

NIGERIA - GENERAL

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Plot to disrupt transition, says Abacha

(226) CP 4/1/98
NIGERIA'S military head of state, General Sani Abacha, said Thursday that a recent alleged plot to overthrow him was aimed at "derailing" Nigeria's transition programme

"Part of the objective of the failed coup plot is to derail the transition programme and extend its period," Abacha said in comments relayed on state television after meeting regional leaders

Under the transition programme, Abacha's regime has pledged to hand over power to an elected civilian regime on October 1

General Oladipo Diya, deputy to General Abacha, 10 other senior

military officers and a civilian, have been arrested in connection with the alleged coup plot

A special Investigation Panel was set up last weekend to determine the involvement or otherwise of the arrested suspects

Also Thursday, the new American ambassador to Nigeria, William Twaddel, expressed the hope for an open trial for the arrested suspects

Earlier last week, the US government has said that it was "closely monitoring reports" on the plot and urged the government to "ensure fair treatment and due process for all the detainees" - Sapa-AFP

Nigerian budget dashes oil hopes

(226) 208/1/98
ABUJA — The Nigerian budget had punctured the oil industry's dreams that the country would be awash with money in 1998 to step up exploration and production, officials said yesterday.

The military government's budget, released on Tuesday, allows more for joint ventures with multinationals than last year — \$2.5bn against \$2.05bn. But the amount falls short of what firms said they needed to maintain production.

"Quite frankly, it is disappointing," a senior official with one of the joint venture partners said. "The effects will not be positive."

Others said they would prefer to see how much their operations would get from the annual shareout before commenting on the year's prospects, but said the picture was far from rosy.

"Industrywide, it is \$1bn less than was asked for," an official of another company said.

In the runup to the budget, Nigeria's oil partners warned that production could suffer if they faced the same cash constraints as in 1997, when projects had to be cut back severely.

The biggest firm, Royal Dutch/Shell, which

pumps about half of Nigeria's more than 2-million barrels a day, said the 1997 cash crisis had already hit production, and warned it would fall further if 1998 funding was inadequate.

But some Nigerian officials say privately the foreign firms are scare-mongering and greedy for cash. They point to the fact that production has actually increased over recent years of budget cuts despite the oil majors' gripes. "They got more than last year did they not?" commented one senior official on this year's budget gap.

Just the four biggest joint ventures put forward a budget of more than \$5bn for consideration to their partner, state-run Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation NNPC proposed a \$3.5bn budget to government.

Hopes had been raised by a report from military ruler Gen Sani Abacha's economic planning committee that in 1998 there would be more money for oil. Instead there were other priorities — such as \$800m for investment in projects for a steel industry that the World Bank has described as extremely wasteful. — Reuter.

Abacha a history relic

LONDON – WHEN Nigeria's military leader, General Sani Abacha, defied world opinion and hanged writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight fellow Ogoni environmental activists in 1995, the outcry convinced many people that he would never again dare defy world opinion

Two events prove they were wrong. The first was the death in prison in December of the former deputy head of state, Major-General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua.

He had been convicted by a secret military tribunal in 1995 – alongside the former head of state, General Olusegun Obasanjo – of plotting to overthrow Abacha.

A fortnight before Yar'Adua's death, Abacha had announced he would soon release detainees who no longer posed a threat to state security. Yet even though Yar'Adua was dangerously ill as Abacha spoke, he was neither released nor allowed to go to hospital, until it was too late and he died.

The second event was the arrest, also in December, of Abacha's own deputy, the Chief of General Staff, Lieutenant-General Oladipo Diya, and 11 other senior army officers. They were accused of plotting to overthrow Abacha.

Diya's arrest constituted an affront to common sense. Eight days earlier, he had survived a bomb explosion at Abuja airport that was obviously intended to kill him. One security officer was killed and another seriously injured.

Diya commented that he had survived because of his faith in God and his loyalty to Abacha. As far as is known, he did not point a finger of suspicion, and Nigerians began to wonder how the obviously shaken Diya could have been in a frame of mind to plot – let alone execute – a coup against a man such as Abacha, who was himself a master of coup-making.

What may have happened is that Diya expressed opposition to Abacha's desire to transform himself from a military to a civilian president in elections due in October.

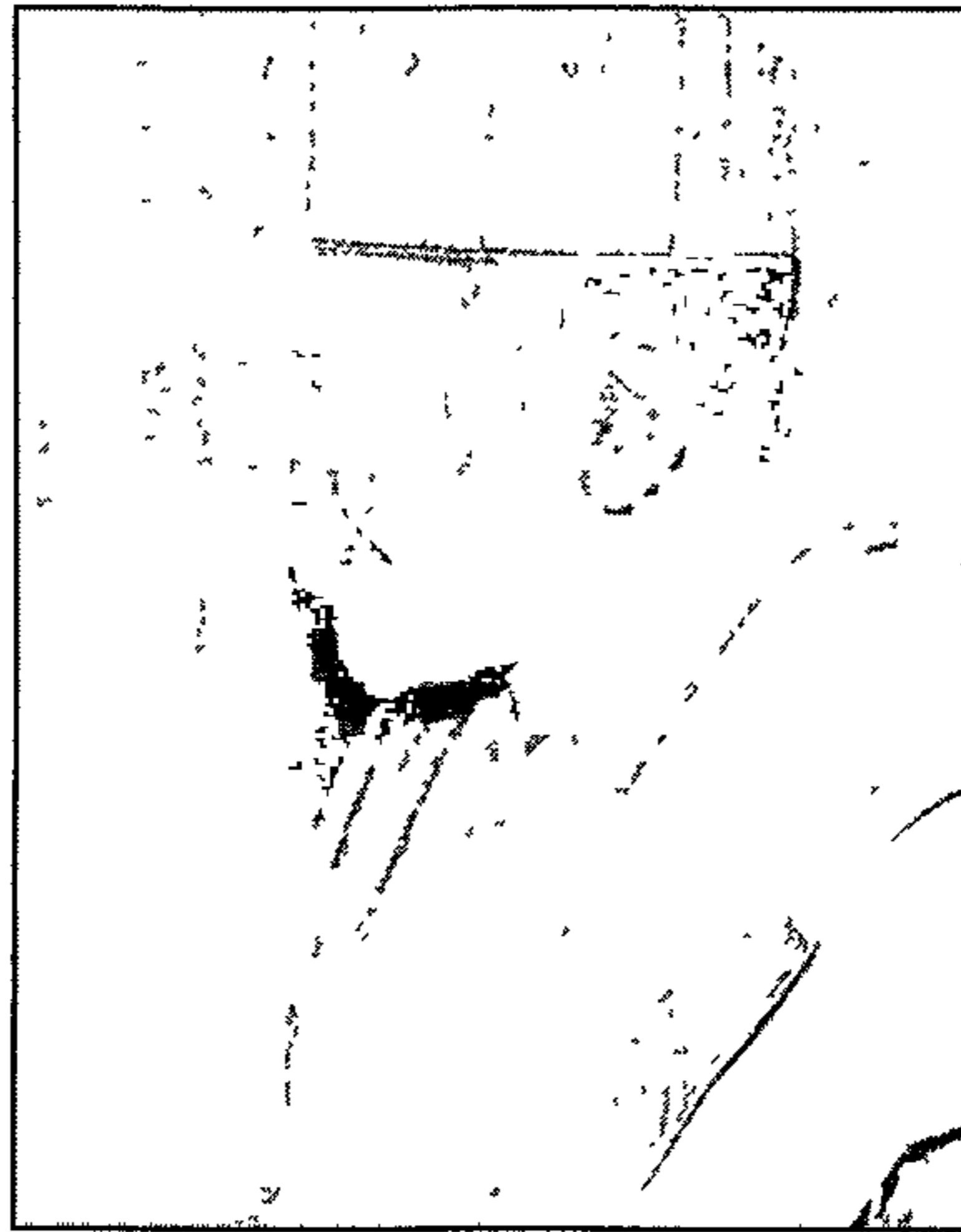
This would have exposed Diya to serious danger, if not from Abacha, then from his security apparatchiks, who want to hang on to power.

So when the assassination attempt against Diya failed, an opportunity may have been sought to frame him in an alleged coup attempt.

This would not have been too difficult because, according to Nigerian custom, most of Diya's friends in the military would have been visiting him to congratulate him on his lucky escape from the bomb blast.

All Abacha's agents would have needed to do was observe who came and went from Diya's house, and pencil their names onto a list of "coup plotters." Then could come the torture to help the apparatchiks manufacture evidence.

(226)
Nigeria's strongman thinks his methods of crushing dissent are sophisticated but is he headed for history's dung heap? **Cameron Duodu** thinks so



General Sani Abacha

During the trial of Yar'Adua and Obasanjo in 1995, the government broadcast on television video tapes of some of the accused allegedly confessing to their roles in the plot. The videos were so amateurishly shot, however, that few people believed them.

"Confession" tapes have also been made in the latest case, but the producers were not taking any risks this time.

First, to judge public reaction, they "premiered" the videos to a selected audience of traditional rulers. Then it was the turn of top military men. Next came diplomats and selected journalists.

At each screening, the audience was sternly warned not to divulge what they had seen. This was, of course, to arouse public curiosity, which was soon satisfied by "unauthorised" accounts of the screening, given by self-appointed critics of the "conspirators."

One traditional ruler came out of the screening to say the plotters had meant to derail the programme for a transition to civilian rule, and had "confessed" their transgression in a manner that was shameful and "embarrassing." Other agents dutifully filled in the gaps.

secretan
13/11/98
Meanwhile, the Abacha government warned the press that if they speculated on the plot – especially if they relayed to Nigerians comments published abroad – they would face the rigours of the law.

This warning had to be taken seriously for in the 1995 coup-plot trials four journalists were sentenced to long jail terms for merely reporting what they had heard about the alleged plot and those involved in it.

The government has now set up two military panels to try the accused. Almost certainly, the trials will be in secret.

The alleged confessions will be screened to the panels, without undergoing the thorough cross-examination of the "producers" that would have occurred in an open court of law.

There is no guarantee that the accused will be represented by counsel of their choice. At the end of the day, Abacha would have got his way, which is a purge of his critics among the top echelons of the armed forces.

Will he be allowed to carry out his scheme? The lengths to which he is going to incriminate and eliminate his former close associates suggest that in his attempt to succeed himself in power, he will allow nothing to stand in his way.

And he seems to have calculated that since his international reputation – such as it was – sank beyond redemption with the Saro-Wiwa hanging, he can now do whatever he likes with impunity, as he has nothing left to lose.

In every decade, Africa seems to produce a leader who is determined to drag the name of the continent into the mud. Who can easily forget Idi Amin of Uganda or Emperor Bokassa of the Central African Republic?

Abacha is treading a well-worn path, although the sophisticated nature of the means he is employing may deceive him into thinking that he is different.

Crude or high-tech, the faking of evidence is the same. And it goes a long way back – to Stalin of Russia, Ceausescu of Romania and many others now consigned to the dung heap of history.

If Abacha wants to end up there, too, the road is open for him – *Gemini News*

Nigeria given poor report

BO 16/1/98

Tim Cohen

(226)

LONDON — There is a "considerable risk" that Nigeria's military will step in to halt democratic elections due to take place later this year, according to security risk company Control Risks.

Political risk in the country is likely to increase sharply as the deadline approaches for the handover to civilian rule in October this year, according to Control Risks' annual report.

In the absence of criteria for Nigeria's future constitutional make-up and electoral process, Nigeria's military ruler Sani Abacha will be able to manipulate the transition process. But his health may prevent him standing as a candidate.

The report listed Angola, Central African Republic and Sierra Leone as high political risk countries, and the same three countries with Nigeria, Niger, Rwanda, Ethiopia and Uganda as high security risk countries. SA is listed as low political risk and medium security risk.

Nigerian regulator to liquidate ailing banks

ES 19/1/98

Kingsley Kubeyinje

LAGOS — Twenty-six ailing commercial and merchant banks are scheduled to be liquidated today by Nigeria's financial regulatory body, the Central Bank of Nigeria. The central bank's spokesman, Tony Ede, said the names of the affected banks would be made public on that date by central bank governor Paul Ogwuma.

Speaking from Abuja in a telephone interview on Friday, Ede said the central bank had already secured the approval of the head of state, Gen Sani Abacha, to revoke the operating licences of the banks. The banks are being liquidated because they failed to recapitalise in terms of guidelines provided by government.

Owing to a loss of public confidence in the banking sector's ability to meet depositors' cash demands, the Nigerian government last year gave all the 115 commercial and merchant banks in the country up till last December to shore up their capital base to the equivalent of about \$5m or have their licences withdrawn.

Finance Minister Anthony Ani explained last week in his 1998 budget breakdown that the 26 banks had failed to recapitalise by December 31 1997 as directed by the government.

He said the central bank, as well as the Nigerian Depositors' Insurance Corporation had been directed to put the machinery for their liquidation into motion. The central bank's spokesman said ev-

everything was being done to safeguard the properties and assets of the affected banks from being vandalised by irate depositors.

Last month Ogwuma told a meeting of accountants a number of the country's banks were still in financial distress and blamed this on poor implementation of the policies aimed at cleaning up the banking sector and boosting the economy in general.

He also said that the country's external debt, which officially stood at \$28.1bn, remained a key problem.

He also predicted that gross domestic product for 1997 would grow at a rate of 3.8%, a marginal increase on the growth of 3.4% in 1996. However, this is still negative growth in real terms, because of the rapidly rising population.

SA in deal to train Nigerians

(226)

Kingsley Kubeyinje

BD 27/11/98

LAGOS — Nigeria and an SA firm have signed a technical agreement that provides for the training of Nigerians in the production of geological maps

Under the agreement signed in Nigeria's capital, Abuja, last week, Travaux Geotechniques et Miniers (TGM) of SA will train survey department officials of the solid mineral development ministry in the making of geological maps

The Nigerian officials will be trained by TGM, in collaboration with the SA council for geoscientists (formerly the geological survey of SA).

TGM vice-president Charles Liddle said the programme's beneficiaries would "become an invaluable asset for Nigeria's development of mineral resources"

Nigeria, which earns about 90% of its foreign exchange from the sale of crude oil, is making efforts to diversify its revenue base away from the volatile petroleum sector. The government has made a list of more than 30 solid minerals which can be exploited

Sani Abacha under pressure to show hand

BA 5/2/98

(226)

LAGOS — Pressure is growing on Nigerian military ruler Gen Sani Abacha to state his intentions clearly, politicians and newspapers said yesterday.

After an eight-hour meeting in the capital, Abuja, on Tuesday, leaders of five legal political parties said they would ask to see Abacha within 24 hours, but declined to say what they wanted to discuss.

Sources close to the talks said the main concern was whether Abacha would stand for the presidency of the oil-producing West African country in elections he had decreed for August 1. "The parties decided that they want Abacha to clear the issue of whether he is contesting or not," one politician close to the talks said.

Abacha has done nothing to discourage campaigns on his behalf from all corners of the country of 104-million people.

But diplomatic and political sources say this nuclear veteran the 54-year-old general

has made a decision to run

Local opponents dismiss the democracy plan out of hand and Western countries are worried about the democratic credentials of the ruling generals as they are holding dozens of political prisoners.

With most of Nigeria's political heavyweights saying they do not plan to contest for a post they do not believe is vacant, the most serious challenger to any Abacha candidacy so far is former police chief Mohammed Yusufu.

Some local newspapers said the five parties at the meeting put forward the proposal that Abacha stand as a single consensus candidate. "Two groups opposed the idea of simply adopting Abacha, but their opposition was weakened by the firm and persuasive voices that canvassed the adoption," the independent Guardian said.

The parties have been dismissed as military stooges by prodemocracy campaigners

Relations between the parties, which were approved by the army in 1996, have grown ever more difficult, but they have not criticised Abacha openly.

Analysts detect the buildup of the same cocktail of personal, ethnic and financial interests in civilian politics that has been taken by soldiers as a reason for ruling Nigeria for all but 10 years since independence from Britain in 1960.

The army says the latest coup was prevented in December, and it plans to set up a military tribunal this week to judge the alleged plotters.

Public enthusiasm for the democracy plan has been low, blamed in part on the fiasco of the 1993 elections, when another military government annulled a ballot as southwestern tycoon Moshood Abiola was poised to win the presidency. Abiola has been detained since 1994, when he declared himself president in defiance of Abacha — Reuter



Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi enters the first session of Kenya's new parliament on Tuesday. Picture AP

Telephony now within reach of most Nigerians

Kingsley Kubeyinje

LAGOS — Five privately owned telephone firms will start to provide their services to the Nigerian public this week following the deregulation of the telecommunications sector

In Nigeria those with access to a telephone make up no more than 5% of the 100-million citizens. The participation of private investors in the sector is expected to put the facility within reach of most Nigerians, and will facilitate business development

The five companies, Eminternational Systems, Intercellular Nigeria Limited, Mobitel Limited, Independent Telephone Network and Communica-

tions Infrastructure Limited, will provide cellular and fixed-line services. Initially they will deploy a total of 45 000 digital lines within Nigeria's commercial capital, Lagos, and its environs. The networks will be expanded later in multiples of thousands to attain the full capacity of 280 000 digital lines for Lagos alone

The five companies have been connected to the main distribution frame of government-owned Nigerian Telecommunications. Prior to deregulation, the government-owned company monopolised the nation's telecommunication industry. The development is a milestone in Nigeria's bid to deregulate major public institutions

Nigerian 'opposition' backs Abacha

Eze Anaba

Four out of the five political parties created by Nigeria's military government have decided to adopt General Sani Abacha as a consensus candidate for the August 8 presidential elections. Abacha heads the military junta that rules Nigeria.

The decision, which confirmed the worst fears of pro-democracy activists in Nigeria, surprised ordinary Nigerians, who said that though they were expecting it, it came too soon.

Only one of the parties, the Grassroot Democratic movement (GDM), which had earlier supported Abacha and then backed out, opposed the decision.

At the end of the meeting, held in Nigeria's capital Lagos, none of the party leaders would speak to reporters about the decision to adopt Abacha, said to be the only key decision the parties arrived at.

Justice Mammam Nasir, chair of the transition implementation committee (TIC), a body created by the military government, told the press that the party leaders had agreed not to disclose the outcome of the meeting until they have communicated it to the appropriate authority (which means the head of state).

He said: "They [the party leaders] met for eight hours, deliberating on important issues. They have resolved that issues agreed on today should not be broken to the press until they have been cleared by the authorities." The four parties that agreed to endorse Abacha were the United Nigerian Congress party, the National Party of Nigeria, the Congress for National Consensus, and the Democratic Party of Nigeria.

The decision surprised even diehard Abacha supporters, who believe it poses a dilemma for Abacha, who now has to respond. In an interview with *The Washington Post*

(226) MTG 6-12/2/98

some time ago, Abacha said he "had not put his mind to the issue" of whether or not he will contest the August election.

Activists have said that he was only waiting to clear the opposition within the army and among pro-democracy elements before making his intentions known.

GDM, the party that backed out of the deal, said it had originally signed the communique endorsing Abacha with "objection". National

chair of the party, Alhaji Gambo Lawan, announced hours after the communique was signed that it dissociates itself from any "such call" by the other parties.

"We denounce the antics of parties and politicians not focused on the task of providing this country with democratically elected leadership in accordance with the will of the people," the party said.

A leading pro-democracy activist, Chief Gani

Fawehinmi, said the parties' decision was like being hit by a thunderbolt. He described the five parties as government parastatals.

Another opposition group, Democratic Alternatives, said this was a complete capitulation of the political class. "We have a group of civilian politicians who have surrendered the leadership of the country to the military. [They] cannot be relied upon for the emancipation of the country."

The **PRESIDENT'S** *World*

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Plight of detainees in Nigeria under spotlight

Business Day Reporter

BD 10/2/98

(226)

THE plight of political prisoners in Nigeria has been highlighted by the deteriorating health of a well-known pro-democracy campaigner, Beko Ransome-Kuti, and the recent death in detention of an influential politician.

There are more than 100 political detainees in Nigeria, some of whom are being held under a military decree which allows for indefinite detention without trial. More than 40 000 other prisoners — 65% of Nigeria's prison population — are in jail awaiting trial, and many have been in detention for between two and 10 years.

Ransome-Kuti, the head of the Campaign for Democracy, who was imprisoned in July 1995 after being convicted of involvement in a coup plot, was admitted to hospital in the northern town of Kaduna last week as he was suffering from an irregular heartbeat and weakness, his family said.

Concern over his health is more acute among his supporters following the unexplained death in December of one of the country's most influential northern politicians, Shehu Musa YarAdua, who was also serving a lengthy prison sentence for involvement in the alleged coup plot of 1995.

Ransome-Kuti, like the other convicted coup plotters of whom there were originally 40, is being held in solitary confinement, and lives on meagre prison food rations.

The Nigerian government makes no distinction between criminals and those held for political reasons, and says the nation cannot afford to have activists at large who threaten its stability. The military, however, did release a number of political prisoners

last year to increase confidence in its political transition programme which is set to lead to a handover to democratic rule in October this year.

Conditions in Nigerian jails are notoriously grim, with prisoners living in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, with poor access to decent food, clean water or adequate medicine. "I see people in cells so crowded that they have to take turns to lie down and sleep," a priest, who regularly visits Lagos's Kirikiri Prison, said. Malaria and skin diseases are common and some prisoners die of their ailments.

Concern over Ransome-Kuti raises the question of whether the Pope will use his visit to Nigeria next month to seek clemency for political detainees.

"The safety of the political prisoners needs to be guaranteed, and we hope the Pope will raise these questions with (military ruler) Gen Sani Abacha personally," Clement Nwankwo, head of the Lagos-based Constitutional Rights Project, said. The Pope will meet Abacha and hold open-air masses in the capital, Abuja, and the eastern town of Onitsha.

However, those who are campaigning for Abacha to stand for election this year so that he can continue in power, believe that even if the Pope does take issue with the government over its human rights record, the visit of such a prominent world figure when Nigeria is suffering from international isolation can only benefit their cause.

"Whatever questions are raised about why political prisoners are in detention, we have answers and we welcome the Pope's visit because it will give our head of state prominence," said Gomez Okpada of the Youths Earnestly Ask for Abacha campaign.

Nigeria to cut 250 000 public service jobs in crucial year

(226) BO 11/2/98

LAGOS — Nigeria's military government is to slash 30% of its public service with the loss of up to 250 000 jobs, officials said yesterday.

"We don't know the exact size of the civil service. It is more than 700 000 and could be more than 800 000 people. I can confirm that 30% are to be retrenched," a senior official said.

"There is a task force working on the retrenchment and by the middle of next month, it should be complete."

The presidency said at the weekend that the public service was to be cut in line with recommendations from a panel set up by military ruler Gen Sani Abacha to reform the state sector, but it did not give figures.

"Competent civil servants have nothing to fear about the current rationalisation exercise," a spokesman said.

Nigeria faces a critical political test this year, with elections promised in August by Abacha to restore civilian government.

The economy has been in the doldrums for years, partly a result of political instability, but also because of a corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy which has helped strangle enterprise and discourage foreign investment.

Donor agencies such as the World Bank as well as local business have long recommended that the public service be cut back heavily.

In line with recommendations of a panel on reform, pay for members of the public service who survive the cuts will be increased to improve productivity.

Present levels of pay are barely enough to support even the most senior Nigerian officials. A permanent secretary, the top official in a ministry, gets 6 100 naira (about R360) a month.

The pitiful pay leaves the door open for various forms of graft, which have helped Nigeria to rank as the world's second-most corrupt country, according to London consultancy Control Risks.

Some public servants

without the chance to cash in on their positions do not bother turning up for work at all, or only on pay day.

Thousands have been trapped in commercial capital Lagos in the southwest by the move to the new administrative capital of Abuja in the north, which started in 1996. "In Lagos there are drivers without cars, civil servants who have nothing to do and are just paid to be idle," the official said. "How can we pay for the idle?" — Reuter

NEWS DIGEST

□ NIGERIA

West African oil deals help soften regional relations for Abacha ~~(221)~~

The military regime of Nigerian General Sani Abacha had concluded a series of deals to sell oil to 10 west African countries in an effort to improve regional ties, a government official said yesterday.

The largest of the contracts is with Ghana, which will buy 30 000 barrels a day from Nigeria, followed by Gambia's 20 000 barrels a day, said a Nigerian official. Benin, Liberia, Togo, Burkina Faso, Niger, Guinea, Ivory Coast and Mali also signed oil deals.

