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Yuletide: Queues Surfaces At ATMs In Benin

By Ezekiel Enejeta

Barely 24 hours to Christmas, bank customers in Benin lamented over inability to make withdrawals from Automated Teller Machines (ATM) .

Newsmen who went round the metropolis reports that not many of the ATMs in some banks visited on Sunday were dispensing cash.

Some of the residents appealed to the management of the banks to urgently deploy more of their staff to the banks to ensure efficiency in the services of the machines.

Abel Basse, who said he was on queue for three hours before he was able to make withdrawal, alleged that the banks deliberately refused to put enough money in the machines.

"I don't understand how one, with his money in the bank, can find it extremely difficult to make use of ATMs," he said.

For Aliu Ozioruva, he said he visited three locations before he could get cash.

"In fact, I started on Saturday evening but could not succeed and had to set out early on Sunday morning to continue.

"My take is that if the machines were fully loaded and there is someone on ground to always reload when they are empty; this challenge would have been avoided.

"Another issue is that of network which I cannot say anything about. However, the banks should have envisaged the traffic associated with these machines at this time of the year," he said.



Bank customers queue for cash withdrawal from ATM

Fillings were selling fuel between N230 and N250 above the government regulated price of N145 per liter.

Newsmen report that only NNPC Mega Station along Sapele road was dispensing the product at the official price and the long queue at the station had resulted into chaotic traffic jam on the road.

Newsmen report that military personnel, police the state traffic officials have had terrible time trying to maintain orderliness around the station.

It was also observed that the station now operate beyond its official closing time of 8pm, as they were found to be dispensing the product to motorists till 11pm on Saturday.

The residents, however, described the situation as unfortunate especially at the Christmas season. A motorists who identified himself as Osadolor, said he had been on queue around 5am to beat the rush. Also, Thompson Ebewe, said though the queue was moving fast but the activities of some persons had slowed the process.

"Though the fuel line is moving, I believe it could be

Increased Nigerian pay TV Competition Brings Hidden Costs

By Haruna Magaji



Over the last 13 years, the Nigerian pay TV Competition has seen new service providers arrive at intervals, provoking, somewhat correctly, greater viewing choices for audiences. This year, two new providers-Kwese TV and TSTV-joined the fray, sparking delight among subscribers.

While the latter has kicked off, the former appears to be held down by an incubus, notably arising from accusations of intellectual property theft and squalid pre-launch preparation, which have eroded the optimism among those it initially seduced with grand promises.

On the face of it, competition is good for consumers, as it offers benefits in terms of pricing and variety. Looked at more closely, pay-television economics, which in recent times has proved to be treacherous to many recent entrants into the Nigerian pay-TV market space, indicate that the vaunted benefits are imaginary.

Though curious, it is true. with Nigerian pay TV Competition, subscribers can actually end up paying more-for less content.

With new operators in the market, it is likely to become difficult for Nigerian pay television subscribers to enjoy all the sport they want on a single platform. Take sport, for instance. A household desirous of seeing the EPL, boxing and Formula 1 (DStv), the NBA (Kwese), Bundesliga (Star Times), on a single service and at a reasonable price will have to subscribe to three different Pay TV services. This, without doubt, requires hardware for different operators, making competition is anything but consumer-friendly.

To acquire a Kwese hardware and have it installed, a subscriber will have to pay N10, 000. Monthly subscription is N6, 275. The DStv hardware (dish and decoder) costs N9, 900, while the cost of installation is N5, 000. Subscription for DStv Compact is N6, 300. StarTimes Combo decoder sells for N5, 900, with installation attracting N5, 000. Monthly subscription is N4, 800. In the heady post-launch days, the decoder was said to cost N5, 000, with subscription put at N3, 000.

Also ignored is the fact that the Pay-TV ecosystem is radically different from what obtains in many other businesses. In the pay television ecosystem, the right to broadcast or redistribute the most appealing content is divided between operators. As such, the fierceness of the

Nigerian pay TV Competition in Nigeria are part of the global premium content-seeking community and, are therefore, not insulated from the same tough negotiations and often high prices for content as operators in Europe, the US and Asia.

Content costs are almost always denominated in hard currencies such as the US dollar, Euro and the British pound. This, naturally, tends to take costs into the stratosphere. Content-related costs are a major factor for the high subscription prices Nigerian subscribers have experienced recently, especially with the slender value of the naira-a victim of serial devaluation.

A large slice of the monthly subscription paid by a consumer is made up of costs that distributors/vendors (Pay TV competitors) are required to pay to the mega-networks-companies that create content or package Pay TV channels. For every household receiving that package, whether or not anyone in the household watches the channel, Pay TV providers pay a fee.

The mega networks, as anyone familiar with their operations would know, have clear and stringent rules on how their television shows and channels can be sold to viewers. These include what packages can contain their channels.

With sport being one of the most valuable pay television properties and a major influence on many consumers' decision to acquire a Pay TV package, competition for rights acquisition are cut-throat, with costs rising dramatically over the years. This has seen rights for popular sports leagues such as US National Basketball Association (NBA) granted to new market entrants, while other key sporting content remains in the hands of more established providers.

In Nigeria, the television rights for the English Premier League (EPL), SuperSport, exclusive broadcasters of the EPL in Nigeria and majority of countries in Africa, paid an eye-watering sum for the rights.

The amount paid, knowledgeable people said, is far higher than it had ever shelled out. These costs, unavoidably, will be a key driver in the higher subscription costs paid by subscribers.

The Nigerian pay television sector is notorious as a mausoleum of failed providers, whose programming was not appealing. Frontage Satellite Television (FStv), the country's first indigenous pay television service operator in 2004, died at infancy. So did HiTV, and DAARSAT.

From the look of things, subscribers will be better served by established Pay TV operators that offer the most appealing local and international content, a great user experience on all devices and

Bitcoin Trading In Nigeria Is Booming As Both Business Users, Speculators Rush In

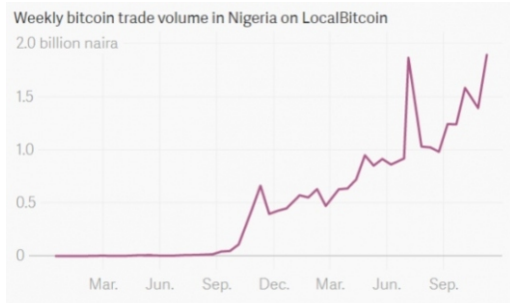
By Ezekiel Enejeta

In July 2016, Manasseh Egedegbe, an Abuja-based investment manager, was caught in the cross hairs of Nigeria's dollar crunch and had some difficulties making an international payment. At the time, with Nigeria's foreign reserves and revenues shrinking amid an economic slump, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) put up currency controls to restrict access to dollars. For Egedegbe, and many other Nigerians, that presented a problem. In his desperation, he turned to the cryptocurrency wave of the moment: Bitcoin trading in Nigeria.

"I was able to use bitcoin to do just one transaction and then I got hooked," Egedegbe tells Quartz.

Over the past 18 months, due to reasons ranging from needing to make international payments, like Egedegbe, or simply wanting a slice of the next big thing, bitcoin adoption in Nigeria has spiked. This year, peer-to-peer bitcoin trading in Nigeria has increased by nearly 1,500%—surpassed only by China. Data from LocalBitcoin, a popular bitcoin exchange available in around 200 countries, shows weekly bitcoin trade volume in Nigeria crossed 1 billion naira (\$2 million) in August. "Seeing the price skyrocket" has drawn a lot of Nigerians "who want a piece of the action," Egedegbe says.

The situation in Nigeria is not too dissimilar from Zimbabwe, whose unstable economy and depleted foreign exchange markets saw locals turn to bitcoin as a storage of value this year. At one point Zimbabwe had the highest bitcoin prices in the world.



New markets

A new crop of local bitcoin exchanges are proving central to the growing local adoption. Timi Ajiboye co-founded Bitkoin Africa in October after experiencing some difficulty trying to buy the cryptocurrency on foreign exchanges. The inability to pay with a Nigerian bank account or card drove Ajiboye's decision to start Bitkoin Africa to make it much easier for local trading.

