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# Neptune Prime WEEKEND

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## The Menace of Phone Snatching in Nigeria: A Focus on Mararaba

By Victor Itodo Abuh

In a bustling corner of Nasarawa State lies Mararaba, a vibrant community bridging the gap between Nasarawa and Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Its streets hum with the energy of commerce, commuters, and countless lives intersecting daily. Yet, beneath this apparent vitality, a dark scourge plagues the town: the rampant menace of phone snatching.

Phone snatching, once considered petty theft, has escalated into a life-threatening menace. In Mararaba, innocent residents have lost more than their phones—they've lost their lives.

Victims recount harrowing tales of thieves armed with knives or guns, ready to strike over a device worth a few thousand naira. For some, resistance or hesitation has proven fatal, leaving families devastated and communities shaken.

The recent Crime Experience and Security Perception Survey (2024) by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) paints a grim national picture, with over 25 million phones stolen in just 12 months. While Mararaba's figures remain unquantified, its reputation

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# Nigeria's 2025 Budget: High Revenue, Yet a Heavy Loan Burden

BY SAKINAT MUSA ABUBAKAR

On December 18, 2024, Nigerians watched as President Bola Tinubu presented the 2025 Budget of Restoration to the National Assembly. Valued at an eye-popping N49.7 trillion, it is the largest budget in Nigeria's history,

with promises to restore peace, rebuild prosperity, and achieve ambitious goals like slashing inflation to 15% and strengthening the naira to N1,500 per dollar. But behind the bold projections and soaring rhetoric lies a troubling reality: Nigeria is still borrowing heavily to fund its future.

### The Numbers Don't Lie

Nigeria's revenue for 2024 shattered records. The Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) delivered over N2.6 trillion, exceeding its target by a staggering 30%. The Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) collected a record-breaking N10 trillion from taxes, the highest in the

nation's history. Oil revenues, despite challenges in production and theft, contributed significantly to government coffers. Yet, these achievements have done little to ease the country's reliance on loans. The 2025 budget deficit is projected at N13.08 trillion, to be financed

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NIGERIAN MAN BECOMES FIRST AFRICAN TO WIN MISTER INTERNATIONAL PAGEANT



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WE DIDN'T PAY FOR EDUCATION IN THE OLDEN DAYS, EVERYTHING WAS FREE - RETIRED JUDICIARY REGISTRAR CHIROMARI



# Neptune World

You can fool all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time.

Abraham Lincoln

The work of Nigeria is not complete for as long as there is one Nigerian who goes to bed on empty stomach.

Ibrahim Babangida

## PICTURE OF THE DAY

Christmas shopping takes centre stage at the ever-busy Mararaba market, outskirts of Abuja.

PHOTO CREDIT: Google



## UP&DOWN



### We will borrow to fund N13 trillion 2025 budget deficit - FG

BY VICTOR ITODO ABUJAH

Nigeria's Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister for the Economy, Mr Wale Edun, has disclosed that the N13 trillion deficit in the proposed N48 trillion 2025 budget would be funded through borrowing.

Edun disclosed this while addressing State House correspondents after the Federal Executive Council (FEC) meeting held at the Presidential Villa, Abuja. The 2025 budget projects a total revenue of NN34.82 trillion, while expenditures are pegged at N47.96 trillion—marking a 36.8% increase from the 2024 estimates. This results in a deficit of N13.14 trillion, equivalent to 3.89% of the nation's GDP.

The minister highlighted that the budget aligns with progress made under President Bola Tinubu's administration over the past 18 months, as well as global fiscal realities.

### Man beats wife to death with iron rod

The Ebonyi State Police Command has arrested and arraigned a 54-year-old man, Eseni Chima, for allegedly killing his wife, Ugochukwu, on Tuesday, December 17.

Reports indicate that the incident occurred at 60 Ogbaga Road, Kpirikpiri, in Abakaliki Local Government Area. While the motive behind the crime remains unknown, Chima is accused of repeatedly beating his wife with an iron rod until she died.

During the court hearing, prosecuting counsel Emmanuel Monday detailed the gruesome nature of the crime, which led to the charge of murder against Chima at a Magistrate Court in Abakaliki. Presiding Judge Chinedu Agama directed the police to forward the case file to the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP) for legal advice. The judge also adjourned the case until December 31 for further proceedings.

The tragic incident has shocked the community, raising concerns about domestic violence and the need for justice to be served.



## ANCIENT FACTS

### Civilization starts when we help others - Margaret Mead

- Years ago, anthropologist Margaret Mead was asked by a student what she considered to be the first sign of civilization in a culture. The student expected Mead to talk about fishhooks, clay pots or grinding stones.
- But no. Mead said that the first sign of civilization in ancient culture was a femur (thighbone) that had been broken and then healed.
- Mead explained that in the animal kingdom, if you break your leg, you die. You cannot run from danger, get to the river for a drink or hunt for food. You are meat for prowling beasts. No animal survives a broken leg long enough for the bone to heal.
- A broken femur that has healed is evidence that someone has taken time to stay with the one who fell, has bound up the wound, has carried the person to safety and has tended the person through recovery.
- "Helping someone else through difficulty is where civilization starts," Mead said.
- We are at our best when we serve others. Be civilized.

**FUN PUZZLE**  
Find The Hidden Words

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
H	E	L	O	K	T	R	Q	N	
S	T	A	Y	M	Q	O	U	N	S
S	T	R	O	N	G	S	V	H	P
S	T	A	Y	P	W	F	L	X	U
P	O	S	I	T	I	V	E	B	C
A	N	D	R	X	C	V	Y	G	D
N	E	V	E	R	B	W	Z	E	T
G	I	V	E	U	P	D	I	G	E
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J

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## COVER

## ...High Revenue, Yet a Heavy Loan Burden

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largely through borrowing. Debt servicing alone will cost N15.81 trillion, dwarfing allocations for critical sectors like education (N3.52 trillion) and health (N2.48 trillion). **The Paradox of Prosperity**

How does a country report record revenues yet find itself sinking deeper into debt? This paradox fuels public frustration. Nigerians are asking:

Where is the money going? Despite massive revenues, public services remain underfunded. Hospitals are under-equipped, schools are overcrowded, and infrastructure projects stall due to "insufficient funds."

Why is borrowing increasing? If revenue-generating agencies are exceeding targets, why is the government still borrowing trillions?

Who benefits from these loans? Many fear that loans are enriching a few while leaving ordinary Nigerians to shoulder the burden of repayment through higher taxes and inflation.

**Debt: A National Crisis**

Nigeria's debt has surpassed N87 trillion, and experts warn that the country spends over 90% of its revenue on debt servicing. This leaves little room for investments in sectors that directly impact citizens' lives.

Take education, for instance. In the 2025 budget, N826.9 billion is earmarked for infrastructure, but strikes, dilapidated classrooms, and unpaid lecturers remain the norm. Similarly, in health, while 282.65 billion is allocated for the Basic Health Care Fund, many Nigerians still rely on expensive private hospitals or travel abroad for

treatment.

**Broken Promises or Bold Vision?**

President Tinubu assures Nigerians that this budget will lead to economic stability. Key promises include: Security: N4.91 trillion to equip armed forces and end insecurity.

Infrastructure: N4.06 trillion for major projects like the Lagos-Calabar and Sokoto-Badagry highways.

Agriculture: Support for farmers to ensure food security.

But can these promises be fulfilled when so much of the budget is swallowed by debt servicing?

**Call for Transparency**

Nigerians deserve answers:

What measures will ensure loans are used effectively?

How will record revenues

translate into visible benefits for citizens?

Can Nigeria avoid a debt crisis while still meeting its development goals?

**What Lies Ahead**

The 2025 budget reflects a government caught between ambition and economic reality. While it seeks to address urgent needs, its heavy reliance on borrowing could deepen the struggles of ordinary Nigerians.

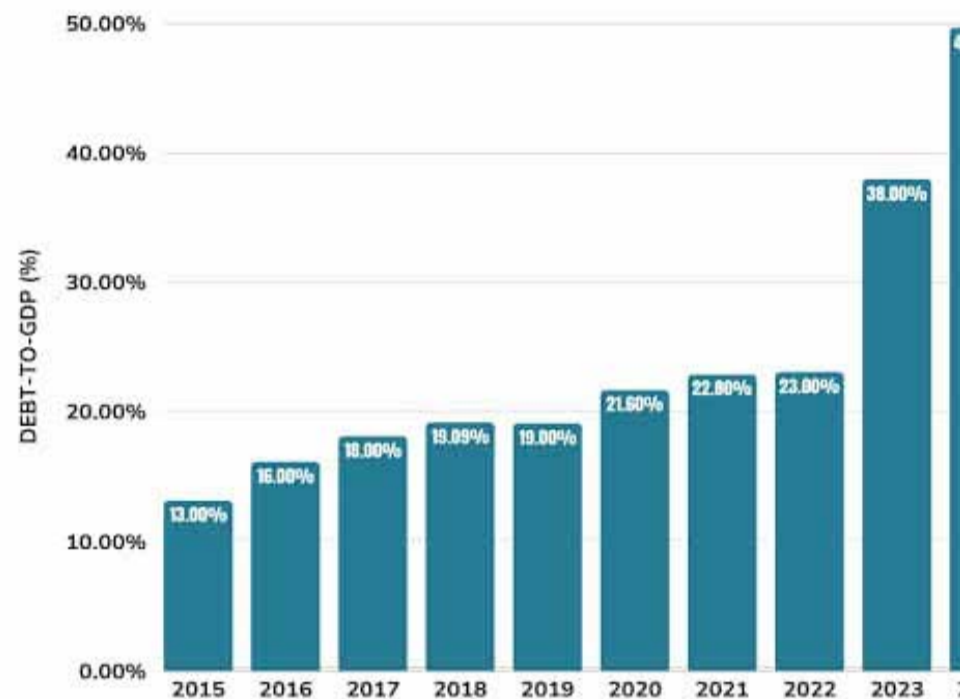
As the National Assembly debates this budget, the public must demand accountability.

With record revenues on the table, the question is no longer whether Nigeria can fund its future—it's whether the government will make choices that truly prioritise the welfare of its people.

This is your future, Nigeria. Let your voices be heard.

**Nigeria's Rising Debt Burdens**

Nigeria's Debt to GDP Ratio, 2015 -2024



Source: DMO, CBN

Dataphyte

@dataphyte @d

## ...Phone Snatching in Nigeria: A Focus on Mararaba

Cont'd from page 1

as a hotspot speaks volumes. Mararaba Junction, the busiest and most popular bus stop in Karu Local Government Area, has unfortunately become a hotspot for criminal activities. One of the respondents, Mr. Peter Odeh, a resident of Aso Pada, Mararaba, described the pedestrian bridge at Mararaba Junction as a haven for phone snatchers and petty thieves.

According to him, criminals often use the bridge as a hideout after committing crimes, confident that their victims cannot match their pace on the elevated structure.

He explained that many of these perpetrators disguise themselves as hawkers or beggars, standing strategically to monitor activities around the junction.

In some cases, they snatch phones from unsuspecting passengers in moving vehicles, making swift getaways while blending into the crowd.

\*What drives this growing menace?\*

The causes are many sided: Unemployment is a significant factor. With Nigeria's unemployment rate hitting alarming highs, many youths turn to crime for survival. In Mararaba, where job opportunities are scarce, phone snatching offers quick, albeit illegal gains.

Drug addiction also fuels many of these crimes. Criminals often steal to fund their habits, perpetuating a cycle of



dependency and violence.

For some, the desperation of hunger outweighs the risk of crime. Snatching a phone can mean food on the table, even if only temporarily.

Lastly, inadequate security infrastructure compounds the problem. Mararaba's burgeoning population has outpaced its security system. With limited police presence and slow response times, criminals operate with impunity. Beyond the stolen phones, the human toll is staggering. Consider the story of Sarah, a

27-year-old hairdresser, whose brother was stabbed to death during a phone snatching incident last year.

"He was coming home late from work," she recalls, tears streaming down her face. "They asked for his phone, but he hesitated. They stabbed him and left him to bleed on the roadside."

Sarah's story is one of many. For every phone stolen, there's a victim whose life is upended—physically, emotionally, or financially.

A recurring theme in victims'

narratives is the inefficiency of law enforcement. According to the NBS report, only 11.7% of victims who reported phone thefts were not satisfied with police response. In Mararaba, residents allege that some officers turn a blind eye or are overwhelmed by the sheer volume of cases.

A community leader John Yakubu highlights the frustration: "We've reported these issues countless times, but nothing change. The criminals return to the streets the next day. It's like they know they're

untouchable."

Tackling the issue of phone snatching demands a comprehensive approach:

Boosting security is essential. Deploying more security personnel and improving street lighting in Mararaba's high-risk areas can help deter criminals.

Empowering youths by creating job opportunities and offering skills acquisition programmes can steer young people away from crime.

Combating drug abuse through rehabilitation centres and community outreach programmes is another crucial step.

Enhancing law enforcement by equipping the police with resources and training to handle crimes more effectively, alongside community policing initiatives, can foster trust and safety.

The menace of phone snatching in Mararaba reflects broader societal challenges: unemployment, poverty, and inadequate governance. While the NBS report highlights alarming national trends, the local stories from Mararaba reveal the depth of the crisis. For residents, the loss of a phone is often just the beginning—a prelude to fear, trauma, or even tragedy.

Solving this issue demands collective action from the government, security agencies, and communities. Only then can Mararaba, and Nigeria as a whole, reclaim its streets from the shadow of phone snatchers.

# NEWS

## Over 20 children feared dead at Christmas funfair stampede

Dozens of children have reportedly lost their lives in a stampede that occurred during a children's carnival in Ibadan, the Oyo State capital, on Wednesday. It was gathered that over 30 children may have lost their lives in the unfortunate incident with many others injured.

In a statement released on Wednesday, the state Commissioner for Information and Orientation, Dotun Oyelade, confirmed that the stampede occurred at a private children's funfair held at Basorun Islamic High School.

Oyelade stated that the government swiftly mobilised a rapid response team as soon as the incident was reported. The commissioner noted that victims were promptly transported to various hospitals across Ibadan for medical attention.

While commending the Commissioner for Health, Oluwaserimi Ajetunmobi, for immediately activating all available response teams to assist at the scene, Oyelade said, "The state government will do all it can to support the victims of this tragic incident during this difficult period."