Nigeria, facing widespread criticism for the country's human rights record, appears to be trying to extend its influence in the region through bilateral trade and military leadership in west African peace-keeping and peace-making efforts. Commonwealth countries — Britain and its former colonies — warned last year that Nigeria would face a mandatory oil embargo from its members if Abacha's military regime was still in power by October this year. — AP, Lagos

CT(BR) 17/2/98



A man suspected of being a junta member is led by a policeman in Freetown, Sierra Leone, this week after Ecomog siezed control of the city from the junta. Picture AP

LAGOS — Thousands of angry villagers have demanded millions of dollars in compensation in the wake of Nigeria's worst oil spill after an underwater pipeline burst last month

Mobil Oil's Nigerian subsidiary said yesterday more than 14 000 claims had been processed by a law firm contracted to handle the cases

Villagers seek compensation from Mobil

Although the total value of the claims was not disclosed, company officials said it could top \$100m

The subsidiary is 60% owned by Nigeria's military government, which is expected to help pay claims. The oil blackened beaches and marshes in at least five

coastal provinces

Mobil said about 500 barrels of light crude washed ashore, although at least 38 000 barrels leaked from the pipeline connecting an offshore platform to a storage terminal in the southeastern state of Akwa Ibom — Sapa-AP

PD 18/2/98

Kuanda charged with knowing about coup

Lusaka - Former Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda was charged in court yesterday with concealing information about October's failed coup in Zambia.

Kaunda (73), who ruled Zambia for 27 years from independence in 1964, was charged with his security chief, Moyses Kaulungombe, on the charge of misprision of treason. Neither was asked to plead and the hearing was adjourned until February 27.

The pair are among 92 people detained under emergency laws invoked after the attempt by junior army officers to overthrow President Frederick Chiluba's government. Kaunda and Kaulungombe are the first to be charged. They could face life imprisonment. Misprision of treason is the



Kenneth Kaunda ... in court

legal term for concealing knowledge of a treasonable act. According to the prosecution, the pair had prior knowledge but failed to report it.

The former president was arrested on Christmas Day on suspicion that he was involved

Stan 19/2/98

in plotting the coup. He was later placed under house arrest. However, the charge against him yesterday did not allege direct involvement.

Kaunda's lawyers, who are already contesting the grounds for his continued house arrest, have called for a preliminary inquiry, charging that he is being held out of malice.

"Our client's ground of detention explicitly stated that he was involved in the military coup attempt and that is why his freedom was curtailed," lawyer Patrick Mvunga said.

Another of his lawyers, Mainza Chona, accused the state of abusing the judicial system to settle political scores. Kaunda has maintained he knew nothing of the coup plot.

Reuters

Swapo wins low-turnout poll

BY TABBY MOYO
Star Foreign Service

Windhoek - Namibia's ruling party, Swapo, has taken control of 26 of 45 local authority councils in Monday's poll, which was characterised by a poor voter turnout.

About 40% of the 188 000 registered voters cast their votes - compared with 82.3% in the first local authority election held in 1992. Voters in Swapo's stronghold, the northern provinces of the country, failed to turn out to vote in large numbers for the first time since independence.

The main opposition party, the DTA of Namibia, won a majority vote in nine local authorities, the United Democratic Front three, and residents' associations two. Four councils

did not have an absolute majority for any party.

Swapo lost two of its strongholds to the DTA - the coastal town of Henties Bay and the north-western town of Opuwo. Local residents' associations which were taking part in the local authority election for the first time proved that they are a force to be reckoned with.

Director of elections, Gerhard Totemeyer, attributed poor turnout to voter apathy.

Joseph Kawandenge, president of the Namibia Movement for Independent Candidates, said the poor turnout was a direct result of the failure of political parties to live up to their promises. He said voters had silently passed a vote of no-confidence in the overall performance of political parties.

Soyuz separates from Mir, sending 3 back to Earth



IN BRIEF

EU urged to slap tougher ban on Nigeria if need be

BD 20/2/98

STRASBOURG — The European Parliament urged European Union (EU) governments yesterday to commit themselves to tougher sanctions on Nigeria, unless presidential elections resulted in the restoration of democracy by October

The EU assembly said existing sanctions, which included bans of some sales of arms "have not been particularly effective". In an indirect reference to France, the assembly said Nigeria's military government was "attempting to drive a wedge between the member states of the EU by offering certain member states very attractive trade and other concessions". (226)

The parliament said EU governments should make a commitment to imposing a total arms embargo, a ban on the sponsorship of trade missions and freezing assets held in the EU by Nigeria's government "if a genuine transition to democratic civilian rule has not occurred by October"

AFRICA

Abacha supporters threaten handover upheaval in Nigeria

(226) 20 23 | 2 | 98
ABUJA— A group campaigning for Nigerian military leader Gen Sani Abacha to stay in power after the date for a handover to democratic rule later this year is threatening to make the country ungovernable if the general is prevented from remaining Nigeria's leader

The group, known as the Youths Earnestly Ask for Abacha, has set up offices countrywide, and is led by a US-educated Nigerian businessman Daniel Kanu Kanu, who is escorted by security men wherever he goes, is a determined man

"We'll make this country ungovernable if Gen Abacha doesn't continue," said Kanu "Gen Abacha is the only person at this time that can do it for us"

Kanu says he has received no government funding for his activities even though his organisation clearly has government approval. Its activities, which at times are attended by government representatives, are broadcast almost nightly on state television

So far the group has bought Abacha campaign vehicles, organised that imported rice bags bear the general's name, and produced badges, leaflets and baseball hats which carry Abacha's name. Last year another private businessman launched an Abacha television set which bore the general's name

The activities of Kanu's group are part of a wider campaign to ensure Abacha remains Nigeria's leader. Government ministers have for several months openly expressed their support for Abacha's continued leadership, arguing that a country as volatile as Nigeria is unsuited to western-style democracy

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, has more than 200 different ethnic groups, and since its independence has been ruled mostly by a succession of military governments in spite of numerous internationally monitored local attempts to install a democratically elected government

Many ordinary Nigerians lost faith in the promises of the military to hand over to an elected government when democratic presidential elections were annulled in 1993 by Abacha's predecessor, Gen Ibrahim Babangida

Opposition groups who criticise Abacha's programme for a transition to democracy as a farce are divided over an alternative strategy. Some call for a government of national unity and others say Chief Mashood Abiola, the detained politician who many believe won the annulled presidential elections of 1993, is Nigeria's rightful president

The divisions and because many of the government's critics are either in detention or in self-imposed exile, means opposition groups are ineffective.

With the five government-approved political parties now deep in discussion over whether to adopt Abacha as a consensus candidate, the question of whether presidential elections will really take place as planned has even arisen

Last week one of the most influential groups in the country, the traditional rulers, lent their backing to the idea of Abacha staying on in power

The only plausible opponent Abacha might face if he does decide to contest elections is an ex-police chief, M D Yusuf, who has never before played a role in politics

Absa finds 'lifeboat' loan terms to be inconceivable

(226)

Linda Ensor

CAPE TOWN— Absa had complied with all obligations in terms of its "lifeboat" agreements with the Reserve Bank and found it "inconceivable" that it would have to pay back the R1,1bn granted to Bankorp over a period of five years, group special projects consultant Christo Faul said yesterday.

It was the prerogative of the Reserve Bank "to decide whether, to what extent and in which manner such assistance would be given, in accordance with its normal central bank function of providing lender-of-last resort facilities to the banking system".

Faul said Absa found it inconceivable that there could be any credible basis on which it would be required to repay assistance given to Bankorp in the early 1990s, prior to its acquisition by Absa. This would violate its agreements with the Reserve Bank, especially as "Absa itself did not benefit from such assistance". His comments followed reports that Bank of England former deputy governor Kit McMahon had supplied government with evidence showing the Reserve Bank's lifeboats extended to shaky banks were illegal.

DD 2/3/98

Abacha faces mass protests

(226) 27 3/3/98

LAGOS: Five million Nigerians are planning to march in an "Abacha must go rally" here today. Brought together by 26 pro-democracy and human rights organisations they want to campaign against the Nigerian head of state General Sani Abacha becoming the country's president.

The demonstration aims to counter a planned rally in Abuja on the same day by a group called NACYAN — a coalition of eight youth organisations fighting to "persuade Abacha to run for president".

In advertisements in national dailies, NACYAN said it would mobilise two million youths to march for Abacha in Abuja.

But the pro-democracy campaign

scheduled for the nation's commercial capital Lagos, is, according to the United Action for Democracy (UAD), the first in a series of planned mass action and campaigns of civil disobedience by the coalition to express dissent.

During the pro-democracy rallies in Lagos — after the annulment of the 1993 presidential election by General Ibrahim Babangida — many people died during violent clashes with security agents.

The protests continued when Abacha took over from the interim national government of Mr Ernest Shonekan in November 1993. The demonstrations stopped only when union leaders were arrested and detained for "economic sabotage".

A UAD press statement said that the rally today was to "prevent General Sani Abacha from becoming civilian president of Nigeria and to terminate military rule in the country".

The statement said that the rally would be addressed by about 25 activists, presidential aspirants, students, labour leaders and wives of political detainees.

A mass signature campaign against the military strongman's candidacy would be launched at the rally.

And in the western city of Ibadan, another pro-democracy group, the Nigerian Council of Liberal Democrats, vowed to stop the Abuja march planned to persuade Abacha to continue in office beyond October 1 1998. — Independent Foreign Service

Police block Lagos opposition rally

LAGOS — Police sealed off a Lagos venue yesterday to foil a rally called to oppose the candidature of Nigerian military ruler Gen Sani Abacha in civilian presidential polls while his backers gathered in Abuja.

About 150 policemen cordoned off the Yaba motor park in the commercial capital, where two police armoured personnel carriers had already been posted, amid warnings against the organisation of a banned protest. Four other armoured cars were stationed outside the national police headquarters.

In Abuja thousands of people gathered for a rally to back Abacha as a candidate in polls due in August as part of his tightly controlled transition programme back to civilian rule.

The anti-Abacha protest has been called by a coalition of 26 pro-democracy and human rights organisations under the umbrella of the national United Action for Democracy movement. Organisers said that they hoped for a crowd of 5-million at the rally.

Lagos state police commissioner Abubakar Tsav said on Monday that any rally would be illegal and would be dealt with firmly.

Thousands of people converged on the national parade ground in Abuja, where organisers of the pro-Abacha show were expecting 2-million people. Abacha was due to address the rally via big screens from inside his offices.

At least three former heads of state were expected to attend.

The military ruler has not formally announced that he intends to run for the presidency, due to be taken up by an elected civilian on October 1. Workers and students in Abuja were told to stay away from work and classes yesterday and today.

Meanwhile, Hilary Andersson reports that armed security policemen raided the house of Nigerian opposition leader Gani Fawehinmi on the eve of an antigovernment rally in Lagos.

The fifteen armed security men, some uniformed policemen and others in plain clothes told Fawehinmi's wife that they were looking for subversive documents relating to the opposition rally when they barged into his house — Sapa-AFP.

Corruption is target of Nigeria's job cuts

et (MR) 4/3/98 (226)

HILARY ANDERSSON

Lagos — The Nigerian government is planning a massive shakeup of the civil service, which will involve sacking up to a quarter of a million people, aimed at reforming a notoriously corrupt and inefficient organisation

The civil service is so large and cumbersome even top officials cannot give an accurate estimate of its size, but it is thought to employ about 800 000 people, a third of whom are due to lose their jobs in the next few days

The move will affect serious unemployment in Nigeria, a country in which almost everyone with a paying job supports extended families of 20 people or more. Unemployment is already a major social and economic problem and the economy has been in decline since the oil boom of the 1980s

Salaries in the civil service, which barely increased during the rocketing inflation rates of about 80 percent in 1995, reflect how tough life has become for the average public employee

A top civil servant earns about 6 000 naira or \$75 (about R350) a month, while a lowly clerk earns the equivalent of \$30 a month

Because \$30 a month is not enough to adequately feed and house even one person in Nigeria, many civil servants have second jobs. As a result, civil servants often turn up for work just before lunch, and leave not long thereafter. The poor pay contributes to their lack of motivation, and bad working conditions do not help

As part of the shakeup, which was recommended by the special Ayida Panel, the salaries of those who are not sacked will increase in an attempt to boost motivation, while getting rid of the many unnecessary and underpaid workers. It is also intended to address corruption, the other notorious problem in Nigeria's civil service

It is standard practice for civil servants to try to boost their meagre incomes with unofficial payments, known here as "dash", and corruption seems to be a national habit. Anything from driving licences to animal permits can be bought from civil servants

Telephone lines are cut for no

reason, and can take months to repair without dash, while the revenues financing Nigerian Electrical Power Association (Nepa), the electricity company, disappear with so little result that the company is popularly known as Never Expect Power Again

Alhaji Gidado Idris, the head of the civil service, has made it clear the shakeup is not intended as a witch hunt. He said those who had been dishonest would be among the first to go. "Competent civil servants," he said, addressing what he clearly considers to be a minority in his organisation, "will have nothing to fear"

The move to restructure the biggest employer in Nigeria is a test of the government's stated resolve to bring the country's economy in line with Asia's tiger economies (before the recent financial crisis) during the first decade of the 21st century. General Sani Abacha, the country's leader, made the pledge when he set up a policy think tank known as Vision 2010, designed to map out a vision for political and economic development

The think tank's recommendations included the need for privatisation and for other reforms that would loosen the strong ties between the state and the economy

In this year's budget, the government followed the recommendations to some extent. It allowed private telephone companies to operate and promised to work towards the privatisation of the electricity company

But this fell short of what foreign donors and economists in the country had hoped for, perhaps because in an election year the government wanted to avoid offending key interests

All eyes will be on Nigeria this year to see whether Abacha plans to fulfil his pledge to hand over leadership to a civilian government

Since the signs indicate that he may try to stay in power as the next civilian leader, and that for better or for worse it is he who will lead Nigeria into the next century, perhaps the real focus should be on how far he is prepared to go with brave, if unpopular, policies — Independent Foreign Service

Nigerians rally — for and against Abacha⁽²²⁶⁾

ET 4/3/98

ABUJA: Thousands of people have been converging here for a rally to persuade Nigeria's military ruler General Sani Abacha to contest presidential elections in August, state radio said yesterday.

"Thousands of youths have converged from all the 36 states of the federation to show support for General Abacha," said Radio Nigeria, which is covering live the two-day, carnival of music and speeches expected to draw two million people.

A coalition of pro-Abacha groups organising the rally said it had set up a sound system and loudspeakers to generate over one million watts of sound to ensure they were heard loud and clear.

"All states of the federation are fully mobilised," said Mr Emmanuel Okereke, a spokesman for Youths Earnestly Ask for Abacha, one of the organisers. "So many people are already in Abuja and many more are on their way."

In the commercial capital Lagos, hundreds of riot police were ready to thwart a rally planned by groups opposing Abacha's candidature, witnesses said.

"The entire venue of the rally is a fortress of policemen and their armoured tanks," said Mr Funke Osundolu, a trader.

The police warned people not to attend the opposition rally, saying the organisers had no permit.

One policeman at the rally venue said "We are waiting and ready to deal decisively with anybody who defies our orders and gathers for any procession."

The Lagos rally, by the United Action for Democracy, aims to demonstrate against what the coalition of 26 opposition groups sees as plans by Abacha to stay in power as a civilian president.

A UAD spokesperson said his group was determined to go ahead with the rally. "With or without police presence, we will go on with our rally," he said.

The rally was due to get under way in Yaba, a popular business district in Lagos.

Abacha, a 54-year-old infantry general who took power in 1993, has not yet said if he will stand for election, but neither has he stopped the campaigns on his behalf.

Nigeria's last presidential poll was annulled in 1993 by a previous military government in which Abacha was a key player.

The presumed winner of the poll, millionaire businessman Mr Moshood Abiola, is among dozens of political detainees — *Reuter*

Leaders join Kabbah for return

BD 9/2/98 (226)

CONAKRY — Nigeria's military ruler Sani Abacha will be among three African heads of state joining Sierra Leone's elected President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah on Tuesday for his triumphant return home.

Kabbah's aides said yesterday that Abacha, whose forces led the strike that made the ousted president's return possible, would be joined by Guinea's Lansana Conte and Gambia's Yahya Jammeh — both military leaders who won legiti-

macy through elections.

"Kabbah will leave on Tuesday for Freetown," Ansu Kaijai, an MP for Kabbah's Sierra Leone People's Party, said in the Guinea capital, Conakry, where Kabbah has been in exile since ousted in a coup last May.

Nigerian-led West African troops played a decisive role in the February defeat of supporters of the coup and the head of their Armed Forces Ruling Council, Johnny Paul Koroma, who remains on the run.

Abacha's administration, accused of flouting

human rights at home, has been instrumental in ensuring respect for the democratic process in both Sierra Leone and Liberia, where its troops helped end seven years' civil war last year.

Abacha, who seized power in 1993, is expected to run for president in elections, as did Conte and Jammeh before him. Nigerian elections are planned for August.

The heads of state are expected to fly to Freetown and drive by motorcade through the city to a welcome at the national stadium — Reuter.

The general's friends boogie while his political opponents

The opposition protest was called to coincide with the far larger event in the capital Abuja, where tens of thousands of people attended a carnival organised by pro-government youth groups in support of the general.

Civil rights groups were furious that the pro-government rally was allowed to go ahead while the opposition rally was banned.

"If we are to be a united country there should not be double standards, there should not be discrimination against those who have a contrary view to the one the federal government wants us all to accept," said Ayo Obe of the Civil Liberties Organisation.

The battle between those for and against Nigerian military ruler Gen Sani Abacha's reported plan to stand for election is gathering momentum, writes Hilary Andersson in Lagos

BD 10/3/98
(22b)

Huge crowds of youths, women's groups and local government employees from around the country thronged to the capital to listen to Nigeria's top musicians and personalities perform, and to see their favourite football stars.

The carnival cost about \$6m to put on, money which the organisers say came from private sources and not, as alleged by opposition groups, from the government itself.

In stark contrast to the violent scenes at the anti-government rally in Lagos, police helicopters circled the pro-Abacha

carnival in Abuja to ensure that the event went smoothly.

One-and-a-half million watts of sound blasted from enormous speakers in the central parade ground, two of which were pointed directly at the presidential villa.

Politicians and professionals broadcast loud appeals for Abacha to stand as a candidate in the presidential elections set for August.

At the end of the Abuja festivities, which were broadcast live on state television throughout Nigeria, a political adviser to the military leader said

Abacha would now go into consultations with his friends, family and colleagues, and announce in a matter of weeks whether or not he intended to stand as a candidate in presidential elections.

"I will, however, assure you that when the decision is revealed to you, you will not be disappointed, for you will know that it was totally consistent with his character and therefore in the interest of the nation," Alhaji Yahya Sule Ahmed said at the rally.

Only two other politicians in Nigeria have said they would be

prepared to contest the elections, and neither is a mainstream political figure.

Other potential candidates are not participating, either because they are in detention, or because they have felt pressured to leave the coast clear for the general.

Presidential candidates, anyway, must be sponsored by one of the five political parties registered last year by the government, and four of the parties have said they want to adopt Abacha as a joint candidate.

Supporters of the general argue that after 30 years of spo-

radic military coups and political instability, the country's next civilian leader must have the power to control the military forces.

"None of the other politicians are ready or are up to it, and the military would just take over from them again," said Daniel Kanu, leader of the Youths Earnestly Ask for Abacha campaign group.

The international community, which has imposed sanctions on the Nigerian government for its record on human rights — including the execution of activist Ken Saro-Wira — is watching Abacha's transition programme carefully to see whether or not his promise of democracy is genuine.



ABACHA

are arrested

Nigeria lashes out at the US

90 17/3/98 (226)

LAGOS — The Nigerian junta has lashed out at the US after an American official said Washington would hold junta leader Gen Sani Abacha to his vow to step aside and allow free elections

Information Minister Ikeobasi Mokuolu called it immoral for one nation to decide the acceptability of another nation's political candidates

Mokuolu said the comments "negated the principles of democracy"

Abacha has promised to hold presidential elections in August and to hand power to a civilian government. Pro-democracy groups, though, have been saying for months that he will orchestrate the election to ensure he remains in power. He is expected to run in the voting.

Mokuolu's comments came after US Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Susan Rice said a victory by a military candidate would be unacceptable — Sapa-AP.

ETHNIC VIOLENCE RENEWED

30 sacrificed to gods in Niger delta conflict

CT 20/3/98

(226)

LAGOS: On the eve of the pope's first visit to Nigeria in 16 years, ritual inter-ethnic violence has broken out afresh among animist and ancestralist ethnic groups in the south.

THIRTY people were sacrificed to local gods in a latest outbreak of inter-ethnic bloodshed in southern Nigeria, a woman who escaped said yesterday, while security forces sought the killers

Press reports put the death toll at 30 after witnesses said members of the Ikaw group in Bayelsa State attacked and killed people of the Urhobo tribe

Several newspapers reported that the victims were murdered in cold blood at a shrine in the Ijaw village of Oboro, citing a witness who said that 11 men, 10 women and nine children were killed after a ritual ceremony

The survivor, Ms Tiro Agbudje, said the Urhobos had been aboard a boat on a river in the Niger delta region, accompanying the body of a member of their community to a funeral, when warriors attacked and forced them to moor the vessel near an Ijaw village

The Urhobos were marched along a bush path into the village and forced to strip naked before the image of a local goddess at a shrine, Agbudje said, according to the account of the massacre in the daily *Concord*

After rituals had been performed by the local chief priest, the warriors began to execute those

they had taken off the boat, according to Agbudje, who said that she had escaped when Ijaws hesitated to kill her because she was clutching a three-month-old baby

During her flight, the young woman lost her child, she told journalists, leading the local press to put the total number of dead at 31

No precise reason was given as to why the Urhobos were "sacrificed to the gods", as the independent daily *Tribune* described the killings, but ethnic strife has frequently been reported in the region

Colonel John David Dungs, the military administrator of the Rivers State, which lies next to Bayelsa, deplored the renewed violence.

The colonel said extra security forces had been sent to the troubled area to maintain law and order, and pledged that those responsible for the killings would be apprehended.

The Ijaws are one of the three major ethnic groups in the region, with the Urhobos and the Itsekims. Clashes have been particularly bloody among Ikaws and Itsekims,

with a flare-up last year after local administrative changes.

Africa's most populous country, with more than 100 million inhabitants, is estimated to be about 45% Muslim, particularly in the north, where much of the leadership of the present and previous military regimes hail from.

Nigeria is also said to be 45% Christian, a figure accounting both for Roman Catholics and a wide range of other groups, while animist and ancestral traditions also remain strong.

Tomorrow, Pope John Paul is due to return for three days to the country he first visited 16 years ago. One of the highlights of his visit is to be the beatification of a Nigerian monk, Father Michael Cyprian Iwene Tansi, who died in 1964

At least a million people are expected to attend that mass, to be celebrated on Sunday at Oba, near Onitsha, in the east of the country.

Onitsha is less than 150km from the Warri region, where bloodshed sparked by the resiting of a local authority centre last year claimed more than 100 lives, according to an AFP toll based on eyewitness and local reports

The regime sent troops to the major oil-producing region in April last year — Sapa-AFP

Victims stripped naked before image of tribal goddess, then executed by local warriors

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Nigerian arrests dash hopes on eve of papal visit

By **GODDY IKEH**
INDEPENDENT FOREIGN SERVICE

Lagos - As Pope John Paul II touches down in Nigeria today, the country's military government has shown no signs of using the visit for a hoped-for relaxation of its suppression of dissent

Human rights groups plan to make representations to the Pope to intercede with military leader Sani Abacha today to release over 120 political prisoners, including 18 journalists

However, instead of easing the regime's brutal suppression of dissent, Abacha clamped down on the eve of the visit, despite appeals for leniency from the Roman Catholic Church and Amnesty International, Associated Press reports

Several pro-democracy activists and political opponents were detained this week.

"Even the Pope's impending visit has not been enough to stop the Nigerian authorities from brutally suppressing dissenting opinions in the country," Amnesty International said in a report released yesterday

During his three-day visit, the Pope is expected to echo recent church appeals for the release of political prisoners in Nigeria

The pontiff arrives in Nigeria at a time of severe economic hardship and socio-political polarisation and fragmentation. The country is in the final stages of a controversial transition to civilian rule, with elections to the National Assembly and the presidency expected by August this year.

