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In Ethiopia's Tigray, a Horrific Military Cooperation: Weaponised Rape

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“They raped me in front of my father.
I was too scared to even make a sound.
They threatened to kill us both.”

– A 24-year-old Tigrayan woman

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In Ethiopia's Tigray, a Horrific Military Cooperation: Weaponised Rape

By Lucy Kassa

"They raped me in front of my father. I was too scared to even make a sound. They threatened to kill us both," said a 24-year-old Tigrayan woman, Simret*, who now lives in Qadarif refugee camp in Sudan.

Before the war in Ethiopia's northern region of Tigray began, she lived in Humera, a town located in contested territory between the Tigray and Amhara regions. In early 2021, when she was attacked, Humera and the rest of Tigray were under the joint control of Ethiopia's federal government, militias from the neighboring Amhara region and Eritrean allied forces.

In November 2020, following months of tension between the national ruling party, led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, and the Tigray region's ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), Tigray's regional government rebelled against the federal government. Their efforts were largely unsuccessful, and their soldiers were routed out of the area after a few weeks of war with the Ethiopian national army and its allies.

Between February and April 2021, when the state was in control of the Tigray region, over 1,288 cases of sexual violence were registered in the regional health facilities, according to Amnesty International. Many survivors, however, told Amnesty that they had not visited health facilities, suggesting these figures represent only a small fraction of rapes in the context of the conflict.

In this investigation, CCIJ also interviewed Dr. Fasika Amdeslasie, who was head of the Tigray health bureau during the early months of the war. He says his office received 1,772 sexual violence cases between Nov. 3, 2020 (the start of the war) and June 10, 2021.

The uptick of sexual violence survivors coming to hospitals for care was the first indication that the soldiers who were running the town were raping women on a massive scale. Since then, evidence has only mounted in reports by the media, human rights groups and a UN commission formed in December 2021.

The Ethiopian government says it has held some of its soldiers accountable for rape and other war crimes in the conflict, even though it minimizes the scale and systematic nature of the sexual violence.

"[D]ozens of our soldiers have been sentenced to serious, serious penalties, some including to life in prison," Gedion Timothewos, attorney general of the Ethiopian government, told the BBC in August 2021.

He did not say whether the prosecuted included members of the regional Amhara militia who fought on the government side. In CCIJ interviews with more than a dozen survivors and witnesses, Amhara militiamen and Eritrean soldiers – in addition to federal government soldiers – were accused of rape in western Tigray.

Timothewos also minimized the scope of the sexual violence perpetrated by government soldiers.

He said the Ethiopian government had conducted its own investigations on the ground and did not agree with the conclusion that the rapes were systematic. "There are sensationalized reports – very exaggerated and unsubstantiated," he told the BBC.

A UN Commission of Human Rights report on Ethiopia found that, among many other abuses, sexual violence had been committed on a "staggering scale." Before the commission's report, the federal government's own minister for women, Filsan Abdi, had resigned over what she called official efforts to suppress her ministry's findings about abuses by the government and its allies.

The perpetrators were not only fighting for the Ethiopian government, however. CCIJ found even Tigrayan fighters committed retaliatory acts of sexual violence that amounted to weaponization of rape in other zones of this complex conflict.

Each group of perpetrators thus far has acted with near total impunity for the lasting damage they have inflicted on victims ranging from 13-year-old adolescents to elderly mothers.

And although military hostilities appear to have ended with the November 2022 signing of a peace treaty by the Ethiopian government and the TPLF, the accord contains no calls for accountability from the rapists or resources to help rape survivors heal.

A 50-something mother, who was gang-raped along with her daughters in February 2021 by men she believes to be Amhara militiamen, said that their "lives are ruined."

"We don't have the same social life we had previously," she added, before lapsing into a long silence.

THE COMPLETELY UNACCOUNTABLE PERPETRATORS

Ethiopia's reluctant admission and limited prosecution might almost look like justice if compared to another state actor in the conflict: Eritrea. By many accounts, Eritrean soldiers led the charge in weaponizing rape in the conflict in Tigray. Of the 13 survivors interviewed by CCIJ in this investigation, five said their rapists were Eritrean soldiers – compared to two who pointed to Ethiopian soldiers. Yet the former are accountable to neither the Ethiopian government nor the international community from which their country, often called “the North Korea of Africa,” is isolated.

Simret says her attackers wore the uniform of the Eritrean army. “They did not hide their identity in the first place. They presented themselves as Eritreans,” she explained.

Another person who fled Humera in those months, a 17-year-old girl who was raped by nine soldiers, said, “I clearly remember... There were five Eritrean soldiers.”

The identity of the other four was unclear to her — she was not fully conscious during part of the ordeal. “Like a bad dream, I can only remember there were four, and [they] spoke Amharic [the official language of Ethiopia],” she recounted.

She said the attack happened in early February 2021 after the soldiers ordered her to walk to their camp. “I was scared they would shoot me. So I obeyed. When we reached the camp, they ripped my clothes and took turns gang-raping me,” she said.

The girl alleges that in mid-April 2021, she and other displaced people from Adi Goshu in western Tigray reached Humera. “They stopped us, let others go and ordered me to stay. Then they forced me into a nearby house – and that is when they raped me.”

Back in Adi Goshu a few days earlier, a 31-year-old woman was returning home from a local church when she was accosted by five soldiers she identified as Eritrean. “They were stationed in our neighborhood,” she explained. “They forced me into a house and gang-raped me.”

Reports by human rights organizations and other observers also prominently name Eritrean soldiers as major perpetrators of sexual violence in Tigray. One in three of the Tigray sexual violence incidence reports logged on the humanitarian data exchange, a data repository run by the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, names the Eritrean Defense Forces soldiers as perpetrators. The incidents reported in this repository are collected from open source, public reports and do not represent the total number of all sexual assaults in Tigray.

VENDETTA IN A DECADE-LONG HOSTILITY

The circumstances that led to Eritrean soldiers fighting a war between the Ethiopian federal government and one of its own provinces are rooted in a decades-long relationship between Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki and the TPLF.

It dates back to Eritrea's armed struggle for independence from Ethiopia, which the TPLF supported – although their alliance was on and off even then. Together, they defeated Ethiopia's socialist regime in 1991. Eritrea broke away and, leading an alliance with other Ethiopian rebel groups, the TPLF took power in Addis Ababa.

Prior to secession, the boundaries between Eritrea and Tigray were of little consequence, since both were administrative regions of Ethiopia. Post-secession, Afwerki laid claim to an area called Badme, which the TPLF saw as part of its home turf – Tigray.

With the military might of the Ethiopian government it now led, the TPLF went to war with Eritrea in the 1998 Eritrea-Ethiopia border war, setting off years of hostility between the two former allies.

The Algiers agreement, signed in 2000 between the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments, ended active hostilities. The territorial issue was forwarded to the Hague boundary commission, whose ruling favored Eritrea. Yet the TPLF-led Addis government refused to hand over the territory ruled for Eritrea.

Under the pretext that this impasse left the possibility of war with its neighbor ever present, Afwerki, who is still ruling Eritrea, indefinitely extended military conscription for men in his country.

Ethiopia's current prime minister won the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize for normalizing relations with Eritrea, but when what he initially called a “law-and-order operation” in Tigray escalated into full blown war, Eritrean soldiers joined the war.

Their battlefield conduct would look a lot more like a long-term political vendetta than routine law enforcement.

RAPE AS A WEAPON OF WAR

Multiple reports have emerged of Eritrean troops subjecting women and girls to sexual violence, but one incident, in particular, highlights the brutality of their alleged crimes.

In March 2021, a video of a young Tigrayan mother, who had reportedly been raped by 23 Eritrean soldiers, circulated widely on social media. It showed doctors removing long nails, pieces of plastic and stones from her body.

Chouchou Namegabe, a Congolese campaigner who has urged the International Criminal Court to classify rape as a weapon of war, recognizes the extremity of the sexual violence inflicted on the woman in the video. They are sending “a message to the enemy – they want to show victory in the woman's body,” she says.

