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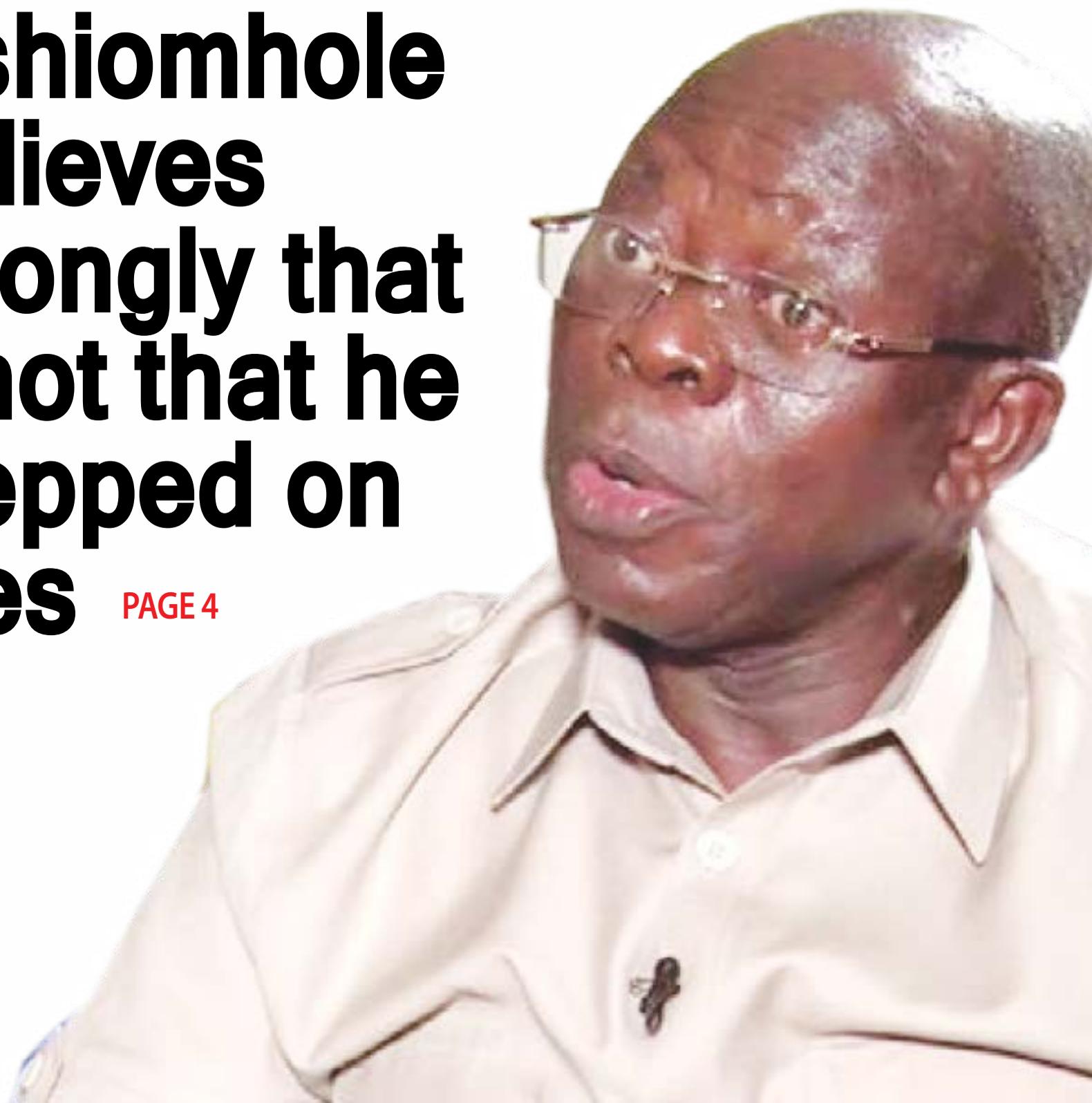
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Mr. President, the time to scrap or reform the Almajiri system is now

President Muhammadu Buhari had pointed out that “Section 2 of the Compulsory, Free Universal Basic Education Act provides that every Government in Nigeria shall provide free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age”, effectively declaring it against the laws of Nigeria to keep children out of the formal education system, which by implication is what the Almajiri system does.

President Buhari went further stating that, “It is indeed a crime for any parent to keep his child out of school for this period”, adding that “when a government fails to provide the schools, teachers and teaching materials necessary for basic education, it is actually aiding and abetting that crime”. His spokesperson would later clarify that the president’s comments did not mean an immediate ban on Almajiri system in the country, but such action would be a gradual process.

Nigeria, according to reports has about 13million children out of formal schooling, the bulk

of whom are in the northern part of the country, where the Almajiri system is domiciled. The failure of education in the region is not unconnected with the multiple security challenges plaguing the region and the rest of the country. These children, who are more than the total population of many countries of the world, have been kept out of formal education and all the opportunities it opens to them by corruption of the elite.

For decades Nigerian governments had failed to make adequate budgetary provisions for education, while the little made available has been frittered away by officials. Nigerian public schools have become a paradox where officials are richer than institutions entrusted into their care, leaving the students for whom such schools were established to suffer.

More than anything else, the current security challenges posed by the Boko Haram (which is translated “Western Education is forbidden”) and others in the north mean that, there is an urgent need for the entire system to be dismantled

and the participants enrolled in the formal education system. Former President Goodluck Jonathan had established Almajiri Schools all over the north to absorb the participants, providing them a mix of formal western and Quranic education, but these schools have since gone into disuse.

It is an emergency that requires a consensus among the leaders of the north and the President needs to follow up with a firm stand on the entire system. There is no social or economic case to be made for having a large army of children roaming the streets of our country, in a day and age when human capital have been acknowledged as being the most valuable resource in the world with less natural resource rich countries dominating all the major Human Development Indices rankings. President Buhari, whose major selling point has been his avowed stand against corruption must take a firm stand against this menace and mobilize leaders of the north and other stakeholders to put a definite stop to it. No doubt the future of our children cannot wait.

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MISSION STATEMENT

Where feeble minds compromise integrity and dignity and refuse to speak out, we will lift our voices in defence of Nigeria and its people against corruption, impunity, bad governance and those who trample the laws of our land under their feet.

Oshiomhole believes strongly that if not that he stepped on toes

In the beginning

When Comrade Adams Oshiomhole was to exit office as Governor of Edo State, after serving two terms, he made a shocking decision as to who would succeed him in government house. The combative former NLC President had sidestepped his deputy, Odudu and Commissioner for Works, to choose an “unknown quantity” in, Godwin Obaseki, who was head of his economic team. Oshiomhole who has always prided himself on the fact that his emergence led to the retirement of godfathers in Edo politics, in a cheeky reference to the Late Chief Tony Anenih, has been in a running battle with his successor, over the way he has governed the state.

According to sources close to him, the then governor “Oshiomhole believed strongly that if not that he stepped on toes, he would not have achieved all he did in Edo, which his choice of Obaseki, who though a Benin man, had lived outside Benin for long, and therefore had no allegiances to the power blocs of the old order”. Obaseki, according to our source, “being the technocrat that he is, when he came into office, decided to run his government by the books rather than the ways of the Oshiomhole days when allegiances were bought with handouts and government patronage”.

It was said that the agreement between godfather and godson was that the governor would concentrate in running the technical side government while Oshiomhole and other politicians would run the political aspect, but the governor was said to have reneged and instead set about being his own man and appointing his own trusted allies into sensitive positions essentially snubbing Oshiomhole.

The beginning of the end

A source in government house who did not want to be named, summarized the crisis, saying “the national chairman of our party was miffed that the executive governor refused to take instructions from him on running the affairs of the state, and he even went ahead to dismantle the political structure Oshiomhole had established in the state removing key players from their positions of power and influence”.

Obaseki had early in his administration removed the revenue collection function that had been delegated to the likes of Osakpawa Eriyo (AKA No molest), a well-known political thug in the state, and introduced electronic collection methods, effectively rendering the youths that were used for that venture jobless and their boss incapable of giving them the usual “empowerment”. His tax reform, which has tripled the state’s



internally generated revenue, has made him a number of political enemies who had gone to lobby the state former chairman against him.

According to a senior political figure in the state who did not want to be named, “Oshiomhole had severally attempted to broker peace between Obaseki and these leaders, to no avail, due to his insistence that ‘the days of sharing government money recklessly are well and truly over’. This has not gone down well with Oshiomhole who has vowed not to return him”.

The former Chairman of Akugbe Ventures and member of the All Progressives Congress in Edo State, Comrade Tony Adun (AKATony Kabaka) was one of the earliest to raise questions over the loyalties of the governor, stating severally that “Governor Godwin Obaseki had abandoned those who worked for his success during the 2016 election”.

And the beat goes up

Even though both sides of the feud had maintained studied silence, with a touch of the occasional denial, Things had taken a turn the worse when the question of the governor’s reelection began to be asked by more and more stakeholders. Several aides on both sides of the divide began throwing jibes at each other making accusations and counter

accusations. While Oshiomhole’s loyalists claimed the governor ran an exclusionist administration, the governor’s loyalists has claimed that the national chairman was plotting seriously to get him removed in order to restore the old way of doing things.

while canvassing support for the governor, Martins Osakwe a senior party chieftain, declared that “the governor’s opposers are those to whom he read the riot act that state resources would no longer be shared as favours to a few”. He queried further “What is Governor Obaseki guilty of? In Oredo, where I come from, women used to pay 900Naira for every stall daily. Today, they are paying 200Naira. 90% of the funds collected in the past went to private pockets”. Loyalists of the party national chairman, on the other hand maintain that the governor runs an administration that has excluded many as “the governor only listens to a few close allies” stated a senior official who didn’t want to be named in this report. This official told our reporter, that “nobody knew Obaseki until Oshomhole brought him onto the scene and chose him ahead of more formidable contestants like Pius Odubu and Charles Arhiabvere”.

A house of assembly divided against itself

The Edo state House of Assembly

is not new to controversy, having been engulfed in a speakership tussle between the PDP and the APC in 2014. In 2019, however the entire 24 members were elected on the platform of the APC, but on the 17th of June, Nineteen out of the 24 members-elect, had publicly called on Governor Godwin Obaseki, to immediately inaugurate the new Assembly following the expiration of the previous old one on June 7th.

Washington Osifo, the spokesman for the lawmakers, had told journalists that “the governor by virtue of Section 105(3) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), is constitutionally required to issue a letter of proclamation for the inauguration of the new Assembly to avoid vacuum”. Osifo had gone further to accuse the governor of “deliberately refusing to allow the Assembly to function, thus usurping the powers of the legislators”. he had laid a marker stating that “the governor, no matter how powerful, cannot impose individuals either as Speaker or Deputy Speaker on the legislators”.

In an unexpected twist to the entire saga, on Tuesday, June 19, Crusoe Osagie, Special Adviser to the Governor on Media and Strategy, issued a statement to inform the public that the Assembly was inaugurated at 3pm on Monday, with nine members who elected Frank Okiye as Speaker. The statement, giving further details, said “the Clerk of the Edo House of Assembly, Alhaji Audu Omogbai, ushered the members-elect into the chamber and read out the letter of proclamation transmitted to the Office of the Clerk by the Governor of Edo State, Mr Godwin Obaseki”.

Anselm Ojezua, Chairman, Edo chapter of the APC, who reacted on the election of the new House leadership, told newsmen that party supremacy prevailed. Mr Ojezua also agreed that by the inauguration, Mr Obaseki has fulfilled the constitutional requirement through the transmission of the proclamation letter to the clerk of the House. He also put his stamp of approval on the emergence of the new leadership and principal officers were in line with the decision of the party.

Defending the availability of only nine out of the 24 members-elect who were all elected under the party were inaugurated, He also said that from information gathered from the clerk of the House, only 10 of the 24 members had so far satisfied the requirement on the declaration of their assets.

Regardless of how things play out, the battle lines seem drawn between the self acclaimed remover of godfathers and a his godson who is battling tooth and nail to save his political future outside of the niche carved for him by his godfather.

Diezani bribe: INEC deputy director bags six years, another bags seven years

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC Kano zonal office on Friday, June 28, 2019 secured the conviction of a Deputy Director of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, Auwal Jibrin and one Garba Ismaila, before Justice Yusuf Birnin-Kudu of the Jigawa State High Court sitting in Gumel, on a six-count charge bordering on unlawful enrichment and gratification.

The journey to prison for them started after the Commission received intelligence report that they benefited from the \$115,010,000 largesse of a former Minister of Petroleum, Diezani Alison-Madueke, in the build-up to the 2015 presidential election.

Investigations showed that they benefited the sum of N45,000,000

(Forty Five Million Naira) out of the N250,000,000 (Two Hundred and Fifty Million Naira) disbursed in Jigawa State to influence the outcome of the 2015 election.

Upon arraignment, they pleaded "not guilty" to the charges thereby setting the stage for full trial.

During the course of trial, the prosecution presented five witnesses and tendered 20 exhibits to prove the case against them.

One of the charges reads: "That you, Auwal Jibrin, while being a public Servant (Deputy Director with Independent National Electoral Commission, Dutse) sometime in 2015, at Dutse within the Judicial Division of this Honourable court dishonestly received the sum of 45,000,000 (Forty Five Million Naira) from Garba Ismail, which you were not

authorized to receive and you thereby committed an offence punishable under section 122 of the Penal Code."

Delivering judgement, Justice Birnin-Kudu held that: "The prosecution proved beyond reasonable doubt, all the elements and facts of the case as contained in the charge and the testimonies of prosecution witnesses and exhibits tendered."

The court added that the defence team failed to counter the evidence presented by the prosecution through its witnesses.

Thus, the court found the first defendant guilty as charged on count two, while the second defendant was found guilty on counts one and three.

The court, however, discharged them on counts four, five and six.

Consequently, counsel for the EFCC, Mohammed Gambo, urged the court to

sentence them accordingly.

Counsel representing the second defendant, Jonathan Methesidie, who also held the brief for counsel representing the first defendant pleaded with the court to temper justice with mercy in sentencing the defendants.

After listening to the plea of the defence for mercy, the trial judge sentenced the first defendant to seven years imprisonment without an option of fine on count one, while the second defendant who was the INEC Deputy Director was sentenced to six years each on counts one and three.

The court further ordered the final forfeiture of the recovered monies and properties attached to the investigation with the exception of a three-bedroom flat attached at No. 1 Hadeja Road, Birnin kudu, Jigawa State.

Alleged money laundering: court dismisses Ofili-Ajumogobia's objection

Justice Rilwan Aikawa of the Federal High Court sitting in Ikoyi, Lagos, on Friday, June 28, 2019, dismissed the preliminary objection filed by Justice Rita Ofili-Ajumogobia, challenging her trial before the court.