Dissidents suspect that Abacha intends to simulate a transition to civilian rule while maintaining control

The regime is exploiting the full publicity value of the Pope's visit, committing millions of rands to it to try to boost its credibility. Opposition groups hope Abacha wants this boost so

badly that he will agree to free some dissidents

The government regards the Pope's visit as compensation for the deliberate exclusion of Nigeria from US President Bill Clinton's simultaneous visit to Africa

The Pope's main purpose is the beatification of the late monk, Cyprian Michael Tansi. This is the final stage towards making him Nigeria's first saint.

Nigeria's more than 10 million Roman Catholics regard the visit as a gracious gesture but, as with his recent visit to Cuba, the political considerations are paramount

Two key human rights groups - the Committee for the

Even the Pope's impending arrival has not been enough to stop brutal suppression of dissent

Defence of Human Rights and the Civil Liberties Organisation - said in Lagos this week that they would seek ways of making representations to the Pope on behalf of more than 120 political prisoners in Nigeria

Many Nigerians believe it was because of the Pope's intervention that the lives of a former Nigerian head of state, General Olusegun Obasanjo, and his co-conspirators were spared after a military court found them guilty of being involved in a 1995 coup. They are still in jail

Many hope the Pope will appeal to Abacha to save the lives of former chief of general staff Lieutenant-General Oladapo Diya and 25 others who are on trial for plotting to overthrow the government in December last year.

But the Catholic authorities have said Diya and his group have not yet been convicted and that the Pope will not be involved in such an appeal.

In another appeal to the Pope, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) in Nigeria has told of the alleged persecution of Nigerian journalists in the hope that he would appeal for their release from prison during his meetings with Abacha

There are 18 journalists in Nigerian prisons - believed to be more than in any other African country - and one journalist has been murdered this year, according to the CPJ letter.

"Most of the jailed journalists are being held incommunicado, under inhumane and life-threatening conditions, without charge, medical treatment, visitation privileges for family members, or legal representation. These journalists are being detained simply for carrying out their professional responsibilities, a blatant violation of their right to hold and express opinions"

Meanwhile Sapa-AFP reports that, following the Pope's visit to Cuba, the US will ease some of its sanctions on the island, according to the White House

Spokesman Michael McCurry linked the decision directly to Cuba allowing the papal visit from January 21 to 25, and to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's Vatican meeting with the Pope this month.

But McCurry underscored that US-Cuba policy itself - centred on a 36-year-old embargo aimed at undermining President Fidel Castro's rule - will remain unchanged

"In the wake of the Pope's visit, there has been a lot of consideration in our government about how we can address some of the real humanitarian needs of the people of Cuba who have suffered under the yoke of totalitarianism for far too long," he said

AFRICA

Thousands greet Pope in Nigeria

ONITSHA — Hundreds of thousands of people welcomed Pope John Paul at an airstrip near a town in southeast Nigeria yesterday where he would beatify ascetic monk Cyprian Tansi.

The 77-year-old Pontiff landed at the Oba airstrip near Onitsha by helicopter about 50 minutes after his scheduled 10 20am arrival. No explanation was given for the delay, but the Pope appeared in good form as he set off on a tour of the crowd in his armoured "Popemobile".

Church officials said they believed the crowd could top 1-million in the ethnic Ibo heartland of Nigeria where most of the half-Muslim nation's 12-million Roman Catholics live.

The Vatican sees the beatification of Tansi, who died in 1964, as the main purpose of the Pope's three-day visit. Beatification is regarded as the penultimate stage before sainthood. Tansi will be the first Nigerian to achieve it.

The Pope on Saturday called on Nigerians to heed Tansi's message of reconciliation in a strong appeal for respect for human rights in the politically troubled west African nation of more than 104-million.

Vatican State Secretary Cardinal Angelo Sodano presented a list of 60 detainees with an appeal for

(226) BD 23/3/98
 clemency to the military government of Gen Sani Abacha, which stands accused of systematic abuses by human rights groups and opponents.

"The testimony borne by Father Tansi is important at this moment in Nigeria's history, a moment that requires concerted and honest efforts to foster harmony and national unity, to guarantee respect for human life and human rights," the Pope said.

Nigeria, divided between more than 200 ethnic groups, is poised at a critical period in its political troubles. Abacha, 54, a Muslim northerner who seized power in 1993, is expected to stand in elections planned for August 1. Opponents have dismissed Abacha's democracy plan out of hand while Western countries are suspicious of his brand of democracy.

The Vatican declined to reveal the names of detainees on the list passed to the authorities, saying only they were well-known. "The Nigerian authorities have received this request and affirmed it would be studied and that there would be a response," chief Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said.

The clemency appeal was similar to that made by the Pope on a January trip to communist Cuba. Three weeks later 299 prisoners, including more than 70 political detainees, were freed — Reuter

Nigeria to privatise major parastatals

Kingsley Kubeyinje

LAGOS — The Nigerian military government appears set to privatise two of its major state-owned utilities, the telecommunications and electricity corporations.

Finance Minister Anthony Ani said last week that the privatisation programme, involving the Nigerian telecommunications company and the national electric power authority, would be out "in weeks".

The minister's announcement put paid to speculations that the privatisation plan, first pronounced by the military leader,

Gen Sani Abacha, in this year's budget speech, might have been shelved.

Ani said "we are ready for privatisation and we want to make it as successful and as transparent as possible." A draft law to back the privatisation bid was already in the works.

At a post-budget dinner given by Abacha last month, a heated debate over privatisation bid ensued between the finance minister and the chairman of the powerful national economic intelligence committee, Prof Sam Aluko.

Aluko, an economist, is decidedly against the privatisation of

(226) BD 23/3/98
 public utilities

Nigeria's public utilities have over the years been a major source of revenue loss to the country with billions of dollars spent in propping up the ineptly managed parastatals.

Under the new programme, at least 20% of the shares of the affected enterprises would be reserved for Nigerians, while government would retain 40%. A trust fund will be set up to manage the proceeds of the privatised businesses, which will be used to improve the nation's dilapidated social infrastructure, as well as investment outlets abroad.

Pope puts pressure on military rulers in Nigeria to

Abuja - Pope John Paul II today promoted family values and human rights at an open-air mass before hundreds of thousands of Nigerians in Kibwa, near the capital here.

He was given an enthusiastic welcome by the crowds when he arrived

on the final day of his three-day visit to Nigeria, moving about the site of the gathering in his "popemobile"

Bearing flags in the Vatican colours and banners reading "Holy Father, pray for us," many in the crowd shouted "John Paul II, we love you," as the pontiff passed

Yesterday, the Pope celebrated a mass in Onitsha, the centre of Nigerian Catholicism, to beatify a Cistercian monk who died in 1964. Father Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi was the first West African to be beatified, a process that precedes sainthood. The Pope arrived in Nigeria on

Saturday, and soon appealed to Nigeria's military regime to grant clemency to 60 political detainees from a list compiled by the Civil Liberties Organisation, a prominent Lagos-based human rights group. Members of General Sani Abacha's military junta were present on the

podium for today's mass - among them the minister in charge of the federal capital, General Jeremiah Useni, navy chief Admiral Mike Akhigbe, Foreign Minister Tom Ikimi and Finance Minister Anthony Ani. The Pope was flanked on both sides of the podium by Nigerian arch-

ARL 23/3/98

bishops and bishops wearing white robes that bore images of the pontiff and Father Tansi.

The Pope emphasised a need for reconciliation and respect for human rights, and at a meeting with Muslim leaders earlier emphasised the similarities between Christian and Islam.

ic beliefs on human dignity and the value of life

Meanwhile opponents of military ruler General Sani Abacha and his government of repeated rights violations, and of detaining dozens of political prisoners. - Reuters

respect human rights



MASS DEVOTION: Hundreds of thousands of worshippers greet Pope John Paul II before mass in the Nigerian town of Onitsha yesterday. The Pope, on a three-day visit, called for the release of more than 60 political prisoners. **PICTURE: AP**

Pope candid on visit to Nigeria

(226) CT 23/3/98

ONITSHA, Nigeria: Pope John Paul II yesterday told Nigeria's politicians there was no place for the abuse of power or intimidation of the weak and said the African nation had to strive to prevent any violation of human rights.

Using candid language in his homily at a beatification ceremony in this eastern town, the Pope said the country of 104 million people and scores of ethnic groups had to reconcile its differences and work towards using its human and natural wealth for the good of all.

"All Nigerians must work to rid society of everything that offends the dignity of the human person or violates human rights," the Pope told a vast crowd of more than one million people.

"This means reconciling differences, overcoming ethnic rivalries and injecting honesty, efficiency and competence in the art of governing," the Pope said under a canopy topped with dried grass.

In a strongly worded passage clearly directed at those who hope to rule Nigeria after elections in August, the 77-year-old Pontiff said

there was a need for men and women "who wish to serve rather than be served."

He said: "There can be no place for intimidation and domination of the poor and weak, for arbitrary exclusion of individuals and groups from political life, for the misuse of authority or the abuse of power."

Turning to one of his most cherished messages, the Pope underscored the value of reconciliation to heal division.

"This reconciliation is not weakness or cowardice," he said. "On the contrary, it demands courage and sometimes even heroism. It should never be seen as dishonour."

The Pope arrived by helicopter, landing in a huge cloud of dust, and was welcomed by the mass of people, thousands dressed in the green and white national colours

and waving flags.

The Pope's message came a day after he called on the Nigerian government of military leader General Sani Abacha to consider granting clemency to around 60 political detainees now in jail.

The list of names was believed to include such prominent political prisoners as the supposed victor of 1993 presidential elections, Mr Moshood Abiola, and trade union leaders.

A Vatican spokesperson said the Nigerian government gave its assurance that the list would be studied and that authorities would later respond.

Amnesty International and other human rights groups say political prisoners in Nigeria number around 200.

The Pope raised the issue of human rights and the presence of the Roman Catholic Church in

Nigeria in a half-hour talk with Abacha on Saturday evening. The Nigerian population is over 50% Muslim and around 11% are Roman Catholic.

He was to meet the heads of Nigeria's Muslim faith in a potentially sensitive encounter yesterday evening. In the Pope's first visit to Nigeria in 1982, a meeting with Muslim leaders was cancelled at the last minute, apparently because of a misunderstanding among them.

The Pope said he was glad to be able to return to beatify former local priest and Trappist monk Father Cyprian Michael Tansi.

Tansi, who died in 1963, is the first Nigerian to reach what the Catholic Church sees as the penultimate step to sainthood.

The Pope described the ascetic as a "man of God" and a "man of the people."

Referring to the parable of the "Prodigal Son", the Pope said Tansi had understood that those who had strayed could return and seek forgiveness in the spirit of reconciliation. — Reuter



PAPAL PRESSURE: Sani Abacha

Tempers fray as lack of fuel cripples Lagos

(226) MS 25/3/98

LAGOS — A week-long fuel shortage paralysed business in Nigeria's commercial capital, Lagos, yesterday and set the city of 8-million on edge after outbursts of anger

Military authorities on Monday promised imported fuel would arrive soon in Africa's biggest oil-exporting nation, while at the same time putting 2 000 paramilitary police on standby to deal with any protests which might get out of hand.

However, sources at the fuel importing arm of the state marketing company warned that lower than predicted world oil prices meant the allocation of crude they use to pay for imports was no longer enough to meet demand

"The head of state is unhappy about this suffering," said Lagos state military administrator Col Mohammed Marwa, one of military ruler Gen Sani Abacha's closest aides

"(Abacha) has directed that we must resume normal supply this week beginning from today," he said.

Last Friday and again on Monday, small protests led by students flared in parts of the sprawling city. Vehicles were burned in a couple of places and newspapers said police had used tear gas to disperse gathering crowds.

Some of those few drivers who had fuel sported sprigs of greenery on their wind-

shields in a traditional African show of solidarity with the protesters.

Fuel is now a black market luxury, costing \$1.43/l against the subsidised price of \$0.13.

"A lot of people are just staying home," said photographer George Esiri after a three-hour struggle to get to work "There is real anger. People are ready to do anything"

Some multinational firms warned expatriates against driving anywhere near crowds

With elections expected later in the year, in which Abacha is expected to stand, Nigeria's 104-million people are already worried about the possibility of further political instability, particularly in Lagos, a hotbed of opposition to the army

Nigeria, despite producing more than 2-million barrels of crude oil a day, has been hit by repeated scarcities of gasoline and other petroleum products as underfunded oil refineries have fallen victim to state neglect

Refineries that do operate are pushed to operate above what they can comfortably cope with and often break down

The temporary answer has been to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to import fuel. However officials of the state-run importer, the Petroleum and Products Marketing Company, say oil prices would have to recover much further to meet import needs — Reuter

Africa's powerful economic engines disagree on oil

Mingsley Kubyinje



LAGOS — Nigeria and SA, Africa's two most powerful economic engines, have taken conflicting steps in relation to their respective huge oil reserves.

Whereas SA has reportedly sold off most of its oil reserves accumulated under previous administrations, Nigeria is stepping up efforts to raise its strategic reserves to 40-billion barrels, up from the current 25-billion barrels.

To realise targets, two multinational oil companies in Nigeria — Shell and Elf Petroleum — have received the strong

backing of the military government in their renewed offshore search for hydrocarbon.

Both companies are sinking \$108,5m into their projects in a desperate bid to open up the hydrocarbon potential of the deep waters in their areas of operations.

Nigeria has an unexplored deep offshore basin of about 2 000m and the basin is believed to contain hydrocarbon resources, capable of substantially boosting the country's crude oil reserves.

The west African country is also granting small indigenous oil exploration companies concessions to exploit marginal oil wells which are shunned by the multina-

tionals because of their limited quantities of oil. If the current efforts pay off, Nigeria expects to get an additional 500 000 barrels a day.

Unlike SA, which has a highly diversified economy, Nigeria's economy is largely oil-based. Earnings from the sale of crude oil account for more than 80% of Nigeria's foreign exchange income.

Brian Casey, acting general manager of SA's strategic fuel fund reportedly said in Cape Town that SA had sold off most of its 25-million barrels of oil stored in government tanks

Nigerian decree has embezzlers in sights

Kingsley Kubeyinje

LAGOS — A failed parastatal decree, under which managers of Nigeria's mismanaged parastatals, ministries and public corporations will be investigated, is under way

The federal government has signed the decree into law.

Babatunde Sangokunle, a member of Nigeria's powerful national economic intelligence committee, said in Ibadan, southwestern Nigeria, that apart from federal establishments, state governments would be required to implement the decree with a view to bringing to book culprits who had embezzled public funds

Sangokunle said details of the decree would soon be made public. It would be used to sanitise the corrupt and poorly managed public service.

He said that when operational the decree would go a long way in reducing the level of corruption and misappropriation of public funds.

A "failed banks' decree" is already operational. Several tribunals set up under it have sentenced scores of top managers of distressed and failed banks. Apart from receiving long jail sentences, a good percentage of the convicted bankers had their property,

including houses, auctioned to offset unsecured loans they had granted.

A similar fate could await managers of government-owned establishments adjudged by the military authorities to have failed or been mismanaged.

Over the years the government sank billions of dollars into its public corporations, but few achieved statutory goals, said Sangokunle.

Disenchanted with the dismal performance of its public utilities, the military government has put into motion a machinery to commercialise and privatise its ailing but money-gulping institutions.

Sangokunle disclosed that the national economic intelligence committee had advised the Nigerian military authorities to suspend payment of the nation's estimated \$32bn debt owed to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), until the two institutions provided "concrete details" about the debts.

He said details being demanded included signatories to the loans and a list of the projects on which the money was spent.

He said that representatives of the Bank and the IMF walked out of a recent meeting when they were unable to furnish the required information.

DD 26/2/98 (226)

Moves to end petrol crisis (22b)

LAGOS — An emergency meeting was held at defence headquarters in Nigeria's commercial capital, Lagos, yesterday to discuss ways of resolving a severe fuel crisis.

Armed soldiers have been deployed at petrol stations around Lagos where sporadic protests have broken out.

Earlier this week police used tear gas when irate youths burnt tyres on the roads in protest against the shortages.

This week public servants also held a march in Lagos because buses which usually ferry them home had no fuel.

Transport prices are rocketing, pushing up food prices, and many businesses are grinding to a halt — Sapa-DPA.

BO 26/3/98

Abacha's election will turn Nigeria into

A campaign is mounting against Nigerian presidential elections scheduled for August. Dianna Games spoke to

THE Nigerian opposition movement in exile — or at least a section of it — is leaning on SA to support its view that the Nigerian presidential elections, planned for August this year, are illegal and should be given no credibility.

The United Democratic Front of Nigeria, an umbrella organisation of 42 groups of Nigerian exiles around the world, has offices in Canada, Washington, London and Johannesburg. It is lobbying in "selected" African countries — including Tanzania, Uganda, Eritrea, Zimbabwe and Ghana — ahead of the elections to put across its point of view.

Its secretary general, Olusola Adeyeye, a biology professor at an American university, passed through SA last week on his way around the continent, but appeared to leave SA empty handed. He said the message in meetings with African National Congress leaders, truth commission members and other political figures in SA was that the

country was more concerned about being seen as the "bully" of the continent than properly assuming its leadership role.

"SA must understand that with leadership comes responsibility and that means exposing tyranny wherever it be found," he said.

Adeyeye complains that the overriding view South Africans have of Nigerians — as criminals and drug dealers — has made it more difficult for the group to make its point here.

"We would like people here to remember that during their own struggle, Nigeria stood behind them. We are not asking for a payback but for the government to recognise and condemn tyranny wherever it festers on the continent," he said.

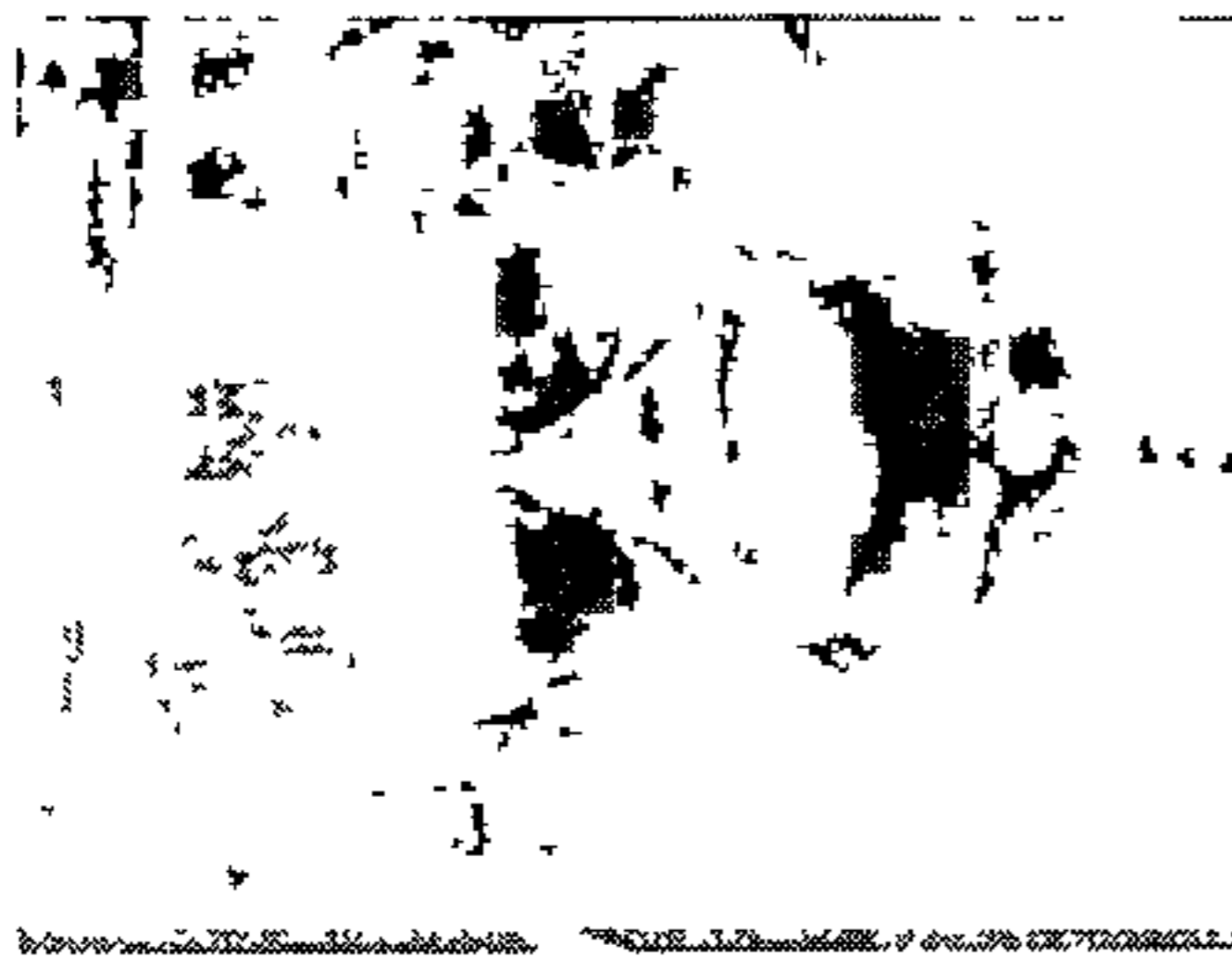
Adeyeye said the presidential elections were a ruse to allow the present military ruler of Nigeria, Gen Sani Abacha, to be elected into power.

"Who is going to stand against him? Anyone who has done so has been detained, disqualified, offered a lot of dollars to withdraw or intimidated."

In fact, there are two candidates standing — Mohammed Yusuf, a former police chief in the government of Gen Olusegun Obasanjo which handed over to a civilian government in the late 1970s and Tunji Brathwaite, a lawyer with leftwing leanings. Many feel that neither has a real chance of winning, which is why the government has left them alone.

Both are members of the Grassroots Democratic Movement, the only party which does not support Abacha which has been allowed to register.

Abacha has not yet said he will stand for election, but he has done nothing to stop a massive campaign, apparently backed by the state, to call for him to do so. Nigerians are sceptical that he will give up power and opposition groups believe that the whole exercise is designed to keep Abacha in power rather than remove him from it.



ABACHA

Recently, a big rally in Lagos to protest against Abacha's candidacy was broken up by police.

Adeyeye said "We would not consider (Abacha's victory) a win, we would consider it a fraud." The front was concerned that if an election held and there was an outcome, whatever the poll, the world would wash its hands of Nigeria.

He was unconvinced the Commonwealth had any real role to play in putting pressure on Nigeria. He said many of its members were not practising democracies themselves. "Other dictatorships do not want to condemn Abacha in case the light falls on them."

In October last year, Abacha refused to register 10 of the 15 political parties which applied to the electoral commission. "Where was the Commonwealth then? How can the election ever be pronounced free and fair when already it is not?"

'a nation of exiles'

opposition leader Olusola Adeyeye

726
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An influential politician and businessman from northern Nigeria, Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, who was chief of staff in a previous government, died in jail in December after being detained three years previously on suspicion of being involved in a coup plot. His ambition to lead the country was well known. Olusola Saraki, a leader of the Nigerian senate in the 1970s, who also had ambitions to run for the senate again, was recently attacked by gunmen, Adeyeye said.

He said Abacha, in his four years in power, had not travelled to at least 75% of Nigeria's 36 states and yet he would claim in his bid for election as the country's president to have the people's mandate.

Abacha's low profile — he seldom leaves the country overnight on official trips — has been linked to fears for his personal safety.

The front is not just objecting to Abacha standing for election. It is fighting against the holding of an election at all. The presumed winner of the 1993 elections, Chief Moshood Abiola, was jailed after the election was annulled and the military, headed by Abacha, took power.

Adeyeye said justice would not be done until Abiola was freed. "Nigerians went to the polls freely and fairly and gave their mandate to Abiola. Nigeria will not move forward until that mandate has been fulfilled and he is asked to lead a government of national unity. The coming elections are a ruse to install a civilian dictator. We will not respect the election nor the outcome."

With the election now only five months away, there is no new constitution. A constitutional conference was held in 1995, but its contents have yet to be made public.

In the state assembly elections late last year, in which only 5% of the population voted, a party backed by the military government won a large number of seats.

Adeyeye said this could be seen as preparing the country for a one-party state and in fact, for Abacha's own election to power, as it would guarantee him the support of the majority of the state leaders who sit in the assembly. The three largest political groups were not registered for those elections.

