated to the off-town.

The senator, also summoned the FCT Minister and “every other person involved in waste management in the city” for a meeting where they will discuss the establishment of a landfill and proper waste management for the city.

Bent decried the poor management of the dump sites which are mostly located within settlements – some on street roads – with the permission of AEPB.

“I think the level which we are in this country now we need a proper landfill,” she said, adding: “I think we have a serious problem here, without them.”

Most of the dumpsites located in open areas have no fence around them and rely heavily on scavengers to sort the wastes.

They neither have incinerators nor any form of solid waste treatment cells. Places visited during the tour included Karu, Nyanya and Jikoyi.

“I am worried the city is dangerously polluted and you can understand the dilemma of people living in these areas. They are human beings but they are totally neglected”, Bent lamented.”

Officials of the board, however, blamed the absence of a proper waste management plant and standard landfill for the city on their inability to develop an environmental impact assessment plan for them.

The officials further complained that it was too difficult to get approvals from the Federal Ministry of Environment. Mr. Oludayo Dada, the Director of Pollution Control in the Federal Ministry of Environment, however, countered the AEPB's claims, saying the processes in the ministry were easy.

Dada explained that the ministry had collaborated with some state governments to establish such landfills adding that these states could testify to the ease of the ministry's processes.

"We have done similar things within Aba (Abia state), Enugu, and Onitsha," Dada said.

However, an AEPB deputy director, Mr. Tony Epediyi, insisted that "it takes time to establish a landfill."

Officials of the board however admitted approving the establishment of a dumpsite within settlements in the suburbs but accused Dada, the representative of environment ministry, of "making a political statement" when he said the process of establishing a landfill was easy.

5. Immigration/Refugee/Idps:

• Drug Trafficker Dies of Cocaine Ingestion

A suspected drug trafficker, Hakeem Adesegun Habeeb, who survived the Surulere fire incident on October 3, 2006, has died of cocaine ingestion.

According to the spokesperson of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Michelle Ofoyeju, the deceased, a 45-year-old trader was said to have ingested the drugs preparatory to his trip to Europe when one of the wraps ruptured. He eventually died at the hospital after admitting to drug ingestion on his death bed.

To ascertain his claim, a post-mortem was carried out which was witnessed by operatives of the NDLEA in a hospital in Lagos. The operation eventually led to the discovery of the suspected ruptured wrap of narcotics buried deep down his intestinal tract. When tested at the theatre, the substance proved positive for cocaine.

Chairman/Chief Executive of NDLEA, Ahmadu Giade described the incident as sad. "It is very sad. I sympathise with the family of the deceased."

Giade also urged youths to have the fear of God and consider the consequences of their actions. "If they have no respect for themselves, they should at least consider their loved

ones and their Creator", the NDLEA boss charged. The late suspect is survived by two wives and eight children.

A member of the family who preferred anonymity said that the deceased kept everybody in the dark about his activities of late. "Hakeem left home without telling either of his two wives where he was going. Three days later, he returned looking very sick. He did not even say what the problem was until he collapsed and was rushed to the hospital. We did not know he had taken drugs".

• **UK Govt: We're Not Denying Nigerians Jobs**

Britain says it has not pursued any policy aimed at refusing qualified Nigerians jobs in the United Kingdom (UK). The UK High Commissioner to Nigeria, Mr. Bob Dewar, stated this in a release weekend.

He was reacting to reports that the Nigerian government had made efforts to secure jobs held by Nigerians living in the UK and United States (U.S.) against measures by the countries to limit certain jobs to citizens of the European Union (EU).

Dewar said, "It is not true that the UK has taken a decision to limit certain skilled jobs only to citizens of the European Union (EU). We want to encourage the brightest and most talented workers to come to the UK, whilst retaining control on the numbers. We want to find the right way to achieve this balance – this is why we are currently consulting on how best to implement our policy to limit economic migration.

The Government of India has expressed an interest in this consultation. The UK Government wants to encourage the Governments of other countries, including Nigeria, to participate in our consultation as well and we have been in close touch with the Government of Nigeria to encourage this."

The High Commissioner, however, acknowledged, "In the meantime, we have introduced an interim limit. This does not shut out Nigerians and citizens from other countries. It simply limits the number who can be granted visas for skilled jobs.

"Nigeria is the UK's third biggest visa operation worldwide. Many people travel legitimately to the UK from Nigeria to conduct business, to visit family or as tourists. We welcome this and want to ensure that our visa processes support this.

"The new immigration policy is not about erecting barriers and closing doors. Britain has benefited from migration from Nigeria and elsewhere and will continue to do so. The aim of the UK government's approach is to control immigration more effectively and reduce numbers to more sustainable levels to maximize the benefits to the UK and all those coming to work and live there."

• **US Grants Nigeria Highest Air Safety Rating**

Some good news came the way of Nigeria's aviation industry yesterday as the country attained the United States Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) International Aviation Safety Assessment (IASA) certification, known as Category 1 Status.

With this status, Nigeria's air safety rating has been enhanced and now puts the country in the premier league of nations that are highly rated in air transport in the world.

Henceforth, Nigerian registered aircraft can fly direct to any state in the United States with its Nigerian crew. Category 1 countries usually enjoy lower insurance premium for aviation industry. This will save millions of dollars for Nigerian airlines.

Also, Category 1 countries are very attractive to aircraft lessors that lease aircraft to airlines because it is believed that the country's airlines will have high level of maintenance standards.

The US Ambassador to Nigeria, Dr Robin Sanders, handed over the certification to the Director-General, Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), Dr Harold Demuren, in Abuja yesterday.

The Minister of Aviation, Mrs. Fidelia Njeze, while accepting the certification on behalf of the Federal Government, identified the gains of the new safety rating.

Njeze, who was elated, noted that Category 1 status "offers Nigeria a golden opportunity to become number 1 regional hub for West Africa and Central Africa," which means that Nigeria would be operational centre for both regional and international airlines from which they connect to other countries in the two regions of the continent.

Announcing the certification, Sanders said that with the attainment of Category 1 status, Nigeria would comply with international air safety standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), the United Nations' technical agency for aviation that establishes international standards and recommended practices for aircraft operations and maintenance.