Ofili-Ajumogobia alongside Godwin Obla, SAN, were re-arraigned on May 15, 2019 on an 18-count charge bordering on breach of trust, false statement and unlawful enrichment.

One of the counts reads: "That you, Hon. Justice Rita Ofili-Ajumogobia and Godwin Obla, SAN, on or about the 21st day of May, 2014 in Lagos, within the

jurisdiction of this Honourable Court, conspired to indirectly conceal the sum of N5, 000,000.00 (Five Million Naira) in the Diamond Bank account of Nigel & Colive Ltd., which sum you reasonably ought to have known forms part of proceeds of unlawful enrichment."

Ofili-Ajumogobia, through her counsel, Chief Robert Clarke, SAN, had, on June 25, 2019, filed an application challenging the jurisdiction of the court to try his client, claiming that the President's approval for her dismissal had not been gazetted.

At today's sitting, Justice Aikawa ruled that Ofili-Ajumogobia is no longer a



judicial officer, having been dismissed by the President on the recommendation of the Nigeria Judicial Council, NJC, and that

she could be tried for any criminal offence she might be accused of.

Justice Aikawa held that, with the letter presented by the EFCC, the President had already dismissed Ofili-Ajumogobia on November 6 2018." The President has approved the recommendation of dismissal by the NJC with the letter. "So, it is not a question of whether it was published or not. The intention of the President was clearly expressed in that letter sent on November 6, 2018," the Judge further held.

The case was adjourned to 24 and 25 October, 2019 for trial.

RTEAN, EFCC partner against corruption in Ilorin

The Acting Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, Ibrahim Magu has stressed the need to implement preventive measures in the fight against corruption, describing such measures as the best way to stamp corrupt practices out of the society.

He made the assertion on June 28, 2019 in Ilorin, the Kwara State capital while receiving the leadership of the Road Transport Employers Association of Nigeria, RTEAN, Kwara

State Chapter, who came on a visit to the EFCC Ilorin Zonal Office.

The EFCC Chair who was represented by Isyaku Sharu, Head, Ilorin Zonal Office, used the opportunity to intimate the visitors on the various efforts of the anti-graft agency aimed at ridding the country of corruption.

"Our duty does not end in arresting and prosecuting people, we are changing lives for good, and we must look at preventive mechanisms," he said.

He also appealed to them to partner with the EFCC in stamping out corruption.

He said: "Fighting corruption is not a one man's business, but is a collective responsibility.

"We collect information from members of the public, because information is key and intelligence is key.

"You relate with the lowest, middle and highest, and so you get information, so I appeal to you to partner with the

EFCC in the ongoing fight against corruption."

While assuring the anti-graft agency of support in the fight against corruption, the RTEAN Chairman, Alhaji Abdulrahman Onikijipa commended the EFCC boss for his efforts, day and night in the fight against corruption.

"Corruption is not a one man's business, and all hands need to be on the deck in the fight against the menace of corruption," he said.

Court jails businessman for N6m fraud

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, Maiduguri zonal office, has on Friday, June 28, 2019 secured the conviction and sentencing of one Mustapha Baba Kura before Justice Aisha Kumaliya of the Borno State High Court, Maiduguri on a one count charge bordering on cheating to the tune of N6, 000, 000 (Six Million Naira) only.

His journey to the prison started when the Commission received a petition against him to the effect that Kura deceived the nominal complainant into paying a total sum of N6, 000, 000 for the supply of chalk flour to one Shehu Saidu, a Lagos-based flour dealer.

The nominal complainant after

agreeing on the terms with Shehu, transferred the sum of N5, 400, 000 (Five Million, Four Hundred Thousand Naira) to him for the supply of 600 bags of chalk flour at N9, 000 (Nine Thousand Naira) per bag.

After the arrival of the goods, the complainant paid the balance of N600, 000 (Six Hundred Thousand Naira) as the transportation cost.

Kura asked Shehu to transfer the said sum to him and there by diverted to his personal use.

The count reads, "That you, Mustapha Baba Kura sometime in April, 2017 in Maiduguri, within the judicial division of the High Court of Justice of Borno

State with intent to defraud, cheated Babagana Mamman Gadai by deceiving him to part with the sum of Six Million Naira (N6,000, 000) under the pretence of purchasing 600 bags of flour at N9,000 per bag which you knew to be false and thereby committed an offence contrary to Section 320 and punishable under Section 322 of the Penal Code Law Cap 102, Laws of Borno State."

He pleaded not guilty to the one count charge.

During the cause of the trial, prosecution counsel, Benjamin Manji called a total number of seven witnesses and tendered seventeen exhibits, in order to prove his case.

While reading her judgement, Justice Kumaliya found him guilty on the one count charge for the offence of cheating, which is contrary to section 320 and punishable under section 322 of the penal code a law cap 102, Laws of Borno State.

During allocutos, the convict pleaded for leniency and urged the court to temper justice with mercy. Justice Kumaliya thereafter sentenced him to three months imprisonment with an option of fine in the sum of Five Hundred Thousand Naira (N500, 000). She further ordered the convict to reconstitute the nominal complainant N4, 300, 000 million or to serve five years jail term.

Court adjourns Okupe's N702m fraud trial to Oct 3

Justice Ijeoma Ojukwu of a Federal High Court sitting in Abuja has adjourned the trial of Doyin Okupe, a former Senior Special Assistant on Media to a former president, Goodluck Jonathan, to October 3, 2019.

Okupe, who is being prosecuted by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, is facing a 59-count charge bordering on money laundering, criminal breach of trust to

the tune of N702million. The EFCC through its counsel, Ibrahim Audu, closed its case against him on June 26, 2019 after calling its sixth witness, Shuaibu Salisu, a former Director, Administration and Finance in the Office of the National Security Adviser, ONSA.

Salisu, while being led in evidence by Audu, narrated how sometime in 2012 the then NSA, Col. Sambo Dasuki (ret'd), directed that money totalling about N50million be paid to



Okupe. "Okupe provided his account details where I paid the amount into the

bank account of Value Trust Investment," he said, adding that several payments were made at different times to him.

Justice Ojukwu had afterwards adjourned to June 28, 2019 for the defence to open its case.

At the resumed hearing, however, defence counsel, J.K. Gadzama, SAN, instead, moved an application for the leave of the court, to allow Okupe travel for medicals.

The prosecution left the decision to the discretion of the court.

Afterwards, the trial judge granted the application permitting him to travel to the United States for medicals, and ordered that the international passport of the defendant should be released to him.

"Upon return, he shall return the international passport to the court," the trial judge added.

The case has been adjourned to October 3, 2019 for adoption of written address on the no-case submission, which the defence intends to file.

Harvest of convictions: five internet fraudsters jailed in Lagos

It was a day of reckoning for Lagos based internet fraudsters on Friday, June 28, 2019, as four different judges rained convictions of varying sentences to five of them in various jurisdictions of the Lagos High Courts.

Among the three persons Justice Oluwatoyin Taiwo of the Special Offences Court sitting in Ikeja, convicted and sentenced separately for internet related offences was Abdulazeez Ismaila, who bagged six months imprisonment for being in possession of fraudulent documents. Onyebuchi Felix was sentenced to one year imprisonment for being in possession of fraudulent documents and Abdulazeez

Ismaila was also convicted and sentenced to six months imprisonment by the same judge for possession of fraudulent documents.

Justice Mojisola Dada of the Special Offences Court sitting in Ikeja, Lagos on the same day also convicted and sentenced one Emmanuel Olasupo to one year imprisonment for being in possession of fraudulent documents.

In the same vein, Justice Dada convicted and sentenced two other internet fraudsters: Amuda Tayo Segun and Aina Afeez Omodolapo to one year imprisonment each for being in possession of fraudulent documents.

The charge against Onyebuchi reads: "That you,

Onyebuchi Felix, sometime in 2019 in Lagos, within the jurisdiction of this Honourable Court, had in your possession documents containing false pretence, which you knew that the said documents contained false pretence."

The charge against Ismaila is "That you, Abdulazeez Ismaila, sometime in 2019 in Lagos within the jurisdiction of this Honourable Court, had in your possession documents containing false pretence, which you knew that the said documents contained false pretence."

For Olasupo, the charge reads: "That you, Emmanuel Olasupo, sometime in May, 2019 in Lagos within the jurisdiction of this Honourable

Court, with intent to defraud had in your possession documents containing false pretence, which you knew that the said documents contained false pretence."

The charge against the duo of Segun and Omodolapo reads: "That you, Amudah Tayo Segun and Aina Afeez Omodolapo, sometime in 2019 in Lagos, within the jurisdiction of this Honourable Court, had in your possession documents containing false pretence, which you knew that the said documents contained false pretence."

For Segun and Omodolapo, Justice Dada gave an "option of fine" of N250, 000 (Two Hundred and Fifty Thousand Naira) each to the convicts.

Ismaila was not too lucky as he was convicted and sentenced to six months imprisonment without an option of fine. The judge also ordered that all items recovered from the convict be forfeited to Federal Government of Nigeria.

Justice Taiwo convicted and sentenced Felix to nine months imprisonment without an option of fine. The judge also ordered the forfeiture of all recovered items from the convict to Federal Government of Nigeria.

The verdict on Olasupo by Justice Dada was one year imprisonment. The Judge also ordered that the two laptops and one iPhone recovered from the convict be forfeited to the Federal Government of Nigeria.

N2.9bn fraud: witness tells court how Mba, former NBC DG defied FG directive on TSA

A principal witness, Abubakar Aliyu Madaki, in the ongoing trial of the former Director-General of National Broadcasting Commission, Emeka Mba and four others, on Friday, June 28, 2019, told the court before Justice Mojisola Giwa-Ogunbanjo of the Federal High Court, Abuja, how the former DG and the four other defendants, allegedly diverted the sum of N2.9 billion, (Two Billion, Nine Hundred Thousand Naira), only.

Mba is facing trial alongside Patrick Areh, Basil Udotai, Babatunji Amure and a company, Technology Advisors allegedly belonging to Udotai, before the Federal High Court, Abuja for illegally diverting the sum of N2.9bn (Two Billion, Nine Hundred Thousand Naira, Only) from the funds meant for purchase of set-up boxes for digital switch-over from analogue system.

Madaki, the 13th prosecution witness while giving his evidence-in-

chief, said the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, received copy of a petition, dated December 31, 2015, which was addressed to the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and copied to the acting executive Chairman of the EFCC and was sent to him for investigation.

The witness said the petition has the signature of the Executive Chairman, EFCC and that it was sent in by one Oke Nwafor.

According to him, after studying the petition and mapping out strategies on how to carry out the investigation, he moved into action but was marveled at the series of revelation he got from the several fraudulent transfers that were done from the account while the 1st defendant was still the Director-General of the NBC.

The prosecution counsel, Chile Okoroma, sought to tender the Certified True Copy, (CTC) of the petition



in evidence to the court but Counsel to the third defendant opposed to the admissibility of the copy of the petition, arguing that the required fee was not paid to the office of the Head of Service of the Federation.

But Prosecuting Counsel urged the court to discountenance the objection of the defence counsel and cited Section 104 (1) of the Evidence Act, 2011, to support his argument that a document can be tendered by a public

officer of a government agency on official duty adding that there was no need to pay any legal fee for such documents.

Justice Ogunbanjo, however, discountenanced the argument of the third defendant's counsel, stating that whoever is tendering a document that the required fees was not paid can go back to pay the fees while the evidence can be admitted.

"The documents are relevant to this court and on basis of this relevance, I hereby admit them in evidence 52", she said.

After the prosecution witness identified the account statement of the NBC, he went ahead to describe how the funds were moved out in spurious manner.

According to him, the sum of N34 billion (Thirty Four Billion Naira) was paid by MTN into the Zenith Bank account of the NBC but that he was surprised that the first and second defendants made

transfers to the account of Technology Advisors, despite the directive of the Federal Government that all accounts of MDAs are to be domiciled in the Central Bank of Nigeria.

Meanwhile, the counsel to third defendant, Paul Erokoro, SAN, moved motion for release of his client's international passport to enable him travel to the United States for a follow-up treatment on his heart related ill-health.

Justice Ogunbanjo granted the third defendant leave to travel out of the country within a period of two months and must return on or before 30th of August, 2019 and ordered that his passport be returned to the Deputy Registrar of the court. She also ordered that his surety must depose to an affidavit in that regard.

Justice Ogunbanjo admitted the statement of the account as Exhibit 53 and adjourned the hearing to 24 and 25 September, 2019, for continuation of trial.

Why corruption in Africa is now a full-blown culture affecting the continent's DNA

By Nana Kwaku M Asamoah

Imagine a continent where six of its countries are among the ten countries considered most corrupt in the world, according to Transparency International. Or one where persons empowered by various states to enforce the law, to protect people and property, and to prevent crime and civil disorder are equally as corrupt as the elected representatives of those states. Or think of living in a place where the cost of corruption is higher than the total combined amount of development aid that is received from foreign donors.

This is the reality of millions of people living on the continent of Africa. Corruption in Africa has been one of the most debated issues over the past three decades not least because it has milked Africa of billions of dollars each year. It will continue to be an issue in the future because of the inconsistency in reforms to governance and government institutions on the continent.

Corruption on the continent is a big tangled web and all countries on the continent are caught up in it. We often hear a great deal about how African political leaders are bent on fighting corruption on the continent but what we are barely made aware of, is how many of these same political leaders are the biggest driving force behind corruption on the African Continent.

This is the continent where the Teodorin Nguema Obiang, the son of Equatorial Guinea's President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, spends millions of dollars of state funds on his lavish lifestyle which includes luxurious homes in California, Buenos Aires, Argentina, London and South Africa; a car collection consisting of Bugatti, Lamborghini, Bentleys and Aston Martin; a Gulfstream Jet and an art collection that could easily make billionaires envious. Frittering away millions of dollars all the while when most citizens of Equatorial Guinea lack access to drinking water and about a quarter of newborn babies die before the age of five.

A similar example is the case of Isabel Dos Santos, the eldest daughter of Angola's President Jose Eduardo dos Santos, whom as at 2011 rose to become arguably the wealthiest woman in Angola by using the influence of her father to win state contracts and government information for her personal gain after her father took the reins of power.

Another example is the case of recently deposed Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, a famously corrupt leader whom according to a secret diplomatic WikiLeaks cable, had siphoned as much as 9 billion dollars as at 2010 from the very much impoverished Sudan into his London bank accounts. Idriss Deby Itno, President of Chad, famously embezzled millions of dollars in

foreign aid aimed at building an oil pipeline through the country, the proceeds of which were meant to feed the desperately poor people and to buy military equipment to keep his minority government in power.

And of course, the western part of Africa is not spared the cases of corruption either. General Sani Abacha of Nigeria, an intensely famous military ruler who ruled Nigeria for only 5 years from 1993 to 1998, managed to steal between 3-5 billion dollars of state money. A situation now famously characterized as the "Abacha Loot".