If the scenario of Abacha being voted into power becomes a reality, Adeyeye predicts the crisis in Nigeria, far from being over, will in fact worsen.

"The struggle will take on a new face as the people's patience is exhausted," he said. He also alluded to events in Rwanda, Somalia and Zaire.

"Nigeria has become a nation of exiles. Those who are still there are praying to leave, but most have no means of leaving. This is not what we want."

Nigeria moves to smart cards

BD 30/3198 (226)

Kingsley Kubeyinje

LAGOS — Nigeria will launch itself into the global "electronic wallet" age on June 1 when a consortium of 19 local banks flags off the operation of the multibillion naira smart card project.

The smart card is an electronic card for cash transfer and with its operations, Nigeria will join the move towards a "cashless world"

The banks will deploy the Card Base 2000, a product of Card Services International, in collaboration with International Business Machines (IBM). The Card Base 2000 will be managed by Smart Card Nigeria, a company floated by the 19 top Nigerian banks.

Smart Card Nigeria will control the interbank clearing, settlement and administration of the scheme. Each bank will be responsible for the issue of cards to its customers and for the collection of proceeds from its merchants.

A Smart Card Nigeria senior official said the project had generated an unprecedented level of co-operation among Nigerian banks. For the first time in the country's banking history, a

large group of institutions, representing about 80% of the sector in terms of assets, came together, set up a joint committee and worked tirelessly to achieve a common objective.

Harold Anumihe, a consulting system engineer with IBM (Nigeria), said that when fully operational, the project would transform the Nigerian banking industry and would be beneficial to customers, as well as the banks.

Card Services International MD Aonghus Geraghty said that "once you have experienced the cash handling difficulties in an emerging economy, you can readily appreciate why the Nigerian banks have embraced smart card with such enthusiasm."

In this year's financial guidelines issued by the Central Bank of Nigeria, the military government barred large cash transactions and threatened to deal ruthlessly with violators.

In Nigeria, owing to the high level of distrust, business transactions are still mainly done via cash payments. It is not unusual to find businessmen withdrawing millions of naira from their banks to pay for goods and services.

Nigeria seeks regional co-operation

CT (PDR) 31/3/98 (226)

TOYÉ OLORI

Lagos — Anthony Ani, Nigeria's finance minister, has called for further economic integration within the west African sub-region to ensure speedy economic development

The region could not afford to lag behind as regional economic blocs strengthened worldwide, Ani said at the opening of the 24th annual conference of the West African Insurance Companies Association in Abuja last week

"West Africa must not be iso-

lated from this development and we must come together to trade and exchange ideas on how we can improve our economies, as well as the living standards of our people," he said

He noted the contributions the association had made to the development of the insurance industry within the sub-region

The body, made up of insurance companies in English-speaking west African countries, was formed 25 years ago

Its main aim is to promote co-operation among all insurance and reinsurance compa-

nies operating in the region

The association is in the process of upgrading its pool to a reinsurance company to increase its capacity and reduce the need to seek reinsurance protection in Europe

"This will not only increase the retainable funds within the region, but also contribute to the development of the industry in the sub-region

"This is also very important, especially now that the world economy is breaking up into regional economic blocs," Ani said

He advised people of the sub-region not to allow the issue of language to remain a barrier to development

He noted that the English and the French had been able to work together successfully in the European Union

The association is made up of Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Liberia and Sierra Leone

Liberia and Sierra Leone have been unable to function in the association as a result of the political crises in their countries — Independent Foreign Service

Nigeria fires up earnings from natural gas

FROM AFP

Lagos — Nigeria earned \$391 million from sales of natural gas last year, Jackson Gaus-Obaseki, the managing director the Nigerian Gas Company, said yesterday

(226) CT(DR) 5/8/98
Nigeria, which earns about \$10 billion a year from oil sales, sold "132 billion standard cubic feet of gas or 23 million barrels of oil equivalent", the state-run Daily Times reported Gaus-Obaseki as saying
He said sales this year would rise

to 316,8 billion standard cubic feet
Industry experts say about 70 percent of Nigeria's gas produced in separate operations and as a part of oil operations is flared off, but efforts are under way to set up a plant to harness the gas for later sale

Abacha's family, friends under corruption scrutiny

(2ab) b18/98

LAGOS — The family and friends of Nigeria's late military ruler, Gen Sani Abacha, are coming under increasing scrutiny over allegations of massive corruption during Abacha's four-and-a-half-year rule.

In the latest development in an unfolding investigation, military authorities plan to seize government buildings "illegally acquired" by Abacha during his time in power, the independent Vanguard newspaper reported yesterday.

Under the headline "Federal government to seize Abacha's estate," the paper reported that "various government buildings illegally acquired by Gen Sani Abacha and his associates" were to be recovered.

"Houses, most of which are located in Abuja and Lagos were allegedly sold to the late head of state, his family members, friends and associates at ridiculously low prices," it said.

The news came a day after the newspaper 'This Day' revealed that authorities had arrested one of Abacha's top aides, former security chief Ismaila Gwarzo, as part of the investigations.

Gwarzo was arrested on Saturday by units of armed troops in his village near the northern town of Kano, the paper said. Since Nigeria's new military ruler, Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar, replaced Abacha on

June 9, various members of Abacha's family and his closest associates have been stopped from leaving the country or placed under virtual house arrest, according to reliable reports.

Abacha's wife, Maryam, has twice been refused permission to travel outside the country, diplomats said this week. Last month, authorities reportedly impounded 38 suitcases she had prepared in a bid to leave the country.

Former finance minister Anthony Amu and the governor of the central bank, Paul Ogwuma, have been ordered not to leave the capital, Abuja, without permission, the newspaper PM News reported this week.

Ogwuma was interrogated last week in Abuja over what he knows about the looting of the country's coffers under the regime, the paper said.

No official figures are available on the scale of the corruption that undoubtedly went on under Abacha, but it reportedly ran into hundreds of millions of dollars.

Nigeria earns \$10bn a year on oil sales, but little of that makes its way back to the people, much of it staying in official hands, claim observers. Abubakar's officials have so far declined to comment in public on the progress of the investigations. — Sapa-AFP.

Congolese soldiers stand guard near Kinshasa Airport under a billboard showing the face of Laurent Kabila, who vowed on Tuesday to crush a rebellion in his country's east Picture AP



Abubakar's task is to turn the oil curse into a blessing

Nigeria's new leader is putting a stop to some of the worst excesses of his predecessor But has he the stomach to take on those fleecing the oil industry, asks Michela Wrong

W 6/8/98

(228)

FOR months now Charles Adake, a company driver, has been rising at 5am to cruise the motorways of the Lagos delta, flitting from one petrol station to another. Only in the early hours can he count on finding fuel, thereby escaping the kilometre-long queues that build up during the day.

His quest underlines how profoundly Nigeria has been afflicted by what economists call "the resource curse" — the tendency for a great natural resource to destroy rather than develop a country, creating a corrupt elite more concerned with capital flight than development.

Nigeria, sub-Saharan Africa's main oil producer, with high-quality petroleum on tap and huge gas reserves waiting to be exploited, is paradoxically blighted by fuel shortages which cripple manufacturing, ground airlines and bring traffic to a halt.

If the domestic market is suffering, the export industry — accounting for 95% of foreign trade — is also in poor shape. Production was targeted to reach 2.5-million barrels a day by the 1990s, 3-million by 2000. Instead, it has scarcely risen above the 2.3-million bpd level recorded in 1979.

The country has also been curbed by an Opec quota keeping production under the 2-million bpd level.

If Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar, who took over the country in June, is to pull Nigeria from the brink, turning the resource curse

into a blessing will be as crucial as any political reform.

While the \$12bn-a-year oil industry always provided rich pickings for Nigeria's ruling cliques, under Gen Sani Abacha's leadership the problem reached unprecedented levels. It also became more concentrated, benefiting a small group of Abacha family and friends rather than a broad cross-section of the military elite.

One particularly cynical scam involved allowing Nigeria's four run-down refineries, source of "light" products for the domestic market, to deteriorate. Government money allocated for maintenance work never reached its destination, ensuring refinery output remained well below demand and enabling the inner circle to justify importing gasoline from abroad.

In fact, say diplomats, output from the refineries was being taken offshore by tanker, reflagged and sold back to Nigeria as foreign fuel.

The Nigerian government bought those refined imports at levels far above the market price, giving middlemen favoured by the Abacha family a fat profit on every contract.

The sale of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation's share of crude abroad was similarly cornered by well-connected companies.

One of Abubakar's first moves was to take fuel imports out of the hands of his predecessors' cronies, authorising the multinational to bring in supplies. Recently he went further, publishing guidelines stipulating that only established companies with sizeable investments and retail outlets abroad would be allowed to lift crude.

The moves have yet to filter down to the market, but they mark the first move in an attempt to cut out the middleman and regulate an anarchic situation. "We'll be spending less money to import the same quantity and earning more from exporting the same amount," said a corporate lawyer.

Abubakar has also set out to win the confidence of the jaundiced oil companies

For years multinationals drilling onshore and in shallow waters complained about the failure of government-owned Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), which holds large stakes in their six joint ventures, to pay its way, forcing them to either cut back operations or shoulder the lion's share of investment.

Abubakar's announcement last month that \$630m in cash call arrears — funding calls made to shareholders but ignored — had been paid, has injected new hope. "We now have a 1998 budget, which makes a big difference," says Michael Weston, manager of Shell's gas operations.

More important, Abubakar said there would be a review of joint venture funding, signalling that alternative arrangements being pushed by the oil companies as a permanent solution to this recurrent problem may be implemented.

"The government could sell equity or give the oil companies a greater share of crude production," says an industry oper-

ator. "The essence is to relieve NNPC of having to produce a big chunk of money."

A generation of more recent investors involved in deep water exploration signed production-sharing agreements with the government, sparing them the cash call nightmare.

But management had become alarmed by the failure of Dan Etete, Abacha's oil minister, to ensure terms laid out in letters of guarantee were turned into legislation, a full five years into operations.

While Abubakar has made no public statement about the issue, oil insiders say they are confident it will swiftly be addressed by an administration working hard to portray Nigeria in a new, investor-friendly light. One company at least, Exxon, has been impressed enough by the new line to send a top-level delegation to meet Nigeria's new rulers.

"So far, I don't think Abubakar has put a foot wrong," says an oilman.

"There now seems to be light at the end

of the tunnel. Under Abacha, things were so bad, there wasn't even a tunnel."

More needs to be done. Systematic cross-border smuggling of Nigerian fuel will only ease once subsidies making it cheaper than West African equivalents end. Real competition on the domestic market will only come when the privatisation promised by Abubakar puts paid to the state monopoly on distribution.

The danger is that today's good intentions will seep away as those at the helm realise what a potential bonanza they are sitting on and powerful vested interests pressure them to leave well alone.

"Resistance will come not from the Abacha group, which is on the run, but from new arrivals who want their share of gravy. They will tell him, 'Go easy, this is a frame-work we can benefit from,' says an industry analyst.

"The question is whether Abubakar has the stomach for that fight."

A key indication will be who is appointed oil minister in the new transition cabinet being pulled together.

If it is Etete, his reputation fatally undermined by his close association with the Abacha regime, the current mood of optimism will falter. If the job goes to someone more credible, Abubakar will continue to score points both at home and abroad.

Financial Times

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INTERNATIONAL & AFRICAN BUSINESS

Difficulties in paying for imports have been compounded by failures of large refineries

Nigeria's fuel shortages still a way of life

(226) CR (PR) 6/8/98

MATTHEW TOSTEVIN

Abuja — Moves by Nigeria's military ruler, General Abdulsalam Abubakar, to clean up imports of petroleum products have yet to bring an end to fuel shortages which have again crippled the oil-producing country.

The failure of the last of four working refineries at the weekend has left the country even more exposed to the energy crisis which became a way of life under late dictator Sani Abacha.

For weeks, queues of vehicles have blocked filling stations in the capital Abuja and at other centres, including Lagos, the business hub and largest city.

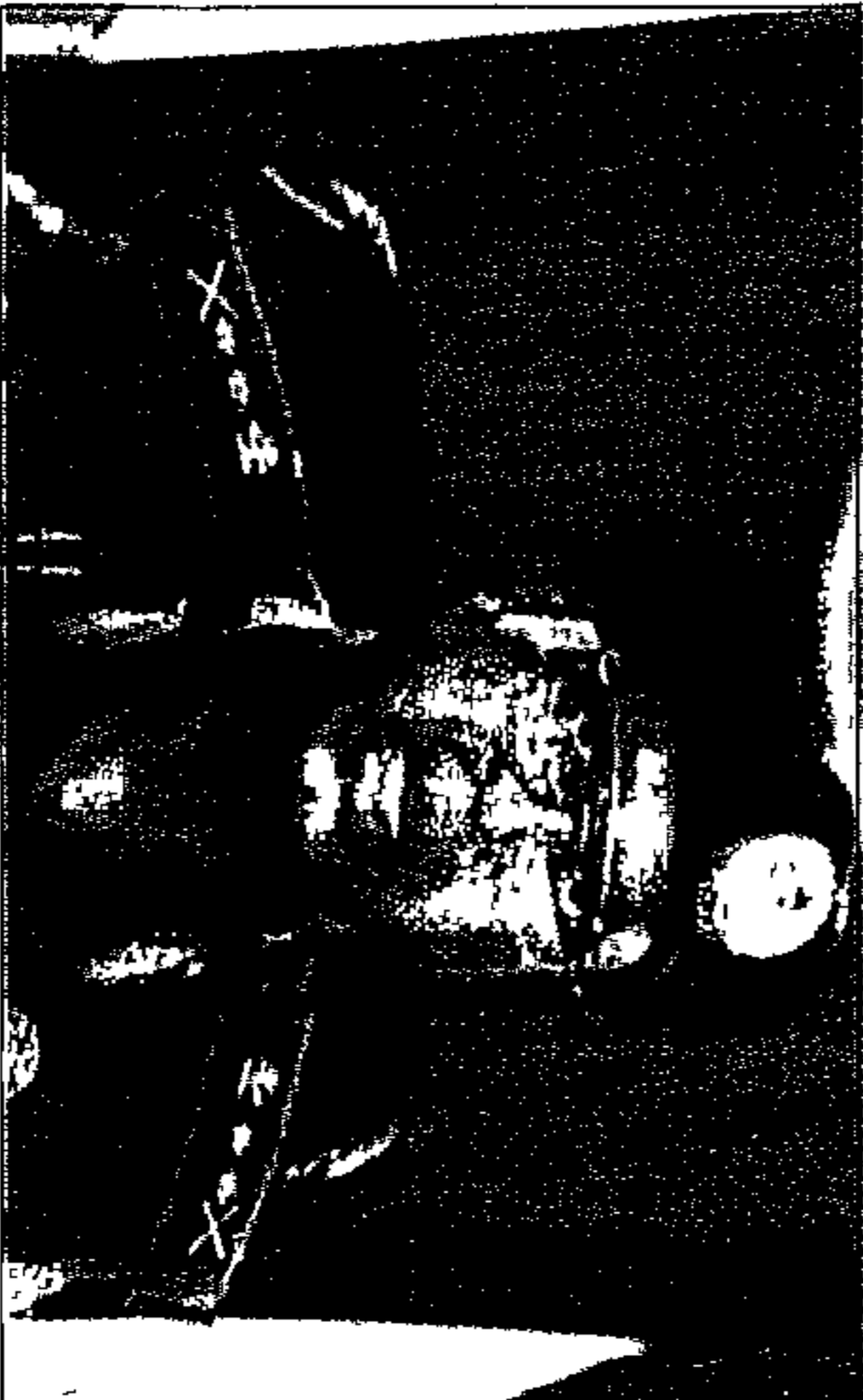
For more than a month, airlines on the busy route between Abuja and Lagos have not been able to guarantee travellers that aviation fuel will be found in time for takeoff. In most cases it isn't

"It has become a way of life now. Mostly we don't even tell people we expect to fly and many people have just stopped travelling," said the ticket sales clerk at a big hotel in Abuja.

As one of the most obvious symbols of military misrule, tackling the shortage of fuel in Africa's biggest oil producer was one of Abubakar's first priorities for reform after taking over on Abacha's death in June.

Abacha cronies who controlled imports were replaced by multinational oil companies long before Abubakar set out his programme of political reform.

But difficulties agreeing on the mode of payment for imports — which prevented the scheme taking off quickly — have been compounded by the failure of the country's only two working refineries at Port Harcourt and Warri.



BEMUSED Nigerian military leader General Abdulsalam Abubakar has failed to resolve the country's energy crisis.

An average of at least 10 imported cargoes a month, mostly of petrol, have been ordered to try and end the crisis.

"The situation is now very serious indeed. Despite the fact

ing capacity of 445 000 barrels of crude oil a day (bpd) — more than enough to meet domestic demand, which is estimated at only about 280 000 bpd.

But the state-run refineries have fallen victim to years of neglect, underfunding and mismanagement. Refinery officials had warned the plants would fail if they were not properly cared for.

Warri refinery, with capacity of 125 000 bpd, stopped producing at the weekend because of a power failure. New Port Harcourt refinery, which should process 150 000 bpd, stopped last month for the same reason.

Officials at Port Harcourt said turnaround maintenance, due to begin in September, was likely to be delayed for lack of funds.

Hopes now rest on the 110 000 bpd northern Kaduna refinery, which may begin to come back on stream this month after being

shut for more than one year, first by an accident and then for maintenance by France's Total.

Local business and international lenders have long called on Nigeria at least to privatise the management of its refineries if not sell them altogether, and to lift government subsidies.

But privatisation has always been a tricky issue in this country, where powerful regional interests depend on maintaining a status quo.

Lifting subsidies would be politically unpopular, even if those people able to buy fuel on the black market are paying anywhere between two and 20 times the official pump price of 11 naira (about 80c) a litre.

"There is going to be no quick solution," the NNPC official said. "Nigerians are going to suffer fuel shortages for a while longer yet" — Reuters.

Nigeria struggles to deal with the corporates that broke the banks

Nigerian banks have been in trouble for some time.

Kingsley Kubeyinje in Lagos examines the problems

WILLIAM Olufemi Ajayi always dressed well in expensive suits or big flowing Nigerian outfits. He was a quintessential banker and businessman who helped to give a new meaning to the word "corporate" in Nigeria in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

"Corporate" became synonymous with flamboyance and good living and so phrases such as "corporate dressing", "corporate hair style" and "corporate look" came into vogue in Nigeria.

Across the country's 36 states, bankers like Ajayi — especially those in the more than 80 new banks created in the 1980s in the wake of government's liberalisation programme — became the symbol of a corporate lifestyle and were sought after in social circles.

It was an era when bank workers became the envy of most professionals because they earned a lot and bought designer outfits and flashy cars. High school pupils planned to study "banking and finance" in Nigeria's more than 200 tertiary institutions.

The bubble burst when Ajayi, the founder of the liquidated Republic Bank, was jailed last year on charges of securing 127,1-million naira in loans to seven companies in which he had a personal interest.

The problems began for many of Nigeria's 115 commercial and merchant banks in 1994 when Sani Abacha's administration stopped credits to them for the purchase of foreign exchange from the Central Bank of Nigeria. The banks previously bought forex from the central bank at a low rate for resale to their customers at higher rates. The opportunity for quick money spawned the launch of many new banks.

The policy shift led to distress in the banking industry. In Nigerian banking parlance "distress" means that a bank has serious cash flow problems, its liabilities exceed its assets, it is unable to refund depositors' money promptly and is unable to participate in the clearing house system.

A thoroughly perplexed nation, which hitherto held the profession in awe, soon realised a lot of malpractices were prevalent in the industry.

The central bank further shocked Nigerians in 1994 when it disclosed that many banks were in trouble. It subsequently liquidated five of them because they could no longer perform.

In 1996, the central bank again declared 52 more banks "distressed" and said 42,36-billion naira was needed to rescue them. It put their total nonperforming loans at 40,3-billion naira. Total deposits was 38,1-billion naira, representing 14,7% of total deposits in the banking industry.

Last January, 26 of the sick banks — made up of 13 commercial and 13 merchant banks — had their operational licences revoked and were liquidated because they could no longer carry out basic banking functions. It emerged that the distressed banks had been posting "paper profits", when in actual fact they were insolvent.

The government said it acted to sanitise the system as well as to restore

depositors' confidence. Fifteen billion naira was trapped in the banks' vaults.

Unfortunately, the distress syndrome has persisted in spite of measures taken to stem it. According to the Nigerian Deposit Insurance Corporation, a government parastatal set up to insure depositors' funds, 22 more banks are now "distressed".

John Ebhodaghe, the CE of the Deposit Insurance Corporation, which acts as the liquidator of terminally distressed banks, attributes the problem to irregular practices on the part of bankers, including insider trade and fraud by senior figures, boardroom squabbles, the granting of unsecured loans, incompetent and inexperienced management, and the banks' overdependence on forex dealings.

Indeed, many directors like Ajayi established phoney companies to which were granted unsecured loans running into billions of naira and large amounts of foreign exchange.

About 200 top officials, including chairmen and CEOs, of some of the liquidated banks are still in prison for their part in ruining the banks.

Reckless

Last year alone, the Deposit Insurance Corporation got 19 judgments against detained executives in special tribunals. A total of 915-million naira and \$5,1m was involved in insider loans and advances. Many banks had been financing long-term projects, giving their workers hefty payments directly from depositors' funds.

A 1996 central bank report indicated that the overhead costs of many of the distressed banks was such that they spent five naira to earn one naira.

Financial experts also said that many new banks lacked imaginative and qualified personnel. A number poached untested middle-level personnel from some relatively well-established banks and appointed them to senior management posts, positions often not commensurate with their experience and qualifications.

The problems of the banking subsector, which accounts for more than 80% of the resources of the financial sector, has eroded public confidence in banks. The Deposit Insurance Corpo-

ration is battling to pay more than 10 000 depositors whose money was trapped in the 26 liquidated banks. None will get more than 50 000 naira, regardless of their deposits.

Customers have become more cautious in their choice of banks, preferring the older ones. Big depositors spread their risk by using several.

Some government policies have also helped to restore confidence. Government has raised the minimum paid-up share capital of commercial and merchant banks from 50-million naira and 40-million naira respectively to 500-million naira to provide for exchange rate depreciation, inflation and the erosion of capital funds by nonperforming credits. It has also set up a dozen tribunals countrywide to try those who contributed to ruining the banks.

National carrier's flight plan stumped

Kingsley Kubeyinje

LAGOS — Nigeria's national carrier, Nigeria Airways, has temporarily shelved its plans to fly the SA route.

An authoritative source at the government-owned corporation said yesterday the plans were being suspended "for the moment" because the airways had no aircraft to put on the new route. He said the plan would be revived as

soon as the airline acquired an aircraft since all necessary arrangements had long been put in place.

Nigeria Airways had originally scheduled its inaugural flight to Johannesburg International Airport for last May.

"The delay is from us. The SA authorities had given us the green light and all the necessary formalities had been completed," he said.