"The government was not involved in any planning, nor was the Ministry of Health consulted to provide logistics for the private children's end-of-year funfair."

Oyelade also emphasised the need for proper coordination when organising events of such magnitude, especially those involving children and the elderly. The commissioner indicated that the government was awaiting a detailed report from the Commissioner of Police to confirm the total number of victims involved in the unfortunate incident.

Concerned parents have been advised to visit any of the following medical facilities in Ibadan for information about their children, ensuring they bring valid means of identification: Patnas Hospital, Basorun, Western Hospital, Basorun, Ringroad State Hospital, Molly Specialist Hospital, University College Hospital, Ibadan.

The state government extended its deepest sympathies to the affected families and urged the public to remain calm as relevant information is gathered and necessary support is arranged for the victims.

## Yuletide: Nigerian gov't announces free train rides for citizens



BY UCHECHI OJO

The Federal Government has announced a free train ride for citizens travelling to celebrate the Christmas holidays.

Mohammed Idris, the Minister of Information and National Orientation, shared the news on Monday during a

briefing on the outcomes of the Federal Executive Council (FEC) meeting.

He revealed that the free train service will begin on December 20, 2024, and run until January 5, 2025.

Idris also mentioned that Nigerians can access the train rides across all routes currently served by the country's train services.



## Dangote reduces petrol price to N899 per litre nationwide

Dangote Refinery has slashed petrol prices to as low as N899 per litre for purchases of two million litres, as part of efforts to stabilise the market and improve supply to marketers. The new pricing structure offers petrol at N899.50 per litre for cash purchases of two million litres, with an additional two million litres available on a 15-day bank guarantee from Access,

Zenith, and First Bank. For larger volumes, marketers can purchase 10 million litres at N895 per litre under similar bank guarantee terms.

This price cut follows the refinery's November reduction, when it lowered the price of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) to N970 per litre from N990, offering a N20 per litre discount to help with distribution costs.

The latest adjustment comes as Nigeria's energy sector faces ongoing challenges with fuel availability and affordability.

While the price reduction is expected to ease cost pressures for independent marketers and consumers, it poses difficulties for fuel importers who face losses due to previously ordered fuel based on higher retail prices.

# EDITORIAL

## Fate of Syria after Bashar al-Assad

Moments after Bashar Assad vacated office on the 8th of December, 2024, Israeli jet fighters, as if waiting on the wings, began a torrential rain of bombing aimed at decapitating Syria's military capacity. At the end of the day, Benjamin Netanyahu gleefully announced that the entire assets of the Syrian Air Force and Navy "have been 100% obliterated."

That is just as the Zionist soldiers have occupied the whole of the Golan Heights and are on Mount Hermon, less than twenty five kilometres away from Damascus. The USA joined Israel in the pummelling by also sending its war planes to unleash bombs at strategic military targets inside the war-torn nation.

Some uncharitable opinions have described the exit from power of erstwhile Syrian President Bashar Assad into exile in Russia, as impromptu, haphazard and hurried. Nothing can be further from the truth. Available facts indicate that, Bashar Assad, with the support of Moscow, consciously planned and negotiated his exit. That explains why Prime Minister Mohammed Ghazi Al-Jalali, calmly stayed back in his office, to hand over the instruments of power to the leadership of the rebels. At that material point, a confrontation between the forces of the government and the rebels would, predictably, have resulted in a monumental catastrophe. For not opting to "fight to the end", in spite of the awesome arsenal in his war chest; that is, for not, out of desperation to cling on to power, resorting to the use of his array of big bombs and chemical weapons as was the case in 2015; for not listening to the rumps of his loyal military officers as well as other hawks in his cabinet who wanted to slug it out with the invading rebels, Mr Assad demonstrated remarkable traits of a great statesman.

Pertinently, by quitting at the time he did, he may also have avoided the fate of Iraqi Saddam Hussein and Libyan Muammar Ghadafi.

Before Damascus was finally taken by the rebel forces of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, HTS, Syria had experienced thirteen years of gruelling civil war. The civil strife resulted in over fifty thousand human casualties, over two million people displaced and scattered

as refugees within and outside of the country. It also, wrought extreme havoc on cities and critical infrastructures.

The ouster of Bashar Assad has brought an end to the Assad dynasty which began in 1970 with Hafeez Assad, the father of Bashar Assad. Having lost out in Iraq with the American overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the recent event in Syria, also implies the end to the political supremacy of the Ba'ath Party in any country in the Arab world. The Arab nationalist and socialist oriented Ba'ath party had been in power in Syria since 1963.

The imperative of the restoration of normalcy in Syria cannot be over emphasised. The new powers in Damascus must avoid the euphoria of victory to becloud their correct appreciation of the real tasks before them. The leadership of the HTS have to work towards building peace and stability by forging a synergy amongst the myriad of divergent rebel forces and interests that combined to oust Bashar Assad.

A lack of synergy amongst the HTS and allied forces is a sure beacon to a state of anarchy and a lingering civil war. Syria now, can learn from the Libyan example, where the rivalries between the different forces that had combined to fight the regime of Muammar Ghadafi, have since reduced the country to a failed state.

Significantly, those now at the helm of affairs in Syria, should also borrow a leaf from Iraq where a of the ISIS were former servicemen of the Iraqi military under Saddam Hussein. In other words, utmost care must be applied in dealing with the vestiges of the Syrian military who, until last week, were in the trenches fighting in defence of the state under President Bashar Assad.

Now that they are in charge, the leader of the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, Ahmed al-Sharar and his partners must strenuously work towards unity and cohesion of the country by discarding the image of Sunni extremism for which the HTS was hitherto identified. This is to avoid igniting a sectarian conflagration in a nation where, adherents of Shiites, Sunni, Alawites and even, Christians coexist as indigenes.

With their successful ouster of the Bashar Assad administration, the HTS has as well, inherited the uneasy burden of dealing with the many external adversaries of the country. From the unfolding picture since the exit of Bashar Assad, the ultimate goal of the Zionist state of Israel and her allies, is a decapitated Syria that will never rise up to its past glory and stature.

Unlike in the days of Bashar Assad, Syria is standing alone, vulnerable and, bereft of her old, reliable allies in Tehran and Moscow.

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# NORTH-EAST



## NEDC trains journalists, CSOs on tech, conflict reporting in North-East

In its efforts to keep media practitioners and members of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) informed about the fast-evolving world of technology, the North East Development Commission (NEDC) organised a three-day training workshop for the two groups in Maiduguri, Borno State.

The workshop, which commenced on Monday and concluded on Wednesday, December 18, 2024, aimed at enhancing the capacity of media professionals and CSOs in deploying non-kinetic approaches to fight insurgency in Nigeria's Northeast region.

Held at the Forshams Event Centre in Maiduguri, in collaboration with RANLAL Global Services Limited, the event featured Professor Umar A. Pate, Vice Chancellor of Federal University of Technology, Kashere Gombe, as the lead resource person. Other speakers included Professor Mu'azu Abubakar of the University of Maiduguri, Mass Communication Department; Dr. Nathaniel Damjibo of the University of Ibadan, and Dr. Muhammad Kudu Abubakar, the lead consultant and facilitator.

The workshop covered various topics, including conflict-sensitive reporting, investigative journalism techniques, media engagement for policy influence, and the role of media in reconciliation and reintegration. Participants also engaged in group work focused on collaboration between media, CSOs, and the government.

In his address, NEDC's Head of Corporate Services, Abba Musa, explained that the workshop was a strategic initiative aimed at enhancing the capacities of journalists and CSOs in the region's post-insurgency recovery efforts.

Represented by NEDC's Strategic Communication Manager, Miss Naomi Abwaku, Abba Musa emphasised that the workshop was not a new initiative, but rather a refresher designed to scale up efforts in working together to provide humanitarian support, economic interventions, social amenities, and contribute to the overall rebuilding process of the zone.

He added that the major objectives of the training were to equip journalists and CSOs with the knowledge and skills necessary to promote peacebuilding, harmonious coexistence, and sustainability, in line with the North-East Stabilization and Development Master Plan of the NEDC.

Abba further noted that, while kinetic approaches have been used to address the conflict, non-kinetic approaches—focused on peacebuilding, partnerships, and community engagement—are equally crucial for promoting sustainable peace and development.

Neptune Prime learned that the training brought together 100 journalists and CSOs from the six states of the Northeast region to explore non-kinetic approaches to conflict resolution. Among the 100 participants, 20 were staff members from NEDC Corporate Services.

## Poverty Alleviation: Gov. Fintiri disburses funds to 65,000 households

Governor Umaru Fintiri of Adamawa State has again flagged off the disbursement of funds to 65,000 households, being part of his commitment to eradicate poverty in the State.

The third phase of the empowerment programme through the Fintiri Business Wallet had 65,000 people across the State received N50,000 each.

The Fintiri's Business Wallet is meant to support micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the State.

The programme, which is part of the Governor's 8-Point Agenda, focuses on youth and women

development, poverty alleviation, and commerce. Addressing the beneficiaries, Governor Fintiri emphasised importance of institutionalising poverty alleviation efforts rather than relying on handouts. He said the State Government is providing skills training and support for entrepreneurs, particularly in the rapidly growing ICT sector in Nigeria, noting that "the programme's impact goes beyond just providing financial support as it also helps to promote family stability and economic growth."



Gov. Fintiri

## Gov. Buni reveals enrollment of 275,358 people into healthcare scheme, other developmental initiatives

By Sa'adatu Maina

Yobe State Government disclosed that as of October 2024, the state Contributory Healthcare Scheme (YSCHMA) has enrolled a total of 275,358 people into the scheme, reflecting the agency's commitment to expanding healthcare coverage across the state.

Governor Mai Mala Buni made this known on Thursday while briefing journalists in Damaturu during the 2024 end of the year press briefing organised by the state Ministry of Home Affairs, Information and Culture.

Represented by his deputy Alhaji Idi Bardé Gubana, Governor Buni explained that the state provided support to 222 primary healthcare providers through 24 secondary healthcare facilities via the fee-for-service arrangement under YSCHMA.

He further revealed that the state government has constructed a modern ICT centre to enhance social protection initiatives for the benefit of the people of the state.

"We have also built an ante-natal and VIP ward at women and children hospital Damaturu, constructed an accident and emergency complex and a one-storey building doctors quarters at the state specialist hospital, Buni-Yadi.

"We also procured and distributed various state-of-the-art medical equipment across different healthcare facilities in the state and kept the momentum on the ongoing research on chronic kidney disease affecting some local government areas of the state.

"We have also procured an important

software for our MRI Machine at the Yobe State University Teaching Hospital (YSUTH), Damaturu; the PV VAR ASSAT Software," said Governor Buni.

According to him, alot has been achieved in the area of wealth creation, empowerment and employment. These include the procurement of 475 modern sewing and embroidery machines, procurement and distribution of 350 disability tricycles, procurement of 712 cows and bulls for livestock farmers.

Others are the provision of cash grant of N50,000 to 3,560 small entrepreneurs across 178 wards of the state, provision of cash support of N20,000 to 4800 unemployed youths, training of 85 youths on shoe making and provision of start-up kits, and distribution of 500 units of deep freezers to women in ice-making business.

"We also procured 1,780 smoking stoves, 1780 frying pans, 1780 frying spoons, 1780 sieving basins, 1780 bowls and procurement of 100 units of motorcycles and 89 units of pick up tricycles for distribution to beneficiaries and the distribution of 340 work bulls, 170 ax-drawn carts and 170 ox-drawn ploughs among others."

Governor Buni commended the dedication and commitment of members of the press in the state towards keeping the public informed about the state's efforts in various sectors and the work done every day to improve the people's living conditions.

He assured journalists, as partners in the development of Yobe State, that the state will continue to keep them abreast of all its efforts in moving the state forward.



Gov Buni

# NORTH-EAST

## Zulum's wife distributes N30m, food items to 600 Christian widows, orphans

Falmata Babagana Zulum, the wife of Borno State Governor, has distributed N30 million in cash alongside food items to 600 Christian widows and orphans in Maiduguri as part of Christmas welfare support.

The initiative, presented on Wednesday, aims to spread joy during the festive season, especially for the less privileged.

Speaking at the event, Mrs Zulum highlighted her commitment to fostering unity and compassion during the celebrations.

"This initiative is an

extension of my felicitation to Christian faithful, especially the widows and the orphans, ahead of Christmas and New Year celebrations," she said.

She also called for continued peace and harmony in the state while reaffirming the government's dedication to supporting vulnerable groups.

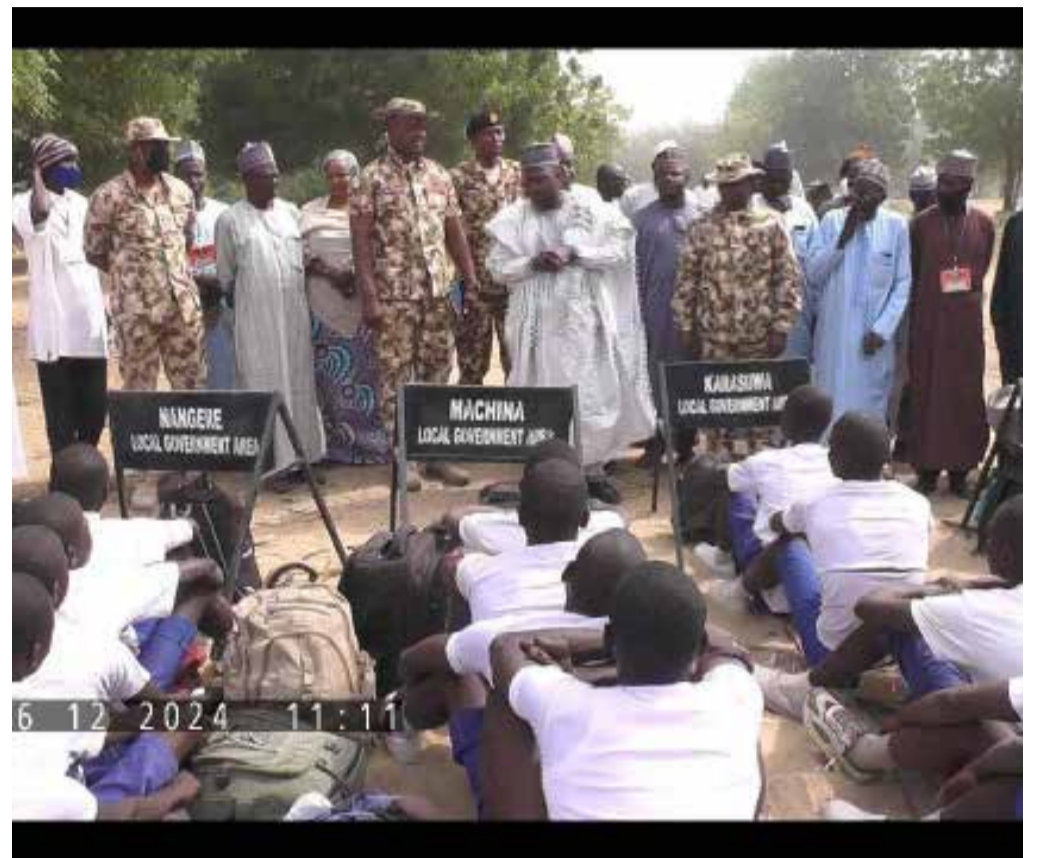
Each beneficiary received N50,000 in cash, a 25kg bag of rice, 5 liters of cooking oil, and a carton of macaroni to ease their holiday celebrations.

