

Business and Politics in the Muslim World

West African News Monitoring

Weekly Report 138

19 – 25 September, 2010

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Presentation on 29 September, 2010.

Headlines

Detail of the news

Political News

Economy

Energy

Environment

Immigration/Refugee/Idps

Health

Human rights/Gender/Social Issues

Geo-Strategic issues

Headlines

Ghana

1. Political
 - Mills dodges UN
2. Economy
 - Oversubscribed Ghana Cocoa Board facility transaction completed
 - Ghana says \$13 bln China loan terms to be set gradually
 - Ghana says in talks with Chinese oil investors
 - Rubber will be number one foreign exchange earner for Ghana soon.
 - China to Invest \$1.2 Billion in Bauxite Industry
3. Energy
 - China gives Ghana over \$3bn loan
4. Environment
5. Immigration/ Refugee/ IDPs
6. Health
7. Human rights/Gender/Social Issues
 - Signing of STX Housing deal postponed indefinitely
 - FIDA wants more women elected in upcoming Assembly Elections
 - Two organizations to launch political project for women
 - Gas expert pushes for local content in oil industry
8. Geo-Strategic issues

Liberia

1. Political
 - NEC Certificates PYJ Party
2. Economy

3. Energy
4. Environment:
5. Immigration/ Refugee/ IDPs
6. Health
7. Human rights/Gender/Social Issues
 - Liberian Leader, Addressing UN Debate, Cites Corruption as Biggest Challenge
 - UN Chief Holds Talks with Liberian President on Corruption, Debt and Human Rights
8. Geo-Strategic issues

Cameroon

1. Political
 - Cameroon leader sued over empty parliament seats
2. Economy
3. Energy
4. Environment
5. Immigration/ Refugee/ IDPs
6. Health
7. Human rights/Gender/Social Issues
8. Geo-Strategic issues
 - Bakassi - FG Accuses Cameroon of Breaching Agreement

Cote d'Ivoire

1. Political
 - U.N. gives approval to Ivory Coast electoral list
2. Economy
 - Ivory Coast group wants UN flexibility on diamond ban
 - Ivory Coast to revive tourism after polls: minister
 - Ivory Coast petrol stockist to double capacity
3. Energy
4. Environment:

5. Immigration/ Refugee/ IDPs
6. Health
7. Human rights/Gender/Social Issues
 - Ivory Coast starts paying former rebels for peace
8. Geo-Strategic issues

Sierra Leone

1. Political
2. Economy
3. Energy
4. Environment:
5. Immigration/ Refugee/ IDPs
6. Health
7. Human rights/Gender/Social Issues
 - Women Increasingly Joining Ranks of Soldiers
 - Youth Unemployment and Corruption among Nation's Biggest Hurdles - UN
8. Geo-Strategic issues

Guinea:

1. Political
 - Political fighting blocking new Guinea vote date
 - UN warns of army takeover risk in Guinea
 - Guinea election body proposes Oct. 10 run-off
 - New dispute clouds Guinea presidential vote
 - Diallo's Alliance Suspends Strike
 - Ecowas Gives 3-Week Ultimatum for Election
 - UN and African Union Launch Joint Task Force on Peace and Security
2. Economy
3. Energy
4. Environment

5. Immigration/ Refugee/ IDPs
6. Health
7. Human rights/Gender/Social Issues
8. Geo-Strategic issues

POLITICS

GHANA

Mills dodges UN

At a time world leaders are racing to New York to attend the 26th session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly meeting, Ghana's President, John Evans Atta Mills is busily touring China under the pretext of attracting investments and building stronger ties between the two nations.

He arrived in Beijing on Sunday evening to start a six-day state/working visit to that country.

Communications Director at the Presidency, Koku Anyidoho yesterday confirmed fears and speculations that the President may after all not attend the meeting where he was expected to deliver a speech on poverty, hunger and disease and interact with world leaders.

The three-day summit which started yesterday is, among other things, scheduled to discuss and review the progress of member countries in the fight against extreme poverty, hunger and disease under the much-talked-about Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Experts say Ghana would not be able to achieve all the goals within the stipulated time frame.

However, UN Secretary General Ban Kim Moon has renewed calls on world leaders to show strong will in addressing the issue.

At the forum, world leaders are expected to commit themselves to an action plan to achieve eight poverty reduction goals by a 2015 target date.

This is probably the first time in the history of Ghana that a sitting president or his vice would miss such a forum, as Vice President John Dramani Mahama has been 'benched'.

The failure of the president and his vice to attend the meeting has resulted in a situation where Foreign Minister Alhaji Mohammad Mumuni is leading a 'lame' government delegation to the meeting.

DAILY GUIDE has however learnt from sources that President Mills' host and Chinese President, Hu Jintao would leave him in China to attend the UN meeting. President Mills would therefore be left in the hands of Chinese Ministers who would take him round the country.

At a time his colleagues were seriously finding lasting solutions to the challenges confronting the world, President Mills was laying wreaths on Monday at the Tiananmen Square where over 3,000 intellectuals and student activists were cruelly gunned down by

the Chinese Communist government in 1989.

Later, President Mills and his Chinese counterpart, Hu Jintao signed a deal for China to give Ghana a loan of \$3billion to develop its energy sector.

Specific areas to be targeted under the deal include infrastructure development, job creation and the development and other derivatives of oil and gas, all in the name of preparing the Chinese to take over of Ghana's oil.

The package, which would be disbursed through the China Development Bank (CDB), constitutes the first phase of Chinese assistance which would start rolling out in the next six months after the Government of Ghana has devised a framework for the package.

The deal was announced after closed-door bilateral talks between President Mills and the Chinese President held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, on the second day of President Mills' visit.

In addition to the \$3billion-package, China would also give Ghana preferential buyers' credit of \$260 million for the expansion of the Kpong Water Works project and another loan of \$150 million for Ghana's e-governance project.

President Mills is also expected to sign a number of protocol and bilateral agreements with the Chinese government to secure funding for various sectors of the Ghanaian economy including health and transport sectors.

President Mills is expected back home in Ghana on Saturday to prepare for another state visit to Tokyo, Japan while he keeps the United Nations and America at arm's length.

LIBERIA

NEC Certificates PYJ Party

The National Union for Democratic Progress (NUDP), a new political party has been accredited and certificated as a full pledged political party in Liberia. NUDP is the party of Senator Prince Y. Johnson who declared his intention to contest the Liberian presidency as the "most formidable" candidate in the 2011 polls.

National Election Commission (NEC), Chairman, James Fromayan said Wednesday at the accreditation ceremony that the NUDP certified all the conditions set by the commission for proposed political parties to be accredited to operate in Liberia. He described the process leading to the accreditation and certification of political parties as tedious and not a process to walk through easily.

He noted that a very high standard, void of bribery has been put into place to enable every Liberian who wants to register a political party to go through without favor. Chairman Fromayan said the commissioners depend on God and their clear conscious as an impartial body to carry on the work of the commission.

The NEC Chairman said there has always been the problem of misunderstanding amongst political parties about their work. "We don't have the final saying," he stated, calling on all political parties to always meet the commission at a round table to trash out differences in opinion. He however praised the leadership of the NUDP for the high level of maturity and cooperation the commission received prior to the accreditation.

Notwithstanding, he cautioned the party to go beyond accreditation and ensure that partisans receive proper civic education to register to enable them vote.

Receiving the certificate, NUDP National Chairman, Emmanuel Lomax described the ceremony as a birthday for democracy in Liberia and called on the commission to raise the criteria for the registration of political parties. He said this will help to cut down mushroom and bedroom political parties that are seen during election year.

He said while the NUDP endorses mergers and coalitions, it will be very scrupulous in accepting any merger or coalition. He warned that no one should underestimate the strength and capacity of the new party. "We will have a one million man match on the day of our launching" Chairman Lomax said.

At the same time, thousands of partisans converged at the NUDP National Headquarter on the Old Road (VP Road) Wednesday where the official holstering of the party's flag took place immediately following the certification amid political revelations and jubilations.

NUDP Secretary General, D.Y. Hne described the ceremony as a victory for the downtrodden people of this country. He said the vision of the party is to move away from the current unitary system of governance to a more citizens centered decentralized and federal system of governance, where true political power will rest in the hands of the citizens. He attributed the underdevelopment of the country to the 163 years of a failed unitary system of governance, where power and management of the national resources lie strictly in the hands of the president and few cronies.

Chairman Lomax informed NUDP Partisans amid shock that there was serious threat to democracy. He exhibited a letter of dismissal under the signature of President Sirleaf from the board of the Liberia Produce Marketing Corporation (LPMC) when he refused to join the ruling Unity Party, but rather took up the chairmanship of the NUDP.

NUDP's Standard Bearer, Senator Prince Y. Johnson was not present. He is said to be out of the country. But a message delivered by Hon. David Zalee from him said he appreciates the victory and the resolve of the citizens of Liberia to ensure that the vision of the party is achieved,

Several opposition political parties, including Liberty Party, the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC), National Patriotic Party (NPP), the Grand Coalition, amongst others were fully represented; Nya Peagan writes.

CAMEROON

Cameroon leader sued over empty parliament seats

A Cameroon opposition leader said on Thursday he was suing President Paul Biya in a regional human rights court for failing to set up elections to replace dead members of parliament.

The challenge comes amid rising political tensions in the central African state ahead of 2011 presidential elections in which Biya, one of the continent's longest serving rulers, is expected to seek another term.

"Since 2007, we've lost seven MPs from five constituencies. This means that the constituencies concerned, especially those which had only one MP, are no more represented in the National Assembly," Abba Aboubakar, head of the RCPU party, told a news conference in the capital Yaounde.

He said the empty seats also meant constituencies were being deprived of government funds for development projects.

"This is a violation of the law and of the rights of the people," he said.

Aboubakar said he had filed a case with the Africa Court on Human and People's Rights, a Gambia-based court focused on human rights cases in African Union member states, claiming Biya had violated the constitution by not setting by-elections within 12 months of an MP's death.

He said Cameroon's top court had declined to take the case.

Analysts have said Cameroon faces the risk of growing social unrest before next year's elections due to public disenchantment with Biya and the slow pace of reforms.

Internal conflict in the oil producing nation, which is viewed as one of central Africa's most stable countries, would be a setback for regional democracy and unsettle billions of dollars' worth of energy and mining investments.

COTE D'IVOIRE

U.N. gives approval to Ivory Coast electoral list

The head of the U.N. mission to Ivory Coast certified its final voter list as "fair and transparent" on Friday, adding momentum to plans to hold elections at last after years of failure.

Voting is scheduled for Oct. 31, but six dates have already been missed in the past five years because of arguing over voters' identities and the disarmament of rebel groups.

Elections are needed to draw a line under Ivory Coast's civil war of 2002 and 2003 which caused investors to flee what had been West Africa's economic success story.

Voting could make way for reforms necessary to fix the cocoa sector in the world's top producer, which supplies two-thirds of world demand but has been hurt by under-investment.

"The challenges lying ahead are not to be underestimated, yet I remain confident that together, we shall meet them with success. The Ivorian people, who had suffered and waited for so long, deserve nothing less," U.N. mission chief Y. J. Choi told a news conference.

All parties to the conflict agreed this month on a final voter list, removing what appeared to be the last serious political hurdle in the way of polls after rebels who have run half the country since the war withdrew to barracks at the end of August.

"SOLID, BALANCED, CREDIBLE"

President Laurent Gbagbo's signature on a decree this month validating definitive voter lists was hailed as a huge step considering he scuppered earlier versions because he suspected they included names from Burkina Faso and Mali.

He has since said the main obstacles to holding elections on time are technical, not political.

At a rally to launch his campaign website in Abidjan's main university, Gbagbo urged thousands of dancing, cheering students to go out and vote in force.

"We are going to have elections that will finally put this crisis behind us," he said, to a loud applause.

About 6.38 million people had registered to vote, but about one million of those were disputed, mostly on the grounds of nationality. The issue fuelled the initial conflict, when many Ivorians from the north said they had been wrongly excluded from a presidential election in 2000.

The final voters list has 5,725,720 names on it.

"This list is solid, balanced, credible and certifiable," Choi said. "Despite multiple challenges and delays, the electoral process has been conducted in an atmosphere that could be qualified as peaceful and stable."

Choi said one positive, longer-term consequence of the process was that many Ivorians who lacked identity cards would now have them. The war that split Ivory Coast in two was largely about identity and who is Ivorian in a fertile land that has for decades attracted migrant labour.

SIERRA LEONE

TOGO

GUINEA

Political fighting blocking new Guinea vote date

Political in-fighting is preventing Guinea's electoral commission setting a new date for the West African country's delayed poll, raising the danger of unrest, politicians and analysts said at the weekend.

Analysts say a successful election in Guinea, seen as a linchpin of stability in a region scarred by three civil wars, is key to billions of dollars in planned mining investments and could draw a line under decades of authoritarian rule since independence from France in 1958.

The European Union said authorities should set a revised date as quickly as possible.

"The EU considers such an unjustified delay risks harming a democratic process of historic importance," EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said in a statement.

The decisive round of the first democratic election in the world's biggest bauxite exporter was due on Sept. 19, but on Wednesday the electoral commission said it would be postponed, blaming a lack of necessary voting equipment.

Days earlier, street battles had killed one person and injured 50 as rival political camps traded accusations of attempted vote-rigging.

The commission said warring between rival candidates Celou Dalein Diallo and Alpha Conde was getting in the way of it fixing a date.

'FLAWED PROCESS'

"We would have preferred it if the President brought the two camps together and reached a consensus ... but instead, we are obliged to propose a date," said Pathe Dieng, operations director of the commission, known as CENI. CENI was supposed to meet last Thursday to choose a new date, but failed to convene.

Diallo, who won more than 40 percent of the vote in June's first round, has called for a delay of no more than 10 days, but his rival Conde, who polled 18 percent, says the electoral process is deeply flawed and must be remedied.

The leadership of CENI has been in dispute since early September's fraud conviction of its chief, Ben Sekou Sylla, who died days later of a long illness.

Sylla's replacement by his deputy Hadja Aminata Mame Camara drew protests from Conde, who complains she is a political ally of Diallo.

"The delay raises a number of risks for Guinea's near-term stability," said Rolake Akinola, West Africa analyst at Eurasia Group. "These include the threat of wider political unrest, of military intervention, and of economic stagnation, which would also undermine investment in the mining sector."

UN warns of army takeover risk in Guinea

Guinea runs the risk of another army takeover if its presidential run-off is further delayed, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's special representative for West Africa has warned.

A decisive second-round vote in the world's top exporter of the aluminium ore bauxite was due to be held last Sunday but authorities postponed it at the last minute citing a lack of technical preparation.

Political infighting within the country's national election commission (CENI) has since prevented it from agreeing on a new date, raising the threat of unrest and growing tensions between ethnic groups backing rival candidates.

"We are getting into a situation where things are getting quite risky and dangerous," Said Djinnit, head of the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA), told Reuters after talks with Guinean officials in the capital Conakry.

"The risk of the army taking over if things go wrong is real," he warned in an interview at his headquarters in the Senegalese capital Dakar late on Tuesday.

Djinnit said he had heard assurances from election officials during talks in Conakry that technical preparations for the second round would be in place by the end of this month, making an election possible either on Oct. 3 or 10.

"Ideally it would be better to have the elections before the school year starts," he said of an Oct. 4 scheduled return to school. Teachers are viewed as an important source of volunteer help for organising the balloting around the country.

Djinnit said there was a widespread yearning in Guinea to draw the line on half a century of coups, unrest and military rule that have so far prevented the vast bulk of its 10 million people from benefiting from its mineral wealth.

"ONE SMALL MILE"

He hailed junta leader General Sekouba Konate's commitment to hand power back to civilians and noted that Konate, an army veteran commanding wide respect from the ranks, had managed to maintain discipline within the notoriously unruly armed forces. But, without elaborating, he warned that elements within the army could use any disorder as a pretext to assert themselves.

"There are people in the army who are looking for excuses," he said.

In a sign of growing impatience with the delays, Konate issued a statement on Tuesday warning that he "would not accept" any further postponement in the presidential run-off, although he did not specify what he would do if there was. Konate is seen as anxious to step down and has already threatened to resign.

The run-off pits former Prime Minister Celou Dalein Diallo against Alpha Conde, a long-time opposition leader who has never served in a national government. Diallo, who leads after the first round, is of the Peul ethnicity while Conde is Malinke.

Guinea's proximity to fragile states such as Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ivory Coast, together with an ethnic mix replicated across the region, means that any domestic unrest has the potential to set off instability across its borders.

Djinnit, who has made around 40 trips to Guinea in less than three years, said there had been a major international effort to support the transition to civilian rule in Guinea and that it was now up to its political class to take the last step.

"There is a real sense of willingness to get out of the crisis that lasted for 50 years," he said. "What is left is one small mile to finish the business."

Guinea election body proposes Oct. 10 run-off

Guinea's electoral commission on Wednesday proposed Oct. 10 as the revised date for the final round of voting in the West African country's first democratic election.

The commission, known as CENI, earlier this month postponed the election, which was due to have been held on Sept. 19, citing logistical reasons.

Analysts have said a successful election in Guinea, a key to stability in a region scarred by three civil wars, will bring in billions of dollars in planned mining investments and may draw a line under decades of authoritarian rule since independence from France in 1958.

The new date must be approved by interim head of state Sekouba Konate. Konate has said he does not want any further delays, and his approval is expected to be a formality. "We have officially written to propose the date of October 10," CENI official Foumba Kourouma told Reuters.

The election, strongly backed by the United States, France and the European Union, is intended to end a political crisis that began when soldiers seized power in the world's biggest bauxite exporter in December 2008, after former President Lansana Conte died.

TWO WAY FIGHT

Former Prime Minister Celou Dalein Diallo, who won more than 40 percent of the vote in June's first round, will take on Alpha Conde, who polled 18 percent. Conde's camp has repeatedly said the electoral process is deeply flawed.

CENI has experienced turmoil since the first round at the end of June. Ben Sekou Sylla, who was chief at the time, was convicted of fraud earlier this month and died days later after a long illness.

Sylla's replacement by his deputy, Hadja Aminata Mame Camara, led Conde to protest that she is a political ally of Diallo.

Earlier this month, one person was killed and 50 were injured in street battles as rival camps traded accusations of attempted vote-rigging, and CENI said the row between Diallo and Conde was hindering its efforts to set a date for the final round.

CENI said the electoral material for which it had been waiting was largely in place.

"There only remains a small quantity of material, and that should be at its destination before Saturday," Kourouma said.

New dispute clouds Guinea presidential vote

The party of the front-runner in Guinea's delayed presidential vote accused the new chief of the election commission of bias on Thursday, casting fresh doubt on the country's troubled transition to civilian rule.

The row flared just as the commission proposed Oct. 10 as the new date for the run-off vote, postponed earlier this month after violence between rival political factions and problems in technical preparations for the poll.

In the latest challenge to the credibility of the CENI election commission, former prime minister and presidential candidate Celou Dalié Diallo's camp said the new chief of the body, Louncy Camara, supported his rival, Alpha Conde.

"It is out of the question for us to accept Camara as president of CENI for October 10, if that date is confirmed," said Mamadou Bah Baddiko, a spokesman for Diallo's party.

"That would be lethal for us. We are not saying that we are going to boycott (the election) but we will not accept this."

A successful election in Guinea, the world's biggest exporter of the aluminium ore bauxite, is seen as vital to stability in a region of West Africa that has been scarred by three civil wars. Analysts say it will give the green light to billions of dollars in planned mining investments.

The vote is intended to end a political crisis that began in December 2008 when soldiers took charge of the country in a rapid military coup, filling a power vacuum that opened when longstanding President Lansana Conté died.

The proposed Oct. 10 run-off date has to be approved by junta leader Sekouba Konate, who earlier this week insisted there should be no new delays to the election.

Baddiko said Camara backed Conde's RPG party, something both Camara and Conde's team denied.

"Louncy Camara is not a member of the RPG, he is not a supporter of the RPG," said Moustapha Naite, a Conde spokesman. "All we are asking for is a transparent election."

ACCUSATIONS, FRAUD, DEATH

Diallo polled 43.69 percent in June's first round of voting, with Conde well behind on 18.25 percent.

Conde's party has fiercely attacked the conduct of the election, saying the first round was riddled with fraud, an accusation played down by foreign election observers.

CENI has had a torrid time since then. Ben Sekou Sylla, who was chief for the first round, was convicted of fraud earlier this month and died days later after a long illness.

He was initially replaced by his deputy, Hadja Aminata Mame Camara -- unrelated to Louncey -- but Conde protested that she was a political ally of Diallo. Earlier this month, one person was killed and 50 injured in street battles as rival camps traded accusations of attempted vote-rigging, and CENI said the row between Diallo and Conde was hindering its efforts to set a date for the final round. This week, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's special representative for West Africa warned that Guinea ran the risk of another army takeover were the final voting round to be further delayed.

Diallo's Alliance Suspends Strike

The alliance backing presidential contender Cellou Dalein Diallo is calling off a strike on Monday, initially scheduled to protest the arrest of around 200 of Diallo's young supporters during last weekend's violence.

"Our leaders have just decided to suspend the strike tomorrow," says Falah Millimono, a spokesperson for the alliance backing presidential candidate Cellou Dalein Diallo. "We have seen some signs of improvements," says Millimono, referring to negotiations to obtain the release of young supporters arrested during clashes last weekend. However Millimono says he does not know how many supporters have or will be released.

The second round vote of Guinea's presidential elections was postponed after clashes last weekend in Conakry between supporters of the two candidates left one person dead and 50 injured.

Diallo's Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea had threatened a strike on Monday to protest the arrest of around 200 young party supporters in the wake of the clashes. On Saturday, a top UN envoy arrived in Guinea at the head of an international delegation for talks with key players in the crisis over the suspended presidential election. Said Djinnit, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's special representative for West Africa, led members of the International Contact Group for Guinea into talks with election officials and political leaders on Saturday.

They were scheduled to meet the country's interim president General Sekouba Konate and the two presidential candidates, Diallo and Alpha Conde, in a bid to fix a new date for the vote.

Veteran opposition leader Conde said the July first-round result, in which Diallo won 44 percent of the vote to his 18 percent, was fraudulent, and blamed the electoral commission.

But both candidates have called for the election to take place as soon as possible.

Ecowas Gives 3-Week Ultimatum for Election

Member countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have issued a three-week ultimatum to Guinea Conakry to organise a run-off election to restore constitutional order in the beleaguered country.