For his part, Tim Akinbo, co-founder of Tanjalo, also an exchange founded in October, says the potential local applications of cryptocurrencies and the enabling technology was the motivation for starting the exchange. There are also some older players in the space like NairaEX, a bitcoin exchange founded in Nov. 2015.

Despite growing adoption, skepticism largely outweighs enthusiasm but Ajiboye says local exchanges can help ensure more people understand cryptocurrencies better. An initial skeptic himself, Ajiboye cites his new-found conviction in cryptocurrencies, after gaining more understanding of their potential, as hope for a broader change in mindset.

Much like how local fintech companies are creating products and services to plug gaps in the local financial system, cryptocurrency technology has some potential across Africa given the lack of "advanced financial infrastructure," Akinbo says. In that respect, these exchanges serve as vital cogs in the evolving infrastructure that will see cryptocurrencies achieve some of its potential in Africa. Whatever that potential is, the first step is "allowing people to buy and own the currencies," Ajiboye says.

Both exchanges are notching up transactions in just two months of being in business. Bitkoin Africa's trade volume is rapidly increasing: nearly half of its total trade volume since inception happened in the first ten days of December. Meanwhile, Tanjalo has done close to \$1 million in trade volume with "very little marketing," according to Akinbo. Dodgy beginnings of Bitcoin trading in Nigeria

The origins of mainstream interest in Bitcoin trading in Nigeria and across many African markets has been credited to Mavrodi Mundial Moneybox (MMM), a two-decade old Russian ponzi scheme. At its peak, MMM had over two million users in Nigeria despite several warnings by authorities. It has also been operational in Ghana, Zimbabwe, Kenya and South Africa in the past 18 months.

The scheme's playbook was simple: users could "invest" money by pledging to other users in the scheme and then receive returns plus 30% interest in 30 days. But its long run in Nigeria came to a halt when, in Dec. 2016, it suspended operations (CBN estimates that MMM users lost \$50 million when the scheme crashed). But, at the start of the year, when MMM sought to relaunch, it tried to get round regulator's rules by allowing users pay and receive pledges using bitcoin—a strategy it has also deployed in other parts of Africa. Many participants of the scheme, looking to make a quick buck, were quick to latch on yet again.

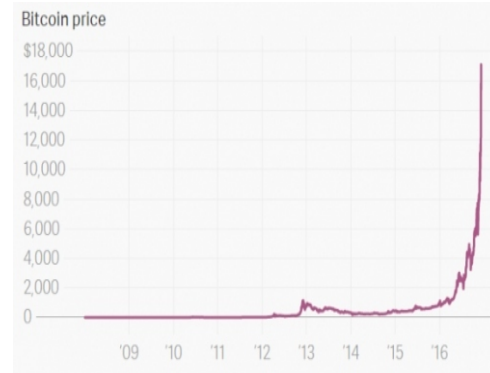
Over time, renewed interest has come from wealthier, middle-class Nigerians who, Egedegbe says, "likely understand the technology better than the average man in the street." But even though it's not a Russian ponzi scheme, a sharp drop in bitcoin's prices could still see people get their fingers burned. Its manic price surge—it has broken through \$1,000 thresholds within hours in December—has seen it questioned as possibly the most obvious bubble ever and has also drawn comparisons with the dot-com bubble at the turn of the millennium.

Akinbo, who is more upbeat about bitcoin's future, says its potential to facilitate cross border trade may eventually justify the increasing price spike. "When you look at it in terms of that potential alone, I'd say it's undervalued." As for a potential bubble, Akinbo views this phase more as a time when everyone is trying to get in on the action. "Just like any new technology, speculation is how this will find its footing," he says.

The big picture

Much of the bitcoin craze is down to big-ticket predictions about its future potential. In Africa, possibilities discussed range from easing payments, particularly for international services to enhancing remittances—a boon for many local economies. But the most basic of these, Akinbo says, is the possibility of having a system "where everyone is permitted to participate" without discrimination of geographical location or origin.

For Ajiboye, who plans to expand Bitkoin Africa into other African countries from next year, making it easier to trade across Africa is a real possibility. "It's easier to send money from America to Nigeria than to send money from Nigeria to Gambia but the technology can power these things," he says.



Death by regulation

Whether or not the bitcoin bubble bursts, its potential locally could be mitigated by regulation. While it's difficult for authorities to regulate cryptocurrencies which they have little control over, it's possible to regulate companies that provide services using the currencies. So far, Nigeria's Central Bank (CBN), like most apex banks across the world, has issued warnings on the risk of cryptocurrencies. One of the earliest came in a January circular in which it cited the dangers of "money laundering and financing of terrorism."

However, more recently, the apex bank's stance appears to have softened: in October, it reportedly set up departments to develop a report on policy proposals for cryptocurrencies. Quartz's email inquiries to ascertain the progress and submission date for the report have not yet been replied.

As CBN mulls its policies on cryptocurrencies, Akinbo advocates that it "remains flexible" by continually reviewing and tweaking its policies in line with global trends. The alternative is adopting and sticking to a policy which could become archaic in a quick changing world. One event that could trigger a wave of apprehensive regulation could be a sharp dip in prices (or the bitcoin bubble bursting). If that's the case, Osarumen Osamuyi, a Lagos-based developer, hopes the apex bank doesn't adopt "draconian regulation." Such drastic action, he says, "will ultimately hurt innovation."

DPR Says Marketers Diverted 129,000 litres of petrol from Abuja on Friday

By Tosin Adetunji



Mr Mohammed Saidu, Head Public Affairs Unit of the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) says petroleum Marketers Diverted petrol upto 129,000 liters from Abuja on Friday.

Saidu, who revealed this the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) after monitoring the stations, added that some of the erring filling stations had been given a total fine of more than N30.5 million.

According to him, more intelligence units are liaising with the public to get information for on-the-spot checks since the scarcity began.

Saidu said the products were being diverted without the knowledge of security agents, who have no mechanism to check amount off loaded at filling stations.Continue on Page 4

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"We now have an intelligence measure that ensures that even if one litre of petrol is diverted, the station is penalised. We have a way of tracing it.

"Through this means, we were able to get to Bulasawa, that remote area behind the National Assembly, and they diverted 13,000 litres and they have been issued a letter to pay N3.575 million to the TSA within one week before they will continue their business.

"Whatever products that were there, we allowed them to sell them off on the spot so we don't compound the issue of scarcity.

"We also got to Oando on Olusegun Obasanjo Way, they also diverted 11,000 litres which means out of the three compartments of the 33,000 that was consigned to them, they took away one compartment.

"They have been issued a letter to pay about N12 million into the TSA.

"We got another station that diverted 15,000 litres and they have been written to pay N15 million to the TSA.

"We got to one station – Toniset, along the Zuba Junction. They applied for formal renovation, they are doing renovation and we were surprised they were given two full load trucks of products without any place to dispense the product.

"We had to trace the two trucks to PPMC to ask how they allocated products to a station that is under construction," Saidu explained.

He further explained that the truck diverted from Bulasawa, was traced to one of its stations on Kaduna Road.

"The remaining 33,000 litres as far as we are concerned was not allocated to that station, so it has to pay the N3.5 million fine.

"The essence of making it N275 per litre is because they lifted the products at the depot at about N133 per litre, and so we double it, meaning, in addition to losing the product indirectly to the government, you are also charged additionally and this is to serve as a deterrent and many marketers are getting jittery.

"If the PPMC consign products to only stations that have physical presence, we are sure the scarcity will end," he said.

He said the department had visited about 360 stations in Abuja, out of which 157 were found to be selling.

"Those few that we found that had products that were not selling, we stationed our staff there to make sure they sell, and they are about 20 stations," Saidu said.

The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) had earlier blamed the current petroleum scarcity in the country on marketers of the product.

The Group Managing Director of the company, Dr Maikanti Baru, had repeatedly assured Nigerians that the queues would disappear by Saturday as it had a 25-day sufficiency.

Emefiele Reassures On 5% Interest Credit To Farmers

By Haruna Magaji

Governor of Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Mr. Godwin Emefiele, Thursday, reiterated its readiness to make cheap funding available to farmers in the country to procure agricultural processing equipment.