Commending the

gesture, Zuwaira Gambo, the Commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Development, lauded the governor's wife for her inclusive approach to welfare. She reiterated the present administration's commitment to improving the lives of all citizens.

One of the recipients, Esther Bwala, expressed heartfelt gratitude, saying, "The gesture will help me celebrate Christmas with joy and dignity."

The disbursement looks at the administration's focus on inclusivity and kindness during the festive season.



## Yobe government pledges professionalism in ongoing Army recruitment

By Sa'adatu Maina, Damaturu

The Yobe State Government has reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring that the most suitable candidates are selected in the ongoing Nigerian Army Recruitment Exercise to fill the vacancy of the state.

The Special Adviser to Yobe State Governor on Security Matters, Brig. Gen. Dahiru Abdus-Salam (Rtd) made this known on Monday 16th December, 2024 when he inspected the ongoing screening exercise of the 88 Regular Recruit intake of the Nigerian Army at 241 Recce Model

Battalion Nguru.

Brig. Gen. Dahiru Abdus-Salam (Rtd), who warned the candidates against bribing anybody to get recruited into the Army, noted that the Military Organization is a reputable government organisation which needs no compromise in its recruitment.

Also speaking, the Director of Recruitment Services, Governor's Office Damaturu Adamu Baba Umar commended the members of the Recruitment Committee for a job well done.

He used the medium to thank the state government for supporting the recruitment unit towards

the success of its activities.

Earlier in her remarks, the Yobe State Coordinator, Federal Character Commission, Hajiya Ruqayyatu Ahmed, appreciated the transparency in the screening exercise, pointing out that it is in tandem with the policy of the commission.

During the inspection visit, the Special Adviser, who is also the leader of the delegation inspected a guard mounted in his honour.

He also interacted with the Commanding Officer of 241 Recce Model Battalion Nguru, Col. Adamu Umar on issues related to the operations of the Unit.

## NAF air strikes eliminate scores of terrorists in Borno

The Nigerian Air Force component of Operation Hadin Kai has struck a gathering of ISWAP terrorists at Kaula in Borno, killing several insurgents.

This was made known by Zagazola Makama, a Lake Chad Basin counterterrorism and insurgency expert.

Makama said intelligence sources informed him that the terrorists were amassing at the site, equipped with gun trucks, motorcycles, and other logistical supplies on Tuesday.

According to the security expert, the buildup by the bandits was designed to coordinate attack on nearby military

installations, especially Malam Fatori.

Responding swiftly to the threat, the Air Component of Operation Hadin Kai (AC OPHK) carried out targeted airstrikes on the gathering.

The operation resulted in the destruction of gun trucks and motorcycles, along with the neutralization of several terrorists reported to be preparing for combat.

The security expert stated that impeccable sources confirmed that the damaging air assault has disrupted the terrorists' plans and diminished their capacity to carry out a potential attack on the Malam Fatori troops' location.



# CUSTOMS & NEMA

## NEMA DG urges ALGON to strengthen disaster management at grassroots

By Fa'izatu Aliyu Doma

The Director General of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), Mrs. Zubaida Umar, has called on members of the Association of Local Governments of Nigeria (ALGON) to bolster disaster management efforts at the grassroots by establishing Local Emergency Management Committees (LEMCs) in their council areas. Mrs Umar made the call in Abuja during a courtesy visit from ALGON's National President, Honourable Bello Lawal, and his delegation. She emphasised that LEMCs, once formed, should be headed by the Local Government Council Chairman or their representative, noting that the committees are expected to enhance early warning systems, improve local resource mobilisation, and ensure timely interventions during emergencies in their councils area.

She said "at NEMA, we recognise the critical role local governments play in ensuring the success of disaster preparedness, response, and recovery efforts."

"We remain committed to fostering a strong partnership with ALGON to ensure our strategies are inclusive, effective, and tailored to meet the unique needs of every community," she added.

Honourable Lawal, in his earlier remarks, highlighted that the visit was an opportunity to introduce ALGON's new leadership to NEMA and seek collaboration in grassroots disaster management. He noted that with the granting of financial autonomy to local government councils, there is a growing need for consultation and guidance from NEMA, particularly on resource utilisation for disaster management initiatives.

ALGON, the umbrella body of Nigeria's 774 local governments, aims to leverage this partnership with NEMA to strengthen grassroots disaster preparedness and response. This visit signifies the beginning of a collaborative effort between ALGON and NEMA, focused on improving



## Customs confiscates goods worth N229.1m in Ogun

Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Ogun Area 1 Command, says it seized illegal goods worth N229,112,424 million within seven days in various locations in the state.

The new Area Comptroller, Mr Ahmadu Shuaibu, disclosed this at a news conference on Thursday in Idioko, Ogun.

Shuaibu said that the seizure, with duty paid value (DPV) of N229.112,424, was made through intelligence gathering, strategic surveillance and collaboration with some patriotic Nigerians.

He stated that the seizure was made at some strategic locations, including Idi-Iroko, Ilaro, All-around axis, Obada Oko, Abule Kazeem-Abeokuta Axis and Imeko-Afon, all of which are believed to hotspots for smuggling.

"Our operatives remain resolute in dismantling the smuggling networks that undermine our economy, endanger lives and

hinder local industries.

"In addition, the command remains vigilant and will continue to collaborate with sister security agencies to rid our society of this menace," he said.

Shuaibu listed the seized items to include: 2,169 bags of foreign parboiled rice weighing 50kg each, 1,128 parcels of hemp weighing 1,109kg, 21 bales and two sacks of used clothes as well as 166 pieces of pneumatic tyres.

Other items are 4,360 cartons of imported shoes, 250 kegs of premium motor spirit (PMS), 20 vehicles used for conveyance and one foreign used vehicle, with a 2012 model Toyota Highlander SUV.

The area comptroller said that the illegal goods seized posed a significant threat to Nigeria's economy and jeopardised the safety and security of the society.

He warned smugglers and their collaborators to desist from such illegal activities or face the full weight of the law.

According to him, the command is prepared to match their activities with superior intelligence, unwavering commitment and lawful force, where necessary.

Shuaibu commended the Comptroller-General of NCS, Bashir Adeniyi, for providing the command with the necessary tools and motivation to carry out its critical responsibilities.

He also praised the operatives of the command for their hard work and dedication toward achieving the 'remarkable' feat.

The area comptroller reiterated the command's commitment to maintaining an open-door policy, work with local communities and encourage legitimate trade that would foster economic development.

## 2024 CGC Awards: Customs boss honours distinguished officers

The Comptroller-General of Customs (CGC), Adewale Adeniyi, hosted the 2024 CGC Excellence Awards Night in Abuja on Friday, 29th November, showcasing a commitment to fostering professionalism and recognising outstanding performance within the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS).

The annual event, held at a prestigious venue, celebrated officers who distinguished themselves in revenue generation, trade facilitation, and anti-smuggling operations. Key stakeholders, including representatives from the Ministry of Finance, the National Assembly, and law enforcement agencies, attended the ceremony.

Prominent guests included Mr Olawale Edun, Chairman of the Nigeria Customs Service Board and Representative of the Minister of Finance; Senator Isah Jibril, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Customs; Hon Leke Abejide, Chairman of the House Committee on Customs and Excise; and Inspector-General of Police (IGP) Kayode Egbetokun.

In his remark, IGP Egbetokun praised the collaborative efforts between the

NCS and the Nigeria Police Force, highlighting their shared commitment to national security, trade facilitation, and revenue generation.

"The synergy between the NCS and the Police is a cornerstone of our national security strategy," the IGP stated, urging the continuation of such partnerships.

Addressing attendees, CGC Adeniyi emphasised the importance of celebrating achievements within the Service.

"This strategic shift springs from our belief that positive reinforcement nurtures a more dynamic, motivated, and high-performing workforce," he said.

The CGC described the awards as a move away from punitive measures towards rewarding excellence. He acknowledged challenges faced by the Service, including a 15% revenue deficit carried over from 2023, and reaffirmed the commitment to overcoming obstacles.

He urged officers to remain united and uphold values of integrity, professionalism, and humanity in

serving the nation.

Ali Muhammad, Director of Home Finance at the Ministry of Finance, representing the Honourable Minister, commended CGC Adeniyi's visionary leadership.

"Recognising excellence among officers not only motivates them but also boosts productivity across the board," Muhammad said.

Assistant Superintendent of Customs, Folusho Adeogun, Liaison Officer for the Nigeria Customs Broadcasting Network (NCBN), was among the award recipients. The recognition highlighted her exceptional dedication and contributions to professionalism.

The awards night reinforced the Nigeria Customs Service's dedication to fostering a culture of excellence and professionalism.

The event inspired officers to continue their service with renewed pride and commitment to the nation.

"Tonight, we celebrate not just individuals but the collective spirit of a Service determined to excel," CGC Adeniyi concluded.



CGC Adewale Adeniyi



# PRIME PHOTOS

Prime Photos  
By Sa'adatu Maina



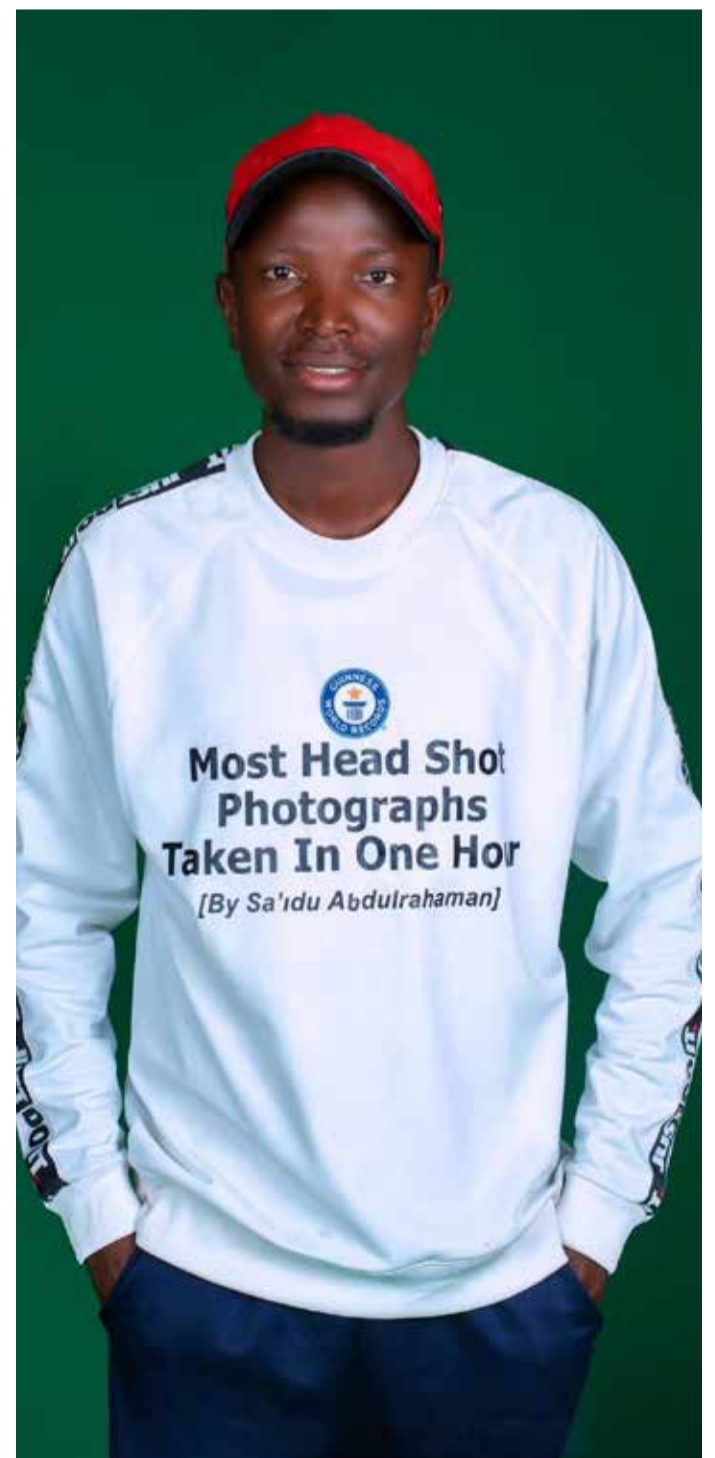
Gov. Mai Mala Buni of Yobe State commits to boosting sesame, livestock exports, meets with the Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Nigeria, Ms Elsie Attafauh.



Hausa lady selling Kosai (Akara), Dankali (Sweet Potatoes), and Akanmu (Pap), a popular delicacy in Northern Nigeria. Photo credit: Facebook



Explore Nigeria with attractive tourist sights like the Sand Dunes and beautiful desert landscape of Yusufari Oasis in Yobe State.