At the extraordinary summit of the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, held at the Transcorp Hilton in Abuja yesterday, the sub-regional body in a communiqué, expressed concern with the developments in the political situation in

Guinea and took note of the postponement of the date of the second round of the presidential elections previously scheduled for September 19.

The Authority acknowledged the efforts made in the first round of the elections as well as the challenges. Consequently, it urged the CENI to take necessary measure with a view to identifying the technical and logistical challenges that are still pending in preparation for the second round.

In order to consolidate on the progress made in the process to return Guinea to constitutional order, the Authority urged all stakeholders to work together, and to immediately announce a date for the effective holding of the second round of presidential election, which should take place not later than three weeks from now.

The Authority appealed to the two contestants, Mr. Celluo Dalein Diallo and Prof. Alpha Conde, to abide strictly by the provisions of the Memorandum of Understanding signed on September 3, 2010 in Ouagadougou under the aegis of President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso.

Guinea has been dogged by political tension in the last couple of weeks following clashes by rival political parties that left several people wounded. The bauxite rich nation is in dilemma of degenerating into further tension after the crisis that trailed the attempted assassination of Captain Dadis Camara.

Meanwhile, chairman of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, President Goodluck Jonathan, tasked the Authority to intensify efforts to curb the lingering political confusion that has bedeviled Guinea Bissau. Jonathan made this known during the Summit. He bemoaned the confusion in Guinea Bissau triggered by the seizure of power by elements within the armed forces of the tiny West African nation in April 2010.

He challenged the Authority to liaise with the international community, saying, "We have a moral responsibility to assist this sister country. It is obvious that in doing so, we will be serving a collective interest as members of the same organisation with common destiny. In the spirit of the African brotherhood, Guinea Bissau's problem is our problem."

The communique issued at the end of deliberations on Guinea Bissau reviewed the security situation in the country and reaffirmed support for Malam Bacai Sanha, President of the Republic of Guinea Bissau. The Authority also underscored the importance of effective implementation of the Defence and Security Sector Reform Programme (DSSRP) for peace and stability of the country.

The crisis started when in March 2009, President Vieira and the chief of General staff were brutally murdered in an incident that triggered a succession of a culture of impunity.

UN and African Union Launch Joint Task Force on Peace and Security

The United Nations and the African Union today launched a joint task force on peace and security as the two organizations continue to step up their cooperation in conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding across the continent.

The Joint Task Force, launched at UN Headquarters in New York by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and AU Commission Chairperson Jean Ping, will meet twice a year at the senior level to review immediate and long-term strategic issues.

Mr. Ban and Mr. Ping noted in a press release that they were determined to strengthen existing cooperation between the two organizations beyond the "groundbreaking joint efforts in Sudan, Guinea and Somalia."

A joint peacekeeping force has operated in Sudan's Darfur region (known as UNAMID) since the start of 2008, while the UN provides support to the troops of the AU peacekeeping mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

In Guinea, the two organizations work together with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to try to promote peace and democratization in the fragile West African nation.

Mr. Ban and Mr. Ping approved terms of reference for the new task force, which will conduct its first consultations on Tuesday in New York, coinciding with this year being declared by the AU as the Year of Peace and Security in Africa.

The task force's programme of work will be mapped out in coordination with the newly established UN Office to the AU and the AU's Permanent Observer Mission to the UN.

ECONOMY

GHANA

Oversubscribed Ghana Cocoa Board facility transaction completed

Stanbic Bank Ghana, a member of the Standard Bank Group, has confirmed that the Ghana Cocoa Board's 17th annual pre-export finance facility (COCOBOD) has secured a record number of commitments.

Standard Bank was one of the joint mandated lead arrangers (MLAs) for the \$1.2 billion transaction along with Credit Agricole, ICBC, Ghana International Bank and SMBC.

The transaction was oversubscribed at \$1.834 billion and the borrower increased the facility size to \$1.5 billion. A total of 28 banks, including the MLAs, confirmed participation, with ticket sizes following scale-backs ranging from \$5 million to \$100 million.

"Cocoa is a strategic economic commodity for Ghana both as a significant contributor to GDP and as a consistent source of foreign exchange earnings. It is therefore necessary for us as a bank to promote and enhance the industry and we are happy to do this," Alhassan Andani, Managing Director of the bank, said. Established in 1947, Ghana Cocoa Board is the chief proponent of the production, processing and marketing of cocoa, coffee and sheanut. Ghana is the second largest cocoa beans exporter in the world after Ivory Coast, providing approximately 18 per cent of the world cocoa supply.

COCOBOD continues to promote the increase in the crop production with larger planted acreage, improved pest control and purchase price incentives for domestic producers.

Farmers are currently paid a minimum of 70 per cent of the Free On Board price in local currency as well as biannual bonus payments. Ghana cocoa is of superior quality and commands a quality premium reflecting excellent growing conditions, fermentation and collection care that COCOBOD designs into the supply chain. Mr. Kwamina Asomaning, Head of Corporate and Investment Banking at Stanbic-Ghana, said: "Standard Bank continues to be regarded internationally as one of Africa's leaders in Agriculture." Ghana earns approximately 40 per cent of its foreign exchange revenues from cocoa. The sector plays a leading role in Ghana's economy, employing more than two million farmers and buying agents. Mr. Asomaning said the need for the partnership cannot be overemphasized.

The structure of the deal remains unchanged, with the facility used to purchase cocoa beans for the 2010/11 season, and secured by the assignment of export contracts from overseas buyers. Ms Anne-Marie Woolley, Head of Structured Trade and Commodity Finance, Africa, at Stanbic Bank Africa, commented: "The Ghana Cocoa Board transaction remains one of the largest structured soft commodity finance facilities in the African market, and it is pleasing to see such strong and continued demand for this premier transaction from international investors, which is a reflection of its long standing structure and excellent performance track record." The deal will be finalised at a signing in Accra on Wednesday, 22 September.

Ghana says \$13 bln China loan terms to be set gradually

Ghana's nearly \$13 billion in Chinese loan agreements will be drawn on gradually as projects that require funding arise and only after financing terms are agreed, the government said on Thursday.

The West African country announced this week it had signed loan accords with two Chinese banks totalling \$12.87 billion, marking one of China's largest financial commitments in Africa to date but surprising analysts worried Ghana could rack up an untenable debt burden.

"They will be project loans when detailed project-by-project feasibility (studies) and agreements with detailed financing terms are agreed upon," Deputy Finance Minister Fiifi Kwetey told Reuters in a text message from Beijing.

"The framework agreement is thus indicative of the quantum of funding that will be made available for the aggregate of projects that are contained in the framework," he said.

The accords, signed during a visit by President John Atta Mills to China, include \$3 billion from the Chinese Development Bank to finance Ghana's oil and gas infrastructure and agricultural development.

A second deal for \$9.87 billion was signed with Chinese Exim Bank for road, railway and dam work.

Ghana, already the world's No.2 cocoa grower, is due to become an oil producer this year and energy revenues are expected to help boost its growth into the double-digits next year, making it Africa's top performing economy.

China has signed a slew of other big money deals across Africa -- including a \$6 billion deal with Congo last year -- as it seeks to secure resources to fuel its dramatic growth, and is among the investors competing for a stake in Ghana's offshore Jubilee oil field. Analysts said the details of the Chinese loan agreements were crucial to understanding their importance.

Ghana, an IMF member and one few sub-Saharan countries with a Eurobond, has cut its budget deficit to around 8 percent of GDP from over 20 percent in 2008 but runs the risk of backsliding due to higher public borrowing.

Ghana says in talks with Chinese oil investors

Ghana is making good progress in talks with Chinese investors interested in buying a stake in the West African nation's oil assets, its deputy energy minister said on Monday. Ghana aims to produce its first barrel of oil this year but developments have often been overshadowed by talk of disputes between state oil firm GNPC and foreign energy firms. Last month U.S.-based Kosmos Energy cancelled an estimated \$4 billion deal to sell its stakes in the giant Jubilee oilfield to ExxonMobil after months of resistance from GNPC, which made no secret of its own interest in the assets.

But Emmanuel Buah, Ghana's deputy energy minister said on Monday that the dispute has not deterred new investors and it was not opposed to future collaborations with new partners. "If you see the amount of investors we've had this year, it tells you the story that Ghana is the investment centre of West Africa," Buah told Reuters at the sidelines of a economic growth conference in London. "China has interest in Ghana and we welcome that...There are a lot of ongoing discussions and we've made a lot of progress with the Chinese."

Buah would not confirm which Chinese firms were interested or if any formal agreement had been reached.

Buah reiterated on Monday that Ghana was on course to become an oil-producing nation by the end of the year and output would quickly reach around 120,000 barrels per day (bpd).

PRODUCTION TARGET

Ghana expects to be producing 250,000 bpd by 2013, which based on current levels would make it sub-Saharan Africa's sixth-largest producer after Nigeria, Angola, Sudan, Equatorial Guinea and Congo Republic.

While its neighbours may have greater production capacity, Ghana believes the high quality of its oil makes it more attractive to potential buyers and investors than rivals. "Our light, sweet crude has a bigger draw to investors than you will find in Nigeria or Angola," Joe Amoako-Tuffour, an official at Ghana's finance ministry told Reuters. Lighter crude is cheaper and easier to refine into oil products, like gasoline, for sale to end users.

Ghana's offshore Jubilee field, operated by Britain's Tullow Oil, holds around 1.6 billion barrels of light crude and is one of West Africa's biggest recent discoveries.

The challenges involved in managing an offshore oilfield of this size were pulled into stark focus earlier this year following the United States oil spill disaster.

"The Gulf of Mexico incident should provide a lesson to Ghana," Buah said. "In the coming weeks the ministry of Ghana is organising a stakeholder conference to really

learn the lessons and see the things we can do to make sure we are in a position not to repeat what went wrong."

In April an explosion on a rig offshore the Gulf of Mexico killed 11 workers and led to the worst accidental offshore oil spill in history.

Rubber will be number one foreign exchange earner for Ghana soon.

Rubber could be the number one foreign exchange income earner in the next five years, Mr. Marc Genot, Managing Director of Ghana Rubber Estates Limited (GREL), has predicted.

Ghana's reliance on cocoa exports for most of its foreign exchange could soon be replaced by rubber and more people will also live of it. Mr. Marc Genot who was addressing a media day at GREL on Tuesday, said the contribution of GREL in the economies of the Western, Central and parts of Ashanti regions was enormous as it currently provides employment for over 6,000 farmers through its Rubber Out-grower Scheme. He said 80 per cent of its income remains in the three regions and between 1995 to this year, a total of 14,785.56 hectares of rubber had been cultivated engaging 3,880 out-grower farmers.

"So far 868 out-grower farms cultivated over 2,947.05 hectares are currently being tapped for rubber".

Mr. Genot explained that 10,500 hectares of rubber trees will be planted between this year and 2014 and this phase of the project will employ an additional 2,750 farmers.

He said the role of out growers in the life of GREL is enormous and all efforts will be made by the company to assist farmers to meet the expected needs of the company.

Mr. Emmanuel Akwasi Owusu, Officers in-charge Out-grower projects, said the scheme was an initiative of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA) and targeted women.

He said 30 per cent of the companies farmers are women and to facilitate and make their participation effective and less stressful, the company provides loans for its farmers. He said the farmers are then encouraged to use the banks to access their loans, repay the same and seek professional advice from the company while selling the natural unprocessed rubber to the company at economic rates.

Mr. Owusu said land administration and documentation were major challenges that confront most of the farmers and the company assists in resolving and assisting them to legally register and demarcate their boundaries.

He noted that stealing of natural rubber from farms was a major challenge and that the help of the regional security was being sought to stop the act. Mr. Owusu said the role of GREL in the rubber industry has minimised the rural urban drift, increased income levels

for farmers and their relatives, regularised the rainfall pattern, and created employment opportunities for the farmers and the youth within the 88 catchment communities.

China to Invest \$1.2 Billion in Bauxite Industry

Ghana's Bauxite and aluminum industries have received a major boost, with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Chinese Firm, Bosai Minerals Group, to invest \$1.2 billion into the sector, by establishing a modern alumina refinery plant in Ghana.

The investment is part of a four-year development plan to massively upgrade the production capacity of the Ghana Bauxite Company Limited in Awaso, in the Western Region, in which Bosai Minerals recently acquired 80 per cent shares, with the government controlling the remaining 20 per cent.

The MoU, which is one of the significant outcomes of the ongoing state visit to China by President John Evans Atta Mills, is expected to revamp the country's bauxite and aluminium industries to become major exporter, with the initial annual production of two million tonnes of bauxite.

Apart from the investment for the refinery, which is expected to be completed by 2014 when construction takes off early 2011, Bosai intends to invest in energy production to assist in providing sufficient power for the plant and other ancillary income-generating activities in the Western Region.

Since the acquisition of all the Rio-Tinto-Alcan 80 per cent shares in the Ghana Bauxite Company, Bosai has put forward an aggressive two-pronged investment strategy, with the objective to increasing bauxite production to 1.5 million tonnes by 2011, and also establish the Alumina Refinery Plant in Ghana by 2014, to make good use of the bauxite. Although the plant is expected to be completed in 2014, President Mills want the project fast-tracked to aid rapid growth in Ghana, as part of the 'Better Ghana' agenda.

At a meeting, President Mills, with executives of the Bosai Group, after signing the MoU, expressed appreciation to the company for having confidence in the Ghanaian economy. Lauding their commitment to expand investment in Ghana, President Mills said the government would cooperate with them to ensure that the projects become beneficial to the company and Ghanaians.

The Managing Director of the Bosai Mineral Group, Zhilun Yuan, initialled the MoU, while the Minister of Trade and Industry, Hanna Tetteh, signed for Ghana.

Briefing President Mills on the operations of the company, Mr. Yuan, said Bosai aims to promote more direct investment in many sectors in Ghana.

At a luncheon held in honour of President Mills by the Mayor of Chongqing, one of the well-developed provinces where the Bosai Group is situated, President Mills thanked the Mayor, Huang Qifan, for encouraging companies in his province to invest in Ghana.

The support, he said, was indicative of the genuineness of the cooperation and friendship between the two countries.

COTE D'IVOIRE

Ivory Coast group wants UN flexibility on diamond ban

The United Nations should ease its embargo on diamonds from Ivory Coast to allow expert-monitored selling points that would stop miners selling them on the black market as happens now, a campaign group said.

But Global Witness, a London-based advocacy group supporting the Kimberly Process to stop diamonds funding wars, said the lifting of the embargo would be unwise unless it could be guaranteed New Forces rebels did not profit from the diamonds. The U.N. Security Council slapped an embargo on Ivorian diamonds in 2005 to prevent "blood diamonds" fuelling a conflict that broke out in 2002 and has left the top cocoa grower divided.

Ivory Coast's diamond mines are all in rebel-held zones.

Elections meant to end the stalemate and reunite the country are five years overdue, but currently scheduled for Oct. 31.

But Michel Yoboue, head of the Abidjan-based Extractive Industries Advocacy Research Group (GRPIE), which works for greater transparency in mining, said thousands of miners continued to dig for stones, which they often sold on to smugglers for a fraction of the market price.

"We are calling on the U.N. Security Council to be flexible with the embargo in order to ease the suffering of miners, prevent smuggling and encourage flows of money into the country," he said over the weekend.

"The embargo is not stopping the extraction and when they mine and there is no buying centre, the miners are forced to sell through illegal smugglers," he added, saying most of the stones were exported through neighbouring Guinea and Mali.

Before Ivory Coast's war and subsequent political stalemate, the country produced about 300,000 carats of diamond worth \$25 million, but Yoboue said more mines had been opened since then.

He said thousands of miners were active in Ivory Coast and they were forced to sell stones for as little as 20 percent of the market price due to the embargo.

The embargo comes on top of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme, which was set up in 2003 to try and prevent the trade in diamonds sold to fund conflicts.

Campaigners last year warned the scheme was failing.

MONITORING

The U.N. panel of expert monitoring the embargo on Ivory Coast has also said that the trade in diamonds is flourishing and access to the stones, which could be used to buy arms, was as important as ever for armed groups.

But, pointing out that there is no actual fighting going on, Yoboue backed a plan to open two purchases offices in Seguela and Tortiya, two main diamond regions, which would be linked to an office in Abidjan and monitored by experts from the government, U.N. and the Kimberly Process.

"This would allow the government to have real figures on the current diamond production, improve traceability and collect money," Yoboue added.

Annie Dunneback, a campaigner for Global Witness, said such a move could fund the rebels if not done properly.

"Our information indicates that the Force Nouvelles (New Forces) are benefitting from the sale of these diamonds and the country ... there are revenue streams going into (their) coffers," she said.

"If the govt. could credibly demonstrate that they have been able to set up diamond buying centres in the vicinity of the diamond mines ... under government control, then it would be reasonable, but ... they don't have full control over those areas."

Ivory Coast to revive tourism after polls: minister

Ivory Coast could again be a popular tourist spot and attract millions of tourists annually if elections finally end the political instability that scared them off, its tourism minister said on Thursday.

Green and tropical with miles of white sandy beaches, Ivory Coast was once West Africa's show piece as it thrived on cocoa exports and became a popular tourist destination, especially for citizens of former colonial master France.

But a 2002-3 war left the top cocoa grower divided, with the north controlled by rebels. Elections meant to end the conflict and reunite the country are scheduled for October 31, but have been delayed multiple times in the past.

Violent anti-French protests in late 2004, after a row between President Laurent Gbagbo and a French peacekeeping force, scared off thousands of expatriates and led foreign ministries everywhere to put travel warnings on Ivory Coast.

"Clearly the crisis has had an impact on tourism and even just numbers of visitors here," Tourism Minister Sidiki Konate told Reuters in an interview on the sidelines of a conference to relaunch tourism at a lagoon-side hotel.

"But the elections will enable us to retake our rightful place. We are prepared to receive 2-3 million tourists."

Konate said the country gets at least 500,000 tourist visitors annually now, but ministry officials say those figures include people coming from around the region to visit relatives, with only 250,000 of that total arriving by air, and only a fraction of those are high-spending Western tourists.

The country currently makes around 100 billion CFA francs a year from tourism, they said.

Contrast Kenya, whose famed safari parks with big game like lions and elephants tend to draw a million mostly Western tourists a year by air and netted it \$800 million in 2007.

Despite its importance as an economic hub, airport officials say Ivory Coast receives two thirds of the air passengers of Senegal or Ghana, both smaller economies.

Tourism is a tiny part of Ivory Coast's economy when compared with cocoa, oil or other commodities, but Konate said the ministry had drawn up a strategy to change that.

"We will take measures to attract investment in tourism and create tourist zones with massively reduced taxation," he said, adding that visas would be made easier and funds would be freed up for tourism and hospitality training.

Another hurdle is Ivory Coast's ailing national parks, which have become overrun with militia groups, poachers, loggers and illegal cocoa farmers.

"During wartime, we concentrated only on security. Now we can liberate the parks from negligence," Konate said.

Ivory Coast petrol stockist to double capacity

Ivorian petroleum stocking company GESTOCI will invest \$400 million over the next five years to double its capacity to 680,000 tonnes, including building a new unit for stocking petroleum products in the major port of San Pedro, its director general said late on Thursday.

The stocking company is 12.5 percent owned by the Ivorian government, and the rest owned by five oil companies with local operations: Total, Shell, Texaco, a Chevron subsidiary, Oil Libya and Petroci.

GESTOCI director general Michel N'Guettia said the company had signed a six month renewable contract with Total worth 1 billion CFA francs (\$2 million) to stock fuels such as gasoline, diesel and jet fuel.

The company had 400,000 cubic metres of capacity in the cities of Abidjan, Yamoussoukro and Bouake, but 60,000 cubic metres of that was destroyed when Bouake and much of northern Ivory Coast fell to rebel hands in a 2002-03 war.

The investments would add a total of 340,000 cubic metres or double current capacity, including rebuilding the Bouake plant to full capacity.

The new San Pedro unit, scheduled to be completed within two years will add 250,000 cubic metres to total capacity, N'Guettia said, while another project in Yamoussoukro would add 30,000 cubic metres.

"Lots of companies were coming to us so we were obliged to make big investments to bring us up to international standards," N'Guettia said, but he declined to name the companies that would be enlisted to construct the extra space.

The company stocks fuel for a number of energy companies from Europe, the United States and Nigeria and serves half a dozen oil importing countries in the region.

"We have all the financing for the construction of the storage site at the port of San Pedro, which is very important for us," he said. "It will allow us to serve directly Mali, Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone."

San Pedro is a major export hub, handling around half of the cocoa in the world's top producer.

Ivory Coast produces only a small amount of oil, about 60,000 barrels a day, but is home to one of Africa's biggest oil refineries -- the 80,000 barrel-per-day SIR plant.

N'Guettia said investment would most likely increase further once Ivory Coast goes ahead with elections scheduled for Oct. 31, meant to reunite a nation currently half controlled by rebels, following years of political crisis.

SIERRA LEONE

Sierra Leone sees sugar, palm oil key to growth

Sierra Leone sees sugar and palm oil farming being as important as its other resources as it aims for growth, the head of its investment board said on Monday, saying it has learned lessons from its diamond-fuelled war.

Conflict gems funded rebels and warlords in the West African country's 1991-2002 civil wars that killed more than 50,000 people, frequently cited as one of the most extreme examples of how resources have proved a curse to some developing states.

But it says it has revolutionised its investment environment since, tightening anti-corruption legislation, restoring the rule of law and holding an investment roadshow in London last year that it says massively increased interest in the country.

Some 40 percent of interest received by the investment board was in agricultural projects, Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency chairman Patrick Caulker said.

"We have made very many improvements since the war," he told Reuters in an interview on the sidelines of the London School of Economics Growth Week event.

"In terms of growth, we are very focused on agriculture -- particularly palm oil and sugar cane. Much of the country is employed in the agricultural sector so when it comes to poverty reduction, it is particularly effective."

He said there were no up-to-date figures on foreign direct investment, but it had unquestionably increased substantially from 2008's \$80 million.

Firms interested in investing in sugar cane included Britain's Tate & Lyle, South Africa's Ilovo and firms from Brazil, he said, while Asian firms including those from the Philippines and Indonesia might take the lead in palm oil production.

"They have the experience," Caulker said.

Sierra Leone had previously talked up a proposed \$1.5 billion deal from Chinese firm Shandong Iron & Steel to buy a stake in an iron ore mine as key to the economy.

SAFER THAN KENYA?