Emefiele, who equally said CBN would soon shift from financing primary agriculture to processing, declared that the apex bank was ready to support ideas and concepts capable of growing the agricultural sector of Nigeria.

The CBN governor spoke at the launch of Ogun State Mitros Ofada Rice, in Abeokuta, Ogun State capital. The rice products are packaged in 50kg, 25kg, 10kg, 5kg and 1kg.

The event was attended by the Chairman, Presidential Task Force on Agricultural Commodities and Production, and Governor of Kebbi State, Abubakar Bagudu, top government functionaries, farmers' associations, traditional rulers and representatives of financial institutions.

Emefiele, who noted that agriculture remained the best way to grow Nigeria's economy, provide food and jobs, also lauded Ogun State for actualising President Muhammadu Buhari administration's vision to make Nigeria food sufficient. He noted further that the production of rice by Ogun State would help the country in reducing foreign exchange spending on rice import, urging the government to venture into other food commodities with a view to helping Nigeria eat what it grows.

"I am extremely delighted to witness this giant stride of Governor Amosun. 12 months ago, myself, Kebbi State governor and the Minister of Agriculture, as part of the Federal Government's efforts to revive agricultural commodities, visited Ogun. We saw farmlands, rice plantations, fish ponds, and the governor promised us that we would soon be invited to see the strides of the state in agriculture.

"I think Ogun State government and the people deserve commendation, as the state continues to demonstrate support for the Federal Government's efforts to create jobs, and grow the economy. Any nation that is not serious with agriculture is doomed. CBN will continue to support anybody who wants to grow the agriculture sector. This step by Ogun State will help in stemming the demands for forex to import rice and we will eat what we grow.

"We presently focus on primary agriculture; we will soon shift focus on the processing. We are ready to provide cheap funding at not more than 5 per cent rate, to support those who want to procure farm processing equipment such as threshers, planters, harvesters and so on.

Nigeria's Economy Still Vulnerable Despite Exiting Recession IMF

By Cynthia Adigwe

The IMF on Friday said that in spite of Nigeria exiting the recession, the economy of the country was still vulnerable.

The IMF in a statement by Raphael Ranspach, its Media and Press Officer, welcomed the Federal Government's actions to improve the power sector and business environment under the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP).

The Fund explained that macroeconomic and structural reforms remained urgent to contain vulnerability and support sustainable private sector led growth.

The IMF said its staff team led by Amine Mati, Senior Resident Representative and Mission Chief for Nigeria, visited Nigeria from Dec. 6 to Dec. 20, 2017 to conduct the 2018 Article IV consultation, which led to this report.

"Overall growth is slowly picking up but recovery remains challenging. Economic activity expanded by 1.4 per cent year-on-year in the third quarter of 2017 – the second consecutive quarter of positive growth after five quarters of recession — driven by recovering oil production and agriculture.



Minister of Finance, Mrs Kemi Adeosun

"However, growth in the non-oil-non-agricultural sector (representing about 65 per cent of the economy) contracted in the first three quarters of 2017 relative to the same period last year.

"Difficulties in accessing financing and high inflation continued to weigh on companies' performance and consumer demand.

"Headline inflation declined to 15.9 per cent by end-November, from 18.5 per cent at end of 2016, but remains sticky despite tight liquidity conditions.

"High fiscal deficits – driven by weak revenue mobilisation – generated large financing needs, which, when combined with tight monetary policy necessary to reduce inflationary pressures, increased pressure on bond yields and crowded out private sector credit."

The fund said the factors enumerated above contributed to raising the ratio of interest payments to the Federal Government revenue to unsustainable levels.

Reflecting the low growth environment and exposure to the oil and gas sector, the banking industry's solvency ratio have declined from almost 15 to 10.5 per cent between December 2016 and October 2017.

"In addition, non-performing loans have increased from 5 per cent in June 2015 to 15 per cent as of October 2017, although with provisioning coverage of about 82 per cent," it said.

IMF, however, said the authorities had begun addressing macroeconomic imbalances and structural impediments through the implementation of policies underpinning the ERGP.

It said recovering oil prices, the new Investor and Exporter foreign exchange window has increased investor confidence and provided impetus to portfolio inflows.

The fund added that these have helped to increase external buffers to a four-year high and contributed to reducing the parallel market premium.

It said important actions under the Power Sector Recovery Programme increased power supply generation and ensured government agencies paid their electricity bills.

It added that welcome steps were also taken to improve the business environment and to address longstanding corruption issues, including through the adoption of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy in August 2017.

The IMF said that with these positive actions, growth is expected to continue to pick up in 2018 to 2.1 per cent, helped by the full year impact of greater availability of foreign exchange and higher oil production, but to stay relatively flat in the medium term.

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"However, in the absence of new policies, the near-term outlook remains challenging. Risks to the outlook include lower oil prices, tighter external market conditions, heightened security issues and delayed policy responses," it said.

It called for measures to contain vulnerabilities and achieve growth rates that could make a significant impact in reducing poverty and unemployment, which required a comprehensive set of policy measures.

On the fiscal front, the Fund welcomed the recent tax reforms aimed at improving tax administration, planned increases in excises, and latest steps taken to lower debt servicing costs and lengthen maturities.

"However, with oil prices expected to remain lower than in the past, upfront actions to mobilise non-oil revenues, including through reforming the VAT and removing exemptions, are needed while safeguarding priority expenditures, including scaling up social safety nets and infrastructure investment.

"Fiscal consolidation should be accompanied by a monetary policy stance that remains tight to further reduce inflation and anchor inflation expectations.

"Moving toward a unified and market-based exchange rate as soon as possible while continuing to strengthen external buffers would be necessary to increase confidence and reduce potential risks from capital flow reversals.

"Such a policy package – along with structural reform implementation, including by building on recent successes to improve the business environment, closing infrastructure gaps, and implementing the power sector reform plan – would lay the foundation for a diversified private-sector led economy.

"Strengthening governance and transparency initiatives, and lowering gender inequality and fostering financial inclusion would also be important," the Fund said.

NNPC: 13 Vessels Discharging Petroleum Products

By Ezekiel Enejeta



Dr Maikanti Baru, New GMD Of NNPC

Dr Maikanti Baru, Group Managing Director, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) says about 13 vessels are presently discharging petroleum products at various seaports across the country.

Baru disclosed NNPC discharging petroleum products on Sunday in Abuja while briefing newsmen and reassured of adequate supply of products in the country.

He said that the vessels discharging had an average of 650 million litres adding that three more vessels were expected to berth before the end of the week.

He said that federal government had instructed the Navy, NIMASSA, Customs and all stakeholders to expedite clearance and anchorage services to facilitate speedy products transfers to various depots.

He noted that with the efforts on ground, queues were expected to disappear in couple days.

He said the NNPC had instructed a 24 hours loading and



sales operations at all its depots and Mega stations and also advised major marketers to carryout 24 hours operations too.

"In addition to regular supply circle, NNPC has programmed the delivery of additional 300 million litres in December 2017 and January 2018 to beef up national reserve to 45 million litres per day," he said.

According to him, the delivery is well above the normal consumption requirement of between 27 to 28 million litres per day.

The GMD noted that over the last two weeks, the national truck out capacity had been beefed up to an average of 1,500 trucks, translated to 52 million litres per day.

This, he said was also much higher than the normal consumption of 850 trucks per day across the various depots in the country.

"This is coming at a time when NNPC is the sole supplier of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) known as petrol as a result of the inability of oil marketing companies to import due to landing cost and exchange rate," he added.

Baru said that the NNPC had activated the 'Fuel war Room' to coordinate all intervention activities for supply and distribution of the PMS nationwide.

He said that the team in the fuel war room includes NNPC, DPR, PPPRA and PEF with the support of the security agencies.

The group, he said work round the clock to ensure speedy resolution of the current situation.

"DPR, PEF and PPPRA have scaled up monitoring activities to ensure seamless and compliant loading and dispensing of PMS nationwide and to specifically ensure deliveries to designate stations and sale at the approved retail price of N145 per litre," he said.

