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I Am Not Targeting Akume's Loyalists in Benue Assembly -Alia



SGF Akume

Gov. Alia

Benue State Governor, Hyacinth Alia has described as untrue report that his administration deliberately working against lawmakers purportedly loyal to the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Senator George Akume.

The Governor made the declaration through his Technical Adviser on Media Publicity and Strategic Communication, Solomon Iorpev while reacting to report by a group known as 'Alliance for Good Governance' which accused him of denying some lawmakers their constituency allowance and official vehicles.

According to the media aide to the Governor, the state assembly members have

reached an agreement with the Governor over the lapses in the procurement of vehicles and other issues affecting the members.

Contrary to the group, Iorpev said that governor carries all members of the state assembly along. He said, "If anything is happening, it's for a reason and am sure the lawmakers also understand, that is the reason none of them has raised any eyebrows.

"So, if anyone is speaking from outside why are they crying more than the bereaved. The governor and the lawmakers have reached an agreement.

The group's National Coordinator and Secretary, Comrade Jide Sanwo and Kenneth Nwakocha respectively have claimed in a statement issued and made available to newsmen in Makurdi that some lawmakers loyal to SGF have been denied constituency allowance and official vehicles.

However, it threatened to mobilize citizens of the

cont. on page 02

Don't Use State Security Guards For Political Gains –Tor Tiv Warns Benue Politicians

The Tor Tiv, Prof. James Ayatse, President of the Benue State Traditional Council, has cautioned politicians against exploiting the newly launched Benue State Civil Protection Guards

(BSCPG) for political purposes. The BSCPG recently recruited 5,000 personnel and was inaugurated at the Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (IBB) Square in Makurdi. The event also featured the commissioning of

100 operational Hilux vehicles and 600 motorcycles to support state security agencies and promote peaceful coexistence in the state. Speaking at the ceremony, the Tor Tiv emphasized that the security outfit

was established to safeguard the state and restore normalcy, not to serve partisan interests.

He urged politicians to refrain from using the personnel for any political agenda that could undermine

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HRM Prof. Ayatse, Tor Tiv V

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Ortom Reacts To Criticisms of Benue State Civil Protection Guards

The former Governor of Benue State, Samuel Ortom, has reacted to criticisms of the launch of the Benue State Civil Protection Guards, BSCPG, also known as "Anyam Nyor," by Governor Hyacinth Alia.

A statement issued by the former Governor's aide, Terver Akase, noted that many reactions suggested that the present administration's renaming of the Community Volunteer Guards was a mere nomenclature to silence the legacy of the Ortom's administration.

According to the former Governor, it is natural to have differing opinions on governance and the direction of the state, urging those who hold strong views on the matter to remember that government is not a static entity; it is rather a dynamic and evolving system. He pointed out that the State Executive Council, in collaboration with the House of Assembly,



has the constitutional power to make laws and amend existing ones to address development issues at any given period.

"I have no regrets about my commitment and the sacrifices I made to defend Benue people against oppression and external interests that sought to undermine our rights and heritage as a people. My actions were always motivated by a desire to uplift our people, secure our God-given land and ensure a bright future for generations to come.

"The establishment of the Community Volunteer Guards,

Livestock Guards and the enactment of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law were results of our pact with the people to always be on their side, as God Almighty was directing me.

"It is however

I Am Not Targeting Akume's...

cont. from front page

constituency of the affected lawmakers to protest what they termed as injustice against the lawmakers. The group decried the governor's decision to deny some lawmakers of their constituency allowance amounting to N30 million each as well as official vehicles.

According to the group, "Constituency allowance is for constituent's benefits and not for legislators personal emoluments but to address socio-economic challenges, development interest and other sundry issues of the constituents."

The group noted that lawmakers are not only elected to make laws for the good of their constituents, the group said that the lawmakers also need to provide dividend of democracy to their constituents.

important to acknowledge that the circumstances and economic realities during my administration differ from those of Governor Alia's time," he stated.

Ortom added: "I encourage all Benue people to refrain from hostility and divisive commentaries in the media. Instead, let us rally round our Governor,

Rev. Fr. Hyacinth Alia, offering support and constructive criticism.

APC Chairman, Northern Govs. Laud Benue Security Outfit, Hails Tinubu For Creating Ministry The All Progressive Congress (APC)

National Chairman, Dr. Abdulahi Ganduje has hailed the establishment of Benue State Civil Protection Guards (BSCPG) as 'a great initiative.'

He spoke at the inauguration of the security outfit by Governor Hyacinth Alia in Makurdi at the weekend. Ganduje, who stressed that "all security is local", lauded President Bola Tinubu for creating the Ministry of Livestock Development.

He said that the new ministry would curtail the intractable farmers/herders conflict. He lamented that herders from other neighbouring countries were

creating problems along the route, assuring that the scenario would soon be tamed through a symbiotic relationship between the two groups.

Governor of Gombe State and Chairman of the Northern Governors Forum, Inuwa Yahaya, described the initiative as a welcome development, calling on the Benue people to cooperate with his colleague to succeed.

Alia's predecessor, Samuel Ortom, had established the Livestock Guards and the Benue State Volunteer Guards, which the Governor has rebranded as Benue State Civil Protection Guards.

Don't Use State Security Guards...

cont. from front page

their role in tackling insecurity and fostering harmonious relationships among the diverse ethnic groups in the state.

The traditional leader commended Governor Hyacinth Alia for his proactive approach to addressing security challenges in the state, noting that Benue is now ahead of many others in ensuring public safety.

Governor Alia

reaffirmed his commitment to improving security, highlighting his promise to recruit 10,000 personnel for the BSCPG, with plans to complete the recruitment process soon.

He stated that the newly established security apparatus would help combat criminal activities and create a peaceful environment conducive to economic growth.

"They need to provide things such as addressing hydra headed security challenges, construction of feeder roads, provision of portable water and drilling of borehole, building culverts and schools, repair and fixing of dilapidated infrastructures, assisting and support the poor and the vulnerable, the orphans and the widows among others. The group further said, "In addition six members of the group tagged Akume boys are yet to be given their official cars over one year after their inauguration and no allowances paid to foot their transportation bills for them to carry out their oversight functions.

"We have the capacity to mobilize citizens of the affected

constituencies on march the state capital to demand for the release of the allowances of affected lawmakers.

.Also shedding light on issues in the state assembly, the Majority Leader, Saater Tiseer adduced the delay in procurement of enough vehicles to lawmakers to the autonomy of the state assembly.

According to him, the assembly got its autonomy after the 2024 budget had been passed,, saying that the allocation for the assembly could not meet some of its obligations after payment of salary. He added that the governor had promised to include all issues in the 2025 budget.

Tiseer said, "No member has received N30 million as consistency project,

though, what each member received varies, some N15 million, some N10 million, we are engaging the governor to do all these things, the shortfall is as a result of autonomy that the house got after 2024 budget was passed.

"On vehicles, we are 32 members and the vehicles brought was not up to that, seven members are yet to get their official vehicles also the speaker still needs a vehicle.

He added, "There is no discrimination in the sharing of vehicles even the member who contested the speakership with the speaker (loyalist of Akume) and most of those who voted her have received their official vehicles.



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Christmas, New Year Celebration in Benue

“We hold this day holy, not like the pagans because of the birth of the sun, but because of Him who made it.” Augustine of Hippo, a theologian and philosopher once cleared the misconceptions surrounding Christmas before Christians.

Interestingly, the historical significance of December 25th intersects with two pagan festivals that honoured the sun. Some historical accounts suggested that the choice of December 25th for Christmas was deliberate, aiming to counteract the influence of these pagan celebrations hence the prophecies of Isaiah before the birth of Jesus Christ; “the people walking in darkness have seen a great light, on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned (Isaiah 9:2:9:6).

The New Year festivity which preceded the Christmas should equally be celebrated with the fear of God.

Nevertheless, even today, a lingering disquiet about Christmas has persisted even amongst the Christians, paving the way to dangerous acts like fornication, drunkenness, recklessness etc. that has not only taint the significance of the day but produced grievous consequences that follows those who abuse it for quite a long time when the cheeks are down.

Benue State as an agrarian state, it is our advice that as cropping season comes but once in a year, so the harvesting season and Benue farmers should be worry of the aftermath of the festive period and channel their resources through meaningful ventures to avoid the slash hammer of the yuletide most especially now that the country is facing very harsh economic realities and children's school fees are at the corner.

As the festive season always comes with its attendant vices, it is our opinion that government should tighten up security in all the nooks and crannies of the state to ensure a peaceful celebrations and avoid the reoccurrence of the ugly incidence where enemies of the state invaded some parts of the state on the new year eve.

Religious leaders should acquaint members of their congregations on the right attitudes to put forth during the yuletide as that alone can slow down the temple of vices during the festive period and by implication the society. After all, Christ is the light and Christians must live by example.

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To stimulate sustainable development and progress through dissemination of balanced and truthful information.

MISSION

We are positioned to become a leading national daily newspaper that sets agenda for national development by upholding best journalistic ethics so as to be objective in our reportage and accommodation of diverse views; also being fair to all so as to provide balanced and truthful information that will stimulate sustainable development.

World Bank to Construct 534 Km Roads In Benue

The Rural Access and Mobility Project, a World Bank-funded project, is to construct 534 kilometres of rural roads across Benue to facilitate the transportation of agricultural produce.

The State Project Coordinator, Mr. Stephen Numbeve, disclosed in an interview with **News men** Wednesday, in Makurdi.

Numbeve said that the project would also construct warehouses across the state for the storage of agricultural produce.

"We prioritised the development of engineering road designs for the 534 kilometres of roads we intend to construct. Surveys, geophysical studies, and final designs have been completed.

0:00/0:00

THE LOUNGE:
What Does Closure After Breakup Mean?

0:00/0:00

"With all these in place, we are ready to move forward once the funds are available. These roads will connect farms to markets, enabling farmers to transport their produce with ease.

"Beyond roads, we plan to build warehouses where

farmers can store fresh or dry produce securely. This infrastructure will significantly boost agricultural productivity and market access.

"The roads span across all local governments in the state. However, there is no specific allocation or sequence for the 534 kilometres.

"These are not trunk A or trunk B roads, which are federal and state roads, respectively. Instead, they are trunk C or D roads designed to create access for farmers to reach markets," he added.

The SPC said that the slight delay in the commencement of the roads was caused by nonpayment of the counterpart fund by the previous administration.

He said other states had paid their dues and moved ahead, but since the new administration came on board, we have done the needful.

"We are now at the

stage of accessing funds from the World Bank and the European

Investment Bank.

"These funds will be directed toward building roads and

markets. So far, we haven't accessed any funds, but progress has been made.

"While access to funds is a challenge, it's important to understand that international funding involves statutory requirements.

"These funds are not government resources, so certain prerequisites must be met. For example, counterpart funding is mandatory. If it isn't paid, the funds

cannot be accessed," he said.

He stated that when he assumed office, there was also the issue of inadequate office accommodation.

According to him, the previous administrative setup did not meet the standards of the International Technological Association.

He said that they required an exclusive office space to avoid undue political influence.

Benue Media Adviser Tasks Broadcasters on Compliance with Journalism Ethics

Technical Adviser on Media, Publicly and Strategic Communication to the Benue State Governor, Solomon Iorpev has tasked broadcasters to uphold the tenets of the broadcast code in order to discharge their duties responsibly.

Mr. Iorpev spoke on Friday during a courtesy call on him by the Benue State delegation of the Society of Nigerian Broadcasters led by the former Director-General of Radio Benue Corporation, Dr. Charles Iornumbe.

He assured that the tenets of the broadcast code would enable them perform creditably.

Iorpev, who expressed Governor Alia's commitment to providing good governance to people of the state, urged the

broadcasters to always demonstrate professionalism

sustainable development.

The Benue State

a chieftaincy title on him as the (Akinde U Konshisha) and also appreciate Governor Alia for appointing a seasoned broadcaster like Chief Iorpev with a pledged to support his administration.

A member of the delegation and the Zonal Director, Nigerian Television Authority, NTA Makurdi Zonal Network Centre, Mr. Pan Dung Nyam acknowledged the significant contributions of Governor Hyacinth Alia's administration to the broadcast industry and encouraged Chief Iorpev to remain focused and deliver on his assignment. Highpoint of the courtesy visit was the presentation of a portrait to the Technical Adviser on his appointment by the Governor.