Yobe photographer, Abdulrahman Saidu

# PRIME10MENT

## Kannywood actor, Sani Danja, gets SA appointment in Kano

BY GIFT LUCKSON

Kano State Governor, Abba Yusuf, has appointed Sani Musa Danja, a Kannywood actor, as his Special Adviser on Youth and Sports. As Special Adviser, Danja will be crucial in shaping the state's youth and sports development initiatives. Before his appointment,

Danja was a loyal supporter of Governor Yusuf and played a crucial role in the campaign of the NNPP candidate in Kano during the 2023 elections. A household name in the entertainment industry, Danja has enjoyed a successful career as a Kannywood and Nollywood actor and singer, with over two decades of experience. He joins an exclusive group of Kannywood

celebrities who have received appointments in the current administration. Notable among them is Ali Nuhu, appointed MD of the Nigerian Film Corporation by President Bola Tinubu in January, Abba Almustapha, appointed MD of the Kano State Censors Board, and Rahama Sadau, who serves on the Technical Committee of the iDICE programme in the office of the vice president.



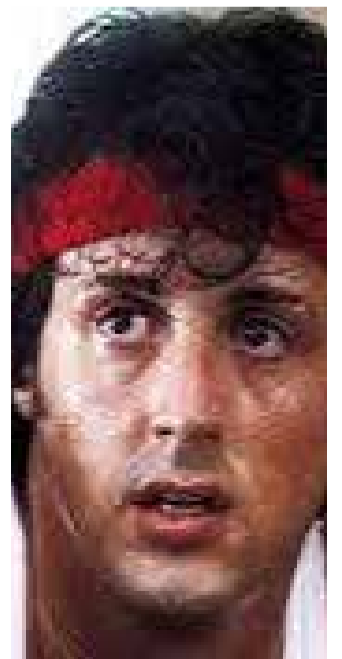
## Sylvester Stallone: From stealing wife's jewellery for money to legendary stardom

BY GIFT LUCKSON

Back in the day, Sylvester Stallone was a struggling actor in every definition. At some point, he got so broke that he stole his wife's jewellery and sold it. Things got so bad that he even ended up homeless. He slept at the New York bus station for three days. Unable to pay rent or afford food. His lowest point came when he tried to sell his dog at the liquor store to a stranger. He didn't have money to feed the dog anymore. He sold it for \$25 only. He recalled walking away crying. Two weeks later, he saw a boxing match between Mohammed Ali and Chuck Wepner and that match inspired him to write the script for the famous movie, Rocky. He wrote the script for 20 hours! He tried to sell it and got an offer for \$125,000 for the script. But he had just

one request: he wanted to be the main actor, Rocky himself. But the studio said no. They wanted a real star. They said he "Looked funny and talked funny". He left with his script. A few weeks later, the studio offered him \$250,000 for the script. He refused. They even offered \$350,000. He still refused. They wanted his movie, but not him. He rejected the offers and insisted on starring in the movie. After a while, the studio agreed, gave him \$35,000 for the script and let him star in it! The rest is history! The movie won Best Picture, Best Directing and Best Film Editing at the prestigious Oscar Awards. He was even nominated for best actor. The Movie Rocky was even inducted into the American National Film Registry as one of the greatest movies ever! After the movie became a

hit, he located the man who purchased his dog and paid him double to buy the dog back. He went on to have a flourishing film career spanning more than fifty years and received numerous accolades.



# PRIME10MENT

## MARKET SURVEY



### Families turn to Sweet Potatoes as food prices skyrocket amidst hardship

BY VICTOR ITODO ABUH

The sweet potatoes has become a normal sight in most markets within the north, vendors eagerly display heaps of this new common dish as customers throng to buy, their earthy aroma filling the air. Once considered a simple snack or an occasional side dish, sweet potatoes are now the star meal in many Nigerian homes.

As the prices of food staples like yam, rice, and beans continue to soar, families are turning to this affordable, versatile, and highly nutritious root vegetable.

For many years, yam and Irish potatoes were the go-to staples for most Nigerian households, cherished for their taste and versatility. However, with the skyrocketing prices of these once-favored foods, they have become increasingly out of reach for the average Nigerian.

In contrast, sweet potatoes, with a price range starting as low as 500 naira, have become a more affordable option. Not only do they offer similar versatility in meals, but they also pack greater nutritional value, making them a practical and healthier choice for families navigating tough economic times.

#### A Solution to Rising Food Costs

The current economic realities in Nigeria have pushed many families to reassess their spending on food. With yam prices rising to nearly unaffordable levels in several parts of the country, sweet potatoes offer a welcome alternative.

"I used to buy yam for my family every week, but now it's too expensive," says Julie Omale, a mother of three. "Sweet potatoes are cheaper, and my children even prefer the taste."

This sentiment resonates across markets and homes, as sweet potatoes, with their lower cost and longer shelf life, have become a staple for millions of Nigerians.

#### The Nutritional Powerhouse

Beyond affordability, sweet

potatoes are packed with essential nutrients that make them a valuable addition to any diet. According to nutritionists, sweet potatoes are rich in: Vitamin A: Boosts vision, immunity, and skin health.

Dietary Fiber: Supports digestion and prevents constipation.

Antioxidants: Protects against chronic diseases by fighting free radicals.

Potassium: Helps regulate blood pressure.

Research shows that "Sweet potatoes are a superfood. They provide energy, improve overall health, and are particularly good for children, who need Vitamin A for growth and development."

#### Versatility in Nigerian Cuisines

In addition to their nutritional benefits, sweet potatoes shine in the kitchen due to their versatility. Nigerians have found creative ways to prepare them, making sweet potatoes a central ingredient in traditional and modern dishes.

1. Boiled Sweet Potatoes: A simple preparation, often served with beans or egg sauce for breakfast.

2. Fried Sweet Potatoes: Sliced into thin chips or fries, they are a favorite snack, especially when paired with spicy pepper sauce.

3. Roasted Sweet Potatoes: A street food classic, enjoyed with roasted groundnuts or grilled fish.

4. Sweet Potato Porridge: Cooked with palm oil, vegetables, and spices, this hearty dish is both filling and nutritious.

5. Mashed Sweet Potatoes: A creamy side dish that complements proteins like grilled chicken or fish.

6. Sweet Potato Flour: Used to make pancakes, bread, and other baked goods, providing a gluten-free alternative to wheat flour.

For many families, sweet potatoes are a lifesaver. "I can cook it in so many ways," says Aishat Raji, a lover of sweet potatoes in Abuja. "Whether boiled, fried, or made into porridge, it never feels boring."



### 2024 Christmas in Jeopardy: Nigerians groan as rice price hits 120k, chicken sales for 30k

BY GIFT LUCKSON

Barely a week to 25th December, the day of the 2024 Christmas celebration, Nigerians are groaning instead of jubilating for the festive period due to difficulties in purchasing food commodities and other basic essentials. This isn't unconnected to the lingering hardship citizens have been enduring for a prolonged period of time after the removal of the fuel subsidy in March 2023 by President Bola Tinubu.

Christmas is an annual festival celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, observed primarily on December 25. It is a liturgical feast central to Christianity. In Nigeria, preparations for Christmas are grand with great feast, travelling, the exchange of gifts, symbolic decoration and buying of Christmas outfits.

Over the years, the meal of rice and chicken is an integral part of the Christmas holiday menu. However, the exorbitant prices of these vital food items might deny so many Nigerians the privilege to savour the usual holiday dish. Buyers and sellers alike are lamenting the increase in prices during the festive period as the demand for these items get higher.

In November 2024, The headline inflation rate rose to 34.6%, a 0.72% increase from October. Food inflation rose to 39.93%, a 7.08% increase from the previous year.

A recent survey revealed that the price of local parboiled 50kg bag of rice ranges from N90,000 to N105,000, while a 50 kg bag of foreign parboiled rice now sells for N110,000 to N130,000.

Prices of some rice brands available in Nigeria are as follows: Big Bull Parboiled Rice 50kg (N85,500), Short Grain Rice (N87,000), Premium Quality Nigerian Rice (N95,000), Royal Stallion 50kg Bag of Rice (N42,000), Tomato Aroso Rice 50kg Bag (N42,000).

Others are Chi Big Bull Silky Parboiled Rice (N95,000), Mama's Pride Long Grey Premium Parboiled Rice (N95,000), Big Bull Rice 50kg (N87,000), Mama's Pride Premium Parboiled Rice 50KG (N87,000).

Meanwhile, a chicken goes for N25,000 to N30,000, depending on the state.

Prices of chickens in major cities like Abuja, Lagos and Port Harcourt are on high side while customers in states like Katsina, Gombe, Adamawa buy chickens around N20,000 to N25,000 depending on the weight of the bird.

A poultry farmer, Tope John, said the

upsurge in the prices of chickens isn't unexpected, considering the financial crisis of the country. He said everything is costly and the basic needs of the masses have turned to luxuries only the affluent can afford.

He bemoaned the lack of patronage as many consumers find the prices very expensive.

On her part, a customer who identified herself as Mrs Ogenyi said rice and chicken are not for the common household, she said her family will celebrate the 2024 Christmas on a low key unlike previous years when things were better.

The mother of four further revealed that no chicken will be used in her home for the festival as the family will go for beef to save cost.

"We can just afford to buy some measures of local rice and beef to make our stew, my husband and I couldn't afford to buy Christmas clothes for our children this year because everything is expensive, from transport fares, school fees, medical bills, things are very hard in this country," she lamented.

Shockingly, the prices of these food items are way higher than the country's new minimum wage of N70,000, an amount some states are still struggling to pay their workers.



# MILESTONE

## Customs 'Whiz Kid', Abdullahi Maiwada, promoted to Assistant Comptroller

BY SAKINAT MUSA ABUBAKAR

In a career-defining moment, the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) has elevated its charismatic National Public Relations Officer, Abdullahi Maiwada, to the prestigious rank of Assistant Comptroller of Customs. This promotion comes as part of a historic exercise that saw over 4,000 senior officers ascend the

ranks, reinforcing the Service's commitment to recognising talent and excellence.

Announced on December 20, 2024, during the 61st regular meeting of the NCS Board, chaired by the Honourable Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Mr Wale Edun, the promotions included one Deputy Comptroller General (DCG) and eight Assistant Comptrollers

General (ACGs). For Maiwada, this milestone is a testament to years of dedication, innovation, and extraordinary service.

### The Brain Behind the Brilliance

Abdullahi Maiwada is not your average Customs officer. Armed with an impressive academic portfolio, he holds degrees in Environmental Sciences from Bayero

University, Kano, and Communication degrees from Crescent University, Abeokuta. His academic achievements culminated in a PhD in Media Arts from the University of Abuja, making him a shining star in the world of public relations and communication.

**His skill set is a treasure trove of expertise:** Strategic Public Relations Planning



Abdullahi Maiwada

## Yobe photographer, Abdulrahman Saidu, breaks Guinness World Record for most headshots in one hour

The Guinness World Records has confirmed Yobe-based photographer, Saidu Abdulrahman, as the new record holder for the most headshot photographs taken in one hour.

This was announced via email sent to Abdulrahman by the records management. The email read, "Dear Abdulrahman Saidu, we are

thrilled to inform you that your application for most headshot photographs taken in one hour has been successful and you are now the Guinness World Records Title Holder!"

The email conveyed the company's congratulations and procedures for Abdulrahman to collect his

certificate and badge.

In September 2024, Abdulrahman, a 28-year-old Yobe-based photographer, made history by capturing an astonishing 897 pictures within 60 minutes, surpassing the previous Guinness World Record of 500.

The event took place in Potiskum Local Government

Area, Yobe State, in the presence of government officials, students, and well-wishers.

Abdulrahman revealed that the feat was achieved after a year of preparation, "We initially aimed for 600 pictures, but I'm glad to have exceeded expectations despite several challenges," he said.



Yobe photographer, Abdulrahman Saidu, breaks Guinness World Record for most headshots in one hour

### Crisis Communication Management

Customs operations.

### Environmental Impact Assessment

### Global and Media Communications

### Social Media Reputation Management

Whether he's crafting compelling narratives, diffusing a crisis, or pioneering innovative environmental solutions, Maiwada operates with precision and creativity.

### A Multilingual Visionary with Global Recognition

Fluent in English, Hausa, and Arabic, Maiwada's linguistic prowess complements his ability to navigate complex multicultural landscapes. His exceptional contributions earned him the prestigious World Customs Organisation (WCO) Meritorious Award in January 2020—a fitting accolade for a man who has consistently set the gold standard in

### A Leader for the People

Beyond his official duties, Maiwada is a man of the people—a geographer, educationist, and community advocate. His commitment to fostering sustainable development and environmental consciousness is evident in his work as a community relations manager. His reputation for excellence and innovation has positioned him as a beacon of hope and progress within the NCS.

As the Nigerian Customs Service marches toward a future defined by professionalism and excellence, the promotion of individuals like Abdullahi Maiwada underscores its determination to build a robust and dynamic workforce. With his unparalleled experience and vision, Maiwada is undoubtedly poised to leave an indelible mark on the Service and beyond.

# HERITAGE

BY: SAKINAT MUSA  
ABUBAKAR & GIFT LUCKSON



## Explore the extraordinary culture of the Nupe people, skilled woodcarvers, master weavers



BY FA'IZATU ALIYU DOMA

The Nupe people are found in Niger State, North-Central Nigeria. The Nupe is a fascinating ethnic group embodied with tremendous traditions. It is one of the prominent tribes in Niger State, known for its rich cultural heritage and fascinating customs. In this article, we will delve into the world of this unique tribe, exploring their wedding customs, amazing cultural practices, and other interesting aspects of their lives.

### Who are the Nupe People?

The Nupe people are primarily found in Niger State, with smaller populations in Kaduna, Kogi, and Kwara states. They are known for their skilled craftsmanship, particularly in woodcarving, weaving, and blacksmithing. The Nupe language, also known as Nupe-Nupe-Tako, is spoken by approximately 1 million people, making it one of the prominent languages in the region.

### Wedding Tradition

One of the amazing traits of the Nupes is their nuptials which are known to be very distinctive and fascinating. The process begins with a formal introduction of the suitor to the bride's family, followed by series of negotiations and gift exchanges. The bride's family presents the suitor with a list of items, known as "kpotshi," which include food, drinks, and other gifts.

Once the kpotshi is accepted, the suitor proceeds to pay the bride price, which is usually in the form of livestock, money, or other valuables. The bride price is seen as a symbol of respect and appreciation for the bride's family.

After the payment of the bride price, the couple proceeds to the wedding ceremony, which is a bright and vibrant affair. The bride is adorned in traditional attire, including a

beautifully designed wrapper and a headscarf.