Another very popular West African corruption story is that of former Liberian President, Charles Taylor, who had already been fired by a previous government after embezzling 1 million dollars into his American bank account and arrested in the US, subsequently amassed wealth of over 100 million dollars when he became the warlord President of Liberia. Don't ask me where the money came from but your guess is as good as mine.

Another former West African leader, Yahya Abdul-Aziz Jammeh of Gambia, has been accused of embezzling 100 million during his 22-year rule. And currently, his assets which include a fleet of vehicles and 3 planes in addition to numerous properties have been put on sale by the current Gambian government. There are numerous other examples of massive corrupt activities perpetuated by African political leaders.

But of course, political leaders bleeding their nations dry will not give us the whole story. If we only focus on the corrupt political leaders as development expects, media reports and international partners do, we will certainly fail to understand the nature of the crisis engulfing our African continent. As we ignored in the past and continue to ignore the low-level bribes paid everywhere and daily on the continent, we're only going to see more corruption in the years ahead.

The current scale of bribery on the continent is only a pale preview of what we're going to witness in the coming decades as Africa plans to unify and establish more continental institutions aimed at achieving full economic integration. Petty bribes are rapidly becoming a "norm" in Africa. Payment of petty bribes is becoming more commonplace, more elusive and ingrained.

Ghanaians for instance instinctively offer to pay bribes to the Policeman (or the reverse) when they commit traffic offences, pay bribes to obtain Passports and Birth Certificates, and health workers in many government hospitals solicit unofficial payments before they treat patients. And recently, judges and football administrators in Ghana among others have been exposed for regularly taking bribes. Nigerians pay bribes everywhere - from banks to courtrooms to hospitals, in the form of what locals sometimes call

"kickback".

And in Cameroon, a minute of delaying payment of "kompo" (bribe) could cause you to miss the train, cause your sick relative to die in the hospital, cause your child who is clever to not get a good education or possibly fail an exams, cause your business to delay and even cause you to lose an employment opportunity.

Likewise, in The Gambia, corruption is driven by a deeply ingrained bribery norm called "maslaha", an expression that when mentioned solicits contemptible favours like perhaps making one's child gain admission into a good school even if the child's grades do not merit it or making teachers get to teach in their school of choice or to secure promotions or transfer to a coveted school. And of course, there is Sierra Leone, a country which refutes any claims of bribery and instead views "kola" (bribe) as a sign of respect or a show of appreciation for the good people do for you.

If paying or collecting bribes seems an inescapable as well as an appalling activity in Western Africa, then let us delve into Eastern Africa where poor people in countries such as Uganda, Kenya and Burundi pay "kitu kidogo" (bribe) for their basic rights. These pervasive acts of "kitu kidogo" keep these countries at the reprehensible end of Transparency International's corruption index year after year.

The issue is not particularly bright in Northern Africa either, where after the Arab Uprisings (which in itself was fueled by the anger provoked by corruption in the area), was estimated in 2016 that millions of people paid bribes to access the basic services they needed. South Africa should not be forgotten as well; despite much development in governance, paying and receiving bribes is still ubiquitous.

The issue of bribery remains a very polarizing one, but pretty much everybody on the continent will agree on one thing: Bribery now is fast becoming part of the African culture, it's becoming our way of life. It is at the present woven deep into the very fabric of our everyday life. Neither do government officials nor private citizens have an interest in staying away from bribery.

This quote from an unknown source perfectly captures the point - "In Zimbabwe, I used to run my own business dealing with mining spares. Most of the larger company purchasing departments would not place an order with us unless a sweetener (bribe) was paid first. Nothing extortionate in terms of sums of money, but it was a reminder that the buyer's generosity would bring out our generosity!"

The scale of bribery and corruption on the continent in the future will dwarf today's levels as people continue to pay and feel a sense of entitlement to collect bribes in the forms of "kickback", "kompo",

"maslaha", "kola", "kitu kidogo" and corruption goes from a mere menace to a complete state of mind where people believe corruption can never be wiped out or purged from the continent.

Even if we could magically halt all corrupt activities, put an end to bribery and end all forms of corruption tomorrow, the consequences of the damage that we've done so far will unfold for many years. This shouldn't discourage us from taking action; on the contrary, this fact only underlines our responsibility to act as urgently and as effectively to mitigate the crisis we face now.

And, denying the reality that corruption on the continent is a crisis is only exacerbating the crisis. It is paradoxical that African governments and political leaders who appear to be very much concerned with corruption, are often outright denying corruption's "crisis-like" nature on the continent with their reluctance to push through sweeping reforms, augment public accountability and strengthen anti-corruption institutions.

Yes, citizens and leaders alike, are free to argue about the effective measures that will curb corruption, but what Africa first needs to do is to recognize the fact that corruption has now become a crisis. Because if we fail to recognize this fact, we are not only going to continue living in an increasingly unstable and violent continent for many more decades to come, we will also be risking the progress and prosperity of Africa.

It is clear that we need to battle and possibly purge corruption off the African continent. And for this to happen, we have to be united in our efforts to combat both high-level political graft as well as low-level petty bribes. From cashiers working at a bank who receive salaries asking for a "kickback" to leaders bleeding their nations dry, corruption takes a toll on the continent's prosperity and opportunities. It takes place in every country on the African continent, taking away people's livelihoods and even their lives. And it is now also being used as a weapon to undermine public institutions and elections and consciously used as an instrument of statecraft on the continent.

So be in doubt, corruption on the continent is endemic, brazen and seemingly unstoppable. An absolute enemy to our fight for progress and a metastasizing threat to the building blocks of prosperity of the African continent; and unquestionably the defining issue and indeed the crisis of our time. And no matter the actions we take in the coming years and decades ahead, we are going to hear more and more about corruption in Africa. But our actions today are going to determine the scale and the duration of this crisis in the future.

Trump adds to his endless parade of corruption and conflicts of interest

Seemingly Every day, a new report emerges about the corruption that taints the Trump presidency, and has tainted it from the beginning. The president's refusal to distance himself from his family business results in an endless parade of blatant conflicts of interest.

When President Trump visits his clubs, federal officials and Republicans pay to go where he is, which has brought his private businesses at least \$1.6 million in revenue. The Post's David A. Fahrenthold, Josh Dawsey, Jonathan O'Connell and Michelle Ye Hee Lee reported on Thursday: "About one-third of all the political fundraisers or donor meetings that Trump has attended — 23 out of 63 — have taken place at his own properties. ... GOP fundraisers say they do that, in part, to increase the chances Trump will attend." Moreover, "the actual amount of money Trump has received as a result of his visits and campaign events is probably much higher than the \$1.6 million The Post identified. That's because most of the records available about government spending date to the first half of 2017 — covering just the first few months of Trump's presidency so far."

The investigative outfit ProPublica estimated earlier this month that the payday lending industry spent roughly \$1 million holding two conferences at Trump National Doral Miami, after donating heavily to the president's inaugural committee. As far as ProPublica could ascertain, the payday lenders had never held conferences at any Trump property before 2018.



Meanwhile, they have been fighting rules at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau meant to crack down on the industry's parasitic practices.

Then there is the foreign money. "Representatives of at least 22 foreign governments appear to have spent money at Trump Organization properties," NBC News found, noting that the count suggested "a

significant foreign cash flow to the American president." Countries such as Afghanistan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Turkey have hosted events at Trump facilities. Iraq, China, Malaysia and Slovakia have either rented or bought property in Trump buildings. Other countries have upgraded infrastructure in such a way that helped Trump properties within their borders.

The Trump Organization, the president's private business, has said it donates foreign profits to the U.S. treasury, but how it calculates its numbers is opaque. Moreover, high demand driven in part by foreign patronage no doubt helps keep rates high at Trump International Hotel in Washington. And not every foreigner seeking attention from the Trump administration represents a foreign government. The Post reported this month that Nahro al-Kasnazan, an Iraqi sheikh and aspiring politician, paid tens of thousands of dollars to stay at Trump International for 26 nights last year, as he was urging administration officials to take a tough line on Iran. Former prime ministers of Thailand and a Nigerian presidential candidate have also been guests.

No surprise that Mr. Trump's most recent financial disclosure forms, released last month, show that the Trump International Hotel produced \$41 million in revenue, accounting for almost one-tenth of the Trump Organization's revenue last year. According to additional financial disclosure reports released this month, Ivanka Trump, the president's daughter and a White House adviser, made \$4 million off the hotel last year.

Courts might eventually conclude that foreign transactions at Mr. Trump's properties represent illegal emoluments — and judges should expedite their consideration of this question. But as long as the president maintains such close ties to a broad array of businesses, wealthy people seeking favors will see them as a way to siphon money into Mr. Trump's pocket.

'Marked' on Queen's Birthday

It was a roll call of the high and the mighty last night in Abuja as the British High Commissioner to Nigeria, Mrs Catriona Laing and her husband, Clive hosted the 2019 edition of the annual Birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. That I went was more to honour Damilola Oyedele, a former colleague at THISDAY who now works at the High Commission but I was glad I did. It turned out to be a celebration of the talent, culture and creativity of our young people.

In her welcome remark, Mrs Laing expressed excitement at what she described as her first Queen's Birthday party in Abuja. "As I get to know Abuja and find my feet around this incredible city, I am already feeling inspired and energized by the many Abuja based residents I have met. It is in recognition of this talent and creativity, and as a

celebration of diverse, dynamic and sassy youth of Nigeria, that we have chosen the theme 'youth and creativity' for our QBP this year." She continued: "I hope you will find that the experience of this QBP is very different from previous ones. Our aim is to inspire you by celebrating the many different facets of youth and creativity in Nigeria."

With each of the guests given copy of a booklet as they entered the premises, Mrs Laing explained: "You will find more information about the artists and young creatives we have worked with to design the event: from a self-taught drone maker and pilot, to a brilliant Nigerian chef whose delicious desserts we will be enjoying tonight. In many ways, this is their event and I would like to thank them and congratulate them. There is much that we can indeed celebrate across the

UK and Nigeria in the creative industry—and the partnerships and bridges we are building are a testament to this."

Some of the young people whose works were exhibited last night include Onyinye Atuanya, a project manager; Benjamin Chiedu, pilot and drone maker; Ernest Ibe, graphic and graffiti artist and Nadine Ibrahim, an award winning filmmaker. Incidentally, it was Nadine's work, a documentary being shown in one of the lounge areas that I (and many others) found most enjoyable. Titled 'Marked', the documentary, according to the producer who said the work took her team two years to complete as they criss-crossed the country, "explores the reasons behind scarification in Nigeria and how they intertwine with beauty, identity and spirituality." Nadine, by the way, is daughter of the United

Nations Deputy Secretary General, Ms Amina Mohammed.

Interviewed along with several other persons for the documentary was Ms Adetutu Alabi, the lady who models with her tribal marks and is now championing a campaign to stop the marking of children, on the social media. But it's fascinating seeing different forms of facial and body lacerations, the reasons behind them and the prejudices and shame those who bear them are made to endure in a society where discrimination is now a thriving industry.

In all, we must thank the British High Commissioner to Nigeria and her husband for using the occasion of Her Majesty's birthday to showcase the ingenuity of our young people aside helping to highlight some of the controversial cultural practices that defined our past.

Buratai and the fighting troops

By Philip Paul Bliss

'Hold the Fort' (Ho My Comrades) is one of the most popular Christian hymns. It is also one of my favourites. Not only because of its powerful lyrics and rich melody but also the story behind it. The hymn was inspired by 'The Battle of Allatoona Pass' on 5th October 1864 during the American civil war. A Union garrison stationed in Atlanta, Georgia had been invaded by a large army of Confederates. Outnumbered and outgunned, the fighting troops were on the verge of surrender when they saw a signal flag raised several kilometres away on the Kenesaw Mountain which read: "Hold the fort; I am coming. W. T. Sherman." It was from their commander, Major General William Tecumseh Sherman.

The signal drew applause and the Union soldiers kept up the fight until reinforcement eventually arrived. Recounting the story in a Sunday School class attended by Bliss in April 1870, Major Daniel Webster Whittle uttered the words that must have nudged the songwriter: "No incident of the war illustrates more thrillingly the inspiration imparted by the knowledge of the presence of the commander; and that he is cognizant of our position; and that, doing our utmost, he will supplant our weakness by speedy reinforcements. So the message of Sherman to the soldiers of Altoona becomes the message of the Great Commander, who signals ever to all who fight life's battle, 'Hold the Fort'."

Although written in spiritual context, the most instructive lesson is that victory on the battlefield depends on the commander. If he is one that can inspire hope, has earned the trust of his troops and is committed to their welfare, the battle is half-won. Regardless of how powerful the enemies might be. The converse is the case if the commander is not trusted by the troops. In the years since Nigeria has been engaged in a war against the Boko Haram insurgency that is 'technically defeated', we have focused on (and derided) the capacity of our fighting troops. It's time we looked at the commanders.

Against the background of the post-retirement confession by the late Chief of Defence Staff, Air Marshall Alex Badeh that he "was head of a military that lacked the relevant equipment" to fight the Bioko Haram insurgency, available facts do not support the recent claim by the Chief of Army Staff, Lt.-General Tukur Buratai. Accusing the fighting troops of "insufficient willingness to perform assigned tasks or simply insufficient commitment to a common national and military course" is enough to dampen their fighting spirit. It is tantamount to a vote of no confidence from their commander. Yet, there are reports that these soldiers often go on for months without their meagre operational allowance and their families are almost always left to fend for themselves when they pay the supreme sacrifice.



Since the beginning of this year alone, dozens of soldiers have either been killed, wounded, are missing or have been captured mostly due to the fact that the insurgents are better equipped and more motivated. In a January 2015 story titled 'The soldiers without enough weapons to fight jihadists', the BBC reported that the Nigerian soldiers running away from Boko Haram militants were low on ammunition and allocated unserviceable vehicles. "Imagine me and you are fighting," a soldier told BBC, "We both have guns but while you are wearing a bullet proof vest, I'm carrying an umbrella." To now suggest that our troops are not committed to the cause is deplorable, especially given their enormous sacrifices on the battlefield.

Some of the challenges of our troops in the war against Boko Haram are highlighted in my book, 'Against the Run of Play: How an incumbent president was defeated in Nigeria'. I particularly recalled how a few weeks after resuming duty at the then newly established 7th Division of the Nigerian Army, Major General Ahmadu Mohammed narrowly escaped death when his own soldiers opened fire on his vehicle at Maimalari Barracks in Maiduguri. The angry soldiers were said to be protesting the death of their colleagues who were drafted to face well-armed insurgents with inferior weapons. I also recounted how desperate wives of soldiers blocked the gates of the 21 Armoured Brigade stationed at Giwa Barracks in Maiduguri, to prevent their husbands being taken out to fight. "Our men are telling us that they go into battle with guns that cannot withstand that of Boko Haram," one of the angry women said before she added: "Some of our friends are now widows and nobody is taking care of them and their children once their husbands are dead."