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In Abuja, Extortionate Police Officers ‘Steal’ Over N300,000 from Corp Member

By Yawale Adamu

Amazing Grace, a member of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) serving in Abuja has detailed how some police officers extorted N364,825 from him despite showing them his identity card.

In a Twitter post, Grace alleged that the police officers forcefully drove him to a secluded area, and collected his ATM card including the pin. Thereafter, they drove off and he would receive debit alerts of six consecutive transactions.

According to him, the extortionate officers accosted him in front of Shoprite/Gateway in Lugbe, Abuja.

“This happened right now,” Grace tweeted. “I just got extorted by some policemen who picked me up in front of SHOPRITE/ GATEWAY Lugbe Abuja. They took my atm card from me and the pin and then went on and removed all my money... they never allowed me to make any single call.”

“Even after I told them I am a corp member they still didn’t listen even after they saw my ID Card.... They kept on driving to different lonely places and then got to a spot where one of the officers came down and collected my card and pin,” he added.

However, the FCT Police Command in response to the tweet asked the victim to call a certain phone number.

The victim later tweeted that he was invited by the police for assistance and would be giving an update later.

“Update... I just called @FCT_PoliceNG and I was asked to come for further assistance, I am on my way going to Garki now. Thank you all for your retweets and I will keep you all updated,” he noted.

Efforts to get in touch with the victim proved abortive as he had not responded to an inquiry sent to him at press time.

Josephine Akeh, spokesman for FCT Police Command confirmed the incident. She told WikkiTimes the matter is being investigated to find the identities of the perpetrators. According to her, the force will ensure justice is done.

12 Perish in Niger Road Crash



By Idris Kamal

At least 12 persons reportedly died in a fatal auto crash along Lambata-Agaie-Bida road in Niger state when two trucks loaded with grains collided.

Reports indicate that 10 other persons sustained various degrees of injuries. They are currently receiving medical care at Agaie General Hospital. Sector Commander Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) in Niger State, Mr Kumar Tsukwam who confirmed the incident said it occurred at about 5am on Saturday.

He said the accident happened two kilometres away from IBB University Remedial Studies Center in Agaie.

The trucks involved in the ghastly accident are loaded with soybeans and benne seeds carrying an estimated 70 passengers on their way to Lagos. Residents said the accident is one of the deadliest road traffic recorded this year due to the deplorable condition of the road.

Bandits Kill 20, Abduct Scores in Zamfara Over Missing Rifles

By Babaji Usman

Irate bandits have killed 20 locals and abducted dozens, mainly males in Randa community of Maru local government of Zamfara state after losing two rifles in a gun dwell with a rival armed group.

Reports indicate that fight ensued between fighters loyal to Lawali Damina, a bandits’ kingpin in the area and another armed group over a lady who recently moved into the community from Shinkafi.

Abdulkadir Abdullahi, the village head of Mutumji said the community had since paid the levy Damina imposed on its residents to make up for the missing rifles and avert any possible attack on the community from him going forward.

Bandits along the border areas of Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna and Kebbi states reported imposing levies against locals and committing their evil acts unchallenged.

Mohammed Shehu, the Zamfara state Police Spokesman told WikkiTimes that he will verify the report and get back to the medium. However, at press time, the officer could not verify or dismiss the report.

FACT-CHECK: Reno Omokri Claims Tinubu Was Shamed in Niger Community, but He Lied

By Yunusa Umar

On Saturday, Reno Omokri, a former presidential aide to erstwhile president, Goodluck Jonathan, posted a video on his YouTube channel, claiming that youths in Lapai town, Niger State, mocked Bola Ahmed Tinubu, presidential candidate of All Progressive Party (APC).

While Tinubu visited the town, Omokri, an ardent supporter of Abubakar Atiku, the presidential flag bearer of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), claimed that the youth were chanting "Ba mayi" (we are not doing).

"Obviously, these are the best times for APC presidential candidate, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu," Omokri said in the two minutes video posted on his YouTube channel. "Now, I got the video of his visit to Lapai, Niger State where his convoy along Umar Bago, APC gubernatorial candidate and Member of house of representatives." He later shared the video via his Facebook and Twitter handles.

Omokri, further claimed that Tinubu's convoy was chased out of Lapai town, chanting "Ba Mayi" and throwing stones at his entourage.

"We don't encourage any kind of violence but we have to tell the story as it happened," he said. "This is indicative perhaps Bola Tinubu is not as popular as he thinks, he is in Niger."

"Anyway, watch this video, put a comment in the comment section. It is not about Bola Tinubu or to engage in gibberish like Balaboo. This time around, it is his people telling him that they want him," Omokri added.

At press time, the footage had generated 15 reactions and 2,472 viewers.

VERIFICATION

Checks by WikkiTimes showed that Abubakar Sani Bello, Niger State Governor alongside his entourage were in Lapai on December 17, 2022 where they had gone to commission female hostels and other projects in Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Niger State.

Jibrin Mohammed Lwafu, the students' union leader in the institution, confirmed that the incident occurred in his school, adding that APC presidential candidate was not among the entourage of the state governor.

"Tinubu was not among the convoy that commissioned the project in the school," Lwafu said.

"It was APC gubernatorial candidate, Umaru Bago and incumbent governor, Alhaji Abubakar Sani Bello that came to commission newly built projects in the university."

VERDICT

The claim by Omokri that youths were chanting "Ba Mayi" and chased Tinubu out of Lapai, is misleading and false.

The incident occurred in the state-owned university in Lapai where youths chanted "Ba Mayi" against APC gubernatorial candidate, Bago and Governor Bello, who is contesting for a senatorial seat come 2023.

In 3 Years, INEC Records 50 Attacks on Offices — Taraba, 2 Others in North

By Babaji Usman

Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) says it has recorded 50 attacks on its offices across the country between 2019 to 2022.

According to data released by the Electoral Commission on Friday, the attacks took place in 15 states which include Imo topping the list with (11), Osun (7), Enugu (5), and Akwa Ibom. (5), Ebonyi (4), Cross River (4), and Abia (4).

Others are: Anambra (2), Taraba (2), Kaduna (1), Borno (1), Bayelsa (1), Ondo (1), Lagos (1), Ogun (1).

INEC stated that 2020 is the year with the most attacks with 22 incidents so far. It followed by 2021 with 12, and 2019 and 2022 jointly with 16 — eight attacks each.

The attacks were predominantly found in the southeastern states and mostly fingered against Biafra agitators. INEC headquarters in Imo had been attacked earlier this week, the third within 12 days in the state.

There were four attacks in Akwa Ibom State in 2019, two in Imo, and one each in Bayelsa and Osun states.

In 2020, there were five attacks in Osun, four in Cross River, four in Imo, three in Abia, two in Taraba, one in Anambra, one in Lagos, one in Ondo, and one in Borno.

In 2021, there were three attacks in Ebonyi, three in Enugu, two in Imo, one in Anambra, one in Abia, one in Kaduna, and one in Akwa Ibom.

While in 2022, there were three pre-election violence in Imo, two in Enugu, and one each in Ebonyi, Ogun and Osun States.

The general election is slated for February 25, 2023, in which Nigerians will elect new president, governors and members of the federal and state parliaments.

Just-In: Police Neutralise 12 Suspected Kidnappers in Bauchi Forest

By Babaji Usman

Police in Bauchi State have killed 12 suspected kidnappers in four different forest hideouts in Alkaleri local government area of the state.

Bauchi State Police Public Relations Officer, SP Ahmed Muhammad Wakil disclosed this to reporters in a statement in Bauchi on Monday.

He said police personnel on operation in Mansur, Digare, Gwana and Dajin Madam in Alkaleri forest neutralised the gunmen in a gun dwell.

“On the 19th December 2022 at about 0230hrs a Joint Operation of security operatives engaged suspected bandits/kidnappers in four different hideouts; Mansur, Digare, Gwana and Dajin Madam in Alkaleri forest.