### Unique Cultural Practices

The Nupe people have several unique cultural practices that set them apart from other ethnic groups. One of these practices is the "Egungun" festival, which is a celebration of the ancestors. During the festival, masked dancers, known as "Egungun," perform rituals and dance to revere the ancestors.

Another interesting cultural practice is the "Kokoshi" ceremony, which is a coming-of-age ritual for young men. During the ceremony, the young men are taught important skills and values, such as bravery, loyalty, and respect for elders.

### Traditional Attire

The Nupe people are known for their beautiful and radiant traditional attire. The men wear a long, flowing robe, known as "Babban riga," which is usually decorated with intricate designs and patterns. The women wear a wrapper, known as "Aso oke," which is also decorated with beautiful designs and patterns.

### Cuisine

Nupe cuisine is a fusion of traditional and modern savors. Some popular Nupe dishes include "Tuwo shinkafa" (a dish made from rice and beans), "Miyan kubewa" (a spicy stew made from okro and vegetables), and "Pate" (a dish made from ground corn, rice or acha and vegetables).

The Nupe tribe of Niger State is a charming ethnic group with a rich cultural heritage. Their unique marriage customs, cultural practices, and traditional attire make them a valuable part of Nigeria's diverse cultural landscape. Additionally, the Nupe people cherished the importance of preserving and celebrating cultural heritage which they uphold in modern times passing down their distinctive norms and values to the new generation.

# HISTORICITI

## The Ancient City of Benin: What happened to Africa's most beautiful and well planned city

**T**he ancient city of Benin, originally known as Edo, was once the capital of a pre-colonial African empire located in what is now southern Nigeria. The Benin empire was one of the oldest and most highly developed states in west Africa, dating back to the 11th century.

It started in 800 AD and continued until 1460 AD. Records said it took 150 million man-hours to build, but nothing much remains of the great city in recent time after it was invaded and destroyed by the British.

When the Portuguese first "discovered" the city in 1485, they were stunned to find this vast kingdom made of hundreds of interlocked cities and villages in the middle of the African jungle. They called it the "Great City of Benin", at a time when there were hardly any other places in Africa the Europeans acknowledged as a city.

In 1691, the Portuguese ship captain Lourenco Pinto observed: "Great Benin, where the king resides, is larger than Lisbon; all the streets run straight and as far as the eye can see. The houses are large, especially that of the king, which is richly decorated and has fine columns. The city is wealthy and industrious. It is so well governed that theft is unknown and the people live in such security that they have no doors to their houses."

Benin City's planning and design was done according to careful rules of symmetry, proportionality and repetition now known as fractal design. The mathematician Ron Eglash, author of *African Fractals* – which examines the patterns underpinning architecture, art and design in many parts of Africa – notes that the city and its surrounding villages were purposely laid out to form perfect fractals, with similar shapes repeated in the rooms of each house, and the house itself, and the clusters of houses in the village in mathematically predictable patterns.

He said "When Europeans first came to Africa, they considered the architecture very disorganised and thus primitive. It never occurred to them that the Africans might have been using a form of mathematics that they hadn't even discovered yet."

At the centre of the city stood the king's court, from which extended 30 very straight, broad streets, each



: A street in the royal quarter of Benin City, 1897. Photograph: The British Museum/Trustees of the British Museum



A plaque showing an entrance to the palace of the Oba of Benin. Photograph: Alamy

about 120-ft wide. These main streets, which ran at right angles to each other, had underground drainage made of a sunken implicit with an outlet to carry away storm water. Many narrower side and intersecting streets extended off them. In the middle of the streets were turf on which animals fed.

Guinness Book of Records certifies the magnificence of Benin City

The Guinness Book of Records (1974 edition) described the walls of Benin City and its surrounding kingdom as the world's largest earthworks carried out prior to the mechanical era.

The Wall of Benin is still considered the world's largest man-made structure by length, second only to China's Great Wall. It was described by Olfert Dapper in his book *Description of Africa* in 1668 as the Great Walls of Benin.

The Benin Moat (An excellent defence system) The Benin Moat served as defensive structures, with steep banks and a berm to deter invaders. Access to the city was controlled through nine gates. Today, remnants of the moats can still be found in Benin City, although urbanisation and land disputes pose challenges to their preservation.

Recognised for their historical significance, the Benin Moat was added as an extension to the existing World Heritage Site of the Royal Palaces of Abomey in 1995 (though still awaiting official recognition by UNESCO).

A city that shocked colonial masters

What impressed the first visiting Europeans most was the wealth, artistic beauty and magnificence of the city. Immediately European nations saw the opportunity to develop trade with the wealthy kingdom, importing ivory, palm oil and pepper – and exporting guns. At the beginning of the 16th century, word quickly spread around Europe about the beautiful African city, and new visitors rushed in from all parts of Europe, with ever glowing testimonies.

A great city lost in history

Now, however, the great Benin City is shirking to chronology. Its decline began in the 15th century, sparked by internal conflicts linked to the increasing European intrusion and slavery trade at the borders of the Benin empire.

Then in 1897, the city was destroyed by British soldiers – looted, blown up and burnt to the ground.

Nowadays, while a modern Benin City has risen on the same plain, the ruins of its former, grander namesake are not mentioned in any tourist guidebook to the area. They have not been preserved, nor has a miniature city or touristic replica been made to keep alive the memory of this great ancient city.

Nowadays, some people in Nigeria don't even know about the wonder of this great city.

A house composed of a courtyard in Obasagbon, known as Chief Enogie Aikoriogie's house – probably built in the second half of the 19th century – is considered the only vestige that survives from Benin City. The house possesses features that match the horizontally fluted walls, pillars, central impluvium and carved decorations observed in the architecture of ancient Benin.



A drawing of Benin City made by a British officer in 1897.

# ROOTS

## Tale of Olaudah Equiano, the former Nigerian slave whose autobiography abolished slave trade in Britain



BY GIFT LUCKSON

Olaudah Equiano (1745 - March 1797) was a former Nigerian slave, an abolitionist and writer who was enslaved as a child in West Africa. His autobiography fuels the abolishment of the slave trade in Britain and he is reputed as the first African-born former slave to write his autobiography without the help or direction of white writers of his time like his predecessors.

### *Nigerian roots*

According to his memoir, he was from the village of Essaka

in modern southern Nigeria. He claimed his home was part of the Kingdom of Benin. He was enslaved as a child in West Africa and shipped to the Caribbean where he was sold to a Royal Navy officer. He was sold twice more before purchasing his freedom in 1766.

### *Experience with slave traders in Nigeria*

Equiano recounted that when he was around the age of eleven, he and his sister were left alone to look after their family premises, as was common when adults went out of the house to work.

They were kidnapped and taken far from their home, separated and sold to slave traders. He tried to escape but was thwarted. After his owners changed several times, Equiano happened to meet with his sister but they were separated again. Six or seven months after he had been kidnapped, he arrived at the coast where he was taken on board a European slave ship.

He was transported with 244 other enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to Barbados in the British West Indies. He and a few other slaves were sent on for sale in the Colony of Virginia.

### *Life as a slave overseas*

Equiano was bought by Michael Henry Pascal, a lieutenant in the Royal Navy. Pascal renamed the boy "Gustavus Vassa". Equiano had already been renamed twice: he was called Michael while on board the slave ship that brought him to America, and Jacob by his first owner.

This time, Equiano refused and told his new owner that he would prefer to be called Jacob. His refusal, he says, "gained me many a cuff" and eventually he submitted to the new name. He used this name for the rest of his life, including on all official records; he only used Equiano in his autobiography.

### *Equiano bought his freedom out of slavery*

In December 1962, Equiano was sold to Robert King, an American Quaker merchant from Philadelphia who traded in the Caribbean, he was set to work on King's shipping routes and in his stores.

In 1765, when Equiano was about 20 years old, King promised that for his purchase price of 40 pounds (equivalent to £6,900 in 2023), he could buy his freedom. King taught him to read and write more fluently, guided him along the path of religion, and allowed

Equiano to engage in profitable trading for his own account, as well as on his owner's behalf. Equiano sold fruits, glass tumblers and other items between Georgia and the Caribbean islands. King allowed Equiano to buy his freedom, which he achieved in 1766. The merchant urged Equiano to stay on as a business partner. However, Equiano found it dangerous and limiting to remain in the British colonies as a freedman.

### *Life as a free man and contribution to slave trade abolishment*

As a freedman in London, Equiano supported the British abolitionist movement in the 1780s, becoming one of its leading figures. Equiano was part of the abolitionist group the Sons of Africa, whose members were Africans living in Britain. Equiano was befriended and supported by abolitionists, many of whom encouraged him to write and publish his life story. He was supported financially in this effort by philanthropic abolitionists and religious benefactors. His 1789 autobiography, "The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano", sold so well that nine editions were published during his life and helped secure passage of the British Slave Trade Act 1807 which abolished the slave trade.

The Interesting Narrative gained renewed popularity among scholars in the late 20th century and remains a useful primary source.

### *Legacy and death*

Reviewers have found that his book

demonstrated the full and complex humanity of Africans as much as the inhumanity of slavery.

The book was considered an exemplary work of English literature by a new African author. Equiano did so well in sales that he achieved independence from his benefactors. He travelled throughout England, Scotland and Ireland promoting the book, spending eight months in Ireland alone between 1792 and 1793.

He worked to improve economic, social and educational conditions in Africa. Specifically, he became involved in working in Sierra Leone, a colony founded in 1792 for freed slaves by Britain in West Africa.

On 7 April 1792, Equiano married Susannah Cullen, a local woman, in St Andrew's Church, Soham, Cambridgeshire. The original marriage register containing the entry for Vassa and Cullen is held today by the Cambridgeshire Archives and Local Studies.

He included his marriage in every edition of his autobiography from 1792 onwards. The couple settled in the area and had two daughters, Anna Maria (1793–1797) and Joanna (1795–1857) who were baptised at Soham church.

His wife Susannah died in February 1796, aged 34, and Equiano died a year after that on 31 March 1797. Soon after, their daughter, Anna, died at the age of four, leaving Joanna to inherit Equiano's estate when she was 21; it was then valued at £950 (equivalent to £92,000 in 2023).

# OLDIES

## We Didn't Pay For Education in the Olden Days, Everything Was Free - Retired Judiciary Registrar Chiromari



Isa Galadima Chiromari

BY KASIM ISA MUHAMMAD

Isa Galadima Chiromari, a retired Principal Registrar at the Yobe State Judiciary and a former teacher, in this exclusive and insightful interview with Neptune Prime, shares his life experiences, thoughts on Nigeria's past, present, and future, and offers advice to younger generations, while also reflecting on the country's transition from colonial rule to independence, the impact of the economic downturn, and the role of education in national development.

### May we know you?

My name is Isa Galadima Chiromari. I was born in 1954 in the Chiromari community of Nangere Local Government Area of Yobe State. I attended primary school in Kukuri, also in the Nangere LGA, and completed my studies in 1969. After finishing primary school, I enrolled in a teachers' college in Potiskum Local Government Area and graduated in 1974. Subsequently, I began teaching at a primary school, and later, I worked with Leadway Assurance Company Limited for 14 years. Following that, I pursued a diploma and secured a job with the Yobe State Judiciary, where I eventually retired as a principal registrar after working for over 27 years.

### What was your childhood like growing up in Nigeria?

When I was growing up, Nigeria was very peaceful,

and there was no insecurity. The economy was also good. What fascinates me is that I spent no money throughout my education; everything was free – our meals, textbooks, and other aspects of our educational journey. Unlike now, we have to pay school fees and other expenses. The government was very supportive of education, and every child had access to quality education. We also had a strong sense of community, and people looked out for one another. It was a very different time, and I feel fortunate to have grown up in such a peaceful and supportive environment.

How can you compare Nigeria of today and yesteryears?

It's incomparable. Nigeria is now facing a lot of challenges, ranging from economic downturn, insecurity, militancy, bribery, and corruption. But in the past,

the economy was relatively good, there was no insecurity like now, and there was also no unemployment. The day I graduated was the day I received my appointment letter. So, you cannot compare the situations, as now people are even paying to secure jobs. I have over four graduates in my family, and none of them is working with the government. This is to tell you that everything has changed. The country has regressed in many areas, and it's sad to see the state of affairs in Nigeria today.

### What kind of education did you receive, and how did it prepare you for your career?

I only had a diploma, but I can tell you that I can deliver work more than many graduates. We received the best education; we underwent rigorous training, and the government was very serious about education at that time. Our education system was designed to produce

well-rounded individuals who could contribute to the development of the country. We were taught important values such as hard work, discipline, and integrity. These values have stayed with me throughout my career and have helped me to become the person I am today.

### What was Nigeria like when you were growing up, and how has it changed over the years?

Nigeria was a very different country when I was growing up. It was a peaceful and prosperous nation with a strong sense of community. People were friendly and welcoming, and there was a sense of optimism in the air. Over the years, however, the country has undergone significant changes, many of which have been negative. The economy has declined, insecurity has increased, and corruption has become widespread. These changes have had a profound impact on the lives of Nigerians, and it's sad to see the country in its current state.

### How did you experience the country's transition from colonial rule to independence?

I was very young when Nigeria gained independence, but I remember the excitement and sense of optimism that filled the air. People were hopeful about the future and the possibilities that independence would bring. As I grew older, however, I began to realise that independence was not a magic solution to all of Nigeria's problems. The country faced many challenges, including poverty, inequality, and lack of infrastructure. Despite these challenges, however, Nigerians remained hopeful and resilient, and the country continued to make progress.

### What were some of the major events or issues that affected Nigeria during your lifetime?

There have been many significant events and issues that have affected Nigeria during my lifetime. One of the most notable was the Biafran War, which had a profound impact on the country and its people. Other significant events include the oil boom of the 1970s, which brought significant wealth to the country but also created new challenges and inequalities. More recently, the country has faced significant security challenges, including the Boko Haram insurgency, which has had a devastating impact on many communities.

### How do you think Nigeria has progressed or regressed over the years?

Nigeria has regressed in

many areas over the years. The country has faced many challenges, including poverty, inequality, and lack of infrastructure. The country has made progress in some areas, such as infrastructure and entrepreneurship, but these gains have been overshadowed by the many challenges facing the country.