Commenting on contributions of the nation's refineries, he said that Kaduna and Port Harcourt Refineries have contributed in the quantity of products supply.

He said Kaduna supplied one million litres daily and in all contributed about 16 million litres while Port Harcourt 2.8 million daily and 45 million litres in total.

He said that with the appreciated all stakeholders and urged Nigerian to stop patronizing black marketers as adequate products were available to serve all.

Commenting on allegation by marketers that government wants to increase the pump price due to the high Landing cost, he said such was false.

He said that at present the landing cost of the product is N171 per litre and NNPC sells to marketers at N131.28k.

"You can see that they still have profit. We are advising marketers to shun profiteering and stop suffering Nigerians.

"Government has no plan to increase the pump price, every effort now is to ensure that we handle all the challenges with distribution to avoid the repeat of this kind of situation," he said

Also, Alhaji Abba Abdu Misua, Zonal Operation Controller, DPR, Abuja said the resources had been given directives to dispense products of any station that defaulted instead of sealing it.

Fuel Scarcity: Buhari Orders Clampdown On Petrol Hoarders

By Cynthia Adigwe

President Muhammadu Buhari has sympathized with Nigerians over their suffering occasioned by the scarcity of petrol across the country, and reassured that the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) is on top of the situation.

The President, who was reacting to the long queues of motorists at various filling stations across the country, in a statement personally signed by him and posted on his twitter handle, said the scarcity was regrettable.

He stated that he was being briefed regularly on the matter by the NNPC and assured that the situation would improve positively in the next few days.



President Muhammadu Buhari

President Buhari disclosed that he had already directed the regulators to step up their surveillance and bring an end to hoarding of the products and price inflation by marketers.

"The fuel scarcity being experienced nationwide is regrettable. I sympathize with all Nigerians on having to endure needless fuel queues.

"I'm being regularly briefed, especially on the NNPC's interventions to ensure that there is enough petrol available during this period and beyond.

"I have the NNPC's assurance that the situation will improve significantly over the next few days, as new shipments and supplies are distributed across the country.

"I have also directed the regulators to step up their surveillance and bring an end to hoarding and price inflation by marketers,

"Let me also assure that the relevant agencies will continue to provide updates on the situation. I thank you all for your patience and understanding."

Correspondents of the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) monitoring the fuel situation reported that a litre of fuel now sells for between N175 and N250 in most filling stations owned by the independent petroleum product marketers across the country.

A motorist in Mararaba, Alhaji Mansur Mande told NAN that he bought 4-litre gallon of fuel at the cost of N1,200 on Saturday.

A NAN correspondent in Enugu who visited the filling stations in the city on Sunday observed that the product was sold for N250 per litre.

NAN, however, observed that major marketers like Total, Oando and NNPC filling stations were selling the product at the official price of N145 per litre but in chaotic situations and endless queues at the stations.

Similar chaotic situations are being reported from other parts of the country including Lagos, Sokoto, Kano Port Harcourt and Ibadan.

Afreximbank, Islamic Corporation Sign \$100m Loan Deal For SMES

By Haruna Magaji

The Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private sector (ICD) and the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank) have signed a line of financing agreement for a USD 100-million facility.

The facility will be utilised by Afreximbank to provide Shariah-compliant financing to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in its member countries in Africa.

Afreximbank has a solid pipeline of projects in the industrial, communication, technology, healthcare, construction and agricultural sectors that would be financed by the ICD Line of financing.



Afreximbank Executive Vice President Mr. Amr Kamel (left) and Mr Khaled Al-Aboodi (right), CEO, Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector in handshake during the signing ceremony in Jeddah

Mr. Khaled Al Aboodi, CEO of ICD, commented: "The proposed financing facility is a token of a good partnership between ICD and Afreximbank, with the purpose of supporting private sector businesses with a Shariah compliant facility structure in our common African member countries".

"This facility will give a boost to our effort to implement our current strategy which prioritizes intra-African trade; intra-African investments and export manufacturing of the labour intensive type," said Mr Amr Kamel, Executive Vice President at Afreximbank.

"It will also promote our knowledge in Islamic finance and provide us with additional manoeuvring capacity in terms of product offerings to our clients."

"We are delighted that ICD has chosen to partner with us in the pursuit of Africa's trade development. This collaboration will contribute to, the objective of fostering sustainable economic growth in the member countries of our two institutions, leading to job creations, contribution to export and Islamic finance development, among others," Mr. Kamel added.

The key economic and financial developmental impact will be, but not limited to: developing private sector, especially SMEs, to help expand the real economic growth based on value creation, and promoting Islamic Finance based on the pipeline of AFREXIMBANK projects.

The Line of Finance facility is also expected to have an impact on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in line with ICD's strategic objectives.

Dangote: BUA Lies On Claims To Mines Ownership

By Tosin Adesoji

THE management of Dangote Industries Limited has again rejected BUA Group's claim to being the rightful owner of Mining Lease No 2541.

Dangote, in a statement yesterday, said its reaction became necessary as a result of its status as a publicly quoted company and to further re-assure its shareholders, the regulators and members of the public that the company is

and remains a responsible corporate citizen.

Faulting BUA's claim that the Dangote Group is trying to monopolise the cement business in the country, the statement said BUA has willfully, deliberately and mischievously concealed the fact that it has at least 12 Mining/Quarry Leases within and around the area in question as opposed to this sole Mining Lease No 2541 owned by the Dangote Group.

It added: "First and foremost, there is no status quo order made by any court that allows BUA to continue mining over the disputed Mining Lease area. In fact, there is no status quo order at all. It is critical for us to point out that there is currently pending, a Motion for Interlocutory Injunction dated 27 April 2016 seeking to restrain the BUA Group from continuing with its illegal mining activities on the Mining Lease Area.

"But in spite of having been served with this application and contrary to all tenets of the law, which forbid a party served with an interlocutory injunction motion from taking any step in respect of the subject matter of the suit, the BUA Group has in utter disdain to the court continued with its illegal mining activities."

Dangote said BUA applied for a Mining Lease over the same area in 2013, but the application was rejected by the ministry on the sole ground that it overlaps ML. 2541, which at the time belonged to AICO.

"If BUA had title that dates back to 1998, is there any conceivable reason why it will apply for the same title over the same area in 2013?" the statement queried.

Dangote, while debunking the claim by BUA that it is trying to monopolise the cement business, stated: "It is misleading for BUA to falsely accuse Dangote of undermining its operations and attempting to create a monopoly in the cement Industry in Nigeria, as we have always coexisted peacefully with other competitors in Obajana and Ibesse."



Aliko Dangote, Chairman of Dangote Group

The Dangote Group affirmed that it has been the one in possession of the Mining Lease since 2016 and this was recently confirmed by the Kogi State High Court's judgment delivered on October 27, 2017 in the charge: State v. Joshua Oghene, Hon. Haruna Afegbua and Bulus Golit, which sentenced the Chief Security Officer of BUA Group, Mr. Bulus Golit to one year imprisonment without any option of fine, for attacking Dangote Group's officials and workers in the Mining Lease No. 2541.

"The imprisonment of BUA Chief Security Officer among other things has confirmed that the claim by the BUA Group that it has been in possession is totally fallacious," the statement said.

Reps To Probe CBN Over Non-Remittance Of \$5b

By Tosin Olajide

The House of Representatives is to investigate the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) for alleged under remittance of over \$5billion to the Federation Account.

The lawmakers also urged the Federal Government to design a bailout fund for collapsed and ailing industries across the country.

This followed the adoption of a motion of urgent public importance by Ayo Omidiran (APC, Osun). He noted that the CBN being the banker of government, receives financial in flows on behalf of the federation and should make same available on demand via the Federation Account on a monthly basis.

She however regretted that the apex bank has not been forthright on the issue.

He said: "The CBN takes advantage of this all important function of warehousing funds for the three tiers of government and preparation of the Federation Account statement, to manipulate the system by opening various accounts not known to the three tiers of government where funds are remitted, hidden, diverted and spent without authorisation.