But Britain-listed firm African Minerals, which would be Shandong's partner in the mine project, said last week the deal had been delayed due to problems getting the teams reviewing the deal to the country.

Caulker said he did not have details of when the deal would go ahead, but that he believed it would do so.

"They are just sorting a few things out," he said. "We hope it will still go ahead -- it is very important to the country."

He said he did not yet have details of the scale of Sierra Leone's oil reserves or when they might enter production. The find is seen as part of a longer string of oilfields off the West African coast including Ghana.

The find is held by several Western oil firms including U.S.-listed Anadarko Petroleum, Spain's Repsol YPF, Australia's Woodside Petroleum and Britain's Tullow.

As well as tapping developed Western investors from Europe and the U.S. and emerging Asian countries, Caulker said interest was also coming from within Africa, particularly Nigeria.

Relatively peaceable elections had helped to build a new reputation for stability, he said. The political risk premiums from the World Bank's Multinational Investment Guarantee

Agency -- offering insurance against risks such as expropriation or political violence -- priced Sierra Leone as safer than Kenya.

"That shows we have lower political risk," he said.

ENERGY

GHANA

China gives Ghana over \$3bn loan

President John Evans Atta Mills and his Chinese counterpart, Hu Jintao, on Monday signed a deal for China to give Ghana a loan of three billion dollars to develop her energy sector. Specific areas to be targeted under the deal include infrastructure development, job creation and the development and other derivatives of oil and gas.

The package, which would be disbursed through the China Development Bank, constitutes the first phase of Chinese assistance, which would start rolling out in the next six months after the Government of Ghana has devised a framework for the package.

The deal was announced following close-door bilateral talks between President Mills and the Chinese President held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, on the second day of President Mills' five-day state visit to China.

In addition to the three billion-dollar package, China would also give Ghana preferential buyers' credit of 260 million dollars for the expansion of the Kpong Water Works project and another loan of \$150 million for Ghana's e-governance project.

Briefing journalists after the meeting, Mr. Koku Anyidoho, Head of Communications at the Office of the President, said President Mills committed himself to supervising the operational areas of the facility. Consequently, the project areas are clearly and comprehensively demarcated for monitoring.

"On the basis of equality, mutual benefits consultation, the Government of Ghana and China Development Bank shall set up a long-term strategic co-operation through a long-term project financing for infrastructural development and have agreed to bring export competitiveness and co-operation in the oil and gas sectors, their derivatives and the agricultural sectors," Mr. Anyidoho said. President Mills, in his remarks before the meeting went into a closed-door session, commended the Chinese leader for his astute leadership and marketing of China to the world.

He recalled that they had exchanged visits when they both served their nations as Vice Presidents, and shared fond memories of activities in those days for the mutual benefits of their people. President Jintao observed that the relationship between the two nations dated back to the last 50 years, adding that the visit would make for new opportunities in the relations of their nations. President Jintao thanked Ghana for sharing the pain when China was recently hit by a landslide.

In all, eight agreements that cover Chinese financial assistance, transfer of medical equipment, malaria drugs from China to Ghana, would be signed.

Earlier in the day, President Mills laid a wreath at the Monument of the Peoples Heroes

and visited the Chinese National Olympic Stadium called the Bird's Nest. On arrival in China on Sunday, President Mills stressed Sino-Ghana relations and collaboration for mutual benefits.

He said it was time the two nations, and for that matter China and Africa, got together to chart a new path because they had similar backgrounds and past experiences, stressing that collaboration among them would help to achieve the common objectives of raising the living standards of the people.

In a brief statement on his arrival at the Beijing Capital International Airport, President Mills told the welcoming party, led by the Chinese Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister, Zhat Jin that Ghana welcomed collaboration and improve ties with China to accelerate her level of development.

HUMAN RIGHTS/ GENDER/ SOCIAL ISSUES

GHANA

Signing of STX Housing deal postponed indefinitely

The signing of the much-talked about STX Korea Housing deal between the government of Ghana and Korea, suffered a major setback on Monday September 20.

The Minister for Water Resources, Works and Housing Mr. Alban Kingsford Sumana Bagbin and a delegation from STX Korea could not sign the deal at the Osu Castle due to some legal discrepancies.

The signing would have paved way for the initial construction of 200, 000 Housing Units for the country's security services.

A Deputy Information Minister James Agyenim Boateng told Citi News' Presidential Correspondent Richard Mensah, that the agreement had been referred to the Attorney General for advice and a subsequent correction of the legal discrepancies before the deal is signed.

Both the Korean and Ghanaian officials are currently in a meeting to deal with the anomalies.

Although it is unclear what the legal discrepancies could be, Mr. Agyenim Boateng said the concerns were raised by both parties.

It is now not clear when the signing will take place since the irregularities may take a little more time to be corrected.

The STX Housing project, would not only provide adequate accommodation to Ghanaian workers, but would also create jobs for a number of artisans in the country.

The Korean government has promised the project would be speedily discharged with sufficient quality to meet deadlines.

FIDA wants more women elected in upcoming Assembly Elections

The International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) Ghana, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is working to increase the participation of women in governance and decision making especially with the upcoming District Assembly election. It aims at creating space for women's interaction with governance machinery to push women's concerns onto the political agenda of government and political parties. This will be done in a manner that will trigger timely and targeted multi-dimensional actions to eliminate discrimination against women in political governance. Mad Saratu Mahama, the Northern Regional Coordinator of FIDA, said this at a durbar of chiefs and traditional leaders on women participation in decision making in Tamale at the weekend. She called for more women to be given the chance and be voted for in the upcoming District Assembly election to deepen the country's democratic governance. Mad Mahama said women's participation in politics had been low because most women lack skills, confidence and political support. She said financial resources were also a constraint to women since in most patriarchal societies women cannot own property nor have money of their own. She said there are only 18 members of parliament out of 230 and the Tamale Metropolitan Assembly has only 6 women out of 78. Madam Saratu said although the number of women in politics was increasing, vital work remained to be done in order to attain true gender equality in governance. She said the country had emerged as a good example of a country working towards the consolidation of democracy but it must eliminate the barriers to give more women the opportunity to contribute to governance. Madam Adishetu Issahaku, Gender Desk Officer of the Tamale Metropolis, said women were known to be having good lobbying skills and when given the opportunity to participate in politics, they could contribute to the country's development.

Two organizations to launch political project for women

The Foundation for Security and Development in Africa (FOSDA) in collaboration with the Upper West region's Department of Women of the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs will on Wednesday launch a project in Wa dubbed "Towards the Economic and Political Empowerment of Women in Ghana". A statement issued by the two organizations at Wa said the project seeks to address the severe under representation of women at all levels of government and decision making in the deprived northern regions of Ghana.

About 45 critical stakeholders from the Northern, Upper West, Brong-Ahafo and Volta regions would be brought together at a workshop to review, validate and launch the project.

It has the objective of increasing the knowledge, self-confidence and relevant skills of

selected women to become successful candidates for elections at local, district and parliament levels. This, the statement, said would be achieved through training courses and dialogue to ensure community buy-in while political parties would be engaged in debates on non-partisan basis to persuade them on the importance of supporting women candidates. The project would address women's rights and interests including natural resources services such as education and increase their representation and participation in decision-making at all levels.

Gas expert pushes for local content in oil industry

Dr Robert Adjaye, an oil and gas expert has expressed the need for Ghana to develop the skills of Ghanaians to take advantage of the fledgling industry.

This, according to him, is the only way the country could maximise gains from its local content policy, which envisages a target of 90 per cent local participation in the oil and gas industry by 2020. He observed that developing a local content policy would not necessarily increase indigenous participation in the industry, because it is easy for multi-national oil companies to get around the provisions, if Ghanaian enterprises lack the prerequisite requirements to do business with them.

Dr Adjaye gave the advice at a day's workshop in Accra to educate the business community on the opportunities in the emerging oil and gas sector and certification requirements in the industry. It was organised by the Private Enterprise Foundation in partnership with the Ghana Journalists Association. The local content policy is a set of rules established by a government to assure that indigenous companies and individuals participate actively in petroleum operations to achieve a number of goals.

These include: the transfer of knowledge to host-country citizens; capacity-building of local companies; creation of local jobs; and development and growth of the local economy. Dr Adjaye noted that experience from successful countries like the United Kingdom and Norway had proved that the oil and gas sector could be the engine for economic growth, industry and employment and enhance general economic development.

He suggested that policies on the oil and gas sector should give preference for local industries and such intervention should focus primarily on targeted training to build the capacity of Ghanaians. Dr Adjaye, who is the Rector of the Accra-based Petroleum Skills Development Institute, said local companies should be encouraged to form partnerships with educational institutions to develop the needed training centres and internship.

He also proposed the setting up of local companies to form strategic alliances among themselves and with Foreign Service providers to increase technology base and expertise, as well as obtain international standards and certification for their goods and services. Dr Adjaye called for the establishment of an independent petroleum regulatory authority to ensure the judicious management and utilisation of the oil revenue.

Such a body, he said, would guarantee that huge premium and responsibilities are placed on Ghana's successive authorities to wisely manage the oil wealth. The oil expert

however cautioned private enterprises not to rely solely on government interventions to increase their participation in the oil and gas industry, and strive to take control of their own development.

Although significant revenue is envisaged from Ghana's oil discovery, experts suggest that expected money would have minimal impact on the economy if local companies are not actively engaged in providing the various services required by the sector. Issues of capacity, timeliness and quality assurance, according to the experts may hinder the involvement of local entrepreneurs in the industry.

LIBERIA

Liberian Leader, Addressing UN Debate, Cites Corruption as Biggest Challenge

Tackling corruption and mismanagement represents the greatest challenge that Liberia faces as it continues to rebuild its economy and society after the United Nations helped it end decades of either civil war or misrule, the country's President told the General Assembly today.

Addressing the second day of the annual debate, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said Liberia had introduced a code of conduct for public service staff, new procurement and financial management systems and strengthened "the pillars of integrity, all aimed at addressing long-standing corruption."

But more measures are needed to combat corruption in the impoverished West African nation, she said in a speech at UN Headquarters in New York.

"Reform of the judicial system and efforts to change an inherited value system are additional measures that are under way."

Ms. Johnson Sirleaf also cited cross-border crimes in West Africa, particularly human trafficking and the illicit drug trade, as another key threat to Liberia's redevelopment.

"We also continue to face the tensions associated with the thousands of our youth who, lacking skills, are still unemployed," she noted. "Moreover, we continue today to manage the raised expectations in the demand from villages and communities across the country for essential infrastructure such as roads, schools and clinics."

Last week the Security Council extended the mandate of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) by another year and authorized the peacekeeping force to provide support to the Government for the staging of presidential and legislative elections next year.

Ms. Johnson Sirleaf said the polls "will mark a groundbreaking turning point. It will complete Liberia's transition to full constitutional rule and participatory democracy it is absolutely essential that everything is done to ensure a peaceful, legitimate and transparent process."

She stressed that "the root cause of civil crisis in Liberia has been the consistent failure of democratic transitions which would usher in governments elected by the people."

But she also emphasized that the country has made substantial progress since the end of its civil war in 2003, such as reform to its security sector, the establishment of a vibrant

environment for free expression and association, and the attraction of investment in mining, agriculture and forestry industries.

"Liberia has no prisoners of conscience in detention, nor does anyone have cause to flee in fear for their life or safety on account of their political belief and association," the President said.

UN Chief Holds Talks with Liberian President on Corruption, Debt and Human Rights

Liberia's progress in tackling corruption, boosting human rights and consolidating peace since the end of the civil war in 2003 were the focus of talks today between the country's President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

In a meeting on the margins of the General Assembly's high-level segment at UN Headquarters in New York, the two officials also discussed preparations for presidential and parliamentary elections next year in the West African country and reform of Liberia's justice and security sectors.

Mr. Ban welcomed the long-awaited creation of Liberia's Independent National Commission on Human Rights and voiced hope it would start work quickly, according to information released by his spokesperson.

He also congratulated Liberia for reaching the completion point under the Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative, in which countries are eligible for special assistance from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In addition, Mr. Ban and the President discussed the future of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), which has helped bring stability to Liberia since the end of the brutal civil war.

COTE D'IVOIRE

Ivory Coast starts paying former rebels for peace

Ivory Coast began paying former rebel soldiers on Wednesday who disarmed ahead of elections set for next month, bringing the West African nation a step closer to ending years of crisis.

The New Forces rebels had long feared the government would renege on their promises to hand thousands of former rebel fighters payouts meant to help them adjust to civilian life, as agreed under a 2007 peace accord.

Karna Soro, head of the New Forces demobilisation programme, told Reuters 400 rebels had received payments on Wednesday of \$100,00 CFA francs (\$200) each in Korogho town.

"There is a real feeling of joy for us," Soro said. "As soon as they are demobilised and they received their money, all will be calm. We are assured payments will not stop until complete, which will greatly reduce tensions."

The world's top cocoa grower has been half run by rebels since a botched 2002 coup attempt against President Laurent Gbagbo, but elections aiming to reunify the country and draw a line under the conflict are scheduled for Oct. 31.

Around 4,000 in Korogho would receive cash in the coming days, Soro said. After that other regions would follow.

At the end of last month, the rebels said they had completed a programme of temporary disarmament and gathering of their troops into barracks ahead of the polls, but they complained that the promised financing was not forthcoming.

The rebels estimate their numbers of demobilised troops at over 20,000, though some diplomats say they are fewer.

Some 5,000 of them are supposed to be incorporated into the national army, with others employed in various government projects, according to an agreement signed by the government, rebels and opposition.

SIERRA LEONE

Women Increasingly Joining Ranks of Soldiers

A woman took position alongside male soldiers at the graveside of a fallen colleague. She positioned her AK47 on her shoulder, and on command fired into the grey sky with the others.

Mariatu Sesay became at that moment the first woman in the Sierra Leone army to take part in a 21-gun salute to honour a dead soldier.

Onlookers were not used to seeing women in such a role. Yet women are becoming a more common sight in the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), after a gender policy introduced to ensure equal opportunities, with support from the Accra-based Women Peace and Security Network (WISPEN) and the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

Sierra Leone is a patriarchal society where women and girls are subjected to structural discrimination by practice, custom and law. The subjugation of women was worsened by the 1991-2002 war and its aftermath. A 2004 report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) noted the army's role in the systematic rape of women and girls as a strategy to sow terror.

But it is a changed army now. "We are breaking the boundaries and barriers that limit our women in the RSLAF," Chief of Defence Staff, Brigadier-General Robert Yira Koroma tells IPS. Koroma said the army has brought in flexible standards so women can clear the physical recruitment processes.

There are an estimated 300 women in the army, of a total troop strength of 8,500, says Col. Michael Samura, in charge of personnel. And they are stepping further and further. "We have initially sent seven female soldiers to Darfur under the UN peacekeeping operations. For the next deployment we have prepared 20 female soldiers to be sent to Darfur. This I think is phenomenal, given the fact that it has never happened in the history of our army," Samura said. And Koroma says there are now four female platoon commanders.

The RSLAF is also putting a conducive workplace environment in place. "We have instituted a board to handle sexual harassment complaints," says Gen. Koroma. "We have also established a board responsible for promotion so no officer will be able to victimise

any soldier, especially female soldiers. There is a chain of redress, so any soldier could exhaust this chain to seek relief."

The big challenge is recruitment. "There is still the problem of getting quality women to apply for the army," says Gen. Koroma. "A large proportion of women in this country are uneducated but the army cannot lower its standards in order to absorb more women." The educational requirement is a basic school certificate.

A senior secondary school certificate is required for officer posts.

Brigadier-General Kestoria Kabia, who is the first female combatant brigadier-general in the sub-region, tells IPS "we are trying to get as many women as possible who are interested in the army to join the force and also see to it that those who are already in the army operate under favourable conditions and are not discriminated against in any form, structurally or otherwise."

Youth Unemployment and Corruption among Nation's Biggest Hurdles - UN

Although Sierra Leone has made strides in consolidating peace and fostering national reconciliation, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says that the West African nation must address the issues of high youth unemployment and corruption to ensure that the gains are not reversed.

In his latest report to the Security Council on the work of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL), Mr. Ban notes that "immense challenges" remain in generating jobs for young people, especially in the current economic climate.

Currently, some 800,000 young people are unemployed, employed without remuneration or underemployed, he writes, stressing that reversing this situation requires stepped up international investment.

The country's former minister of fisheries and marine resources is still on trial for alleged corruption, and the number of cases being investigated by the Anti-Corruption Commission continues to be steady.

UNIPSIL was established by the Security Council in 2008 to continue UN efforts to augment peace in Sierra Leone following the end of the country's civil war in 2002. It has the mandate of providing political advice to foster peace and political consolidation, offering support and training to the national police and security forces and strengthening democratic institutions.

The Secretary-General pointed to three significant developments that could potentially greatly impact UNIPSIL's efforts to shore up peace in Sierra Leone which occurred in the March-August reporting period.

Firstly, he writes, the country is already gearing up for the 2012 elections, and secondly, the Government has speeded up initiatives to wrap up several important mining agreements, which could allow Sierra Leone to become a major mineral exporter.

Lastly, presidential elections in neighbouring Guinea could potentially usher in a new democracy in the Mano River Basin area of West Africa.

"While generating great benefits for Sierra Leone, these developments could also carry considerable inherent risks that bring new and complex challenges, which the Government, political parties and other political stakeholders in Sierra Leone will have to anticipate and manage in the immediate future," the report notes.

GEO-STRATEGIC ISSUES

CAMEROON

Bakassi - FG Accuses Cameroon of Breaching Agreement

The National Emergency Management Agency, NEMA, has lamented the incessant harassment of Nigerians by Cameroonian gendarmes in Bakassi Peninsula, saying the action amounted to a willful breach of the Green Tree Agreement brokered by the United Nations as part of measures to sustained peace in the area.

The acting Director General of The Agency, Dr. Charles Agbo, made the charge at the weekend in Calabar during a Joint meeting of officials of NEMA and other stakeholders in emergency management towards finding solutions to the challenges of displaced Nigerians from Bakassi. Cameroon, after the transfer of authority to it by Nigeria, guarantees to Nigerian nationals living in the Bakassi Peninsula the exercise of the fundamental rights and freedoms enshrined in international human rights law and in other relevant provisions of international law.

Under the article three of the GTA agreement, Cameroon is bound not to force Nigerian nationals living in the Bakassi Peninsula to leave the Zone or to change their nationality. The authorities of the country is also to respect the culture, language and beliefs of Nigerians as well as respect the measure to protect Nigerian nationals living in the zone from any harassment or harm.

In a statement signed by NEMA's Head of Public Relations, Mr. Yushau A. Shuaib, the DG was reported to have said the Cameroonian authorities have abided by the Green Tree Agreement (GTA) more in breach than in honour.

According to the DG, "incessant harassment, extortion, torture and even killings of Nigerians living in Bakassi Peninsular triggered off their mass exodus into resettlement camps in Cross River state while a few others preferred to go to their home states."

The NEMA boss further disclosed that in reaction to the ugly development the federal legislators passed a resolution requesting NEMA to immediately resettle returnees from Bakassi.

He said the federal government had provided 400 housing units of flats at the resettlement estate in Ikang in Cross River State, adding that NEMA has also provided humanitarian relief assistance to the returnees as well as the provision of income generating tools in the form of fishing nets, grinding machines, sewing machines, hair dryers and utility boats."

Governor Liyel Imoke of Cross River State while commending the initiative of NEMA over displaced people from Bakassi urged the agency to relate with relevant agencies to ensure that the people of Bakasi were fully settled.

Business and Politics in the Muslim World
West African News Monitoring
Weekly Report 138
19, Sept 2010-25, Sept 2010
By Mustapha Shafi
Presented on 29, September 2010

Table of Contents

Headlines	2
Detail of the news	4
China-African Relations	4
Pan-African issues	10
Nigeria News	13
Other W/African State News	47

Headlines

1 China-African Relations:

- More Chinese Doctors for Mozambique
- Kidnapped Chinese engineer released in Sudan's Darfur
- Efforts underway to boost up Ethio-China trade exchange volume: Ambassador.
- Zambia eyes Chinese funds for power plant
- China gives Ghana over \$3bn loan

2 Pan-African issues:

- UN, AU launch joint task force on peace, security
- ECOWAS backs UN resolution on women's role in peace, security
- Africa Makes Substantial Progress on MDGs, but Much Still to be done.

Nigeria:

1. Political News:

- Nigeria Election: Jonathan or Babangida?
- Nigerian Party Primary Suspended, Giving North More Time
- INEC Affirms May 29 Handover Date
- Shift in polls dates get more support
- 2011: Lawyers Back INEC on Election Postponement
- Jonathan's Rally Was Rented Crowd, Says Saraki
- Jonathan Group: May 29 Handover Date Sacrosanct
- I'm not desperate to be President, Says IBB
- Campaign Funds: Respond to Allegations, Atiku Tells Jonathan
- ACN Does not believe in Zoning, Says Tinubu
- Nobel laureate Soyinka starts political party.
- Nigerian Presidential Candidates Campaign for Youth Vote.
- Atiku: Jonathan's Aspiration Divisive

2. Economy:

- NLC under Pressure to Protest over New Pay, Says Omar

- Sacked Workers Sue NSE over Wrongful Termination

3. Energy:

- Banks Plan IPP to Generate Own Power

4. Environment:

- Nigeria gold rush sees 200 children killed in outbreak of lead poisoning
- Northern Nigeria flooding 'displaces two million'
- How FG Cancelled N74 Billion Kano-Abuja Railway Project

5. Immigration/Refugee/Idps:

- U.S. Strikes-Off Nigeria from Major Drug Nations' List
- NAPTIP to Repatriate Nigerians Stranded In Mali

6. Health:

7. Human rights/Gender/social issues:

- Rebels: Three abducted French nationals, one hostage found

8. Geo-Strategic issues:

- The millennium development goals need progressive UK leadership
- Japan Grants Nigeria \$190,177 for Water, Others

Other West African States

Cape Verde:

Chad:

Gambia:

- Gambian Vice-President Women involved in peace process...H7

Guinea- Bissau:

- Nation Requires Sustained International Support, General Assembly Hears

Mali:

- Two Malian women promoted to rank of Brigadier-General...H7
- Pockets of extreme vulnerability persist...H4
- Doctors and vets work together in north...H6

- Cured meat as a cure.....H6

Mauritania :

- Al-Qaeda Offshoot Threatens Country....H7
- Army Attacks Suspected Al Qaeda Fighters....H7

Niger:

- Gov't Calls on UN to Observe Upcoming Referendum and Elections...H1
- Web message says al Qaeda affiliate claims abduction....H7
- France confirms al-Qaeda kidnap at Niger uranium mine....H7
- France Believes Hostages Captured in Niger Are Still Alive....H7
- France: No Military Rescue for Hostages in Niger....H7

Sénégal:

- CLIMATE CHANGE: Adaptation Fund starts delivering.....H4
- UBA secures 234 Million Euro Oil and Gas Financing Deal in Sénégal....H2

Details of the News

1 China-African Relations:

More Chinese Doctors for Mozambique

The Mozambican and Chinese governments signed an agreement in Maputo on Monday under which a team of 12 Chinese doctors will work in Maputo Central Hospital, the largest health unit in the country.