"This achievement is an important milestone for Nigeria and the US-Nigeria bilateral relations. It is only fitting that this coveted Category 1 rating comes at the dawn of the nation's year of golden jubilee. The US Mission, NCAA and FAA have worked together as a team in the true spirit of bilateral partnership over the last two years to achieve this goal. Hats off to everyone for a job well-done and rating well-deserved," she said.

She said the FAA International Aviation Safety Assessment Category 1 rating was based on the results of a July FAA review of the NCAA.

“With the IASA Category 1 rating, Nigerian air carriers may now apply to operate to the laws and regulations necessary to overseas air carriers in accordance with minimum international standards, and its civil aviation authority

6. Health:

- **Hundreds die of cholera in Nigeria, Cameroon**

A cholera outbreak has erupted this summer in Africa, killing more than 600 people in the neighboring countries of Nigeria and Cameroon.

Nigeria's Health Ministry said more than 350 people have died since June and the infection threatens to spread to the entire country, the most populous in Africa. In neighboring Cameroon, nearly 300 people have been killed.

"There's a lot of people crossing over the border all the time," said Dr. Eric Mintz, the leader of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's global water sanitation and hygiene epidemiology team. "So it's not surprising that the cholera is also crossing over the border."

Nigeria's outbreak had sickened more than 6,400 people and killed 352 people by Wednesday, the federal Ministry of Health reported.

"Although most of the outbreaks occurred in the northwest and northeast zones, epidemiological evidence indicates that the entire country is at risk," the ministry reported.

Cholera occurs in much of the country under normal conditions, but the lack of clean drinking water and recent flooding following heavy rains are fueling the spread of disease, the ministry reported.

Two-thirds of rural Nigerians lack access to safe drinking water, and fewer than 40 percent of the people in the affected states have access "to toilet facilities of any description," the health ministry said.

The intestinal infection causes diarrhea and vomiting that can cause severe dehydration without prompt attention, according to the World Health Organization.

About 120,000 people die worldwide each year from cholera, and the disease can kill within hours if untreated, the World Health Organization says.

Cholera is spread through water contaminated with human waste.

"What puts people at risk is a lack of safe drinking water," Mintz said.

Boiling the water or treating it with chlorine or filtration or other ways to remove the contaminants can make it safe.

Untreated, cholera can kill within hours, WHO said.

Mintz said the Cameroon outbreak began in May and has exceeded 3,000 cases.

Under ideal conditions, cholera's fatality rate ought to be less than 1 percent, he said. But Cameroon's conditions are not ideal. Many people live far from the medical aid that could help them rehydrate and replace the sodium and potassium lost in their stools and vomit.

"That delay can be critical," Mintz said. "If you don't get the fluids and the electrolytes replaced through hydration, you can go into shock and die as a result."

The country's northern region has been particularly hard hit. Three of 10 prisoners diagnosed with cholera at Maroua Central Prison in the far north were among the dead, the officials said.

Mintz said the rugged and remote region has been affected repeatedly by cholera epidemics, most recently last year.

About 70 percent of people living in the country's far north, bordering Nigeria and Chad and the Central African Republic, do not have access to potable water, according to a Ministry of Water and Energy official.

7. Human rights/Gender/social issues:

- **Two abducted Chinese rescued in southwest Nigeria**

Two Chinese workers abducted in southwest Nigeria's Ogun state on Thursday evening were successfully rescued by police, an official of the Chinese Consulate in Lagos said on Friday.

The two Chinese are in stable condition, the official told Xinhua, adding that three kidnapers were also arrested by the Nigerian police force.

The two Chinese were rescued at around 1 a.m. local time (0000 GMT) on Friday.

Security sources told Xinhua that the Chinese Consulate has lodged a formal complaint with the state government and the police authorities, shortly after the Chinese were taken hostage.

"The kidnapers allowed the Chinese to make phone calls in order to get ransom from their employers, so we took up the case from there," the source said.

Three of the armed gangs were arrested "after a serious gun battle," the source told Xinhua.

• **Children abused, killed as witches in Nigeria.**

Just after midnight, the pastor seized a woman's forehead with his large hand and she fell screaming and writhing on the ground. "Fire! Fire! Fire!" shouted the worshippers, raising their hands in the air.

Pastor Celestine Effiong's congregants are being delivered from what they firmly believe to be witchcraft. And in the darkness of the city and the villages beyond, similar shouts and screams echo from makeshift church to makeshift church.

"I have been delivered from witches and wizards today!" exclaimed one exhausted-looking woman.

Pastors in southeast Nigeria claim illness and poverty are caused by witches who bring terrible misfortune to those around them. And those denounced as witches must be cleansed through deliverance or cast out.

As daylight breaks, and we travel out to the rural villages it becomes apparent the most vulnerable to this stigmatization of witchcraft are children.

A crowd gathered around two brothers and their sister. Tears streamed down their mother's face as she cast out her children from the family, accusing them of causing the premature deaths of two of their siblings with black magic.

"I am afraid. They are witches and they can kill me as well," she sobbed.

Taking his time to talk to the mother, Sam Ikpe-Itauma, an imposing man wearing a "Child's Rights & Rehabilitation Network" t-shirt, has come to try to rescue the three children.

"If we are not here there's a possibility of them being thrown into the river, buried alive or stabbed to death," Sam said.

He tries to persuade their mother and a crowd of villagers that the three children are not witches - but no one believes him. And so, putting the children in his white pick-up, he drives away to his orphanage and safety.

Sam runs Child's Rights & Rehabilitation Network, or CRARN -- an orphanage that supports nearly 200 children. All of them were accused of witchcraft and cast out by their

families, often after being tortured. The orphanage provides security, healthcare, nutrition and counseling.

Godwin's story is typical. As he sat next to the quiet 5-year-old, Sam said that after Godwin's mother died, the church pastor told his family that "Godwin is responsible."

From his own investigation, questioning Godwin and talking with neighbors, Sam said that when a relative asked Godwin if he was a witch, "he said no and was beaten and made the confession that he actually killed the mother."

Sam said Godwin was locked up with his mother's corpse every night for three weeks with little food or water before a neighbor contacted Sam, who was able to rescue him.