There are several disturbing reports on the welfare of the soldiers we send to die for their country and the weapons we give them to fight. Notably, when

54 soldiers were sentenced to death in December 2014 by a military court, one of them took to his Facebook page to write: "I am a soldier and I am sentenced to death by the Nigerian Army, because we did not go to fight Boko Haram without equipment. We ask(ed) for weapon instead (they) gave (us) death sentence." The pertinent question here is: If we send soldiers to the war front without the necessary arms and ammunition and they also know that if they die, their families will not be taken care of, why should we blame any of them for showing 'insufficient commitment'?

Trading blames and making excuses are clear signs that those saddled with the war against insurgency have run out of ideas. On May 15 while receiving the House Committee on Army led by its Chairman, Remade Shawulu, at the Theatre Command in Maiduguri, Buratai said "the myriad of security challenges we are facing now in the North-west, North-central and other parts of the country, I want to believe and rightly so, is the fall out of the just concluded general election". He added: "There are several political interests – politicians in particular are not happy with their defeat and therefore, trying to take revenge, sponsoring some these criminal activities." A month earlier, the then defence minister, Mansur Dan Ali accused traditional rulers of 'helping' armed bandits attack communities and increase insecurity in the country. At other times, it is the communities at the receiving end of Boko Haram brutalities that are blamed. Now we are told the problem is with the fighting troops.

Unfortunately, the chief of army staff seemed to have opened a Pandora box as several images of our soldiers in pathetic conditions now flood the social media. Buratai must therefore know by now that he has a responsibility to provide for the troops and motivate them with winning words, as he did when he first assumed office. But it is also obvious that we need fresh ideas and new hands with points to prove in the next phase of the war against insurgency so as to signal a new approach. The president cannot continue to create the impression that the current service chiefs are indispensable.

Challenged on all fronts, the single most important agenda in the country today is how to restore law and order. That ordinarily is the responsibility of the police. But with the police practically prostrate, Nigerians now look up to the military for solution to the problem of insecurity. That is creating a lot of aberrations. Just two weeks ago, the Governor of Osun, Mr Gboyega Oyetola left Osogbo to keep an appointment with Buratai in Abuja on the security situation in his state. That those who should direct their request to the Commander-in-Chief now kowtow before Buratai explains why our army chief talks and behaves like a politician. More disturbing is that he and other service chiefs seem to have taken on a life role.

In a regimented service, there is no greater incentive for professional excellence than the aspiration to reach

the top. Yet from 2016 to date, well over 100 Major Generals and their equivalents in both the Navy and Airforce have been retired due to a lack of vacancy at the top. After 35 years, the Chief of Defence Staff, General Abayomi Gabriel Olonisakin should have retired from the army on 18th December 2016 while the Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Ibok-Ete Ekwe Ibas should have left the Navy since 1st January 2018. Buratai of course was due for retirement on 17th December 2018 before his tenure was extended. For the Chief of Air Staff, Air Marshall Sadique Baba Abubakar, his course-mates in the three services (Air force, Army and Navy) have all since retired and he should have joined them on 15th May 2017 after serving 35 years. For how long shall we continue to recycle officers who have entered professional menopause?

From my reading of the situation, when you leave officers who have nothing to lose at the helm of affairs, you encourage errant behaviour. The service chiefs have not only reached the pinnacle of their careers, they have stayed beyond the normal course. The talk in town is that there is no better employer than President Buhari because he will never sack you no matter what you do, sometimes even against his own interest. However, the issue here is national security. Olonisakin, Abubakar, Ibas and Buratai have given their best in the fight against insurgency and they obviously have nothing new to offer. It's time they took their leave.

On Sex for Grades...

Shortly before the commencement of a public policy forum, 'Galvanising popular consensus against corruption' organised by the Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Centre and the MacArthur Foundation on Tuesday, I had a chat with Ms Monica Osagie, the post-graduate student at the centre of the sex-for-marks scandal that brought down Professor Richard Akindele at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. She would later share her story at the session where young people were mobilised to fight the different variants of corrupt practices in our society, including sexual harassment in Nigeria's tertiary institutions which is the subject of my current research.

For decades, randy lecturers demanding sexual gratification from female students in exchange for marks has been a norm on most of the campuses of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. In many cases, female students who refuse to accede to such demands have had their academic careers delayed, truncated or damaged. With funding support from Ford Foundation, I have since January been working on a book on this malaise so as to deepen awareness of the drivers, risks and consequences of the culture of gender-based violence on our campuses. Tentatively titled, 'Naked Abuse: Sex for Grades in Nigerian Universities', I must express my appreciation to the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) chairman, Prof Bolaji Owasanoye whose office has been of tremendous assistance to my research efforts. I am targeting early next year for the release of the book.

Building strong institutions and the security chiefs

By Idoko Ainoko

The second term of President Muhammadu is a month's old by today. As usual, Nigerians are very anxious and expectant of the caliber of men and women Mr. President would recruit to assist his administration in the #NextLevel.

Ardent critics of the Buhari Presidency have been consistent that his first tenure which just expired failed to fully meet its targets. The experience was inevitable given the pressure politicians in Nigeria mount on any leader over appointments of surrogates into government.

And even granted the proven integrity of President Buhari, but it was impossible to completely resist such lobbyists based the peculiar scenario of politicking in the country. So, most of Buhari's appointees were incompetent and disconnected from the vision of the administration.

And reenacting the criticisms of the First Lady, Hajia Aisha Buhari, most of those Buhari assembled in his cabinet were strange bedfellows and anti-change mantra agents. It was convincing argument that most of them still believed in the old order and never shared the President's vision of Nigeria's redemption.

These arguments and assessments on the President's former cabinet are intrinsically plausible. But it is also unarguable that some of his cabinet members- from FEC to expanded appointees and heads of the over 500 federal MDAs performed creditably.

Recently, there were speculations in the media which tipped over 30 women as likely to make the list of President Buhari's expanded cabinet in the second term. These names included notable women who served in various capacities and truly distinguished themselves on their schedules by assisting the President drive home his vision of regeneration and redemption of Nigeria.

And even in public domain, Nigerians can attest to their excellent performances in the areas they superintended. And the current, chorus, bargain and even persuasion of President Buhari to retain these respectable women on their portfolios streams from the track records of splendour on the job.

These virtuous women have contributed in building strong institutions, as against powerful elites/politicians as was the tradition yesterday. It is a mark of honor for them in striving to elevate the pride of their country before the comity of nations.

Elsewhere, there are also men who keyed and religiously adhered to President Buhari's 'Change mantra,' and transformative agenda. They worked assiduously and devotedly

in the service of their fatherland. They risked everything, including their precious personal lives to serve Nigeria and berthed succour to distressed or traumatized people around the country.

The crop of current Security Chiefs, led by the indefatigable Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Gen. Gabriel Olonisakin are also pictured in this illumination of men who have offered rewarding service to Nigeria. They gave their soul to it and ought to be considered for reappointment in Buhari's second term.

Gen. Olonisakin has also marketed himself as an effective leader and courageous soldier whose performance is reflective in his building of the institutions of the different arms of the Nigerian Armed Forces.

The burden admirably discharged by the CDS can only be properly decoded to understand that he came on board at a time the Armed Forces were fragmented and fractured within. The arduous task sank into oblivion many of his predecessors.

But he stood firm and tackled every obstacle on his path to success. The first snag was that the Nigerian Armed Forces were devoid of professional co-ordination and synergy it needed badly to tackle the multiple security challenges crumbling Nigeria.

Before Gen. Olonisakin emerged, Nigerians were compelled to bear the brunt of triumphant militants in the Niger Delta; victorious Boko Haram insurgents on forceful conquest of Nigeria; rampaging armed bandits in the Northwest; senseless chants of war in the Southeast by violent secessionists and the celebration of carnivals of bloodletting and arsons by ethnic warlords as well as the herders and farmers incessant upheavals.

But Gen. Olonisakin reviewed the ugly trend and declared it unacceptable. He introduced reforms and undertook sensitisation visits to military formations. It paid off handsomely, by restoring trust, mutuality, operational coherence and confidence among personnel of the Nigerian military.

Therefore, the songs of war have quietened in virtually every part of the country and Boko Haram is fruitlessly struggling to retake territories reclaimed by Nigerian troops. Terrorists have been severely decimated and Nigerian troops now mock their power to recklessly visit horrendous atrocities on Nigerians.

The United Nations (UN) can declare states previously very insecure because of herders/farmers carnages, including Benue state as safe; while armed bandits and militias are singing mournful lullabies of defeat. These milestones only trumpets loudly, the ingenuity of the CDS in dispensing his coordinative and supervisory responsibilities on the Nigerian

military.

Gen. Olonisakin is completely loyal and patriotic to his country. He has inculcated same spirit in all military personnel. So, at the risk of flattery, it is pertinent to assert that Nigeria needs leaders with his mindset on the job to pair up with President Buhari, if Nigerians must continue to sustain the growth and development of the country.

The Chief of Army Staff (COAS) and leader of the counter-insurgency operations in Nigeria Lt. Gen. TY Buratai typifies the teamwork in insecurity operations in the country, as preached and stamped by the CDS. This is glaring in the manner he leads troops, comprising soldiers from all arms of the military to victorious operations.

Indeed, during military operations, in any part of the country, there is usually smooth and effective cooperation among air, naval and ground troops. And the results of this understanding spurred by patriotism and elevation of national interest above personal considerations is responsible for the winning streaks Nigerian military have recorded against the country's armed enemies.

Many Nigerians are aware that the present crop of Security Chiefs have extricated Nigeria from very dire threats to national security; attempts to pierce a knife on cord of national unity, and cohesion which would have ultimately led to the much hyped disintegration of the country.

It is relieving to know that 18 local government areas in the Northeast under Boko Haram capacity have been reclaimed by troops. And nearly 20,000 Nigerians held hostage by insurgents have been freed by Nigerian troops and reunited with their families.

Today in the Northeast, IDPs camps are no longer swelling with populations of people displaced by insurgency. Instead, IDPs have gradually deserted the camps to their ancestral communities and villages because of the aura of palpable security pervading the region.

Nigeria's crude oil exploration and exportation have witnessed a steady climate in the last three years. Niger Delta militants have been tamed. And the respite is everywhere because the CDS, Gen. Olonisakin has provided the right leadership to the Nigerian military and the troops.

The armouries of all arms of the Military are replenished with weapons from time to time and simultaneously. And no one is in doubt that the CDS is not only focused, but knows the briefs of his job.

What is striking is the overt desire of President Buhari to sustain and consolidate efforts on areas the administration has been impactful in his first term.

He has been clear that the economy, security and fighting

pervasive corruption in the system will be pursued with greater determination and vigour in his second coming. Even Buhari's most staunchest of critics, including former President Olusegun Obasanjo have given him credit in these areas.

It is therefore, instructive that President Buhari would not be out of tone with reality by retaining this clan of hard working and committed Security Chiefs to complete the assignment of securing Nigeria. They stood firm for Nigeria in the worse moments.

It's obvious these Security Chiefs can even perform much more better now that they are very conversant with the terrain and nuances of such operations.

In essence, there is every sense of wisdom for these Service Chiefs to also make the President's second term list for another for years. It is necessary as he contemplates the re-engagement of professionals who have actively contributed to the success narrative of his first term.

There is really no difference between civilian and military appointments. And come to think of it dispassionately, it is the prerogative of the President to make appointments into offices be it civil or military in order to achieve his mandate and programmes he has outlined for himself and his government. He solely bears public backlash for success or failure of his administration.

So, it is unfair for anybody to blackmail him into discarding his best hands on the simplistic reason that they have overstayed in office. Or the excuse that a new tenure necessarily means total overhaul of appointments.

The Security Chiefs also worked in tandem with Mr. President's vision who is equally interested in building and restoring back to Nigerians the institutions of state, as exemplified by the armed forces. They combined both anti-terrorism combats with development of the Nigerian Armed Forces into a virile and professional institution.

President Buhari had bemoaned from the outset of his administration the preponderance of strong men in Nigeria, instead of strong public institutions. He yearned for a change.

The Security Chiefs have lived up to this expectation as today, Nigerian Military has regained its lost glory, by conducting itself as a responsive and responsible military, earning the pride of Nigerians and recognition of the world as a force in warfare.

Gen. Olonisakin and his colleagues in the security sector have done an excellent job and deserves Presidential commendation. An extension for these Security Chiefs to finish what they have started is critically sensitive and important.

- Ainoko wrote this piece from Kaduna, Kaduna State.

ICPC and CODE to partner against Corruption

ICPC's quest for a vibrant and effective young force in its campaign against corruption may receive a boost as a non-governmental organisation, Connected Development (CODE), has offered to partner with the Commission to mobilize youths in tertiary institutions against corruption in Nigeria.

CODE, during a courtesy visit to the Chairman of the Commission, Prof. Bolaji Owasanoye, at the Commission's headquarters recently has also offered to help ICPC in its Constituency Projects Tracking initiative to ensure quality project delivery to the citizens of Nigeria.

The Chief Executive of the

organisation, Mr. Hamzat Lawal, who led several other members of the organisation and spoke during the visit, said that they wanted collaboration with the Commission on youth mobilization against corruption in university campuses and on the just-launched Constituency Projects Tracking initiative.

Mr. Lawal said that his organisation was proud of the Commission's achievements so far in the anti-graft war, stating that CODE was also seeking the partnership in order to monitor the financial activities of local governments for accountability and transparency in the handling of funds released by the Federal

Government.

The CODE boss also explained that his organisation strengthened local communities by creating platforms for dialogue, enabling informed debate, and building capacities of citizens on how to hold their government accountable through FollowTheMoney initiative.

He also revealed that his organisation was in the process of touring university campuses to reach out to students, enlighten them on anti-corruption, and on the FollowTheMoney initiative.

In his response, Professor Owasanoye, commended the group for all the efforts they put in the anti-graft war to see that Nigeria

turned right, stating how he always commended youth-led initiatives and how in its effort to rid the nation corruption, the Commission had always welcomed partnerships with organisation.

The Chairman noted that he was aware of young people's expectations that people accused of corruption should be grabbed by ICPC and thrown into jail, but he explained that due process must be followed in fighting corruption due to rule of law. He also well urged them to forward reports of corruption from their FollowTheMoney initiative on government-funded projects for further investigation and possible prosecution.

Lai Mohammed to appear in court over N2.5bn NBC fraud case – ICPC

The immediate past Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed, has been scheduled to appear before a Federal High Court, Abuja, to explain his role in the alleged misapplication of N2.5 billion Federal Government Digital Switch-Over (DSO) programme.

The planned appearance of Mohammed was revealed by the Independent Corrupt Practice and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), which is prosecuting the Director-General of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), Ishaq Modibbo Kawu, over an alleged abuse of office and money laundering.

