

Insecurity: Nigeria harvesting its sown seeds — Bishop Kukah

The Catholic Bishop of Sokoto Diocese, Matthew Kukah, says the rate of banditry will continue to grow across the country because Nigeria is reaping what it sowed. Following incessant attacks by bandits and terrorists across the country, most especially in the North, Bishop Kukah also warned that if the government fails to prioritize the education of Nigerian youths, the situation may get worse in the future. The Catholic Bishop, who delivered a lecture at the 42nd Actualisation conference of Rotary International, District 9110 in Abeokuta, Ogun State capital, maintained that the government's inability to prioritize education for the younger generation was largely responsible for insurgency and worrying level of criminality being witnessed in the country today.

Specifically, he said Nigeria is facing rising security challenges, particularly in terms of banditry and terrorism attacks, due to the government's lack of investment and the consequences of the young generation not having a proper education. "We are facing the challenges that are the consequences of our children not having education. Now everybody fears bandits, everybody fears Boko Haram, we are reaping today what we sowed yesterday and it will actually grow worse. "We have millions of children, at least between 10 and 12 or 15 million children that are on the streets who are begging, each of these children are growing by the day, the Almajiri that is 10 now, in 10 years time he will be 20 years, so unless we quickly do something the situation may go worse." Urging philanthropists, religious bodies, and other humanitarian organisations to channel their efforts toward combating illiteracy in the country, the Clergy said Nigeria "must try to combat illiteracy because there is no substitute for education and if we who are educated believe that we are secured then we must think again."

In his goodwill message to the occasion, former President Olusegun Obasanjo charged the Rotary Club to redouble their efforts in creating a better world. Speaking through a pre-recorded video, Obasanjo tasked the club to continue putting service to humanity above every other thing, even as he urged participants to use the opportunity of the conference to reignite the passion for helping the less privileged and positively impacting society. For the District Governor, Ifeyinwa Ejezie, under her watch, the Rotary Club has invested hugely in areas such as basic education and literacy, maternal and child health as well as economic empowerment, adding that the District has taken the issue of mental health to another level by educating a lot of people. She also said the disturbing trend of drug abuse among the youths is equally being addressed by the Rotary Club and reiterated its commitment to humanitarian activities within the district and across the world. The four-day conference attracted thousands of

Rotarians from Lagos and Abeokuta.

UK's National Crime Agency in Nigeria to help EFCC fight corruption, recover loot

Graeme Biggar, the director-general of the National Crime Agency (NCA), says the UK crime agency will continue to support the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission in tackling corruption and recovering looted assets, lauding EFCC for being professional. Mr Biggar said this recently when he led a delegation of the UK's anti-crime agency on a working visit to the EFCC chairman, Ola Olukoyede, in Abuja. "We have a long-standing relationship with EFCC in Nigeria. It is important for us to support you in the fight against corruption and asset recovery. I am here to deepen our cooperation. We really appreciate the relationship we have with your organisation and the professionalism of your officers," he said. The NCA boss expressed his agency's readiness to strengthen the relationship with the EFCC, maintaining that "we are ready to take the relationship deeper." "It is important we continue the strong relationship existing between us for us to tackle those fraudulent dealings," he said. Mr Olukoyede stated that the EFCC valued its relationship with NCA, noting that the good working relationship between Nigeria and the UK dates back a long way.

The EFCC boss said, "Our relationship has been mutually beneficial. We have had cause to collaborate on so many cases. I want to thank you for extending that hand of collaboration to us and for some of the support you have brought in the area of manpower development, training for some of our operatives and also the support you have given our digital forensic laboratory. "We are also looking for more mutually beneficial relationships and more support. The world is a global village. Sometimes what we have, you don't have and what you have, we don't have. We place much premium on exchange of ideas and compare notes where necessary. We are also looking at issues where you can be of support from your jurisdiction."

