National Ports Authority urges Maritime Workers to postpone planned strike

The Managing Director of the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), Mohammed Bello-Koko, has called on the Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria (MWUN) to halt its proposed strike. In a statement released Bello-Koko revealed that the NPA had successfully mediated a resolution between the union and stakeholders in the oil and gas sector regarding non-compliance with Stevedoring regulations

Last week, the MWUN had issued a threat to close the nation's seaports, jetties, and oil and gas platforms on the following Tuesday, citing the International Oil Companies and Stevedoring Contractors' persistent refusal to adhere to Stevedoring Extant Laws, as well as issues such as the lack of access to work locations and the non-remittance of a 3 percent MWUN levy by Stevedores. The union expressed frustration, stating that despite numerous letters, press releases, ultimatums, marine notices, and ministerial orders, their concerns had been consistently ignored. Additionally, they pointed fingers at the NPA for allowing the International Oil Companies to operate without proper oversight.

In response, Bello-Koko emphasized the NPA's commitment to preserving peace and industrial harmony within the involved groups. He stressed the importance of preventing any disruption to crucial production platforms in the oil and gas sector that maritime workers oversee, emphasizing that a shutdown at this time would be detrimental to the national economy. Following a meeting at the agency's headquarters in Marina, Lagos State, a communiqué addressing the workers' grievances was signed, leading to the subsequent suspension of the planned strike. Notable attendees at the meeting included the Executive Vice-President (Downstream) of the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited, Mr. Adedapo Segun; Deputy President of the Nigerian Labour Congress, Adewale Adeyanju; President of the National Association of Stevedoring Operators, Mr. Bolaji Sunmola; Managing Director of the Nigerian Pipeline Storage Company, Mr. Bayo Adenrele; and the Assistant Director of Distribution System, Storage, and Retail Infrastructure of the Nigerian Midstream & Downstream Petroleum Regulatory Authority, among other industry leaders.

Food Prices Projected to Rise in Nigeria, Others in 2024 – Report

Nigeria and other countries across the West Africa region are projected to see increased prices of staple foods such as rice, maize, millet, cereals, etc in 2024. This is according to a report titled "West Africa Regional Supply and Market Outlook" published jointly by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), World Food Program (WFP), and others. According to the report, prices of staple crops such as maize, wheat, rice, millet, etc will increase above the five-year average price occasioned by a reduction in production, trade restrictions, global geopolitical factors, and others. The report in part read, "Staple prices currently remain above the five-year average across the region. This is attributable to a combination of factors including production deficits, trade restrictions, insecurity in the Sahel, elevated global prices, high transaction costs, and currency depreciation in the coastal countries of gulf of guinea and Nigeria, stated specifically that an increase in annual inflation propelled by the removal of fuel subsidies will push prices of staple foods above their average level. It also identified limited production as well as sustained demand, trade restriction, insecurity, etc as factors fuelling the increased prices. It stated, "Moreover, Nigeria's annual inflation continues to climb, exacerbated by the removal of fuel subsidies. Prices are projected to stay above both average owing to the limited production performance, sustained demand, constrained humanitarian assistance, continuing trade disruptions, and security and socioeconomic challenges in the region."

The report also forecasted a huge decline of 42% in maize, sorghum, and millet production due to agro climatic challenges, insecurity, and rising production costs while rice production will see an increase and reduction in imports. It added that the drop in imports is due to "global trade restrictions, shipping costs, lower national exchange rates, and domestic policies." The report further highlighted positive regional production outlooks for most roots, tubers like cassava and yam, and cash crops due to the strong output of major coastal country producers.

President Bola Tinubu Signs 2024 Budget, task Ministries, other to provide monthly performance report

President Bola Tinubu has signed the 2024 Appropriation Bill into law in keeping with his avowed commitment to maintaining a timeout, predictable, and efficient budget cycle. Chief Ajuri Ngelale, Special Adviser to the President (Media & Publicity), disclosed this in a statement. President Tinubu assented to the bill at the State House, on Monday, shortly after returning to Abuja from Lagos.

Speaking at the signing of the bill, the President assured Nigerians that the implementation of the budget would be efficiently pursued and vigorously monitored, adding: "All the institutional mechanisms shall be held to account in ensuring diligent implementation". "All MDA's have been directed to take responsibility and provide monthly Budget Performance Reports to the Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning, which in turn shall ensure the veracity of such.

The Minister of Finance and Co-coordinating Minister of the Economy shall hold regular reviews with the Economic Management Team and, in addition, I shall Chair periodic Economic Coordination Council meetings," he said. The top priorities of the 2024 budget of N28.7 trillion are defence and internal security, job creation, macro-economic stability, improved investment environment, human capital development, poverty reduction, and social security.