### What are your thoughts on the current state of the country?

The current state of the country is worrisome. The economy is in shambles, insecurity is rampant, and corruption is widespread. The government seems to be struggling to address these challenges, and many Nigerians are losing hope. It's very sad to see the country in this state, especially considering the many opportunities and resources that Nigeria has.

### \*What do you enjoy doing in your free time?\*

I enjoy spending time with my family and friends. I also like to read and listen to radio. I find these activities to be relaxing and enjoyable.

### Do you have any hobbies or interests that you're passionate about?

I am passionate about farming and reading. I find it relaxing and fulfilling to work with the land and grow my own food. It's also a great way to stay active and healthy.

### How do you stay active and healthy at your age?

I try to stay active by engaging in physical activities like walking and gardening. I also eat a balanced diet and get enough rest. I believe that taking care of one's health is fundamental, especially as one gets older.

### What role does family play in your life, and how have you maintained relationships over the years?

Family is very important to me. I have maintained relationships with my family members through regular communication and visits. I also make it a point to attend important family events and gatherings.

### What advice do you have for the younger generation based on your life experiences?

My advice to younger generations is to work hard, be patient, and persevere. They

should also prioritise education and personal development. It is also important to be honest, respectful, and kind to others.

### Looking back on your life, what are some of the most important lessons you've learned?

One of the most important lessons I've learned is the importance of hard work, patience, and perseverance. I have also learned that education is key to personal and national development. Meanwhile, I have learned that honesty, respect, and kindness are values that should guide one's interactions with others.

### What advice would you give to someone who is just starting their career or life journey?

My advice is to set clear goals, work hard, and be patient. One should also go to school and be open to learning from others. It's also important to be honest, respectful, and kind to others, and to always strive to do one's best.

### How do you think Nigeria can improve or overcome its current challenges?\*

Nigeria can improve or overcome its current challenges by addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality. The government should work round the clock to improve education, healthcare, and infrastructural development. Corruption should also be tackled relentlessly, and the government should be more transparent and accountable to its citizens.

### Any final important message?

My message is that hard work, patience, and perseverance are essential for personal and national development. Education is also key to untapping our full potential.

I would like to emphasize the importance of education and personal development. I want to also encourage Nigerians to be more patriotic and to work towards the development of the country. Finally, I'd like to leave you with a message of hope and optimism. Despite the many challenges facing Nigeria, I believe that the country has the potential to become a great nation.

As I grew older, however, I began to realise that independence was not a magic solution to all of Nigeria's problems



# HUMANIST

## Nursing student cries out for help after amputation, homelessness caused by accident

BY GIFT LUCKSON

Ms Aishat Oyiza Hamzat, a native of Adavi local government, Kogi State is soliciting financial assistance from members of the public following a fatal accident that led to the amputation of her left leg.

Oyiza Aishat, a student of College of Nursing Obangede, had a promising future backed

by a dream of becoming a professional Certified Nurse/Midwife (CNM) before the unfortunate incident occurred on March 7, 2017, on her way back from school to Lokoja.

Ms Oyiza told Neptune Prime that she went for skin grafting, and her hand was grafted for her body to cover the affected arm from her elbow to the shoulder area but her skin failed.

Her doctors suggested another surgery for grafting

but she couldn't afford the cost of the operation.

She said she lost her father on the day her left leg was amputated, her family members tried to support but couldn't continue as they have exhausted their little resources.

She have been managing the hand as her health condition continue to deteriorate over the years.

Her health and financial situation worsened on 18th May 2024 when she was

robbed of the N70,000 donated by Good Samaritans to pay for a house.

After the robbery, the young lady resorted to sleeping in a classroom.

Oyiza is now homeless as the knife-wielding criminal collected all her money and her Infinix smart phone.

Aside sleeping in the classroom alone under harsh weather condition with no security since May, the helpless lady said she cannot afford to buy drugs, food or dress the wounds on her skin

and is wallowing in constant pain.

Ms Oyiza is passionately pleading with kind-hearted Nigerians to come to her aid and help her financially to get treatment and a roof over her head.

"Please, I am begging people out there, brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers, to please come to my aid. I need your help. I am a nursing student. But because of this condition, my life is on hold. I only put my trust in God. I pray God use compassionate

people out there to help my life." she said.

Help Ms Oyiza to get her life back and pursue her dreams. Here are her contact and account details:

Address: ARIGBEDE COLLEGE PHASE 2 LOKOJA KOGI SATAE.

ACCOUNT NAME: Hamzat Aishat Oyiza.

ACCOUNT Number: 0156647350.

Bank: GTBank.

PHONE NUMBER: 07070150902.



# FEATURES

## No excuse for violence against women,

No cultural practice, tradition, economic, or social pressure can justify the suffering endured by millions of women and girls. Our role is to challenge these harmful narratives.

Gender inequality and violence against women remain among the greatest challenges to sustainable development, not just in Nigeria, but globally. According to UN Women, globally, an estimated 736 million women, almost one in three, have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both, at least once in their life, which represents 30 per cent of women aged 15 and older. This figure does not include sexual harassment.

Violence against women and girls is a violation of human rights. It undermines the principles of equality, dignity, and respect. This violence takes many forms—physical, emotional, sexual, and economic—and occurs in every part of the world, including Nigeria. From intimate partner violence to harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, trafficking, exploitation, sexual harassment, and assault, the pervasive nature of gender-

based violence reflects deep-rooted societal inequalities.

Reports have also established that women who have experienced violence are more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety disorders, with long-lasting dire consequences. The United Nations further captured the situation of gender-based violence globally: "For at least 51,100 women in 2023, the cycle of gender-based violence ended with one final and brutal act—their murder by partners and family members. That means a woman was killed every 10 minutes."

In Nigeria, violence and harmful practices against women and girls happen every day, and most of the time, they are not reported. The Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey in 2018 found that 9 per cent of women aged 15 to 49 had suffered sexual assault at least once in their lifetime, and 31 per cent had experienced physical violence. Restrictions and implications from the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated gender-based violence (GBV) in the nation.

One of the global initiatives that consistently puts a spotlight on the issue of gender-based violence is the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-

Based Violence, which starts on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and ends on 10 December, Human Rights Day. This period serves as a crucial platform to raise awareness, mobilise action, and demand an end to all forms of violence against women and girls.

During these 16 Days of Activism, let us not only reflect on the stories of pain but also celebrate the strength, resilience, and courage of women and girls in Nigeria and the rest of the world. Let us honour their voices and commit to a future free from violence. It is a time to reflect on our progress and acknowledge the work that still lies ahead.

"No Excuse. UNITE to End Violence against Women" is this year's theme, and according to UN Secretary-General António Guterres, it means standing with activists around the world who are calling for change and supporting survivors of violence. It is a powerful call to action. It asserts our collective responsibility to ensure that no woman or girl is subjected to violence in their homes, communities, or workplaces. Violence in any form is

never justified, acceptable, or excusable.

We must unite in our efforts to eliminate violence in all its forms. We must collaborate with governments, civil society, international organizations, and the private sector to address the root causes of violence. We need to confront the harmful attitudes, stereotypes, and discriminatory norms that perpetuate a culture of violence. It is essential to break the silence and ensure that survivors receive the support and protection they need to rebuild their lives.

There is no excuse for violence against women. No cultural practice, tradition, economic, or social pressure can justify the suffering endured by millions of women and girls. Our role is to challenge these harmful narratives. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that every woman and girl can live free from the fear of violence and discrimination. We must create safer environments where women and girls can access education, work, and health services, and lead fulfilling lives without fear.

As Nigeria joins the rest of the world to observe the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence,

I stand with the global community in declaring an urgent truth: There is no excuse for violence against women and girls. This is not a matter of debate; it is a call to immediate action. The United Nations in Nigeria stands firmly against violence in all its forms. We are resolute in our commitment to supporting the Nigerian government and all stakeholders to end gender-based violence.

Our work in Nigeria focuses on strengthening legal frameworks, improving access to justice, and creating awareness to change mindsets and behaviours. But we cannot do this alone. We need support from everyone: community leaders, religious institutions, educators, and individuals. It is vital to engage men and boys as partners in this fight, encouraging them to speak out against violence, challenge harmful gender norms, and foster respect and equality in their homes and communities.

We must also ensure that survivors of violence have access to the services and resources they need to heal and rebuild their lives. This includes healthcare, legal aid, and counselling services. It is essential to create spaces where survivors can share their stories

without fear of retaliation and where their dignity is preserved.

Together, we can unlock the full potential of every Nigerian and build a future where gender equality is not just an aspiration but a reality. There is no excuse for violence against women. Together, we can make a difference. Together, we can create a world free from violence and discrimination. A world where women can live with dignity and respect.

*Mohamed M. Fall is a United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria. He writes from Abuja.*



Mohamed M. Fall

## Tax Reform Bills: The North must modernise anyhow

The tax reform bills recently sent to the National Assembly by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR, have generated controversies over the past weeks. Many commentators have expressed their views in support of the bills or against some of their provisions. The Northern Region has expressed vehement objection to the bills. They are against the bills because, in their views, the bills are entirely or partly anti-north. Given most of the observations and the pros and cons of the arguments advanced by the various commentators, it is pertinent to say that whatever views are advanced by the Northern stakeholders, the truth that must be told is that Northern Nigeria must yield itself to the full extent of modernisation, anyhow and soonest. The tax bills will invariably switch a region like the North out of its encrusted traditional and provincial life patterns.

There is no need to regurgitate the controversial issues around the tax reform bills as they are already in the public domain, and much has been said about them thus far. However, three keywords about the VAT derivation model proposed in the tax bills should form the cornerstone of deliberations and whatever decisions may be taken afterwards by the Northern stakeholders. These signature words are production, consumption, and competition.

The Value Added Tax (VAT) is described as a consumption tax. However, before consumption occurs, there must be production, whether in goods or services. Therefore, production is a key factor in any consideration or discussion of the Value Added Tax. Our rudimentary economic class tells us that factors of production are land, capital, labour, and entrepreneurship, which are the building blocks of any economy. Any society that desires economic progress will not take these factors of production for granted. Without mincing words, these production factors are abundant in Northern Nigeria, almost to the point of waste. One would expect that the North will have no issue with production, which invariably gives rise to consumption.

As an output of the production process, consumption depends on the purchasing parity of a people and their cultural tastes. Nonetheless, consumption can happen away from the point where goods and services are produced. It is expected, however, that both production and consumption can occur at the same place, thereby enriching the economy of that particular place. This is because trading and commerce will enhance people's purchasing parity. Without mincing words, Northern Nigeria is essentially a consumption society but with the potential to be a producing economy. It must



Abdullahi Ismaila

embrace progressive ideas and modernisation to harness its full economic potential.

This is where competition comes in. There is competition in every aspect of our lives, from the products and services being churned out daily to how societies employ strategies to grow their economies. This makes every society think progressively and forecast the future. No society lays back or indulges in wastefulness or a careless lifestyle and expects to be at par with other societies that have moved on the fast pedestal of development.

The pertinent question to ask at this juncture is why Lagos has suddenly become the envy of the entire nineteen northern states.

What does Lagos state have that all northern states do not have or cannot have? The answer to the second question is that Lagos state has painstakingly embraced the full extent of modernisation through its deliberate policy planning and execution, it has embraced technology, industrialisation, financial inclusiveness and wealth creation strategies. Northerners are among those who made Lagos State what it is today with their massive investment there.

The point being emphasised here is that the VAT derivation formula being proposed by the tax bills should also be seen as a wake-up call for the Northern stakeholders and political establishment to stir the region out of its slumber and decipher these salient issues dredged up by the bills and quickly embrace the imperative of modernisation. Modernisation does not mean only the erection of skyscrapers, the construction of flyovers, or paved motorways. Suppose we have all these, by all means, okay. In other words, modernisation refers to a reformation of habits, which W. H. Auden refers to as a 'change of heart', which is not simple. In this regard, modernisation 'is the reshaping and resharing social values, such as power, respect, rectitudes, affection, well-being skill, and enlightenment'. This is to say that the Northern leadership and political establishment must

change its old ways of engaging with the people and the society. It must change its way of perceiving reality to begin to understand that leadership is an instrument for improving the conditions of a people, not a tool for manipulating them. It must wake up to an understanding that modern life is about competition, progress, and overcoming challenges that improve the condition of a people. It's not about rhetoric and hyperbole.

On automation, it's essential that state governments in the North also recognise the role of technology in business transactions. Globally, technology is being used to drive revenue collection. Today, the record-breaking revenue collected by the FIRS is made possible because of the massive investment in technology allied with administrative finesse. Therefore, automation of tax payment processes is the norm everywhere. Automation can be done right from the point of business registration, where the data of a business owner can be collected and included in the financial or fiscal process.

Most importantly, this automation option becomes more compelling with the proposed derivation method of sharing VAT. In terms of consumption, it's unarguable that soft drinks like 7UP, Fanta, Coca-Cola, Mirinda, Sprite, etc, are widely consumed in the remotest part of the North.

In the North, soft drinks equate to the liquor in the South. To be able to appropriate VAT from these drinks and other goods like indomie, pasta, sugar, cement, etc, an automation process needs to be implemented to track how VAT is charged at the wholesale distribution point. This is what is referred to as the output VAT.

Regarding the input VAT, deliberate policy can be made to create a value chain in producing and processing products like rice, yams, vegetables, and fruits. In other words, instead of selling the products in their raw forms, state governments should encourage investors to set up factories to create value chains necessary for generating the required revenue. Given its large population, the North can gain more from the consumption-based VAT method if a deliberate strategy is implemented to optimise the process of output VAT.

There is nowhere in the proposed VAT law explicitly stating that the 60% proposed is entirely and exclusively for Lagos state. The presumption that the VAT proposal will favour only Lagos state is just a figment of the imagination of those peddling the sentiment, which stems from a feeling of inadequacy.

*Abdullahi Ismaila Ahmad, Ph.D. is the Director, Communications & Liaison Department, Federal Inland Revenue Service*



# SPO R S

## NIGERIANS HAIL AJAX, OTHER DUTCH CLUBS FOR SUPPORTING TIJANI BABANGIDA IN TRYING TIMES

Nigerians have been expressing gratitude to Dutch football clubs Ajax, VVV Venlo, and Roda JC Kerkrade for their efforts in raising a minimum of €170,000 (approximately N272 million) to support former player Tijani Babangida during a difficult time.