ICPC had filed a 12-count charge before Justice Folashade Ogunbanjo-Giwa, against Kawu, Lucky Omoluwa and Dipo Onifade, the Chairman and the Chief Operating Officer of Pinnacle Communications Limited respectively, saying that the NBC Director-General misled the former Minister into approving government funds to be paid to a private company.

The former Minister's involvement had come under questioning following

the discovery by ICPC during investigations, that a government White Paper that governs the execution of the DSO programme was allegedly flouted by the head of NBC.

Mohammed had however admitted in a statement to the Commission that he was misled by Kawu, as stated in court by a witness from ICPC, Osanato Olugbemi.

Olugbemi, led in evidence by counsel to ICPC, Henry Emore, had also told the court that the payment of N2.5 billion from NBC to Pinnacle Communications Limited as seed grant was suspicious because ICPC had found out through its investigations that only government-owned companies were approved to benefit from the grant according to the White Paper.

The court also heard that the processes that led to the final payment of the fund to the private company were shrouded in secrecy as revealed by the minutes from an NBC emergency board management meeting where issues of carriage fees owed Pinnacle and not seed grant was discussed.

He told the court that 47 suspicious



transactions were originated by the Chairman of Pinnacle Communications, Omoluwa, immediately after the receipt of the funds on June 2, 2017.

The transactions included payments of N363 million to one Idowu Olatunde, N274.4 million to one James Segun and N127 million to Dipo Onifade, the Chief Operating Officer of the

company.

He informed the court that Omoluwa refused to explain the reasons for the payments to Olatunde and James when asked by ICPC, but Onifade explained that he received the N127 million as legal fees he rendered to Pinnacle Communications Limited.

A Bureau de Change operator, Salisu Mamman Daura, who also testified in court, said he received N167 million in two installments of N97 million and N70 million respectively from Pinnacle Communications Limited.

Daura added that the sums were converted into \$265, 000 and \$195, 735 respectively, at the rate of N360 to an American dollar, and handed in cash to one Alhaji Sabo, supposedly on behalf of Pinnacle Communications.

Counsel to the accused persons, Alex Iziyon (SAN), A Yusuf and A. V. Etuwewe for Omoluwa, Onifade, Kawu and Pinnacle Communications respectively, took turns to cross-examine both witnesses after which the matter was adjourned by the trial judge to July 1, 2019 for continuation of trial and ruling on two pending motions.

N26.6m fraud: ICPC drags ex-law reform commission scribe to court

A former Secretary to the Nigeria Law Reform Commission, Mrs. Folake Abiodun Oguneye, has been arraigned before Hon. Justice M.B. Idris of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) High Court 29 sitting in Nyanya for fraud by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC).

Mrs. Oguneye is facing prosecution for allegedly defrauding the Federal Government of the sum of N26,637,116.00.

The Commission, in a 5-count charge, had averred that Mrs. Oguneye, while serving as the Secretary to the Nigeria Law Reform Commission conferred corrupt advantage upon herself by using

her office to derive various unlawful pecuniary benefits for herself to the tune of the above sum.

ICPC, in Charge No: CR/334/19 told the court how the accused person received the sum of N4, 100,000.00 from Kings and Khad Tours and Travels Nigeria Limited which was part of the sum of N10,171,100.00 paid to a company, Snugees Investment Limited, by the Nigeria Law Reform Commission for publicity over the reform and unification of Sale of Goods law in Nigeria.

The defendant was also accused of receiving the sum of N96,293.05k monthly amounting to N1,155,516.6k for one year as furniture allowance from the Law Reform Commission

whereas she had actually collected the bulk sum of N5,777,600.00 for the five-year period of her tenure.

Mrs. Oguneye, was further charged for accepting the sums of N15,004,000.00 from one Huthman Ademola Oluwatoyin, the Proprietor of Mutoy Adekunle Enterprises, being part of the sum of N15,516,225.00 for the unification of Sale of Goods law in Nigeria and N600,000.00 as gratification from a contract she had awarded respectively.

Her action is contrary to and punishable under sections 10 (a) (ii) and 19 of the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act, 2000. If she is found guilty, she shall on conviction be liable to imprisonment

for five years without any option of fine.

Oguneye pleaded not guilty to all the charges leveled against her and her counsel, A.O. Ayodele, via a written application sought the reliefs of the court to grant her bail which was not opposed by the prosecution.

The trial judge therefore admitted the accused person to bail in the sum of N5,000,000.00 and a surety in like sum who must not be lesser than a Grade Level 14 public officer within the jurisdiction of the court, and must possess evidence of a landed property within the FCT.

The matter has been adjourned to September 19th 2019 for the prosecution to open its case.

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Cross River Monarch accuses government of fighting corruption lopsidedly

The Paramount Ruler of Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State, His Royal Majesty (HRM) Etinyin Otu Asuquo Mesembe VI, has said that the government was part of the problem corruption in the country.

He alleged that traditional institution was not well taken care of, "The government at all levels fight corruption in a selective manner and this makes the fight a lip service".

Speaking at a symposium, combating corruption through interfaith organized by Mac Arthur Foundation on Wednesday, the monarch said "If we want to fight this hydra headed problem, we must do it from the roots.

"As a leader, whether traditional, religious or political

you must understand that once you become corrupt, no matter the level, the people will not have regard for you any longer, it doesn't really matter how long it takes, you will be exposed.

"We have been coerced to join the bandwagon because the government seems to have neglected the traditional institution. Our constitution was borrowed and developed with a mind set of corruption and carefully excluding the traditional system because of greed and other selfish interests"

He further said, "Our constitution is borrowed, it does not serve the purpose of the people. But our leaders while adopting the constitution carefully avoided the traditional institution. The traditional institution can stop corruption

because we all come from a community.

"We must include religious studies in our school from the cradle, it is important, it is essential, it builds morality in our society and it must be brought back to in still morals in our children" he stated.

In his lecture, Prof Uno Ijim Agbor, a lecturer in the Department of Public Administration, University of Calabar, said that the African culture mounts so much pressure on the leaders from the continent to steal and become corrupt as they enter public offices because they want to please their people.

Prof Agbor said Africans demand so much from their leaders once they are in position because they want them to satisfy all their selfish needs at

once even if it means dipping their hands into public funds.

"Our culture as Africans mounts so much pressure on our leaders to become thief and steal as well as become corrupt once they take up leadership positions because we want them to satisfy all our needs at once.

"There are a lot of demands on public office holders by the traditional and religious leaders to meet up with so many demands, and when they look back or be perceived in negative light they steal.

"They have no choice than to deep their hands into public funds to satisfy the needs of the people at home. The people must understand that public funds do not belong to the man in office or them; neither is it private funds," he stated.

BRIEF

Court overrules defence, admits more evidence against ex-Plateau Gov, Jang

Justice Daniel Longji of a Plateau State High Court, sitting in Jos, on June 27, 2019 admitted more evidence against a former Plateau State governor, Jonah Jang, who is being prosecuted by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, for an alleged N6.2 billion fraud.

At the last sitting on June 13, 2019 counsel for Jang, Mike Ozekhome, SAN, had raised objections to the admissibility of the minutes of the State Security Council meeting and that of the State Executive Council between 2014 and 2015 during Jang's tenure. Sunday Odey, counsel for Yusuf Gyang Pam, a cashier of the Office of the Secretary to the Plateau State Government, who is standing trial along with Jang, also objected to the admissibility of the document.

Counsel for the EFCC, Rotimi Jacobs, SAN had, through the ninth prosecution witness, Jonah Kabong, a Civil Servant in the Office of the Secretary to the State Government sought to tender the documents. Describing them as "crucial in the prosecution of the matter", Jacobs had argued that, "the government does not need an authority from itself to tender a document that's within its custody", stressing that what governed admissibility of a document in court was the Evidence Act.

At the resumed hearing, Justice Longji, dismissed the objections and admitted the documents as exhibits P47 - P50.

In his ruling, the trial judge held that: "I have carefully considered the submissions of both counsels on some of the issues raised.

"The issues raised by the defence team are elementary, and the crucial issue is that all the authorities cited are considered civil matters, and none of the documents tendered in support of their position has met requirement of the law in dismissing the application made by the prosecution."

Justice Longji further held that: "Only the State Government knows the information that will jeopardise the security of the State and the Government has released these documents, the PW9 did not tender it in a private capacity, he is a representative of the government and no private individual has the right to challenge it."

The case has been adjourned to July 10 and 11, 2019 for "continuation of trial".

PDP expanded the scope of corruption – Presidential aide

Lauretta Onochie has criticised the Jonathan administration for alleged corruption - The presidential aide said the PDP expanded the scope of corruption in the country - The former president is allegedly linked to the Malabu oil scandal An aide to President Muhammadu Buhari on social media, Lauretta Onochie, has lashed out at former president, Goodluck Jonathan, for his alleged role in the Malabu scandal.

The case involved an international oil deal that has reportedly been at the centre of a corruption trial. Onochie in a couple of tweet via her social media page on Thursday, June 27, said the Peoples Democratic Party

(PDP) government has always been involved in corruption.

Lauretta Onochie @Laurestar · Jun 27, 2019 Isn't it a disgrace that Jonathan who had the mandate of Nigeria to look after her welfare, is the one who is featuring prominently in an International fraud case, #opl245fraud. So how did past PDP governments fight corruption? They didn't. They expanded the scope of corruption. Lauretta Onochie

@Laurestar But why are Nigerians silent on this #OPL245Fraud case involving prominent members of past Nigerian govts? Why is there not an outrage over this International disgrace? Is it because they practice the "right" religion and come from



the "right" part of Nigeria? A fraud is a fraud
Meanwhile, Jonathan reacted to a media report

which alleged that lawyers to the federal government had, in a London court filing, accused him of accepting bribes in order to broker a \$1.3 billion oil deal. The former president denied the allegation, while describing the report as a recycled falsehood that is "blatantly dishonest, cheap, and predictable".

According to Ikechukwu Eze, media adviser to the former president, Jonathan did not ask for or collect any bribes, neither has he been charged for asking or collecting bribes, neither will he ever be charged with asking for or collecting bribes, because such never happened. He added that the dispute predated the Jonathan administration and survives it.

Two suspected insurance agents, arraigned in court for swindling lady of N39.5 million

Two suspected fake insurance agents, Daniel Udeze and Smith Obume, who allegedly swindled a lady of N39.5 million, were on Friday brought before an Igbosere Magistrates' Court in Lagos.

The defendants, who are both 24 years' old, are standing trial on a four-count charge bordering on fraud and impersonation.

The Prosecutor, Sgt. Friday Mameh, told the court that

the defendants conspired with others still at large and committed the alleged offences sometime in April, at Coker Road, Ilupeju area of Lagos.

Mameh said that the duo presented themselves as agents of one Axa Mansard Insurance Plc and another company, Doheney Recruitment services, and defrauded the complainant, Chioma Obi of N39.5 million.

He said that the defendants

defrauded the complainant through a GTB bank account No. 0154207679 with the name Zyfeso Enterprises.

"The defenendants hacked into the two companies' sites, pretended that they can employ the complainant, used the companies' names to swindle the unsuspecting complainant," Mameh said.

The alleged offences contravene Sections 287, 314, 380 and 411 of the Criminal Law of Lagos State,

2015.

The defendants, however, pleaded not guilty to the charge.

The Magistrate, Mrs A. M. Davies, granted them bail in the sum of N4 million each, with two sureties each in like sum.

She ordered that the sureties must show evidence of tax payment to the Lagos State Government.

She adjourned the case until July 9 for mention.

40 traditional rulers complete training on anti-corruption fight

Campaign against the cankerworm of corruption initiated by the administration of Muhammadu Buhari, yesterday, received a boost, as a non-governmental organisation (NGO), operating under the aegis of Interfaith Anti-corruption Network (headed by Islamic/Christian clerics), ended the training of 40 traditional rulers in South South zone on how to join hands with the federal government in the fight against corruption in their various domains.

The Co-coordinator of Islamic faith, who is joining hands with Bishop Emmah Isong, to pilot affairs for interfaith Anti-corruption Network in Nigeria (IANN), is Imam Shehu Abdulkareem Majemu.

In an interactive session with journalists in Calabar,

yesterday, shortly after the NGO completed the training, Co-coordinator for Interfaith Anti-corruption network, Bishop Dr Gospel Isong, urged the traditional rulers to demonstrate every aspect of the training received at the symposium.

He said that with skills acquired at the training session, it's believed that every iota of cankerworm/cancer of corruption existing in their domains would be removed.

Isong, who is also the national publicity secretary of Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN)/General Overseer of Christian Central Chapel International (CCCI), otherwise known as Faith Mansion, Calabar, stated that corruption is one cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian society and warned that if something is

not urgently done to stem the tide of corruption, the cankerworm of the disease is capable of pulling down the entire economy of Nigeria on the wheel.

"I foresee a total collapse of our one and only dear country, Nigeria, if all hands are not put on deck to get rid of this ugly trend so that as a country, we can avert being consumed by this cankerworm."

Isong called for a change of mindset by youths in the country so that the nation can be rebuilt.

He said that though President Muhammadu is doing a lot to get the nation back on track with regards to stemming the tide against corruption, irrespective of religious/ethnic affiliation, the fight cannot be left alone in the hands of the president if Nigerians are serious with the business of getting our economy back on track again.

UK detectives probing Nigeria's former minister of petroleum arrives Nigeria

United Kingdom detectives working on the probe of a former Minister of Petroleum Resources, Mrs. Diezani Alison-Madueke, have stormed Nigeria.

They already met with operatives of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), according to reports.

The commission has so far traced N47.2 billion and \$487.5 million to the ex-minister arrested since October 2, 2015, but been restricted to the UK with her probe costing fortunes.

The agency also claimed that Diezani has N23,446,300,000 and \$5 million (about N1.5 billion) in various Nigerian banks.

The EFCC has also secured final forfeiture orders on the following assets of Diezani: about \$37.5 million Banana Island property; Heritage Court Estate,

Plot 2C, Omerelu Street, Diobu Port Harcourt; 135 Awolowo Road/Plot 808 Awolowo Road, Ikoyi; and 7, Hurnburn Street and 5, Raymond Street, Yaba, Lagos.

A source was reported as saying: "The detectives from the UK have been in Nigeria for a week in line with the ongoing investigation of Diezani.

"It is a major case the National Crime Agency (NCA) in the UK has been collaborating with the EFCC to probe.

"A few weeks ago, EFCC Chairman, Mr. Ibrahim Magu, was also in London to compare notes with similar agencies on this case.

"You will recall that Magu in November 2018 made it clear that Nigeria was tired of waiting for the trial of Diezani by the UK.

"But after the initial issues between EFCC and UK agencies,

there were talks which revealed that those at the London end were making painstaking investigations.