'SA willing to help Nigeria return to democratic rule'

Kingsley Kubeyinje

LAGOS — SA has indicated its willingness to help the Nigerian military government in its bid to return the country to democratic rule

Nigeria embarked on a transition to civil rule in 1985 under former military strongman Gen Ibrahim Babangida. The programme is yet to be concluded 13 years later

SA envoy to Nigeria, George Nene, said in an interview in Lagos yesterday that Nigeria

could count on Pretoria's support, although SA would wait for Nigeria to make the first move in seeking assistance

Nene said the new government of Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar was "doing well"

"So far, there are strong indications that suggest to us that Gen Abubakar and his government are moving in the right direction," he said

The SA government was satisfied with the manner in which Abubakar had approached various political issues in Nigeria

(226) DD 11/8/98
The envoy said the world was waiting for Nigeria to come back and play its role in the international community

The relationship between SA and Nigeria nose-dived after the execution of playwright Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1996. Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth for alleged human rights abuses, and Nigeria accused SA and other "powerful" members of engineering its suspension from the club

President Nelson Mandela felt particularly slighted by the

execution of Saro-Wiwa and eight of his colleagues, who were convicted by a special military tribunal for allegedly instigating the assassination of four prominent compatriots

Mandela said he had secured the personal assurances of then Nigeria ruler, the late Gen Sani Abacha, that Saro-Wiwa would not be hanged

The countries have mended fences, however, and an SA delegation led by Deputy President Thabo Mbeki visited to Nigeria recently

Government seizes former military leader's gifts

Kingsley Kubeyinje (22b)

LAGOS — A set of 60 vehicles imported by late Nigerian military leader Gen Sani Abacha as gifts for traditional leaders has been seized by the new government

A source at the presidency in Abuja, the new federal capital, estimated the cost of each vehicle at \$58 000, which put the total consignment at about \$3,48m. He said five of the Toyota Land Cruiser Safari jeeps imported from Dubai and the United Arab Emirates arrived at the Aminu Kano International Airport, Kano

State, last Wednesday and "were promptly impounded"

The vehicles, according to the source, were to be distributed to 58 powerful traditional rulers and two prominent spiritual consultants to the late head of state

The source said the vehicles were brought into the country labelled "dangerous goods as per attached shippers' declaration"

Abacha, in a bid to perpetuate his five-year rule, got the support of a number of eminent traditional rulers who consequently urged him to continue in office "as there was no other viable option"

BD 11/8/98
Since Abacha's death on June 8 the new government has embarked on a quiet but systematic probe of the previous regime. Ismaila Gwarzo, who was national security adviser to Abacha, is being investigated for the huge amounts he allegedly siphoned from the national coffers, ostensibly for "security operations"

Recent publications showed that just days before Abacha's demise, Gwarzo got the approval of the former military strongman to withdraw \$80m, £40m and 250-million naira "to sell Abacha to some unnamed African leaders"

Nigeria moves down path to democracy

(226) CT 12/8/98

ABUJA: Nigeria's new electoral commission was sworn in yesterday and military leader Abdulsalam Abubakar gave members two weeks to produce guidelines and a timetable for elections to end military rule.

Abubakar also signed decrees abolishing agencies set up by late dictator Sani Abacha and lifting restrictions he imposed on trade union activity, particularly the once-powerful oil unions.

"To this administration, the May 29 handover date is sacrosanct. All members of the Independent National Electoral Commission must therefore work hard to ensure its fulfilment," Abubakar said at a swearing-in ceremony.

"The immediate task before you is the production of the necessary guidelines for political party formation, registration and other tasks that are relevant to a successful free and fair electoral process."

Commission chairperson Ephraim Omorose Akpata, 71, said: "Independence we will guard jealously." Pro-democracy groups say the independence of the commission is essential to give credibility to Abubakar's promises.

The soldiers who have ruled Nigeria for all but 10 years since independence from Britain in 1960 have long failed to deliver on such pledges.

Presidency officials said the electoral commission, abolished after Abacha's death in June, is under investigation to account for \$36 million spent organising elections in which Abacha was the only candidate. — Reuter

IMPOTENCE



Abiola died of natural causes, medical team confirms

MD 13/8/98 (226)
Ottawa - The death of Nigerian opposition leader Chief Moshood Abiola was due to natural causes, an international medical team confirmed yesterday.

But Abiola's lengthy imprisonment could have added to his hypertension problems which contributed to his death on July 11, suggested Dr James Young, the chief coroner for Ontario, Canada, and a member of the

international team

Young released details of the team's findings which showed Abiola suffered from "severe long-standing disease of the heart of a type and severity that can cause sudden unexpected death". This was displayed by "severe narrowing of the main coronary arteries by fatty plaques"

"In addition, there was very

significant enlargement of the heart due to long-standing hypertension."

Either of these conditions could result in sudden death, said Young, with the presence of both conditions simultaneously even more likely to cause death.

Young said the international medical team found no traces of poisons or inappropriate medication. - Sapa-AFP

Central bank cracks down on corruption

B.D. 19/8.198
Kingsley Kubeyinje (226)

LAGOS — The Central Bank of Nigeria has begun to crack down on malpractice among bank employees, particularly those abusing their access to credit facilities.

A top source said the bank had ordered Nigeria's 115 commercial and merchant banks to submit to it their lists of "insider debtors" with immediate effect.

Insider debtors were bank employees who refused to repay loans on due dates and were using their influence to stall moves to collect them. It had been discovered that most insider debtors were able to delay payment until after five years, when such loans would be classified as "nonperforming" and "bad debts" and subsequently written off.

Insider abuses were partly responsible for the distress being experienced in the banking sector which had led to the collapse of 31 banks in the past three years.

The source said the central bank had asked the banks to furnish it with the names of such debtor employees, details of loans taken by them and reasons why credit facilities were not paid on the due dates. He said the central bank would sanction banks which refused to comply with this directive.

Depending on the gravity of the offence, culprits could be dismissed from service or dragged before the failed banks' tribunal, which had jailed a number of bank officials, including directors and senior managers.

Last year, 471 cases of "fraud and forgeries" involving 3,51-billion naira were reported by the commercial banks.

Abubakar to control oil through his own office

BD 24/8/98 (226)

LAGOS — Nigeria's military ruler, Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar, would run the country's oil interests through a directorate set up under his office, sources confirmed yesterday, the day after the new cabinet was sworn in.

The sources said petroleum affairs, which used to come under the country's discredited oil ministry, would now be handled by a directorate of petroleum resources under the presidency. They will be supervised by a special adviser to Abubakar.

Abubakar on Saturday named a new 31-member cabinet including Ignatius Oluisekema, an accomplished former ambassador to Washington, as foreign minister and Ismaila Usman, a respected deputy governor of the central bank, as finance minister. He named no oil minister to replace the discredited Chief Dan Etete.

The position of oil minister is normally considered one of the top three posts in the Nigerian government, ranking alongside the foreign and finance ministries in importance, because of Nigeria's dependence on oil sales for 90% of its foreign earnings.

But the ministry has in recent years become a target of particular criticism

about fuel shortages experienced on the domestic market and rampant corruption in dealings with the industry.

Abubakar left Nigeria yesterday for his first foreign trip, a three-day visit to SA, during which he will meet President Nelson Mandela. Before he left, he told the ministers they faced "enormous responsibilities" in steering the country towards elections promised for the first quarter of next year.

"Of no lesser urgency and perhaps of greater importance in the long run, is the economic challenge," he said. "The take-home earnings of our citizens are being dwindled fast by inflationary pressures. Unemployment and underemployment are both on the rise and every human welfare and development index is on the decline."

"Currently we are the world's 13th poorest nation. Given our resource endowments, both human and material, this sorry state is a serious indictment of our national will and competence in resource management."

The general said corruption would not be tolerated, and he warned his ministers against seeking to play any role in the elections or in emerging party politics. — Sapa-AFP

Nigerians rip off national shipping fund

Kingsley Kubeyinja

LAGOS — Nine ship-

ping firms are in trouble with the Nigerian government and may soon be dragged before a special tribunal to answer charges of economic sabotage.

The firms procured "junk" vessels with \$20m loans they secured via the nation's ship-building and acquisition fund.

The ships, imported from Europe, are said to be too old to sail.

Buba Galadima, director-general of the National Maritime Authority, said the nine firms incurred government's wrath because they failed to repay their loans, a result of the inability of their "junk" ships to perform.

The government was particularly piqued because the firms had behaved dishonestly by buying vessels for amounts far lower than the loans.

Galadima said the government would be interested in knowing from them what had become of the "surplus" money from their purchases.

"The defaulters have been given more than enough time to redeem their debts and we now have no alternative but to take them to the tribunal," he said.

He said the government was unhappy because debtor firms had crippled the ship-building acquisition fund and this had led to its suspension.

Sabotage hinders Shell's production

BD 25/8/98 (226)

LAGOS — A series of spills, leaks and community sabotage yesterday halted oil giant Royal Dutch Shell Group's crude exports, estimated at up to 800 000 barrels per day (bpd), from Nigeria

Senior company officials said it had told traders it could not meet export commitments from last Saturday at either of its two terminals, Bonny in the east or Forcados in the west of the Niger River delta.

"For Forcados we don't yet know when it will end, for Bonny it will be a few days," a senior official said.

Forcados — which exports a little less than half of Shell's Nigerian output — stopped loading to ships on Thursday after a spillage of roughly 100 barrels was noticed as a sheen on the water. Output is being stored in tanks

Further delays were announced at Bonny, which optimists had suggested could be exporting again as early as yesterday after a rash of problems.

Flowstations are being brought back onstream, accounting for about 100 000 bpd of crude which had been shut after a leak, now proved to have been caused by sabotage, to a pipeline

While industry analysts are cautious to blame the severity of the present barrage of problems on anything more than a run of bad luck, all acknowledge that the dissatisfied communities of the Niger Delta are growing ever more restive

Impoverished farming and fishing communities have long protested that they do not benefit from the roughly two million bpd of oil which Nigeria produces — accounting for about 90% of export earnings

Military ruler General Abdulsalam Abubakar, who took office in June, has promised oil-producing communities a better deal

However, few expect to see any rapid improvement in lifestyles to quell tension which is compounded by ethnic rivalries

Multinationals in joint ventures with state-run Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation face a dilemma in dealing with community problems and are reluctant to use force against local people.

"Nobody would say Nigeria is an especially attractive place to work, but with production costs of about \$2 a barrel nobody is going to walk away anytime soon," an industry executive said — Reuter

Nigerian oil ministry scrapped 'temporarily'

BD 25/8/98

(226) ~~226~~ ~~226~~

LAGOS — Nigeria's military ruler, Gen Adulsalam Abubakar, has scrapped the country's oil ministry and would appoint a civilian technocrat to oversee its lucrative petroleum sector, an official said at the weekend.

Although no one had yet been named to the post, a senior figure in Nigeria's commercial petroleum sector was expected to head a new directorate to be created by Abubakar.

The move to scrap the oil ministry follows mounting calls for Nigeria to abolish it in favour of an advisory body.

The oil ministry, including Minister Chief Dan Etete, had been linked to wide-scale corruption and mismanagement allegations.

Although Nigeria has one of the world's largest oil industries, the country is plagued by chronic shortages and a number of refineries stand idle as a result of neglect and graft.

Abubakar has sworn in 31 new ministers recently after dissolving the cabinet, which included key allies of the late dictator Gen Sani Abacha. Among the new ministers are Finance Minister Ismaila Usman and Foreign Affairs Minister Ignatius Oshemeka.

However, sources close to the government said yesterday that Abubakar's decision not to reappoint a petroleum minister to his new cabinet did not mean the petroleum ministry was being scrapped.

It will remain, probably with the head of state as effective minister for petroleum, they said. The functions of the petroleum minister, which include

attending meetings of oil exporting countries organisation OPEC, would be performed by an adviser to the president on petroleum and energy.

Government and industry sources said it will almost certainly be Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation MD Dalhatu Bayero. He has been a close adviser to Abubakar since he took power in June.

Over the last two weeks he has carried out a significant restructuring of the management of the corporation, something only someone who is sure of his position would undertake.

Among the changes effected last week was the swapping of some top posts, with head of crude marketing Taiwo Idemudia changing jobs with Nigerian Gas Company MD Gaus Obaseki.

The use of an adviser to run the petroleum sector is not new in Nigeria. A similar arrangement was in place between 1979 and 1983, when civilian President Shehu Shagari sent his adviser on petroleum, Yahaya Dikko, to OPEC meetings.

The arrangement ended when the military seized power at the end of 1983. Since then, significant restructuring of the petroleum sector has strengthened the position of the ministry to a point where, analysts say, it would be highly disruptive to scrap it.

They said the new arrangement would probably be temporary, lasting perhaps until the promised restoration of civilian rule early next year — Sapa-AP, Dow Jones.

How the West has won

Sometan 25/8/98

THE West has long betrayed Africa. In engaging the continent, principles have often come a distant last to crude self-interest.

During the Cold War, Africa provided a theatre for two schizophrenic superpowers to play out their proxy wars, fuelling and prolonging conflicts from Angola to the Horn of Africa, extending the life of apartheid South Africa's white minority oligarchy and propping up corrupt autocrats like Mobutu Sese Seko.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, many Africans naively believed that the West would help promote democracy on the continent. Alas, not so! In the post-Cold War era, Western countries have continued to pay only lip service to African democracy.

Nigeria provides a striking example of the duplicity of the West in Africa. Democratic elections were held in Nigeria in June 1993. A handful of military brass hats who disliked the result annulled the elections in which 14 million Nigerians had freely participated.

The Western diplomatic reaction was lame, as the winner of the elections, Moshood Abiola, shuttled around Western capitals in a vain attempt to drum up support for his mandate.

After the brutal dictator General Sani Abacha seized power in November 1993, the West merely rapped him on the knuckles, imposing only mild sanctions.

Human rights abuses proliferated as journalists were jailed, political activists assassinated and, in the most blatant act of defiance, nine environmental activists were hanged during a Commonwealth meeting in 1995.

The West still refused to impose meaningful sanctions, encouraging Abacha to continue on a five-year transition to Eldorado.

Nigeria's exiled opposition was 'stunningly naive in failing to see the *realpolitik* involved in Western policy towards Nigeria. Its entire strategy relied on the West's good faith.

Its members placed their hopes in empty resolutions passed by largely powerless bodies such as the Commonwealth and European Parliament. They failed to present a coherent strategy and vision, constantly reacting to events rather than anticipating them.

During his African diplomatic safari, United States president Bill Clinton confirmed all the suspicions of Western policy towards Nigeria when, in an infamous diplomatic gaffe, he basically invited Abacha to take off his military khaki and metamorphose into a civilian president.

This marked the culmination of an established pattern that suggests that the West is more interested in its oil supplies and investments in Nigeria than in promoting genuine democracy.

The US, for example, has R24 billion

Nigeria would be foolish to trust the West implicitly when it comes to restoring a democratic order.

Adekeye Adebajo and Chris Landsberg explain.



General Abdulsalam Abubakar is met by Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo and Deputy President Thabo Mbeki on Sunday.

invested in Nigeria's oil sector and imported R36 billion worth of Nigerian oil last year. The West revealed itself to be more concerned about political stability through military rule than in democracy.

As Western delegations trip over themselves in the rush to legitimise the new military regime, Western corporations salivate at the prospect of contracts in the lucrative Nigerian oil and gas sectors. France and Britain have already started calling for a review of existing sanctions.

But the transition to democracy in Nigeria has hardly become irreversible and much can still go wrong. It does not seem to have dawned on the Western powers that Nigerians have lost total confidence in the military as an agent of democratic change only once in the country's 38-year history of independence has a military regime handed over power to civilians.

Yet Western diplomats encouraged the new leader, General Abdulsalam Abubakar, to embark on a longer transition without trying to encourage greater civilian participation in the process. In fact, they appear to be largely pursuing a closed door policy towards the domestic opposition forces.

The whole process now relies on the word of Abubakar who, though seemingly honest, is susceptible to enormous pressure from the military. It also relies on an institution that has no business organising democratic elections, and that has repeatedly shown itself incapable of delivering democracy.

It is, however, not too late to change course. The West can still play a positive and constructive role in Nigeria's democratic transition.

But it must shed its short-sighted view of stability in Africa's most populous country and realise that long-term order cannot be guaranteed by a politicised military, but by principled democratic leadership that enjoys the support of the people.

There are three main goals the West should pursue in order to guarantee a successful democratic transition in Nigeria.

First, it should encourage a process that ensures that the electoral commission, political parties and politicians are immune from military manipulation.

Secondly, it should hold the military to its promise to allow international monitors at every stage of the process.

Finally, it must insist that the electoral timetable is strictly adhered to and spell out clearly what sanctions it will apply if the soldiers renege on their promise.

However, we must register a note of sober caution here: Nigerians will be left once again as helpless bystanders in their own history as the military engages in another endless charade of musical chairs with the tacit collusion of self-interested foreign meddlers.

Nigerians would be wise not to rely on Western countries to help restore democracy to their country. Their interests do not necessarily coincide with those of the West.

Ultimately, Nigerians themselves will have to sacrifice to ensure that democracy wins out against military dictatorship. The West is fast becoming part of the problem, not the solution, resolving the struggle for democracy in Nigeria.

(Adekeye Adebajo is a research fellow at Stanford University's Centre for International Security and Arms Control. Chris Landsberg is deputy director of the Johannesburg-based Centre for Policy Studies.)

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Nigerian civil rule promised

By Willie Bokala

A DEMOCRATICALLY elected government in Nigeria will be the focal point of discussions between General Abdulsalam Abubakar and Deputy President Thabo Mbeki in Cape Town today.

After meeting President Nelson Mandela at his official residence yesterday morning, Abubakar addressed Nigerian businessmen in and around Gauteng.

Foreign Affairs spokesman Machiel van Niekerk said Mbeki and Abubakar would not only discuss peace in Africa, but Nigeria's road to democracy as well.

He said after meeting Mbeki and the Nigerian leader would address the National Assembly before visiting Robben Island.

Mandela and Abubakar reportedly discussed the issue of Nigeria's return to civilian rule extensively.

Abubakar briefed Mandela and announced he had decided on May next year as the month in which general elections would be held in his country.

Mandela praised Abubakar for the steps he had taken to lead Nigeria to all-inclusive democracy.

The President said South Africa and other countries believed from the very beginning that Abubakar was the right man to lead Nigeria to a peaceful democracy.

The military leader said he expected a deepening of ties between the two countries, especially after a return to civilian rule in Nigeria.

"It is important for us to renew our relationship because those ties can only be in the interest of the continent of Africa," Mandela told reporters after meeting Abubakar in Pretoria.

Abubakar said South Africa and Nigeria had a longstanding history of ties marked by respect and understanding.

"We share some common values about how we see Africa being developed," the general told reporters.

The natural and human resources of both countries could contribute much to upliftment on the continent, Abubakar also said.

The general is on a three-day state visit to South Africa, the first by a Nigerian head of state.

Mandela described Abubakar as an old friend, saying South Africa welcomed his coming to power on June 9 after the death of military dictator Sani Abacha.

Sowetan 25/8/98



President Nelson Mandela addresses journalists yesterday while Nigerian military leader General Abdulsalam Abubakar (right) looks on during a photo-call at Mandela's official residence in Pretoria. Abubakar, who is on a three-day official visit, told Mandela of his intentions to democratise Nigeria and hold general elections in May 1999. PIC. AFP

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Africa must forget malignant history and look to the future

26/8/98 (2ab)

MY PRESENCE in SA, in my first official visit outside Nigeria, underscores our admiration for this country and what it stands for in our continent and the world at large. My visit also is a happy reflection of the historical links between our two countries and the abiding common faith that we share of the peculiar challenges facing our people and continent.

Foremost among my hopes is the expectation that this visit will strengthen fraternal relations and co-operation that have always existed between our people.

The SA miracle was a triumph of reason over prejudice, co-operation over conflict and restraint over abuse of power. Your example has underscored the utility of dialogue among people believing that with sensitivity, tolerance and forgiveness, we can build peaceful and stable societies of equal opportunity.

Africa and its problems have retained an enduring focus for Nigeria's foreign policy since the early days of our independence. Our commitment to emancipation has been motivated by the facts of history.

Africa is a continent that has been maligned and misunderstood in history — from the unwholesome impulses that fuelled the slave trade and later encouraged the colonisation of its people and exploitation of its resources to the continuing perception that Africa cannot redeem itself. I believe that we have come of age and should seize every opportunity to demonstrate this maturity.

We worked assiduously for the creation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 in the conviction that it would be an instrument to help Africa achieve its development goals.

There is no doubt that SA shares these goals with Nigeria. We have much in common and, with so much faith in the potential of our continent, the relationship between us should always be that of co-operation not competition, balance not disharmony, friendship not disrespect, vision not myopia.

I am confident that, working together on all the vital issues of our time, Nigeria and SA along with all the other countries in our region can help create an African renaissance.

To give meaning and concrete expression to our common aspirations, interests and destiny, we must approach our task with knowledge and sensitivity. This would require that we rededicate ourselves to a higher level of engagement and bilateral co-operation in the critical fields of trade, finance, science and technology, mining, education, culture and sporting links.

This would provide the spring board to our goals of continental unity and economic integration, especially as envisaged in the Abuja Treaty establishing the framework for the African Economic Community. It is in this regard that Nigeria has given active and concrete support to the objectives of the

SA and Nigeria are the torch bearers of the new Africa, Nigerian President Abdulsalam Abubakar said in his address to Parliament yesterday.



Nigerian military ruler Abdulsalam Abubakar addresses Parliament in Cape Town. Picture AP

Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas). Similarly, we have viewed, with respect, your commitment to the Southern African Development Community.

We must show the world that Africa is a continent rich in ancient and glorious traditions of creativity as well as all the uplifting values of civilisation.

This is why Nigeria is acutely concerned about conflict in Africa. It is a matter of considerable regret that, whenever and wherever these conflicts have occurred, civil conflicts have often been intractable and exceedingly ruinous.

It is disheartening that tragic situations have increased in frequency and ferocity in virtually every corner of Africa. We are concerned about the deteriorating situation between Ethiopia and Eritrea and recent developments in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Our two nations have to face critical questions. How can Nigeria and SA build up their relationship in the face of this

tremendous challenge confronting Africa? How can we contribute to the redemption of Africa? How can we create a stable and progressive order and contribute to the definition of a new and equitable world order?

The challenge calls for a strategic engagement between our two countries. It demands that we foster conditions that would prevent the incidence of debilitating African conflicts to enable the countries of the region to remain focused on the task of socioeconomic development. We should, as a matter of priority, work for the effectiveness of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution.

Let me reaffirm that Nigeria shall never abandon its quest for peace and security in our continent. We believe that without peace, security and stability, it would be impossible to ensure the economic and social regeneration of the continent, the promotion of fundamental human rights and the establishment of lasting democracy.

At the moment, a major transformation is taking place in Nigeria. It is pertinent for me to share with you our perspectives on these changes and our aspirations for a just and democratic society.

It is most reassuring that democracy is gradually making a bold return to the continent. Concrete evidence of the emergence of democracy, such as the strengthening of the legal and judicial systems and the holding of free and fair elections, are unfolding all over the continent.

In Nigeria, we have chosen democracy as our preferred option of governance. We believe that, as a form of government, democracy belongs to humanity as a whole. We believe that no race or group of countries has exclusive right to democracy or has mastered and perfected it.

The renewed commitment of Nigerians to democracy gives us the confidence that the programme of transition to civil rule and democratic rule will be successfully concluded by May 29 1999.

I hereby reiterate my address to my fellow countrymen and women on July 20 1998, that Nigerians want nothing less than true democracy in a united and peaceful country. They want a country where fairness, justice and equity are not mere slogans but principles put into practice.

Since my assumption of office, we have taken steps to create the environment in which true democracy can thrive. We have opened up the political process with the release of all political detainees, withdrawn all politically related charges against those concerned and abrogated all legal provisions that constricted political debate and interaction in the country.

We have also created institutions that will support the effective and transparent implementation of our transition to civil rule programme.

In our quest for enduring solutions to our national problems, pursued in a humane and liberal manner, it is our sincere hope that we shall receive the understanding of our friends and all peoples and nations of goodwill. In this we count on the support of our brothers in Africa.

As we prepare for the challenge of a new millennium, our two countries with our other brothers on the continent are confronted with the urgent task of recreating a new Africa. Let us not be burdened by the doubts of the past, nor discouraged by the apparent liabilities of our continent.

The challenges we face are unquestionably formidable, but so are the resources at our disposal. Assured of the support of our people, let us not only dream of greatness for our continent, but also seek to translate our dreams into reality, by offering Nigeria-SA relations as a model of co-operation in Africa.

□ This is an edited version of Abubakar's speech.

Africa must forget malignant history and look to the future

AP 26/8/98

(226)

MY PRESENCE in SA, in my first official visit outside Nigeria, underscores our admiration for this country and what it stands for in our continent and the world at large. My visit also is a happy reflection of the historical links between our two countries and the abiding common faith that we share of the peculiar challenges facing our people and continent.

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Nigerian military ruler Abdulsalam Abubakar addresses Parliament in Cape Town

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Abubakar appeals to world to give Nigeria another chance

WALTER DHLADLA, AFP

By GILBERT DA COSTA
Independent Foreign Service

The belligerent attitude of his reclusive predecessor, the late General Sani Abacha, and its profoundly negative international fall-out, have sent General Abdulsalam Abubakar scurrying out to repair Nigeria's damaged or impaired relationship with the world community.

"Nigeria deserves a fair hearing and constructive engagement, not isolation," Abubakar declared in his maiden televised address.