Iorpev

while carrying out their duties, and commended the broadcasters for the visit, just as he underscored Governor Alia-led government's passion for bringing development closer to the people through strategic initiatives that could drive economic growth, and promote

Coordinator, Society of Nigerian Broadcasters and leader of the delegation, Dr. Charles Iornumbe earlier in his remarks said that the visit was to congratulate and identify with Chief Iorpev on his appointment as the Technical Adviser to the Governor, and the recent conferment of

Benue Community Accuses Ebonyi Warlords of Killing 4 of Its Members

Residents of the Ezza-Ezekuna community in Ado LGA of Benue State have accused members of their community. In a letter addressed to Governor Hyacinth Alia, Lady Perpetual Nkechi Okafor, a former Secretary of Ado LGA and current President General of the Ezza-Ezekuna Benue Development Association (EEBDA), expressed the community's deep concern over the

ongoing violence. The letter alleged that on December 12, 2024, four prominent individuals were killed in an unprovoked attack at Azaoke, near Apa Ogbozu in Apa ward, Ado LGA, insisting that the attackers were reportedly warlords from the Akparata community in Ohaukwu LGA, Ebonyi State.

The letter detailed the historical roots of the violence, tracing it to the Ezza/Effium crisis in Ebonyi State, which spilt into Benue due to the presence of Ezza and Effium groups in Ado LGA.

Okafor said the crisis has since destabilised their community, forcing many residents to flee and others leaving in a state of fear.

"We have become an open killing field stalked by Effium warlords," the letter stated, adding that residents were unable to go to markets, farms, or places of worship. Children have also stopped attending school due to the persistent threats of attacks.

The community therefore called on Governor Alia to collaborate with his Ebonyi State counterpart to address the security situation and bring the perpetrators to justice. "This is beyond politics. Ezza-Ezekuna community needs your intervention to restore peace and prevent the situation from deteriorating into total chaos," the letter added.

Gov. Alia Launches New State Security Outfit ...Pledges Safety for All



Benue State Governor, Rev. Fr. Hyacinth Alia, has assured the people of the state that his administration will ensure the safety of every Benue resident and create an environment of equal opportunities for everyone to thrive.

Governor Alia gave the assurance at the IBB Square Makurdi on Saturday during the official launch of the 5000 gallant officers of the Benue State Civil Protection Guards (BSCPG) code named "Anyam Nyor" and the donation of 100 Hilux vehicles and 600 Special combatant motorcycles to security agencies in Benue state.

The Governor said, "I am aware of my duty to protect the lives and property of our people. My total commitment to ensuring the safety of every Benue resident is firm, as security remains my top priority. We cannot build a prosperous state upon insecurity. I am resolute in my determination to

safeguard our people and to create an environment where they can flourish".

He explained that "the move to establish the BSCPG and the donation of security vehicles was a demonstration of his deep commitment to the security and well-being of the people of the state, and also a fulfilment of the earlier promise he made some time ago that the State government will recruit ten thousand youths to complement the efforts of conventional security apparatuses in safeguarding the state and its people".

He described the BSCPG as a security outfit established by law, with the goal to decisively combat criminality and create an environment where the people of the state can live, farm, work, and prosper without fear.

"The formal launch of

the 5000 gallant officers of the Benue State Civil Protection Guards, the donation of vehicles and special combatant motorcycles, as well as the unveiling of the Operation "Anyam Nyor" Joint Security Task Force, represents a decisive step forward in ensuring the safety and security of our people. It is my firm



belief that with these initiatives, we are not only reinforcing our commitment to safeguarding lives and property but also sending a clear message that the fight against insecurity in Benue State is won already", the governor assured.

Governor Alia

appreciated President Bola Ahmed Tinubu for his unwavering support to the state, his colleagues and fellow governors and the National Security Adviser, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, for their cooperation and encouragement in their shared commitment to national security, as well as the state security team led by Air Commodore Jacob Gbamwuan (Rtd), Special Adviser on Security and Internal Affairs, Mr. Joseph Har for their leadership and dedication which he said have made the initiative a reality

The Governor equally appreciated the Service Chiefs, especially the Inspector General of Police for recently donating two Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs) to the Benue State Police Command; the Benue State Traditional

Council, led by the Tor Tiv, His Royal Majesty, Orchivirigh Prof. James Ortese Iorzu Ayatse and the Ochi Idoma, His Royal Majesty Chief John Elaigwu Odogbo, as well as the Catholic Bishop of Katsina-Ala Diocese, Most Rev. Isaac Dugu, for his dedication to peace-building in Benue.

He thanked the 5000 youths for responding to the call of service to serve as Gallant officers of the Benue State Civil Protection Guards, charging them to embody the highest standards of professionalism and ethics in the discharge of their duties, as they have been entrusted with the responsibility of upholding the safety and security of Benue communities.

While calling on the people to take full advantage of the Amnesty Programme, which is being vigorously pursued by the State Amnesty Committee, chaired by the Tor Tiv and the Catholic Bishop of Katsina-Ala Diocese, the governor reminded the people of the State that the time for elections are over, and as such, it is now time to deliver good governance.

He called on all well-meaning Benue sons and daughters to come together and support his administration to move the state forward.

Over 55,000 Children Vaccinated In Benue IDPs Camps –ES, SPHCB

Over 55,000 children of zero to five years in Internally Displaced Persons, IDPs, camps in Benue state have been immunised against childhood killer diseases. Pregnant women in the camps also received Tetanus Diphtheria as well as Tuberculosis vaccines.

The Executive Secretary of Benue State Primary Health Care Board, BSPHCB, Mrs. Grace Wende who made this known Thursday when she led an Integrated Supportive Supervision, ISS, mission to Abagena IDPs camp in the outskirt of Makurdi and Mbawa IDPs camp in Daudu, Guma Local Government Area, LGA, of the state said the success was recorded in the last one year.

She explained that the intervention was provided through the United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, Humanitarian Health Response for IDPs Outreach implemented by the Benue State Primary Health Care Board, BSPHCB, in synergy with, World Health Organization, WHO, Red Cross and other partners. She said aside pregnant women, girls of nine to 14 years were also vaccinated against Human Papillomavirus, HPV, for protection against cervical cancer and other HPV-related diseases.

The Executive Secretary stated that the intervention in the last one year was far-reaching “with necessary medical teams on ground to provide services as



well as essential drugs provided patients at no cost.

“And aside the regular medical personnel there were five consultants in those camps and over 34,677 consultations were held with our medical teams

for treatments. Where any ailments requires referral that is done. In December we have had five referrals to Benue State University Teaching Hospital, BSUTH, for emergency cases for further treatments.”

According to her, “Over 55,000 children under five, have been reached and vaccinated against vaccine preventable diseases.

“There were also children who were never exposed to immunization, that is

the zero dose children. They were 303 of them. We reached them within this period of the intervention which started in December last year.

“We are currently in the fourth phase of the programme. The first phase lasted between last December and February this year, the second phase was between March and May, while the third phase was between June and August and this last phase is between September and December 2024.

“The essence of the mission or visit to the camps is to enable us see how the health workers have been rendering services in

the camps. We are able to know their challenges and also ensure they are restocked whenever they need supply of essential drugs and consumables.”

“All the services are being rendered free of charge and it helps the IDPs to stop out of pocket expenditures and ensure that they are in good health.”

Mrs. Wende thanked Governor Hyacinth Alia for giving top priority to the wellbeing of the IDPs in the state noting that the board was recording successes because of the attention the Governor was giving to the health needs of the people.

Benue Govt. Partners CSO to Curb Rights Abuse

The Benue State Government has pledged to partner with Civil Society Organizations, CSOs, to minimize Gender-Based Violence, GBV, in the state.

This was disclosed by Governor Hyacinth Alia while receiving the draft communiqué from CSO stakeholders in Makurdi.

Governor Alia, who was represented by his Chief of Staff, Mr Paul Biam, expressed his administration's commitment to creating an enabling environment to support efforts aimed at minimizing human rights abuses.

He promised to liaise with partners and other critical stakeholders to ensure the implementation of policies targeted at reducing GBV cases in the state.

Governor Alia urged the people to be

morally upright so that younger generations could emulate their positive behavior.

He also tasked Benue women to educate their female children on the importance of dressing decently to avoid unnecessary harassment from the opposite sex.

The CSO stakeholders in Benue State called on the

state Governor, Rev. Fr. Hyacinth Alia, to facilitate the signing of the amended Violence Against Persons Prohibition, VAPP, Bill into law to combat Gender-Based Violence, GBV.

The stakeholders, which included the Sexual Assault Referral Center, SARC, BENGONET, and the Community

Link Empowerment Initiative, made the appeal at the end of the commemoration of 16 Days of Activism Against GBV.

The groups also held a road walk from Savannah Roundabout to the Government House, Makurdi, to present the communiqué to the governor, outlining their

requests.

In the communiqué, SARC, led by Linda Ene Dirisu, also appealed to Governor Alia to equip its center adequately to handle GBV cases effectively.

The document further highlighted all activities and engagements carried out during the 16 Days of Activism.

FRSC Decorates Eight Officers, 29 Special Marshals in Benue

The Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) on Friday decorated 8 officers and 29 special marshals in the Benue State Sector Command.

The State Sector Commander, Mr. Steve Ayodele, who performed the ceremony in Makurdi, said the officers and marshals were promoted due to

their hard work and dedication to service. Ayodele said two officers were decorated with the rank of Deputy Corps Commander (DCC), three Superintendent Route Commanders (SRC), and three Deputy Route Commanders.

He said promotion in FRSC was guided by criteria of merit, intellectual ability,

character, and compliance to the corps corporate strategic goals.

Represented by Head of Operation, DCC, Clement Chwang, Ayodele commanded the management to find those within the command worthy of promotion.

He said their promotion comes with higher responsibilities and

charged them to sit up for the responsibilities ahead.

Speaking on behalf of the decorated officers, ACC Uchechuku Ebia commended the management for finding them worthy of promotion.

Ebia said they would redouble their efforts and continue to do their best for the service.

Idoma Paramount Ruler Cautions Against Petition Writing

The paramount ruler of the Idoma Kingdom, John Elaigwu, has advised Idoma sons and daughters to shun petition writing and 'pull-down' syndrome.

The Och'Idoma gave the advice when the Federal University of Health Sciences, Otukpo officials, led by the acting vice-chancellor, Stephen Abah, visited him on Friday in Otukpo.

Mr. Elaigwu expressed concern about the recent happenings in the university, which he described as unfortunate, emphasising the need to respect constituted authorities in the land. He said that leadership comes from God and gives it to whoever he chooses at his appointed time, saying that all the petitions and counter-petitions against FUHSO leadership were unnecessary. The traditional ruler urged all Idoma people to exhibit true love, peace and unity towards one another to make Idoma land a development hub for all.

The Och'Idoma, while congratulating the new leadership of the university, said that as the first federal government-owned university of health sciences in Nigeria, situated in Idoma land, it must be guarded jealously by all to serve its original purpose.

He challenged the management under the new leadership to build on the good foundation already

laid by the foremost leaders of the university.

Mr. Elaigwu encouraged the school's management team members to do their best to make the university's future great.

Earlier, the acting vice chancellor said the visit was to pay

homage and seek his blessings, particularly during the transition of the university.

Mr. Abah said that he was nominated as the acting vice chancellor following the retirement of the pioneer vice-chancellor, Innocent Ujah.

He was nominated on

November 28 by the university's senate.

Mr. Abah said his nomination was subsequently approved, and he was issued an appointment letter on November 29 by the second governing council of FUHSO.

He thanked the traditional ruler for



the peace in his domain and the good working relationship between the palace and the university and promised to build on

the legacy.

Mr. Abah said there is no alternative to peace and progress at the university.

Over 20 Bodies Recovered, 50 Rescued In Benue Boat Mishap

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has reported that 50 persons have been rescued and are safe following a boat mishap in Benue State.

The accident occurred around 7:00 pm on Saturday along River Benue in Agatu local government area and has claimed three lives so far.

According to NEMA's media office, 49 persons were rescued, one was able to swim to safety, and 23 persons remain unaccounted for.

The boat was carrying 76 passengers when the driver, unaware of a submerged tree in the river, accidentally navigated into it, causing the boat to tip off and capsize.

NEMA stated that the victims were traders from Odenyi Magaji and other communities in Nasarawa State.

"The passengers were said to be returning home from the Ocholonya Market, a

major economic hub that draws traders from several communities in Agatu and neighbouring states, including Nasarawa State.

"Besides the 49 rescued passengers, one of the victims managed to swim to safety while 23 persons are still missing. Three bodies have been recovered so far. Most of the boat passengers were from Odenyi Magaji and other communities of Nasarawa state.

"The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) is working with the Benue State Emergency Management Agency and other stakeholders, including the local authorities and divers, to expedite the ongoing search and rescue operations to trace the remaining missing passengers."