"After Magu's visit to London, the investigation of Diezani assumed enhanced dimension because some grey areas were cleared.

"The coming of the detectives from London was meant to fill some gaps, get additional evidence and crosscheck a few findings on their part.

"We are hopeful that the latest bend of investigation was in preparation for the trial of the ex-minister."

The source added that the Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Bill, 2019, signed into law about a week ago by President Muhammadu Buhari might help in confiscating Diezani's assets at home and abroad.

SHORTNEWS

Nigeria pioneer digital marketplace for cars, launches systems for transparent Purchase for Sale of Cars in Nigeria

Cheki.com.ng, the pioneering digital marketplace for cars in Nigeria, has successfully Systems for Transparent Purchase, Sale of Cars in Nigeriare primarily aimed at improving buying and sale of cars in the country.

The Chief Executive Officer of the firm, Gbenro Dara, who introduced the major advancement to journalists during the week, said it was part of their long-term plan of making the car buying process easy for Nigerians.

Dara said the two financial technology products, which were launched in the first and second quarters of this year, are the Cheki Finance; a quick car loans service; and the Cheki True Price, which is a tool for car price comparison.

The CEO said the Cheki Finance aims to ease the financial burden of acquiring both new and used cars, explaining that car buyers could apply for loans to purchase cars being sold on Cheki.com.ng, and this can be done at the click of a button. The second product, Cheki True Price aims to foster price transparency and help car buyers get value for the money they intend to spend on acquiring cars.

He said True Price shows the price range that a car falls within and goes on to compare this price range with the price that a car seller is asking. This proves to be a valuable tool for car shoppers as it helps them get value for their money.

"Our strong commitment to customer-centricity is what has allowed us to remain a top player in Nigeria's automotive market for almost a decade. In furtherance of our efforts, we're investing more in technology solutions

that help our users to overcome the most prevalent challenges as regards car acquisition," Dara said.

He said over the years, Cheki.com.ng has continually made efforts to innovate its processes, products and packages and also in the development of technology solutions that improve the buying experience of car buyers in Nigeria. In addition to its fintech solutions, the platform also provides car user reviews and car buying concierge services.

Cheki Finance is a car loan service designed to effectively meet the financing needs of car buyers in the country. This service aims to provide car buyers with quick car loans for the purchase of Nigerian used cars, foreign used (Tokunbo) cars, or brand new cars that are available on its website; Cheki.com.ng. Cheki is offering the exciting car loan service in collaboration with top-rated financial institutions in Nigeria at a very conducive terms and conditions and convenient interest rates.

Giving more details about the company's background, Ikenna Oyenta, Cheki.com.ng marketing campaign manager said that, Cheki is a digital marketplace for quality vehicles.

The platform provides car buyers with a wide variety of quality cars and supports car purchasing with a range of supplementary services that include car loans, insurance, and car buying concierge. Cheki also provides private car sellers and car dealerships of all sizes with qualified leads and buyers. The company has been in the business of providing intermediary services to prospective vehicle buyers in the past six years.

FIRS accuses First Bank of account manipulation in N25bn suit

The Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) has admitted that it received a purported over-bloated turnover of Biatemp Ventures Limited account from First Bank Plc.

In a statement of defence filed before the Federal High Court, Abuja, FIRS stated that it received a compact disc (CD) containing evidence that the company received an inflow of over \$6.8 million from the bank.

Biatemp Ventures Limited had sued First Bank and FIRS, demanding N25 billion as special and general damages for alleged manipulation of its domiciliary account and illegal withholding of its tax clearance certificate.

It also alleged that the bank manipulated its domiciliary account with over-bloated turnover of N2.4 billion, whereas the deposit to the account within the period was only \$22,475 or N786,000.

The firm claimed that the manipulation of its account and delay in issuing its tax clearance certificate prevented it from participating in bids for several businesses leading to severe economic losses and embarrassment.

It added that its Chief Executive Officer (CEO) withdrew the \$22,475 deposit in about four transactions, insisting that when it obtained its statement of account from the bank, the inflows and outflows of funds varied from its records with FIRS.



The plaintiff added that the deposit and withdrawal of over \$6.8 million were enlarged mirror of the \$22,475

deposited into its account by its client for consultancy services and withdrawn by its CEO.

But in its statement of defence filed on its behalf by N.J. Kalu and Co., FIRS told the court that it acted on information provided by the bank.

Specifically, Senior Manager (Tax) FIRS, Oyerogba Kehinde, deposed that the service was only performing its statutory function based on information received from the first defendant (First Bank).

"In compliance with the statutory provisions, First Bank forwarded a CD to FIRS, which contained evidence that the plaintiff received a deposit of \$6,861,618 into

its account with the bank.

"FIRS only acted on information and facts the bank provided and the bank has never written, denying that it forwarded the CD containing information and evidence showing that the plaintiff received a cash flow of the amount on November 28, 2018," it stated.

But First Bank in its statement of defence denied allegations that it manipulated the plaintiff's account or collaborated with FIRS, and urged the court to declare that the plaintiff was not entitled to any of the reliefs sought.

Meanwhile, Justice Binta Murtala-Nyako adjourned the case to October 28, 2019 for further hearing.

EU pledges to assist Borno State with €20million to revamp its educational sector

The European Union (EU) has pledged to assist Borno State with €20million, approximately N8 billion, to revamp its educational sector.

The state, the worst affected by Boko Haram crisis, had its education crippled for about two years as both primary and secondary schools were closed even as scores of teachers were slaughtered by the terrorist group.

The EU, who is supporting the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and Plan International to execute the projects in the troubled state, said at the launch yesterday in Maiduguri that over 150,000 children and 2,500 teachers will directly benefit from two projects it is funding in the state.

The EU said the projects were aimed at providing immediate education services with a view to strengthening the education system in Borno State.

It said the projects, for which €20million had already been earmarked for, will expand and deepen the already extensive EU humanitarian and development assistance to the victims of violence and displacement in Nigeria's North East while addressing some of the underlying drivers of violence extremism in Nigeria.

A statement released by EU yesterday said: "This

intervention has been designed to build on the EU's Education in Emergencies support to North East Nigeria, but go beyond provision of immediate services to strengthen service quality and delivery, to help increase learning outcomes for girls and boys in the longer term."

The EU's Head of Cooperation, was quoted to have said: "Education is crucial for both the protection and healthy development of girls and boys affected by crises. For girls, education reduces maternal and child mortality and educated mother is more likely to have educated children."

He said that proven international implementing partners would execute the projects over a period of three years.

The statement added: "The projects will target primary, secondary and Tsangaya schools, where classrooms will be rehabilitated and furniture provided, water points will be installed or repaired, and latrine cubicles constructed. Children will receive vouchers for learning kits, girls and young women will receive dignity kits to manage menstruation, and young people will receive vouchers for business start-up kits.

"Teaching kits, textbooks will be provided and over 900 primary and secondary teachers will be trained,

the majority of whom will be employed by government. 36 schools will establish kitchen gardens and psycho-social resources will be brought into schools with referral for children with trauma. School Based Management Committee (SBMCs) will be refreshed, retrained and work with communities to engage in education advocacy."

Meanwhile, the Governor of Borno State, Prof. Babagana Umara Zulum has said that the state will take accountability in the running of reconstruction and rehabilitation projects in the state very crucial.

He said the state would continue to ensure that the finance got to build projects in the state were well spent and did not get into the pocket of corrupt officers.

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Cross River's \$600m moribund Tinapa facility for sale

The \$600 million moribund Tinapa facility in Cross River State is up for sale as American investors expressed interest.

The first phase of the project fashioned after the similar massive one-stop shopping and tourism resort of Dubai was conceived and built by former Governor

Donald Duke and commissioned on April 2, 2002 to boost business in the state and the country at large.

But due to poor and inconsistent government

policies and other factors, Tinapa died and remained a white elephant project.

Consequently, the state government has replied to the expression

of interest to acquire the facility by the Chief Executive Officer and President of ROPA Corporation Inc, Robert Glover, inviting him for further negotiations.

After 30 months of abandonment, Edo Govt opens abandoned five star hospital

After 30 months of abandonment, Obaseki finally opens the New Central Hospital built by former Governor Adams Oshiomhole. Adibe Emenyonu writes.

Before his exit as Governor of Edo State, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole built a five-star hospital. The new ultramodern hospital was erected beside the old Central Hospital and was commissioned on November 8, 2016 by President Muhammadu Buhari.

While commissioning the hospital, President Buhari who was then on a two-day official visit to the state noted the importance of having such befitting ultramodern hospital to ensure that members of the public no longer suffer from accessing modern facility for treatment.

The president lauded the sacrifices made by Oshiomhole and expressed his respect for the personal sacrifice he made to complete the edifice.

He further described the hospital as the best legacy Oshiomhole gave to the people of the state, pointing out that he was impressed with the project because "it takes a lot of courage for the former governor to do what he did".

Emphatically, President Buhari said: "I am impressed with the work. This is the best thing Oshiomhole can do for the people. When I was coming, I asked him, 'whose edifice is this?'"

In his address during the inauguration, Oshiomhole stated that his aim of building a hospital of such sophistication was to prevent medical tourism.

The general hospital, he stated was established in 1902 with 10-bed capacity but has since been upgraded to 280 bed capacity by successive governments hence the need for state of the art equipment.

He added that his administration deemed it wise to build a new one at the detriment of a new government house to provide quality healthcare to both the rich and poor in the state, noting that equipment in the new hospital were

ordered from a German-based company with the latest technology and would be manned by experienced and qualified personnel from the private sector.

Oshiomhole explained that the hospital will not be run by government but a private body for sustainability.

According to him, "I almost wept when I first visited the old hospital. What I found there was shocking and I concluded that even if a healthy man visited the hospital, he would be admitted the next day.

"This new hospital is fitted with the latest technology in healthcare delivery. Subject to what the next governor will do, my position is that this hospital will not be run in the same way the public service is run", he said.

All these elicited accolades from members of the public who hope that a new healthcare delivery system has eventually come.

Their hope however was prolonged when the new government under Godwin Obaseki refused to open the hospital for public use.

Even in the midst of protest and condemnation, the governor was not moved. At first it was the civil society group that came up last year by giving Obaseki a marching order to open the hospital. The second was the opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the state who came mocking the APC led administration saying the so called state of the art equipment purportedly in the new hospital was after all taken from the old Stella Obasanjo Women and Children Hospital, also owned by the state government but built under the PDP government of Chief Lucky Igbinedion.

Against this barrage of criticism, the state government was forced to issue a statement giving its position on why the hospital was yet to be opened for public use.

In the statement signed by the Media and Communication Strategy



Adviser to Governor Obaseki, Mr. Crusoe Osagie said government has a robust healthcare delivery plan for the hospital and people of the state which according to him are categorised into primary, secondary and tertiary.

He said Edo government has started with the development of primary and secondary healthcare and the Central Hospital was being developed to serve the tertiary healthcare needs.

Osagie disclosed that as soon as the plan is completed, the old Central Hospital will be moved to Stella Obasanjo Hospital to provide secondary care to patients, adding however, that the new Central Hospital would be run on a Public Private Partnership (PPP) bases.

His words: "Government wants to run Central Hospital on a Public Private Partnership (PPP) basis. We are bringing investors and several of them have come to look at it but we are yet to come to agreement on which private organisation should run it and the way and manner it should be run".

Obaseki's media adviser also debunked the rumour and insinuations that the hospital was either ill-equipped or facilities therein borrowed when he declared, "the hospital is fully equipped and any right thinking government would think of sustainability of the project and not just running it because if you start running

it without a sustainability plan, it is only a matter of time before it goes comatose. The PPP would ensure its sustainability, functioning, and efficiency".

He further stated that the hospital would be affordable to the common man because the government was working on a health insurance scheme plan that would capture every Edo person, adding that a law is being drafted by the state to be taken to the assembly to help initiate the scheme.

"I believe that by the third quarter of next year, the people will begin to see the health policy of this administration taking effect," Osagie declared.

Corroborating Edo government's position in the area of equipment availability to run the hospital, the firm which was awarded the contract to supply equipment for the hospital, Vamed Engineering, through its spokesperson, Anthony Azodo, said all equipment and office furniture have been supplied and installed to full capacity at the hospital.

Azodo's clarification was in reaction to protest and insinuations by some NGOs and the opposition PDP respectively, demanding explanation on why the hospital was still under lock and key more than two years after it was commissioned.

He however, disclosed that one of the hurdles preventing the hospital from being put to use was because they are waiting for personnel that will man the equipment.

He said to that effect, several memos were written to Edo State government to get personnel that would handle the various machines which had not been replied to, warning that some of the equipment have a duration of two years to wear out if not put into use.

The Vamed Engineering spokesman who explained that the equipment came in batches and that majority of them were installed last year and early this year, added that 100 percent of the equipment in the bill of quantity have

been installed.

Among those listed were mammograph, an equipment used for diagnosing and locating tumors of the breast otherwise known as breast cancer, adding that the hospital as at the time it was commissioned was not fully equipped because of the sudden rise in the exchange rate.

Explaining the position of government on the delay in response to Vamed's memo requesting for training of workers to operate the machines in the new hospital, Edo State Commissioner for Health, Dr. David Osifo, said government does not just want to recruit any how medical personnel, but those specially trained with experience to man the equipment. He said, "These special personnel are not easy to come by".

In spite all the hurdles, there was a sudden cheer last week as the Central Hospital was unceremoniously opened to the public.

Although no explanation was given for the impromptu opening of the medical facility, it was however gathered that it was politically motivated given the present political crisis in the state between Obaseki and his predecessor, and in a bid to score some political points, decided to open the hospital.

Few days ago and at the height of imbroglia at the state assembly over the clandestine inauguration of nine members out of 24, and election of a new speaker and deputy speaker by the nine, the hospital renamed Edo Specialist Hospital was seen attending to patients who reportedly went there for medical checks.

Besides, workers were seen attending to patients when THISDAY visited the facility. The hospital also offered free radio diagnostics and CT scan to patients.

Speaking, the Chief Executive Officer of the hospital Dr. Chukwuka Monye said facilities in the hospital are of specialist category and not that of a general hospital. According to him, patients who can afford it would get world best standard services.

NRC MD, Mr. Fidel Okhiria debunks reports of alleged overpricing, misappropriation of funds in the construction of the Lagos-Ibadan railway line

The managing director of the Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC), Mr. Fidel Okhiria, has debunked reports of alleged overpricing or misappropriation of funds in the construction of the Lagos-Ibadan railway line.

There were reports that the Nigerian project was costlier than a similar one in Ghana.

Also, the Ghanaian minister of Railway Development, Joe Ghartey, has said that his country has no deal or contract with the Chinese company handling the Lagos-Ibadan rail line.