The doctors included surgeons, anesthetists', and ear, nose and throat specialists. In addition to providing care for the public, the Chinese team will also help train Mozambican specialists.

Speaking at the ceremony, Deputy Health Minister Nazira Abdula said that this partnership provides an opportunity to learn from Chinese experience in health and development.

“Through this partnership, we want to obtain the experience of this country in attaining rapid development, such as they have managed over the past 30 years”, she said.

For his part, the Chinese ambassador, Huang Songfu, said his country's government is always willing to help the Mozambican people in their fight against poverty, since a precarious health system is one of the forms that poverty takes.

“In the area of health, shortage of doctors and of medicines is one kind of poverty”, said Huang, “and the Chinese government is thus pleased to offer medical assistance to this country”.

He added that the two countries will also exchange experiences in the field of “traditional medicine”.

Since 1976 China has sent teams of doctors to Mozambique every two years. This is the 18th such group of doctors.

Kidnapped Chinese engineer released in Sudan’s Darfur

A Chinese engineer kidnapped last week in Chad near Sudan’s border had been released today, Sudanese army and former Darfur rebel group announced Friday.

The engineer was captured in the Chadian region of Ennedi, less than ten kilometers from the border with Sudan, where he was working on a project to supply water to the town of Am-Djarass.

"The Joint Sudanese-Chadian forces have managed on mid-Friday to free the Chinese worker who was abducted by a Chadian group days ago and led into the Sudanese borders," Sudan Armed Forces spokesperson Al-Sawarmy Khaled said in a statement released Friday evening.

Meanwhile, the former rebel Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM), led by Minni Arko Minnawi, earlier today announced their group had handed over the Chinese engineer to the joint force at Um Baro area in North Darfur State after freeing him from the kidnappers.

"The Chinese engineer was freed without resort to violence. The kidnapers fled and left the Chinese hostage when they saw our forces," said Zunoon Suleiman, spokesperson of SLM-Minnawi.

No details are available about the identity of the abductors who took their hostage into the restive region of Darfur.

The Sudanese army spokesperson said the Chinese engineer has been transported to Ndjamena at a request by the Chadian President Idris Deby," stressing that "the Chinese worker is in a good health.

Sudan and Chad formed a joint force last February to monitor the joint border in a bid to curb the activities of the rebel groups across the border. Recently the command of the force was transferred to the Chadian army.

Efforts underway to boost up Ethio-China trade exchange volume: Ambassador

The Chinese ambassador to Ethiopia Gu Xiaojie said his government is taking various measures to strike the balance on the trade volume exchange between Ethiopia and China, which is in favor of his country.

In an exclusive interview with ENA the ambassador said China is taking a number of policy measures including zero tariff treatment for developing nations and organizing exhibition and trade fair that benefit Ethiopia.

He said until mid of 2010, the trade volume exchange has reached 785 million USD which showed 27.6 percent increase when compared last year's same period.

He said the exchange in 2009 was 1.467 billion USD which showed an increase of 11.8 percent from the preceding year.

The ambassador said China's import from Ethiopia is 215 million USD, which hit an increase of 163 percent when compared to the previous year.

The trade volume is increasing that shows more interaction and more goods exchanged between the two governments, however, he said figures are in favor of China.

The ambassador said the Chinese investment projects registered in Ethiopia has reached 1230 amounting to 2.5 billion USD quoting the data from the Ethiopian Investment Agency.

He said owing to Ethiopia's economic growth registered over the past few years the Chinese investor's engagement has been increasing in various sectors including manufacturing and communication infrastructures.

He said the government of Ethiopia is embarking upon a five year National Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) which outlines the agriculture and industry sectors to be a major source of growth.

The Chinese government has rich experience that managed to feed its massive population, he said and adding his government would support in this regard.

He said his government is providing support for human resource development of Ethiopia through capacity building and technology transfer.

He said close to 42 Ethiopians are getting full scholarship to China a year besides many short term training courses in various fields.

Ambassador Gu said as the plan needs coordinated effort of the government, people and development partners, ongoing discussion among various stakeholders on the Plan is commendable.

Zambia eyes Chinese funds for power plant

Felix Mutati, Zambia's trade minister, says China is playing a significant role in his nation's economic development.

Sinohydro is already engaged in building a \$450 million extension of the Karibu North Bank power station, creating a further capacity of 360 mW.

Mutati, who is Zambia's minister of commerce, trade and industry, was speaking at the Beijing American Club prior to addressing a meeting of the Association of Certified Chartered Accountants (ACCA).

He said the Chinese investment was vital to the development of the economy since the country lacked funding of its own to build power capacity.

"That level of financial resource takes a long time to find. It can take five or six years to build a power station and by the time you build it, you find it is inadequate for your needs. We are constrained by our ability to find the financial resources," he said.

China has had a long history of involvement in Zambia.

After a meeting in Beijing between then Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda, Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere and Chairman Mao Zedong in the 1960s, China helped fund the 1,800-km Tazara railway line between the two countries.

This enabled Zambia to export its copper without going through unfriendly neighboring countries.

Since 2000, trade has shot up between Zambia and China, with the African country's exports increasing from around \$20 million to around \$900 million last year. China's exports to Zambia in 2009, mainly machinery and pharmaceuticals, were worth around \$100 million.

China's involvement in Zambia has mainly been in the copper industry, where Chinese investment accounts for up to 20 percent of Zambia's domestic capacity.

Around 55 percent of the Zambian economy is dependent on mineral resources, mainly copper.

Following a meeting between then Zambian President Levy Mwanawasa and Chinese President Hu Jintao in 2006, China agreed to invest \$900 million in special economic zones.

The first of these at Chambishi has 13 Chinese-owned companies, mainly engaged in copper processing. The companies employ 6,000 people, of which only 150 are Chinese.

Mutati also had meetings in Beijing with senior figures from the State-owned China Nonferrous Metal Company (CNMC) about securing an additional \$100 million of funding to build a second zone, the Lusaka South Sub Zone, on which work is expected to start next year.

“They indicated to us that they will be able to procure the extra money in order to finish the zone,” he said.

Rebalancing economy

Mutati said Chinese investment had helped rebalance the Zambian economy, making it less dependent on exports of copper ore and helping it to develop value-added manufacturing processes so that it could also sell copper products such as wire.

He rejected perceptions in the West that China’s involvement in Africa was exploitative.

“What you get by way of comments is that China is extractive and taking away while leaving nothing back. When you look at what is happening on the ground, they are reinvesting profit to add value and take industry on to the next level,” Mutati said.

He said Zambia was typical of many African countries as it still failed to keep up with the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) nations.

“I think there are a number of reasons why Africa continues to lag behind. We tend to be primarily exporters of commodities which are very vulnerable to price shocks,” he said.

Mutati added China’s investment helps lessen this vulnerability by investing in higher value added processes.

He said the wealth generated by the economic zones had fuelled Zambia’s construction and tourism sectors.

“Higher standards of living in the economic zones mean that people can afford to buy houses” and this is promoting the construction industry, he said.

“I would say that China has been significant, if not central, to the development of the economy.”

Mutati, the only fellow of the ACCA in the Zambian cabinet, said the subject of accountancy had played a key role in his life.

“I think accountancy gives you the space to look at issues and in the pursuance of your job and to be as concerned about social morality as commercial aspects,” Mutati added.

China gives Ghana over \$3bn loan

President John Evans Atta Mills and his Chinese counterpart, Hu Jintao, on Monday signed a deal for China to give Ghana a loan of three billion dollars to develop her energy sector. Specific areas to be targeted under the deal include infrastructure development, job creation and the development and other derivatives of oil and gas.

The package, which would be disbursed through the China Development Bank, constitutes the first phase of Chinese assistance, which would start rolling out in the next six months after the Government of Ghana has devised a framework for the package.

The deal was announced following close-door bilateral talks between President Mills and the Chinese President held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, on the second day of President Mills' five-day state visit to China.

In addition to the three billion-dollar package, China would also give Ghana preferential buyers' credit of 260 million dollars for the expansion of the Kpong Water Works project and another loan of \$150 million for Ghana's e-governance project.

Briefing journalists after the meeting, Mr Koku Anyidoho, Head of Communications at the Office of the President, said President Mills committed himself to supervising the operational areas of the facility. Consequently, the project areas are clearly and comprehensively demarcated for monitoring.

"On the basis of equality, mutual benefits consultation, the Government of Ghana and China Development Bank shall set up a long-term strategic co-operation through a long-term project financing for infrastructural development and have agreed to bring export competitiveness and co-operation in the oil and gas sectors, their derivatives and the agricultural sectors," Mr Anyidoho said.

President Mills, in his remarks before the meeting went into a closed-door session, commended the Chinese leader for his astute leadership and marketing of China to the world.

He recalled that they had exchanged visits when they both served their nations as Vice Presidents, and shared fond memories of activities in those days for the mutual benefits of their people.

President Jintao observed that the relationship between the two nations dated back to the last 50 years, adding that the visit would make for new opportunities in the relations of their nations. President Jintao thanked Ghana for sharing the pain when China was recently hit by a landslide.

In all, eight agreements that cover Chinese financial assistance, transfer of medical equipment, malaria drugs from China to Ghana, would be signed.

Earlier in the day, President Mills laid a wreath at the Monument of the Peoples Heroes and visited the Chinese National Olympic Stadium called the Bird's Nest.

On arrival in China on Sunday, President Mills stressed Sino-Ghana relations and collaboration for mutual benefits.

He said it was time the two nations, and for that matter China and Africa, got together to chart a new path because they had similar backgrounds and past experiences, stressing that collaboration among them would help to achieve the common objectives of raising the living standards of the people.

In a brief statement on his arrival at the Beijing Capital International Airport, President Mills told the welcoming party, led by the Chinese Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister, Zhat Jin that Ghana welcomed collaboration and improve ties with China to accelerate her level of development. 20 Sept. 10

2 Pan-African issues:

UN, AU launch joint task force on peace, security

The UN and the African Union (AU) Saturday launched a joint task force on peace and security as the two organizations stepped up their cooperation in conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peace building across the continent.

The Joint Task Force was launched at UN headquarters in New York by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and AU Commission Chairperson Jean Ping.

The Pan African News Agency (PANA) learnt that the task force will meet twice a year at the senior level to review immediate and long-term strategic issues.

A statement said that Ban and Ping noted that they were determined to strengthen existing cooperation between the two organizations beyond the "groundbreaking joint efforts in Sudan, Guinea and Somalia."

It said the UN chief and the AU Chairperson approved terms of reference for the new task force, which will conduct its first consultations Tuesday in New York, coinciding with this year being declared by the AU as the Year of Peace and Security in Africa. It also stated that the task force's programme of work will be mapped out in coordination with the newly established UN Office to the AU and the AU's Permanent Observer Mission to the UN.

Among the joint efforts are the joint peacekeeping forces in Sudan's Darfur region, known as UNAMID since the start of 2008, while the UN provides support to the troops of the AU peacekeeping mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

Also, in Guinea, the two organizations work together with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to try to promote peace and democratization in the fragile West African nation.

ECOWAS backs UN resolution on women's role in peace, security

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on Friday adopted the Dakar Declaration that gives women equal participation and full involvement in all peace and security issues in compliance with a landmark UN Security Council resolution.

A UN statement on Saturday said the representatives of the countries adopted the declaration after a three-day forum in the Senegalese capital, Dakar.

The forum was organized to consider how West African countries could effectively implement resolution 1325 adopted by the Security Council 10 years ago. It is considered historic for its recognition of the vital role that women can play in preventing, diminishing and ending conflicts.

"The Dakar Declaration stresses the need for the effective participation of women in peace processes, the protection of women and girls from conflict-related sexual violence," the statement noted.

It also said it was designed to reduce conflicts through the greater involvement of women in preventive diplomacy.

It emphasized the importance of adequate care and humanitarian services during the relief and recovery periods after conflicts, disasters or other crises.

The statement stated that gender ministers in West Africa have made commitments under the declaration to draw up national action plans outlining what steps they will take to implement resolution 1325 in their countries.

They are also to put up mechanism to monitor and evaluate progress being made.

This process will be shepherded by ECOWAS in collaboration with the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA) and United Nations Women (UN Women), the new UN entity dedicated to gender issues.

Said Djinnit, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for West Africa, who attended the forum, said the forum represented the first time that such issues were being discussed at the regional level.

UNOWA, which Djinnit heads, organised the forum in cooperation with several other UN agencies, including the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).

Others are the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN Information Centre (UNIC) in Dakar.

Africa Makes Substantial Progress on MDGs, but Much Still to be done.

Five years before the target date for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a new report card shows sub-Saharan Africa making substantial progress. But not all countries there are advancing at the same rate.

The Overseas Development Institute, a British think tank, issued its findings prior to next week's U.N. summit on the MDGs.

"The main message that comes out ... is that African countries are making substantial progress on the MDGs. Some of that progress is not recognized at the moment because progress is often measured relative to countries' initial conditions or starting point," says Dr. Liesbet Steer, who led the report card research.

She says many African countries started from a "very low base."

"If we look at absolute reduction – and forget for a moment about where they started from – huge progress is being made. There is better news behind maybe the relative measures that are used in a traditional way," she says.

Many sub-Saharan African countries faced greater obstacles than other nations when they began their efforts to achieve the MDGs. Comparing it to a race, for example, one runner may start much closer to the finish line than another. Both eventually cross the finish line, but one has a lot more ground to cover to get there.

Poverty and hunger

Halving poverty and hunger is the first Millennium Development Goal.

"On a global scale the view is that we will reach the MDG on poverty reduction by 2015, despite the setbacks we've had with the (food) crisis. Again, if we look at Africa, there is variation, but there is some really good news. When we look at absolute progress measures we find that six out of the top ten performers globally come from Africa," she says.

She adds that "some countries are doing great. Some are not doing so well. And if you look at the hunger target, for example, Ghana...reduced its hunger (rate) significantly from 35 percent to 9 percent. But at the same time, in the DRC there was a huge increase, more than doubling from 29 percent to over 70 percent."

The eastern DRC has been plagued by years of war and sexual violence. A similar increase in hunger can be found for conflict-ridden Somalia.

Maternal Health, AIDS

The MDG of improving maternal and child health has been receiving much attention over the past year.

“Obviously, this is the goal where the least progress has been made globally. If we look at the numbers, what we do recognize is that there’s huge variation in that goal,” she says.

HIV/AIDS is another area that’s received much attention and money since the MDGs were established.

“This is obviously also a difficult one because Africa definitely is in one of the worst positions,” she says. “If we look at the coverage of treatment and so on, there is some good news around Africa, but there’s a lot more that needs to be done on that one as well.”

Africa is home to most of those living with HIV/AIDS and most of those who’ve died.

Different perspective on statistics

“What stood out for us is that it’s important to recognize that there are different ways of measuring progress. This doesn’t mean that traditional measures are wrong. But it’s important to look at things in alternative ways,” she says.

She says an “Afro pessimism” developed after the goals were launched in 2000. That’s because the MDGs, which are global goals, were also instituted on the country level in Africa. Steer says that was not the initial intention.

“Applying those in Africa has led some people to thinking things are just not working. What we found looking at things slightly differently is, there’s actually some positive news out there, there is progress, and it’s good to recognize that,” she says

Nigeria:

1. Political News:

Nigeria Election: Jonathan or Babangida?

With presidential campaigning under way in Nigeria voters are debating the merits of the two frontrunners.

A president with four-month experience in office or a former coup leader who ran the country for eight years atop a military dictatorship? Those are the two leading choices for Nigerian voters: President Goodluck Jonathan or retired General Ibrahim Babangida.

Publisher Adeyemi Adebawo says President Jonathan has shown he is qualified to lead the country since coming to power in May, following the death of President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua. But Adebawo prefers Mr. Babangida’s leadership.

“I like Goodluck Jonathan. He is a fair man. He is an honest man. He is a humble man. He is an easy going man. The only reservation I have against him is he is a slow person. But Babangida is a man of action to an extent. I think IBB is more of an action man,” Adebawo said.

Adebawo says there is no denying the corruption of Babangida’s rule from 1985 to 1993. But he believes the former general, known popularly by his initials IBB, accomplished many great things, including moving Nigeria’s capital from Lagos to Abuja.

“It has always been the consensus that people are saying that it was during the time of IBB that corruption was much in the country. But I believe he is man who has really built a lot of structures,” Adebawo states. “If you look at Abuja generally, most of the major structures – roads, bridges – most infrastructure you see in Abuja, he was the one who did it. So I think he could be a better person.”

Babangida supporter Folashode Onabanjo returned from Europe to help the former general’s campaign.

“Everything to do with better Nigeria, IBB is there. He stands for the betterment of Nigeria, to be good, to be a good country, to be a developed country that could talk to any other in the world and compete with any other in the whole world,” Onabanjo said.

Attorney Anna Irabor says she finds it hard to believe that anyone who lived under Babangida’s rule would vote to put him back in power.

“If you ask me, I can only remember the times that we suffered,” Irabor says, “Because of that, I do not really think he should come back. I do not think he should come back. Let him step aside. I know he has some good parts in his regime, and those good parts, let him use it to advise those who are already showing their interest to come for the presidency.”

Irabor says her choice is President Jonathan. “I am just looking at Jonathan as a person and as a Nigerian and as somebody who I really have great regard and respect for because of the short time he has been with us, the way he has ruled us and the way he has handled situations, that is the reason why I am saying that I prefer him,” she said.

President Jonathan’s bid upsets an informal power sharing agreement in the ruling party that rotates power between north and south every eight years. Under that plan, the next Nigerian president should be from the north to finish out President Yar’Adua’s term, instead of continuing with President Jonathan, who is from the south.

Ovie Joseph is a ruling party official from the southern Delta State. He supports the president politically, but wonders how northerners will respond to his breaking the power-sharing deal. “The only thing that is bad in it is for himself indicating interest,

forgetting the mutual understanding is not a good one,” he says, “the gentlemen’s understanding has to hold. And that one makes you a good man.”

Joseph says it is time of political uncertainty between the mainly Muslim north and the predominantly Christian south. “As it is going now, the Christians are not sleeping. And I know that the Muslims are not sleeping. They are praying for the welfare of the country. And I know by the special grace of God we will survive it,” he said.

Ruling party primaries begin October 18. Nigeria’s electoral commission says it needs more time to register voters for the election itself and is looking to postpone presidential polls currently scheduled for January. VOA

Nigerian Party Primary Suspended, Giving North More Time

Nigeria’s ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP) has indefinitely suspended its party primaries, scheduled for October. The move gives President Goodluck Jonathan’s opponents, especially northern PDP elites, more time to choose a strong northern candidate to challenge Jonathan, who is running for the PDP nomination after replacing the deceased Umaru Yaradua as president in May.

Nigeria’s northerners feel a Jonathan victory would violate the PDP’s unwritten zoning agreement, which rotates presidential power between the north and south. The extra time before the primaries will bring more political wrangling among the north’s presidential contenders and make the overall PDP contest more intense.

Analysis

The National Working Committee (NWC) of Nigeria’s ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP) decided late Sept. 22 to suspend indefinitely the party primaries that had been scheduled for October.

The move by the PDP leadership reflects the intense pressure being applied within the party by President Goodluck Jonathan’s opponents — most notably the northern elites, who feel he is trying to take a presidential term which, under Nigeria’s unwritten power-sharing agreement, rightly belongs to them. Allowing for more time in the campaign for the PDP presidential nomination ensures more political wrangling for control of Nigeria in the coming months, during which a single northern candidate likely will emerge to challenge Jonathan.

A statement issued after the NWC meeting claimed that the decision to indefinitely suspend the PDP primaries was linked to a request made one day earlier by the Independent National Electoral Commission, which asked that the country’s upcoming national elections be pushed back from January to April.

While the electoral commission's claims that there is not enough time to organize a free and fair election before January are credible, this does not actually explain the PDP leadership's decision to discard its party primaries timetable.

Jonathan became president in May, when his predecessor Umaru Yaradua died. He refused to disclose his ambitions regarding a presidential term of his own, however, until Sept. 15, when he posted his intentions on Facebook.

Jonathan was playing a delicate game; trying to ascertain the level of public support he would have before making a decision to enter the race. In the end, after months of forming alliances across different regions, buying support and branding himself in the public eye as a true reformer, he decided that his chances were good enough to warrant a run.

His decision was provocative in the eyes of many Nigerians — particularly the northerners, who felt that the PDP zoning agreement assured that the presidency would stay with the north for four more years. Zoning is a term used in Nigeria to describe the arrangement that has held the Fourth Republic together since the transition from military rule in 1999.

This unwritten PDP agreement mandates that power be shared between north and south, with the presidency rotating between regions every two terms. Zoning is what gave the north the incentive to relinquish power after a prolonged period of military rule, as it was guaranteed to regain control of the country every eight years. (Yaradua died before finishing his first term in office.)

The agreement is also fundamental to ensuring that all six of the country's sub-regions have a stake in the national government and the patronage network that comes with it. Essentially, the zoning agreement is designed to prevent regionalization and the political instability that arises from any one group obtaining a monopoly on power.

While the north is largely unified in its opposition to a Jonathan presidency, it is politically fragmented in terms of which candidate its people support. Four men who have declared their intention to seek the PDP nomination are seen as the leading contenders: former military dictator Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (referred to as "IBB" in Nigeria), Kwara state Gov. Bukola Saraki, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar and Jonathan's former national security adviser, Aliyu Gusau. All four recently pledged their intention to convene and agree upon just one man to run against Jonathan, though this is easier said than done.

The NWC decision to give them more time (how much time is unknown at present) will both ramp up the competition among the northern candidates and increase the intensity of the overall battle for the PDP nomination. After all, this is the true election in Nigeria — no other party can effectively challenge the PDP in a national election.

The extension on the campaign is therefore to Jonathan's disadvantage, as it allows his opponents more time to get organized.