NEMA said it has established contacts with the Nigerian Navy to provide more support for the search and rescue.

Chairman, Agatu LGA, Mr. Melvin James, confirmed that the victims were from Nasarawa State.

"It's true that there was a boat mishap yesterday, and the people came to Ocholonya market in Agatu," he added.

"What I learnt is that when they were returning to their base in Apochi and Odenyi communities in Doma in Nasarawa State, the boat they were travelling in capsized.

"I am trying to get my colleague from Nasarawa State to see how we can go there to visit the families and console them," he said. James said he had contacted the commander of the Nigerian Navy in the LGA to help in the rescue.

The Benue State Command of the Nigerian Police Force has confirmed the incident but said 11 persons rescued and 20 bodies recovered from a boat accident in Agatu

Local Government Area. The state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Superintendent

of Police Sewuese Anene, Anene said the rescue was still ongoing.

Police Caution Against Bush Burning In Enugu

The Commissioner of Police in Enugu State, Mr. Kanayo Uzuegbu, has restated the ban on sale and unauthorised use of fireworks (bangers) during the Christmas and new year celebrations.

This is contained in a statement issued by the command's Public Relations Officer, DSP Daniel Ndukwe on Tuesday in Enugu.

Ndukwe quoted Uzuegbu as saying that the ban was aimed at preventing criminals from taking advantage of the use of fireworks by revellers to commit crimes.

The CP also said that the ban on the unauthorised use of fireworks would eliminate public panic, mitigate possible fire outbreaks that could endanger human lives and property loss.

"Consequently, I am warning businesses and individuals engaged in the sale and use of fireworks to desist immediately," Uzuegbu said.

The CP further advised parents and guardians to discourage their children and wards from purchasing or using fireworks, emphasizing that violators would face the

full weight of the law.

The police chief also cautioned against indiscriminate bush burning during this harmattan season.

He underscored the legal consequences and the grave risks of fire outbreaks, which could endanger lives, destroy property as well as disrupt social and economic well-being of the community.

"I urge residents of Enugu State to remain law-abiding and vigilant, avoiding actions that could jeopardize their safety and security during the Yuletide and beyond.

"I encourage the public to report suspected criminals and their activities to the nearest police station.

"The residents should call 08032003702, 08086671202, or 08098880172.

"Moreover, reports of police misconduct can be made by calling 09160002486, 07059160602, or 08176255557, or by sending text or WhatsApp messages to 09160002486," Uzuegbu said.



Boat mishap

Benue Assembly Suspends Teachers Recruitment in Benue Due To Irregularities

The Benue State House of Assembly and the State Universal Basic Education Board, SUBEB, are at loggerheads over alleged demand for recruitment slots. The State House of Assembly had suspended the recruitment of primary school teachers over allegations of irregularities in the recruitment exercise. The Assembly had summoned the SUBEB chairman, Dr. Grace Adagba.



Dajoh, Speaker BSHOA

However, sources from SUBEB have alleged that the lawmakers' move might be as a result of

the Refusal of SUBEB Chairman to honour a request for recruitment slots.

Sources, who spoke on the condition of anonymity with our reporter, claimed the lawmakers requested 1,000 slots for their people, but SUBEB refused.

According to the sources, the recruitment exercise was suspended because SUBEB rejected the lawmakers' demand.

However, the Assembly said it is due to irregularities in the recruitment exercise.

At plenary session

chaired by Speaker, Hyacinth Aondona Dajoh, the lawmakers cited alleged irregularities, including unqualified candidates with poor test results.

This followed a motion of urgent public importance moved by member representing Makurdi South Constituency, Mr. Douglas Akya, who expressed concerns that the Board shortlisted graduates without qualification in education, contrary

to the requirements specified in the advertisement.

Akya said the manipulation of the exercise was against the Governor's good intention to revamp public primary schools.

Seconding the motion, Deputy Whip Alfred Emberga said he received several complaints from his constituents, noting that it was not the responsibility of the Board to recruit teachers.

Benue Varsity Lecturer Arrested Over Alleged Abduction, Robbery

Benue State Police Command has arrested Dr. Ichor Tersagh, a lecturer at the Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi (JOSTUM), for allegedly masterminding the abduction of one Mrs Susan Anyagh.

The kidnaped victim, Susan, is the wife of Paul Anyagh, the chairman of the Academic Staff

Union of Universities (ASUU), JOSTUM chapter.

The incident occurred last Saturday on Otukpo Road in Makurdi, where Mrs. Anyagh was abducted, forced into her vehicle, robbed of ₦1.35 million, and assaulted before being left unconscious on a bush path.

She was later found along Yandev-

Ugbema Road and rushed to the Primary Healthcare Clinic in Ameladu for treatment, according to state command spokesperson, Catherine Anene, who confirmed the incident.

"She stated that while she was driving from the NNPC mega fuel station, Kanshio, where she went to collect money from her customer, she was

flagged down at Otukpo Road by persons who claimed to be in need, and she stopped to render help," the state police report revealed.

"They quickly jumped into her car and pointed a gun at her, ordering her to drive towards the Wurukum area."

According to police reports, immediately, she (Mrs Anyagh) looked outside the car and saw her husband's colleague, Dr. Tersagh, standing by

the car; she beckoned him for help but he turned his back and walked away.

The victim also disclosed that her abductors received a phone call from Dr. Tersagh during the kidnapping, allegedly instructing them to kill her.

The kidnappers eventually stopped near a police checkpoint, where they decided to abandon the vehicle.

"When they sighted a police checkpoint

ahead that was checking vehicles, they decided to reverse to a hidden place. They parked the car, brought her out, collected the sum of ₦1,350,000 she had in the car, opened the car boot, and took a vehicle jack, which they used to hit the back of her neck, and she fell."

Police have disclosed that an investigation into the case is ongoing and that the lecturer is currently in custody.

Benue Police Arrest Driver, Native Doctor For Alleged Theft

Benue State Police Command has arrested a driver with CHEC Construction Company, Taraku Camp and a native doctor for alleged theft.

This was contained in a statement by the Benue State Police Command Spokesperson, SP, Catherine Anene.

She said the driver was given a truck to convey stones from Ohimini LGA to

Mase in Gwer-East Local Government Area for road construction but he diverted the vehicle to an unknown destination.

Anene said during an investigation, the said driver, named Aondoaver Viaga and a native doctor, one Veror Orduen were arrested in possession of the vehicle at Ikyurav, Kwande Local Government Area of Benue state.

She said the suspect was unable to give a

satisfactory account of why he took the vehicle to the native doctor's place for four days and switched off his phone.

Anene said the Benue State Commissioner of Police, Steve Yabanet has advised all criminals to desist from perpetuating crime or leave Benue State.

"I am not ready to accommodate them. I will work tirelessly to ensure that the state is safe during the festive period and beyond,"



Steve Yabanet

MUTA Provides Healthcare Service to More Than 2,000 Benue Residents

A socio-cultural group in Benue State known as 'Mutual Union of the Tiv in America' (MUTA) on Saturday in Gboko said that over 2,000 people have benefited from the ongoing health fair.

The group, Health Committee Chairman, Dr. Orduen Abunku who disclosed this to newsmen at St. John's Secondary School, Gboko said the group was carrying out the program with support from the Catholic Diocese of Gboko and Global Health and Development Initiative which are being sponsored by RedAideNigeria. According to him, the group intended to support the existing health structures in the state for improved

services, adding that the most common illness diagnosed so far were eye problems and that in one to eight patients,

said other cases discovered are hypertension, and abdominal amongst others.

conduct this fair. "We have seen over 500 people yesterday, the crowd today is extremely much more

part of MUTA's contribution to society. Gboko is the traditional headquarters of Tiv people and we decided to conduct the 2024 health fair here.

"Ours is only to complement the efforts of the government and the Catholic Church for our people to have access to quality healthcare service delivery".

Abunku further listed other members of the health fair committee

including: Dr Terwase Diwa, Mrs Jene Abunku, Helen Nyamor and Ahsizungwe Nyamor.

Also, the head of the pharmaceutical unit of the health fair, Dr Diwa said they had

enough drugs to meet the needs of the patients.

Diwa said they have made additional plans so that there would not be any shortage adding that the goals and objectives of MUTA were to complement the existing health structures in the State. Also, Mrs Jene Abunku said the aim of the union was purely to support the health needs of the people.

Speaking to one of the beneficiaries, Mrs Ruth Igbadoo, said she had suffered eye problems for years and could not get medical attention until the fair.

She said the fair had helped her to get the needed attention and thanked the organisers for coming to their aid.



eye issues were discovered.

Among the eyes, challenges noticed range from inching, pains and others.

Abunku, a former commissioner for health and human services in the state

"We are here on behalf of the MUTA to conduct a health fair for the people of Gboko at St. John's Secondary School Gboko, courtesy of the Catholic Diocese Gboko. They offered the facility for us to

than that of yesterday. We have a very competent team that can execute the exercise.

"At the end of the exercise, over 2000 people are expected to benefit from this health fair. This is

Use Leverage SAED Programme to Build Successful Careers, Coordinator Tells Benue Corps Members

The State Coordinator of National Youth Service Corps in Benue State, Mrs. Veronica Garba has charged the Batch C stream 1 corps members deployed to the state to use the knowledge and skills gained from the SAED program to serve as a foundation for building successful careers and businesses.

The Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme was introduced in to NYSC orientation course content to equip corps members with requisite skills and entrepreneurial experience to address

post service unemployment.

In a statement issued by the spokesperson for the organization, Yauza Adamu stated that the Skill acquisition programme which rounded off on Friday marked the end of weeks of intensive training aimed at equipping corps members with practical skills and entrepreneurial knowledge.

While commending the Corps Members for their active participation and the quality of work displayed during the exhibition and competition, the State Director of NYSC expressed pride in

their achievements.

She urged them to continue honing their talents and exploring entrepreneurial opportunities to become key contributors to Nigeria's growth and progress.

The State Coordinator reiterated that the ceremony reaffirmed the NYSC's commitment to youth empowerment, with the SAED programme remaining a vital tool in inspiring innovation, entrepreneurship, and self-reliance among Corps Members. Speaking earlier, the Assistant Director and Head SAED Branch NYSC Benue State, Mr.

James Sumpot, commended the Corps Members for their commitment and creativity.

He encouraged them to leverage on the skills acquired during the programme to create sustainable livelihoods and contribute to the nation's growth and development.

The event featured an exhibition and a

SAED competition, where Corps Members showcased their creativity and innovations across various fields, including ICT, agro-allied, fashion design, and crafts.

The statement said that the exhibition underscored the program's success in preparing young Nigerians to tackle unemployment and

foster economic growth through self-reliance and innovation.

In attendance were the Camp Director, Mr. Yahuza Isa Adamu and other key Camp Officials as well as Corps Members. Cash prizes, Plaques and Trophies were presented to the most outstanding Platoons' representatives.



Alleged Crypto Fraud: EFCC Arrests 193 Foreigners, 599 Others

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has announced the arrest of 193 foreigners and 599 other suspects for offences bordering on cryptocurrency investment fraud and romance scam.

The EFCC Director of Public Affairs, Wilson Uwujaren, confirmed their arrest while briefing journalists at the commission's office in Lagos on Monday. Uwujaren said the suspects were arrested on Tuesday, December 10, 2024, in a sting operation at their hideout, a seven-storey building known as Big Leaf Building, on No.7, Oyin Jolayemi Street, Victoria Island, Lagos.

"The breakthrough followed actionable intelligence and months of surveillance and monitoring the activities of the syndicate. Among the foreigners arrested are 148 Chinese, 40 Filipinos, two Kharzartans, one Pakistani, one Indonesian," he said. "Investigation established that the foreign nationals use the facility at 7, Oyin Jolayemi Street, which could be mistaken for a corporate headquarters of a financial establishment to train their Nigerian accomplices on how to initiate romance and investment scams and also use the identities of Nigerians to perpetrate their criminal activities.

"All the floors are equipped with high-end desktop computers. On the 5th floor alone,



investigators recovered 500 SIM cards of local telcos that were bought for criminal purposes."

According to Uwujaren, their Nigerian accomplices were recruited by the foreign kingpins to prospect for victims online through phishing, targeting mostly Americans, Canadians, Mexicans, and several others from European countries. He explained that they usually arm

them with desktop computers and mobile devices and create fake profiles for them.

"The Nigerian accomplices are equally provided with logs that allow them access to foreign communication lines and victims, which they chat with on WhatsApp, Instagram and Telegram," he added. "They are also assigned WhatsApp accounts linked to foreign telephone

numbers, especially from Germany and Italy.

