

Panel orders former official to refund N33.5 million

THE Financial Impropriety Verification Committee in Cross River State has given the former Commissioner for Agriculture, Water Resources and Rural Development, Mr. Usani Sani, 48 hours to refund the sum of N33.5 million to the coffers of the state government.

This order was contained in a statement issued on Wednesday by the secretary of the committee, Mr. Okoi Obono Obi, who said the commissioner should refund the amount to the government of Cross River State before

the 14th of October 1998." Oyo said the "contract which contravened all the processes and procedures of the government for contracts award was found out by the committee to be highly inflated to the tune of N20 million."

The committee, according to him, "found that a sum of N8 million approved and paid by the then military administrator of Cross River State, Col. Umaru Faruk Ahmed (rtd) to Mr. Usani for improvement of water supply in Calabar municipality was diverted by Mr. Usani."

The committee also ordered the ex-commissioner

to refund N5.5 million to the government, being public funds expended by him to construct a bridge at the National Agric Land Development Agency (NALDA) farm settlement at Obeyi, Obubra Local Government area, saying the farm was exclusively owned by NALDA.

But Governor Donald Duke while briefing reporters on Wednesday said a format report of the committee has not been received, assuring, however, that the state government would follow due processes in implementing its recommendations.

Friday, August 6 1999 (today)."

The statement credited to the chairman of the committee, Chief Orok Oyo, alleged that "Mr. Usani was instrumental to the over inflation of a N29 million contract awarded to Excel Plastics Industries Limited, Calabar by the Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Rural Development for the manufacture and supply of UPVC pipes and accessories to Cross River State Water Board on

DEBATE on the merits and general principles of the supplementary appropriation bill submitted to the Senate last week by President Olusegun Obasanjo was yesterday kicked off at the chambers.

Several senators were of the view that the debate be deferred for one or two days to enable them properly study the details, which they said, were made available to them only yesterday.

A motion for deferment, moved by Sen. Patrick Okafor (PDP, Delta), and supported by Sen. Oshinbajo Osunbor (PDP, Edo), was ignored by the Senate President, Chief Evan Enwerem, who ruled that the debate should continue.

Sen. Vincent Ussulor (PDP, Ebonyi), Dr. Jonathan Zwingina, (PDP, Adamawa) and Chief Udoma Udo Udoma (PDP, Akwa Ibom), were unanimous that the debate should be deferred as they needed time to digest the

Senate begins debate on appropriation bill

supplied by the presidency to enable them make meaningful contributions.

However, Enwerem faulted their arguments, saying that the House could continue with the debate on the merits and general principles of the bill while detailed discussions on it could be referred to the committee on appropriation.

Speaking in an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) accused some of his colleagues who wanted the debate to begin

yesterday of "blowing hot and cool."

"You cannot discuss the merits and general principles of the bill without having the full details and facts at your disposal," he said, adding that since they requested for the details, they should be given time to study what was submitted.

The chairman of the ad-hoc committee constituted by the Senate to look into the threatened strike by PENGASSAN last month, has submitted the committee's final report.

Obe advises media on objectivity

THE Head of the Civil Service, Mr. Abu Obe, has urged journalists to let objectivity be their watch word.

Speaking yesterday in his office at the Federal Secretariat, Abuja,

when a delegation of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) led by its National President, Mr. Launre Ogun-dipe, paid him a courtesy call, he said criticisms should be objective and without bias.



Director, National Youth Service Corps, Lagos State, Mrs. Olufunke Aina (left); Chairman/Managing Director, the Elitade Nigeria Limited, Chief Ade Ojo and President, 21st Youths Organisation, Mr. Goddy Thompson Udo, at a workshop on poverty alleviation in Lagos... yesterday

PHOTO: VICTOR LAMIKANRA

OAU teachers back ASUU's industrial dispute

THE Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), branch has expressed support for the industrial dispute declared by the association's National Executive Council (NEC) on Monday.

The chairman of ASUU, OAU, Dr. Idowu Awopetu, in a statement said the step was in order, in view of the

alleged unwillingness of the Federal Government in implementing the May agreement with the union.

He said that after an extensive deliberation by the university teachers congress, they resolved that the national body should do all that

was possible to get the government to see the wisdom in the immediate implementation of the agreement.

Besides, he urged ASUU's national executive to begin effective mobilisation of its members nationwide "to back up the declaration of the dispute with appropriate industrial action, after the expiration of the industrial dispute".

The OAU teachers also ad-

vised the union's leaders to communicate "with the various organs of government at all, tiers of government and by educating the generality of the Nigerian public" on their demands.

They, however, urged the Federal Government to implement the agreement "and thereby prevent another crisis in our universities".

Group outlines reasons for PTF's failure

THE failure of the Petroleum (Special) Trust Fund (PTF) currently being wound up, to outline its set goals, has been blamed on the "rip off" of a substantial part of its revenue, lopsidedness in the siting and execution of projects, violation of standards and unethical practices by the fund's senior officials.

A non-governmental organisation, Bread of Life Foundation (BLF), in a report released to reporters in Lagos on Wednesday, alleged that parameters such as equality, population, land/water mass, difficulty in terrain and need assessment were abused by the PTF management and consultants because "there was no sincere, deliberate, conscious or concerted effort by the operators of the fund to respect their own rules."