In the past few days, the media in Nigeria had been awash with stories that a Chinese company, CRCC had been contracted to construct a 560km railway line in Ghana for \$2 billion, which the stories claim, was about the same cost, the company is using to build the 156km Lagos-Ibadan line.

Consequently, questions were raised as per the cost of the Nigerian railway line, with some persons casting aspersions on the immediate past minister



of Transportation, Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi, alluding that he may have inflated the cost of the project.

Okhiria spoke over the weekend in Abuja that the reports were fake, noting that the project was first awarded in 2006, even before the coming of the present administration and Amaechi as a minister.

He explained that the former minister insisted that a project

that was awarded in 2006 was implemented at the same cost from 2015 with modern facilities as against the ones approved in 2006.

On why the change from \$1.488 billion to \$1.58 billion for the project, the NRC boss said: "Don't forget that in any contract, there's a part called contingency. When you talk about \$1.488 billion that is from Ebute Metta to Ibadan, but when this administration came in, the then minister (Rotimi Amaechi) said we must get to the seaport; it won't make sense terminating the rail, without reaching or entering the seaport."

"So that element of over 25 kilometres from Ebute Metta junction, a place popularly called Alagomeji to the port and within the port is going to take more because we have to link all terminals. So that's an additional addendum, which is about \$9 million," he said.

Okhiria, who denied that any of such a contract exists in Ghana, challenged anyone that says otherwise to publicly provide proof of the \$2 billion Ghana

railway contract.

According to him, "the point is that the rumour-mongers are comparing something (Lagos-Ibadan rail project) with nothing because there is no such rail contract in Ghana as it is being peddled by the mischief makers."

In a letter to the managing director of the Chinese company, CRCC, the Ghanaian minister of Railways Development, said that the \$2 billion Ghana rail story is fictitious.

Titled: :Re: CRCC to Construct 560km Railway line for \$2bn – same cost as the 156km Lagos-Ibadan rail', the Ghanaian government through the minister also cancelled the 'non-binding' Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) they had with the Chinese firm.

The minister stated that, "my attention has been drawn to a media publication with the caption 'CRCC to construct 560km railway line for \$2bn – same cost as the 156km Lagos-Ibadan rail.' I regret the said publication which contains a lot of factual inaccuracies. "Ghartey rebutted

the publication and state the facts of the matter as, "the Ministry of Railways Development signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) dated 21st March, 2019 with Messrs China Railway Construction Corporation (CRCC)..."

"Messrs CRCC expressed interest in supporting the ministry to develop and modernise Ghana's railway network, particularly the trans-ECOWAS line, which runs along the coast between Aflao, on the border with Togo, and Elubo, on the border with Cote d'Ivoire. The purpose of the MoU is for CRCC to undertake feasibility studies through the use of independent consultants," he said.

The minister added that, "CRCC has NOT submitted any report of the feasibility studies to the Ministry of Railways Development, let alone the project cost estimate. The Ministry of Railways Development has not received any offer from CRCC for the construction of the proposed Aflao-Elubo railway line (trans-ECOWAS line)."

Court jails Yahoo Yahoo Kingpin, one other in Calabar

Justice Simon Amobeda of the Federal High Court sitting in Calabar, Cross River State, on Wednesday, June 26, 2019, sentenced a notorious yahoo yahoo kingpin, Akpojivi Onoriode, who was arraigned by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, on a one-count charge bordering on cybercrime.

The convict, a 29-year-old graduate of Delta State University, Abraka and a father of two, was arrested by operatives of the Uyo Zonal Office of the Commission in the early hours of Saturday, May 4, 2019, following intelligence report exposing him of living above his means. He was picked up at his lavishly furnished duplex on Plot 10, Block VI, Unical Satellite Town, Calabar, Cross River State.

Upon his arrest, the convict, popularly known as "Blinks" or "Mr. White", confessed to having

offshore accounts in China, and narrated how he started the business of defrauding people quite early, while he was still an undergraduate at Delta State University, Abraka in Delta State.

The charge against Akpojivi reads: "That you, Onoriode Joel Akpojivi, on or about the 4th day of May 2019, in Nigeria within the jurisdiction of this Honourable Court did unlawfully produce, supply, procure for use and distributed a computer program (fake online banking link platform) designed for the purpose of electronically defrauding unsuspecting persons and thereby committed an offence contrary to Section 28 (1) (a) of the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention Etc) Act 2015 and punishable under Section (1) (c) of the same Act."

Shocked by the weight of evidence gathered against him by the EFCC, Akpojivi chose not

to waste the time of the court as he pleaded "guilty" to the charge.

In view of his plea, counsel for the EFCC, A.S. Abuh, informed the court of a plea bargain arrangement entered between the convict and the Commission, dated June 19, 2019 and filed on June 20, 2019.

"I hereby pray the court to convict and sentence him based on the terms of the agreement," she said.

Delivering judgement, Justice Amobeda held that: "It is a known fact that crimes of this nature appear now to be prevalent in our time. I do hereby sentence the convict to 6 months imprisonment with an option of fine of N500,000.

"The convict shall forfeit to the Federal Government of Nigeria the instruments used in the commission of the offence being thus: Acura ZDX with registration number SMK 245 DQ (Lagos),

Range Rover Envogue with registration number FST 772 EQ (Lagos), Mercedes Benz E 300 with registration number LSD 393 EG (Lagos) and the seven bedroom duplex situated at Victory Way Extension, Satellite Town, Calabar, Cross River State."

Earlier, Justice Amobeda convicted another graduate of Delta State University, Abraka, Obabueki Philips, who was equally arraigned by the anti-graft agency on a one-count charge bordering on impersonation and cybercrime.

When Obabueki was arrested, he admitted that his area of specialisation was impersonation, and that he sends out fraudulent emails to defraud his victims.

A forensic analysis of his laptop led to the recovery of quite a number of highly incriminating scam documents that further indicted him of the crime.

The charge to which Obabueki

pleaded guilty to reads: "That you, Obabueki Eromosele Philips, (aka Leo Sim) 'm' on or about the 30th day of May, 2019 in Nigeria within the jurisdiction of this Honourable Court did fraudulently impersonate one Leo Sim, with intent to obtain property from unsuspecting persons, the pretence you knew to be false and thereby committed an offence contrary to Section 22 (2) (b) (ii) of the Cybercrime (Prohibition and Prevention, Etc) Act, 2015 and punishable under Section 22 (2) (b) (iv) of the same Act."

In view of his guilty plea, Abuh informed the court of the plea bargain arrangement entered between the Commission and the convict and also prayed the court to convict and sentence him based on the agreements therein.

The court thereafter sentenced him to six months imprisonment with an option of fine of N50,000.

EFCC gets final forfeiture order on N49m

Justice Saleh Musa Shuaibu of the Federal High Court sitting in Kaduna, has ordered the final forfeiture of the sum of N49, 000,000 to the federal government of Nigeria.

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Kaduna

Zonal office, intercepted the money on March 14, 2017 at the Kaduna International Airport.

The money, all mint, stashed in five large 150 kilogramme coloured sacks, was intercepted by EFCC Operatives following an intelligence report received

by the zone.

EFCC spokesperson, Tony Orilade, said the final forfeiture order followed a motion on notice brought by the EFCC through prosecution counsels, Joshua Saidi and Onyeka Ekweozor.

After obtaining an interim forfeiture order, some

persons showed up and claimed to be the owners of the abandoned money.

They further filed a counter affidavit against the Commission's motion for the final forfeiture in suit No: FHC/KD/CS/32/17 between Oyebanji Olaitan Steve & others Vs EFCC.

Consequently, the court ordered for oral evidence to be taken, as there were conflicts in the various affidavits filed by the parties.

In his ruling, Justice Shuaibu granted the EFCC motion for the final forfeiture of the sum as he dismissed the claims of the applicants.

US warns Nigeria, African countries over debt burden

United States of America, USA top Africa diplomat, Tibor Nagy, on Monday warned African countries to be mindful of their debt burden.

Nagy, who spoke in Pretoria, South Africa, warned that African countries owing amount they cannot pay back, not to expect being bailed out by western-sponsored debt relief.

Nagy, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, said "The International Monetary Fund and World Bank began the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries

(HIPC) Initiative in 1996 to help the world's poorest countries clear billions of dollars worth of unsustainable debt.

"But Africa is facing another potential debt crisis today, with around 40 percent of low-income countries in the region now in debt distress or at high risk of it, according to an IMF report released a year ago.

"We went through this, just in the last 20 years, this big debt forgiveness for a lot of African countries.

"I certainly would not be sympathetic, and I do not think my administration

would be sympathetic to that kind of situation," he told reporters.

Under Donald Trump's administration, the U.S. has criticized China for pushing poor countries into debt, mainly through lending for large-scale infrastructure projects.

Nagy has warned that those nations risk losing control of strategic assets if they cannot repay the Chinese loans, NAN reports.

Sri Lanka formally handed over commercial activities in its main southern port in the town of Hambantota to a

Chinese company in 2017 as part of a plan to convert \$6 billion of loans that Sri Lanka owes China into equity.

U.S. officials have warned that a strategic port in the tiny Horn of Africa nation of Djibouti could be next, a prospect the government there has denied.

From 2000 to 2016, China loaned around \$125 billion to the continent, according to data from the China-Africa Research Initiative at Washington's Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies.

FBI is probing corruption in Puerto Rico government contracts

The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation is probing potential corruption and favoritism in how Puerto Rico awarded some government contracts and arrests may be forthcoming, according to the bureau's special agent in charge on the island, Douglas Leff.

Speaking Thursday on local station Radio Isla, Leff said prosecutors would have final say as to when enough evidence had been gathered to justify arrests.

The remarks come during an

extraordinary week in which Puerto Rican Treasury Secretary Raul Maldonado used a radio interview to disclose an "institutional mafia" within his own secretariat, revealed an FBI probe into the matter, and subsequently lost his job for failing to tell the governor about the problems before going to the press.

Then, just hours after Maldonado was asked to resign, his own son took to social media to call Governor Ricardo Rossello himself "corrupt," purporting

to offer a firsthand account of the governor's efforts to alter a report on Hurricane Maria aid, an episode which Rossello vehemently denied had taken place.

Until now, the FBI hadn't spoken out on the matter. Leff confirmed the existence of widespread probe into improper awarding of government contracts at various levels of government, although he declined to specifically say if the Treasury was involved.

"It's fair to say that this is going to be a very busy summer for us," he said, adding that an announcement may be forthcoming as soon as this week.

The corruption drama and insult-slashing could hurt Puerto Rican leaders' efforts to restore confidence in their stewardship. The island commonwealth is navigating a record-setting bankruptcy and trying to ensure that federal aid money keeps flowing to recover from the devastation of Hurricane Maria.

New U.S. sanctions will cripple Iran's corrupt leaders

June 27 (UPI) -- U.S. President Donald Trump's announcement this week that he had signed an executive order imposing another round of "hard-hitting" sanctions on Iran has sent new shockwaves through the theocratic dictatorship headed by supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Indeed, the sanctions specifically targeted Khamenei, together with Iran's foreign minister Javad Zarif and eight senior commanders of Navy, Aerospace and Ground Forces of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, the elite military unit known as the regime's Gestapo and itself recently listed as a foreign terrorist organization by the Americans. These commanders supervise the IRGC's malicious regional activities, including its provocative ballistic missile program, its recent sabotage of oil tankers in the Gulf and the shooting down of an American drone in international airspace, as well as its ongoing support for Bashar al-Assad's bloody civil war in Syria, the Houthi rebels in Yemen, terrorist Hezbollah in Lebanon and the brutal Shi'ia militias in Iraq.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin said the new sanctions would "lock up literally billions of dollars of assets." The venally corrupt Khamenei controls an estimated \$200 billion corporate empire that includes hundreds of companies with interests in agriculture, energy, real estate and other sectors, so those who say the new sanctions are simply symbolic are mistaken. The sanctions will block Khamenei and his closest advisers from accessing the American financial system or any American assets. The U.S. Treasury has also been authorized to impose sanctions on any foreign financial institution that conducts transactions for any of these listed individuals or groups.

Iran, despite its rich, civilized and open culture, has now become an international

pariah, its religious fascist regime condemned for human rights abuse and the export of terror, while its 80 million beleaguered citizens, over half of whom are under 30, struggle to feed their families against a background of power outages, water shortages and food prices that have risen by more than 80 percent. Since the second tranche of U.S. sanctions affecting oil and banking came into effect at the end of 2018, the economy has been in freefall, with inflation reaching 52 percent in May.

McConnell to allow vote on Iran war authorization

Iran's descent into economic chaos can be traced directly to Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani. Their policy of aggressive military expansionism across the Middle East has drained the country's resources. Combined with the mullahs' own partiality for corruptly lining their own pockets, it is little surprise that the country with the world's second-largest gas reserves and fourth-largest crude oil reserves is now facing economic meltdown and mass demonstrations from an angry public.

Over the past 18 months, the widespread protests have spread from the main cities to rural towns and villages, uniting the working classes with middle-income earners, whose chants of "leave Syria alone, think of us instead" and "death to the dictator," have clearly signaled the burgeoning demand for regime change. The previously unimaginable cries of "death to Khamenei" and "death to Rouhani" are now commonplace during every protest and have been heard from striking steelworkers in Ahvaz in the southwest of Iran, to defrauded investors in Rasht in the north and even teachers, nurses and bazaar merchants in Tehran.

The coordinated nature of the protests has been blamed by the regime on the



main organized opposition, the People's Mojahedin of Iran (PMOI/MEK), which has set up "resistance units" across the country. The MEK is the key democratic alternative to the mullahs' theocratic dictatorship and offers a future of freedom, justice, democracy, human rights, women's rights, abolition of the death penalty, an end to international terror and aggression and an end to the nuclear threat. It is a vision of such contrast to the current chaos and oppression that young Iranians are now willing to risk their lives to bring it about.

As U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has said: "To the regime, prosperity, security and freedom for the Iranian people are acceptable casualties in the march to fulfill the revolution." He accused the clerical regime of "lining its own pockets while its people cry out for jobs." Pompeo has provided specific examples of the industrial-style corruption in Iran, citing Sadeq Larijani, the head of Iran's judiciary, who is worth an estimated \$300 million, embezzled directly from public funds. He also cited former IRGC officer and Minister

of the Interior Sadeq Mahsouli, who is nicknamed "the billionaire general."

Pompeo said he went from being a poor IRGC officer at the end of the Iran-Iraq war to being worth billions. He identified Grand Ayatollah Makaram Shirazi, who is known as the "sultan of sugar" for his illicit trading of sugar, which has generated over \$100 million for him. And he said that Khamenei "has his own personal, off-the-books hedge fund called the Setad, worth \$95 billion."

Pompeo concluded that judging by their vast wealth, the ayatollahs "seem more concerned with riches than religion." He continued: "These hypocritical holy men have devised all kinds of crooked schemes to become some of the wealthiest men on Earth while their people suffer." This crushing exposé by the U.S. secretary of state gives the lie to Khamenei's contention that "foreign enemies" are to blame for Iran's economic collapse.