"Their jobs are to engage victims in romantic conversations and phantom business and investment discussions to trick them to shop on the purported online investment shopping platform called www.yooto.com. For those who show interest, activation fees for an account on the platform starts from \$35USD."

He said investigation revealed that the criterion for recruiting these young Nigerians is proficiency in the use of computers, especially typing skill.

He explained that those who passed the test are given desktop computers and mobile devices and then taken through a two-week induction on how to personate foreign females in romance scam chats and convince victims to invest in their employers' Cryptocurrency investment scam.

"Once the Nigerians are able to win the confidence of would-be victims, the foreigners would take over the actual task of defrauding the victims and proceed to block their Nigerian accomplices from the network. This would then leave them in the dark about the transaction,"

Uwujaren said.

"Surprisingly, the Nigerians do not know the owners of the 'company' they work for, as they neither get letters of appointments nor receive payment from a corporate account. Investigation revealed that they are paid either in cash or through an individual's account." He added that further investigation is ongoing to establish the extent of the scam and the accomplices, including the likelihood of any collaboration with organized international fraud cells.

According to him, the commission is working closely with its foreign partners in this regard. Items recovered from the suspects include desktop computers, mobile phones, laptop computers, and cars.

No Foreign Military Base In Nigeria, Says DHQ

The Defence Headquarters (DHQ) has denied reports that the French military was planning to establish a base in Nigeria.

In a statement yesterday in Abuja by its Director of Defence Media Operations, Maj.-Gen. Edward Buba, the DHQ said the clarification was necessitated by the reports making the rounds that French soldiers had arrived in the country.

"The attention of Defence Headquarters has been drawn to online reports alleging the arrival of the first

contingent of French soldiers in Maiduguri (Borno State) towards establishing a French Military base in Northeast Nigeria.

"The Armed Forces of Nigeria hereby state unequivocally that this information is fake, totally false and mischievous. It would be recalled that Chief of Defence Staff, General Christopher Musa, recently addressed this matter in different media fora in which he debunked the news and such speculations."

The statement urged the general public to disregard the news



and any such speculations on the matter.

"It is clear that these are the antics of mischief makers," it added.

The DHQ added that the military would continue to carry out its constitutional responsibilities

professionally and ensure the territorial integrity of Nigeria. Also, the DHQ has said it is set to harmonise court martial procedures across the services in line with the nation's justice system.

The Chief Defence Staff (CDS), General

Christopher Musa, announced this at the opening of the conference on Rules of Procedure, Substance Abuse and Sexual Orientation in the Armed Forces of Nigeria yesterday in Abuja.

Pope Francis Urges Priests To Guard Against Spirituality That Stokes Divisions

Pope Francis urged Catholic priests on Sunday to guard against spiritual groups that stoke political divisions, speaking during a one-day visit to Corsica, the first by a pontiff to the French Mediterranean island.

At a conference on religion across the Mediterranean, the pontiff warned against varieties of spirituality that "seek self-aggrandizement by fueling polemics, narrow-mindedness, divisions and exclusivist attitudes."

"The Church's pastors (are) called to be vigilant, to exercise discernment and to be constantly attentive to (these) popular forms of religiosity," the pope said.

Francis, making his third and probably last foreign trip of 2024, did not name any specific religious groups.

Corsica, like much of France, has a long history of lay Catholic associations, known as confraternities. They usually focus on spiritual matters but sometimes play a role in local politics.

The pope will spend about nine hours in Ajaccio, Corsica's capital, on Sunday. After attending the conference, he will celebrate an outdoor Mass with local Catholics and will also meet French President Emmanuel Macron.

Visiting places that often do not draw international attention is part of Francis' policy of highlighting people and problems in what he calls the "peripheries" of the world. Over his 11-year papacy he has still not visited most of the capitals of Western Europe, including Paris.

Macron had invited Francis to attend the December 7 reopening of Notre Dame Cathedral, five years after a devastating fire nearly destroyed the medieval building. The pope decided not to go, and the two will instead meet briefly at Ajaccio's airport on Sunday before Francis heads back to



Pope Francis is welcomed at the Ajaccio Napoleon Bonaparte Airport during his apostolic journey in Ajaccio, Corsica, Sunday

Rome.

As is now normal, Francis, who turns 88 on Tuesday, left

his plane on arrival in Corsica via an elevator and used a wheelchair while greeting officials on the

tarmac.

During a brief ride in an open-air popemobile from the airport, the pope waved at crowds on the street and appeared on good form, though he still has a small bruise on his chin, the result of what the Vatican described as a minor fall in his bedroom last week.

Corsica, famed for its steep, mountainous terrain and as the birthplace of Napoleon Bonaparte, is the fourth largest island in the Mediterranean. It is one of France's poorest regions, where about 20% of the

population lives below the poverty line, according to government figures.

The Vatican estimates that about 81% of Corsica's population of 356,000 is Catholic. There are 83 priests on the island and some 30 Catholic nuns, it says.

Francis, originally from Argentina and the first pope from the Americas, has traveled widely around the Mediterranean since becoming pontiff in 2013, visiting Malta, the Greek island of Lesbos, and the Italian island of Lampedusa.

At least 11 Dead from Cyclone Chido in French Territory of Mayotte, But Figure Could Rise to 'Several Hundred,' Official Says

The death toll in the French territory of Mayotte from Cyclone Chido is "several hundred" and may run into the thousands, the island's top government official told a local broadcaster Sunday. France rushed rescue teams and supplies to its largely poor overseas department in the Indian Ocean that has suffered widespread destruction.

"I think there are some several hundred dead, maybe we'll get close to a thousand. Even thousands ... given the violence of this event," Mayotte Prefect François-Xavier Bieuville told TV station Mayotte la 1ere.

He had previously said it was the worst cyclone to hit Mayotte in 90 years.

Bieuville said it was extremely difficult to get an exact number of deaths and injuries after Mayotte was pummeled by the intense tropical cyclone on Saturday, causing major damage to public infrastructure, including the airport, flattening neighborhoods and knocking out electricity supplies.

The French Interior Ministry confirmed at least 11 deaths and more than 250 injuries earlier Sunday but said that was expected to increase substantially.

Mayotte in the southwestern Indian Ocean off the coast of Africa is France's poorest island and the poorest

territory in the European Union. It has a population of just over 300,000 spread over two main islands.

Bieuville said the worst devastation had been seen in the slums of metal shacks and informal structures that mark much of Mayotte. Referring to the official death toll so far, he said "this figure is not plausible when you see the images of the slums."

"I think the human toll is much higher," he added.

Mayotte took the brunt of Chido

Chido blew through the southwestern Indian Ocean

on Friday and Saturday, also affecting the nearby islands of Comoros and Madagascar. Mayotte was directly in the cyclone's path, though, and took the brunt. Chido brought winds in excess of 220 kph (136 mph), according to the French weather service, making it a category 4 cyclone, the second strongest on the scale.

Later, Chido made landfall in Mozambique on the African mainland and there were fears for more than 2 million people in the country's north who could be impacted, according to authorities there.

French President Emmanuel Macron said his "thoughts" were with the Mayotte people and Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau was due to travel to Mayotte on Monday. Retailleau had warned Saturday night after an emergency meeting in Paris that the death toll "will be high," while new Prime Minister François Bayrou, who took office on Friday, said infrastructure had been severely damaged or destroyed across Mayotte.

Pope Francis offered prayers for the victims while on a visit Sunday to the French Mediterranean island of Corsica.



Residents in France's Indian Ocean territory of Mayotte sit among piles of debris of metal sheets and wood on December 15 after homes were destroyed by Cyclone Chido.

South Korea's Impeached Leader Avoids...

cont. from page 13

incident could have erupted that morning between the citizens who would have taken to the streets and our young soldiers," Han told a news conference.

Yoon's Dec. 3 imposition of martial law, the first of its kind in more than four decades, harkened back to an era of authoritarian leaders the

country has not seen since the 1980s. Yoon was forced to lift his decree hours later after parliament unanimously voted to overturn it.

Yoon sent hundreds of troops and police officers to the parliament in an effort to stop the vote, but they withdrew after the parliament rejected Yoon's decree. No major violence

occurred.

Opposition parties have accused Yoon of rebellion, saying a president in South Korea is allowed to declare martial law only during wartime or similar emergencies and would have no right to suspend parliament's operations even in those cases.

White Christmas Forecast: Will You Be Left Dreaming of Snow or Reveling in it?



Snow blankets a home decked out for the holiday season

Christmas is approaching nearly as fast as Santa's sleigh, but almost anyone in the United States fantasizing about a movie-worthy white Christmas might need to keep dreaming.

Early forecasts indicate temperatures could max out around 10 to 15 degrees above normal for much of the country on Christmas Day. It's a forecast reminiscent of last Christmas for many, which came amid the warmest winter on record in the US.

But the country could be split in two by warmth and cold in the run up to the big day. Unseasonably warm conditions will dominate the western half of the US — including Alaska and Hawaii — while the eastern half will be quite cold until Christmas, according to the Climate Prediction Center.

High temperatures in Washington, DC, for example, could fail to climb above freezing from next Sunday through Tuesday but could rebound into the more-typical 40s for December 25, which also marks this year's start of Hanukkah.

Even though it could be cold in the East, it's also expected to be much drier than normal from next weekend through the holiday, conditions that should be in place across much of the Lower 48, according to the center. That's bad news for snow lovers.

It's too soon to pinpoint exactly which areas will be dry or see storms, so some white Christmas dreams could stay alive until the forecast is fully in focus.

Some wet weather could impact parts of the East on Christmas Day. Early forecasts show a potentially sloppy mix of rain and snow could impact high elevation areas of the Northeast. Some snowflakes could flutter over a few spots in the Rockies on Christmas.

Any of these scenarios are far from guaranteed over a week in advance, and minor shifts in the weather pattern over the next week could change the forecast.

At least 1 inch of snow needs to be on the ground on December 25 in order for it to count as a white Christmas. It doesn't necessarily have to fall the same day.

If a few flurries fly through the air but they melt on contact with the ground, sorry, that's not a white Christmas. But if mounds of snow are still on the ground after multiple massive lake-effect events even though it's not actively snowing on Christmas — winner! That's a white Christmas.

The mountains of the West, parts of Michigan and New York, along with interior northern New England likely have enough snow on the ground now that at least an inch of it will stick around through

Christmas Day. Historical chances of a white Christmas

The number of locales in the US likely to have a White Christmas is limited, even if completely average temperatures were in store this year.

North-central states like the Dakotas, Minnesota and Wisconsin, along with mountainous portions of the West and Northeast are most likely to have a white Christmas any given year.

That's because the north-central US is usually quite cold by late December. The chill helps prevent snow dumped by quick-moving storms — typical for the region in

late-fall or early-winter — from melting.

Multiple rounds of snow tend to build a decent snowpack in the mountains of the West and Northeast by late December, but sometimes this blanket of snow is found only in the highest elevations where not many people live.

If you want a white Christmas in a city setting, your best bets historically are Minneapolis — about a 70% chance — or Burlington, Vermont — around a 60 to 65% chance.

The Chicago area has

about a 35 to 40% chance of a white Christmas each year while New York City and Philadelphia's chances are an abysmal 10 to 15%.

Chicago and Minneapolis last had a white Christmas in 2022, but New York City, Philadelphia and Washington, DC, haven't experienced one since 2009.

Atlanta and much of the South have about a 1% chance or lower of seeing a white Christmas.

South Korea's Impeached Leader Avoids Investigators As Court Begins Meeting To Determine His Fate

South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol dodged requests by investigative agencies to appear for questioning over his short-lived martial law decree, as the Constitutional Court began its first meeting Monday on Yoon's case to determine whether to formally unseat or reinstate him.

A joint investigative team involving police, an anti-corruption agency and the Defense Ministry said it wants to question Yoon on charges of rebellion and abuse of power in connection with his ill-conceived power grab.

The team on Monday tried to convey a request to officials at Yoon's office or residence but they refused to accept it, according to the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials.

Agency investigator Son Yeong-jo cited presidential secretarial staff at Yoon's office as claiming they were unsure whether conveying the request to the impeached president was part of their duties. Son said his team had also mailed the request to Yoon, but declined to provide specifics when asked how investigators would respond if Yoon refuses to appear.

Yoon was impeached by the opposition-controlled National Assembly on Saturday over his Dec. 3 martial law decree. His presidential powers have been subsequently suspended, and the Constitutional Court is to

determine whether to formally remove him from office or reinstate him. If Yoon is dismissed, a national election to choose his successor must be held within 60 days.