Senate approves death sentence for hard drugs, substance trafficking

The Senate has prescribed death sentence as penalty for trafficking in hard drugs and other substances in Nigeria. This followed the passage of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) Amendment Bill 2024. It

also prescribed not more than 15 years imprisonment without option of fine, for conviction on consumption of hard drugs and substances. This followed adoption of report of Senate Committees on Judiciary, Human Rights and Legal Matters and Drugs and Narcotics on the NDLEA Amendment Act at plenary. The report was presented by Chairman of the committee, Sen. Mohammed Monguno (APC -Borno). Monguno in his presentation said the amendment sought to strengthen operations of the NDLEA, empower its operations to establish laboratories for forensic review and update list of dangerous drugs. He said the amendment was also designed to review penalties and enhance powers of the NDLEA to prosecute drug related offences and issue subsidiary legislation. He said senate had on Feb.28, deliberated on the bill, which was transmitted from the House of Representatives for senate's concurrence. He said it was important to make a general comment on the bill, especially on classification of the offences and penalty categorizations of drug related offences. He said the categorizations were peculiar and different from other laws because of the sentencing guideline used in determination of drug related offences. "These guidelines in drug laws are designed to promote fairness, consistency and proportionality in the criminal justice system, while considering the broader goals of rehabilitation and public safety." It is also important to note that several variables are used in determining the penalties imposed on a suspect. "This includes type and quantity of controlled substance, defendant's criminal history, intent behind drug-related activities, aggravating or mitigating circumstance such as organised crime, violence, use of offensive weapon. "Others like endangerment of minors can aggravate penalties, conversely mitigating factors like cooperation with law enforcement or lack of prior criminal record may lessen the severity of punishment." Earlier, before passage of the bill during clause by clause consideration, Sen. Ali Ndume (APC Borno), had moved a motion for amendment to clause 11 of the bill, which initially prescribed life imprisonment to drugs and substances trafficking in Nigeria. Ndume had called for stiffer sanctions and moved a motion for a prescribing death sentence. The motion was seconded by Sen. Onyekachi Nwaebonyi (APC-Ebonyi), who said that drugs and substance trafficking was doing great harm to the nation and hence, stiffer penalty should be given to offenders. When the voice vote for adoption of the motion on death penalty was put to vote, the "Yes" had their way as the Deputy President of Senate, Barau Jubrin (APC-Kano), who was presiding ruled in favour of the "Yes." However, the decision did not go well for Sen. Adams Oshiomhole (APC – Edo), who objected to the ruling, saying that he was responsible to his constituents for every law passed in the senate. He said issues of life and death should not be passed based on "Yes or No" response, advocating for a voting by every senator. Responding, Barau said the best approach for the Edo lawmaker was to have called for a division immediately the clause on death sentence was adopted. Barau said the decision to rule in favour of the "yes" was not the making of the presiding officer but on the voice vote of members.

Army Chief reiterates commitment to soldiers' welfare

The Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant General Taoreed Lagbaja, has reiterated his commitment to ensuring the highest commitment of his administration to enhance the welfare of Nigerian Army personnel and their families. He emphasized that it would boost troops' morale and ultimately enhances operational effectiveness. The Director, Army Public Relations, Major General Onyema Nwachukwu, revealed the development in a statement. He noted that Lagbaja made the declaration in his remark at the opening ceremony of the Combat Arms Training Week on May 7, 2024, at the Ihejirika Auditorium, Jaji Military Cantonment in Kaduna State. The COAS stated further, that he considered this year's CAT Week theme, "Sound Administration: A Panacea for Improved Combat Arms' Efficiency in a Joint Environment," to be very apt and relevant. He added that it resonates with one of the essential beams of his command's philosophy, which is 'sound administration', adding, that it has been established to be among several key indices that enhance the operational efficiency of all formidable military forces over history. Noting that as someone who has lived extensively in the barracks, General Lagbaja noted that he was not oblivious to the challenges of poor barracks accommodation, infrastructure decay in army medical centres, schools and other administrative issues that have negatively impacted unit administration. He revealed that to bring succour to personnel and their families, he has initiated intervention programmes, specifically in the areas of accommodation, credit financing, and other family support schemes to enhance troops' morale and build family resilience. Lagbaja said, "We have so far structured our intervention plan to make it more encompassing and adaptive to the prevalent economic reality of the nation,"

The Army Chief clarified that this year's CAT Week, being his maiden one as COAS presents an opportunity to restate his desire to improve the combat arms' capabilities towards achieving the Nigerian Army's constitutional obligations. He challenged the combat arms to leverage the skills and competencies inherent in the Support Corps to enhance their doctrine and capabilities needed to defeat contemporary threats. Lagbaja expressed gratitude to the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Nigeria, Bola Tinubu for his unflinching support to the Nigerian Army. He assured of the unalloyed loyalty of officers and soldiers of the NA. Also addressing participants at the CAT week, the Kaduna State Governor, Senator Uba Sani, who was represented by the State's Commissioner for Security and Homeland Affairs, Mr Samuel Aruwan, saluted the courage and resilience of troops in confronting the menace of terrorism and insurgency in the country. He stressed that the expanded