"The CBN in 2006, opened various accounts with JP Morgan Chase Bank in New York, USA, in which International Oil Companies (IOCs) remit all revenues for the federation.

"The CBN still operates an account with Federal Reserve Bank of New York, USA, alongside that of JP Morgan Chase Bank from 2006 till date.

"The CBN's responsibility of receiving revenue in foreign currencies and converting same to Naira for the benefit of the three tiers of government, has led to substantial loss in the amounts remitted to the Federation Account.

"About the substantial difference between the official exchange rate of dollar to naira, and that at which the Bureau De Change sell in the parallel market, whereas it is the CBN that sells dollars to the Bureau Dr Change operators on a weekly basis as well as regulate the financial market.

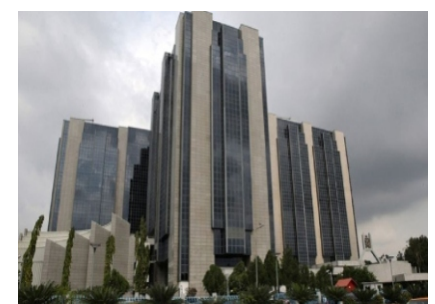
"In the recent past, FAAC meetings have been postponed due to irregularities observed in the Federation Account by the states."

According to her, CBN violated Section 80 (2) of the 1999 constitution as amended by spending funds not appropriated by the National Assembly.

"The CBN takes 0.25 per cent of all foreign denominated revenue as exchange commission (for converting dollars to naira), but even after deducting this commission, the balance credited to the Federation Account at various times have been in negative difference (against expectations), running into billions of naira per year.

"It is worrisome that the office of the Accountant General of the Federation has not reported these infractions of under remittance of millions of dollars and trillions of naira into the Federation Account by the CBN," she lamented.

The motion was unanimously adopted after it was put to a voice vote by the Speaker, Yakubu Dogara.



Innoson vs GTBank: The True Story

By James Osaremen

Recently, the Innoson/GTBank story has gained so much media prominence, especially following the arrest of the Innoson chairman a few days ago by EFCC. Though the case is pending in court, Innoson has taken the battle to social media. There have been numerous sponsored social media campaigns against the Bank such as #BewareOfGTBank and #WhatIsWrongWithGTBank. The company has also gone Television, with its owner, Dr Innocent Chukwuma granting an interview to TVC, where he claimed he had obtained a judgement of N8bn against the bank. He added that the bank pleaded with him over their inability to pay, and that he graciously offered to accept shares of the bank as payment.

GTBank on their part has chosen to remain silent on the matter, perhaps trusting in the integrity of the legal system as against playing to the gallery. Many attempts by us to get the bank's representatives to comment on the story has proven abortive. A staff of the bank who spoke under anonymity, stated "Irrespective of the issues we are facing with the company, Innoson remains a customer of the bank and we owe him a duty of confidentiality and to conduct ourselves in a responsible manner towards him". This statement didn't stop us from conducting our own investigations on the matter, and below are our findings, put in bullet points for your optimum understanding.

The obvious:

Innoson is, and still remains, a customer of GTBank.

What we discovered:

1. GTBank (in 2009) granted Innoson several credit facilities (i.e loans) totalling N2,400,000,000.00 (two billion, four hundred million Naira only), to part finance working capital requirements, import new motorcycles and motorcycle spare parts, agricultural spare parts and plastic manufacturing equipment ("Imported Goods").

2. Under the loan terms agreed by Dr. Innocent Chukwuma on behalf of Innoson, proprietary interest in the Imported Goods was consigned exclusively in favour of the Bank. This means that the Bank was the exclusive owner of the Imported Goods. Accordingly, the original shipping documents (i.e. the Bills of Lading) were in the custody of the Bank, and have remained in the custody of the Bank at all times.

3. Because GTBank was the exclusive owner of the imported goods, ownership of the goods could only be transferred to Innoson (or any other third party) by the Bank. The condition in the agreement between the Bank and Innoson, for the release of the Imported Goods by the Bank to Innoson, was the payment of 25% of the value of each Letter of Credit transaction by Innoson.



Innocent Chukwuma, Chairman/CEO Innoson Motors

What we learnt:

1. Innocent Chukwuma approached the Bank, on behalf of Innoson, requesting the release of the shipping documents without payment of the agreed+ 25% equity. The Bank declined his request as a result of Innoson's failure to meet the agreed conditions.

2. It came to the Bank's knowledge sometime in June, 2011 that the Imported Goods for which the Bank declined to release shipping documents to Innoson in view of its failure to meet the agreed conditions, had been fraudulently procured by Innoson.



3. The Bank discovered that Innoson, under the control of Dr. Innocent Chukwuma had forged the Bank's endorsement on the bills of lading to the Shipping Line and fraudulently cleared the Imported Goods which were in the name of the Bank. The Imported Goods, being property of the Bank should not have been cleared from the Port without the original shipping documents being endorsed by the Bank in favour of Innoson, or any third party.

4. The signatures of 4 (four) staff of the Bank, to wit, Taofeek Olalere, Dan Attah, Bunmi Adeyemi and Amazu Amalachukwu, as well as the Bank's stamp were forged on all the shipping documents used by Innoson to fraudulently clear goods at the port. The Bank did not at any time endorse or transfer the shipping documents to Innoson, as the originals of each of the relevant Bill of Lading remain in the Bank's custody to this very day.

5. When the Bank reported the matter to the Nigeria Police, Dr. Innocent Chukwuma claimed the Bank released the shipping documents to him. Consequently, the Police commenced investigation into the Bank's complaint, including a forensic examination of the disputed signatures, and established that the signatures of the Bank's staff were forged, and the Imported Goods were fraudulently cleared from the Nigerian Ports Authority by Dr. Innocent Chukwuma and his accomplices.

What we heard from the Police:

1. Police investigations confirmed that Innoson and Dr. Innocent Chukwuma deliberately set out to defraud, steal from the Bank and convert the Imported Goods belonging to the Bank by deceptive means and through forgery and misrepresentation.

The unlawful takeover of the Imported Goods, which served as the Bank's collateral, left an indebtedness in excess of the sum of N1,654,481,895.04 (one billion, six hundred and fifty four million, four hundred and eighty one thousand, eight hundred and ninety five Naira, four Kobo) as at September 26, 2012.2. Chief Innocent Chukwuma was arrested and interrogated by operatives of the EFCC, following which he agreed to make monthly payments into Innoson's account until the full liquidation of Innoson's indebtedness to the Bank. However, Innoson defaulted in making the agreed payments.

Investigations by the Nigeria Police following a petition by the Bank in September 2013 also found Innoson and Chief Innocent Chukwuma culpable of the criminal allegations levied against them by the Bank, and Chief Innocent Chukwuma was accordingly charged to court by the Police.

3. The Police filed Charge No. FHC/L/565C/2015- Inspector General Of Police And Innoson Nigeria Limited: Innocent Chukwuma: Charles Chukwuma: Maximian Chukwura: Mitsui Osk Lines: Annajekwu Sunny for fraudulent clearance of goods, forgery, conversion, stealing and conspiracy presently pending before Faji J, at the Federal High Court, Ikoyi and adjourned to November 21, 2017 for arraignment/or hearing of motion for issuance of Bench Warrant.

What Innoson did:

1. Innoson approached the Bank for a reconciliation of his account and pleaded for a debt forgiveness. A reconciliation was carried out on the account – which had a debit balance of N1,654,481,895.04 as at December 31, 2011. In the spirit of amicable resolution and EFCC intervention, the Bank said it agreed to forego the sum of N559,374,072.09 which represented default charges that has accrued on the account and debited in line with the loan agreement between the customer and the Bank.

2. Based on this, the Bank decided to accept from the customer, the sum of N1,095,107,822.95 as full and final payment of the customer's indebtedness to the Bank, provided that same shall be fully paid not later than (30) days from the date of the letter written to him

3. Surprisingly, Innoson commenced suit no: FHC/AWK/CS/2012 against the Bank at the Federal High Court, Awka stating the bank had debited its account with excess charges totalling N559,374,072.09 and obtained judgement in excess of N4.7Billion against the Bank. Again choosing to dishonour an agreement that was amicable reached between him and the Bank for a full and final settlement of N1,095,107,822.95 wherein the Bank graciously forgave him the sum of N559,374,072.09 which accrued on his account during the period which he abandoned his account.