The longer the delay, the higher the chance that a single northern candidate will emerge as a credible threat to Jonathan. (One recent opinion poll indicated that if the primaries were held today, Jonathan would receive 40 percent of the PDP delegates' votes, while the four northern candidates combined would gather 47 percent. Babangida leads the other three in the poll with 20 percent.)

Jonathan's candidacy may go against the spirit of zoning, but Yaradua's death has given him and his southern supporters an opportunity that might not come again for years. The Jonathan camp is therefore adamant that he has just as much a right to the presidency as anyone else. The PDP said so in August, after all, basing its endorsement of his right to contest upon the logic that he represented the Yaradua/Jonathan (i.e. northern) ticket, which came into power in 2007.

So while his victory would risk a backlash from the north, his defeat would trigger a similar reaction from southerners who thought they were about to see the first president of Nigeria elected who hails from the Niger Delta. (Babangida has sought to pull some of the Niger Delta vote himself by naming former Rivers state Gov. Peter Odili as his running mate, but the presidency is a much bigger prize than the vice presidency.)

As STRATFOR has noted, the zoning agreement has already suffered long-term damage due to the events in Nigeria since November 2009, when Yaradua first fell ill and had to seek medical treatment in Saudi Arabia. But with the possibility that the National Assembly will once again seek to amend the constitution and allow for the rescheduling of national elections from January to April, the battle for the PDP nomination has now likely been extended for several weeks, if not months.

The constitutional review committees from both houses of the assembly will meet Sept. 27 to discuss the matter, at which point more light will be shed upon when exactly the elections may be rescheduled. Regardless of exact dates, however, the extension of the campaign for the PDP nomination will only intensify the fight.

INEC Affirms May 29 Handover Date

If poise and eloquence was the Holy Grail needed by an electoral umpire to conduct a credible election, then the nation need not lose sleep over the 2011 general elections.

If what is needed for credible polls next year is surefootedness on the part of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), then it is fait accompli.

And if what Nigeria needs in the INEC chair is a committed citizen with a profound grasp of the beached state of the nation's electoral process, perhaps one has been found one.

To be sure, poise and eloquence, surefootedness and commitment plus a profound grasp of the matter at hand as leaving no margin for error or room for failure in 2011 oozed from every word he uttered on the programme. He serenaded his otherwise extraverted anchorman and, no doubt, thousands of viewers in offices and living rooms across the country and beyond.

And so let it be on record for posterity that if it were a public relations stunt or heart-felt imperative to de-fuse building tension over the 2011 General Elections, INEC Chairman, Prof. Attahiru Jega pulled it off, live on the widely watched “Focus Nigeria” programme on Africa Independent Television (AIT) yesterday morning in Abuja, the nation’s capital.

While he came into the studios some minutes behind schedule due to circumstances beyond his control, Jega soon covered lost ground by answering all the questions posed to him first by his host, Mr. Gbenga Aruleba and a string of callers far afield as Central Africa via the telephone.

The INEC chief firmly lay to rest speculations that the tenure of current elected public office holders would be extended through on-going move by the commission, after due consultations with political parties and other stakeholder, to shift next year’s election to a date in April 2011 as against its published time-table, which has January 15, 2011 as the starting block.

Admitting that the commission had missed some important timelines on its election time-table, Jega stressed: “Although we believe that what is worth doing at all is worth doing well, INEC will operate within the framework of the 2010 Electoral Act and the Constitution to conduct all elections.

“While we need to have more time to conduct credible election, the time that that should be granted must be within the context of the sacrosanct need to transfer power on May 29, 2011. INEC will work within that context. I have made representation to the President and the National Assembly on this and we all know that the timetable is an imposition of law. If it must be changed, it must be within the provision of the law.”

On the lingering controversy trailing INEC’s plans to procure about 15,000 Direct Data Capturing (DDC) machine, Jega said: “In order to avoid the mistakes of the past, which adversely affected the conduct of elections in the country, we identified suppliers and manufacturers from the pool of those who applied to supply the machines. We followed due process and got approval every step of the way.

“We opted for manufacturers because some companies which claimed to be manufacturers of these machines in the past turned out to be vendors and put INEC in a quandary, which caused a lot of credibility problems for both the commission and the elections it conducted then. We want to avoid a recurrence. We are currently going through the contracts with manufacturers of these DDC machines before signing them.

“From the day we raised the required Letter of Credit for these machines, the manufacturers will have two weeks to start to supply them and all must be supplied within 28 days.

“We are aware of citizens’ concern over the election. We are doing our best. We want to account for every kobo given to INEC, to us, to conduct the election. When we get more time, we will conduct free and fair election; there will be no room for failure.”

Jega assured that the two weeks provided on the election time table for voters’ registration would be enough to register the estimated 70 million Nigerians expected to register, stressing that it takes only five to seven minutes to register a prospective voter but that INEC has allocated a maximum of 15 minutes to the process.

He added: “Our personnel will work from 9 in the morning to 5 in the evening, including weekend. Our projection of the 70 million voters is based on the 2006 census figures. We’ll be able to register everyone. The only thing is if people delay to register and come out late, towards the end of the two-week period, then there might be challenges. We are trying to prevent this through public enlightenment.”

Jega disclosed that INEC was taking several measures to ensure the integrity of the electoral process against the backdrop of past experiences and probable new problems.

However, he argued that Nigerians as a whole, and especially the political parties, have lot to contribute to restore integrity into the nation’s electoral process.

The INEC helmsman suggested that political parties and civil society and individual should detail observers to watch over the voter’s registration exercise to complement INEC efforts towards ensuring the integrity of the process.

Jega said politicians must be prepared to change their win-at-all-cost mindset, stressing, however, that INEC was ready to change apply the full weight of the law to anyone caught breaking the rules in the 2011 polls.

He warned parties to carry INEC along in their plans to hold primaries, saying the commission would simply take it that such did not take place if INEC was not invited to observe their conducts, with the consequence of non-recognition of any candidate ‘elected’ from such primaries .

He said: “INEC will not break the electoral rules but do our best to comply with them. However, if politicians break the rules, we will do our best to apply sanctions.”

Addressing the vexed issue of INEC’s independence, especially against the backdrop of the disclosures by former Cross River Governor, Donal Duke, on how states allegedly use inducements to buy INEC official’s loyalty and compromise the electoral process, Jega said: “We are doing our best to provide the needs of our officials at the state and local council levels so that they do not go cap in hand to vested interests and compromise

the integrity of the electoral process. Of course this is difficult because time is also a problem here. But what we have told our Resident Electoral Commissioners and other officials is that the INEC Headquarters must approve any assistance from the state government and local council before they accept it.

“We are doing our best not to compromise the reputation and credibility of the Commission and the electoral process.”

The commission, Jega also disclosed, is primed to monitor campaign finance as never before, with a view to preventing abuse of provisions and punishing violators as appropriate.

Jega added that the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), who’s Board he was chaired, was working well with INEC with a view to getting members of the scheme to approach the 2011 election, as a sacred national duty, with the plans to deploy them as ad hoc staff for the exercise.

On some citizens’ clamour for the use of Option A4 for next year’s elections, Jega said: “Option A4 is not supported by the current laws on election in our country. The laws say we must use the Open Secret Ballot System. However, we are open to good, innovative ideas on all aspects of the electoral process. For instance, some well meaning citizens have called for voter’s accreditation on polling day to be done at the same time nationwide. This would reduce movement of people and by extension check rigging. We are open to these ideas; we’ll weigh them and see how they can be part of our electoral laws, and thereafter the process itself.”

The INEC chairman allayed the fear raised in some quarters over the software to be used for the voter’s registration, saying that the Commission has come up with its own programme, albeit with valuable inputs from the professional information and communication technology groups in the country as well as government agencies like NOGCOMSAT.

He said: “INEC owns the copyright to the software unlike in the past when some suppliers held us to ransom over their programme installed on our equipment. We took security seriously in developing the software; it is very secure and we have been testing to satisfactory results. The manufacturers of the DDC machines would also test it.

Jega foreclosed the participation of Nigerians in the Diaspora as well as the use of electronic voting machines in next year’s election, saying these were not backed by the country’s extant laws.

Shift in polls dates get more support

THE request by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for a shift in the dates of the 2011 general elections has enjoyed the support of more civil society groups

in the country who urged the National Assembly to give speedy consideration to the proposal.

Meanwhile, the Cross River State governor, Liyel Imoke, has urged INEC to evolve an initiative that will make the electorate properly sensitised and educated on its functions.

In a statement, Project Swift, a coalition of civil society organisations, described the INEC's request as a right step in the right direction, noting that anything worth doing at all is worth doing well.

The group said: "The timetable earlier rolled out by the INEC, though conforms, with the new constitutional amendment, appear to be hasty in view of the legislative, political and judicial landmines on the way to achieving the objectives for setting the timetable. The task of conducting credible, free, fair and legitimate elections cannot be achieved with this timetable, given the limited time allotted to activities.

"Having decided not to conduct the 2011 election with the present voter's register, which has the reputation of being the most ridiculous in the world as it contains names of foreign nationals and names of presidents of other countries, it would be inappropriate to undermine the yearnings of Nigerians to use a timetable, which would not allow citizens to register as voters in an election which they have decided to use as instrument to chase out and replace those they consider as unfit representatives who have not shown respect for the will of the people to prevail."

In its own reaction, Re-Birth Nigeria, a generational shift campaign group, said granting INEC's request would help prepare a solid ground for the conduct of the polls and help bring into fruition President Goodluck Jonathan's desire to leave behind the legacy of a free, fair and credible election.

The group's spokesman and South-East Co-ordinator, Mazi Akpowen Emerenini, in a statement, also called on Nigerian electorate to give President Jonathan a chance in 2011 as a way of healing the age-long wound inflicted on the South-South and the Niger Delta in particular by successive administrations in the country.

The group, joining others that had thrown their weight behind Jonathan, noted that giving the President the chance in 2011, would improve on the high level of peace already achieved in Niger Delta.

Mazi Emerenini advanced several reasons the group decided to throw its weight behind Jonathan. He said the remarkable success the President recorded just within 100 days in office, particularly in the areas of improved electricity, restoration of international confidence in Nigeria and restoration of peace and order in the country, especially in the restive Niger Delta are commendable.

Imoke who made the call for education of the electorate on Tuesday while receiving the Resident Electoral Commissioner in Cross River, Mr. Mike Igini, said the people and not

the political parties only, should be aware and enlightened about voters' registration exercise, party symbols and identification of candidates.

The governor commended the leadership of the commission for organising a series of seminars, retreats and workshops in preparation for the 2011 elections, which he said is a critical ingredient to its roadmap for hitch-free polls.

Imoke called on the commission to remodel its distribution of ballot papers to difficult terrain and rural areas as well as make it possible for eligible voters to identify their candidates.

2011: Lawyers Back INEC on Election Postponement

As the controversy over the date for the 2011 elections and which constitution should be used to conduct the election rages, a cross section of eminent lawyers yesterday supported the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for postponing of the 2011 elections.

Speaking with THISDAY, former president of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Mr. Olisa Agbakoba (SAN) commended INEC for decision, stating that there was nothing wrong in the shift in election timetable, saying that it was not clear which constitution was in operation at the moment.

Agbakoba also advised President Goodluck Jonathan to instruct the Attorney-General of the Federation (AGF) to go to the Supreme Court to determine which constitution should be used for the election.

“As far as I am concerned, there are two constitutions – the 1999 constitution and the 1999 constitution as amended. We need to know which one of them is our constitution being operated because it is what gives life to the electoral process. We cannot have a free, fair and valid election. We cannot run away from the question of which one is the constitution to be used for the election. It is like saying we don't know our names.

“I think the president who is also running for the election should direct the Attorney General to approach the Supreme Court for a decision so that we will know the constitution that governs Nigeria. The Supreme Court does not waste time in taking its decision,” he said.

While commending Professor Jega for saying that he needs more time to ensure a credible election, Agbakoba said his timetable is invalid.

“Professor Jega says he wants time so that he can give a Grade A election. He cannot do that on an invalid constitution. He is changing the timetable on a purportedly invalid constitution.

Jonathan's Rally Was Rented Crowd, Says Saraki

The campaign team of PDP presidential aspirant Bukola Saraki yesterday said the attendance recorded during the declaration of President Goodluck Jonathan last Saturday was not a measure of popularity because it was made up of rented men and women from a section of the country.

In a maiden press conference in Abuja, Director General of the ABS Campaign Organisation Dr. Udentia Udentia said the rally had in no way intimidated Governor Saraki who is one of Jonathan's major challengers for the PDP presidential ticket.

The DG who was responding to a question on why Saraki declared his presidential bid without the kind of fanfare and crowd that attended Jonathan's declaration, and whether he was intimidated, said veterans of so many campaigns in Nigeria "understand the concept and philosophy of renting a crowd."

Udentia said it would be a misnomer to judge the popularity of an individual through such rented crowds that is being identified with some politicians.

He said Saraki is not in any way moved by the declarations that have already taken place at the Eagle Square and he is not going to adopt the Eagle Square format simply because somebody else had done so.

"Saraki is coming unique. The kind of public presentation of His Excellency will be grand in a strategic and intellectual way. It will be a policy declaration where Nigerians will have the policy document to judge him when he becomes the president," he said

Speaking on the ongoing effort to produce a consensus candidate from the north, the DG said Saraki will be bound by the decision of the "committee of the wise men" who have been mandated to come out with a consensus from among the four aspirants in the north.

"Our exchange with them is lively; it is robust on issues of transformation and not on individual. But at the end of the day his excellence is fully committed to the decision on the consensus candidate," he said.

Corroborating Udentia's statement, former Minister of Police Affairs Lame who is the Deputy Director General of the organisation said the "thinking or the objective of the discussion is not only to ensure that power is transferred to the north but the bigger question is about the stability of this country."

"I want to assure you that any of the aspirants that are selected by the wise men will be supported by all the others and that is in the spirit of making sure that we attain stability in 2011 and beyond," he said.

Jonathan Group: May 29 Handover Date Sacrosanct

The Goodluck Jonathan/Namadi Sambo Presidential Campaign Organization yesterday said the May 29, 2011 handover date remains sacrosanct, while calling on other

presidential aspirants of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to base their campaigns on issues.

It also lampooned Governor Bukola Saraki of Kwara state of turning the state into a family business.

According to a statement by the Media and Publicity Director of Jonathan/Sambo Campaign Organisation, Mr. Sully Abu, it dismissed Saraki's part in the anti-Jonathan gang-up by the other PDP presidential aspirants as not worthy to be taken serious, while lampooning the Kwara governor, saying, "Saraki preaches zoning at the centre when it suits him but obviously not in Kwara where the business of governance has been turned into a family affair. If nothing else, presidential candidates should be more principled."

Reacting also to the utterances of Edo State Governor, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole, that he would stage a protest against the Federal Government under the watch of President Goodluck Jonathan, if the May 29 handover date was tampered with, the statement said the Jonathan/Sambo Presidential Organization believes that the May 29 2011 is irrevocable.

It said, "We are taken aback by the largely speculative statements by Oshiomhole and the impression created that the request for more time by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), was masterminded by the Federal Government.

"We condemn the attempt by Oshiomhole to tar the President and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)-led Federal Government with the brush of complicity in the call for polls shift by the electoral body.

"President Jonathan and the Nigerian people are committed to the May 29 handover date and nothing is being done to compromise that," the statement stated.

According to the organization, "majority of registered political parties, including Governor Oshiomole's Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), are in favour of a shift in date to allow INEC more time to deliver on its promise of a free and fair election in 2011.

"Much as we believe in the capacity of the INEC to deliver on credible elections, at all levels, we urge Governor Oshiomole to desist from playing politics with serious issues.

"Following the request by INEC Chairman, Professor Attahiru Jega, the President has ordered the release of the N87 billion requested by INEC; he has also signed the amended Electoral Act 2010, despite some reservations.

"How else could the Government have demonstrated good faith? Oshiomole's attempt to insinuate ulterior motives in the present circumstance is simply preposterous," the statement said.

I'm Not Desperate to be President, Says IBB

Former military president, General Ibrahim Babangida, has said becoming president is not a do or die affair and that life continues whether he wins or loses the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) presidential primary election.

Babangida, who was forced out of office in 1993 following the annulment of the June 12 election, is one of those jostling for the PDP ticket for the 2011 presidential poll.

The immediate past National Security Adviser (NSA), Lt. Gen. Aliyu Gusau, has also explained why he is contesting against President Goodluck Jonathan who appointed him NSA only last March, saying it was democracy at work. Gusau resigned as NSA last week to contest the PDP presidential primary election.

“For me, politics is not and has never been a do or die affair. If I lose, I lose and if I win, I win: such is life and life continues,” Babangida said.

The former military president spoke at his tophill residence in Minna, Niger State yesterday when some Nigerians in the Diaspora paid him a solidarity visit on his presidential ambition.

He was speaking against the backdrop of reports that 27 PDP governors coughed out N11 million to purchase PDP expression of intent form for President Jonathan who is also in the 2011 race.

Babangida said he is not bothered that some state governors contributed money to pick the form for the president, stating that he is in the presidential race because he is convinced he should be in it.

“I did not know that they are purchasing the form for President Jonathan or else I would have gone to solicit that they get me the form too but on a serious note, I am in the presidential race because I have the conviction and I’m not in the race for the fun of it but because I’m convinced I should be in the race,” he said.

Babangida said this is the time to build a new Nigeria in all spheres, explaining, “The time to start building a new Nigeria is now. At least we have concluded the last 50 years; we have to start building the next 50 years so that our great grand children will be proud of us and what we have done.”

He said his intention to contest was centred on his love for Nigeria because, according to him, “I love this country passionately.

”I love this country so much and that was why in my youth I fought for the unity of the country. I have a passion for the security of the country, its well being and development.”

Babangida said he believed strongly in Nigeria and its unity, adding that the only way he could be provoked was when he encounters people who do not believe in the country.

“If you want to provoke some of us, you can easily do that by not believing in Nigeria and the unity of the country,” he said.

The former military leader said he could not move Nigeria forward without the support of the younger generation who equally believes in Nigeria as a nation and its unity.

He said: “The only way we can move Nigeria forward is when we work with people who have the love of the country at heart and especially the younger generation.”

He called on Nigerians to continue to believe in the country. Making reference to America, he added that one day Nigeria would be the country of every Nigerian’s dream.

Ahead of today’s deadline for the submission of forms by all categories of PDP aspirants for elective offices, the former NSA, Minister of Police Affairs, Alhaji Adamu Waziri, and at least four governors namely Aliyu Shinkafi (Zamfara), Sule Lamido (Jigawa), Godswill Akpabio (Akwa Ibom), and Adebayo Alao-Akala (Oyo) submitted their nomination forms to the party’s headquarters in Abuja.

Speaking with journalists after submitting his expression of intent form, Gusau said he was vying for the PDP presidential ticket against President Jonathan because such was one of the hallmarks of democracy. “That is democracy. I told him I have an ambition and he said yes, you can achieve your ambition by contesting, go and contest. I had a very good relationship with Mr. President. Even yesterday, I talked with him before he left for the United States,” he said.

Gusau, who is 67 years old, dismissed the clamour in some quarters for generational change.

He said: “It is not a generational shift. It is the capability to deliver. If an old man is capable of delivering the goods, so let it be. Mohammed Ali, founder of modern Egypt, was in his 80’s when he developed Egypt to what it is up till now.

“The great miracle of China, the economic recovery, was initiated by a man of 87 years and the programme is still going on. So, it is not the generational shift, it is the capability to deliver. Abdullahi Wade is in his mid 80’s in Senegal and he is doing extremely well.”

On his position on the quest by the North to present a consensus presidential candidate, the taciturn politician said: “Definitely. All of us decided to support whoever is the consensus candidate and I stand by my word. Whoever emerges as the candidate, I will follow him.”

However, he said he would not step down for Babangida as an individual. “No, we agreed I will step down for a consensus candidate,” he said.

On how long it would take the 17 ‘wise men’ working on picking a consensus candidate from among the Northern presidential aspirants – Babangida, former Vice-President

Atiku Abubakar, Kwara State Governor Bukola Saraki and himself (Gusau) – to do the job and submit their report, Gusau said: “Well, I am not one of the wise men. It is up to them to come up with the time and date.”

He also denied there was an agreement between him, Babangida and late General Sani Abacha to rule Nigeria one after the other, saying, “No, that is not true. I am not aware of that.”

And while receiving Gusau in his office shortly after returning his presidential nomination form, PDP National Chairman Okwesilieze Nwodo said the calibre of presidential aspirants picking nomination forms for the 2011 general elections had given him the hope that Nigeria would be in good hands at the turn of the next 50 years after independence.

Nwodo said he was excited by the calibre of aspirants coming forward to present themselves for governance at all levels.

A statement from Nwodo’s spokesman Ike Abonyi quoted the PDP chairman as saying that Nigeria would be in good hands notwithstanding whoever emerged the flag bearer of the party.

“I’m excited at the caliber of presidential aspirants coming up for this general election, it means Nigeria will be in a good hand whoever emerges our flag bearer,” he said.

The PDP chairman assured all aspirants that there would be a level playing field for them.

Earlier, Gusau told Nwodo that he joined the race to contribute his quota to the political and economic development of the country.

Meanwhile, former Deputy Governor of Lagos State, Otunba Femi Pedro, will today formally declare his interest to contest the 2011 gubernatorial election in Lagos State on PDP platform.

“I am offering a fresh approach; visionary, idealistic, energetic, committed and tested leadership, and I hope you will cast your vote for change and give me the opportunity to serve you. On my part, I give you my word and assurance that I will not compromise on the values of ethical leadership, public integrity and good governance as we partner to realize our dream for a greater Lagos,” he said.

In an interview with THISDAY, Pedro summed up his vision thus: “to transform the entire state of Lagos into a safer, cleaner, more secure and thriving mega city – a mega city where its residents enjoy quality healthcare and a robust educational system, a mega city with modern infrastructure in roads and highways, transportation, telecommunications and power generation, all sensitive and tailored to the needs of the average Lagosian, irrespective of societal class or background.”

Pedro, who was the state deputy governor between 2003 and 2007, led the economic team of the state government to raise the Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) from N300 million per month to a staggering N7 billion in a spate of eight months.

Apart from coordinating the activities of government and the Organized Private Sector, he was in charge of the Parastatal Monitoring Office, a body responsible for monitoring the activities and performances of all parastatals in the state.

He contested for the governorship of the state in 2007 and lost to Governor Babatunde Raji Fashola.