“Following the hot exchange of superior fire-power by the operatives which left twelve (12) of the kidnappers neutralized while others were subdued, dislodged, and scampered in disarray into the nearby bushes with possible gunshot wounds and abandoned their Camp.

“Consequently, weapons and operational motorcycles were recovered during the operation,” the statement read in parts.

Alkaleri local government host the Kolmani oil field where Federal Government began oil exploration a few weeks ago.

However, before the exploration began, the area grappled with the activities of gunmen who kidnapped innocent residents of the area for ransom unabatedly.

Taraba Assembly Gets New Speaker

By Babaji Usman

Taraba State House of Assembly on Wednesday elected a member representing Zing constituency, Kizito Bonzena, as its new speaker, the third in one tenure.

Bonzena emerged the speaker during an emergency sitting of the house shortly after the resignation of the former speaker, Joseph Albasu Kunini.

Kunini’s letter of resignation was read during a meeting presided over by the Deputy Speaker, Hamman Adama of Daka State Constituency, the members unanimously nominated and elected Bonzena as the new speaker. Daily Trust reported that the resignation letter of the former Speaker dated December 21, 2022, reads: “I write to convey my letter of resignation as the Speaker, Taraba State House of Assembly.

“My resignation is on personal grounds. I wish to thank the Hon. Members for their support and cooperation while I served as the Speaker of this Honourable House.”

Prior to being elected as the new speaker of the state, Bonzena was the Chief Whip of the Assembly.

After Dumping APC For PDP, Sen Bulkachuwa Kicks CBN’s Withdrawal Policy

By Idris Kamal

Adamu Muhammed Bulkachuwa, Senator representing Bauchi North in the Senate has rejected the recently introduced cash limit withdrawal policy of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN).

Senator Bulkachuwa, who recently dumped the APC for PDP after establishing a reputation of being a staunch Buhari supporter said the policy has a lot of political colourations.

He said despite CBN’s repeated claims that the policy is not designed to prostrate the opposition ahead of the 2023 polls, it will definitely take a toll on electioneering going into the polls.

“It looks so (political) even if they say it is not because I have never been in a situation whereby during elections and electioneering campaigns where people are subjected to a situation where they cannot even buy fuel for the cars they take on campaigns,” he said.

“So, how do you reason that it will not affect the elections or how do you explain that it has nothing to do with the elections?” he asked.

Senator Bulkachuwa said the “nationwide” nature of the policy “has serious implications because the election itself is nationwide.”

WikkiTimes recalls that the CBN, in early December, pegged maximum daily withdrawals via Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) and Point Of Sale (PoS) terminals at N20,000.

OBITUARY: Prof Mahadi's Footprints as Vice Chancellor of Gombe Varsity, ABU Zaria

By Hafsa Mohammed Ibrahim

Following a protracted illness, Professor Abdullahi Mahadi, former Vice-Chancellor of Gombe State University (GSU), passed away at 77.

The erudite historian and successful university administrator, passed away at the Federal Teaching Hospital Gombe, according to a family source.

“Innalillahi wa Inna'ilaihi Raji'un. It is with a heavy heart I announce to you that Prof. Abdullahi Mahadi has passed away last night at the FTH, Gombe. The funeral prayer will take place today (Saturday) by 4 pm at the Emir's Palace Gombe,” a member of his family had posted.

FROM ABU TO GOMBE STATE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

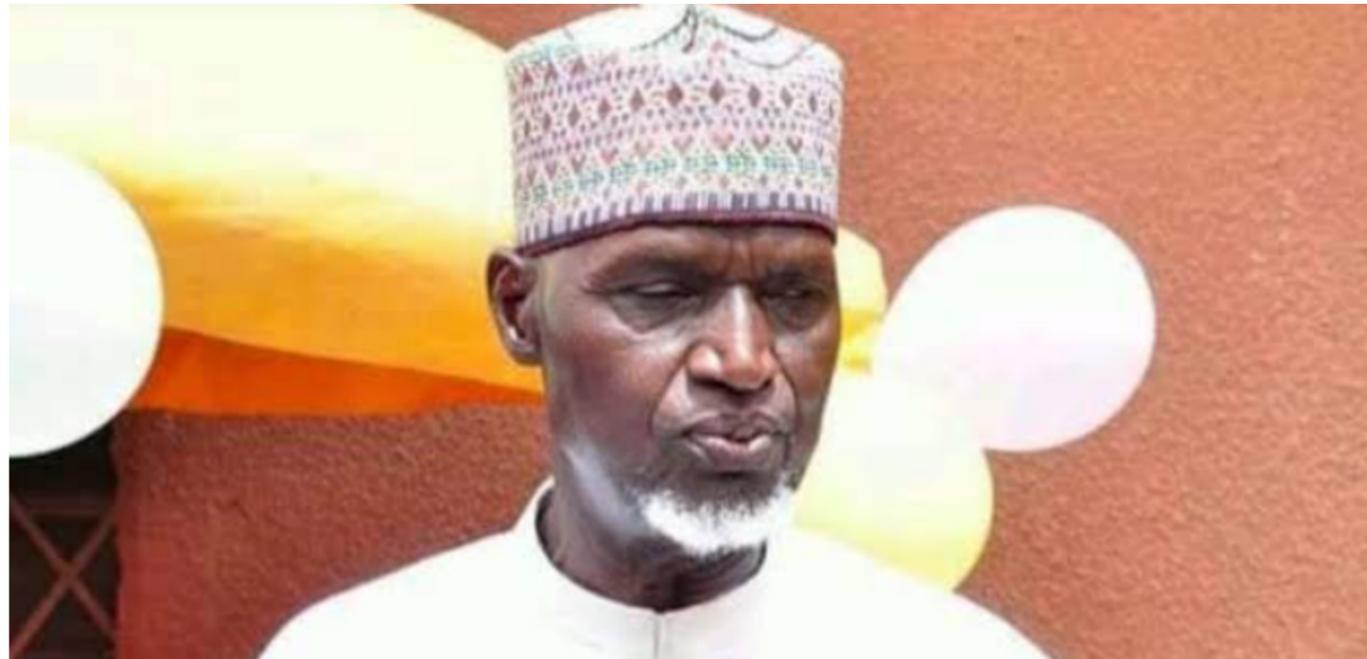
Prof Mahadi, a renowned historian and excellent educator, had held the positions of vice chancellor at three universities — Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, Gombe State University, and Gombe State University of Science and Technology.

Born in December 1945, Mahadi hailed from Gwoza, Borno State. He attended Warrabe Primary School to begin his schooling. Later, he enrolled at Maiduguri's Gwoza Centthe School, Government Craft School, according to Abusite.

He proceeded with his secondary education at Mubi Teachers' College and his undergraduate and graduate degrees in history, respectively, from ABU, Zaria. He started working as a teacher at Gadamayo Primary School in Gwaoza town.

At ABU, Mahadi began his lecturing career in 1984 as a senior history instructor. He performed numerous functions for the university.

He would rise to become the institution's vice chancellor from 1998 to 2004. The Gombe State University and Gombe State University of Science and Technology both nominated him as their first vice-chancellor.



He received a hard deal from the military back then, and the wounds of those terrible times are still visible on his physique.

Currently, his son, Musa Abdullahi Mahadi, is the Director of Ahmadu Be University's Division of Agricultural Colleges (DAC).

AN ENVIRONMENTALIST PER EXPERIENCE

Mahdi, a lover of the environment, eco-friendly nurtured GSU and ABU simultaneously. Many of his proteges at ABU have taken after his environmental legacy.

At GSU, Professor Mahadi built a zoological garden that draws a lot of wildlife lovers. According to insiders, he donated a portion of his salary over the years to help the institutions become greener. since he loves the outdoors.

In 2017, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia recognized Mahadi for his work on: 'The Environmental Management and Protection in the Islamic World' at the ISESCO Headquarters in Rabat, Morocco.