The ex-Nigeria international is in the Netherlands with his wife for treatment after being involved in a car accident in May along the Kaduna-Zaria Road.

Babangida lost his one-year-old son Fadil, his younger brother Ibrahim while his wife and their maid had varying degrees of injuries in the accident.

After initial treatments at the Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital and another hospital in Abuja, Babangida and his wife are now in the Netherlands, thanks to the efforts of his former teammates.

In a publication titled 'Tijani Babangida's suffering: "He laughs from the outside, but crying from the Inside"', it was revealed that his wife recently underwent the first major surgery on her face with at least three or four heavy interventions to follow while Babangida is also working on his rehabilitation after having surgery on his knee. "There are financial challenges. The total picture to cover the treatment and all other costs is at least 170,000 Euros.

A large sum that Baba can't afford. Due to wrong investments and failed projects in his home country of Nigeria, he has lost all his money," the article further stated.

The 1996 Olympic gold medallist was full of appreciation for his former clubs and teammates.

"Fortunately, Ajax, VVV and Roda have all offered to help me. They have joined forces so that not only a few people, but everyone can help through crowdfunding. This is to pay my wife's medical expenses. I think that's very beautiful, I don't know how to thank them," he said.

"These guys did everything for me. When I came here, my driver's license was no longer valid. They took me everywhere. Not only to the hospital but also to the rehabilitation centre Adelante. My wife's arm is paralysed, she can't use it

anymore. Rehabilitation will be months."

Babangida was contracted to Ajax for seven years. He won an Eredivisie title in 1998 and two Dutch Cup trophies, scoring 20 goals in 77 appearances for the club. Before then, he played at Roda JC from 1991 to 1996 and was on loan at VVV Venlo from 1991 to 1993.

See below how Nigerians are thanking the Dutch clubs on X:

Habdulakeem Badmus wrote: "Remarkable show of unity and support from @VVVVenlo, @RodaJCKerkrade and @AFCAjax in standing behind former Nigerian player Tijani Babangida. This act highlights the deep bonds football creates beyond the pitch. Thank you for setting such a beautiful example of solidarity!"

Aji Bussu Onye Mpiawa azu commented, "Tijani Babangida's accident happened in Nigeria, yet the Netherlands has stepped up to provide him with the critical support he needs, simply because he once played for Ajax and holds their passport."

Calvin Emeka Onwuka wrote, "Last Repost. Tijani Babangida's former clubs in the Netherlands have come in strong for the man and his family in this difficult time. When he played for these clubs they paid his salaries. Ajax with a 14min feature for him on their digital platforms. Thank you, @AFC Ajax."

Monday Lee said, "Ajax and Nigeria Super Eagles legend Tijani Babangida didn't get any support from Nigeria and the NFF after his accident but got support from Ajax in the Netherlands. As usual, Nigeria neglected its own. It's really sad and shameful. Thank you, Ajax!"

Chxta wrote, "Tijani Babangida's accident was in #Nigeria, but it was #Holland that stepped up for him simply because he played for @AFC Ajax and has their passport."

"You can't expect patriotism if people see how you treat even your prominent citizens once you think they're no longer useful."

Sports journalist Oma Akatugba wrote, "Thank you very much @AFC Ajax for your support for Tijani Babangida. You thought us how to appreciate our own."



## From Ademola Lookman to Super Falcons, Nigerian players win big at 2024 CAF Awards

By Maryam Sulaiman & Muhammad Kukuri

Nigerian forward Ademola Lookman, Zambian striker Barbra Banda and South Africa goalkeeper Ronwen Williams were the big winners at a star-studded 2024 CAF Awards in Marrakech, Morocco on Monday as Africa's best performers for the year were honoured.

The glittering ceremony was attended by football royalty from the continent and beyond in a celebration of the incredible growth and development of the game in Africa, and the astonishing strides that have been made in men's and women's football in recent years.

See full list of the winners below:  
**2024 CAF AWARDS WINNERS**  
**CAF PLAYER OF THE YEAR (MEN)** Ademola Lookman (Nigeria / Atalanta)  
**CAF PLAYER OF THE YEAR (WOMEN)** Barbra Banda (Zambia / Orlando Pride)  
**CAF GOALKEEPER OF THE YEAR (MEN)** Ronwen Williams (South Africa / Mamelodi Sundowns)  
**CAF GOALKEEPER OF THE YEAR (WOMEN)** Chiamaka

Nnadozie (Nigeria / Paris FC)  
**CAF INTERCLUB PLAYER OF THE YEAR (MEN)** Ronwen Williams (South Africa / Mamelodi Sundowns)  
**CAF INTERCLUB PLAYER OF THE YEAR (WOMEN)** Sanaâ Mssoudy (Morocco / AS FAR)  
**CAF YOUNG PLAYER OF THE YEAR (MEN)** Lamine Camara (Senegal / AS Monaco)  
**CAF YOUNG PLAYER OF THE YEAR (WOMEN)** Doha El Madani (Morocco / AS FAR)  
**CAF COACH OF THE YEAR (MEN)** Emerse Fae (Cote d'Ivoire)  
**CAF COACH OF THE YEAR (WOMEN)** Lamia Boumehti (TP Mazembe)  
**CAF NATIONAL TEAM OF THE YEAR (MEN)** Cote d'Ivoire  
**CAF NATIONAL TEAM OF THE YEAR (WOMEN)** Nigeria  
**CAF CLUB OF THE YEAR (MEN)** Al Ahly (Egypt)  
**CAF CLUB OF THE YEAR (WOMEN)** TP Mazembe (DR Congo)  
**CAF REFEREE OF THE YEAR (MEN)** Mutaz Ibrahim (Libya)  
**CAF REFEREE OF THE YEAR (WOMEN)** Bouchra Karboubi (Morocco)

**CAF ASSISTANT REFEREE OF THE YEAR (MEN)** Elvis Guy Noupue Nguougou (Cameroon)  
**CAF ASSISTANT REFEREE OF THE YEAR (WOMEN)** Diana Chikotesha (Zambia)  
**CAF GOAL OF THE YEAR** Mabululu (Angola)



## After Ballon d'Or snub, Vinicius Junior bags FIFA Best Men's Player Award

By Maryam Sulaiman & Muhammad Kukuri

Real Madrid and Brazil winger Vinicius Jr has been named the men's player of the year at the FIFA Best Awards.

It could be recalled that the 24-year-old and his club boycotted the recent Ballon d'Or Awards after losing out to Manchester City's Rodri, but he picked up this prize in Doha, Qatar.

Vinicius played a key role in Madrid's Champions League and La Liga's championship win in 2023-2024, scoring 24 goals and providing 11 assists.

Earlier in the ceremony, Barcelona midfielder Aitana Bonmati was named the women's player of the year for the second year in a row.

This was the first time Vinicius has won the award and capped a happier finish to the season following October's Ballon d'Or boycott.

The Ballon d'Or and FIFA Best Awards are the two most prestigious honours in football.

This is Vinicius' first FIFA prize, with Lionel Messi and Robert Lewandowski, each winning the award twice.



# FAMILY DYNAMICS & CUISINES

DEAR SIS EESHER,

“I read your piece about boys and hormones, and I replied, ” I don’t know why I’m so defensive like I don’t like it.” I don’t know why I don’t trust anybody with what is happening in my life, like for whatever situation. It will be hard for me to talk to anyone, and I read a lot about talking to someone, especially when you are in a bad situation.

The second thing is aggression; sometimes I wake up with so much aggression, and I don’t fear anything. I don’t know if this is psychologically normal.”

Dear Anonymous, Thank you for sharing how you’re feeling. It’s clear that you’re going through a complex emotional phase, and it takes courage to acknowledge that. Here’s a breakdown of what I think might be happening:

1. Being Defensive and Not Trusting Others: It’s not uncommon to feel defensive when we’re dealing with internal struggles. Often, this can stem from fear of being judged, misunderstood, or perhaps not wanting to feel vulnerable.

Trusting others in our inner lives requires a sense of safety, and if that’s missing, it’s natural to put up walls. This self-protection can turn into isolation, which makes us more defensive.

2. Reluctance to Talk to Others: While opening up to others is often encouraged, it’s not easy for everyone. Some of us need time to process things internally before we can share, and that’s okay. But when we hold everything in, it can increase emotional stress, leading to feeling overwhelmed. Talking to someone who feels safe—whether a trusted friend, mentor, or therapist—can help lift some of that weight.

3. Aggression and Lack of Fear: Feeling aggressive or waking up with a surge of strong emotions could be related to unresolved tension or stress. Sometimes, when we’re under a lot of pressure or emotionally drained, our body’s way of coping can manifest in unexpected ways

# Managing emotional defences and aggression

‘WITH AISHA AUYO’

like irritability or aggression. It’s like your body is trying to release pent-up frustration. Not fearing anything in these moments could be your mind’s way of asserting control

or rejecting the vulnerability you may feel deep down. Is this psychologically normal? Emotions like defensiveness and aggression often signal that

something deeper is going on internally. While they can be common reactions to stress or emotional overload, it’s important to reflect on what’s triggering these feelings. Keeping

them unchecked can affect your mental and emotional well-being. It might help to start journaling your thoughts or practising mindfulness to see what specific

triggers are present. Seeking a counsellor to explore these feelings further could also be helpful, especially if the emotions feel overwhelming.

Most importantly, frequent yourself with duas and zikr, “Surely in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find comfort.” – Quran, 13:28  
*With Love, Sis Eesher.*

## Auyo’s Cuisines Signature Tea Recipe (1)

As the cold and dry season sets in, let’s stay warm, hydrated, and boost our immunity with this aromatic, immunity-boosting tea.

Perfect for warding off seasonal illnesses and creating a cozy atmosphere at home.

**Ingredients:**

- 1. Water

- 2. Tea bag (any variety of your choice)
- 3. Fresh or dried ginger
- 4. Cloves
- 5. Cinnamon sticks or powder
- 6. Lemon grass

- 7. Mint leaves
- 8. Sugar or honey (to taste)
- 9. Star anise
- 10. Pineapple peels

**\*rocedure:**

- 1. Combine all

the ingredients in a pot with water. 2. Simmer on low heat for about 20 minutes or until the fragrant aroma fills your home. (This tea also doubles

as a natural air freshener!). 3. Strain the tea into a container using a sieve. 4. Serve warm and enjoy! Tip: The used ingredients can

be reused to brew a fresh pot until the flavours and aroma are fully extracted.

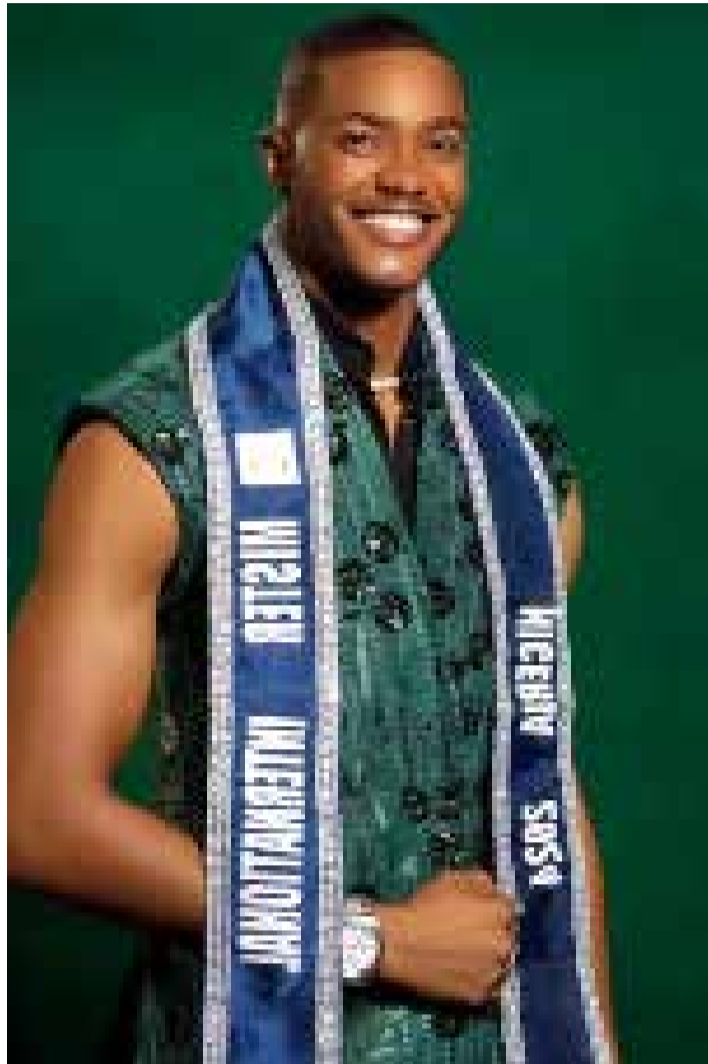
**Note:**

Don’t make any promises

immediately after drinking this tea—it’s known to have a euphoric, uplifting effect that might leave you feeling unusually generous!



# SOCIALS/FASHION



## NIGERIAN MAN BECOMES FIRST AFRICAN TO WIN MISTER INTERNATIONAL PAGEANT

By Gift Luckson

Nigerian man becomes first African to win Mister International pageant  
Mr Nigeria, Samuel Nwajagu, has broken a decade-long record by becoming the first African to win the Mister International competition.

The 16th edition of the Mister International 2024 pageant took place at Fashion Island in Bangkok, Thailand, featuring over 47 contestants from around the globe vying for the position of Mister International.

After clinching the crown and making history, Mr Nigeria, Nwajagu Samuel, was crowned by his predecessor, Kim Thitsan Goodburn of Thailand at the end of the event.

Nwajagu is now the first Nigerian, and the first African, to win the title.

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Nwajagu is now the first Nigerian, and the first African, to win the title.



Bisola, Falz and Funke

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# TECHWORLD

## GAMESCIENE

Dubbed the 'sickest ever' video game because players only have one aim - to massacre as many people as possible in a 'genocide crusade', Hatred is the second game in history to get adults only rating.

## GADGETADDICT

Obviously inspired by the iPhone's glass touchscreen display, the Iconoclock, which is a wall clock that points out each hour with approximations of familiar app icons. Its crystal face delivers a similar jet black yet glossy background as the ubiquitous smartphone.