The extent of corruption by the mullahs is well known to the Iranian people, who are sick of seeing their rich oil and gas wealth stolen and used to fund proxy wars in Syria, Yemen, Lebanon and Iraq and to fill the bank accounts of the mullahs, while they starve.

The oppressed millions in Iran will welcome Trump's latest round of sanctions against their corrupt leaders. It is now the duty of the European Union to follow America's lead and show their support for the Iranian people.

Struan Stevenson is the coordinator of the Campaign for Iran Change. He served as a member of the European Parliament representing Scotland (1999-2014), president of the Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Iraq (2009-14) and chairman of the Friends of a Free Iran Intergroup (2004-14). He is an international lecturer on the Middle East and president of the European Iraqi Freedom Association.

Switzerland says \$133 million belonging to Gulnara Karimova to be sent to Uzbekistan



Switzerland said it would send \$133 million in seized assets linked to Gulnara Karimova to Uzbekistan, amid a continuing international struggle over the fate of more than a billion dollars tied to the elder daughter of the late president of Uzbekistan.

The order was announced June 24, just days after an unusual first-person appeal from Karimova, who has been held in a Tashkent prison since March.

In her appeal, which was posted to her daughter's Instagram account, Karimova appealed to the current Uzbek president for clemency. She also said she had ordered her lawyers to stop legal efforts to claim \$686 million in frozen assets, believed to be mainly in Swiss bank accounts.

The statement's authenticity was confirmed by one of her Swiss defense lawyers.

Criminal investigations in Switzerland, the United States, Sweden, and the Netherlands have linked Karimova to a years-long, massive bribery scheme that revolved mainly around foreign telecommunications companies gaining access to the lucrative Uzbek cell phone market.

The U.S. Justice Department, which indicted Karimova in March, days after she was sent to the Tashkent prison, said Karimova's case was one of the largest bribery schemes ever under the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act.

In its statement, the Swiss Attorney General's Office said an unnamed male relative of Karimova's had concealed the seized funds by "opening bank accounts on behalf of companies in order to fragment the money transfers."

The forfeited assets will be returned to Uzbekistan, the office said.

The Attorney General's Office did not immediately return a voice mail and e-mail seeking clarification on

who the male relative was, whether the announcement was connected to Karimova's first-person statement issued over the weekend, and how exactly the money would be transferred to Uzbekistan.

Karimova's statement was the first she had issued since being accused in March of violating terms of her house arrest and ordered to a notorious women's prison in the Uzbek capital, Tashkent.

In the statement, Karimova said she had asked Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev for clemency, and she apologizes for "any disappointment that I may have caused."

Karimova claimed that \$1.2 billion of her assets have already been repatriated to Uzbekistan and is "now working for the benefit of the budget of the republic." She also said that she told her lawyers to stop legal claims on another \$686 million kept in foreign bank accounts.

Karimova also said she needed surgery for unspecified health problems.

Her Swiss lawyer, Gregoire Mangeat, confirmed the authenticity of the

statement by Karimova, and also criticized the announcement by the Swiss Attorney General's Office.

"The reason for the release of \$131 million is because [Gulnara Karimova] withdrew her opposition to the confiscation. She did this to show good faith and to try to obtain the end of her arbitrary detention," he told RFE/RL in a private message.

Amassed A Fortune

Once seen as a possible heir to her father, Islam, Karimova grew to become of Central Asia's most powerful women in the 2000s, dabbling in fashion, pop music, charity work, and serving as a United Nations ambassador for the country.

Court records showed that she amassed a substantial fortune that, investigators say, was channeled through hidden offshore accounts into Swiss banks and elsewhere.

Beginning in 2012, however, news reports began uncovering a multinational bribery scandal that involved telecoms in Sweden and elsewhere, who had sought to do business in Uzbekistan.

By 2014, she fell out of the public eye, and later was reported to be under house arrest. Her father died in 2016 and was succeeded by Mirziyoyev.

The following year, the Uzbek Prosecutor General's Office announced she had been charged with "directly abetting the criminal activities of an organized crime group whose assets were worth over \$1.3 billion."

In December 2017, Karimova was sentenced to a 10-year prison term, but several months later, the sentence was reclassified to house arrest and shortened to five years.

In 2017, nearly a year after her father's death, Uzbek prosecutors announced

that she had been convicted in 2015 on corruption charges

But in March 2019, prosecutors announced that a Tashkent court had found that Karimova had violated the terms of her house arrest and ordered her sent to the notorious Zangiota prison in Tashkent.

That order was followed two days later by the U.S. Justice Department announcing it had indicted Karimova and a former longtime aide on bribery and other charges.

There's no publicly known figure on the amount or type of assets that Karimova had in various bank accounts and other locations. But in announcing the indictment against Karimova in March, U.S. Attorney Geoffrey Berman said she was linked to a "\$1 billion bribery scheme."

In their statement, Swiss authorities said more than \$650 million in other assets remain frozen.

U.S. authorities, meanwhile, have also moved to seize some of the funds frozen in Swiss bank accounts, and have met with Uzbek officials repeatedly in a bid to figure out what to do with the funds.

But the talks have been stuck, in part due to the Swiss proceedings, but also due to the Uzbek government insisting that it was the rightful owner of the frozen assets, according to people familiar with the negotiations.

Activists and experts who have consulted on the negotiations have noted that top Uzbek officials were likely aware, if not complicit, in the efforts by Karimova to solicit bribes from telecom companies.

The current prime minister, Abdula Aripov, served as the deputy prime minister in charge of telecommunications until 2012, when he was ousted amid growing scrutiny of Karimova's business practices.

Judge rules against Trump in federal corruption case

In a significant blow to Donald J. Trump's legal attempt to block a lawsuit and investigation into how his private business practices violate the anti-corruption emoluments clauses in the U.S. Constitution, a federal court denied a series of motions by attorneys for the president this week and allowed discovery of records to move forward.

U.S. District Judge Emmet G. Sullivan in Washington denied motions to drop or delay the lawsuit brought by Democrats in Congress and ruled that lawyers could move forward with their demands to obtain financial records and conduct interviews with members of the Trump Organization.

"... discovery will conclude and cross motions for summary judgment will be fully briefed within six months," the judge wrote in a 12-page ruling rejecting Trump's appeal trying to argue that members of Congress have no standing to sue

him.

The ruling is another setback in Trump's attempt to block the courts from investigating his private business practices and how they violate a constitutional provision that makes accepting payments or gifts from state or foreign governments a crime and grounds for impeachment by Congress. A similar case brought by attorneys general in D.C. and Maryland is also proceeding in the U.S. District Court in Greenbelt, Maryland.

Federal Judge Denies Trump's Request for a Stay in Emoluments Clause Case

Both cases, which could eventually make it to the U.S. Supreme Court, are unique and mark the first time courts have been put in the position of interpreting the emoluments clauses due to actions by a sitting president. They could reveal what critics have been saying all along, that the president's commingling of

his official duties with profits from his private businesses is wrong, especially business at the Trump International Hotel near the White House where many foreign officials stay in an attempt to gain influence with the administration.

Even the president's dependence on U.S. Justice Department lawyers to make his case rather than his personal, private attorneys in this situation raises eyebrows with critics.

At Trump's behest, department lawyers asked Sullivan to take the unusual step of signing off on an immediate appeal of his earlier rulings because of the "exceptional circumstances" of the case, but the judge refused.

"Plaintiffs are now poised to seek civil discovery against the President, including into his personal finances and official actions, which will distract the President from his official duties," the attorneys argued.

Instead of going along and halting

the case, Judge Sullivan ordered the two parties to begin requesting records and other information as part of a three-month discovery period from June 29 to September 27.

Justice Department spokeswoman Kelly Laco said the federal government would appeal.

"This case should have been dismissed. It presents important questions that warrant immediate appellate review and is another impractical attempt to disrupt and distract the President from his official duties," Laco said in a statement.

The judge disagreed, and the case moves the attempt to seek private financial information about Trump and the Trump Organization forward. Many critics say it is unprecedented for a sitting president to maintain ownership of private

Zimbabwe: corruption convicts to lose wealth

Those convicted of corruption will have their wealth and assets forfeited to the State as part of restitution for their criminal deeds, President Mnangagwa has said. He said his administration will rapidly and more effectively respond to legitimate concerns of the general public with regard to tackling corruption head-on by holding the corrupt fully accountable for their misdeeds.

The President said this in a speech read on his behalf by Foreign Affairs and International Trade Minister Sibusiso Moyo at a two-day Fraud and Corruption Conference, which opened in Harare yesterday.

"In parallel with such restitution must, of course, come retribution," he said.

"Those found guilty of such corruption must be sanctioned where they can reflect upon the consequences of their greed and the shame and misfortune that that greed has brought upon themselves and their families."

President Mnangagwa said Government has made progress in strengthening existing legislation and introducing extra laws to boost the Second Republic's anti-corruption drive.

Some of the significant amendments that have been made to tighten up mandatory reporting and oversight requirements feature in a number of laws such as the Public Finance Management; Insolvency; Audit; Public Entities Corporate Governance; Companies; Public Procurement and Disposal of

Public Assets; and Money Laundering and Proceeds of Crime Acts among others.

The Government is also working on a Whistleblower's Act to encourage and protect those who see evil being done and wish to stop it.

President Mnangagwa said Government is in the final stages of appointing commissioners to the Anti-Corruption Commission and strengthening the Office of the Prosecutor-General.

Government, he said, is also building capacity in key oversight agencies such as the Auditor-General's, Accountant-General's and Attorney-General's offices.

"We are seeking assistance from international partners to build investigative capacity within key components of our law-enforcement agencies, those tasked with investigating and building solid evidence-based cases against the corrupt; cases which will hold up in court and lead to conviction and, where the court so-decides, incarceration and the forfeiture of assets," he said.

The President said the fight against corruption was not one that Government can wage alone urging the participants to play their role and work towards a Plan of Action, identifying roles and responsibilities for the various sectors represented at the conference.

"Government and yourselves collectively, can intensify our common battle against the evil of corruption," he said "Together, we can and must make a difference."



President Mnangagwa said from the onset, the Second Republic's moto has been 'Zero Tolerance to Corruption,' but progress has been slow.

He attributed the slow progress to resistance the State is facing which has tended to impede headway and undermine Government's good intentions.

"That, in turn, is a reflection of how deep the rot has reached, how the beneficiaries of that rot are able to manoeuvre and manipulate the system to their advantage, to keep ahead of law enforcement, weaken the justice system and, in so doing, to continue their nefarious activities, cheating the Government and the people of

Zimbabwe," he said.

"The slow pace of progress is also a reflection to some extent, of the level of sophistication and complexity which the corrupt amongst us have brought to bear, so as to mask their crimes, cover their tracks and confound our law enforcement officials."

President Mnangagwa said corruption should be totally eradicated because it undermines Government efforts on economic reform and progress towards the national vision of a middle-income economy by 2030.

"Just as importantly, the scourge of fraud, the theft of public funds and the seeming impotence of our law-enforcement agencies and the justice system more broadly to effectively stop such practices serves to further erode public trust and confidence in Government and its institutions," he said.

President Mnangagwa, however, hailed the conference saying its focus on fraud was not only welcome, but timely in that it coincided neatly with the enhanced efforts Government was making in the fight against corruption.

The participants were drawn from all stakeholders representing both public and private sectors, academia, civil society, the media, law enforcement agencies and the legal fraternity.

The objective of the conference is creating greater awareness and a deeper understanding of fraud in all its sinister forms and to appreciate the negative impact it has on the national economy.

Judge rules against Trump in federal corruption case

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businesses while in office, leading to all kinds of situations ripe for corruption.

The 4th Circuit Court, which reviews cases from Maryland, heard oral arguments in March and could issue a ruling at any time in an appeal of the case in Greenbelt.

About 200 Democrats, led by Senator Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut and Congressman Jerrold Nadler of New York, seek a court order to stop the president from accepting payments that appear to be violations of the Constitution's foreign emoluments clauses.

Lawyers from the nonprofit Constitutional Accountability Center say the clause in the Constitution was designed to guard against undue influence by foreign governments by barring any gift or payment without prior approval from Congress.

"Judge Sullivan articulated what the law makes clear: there is absolutely no reason to delay one more day in ensuring that President Trump is held accountable for his violation of the Constitution's preeminent anti-corruption

provision," Senator Blumenthal said in a statement.

Back in September, Judge Sullivan ruled that lawmakers had legal standing to sue and allowed the case to continue in part because the foreign emoluments clause "requires the President to ask Congress before accepting a prohibited emolument."

Sullivan issued an additional opinion in April adopting a broad definition of "emolument" backed by the congressional Democrats. Sullivan described the record as "overwhelming evidence" from "over two hundred years of understanding the scope of the clause to be broad."

In an example of how the Trump Hotel is being misused to influence the administration, it has been reported that a Saudi-funded lobbyist paid for 500 rooms at Trump's hotel after the 2016 election and recently sought significant arms sales from the U.S., which were recently blocked by a vote in the Senate.

Lawyers characterized the president's request for an immediate appeal as a delaying tactic designed to prevent any resolution of the case before the end of his term.

"If the President succeeds in

running out the clock, an entire presidential term will have gone by with the nation's highest officeholder making countless foreign policy decisions under a cloud of potentially divided loyalty and compromised judgment caused by his enrichment from foreign states," according to the court filing from the Constitutional Accountability Center.

In his ruling this week, Judge Sullivan said the president failed to meet the legal standard for showing that an immediate appeal was warranted and might "advance the ultimate termination of the litigation."

"Even though discovery has not begun, it will be scheduled to conclude and cross motions for summary judgment to be fully briefed within six months," Sullivan wrote.

The Trump International Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue, just a couple of blocks from the White House, has attracted a number of government clients, including the Kuwaiti Embassy, which has held its National Day celebration there three years in a row, for example. Lobbyists representing the Saudi government reserved blocks of rooms in December

2016 and the Trump administration recently tried to sell some of the most sophisticated weapons produced in the United States to the Saudi government, although the sale was blocked by a vote in the Senate.

Also, former Governor Paul LePage of Maine stayed at the hotel and dined at its restaurant in 2017 in an attempt to curry favor with Trump.

Despite the lawsuits, the Trump Organization did more business with foreign governments in 2018 than it did the year before, according to reporting by the Washington Post. The company says it received about \$191,000 in profits from large events and hotel bookings paid for by foreign governments last year, money it claims to have donated to the U.S. Treasury. The previous year the company reported about \$150,000 in business from foreign governments.

On the face of it this seems corrupt. But many things about the Trump administration are different from anything seen by any administration in American history. Trump's hard core supporters don't seem concerned. His public approval rating still hovers around 40 percent.