Prof. Mahdi also served as the Chairman of the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU) during the military era before being appointed Vice-Chancellor.

During his tenure as the VC of GSU, Mahadi implemented stiff punishment for students who violated the campus' generations.

Also, ABU has received help from Mahadi Foundation, a pro-ecological and tree-planting not-for-profit organization, to stabilize some of its ecological zones and maintain the environment in Gombe State.

Abdullahi Sule of the Department of Crop Science referred to Prof. Abdullahi Mahdi as a philanthropist since he has funded numerous persons and organizations to get environmental education.

Cont. reading @
<https://wikkitimes.com/obituary-prof-mahadis-footprints-as-vice-chancellor-of-gombe-varsity-abu-zaria/>

FACT-CHECK: No, Ahmed Musa Did Not Donate Vehicles and ICT Center to APC's Tinubu



By Yunusa Umar

On Thursday, a post went viral on social media, claiming Ahmed Musa, Nigeria's Super Eagles and Sivasspor left-winger, has donated 100 vehicles and Information Communication Technology (ICT) centre to Ahmed Bola Tinubu, presidential flag-bearer of All Progressive Party (APC).

A Facebook user, George Udom with 201,005 followers posted the claim on his Facebook wall on Thursday with a caption.

"Ahmed Musa donated 100 vehicles, ICT centre to Tinubu campaign," he wrote on his Facebook page.

The tweet generated about 620 reactions, 124 comments and 37 shares as of press time.

Also, @Ahmed_Oris, a Twitter user posted the claim that the super eagles captain donated ICT centre and vehicles to APC presidential flag-bearer, Bola Tinubu

"Ahmed Musa donates 100 vehicles, ICT centre to Tinubu campaign", the user poster.

The tweets garnered about 168 retweets, 9 quote tweets, and 956 likes, as of the time of filing this report.

The post had generated reaction among Nigerians, claiming Super Eagles captain donated vehicles and ICT.

VERIFICATION

Checks by WikkiTimes showed that Bola Tinubu visited Minna, Niger State capital on Wednesday where a mammoth crowd gathered.

Further findings revealed that Senator Sani Mohammed Musa (APC Niger East) donated 100 vehicles and an ICT centre to support Tinubu presidential campaign.

On the same day, Blueprint publisher, Idris Mohammed Malagi and Strategic communication chairman also donated campaign offices to the presidential candidate, Tinubu in Minna.

VERDICT

The claim that the Super Eagles captain donated Vehicles and ICT center is false and misleading.

However, the Donation of 100 vehicles and ICT were made by Niger East senator, Sani Musa (313).

Bauchi Education Ministry Updates Website After WikkiTimes' Story

By Yakubu Mohammed

Bauchi State Ministry of Education has updated its website following the resignation of its erstwhile commissioner, Dr Aliyu Usman Tilde.

This comes after WikkiTimes reported that the ministry was still portraying Tilde [on its website] as its commissioner barely two weeks after he resigned. Tilde claimed he left to assist an associate who was in “dire” need of his service.

At the time WikkiTimes did the report, Tilde’s picture and biography were on the ministry’s website as the current boss piloting its affairs.

However, the ministry, following the story updated the website and leave empty the spot featuring the commissioner’s portfolio. Although an inquiry sent to the ministry was not responded to.

Tilde was appointed commissioner by Governor Bala Mohammed in 2019 and retained his position even after a cabinet reshuffling about a year ago.

The former commissioner sent his resignation letter to the governor on December 1, but was approved four days after.

“A few minutes ago, Today, 5 December 2022, I received a letter from the Secretary to the Government conveying my release by His Excellency. In it, the Secretary conveyed “the appreciation of the Executive Governor for your contribution to the Education Sector and wish you well in your future endeavour,” he posted on his Facebook page.

Katsina Women ‘Begged’ Bandits to Kidnap Mother-in-law — It Backfires

By Hafsa Mohammed Ibrahim

Last week, two co-wives allegedly conspired with bandits to kidnap their mother-in-law in Dambowa village under Danmusa local council area of Katsina State.

As seen in footage obtained by WikkiTimes, the unidentified women had sought the bandits’ help in their hideouts to kidnap their husband’s mother who they believed was troublesome.

According to one of the wives, she was encouraged by her mother to plan the abduction.

In the video, one of the wives added that the abduction was carried out in the absence of their husband.

PLAN BACKFIRED

Things would later turn around as the bandits released the mother-in-law and abducted the wives.

A source familiar with the incident told WikkiTimes the bandits accused the wives of being unfair to their mother inlaw.

“It was reported that she has been a strict mother in law to them, so they agreed on meeting the bandits to kidnap the woman on a deal that the husband would pay much ransom, luckily for the woman, the husband refused to pay a dime and one of the terrorists leader insisted that she must be released,” the source said.

“In turn, some of the bandits kidnapped them [the women] for disappointing them.”

Gombo Isah, spokesman for Katsina Police Command was not available for comments. At press time, a text sent to him had not been responded to.

Yobe Civil Servant Faked ICPC Investigation Against Academician to Pocket N3.5m

By Babaji Usman

Mohammed Ali Garba, a Yobe-based civil servant allegedly faked an investigation against the Provost of the Federal College of Education, Oji River, Dr. Owan Obodagu Tonica to pocket N3.5 million.

According to Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Garba had fabricated a letter purportedly signed by the commission’s Director of Operations.

Garba would demand N3.5 million under the guise of settling the Director of Operations to “kill the non-existing investigation.”

During the process, he also faked his educational status, saying he did not further his education beyond the primary level. However, he holds a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Linguistics/English from the University of Maiduguri.

The accused was arraigned by the ICPC before Justice M.A. Hassan of Federal High Court, Abuja with a suit No: CR/478/2022.

Garba was charged with extortion, forgery and personification.

Justice Hassan ruled that the accused has committed offences contrary to, and punishable under Section 364 of the Penal Code Act, and sections 10 and 25 of the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act, 2000.

However, Garba, through his counsel, A.D. Atanda and M.K. Akanbi, pleaded not guilty to all the charges read against him.

The matter was therefore adjourned to the January 15, 2023, for determination of the bail application as it was not opposed by the prosecution counsel, Mashkur Salisu. That was after the Judge ordered the administrative bail earlier granted him by the commission to subsist.

Major Al-Mustapha Reveals Conspiracy Intrigues Behind Boko Haram Insurgency

By Babaji Usman

Major Hamza Hamza Al-Mustapha, the Presidential candidate of the Action Alliance (AA) in the 2023 general election has alleged that the insurgency in northeast Nigeria is an investment orchestrated by the western organisations to continue mining and looting resources from the region.

Interacting with Brekete TV, Al-Mustapha maintained that international communities with backing from some unscrupulous Nigerians to root insurgency and continue mining the expensive resources in the country.

A-Mustapha, who was the former Chief Security Officer to the former military Head of State Gen Sani Abacha, said at the expense of poor Nigerians, NGOs working in the northeast disguised as aid agents to corner precious natural resources that are in abundance in the Lake-Chad region in Borno State.

He said the international bodies are comfortably going to “no-go-areas” for Nigerian security agents in Borno which creates suspicions about the real motive of the mining. “In Borno State, there is Boko Haram, there are no go areas, there are areas that are still mined, the weather is harsh, is very unfriendly, is a small area”. He said that the places are home to some international organisations with the carnival of Nigerians.

“They have been renting houses for over 20 years and when you give them the rent price they wouldn’t ask – they just pay, what are they doing there? Why do the NGOs go to places at night that soldiers and other security agents dread to go to? What are they doing there?”

“Why are most of them coming with phones with satellites, satellite PCs? How come most of them come under the guise of supportive activities to the poor? And the ministry of health bothers not to know the kind of medicine they give to the poor,” he said.



Al-Mustapha faulted Nigerian authorities for negligence and ignorance of the real activities of the foreign bodies in the mining areas across the country, maintaining that they disguised themselves as aid agents to swindle Nigerians.