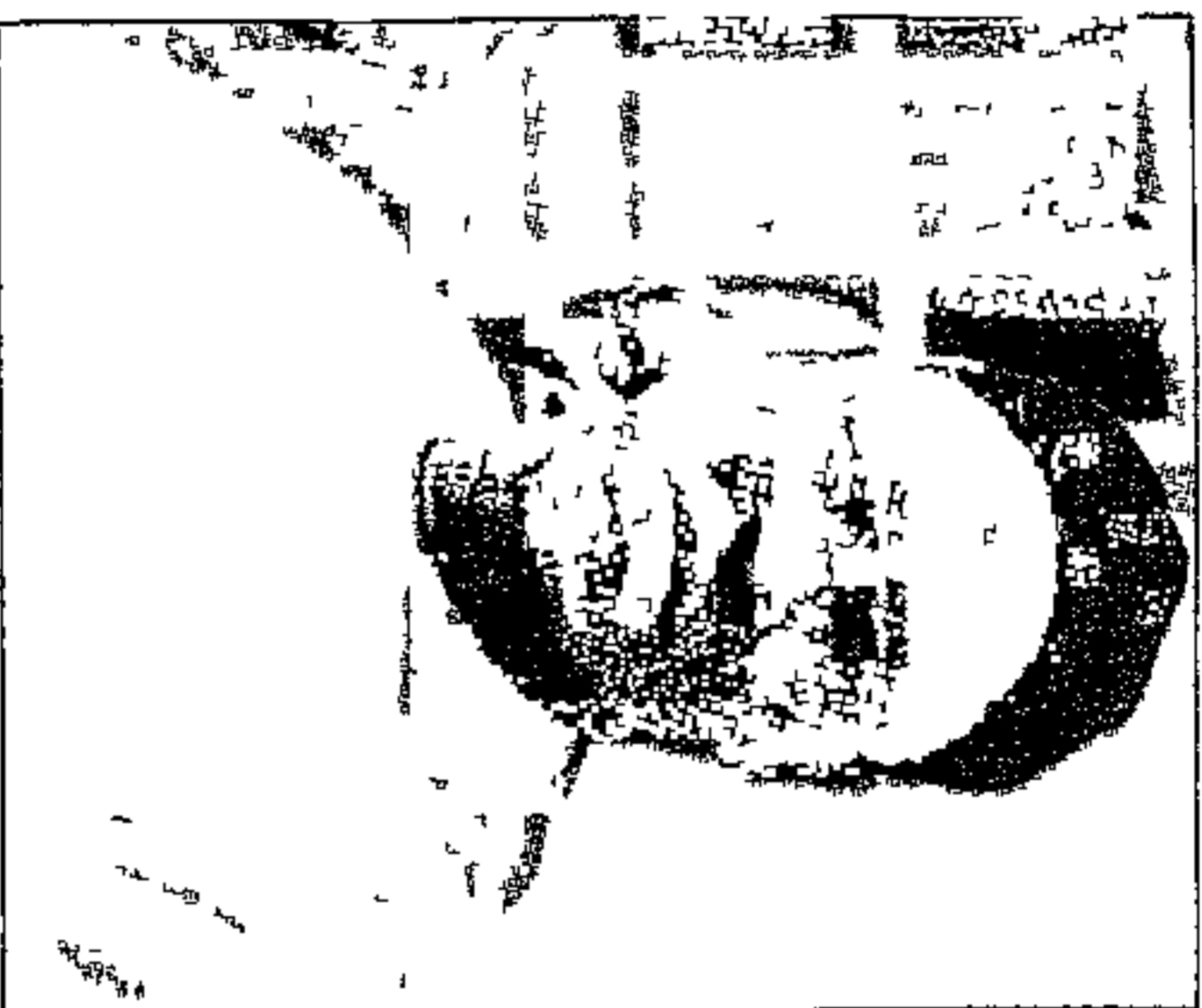
The despotic Abacha regime seemed indifferent to the immense international hostility and sanctions directed against it.

Its response was "area boy" diplomacy - a derogatory term for the uncouth attitude of officials under Abacha, derived from the local slang name for young hoodlums.

It was a hallmark of Abacha's burly Foreign Minister Tom Ikimi and "gutter-mouthed" ex-spokesperson Walter Ofonagoro. This do-your-damnedest approach suited the farcical show of absolute strength which the politically incorrect regime sought to project.

Pragmatism quickly emerged as a key element in the business of government under Abubakar. He quickly dropped the offensive style of Abacha in all things.

The release of political prisoners, easing of state-sponsored attacks, constructive dialogue with a broad spectrum of Nigeria's diverse society, a commitment to hand over power within a "decent" time frame, a willingness to open up the political process and bring discipline to the af-



Positive .. General Abdulsalam Abubakar is making changes.

fairs of government, all of these have launched Abubakar on the road to becoming a national hero - if only by contrast with his predecessor who was admittedly a very easy act to follow.

The crowning moment will come, hopefully, on May 29 1999 when Abubakar says he will formally hand over power to a democratically elected chief of state.

If so that will only be the second time in Nigeria's long history that the military has relinquished power to the civilians.

"I am not going to tempt the good Lord in heaven with any hidden agenda," was Abubakar's reaction to suggestions that he would not keep his word - as Abacha seemed likely to do.

The next step in the current "rehabilitation" initiative is the reintegration of Nigeria into the interna-

tional community. A host of international delegations, ranging from the United States to Ukraine, have in the past two months held friendly talks with the new military ruler at the presidential villa in Abuja.

The European Union, according to Abubakar, is on the verge of lifting sanctions imposed in 1995 following the executions of nine Ogoni activists and the sweeping arrest of opponents.

The Commonwealth, which also suspended Nigeria as a result of the executions, may now re-admit it in October and direct air links between Nigeria and the United States - suspended since 1993 by Washington - may resume soon, the Nigerian leader said.

The feeling at the presidency in Abuja, however, is that international goodwill has so far not matched Nigeria's political reforms. The presidency is particularly concerned at the continued imposition of sanctions.

The wait-and-see attitude of the international community may not be misplaced but Abuja is impatient. That, ostensibly, is where the Madiba magic comes into play.

Abubakar reckons Mandela's tacit support for his regime is crucial in conveying the message that current changes in Nigeria are real.

Mandela is arguably Africa's most respected statesman and therefore his willingness to facilitate improved ties between Abuja and key members of the international community is deemed invaluable, according to official sources in Abuja.

They feel that since Mandela spearheaded Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth in 1995, precipitating a wider isolation, he has a

role to play in its re-admission to the world.

The sense of relief in Nigeria that relations between Abuja and Pretoria are on the mend is palpable. A Nigerian international relations analyst said the difficult bilateral relations since 1995 had been "couched in apparently cosmetic diplomatic niceties" for the most part, although the Abacha regime also flung some sharp insults at South Africa.

Most memorable was the accusation that Mandela was the "black ruler of a white country".

The announcement of Abubakar's official visit to South Africa - his first official trip outside Nigeria since he assumed power on June 8 - was a major front page item in all Nigerian national dailies.

Abubakar seems to have found an ally in Deputy President Thabo Mbeki who was effusive in his public commendation of Abubakar following talks last month in Abuja.

Officials accompanying the Nigerian leader on his South African visit are equally preoccupied with improvements in bilateral ties, especially in key areas like economic, political and social relations.

The establishment of a direct air link is a priority since the perception is that closer contacts are necessary to build the spirit of co-operation Abuja is canvassing.

There is also optimism that the protocol to be signed by the two leaders highlighting the new era of bilateral relations signifies a breakthrough for Abubakar.

Still on a positive note, this breakthrough is also a major step in Nigeria's long delayed and rather long overdue rehabilitation.

(226) Fran 26/8/98

Nigerian leader opens new door

Wyndham Hartley

CAPE TOWN — SA and Nigeria are poised to enter a new era in their relations after the successful visit of military ruler Abdulsalam Abubakar and his reaffirmation yesterday of his commitment to achieving a democratic transition in his country by May next year

Abubakar, who addressed a meeting of MPs in the National Assembly yesterday, appealed for broad co-operation between SA and Nigeria on matters of "trade, finance, science and technology, mining, education, culture and sporting links"

Nigeria is rich in oil and closer trade and economic ties could hold potential for SA business

This "first "official" visit marks a complete turnaround in relations with Nigeria since President Nelson Mandela called for Nigeria's expulsion from the Commonwealth following the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa and eight Ogoni activists by former military leader Gen Sani Abacha. Abubakar took over in June after Abacha's unexpected death

Abubakar stressed that Nigeria and SA could be forces for stability in Africa

He expressed confidence that Nigeria and SA could, by "working together and collaborating fully on all the pressing

issues of our time... along with other countries in our region, help create an African renaissance" This would help reposition Africa, a maligned and misunderstood continent, for a meaningful and significant world role in the next century

He told the assembly, which included Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, he was concerned about the conflicts in Eritrea and Ethiopia and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He said both Nigeria and SA should be more strategically involved in Africa and that the Organisation of African Unity had to improve urgently its reaction to conflict resolution

He said Nigeria was committed to reinstating civilian rule and democracy

Abubakar visited Mandela's cell on Robben Island and said afterwards that as far as he knew, all political prisoners in his country had been released

The Nigerian leader was full of praise for SA's transition to democracy and said that this had shown the way for others.

Abubakar encountered a small group of protesters when his convoy arrived at Parliament. Placard-carrying protesters standing at the gates of the parliamentary complex shouted at him to "go home"

The new Africa: Page 14

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Nigerian cabinet faces hard task

(226) DD 27/8/98

NIGERIAN newspapers have been questioning the long delay by Nigerian president Abdulsalam Abubakar in constituting his new cabinet following the dissolution of the old one on July 8

Abubakar finally answered the question last Saturday with his announcement of a 31-member cabinet which included eight members of the previous cabinet and 23 new ones and appeared to indicate that he was seriously getting down to business

Abubakar, in an address to the nation on July 20 on his political and economic agenda, promised a cabinet that would "reflect the various shades of political opinion across the land"

With the new cabinet, Abubakar has shown that he is his own man. Political considerations may have their place but this was a cabinet chosen more for skills. These are Nigerians who distinguished themselves in their chosen careers either as technocrats or as self-employed individuals

A key development was the dropping of the oil minister's portfolio, previously held by Dan Etete and known to be one of the most corrupt ministries under former ruler Gen Sani Abacha. This has been transferred to the presidency, apparently in line with the launch by Abubakar of a programme of reforms of the sector that provides more than 90% of export earnings

Of eight military men in the cabinet, the only important appointment is that of the minister for the capital, Abuja, occupied by retired major-general Mohammed Kontagora, an Indian-trained engineer and former works minister

The new foreign minister, IC Olusemeka, is an experienced and well respected diplomat. As former ambassador to the US and Israel, he carries weight in international circles. He replaces Tom Ikimi, one of the longest serving members of the old cabinet

The new finance minister is Ismaila Usman, previously deputy governor in the central bank. The defence portfolio remains with the president

Other cabinet appointments include
 National Planning Minister Chief Rasheed Gbadamosi, an economist, compa-

Nigerian leader Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar announced his new cabinet last weekend. **Adebola Olowo** in Lagos took a look at the changes he made and the demands the ministers face

ny director and playwright who, at 30, is the youngest person to be appointed to the Nigerian cabinet,

State, Works and Housing Minister Ambrose Fesse, a banking executive and former chief executive officer of a government-owned investment bank,

State and Health Minister Maj-Gen Garba Ali, a former works and housing minister who was once the secretary of government watchdog, the National Economic Intelligence Committee,

Transport Minister Festus Porbent, a naval officer and diplomat who was Equatorial Guinea ambassador and then administration chief at defence headquarters,

Agriculture Minister Alhaji Alfa Wali, former head of federal ministry of information and defence, and

Industries Minister Omkepo Akande, former industries minister, a chartered accountant and former financial director of a group of companies

Of the new cabinet, eight ministers were retained from the dissolved executive and two had at various times been ministers, while the rest are new faces

The new ministers have a herculean task on their hands

The foreign minister in particular will have his hands full. Chosen to accompany Abubakar on his first foreign trip — to SA — he will also have to convince the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group to lift Nigeria's commonwealth suspension at its meeting in October this year

Abubakar has been very preoccupied with the state of the economy, saying in his state of the nation address that Nigerians are "heavily burdened with serious economic and social problems"

The economic figures back this assertion. Nigeria as at January owed external creditors 70.7% of gross domestic product. This could prove to be a headache for the

new finance minister

Reuter reports that Usman, who is Harvard educated, has a reputation for discipline but his attitude towards privatisation and reforms demanded by foreign lending agencies ahead of talks on rescheduling an estimated \$30bn debt are not known

The manufacturing subsector is in bad shape as the average capacity utilisation according to government figures was 37.2% last year and 36.8% in 1996

The reasons for this, according to analysts, is weak demand for manufactured goods because of declining purchasing power, high production costs, breakdown of refineries and deterioration in the services of infrastructural facilities

The new industries minister will have to look at the special needs of the manufacturing sector, otherwise an already high unemployment figure will rise

The new finance minister will have to complete capital market reform started by predecessor Anthony Ani. Abubakar has set his agenda: short-term microeconomic measures targeted at specific sectors whose revitalisation would have multiple effects on the economy, rehabilitation of the refineries, meeting funding needs of joint venture operations and payment of their outstanding cash call obligations, reliable power and telecommunications services, and above all privatising key government enterprises.

Analysts believe he has a team that will back his privatisation scheme, a team confident of its own success and which will thus not persuade him to stay beyond his term and which will command respect

What matters is how Abubakar uses their expertise. He, and his coterie of new ministers, have nine months to prove themselves before the handover to an elected government on May 29 next year

Olowo is a Lagos-based freelance writer

Jailed bank heads go on hunger (226) strike in Nigeria

LAGOS — More than 160 bank chiefs jailed by Nigeria's military regime have gone on hunger strike to protest against their continued detention without trial, local reports said yesterday

Eighty-five jailed bank chiefs refused food on Sunday at their detention centre in Lagos, joining 78 others in jails around the country who launched their protest last week, said the privately owned Post Express and state-owned Daily Times newspapers. The bank chiefs, among them heads of some of Nigeria's larger banks, have been held for up to four years without trial under one of two decrees signed by late military ruler Gen Sani Abacha

One of them, Decree 2, is a catch-all decree covering general security and allowing people to be held without trial for unspecified periods of time on any security charges. The other, Decree 18, was originally promoted to guard against malpractices in the banking sector, but critics claim it was used for more political purposes.

The detainees said the strike was "a weapon of last resort" aimed at getting their release on bail and a review of their cases.

Since coming to power on June 9, Nigeria's new political leader Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar has released dozens of political prisoners and others detained under the Abacha regime. He has failed, however, to address to date the question of the detained bank chiefs — Sapa-AFP

NIGERIA Unrest and technical snags cut output by 500 000 bpd

CT(MR) 3/9/98
Shell losing a quarter of oil exports daily
18 (226)

FROM BLOOMBERG

Lagos — Royal Dutch/Shell Group, the world's biggest publicly traded oil company, said yesterday that civil unrest and technical problems in Nigeria were stopping exports of about a quarter of its daily worldwide oil production

A leak in a pipeline at the Forcados export terminal is cutting exports by about 400 000 barrels a day (bpd), while threats by the local Nembe community have reduced exports from the Bonny terminal by about 160 000 bpd, said Shell spokesmen in Lagos and London

The lost export amounts to about 70 percent of Shell's total oil production in Nigeria and about a quarter of its production worldwide

Shell is Nigeria's biggest oil producer. The country's output in July was 2.1 million bpd, making it Africa's biggest oil producer

"It's going to make a fair dent in their export capability," said Alan Marshall, the director of oil and gas research at Robert Fleming Securities in London. "Potentially Shell is losing a quarter of its production for a while," he said.

Shell Transport & Trading Company, which owns about 40 percent of Royal Dutch/Shell, rose 11p to £3.38. Royal Dutch Petroleum Company, which owns about 60 percent of Royal Dutch/Shell, rose 1.7 guilders (about R5.41) to 88 guilders

Last month Shell declared force majeure in Nigeria. The move, which is still in effect, excuses the company from fulfill-

ing supply obligations when circumstances beyond its control affect production

"We have not been able to fix the line (at Forcados)," said Bisi Ojediran, the head of communications for Shell in Nigeria

Divers are having difficulty locating the leak in the 25 kilometre pipe, which runs between the Forcados terminal and the loading zone for tankers

At Bonny exports are taking place at a reduced rate after threats by the Nembe to attack workers unless demands they have made are addressed

"They have said we are going to attack you," Ojediran said. "We are talking at them, we are trying to make them see reason"

While the spokesman did not specify the Nembe's demands, Marshall said protests against oil companies in Nigeria have traditionally been caused by alleged damage to the environment and the perception that local communities were not getting their share of revenue

In December armed youths took control of two of Shell's pumping stations in Nigeria, temporarily cutting the flow of about 80 000 bpd to the Forcados terminal. They youths were demanding electricity supply, road improvements and guarantees of employment

Nigeria was hit by civil unrest in July following the death of opposition leader Moshood Abiola, who died just after the government agreed to release him from prison

Crude oil futures jumped almost 3 percent in London on July 8, on concern the riots that followed Abiola's death would disrupt oil exports

Cameroon oil pipeline faces delay

TANSA MUSA

Cameroon — A planned pipeline to take crude oil from Chad to port in Cameroon faced construction delays if civil unrest slowed environmental studies needed to secure donor finance, a World Bank official in Cameroon said yesterday

"If security problems prevent adequate information gathering, the project is probably not ready to be implemented," said George Minang, a spokesman for the World Bank

Western oil companies are among Chad's partners in the development of its three southern oil fields. The World Bank is funding 10 percent of the project, whose total cost is \$340 million

Production from as early as 2001 will potentially make the poor landlocked country Africa's fourth largest producer after top exporters Nigeria, Angola, Libya and Gabon

Abdoulaye Lamana, Chad's energy minister, said he was confident the pipeline to the Atlantic would be built despite opposition from environmental and human rights groups. These groups met in Cameroon in late August to voice objections to the project

Pipeline critics say their concerns surround the potential impacts on pygmy and Bantu farmers migration practices, livestock, and the fate of ecologically sensitive areas

There is added concern that the criteria for granting involuntary resettlement assistance, and the amounts, are also not clear

Jean Nke Ndi, the chairman of Cameroon Environment Defence, said poor farmers stand to lose — Reuters

Nigerian ministers' powers cut

(226)

AD 4/19/98

Kingsley Kubeyinje

LAGOS — Determined to curb financial recklessness and unaccountability in governance, the Nigerian military government has curbed the powers of its 31 new cabinet ministers.

A key step has been to bar them from interfering with the finances of parastatals under their supervision, a widespread problem because ministers routinely held back billions of naira annually which had been approved by government for parastatals.

Such money was being spent on unbudgeted expenses via ministerial orders, with a good portion being diverted into private accounts.

Managers of most of the loss-making parastatals spent huge chunks of their yearly allocations on currying favour with their supervising ministers. Parastatals were often com-

pelled by ministers to rent and furnish accommodation for them, provide allowances for them and officials, buy cars and air tickets, as well as grant loans to them.

It was not uncommon for a minister to have as many guest houses as the number of parastatals under his care.

Gidado Idris, secretary to the Nigerian government, ordered ministers in a circular to keep their hands off parastatal finances "This (interfering with funds) had a bad effect on the parastatals as they were unable to perform their statutory functions," he said.

The government, in the circular, also barred ministers from functioning as chairmen of the boards of parastatals and government-owned companies.

Idris said the new measure aimed to give government-owned corporations a measure of

independence, allowing them meet set objectives. The government, tired of pumping funds into loss-making corporations managed by feckless officials, is privatising and commercialising a number of them.

Sapa-AFP reports that Nigeria's head of state, Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar, has agreed to roughly triple the salaries of most of the country's public servants.

The new wages, including those of the president, vice-president, ministers and members of parliament, are set out in the document sent this week to senior officials. The wage increases have already been approved by Abubakar, and are to be paid as from September 1.

Abubakar, sworn into office in June, last month promised a quick review of poor public service pay, previously blamed for a high level of corruption and inefficiency in the sector.

Exiles refuse to return until security decree is revoked

(226) DD 9/9/98

LAGOS — Nigeria's leading exiles will not return home until the military junta has revoked a sweeping security decree allowing people to be arrested without charge, an opposition figure has said.

The comments from Abraham Adesanya, chairman of the National Democratic Coalition, came one day after Nigeria's military ruler again invited the country's political exiles to return, saying he had asked his justice minister to drop felony charges against many of them.

However, the continued existence of decree No 2 — which gives the security services wide latitude to make arrests — would keep the exiles abroad, Adesanya said.

Many of the country's most prominent exiles belong to the Democratic Coalition.

Nigeria's most prominent exile, Nobel Prize-winning writer Wole Soyinka, was among a group of Nigerian dissidents who planned to return from exile if the military

regime dropped criminal charges against them, a Lagos newspaper reported last week.

The exiled activists met recently in London and decided to return to their homeland if Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar's government formally withdrew murder, treason and other charges lodged by late dictator Gen Sani Abacha.

The exiles also demanded the repeal of decrees allowing the government to detain opponents without trial.

Soyinka fled Nigeria in 1995 after learning that military authorities were going to arrest him for criticising the government.

Meanwhile, a Nigerian court has freed 20 Ogoni minority activists detained since 1994 on charges of murdering four pro-government chiefs.

The youths were facing the same murder charge for which author Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others were executed in 1995 — Sapa-AP

Red tape fetters privatisation

Claire Pickard-Cambridge

THE privatisation programmes of Uganda, Nigeria and Ghana have been hampered by limited credit for small businesses and individuals, partly as a result of high interest rates, and bureaucratic impediments.

However, achievements include increased employment and higher earnings from privatised companies in the long run, speakers told a Pan African Investment summit in Johannesburg yesterday. Despite government moves to modernise legislation to eliminate red tape, bureaucracy still impeded smooth business practice.

The liabilities of most state enterprises exceeded the proceeds realised from sales

This meant that instead of being an instant source of state revenue their sale reduced government's financial burden in keeping them afloat.

Uganda's Minister of State for Finance, Planning and Economic Development (Privatisation), Matthew Rukikaire, said more than 70% of parastatals had already gone a long way along the privatisation route.

On the negative side, the programme in Uganda had seen many enterprises sold off to foreign companies and there had been limited local public participation which had not gone down well with Ugandans. The authorities were trying to rectify this problem with the remaining enterprises to be sold

A greater regional spread was also need-

ed and government was trying to provide more incentives to attract investors to neglected parts of Uganda.

He said the privatisation process — which had been suspended by parliamentarians — had resumed again after it was agreed this was in the national interest. An investigation of complaints found that sales had not involved corruption, although some errors of judgment had been made. In such cases in the past, sales had been reversed

Several important enterprises still needed to be sold in Uganda. These included Kinyara Sugar Works, a plantation with a production complex; Dairy Corporation; National Insurance Corporation; the Nile Hotel; and Uganda Airlines. He said SA Airways, Sabena, British Airways and Air Mauritius were involved in talks linked to the possible sale of Uganda Airlines.

Utilities being restructured included Uganda Posts & Telecommunications, Uganda Railways Corporation and the Uganda Electricity Board.

Hamza Zayyad, the chairman of the Bureau of Public Enterprises in Nigeria, said a major drive in the Nigerian process had been ensuring wider share ownership in society; enabling all those wanting to participate in the process had access to funding, even if this meant government encouraging employers to give employees loans; and achieving a greater geographical spread in ownership across the country

(224) (226) 11/9/98
The public offer of shares through the Nigerian Stock Exchange was the dominant method of privatisation, although other methods included the private placement of shares in cases where government's holding were small, and the sale of assets through public tender.

This year government had announced the resumption of privatisation on a large scale, and planned to sell several important utilities and refineries. It would keep 40% and sell 40% shares to foreign investors, with the remaining 20% being sold to the Nigerian public through the exchange.

Albert Essien of Ecobank in Ghana said more than half of about 300 public enterprises earmarked for divestiture had already been sold, leased or liquidated.

Problems included the low level of credit extension granted from the banking sector to the private sector. A recent study had found that microenterprises received only 3.1% of amounts applied for, while small and medium-sized enterprises received 37.9% and 54.5% respectively.

Several factors accounted for this, such as the fact that government and public sector entities dominate the demand for bank credit in Ghana, thus crowding out the private sector. Low gross domestic product growth, low savings mobilisation, many enterprises' poor credit ratings, lack of collateral and poor loan proposals were also contributing factors.