footprints of the ongoing operations have brought further succour to troubled areas and Kaduna State in particular. He averred that the CAT week's review of sound administration resonates with global best practices and is indicative of the mutual resolve to bring about a safe and secure Nigeria under the current leadership. He also disclosed that effort is in the offing to propose a security fund bill to promote the fight against security challenges. The Commander Infantry Corps, Major General Olufemi Oluyede, had earlier noted that in meeting the need for a whole-of-society approach to tackling contemporary security challenges, the CAT Week provides a platform for harnessing the collective effort of all stakeholders in addressing the current security challenges in the country. The opening ceremony of the CAT Week drew participations from all works of life including the economic, defence and security sectors, as well as the traditional institutions.

NASS responsible for failure of Nigeria's economy, rising debt – Ita Enang

Former Special Adviser to the President on National Assembly Matters, Senator Ita Enang has blamed the National Assembly for the failure of the Nigerian economy, the rising debt profile of the country and the collapse of the national currency, the naira. Enang stated this at the public presentation of Oversight Magazine dedicated to reporting events in the parliament and published by a former member of the House of Representatives, Aniekana Umannah. He said the failure of the National Assembly to ask relevant questions was responsible for the problems in the economy. Enang who served as Chairman of both the House and Senate Committee on Rules and Business said both chambers of the National Assembly have never published any report of their oversight function as required of them or asked critical questions about the nation's debt. According to him, the lawmakers have often embarked on oversight to see what the Ministries, Department and Agencies are doing they have never brought their report to the floor of the parliament for deliberation as required of them. The ex-Special Adviser said the failure of the executive arm of government both at the state and national level to perform optimally is as a result of the failure of the oversight function of the National Assembly as well as state Houses of Assembly across the country. "It is the fault of the National Assembly failing to do their oversight function. If the National Assembly were able, they would ask questions. When you pass a budget, you embark on oversight to see how much of that budget has been released and to what extent the projects in that budget have been executed. "After that, you bring a report to the floor stating how much has been released and to what extent that

project has been executed. You will then know how much is needed to complete those projects that will be included in next year's budget and what to project in the Medium Term Expenditure Framework, MTEF, in the next three years to exit that project. "So, the failure of the Nigerian economy, the collapse of the naira and the unimaginable debt of Nigeria is the failure of the National Assembly," he said.

Tinubu approves wage increase for Civil Servants

- The President Bola Tinubu administration has approved 25% and 35% salary increase for civil servants across various consolidated salary structures. According to a statement signed by the Head of Press, National Salaries, Incomes, and Wages Commission, Emmanuel Njoku, the increases takes effect on January 1, 2024. The statement added that the augmentation applies to the six remaining consolidated salary structures, namely the Consolidated Public Service Salary Structure, Consolidated Research and Allied Institutions Salary Structure, Consolidated Police Salary Structure, Consolidated Para-military Salary Structure, Consolidated Intelligence Community Salary Structure, and Consolidated Armed Forces Salary Structure. Also approved for augmentation is the pension of retirees enrolled in the Defined Benefits Scheme within the aforementioned consolidated salary structures from 20% to 28% effective from the same date. Recall that the FG had increased the salary for sectors such as tertiary education and health, encompassing structures like the Consolidated University Academic Salary Structure, Consolidated Tertiary Institutions Salary Structure, Consolidated Polytechnics and Colleges of Education Academic Staff Salary Structure, Consolidated Tertiary Educational Institutions Salary Structure, Consolidated Medical Salary Structure and Consolidated Health Sector Salary Structure.

NIGERIA'S DECLINING ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES WORRISOME SAYS CBN

The Central Bank of Nigeria, CBN, has expressed worries over the declining economic activities in Nigeria. The CBN deputy governor of Corporate Services, Bala Moh'd Bello, disclosed this in his personal statement at the end of the last Monetary Policy Committee meeting released on the Banks' website. He noted that the country's Composite Purchasing Managers' Index, PMI, declined sharply to

39.2 index points in February 2024 from 48.5 index points in the previous month. He stressed that economic activity has contracted for eight months due to exchange rate pressures, inflation and security challenges.

"It is concerning to note that the Composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) declined sharply to 39.2 index points in February 2024 from 48.5 index points in the previous month. "Economic activity has been contracting for eight consecutive months, mainly due to exchange rate pressures, rising input prices, security challenges, and other idiosyncratic headwinds. This calls for well-nuanced policy decisions targeted at price stability to forestall stifling economic activities and derailing output performance.