Other children at his orphanage bear the scars of being beaten, attacked with boiling water, and cuts from machetes. But these children are the ones lucky to be alive.

"A child witch is said to be a witch when that child possessed with certain spiritual spells capable of making that child transform into cat, snake, vipers, insects, any other animal and that child is capable of wreaking havoc like killing of people, bringing diseases, misfortune into the family," Sam said.

"When a child is accused of being a witch -- that child is hated absolutely by everybody surrounding him so such children are sent out of the home... But unfortunately such children do not always live long. A lot of them, they're either killed, abandoned by the parents, tortured in the church or trafficked out of the city."

Sam doesn't believe in witchcraft and is trying to raise awareness in local communities now gripped by hysteria.

Belief in witchcraft is rooted in centuries of tradition, but it's only in the last 10 years, that it has become associated with child abuse, he said.

"It's a social crisis," he added. "Poverty propels this child witch phenomenon and poverty is a twin sister to ignorance.

"Most vulnerable children come from single parents, divorced parents, and dysfunctional families."

But the orphanage has very little space for more children. Overstretched finances mean he can barely pay a staff of 16 people, as well as feed the children.

Instead, many children are left to roam the streets.

"My parents sent me out of the house -- said I'm a witch," said Samuel, a 15-year-old who has lived on the streets for five years after a local pastor blamed him for unexpected deaths in the family.

"I was beaten by the prophet in the church," he said in a quiet voice.

Samuel lives in an abandoned building with 10 other children accused of witchcraft. A local group, 'Stepping Stones Nigeria,' which is dedicated to helping street children, visits them.

"Religious leaders capitalize on the ignorance of some parents in the villages just to make some money off them," said Lucky Inyang, project coordinator for 'Stepping Stones Nigeria'.

"They can say your child is a witch and if you bring the child to the church we can deliver the child but eventually they don't deliver the children... The parents go back to the pastor and say, 'why is it you have not been able to deliver the child' and the pastor says 'Oh - this one has gone past deliverance - they've eaten too much flesh so you have to throw the child out.'"

And most pastors charge a fee for deliverance -- anywhere from \$300 to \$2,000.

One of the most notorious and influential pastors is Helen Ukpabio of Liberty Gospel Church. Her 1999 film, the widely distributed, "End of the Wicked" has been attacked by child rights groups for its depictions of Satan possessing children.

She had agreed to an interview but the meeting was continually postponed for two days.

But in her preaching at Liberty Gospel Church, she heralds success stories of how she has driven out demons through deliverance.

"Witches and wizards, they started getting afraid. I never gave them rest!" she shouted to a cheering congregation.

Some pastors believe education is a more powerful tool against witchcraft fears. s"One of the things that caused the parents to abandon the children is ignorance," explains another local pastor, Celestine Effiong.

The local government, however, accuses Sam Ikpe-Itauma and Lucky Inyang of using the children to run a scam.

"We insist that the name of Akwa Ibom state must not be smeared and the people of the world should not be deceived by certain NGOs who are claiming to be taking care of stigmatized children of Akwa Ibom," said Aniekan Umanah, the Information Commissioner of Nigeria's Akwa Ibom state.

"This is a ruse; they are making money for themselves."

Stories of NGOs rescuing children, say the government, are exaggerated. They argue instead, that a new Child Right's bill outlawing child stigmatization has largely ended the problem.

But despite some arrests, so far, the government acknowledges, there have been no prosecutions.

"There may be problems yes but it's been blown out of proportion and people are capitalizing, on what ordinarily may be a social problem, across the globe in painting Akwa Ibom state black -- that is the aspect we say no to. We will not allow the image of our state to be smeared."

Sam and other NGOs deny any improprieties, insist their finances are a matter of public record and plead with the government to support their cause.

"Relevant government agencies, working on security and protection of children must step up their efforts to make sure any child that is stigmatized must -- that parent, the churches, the law must be evoked to make sure such people face the law immediately, otherwise it must go on and on, on and on." With the night comes the screams of more deliverances -- and more witches to be cast out.

• **Human Rights Watch's Report on the Police**

A recent report released by Human Rights Watch (HRW) has ranked the Nigeria Police extremely high on corruption, extortion, brutality and rights' abuses.

The report, which covered a period of 18 months (January 2009 - June 2010), alleged that the police allegedly extorted N20.3 billion within the period nationwide. The zonal breakdown of the alleged police extortion showed that the South-East zone of the country raked in N9.3 billion, South-South and South-West (N4 billion each), North-Central (N2 billion) while North-East and North-West raked in N500 million each.

Using Anambra State as a case study, HRW said police extorted N6 billion from helpless motorists. Also, the report discovered the existence of 1,350 illegal road blocks during the period nationwide. The report frowned at the 'return syndrome' within the police, saying the police high command was not exempted from the scourge. This refers to the way bribes are shared in the police hierarchy.

But in a swift reaction, the police dismissed the report; describe it as highly exaggerated and non-reflective of its own response to the allegations. The police said further that the report was unfair because it did not reflect the whole truth. It said the report "contains largely embellished innuendoes and suggestive graphics aimed at reaching a preconceived conclusion".

To most Nigerians who daily interact with their law officers, it would be very difficult to deny most of the allegations in the report. It would also be very difficult for most Nigerians to align with the police defense on most of the issues raised in the 102-page report, except perhaps the monetary statistics contained therein.

The report is a clear indictment of the federal government's anti-corruption campaign and a pointer to how far the nation still needs to go to meet global policing and anti-corruption standard. This report must be a rude wake up call to the Nigeria Police Force to clean up its act instead of attempting to rubbish the report.

The erection of check-points, which do not significantly help in curbing crimes but serve as an avenue for extortion by the police, is not only an established fact, but a daily occurrence on Nigerian roads.

Also real is the report's description of the Nigerian police as a predator rather than a protector. This is evidenced by the fact that hardly does a week pass without one ugly incident or another in which the police indiscriminately shoot at citizens for refusing to pay bribe.

There are constant press reports detailing the records of extra-judicial execution of suspects during the period covered by HRW's report. We would have expected the police high command to accept its shortcomings, explain the measures it has taken and what it is going to do to improve on its battered image rather than issuing denials.