To him, the activities of foreign NGOs exacerbate the health challenges in the mining area, especially in the Niger Delta region.

“The oil spill in the Niger Delta is deliberate – is a game. Environmental pollution is an investment at the expense of our mothers, at the expense of the fishermen in the South-South and our health. How much is the increase in kidney liver and cancer problems in mining communities?”

“Giving reference to one of the elements mined by the foreign bodies in the Borno, the Presidential candidate stated that a gram of californium sales over twenty-seven million US dollars, “Californium is \$27m per gram, is the most expensive mineral resource and abundance in

Borno State, that’s what started Boko Haram – that’s the game”, he insisted.

He bemoaned that most of the presidential candidates for the next year’s elections are ignorant of their country, “If you don’t know of your country which type of leadership are you coming to give, you are a liability if you don’t know”.

Al-Mustapha said for knowing and wanting the exploitation of foreign NGOs to be uncovered, he was tagged as an enemy in the 1990s.

“I knew this in 1996 and one of the offences I committed is getting to know this, that it shouldn’t be known. I was tagged as an enemy, How do we have these riches and remain poor? It’s better to offend any person than to offend the Almighty.

Cont. from page 3

“In Congo, at first, we thought it was for a sexual need. But later we saw it was not,” Namegabe explains. “They [the perpetrators] want to inflict as much suffering as possible.”

Katrien Coppens, the executive director of Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation, a foundation formed to end rape as a weapon of war, has identified common patterns which help distinguish between weaponized rape – a war tactic which uses rape to humiliate and destroy enemy forces – and rape by rogue troops.

In weaponized rape, she says, there are victims of all ages – including the elderly and children. The rapes are usually gang-rapes and carried out en masse. They also include a disturbing level of violence, such as cutting of breasts or other private parts of the body. The rapes may include an element of torture. They often are carried out in front of family members or in public areas. And the perpetrators routinely use ethnic or otherwise derogatory slurs.

Coppens says, “Unfortunately, in almost any war, sexual violence is used as a weapon, because it is effective in causing terror and because of the shame associated with it in almost all cultures.”

“The trauma,” she adds, “lasts for generations.”

During interviews with CCIJ, we learned the victims in Tigray were subjected to many of these same patterns of weaponized rape. The testimonies in this investigation reveal the troops had targeted women and girls of all ages – from 13 to 65. Of the 13 victims interviewed, 12 of them said they were gang-raped. Four victims said they were gang-raped in front of their close family members.

Amdeslasie, who was head of the Tigray health bureau, also confirmed that whether committed by Eritrean soldiers or others, the sexual violence that happened in Tigray during that period had the hallmarks of weaponization.

“Almost all of the cases were gang-rape. The targets were women and girls in all age groups, from 6 years old to very old women. Religious groups, including monks and nuns, were targets. The abusers used ethnic slurs,” said Amdeslasie.

“There was also sexual slavery. A group of soldiers would hold captive dozens or more women in their military camp, repeatedly gang-rape them for weeks and then throw them [out] or kill them when they got very sick,” he added.

“Some of the victims say while they gang-raped them, the soldiers would say to them they are cleansing their Tigrayan blood,” Lewam Gebreslasie, a nurse treating rape survivors in Qadarif refugee camp in Sudan, told CCIJ.

OPTIONS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

The Eritrean government has shown no indication of remorse, let alone any intention to hold its soldiers accountable, for weaponizing rape against Tigrayan women.

The Ethiopian government also appears unwilling to extend accountability beyond what it says it has already done. This October, it dismissed the UN human rights experts report, which found that its national army, allies and opponents committed violations, including the use of rape as a weapon of war – a form of war crime.

And though the Ethiopian government and Tigrayan forces signed a peace treaty in South Africa this November, it made no mention of providing justice for the victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence.

However, all of this does not mean that survivors of the documented abuse must go without accountability, says human rights advocate Dr. Ewelina Ochab, co-founder of the Coalition for Genocide Response. The organization has been calling for the UN to create a mechanism for evidence collection and preservation – and to include a special focus on the issue of sexual violence in its mandate.

Ochab also argues for building coalitions and consortiums across organizations working on justice and accountability for Ethiopia. “If we can learn anything from recent cases of atrocities, for example, those perpetrated by [Russian leader Vladimir] Putin in Ukraine, it’s that joint action towards justice and accountability can take us far,” she says. Though in their investigative infancy, at least 18 countries have initiated investigations of Russian abuse in Ukraine, and there is hope that accountability may follow.

But Ochab thinks there are other options – including “an ad-hoc or hybrid tribunal.” Ad-hoc

international courts are temporary tribunals that focus on specific crisis situations, such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR).

Both were established by the UN Security Council to prosecute persons responsible for genocide and other serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in the territory of these two countries between specific dates. According to the UN, since its opening in 1995, the ICTR has indicted 93 individuals responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian law, including high-ranking military and government officials, politicians, and religious and media leaders.

“The fact that the UN commission has now stated sexual violence has been perpetrated in the Tigray war... is an important step towards establishing ad-hoc courts. In good precedents, like Rwanda, there were similar steps before the establishment of ad-hoc courts,” says Ochab.

She also urges other countries to consider turning to their domestic courts by employing the universal jurisdiction principle, which allows countries to claim criminal jurisdiction over a person regardless of where the crime was committed. It is typically applied in extreme cases of genocide, torture and other war crimes.

One recent example is former Ethiopian official – Eshetu Alemu – who participated in ordering the execution of 75 people and other violations during the 1970s. In 2017, he was sentenced to life in prison in the Netherlands. In 2022, an appeals court upheld his conviction and life sentence.

Similarly, in recent years, Swiss courts have tried alleged perpetrators of war crimes in Liberia’s civil war under universal jurisdiction. On June 18, 2021, the Swiss federal criminal court sentenced Alieu Kosiah, a former commander of Liberia who participated in systematic killings, sexual violence and other war crimes in Liberia, to 20 years in prison. Kosiah has appealed and hearings are scheduled for January 2023.

Ochab says any country with expertise in prosecuting under this principle should take action. But there are challenges in invoking it, too. “Prosecutors would need credible and comprehensive evidence, which is currently hard to come by since Tigray is blockaded by the Ethiopian government from the rest of Ethiopia and the world,” she explains.

IMPUNITY BEGETS IMPUNITY

The sexual violence in Ethiopia’s conflict did not stop in Tigray, and the perpetrators were not limited to federal forces, Amhara militia and Eritrean allies. During their advance to neighboring regions of Amhara and Afar, the Tigray fighters also committed sexual violence in retribution for abuses committed in their homelands.

Abdi, the federal government minister for women who resigned, told the Washington Post that she believes these rapes would have been far less likely if there had been accountability for what the government forces and their allies had done in Tigray earlier in the war.

While CCIJ could not obtain comprehensive data on the scale of retaliation, doctors in major hospitals in Amhara estimate they have treated hundreds of victims of rape. And the humanitarian data exchange has logged at least 26 incidences of rape in Amhara and two in Afar, in which TPLF fighters have been named as the perpetrators.

Meanwhile, Amhara regional government officials told Amnesty International that more than 70 women alleged they had been raped in Nifas Mewcha, just one town in Amhara. In its own investigation, Amnesty found 16 rape victims in Nifas Mewcha.

Mihret* is one of the victims of that retaliatory TPLF rape campaign in Amhara. Her ordeal began on the afternoon of Sept. 1, 2021, when fighters from the Tigray army came to her village, Keno. Six soldiers barged into her house, where she also sells coffee, and gang-raped her, she says.

Over the next four days, other Tigray fighters continued to gang-rape her. According to her doctor, Mihret now suffers from a major depressive disorder and has tried to commit suicide several times.

In Chenna, another village in Amhara, several women were gang-raped, including Aynalem*, a 25-year-old woman who said she was gang-raped by three Tigray fighters on Sept. 2, 2021. During the attack, she told CCIJ, her abusers beat her and humiliated her with degrading ethnic slurs. Though she became pregnant following the assault, she managed to get an abortion.