Yoon has justified his martial law enforcement as a necessary act of governance against the main liberal opposition

were unanswered.

Yoon's presidential security service has also resisted a police attempt to search Yoon's office for evidence.

The Constitutional Court on Monday met for the first time to discuss the case. The court has up to 180 days to rule. But observers say a ruling could come faster.

In the case of parliamentary impeachments of past presidents — Roh Moo-hyun in 2004 and Park Geun-hye in 2016 — the court spent 63 days and 91 days respectively before determining to reinstate Roh and dismiss Park.

Kim Hyungdu, a court justice, told reporters earlier Monday that the court will “swiftly and fairly” make a decision in the case. He said Monday's court meeting was meant to discuss preparatory procedures and how to arrange arguments at formal trials.

Court spokesperson Lee Jean later said the court's first pretrial hearing is set for Dec. 27.

Upholding Yoon's impeachments needs support from at least six out of the court's nine justices, but three seats are vacant now. This means a unanimous ruling by the court's current six justices in favor of Yoon's impeachment is required to formally end his presidency. Kim said he expected the three vacant

seats to be filled by the end of this month.

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, who became the country's acting leader after Yoon's impeachment, and other government officials have sought to reassure allies and markets after Yoon's surprise stunt paralyzed politics, halted high-level diplomacy and complicated efforts to revive a faltering economy.

Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung urged the Constitutional Court to rule swiftly on Yoon's impeachment and proposed a special council for policy cooperation between the government and parliament. Yoon's conservative People Power Party criticized Lee's proposal for the special council, saying that it's “not right” for the opposition party to act like the ruling party.

Lee, a firebrand lawmaker who drove a political offensive against Yoon's government, is seen as the frontrunner to replace him. He lost the 2022 presidential election to Yoon by a razor-thin margin.

Yoon's impeachment, which was endorsed in parliament by some of his ruling party lawmakers, has created a deep rift within the party between Yoon's loyalists and his opponents. On Monday, PPP chair Han Dong-hun, a strong critic of Yoon's martial law, announced his resignation.

“If martial law had not been lifted that night, a bloody



South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol

Democratic Party that he described as “anti-state forces” bogging down his agendas and vowed to “fight to the end” against efforts to remove him from office.

Hundreds of thousands of protesters have poured onto the streets of the country's capital, Seoul, in recent days, calling for Yoon's ouster and arrest.

It remains unclear whether Yoon will grant the request by investigators for an interview. South Korean prosecutors, who are pushing a separate investigation into the incident, also reportedly asked Yoon to appear at a prosecution office for questioning on Sunday but he refused to do so. Repeated calls to a prosecutors' office in Seoul

Don Calls For New Constitution in Nigeria

Dean of the Faculty of Law, University of Lagos (UNILAG), Prof. Abiola Sanni (SAN), has called for a new constitution that makes the provisions of Chapter 2 justiciable.

He said the chapter provides a pathway to prosperity and security, but the government is not bound to comply.

"Instead of decorating the Constitution with Chapter 2, let us be realistic and decide areas of intervention, focus on it, budget for it and move the needle in that regard by enacting appropriate laws," he said.

Sanni submitted in his lecture at the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) Lagos Branch 2024 yearly dinner, tagged: "Eko for show: Culture of Excellence."

The event, which was held at the Oriental Hotel on Victoria Island, saw lawyers turn out in various traditional attires on a colourful night.

It began with a red carpet and cocktail and featured a live band, spoken word performance, awards for most creative expressions of the theme, and honours for distinguished members. It ended with an after-party.

Sanni stressed the need for power devolution and local government reforms to bring development closer to the people.

He said: "The Supreme Court is intervening, but that is a slow approach. We need a leader that will focus on fixing the fundamentals."

"There are documents from confabs gathering dust. Money was spent on them. We should pick them again and run with them."

Sanni said Nigeria borrowed its Constitution from India, but unlike Nigeria, India is lifting its citizens out of poverty.

"In Nigeria, we're still talking and sloganeering about it but we're not doing enough. So, we must prioritise poverty alleviation. Nigeria must look after the weakest, those



NBA Lagos Branch Chairman, Olabisi Mekanjuola (left) with the dinner speaker, Prof Abiola Sanni (SAN)

who are vulnerable," the SAN said.

Sanni added that the constitution must address what he called the missing link – the disconnect of government at the grassroots.

"Even when we fix everything at the top, and the bottom is leaking in terms of

local governance, we'll never see development.

"In a country where everything is centralised, where the tax system is not working at the local level, what effort has been made to fix them? It was since 1976 that we attempted a local government reform.

"The Supreme Court

judgment on council autonomy will amount to nothing if we don't back it up with reform that will enable people to see development in their lifetime.

"We need technocrats at the local government level, not politicians, and for the people to have a say on who leads them," he said.

Sanni urged lawyers to be actively involved in shaping policies rather than being reactionary.

NBA Lagos Branch chairman, Olabisi Mekanjuola, said it was a privilege to lead the premier Bar since he was sworn in on July 23, 2023.

He highlighted his key

achievements, including an agreement with Uber to provide discounted ride rates for members; international secondments, which will see members gain experience in UK law firms, and several welfare initiatives.

The chairman said the dream to build a Bar centre was becoming a reality, as a SAN had pledged N50 million, while the Branch's investments in treasury bills will yield N40 million by next year.

Twenty-seven members of the branch, including those newly conferred with the rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) and others "who exemplified dedication and integrity" were honoured.

"We hope this recognition inspires all to continue striving for excellence," Mekanjuola said.

Nigeria Ranks Sixth Globally In Suicide Rates –Don

A Professor and Consultant Psychiatrist at Obafemi Awolowo University and the Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospital, Ile-Ife, Prof. Adesanmi Akinsulore, has revealed that Nigeria ranks sixth globally among countries with the highest suicide rates.

He disclosed that men account for 79% of suicides, while women are more prone to suicidal thoughts, emphasising the urgent need for collaborative efforts to address the issue, especially among students.

Akinsulore made these remarks on Monday during a lecture at an event organised by The Still Waters Mental Health Foundation, held at Ladoke Akintola University of Technology Ogbomoso, Oyo State.

The event, themed, "Navigating the Storm: Unraveling the Intricacies of Suicides Amongst Students," focused on understanding and

preventing suicide in educational institutions.

Why Netizens Are Dragging Egungun's Trending Video
0:00/0:00

THE LOUNGE: What Drives Women to Bath Their Spouses Hot Water For Relationship Betrayals?

He described suicide as a major public health concern, noting that it was the third leading cause of death globally among individuals aged 15 to 29 in 2021.

According to him, while suicide is a personal tragedy, it has devastating social, emotional, and economic consequences.

The psychiatrist attributed school-related risk factors for suicide to various challenges, including difficulties in accessing psychological care, stigma associated with seeking help, discrimination due to disabilities or physical differences, academic failure, and a lack of supportive school environments.

He also highlighted

broader risk factors such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, previous suicide attempts, self-injury, loneliness, isolation, and chronic illnesses.

Additionally, interpersonal difficulties, exposure to stigma, and access to lethal means were identified as contributors to suicidal behaviour.

Akinsulore pointed out protective factors that could mitigate suicide risks, including strong parental support, social involvement, mentorship, and accessible student support services.

"There is one suicide for every 25 attempts. In 2021, suicide was the third leading cause of death among 15 to 29-year-olds globally," he said.

He called for collective responsibility in tackling suicide, urging schools, communities, and stakeholders to prioritise mental health, combat stigma, and ensure access to resources for student well-being.

"Navigating the storm is a

collective responsibility. We must work together to create a supportive and inclusive environment that promotes student well-being and resilience," he said.

In his remarks, the Founder of The Still Waters Mental Health Foundation, Dr. Oyewole A. Olutunmise, reiterated the need for unity in addressing suicide and mental health challenges.

"This gathering reminds us of the power of unity in addressing one of the most critical issues of our time—suicide and mental health challenges.

The Still Waters Mental Health Foundation was borne from the belief that no one should face their struggles alone," Dr. Olutunmise said.

He expressed gratitude to the programme sponsors, organising committee, and other stakeholders for their support, stressing the importance of replacing silence with open conversations and fostering hope for the future.



AGATE HEALTH

with Blessing Yakubu
08068904441

ASTHMA is one of the most common non-communicable diseases, affecting an alarming population, and causing nearly half a million deaths every year.

Although asthma cannot be cured, people with asthma can enjoy a normal life if correctly diagnosed and treated. Inhalers (both bronchodilators and steroids) are considered essential medicines in the WHO package of essential non-communicable disease interventions for primary health care and should be available to all people living with asthma around the world.

On World Asthma Day, WHO experts offer 5 tips on how to manage your asthma better.

Be aware of your symptoms: Cough, wheeze and difficulty breathing are all signs that your asthma is not well controlled. If you feel that your symptoms are getting worse, follow the instructions from your doctor. Use a reliever inhaler (e.g. salbutamol) with a spacer to open your airways.

Identify and avoid the triggers: Common triggers include smoke, fumes, viral infections, pollen, changes in the weather, animal fur and feathers, and strong fragrances. Know what affects you and try to avoid if possible. If not possible, make sure you have your reliever inhaler readily available.

Use your inhalers: A

reliever inhaler (also called a bronchodilator) opens up the small airways and improves airflow in and out of the lungs. Use this when you have symptoms. A steroid or preventer inhaler reduces inflammation in the lungs and is an essential part of long term asthma treatment. By using a

steroid inhaler, as directed by your doctor, you will improve your symptoms and reduce the risk of a severe attack. Inhalers are the safest, most effective treatment for asthma and allow people with asthma to lead a normal, active life.

Use a spacer: A spacer is a plastic chamber which connects the inhaler

at one end, to your mouth via a mouthpiece or mask at the other end. It can help inhaled medicines to reach the small airways in the lungs and work better. The spacer allows more time for the medicine to be breathed in and means that less coordination is required. Without a spacer, you have to breathe in deeply and press the inhaler at the same time – inhaled medicine often ends up in the mouth or throat and is ineffective. Some types of inhaler (e.g. dry powder inhalers) do not need a spacer – check with your doctor if you are unsure.

Take back control: Knowledge is power. Ask your doctor to explain how your inhaled medicines work and how you

should use them. Make sure your friends and family also know what to do if your asthma is bad. By taking your inhalers early, when you first notice that your symptoms are worsening, you can avoid a serious attack.

WHO is working to support countries to provide essential asthma interventions as part of universal health coverage, through technical tools and guidance. “Uncontrolled asthma has major consequences for people living with asthma, their families and communities, health-care systems and national economies. It is shocking that every day children and adults suffer needlessly from symptoms that could

be prevented with essential inhaled medicines,” says Dr Bente Mikkelsen, Director of the Department of Noncommunicable Diseases at the World Health Organization. “A huge effort is needed to accelerate universal health coverage and meet the Sustainable Development Goal commitments that have been made.”

The latest WHO NCD country capacity survey found that in low- and low-middle income countries: bronchodilator inhalers are available in 60% of countries and steroid inhalers are available in 40% of countries.

If the number of avoidable premature asthma deaths that occur in low- and middle-income countries every year – roughly 185 000 people aged <70 years – is to be reduced, this global inequity must be addressed.

WHO convenes a network of organizations committed to reducing the global burden of chronic respiratory diseases, including asthma, call the Global Alliance against Chronic Respiratory Diseases (GARD). The alliance also has a focus on addressing global inequity. Recently, a new GARD community on the WHO Knowledge Action Portal on NCDs was set up to help accelerate progress, by supporting networking and sharing of information and resources.