According to the report, there was disparity in the distribution of PTF projects in all the six zones in the country.

The report added: "The appointment of consultants, contractors and suppliers to execute and implement all PTF programmes was

greatly skewed in favour of the North and North-west. The genesis of this scenario lies in the appointment in 1995 of Gen. Buhari, a Northerner, as the executive chairman of the PTF, and the appointment of the AFRIPRO Consortium, an outfit wholly owned and managed by Northerners as PTF's sole management consultants."

The report stated that while Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo and Ekiti states (zone one) got N579.6 million in July last year for contract sums under the education scheme, states in zone three, namely Kebbi, Sokoto, Katsina, Jigawa, Kano and Zamfara got N1,532 billion."

The report further stated: "While zone two - Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Imo and Ebonyi states, received N752.6 million, states in zone four, namely: Yobe, Borno, Bauchi, Taraba, Adamawa and Gombe got N1,947 billion under the PTF national projects scheme."

It also accused the former management of the agency

of perpetuating a Northern hegemony and dominance in the management of the fund.

"Almost all the 17 companies that supplied drugs to zone one (South West) under the PTF assisted drug revolving fund scheme were owned by Northerners. Only four out of 18 professionals engaged to conduct nationwide survey, under the PTF health programme, are southerners of Yoruba extraction. All the others are indigenes of the North."

"About 85 per cent of the suppliers recently appointed to supply educational materials to zone one, are Northerners," the report added.

On the agency's financial status, the report claimed that an interim financial statement prepared at the end of last year revealed that the PTF was "in deficit to its

commitments to on-going projects to the tune of N156.74 billion."

While attributing this deficit to mismanagement, the foundation called on the Federal Government to investigate the activities and operations of the PTF.

It suggested that a probe committee should be vested with powers to physically verify all completed and on-going PTF projects, independently verify all assets of the agency and determine the extent PTF consultants coupled with the funds directives in regard of programme execution."

It added that the panel should investigate all matters pertaining to the disbursement of about N110 billion by the PTF to execute its programmes since its establishment."

ESUT graduates students August 14

THE third set of executive MBA students of Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT) Business School, Lagos will graduate on Saturday, August 14 at a special convocation ceremony at Michael Okpara Square, Independence Layout, Enugu.

Sixty-six of the students specialized in Banking and Finance, 75 in Business Administration, seven in Insurance and Risk Management and 60 in Marketing while 71 bagged the post-graduate diplomas in business administration.

Lagos raises panel on return of mission schools

DESPITE mounting criticisms, the Lagos State Government has raised a committee that will facilitate the return of some schools to their former owners.

Also, the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Ekiti, Rev. Olatunji Michael Fagun, has argued that the return of schools taken over by government would raise the falling standard of education.

The Lagos State Government's decision to return those schools had been criticised by the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) and some interest groups while it received praises from other itching to repossess these schools.

The teachers had expressed the fear that their careers would be jeopardised with the return of schools to the private owners, with some of them already due for pension.

They also expressed doubt over the ability of private school proprietors to pay the new minimum wage.

But the Special Adviser to the Governor on Education, Dr. Idowu Sobowale, who spoke with *The Guardian* on telephone said the state government was going ahead with its plan to return the schools to their owners.

He confirmed the sitting up of a committee on the matter adding that the committee's report would soon be presented to the

governor.

On the options suggested by various interest groups, on the issues Sobowale said they were being considered, on their merit adding that although a good number of the missions have indicated interest to have the schools back, some others have objected to the proposal.

"The oppositions is from various groups - The NUT and some Moslems. But what I think they are saying is no opposition as such. They suggested options which are being considered on their merit," he said.

However, Fagun in a statement issued in Ado-Ekiti yesterday traced the decline in the standard of education to government forceful acquisition of privately owned secondary schools.

In the statement titled: "A New Dawn in Nigeria," the cleric said it was heart warming that steps were being taken by the federal and state governments in favour of compulsory and free primary education.

But he added that the efforts of the government towards privatising the nation's education sector could be enhanced through the return of mission schools.

Fagun said: "It was not only a fatal error that the dictatorial military government of the past took over mission schools in the entire south, schools in the North until now."

"Let President Olusegun Obasanjo and the state governments consider the return of the forcefully acquired schools without compensation to the rightful owners. In fact this is a case for the consideration of the Human Rights Abuse panel set up by President Obasanjo."

40 feared dead in accident

NO fewer than 40 lives were lost yesterday in a multiple accident which occurred along Suleja-Kaduna road in Niger State.

The accident occurred after a fuel tanker coming from Kaduna hit a bus as a result of brake failure with the fire engulfing other oncoming vehicles.

Reports say it was a

frightful sight as many people were burnt beyond recognition with one of the victims being a pregnant woman who was carrying a baby.

Men of the fire service who arrived the scene of the fire, said though they were able to get the blaze under control, they were assisted by on lookers for arriving the scene of the accident late.

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QUALIFICATIONS

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3. With current Professional Driving Licence and
4. Within the age of 25 and 40 years.

METHOD OF APPLICATION

If you meet the above criteria, please apply in your own handwriting, accompanied with CV, photocopies of supporting documents and passports photos within the next two weeks to:

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