Slogans on which the police base their so-called efforts at reforming themselves are nothing but mere catchphrases which no longer reassure the Nigerian public in trusting its police force. This, of course, is negatively affecting the cooperation which a crime-fighting outfits like the police need if they are to battle the crimes confronting the nation. Not only does this affect the operational efficiency of the police, it also affects the image of the nation and its citizenry.

We call on the police high command to examine this report with an open mind and to overhaul its operational efficiency, retrain its personnel and show the way out to those whose conduct and actions have contributed to giving the police this bad boy image that it has now seen even beyond the shores of Nigeria.

• **Soboma's Killing - Alaibe Calls for Probe**

The Special Adviser to the President on Niger Delta and Chief Executive Officer of the Presidential Amnesty Programme, Mr. Timi Alaibe, yesterday condemned the gruesome murder on Tuesday night of former militant leader and head of the outlaws, Soboma George and called for a thorough investigation of the murder.

But the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) accused the federal government of masterminding the killing. It, however, did not substantiate the allegation but threatened to resume hostilities.

Soboma was cut down by four men in French suit and driving a Corolla car who accosted him as he was leaving the field around Nembe Street, Town Area, Port Harcourt, and Rivers State where he went to play football last Tuesday.

His death has led to tension in Port Harcourt as some militants loyal to Soboma and dressed in police and military uniforms were said to be heading towards town in an anticipated retaliatory strike against the presumed killers of their leader.

In a statement on his behalf by Henry Ugbolue, Alaibe recalled that Soboma was one of the first ex-militia leaders to embrace the amnesty programme, saying his surrender of a huge cache of arms and ammunition to the nation's security agencies on Thursday, 13th August 2009 was a huge boost to the efforts of the Federal Government to end militancy in the Niger Delta.

He said until his death, the former militant leader continued to cooperate with the Presidential Amnesty Office.

"Indeed, just four days ago, Soboma George actively collaborated with the Amnesty Office to draw up a list of 1,000 ex-militants from Rivers State, who will this weekend, proceed to the Rehabilitation Camp in Obubra, Cross River State, to commence non-violence transformational training," he said.

He called on security agencies in Rivers State to "painstakingly investigate the circumstances that led to the murder of Soboma George and speedily bring the culprits to book. Even then, Alaibe wishes to reiterate the dogged commitment of the Federal Government to the pursuit of all legitimate means to instill lasting peace and security as well as sustainable development in the Niger Delta".

In a reply to an online inquiry made by THISDAY on Soboma's killing, MEND Spokesman Gbomo Jomo, however, stated that the organisation's resumption of hostilities would not be based on the killing of Soboma but on the fact that the root causes of its agitation has been left unattended to. Jomo said the killing of Soboma, which he described as "government sponsored assassination, has confirmed their fears about the amnesty programme being a sham.

"Our worst fears have been confirmed with what is clearly a government sponsored assassination against anyone now realizing the amnesty scam. The killing of Soboma by itself will not be the basis of a resumption of hostilities. Hostilities will resume because the root issues have not been addressed by the government.

"The federal government killed him. The control of our resources under a proper federal system of government is what we are asking for and if we do not get it, hostilities will resume," Jomo said.

Meanwhile, the Rivers State government has asked the police to do all within its abilities to ensure that they establish those behind the killing of Soboma with a vow that anyone directly or remotely connected with the killing must be arrested and prosecuted.

Following the incident, some text messages have been flying around alleging movement of some Soboma loyalists have been regrouping with the intention of carrying out retaliatory attacks.

However, security sources said it was not possible for the group to hit back now as they have to establish those behind the hit, plan retaliation and carry it out at a time that will be convenient and catch their opponents off guard.

On Wednesday night, there was a text message that some militants had gathered at a mast belonging to one of the service providers in Borokiri area, soldiers mounted and raced to the place only to see that the area was quiet without any militant in sight. Soboma was shot on the head and further cut to pieces with an axe by his attackers according to eye witnesses.

• **Boko Haram Snipers Kill Three Policemen**

Members of the outlawed Boko Haram sect appeared to have resorted to guerrilla warfare as they waylaid and shot dead three policemen in Damaturu and Maiduguri, centres of the deadly violence sparked by the group in July last year.

In Maiduguri, Borno State, two policemen were shot and their guns taken by four suspected members of the sect, who came riding bikes on Wednesday night, while another cop was killed in Damaturu when other gunmen attacked the private residence of Yobe State Governor Ibrahim Gaidam also on Wednesday.

Inspector Shettima Mustapha and newly-decorated Corporal Ahmed Mohammed, both of the Bulunkutu-Gomari Divisional Police Station in Jere Local Government Area in the outskirts of Maiduguri city, were attacked near the Gomari central mosque by four men dressed in black overalls.

The gunmen drove towards the policemen, who were also riding a bike, thereby felling them, before firing at them at close range, according to accounts of security sources. The sources said 16 shells of used ammunition were found at the scene of the killing.

Borno State Police Commissioner Ibrahim Abdu, who confirmed the shootings, told newsmen yesterday the cops were on their way to their beat at the Gomari bus stop for the routine stop-and-search operation and also the enforcement of the ban on the movement of motorcycles, which was recently extended to 10pm.

"They were on a motorcycle. The inspector was riding and the corporal was backed on the motorbike. As they were moving, unknown to them, two motorcyclists were trailing

them from behind. They came very close to them, opened fire and killed them. They shot them from behind at the back of their neck," Abdu told newsmen.

He said police investigations are pointing to a particular direction, which he did not mention, following recent series of killings of policemen in similar pattern. "But we do not want to disclose and pre-empt investigations. The SSS and military intelligence are assisting us. The security outfits are all working together to see that the perpetrators are brought to book," he added.

A witness told our reporter that the gunmen might have trailed the policemen "because immediately they swerved across their path with one of their motorcycles, two of them took up positions in separate directions of the fleeing officers and shot at them until they were sure they had died."

Six policemen have so far been killed in Maiduguri in attacks following similar patterns. One civilian was also killed while another sustained injuries. In all attacks, the gunmen rode on motorcycles.