NDLEA Busts Twin Massive Drugs Importation To Nigeria

Operatives of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, NDLEA, at the Tincan seaport in Lagos, have intercepted multi-billion-naira worth of shipments of Methamphetamine and Loud, a strong synthetic strain of cannabis meant for distribution during the Christmas and New Year festive season. The huge consignment of drugs concealed in automobile spare parts imported from Canada was intercepted by NDLEA after months of intelligence-driven tracking of the cargoes across three continents. Spokesman of the agency, Femi Babafemi, made this known, yesterday, just

as he disclosed that three businessmen linked to another consignment of Opioids valued at N4.4 billion was intercepted in Lagos. He said: "For the first time in the history of NDLEA's anti-narcotic operations, two consignments of methamphetamine weighing 83.301 kilograms were on Thursday, 12th and Friday 13th December 2024, recovered from separate containers bearing vehicles and spare parts coming from Canada and heading to warehouses in the Ladipo automobile parts market in Mushin area of Lagos. "While one of the containers going to Ladipo market through the Sifax



bonded terminal was examined on Thursday, December 12, not less than 5.001kg methamphetamine hidden in a bag wrapped in bed sheet that came in a Toyota Camry car, was recovered, even as a businessman, Isaac

Onwumere, linked with the consignment was promptly arrested. "The other container bearing automobile spare parts checked on Friday, December 13 was found to contain 1,735 parcels of loud packed in 44 jumbo bags with a

total weight of 867.5kg and six plastic coolers containing 87 packs of methamphetamine weighing 78.3kg. "At least, two businessmen, Nwanolue Emeka and Friday Ogbe, have been arrested in connection with the seizure. "The two meth consignments have a combined weight of 83.301kg worth N124,951,000.00 while the 867.5kg loud is worth N2,168,750,000.00 in street value. The seizures were made during a joint examination of the shipments with

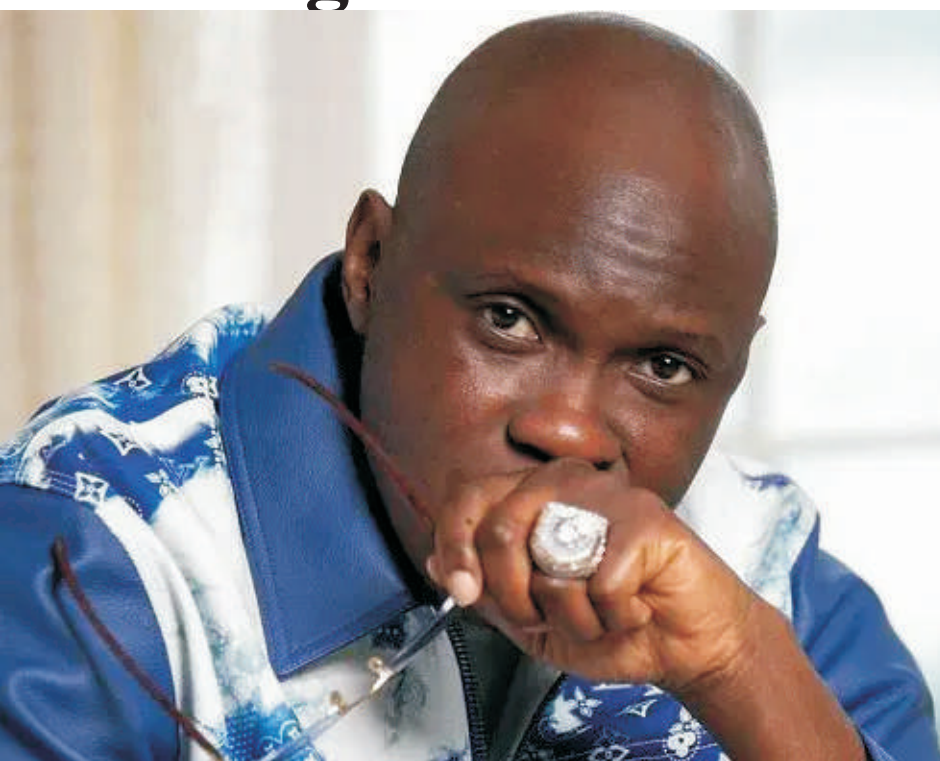
Customs and other port stakeholders." "At the Port Harcourt Port Complex, Onne, Rivers State, no fewer than 636,600 bottles of codeine-based syrup worth N4, 456,200,000.00 in street value were intercepted in shipments from India on Monday 9th, Wednesday 11th and Friday 13th December 2024. "The seizures were made during joint examination of four containers by NDLEA officers, men of Customs and other security agencies at the port following processed credible intelligence on the shipments."

With the same vigour, Commands and formations of the Agency across the country continued their War Against Drug Abuse, WADA, sensitization activities to schools, worship centres, work places and communities among others in the past week.

These include: WADA sensitisation lecture to students and staff of City Comprehensive College, Ogidi, Anambra; Government Secondary School, Tongo, Adamawa; Bonny Camp Primary School, Victoria Island, Lagos; Government Junior Secondary School, Yarganji, Kano, while Oyo state command of NDLEA delivered W A D A enlightenment lecture to leaders, elders, youths and residents of Tapa community, Tapa, among others.

No Evidence I've Been Seen in Night Club –Nigerian UK-Based Pastor

United Kingdom-based pastor, Tobi Adegboyega, has dismissed claims that he has ever been seen in a nightclub, describing such allegations as baseless. Speaking during an appearance on Channels TV's Politics Today on Monday, Adegboyega clarified that his outings are limited to restaurants, where he often dines with friends, including Nigerian musicians. "I have never been seen in a nightclub. That is the figment of the imagination of



Pastor, Tobi Adegboyega

certain people. I have never been seen in a nightclub, not once before," the 44-year-old stated. "I have been seen in restaurants with

some of my friends who are musicians from Nigeria, we go eat, but certainly not in a nightclub. Nobody can come up with evidence of me

being seen in a nightclub." Adegboyega, the founder of the Salvation Proclaimers

Anointed Church, emphasised his commitment to his faith, citing his track record of positively impacting lives through his ministry. "I have had a 20-year record of staying true to the message of Christ that we preach. We have seen many lives change. That is what people should focus on," he added. Addressing criticisms of his flamboyant lifestyle, Tobi Adegboyega explained that his intention is to inspire young people to believe in legitimate means of financial success.

I have been greeted with the question what and who is a possibilitarian by many people, the root meaning of the word possible is "capable of making things happen." A Possibilitarian refers to someone who embraces the idea that there are always possibilities and potential solutions in any given situation at any given time, the word Possibilitarian was first coined by the motivational speaker and author Norman Vincent Peale, who wrote the book "The Power of Positive Thinking." You should consider being a possibilitarian because it helps one to embrace the idea and fact that there are always possibilities and potential solutions in any given situation, individually or collectively as a people. Being a possibilitarian is a mindset that encourages individuals to focus on opportunities



IMPACTS

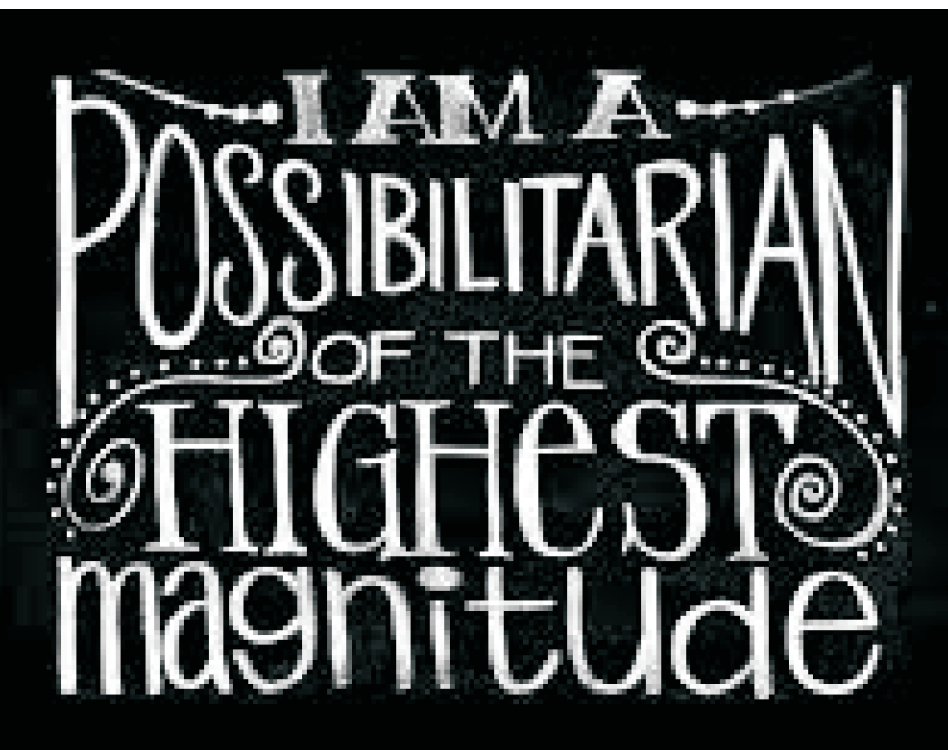
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WHY NIGERIANS SHOULD BE POSSIBILITARIANS

rather than obstacles, to maintain a positive attitude, and to approach challenges with a belief in their ability to overcome them.

NIGERIANS should consider being possibilarians because things are getting tougher in Nigeria economically and otherwise, you need to become a possibilitarian in order not to allow the past pains and present frustrations to diminish your potentials, stifle your invincibility and choke the unlimited zeal and will of becoming capably able to making things happen positively in your favour through legitimate means. I challenge you to become a possibilitarian. No



matter how dark things seem to be or actually are, raise your sights and see the possibilities always see them for they are always there, and dare say; "no matter the matter it doesn't matter", it is well said of us as Nigerians that we

suffer and smile, YES that is who we are, we create our happiness and have never lost our ability to smile even when we are going through fire, maybe we consider every firelike situation as a refining process.

Joel Brown once said "the only thing that stands between you and your dream is the will to try and the belief that it is actually possible." So standing on the backdrop of Brown's words it's only fair to say we and I can get out of our uncomfortable situations, it starts from a positive mind set and being a possibilitarian is what you need in Nigeria and elsewhere in the World.

The very idea of being a possibilitarian is National, State,

Community and self development, but one can't reject one of the main ingredients of development by not being a possibilitarian and expect to development and excel by mere wishful thinking.

THINGS POSSIBILITARIANS DON'T DO

Don't focus on previous difficulties and disappointments, rather cultivate the I can attitude and habit then believe it and push any way possible, with the mind set of faith, you don't need to see the staircase just take the step and the staircase will appear in an unimaginable way, yes I've seen it work in my life and it can work for anyone who will become a possolibitarian today.

Don't perceive problems as obstacle rather see them as chances for development and learning, don't allow yourself to be afraid or feel overwhelmed and discouraged when confronted with problems that you feel are well above you. A possibilitarian immediately becomes an emotionally intelligent person calm, cool, collated and coordinated, such a disposition makes you become powerfully and poised to achieve your purpose.

Don't be a procrastinator instead be proactive in finding solutions and taking action to overcome obstacles, still don't wait for others to solve your problems alone, take necessary steps to be part of the solution solving.

Don't handle as a bedeviling means rather handle criticism as feedback, see it as a chance to improve and grow, don't become overly defensive else you will look stupid and loose your esteem credibility before people.

Being a Possibilitarian is a Way of Life one turn to consider more the possibility of achieving goals and purpose at any given time and opportunity. Together, we can all be possibilarians and limit the negativity in thinking and in acting. In a special way I invite you to being a POSSIBILITARIAN, with all my Love.

THAT RISK YOU'RE AFRAID TO TAKE COULD CHANGE YOUR LIFE.



Benue Boat Accident: Step Up Oversight, Enforcements Now, NGF Charges Regulatory Agencies

The Nigeria Governors' Forum (NGF) has asked regulatory agencies charged with the responsibilities of monitoring activities on the nation's waterways to step up their oversight functions and enforcements to halt the recurring cases of boat accidents that have continued to claim many lives.



Mallam AbdulRahman

The forum also advised boat operators to avoid night travels, overloads, and adhere to all safety protocols at all times in the larger interest of everyone.

This was contained in a statement personally signed by the forum's chairman and Governor of Kwara State, Mallam AbdulRahman AbdulRasaq to commiserate with the

people and government of Benue state on the death of 20 people in last weekend's boat mishap in Agatu local government area.

The forum also commends the emergency responders for rescuing 11 of the travelers alive.

"We send our commiserations to His Excellency, Governor Hyacinth Alia and the people of the state on the sad incident. We beseech God

Almighty to repose the souls of those who died in the incident," the forum says in a statement.

"Similarly, we again call on regulatory authorities to step up oversight and enforcements to prevent these recurring incidents, while urging citizens and boat operators to avoid night travels, overloads, and adhere to all safety protocols at all times in the larger interest of everyone," it added.

Why Nigerian Women Die During Child Birth –Health Commissioner

The Borno Commissioner for Health and Human Services, Prof. Baba Mallam, has blamed the rate at which Nigerian women die during child birth on indecision by most families.

Mallam spoke on Monday, when he received a donation of two tricycle (keke) ambulances from an international Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), Doctors Without Borders, in Maiduguri.

He said; "there are many reasons Nigerian women are dying at the point of labour.

"The indecision by the family of the pregnant women during labour has been a major cause of women's death.

"The indecision comes in because the pregnant women are surrounded by families.

"They tell them, no you can do it.