Nigerians benefit from privatisation exercise

14/9/98 (226)
Claire Pickard-Cambridge

PRIVATISATION had vastly expanded personal share ownership in Nigeria with more than 800 000 shareholders created directly by the exercise and another 2-million through the enthusiasm it generated about the benefits of shareholding as a form of savings.

The chairman of the Bureau of Public Enterprises in the Nigerian presidency, Hamza Zayyad, said the programme launched in 1988 had been aimed at a wide-cross section of society, and helped to alter perceptions that holding shares was an elitist past time. This in turn had benefited the national economy.

He told a recent Johannesburg conference that a decree had stipulated that at least 10% of the shares being sold in each enterprise be reserved for its employees. To ensure access to credit for such purchases, government encouraged employers and local government to give loans to employees. He said there had been a positive response to the requests.

The Central Bank of Nigeria instructed commercial banks to direct up to 5% of their lending portfolio to share purchase loans for deserving customers. To ensure geopolitical spread in participation, special media campaigns were organised in inactive areas. Share application forms were distributed through post offices, local councils and ministries, in addition to banks, brokers and issuing houses.

Zayyad said Nigeria was unusual in launching its privatisation and commercialisation programmes simultaneously. In the case of commercialisation, the managers of enterprises sign an agreement with government in which they guarantee attaining cer-

tain performance levels in return for greater autonomy.

Both programmes had experienced problems, particularly with several changes in government. However, commercialisation had not proved as popular or successful as privatisation because it permitted some government interference at a time when this was becoming unpopular.

Apart from realising more than 3,7-billion naira in privatisation proceeds, the programmes had relieved government of the burden of financing the investment needs and deficits of public enterprises. The good performance of the recently privatised enterprises had improved the volume of corporate taxes accruing to the treasury.

Zayyad described the Nigerian capital market as the largest beneficiary of the privatisation exercise. Market capitalisation had jumped from 8-billion naira in 1989 to more than 500-billion by end-1997.

In this year's budget, government announced the resumption of privatisation on a large scale. The head of state, Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar, said government would explore the possibility of handing over the management control and disposal of 40% of the ownership of many important state-owned bodies — including telecommunications organisation Nitel, the Federal Super Phosphate Fertiliser Company and refineries — to technical and financial partners through international bidding. Government would retain 40% and the remaining 20% would be sold to the Nigerian public through the stock exchange.

The Bureau of Public Enterprises was also organising arrangements for privatising 25 public enterprises not privatised during the first phase.

SA lauds Nigerian electoral programme

Kingsley Kubeyinje

LAGOS — SA was satisfied with the programme and timetable for Nigeria's transition to civilian rule announced by its Independent National Electoral Commission, SA acting high commissioner to Nigeria, Christian Botha said

Botha was paying a courtesy call on the new chairman of the electoral commission, Judge Ephraim Akpata

Botha said his visit to Nigeria's federal capital of Abuja was to show SA's approval for the recent-

ly adopted political timetable which has scheduled a presidential election for May 29 1999

Akpata told the SA envoy that more than 20 political associations wishing to be recognised as political parties had already submitted their applications to his commission

However, he said the commission was not in a hurry to register parties for next May's elections, explaining that the organisations' performances in the local government elections scheduled for December would be the yardstick

Meanwhile, the World Bank representative in Nigeria, Trevor Byer, said last week that Nigeria's chances of receiving a reprieve from or write-off of its official \$27bn in external debt, was bleak. He said Nigeria needed to go beyond mere policy statements

Byer said Nigeria's problem was managerial. Before it could get favourable attention from the Paris Club — the country's main official creditors — policy consistency and stability and a more attractive tax regime had to be put in place

BD 16/9/98

(226)

BD 17/9/98

Revamp of Nigeria's rail system halted

(226)

LAGOS — A \$528m Chinese revamp of Nigeria's colonial-era railway system is 75% complete, but has been delayed by the West African country's failure to provide agreed supplies, the railway's administrator said.

Greg Ilukwe, sole administrator of Nigerian Railways Corporation, said the work of the Chinese contractors had already meant a vast increase in freight carried by the railway with great hopes for future expansion.

"I know their work has been slowed down between March and now by the lack of materials which should have been supplied by the Nigerian side. We do not produce them, they were ordered but they have not arrived," Ilukwe said.

British colonialists began construction of Nigeria's rail network in the 1890s and a further 400km of track were added after independence in 1960, bringing the total to 3 500km.

However, the railway, like much of Nigeria's state-run infrastructure, fell into decline as mismanagement and corruption deprived the system of investment. Freight and passengers shifted to the roads.

In 1995 then-dictator Sani Abacha took on the railways as a pet project and agreed to spend hundreds of millions of dollars of oil money on the contract, carried out by China Civil Engineering and Construction Corporation, which is due for completion this month.

He said the rail network had carried more than 872 000 tons of goods in the first six months of 1998 compared with 566 000 tons carried through the whole of 1997.

But Ilukwe said despite the revival, the railway was far from becoming self-sufficient and it was much too early to talk of privatisation. — Reuter

Debt relief demanded by Nigeria

(226)

at (M) 17/9/98

FROM AFP

Abuja — A World Bank official yesterday pursued consultations with Nigerian officials on broadening their relationship, covering debt relief and new credit lines, the lending body said

Jean-Louis Sarbib, the bank's vice-president for Africa, met Gidado Idris, the secretary of the federal government, and was due to meet Ismaila Usman, the finance minister, and other officials, said Obadiah Tohomdet, the bank's spokesman

It would be the third meeting between Sarbib and Usman since Sarbib arrived in Nigeria on Sunday. In the earlier meetings, Usman appealed to Sarbib to release lines of credit frozen in 1995 and to accept Nigeria's demands for debt relief

Sarbib on Tuesday met General Abdulsalam Abubakar, the military ruler, who reiterated his calls for debt relief and urged the bank to assist in getting investment to come to the country

Abubakar called for a "meaningful discussion" of Nigeria's debt burden with the country's Paris Club creditors

Discussion of the debt issue is expected to come up at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) meetings in Washington next month

A World Bank official said on Sunday the bank was "very encouraged" by economic reforms under way in Nigeria and hoped the new government would keep up the momentum

"We are very encouraged by the whole tenor of the new administration. They have announced a lot of reforms and

taken some good steps

"We want to see they keep up the momentum, particularly on privatisation and poverty alleviation," said Trevor Byers, the bank's representative in Nigeria

Ever since Abubakar became head of state on June 9, he has sought to tackle the economic problems of the oil-rich nation

Key among awaited measures is the privatisation of electricity and telecommunications. Speaking last week, Abubakar promised decrees "soon" to liberalise the economy and partially to privatise key state-run companies, including Nepa and Nitel, the electricity and telecoms giants

"This administration invites the international community and Nigerians to participate in our privatisation programme

"We also invite international investment banks, commercial banks, export credit agencies and management consultants to work with us in our liberalisation of markets, deregulation and privatisation," he said

"In the light of these efforts, we urge our creditors to take cognisance of our reforms and the unique problems facing our nation to grant us debt relief"

Abubakar also said investigators had started the recovery of hundreds of millions of dollars stolen from the national coffers by members of the previous regime

He also approved a long-awaited civil service pay package, viewed by economists as a boost for a depressed economy, which has seen inflation tumble but at the cost of falling living standards

Sarbib will leave tomorrow, after meeting business leaders

Lack of supplies delays Nigeria rail

DULUE MBACHU

Lagos — A \$528 million Chinese revamp of Nigeria's colonial-era railway system was 75 percent complete but had been delayed by Nigeria's failure to provide agreed supplies, the railway's administrator said.

Greg Ilukwe, the sole administrator of Nigerian Railways Corporation, said the work of the Chinese contractors already had meant a vast increase in freight carried by the railway, with great hopes for future expansion.

(226) C (MR) 7/9/98
"I know their work has been slowed down (since March) by lack of materials which should have been supplied by the Nigerian side," Ilukwe said. "We don't produce them, they were ordered but they have not arrived."

"What we have been engaged in over the past two-and-a-half years is a process of making sure there is a railway, because before then there was none. That was the sad state of affairs."

In 1995, then-dictator Sani Abacha took on the railways as a pet project. "By 1995, freight had

declined to just over 100 000 tons," Ilukwe said. "By 1997, the freight we carried was higher than 1995 and 1996 together."

The network carried more than 872 000 tons in the first half of this year, compared to 563 000 tons in the whole of last year.

The Chinese have provided 35 out of an agreed 50 locomotives and 300 of 400 goods wagons.

But Ilukwe said despite the revival, the railway was far from becoming self-sufficient and it was much too early to talk of privatisation — Reuters.

Privatisation promises to better Nigerian lives

MD 17/9/98

(2ab)

Nigeria's ambitious privatisation programme has suffered long delays and many problems, but overall it has been a big success story. Features editor Dianna Games spoke to the man spearheading the process, Hamza Zayyad, during his recent visit to SA.

HAMZA Zayyad was watching television with his wife when he heard on the news that he had been appointed chairman of the Bureau of Public Enterprises to spearhead Nigeria's privatisation process.

That was back in 1989 when he was head of an umbrella organisation of parastatal companies. It was an inauspicious beginning for an ambitious programme designed to effect fundamental improvements in the daily conditions experienced by the majority of Nigeria's 110-million people.

Zayyad said the announcement was not completely unexpected, but it did come 18 months after his discussions on the matter with then military ruler, Gen Ibrahim Babangida. The delay was an indication of the difficulties faced by Babangida, a strong proponent of privatisation, by his ruling council.

At the time there was widespread suspicion of privatisation. This was in part due to the problems being experienced in the UK, the perceptions that it was a phenomenon of the developed west and unsuited to developing countries and because of other negative aspects such as potential job losses.

Since independence in 1960, and particularly the oil boom years of the '70s, Nigeria developed a huge public sector over a wide range of sectors. It has more than 2 000 public enterprises. While the oil boom lasted, no one complained of the waste and inefficiencies of some enterprises. More companies of questionable commercial and financial viability continued to be set up "to provide jobs for the boys... Many of them have developed into monsters capable of devouring the entire financial resources of the government."

Attention was focused on them only in the wake of the economic recession in the early 1980s. They were found to be infested with problems such as misuse of monopoly powers, defective capital structures, mismanagement, nepotism and corruption.

The process — a dual programme of privatisation and commercialisation open only to Nigerians — kicked off in 1989 with the identification of 111 enterprises targeted for full or partial privatisation and 35 for a degree of commercialisation. In addition, 117 small and micro enterprises were sold off.

One casualty was Nigeria Airways. By 1993, all the work had been done for its privatisation, but the programme was scuttled due to government corruption. The airline at the time had 64 bilateral air agreements in place even though it was operating only four and making \$60m in fee collection without an aircraft even leaving the ground.

The bureau presented its report to the gov-

ernment in June 1993 by which time work on 86 of the 111 enterprises had been completed. However, the amount of spillover led to a delay in implementing the second phase — the privatisation of major government utilities.

This was compounded by the takeover of the government by military ruler Gen Sani Abacha. Zayyad is careful not to ascribe the blame to obstruction of the process by Abacha, except to say that his government had had to devote its energies to "political re-engineering to sort out its polluted political situation."

The political situation was also a deterrent to potential foreign investors who were to be invited into the second phase.

Preparations for the second phase of privatisation are already under way. The question of next year's elections, and with it the prospect of a new government, have briefly thrown the programme into disarray. Discussions are under way on whether the privatisation effort should be stalled until after the election for a new administration to oversee, or whether current efforts should stay on track.

Up for grabs are the Nigerian Electricity Power Authority (Nepa), the Nigerian Telecommunications authority (Nitel), the National Fertiliser Company (gas); the Federal Super Phosphate Fertilizer Company (sulphuric acid), and refineries.

A 40% stake will be offered to foreign companies, government will retain 40% and 20% will be offered to Nigerians.

Zayyad said it was still early days but already a number of large international companies had made inquiries. The international open bidding process would begin once the corporations have been adequately prepared.

This in itself is a big job, particularly in the case of Nitel and Nepa. For years, many Nigerians have had no electricity while millions more have suffered regular power cuts, even in Lagos, a city of more than 10-million people.

The telephone service has suffered a similar fate. The current density is officially 1 150. The aim of the Vision 2010 plan is to bring it down to 1 50. However, unofficially, it is estimated that there are about two telephone lines for every 100 000 people — one of the lowest installation rates in Africa.

Years of government neglect have allowed both utilities to run down. For instance, Zayyad said, two years ago Nepa had asked the government for 170-billion naira (\$2bn) and had been given 7-billion naira. The budget restraints were a result of competing demands, plus the unprecedented rise in demand. However, some are more cynical, saying that the



ZAYYAD

government would rather pocket the money once it has ensured its own facilities, primarily in the capital Abuja, are unaffected.

In addition to turning around large, unwieldy and inefficient utilities, investors will have to work within a very run-down infrastructure.

The 20% being offered to Nigerians will be a staggered process, Zayyad says, because of the scale of the investment. Both Nitel and Nepa, for example, are valued at about \$10bn, which would mean 20% would amount to \$2bn or 170-billion naira, which represented about a third of the market's capitalisation. "We have to do it in such a way that the market will be able to absorb it."

Nepa, a huge monolith, is to be unpacked into 25 separate companies, eight power stations, 15 distribution and sales companies and

one national grid company. There will also be one marketing company in neighbouring Niger which receives 70% of its power from Nigeria.

Nigeria's privatisation is a continental success story, says Zayyad. He claims that it has not had its share of publicity because the first phase was a domestic programme whereas countries such as Uganda, Kenya and Ghana had benefited from the publicity generated by using foreign consultants.

Labour was initially resistant to the process, fearing job losses. However, the improvement of entices has also allowed their expansion and jobs have been created, helping to get the unions on board, Zayyad says.

He blamed the obstruction by civil servants and ministries — whose power was being undermined or even removed by privatisation — for delays and problems. But it promises to improve people's lives in very real ways. The resources which the government has poured into loss making can now be diverted into education, health, roads and social spending, while also broadening the income and employment base.

Zayyad — in Johannesburg while in SA for a conference on privatisation — said it was too early to say whether there would be interest from this country. But Nigerian consultant Foluso Philips, also in SA for the conference, complained that business ties between the two countries were slow in forming. He blamed this on Nigeria's negative image caused primarily by its politics.

"The message I get is that why should businesses go through the stress of going there when they can carry on in this part of the world."

But Zayyad says the opportunities in Nigeria are enormous. In addition to the government's privatisation programme, the country's 36 states had their own programmes. The numbers of people involved and potential investment returns could only make such ventures a success.

Public servants reject Nigerian wage deal

Kingsley Kubeyinje

LAGOS — Unless urgent steps are taken, the Nigerian public service, known for its docility, may see an unprecedented labour crisis, following the rejection of a new pay structure by workers in state government employ.

From one state to the other, public servants employed by Nigeria's 36 state governments are rejecting the new monthly minimum wage fixed at 2 800 naira and are insisting that they should earn the same pay as their colleagues in the federal service.

Three weeks ago, the Nigerian federal government awarded a 300% across-the-board pay rise for its more than 400 000 employees

The state governments, most of which are not viable and look up to the federal government for more than 90% of their revenues, have said that they cannot pay even the new 2 800 naira monthly minimum without increased subvention from central government

The Lagos state government, the richest among all the 36 states, shocked its workers early this week when it said all its yearly subvention from the federal coffers would not be

enough to pay its more than 60 000 workers the new pay

Under new dispensation, the lowest-paid federal worker will take home 5 200 naira monthly, up from the previous 1 200 naira, while the lowest paid worker employed by a state government will take home 2 800 naira, up from the 1 200 naira

But from the different states, the workers are poised to reject the new minimum pay. Already, workers in Oyo, Kano and Anambra states have rejected it, while insisting that both federal and state workers "patronise the same markets"

Labour leader Oyekan Ariye has described the discrepancy as unconstitutional, adding "a messenger in Kano, Kwara or Ondo state carries files like a messenger at the federal level"

A worker in the employ of the Lagos government, Richard Akindele, said there was no way a state employee would earn less than a federal worker

"The government will be brewing discontent if it insists on paying differential wages," he said

Union leaders in the Lagos State Civil Service said they meet the state government on the issue

DD 28/9/98 (226)

Abubakar burnishes his image

paint a positive picture of his country as he promises a speedy return to democracy

Nigerian leader seizes opportunity at UN General Assembly to

By FARRUK HAO
United Nations

Nigeria's Abubakar took full advantage last week of the golden opportunity the annual opening of the UN General Assembly every September offers new heads of government to refurbish the image of their nations.

Abubakar, who took office after Sam Abacha died on June 8 of what was ruled a heart attack, used his first appearance at the assembly as Nigeria's president to promise that the nation's dominant military will restore democracy by next May. He also won some praise from US and other officials for his programmes to improve human rights in Nigeria and to open up the economy to competition.

"I think the world now wants democracy," Abubakar said. "Our goal is to return our country to a democratically elected civilian government on May 29 1999."

In a speech to the assembly on Thursday, Abubakar pointedly mentioned what he claimed would be his government's "short tenure", and discussed a transition process that would lead to presidential elections next February 27. "Every stage of the elections may be freely observed by international monitors from the UN, the Commonwealth and other international bodies," he promised.

In addition, he contended that in the nearly four months since he took over, Nigeria's poor human rights record has improved. "The commitment to human rights has been amply demonstrated by the release of political detainees, granting of pardon to some convicted persons and the withdrawal of charges against others," he argued.

"These arguments have apparently softened the stance of the US,

wooing world leaders.

Nigerian leader

Abubakar

addressed the

53rd session

of the United

Nations

General

Assembly on

Thursday

Clung

progress on

human

rights and

democracy,

Abubakar

urged the

international

community to

lift economic

sanctions to

support the

silent, but

peaceful

revolution."



RICHARD DREW/AP

which is planning to send political advisers to Nigeria during the pre-election period. After a Wednesday meeting between Abubakar and US President Bill Clinton, US Secretary

of State Madeleine Albright praised the Nigerian general for trying to end Abuja's international isolation Clinton did not explicitly promise any improvements in US-

Nigerian relations in return but according to one US source, Washington may be willing to restore direct travel links with Nigeria and to help the country secure

debt relief. The US and the Commonwealth suspended many types of economic assistance following the 1993 execution of author Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other minority

(AAB) Star 30/9/98

rights activists by Abacha's regime. The warmer attitude towards Abubakar, however, has already drawn some criticism by human rights groups, who have been guarded about the level of improvements in Nigeria in recent months.

"We continue to have serious concerns about respect for human rights in Nigeria, including the right to take part in genuine elections," Peter Takirambudde, executive director for Human Rights Watch/Africa, wrote in a letter this week to Clinton.

"The international community should exercise caution before embracing the new breed of state, and set clear and stringent guidelines as to what is required for a credible transitional programme," he added.

In particular, Takirambudde warned that some pro-democracy groups in Nigeria still believed that the transition process "remains far too closely controlled by the military."

"An electoral commission should be seen to be completely impartial, yet at least three members of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) have played prominent roles on a partisan basis in previous political processes," he wrote. "The military government has appointed the secretary to the commission and its regional commissioners, leaving it open to further manipulation."

Abubakar, however, contended that his government was "committed to sustaining the independence, integrity and transparency of the INEC" and noted that UN and

Commonwealth teams would meet with the INEC to discuss elections arrangements.

The US Chapter of Amnesty International raised similar concerns in a September 21 letter to Clinton, pointing out, for example, that "the lack of freedom in Nigeria directly impinges on how free and fair the (transition-to-democracy) process will be."

Some of the doubts over the military regime's credibility surfaced after UN secretary-general Kofi Annan visited in June to meet Abubakar and detained opposition leader Moshood Abiola, the presumed winner of 1993 elections. Annan stated that he trusted Abubakar's commitment to a democratic transition and announced Abiola's willingness - after four years in jail - to set aside his claim to the presidency.

Just days later, as Abiola's impending release from prison was being discussed, the political leader died of an apparent heart attack while meeting with US officials. Even an autopsy by US doctors who found no signs of foul play failed to convince Abiola's supporters, and they rioted for days.

Abiola enjoyed particular support in southern Nigeria, whereas the country has been ruled by military leaders from the north for much of its recent history.

Some pro-democracy activists believe that Abubakar and his top aides may be willing to transfer power to civilians, but are less eager to hand it over if any southerner should win elections. - Sapa-IPS

“ We continue to have concerns about human rights ”

Rivals clash over oil rights in Nigeria

(226) ND 30/9/98

NIGERIA — Clashes between two rival communities fighting over oil rights in southwest Nigeria have claimed hundreds of lives

Otunba Mallon Omogbemi, a spokesman for the Ijaje ethnic community in Ondo State, said that 500 people had been killed in 10 days of clashes with members of the local Ijaw tribe, reportedly over new oil wells promising jobs and money to the poverty-stricken communities.

He said the crisis erupted on September 19 when Ijaw youths "went to Obe-Apata, killed and maimed several people, looted their property and burnt down the whole community".

About 50 villages in the riverine area close to the town of Okitipupa had been razed, he claimed, causing around 80,000 people to flee

Omogbemi called on the government to set up an inquiry into the violence and the source of arms used — Sapa-AFP

Nigeria needs \$6bn for more phone lines

Kingsley Kubeyinje

LAGOS — Nigeria needs \$6bn to improve its telecommunications network and is seeking foreign investment to help achieve this.

Nigerian Communications Minister Patrick Aziza said because so much money was needed, the military government had decided to open the telecommunications sector to local and foreign investors

Up until now government

had a monopoly on providing telecommunications services in the country.

Aziza told a seminar in Nigeria's federal capital, Abuja, recently that the \$6bn would be used to install 3-million telephone and 200 000 cellular lines

He said with a population of more than 100-million people and 700 000 telephone lines, the country had a telephone density of one line to 200 people. The ratio was far below the one

line to 100 persons recommended by the international telecommunications union

Aziza said that apart from the initial \$6bn investment, Nigeria would also require \$600m yearly for network expansion. It was hoped that by the year 2010, Nigeria would have 8-million lines. "A partnership with the private sector, therefore, presents the only way to attract the multibillion-dollar investment requirement for network expansion," he said

(22b) BD 2/4/98

Nigerian youths radicalised by poverty in midst of oil-rich delta

Port Harcourt, Nigeria – In the struggle over who should rule Nigeria and control its treasure of oil, no place is more important – or more on edge – than this gritty port and the surrounding swamplands of the Niger River delta

It has been 28 months since Nigeria's military government executed writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and other dissidents to quash the demands of local tribal communities, notably that they be allowed to share in billions of dollars of oil profits pumped from beneath the Nigerian delta

Authorities keep tight military control on the delta, with frequent arrests of suspected dissidents. But opposition to the government and its oil policy is growing, especially among the young, according to residents and Nigerian political scholars

The government has long

contained dissent by co-opting or intimidating tribal elders. But the delta's continued poverty and environmental problems have radicalised youths who "no longer recognise the elders' authority", said Chnedu Uchegbu, a researcher for the Port Harcourt-based Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law

Protests and violence that began with Saro-Wiwa's Ogoni tribe continue to spread among other groups, crimping oil production. As Nigeria's military ruler, General Sanj Abacha, appears to be aiming to keep power despite his promise to permit elections and civilian rule by autumn, many Nigerians worry that political uncertainty could slide into civil upheaval

The worries appear deepest in the delta. Tangled in the conflict are oil companies – includ-

(226) ARG 14/4/98
ing United States firms Texaco, Mobil and Chevron – that for years have been the government's business partners in pumping and selling the oil

Environmental and human rights groups have condemned oil companies – particularly the British-Dutch giant, Royal Dutch Shell – for environmental damage and accused them of complicity in the repression of dissidents, notably Ogonis

Shell is trying to repair its image with a year-old human rights policy and funding for a broad development programme for delta communities. But Nigerian scholars warn, and some company officials concede, that the effort can do little against political repression and poverty in the delta as long as the military continues to rule

Nigeria's oil industry boomed in the late 1960s. The more money it earned, the more

the military tightened its control, declaring in 1969 the government's sole ownership of mineral rights

For decades, the delta's mostly rural farmers and fishermen have seen little benefit from tens of billions of dollars' worth of oil pumped out of their homelands. In Nigeria's joint venture with Shell, which produces almost half the country's oil, the government takes about 70% of the sales price, Shell officials said.