Residents fear that this could be a comeback or revenge attempt by the Boko Haram sect, which recorded heavy losses in days of fighting with security forces last year.

In Damaturu, the gunmen attacked Gaidam's residence at the Gwange area around 8pm on Wednesday, killing Constable Barde Emos, State Police Commissioner Mamman Sule told journalists. The governor is away in Saudi Arabia for the lesser Hajj.

"The attackers were two in number and they went to the house on a motorcycle," he said. "Immediately they arrived, they used gun and killed the police constable who was guarding the house before they fled away. He died shortly after taking him to hospital. We did not arrest anybody but we have recovered some pellets (used bullets) at the scene of the attack," he added.

Emos said incident was exactly like the one that happened few months ago at the residence of former Governor Bukar Abba Ibrahim, where the attackers killed a policeman and fled away.

"As at now, we are yet to ascertain the actual mission of the attackers even though some people have started giving it political coloration. Personally, I feel it is a reprisal attack by the remnants of the Boko Haram sect," he said.

The commissioner said two members of the Boko Haram sect were arrested at the weekend in Damaturu while downloading some speeches of the late leader of the sect Mohammed Yusuf.

"Some of the sect members are resurfacing in town because they have been discharged and acquitted by courts," the commissioner said.

He said security would be beefed up in Damaturu to forestall further attacks. "We would intensify stop-and-search surveillance from 6pm to 6am everyday," he said.

• **Dozens of Children Die in Lead Poisoning**

As many as 30 children have died of lead poisoning in Zamfara State over the past week, authorities believe. The latest deaths occurred in a remote village near the town of Anka.

Scores of people – mostly children – had earlier died this year in Zamfara State, poisoned by lead-contaminated waste from illegal gold mining.

But officials have not been able to confirm the reports because rainy-season downpours have prevented them from getting to the area.

Lead poisoning has killed at least 160 since June, when visiting doctors realised children in the region were dying in unusually large numbers.

Investigating scientists traced the source of the poisoning to soil contaminated with lead which had been dumped in water sources by miners.

For weeks in June, teams worked to try to decontaminate a number of villages, by scraping away topsoil.

But experts at the time said that many more children would be affected by the slow-acting poison.

There are fears that the rains may have washed the poison back into wells and other water sources.

In their attempts to extract gold, deadly amounts of lead were released – it is thought that soil containing lead deposits was dumped in water sources and in places where children played.

The deaths were discovered during the annual immunisation programme, when officials realised that in several villages there were virtually no children.

Villagers said the children had died of malaria and it was only when a team from international aid agency, Medecins Sans Frontieres, took blood tests from local people that the high concentrations of lead were discovered.

Zamfara State had recently employed a Chinese company to mine gold in the area. But villagers had also attempted to capitalise by digging for the precious metal themselves – an illegal activity in Nigeria.

8. Geo-Strategic issues:

• **Gulf of Guinea Assets: NIMASA Partners US**

The management of the nation's apex maritime regulatory authority, Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), has started a partnership with the United States of America (USA) on safety and security exercise to protect the country's asset in the Gulf of Guinea.

In view of this, the management of NIMASA has started holding discussions with top officials of the US Government.

Director General of NIMASA, Mr. Temisanre Omatseye, dropped this hint while addressing top government functionaries on the USA team, explaining that the move is aimed at protecting Nigeria's huge asset and mineral resources in the Gulf of Guinea.

“The country's asset in the Gulf of Guinea is quite tremendous and we have high level of mineral resources between Nigeria, Angola, and Ghana. Therefore, any insecurity in the region would mean disaster for Nigeria as a maritime nation. This is because any form of insecurity would not allow these resources to be adequately harnessed for the growth and development of our economy”, he stressed.

He explained that though NIMASA has maritime guard command handling maritime safety issues in the country, working with USA Coast Guard would boost security in the region.

“What we have today in this country is not where we want to be as a maritime nation. We must put measures in place to move forward and stimulate tangible growth in the industry. Working with the government of USA would boost security in the region and would in turn bring tremendous economic benefits to our country”, he said.

The NIMASA helmsman stressed that their aim of collaborating with US government is to improve the maritime terrain in the country, emphasizing that a country like Nigeria could be vulnerable to sea attack if there are no adequate security measures on the waterways.

He mentioned that NIMASA would soon ensure that all containers coming into the country's waterways are properly scanned to determine the content and to ensure that offensive goods are not brought into the marine environment through the waterfront. According to Omatseye, collaboration with US would help both countries and would protect the country's assets within the Gulf of Guinea region.

In his response, Head of USA team, Mr. Gerarld Hueber, said that the collaboration would benefit both countries in terms of security issues and economic development. He added that USA government would assist Nigeria in the area of capacity building to ensure regular training and retraining programmes.

“We would work with Nigeria in the areas of capacity building, enlightenment on security matters, installation of equipment and infrastructural development”, he said.

Other West African States

Cape Verde:

Chad:

- **Malnutrition outstrips response....H6**

In parts of Chad acute malnutrition levels far exceed the international emergency threshold, according to a new study – fallout, partly, from crop failure hitting already fragile communities where access to basic health services is low and aid agencies are scarce.

The study, by Action contre la Faim (ACF) along with the government, donors and UN agencies, showed that in Nokou and Mao in the western Kanem region, acute malnutrition strikes 27.2 percent and 21 percent of under-five children, respectively. The figures for severe acute malnutrition – which commonly results in death if untreated – are 6.4 and 4.7 percent.

The highest numbers are in the central-west Barh El Gazel region, where 28.1 percent of children are acutely malnourished – 10.4 percent severe.

Even in a part of the world where periods of grave hunger are common, the recent survey numbers shock, Cyprien Fabre, head of the West Africa office of the European Commission's humanitarian aid department (ECHO), told IRIN.

“In the Sahel [region of Africa] we always have high malnutrition rates during the lean season, above the World Health Organization emergency threshold of 15 percent,” he told IRIN. “But when we see numbers like 27 and 28 percent, it's appalling.”