"Give it a push and from one hour, two hours, three hours, four hours, after the

woman is exhausted they now say you can go to hospital and there is a problem of transportation, she doesn't have a car and their neighbours do not have a vehicle and, therefore, this adds to the quagmire."

Mallam said that available statistics show that 120 Nigerian women die hourly due to delivery-related complications.

According to him, Nigeria is only better than Southern Sudan and Chad in the world, in terms of maternal mortality.

"Nigeria contributes 28.9 per cent of maternal deaths in the world," he said, adding: "It is important for Nigerians to realise this.

"Despite the fact that Nigeria's economy is one of the best in Africa, our medical indices are very poor.

"We are 200 million now and by 2050 we will be more than 400 million and that will make Nigeria the third largest country, in terms of population

after India and China.

"You can imagine how many pregnant women will be dying.

"At the moment, every two minutes, the country loses a woman during delivery in Nigeria.

"So, if we spent 10 minutes here, 20 women would have died.

"So, it is very important we realise this as Nigerians and take everything necessary to mitigate this carnage of young women.

"And that also includes new borns because they also suffer from simple basic problems.

"As I speak here, children are dying from a blockage of airway to breathing and Nigeria is number three or four in the world, in terms of death of new borns," Mallam said

He described the donation of the emergency transportation system as very crucial.

He said the tricycle ambulances in rural communities of Borno would go a long way in saving the

lives of many pregnant women.

He expressed appreciation to the NGO for donating the "innovative tricycle ambulances" to Borno Government for the enhancement of the transportation of pregnant women from remote villages to nearby medical facilities.

Earlier, Stewart said: "We are presenting these two ambulances to the Honorable Commissioner for Health, together we have been working on how to do innovative projects so that they

can be sustainable.

"We believe that these will do a good job for the human family."

She said that the NGO had been doing a lot of innovative projects in the state, hoping that the ambulances would serve the purpose for which they were donated.

Stewart said that the organisation was committed to bringing innovative ideas into its projects in the state for sustainability.

She further said that the organisation had observed of late that

many projects were unable to survive due to the lack of funds for their sustainability.

She said that the idea of converting tricycle through local fabrication to ambulance was geared toward establishing the concept of sustainability due to its low level of fuel consumption.

Stewart, therefore, called on the government to put necessary measures in place and ensure the ambulances were deployed to where they could serve the purpose they were meant for.

Yuletide: Tinubu Approves Free Train Rides For Two Weeks

President Bola Tinubu has approved free nationwide train rides from December 20, 2024, to January 5, 2025.

The initiative aims to alleviate transportation costs during the Christmas and New Year celebrations, according to the Minister of Information and National Orientation, Mohammed Idris.

Idris said, "As we did last year, there will be free train services for all



Nigerians during this period. This aligns with the President's commitment to reducing transportation burdens, particularly for vulnerable citizens."

He noted that similar measures were implemented during last year's Christmas and Sallah festivities, showcasing the Tinubu administration's

Inflation Bites Harder As Nigerians Await FG's Food Import-duty Waiver-Edun

The aggressive monetary and fiscal measures taken to check headline inflation appear to be slow in taming inflation as the consumer price index rose to 34.6 per cent in November highest in 26 years, setting a new multi-decade high and suggesting that the war against price crisis is far from being won.

Food inflation, a major driver of the inflation run that has lasted for over two years, climbed up to 39.93 per cent, sending a shockwave through the market for the umpteenth time.

The spike in food inflation is happening at a time when crop harvest was expected to have moderated the prices of essentials, suggesting that the country is yet to see the worst and that the situation could deteriorate towards the end of quarter one when planting season would be approaching.

The crisis comes just as the government continues to dilly-dally on the fiscal measures aimed at reining in the escalating food prices. For instance, six months after the Federal Government rolled out zero-import duty waivers on selected food items, there are no signs that the programme has commenced.

On July 8, 2024, the Federal Government announced a 150-day duty-free import window for food commodities to ensure a reduction in food inflation in Nigeria. The food commodities include maize, husked brown rice, wheat and cowpeas.

The executive order gave a 150-day window for the importation of food items, including rice, millet, maize and wheat duty-free.

It was reported that the Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Wale Edun, confirmed that the FG started guided import some weeks back while the private sector was

expected to follow suit. Neither the imports by the government nor the reported participation of the private sector has moved a needle in the food market. Since the policy was unveiled, a bag of rice has increased by 50 per cent, with 50kg trading around N110,000 a few days to Christmas. Edun while responding to a question at a media event in Abuja about the delay in the take-off of the duty-free import of food, said the government was being careful not to flood the country with food that can be produced locally and thereby shutting out local producers.

He noted that the government was rather supporting local farmers. Edun highlighted ongoing efforts to increase the availability of essential farming inputs such as fertiliser and seeds, particularly for small-scale farmers, which is expected to enhance local food production and ensure food security in the long run.

The government may have also frittered away the opportunity to leverage fiscal spending to stimulate the performance of the agriculture sector, with the sector getting as little as one per cent of the yearly budget in some cases.

In eight years spanning 2017 to 2023, the budget for the agricultural sector has not exceeded two per cent of the total budget, a report tracking budget allocations said.

Within the periods under consideration, the budget for agriculture increased from 1.7 per cent in 2017 to two per cent in 2018. Then, it fell to 1.56 per cent in 2019, and fell further to 1.34 per cent in 2020 with a slight increase to 1.37 per cent in 2021. It increased to 1.78 per cent in 2022 and fell back to 1.11 per cent in 2023.

The trend shows a

precarious allocation pattern with no commitment to increasing the allocations in line with the expected demand in the sector.

According to the analysis of the 2023 agriculture budget prepared by ActionAid, the marginal decrease of about 0.67 per cent from the N291.4 billion budgeted in 2022 was 1.11 per cent of the total budget. That falls short of the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) benchmark of 10 per cent.

It is against this background that stakeholders argued that public spending in the agricultural sector is low and should be increased. Demands have also been

It noted that there are 5.4 million children and 800,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women at risk of acute malnutrition or wasting.

"Of these, an alarming 1.8 million children could face Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) and may require critical nutrition treatment," the report said.

It blamed a combination of triple-digit increases in food prices, the aftermath of devastating floods, and 15 years of insurgency in the northeast for the debilitating food shortages.

Reacting to the continued rise in food prices, the National President of the All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN), Kabir Ibrahim, said the association was as

food items by giving sustainable subsidies to make food distribution seamless to minimise food inflation.

The National Administrative Secretary of Nigeria Cassava Growers Association, Segun Ilori, said the major driver of food inflation in Nigeria is the high cost of transportation as well as the cost of input.

He said since the removal of fuel subsidies, and the devaluation of the naira, prices of everything have gone up.

"It now costs more to cultivate a hectare of land unlike before, all the input from seed to agrochemicals including fertilisers are very expensive now because most of them are imported," he said.

He said it is also expensive to transport food from the farm to markets because of the high cost of fuel and diesel.

He pointed that the only way to bring down the prices of food is for the government to support farmers with mechanised farming, not by food importation.

Also reacting, the National President of the National Palm Produce Association of Nigeria, (NPPAN), Alphonsus Inyang, said the decision by the Central Bank of Nigeria to stop development finance intervention programmes, is a wrong policy decision.

He said bad as the Anchor Borrowers Programme may have been said to be, it was a good programme that made available to farmers funds to carry out their farming activities.

From his words, funds are not available to farmers as they cannot borrow from commercial banks. Some rice mills are selling off their plant to raise money to pay off their loan.

He said the price of palm oil has gone up by as much as 130 per cent and it is not likely to come down. He said the reason is that Indonesia, a major exporter of crude palm oil, has stopped exporting.

"As I am talking to you, I know many vegetable oil firms that have shut down because they cannot access palm oil for their operation," he said.

He said rather than waste money by granting import duty waivers, the government should make this money available to farmers at cheap rates.

Business and policy analyst, Dr. Vincent Nwani, said the sharp rise in food and core inflation is not surprising and that some experts had warned the government about it, given that over 35 per cent of Nigerian farmers did not plant this year because their farmlands were taken over by terrorists.

"Those that farmed did not farm on a large scale, that is, those that supply food to the markets. Imported food on the other hand is suffering from exorbitant FX costs at almost N1800/\$1 in Q3 and Q4 this year. The two hydra-headed monsters- insecurity and high FX have impacted food costs and that is why we are experiencing this level of inflation," he said.

Nwani said the unfortunate situation would continue in the new year as "we head into the planting season" when local foods become scarce.

Chief Executive Officer of the Centre for the Promotion of Private Enterprise, Dr. Muda Yusuf, pointed out that food inflation at almost 40 per cent is disturbing and that the figure would spike further given the fact that the festive season is around the corner.



placed on agriculture as part of the government's vision of diversifying the economy.

In recent years, different agencies including the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), have warned of an impending food crisis in some parts of the country, especially the north.

In their recent Cadre Harmonisé report, 33.1 million Nigerians were projected to face acute food insecurity in 2025.

Cadre Harmonisé is a biannual analysis led by the Nigerian government in collaboration with the United Nations, regional technical agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

surprised as everyone that there is heightening inflation at the height of harvest.

He blamed the rising food prices on the dwindling fortunes of the naira and high transport costs. According to him, those trading in produce pay large sums of money to get the produce to the market.

He said: "We made statements to the effect that the import of the listed commodities was only a stopgap and might not bring about sustainable solutions to the problem at hand."

According to him, Nigeria must optimise production internally, shore up the Naira and stem insecurity as well as create special vehicles for the distribution of

Only FIFA Can Determine Best Player In The World –Infantino

...As Vinicius Jr wins FIFA Best Award after losing Ballon d'Or to Rodri

F I F A president, Gianni Infantino has said that only the leading football body has the capacity to determine who is the best player in the world.

The football was apparently taking a dig at the Ballon d'Or during the 2024 FIFA The Best Awards on Tuesday night. He claimed that the football governing body should be the body that decides the best player in the world because of its peculiar voting system.

The Ballon d'Or and FIFA The Best are two of football's highly coveted individual awards.

Vinicius Junior of Real Madrid was on Tuesday named the FIFA Best Men's Player of the Year for 2024.

The Ballon d'Or is organized by France Football and voted for by top journalists across the world.

The Best award meanwhile, is handled by FIFA, while votes are cast by fans, the current captains and coaches of all women's/men's national teams, and media representatives.

Speaking during the 2024 FIFA The Best award ceremony held in Doha, Qatar, Infantino said, "If you want to know the best in the world, it should be by FIFA. Because everyone votes, it's



Infantino

objective, it's all-inclusive."

Infantino's comments come on the back of a controversial 2024 Ballon d'Or gala, which saw Manchester City's Rodri pip Real Madrid's Vinicius Jr. to the award.

Meanwhile, Real

Madrid winger Vinicius Jr was on Tuesday announced as the Men's Player of the Year at the FIFA Best Awards.

The 24-year-old was present in Doha to receive the prize during the ceremony.

Vinicius and his club teammates had boycotted this year's Ballon d'Or event, where Manchester City's Rodri claimed the award.

The Brazilian played a crucial role in Los Blancos' 2023-24 season, which saw

them secure both the Champions League and LaLiga titles. He contributed 24 goals and 11 assists across all competitions.

Earlier in the evening, Barcelona midfielder Aitana Bonmati won the Women's Player of the Year award for the second consecutive year.



Alia Will Reposition Benue Sports, Says Egbe

In alliance with Governor Hyacinth Alia's dream of elevating the state's sports infrastructure, the CEO of Monimichelle Group, Ebi Egbe, has vowed to deliver a facility that will stand as a beacon of hope and development for the state.

Governor Alia has demonstrated a strong commitment to elevating the state's sports infrastructure hence the award of a contract to Monimichelle, a leading sports facility development company. "This project aims to transform Benue's primary stadium into a world-class facility that will not only serve as a hub for sports but also boost the state's reputation at the national and international stages," he said.

"The Governor's decision underscores his dedication to fostering youth development, creating employment

opportunities and positioning Benue as a leader in sports excellence."

By partnering with Monimichelle, known for delivering top-tier sports infrastructure, the state ensures that the stadium will meet global standards, comparable to some of the best facilities in the world.

This initiative aligns with his administration's broader vision to promote economic growth through sports tourism and empower local talent with top-notch training facilities. However, this transformative project has not been without its challenges. Critics and detractors have raised concerns, some of which appear aimed at distracting or undermining the government's efforts.

The Governor has firmly reiterated that any opposition to the project is tantamount to standing against the development of Benue

State.