THE AFTERMATH

In the dusty deserts of Sudan, tens of thousands live in makeshift shelters in sprawling refugee camps. Data from the United Nations refugee agency shows that more than 70,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Sudan are from Ethiopia. Among these refugees are survivors of sexual violence.

Unlike other refugees, they tend not to socialize much. They also don’t share their traumatic experiences, except with fellow rape survivors.

A few, however, did speak to CCIJ. Though they wildly varied in age, they all shared disturbing similarities of the brutality they were forced to endure.

A 65-year-old mother, who used to live in the town of Adebay, said she fled her hometown in February 2021 after being gang-raped by six militiamen. They spoke Amharic, and she believes they were part of the regional Amhara militia which fought on the side of the government in western Tigray.

“I was in my house. Suddenly a group of militiamen came to the neighborhood, terrorizing people in house-to-house searches... I begged them to leave me, saying I am very old. But they did not stop,” the mother of three said, before bursting into tears.

Today, she carries not just the horrific memory but shame too. She says her children, who are all adults, don't know what happened to her. "How can I tell them? What happened is shameful to even think about it to myself."

A 37-year-old former employee of the Ethiopian government is still in disbelief that it was soldiers of the same government she worked for who violated and scarred her for life. She said she was raped during a house-to-house raid in early January 2021 in the town of Adi Goshu.

"The [federal] soldiers were going from house to house, searching for supporters of the TPLF. I explained to them I am not a supporter and even showed them my office ID. They slapped my face and then took turns raping me," she said.

A 21-year-old woman still blames herself for her brother's murder. "He would have been alive if not because of me," she said. The woman explains that in March 2021, soldiers, who she believes were Amhara militiamen, came to Adebay where she lived.

"They came into our house and started looting. They did not stop there. They raped me. My brother tried to fight them in defense of me, but he could not rescue me. Done with the rape, they pulled him out and shot him."

A 52-year-old mother, who also fled from the town of Adebay, mourns the life she and her daughters once had. She says that on the night of Feb. 21, 2021, nine soldiers, who she believes were Amhara militiamen, barged into her house, demanding she give them jewelry and money, which she did.

"They were about to leave, taking the jewelry, but then three of them suggested rape. I begged them to do whatever they wished to me, but to leave my daughters. They took turns raping my daughters, who are 25 and 19 years old – and then on myself."

In the refugee camp, she says all three of them have been receiving treatment for trauma.

Back in Tigray, where the rape campaigns first started, Amdeslasie, the former head of Tigray's health bureau, says that a majority of the survivors who showed up at hospitals had signs of serious mental illness. "PTSD was very common. There were suicidal attempts," he said.

Others showed signs of depression and dissociative disorders. "Some of them don't know themselves. They have developed madness," he said.

Gebreslasie, the nurse treating rape survivors in the refugee camp, says she is seeing many of the same symptoms among her patients. "They isolate themselves. They think everybody knows about [what happened to] them."

Last October, she says a 15-year-old girl even hanged herself after being gang-raped in the town of May'cadra by four Amhara militiamen.

For those who survive and are now living in the refugee camp, the only way forward is to focus on recovering from their physical and psychological wounds. But, they all acknowledge, the memories of the brutal gang-rapes will likely stay with them for years to come.

*The names in this story have been changed to protect the victims' identities.

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Kano Ex-Councilors Hold Prayers Over Unpaid Entitlements

By Babaji Usman

Over 360 ex-councillors in Kano State held a prayer session, seeking God's intervention over unpaid entitlements.

The former councillors said they are in untold hardship after serving their communities. They pleaded with the government to look into their affairs.

The ex-councilors revealed that most of them died as a result of post-service trauma associated with poor living conditions.

Aminiya, a weekly publication of Daily Trust Hausa revealed that one of the former councillors said they organized the prayer for the state government to sympathise with them.

"We have come to the Kano Government to sympathize with us and pay us our rights to mitigate our plight.

"Look at us, everyone who sees us knows that we are in sympathetic condition. We served as councillors and served the community, but we were left in this situation," said one of them.

'WE ARE AWARE OF THEM'

When contacted, Lami Sani, Kano State Commissioner for Local Government Affairs, said the state government is aware of their plights.

The commissioner noted that most of the aggrieved councillors were owed by the previous governments, but the state government is following the details in paying them their dues.

Sani added that the governor of the state, Abdullahi Umar Ganduje, would not leave his successor with a lot of debt as he inherited from previous governments.

'He's Not Boko Haram, He's My Husband'

By Babaji Usman

For the past three years, Yagana, a resident of Ruwasa community of Bama local council area of Borno State has not been in touch with her husband, Mode Kamsulum who was taken into military custody as Boko Haram suspect.

The mother of six recalled that terrorists had in 2019, raided their community which is 15 kilometres away from Bama town.

A day after, soldiers invaded the community and arrested people suspected to be accomplices of the Boko Haram insurgency. That was how Kamsulum went missing. Although his family believes he is innocent, not the armed soldiers.

DISPLACED

Not long after her husband's disappearance, another terror attack forced Yagana and her children out of the community.

They settled at Bama Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camp, in an unbearable hardship that heightened the need for the return of their householder, Kamsulum. "We have no husbands to help us take care of our children," she said in a podcast by HumAngle.

She explained that water and food are difficult to get in the camp and there is no comfortable toilet to be used. "Women live in distress, they have to beg, fetch firewood, do the menial jobs in the town to earn a living."

For Yagana, she hopes her husband will return and take them out of the camp. She was told that her husband was somewhere in Giwa Barracks in Maiduguri.

Whatsoever, Yagana insisted that her husband, Kamsulum is not a terrorist. "He is not Boko Haram, I know him, he's my husband."

After WikkiTimes' Story, First Bank Refunds Customer's N100,000 Deducted Last Year

By Hafsa Mohammed Ibrahim

First Bank of Nigeria has refunded the sum of N100,000 belonging to Muazu Muhammad Aminu, a Yobe-based man who had a failed transaction in December, 2021.

As earlier reported, Aminu initiated a transaction using an Opay Point of Sale (POS) terminal on December 12, 2021. The transaction failed but his money was not reversed. He would lodge a complaint at the bank's branch in Potiskum where he was assured that it would be reversed between 24 – 48 hours.

At some point, First Bank told Aminu his money "has gone."

Following that, WikkiTimes contacted the bank over the issue, but there was no response.

Subsequently, WikkiTimes reported the issue to the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC).

Two weeks later, FCCPC emailed WikkiTimes, saying the complaint has already been assigned.

Aminu, however, appreciated WikkiTimes for its good journalism. "I want to say a very big thank you to WikkiTimes for lending me a listening ear and fighting the battle with me until my hard-earned money was reversed.

"WikkiTimes are warriors on this struggle and they have proven to be the voice of the voiceless. I have cried for a long time about this until they came to my rescue and I have now wiped my tears Alhamdulillah. Thank you once again," Aminu said.

From Sleep to Death — A Local Vigilante Answered Distress Call and Never Returned

By Yawale Adamu

Zaiyanu Ibrahim, a local vigilante was in bed when terror elements invaded his village, Goronyo in Sabon Birnin, Sokoto State. He would carry his Dane gun to revolt and that was his end.

His neighbours had knocked on his door to tell him about the invasion. They (bandits) are wreaking havoc in the village square, they had told him.

When he picked his gun to go and confront the terrorists, his family bid him farewell and wished him success, according to Birbishin Rikici, a weekly podcast produced by HumAngle.

Maryam Ibrahim, his wife, said in the podcast that she never knew her husband is bidding her farewell when he stepped out to repel the attack.

The 26-year-old widow said her husband, Ibrahim, paid the supreme price while salvaging his people from waylaying bandits who murdered about 60 persons in the village square.

Ibrahim left behind four children for Maryam to cater for. According to Maryam, her husband's demise remains her greatest nightmare. She never imagined that life would be difficult as what she is experiencing.