As the elections draw near, the former deputy governor said it was not enough to simply identify the problems and drawbacks confronting the state, adding there was a need for sound and thorough understanding of the issues and solutions that will bring about the desired results.

“If elected, my mode of implementing solutions to these major challenges confronting Lagos will be remarkably different and much more efficient than what is seen today,” he said.

Explaining that Lagos is a vibrant state with vast opportunities and endless possibilities, Pedro said his administration would make it work for the teeming population of the state to seize these opportunities.

“I am determined to impact and transform the lives of every Lagosian, the traders and the market women, the unemployed and ever-growing street urchins. Indeed, it is time for a change,” he said.

Campaign Funds: Respond to Allegations, Atiku Tells Jonathan

Former Vice President and presidential aspirant of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Atiku Abubakar, have asked President Goodluck Jonathan to respond to allegations that his campaign funds are taken from the nation’s treasury.

Atiku said in a statement by his Campaign Organisation (ACO) in Abuja yesterday that “President Jonathan has failed to respond to a critical and serious allegation made by a major and reputable socio-cultural group in the country, the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), that the President is using public resources to fund his lavish campaign engagements.”

The PDP presidential aspirant said it would amount to double standard and chicanery for the President to commit himself to zero tolerance on corruption and then resort to use of the peoples’ money to pursue personal ambition.

He said there must be a clear distinction between President Jonathan as an individual aspirant and the President as the Head of Government and Commander in-Chief.

“Wherein lies the level playing field when public resources are put at the disposal of the President just because he is an incumbent,” Atiku queried.

According to him, the President’s deliberate taciturnity is not a virtue in the face of great moral challenge.

“There is urgent need for President Jonathan to speak up on this issue in the interest of the relevant political finance contents of the 2010 Electoral Act and his avowed anti-corruption crusade,” Atiku said.

ACN Does not believe in Zoning, Says Tinubu

Former Governor of Lagos state and staunch member of the Action Congress of Nigeria (CAN), Senator Bola Tinubu, has said the party does not believe in zoning because such notion is not progressive or democratic, promising that the party would pick its presidential candidate from any part of the country for the 2011 elections.

Tinubu made this known yesterday while fielding questions from newsmen at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos and urged all the old politicians who have ruled this country in the past and their contemporaries to give way to the younger generation, noting that they are taking away what belonged to the new generation.

“Ethnicity, zoning and the likes are not good for this country. My party doesn’t believe in it; what the party says is that the candidate can come from anywhere. Why do they continue to promote division in this country?”

They are not good leaders; they are just like people parading themselves today as nationalists but are not. Yesterday they were calling for unity and one Nigeria, and all that and then today you call for zoning, what are you preaching, misery and contradiction?

They should go and retire; they are like fathers stealing from baby’s milk!”

Tinubu insisted that there must be generational change, adding that the old politicians who are currently holding sway and determining the political and economic fortunes of Nigeria.

Nobel laureate Soyinka starts political party.

Nobel literature laureate Wole Soyinka has launched a political party in Nigeria, months before the presidential election.

He was elected chairman of The Democratic Front for a People's Federation at an event in Lagos.

The new party says it aims to tackle corruption and improve health and education in Nigeria.

Wole Soyinka's books and plays have won worldwide acclaim but he is also renowned as a political activist.

His book "The Man Died" in 1972 dealt with his period in jail during Nigeria's 1967-70 civil wars.

He was the first African to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1986.

State, presidential and legislative elections are due to take place next year but it is unclear whether Mr. Soyinka intends to be a candidate.

Nigerian Presidential Candidates Campaigning for Youth Vote.

The frontrunners in Nigeria's presidential election are both seeking the country's considerable youth vote.

Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan is 52 years old. His main rival for the Nigerian presidency, retired general Ibrahim Babangida, is 69.

Yet both men say they understand the needs of the younger generation and are actively campaigning for the youth vote in a country with more than 45 million people between the ages of 10 and 24.

Mr. Babangida says there is a disconnect between the government and young Nigerians.

"The plight of the young man and woman who together can safeguard our future must engage our collective attention. I worry about the large army of youths and women who are unemployed. They are our countries most critical resources," he said.

President Jonathan says he has passed laws to make foreign oil and gas companies source more of their goods and services locally, which he says will make more jobs for young people.

But his biggest campaign appeal to the youth vote appears to come in the telling of his life as a child in the Niger Delta - little money, no electricity, no shoes for school, some day's only one meal. And yet he says he never despaired.

"If I could make it, you can make it, and nothing will inhibit you. My story is a story of a young Nigerian whose access to education opens up vast opportunities that enabled me to attain my present position," he said.

So what do young people think about the two candidates?

Bunmi Oladipo says she prefers President Jonathan, in part, because he is younger.

"Some of the things he has done, for me as a Nigerian, I think it portrays that he means well," said Oladipo. "He is insisting on credible elections. And he is insisting on one man one vote and all that. I believe that he has something to offer. We should give him a chance."

Oladipo agrees that Mr. Babangida has more experience than President Jonathan. But she says Mr. Babangida's experience is nothing Nigerians would ever want to live through again.

"No matter how he wants to wish away those incidents that happened - the annulment of June 12th [elections], the crisis in our financial sector, proscription of media houses, students going on strike for a long time - all those things. There is no way he can wish away those things. Nigerians will always remember those years he ruled," she said.

Student Shehu Musa says Mr. Babangida has every reason to be proud of his legacy.

"What Babangida did when he was the president, most of the structures he put in place are still the structures we are using today," said Musa. "Successive governments have not been able to improve on such structures. If you are telling me that Jonathan has changed the economy, I don't believe that is what happened. He has just consolidated on what he inherited from the former president."

President Jonathan's candidacy disrupts an informal agreement in the ruling party that rotates power between north and south. That deal says the next Nigerian president should be from the north to finish out what would have been the late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's second term instead of continuing on with President Jonathan, who is from the south.

Musa says the deal, though unofficial, should be respected. So he is backing Mr. Babangida, who is known popularly by his initials IBB.

"I will go for IBB because power is in the north presently. And if we are going to abide by the PDP arrangement, it is going to give us peace in the country," he said.

Both candidates must now carry on a far longer campaign with the postponement of ruling party primaries because the electoral commission is asking that the vote itself be put back from January to April.

Atiku: Jonathan's Aspiration Divisive

Former Vice President and presidential aspirant of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Atiku Abubakar yesterday warned that President Goodluck Jonathan's insistence on running in 2011 in negation of the zoning system provided for in the party's constitution

and the pact of the founding fathers of the PDP is polarising and leading the country into endless crisis.

“I am convinced that those who want power rotation jettisoned do not have the best interest of the country at heart. The anti-zoning elements want to plunge this country into a needless crisis,” Atiku said.

He also said that he has welcomed the acceptance of his challenge by President Goodluck Jonathan and Governor Bukola Saraki of Kwara State to a debate on the economy.

According to a statement issued by the Atiku Campaign Organisation (ACO), the PDP presidential aspirant who spoke on Tuesday in Sokoto in continuation of his nationwide tour said the country, which is already divided along regional, ethnic and religious fault lines should be spared further divisions as represented by President Jonathan’s bid to appropriate a mandate meant for the North.

Atiku while addressing party supporters and party delegates from Sokoto, Kebbi and Zamfara States, said, “This nation has survived thus far because our founding fathers have maintained a delicate balance between the regions; between the two great religions and among our various ethnic groups.”

The former vice president said those who want to subvert the unique arrangement of rotation of power between the North and South do not wish the nation well.

He said Nigerians should not personalize policies or jettison agreements freely entered into because of an individual's ambition.

Atiku warned that Jonathan's candidacy will eventually lead to the realization of the illegal Third Term agenda of former President Olusegun Obasanjo, which he and other patriots fought against and defeated in 2006.

He asked his supporters to ensure that a northern candidate emerges the winner of the forthcoming PDP primaries to defeat this latest attempt to smuggle Third Term into our polity.

According to the statement, Atiku’s supporters promised to deliver the three states to him, saying his visit to the seat of the Caliphate is proof of the high regard he has for the region.

Atiku, the statement said later visited the flooded plains of the Usmanu Danfodio University, Sokoto, where he was received by the Army Corps of Engineers. He commended the army engineers for their humanitarian work, which include the provision of ferry and boat services to submerged villages.

On the debate, the Presidential aspirant praised the Jonathan and Bukola Saraki camps for accepting to pick up the gauntlet of the presidential debate.

According to Atiku Abubakar, the debate would help Nigerians assess the extent each individual aspirant grasps the economic challenges and how they can fix it and improve the social conditions of Nigerians.

Atiku Abubakar suggested a neutral venue and neutral organizers to conduct a credible debate. According to him, Nigerians should no longer give power to those who aspire for its own sake but without adequate preparation to tackle the challenges of governance.

He dismissed the notion that Nigerian democracy is not ripe for presidential debate. In his view, the citizens have the right to assess the capabilities of those aspiring to lead.

Therefore, he suggested that, in the absence of an institutional presidential debate commission, credible institutions that are non-partisan may offer themselves for hosting such debates. He named such institutions as including the Aminu Kano House, Centre for Democratic Research and Development, (BUK Kano) the Claude Ake Centre, Centre for Advanced Social Studies (Port Harcourt), Centre for Democratic Development (CDD) Ibadan, and the Centre for Continuing Education, UNN Nsukka.

2. Economy:

NLC under Pressure to Protest over New Pay, Says Omar

THE delay in implementation of a new national minimum wage is causing some disquiet in the labour movement as the leadership of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) is under immense pressure to call its members out on an industrial action, the

President of Congress, Abdulwahed Omar has said.

The development came amid fresh anxiety that state governments may be responsible for the delay in transmitting the bill to the National Assembly for passage.

At a meeting with the Minister of Labour and Productivity, Chief Emeka Wogu in Abuja on Thursday evening, Omar expressed the displeasure of Congress over the inability of government to begin the implementation of the new minimum pay first by May 1, which was workers day and now on October 1, which marks the 50th Independence anniversary of the country.

“I thank you for calling this meeting to update us on what has been done so far on the new minimum wage. While we thank you, I must say that Congress is under immense pressure to ensure immediate implementation. There is anxiety over the matter. Anything contrary to the implementation of minimum wage agreement by the tripartite committee is capable of throwing the country into chaos based on the expectations of workers.

We keep receiving correspondences from states of their readiness to strike if the wage is not implemented as soon as possible. While we want the issue to be handled carefully, we need it to be done in the most urgent manner. Obviously, workers are becoming restive.

We do not want to be accused of not being committed. There is overwhelming pressure on us to act and we cannot do otherwise,” he said.

While the Federal Government is desirous of beginning a new minimum wage, the Minister said the reaction of State governments, which may decline to pay and the possible strikes and protests that this may generate in the states are the reasons behind the seeming delay.

Wogu stated that being an election year and the possibility of using any policy as potential political campaign tool, government seems to be caught between two extremes that have implications for the wellbeing of the nation.

Said Wogu: “The Federal Government is ready to implement the new minimum wage. The National Economic Council and Council of State have met over the issue and have endorsed the new minimum wage and at those meetings, Justice Alfa Belgore was invited to attend. Some state governments were against it but we reminded them that they were part of the Justice Belgore committee where decision to implement a new minimum wage was taken. Our fear is that some state governments may not implement it and that may cause industrial unrest.”

In his submission, the General Secretary of Congress, John Odah, said there is no need for Federal Government to fret over the passage of a new minimum wage bill by the National Assembly. He pointed out that the matter is on the exclusive legislative list and that states will not have any reason not to implement it.

Odah also said the Federal Government should go ahead with the formulation of the bills, promising that Congress will mount intensive protests and rallies in states that decline to implement the new pay when it becomes operational.

“We want to encourage government to go ahead and leave the states to us. We will slug it out with any state that refuses to pay when the bill becomes law. The passage of the bill is within the capacity of the National Assembly to pass,” he said.

Sacked Workers Sue NSE over Wrongful Termination

Thirty-two sacked workers of the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE) have dragged the Exchange to court claiming that due process was not followed in the purported termination of their employments.

In a suit No. LD/1860/10 filed the claimants said they were forced to sign their resignation and termination letters under duress.

The sacked workers argued that resignation presupposes that the employees would be the one paying one month salary in lieu of notice.

"In this case, the NSE paid some of the sacked staff two months salary and some one month salary in lieu", they claimed.

The claimants averred that the Interim Administrator claimed before the mass sack of staff of the NSE that there was need to "right size" the workforce.

They claimed that the NSE after their purported sack went ahead to employ other workers which was contrary to their claim of right sizing the work force.

The claimants therefore prayed the court to make a Declaration that their forced and/or induced resignation and was illegal, null and void. They asked the court for an Order compelling the NSE to reinstate their employments.

They also asked the court to compel the NSE to pay all their entitlements and emoluments from the day they were forced to resign or their employments terminated until their appointments are properly determined. It would be recalled that the 32 workers were sacked on Aug. 26 following the crises that rocked the NSE.

3. Energy:

Banks Plan IPP to Generate Own Power

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) is currently leading a pilot initiative to build an Independent Power Project (IPP) which will serve as an autonomous source of power for banks operating in Lagos State.

And in an attempt to accelerate the completion of power projects across the country, the Federal Government yesterday directed the immediate and unconditional release of all equipment meant for the projects that are being "detained" at the nation's ports by the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS).

This came as the government said it had paid N45 billion out of N57 billion monetisation arrears owed to electricity workers across the country.

The CBN-led power project is part of the strategic measures targeted at reducing banks' overhead by 30 per cent within the next three years.

CBN Governor, Mallam Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, made this known yesterday in Abuja at the 4th Annual Banking and Finance Conference christened "Evolving Financial Landscape: Strategies for Economic Resilience".

Sanusi's announcement came a few hours after Vice-President Namadi Sambo said the current administration fully identified with the efforts of the CBN in repositioning the Nigerian financial sector.

Elaborating on the cost reduction strategy for banks, Sanusi said given the criticality of efficiency to cost of funds, the apex bank recently started a shared services project in collaboration with banks aimed at centralising back offices and the industrialisation of common processes.

He said: “In the next three years, we will reduce overhead costs in the banking industry by 30 per cent. We are also working towards establishing an IPP for independent power supply for all banks operating in Lagos as a pilot cluster.”

The CBN governor said an evolving financial landscape was capable of providing the platform for sustainable economic growth, development and economic resilience if all stakeholders in the Nigerian economic commit to all the various reforms and initiatives being implemented.

The CBN governor had dropped the hint on the planned cost reduction initiative in an interview with the THISDAY board of editors to commemorate his one year in office at his Abuja residence a few months ago.

Sanusi had said one of the major reasons for high interest rates in the industry is banks’ operations high cost structure – some of which were beyond their control such as power and security.

Speaking at the seminar, which was organised by the Chartered Institute of Bankers of Nigeria (CIBN), Sanusi also stressed the need for stakeholders to commit to good governance and transparency in their respective areas of operation.

He, however, warned that “no one can be so rich or so powerful as to get away with putting an entire system at risk to feed personal greed. A resilient economy requires hard work, intelligence, consistency and time. We will go through difficulties in the short-term. Tough decisions have been taken and we will continue to take them. Market condition must also improve”.

The CBN governor said financial institutions needed to be more proactive and innovative in packaging and marketing their products in order to remain relevant as financial intermediaries.

Earlier, the vice-president said government was determined to ensure confidence is restored in the banking sector considering the crucial role that sector plays in any economy.

He also said government would continue to support the banks in financing the real sector of the economy at a single-digit interest rate.

He added that all efforts are geared towards achieving the highest level of fiscal responsibility.

“We will give you (CBN) all the support needed to support the real sector of the economy. History must not be allowed to repeat itself as was witnessed in the past,” he said.

Sambo also said the role of the CIBN was crucial to complementing the efforts of the CBN towards evolving a strong financial system in the country.

He said government would continuously aim at reshaping the financial landscape to sufficiently meet the needs of various sectors of the economy.

Sambo added that the new prudential guidelines released recently by the CBN were a positive development that would enhance the success of ongoing efforts to revive the economy.

In the meantime, the Federal Government yesterday directed the immediate and unconditional release of all equipment meant for power projects across the country that are being “detained” at ports because of non-payment of demurrage.

Minister of State for Power, Mr. Nuhu Wya, who gave the directive during a meeting with the National Executive of the Nigeria Association of Chambers of Commerce, Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA) yesterday in Abuja, said as it stands, the power situation in the nation required pragmatic solution.

Government, Wya stated, had decided to “go the extra mile because a desperate problem requires a desperate solution. This administration will do whatever that is humanly possible to better the lot of Nigerians through provision of electricity which is one single item very dear to their life”.

On the monetization arrears of the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) workers, Wya told NACCIMA that the Federal Government had paid N45 billion of the N57 billion owed.

He, however, added that “we have not privatized PHCN yet because President Goodluck Jonathan as a leader with a human face directed that we must successfully negotiate the welfare of our workers in PHCN before the privatization process is concluded”.

Wya also used the occasion to announce that, by the end of the year, domestic gas would cost \$1 per million square cubic feet (mscf).

Besides, he said, the president had approved a different gas regime for the industrial sector to catalyze industrial growth through optional operation and production.

4. Environment:

Nigeria gold rush sees 200 children killed in outbreak of lead poisoning

An unprecedented outbreak of lead poisoning linked to a gold rush has killed at least 200 children in northern Nigeria this year, with a further 18,000 people affected.

Announcing the figures, the UN said it had sent an emergency team to assess the full impact of the "acute massive lead poisoning" in Zamfara state, where seven villages have so far been confirmed as contaminated. In all cases, villagers had been grinding ore by hand to search for gold when they unwittingly freed lead particles also contained in the rock.

The quantities of lead released into the dust and soil were large enough to kill children – most of the deaths were among under-fives – while also causing deafness, blindness, brain damage and muscular problems.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which conducted a preliminary study into the deaths, said that the scale of the problem was "unprecedented in CDC's work with lead poisoning worldwide".

More people have died in the affected villages this year than in community-wide disasters anywhere in the world over the past 40 years, according to TerraGraphics, an environmental engineering firm involved in the clean-up operation.

"This is an incredibly serious and worrying situation," said Lauren Cooney, emergency manager at Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which has been helping with the response. In one village 30% of children under five had died this year due to poisoning, the charity said.

"While we still don't know the full extent of the problem, we expect that there are going to be medium- and long-term health effects for people in these villages," said Cooney.

All mining has been banned in Zamfara state for several months as a result of the disaster, and local officials insist the situation is under control, even though their response has been hampered by heavy rains which have made the isolated villages difficult to reach. But new cases of poisoning are still being reported. MSF recently found dangerous levels of lead in two more villages where mining has occurred, and believes the total number of affected people exceeds 30,000.

Sadiq Abubakar Sadauki, special assistant to the governor of Zamfara, said during a telephone interview that ore obtained from a village called Sunke, which contained very high levels of lead, had caused most of the fatalities. "The problem was not the mining of the gold, it was the processing," said Sadauki. "People have no machines to detect gold and other minerals, so they used their hands."

Local authorities in northern Nigeria were first alerted to the problem in March this year when numerous small children in villages in the Bukkuyum and Anka areas of Zamfara suddenly had convulsions and then died.

Called in to help, MSF doctors initially suspected malaria or meningitis, but when treatments did not work they tested for heavy metals. Results from blood and soil samples showed lead levels so high that they exceeded the machines' upper testing limits.

Children were especially vulnerable to fatal poisoning because of their small size and their tendency to play in the contaminated dust. The rate of deaths among children in the worst-affected villages is more than three times that normally seen in refugee camps during emergencies, the UN says.

MSF has also recorded high levels of lead in adults' blood, which though not immediately fatal could have severe consequences over time, including stillbirths, kidney problems and male sterility.

Under a government-led clean-up project, the contaminated topsoil in two villages has been removed, disposed of safely, and replaced with clean soil. But the process is moving slowly, and there are fears that contaminated water sources will remain dangerous for some time.

The UN emergency team that has just arrived in Zamfara includes specialists from the World Health Organisation and Unicef.

They are equipped with a mobile laboratory, and hope to assess the magnitude of the problem and design a response. The UN said that besides lead, the soil was likely to be contaminated with copper and mercury, which is used by some villagers during the sluicing process to separate the gold from rock particles.

Northern Nigeria flooding 'displaces two million'

About two million people in northern Nigeria have been displaced after authorities opened the floodgates on two dams, an official says.

The flooding began suddenly when the gates on the Challawa and Tiga dams were opened, a spokesman for the Jigawa governor said.

The dams are in Kano state, but about 5,000 villages in neighbouring Jigawa state have been affected, he added.

Several states in northern Nigeria have been hit by floods this year.

It is not yet clear whether residents received a warning or if anyone was injured or went missing in the flooding, reported the Associated Press news agency.

The floodgates are normally opened every year during the rainy season.

Nigeria's meteorological agency had previously forecast low rainfall in the north, warning that more than 12 million people could face food shortages as a result, according to the AFP news agency.

In a normal year, the water released from the dams flows into fields, irrigating crops of corn, rice and vegetables during the brief growing season.

Jigawa and Kano are part of the Sahel region, a belt of semi-arid land south of the Sahara desert.

In neighbouring Niger, millions are facing food shortages after a prolonged drought caused crops to fail. That was followed by severe flooding last month. Millions are now facing food shortages.

How FG Cancelled N74 Billion Kano-Abuja Railway Project

The Federal Government has diverted the \$500m (N75bn) loan secured from the Chinese government for Kano-Abuja Railway project to finance National Public Security Community System Project; a letter obtained by Daily Trust has shown.

The letter, written by the Minister of Finance Dr Olusegun Aganga and addressed to the Ambassador, the People's Republic of China dated 30th August 2010, notified the Chinese government of the shift in the project.

The letter referenced F16348/II/449, titled: "Request for Negotiation of the Agreement on the US\$500 Million Loan Extended To Nigeria By the Peoples Republic of China and Utilisation of the Loan for the National Public Security Community System Project" informed the Ambassador that "the President has approved that the US\$ 500 million loan granted to Nigeria by China which was earlier proposed for the implementation of Kano-Abuja Railway would now be utilized for the new security project".

The Kano-Abuja railway project was negotiated by the late President Umar Musa Yar'adua with the Chinese government in 2008 during his visit to China.

The project is part of the portion of Lagos-Kano railway project proposed by Olusegun Obasanjo administration but reviewed by late Yar'adua.

A source told Daily Trust that Mr Aganga wrote the letter without consulting the Ministry of Transport under which the project was initiated.