"This project is not about me; it is about the people of Benue and the future of our youth. Anyone who distracts or opposes this vision is against the progress and prosperity of our state," the Governor stated emphatically.

Indeed, Governor Alia has continued to prioritize the interest of the state, saying that a world-class stadium will not only attract top-tier competitions but also inspire the next generation of athletes in Benue.

"The people of Benue have largely welcomed this initiative, seeing it as a long-overdue step toward revitalizing sports and youth engagement in the state. Community leaders, sports enthusiasts, and youth organizations have applauded the Governor for his vision and bold leadership in driving this historic project forward," posited a local sports aficionado.

NPFL: Lönnström Celebrates Lobi Stars' Derby Win Over Plateau United

Lobi Stars head coach, Mika Lönnström, has praised his players for their impressive performance in the derby win over Plateau United.

The Makurdi club defeated Mbwas Mangut's side 1-0 at the Lafia City Stadium on Saturday.

Waheed Adebayo scored the winning goal in the first half.

"The team played good football with good defending, the first half was fantastic, and the three points secured are important for us," he told the club's media.

Lobi Stars moved from bottom spot to 15th position on the table following the win.

The Pride of Benue will travel to Bendel Insurance in their next game.



Lönnström

Women's Football to Enter New Era With UEFA Women's Europa Cup

The competition will kick off from the 2025/26 season as part of an exciting new era for women's football in Europe.

The UEFA Executive Committee has approved 'UEFA Women's Europa Cup' as the name for the newly created second women's club competition.

Announced a year ago, the tournament will launch in the 2025/26 season, marking a significant milestone in the evolution of European women's football.

The UEFA Women's Europa Cup will give more teams the chance to test themselves against continental opposition, providing further incentive for investment at domestic level.

The name for our second women's club competition was carefully chosen to resonate with fans – thanks to the men's UEFA Europa League, 'Europa' is already known as a term associated with the second tier in European club football, while 'Cup' emphasises the new tournament's purely knockout format.

Competition branding and the new trophy will be presented in 2025 ahead of next season's kick-off.

The UEFA Women's Europa Cup: how it will work

The Women's Europa Cup will take place over six rounds – two qualifying rounds, the round of 16, quarter-finals, semi-finals and a two-legged final.

Thirteen teams – the



third-placed teams in the domestic league from associations ranked 8-13 and the runners-up of associations ranked 18-24 – will be entered directly into the

Women's Europa Cup. Additionally, clubs eliminated in the Women's Champions League third qualifying round, along with runners-up and third-placed

teams from second qualifying round, will enter the tournament via a 'feeding' system. Winners of the Women's Europa Cup will automatically qualify for the third

qualifying round of the following season's Women's Champions League. New era for women's club competitions Next season will also

see a revamped Women's Champions League, featuring an 18-team single-league phase.

These changes to UEFA's women's club competitions are based on extensive consultation and collaboration with the European Club Association (ECA), national associations, leagues and competing clubs, as well as the analysis and recommendations of the UEFA Women's Football Committee.

The innovations highlight UEFA's commitment to enhancing competitiveness and maximising participation in women's football.

Man Utd Must Get Rid of 'Moping' Marcus Rashford in January

The Red Devils didn't miss the academy graduate in the derby, and there's no sense prolonging an unhappy marriage for another six months "It doesn't look good for him," Roy Keane told *newsmen* after seeing Ruben Amorim leave Marcus Rashford out of his squad for Manchester United's trip to the Etihad Stadium on Sunday. "I think a move for Marcus would suit the player. He hasn't been great recently. He (Amorim) has obviously seen something he doesn't like."

To make matters worse for Rashford, United pulled off a stunning 2-1 victory over Manchester City without him, as Amad Diallo solidified his status as the best

winger at the club. The dazzling Ivorian won the penalty that Bruno Fernandes converted to level the scoreline, before producing a brilliant run and finish to complete a remarkable late comeback for the visitors, who are now within sight of the Champions League places again. Amorim's ruthless decision to drop Rashford paid off. To say the 27-year-old "hasn't been great recently" is actually a

massive understatement, and a transfer away would also "suit" United, ideally at the earliest possible opportunity. Rashford will keep letting Amorim down When pressed on his reasoning for dropping Rashford, and erratic Argentine forward Alejandro Garnacho, before kick-off at the Etihad, Amorim said. "I pay attention to everything, the way you eat, the way you put your clothes to go to a game. Everything.

I make my evaluation and then I decide." The suggestion is clear: both men have fallen short of the manager's standards for commitment and general effort in some way. If it was just a tactical call, or based purely on current form, they would have at least taken a place among the substitutes.

Amorim was even stronger on Rashford's case after the game, as he referred to the extreme cost-cutting measures across all levels of the club taken by INEOS chairman Sir Jim Ratcliffe over the past few months. "You understand for so long

we try something with Rash, it doesn't work," he admitted to the media. "Let's continue to do the same thing or try something different. It's as simple as that. They have to work hard. Today they trained really hard. It was not a disciplinary thing. Next week, next game, new life... When we want to change a lot of things, when people in the club are losing their jobs, they have to fight for their place in the team."

Amorim is not the first coach to demand more "fight" from Rashford. He will continue to let the Portuguese tactician down, just as he did Erik ten Hag, Ralf Rangnick, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and Jose Mourinho. Rashford has used up all of his nine lives at this point, and the constant speculation over his mentality is just serving as a distracting sideshow.



Burial Arrangement

The Family of Myina -Iordye in mbayasam, Made, Tombu Mbalagh in Buruku Local Government Area has announced The burial program of their Wife and Mother, Late Mama Ayem Myina-Iordye who's sad event occurred on Tuesday, December Eleven after a protracted illness. Aged seventy eight, Mama Ayem survived by Four Children, Twenty One Grand children and one great grand child. among whom are Moses Terungwa Myina of the State Auditor General's Office, Lizzy Jerry Tyosase, Nongo- bee Myina and Terkumbur Iortyom . A statement by her son In-law and Editor of Agate Newspaper Jerry Tyosase said wake will take place Sunday December twenty two while burial will hold on Monday, December Twenty three at Tse Myina Iordye, Mbayasam Made Tombu Mbalagh, Buruku Local Government Area.

Glorious
Call



Died:
10th Dec, 2024
Burial:
23rd Dec, 2024
Place:
Tse Myina Iordye,
Agbatar Mbayasam
Tombo Mbalagh Buruku,
LGA. Benue State



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**HANNAH AYEM
MYINA**



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AGATE LITERATURE

With Msenhemba Nyiyongu Yonguhime

1. COMPASS

Sailing through life
Blind as a bat
Confused as a mole
Tossed around by wind and breeze
In the cold arms of storms I freeze
Seeking warmth in the bosom of ice
Daily I cast my dice
That my lines may align with my dreams
Still am cut short when mares flow as
streams
Cascade of emotions
Still, no motion
Am clogged
To break free I must be flogged
To get through, I must get a pass
To come through, I need a COMPASS
Side by side,
Due north
Or maybe not
Due east
There maybe a beast
Due south
Words in my mouth
Due West
Weary I rest
Due You, Due me, Due us
Due Right.
You're my COMPASS, So I port.
Aye Aye Captain.
Mused by my Will to live.
Woven by MsentrampledRose ...blooms.

2. MOMENT

Let's not tell the tales of old
Let's not sing the songs of the bold
Let's not ring the bells of ifs
Let's not play the strings of buts
Let's not strike the chords of doubts
Let's not hum the tunes of regrets
Let's not cradle the burden of the past

Let not ourselves be laden by the
Excitement of the future
Let's not wilt the sprouts of the present
Let not the moment be draped in
uncertainties
Inhale.
Exhale...
Sway to melodies of the now
Dance to the tik tok rhythm of the seconds
Mime to every minute
Honour every hour
Worship the cycling circle.
LET NOT LIFE!

3. JUDGE BOOK BY ITS COVER

Books are meant to be judged by their covers
For what is a book without its cover?
But how do I judge when I cannot even see
myself?
How can I be judged when the covers play a
game of pee ka boo?
How can I be a judge when the pages are no
longer there?
How do I become a judge when the covers
are edited to suit an audience?
How do I become a judge, when I don't know
if my cover carries honour in its ambience?
Day and Night, I search myself, hoping to
find the perfection in the little crevices
True the first impression matters but it's the
first impression the actual impression?
Does the impression of the who and the Why
count as the Real?
Reality is Unwavering
Reality is non-conforming
Reality is who you rid of bias
Reality is REAL
Is your reality, real enough to be the TRUTH?
Does your cover match your CONTENT?
Judge a Book by its cover
Only when you have READ the CONTENT!

THIS is the period of the year when joy saturates the air. Forget economic difficulties and other prevailing challenges, this season has a template of its own that easily pulls out happiness and joy from their hidden crevices. This is what Christmas does. It has a way of making people, Christians and non-Christians alike, become momentarily numb to their sufferings, pains and sorrows, to savour the joy that the season offers in golden plates.

Yes, Christmas is a time of joy, love and reflection, welcomed by millions around the world every December 25. While often commercialised and surrounded by a flurry of shopping and festive decorations, Christmas, at its core, holds a profound spiritual meaning that transcends cultural and religious boundaries. This season invites everyone not only to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ but also to embrace the themes of hope, joy, compassion and redemption.

The story of Christmas centres around the humble birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, symbolising new beginning and the arrival of hope in a world often marred by darkness. For Christians, this event marks the incarnation of God in human form, bringing forth the message of love and grace. The Nativity scene represents not just the birth of a child, the saviour, but the initiation of a transformative spiritual journey for humanity.

In reflecting on this event, we are prompted to consider our own lives and the new lights we can bring into the world. This could relate to personal growth, extending kindness to others, or fostering a sense of community in an



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CHRISTMAS: LET LOVE PREVAIL



increasingly disconnected nation state. By embracing the spirit of Christmas, we can become beacons of hope in our various communities, and by extension, our nation. One of the most touching aspects of the Christmas season is the call to love and show goodwill towards all. The narratives surrounding Christmas highlight acts of charity and kindness; from the Three Wise Men offering various gifts, to the humility of the shepherds at the manger. This spirit of giving is reflected in various cultures through the tradition of gift-giving, not solely as a materialistic gesture, but as a way of expressing true love and appreciation.

Participating in charitable

acts during this season can fill our hearts with joy and purpose. Whether it is volunteering at a community project, donating to those in critical need, or simply reaching out to friends and family with a message of love, these actions echo the spiritual essence of Christmas. They remind us that the essence of this celebration is rooted in compassion, and that our capacity to love others brings us closer to understanding the message of Christ.

This holiday season also serves as a profound opportunity for reflection. As the year draws to a close, many take the time to introspect on their life's journey, evaluating

accomplishments and challenges alike. Christmas thus invites us to renew our spirituality, prioritise what truly matters, and seek forgiveness for past failings. In many liturgical practices, Advent – the period leading up to Christmas – encourages preparation of the heart for the arrival of Christ. This spiritual discipline fosters mindfulness about our thoughts and actions, allowing space for repentance and renewal. By engaging in prayer, meditation, or simply quiet contemplation, we can align ourselves with the deeper meanings of this holy time, preparing to welcome not just the celebration, but the challenges and blessings ahead.

Also integral to the Christmas experience are family gatherings and community celebrations and interactions. These gatherings serve as reminders of the importance of connection and support in our lives. The communal spirit of Christmas aligns perfectly with the teachings of Jesus, which emphasises love for one another and the critical value of relationships.

As we come together during this season, let us cherish moments spent with loved ones, embracing both the joyous and challenging

components of family dynamics. It is a time to strengthen bonds, create lasting memories, and, importantly, practise forgiveness. The spiritual essence of Christmas teaches us that, despite our human imperfections, love prevails.

Interestingly, the spiritual themes embedded in Christmas resonate with various cultures and faiths. Across the globe, many different celebrations occurring around this time of year share similar motifs of light, hope and renewal. While the rituals and names may differ, the underlying values of love, compassion, and redemption are universal.

By embracing these shared values, we can build bridges that transcend cultural and religious divides. In a country sorely in need of unity, Christmas offers a reminder that our differences can enrich our understanding of one another, fostering a collective human and national spirit that celebrates love in all its forms.

As we approach Christmas Day, let us not lose sight of its spiritual essence. Beyond the hustle and bustle lies an invitation to connect with our deepest values of love, hope and compassion. This holiday season, let us celebrate not just with decorations, gifts, new clothes, food and other forms of entertainment, but with a genuine commitment to embodying the spirit of the season in our hearts, in our homes, and in our lives. Through this commitment, we not only honour the true essence of Christmas but also illuminate the path towards a more loving and compassionate nation.