Of the roughly 102,000 children nationwide classified as having severe acute malnutrition, about half are in Chad's Sahel band - a semi-arid zone some 500km wide stretching from near the capital N'djamena to the border with Sudan, according to UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Malnutrition rates are higher than in neighbouring Niger, another West African country where poor food and fodder production from 2009 has destabilized agro-pastoralist communities who already live on next to nothing during lean seasons. In Chad, UNICEF says, under-nutrition is also due to poor access to health services and safe drinking water, inappropriate infant feeding practices and a lack of trained staff in hard-hit areas.

Malnutrition has been above the 15 percent threshold in Chad for a decade, according to UNICEF.

Kalzeubé Payimi Deubet, governor of Barh El Gazel, lives about 100m from the main regional hospital. He says he sees malnourished children daily. "It is difficult just being in that atmosphere," he told IRIN. "You have little children, their skin just sagging over bones - nothing but skin and bones."

Response, but not enough

While aid groups have been operating for years in eastern Chad, where over 400,000 Darfur refugees and displaced Chadians live, humanitarian agencies are scarce in the rest of the country. UNICEF has long pointed to the lack of aid partners as a barrier to tackling acute malnutrition in Chad.

From January to May 6,508 children were treated at UNICEF-supported therapeutic feeding centres in the Barh El Gazel and Kanem regions, according to UNICEF. The recovery rate at outpatient therapeutic feeding centres was 88 percent; in inpatient feeding centres the rate was lower and varied widely - from 16 percent to 75 percent. UNICEF says this is due in part to the lack of centres for severe cases (Barh El Gazel, population 260,865, has just one); in many cases children are simply arriving too late.

Malnourished children with other health complications receive medical treatment in addition to therapeutic feeding. For severe acute malnutrition children receive foods like special fortified milk several times a day and are closely monitored by health staff. Some children can be treated at home with nutrient-dense, ready-to-eat Plumpy'nut, with regular checks.

Barh El Gazel governor Kalzeubé told IRIN children in many of the region's villages are simply not being reached, even for detecting under-nutrition. "We do not have the means to diagnose and treat all children."

ACF operates 33 nutritional centres in Kanem and Barh El Gazel - expected to reach 43 in the coming months, with one mobile clinic - according to ACF head in Chad Jean-François Carémel.

Some areas with high malnutrition are supported by Médecins Sans Frontières and other NGOs, but "the system is not covering all the needs," Carémel told IRIN. He said government health structures are "weak" with a lack of skilled staff and quality care.

Under a just-revised national protocol for treating malnutrition - to reflect changed World Health Organization standards - more children would be classified as needing treatment, which will only underscore the deficiencies of the health system, ACF says.

Funding shortfall

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Chad said the nutrition response needed more aid workers and more dollars.

“We received US\$3.8 million from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) early in the year for this crisis but much remains to be done,” said OCHA humanitarian affairs officer David Cibonga.

“We need more aid groups to fill coverage gaps. At the same time we need more funds; the UN consolidated appeal for Chad is funded at only 50 percent.” OCHA is seeking another \$8 million from CERF.

Parallels with Niger 2005

Patricia Hoorelbeke, ACF West Africa representative, said Chad’s nutritional situation today is similar to Niger’s in 2005, when few humanitarian agencies were in place when a hunger crisis hit. “There is a lack of implementing partners in Chad as was the case in Niger at that time; that’s still a major problem.”

ECHO’s Fabre said the comparison is apt.

“There is not enough attention [by aid agencies and donors] to the nutritional situation in much of Chad. The problem is overshadowed by the refugee situation in eastern Chad and by Niger.”

For Nicolas Louis, ECHO’s representative in Chad, the “weak humanitarian response” to date has dire consequences: “Quite high morbidity and mortality, as well as potential long-term effects on psychomotor development.”

He added: “Irregular migration [driven by the crisis] and household debt burden could block some families from restoring their lives and livelihoods, thereby making them more vulnerable to future shocks.”

• Chad under water....H5

Flooding across Chad has destroyed homes, crops, livestock, wells and latrines in communities already pummeled by food shortages and high malnutrition, according to the UN.

"Huge numbers of people are injured and displaced - many zones are not even accessible yet because of water, and the rain continues," an Interior Ministry official told IRIN on 27 August.

"The Chadian authorities and humanitarian organizations note the threat this poses, given the vast destruction and extreme food insecurity in the coming months," the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in a report released on 26 August.

Drought in 2009 meant at least two million had to deal with food shortages, and "on top of that, Chad now faces floods that once again create food insecurity."

Initial assessments in accessible areas show that floods have affected 20,000 households and left at least 47,000 people homeless. The government, the UN and NGOs are distributing food, medical kits, water purification equipment and other relief supplies throughout the country.

The Borkou and Tibesti areas in the north, where there are at least 20,000 people in need of assistance and aid agencies are scarce, are among the hardest hit.

Victorien Ndakass of the UN Refugee Agency, which is providing tents and other relief supplies to flood victims, told IRIN that the agency has materials available at its field offices in Abeche, Koukou and Goz Beida that the government can transport to the north.

Gambia:

Guinea- Bissau:

- **Kindergartens to help in MDG fight.....H6**

In the village of Gantauda, 90km from Guinea-Bissau's capital, Bissau, a child's third birthday is a milestone: it is the age when they can start at the local kindergarten, which their parents know improves their chances of survival.

Enrolling in Gantauda kindergarten, Guinea-Bissau's only pre-school centre, not only increases the chances of the children going on to primary school, but critically also provides a level of basic nutrition and health care most children are denied in a country where under-five mortality has risen from 203 to 223 per 1,000 live births, according to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The Gantauda programme provides lunch for the children, has clean latrines on-site, and will soon have a healthcare centre. It also hones children's motor skills, encourages joint learning and establishes reading and writing techniques - the kind of integrated approach that can help improve children's health outcomes, said Sophie Nadeau, human development specialist at the World Bank.

Numerous World Bank studies - including in Colombia, Bangladesh, Mozambique and Argentina - show introducing children to pre-school will up their likelihood of not only attending, but performing well in, and completing, primary school.

Only 28 percent of 7-12 year olds currently attend primary school in Guinea-Bissau, according to UNICEF, while just 12 percent of girls complete it, compared to 18 percent of boys. As such, Guinea-Bissau is still way off-track to meet the Millennium

Development Goal (MDG) of primary education for all by 2015, estimates the World Bank, which has re-set the goal for 2020.