Economic & Financial Crime Commission (EFCC)

4. To further stall the criminal proceedings against him, Chief Innocent Chukwuma and his company instituted suits at the Federal High Court, Abuja, as well as the Federal High Court, Awka in January 2014 against The Inspector General of Police, The Nigeria Police Force and Investigating Officer(s), seeking declaratory and injunctive reliefs, including orders restraining the Police from commencing criminal proceedings against Innoson and Chief Innocent Chukwuma. Furthermore, in a bid to stall the Bank's recovery steps, and distract the Bank from focusing on the criminal action, as well as civil actions filed for recovery of the debt, Chief Innocent Chukwuma and his company Innoson, have continued to institute various spurious suits before various courts, claiming frivolous and outrageous sums against the Bank.

What GTBank is not saying:

1. In responding to Innoson's motion for a stay of criminal proceedings at the Court of Appeal, the Honourable Justice J.S Ikoye on September 17, 2017 dismissed the motion for being unmeritorious and ordered that proceeding in the criminal case against Innoson should proceed.

2. On October 12, 2017, the Police through its Charge No. FHC/L/565C/2015- filed an application for the issuance of bench warrant against Innocent Chukwuma: Charles Chukwuma and Annajekwu Sunny for ...Continue on Page 8

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fraudulent clearance of goods, forgery, conversion, stealing and conspiracy presently pending before Faji J, at the Federal High Court, Ikoyi and adjourned to Decemeber 8, 2017 for arraignment/or hearing of motion.

What we think:

Innoson should stop trying to play the underdog and simply resolve his issues through legal means or arbitration. On Innoson playing the Igbo tribe card, this is not in good taste in this moment in history. We are aware of GTBank's strong position on unpaid debts. We know GTBank has gone often several debtors of the bank irrespective of who they are or where they come from. So why is Innoson's matter now tribal? Please, this makes no sense. Innoson and GTBank, resolve your issues privately and let us all hear word.

Segun Agbaje: Using Fairs To Redefine Retail Banking And SME Lending

By Ezekiel Enejeta

Segun Agbaje, the managing director/CEO of Guaranty Trust Bank (GTBank), is not a popular man. To many, he is aloof, too strait-laced, not your typical run-of-the-mill Nigerian. As one of Nigeria's foremost bankers, he has a reputation for running a tight and efficient ship, is unflinching in his pursuit and recovery of loans from the country's systemically chronic debtors who have a sense of entitlement believing that they can borrow depositors' funds without paying back, and does not give a hoot about those critical of his take-no-prisoners approach to banking.

In the media space, he does not seek publicity, he lets his work speak for itself, could not care less if his story or photograph makes the front page of the newspapers, limits his bank's advertising spend to what he believes is necessary to market and promote GTBank to a wider audience, and through NdaniTV and Ndani Blog understands the power of the social media in reaching out to youths that make a larger percentage of Nigeria's and regional demographic where the bank operates.



Segun Agbaje, the managing director/CEO of Guaranty Trust Bank (GTBank)

To me, Agbaje is the ideal banker. He is not my friend and we only interact sparingly and strictly professionally as the need arises. Yet, I cannot help but wish that we had more bankers like him in this country. If we did, fewer Nigerian lenders would have to make provisions for unardonable impairment charges on bad loans given to delinquent debtors, fewer banks would engage in reckless insider lending that threaten their capital adequacy and liquidity ratios, more banks would recognise that they have a fiduciary responsibility to manage their customers' deposits with care, and more banks would know how to sweat their assets in the most cost-efficient manner to make the most attractive returns to their shareholders.

In all the key parameters used in defining the size of banks, GTBank, among the five Tier 1 banks in the country, is not by any stretch of imagination the biggest. In terms of total assets, loans and advances, customer deposits, number of branches, and presence on the African continent and beyond, FirstBank, Zenith Bank and United Bank for Africa (UBA) stand head and shoulders above GTBank. By Nigerian standards, the "big three" could be called banking behemoths and are very difficult to supplant. Still, GTBank, with its cost optimisation strategy, asset quality and stability ratios, among others, has over time proved to be the most profitable bank in the country. Its stock has remained the bellwether in the banking segment of the Nigerian bourse for years, signposting the confidence institutional and individual investors have in the bank.

But this article is not about GTBank's financial performance. Its annual and quarterly reports, including those of its peers, are public documents that can be readily accessed for in-depth comparative assessment. What I have found more interesting about the bank is its focus on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and interventions in key economic sectors targeted at strengthening small businesses through not-for-profit fairs and capacity building initiatives. For two years in a row, GTBank has solely funded and hosted its Food and Drink Fair and Fashion Weekends, making them social and tourist events that feature prominently on Nigeria's social calendar. That is not to say that the bank has not focused on other areas of CSR. Its 2016 annual report showed that GTBank spent about 58 per cent of the N449.62 million of its CSR funds on education alone while community development accounted for another 30.8 per cent.

But it is GTBank's focus on food, drink and fashion that have been the most impactful publicly, bringing together scores of promising, talented and recognised local and international chefs and food vendors, drinks makers and merchants, fashion houses, milliners, fashion accessory designers and leather goods makers in a dizzying, well-put together and well-thought out extravaganza that leaves the public yearning for more. Both events, which are open to the public, have been attended by several thousands of people, including children, for two years running that have left attendees breathless and wondering how the bank manages to package the two fairs in areas where it has no competencies.

The trick, says Agbaje, whom I had to hound to open up on the success behind both fairs, is getting and attracting the best participants and controlling costs by getting the bank to work directly with the contractors who have to build the stalls, decorate the venue, create play areas and cooking classes exclusively for children, and provide the music, etc., during both fairs: no middlemen or consultants are used by the bank. For him, the fairs present an opportunity for GTBank to deepen its footprint in the retail banking space and increase its SME lending from 2 per cent of the bank's loan book to 10 per cent over the next five years.

With time, he would also rather extend more loans to small and medium-sized businesses that are more impactful on the economy and achieve a loan recovery rate of 70-80 per cent, than pursue Nigeria's so-called "big men" with woeful credit track records. Although he was demur about what it costs his bank to host both events, he was emphatic that making money at this juncture is not the overdriving objective, at least not in the short-term, but recognises the long-term benefits not just for GTBank but other Nigerian lenders.

Beyond this objective and given the magnitude of both fairs and their potential to grow into annual events that could attract millions from across the global, Agbaje's vision is not one to be trifled with. Already, the GTBank Food and Drink Fair and the GTBank Fashion Weekend create thousands of direct and indirect jobs and referrals for hundreds of young Nigerians who have to build the stalls, decorate the venue, and provide the music, entertainment, security and other support services to make them a resounding success. And they have the potential to create even more.

Aside the suppliers, vendors and designers that make brisk business and achieve record sales during the fairs, the Master Classes included in both events are helping to build capacity and drive innovation in the creative industry that has proved to be a major magnet for Nigerian and African youths. By bringing them under one roof, GTBank has also provided a platform for shared services and given them the exposure that help these small businesses to grow and create more employment opportunities.

Without doubt, both fairs are worthy initiatives. But they could be better. In the last two years, GTBank has handled both fairs singlehandedly without support from other institutions and/or the Lagos State government, a direct beneficiary of the events and their spin-offs. In 2016, the food and drink fair alone attracted 25,000

people; this year, it attracted 75,000 people. I do not have the numbers for the bank's fashion weekends, but I can imagine that the number of visitors will not be far off from those who attended the food and drink fairs.

Given the swelling numbers, both fairs have already started to cause traffic gridlocks on the days they are held. They are also attracting touts and hoodlums who mill around the roads leading to the venue and try to pounce on unsuspecting visitors as they alight from their cars or walk to the venue. On a positive note, big and boutique hotels, restaurants and food caterers on the Lagos Island experience an upsurge in occupancy rates and patronage by participants and the international media who have flown in to take part or cover the events. All these translate to more tourist dollars, taxes and revenue generation for the federal and Lagos State governments.