The President emphasized that his commitment to enhance investment promotion while creating a rules-based society that favours no individual over the law begins with important reforms in the Nigerian judiciary, the funding for which is captured in the 2024 Appropriation Act. "Funding the judiciary is a major element in our effort to support a just, rules-based society. Statutory transfer to the Judiciary has been increased from 165 billion naira to 342 billion naira," the President said. Some of the key estimates are capital expenditure, N10 trillion; recurrent expenditure, N8.8 trillion; debt service, N8.2 trillion, and statutory transfers, N1.7 trillion. President of the Senate, Godswill Akpabio, and Speaker of the House of Representatives, Tajudeen Abbas, was present at the signing. Other senior government officials present at the brief ceremony include: Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Wale Edun; Chief of Staff to the President, Femi Gbajabiamila; Minister of Budget and Economic Planning, Senator Atiku Bagudu, and National Security Adviser, Nuhu Ribadu.

Nine States in EFCC trouble over mismanagement of 84.7billion Derivation Funds

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and nine governors of oil-producing states are heading for a collision over N84.7 billion siphoned from the statutory 13 per cent derivation meant for the nine oil-producing states.

We gathered that another bone of contention was the request for the release of N52 billion recovered from former Accountant General of the Federation, Ahmed Idris, and some of his accomplices. Idris is standing trial over an alleged N109 billion money laundering charge, diversion of public funds, abuse of office, and conspiracy, preferred against him by the EFCC. Our checks revealed that EFCC's investigation uncovered N84.7 billion siphoned from the statutory 13 per cent derivation meant for the nine oil-producing states. The states are Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers. The money was allegedly siphoned by a consultancy firm, Olusegun Akindele Consultancy, and other accomplices engaged by the nine NDDC states to review and reconcile the payments due to them from the Excess Crude Account (ECA) between 2004 and 2016. Specifically, Olusegun Akindele Consultancy firm received a total sum of N84. 7 billion, being 9.84 per cent of N861, 135,887,749.10 as consultancy fees and the money was shared among four groups. We gathered that through diligent investigation, the EFCC was able to recover the total sum of N52 billion from fictitious consultancy contracts awarded to three out of the four groups.

The funds belong to the nine oil-producing states as approved by the Federal Executive Council (FEC) in their meeting on August 20, 2021. Further investigation showed that several correspondences were made between the Akwa Ibom State Governor, Umo Eno, on behalf of the nine states, and the EFCC.

The Akwa Ibom State Governor, Eno, wrote the EFCC seeking the release of the N52 billion to the nine states to a consultant, Messrs Platinum Resources Limited.

Our investigation further gathered that the EFCC turned down the request, insisting that each of the states should send the account details of their government for the release of the money. However, the EFCC's directive was not complied with as Eno was said to have sent the account details of only four states – Akwa Ibom, Delta, Bayelsa, and Rivers to the EFCC, while the account details of the remaining five states were not sent. Further investigation showed that the EFCC insisted that all the account details of the nine states should be provided. We learnt that the EFCC Chairman, Ola Olukoyede, is planning to pay the money into the CBN derivation account of each of the states. "This development is the basis of the fight of the governors of the nine states with the commission. The EFCC's position is to allow for transparency and accountability concerning the use of the recovered funds," a competent source familiar with the development, said.

NNPCL Announces Impressive Financial Performance With Over N2tn Profit

The Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL) announced that it achieved a remarkable profit of N2.548tn in 2022, marking its "highest profit since inception." NNPCL, established in 1977 and a key player in the Nigerian oil and gas sector, has become commercially driven following the enactment of the Petroleum Industry Act in August 2021. The financial journey of the company has seen a notable turnaround, as it reported a loss of N803bn in 2018, which gradually decreased to a N1.7bn loss in 2019. The company experienced a significant shift in 2020, recording a profit of N287bn, which it deemed a "turning point." The positive trend continued in 2021, with a profit of N674.1bn, and reached its zenith in 2022 with an impressive N2.548tn profit.

In November 2023, Mele Kyari, the Group Chief Executive Officer of NNPCL, expressed optimism about the company's corporate profit, anticipating over N2tn after the release of the Annual Financial Statement for 2022. Kyari highlighted the impact of the Petroleum Industry Act, stating that it played a crucial role in transforming NNPCL's financial landscape from a loss position of N803bn in 2018 to a profit position of N674bn in 2021. He also mentioned that dividends had been distributed to shareholders since July of that year.

Simultaneously, the company revealed its active efforts to combat illegal activities in the oil and gas sector. In the past week, NNPCL uncovered 32 illegal pipeline connections and dismantled 52 illegal refineries in the Niger Delta region. The company reported 157 incidents of oil theft during the period, attributing them to various sources, including Nigeria Agip Oil Company, Pipeline Infrastructure Nigeria Limited, Maton Engineering Limited, and others.

Additionally, NNPCL disclosed the discovery of seven illegal storage sites in Akwa Ibom State, where buried drums of crude oil were unearthed. The company also confiscated stolen crude in Bayelsa and Warri, and reported instances of vandalism, including oil well head damages.

NNPCL emphasized its commitment to curbing these illegal activities, with 17 suspects already arrested during the period. The company affirmed its resolve to continue the fight against oil theft until the situation is effectively addressed.