Though it is too early to study the links between this programme and primary school completion rates, or health indicators, teachers have tracked children's performance. "Children who attend the kindergarten appear to learn faster once they go to primary school," said Bacar Lano, who teaches the three- and four-year olds at the centre. "We work on all kinds of techniques here to help them do that, including the basics of handwriting and the alphabet. We also spend a lot of time encouraging the kids to play, which helps to develop creativity."

According to Ingrid Kuhfeldt, director of Plan International which funds the Gantauda programme, the biggest initial problems children starting primary school face in this region are behavioural problems in the classroom, and language barriers - the official language of instruction is Portuguese, but most children speak local languages.

The World Bank's Nadeau told IRIN studies in Ecuador, Cambodia and Mozambique showed that while socio-economic differences do not greatly affect children's performance at age one, two or three, by age five, those living in poverty "lag behind considerably". Pre-school education can change that, she said. If not, "if they are already disadvantaged then this, coupled with low quality conditions means it is not surprising they don't learn much at school."

Community-run?

Donors are currently testing the cost-effectiveness and impact of three early childhood development (ECD) models in different settings: government-run or "formal" early childhood development programmes; community-based schemes; and "parenting programmes", whereby parents regularly meet to discuss ways to nurture their children's development.

Plan International has adopted the community-based model: Villagers choose the teachers, pay into a joint fund to support families who cannot afford to send their children, and contribute 30 percent of the running costs. All the playground equipment was made by local carpenters from local materials so that it will be sustainable, says Kuhfeldt.

The Ministry of Education has a very low capacity in Guinea-Bissau. Its budget barely covers teacher salaries, and would be very hard-pushed to take on quality ECD programmes on a large scale, she told IRIN.

Currently, every child in the village aged 3-6 attends the kindergarten, teacher Lano told IRIN. "Nobody is left out."

Donors catching on

The 30 donors and agencies involved in the Fast Track Initiative to help achieve universal basic education are increasingly funding early childhood as well as primary education, said Nadeau.

UNICEF helps develop training materials and curricula for ECD teachers; and tries to push the agenda forward with education ministries.

MDG meetings in September will provide an opportunity for ECD experts to push their agenda further, Nadeau told IRIN. In an ideal world, some sort of ECD intervention would be part of all universal basic education projects, she said.

But to get there, they must collect more data to convince decision-makers, said Nadeau. "The magnitude of the problem [children arriving at school unprepared] is not documented enough." And once armed with data, advocates must reach beyond educators, to try to convince ministries of finance to start supporting some of these projects in the future, she said.

Mali:

• Mali Nomads Flee Drought.....H5

Nomadic communities in northern Mali's desert regions are facing one of the most serious droughts of the last twenty years.

"Since the end of last year's rainy season, many herders understood that this was going to be a drought year," said Mohamed Assaleh, mayor of the northern town of Talataye. "Grass hasn't grown anywhere in the district. So they have decided to search for pastures further afield."

More than a quarter of the district's population has already migrated elsewhere - towards the Niger river at Tessie and Ouattagouna, into neighbouring Niger and even as far as Burkina Faso far to the south.

Talataye is on the list of 43 districts at risk for food insecurity published by the Malian government back in March. Its population, estimated at 30,000, survives mainly from herding cattle, camels, sheep and goats. Drought is a recurring threat, and the pastoralists presently face acute shortages lack of water and pasture, though locals argue that the situation was worse during the droughts of 1973 and 1984. Some areas in the western part of Mali are also affected by the shortage of water and forage. But the economy of the northern desert regions is hardest hit.

"It's unclear how many herds remain in Talataye versus how many have been displaced. Wherever they go, the animals die in large numbers, especially sheep, cows and donkeys. A few camels and goats survive in places where there are a few trees," said Assaleh.

"Because of the water shortage, some heads of families have lost almost all their animals," said Ag Mahmoud Idriss, a farmer from the northern town of Menaka.

Because so many are selling, the price of livestock has collapsed. According to Idriss the sale of five to six goats is barely enough to cover the price of a 50 kilogramme-sack of rice, about 15,000 CFA francs (about \$30 US).

Ahmed Ould Baba told IPS: "I usually leave the Menaka region only during the rainy season. But this year, my animals will not survive until then. There is not enough water for them to drink, which is why they have all become so thin. It is because many wells have dried up and there is no grass or plants to feed the animals." The crisis is affecting all spheres of life.

"Even the education system is feeling the crisis a bit. Some of my colleagues told me they are struggling to keep students in class who are compelled to follow their parents to Niger in search of water and pastures," Babacary Adama Diarra, a primary school teacher in the city of Anderaboucane. Assistance has been limited.

"The Malian Red Cross, with support from the U.S. government has started free food distribution in affected communities. They also distribute feed for the animals," Diakaridia Dembele, head of communications at the Red Cross, told IPS.

In June, the European Commission announced it was providing 30 million dollars of assistance to Sahelian countries, including Niger, Mali and Chad. However, the non-governmental organisation Oxfam International stressed rich donor countries need to increase emergency aid for Sahelian populations.

Relief efforts in neighbouring Niger have had to be sharply scaled back as donors have not come forward in response to a request from the World Food Programme for \$371 million dollars to support emergency aid.

The Malian government sent the district of Talataye 389 tonnes of sorghum for distribution. "It's sorely needed support... but is not part of the customary diet," says Assaleh, who told IPS that government had not consulted with locals before sending the sorghum.

"It should have been replaced by rice or millet. What is worse is that the animals die eating it. So these donations will neither feed people, nor replace cattle feed," lamented Assaleh.

Mauritania :

- **Spanish aid workers freed....H7**

Two Spanish aid workers are free after being taken hostage by al Qaeda in North Africa nearly nine months ago, the Spanish government said Monday.

The workers were taken from Mauritania on November 29 of last year; but they are now in a safe place, according to government officials.

No details of the release have been given.

Spanish President Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero was expected to hold a news conference Monday to address the issue.