He said the Minister of Transport, Yusuf Suleiman, was at the council meeting last Wednesday to challenge the directive but the issue was not entertained.

The decision by the late President Yar'adua to put off the Lagos-Abuja railway project was based on abused of due process in the agreement.

The loan was negotiated on condition that Nigeria government will pay the count part funding of \$70.5 within three years and the China EXIMBANK will provide \$470 million as contained in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Source said Nigerian government paid the first count part fund in 2009 but it did not affair in 2010 budget.

"The failure by government to make provision of the count part funding in this year's budget indicated the already they was plan to stop the project," the source said.

Dr Aganga's letter read: "As indicated during the meeting with Mr. Lei, the National Public Security Community System Project has been designed to address security Challenges which are sine qua non for the socio-economic development of the country".

The source said the minister is yet to travel for the negotiation due to some undisclosed reasons.

5. Immigration/Refugee/Idps:

U.S. Strikes-Off Nigeria from Major Drug Nations' List

The United States of America has delisted Nigeria from the list of major drug trafficking countries due to the laudable efforts of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA).

According to statement issued by NDLEA, "The United States government has gone a step higher than the usual annual drug certification of the country to outright removal of Nigeria from the majors list. The removal which is an acknowledgement of the agency's current drug control achievements is contained in the 2010 annual drug certification report."

The agency said that the reports was presented to congress by President Barack Obama on Friday, noting that it was the first time the country would be delisted from the drug majors list since 1991.

The statement also said that President Obama pointed out that "Nigeria, a worldwide drug trafficking focal point, makes counternarcotics a top national security concern for the country. United States and international data show a continued strengthening of illegal drug trafficking between Latin America and West Africa, especially via Brazil and Venezuela, with a considerable portion of illegal product destined for Europe".

The CEO of the NDLEA, Ahmadu Giade said the honour was for all Nigerians and well deserved.

"The removal of Nigeria from the majors list is an endorsement of our collective resolve to have a drug free society. It is a well deserved honour to all Nigerians. A product of dedication, transparency, hard work and cordial working relationship between Nigeria

and United States in drug control through the political will of President Goodluck Jonathan" Giade stated.

According to the report, Nigeria, Brazil and Paraguay were removed this year from the list because they no longer meet the criteria for the list according to US law. The assistance of international donors and organizations to West African governments to improve their counternarcotics capability is increasingly urgent.

The United States fully supports all efforts to promote, preserve, and protect the stability and positive growth of countries in West Africa ".

While thanking President Barrack Obama and Americans over what he described as candid assessment of the country's performance, Giade noted that drug control has defined indices such that the most assiduous efforts of countries could be easily measured.

"I appreciate President Barrack Obama and Americans for this candid and credible assessment. The removal speaks volumes concerning our impressive scorecard and determination to address the drug problem. Illicit trade in narcotics transcends national boundaries. Our foreign collaborators also have a way of monitoring our most assiduous efforts. All exit and entry points will remain invincible to drug criminals through effective drug interdiction". Giade stated.

The NDLEA boss thanked President Goodluck Jonathan for his anti-drug policies. He also commended all stakeholders, reassuring that no drug baron or major drug trafficker notwithstanding the status will go unpunished in the country. "NDLEA is one of the best anti-drugs Agencies in Africa and we are prepared to make sacrifices to sustain and improve on our drug control performance" he promised.

Giade also said, "Our level of professionalism shall be further consolidated on the tripod of transparency, anti-corruption and respect for the rule of law. It is a call to duty that demands higher commitment on our part. We shall continue to partner with the United States and other stakeholders. No stone will be left unturned in our quest for a drug free society." Giade assured.

NDLEA said that 20 countries on the list this year are Afghanistan, The Bahamas, Bolivia, Burma, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, India, Jamaica, Laos, Mexico, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Panama, Peru and Venezuela.

The agency also explained, "A major drug-transit country is defined as a significant direct source of illicit narcotic or psychotropic drugs or other controlled substances significantly affecting the United States; or a country through which such drugs or substances are transported."

The statement noted that the certification process was instituted by the United States to demand tougher counter narcotics measures by other governments.

"In Nigeria, US drug certification dates back to 1991 following the country's inclusion in the majors list. However, between 1994 and 1998 Nigeria was decertified and was given a national interest waiver in 1999. The following year it was certified and continued to enjoy certification till last year before its removal this year," NDLEA narrated.

NAPTIP to Repatriate Nigerians Stranded In Mali

DESPITE attempts by various government establishments and international organizations to stem human trafficking, it has been discovered that more Nigerians are at the moment stranded in Mali in desperation to find their way to Europe.

But insufficient fund and other logistics may stall moves to repatriate them to Nigeria as some of them are said to be living in "very poor conditions."

Executive Secretary, National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and Other Related Matters (NAPTIP), Simon Egede disclosed this in Benin, Edo State yesterday at the commissioning of a skill acquisition centre in Ugoneki, Orhiomwon Local Council and the commissioning of renovated school buildings in Ogida quarters in Benin.

Represented by the Director, Counseling and Rehabilitation, Mrs. Lilly Oguejiofor, the NAPTIP boss said the projects were funded by the governments of Norway, Italy, Netherlands and technical support from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

He said as at Wednesday, 87 persons have been convicted for human trafficking across the country, while over 4,000 trafficked persons have been rehabilitated in the eight centres established by the agency across the country.

Egede said: "America has rated us in the first tier as a nation that is complying to all standards in the fight against human trafficking, so Nigeria is trying in every way to fight the crime. We can beat our chest to say that we have tried but the problem is still there, it is a big problem. We cannot say it is over but we are trying. Funding is one of the challenges we have.

"We have just come from Mali because we have had stories that our children are stranded there. So the management of NAPTIP went there and saw that many children are actually stranded there and we have to do something. We need money, we need to go in there and bring as many as possible home and when they come home they need to be rehabilitated. All these are capital intensive."

According to him, such skill acquisition centres would be established in other 19 centres in the state. He disclosed that the locations were chosen after deliberate study surveys to locate areas where trafficking is prevalent in the state.

He also said the projects were chosen directly by the host communities to ensure that there is no imposition of projects on the people.

Governor Adams Oshiomhole, represented by the Commissioner for Women Affairs, Hajia Memuna Momodu said the state government was ready to partner with foreign donors and agencies to create an environment that would discourage human trafficking in the state.

6. Health:

7. Human rights/Gender/social issues:

Rebels: Three abducted French nationals, one hostage found

Rebels in Nigeria's delta region said Thursday they have located three abducted French nationals and one more hostage, and are working with kidnappers to ensure their release.

"The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta can confirm that it has located the three abducted French nationals and another individual abducted in a separate incident on the same night," the group said in a statement.

"We are in negotiations with the abductors towards effecting a transfer of the men to the custody of MEND."

The rebel group said it will release more information on their health once the kidnappers free them. The statement by the group's spokesman Jomo Gbono did not give details of who the kidnappers were.

The three French nationals were kidnapped overnight in an attack on their oil-services ship off the coast of Nigeria, the company they work for said Wednesday.

There has been no claim of responsibility for the attack on the Bourbon Alexandre by several speedboats, the oil services company said in a statement.

Sixteen crew members were onboard at the time. Thirteen remained on the ship and were unhurt, the company said.

The company provides ship and underwater services to oil and gas clients worldwide. It declined to release any more information.

It was unclear where the fourth hostage was abducted.

MEND, the key militant group in the oil-rich Niger Delta, is an umbrella organization of several rebel groups. It has been battling the government for years over fairer distribution of the country's oil wealth.

8. Geo-Strategic issues:

The millennium development goals need progressive UK leadership

Yesterday was the final day of the critical UN millennium development goals (MDGs) summit, where world leaders gathered to review progress against ambitious targets including halving world poverty, achieving universal primary education, fighting killer diseases, empowering women, and delivering water and sanitation, all by 2015. The outcomes are crucial to gaining increased support and momentum towards these and other MDG aspirations.

Last week, I was privileged to speak at an event convened by Bond (the membership body for 370 UK NGOs working in international development), where Nick Clegg, the deputy prime minister, and Andrew Mitchell, the secretary of state for international development, set out the UK government's plans for the summit, with a focus on maternal mortality and malaria. It is vital we make progress in these areas: every minute, a woman dies from a pregnancy or child-related cause, and malaria causes nearly a million deaths each year.

For progress to be made on these and other targets, policymakers need to recognise that the MDGs are interwoven. So, when a particular target is very off track, it holds back all the others. Good management of water resources and proper drainage, for example, can make a real difference in reducing transmission of malaria and other water-borne diseases, while progress on maternal health and mortality requires not only improved healthcare systems, but also safe sanitation, water and sound hygiene practices to ensure infection-free births and good chances of child survival in the first month of life.

Without sanitation, safe water and hygiene, we will fail to reach the MDGs across large parts of the developing world. In Nigeria, where I live, the statistics on water and sanitation are shocking: only half the population has access to safe water, and less than a third has proper sanitation. As a result, 150,000 children under the age of five die every year from diarrhoea.

In Africa, diarrhoea is now the biggest killer of children, claiming the lives of almost one in five children before their fifth birthday - more than AIDS, malaria and measles combined.

With a population of 140m, Nigeria has the third highest number of people living in poverty of any country in the world. It will be difficult to claim successful delivery of global MDG ambitions without achieving success in Nigeria.

Yet according to the national 2010 countdown strategy, achieving the MDGs could cost as much as \$170bn by 2015. A substantial portion of this is expected to come from the oil and gas industries. Government revenues are estimated at around \$40bn a year, but with such a huge population, there is a vast shortfall to make up.

Last week in London, I asked Mr Clegg whether the UK government had any plans to breathe new life into the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). The body

was set up by the previous UK government to set a global standard for transparency in oil, gas and mining, and he has promised me he will look into it. Although the EITI does not carry a high profile in terms of the MDGs, for a country like Nigeria it has huge potential to make a difference.

The UK has a role to play by supporting the implementation of the Nigerian EITI. I would ask Mr. Clegg to ensure that the UK government promotes financial transparency of UK-regulated companies operating in Africa with a zero-tolerance approach to bribery and corruption. If the UK government can help ensure British (and other OECD) companies meet their obligations in respect to the transparency initiative, they will be doing an important service for the poor of Nigeria.

It is clear that Nigeria will only deliver MDG progress if the revenues from oil and gas are directed by the government - at national, regional and local levels - to where the need is greatest. Those areas include tackling extreme poverty and hunger, strengthening health and education, diversifying our economy, bringing greater gender equality and delivering sustainable access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene.

However, oil and gas revenues alone will not be sufficient for meeting Nigeria's MDGs by 2015. Action and reform are urgently needed across many policy areas, but Nigeria also needs international aid – to strengthen governance and institutions and address the overwhelming levels of poverty.

There must be a sense of urgency and even impatience to address the lagging and critical sectors, such as sanitation, if world leaders are to honour the promises they have made and stop Africa losing too many of our children for lack of the bare essentials such as safe water and sanitation.

With only five years to go to 2015, and many MDGs off track, progressive UK leadership on development is needed more than ever to help accelerate progress towards attaining the vital, and achievable, millennium development goals.

Japan Grants Nigeria \$190,177 for Water, Others

Japanese Ambassador to Nigeria Mr. Toshitsugu Uesawa, yesterday in Abuja approved a grant of US\$190,177 to implement projects for the improvement of water/sanitation and primary school education in grassroots areas of Nigeria.

The ceremony was witnessed by representatives of two local Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Mr Thomas Gaya of Transfer of Appropriate Sustainable Technology and Expertise (TASTE) and Mr Alfred Emeka Okwuchukwu from Mankind Development and Rehabilitation Organisation (MADRO), who are to implement the community-based projects under the Japanese Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP).

Uesawa, during his keynote address, stressed that the money released is to enable under-privileged people and children gain access to clean and safe water and also to cultivate their talents in the classrooms to be constructed.

He also stated that NGOs are the best development partner to contribute directly to promoting the well-being of grass-roots communities through implementation various project.

According to a statement released by Japanese Embassy, the project for Water Supply and Sanitation is to be carried out in Kagarko Local Government area of Kaduna State in partnership with Transfer of Appropriate Sustainable Technology and Expertise (TASTE) and a total amount of US\$93,136 has been fully assigned for the implementation of this project.

Other West African States

Cape Verde:

Chad:

Gambia:

Gambian Vice-President Women involved in peace process...H7

Isatou Njie-Saidy, Gambian Vice-President, on Friday outlined the progress made by the West African nation towards implementing the UN Security Council resolution on women's rights saying her government has done a lot towards ensuring the full participation and representation of women in peace process.

The Dakar-based United Nations office for West Africa organized a sub-regional conference on the "Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 revolving around the involvement of women in issues relating to development, peace and security" in the Senegalese capital, Dakar.

Njie-Saidy said the Gambian government had adopted and ratified several international protocols and conventions such as UN Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

"These and other legal instruments such as the 1997 Constitution provide safeguards for women to enjoy a full and dignified living standard," the Gambian Vice-President said.

She also pointed out the participation of women in many areas such as the security sector.

"Gambian women security personnel have continued to participate in a number of peacekeeping missions. From 2001 to 2010, a total of 118 female officers have served in different UN peacekeeping missions in various parts of the world including Liberia, East Timor, Guinea Bissau and Darfur."

However, many rights groups like Amnesty International and the Accra-based Media Foundation for West Africa have repeatedly criticized the Gambian government over its poor human rights and governance records.

Guinea- Bissau:

Nation Requires Sustained International Support, General Assembly Hears

Guinea-Bissau needs sustained international support to help the fragile and impoverished nation tackle its major challenges, such as organized crime, high unemployment, environmental degradation and a poorly performing justice system, its President told the General Assembly today.

Malam Bacai Sanhá told the Assembly's annual general debate, taking place at United Nations Headquarters in New York, that the "understanding of all the partners of Guinea-Bissau" is required given the breadth and scopes of the challenges before the West African country.

Guinea-Bissau has been beset by coups, misrule and political violence for most of its life since it became independent in the early 1970s, and the UN has an integrated peacebuilding office (known as UNOGBIS) in place to help promote stability.

On 1 April this year the Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior and of the Chief of General Staff and other senior military officers were briefly detained by some members of the armed forces, prompting expressions of concern from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the Security Council.

"The handling of this incident and the consequences that derived from it did not always merit the understanding of all the partners of Guinea-Bissau," Mr. Sanhá said.

He also voiced concern that authorities in his country struggle to exert control over the more than 80 islands and reefs that comprise the Bijagôs archipelago in Guinea-Bissau.

The archipelago is "a confluence of water and wind... [that] could and should be a terrestrial paradise," the President noted.

"Instead, due to an assumed incapacity by the authorities to effectively exercise control, there is a risk of converting it into a sanctuary for evildoers."

Organized crime is a particularly persistent threat for Guinea-Bissau, with cartels using the country as a transit point for the shipment of drugs from Latin America to Europe.

Mali:

Two Malian women promoted to rank of Brigadier-General....H7

Malian President Amadou Toumani Toure has promoted two women to the rank of Brigadier-General on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the country's independence which fell last Wednesday.

Sources close to the Malian Defence minister said in Bamako on Friday that the two women were Brigadier-General (Dr) Kani Diabate and Brigadier-General (Dr) Togola Fatoumata Konipo.

The two are the first ladies to reach such a rank in the Malian army.

Pockets of extreme vulnerability persist....H4

Good rains in much of northern Mali over recent months have caused pasture to regenerate and animals to begin to recover in parts of Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal regions, but extreme vulnerability persists for Gao-based farming communities, who have exhausted all their coping mechanisms and are unable to recover their livelihoods, say aid agencies.

"The pastoralist crisis is on the point of ending... and the price of animals is rising again, but for non-pastoral communities who depend on a good harvest, we have not yet seen the end. We are still in the peak of crisis, and emergency activities need to continue," said Philippe Conraud, Oxfam's West Africa emergency coordinator.

Rains started slowly in June but became more intense in mid-July and August in much of the north, according to Action against Hunger (ACF), and have continued into September.

The practice of seasonal livestock movements has again picked up in much of the north, and the latest US Agency for International Development FEWS NET report [<http://www.fews.net>] predicted the 258,000 food-insecure would start to meet more of their food needs in coming months, though they may continue to face moderate food insecurity until the end of the year.

Grain prices have risen to the five-year average, and the price of goats and sheep is rising to pre-crisis levels - up to US\$50 from just \$10 per animal in the peak of the pastoralist crisis, estimates head of NGO Agronomes et Vétérinaires sans Frontières (AVSF) Marc Chapon.

But sedentary, farming communities in Gao continue to live in a situation of extreme stress as the pre-harvest lean season continues. They lack the option to up and leave to greener pastures, and must wait until harvest to repay debts. Repeat shocks, including the 2008 food price crisis and repeat drought have led households to go into extreme debt, said ACF head in Mali David Kerespars, and Oxfam's Conraud.

ACF estimates 40 percent of households in Ansongo, on the Niger river in Gao are in debt and have no means to pay back creditors. Without help, Conraud predicts, "in the middle and long-term it could get even worse."

Global acute malnutrition rates among under-fives in Ansongo are 18.5 percent, according to ACF's latest June nutrition assessment, up from 15.9 percent at the same time in 2009.

With UK backing, ACF runs therapeutic feeding clinics through 17 regional health centres, and is providing wider food security interventions to all under fives to prevent them from becoming malnourished. Cases of acute malnutrition with complications are referred to regional health centres.

Meanwhile, across the north, the government is subsidizing grain prices, and aid agencies, including the World Food Programme (WFP), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Committee of the Red Cross, ACF, Oxfam, Save the Children and CARE, continue to support the government's response efforts to treat malnourished children, provide supplementary food, food and healthcare for animals, and help improve stock management.

Variegated vulnerability

Vulnerability is highly variegated among different livelihood groups in the north, say aid agencies.

In areas surveyed in the Kidal and Timbuktu regions, global acute malnutrition is no higher than 10 percent, estimates UNICEF's nutrition manager Katrien Ghoois, though UNICEF's recent malnutrition assessment results are yet to be verified or published.

While pastoralists are also highly vulnerable to shock, given "they have milk and animals, but no alternatives," and their acute malnutrition tends to rise sharply in a crisis, their prospects can shift dramatically when grazing land improves as animals are quick to recover milk production.

Semi-sedentary agro-pastoralist populations who settle for months at a time along the River Niger, are slightly more protected from shock, says ACF's Kerespars. "They have more ability to cope with shocks such as droughts as they can migrate, find odd jobs, do artisanal work, or borrow money," he said.

But the poorest of these communities in Gao have also exhausted their coping mechanisms, and are finding it hard to turn to short-term construction or labour in the fields, which can supplement over half of their income, given such work opportunities are down by a third this year, according to FEWS NET.

Early recovery

Early recovery efforts must start as soon as possible to help people bring their livelihoods back to pre-crisis levels, says Conraud.

Oxfam hopes to start a cash transfer programme to help households pay off their debts and avoid having to sell grain at rock-bottom prices. The NGO and other aid agencies are meeting donors to try to encourage them to support such middle-term recovery efforts.

The need to get communities back on their feet is all the more important, given the likelihood of northern communities facing more problems in the future, say aid agency representatives. The problems facing northern Mali - including drought, ongoing tension over pastoralist routes, continually growing populations, and ongoing insecurity - are not going to go away, warned WFP head Alice Martin-Dahirou.

Doctors and vets work together in north...H6

Rains have improved pasture in parts of northern Mali, bettering many animals' survival prospects, but with rain come the risk of illnesses for animals weakened by months of malnutrition, making this a critical time for veterinary care, say aid agencies.

Some 40 percent of cattle, sheep and goats in northern Mali have died as a result of drought this year, the US Agency for International Development's FEWS NET estimates - in a region where 80 percent of the inhabitants rely on stockbreeding and agriculture.

When NGO Agronomes et Vétérinaires sans Frontières (AVSF) asked locals in the northern region of Timbuktu what kind of health interventions they needed, most said they wanted care for both themselves and their animals, "so we decided to take a holistic approach and treat them both together," AVSF head in Mali Marc Chapon told IRIN.

NGOs AVSF and Médecins du Monde (MDM) have each set up mobile health teams made up of a nurse, a state vaccinator, a veterinarian, and a community representative, to go to pastoralists' settlements in the Timbuktu, Kidal and Gao regions of northern Mali to vaccinate people, treat illnesses, give pregnant women prenatal checkups and nutritional advice; and to de-worm and inoculate animals against common diseases.

A combined approach makes sense in these types of crises, said the Food and Agriculture Organization's chief veterinary officer, Juan Lubroth, as it gives more flexibility and is often prioritized by nomads. "If you keep people alive and their animals die... then what will they live off?" he told IRIN.

Sickness risks

The change of diet from the dry to the wet season can bring on new sicknesses and diseases, according to deputy head of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Niger and Mali, Christian Wabnitz, "but if we get through the transition phase, their health improves."

Some of the illnesses threatening animals in droughts include trypanosomiasis spread by the tsetse fly; foot and mouth disease; contagious bovine or caprine pleuro pneumonia;

and PPR, known as “peste des petits ruminants”, says Lubroth. Given a weak herd, the illnesses of one animal can infect all, he said.

Weak animals are also more likely to be washed away by heavy rains: in Ber, a village in Timbuktu, 1,200 livestock drowned in July when two years’ worth of rain fell on two separate days.

“We need to make sure animals are healthy now as the rain improves pasture,” AVSF’s Chapon told IRIN, “because if they are carrying parasites, when they start to eat again, they end up feeding the parasites, not themselves.”

Among humans, pregnant women and malnourished children are most in need of healthcare interventions, said MDM’s project manager Sidy Diallo. Animal milk makes up the bulk of pastoralist children’s diets, according to Tufts University researchers, causing malnutrition when the supply dwindles.

But Lubroth points out that a holistic care package is needed to maintain both animal and human health. “Animals require water, shelter and decent food in order to recover from illness... No vaccinations will be as effective in malnourished animals without these.”

Logistics

The project is expensive to run as the teams cover vast, sparsely populated areas. Many nomads settle in temporary camps, up to 55km away from the nearest health clinic. AVSF targets just 2,500 people across 40,000sqkm - an area the size of Switzerland. “This is not health care for the masses,” said Diallo. “We don’t treat several hundred people a day.”