"We were left to feel the burden of banditry," she said. "Life has turn upside down for me and my children. Our town has since been devastated by the bandits but I never imagined that my husband would be killed by the terrorists."

Goronyo, Mailalle, Gatara, Lafinge, Bafarawa and many villages surrounding Sabon Birni in southern Sokoto have been devastated by banditry, WikkiTimes learnt. The villages have become strongholds for the bandits as government has left the places ungoverned and the people, to protection of the terrorists.

Many local vigilantes like Ibrahim wanted to defend their people, but they ended up paying the supreme price.

There are about 15 villages between Chinaka, a community in Goronyo and Sabon Birnin. But there are only two military checkpoints in the axis. Many times, the brazen bandits defied the checkpoints to raid the villages.

Five months after her husband was killed by the bandits, Nafisa Bashiru said she has not recovered from the trauma.

Her 38 years old husband, Haruna Bashiru, was among those killed in Goronyo market square.

According to Nafisa, an eyewitness said Bashiru, before his death, was warning his fellow traders to avoid the market areas, saying the criminal elements were on rampage. Unfortunately, he was killed a strayed bullet.

His brother, Bello took him to hospital where he was confirmed dead. He later buried him with leaves.

Bashiru was later given a befitting burial — a place designated for locals killed in the market square — when Bello informed other family members how he covered his body with leaves.

"Since then, life has been difficult for me and my eight children," Nafisa said. "We were given a meager rice every month by a councilor and I also sell awara, (a local food made from soya beans) but that alone can not sustain us."

Aisha Umar is another woman widowed by the terrorists. Her husband was killed alongside other locals.

Aisha believes the terrorists would have spared her husband if they know his occupation.

"My husband is a health worker in Goronyo General Hospital. He was killed on his way coming back from work," Aisha said. "He was a charitable man, nobody ever wished him to die like that. They (bandits) don't respect humanity."



Train Kills Woman While Crossing Kaduna-Abuja Rail Line with Her Car

By Yawale Adamu

Last week, a moving train killed a Kaduna-based woman, Selimat Suleiman along Kaduna-Abuja rail line, according to Shehu Sani, a Senator formerly representing Kaduna Central.

The woman was reportedly crushed in her car while trying to cross the rail line.

According to Sani, the community where the woman lived had written letters to concerned authorities clamouring for a flyover to avert such incidents, but their cries fell on deaf ears.

The residents of the community through their association 'Chikakore (Byazhin) Kuwba Layout Landlords Association' had on March 29, 2016, written a letter to the Minister of Transport and Director of Rail Transport Services. They requested an overhead bridge be constructed in the area.

The residents, in the letter, said considering the fact that Layout is one of the high-density populated areas along the Abuja-Kaduna rail track, with over 12 worship centres, seven educational institutions that include both nursery,

primary, and secondary schools and a proposed market place, there is a need for the government to construct the bridge in order to allow for easy usage of the rail line by both the residents and trains.

"The Association hereby formally writes and requests as a matter of urgency for your Ministry to authorize the contractor to provide an overhead bridge across the rail track for our usage.

"This request is premised on the nature of the train, which we believe will be one of the modern fastest trains which will impose a lot of dangers and possible casualties to our trains children and elderly impose while crossing the rail track," the read in parts.

At press time, an inquiry sent to the Ministry of Transportation had not been responded to.

How Unemployment Favoured Zamfara Kannywood Artist

By Babaji Usman

El-Muneer Ali, a Zamfara-based Kannywood artist lost his job some years ago, yet, he said it turned out to be a blessing for him.

Hailed from Gusau local government, the headquarters of the Zamfara State, the young musician is also a professional tailor. In an interview with BBC Hausa, Ali said he started as an imitating dancer during events in his community before he later became a popular performer.

The famous artist recalled when he first visited the studio and couldn't sing a stanza. But that, he said, becomes the beginning of his journey to a successful musician.

Nonetheless, he still sews clothes. "I'm still a Tailor. I have customers that can bring clothes for sewing only that I don't stay in the shop," he said.

Ali is becoming one of the fast-growing musicians in the Kannywood industry. Among his popular songs is Labarin Lubah 1 – 3.

The artist said as a performer, he sometimes serves as a pianist. "I can sing and sometimes play piano," he told BBC Hausa.

Ali said his ambition is to become a more successful and popular musician to help young talents in the industry.

Kafin-Lemo — A Bauchi Community Where Pupils Learn Inside Collapsed Classes

By Hafsah Mohammed Ibrahim

School children in Kafin-Lemo, a community in Ningi local government area of Bauchi State continue to receive lessons under collapsed structures despite inclusion of their school in the 2022 Zonal Intervention Projects of the Federal Government.

Five teachers control 579 pupils in the school. Out of the four buildings sighted within the premises of Kafin-Lemo Primary School, three are completely dilapidated.

Tracka, a project monitoring arm of BudgiT reports that only one block of two classrooms and an office is in good shape. Pupils' school attendance in the school is seasonal. Harmattan and rainy seasons keep Kafin-Lemo children at home because the classroom structures available cannot support learning during these periods.

In the event that some pupils found their way to school during either harmattan or rainy seasons by chance, the headteacher and other teachers send them home.

“It is quite unfortunate for a child to close from school before normal closing time just because the weather is hot or harmattan or rain.

“We are worried as harmattan is about to start, this is because most pupils might not be coming to school due to the bad conditions of the buildings we are using that have no roofs, doors, windows and furniture.

“Even in the rainy season, this is the same problem we were facing that makes us always send the children home whenever it is about to rain for preventive measures,” Kafin-Lemo headteacher told Tracka with worry and frustration manifesting on his forehead. He called on elected officials to come to their aid.

FACT-CHECK: Viral Audio Says WhatsApp Is Set to Ban Accounts and User Will Pay N20,000 for Retrieval



By Hafsah Mohammed Ibrahim

An audio message has been going viral on WhatsApp claiming that the platform would ban some accounts as a result of “overpopulation.”

According to the message, users only need to forward a message purportedly sent by WhatsApp Engineering Manager.

CLAIM

As contained in the audio, recorded and shared by one Hamisu Azare, spreading the WhatsApp message would prevent a ban on personal accounts as well as groups. But failure to share the message would lead to a ban and it will take N20,000 to retrieve banned accounts.

In addition, Azare, in the audio message claimed that users' icons would change to that of Facebook if the message is widely spread. He premised this on the fact that Facebook had bought over WhatsApp.

Also, the message is expected to be shared with all contacts until 6 pm of the following day from the time the audio was recorded. However, WikkiTimes could not find out when it was recorded.

VERIFICATION

WikkiTimes fact-checked the claims as contained in the audio. A visit to the WhatsApp official news blog showed that no such directive was given by its management.

Also, a visit to their social media pages did not reveal any relevant news content to the claims.

VERDICT

WhatsApp Engineering Manager did not order a message to be spread nor is WhatsApp about to ban accounts and request money to retrieve it. The claims are false and misleading.

Man Suspects Chinese National Trafficking Nigerian Minors at Kano Airport

By Hafsa Mohammed Ibrahim

Abubakar Hidima, a Twitter user had detailed how a Chinese national alongside other man “trafficked” two underage girls through Aminu Kano International Airport to Lagos State.

According to him, the foreigner and the man looked suspicious because the girls in their company are about 13 years of age.

Subsequently, he called the attention of security operatives in the airport, whom he said were unbothered about the situation.

He tweeted: “Today, at Aminu Kano International Airport & I came across a situation. A Chinese national was in the company of two teenagers (not older than 13 years) & they were boarding to Lagos. To my surprise, NOBODY in the Airport seems to bother.

“I felt uncomfortable with the whole thing, having heard a lot about how girls are being trafficked & I went to the Airport Security to make my observations. The man & two teenagers have already been checked in. I insisted that the security there should check what was going on.