The import of this should not be lost on the federal and Lagos State governments.

They have to do more than just show a passing interest in what GTBank has started. Given the potential for both fairs to become global destinations for tourists and visitors on the African continent, Lagos State in particular needs to improve on its infrastructure in and around the venue where both fairs are held. It must improve on traffic management and security to ensure that visitors can move about with ease and feel secure. According to Agbaje, in terms of support, the state government has not yet stepped up to the plate, nor has his bank sought for any. But he does acknowledge that with time, GTBank will have to reach out to Lagos State because of the interest both fairs are generating in terms of attendance and participation.

Right now, Agbaje appears to be satisfied with what his bank has accomplished in terms of bringing both fairs to the public's consciousness. But do the federal and state governments understand the roles that they have to play in institutionalising them and ensuring that they outlast his stewardship in GTBank? Cities like Rio de Janeiro, London, Paris, New York and Melbourne that host major sporting, fashion, carnivals, music and film festivals every year, attracting thousands of visitors do not owe their success just to corporate sponsors but to the municipalities, state and federal governments that understand their roles and lend the required support to the private sector. As such, Lagos State needs to buy into the GTBank fairs as a public-private partnership that can and should work.

Linkage posts N4b premium income

By Haruna Magaji

Linkage Assurance Plc has recorded a Gross Premium Income of N4.03 billion in its 2016 financial year from N3.78 billion in 2015, representing a six per cent growth.

The firm also recorded a boost in its underwriting profit by 55 per cent to N701 million from N1.2 million.



The 2015 dividend income from Stanbic IBTC Pension Limited that was not received during the year led to a drop of 36 per cent to N951 million from N1.4 billion in 2015...Cont on page9

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Also, its Profit before Tax grew marginally by 2 per cent to N544 million from N508 million in 2015.

Speaking at the company's 23rd Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Lagos, its Chairman, Dr. John Esemokumoh, said the firm's oil and gas business improved its gross premium income.

He said the firm was positioning to take competitive advantage of the transformation and regulatory efforts of the National Insurance Commission (NAICOM) intended to deepen insurance penetration, and provide huge growth prospect for underwriting firms.

He disclosed that the firm had embarked on a new phase of growth that guarantees greater returns on investment (ROI) for its teaming shareholders.

He said this is coming from the strategic initiatives of the new management to navigate the organisation towards better performance and profitability even with the challenges of the current market environment.

In addition, the company's chairman said the company was introducing affordable retail products with superior value propositions to the insurance market via numerous business channels, especially online platforms, to increase insurance acceptability and improve perception by the teaming population.

Managing Director, Dr. Pius Apere, told shareholders that this is a new era in the life of the company, assuring them that come next AGM shareholders would be glad they invested in Linkage.

He said: "We have repositioned the company for growth and stronger returns on investment for shareholders, and this is evidenced in our half year 2017 performance, which is already in public domain.

"We will continue to explore new growth opportunities in the economy to increase its market share; reengineered its operations for increased efficiency via state of the art business technology to drive productivity and empowerment of its workforce in its efforts to deepen insurance penetration in the economy.

Fertiliser import boosts food production

By Cynthia Adigwe

The increase in fertiliser importation between January and early this month led to a boost in local rice production, The Nation has learnt.

The Federal Government was said to have imported one million tons of fertiliser (about 20 million 50 kilogramme (kg) bags of fertiliser) through the Lagos and Tincan Island ports between January and the first week of this month.

Findings showed that both ports took delivery of 254,157 metric tons of the product valued at N27.95billion from eight vessels.

Some farmers said the fertiliser imported from Morocco and Europe was sold to them at N5, 500 per bag.



The last batch of 157, 000 tons scheduled for the last three months arrived the country and was cleared, while the last vessel, V. Sanderling berthed at ENL Terminal few days ago with 43, 180 tons.

Since the beginning of the year, the country was said to have received at least 957,000 metric tons of the product from ENL Consortium Terminal at the Lagos Port and JosepDam Terminal in Tincan Island Port.

The fertiliser was ferried to the seaports by Orient Tiger laden with 19, 892 tons; SFL Humber, 37,800 tons; Nord Mumba, 3,570 tons; Desert Calm, 46,200 tons; Team Tango, 13, 199 tons; Silver Lake, 25, 000tons; Skala Wolid, 31,246 tons; Atlantic Tramp, 36,250 tons and Ionian Eagle, 41,000 tons.

Also, between last May and June, some 343,657 metric tons of Muriate of Potash (MOP) arrived Lagos and Tincan Island ports, while 359,006 tons of Nitrogen Phosphorous and Potassium (NPK) were imported into the country between July and November.

Last year, the Federal Government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Morocco to import NPK and some companies in Europe MOP.

Following the agreement, the government promised that one million tons of NPK and MOP fertiliser would be exported in five batches of 200,000 metric tons before the end of the year as part of efforts to find solution to food shortage and to further reduce the price of food in the country.

In the MoU, government explained that it would control 40 per cent shares, while IML Limited, a consortium of private local investors, would hold the remaining 60 per cent equity stake.

Following the massive importation of the products, the Minister of Budget and National Planning, Senator Udoma Udo Udoma, said recently that the Federal Government would further reduce the price of fertiliser to cut down the price of locally produced rice.

Jonathan's ex-campaign chief, Olejeme forfeits 38 houses

By Ezekiel Enejeta



Ngozi Olejeme, Former Financial Campaign Manager for Goodluck Jonathan in 2015 Poll

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has traced 38 choice houses to a former Chairman of the Nigerian Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF), Dr. Ngozi Olejeme.

Mrs Olejeme, Deputy Chairman of the Finance Committee of the Goodluck Campaign Organisation in 2015, is being investigated by the EFCC for alleged diversion of \$48,485,127 from the accounts of the NSITF.

Of N62.3billion fraud discovered in NSITF, \$48,485,127 is allegedly credited to Mrs. Olejeme.

The anti-graft agency has secured a court order to place the assets under interim forfeiture, pending Mrs. Olejeme's trial.

Besides, EFCC has obtained a warrant from the court to detain the suspect for two weeks to complete the first round of the investigation and her arraignment.

Mrs. Olejeme, who is said to have taken ill, is at a private hospital in Abuja where EFCC detectives are keeping an eye on her.

EFCC detectives uncovered 40 houses, 38 of which are believed to be Mrs Olejeme's.

Of the 38 houses, detectives rated the mansion at No. 51, Kainji Crescent in Maitama, as a "multi-billion naira piece with some foreign leaders occasionally staying there when they come visiting".

The golden mansion was at the weekend sealed off by the EFCC.

A source, who spoke in confidence, said: "EFCC recovered over 40 properties out of which 38 belong to the ex-NSITF chairman, including the property at No. 51, Kainji Crescent, off Lake Chad Crescent in Maitama District.

"The Kainji Crescent property is said to have housed some foreign leaders when they came visiting. It is a multi-billion naira mansion.

"We have invoked sections 28 and 34 of the EFCC (Establishment Act) 2004 and Section 13(1) of the Federal High Court Act, 2004, which empower the agency to apply the Interim Assets Forfeiture Clause."

Section 28 of the EFCC Act reads: "Where a person is arrested for an offence under this Act, the Commission shall immediately trace and attach all the assets and properties of the person acquired as a result of such economic or financial crime and shall thereafter cause to be obtained an interim attachment order from the Court."

The EFCC source went on: "As I am talking to you, we have placed all the over 40 assets under interim forfeiture based on the approval of our application by the court. The assets will be temporarily forfeited until the end of the trial of all the affected suspects."

"We have also secured a court order to detain her for two weeks in preparation for Dr. Ngozi Olejeme's arraignment in connection with the alleged diversion of \$48,485,127 from NSITF's account. We have charges already prepared and we will be arraigning her soon.

"But she sought for medical attention in a private hospital for an undisclosed illness. We accorded her the right to seek medical aid and deployed in detectives and sentry guards to the hospital."