## web update

## Nigeria develops 35 new ICT standards to strengthen digital sector



Stories by Victor Itodo Abuh

The Computer Professionals Registration Council of Nigeria (CPN), in collaboration with the National

Board for Technical Education (NBTE), has developed 35 new National Occupational Standards (NOS) to advance ICT education in the country. During a validation workshop held in Abuja, the

Registrar of CPN, Muhammed Aliyu, stated that the initiative aligns with President Bola Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda. He emphasised that the new digital skills framework would promote entrepreneurial development, job creation, and national growth. Aliyu announced that the CPN had been granted awarding body status by the NBTE under the Nigerian Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF). This designation empowers the council to oversee the certification of ICT-related skills. "Candidates trained using these National Occupational Standards will not only enhance the local economy but also seize outsourced opportunities," Aliyu explained. He added, "Information Technology is a dynamic profession, innovations and developments are taking place daily globally. This necessitated our foray into studying the current National Occupational Standards in (NOS) in ICT to ensure it is in line with current trends in IT practice." Professor Idris Bugaje, the Executive Secretary of NBTE, represented by Dr. Musa Hatim Koko, praised CPN for spearheading the initiative. He highlighted the importance of addressing skills gaps in data protection and privacy, which requires at least 500 experts nationwide. Benjamin Prince, Head of Business Development at CPN, provided an overview of the new standards and reiterated the council's commitment to collaborating with stakeholders to strengthen the ICT sector.

## Google adopts AI to tackle spike in phishing, spam, malware attacks during

Google has introduced advanced Artificial Intelligence tools designed to safeguard Gmail's 2.5 billion users from a surge in holiday scams, the tech giant announced in a blog post. These tools aim to tackle the seasonal spike in phishing, spam, and malware attacks that intensify during the holiday shopping period, starting in mid-November. "With more than 2.5 billion users, Gmail is the world's largest email provider, and we know how important it is to keep inboxes everywhere safe," Google stated. Google revealed that while its systems block over 99.9% of spam, phishing, and malware attempts throughout the

year, the challenge escalates during the holidays. To address this, the company has deployed cutting-edge AI models to enhance email security. The efforts are paying off. Google reported a 35% reduction in scams reaching inboxes during the first month of this holiday season compared to last year. These enhancements have blocked millions of additional harmful messages before they could reach users. One key upgrade is a large language model (LLM) specifically trained to identify phishing, spam, and malware patterns. This new AI tool has boosted detection capabilities, blocking 20% more spam and processing 1,000 times more user-reported spam daily.

In preparation for the holiday shopping rush, Google also rolled out an AI "supervisor" model ahead of Black Friday. This model acts as an overseer, rapidly analyzing hundreds of threat signals to provide real-time protection against the flagged messages. "Our AI systems work behind the scenes to protect billions of inboxes, adapting quickly as attackers adjust their methods," Google said. Despite these technological advancements, Google acknowledged that scammers continually refine their tactics, especially during high-activity periods. "We typically see a second wave of attacks around this time in the holiday



season as attackers adjust and try new things," the company warned. Google urged users to remain alert and report suspicious

emails as spam or phishing. "It's equally important for you to stay ahead of scams," the blog post emphasised. With these AI-powered

tools and proactive user participation, Google aims to make this holiday season safer for its billions of Gmail users worldwide.

# WORLD NEWS

## China extends visa-free stay for tourists to boost tourism

China has introduced a significant change to its visa-free transit policy, allowing tourists to stay in the country for up to ten days.

This new policy marks an extension from the previous maximum of six days, aiming to attract more visitors as China seeks to revive its tourism industry and strengthen its economy.

The revised policy applies to travellers from 54 countries, including the United States, who are transiting through China to a third destination.

This change expands the scope of visa-free travel to 60 approved ports and permits visitors to explore up to 24 provinces, a shift from the prior restriction to specific entry regions.

The Chinese government said, "It invites more foreign friends to come to China and experience the beauty of the country in this new era firsthand."

Travellers eligible for the visa-free transit programme must book two flights: one to an approved Chinese port and another to a third country within 10 days. Upon arrival, tourists must provide proof of onward travel, a valid passport, and complete an application form.

Scott Keyes, founder of the travel app Going, commented on the programme's potential impact, stating, "All countries want to kind of control the flow of who's coming in and out of the country. They also just want more visitors, and if you are a potential tourist, even if you're just transiting, that's an opportunity to wow you as a tourist."

Since reopening its borders in 2023, China has faced challenges in regaining its status as a top tourist destination.

High travel costs and geopolitical tensions with the United States have hindered progress, despite over 14 million international visitors entering the country in the first half of 2024.

Experts like Keyes said that demand for flights to Asia remains lower compared to destinations like Western Europe and the Caribbean.

Meanwhile, a U.S. State Department advisory urges travellers to "exercise increased caution" in China due to potential risks of arbitrary detention.

With this new visa-free policy, China is taking steps to rebuild its global tourism appeal and showcase its cultural and economic offerings.



## Malaysian Foreign Minister gets hefty fine for smoking inside restaurant

Stories By Sakinat Musa Abubakar

Malaysia's Foreign Minister, Mohamad Hasan, will be fined for smoking in a prohibited area, the country's Health Minister Dzulkefly Ahmad confirmed on Wednesday.

The announcement followed a viral photo showing Mohamad smoking at a street-side eatery in Negeri Sembilan, an area where smoking is banned.

Health Minister Dzulkefly Ahmad reposted the image earlier this week, stating that the Foreign Minister's office had been informed of the violation.

"The Foreign Minister himself wanted to be issued a fine for the offence," Dzulkefly wrote on X (formerly Twitter).

Malaysia has enforced a strict smoking ban in all eateries and restaurants since 2019, with recent measures tightening regulations in October 2024. Offenders face fines of up

to 5,000 ringgit (\$1,120).

In response to the incident, Mohamad apologized publicly, acknowledging the violation and confirming he had received a notice from health authorities.

"If it has become a concern and an issue among the public, I would like to sincerely tender my apology," he told The Star.

"I will pay the fine, and I hope it will not be too high."

The photo sparked widespread criticism online. One user on X commented, "Whether you're a minister or a VVIP, wrong is still wrong. No one is above the law."

Another added, "Lawmakers and law enforcement authorities who break laws should be punished more severely than the public."

This incident emphasises Malaysia's commitment to upholding its anti-smoking laws, regardless of status or position.

## I escaped two assassination attempts in Iraq - Pope Francis

Pope Francis has disclosed how he survived two assassination attempts during his historic visit to Iraq in March 2021, as detailed in excerpts from his forthcoming autobiography, *Hope*, published Tuesday by Italian media.

The pontiff revealed that his Vatican security team received a critical warning from British intelligence about imminent threats during the trip.

"A woman packed with explosives, a young suicide bomber, was heading towards Mosul to blow herself up during the papal visit," Francis wrote. "And a van had also set off at great speed with the same intention."

According to the pope, the two attackers were intercepted and killed by Iraqi police.

Despite the warnings, Francis, who turned 88 on Tuesday, stood firm in his resolve to visit the war-torn country. "Almost everyone advised me against the trip to Iraq, but I wanted to get to the bottom of things. I felt I had to do it," he wrote.

The March 2021 trip marked a significant moment in history as the pope travelled across

Iraq amidst tight security and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. During the three-day visit, he visited Baghdad and Mosul, a former stronghold of the Islamic State group, highlighting the importance of peace and reconciliation in the region.

Security for the pope's overseas trips is typically managed by the Pontifical Swiss Guard and the Vatican Gendarmerie in coordination with local authorities.



## U.S court moves to ban TikTok as Trump returns to office

By Victor Itodo Abuh

TikTok is once again at the centre of U.S.-China tensions, with a looming deadline that could see the popular app banned from U.S. app stores by January 19, 2025. The ban stems from a law passed in April requiring ByteDance, TikTok's Chinese parent company, to divest its U.S. operations or face removal.

The deadline coincides with former President Donald Trump's return to office, raising questions about TikTok's future and the role Trump might play in determining its fate.

TikTok has faced numerous legal battles over its operations in the U.S., with courts repeatedly striking down previous ban attempts. However, the stakes are now higher as the app's emergency motion to delay enforcement of the divest-or-ban law has been denied.

The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to hear arguments on January 10, offering TikTok one final opportunity to overturn the decision.

"The First Amendment exists to protect free speech in the United States," the ruling stated, adding that the government's action is aimed at preventing foreign adversaries from accessing sensitive U.S. data.

Support for a TikTok ban has waned among Americans. A Pew Research survey showed only 32% of respondents favoured a ban in July and August 2024, a sharp decline from 50% in March 2023. Despite bipartisan backing in Congress, the public's changing attitude could influence how the issue unfolds.

Surprisingly, Trump, who previously sought to ban TikTok during his first term, has signalled a more conciliatory approach. On December 16, he met with TikTok CEO Shou Chew, expressing a willingness to "take a look at TikTok" and suggesting he has "a warm spot" for the platform.

Legal experts believe Trump could take several approaches to save the app, including instructing the Justice Department not to enforce the law or interpreting its provisions in a way that allows TikTok to operate. However, such strategies may face significant legal hurdles.

Congressional leaders, including Rep. John Moolenaar, have proposed a more straightforward solution: a sale of TikTok's U.S. assets to a non-Chinese company. While ByteDance has previously resisted such moves, this option could become a bargaining chip in broader U.S.-China trade negotiations.

Concerns over TikTok's Chinese ownership have fueled fears that the app could be used as a propaganda tool or forced to share user data with the Chinese Communist Party. While TikTok has denied these claims, asserting that its U.S. operations are independent, skepticism remains high among lawmakers.



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## The Arbiter

BY HASSAN GIMBA



# Why Nigerians no longer want to pay tax (1)

**T**here is this hullabaloo that has enveloped the country, with debates all over, in some instances threatening to degenerate into fisticuffs. It is all about the Tax Reform Bills.

Even though, after all is said and done, it may end up as an issue that signifies nothing but being blown out of proportion, it made me recall Macbeth's speech in William Shakespeare's Macbeth.

In his speech, he surmised that there is no meaning or purpose in life. Understandably, with his wife dead and armies marching against him, he came face to face with the transience of life. He visualised his life following a "way to dusty death" and likened life to a candle flame.

To Macbeth, "Life is but a walking shadow; a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

We may not say the Tax Reform Bill is a tale full of sound and fury but when considered from the submission of the Revenue Mobilisation Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC), the whole idea does not signify anything; it may amount to nothing. But that is if we are truly practising constitutional democracy and desirous of adhering to it.

In a 2470-word memorandum, the RMAFC buttressed the fact that tax reforms are good for the overall interest of the country's economy but pointed at complexities in determining tax by derivation as "VAT is a tax levied on the consumption of goods and services. The final tax burden falls on the consumer, and the tax is remitted by businesses (agents of VAT collection) to the tax authorities. The complexity in determining the taxpayer's "residence" for derivation purposes arises when goods are purchased in one location and consumed in another, the seller and buyer operate across state boundaries, and VAT reporting systems do not track the end-use location effectively."

The memorandum gave an example: "A Man from Kano Buys a Fuel Pump in Lagos for Use in Kano State."

Most importantly, the memorandum reminded us that Section 162 (2) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) empowered the

RMAFC to determine the formula for the equitable sharing of revenue among the three tiers of government and to ensure that such formula reflects the principles of fairness and justice. It then asserted that the Constitution conferred on the RMAFC the sole power to mediate in matters of revenue allocation for the three tiers of government.

Paragraph 10.2 of the memorandum warned that "The Constitution, being supreme, does not envisage that any other Act of Parliament such as the VAT Act could assume this responsibility. Any such attempt would contravene the Constitution. Therefore, the RMAFC remains the sole arbiter in producing allocation formulae that are fair and equitable for the three tiers of government. Any deviation from a formula crafted by the RMAFC risks violating constitutional provisions and undermining the Commission's role as the impartial arbiter of revenue allocation in Nigeria."

Sometimes, you wonder what our lawmakers know. Many have been in the National Assembly more than once, including the Senate President, his deputy and principal officers. Yet they were at each other's neck on an issue they had no right to legislate. Even those against the bills were not doing so because of their knowledge that it was not their turf as lawmakers. Sad, isn't it?

Nonetheless, we will say the little we can about the issue, hoping it will contribute to the debate on tax reform.

In the first place, why should a Nigerian, especially a Northerner, raise the muscles of his neck over any tax for that matter, considering that it is in the tradition of the Northern system of government, which even the colonialists met, to pay tax?

Not only that, there was a time when northerners and, of course, most Nigerians willingly gave, not even paid, tax. Sometimes, payments are deducted from the source, which means that the payee had no choice but to see the money, in this context, deducted.

A story was told of how, in the 50s, northerners willingly taxed themselves and gave the proceeds for the education of their sons in the United Kingdom, then the focal point for education. It was said that northerners were made to contribute one penny each, and they did so happily. That story may or may not be the whole



truth but it is an indication of what trust can do – to make people give taxes out of their own volition. Two of those who benefited were Doctor Bukar Shuaib and AJKG Imam.

Dr Bukar Shuaibu, CFR, born in 1927 in Geidam in the old Borno Province (now Yobe State), attended Elementary and Middle School, now Government College Maiduguri, before proceeding to Barewa College between 1934 and 1948. He was at Liverpool University from 1949 to 1954 where he obtained

a Bachelor's Degree in Forestry. While there, he attended Aberdeen Veterinary Medicine. A member of the Royal University in Scotland and College of Veterinary Surgeons, he was the first Forestry, also in the fifties. Born in 1928 at Benisheik, where his father was on posting as a staff of the Borno Native Authority, he came from the illustrious Imam Family.

Alkali Jafar Kalli Goni Imam, popularly called AJKG Imam, or Malam Kalli, was the first Kanuri and northerner to be sent to the United Kingdom for a full degree course

There is no doubt that trust was the main determiner in making earlier citizens pay taxes willingly. There was trust in the leadership of the day and the knowledge that the taxes collected would not be misappropriated. Now, even...

Sometimes, you wonder what our lawmakers know. Many have been in the National Assembly more than once, including the Senate President, his deputy and principal officers

*Hassan Gimba, anipr, is the publisher and CEO of Neptune Prime.*

*To be continued.*