"Of more concern is the rising inflationary trend despite sustained hikes in the monetary policy rate with forecasts of further price increases in the near term.

"Both food and core inflation rose in February 2024, underpinning acceleration in headline inflation to 31.70 per cent in February 2024 from 29.90 per cent in the previous month. "This continued rise in inflation was mainly due to high production costs, lingering security challenges and exchange rate pressures," he said.

He added that the country's inflation soared to 33.22 per cent in March, which is unacceptably high and requires coordinated efforts to curb. "Inflation is currently unacceptably high and requires decisive and coordinated efforts to curb it, given its adverse impact on citizens' purchasing power, investment decisions and broad output performance. "The Federal Government's initiatives addressing food insecurity, such as releasing grains from the strategic reserves, distributing seeds and fertilizers, and supporting dry season farming, are important and commendable," he added. Recall that the MPC raised the country's interest rate to 24.75 per cent in March.

Obi: Nigeria's judiciary weak, compromised by highest bidders

The Labour Party (LP) presidential candidate in the 2023 election, Peter Obi, says he was the highest beneficiary of judiciary in the country when there were incorruptible judges. Obi said this at Justice Anthony Aniagolu's Memorial Lecture organised by the family and hosted by the Godfrey Okoye University (GOUNI) in Enugu on recently. Delivering a lecture on the topic 'The Judiciary and the Future of Nigeria', Obi said he won the gubernatorial election in Anambra State and when another candidate was declared winner, he approached the court for justice. The two-term former governor said: "I spent three years in court and it was given to me and after few months I was impeached but judiciary restored me to power. "After one year in office, they conducted another election and elected another person. "But I went to Supreme Court where judges with respect for the rule of law reinstated me to complete my tenure. "All these things happened because there were incorruptible and independent judges." Obi, who noted that such jurists were hard to find in present-day Nigeria, added: "Our judiciary is weak and compromised by the executive and highest

bidder. "The future of our society is compromised because the independence of the judiciary has been destroyed. "We need a strong judiciary to fight criminality. Rule of law is the foundation on which any society survives and develops and the only thing that makes it sacrosanct is the independence of the judiciary. "It is a strong judiciary that makes businesses, investments and democracies thrive." Obi stressed that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is not the problem of Nigeria but the judiciary whom those denied their rights approached but ended up being disappointed. The former governor said Nigerian institutions are weak because there is no strong judiciary where litigants could report wrongdoings and get desired justice. While proffering solutions, Obi advocated for independence of judiciary and non-interference by the executive, saying: "As a governor, I never appointed any judge but left the power to the Chief Judge. "I bought cars for them but never appointed any judge throughout my tenure." Obi, however, extolled Aniagolu for his exemplary life, stressing that he served his country and practiced law in an exemplary manner. Also speaking at the event, Enugu State Governor Peter Mbah, who was represented by the State Commissioner for Health, Prof. Emmanuel Obi, described the lecture as "apt". Mbah said the state has made several laws, noting that the government used the instrument of law to create an enabling environment for businesses to thrive.

Ruifu Lithium partners with FG, to establish 6000-per-day lithium ore processing plant in Nasarawa State.

The Federal Government through the Ministry of Solid Minerals is set to partner with Ruifu Lithium Company to establish a 6000-per-day lithium ore processing plant in Nasarawa State. China-based Ruifu Lithium produces and sells battery grade lithium carbonate, an important raw material for the manufacture of lithium-ion batteries, which are widely used in various applications, including for rechargeable batteries for electric vehicles.

Ruifu Lithium's collaboration with the Federal Government of Nigeria was made known in an X (formerly Twitter) post by Dele Alake, the current Nigerian minister of Solid Minerals. "Lithium presents a remarkable opportunity. 74% of global demand stems from the production of rechargeable batteries and I'm glad to have met with Alhaji Aminu Bello, Chairman of Ruifu Lithium Company, to discuss the future of our solid minerals sector. "The Ruifu Lithium Company is eager to partner with the Federal Government through the Ministry of Solid Minerals to establish a 6000-per-day lithium ore processing plant in Nasarawa State, a significant stride toward sustainable energy solutions. "With Ruifu Lithium Company's recognition among Asia's top three in lithium processing, this collaboration promises economic growth and innovation in our solid minerals sector. The future of clean energy is looking brighter than ever."