AVSF’s one clinic in Timbuktu, and MDM’s six in Gao and four in Kidal, are not enough to cover the regions’ needs, said project managers. The European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid Department (ECHO) currently supports both NGOs and may continue to do so over the longer-term, but prefers that treatment for all be free. At the moment, patients pay for care for themselves and their animals. Antibiotics for a camel will cost a herder US\$1.50; and an antibiotic vaccination for an animal costs 20 US cents, according to AVSF; with state-covered treatment for mandatory vaccines, pregnant women and young children only.

To keep the project going over the long term, NGOs say the state will need to step in. The Mali Ministry of Health has expressed interest but has not yet outlined any firm plans.

Cured meat as a cure.....H6

Destocking weak animals has long been considered part of the emergency and recovery response to help pastoralists survive, and protect their livelihoods in droughts, but experts say destocking must come sooner - before emergencies develop.

In northern Mali, 40 percent of herders' animals are believed to have died from starvation or disease due to lack of pasture this year - a stark statistic in a region where 80 percent of people rely on stockbreeding and agriculture to survive.

“The crisis has been known for a long time - since November 2009. If we had all responded a lot earlier [to livestock needs] we could have reduced pastoralists' stress movements, and remaining animals would have stayed alive,” said Marc Chapon, head of NGO Agronomes et Vétérinaires Sans Frontières (AVSF), in Mali.

Aid agencies Oxfam and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have been leading destocking programmes in northern Mali to help inject cash into pastoralists' pockets; improve the prospects for the remaining healthy flock; reduce pressure on the fragile environment; and in ICRC's case, improve food security by redistributing slaughtered animals as cured meat.

ICRC staff buys sheep, goats and cattle at pre-crisis prices - US\$ 40 for a sheep or goat, \$150 for a cow - from herders with 50 animals or less, so they can buy grain to fill the hunger gap, said Christian Wabnitz, ICRC's deputy head in Mali and Niger. Thus far, ICRC has bought 36,000 animals in Agadez (northern Niger) and in Gao and Timbuktu (both in northern Mali); and given veterinary help and fodder to 60,000 stronger animals that remain.

“The main aspect is a cash injection, but the meat is also available which can boost nutrition,” Wabnitz said. “And allowing weakened or sick animals to die can protect the health of the remaining herd.”

The agency works with district vets to kill the weakened animals, and with women's cooperatives to cure the meat, before distributing it to beneficiaries, prisons, hospitals and schools.

Community members inform how the animals are killed, to ensure it is done in line with traditional practice, said Wabnitz. Women cure the meat by cutting it into strips which are then marinated in salt and dried in a protective cage.

“There are some other more advanced [curing] techniques, but we want to fine-tune our approach to suit cultural habits,” he pointed out.

Resistance

But some herders are reluctant to give up their animals, despite their deteriorating health, says World Food Programme head in Mali Alice Martin-Dahirou. “Some nomads would rather keep their animals to the end, and see them die, rather than selling them en masse,” she said.

Weakened goats and sheep were selling for just \$10 at the height of the crisis; while in neighbouring Niger, cattle worth \$300 were reportedly sold for as low as \$6.

Herd size is an important cultural status symbol. “A large herd is like a large bank account - and it is a way to accumulate further wealth, as well as ensuring social functions can be acted upon, so some nomads will resist culling,” Wabnitz told IRIN.

Resistance to destocking - with or without slaughter - is common in African pastoralist zones, said Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) animal production officer Nacif Rihani. “There is often confusion between the early and accelerated livestock off-take [culling], which is the main objective sought, and the distress sale of livestock, which herders fear the most,” he said.

[“Distress sales] can cause psychological and cultural shock, in addition to the loss of livestock assets, which are crucial for their livelihood, food security and social status,” he said.

Reluctance can also come from bad past experiences in which agencies have taken a top-down, non-consultative approach, to destocking, said Rihani. Local and indigenous organizations must take the lead in selecting beneficiaries and stocks; organizing stock sales; and agreeing on pricing and meat preparation and preservation methods if destocked animals are slaughtered, he pointed out.

This approach is in line with the Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards, which were issued in 2009 to improve the quality of livestock relief interventions.

As the Sahel crisis deepened, reluctance among herders dissipated in northern Mali, said Wabnitz, which he says is “an indication of how bad the situation was”.

Timing

Despite ample early warning, in northern Mali, destocking came late, said AVSF’s Chapon: it should always be addressed in the first emergency phase of a crisis.

But FAO’s Rihani says in slow-onset droughts destocking can get started even sooner. “Specific indicators can trigger the appropriate response, and [enable] adequate resources - such as a flexible local fund - to be put in place to start destocking,” he said.

If done this early, animals will retain their market value.

Indeed, experts recommend continual destocking to regulate herd numbers and not over-pressure the fragile ecosystem. “In many pastoral and agro-pastoral zones in Africa, herd sizes expand to unsustainable numbers [encouraged by]... subsidies or direct aid through animal feed,” explained Rihani.

Herders do regulate their herds to some extent, but complex social and ethnic issues are at play which can encourage herd-growth. An indirect approach is needed, says Rihani, involving a stress on improving milk production per animal; improving access to livestock markets; and helping herders attain fair prices for their animals, so they can get more out of a smaller herd.

Mauritania :

Al-Qaeda Offshoot Threatens Country....H7

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb accused the Mauritanian government on Monday of killing civilians in Mali and of being the agent of France. In a communiqué published by the website Nouakchott Information, Aqim denounced an aerial raid by the Mauritanian army.

"Our Muslim brothers in the North of Mali were the object of a cowardly aggression, which killed two women, Najiya et Salka, and wounded one man," the statement said. "The Mauritanian army, acting in the pay of miscreants who kill innocent people in Afghanistan and Iraq, is lying when it says that the woman who was killed was the wife of a mujahidin."

They called Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz the agent of France and said that the blood of the two women who were killed would not go unavenged.

Mauritania launched a military operation against Aqim in the Timbuktu region on Friday, and Mauritanian troops clashed with Aqim fighters Friday and Saturday, in which eight Mauritanian soldiers and 12 Aqim members reportedly died.

Witnesses in Mali confirm that three civilians were killed in Sunday's airstrike, but Nouakchott has firmly denied it, saying only that one woman died, and that she was the "wife of a terrorist".

On Monday, France sent 80 troops to try to recover seven hostages, five of which are French nationals, from suspected Aqim kidnappers.

Army Attacks Suspected Al Qaeda Fighters....H7

Mauritanian warplanes attacked militants of Al-Qaeda's North African wing in Mali, senior officers said, as the head of Mauritania's ruling party urged support for a "holy war against terrorists".

Mauritanian aircraft reportedly attacked a convoy of three cars carrying suspected militants from Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (Aqim).

"This holy war against the terrorists will benefit from the backing of us all and our armed forces should have the support of all of us," said Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Mohamed Lemine, the head of Mauritania's ruling party.

"We are engaged in battle with extremists who have tarnished the image of our sacred religion as well as the image of Muslims," added Ould Mohamed Lemine, a former defence minister.

In Niger, a government spokesman denied the targeted militants were those suspected to have kidnapped seven foreigners, including five French nationals, from the north of the country and then taken them to Mali.

They "are not those who took the hostages", said Laouali Dan Dah, but added: "However, it cannot be excluded that they are in touch with the group that took the hostages."

A local mayor in Mali denounced the air raids, saying the victims had been Malian civilians.

"I am currently at the hospital in Timbuktu," said Mohamed Lamine Ould Sidate, mayor of the nearby town of Ber.

"Two women from our region are dead and four men are wounded after gunfire from a Mauritanian plane this morning on their vehicle," he said.

"We are angry. We, the civilians, we have nothing to do with this business and here they are killing us."

A source at the hospital said one of the dead women was in fact a minor. And one Malian security source spoke of a blunder by the Mauritanian army.

A senior Mauritanian officer dismissed the claims of civilian casualties.

"Our targets are armed terrorists," the officer, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told AFP. "If there is anyone who profits from these kinds of allegations, it is certainly propaganda of the terrorists."

But other Malian politicians joined the condemnation.

"I condemn the death of civilians, who in no circumstances should be targeted," said Assarid Ag Imbarca-Wane, vice president of Mali's National Assembly, in a statement.

The attacks followed Thursday's kidnapping by suspected Aqim militants in northern Niger of five French nationals, a Togolese and a Madagascan.

French government spokesman Luc Chatel on Sunday refused to rule out taking military action to free the seven hostages but said no French troops were involved in the latest Mauritanian offensive against Aqim.

French officials have said they believe the kidnappers were connected to Aqim and had taken the hostages to Mali.

In July French commandos accompanied Mauritanian troops in a raid on an Al-Qaeda camp in Mali, which left seven militants dead but failed to find French hostage Michel Germaneau, now known to have been killed.

Security sources in Mali and Niger meanwhile said French reconnaissance planes had been searching several countries in the Sahel region since Thursday's abductions.

The Sahel is a mainly desert region that covers Mali, southern Mauritania, southern Niger and several other countries, and includes areas where the north African branch of Osama bin Laden's terror network operates.

Niger:

Gov't Calls on UN to Observe Upcoming Referendum and Elections...H1

Niger's head of State Salou Djibo today called for the United Nations and other international organizations to observe the forthcoming series of elections to restore the impoverished West African country to constitutional rule after February's coup d'état.

Addressing the General Assembly on the opening day of its annual session, he stressed the transitional government's determination to "guarantee free, fair, transparent and credible elections."

In February soldiers stormed the presidential palace and deposed Mamadou Tandja, who had been accused by opposition figures and others of anti-democratic practices.

"The commitments that we made the day after the events of 18 February 2010, are at an advanced stage of fulfillment and will be held within the agreed timetable, with your support," General Djibo said.

The electoral timetable provides for polls to be held between 31 October and 6 April 2011, beginning with a referendum on the new constitution and culminating with the election of a new president who will be inaugurated on 11 April. Members of the transitional government and the military and security forces will be ineligible to stand.

Gen. Djibo thanked the international community for its aid during a severe food crisis earlier this year, in which the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and partners cooperated with the Government in easing the situation for almost half of the population of 15 million.

He also underscored the threat of terrorism in the region, citing the abduction last week of seven foreigners in Niger, which "reminds us of the gravity of the situation and the urgency of taking the necessary measures to effectively confront this threat peace, security and the development of our countries.

"Each day which passes sees terrorism expanding in our sub-region, at the risk of tarnishing the image of the Sahelian countries, compromising tourist revenue and increasing the misery and insecurity of the populations."

Web message says al Qaeda affiliate claims abduction...H7

An al Qaeda claim of responsibility for the kidnapping of five French nationals in Niger has surfaced on Islamist websites.

The message, purportedly from al Qaeda in Mahgreb, said it kidnapped five French nuclear experts who worked for Areva, the French nuclear reactor builder in the Arlit area in Niger last Wednesday. The message said the abduction was a follow up to a warning that its leader issued to France.

"Despite the high military preparations in the area and the security belt around it, those lions of Islam were able to break in and kidnap five nuclear experts who work for Areva," the message said.

"So we claim our responsibility to this blessed operation and we tell the French government that our fighters will deliver their lawful demands to them."

Al Qaeda in Mahgreb is the al Qaeda terror movement's affiliate in North Africa.

President Nicolas Sarkozy said Wednesday that France plans to "mobilize all of its state agencies" to free the people, his spokesman reported.

"The president considers this a very serious affair," spokesman Luc Chatel told reporters.

The message noted that the Niger region "is one of the world's most important uranium producing areas" and that France has stolen the "strategic resource for decades."

"We want to remind our Muslim brothers and public opinion that the uranium thieves caused the killing of thousands of poor Muslims in the area and abusing them in those mines and exposing them to dangerous radiation from radon gas while denying them any protection or health care," the message said.

"The crusaders' companies who steal our resources and abuse our sons should know that the fighters' goals are lawful and they must leave.

The message was posted on Islamists websites that have carried messages from al Qaeda in the Mahgreb in the past. CNN was not able to verify the authenticity of the message.

France confirms al-Qaeda kidnap at Niger uranium mine....H7

France's foreign ministry has confirmed that an al-Qaeda group is holding five of its citizens after abducting them from a uranium mine in Niger.

A ministry spokesman said France had no proof the five were alive but had "good reasons" to believe they were.

He said a claim from al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) was genuine.

Another two people, one from Togo and the other from Madagascar, were seized along with the French group.

Speaking to AFP news agency in Paris, foreign ministry spokesman Romain Nadal said the government was "in a position to confirm the authenticity of the claim" from AQIM, which was broadcast on the Arab satellite network al-Jazeera.

He said France had received no other communication and was not yet aware of any precise demands from the hostage-takers.

The AQIM statement said the group would issue demands to the French government "shortly" and warned against doing "anything stupid".

Niger's government believes the kidnappers are affiliated to Abou Zaid, the AQIM leader in northern Mali.

France has sent 80 military personnel to Niger's capital Niamey to help search for the hostages.

They are backed by a long-range Breguet Atlantique aircraft and a Mirage jet equipped with sophisticated monitoring equipment.

Previous kidnaps

Two of the French nationals are employees of the French nuclear energy firm Areva, which operates the mine near Arlit.

Map of Niger

The other five hostages work for a subsidiary of the French construction company Vinci, which is a subcontractor there.

The hostages and their captors were last seen heading towards Inabangaret, an important well and stopping point in north-western Niger.

The AQIM is active in the region and has kidnapped French and other European nationals in the past.

In July, the group announced that it had executed a 78-year-old retired French engineer it was holding hostage in Mali, after a raid by the French and Mauritanian armed forces had failed to free him.

The following month, the Spanish government is believed to have paid millions of euros to free two of its nationals seized by AQIM in Mauritania.

Niger is the world's sixth biggest producer of uranium, and the radioactive heavy metal is its main export. Areva gets much of its uranium from the two mines it operates in the country, Arlit and Imouraren.

France Believes Hostages Captured in Niger Are Still Alive....H7

France's defense minister says there is "every reason" to believe the five French nationals held captive by al-Qaida-linked militants in Niger are alive.

Herve Morin says the fact that al-Qaida has indicated it will soon make demands has led French authorities to think the hostages are alive. He says French officials have been waiting for the kidnappers to make their demands.

Morin also acknowledged his government has no proof the hostages are alive.

Gunmen kidnapped the five French nationals, as well as two Africans, September 16 in the town of Arlit in northern Niger. Officials say the kidnappers may have taken the hostages to neighboring Mali.

North Africa's Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb has claimed responsibility for the kidnapping.

On Friday, France said it has no immediate plans to use military action to rescue the five French hostages.

The head of armed forces in France, Edouard Guillaud, said the hostages' lives do not appear to be in immediate danger, but he said military intervention is possible if the situation worsens.

France has sent a military intelligence unit to the region, but has said it wants to open communication with the militants in hopes of freeing the five French nationals and two Africans.

The hostages include two employees of the French nuclear energy firm Areva and five with a subsidiary of the French construction company Vinci.

Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb has carried out previous kidnappings in the region, including that of a 78-year-old Frenchman who was abducted in Niger in April and later killed.

France: No Military Rescue for Hostages in Niger....H7

A French official said Friday France has no immediate plans to use military action to rescue five French nationals abducted by al-Qaida forces in North Africa. A French aid worker was executed by the same group in July after France launched a failed rescue mission to retrieve him.

Edouard Guillard, the head of the armed forces in France, said Friday a military intervention to save the hostages is not in the cards at the moment.

Seven hostages were kidnapped in northern Niger last week. Five are French nationals and the other two are from Togo and Madagascar.

The militant group al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb has taken responsibility for the attack.

Speaking on French radio, Guillard said France is right now assessing the situation and that military forces are present to support diplomacy.

France has sent a military intelligence unit to the region but has said it wants to open communication with the militant group. On Thursday, a French Minister called for the militants to put their release demands on the table.

Guillard said Friday the lives of the hostages don't appear to be in immediate danger, but he added a military intervention is possible if the situation escalates.

The militant group, which is known by the acronym AQIM, has used jihadist forums to warn France against launching a military campaign to rescue the hostages.

In July a joint French and Mauritanian operation tried to rescue a 78-year-old French aid worker who had been kidnapped by AQIM. Seven militants were killed in the operation but AQIM later executed the Frenchman.

Sénégal:

CLIMATE CHANGE: Adaptation Fund starts delivering.....H4

In what is being hailed as a breakthrough for a "collective effort" by developed and developing countries, the Adaptation Fund set up by the UN to help poor countries cope with the unfolding impact of climate change has finally become operational.

Last week, the Fund's board approved two adaptation projects, one in Senegal - threatened by sea-level rise, less rainfall and high temperatures - and the other in Honduras, which faces increasing water shortages.

The two projects worth a total of about US\$14 million are not only the first to be approved by the board but also the first to get money directly from the Fund. Developing countries had been lobbying for direct access, and have now been granted control over how to spend the funds.

The decision is good news ahead of more UN climate change talks slated for December in Mexico.

The money for the Senegal project will be used to implement the country's National Adaptation Plan for Action in the areas of Rufisque, Saly and Joal, along the country's west coast, and will cover actions to protect houses from flooding, erosion and sea-level

rise. The project also aims to help rice growers and the fishing community in the region adapt to increased salinization.

Honduras will use the funds to improve water management in its capital region of Tegucigalpa. At least 13,000 households stand to benefit.

Direct access

Direct access marks yet another "positive and innovative action" by the Fund, said Saleemul Huq, lead author of the chapter on adaptation in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's fourth assessment report.

Huq, who heads the climate change group at the UK-based policy think-tank International Institute for Environment and Development, said the decision adds to the growing list of "positive and innovative features" of the Adaptation Fund. He said these included "its uniquely innovative source of funding through an adaptation levy, its governance structure, which - again uniquely - has a majority of developing countries, and its genuinely participatory and collegial board".

Besides direct contributions from developed countries, the Fund raises money from a levy of about 2 percent on credits generated by the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) set up under the Kyoto Protocol, which in turn operates under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The mechanism allows industrialized countries to earn and trade emission credits by implementing projects in developed or developing countries; they can then put the credits towards meeting their greenhouse gas emission targets.

Sven Harmeling, co-chair of the adaptation working group of Climate Action Network International, a global coalition of NGOs, said the Fund's board "has shown that a collective effort of experts from developed and developing countries, even with a majority of developing country representatives, has been able to set up a consolidated Fund which had to face many complex and new issues, and which manages to address concerns from different sides with regard to fiduciary standards for direct access."

"Developing countries should now do their best to show that they really want to use the direct access opportunity, to show that they are willing to take up the associated responsibility," he said.

The decision to set up the Fund was taken almost 10 years ago under the Kyoto Protocol. Vulnerable countries are given the option of directly accessing money through their national institutions charged with implementing the projects. The first such body - Le Centre de Suivre Écologique du Sénégal - was approved in April 2010.

Similarities with Global Fund

The Fund's direct access approach is "unique in international environmental governance", said Harmeling, pointing out that the only similar example was the Global Fund to Fight HIV/Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which had inspired it.

"Both funds are the only ones which allow developing countries to directly access resources, and in my view the Global Fund has shown that it is a workable approach, which can increase significantly the ownership of developing countries... Of course, the scale of the two Funds cannot be compared, since the Global Fund manages several billion dollars."

Harmeling, who is also senior adviser at Germanwatch, a North-South watchdog initiative, asked: "However, if donors admit to give billions of dollars in a direct access health fund, why shouldn't they in an international climate fund?"

Short of funds

Marcia Levaggi, manager of the Adaptation Fund's board secretariat, told IRIN, the Fund had about \$150 million - far short of the sum required, according to various estimates.

UNFCCC reckons that by 2030 poor countries would need \$28-59 billion a year to adapt; the World Bank \$20-100 billion; the European Union Commission \$10-24 billion a year by 2020; and the African Group of climate change negotiators more than \$67 billion a year by 2020.

Huq noted that while "money is available in the short term for initial projects", there could be bottlenecks "as more countries get their national implementing entities approved and submit project proposals".

Model for the future?

There is still a lot to learn and build on for the Adaptation Fund, which could be the "model for the future" for other climate financing mechanisms, reckoned Harmeling.

The Global Fund's country-coordinating mechanisms such as the multi-stakeholder forum, which decides on which proposals to submit could be a feature to emulate, he suggested.

The Adaptation Fund also needed to build on its repository of national implementing entities "as much as possible while at the same time ensuring that the fiduciary management standards are not weakened," said a paper Harmeling co-wrote with Alpha Oumar Kaloga, a member of the Guinean delegation at the UNFCCC talks.

But a contentious issue is still outstanding: the criteria on which decisions are made as to which project gets the money first. There have been heated debates at various UNFCCC talks on how to assess the extent to which individual developing countries are vulnerable to climate change, allowing a fair allocation of funds.

It was easy to allocate funds to the projects in Senegal and Honduras as they were the only fully-developed proposals on the table, said Levaggi. Harmeling believes it would be better to allocate money regionally as it is not clear that every developing country will submit a project.

UBA secures 234 Million Euro Oil and Gas Financing Deal in Sénégal....H2

In a move that underscores its capacity to fund big ticket transactions across Africa, United Bank for Africa has secured a multi-million oil and gas financing deal with SAR (Société Africaine de Raffinage) of Senegal.

Under the financing deal, secured after a rigorous bid process involving other financial institutions, UBA Senegal will avail SAR, the National Refinery of Sénégal a total facility of EUR 234million in three parts.

The first part is a crude oil financing facility of Euro 180 million, followed with a short Term Loan of Euro 54 Million to finance stock and receivables and then a Receivable Financing Facility of Euro 60 Million.

The official signing ceremony took place at the Ministry of Energy and was witnessed by the Senegalese Minister of Energy, Samuel Sarr, Mr. M. Carmello SAGNA, CEO of SAR and a delegation of UBA which included CEO UBA AFRICA, Mr. Rasheed Olaoluwa and Managing Director, UBA Senegal, Mr. Jean-Luc Konan.

According Mr. Rasheed Olaoluwa, CEO UBA Africa, the transaction is the largest outside of Nigeria and comes on the heels of UBA's lead role in the US\$265million supplementary refinancing deal for Exxon Mobil and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). "We are positioned to support governments and institutions actualize growth and development potentials in Senegal and across Africa, thus making UBA a financial partner of choice for major players in the oil and gas sector in Africa" Olaoluwa said.

Commenting on the deal, The Senegalese Minister for Energy, M. Samuel said the development is historical for Senegal and for UBA Group.

"The UBA/SAR deal demonstrates the increasing importance of intra-African finance, with African institutions ready and willing to provide long term and sophisticated financial solutions to African clients. The transaction also underlines the strong relationship between Nigeria and Senegal, and brings with it the potential for the refining of Nigerian crude by SAR" the minister said.