“The way they were unbothered was worrisome & I threatened that I will report them if they refuse to take action. A lady there checked & the guy said the girls’ there had their brother working for him in Lagos & he is taking the girls to join the brother to work for him.

“This still doesn’t hold water & I insisted that they liaise with the Airport Security in Lagos to keep the girls & ask the brother to come pick them instead of allowing them go with the Chinese guy.

“This is the flight in question & I hope you’d follow this and similar cases up.”

As of press time, When WikkiTimes contacted the user, he wasn’t available to respond.

Also, a text message sent to the airport had not been responded to at press time.

Few Days After Tilde’s Resignation, Bauchi Ministry of Education Hasn’t Updated Its Website

By Yawale Adamu

Barely two weeks after the resignation of Dr Aliyu Usman Tilde as Bauchi State Commissioner of Education, the ministry is yet to update its website as Tilde’s profile — picture and biography — remain as its commissioner.

Tilde, while announcing his resignation on his verified Facebook page, said he had sent a letter of resignation to Governor Bala Mohammed, seeking his approval to allow him to attend to a call of an associate who direly needs his services.

“That was my prayer as I left my office last Thursday after writing a letter to His Excellency, the Governor of Bauchi State, to allow me attend to a call of an associate who direly needs my services.

“Few minutes ago, Today, 5 December 2022, I received a letter from the Secretary to the Government conveying my release by His Excellency. In it, the Secretary conveyed the appreciation of the Executive Governor for your contribution to the Education Sector and wish you well in your future endeavour,” he said.

“I am happy to see the peaceful ending of what have been very exacting but fruitful years and will ever remain grateful to God who stood by me until the last minute,” Tilde added. “It was natural that the above verse came to mind as I was taking a memorable snapshot of the office. I pray that he will also be with me in my new assignment.”

Nonetheless, the erstwhile commissioner’s biography and picture, remain on the ministry’s official website as the current boss piloting the ministry’s affairs.

Efforts to reach the ministry through the telephone number provided on the website were not successful as the phone number was not reachable. At press time, a text sent to the line had not been responded to.

Man Suspects Chinese National Trafficking Nigerian Minors at Kano Airport

By Yawale Adamu

Bauchi-Jos border Road has continued to claim locals' lives despite the release of N227 million cumulatively budgeted for the rehabilitation of the road between 2020 to 2022.

According to Tracka, a project monitoring and accountability organisation, the federal government budgeted the sum of N144 million in 2020 for the maintenance of the road. However, it wasn't done.

A year after, the federal government budgeted another N57 million for the same purpose. Yet, the road continues to deteriorate. Also, in 2022, the government budgeted another N76 million for the same project.

"We're aware that between 2020 and 2022 in the FG budget the following amounts were BUDGETED, N144m in 2020, N57m in 2021 and N76m in 2022 for the maintenance of Bauchi-Jos Plateau state border Rd in Bauchi-State," Tracka tweeted. "Road now a death trap for road users."

It continued: "Over N277m has been BUDGETED on the road between 2020 till date, no tangible work was done. We call on Hon @tundefashola and @FedRoadsNGR to direct the relevant stakeholders to fix the road for commuters."

WikkiTimes understands that this is not the only federal road in Bauchi that was left in deplorable condition despite multimillion naira released by the government.

WikkiTimes investigated how millions of naira were wasted in emergency repair of Bauchi-Gombe road. The investigation revealed how the Federal Ministry of Works and Housing not only failed to execute the work but paid contractors that have nothing to do with road construction; some of them are oil companies.

In a similar fashion, WikkiTimes investigated how two companies — AJ & N Multi-Ventures Limited and Amis & S Global Service Limited — individually cornered the total sum of N78 million meant for the rehabilitation of Yana-Shira-Azare Road and Adamami-Madakeri road in Bauchi State.

125 Years After, Parts of Looted Bronzes Repatriated to Nigeria

By Babaji Usman

German officials Tuesday returned 20 of the treasured Benin Bronzes, a move that has attracted international attention amid a debate about returning looted arts during the colonial era.

The valuable objects were handed over to Nigeria in a solemn ceremony in Abuja with German Foreign Minister, Annalena Baerbock and Culture Minister, Claudia Roth accompanied by the heads of several museums.

WikkiTimes had last month, reported that the German museum — Rautenstrauch-Joest — an ethnography museum in Cologne, said it will return 92 Benin bronzes to Nigeria starting from December 2022 while other artworks would be from 2023 onwards.

German media agency, dpa quoted Baerbock shortly after meeting with Geoffrey Onyeama, the Nigerian Foreign Minister, saying: "It was wrong to steal these bronzes. It was wrong to keep these bronzes. And it is more than overdue for these bronzes to be returned to their homeland."

"This is a story of European colonialism," in which Germany played "a dark role, causing tremendous suffering in different parts of Africa," said Baerbock. She said returning the bronzes is a crucial step towards addressing the repatriation which is planned to be in batches with the willingness to critically assess the country's action.

In his remark, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, Nigeria's Minister of Information and Culture, said "Nigeria, Africa and indeed all of humanity will remember and always cherish the period in human history when Germany stood by us."

Lai said 20 or even 10 years ago, nobody could have anticipated the return of the works, "because the obstacles to achieving repatriation were seemingly insurmountable."

The treasures — looted by colonial powers in the 19th century — were stored in museums in Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, Dresden, Leipzig and Stuttgart.

More than 1,100 of the works from the palace of the then kingdom of Benin, which is now part of Nigeria, have so far been in the possession of 20 German museums. The objects, which are made of ivory and other materials in addition to bronze, mostly come from British looting in 1897.



Adamu Muhammad Hamid, PhD

Public Information Gaps, Participatory Journalism and the Case for Media Literacy for Citizens

Participatory journalism is otherwise known as Citizen Journalism, ‘Democratic’, ‘Street’ or ‘Public’, journalism as a form of alternative media gives rise to a radical challenge to the professional and institutional practice of the legacy media. The practice of participatory journalism is literally explained by Glasier “people without professional journalism training using the tools of modern technology, the Internet, to achieve global distribution of information by creating or fact-checking the mainstream media.”

For example, you might write about how 12 bandits were killed by a joint operation between the police and a local vigilante group in Alkaleri LGA on your blog or just on an online forum. At the same time, you could also fact-check the biases and factual errors of what was reported by a newspaper or any of the legacy media like a broadcast house or newspaper. Better still, you might snap or video record a digital photo of a newsworthy event in your community and post it online on YouTube for worldwide consumption.

The most valuable criterion of news selection in the legacy media is ‘timeliness’, ‘recency’ or ‘freshness’. That is probably why journalists often make mistakes in their reportage because as they compete for being the first to break the news, they leave out the salient facts which have not germinated yet at the time they break the story.

Citizen journalists beat professional journalists in this respect because most of the time, newspapers distribute stories that readers have already been hinted at through citizen journalism. At the onset, the discussion of citizen journalism focused on promoting a kind of journalism that was ‘for the people’ by changing how professional reporters did their work. This is because of the advantages presented by new media.

New media technologies such as social networking and media-sharing websites in addition to the increasing prevalence of cellular telephones have made citizen journalism more accessible to people worldwide. Due to the availability of technology, citizens often can report breaking news more quickly than traditional media reporters. Notable examples of citizen journalism reporting from major world events are the Arab Spring, the Occupy Wall Street movement, the 2013 protests in Turkey, and the 2010 Haiti earthquake.

Citizen journalism accompanied the advancement of communication technology or the Internet which made it possible. The practice that average citizens can engage in the practice of journalism has a long history particularly in the United States. Today’s citizen journalist movement emerged after professional journalists themselves began to question the predictability

and completeness of coverage of such events as the 1988 US presidential election. The journalists became part of the public or, civic journalism movement, a countermeasure against the eroding trust in the news media and widespread public disillusionment with politics and civic affairs.

In 1999 for example, activists in Seattle created a response to the WTO meeting being held there. The activists knew very well that the only way they could get coverage by the corporate media was by blocking the streets.

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