Niger:

• Small steps towards a sustainable future....H7

The population of Niger, one of the poorest countries in the world, is growing at an unsustainable rate, according to the authorities and civil society groups.

If current growth rates of 3.3 percent per year remain unchanged, by 2050 Niger's population will have reached 50 million. The current population is 15.2 million - and even at this level there is widespread malnourishment.

It has been nearly 25 years since Niger identified population control as a priority in its fight against poverty, said senior Ministry of Social Development and Population official Barra Bahari. But convincing people to have fewer children by marrying later and using contraception is not an easy task.

"This is a humanitarian emergency. We have no future without birth control," said Idé Djermaakoyé, president of a local NGO involved in family planning, the Nigerien Organization for the Development of Human Potential (ONDPH). "The government cannot cope. The population is poor, the health system is weak and there is no land for farming. We are already unable to feed and educate our population."

National statistics are grim. Nearly 60 percent of the population survives on less than a dollar a day. A woman dies every two hours while giving birth. Nearly one child in five dies before the age of five. Almost one in three does not attend primary school.

The economy would have to grow at a rate of 7 percent a year to meet people's basic needs, according to Najim Mohammed, coordinator of the Permanent Secretariat of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, a government body. In 2009, growth was negative, he said. The government says average annual growth in the last decade has been just 3.1 percent.

A recent government study on the impact of population growth notes that by 2015, if the trend remains unchanged, thousands more classrooms, teachers, and health personnel will

be required. In general, each active member of society will have to look after at least two inactive ones. And the already deficient food production will be even less adequate.

Promoting contraception

In the maternity ward of Diffa's health centre, Mamane Fati is holding her newborn daughter, her ninth child. "The first born could not even stand when I had a second one," she said. Her sister then told her about contraception. "Now, I have understood that we have to put some space between births. I try to leave three years between each of them."

The fact that this is Fati's ninth child is hardly exceptional. The average Nigerien woman gives birth seven times in her life, the highest number in the world.

What may be noteworthy is that Fati, now 38, was 21 when she had her first child. That is almost old in a country where half of all females have their first child at 15-16, according to a 2006 government demography and health survey.

By promoting education for all, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) hopes to reduce instances of early marriage. "Education could most often break the cycle of early marriage", said UNFPA's deputy in Niamey, Saidou Kabore. "Girls will not marry while studying. And then, the more a woman is educated, the fewer children she will generally have."

By 2015, the country aims to reduce the proportion of early marriages from 60 to 40 percent and the number of children per women to five. Some 18 percent of its sexually active population should be using contraception by then.

Family planning and contraception are among the topics discussed with every woman giving birth in Diffa's maternity unit. "We stress that it is important for their health and that of the child to space births," explained the head of the maternity unit, Mariama Daouami.

In the last nine years, Daouami said, the contraception message seems to have had more resonance in the cities. "In the countryside, it is another story. Most often women say they will have to ask their husband. And then, there is the religious factor. They think that spacing birth is defying Islam."

She added that when a man has several wives, wives will often compete to have the most children, because this will reflect on their status in the family and on their inheritance share.

Key targets: Men and religion

Organizations such as UNFPA have understood that without the sanction of men and religion, change is unlikely.

“We used to only target women, but we cannot promote family planning without involving men,” said UNFPA’s Kabore. “It is men who decide when it comes to contraception, or delivering at the health centre. This is related to the problem of women’s status in the society.”

In 2004, UNFPA started engaging men in family planning by opening a dozen “husbands’ schools” in central Niger. Married men were invited to meet twice a month to discuss reproductive health. Kabore said it led husbands to become more involved with health and family matters. This year, 136 such “schools” have been established.

Hassan Ardo Ido has 12 children under 21. He describes it as a heavy burden but also explains: “We think that if you have five children who can fetch wood, well, that will help the family.” This is one of the ideas that UNFPA is trying to fight against by stressing that children are expensive to raise, said Kabore. “It is believed to be a security net, but several examples show that it is insecurity net.”

The fact that children have tended to die more frequently at a very young age may also explain the urge to have a large family. “People have to understand that it is no longer necessary to have five children to ensure two survive,” said Djermaakoyé, from ONDPH. “Many more children live now that we have relatively better access to health care and vaccination.”

Working closely with traditional chiefs and religious associations has also become a priority. Islam is not against family planning, said Kabore. Citing Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and Iran, he noted: “There are Muslim countries where family planning has worked very well.”

Marabout Gabo Sabou preaches about family planning to his fellow marabouts. “The Koran says we cannot prevent births. We don’t contradict this, but we say that the size of the family needs to be on a par with resources. The Koran never said you should make children regardless of your ability to look after them.”

Even though his sermons are not always warmly received, he says his peers are now much more responsive than they were when he started two decades ago. “Now people listen and we can discuss. There was not even a discussion before, just a fight.”

“We are starting to see the impact of our work, but it is very slow,” said the Population Ministry’s Bahari, noting that the use of contraception has increased from 5 percent in 2006 to over 13 percent. “Contraception was a taboo subject when I started in 1990. This is no longer the case. Condoms are being shown on TV and people are not shocked.”

- **Almost 200,000 displaced by floods...H5**

Further heavy rains in Niger have caused the number of people displaced by flooding to soar from 111,000 last week to 198,740 this week, says the UN Office for

the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which is calling on donors and aid agencies to urgently send shelter materials, blankets and mosquito nets.

"Response in rural areas has been slow thus far," the head of OCHA in Niger, Modibo Traoré, told IRIN. Flood-displaced families in remote the Diffa region in the southeast, and Agadez in the north, have received no assistance to date.

In Agadez some 80,000 animals, already weakened by the ongoing nutrition and food security crisis, have died in the floods. "We must find a way to quickly burn or bury their bodies to ensure water sources are not contaminated," Traoré told IRIN.

The government is sending 400 tons of food to people displaced by floodwater, and has released \$200,000 in emergency funding to purchase more.

The flooding has aggravated a countrywide food security crisis, in which nearly half of Niger's 15.2 million people are experiencing hunger after the harvests failed, according to the government.

Traoré warned that the flooding could worsen. "The rainy season is still continuing, so victim numbers may rise even further."

Sénégal: