

## Nigeria Press Review

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### Welcome to Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's Nigeria Weekly Press Review

The weekly press review seeks to explore and keep you informed on selected issues relating to politics, business and economy, insecurity, infrastructure and development, health related issues, new trends and matters bothering on the overall situation in Nigeria.

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### **UN Says 64.3 Million Nigerians Lack Adequate Food, Nigeria's Public Debt Rises to 46.25 Trillion Naira, Oil Marketers Say Removal of Fuel Subsidy Will Drive Fuel Prices Over 750 Naira Per Liter**

According to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), 32% of Nigerians, amounting to more than 64.3 million citizens, do not have enough food to consume. In a March 28 update of their live hunger map for Western Africa, the countries with the highest prevalence of insufficient food consumption are Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Chad, Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Liberia, Central African Republic, Togo, Guinea Bissau and Nigeria. In its latest Food Security Update, the World Bank revealed that food insufficiency in Nigeria has increased from 29% to 32% over the last three months. It stated that the overall food and nutrition situation in Nigeria and other West African countries was challenging for a large share of their populations. According to the World Bank, the food security situation in West Africa is expected to worsen as the dry season progresses in the months ahead. The region is especially hit hard by high domestic food price inflation. Temitayo Jaiyeola, [The Punch News \(March 30<sup>th</sup>\)](#) reports.

The Debt Management Office (DMO) disclosed that Nigeria's total public debt stock increased to NGN 46.25 trillion or USD 103.11 billion as of December 2022. This means the country's debt increased by NGN 6.69 trillion or USD 7.34 billion within one year with regard to the comparative figure of public debt as of December 31, 2021, which stood at NGN 39.56 trillion or USD 95.77 billion. Amongst the reasons for the increase in the total public debt stock were new borrowings by the federal and sub-national governments, primarily to fund budget deficits and execute projects. Donatus Anichukwueze, [Channels TV News \(March 31<sup>st</sup>\)](#) reports.

Marketers and other groups in the downstream sector of the Nigerian petroleum industry during a workshop on deregulation of the sector have said that fuel prices in Nigeria may hit NGN 750 per liter as the Nigerian government plans to remove petroleum subsidies. The downstream actors, in conjunction with economic policy analysts and relevant government agencies, also outlined strategies and measures that should be deployed to ensure the sustainable removal of petrol subsidies. Chinedu Okoronkwo, the National President of the Independent Petroleum Marketer Association of

Nigeria (IPMAN), represented by the association's National Operations Controller, Mike Osatuyi, revealed that the marketers were in support of the government's plan to embark on complete deregulation of the downstream sector. He urged the government to channel expected savings from subsidy removal to the provision of palliatives for the masses. He, however, advised the government to be alert and sensitive to resentment from Nigerians. The National President of the Nigerian Association of Road Transport Owners (NARTO), Lawal Othman, said that the full deregulation of the downstream sector and complete removal of petrol subsidies would introduce a mix of opportunities and challenges into the operating environment. Mary Izuaka, [The Premium Times News \(March 18<sup>th</sup>\)](#) reports.

### **INEC Fixes April 15 for Supplementary Election, Records Show Over 39 Deaths in Just Concluded 2023 Elections, PDP Reverses Suspension of its Members, CBN Governor Appeals to Labour Union Over Planned Protest, Labour Union Suspends Planned Strike, Gives 2 Weeks Ultimatum to CBN, President Buhari Says Energy Security, Prosperity Will Be Achieved from Oil Drilling in Nasarawa State, FG Seeks to Compensate Citizens with Pay Rise After Fuel Subsidy Removal, Shi'ite Protesters Storm Abuja, Demanding Release of El-Zakzaky's Travel Passport**

Although governorship and legislative elections have been concluded in most parts of Nigeria, the elections were declared inconclusive in some states and legislative districts. As a result, the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) has announced that all outstanding governorship, national and state assembly supplementary elections would take place on Saturday, April 15. INEC urged political parties, candidates and their supporters to see the exercise as an election and not war, saying they should avoid incendiary statements and negative mobilization so that the elections could be conducted and concluded as scheduled. A comprehensive list of the polling units by state, local government, registration area, registered voters and permanent voter cards (PVC) collected will be published on the INCE website on or before March 29. In Kebbi and Adamawa states, the March 18 governorship elections were declared inconclusive by INEC, and other elections will hold in some polling units in both states as well. Amongst other states affected are Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Ebonyi, Edo, Imo, Jigawa,

Kano, Rivers and Zamfara states. Qosim Suleiman, [This Day Live \(March 27<sup>th</sup>\)](#) reports.

Reports from the recently concluded presidential, National Assembly, governorship and State Houses of Assembly elections held on February 25 and March 18 indicate at least 39 Nigerians killed during the 2023 general elections, including police officers, politicians, hired thugs, members of the electorate and a yet to be identified ad-hoc staff of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reportedly struck by a stray bullet. In addition, a sitting member of the House of Representatives who doubles as majority leader in the House of Representatives, Ado Doguwa, has already been charged to court for the election day violence that led to the death of three constituency members. Journalists have gathered that although the police have vowed to arrest and prosecute perpetrators of election violence, many cases have gone unreported, leaving the culprits to roam free. [Leadership News \(March 27<sup>th</sup>\)](#) reports.

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has reversed the suspension of a former Senate president, Pius Anyim, former Ekiti state governor, Ayo Fayose, and former Katsina state governor, Ibrahim Shema. It also lifted the suspension on two other members. The party also reversed the referral of the governor of Benue State, Samuel Ortom, to its disciplinary committee. PDP spokesperson Debo Ologunagba said it was decided at the national working committee (NWC) meeting where developments in the party are extensively discussed. [Premium Times News \(March 30<sup>th</sup>\)](#) reports.

On Monday, the governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Godwin Emefiele, appealed to the Minister of Labour and Employment, Chris Ngige, to prevail on the leadership of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) over its planned protest. The leadership of NLC had mobilized its affiliate unions and the state councils to shut down offices of the apex bank nationwide over current cash scarcity in the country. But at a closed-door meeting held at the Ministry of Labour and Employment headquarters in Abuja, Emefiele said the protest would hinder the progress of the apex bank if not averted it. An official of the ministry who attended the meeting stated anonymously that Emefiele promised to ensure that all commercial banks were given enough cash from the CBN's vault. Idowu Isamotu, [The Daily Trust News \(March 27<sup>th</sup>\)](#) reports.

The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) has suspended its planned nationwide indefinite strike and picketing of Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) offices across the country over the scarcity of Naira notes. It had planned to begin the nationwide indefinite strike from Wednesday, March 29, and picketing CBN headquarters and its state offices across the country over the current cash crunch. Leaders of NLC, however, gave the CBN two weeks to normalize the money supply nationwide, especially in rural areas. In addition, the NLC's National Executive Council (NEC) resolved that "the CBN has made significant efforts to curb cash scarcity in Nigeria, thus to some extent complied with the demands of NEC that availability of cash has noticeably improved in the major urban centers in Nigeria". The NLC thus decided to end the planned strike on these bases. Victor Ahiuma-Young, [The Vanguard News \(March 29<sup>th</sup>\)](#) reports.

President Muhammadu Buhari has claimed the discovery and drilling of oil in Nasarawa state will enhance the overall energy security of the country. Buhari said the official commencement of drilling activities in the Middle Benue Trough was in line with ongoing campaigns for the exploration of crude oil and gas in the nation's frontier basins. He listed the Chad Basin, Dahomey Basin, Anambra Platform, the Calabar Embankment, Sokoto Basin, Bida Basin, Benue Trough and the ultra-deep-water Niger Delta as areas where the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) is extending its crude oil exploration. Speaking virtually, Buhari noted the spud-in ceremony would lead to greater prosperity for Nigerians, with the surrounding communities particularly benefiting from the value created by the exploration and eventual production activities. He directed the NNPC and its partners to take due care of the environmental consequences of these oil exploration activities and to mitigate adverse effects. Bunmi Aduloju, [The Cable News \(March 28<sup>th</sup>\)](#) reports.

Minister of Labour and Employment Chris Ngige recommended that the new administration of president-elect Bola Tinubu give public sector workers pay raises after removing the fuel subsidy. President Muhammadu Buhari's government is set to step down in May; however, he had planned to remove the popular but costly subsidy in 2022 as part of fiscal and petroleum sector reforms but abandoned the plan because of fears of protests in the run-up to the last month's election. Many Nigerians regard cheap, subsidized fuel as a

benefit they receive from the state, which they say has failed to deliver other basic services such as electricity and security despite receiving billions of dollars yearly from oil exports. While the new government is not obliged to act on the recommendation, the call does put pressure on Tinubu to fulfil his campaign promise to remove the subsidy. According to the Minister of Finance, Zainab Ahmed, Nigeria sets aside NGN 3.36 trillion (USD 7.3 billion) to spend on the subsidy until mid-2023, Felix Onuah, [Reuters News \(March 28<sup>th</sup>\)](#) reports.

Shi'ite protesters have protested in Abuja, asking President Muhammadu Buhari to lift the travel ban placed on the leader of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria, Sheikh Ibraheem El-Zakzaky. In addition, the protesters demanded the release of the international passports of El-Zakzaky, and his wife, Malama Zeenah, for a medical trip. Earlier on Thursday, a Federal High Court in Abuja had rejected an application filed by El-Zakzaky, asking the Department of State Services (DSS) to release his passport and that of his wife. Delivering the judgement, Justice Obiora Ekwuatu ruled that the Islamic cleric failed to prove that his passport was missing, despite the ten exhibits provided by his lawyers, to prove that the DSS took the passports away after his return from India in 2018. Nathaniel Shaibu, [The Punch News \(March 30<sup>th</sup>\)](#) reports.

### **Insecurity: Department of State Services Confirms Plots to Introduce Interim Government, About 600 Ex Boko Haram Militants Exit Rehab, Military Troops Kill ISWAP Commander, 41 Fighters**

On Wednesday, the Department of State Services (DSS) confirmed plots by some political actors to introduce an interim government in Nigeria. DSS spokesman Peter Afunanya said the secret police had identified some key players behind the alleged schemes to truncate democracy after the 2023 general election. The DSS spokesman said the plots to impose an interim government are being planned through protests in the country and court orders to block the transition of power to the next government. President Muhammadu Buhari will finish his second tenure on May 29, when president-elect Bola Ahmed Tinubu is expected to be

sworn in as the next president of Nigeria. Buhari at separate times insisted that he does not plan to stay in office beyond the constitutional eight years. Afunanya said the DSS supports the transition council in charge as well as Buhari in his avowed commitment to a hitch-free handover. Dennis Erezi, [The Guardian News \(March 29<sup>th</sup>\)](#) reports.

Nigerian authorities say Operation Safe Corridor, a rehabilitation program for former Boko Haram fighters, is helping weaken the group's fighting power. Nearly 600 fighters graduated from the program over the past weekend and tendered a public apology for their actions. Authorities say they will be reintegrated into society, but experts warn of possible relapses. The former Boko Haram fighters simultaneously echoed an oath of allegiance to Nigeria during a graduation ceremony on Saturday at the deradicalization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DRR) camp in northern Gombe state. Nigerian authorities started the safe exit program in July 2016 to degrade the fighting power of terror groups like Boko Haram. "Based on the therapeutic interventions these sets of clients have undergone, they're better citizens from when they initially arrived at the DRR camp and accordingly are certified fit for graduation and subsequent reintegration to their respective communities," program coordinator Uche Nnabuihe said. Timothy Obiezu, [The Voice of America \(March 27<sup>th</sup>\)](#) reports.

Troops of Operation Hadin Kai (OPHK), in collaboration with the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), have neutralized a commander of the Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP). In a coordinated operation, the commander and other terrorists were eliminated in a silent intelligence-led mid-night offensive in Borno state. According to a military source, the commander said he was particularly pained because the military killed scores of his fighters and burnt his foodstuff and some newly-acquired furniture meant for his wedding soon. However, a counter-insurgency expert in the Lake Chad region, Zagazola Makama, disclosed yesterday in Maiduguri that the ground troops eliminated the commander in a deadly special operation. Njadvara Musa, [The Guardian News \(March 28<sup>th</sup>\)](#) reports.



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