The EFCC has already arraigned a former Managing Director of NSITF, Umar Munir Abubakar, and four others for alleged diversion of N18billion.

The others are Henry Ekhasomi Sambo, Adebayo Adebawale Aderibigbe, Chief Richard U. Uche and Aderemi Adegboyega.

The cash was said to be the Federal Government's contribution to the take-off grants and Employees Compensation Scheme (ECS) for Ministries Departments and Agencies (MDAs).

EFCC's report on preliminary investigation said in part: "That through this process, Dr. Ngozi Olejeme, the then NSITF board chairman, has collected a total sum of \$48,485,127 from Mr. Chuka Eze (her account officer at FBN), which cash he collected on her behalf being the dollar equivalent of monies paid to BDCs by NSITF contractors.

"She and others also diverted huge cash allocated for allowances of its staff and compensation to contributors. Detectives actually traced some of the NSITF funds in the personal accounts of Olejeme and the former MD, Umar Abubakar.

"For instance, Abubakar and others dishonestly converted to N18billion, being contribution from the FederalCont. From Page 10

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Government of Nigeria as take-off grants and Employees Compensation Scheme (ECS) for MDAs.

“The said sum was diverted into personal accounts by an e-payment mandate jointly signed by Umar Munir Abubakar and Henry Ekhasomi Sambo.”

The report added: “It was discovered that the NSITF accounts in First Bank of Nigeria and other banks have witnessed a total turnover of over N62, 358,401,927 between 2012 and 2015 from the Employee Compensation Scheme contributions.

“That out of the N62bn, the Federal Government contributed N13,600,000,000 while the sum of N48,758,401,927.80 was contributed by the private sector. That there were several payments to individuals and companies from the NSITF bank accounts for purported contracts or consultancy services.

“That some individuals and companies that received these payments, in turn, transferred part of the monies directly to the NSITF officials while others transferred huge sums to bureau de change operators who changed them to dollars.”

NNPC: petrol subsidy now N26 per litre

By Ezekiel Enejeta

Petrol is being subsidised to the tune of N26 per litre, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) Managing Director Maikanti Baru said yesterday.

According to him, the landing cost of petrol (PMS) is N171 per litre; it is being sold at the pump at N145 per litre – a difference of N26.



Baru told reporters in Abuja that the consumption of PMS had risen to over 50 million litres per day, due to hoarding and diversion.

He said the product was being smuggled across the borders because of the price disparity that exists between Nigeria and the neighbouring countries.

Baru said the Cost, Insurance and Freight price of PMS is \$620 per metric tonne, adding that at N305 to a dollar, the landing cost translates to N171 per litre.

The Federal Government has approved preferential and speedy treatment for vessels carrying petrol, to end the lingering scarcity, according to the NNPC boss.

The Navy, Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), Customs and Excise and the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) are said to be expediting the clearance of fuel vessels and anchorage services to facilitate speedy product transfers to various depots, including during weekends and public holidays.

The NNPC helmsman noted that President Muhammadu Buhari was deeply concerned about the fuel crisis and had ordered all stakeholders, including security agencies, to ensure a speedy resolution of the situation.

The NNPC, he said, has begun a 24-hour loading and sales operations at all depots and its mega stations across the country.

“Major marketers were also advised to carry out 24-hour operations, most of who have been complying.

This has increased load-out from the depots significantly and continuous sales at the filling stations nationwide,” Baru noted.

He affirmed that in addition to the regular supply circle, the NNPC had programmed the delivery of additional 300 million liters in December 2017 and January 2018 to beef up national reserves to 45 million litres per day, well above the normal consumption requirement of between 27 and 28 million litres per day.

He added that in the last two weeks, the national truck-out capacity had strengthened up to an average of 1,500 trucks, about 52 million litres per day, which, he explained, was higher than the normal consumption of 850 trucks per day.”

The NNPC boss said at present, 13 vessels, with an average capacity of 650 million litres, were discharging the commodity at ports across the country, noting that three vessels with the commodity were coming in before the end of the week, bringing the combined quantity of the product in depots to 814 million litres of petrol till the end of the month.

He added that 14 shuttle tankers, with a combined capacity of 187 million litres of the commodity, would be discharging the product at various destinations across the country in the next three days.

In addition to the importation of the product, Baru noted that the Port Harcourt and Kaduna refineries were contributing about one million litres per day and 2.8 million litres per day of PMS. He said since the fuel crisis began, both refineries had contributed about 61 million litres.

To ensure the speedy resolution of the crisis, Baru said the NNPC had activated the ‘Fuel War Room’, comprising NNPC, Department of Petroleum Resources, DPR, Petroleum Products Pricing Regulatory Agency, PPPRA and Petroleum Equalisation Fund, PEF.

The team is coordinating all interventions for supply and distribution of PMS nationwide. With the support of security agencies, the team is already working round the clock to ensure a speedy resolution of the current fuel situation.

With all these measures, Baru said, and if full compliance is achieved, the crisis would end within the next two days, adding that efforts were in place to ensure that the crisis did not go beyond this week.

Baru also accused black marketers of sabotaging efforts to end the fuel crisis, stating that most of the peddlers permanently put their vehicles on queues at petrol stations, and after purchasing, discharge the products into containers and return to join the queues.

Armed Robber Mistakenly Shoots Partner During Robbery In Bayelsa

By Tosin Olajide

An armed robber died from his partner's bullet during a foiled robbery attack on one Francis Chibueze, along Bakery road, Azikoro village, Yenagoa.

Confirming the incident on Sunday, the spokesman of the State Police Command, DSP Asinim Butswat, disclosed that the armed robber mistakenly shot and killed his partner.

“On Dec. 22, at about 8 p.m., a gang of two armed robbers attacked one Francis Chibueze of Bakery Road, Azikoro Village, Yenagoa.

“As they were trying to attack their victim, one the robbers mistakenly shot and killed his partner, while the victim, Chibueze, escaped unhurt.

“The deceased armed robber was identified as Thankgod Smith, a 25-year old man, and the partner who shot him is Peter Napoleon, 23,” Butswat said.



He said the suspect came to the Azikoro Police Station on December 23, and turned himself in.

The spokesman said the suspect confessed to the armed robbery and killing of his gang member.

“The suspected armed robber led Police detectives to an uncompleted building on Bakery Road, Azikoro Village, where the gun was recovered,” he said.

EFCC Files Criminal Charges Against Innoson Boss, Others

By Ezekiel Enejeta

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), has filed four charges against the C.E.O of Innoson Motors, Dr. Innocent Chukwuka, and others at the Lagos State High Court, Ikeja.

In a letter by the Head of Legal and Prosecution for the EFCC, A.B.C. Ozioko, dated November 30, the commission noted that the four charges were bordering on conspiracy to obtain property by false pretense, obtaining property by false pretense, stealing and forgery.

The other defendants in the case are Innoson Nigeria Limited and Charles Chukwuma.

This comes days after the EFCC released Mr Innocent Chukwuma, following his arrest by the commission at his Enugu residence.

The spokesman for the anti-graft agency, Mr Wilson Uwujaren, said Mr Chukwuma was arrested following his refusal to respond to earlier invitations by the commission.

He said the businessman who runs a local auto assembly plant was initially granted administrative bail by the commission while his surety could also not be found.

“His arrest followed his refusal to honour invitation by the commission having earlier jumped an administrative bail granted him in a case being investigated by the Capital Market and Insurance Fraud Unit of the Commission's Lagos office,” a statement by Mr Uwujaren, read.

The arrest, however, sparked criticism and attracted the attention of the Senate which mandated its Committee on Financial Crimes and Anti-Corruption to investigate the actions of the EFCC.

Although he was released a day after he was arrested, the Innoson Group disagreed with the anti-graft agency and faulted the allegations levelled against its CEO.

In a statement signed by its Head of Corporate Communications, Cornel Osigwe, the group said Chukwuma never ignored invitations extended to him by the commission, neither did he mobilised thugs to manhandle any EFCC official.

“Chukwuma is a law-abiding citizen; there is no how he would be invited by the EFCC and he would ignore or refuse to honour the invitation. Dr Chukwuma has never had any issues or query from the EFCC recently.