Twenty percent pays production costs, Shell gets about 5% and minor partners share the rest. Theoretically, the government is supposed to send 13% of gross oil revenues to develop "oil communities". But villages still lack electricity, running water, schools and clinics, and residents say the development money is being diverted to enrich government officials – The Washington Post

BUSINESS

NIGERIA *Militarisation of Delta region increases in response to civil unrest*

Ogonis' oil protests gather volume

(226) CT(MR) 15/4/98

JAMES RUPERT

Port Harcourt — In the struggle over who should rule Nigeria and control its treasure of oil, no place is more important — or more on edge — than gritty Port Harcourt and the surrounding Niger river delta

It has been 28 months since Nigeria's military government executed writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and other dissidents to quash demands of tribal communities that they be allowed to share in oil revenues pumped from beneath the delta

Authorities keep tight military control on the delta, with frequent arrests of suspected dissidents. But opposition to the government and its oil policy is growing, residents say

The government has long contained dissent by co-opting tribal elders. But the delta's poverty and environmental problems have radicalised youths who "no longer recognise the elders' authority," said Chinedu Uchegbu, of the Port Harcourt-based Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law

Protests and violence that began with Saro-Wiwa's Ogoni tribe continue to spread, crumpling oil production. As Nigeria's military ruler, General Sani Abacha, appears to be intending to keep power, despite his promise to permit civilian rule this year, many Nigerians worry that political uncertainty could slide into civil upheaval

Tangled in the conflict are oil companies that have been the government's business partners in selling the delta's oil. Environmental and human rights groups have condemned



particularly Royal Dutch/Shell for environmental damage and accused it of complicity in the repression of dissidents. Shell is trying to repair its image by funding a development programme for delta communities

Nigeria's oil industry boomed in the 1960s. The more money it earned, the more the military tightened its control, declaring in 1969 the government's sole ownership of mineral rights

The delta's farmers and fishermen have seen little benefit from tens of billions of dollars worth of oil pumped out of their homelands. In Nigeria's joint venture with Shell, the government takes 70 percent of the sales price, 20 percent pays production costs, Shell gets 5 percent and minor partners share the rest, says Shell

The government is supposed to spend 13 percent of gross oil revenues to develop "oil com-

munities" But villages still lack electricity, running water, schools and clinics. Residents say the money is being diverted to enrich government officials

In 1990, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People launched protests, demanding a share of royalties, a halt to oil spills and political autonomy. The government responded brutally with sweeping arrests

The protests and violence spread, in part, Nigerian scholars say, because authorities used government-appointed tribal chiefs to encourage fighting among Ogonis and neighbouring groups. By 1993, Shell was forced to halt its Ogoniland operations

In 1994, after four Ogoni tribal leaders were slain, Abacha's government charged Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni leaders with murder. A tribunal convicted them and they were

hanged. The executions shattered the Ogoni protest campaign, forcing many of its leaders into exile

There has been "an unprecedented militarisation of the (delta) region", Uchegbu said. A new anti-crime patrol was intimidating oil field villages where protests had increased

Protesters routinely occupy and close oil platforms to get government attention for their grievances. Following global protests about police brutality, Shell has distanced itself from the government's use of force. It says it has "on many occasions" appealed for a fair trial of the 19 Ogonis still held in connection with Saro-Wiwa's case

But human rights groups say Shell is failing to exert the influence it holds as Nigeria's business partner in exporting nearly half of the country's oil — The Washington Post

Nigeria's main party picks Abacha to stand for president

00 17/4/98 (226)

Hilary Andersson

LAGOS — Nigeria's strongest political party, the United Nigeria Congress Party formally adopted military leader Gen Sam Abacha yesterday as its presidential candidate to stand in elections in August.

This is a key political moment for Nigeria because the party took the overwhelming lead in recent local and state elections.

Abacha took power in 1993 after annulment of democratic elections. The following year, he announced a three-year programme for a transition to democracy which would culminate in a handover to civilian rule this year.

If three of the other parties do likewise later this week, as is likely, Abacha will be on the road to victory, despite not having publicly said whether he wanted to contest elections. Only the Grass Roots Democratic Party may prove to be a thorn in his side.

Two people were killed and scores arrested in clashes between police and protesters at a pro-Abacha rally in Ibadan on Wednesday.

Nigerians wary of Abacha's poll

APG 17/4/98

(226)

JAMES RUPERT

Lagos, Nigeria - Nigeria's military ruler, General Sani Abacha, is preparing an election in August for a president to lead Nigeria's first civilian government in 15 years. State television, government officials and newspaper ads placed by Abacha loyalists say he is the only man for the job and will be a sure winner.

But according to virtually everyone else a visitor meets in Nigeria these days, what is being prepared is not a real election - and if it were, General Abacha would be booted out of power. "These people (in government) are thieves. If we had a choice, no one would keep them there," said Ben Opara recently as he sought shade and, if possible, work, on a sweltering Lagos street corner.

In General Abacha's sixth year as Nigeria's head of state, people line up for hours or days for petrol. State-owned electrical grids, railroads and phone systems barely function, largely because corrupt officials siphon off their funds, Western and Nigerian economists say.

United Nations studies say half of Nigerians have no access to basic health services or safe drinking water and rate the country's overall level of development just ahead that of Congo, formerly known as Zaire.

Nigerians say their nation, as Africa's biggest oil producer, should be one of its wealthiest, and many are angry at its failings. But even more, they say, they are exhausted, dispirited and apathetic.

"Many people have almost resigned themselves to whatever happens," said Joseph Otteh, who heads a pro-democracy organisation in Lagos, the Social and Economic Rights Action Centre. "The main thing has become how to work out their survival in a very harsh economic climate."

General Abacha's most prominent political challengers in recent years have been jailed, exiled, assassinated or executed. "The economic collapse has gutted the middle class, and repression has decapitated any alternative leadership" to General Abacha, said a Nigerian political scientist who asked not to be named.

As a result, Nigerians "will be forced to accept his reimposition", a prospect that risks civil upheaval, said Sam Amadi, an attorney with United Action for Democracy, an anti-Abacha alliance of labour, professional and civic movements. "There is a very serious possibility of the various ethnic groups deciding to go their different ways," raising fears of civil war, Mr Amadi said.

Nigerian and foreign analysts disagree over the likelihood of a broad upheaval, but even the possibility is worrisome for this continent. The roughly 100 million Nigerians represent a sixth of the population of sub-Saharan Africa, and any breakdown in order here would overwhelm the region with refugees.



REUTERS
Protest: Nigerian police open fire from the back of a truck to disperse protesters demonstrating against General Sani Abacha in the southwestern city of Ibadan

General Abacha, 54, is the latest of many soldiers who have ruled Nigeria for 28 of its 38 years of independence. Like his predecessors, he declares that only his rule has saved Nigeria from disintegrating along ethnic lines.

In 1914, British colonisers joined the homelands of three major ethnic groups - the Hausa-Fulani in the north, Yorubas in the west and Ibos in the east - into a colony they named Nigeria. In 1960, as the British left, the Hausa-Fulani elite dominated Nigeria's first government. In 1966, Ibo officers led a coup that was quickly thwarted, anti-Ibo pogroms erupted in the north, and the eastern, Ibo region soon seceded as the state of Biafra.

Nigeria crushed Biafra in an ensuing civil war and imposed a blockade that starved to death, by some estimates, a million or more civilians by the time the war ended in 1970. The war helped persuade the Nigerian military it had a leading role as guarantor of the nation, and a boom in Nigeria's oil income during the war made power more attractive.

General Abacha rose to prominence as a key aide to Major-General Mohammed Buhari, who toppled Nigeria's last civilian government at the end of 1983, and to General Buhari's successor, General Ibrahim Babangida.

General Babangida promised a transition to civilian rule but aborted a 1993 presidential election that a Yoruba southerner, Moshood Abiola, had apparently won. General Babangida handed power to a hastily installed civilian-military interim government, but General Abacha seized power out-

right three months later. General Abacha's rule quickly turned repressive. He had Mr Abiola arrested for claiming to be Nigeria's legitimate president. He drew global condemnation for overseeing, in 1995, the execution of nine ethnic Ogoni environmental activists, including writer Ken Saro-Wiwa, who had been convicted of murder.

At the same time, General Abacha began a tightly controlled transition intended to inaugurate civilian rule on October 1, 1998, and promised that he would not run for president. He had a constitution drafted for the civilian government but has kept it secret. He appointed the election officials who licensed five political parties - four of which have called for General Abacha to become the sole candidate for the presidency.

In Washington, the Clinton administration is in the final stages of a policy review on Nigeria that has split the president's senior advisers, administration officials said.

One group is supporting greater engagement with the Abacha government in hopes of influencing the political transition, while the other favours greater efforts to isolate General Abacha.

With four months left before the presidential election, General Abacha has not declared himself a candidate but has done nothing to discourage a campaign calling for him to stay in power.

One group - called Youths Earnestly Ask for Abacha - is subsidising the sale of imported soap and rice bearing General Abacha's name. Others have marketed Abacha-brand television sets. - The Washington Post

Abacha gets unanimous backing

CT 17/4/98 (226)

ABUJA: Military dictator General Sani Abacha yesterday was unanimously chosen by Nigeria's largest government-backed political party to run for president in civilian elections scheduled for August.

All 1 500 candidates the United Nigeria Congress Party voted for Abacha at a convention in Kaduna, the party announced.

There was no word on whether Abacha would accept the nomination, although the move came nine days after his military regime ordered each of Nigeria's five sanctioned political parties to ratify the general's presidential candidacy.

Abacha has not declared that he will run in the poll although he is widely seen to be engineering his transformation from military dictator to civilian president.

Announcing yesterday's decision, UNCP party chairman Mr Issa Mohammed praised Abacha — who

took power following a 1993 coup — as a strong and stable leader.

In order to nominate Abacha, the party had reversed its constitution which disallowed non-members from running for office.

"It will be recalled that the country was on the brink of disintegration when General Abacha assumed the country's leadership in 1993," Mohammed said. "There was nearly anarchy and fears of a break-up of the country were real."

He went on to describe the military strongman as a statesman blessed with the dexterity to "pull Nigeria back from the edge of the precipice".

After seizing power, Abacha suspended the country's constitution and dissolved all government departments.

He has repeatedly pledged to hand the government over to a civilian leadership, but has reneged each time so far.

Several UNCP members said the only reason Abacha had been chosen as presidential candidate was because the party was under threat from the country's military leaders.

"As a matter of fact, it was imposed on the party by the government and there was absolutely nothing anyone could do about it. They are running the show. What could we do?" said UNCP senatorial candidate Alhaji Sanusi Batanko.

A leading pro-democracy group, the Civil Liberties Organisation, warned that Abacha's candidacy would spark anger and unrest among the country's repressed opposition groups.

"There are aggressive (opposition) forces will not sit idle and swallow this," said the organisation's leader, Mr Abdul Oroh referring to shadowy groups that have threatened an armed uprising against Abacha — Sapa-AP.

Motshkega, Appla man under scrutiny

ANC commission of inquiry into spying activities presents its report to party's national executive committee next weekend

OWN CORRESPONDENT

ANC inquires into spying allegations against Gauteng Premier Mathole Motshkega are concentrating on allegations that he gave information, in the apartheid-era, to both the police security branch and military intelligence

The ANC investigations come after long-held suspicions in the Pretoria townships of Mamelodi and Atteridgeville, where he conducted law clinics in the 1980s

Motshkega denies the claims

The spying allegations against yet another senior government official come after claims by Pan Africanist Congress MP Patricia de Lille that seven senior members of the ANC, including three cabinet members, were in a list of 12 names of apartheid-era spies in top positions in government

De Lille's allegations came after President Mandela refused to appoint PAC president, the Rev Stanley Mogoba, to the parliamentary intel-

ligence committee

Mandela told Mogoba he did not "want him humiliated by a security check".

The PAC withdrew Mogoba's name, as allegations that Mogoba had been an apartheid era informer flourished

Mogoba denied these investigations are under way that a top-ranking Azaman People's Liberation Army (Apla) commander was also controlled by SA intelligence services

Guarded response

Mandela has consistently refused to reveal the list of names of apartheid-era spies

The ANC has been guarded in its response, and has merely drawn attention to the terms of reference of its internal commission of inquiry investigating the Motshkega allegations

The commission, established in February under the chairmanship of lawyer George Negota, was instructed to investigate allegations emanating from media reports on the alleged improper conduct of

Motshkega from 1986 to 1997

The commission was looking into

- Allegations of possible involvement in fraudulent administration of international donor funding;
- His possible involvement in the unapproved use of donor funding;
- Allegations of a lack of financial accountability and inadequate planning, concerning donor funding;
- Allegations concerning nepotism and autocratic management;

- The exact nature of his relationship with anybody insofar as it may have had, or has, a negative or detrimental effect on the ANC

ANC leaders, including a number of cabinet members, have known about the allegations for some years

In the late 1980s a senior trade unionist, and later ANC leader, was asked to investigate allegations, but little seems to have happened

Firmer charges came from ANC intelligence sources in the early 1990s, but still the ANC failed to act.

Some now say this was because there was a wide array of charges of



SPYING ALLEGATIONS Premier Mathole Motshkega denies it all

this nature being levelled at a number of top officials and, given the pressures of negotiations, and later of government, not all were adequately investigated.

The ANC is also wary of apartheid-managed disinformation cam-

pagans against senior members

The commission is to present its report to the ANC's national executive committee next weekend

But the commission does not appear to have seen a report allegedly handed to Deputy President Thabo Mbeki late last year by two high National Intelligence Agency managers detailing espionage allegations against Motshkega

Mbeki has apparently more than once intervened in the running of Gauteng ANC sources say he and Safety and Security Minister Sydney Mufamadi pressed Motshkega to ensure ANC vice-chairman for Gauteng Paul Mashatile was appointed safety and security MEC - and not a Motshkega intimate.

In addition, Mbeki and Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo made arrangements for Teddy Phakane, a former exile and ANC loyalist in the Department of Foreign Affairs, to be seconded to Gauteng to head Motshkega's office

Motshkega and some of his staff have reportedly opposed

the nomination

And a month ago, Sumpwive Saul (28), a former East Rand policeman Motshkega appointed as political adviser, was dismissed after top ANC officials expressed unhappiness with his appointment.

Top former security branch officers claim Motshkega was handled by Lieutenant-Colonel Willem "Timol" Coetzee, who was suspended and then dismissed when former safety and security MEC Jessie Duarte took office.

Third force

Intimates of Coetzee claim that, after a rapid rise in the security branch, serving in Johannesburg (where he allegedly first met Motshkega), then Soweto and the East Rand, he saw no further promotion for six years after allegations he was involved in the murder of an ANC activist in 1983

Additional allegations in the hands of the attorney-general and ANC investigators are that Coetzee

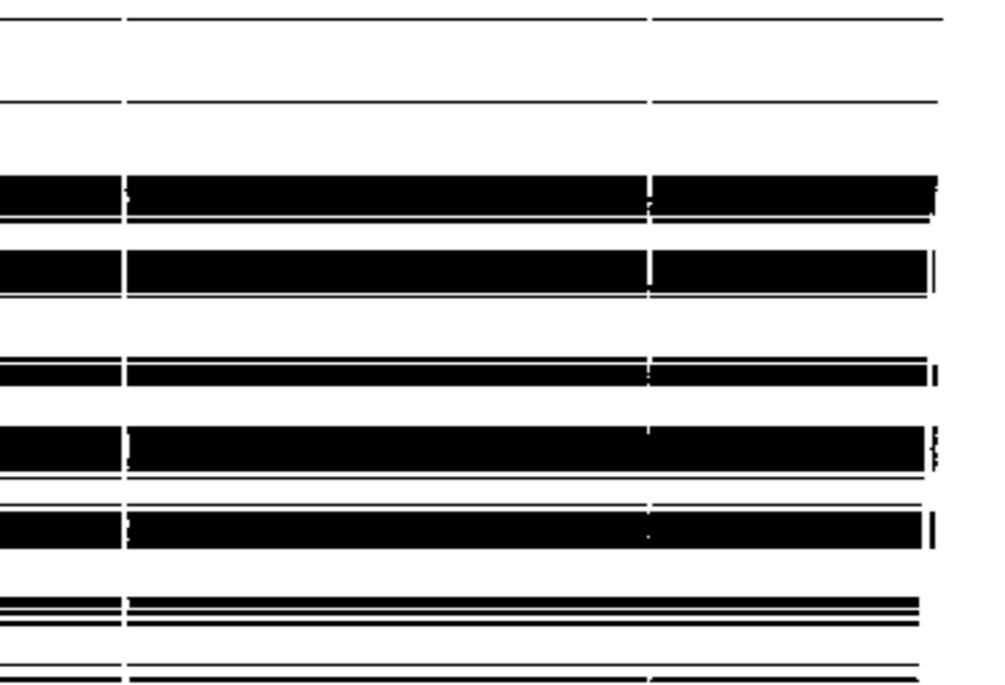
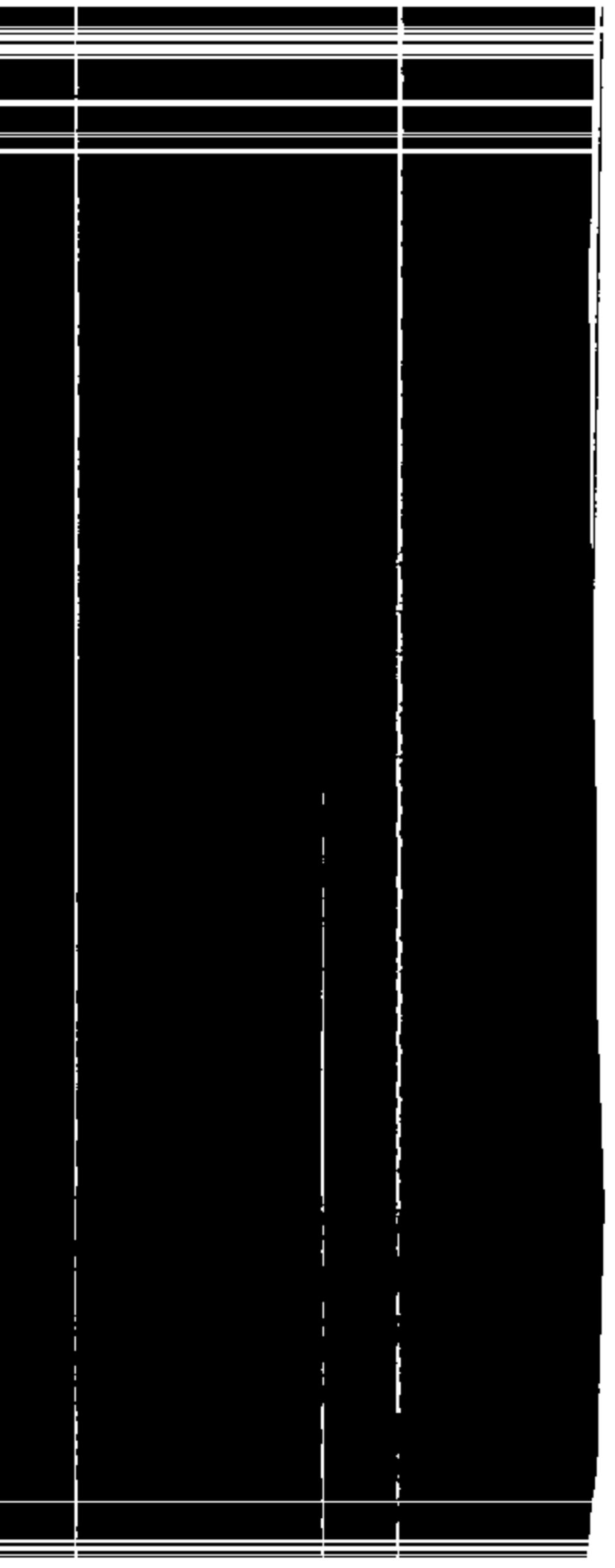
was also involved during the 1990s in East Rand "third force" train and taxi violence, along with a close colleague, Anton Pretorius who was suspended with him

While with the Johannesburg security branch in the early 1980s, and when he was alleged to have been Motshkega's handler, Coetzee was in charge of investigating cross-border activities of liberation movements

Coetzee has not responded to messages left for him in an attempt to hear his side of the saga. Attempts to contact Pretorius also failed. Both have applied for amnesty to the TRC

A former senior security branch official said Johannesburg handled more than 260 to 270 paid informers at a time, all senior officials in anti-apartheid organisations, earning R500 to more than R50 000 a month

Receipts or reports linking Motshkega to police security or military intelligence have apparently been foiled by the widespread destruction of documents before the 1994 elections.



Don't execute six, Nigerian regime warned

Star 20/4/98 (2ab)

SA joins Britain and Commonwealth in condemning death penalty imposed on men found guilty of plotting coup.

REUTERS
London

South Africa yesterday joined Britain and the Commonwealth in calling on Nigeria not to carry out the death sentences passed against six men convicted of plotting to overthrow military ruler General Sani Abacha.

Abacha's ruling military council must ratify the sentences on his former deputy, Lieutenant-General Oladipo Diya, and the other five before they can be carried out.

Questioning the credibility of their closed trial, with only military lawyers responsible for the men's defence, the Department of Foreign Affairs in Pretoria said Nigeria should consider the repercussions of the executions.

"It is likely there may be an adverse reaction, both inside Nigeria and internationally, which would impact on all levels of Nigerian society," it said.

"The SA Government would strongly urge the Nigerian military government to refrain from carrying out the six death sentences handed down."

Nigeria has been under limited international sanctions since the 1995 hanging of author Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others for murder. Western countries have threatened an extension of sanctions, although not yet to crude oil exports, if Nigeria does not improve its attitude to human rights and restore democracy this year.

Britain appealed to Nigeria yesterday to respect the civil rights of the six sentenced to death.

A British Foreign Office spokesman also said Britain was unhappy that the trial, which ended on Tuesday, had been conducted almost entirely behind closed doors since it started on February 14.

"We are appealing to the Nigerian authorities to treat the alleged coup plotters fully in line with the international convention on civil and political rights," she said. "This includes an undertaking for convicted persons to be given the right to seek pardons and the right to appeal."

Britain is at loggerheads with Nigeria over its delay in restoring democracy, and the way the trial was conducted is likely to sour relations.

The Commonwealth has already suspended Nigeria over its human rights record and has threatened to expel the populous oil-producing nation unless it sticks to a promise to restore a democratic system by October.

Commonwealth secretary-general Chief Eneke Anyaoku said the Commonwealth would be "seriously concerned" at the prospect of the death sentences being carried out.

Abacha is expected to stand unopposed in presidential elections on August 1 after securing the backing last week of all five registered parties, a move that Britain and the US condemned.

Nigeria scraps planned August presidential

Hilary Andersson

LAGOS — Presidential elections would be scrapped in Nigeria and replaced by a referendum following the decision of five of the government-registered parties to adopt Gen. Sam Abacha as their presidential candidate, a senior government spokesman, Kalfu Hassan Yusuf, said yesterday.

Presidential elections had been set for August. Abacha, who came to power after democratic elections were annulled by the military in 1993, has been promising for four years to hand over power in a poll this year.

The opposition, which has played no part in the government's programme for a transition to democracy, has declared that it will boycott all elections on the basis that people will have no real choice while opposition leaders are detained or unable to operate freely.

The international community has threatened to tighten existing sanctions against Nigeria if the military does not hand over power to a civilian government in free and fair elections this year.

The government-registered Grass-Roots Democratic Movement opted to back Abacha after a tense convention which ran into the early hours yesterday

in the northern town of Maiduguri.

Last week the other four government-registered parties, including the strongest, the United Nigeria Congress Party, also passed motions adopting Abacha as their presidential candidate in party conventions which they were unexpectedly instructed to hold by the national electoral commission.

At the Grass Roots Democratic Movement conference, Abacha won twice as many votes as his nearest rival, former police chief MD Yusuf, in a ballot held among party delegates gathered from around the country.

Initially the party said it would not ac-

cept Abacha as its candidate as he had not declared his own interest in contesting elections.

Yusuf's supporters held a small demonstration outside the stadium where the convention was being held, after a senior party official resigned saying he did not want to be part of a scheme to impose a key candidate on the party.

Reuters reports from Maiduguri that Nigeria's main opposition group, the United Action for Democracy, called on Nigerians on Sunday to boycott all elections under a transition programme, starting with April 25 national assembly polls. Abacha's new victory is bound to in-

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Poll

BD 2/14/98

tensity cries of foul play from local opposition and democracy groups which already dismiss the transition plan for restoring democracy to the country.

The plan to restore civilian rule has come under fire from local democracy campaigners and supporters of detained presidential claimant Moshood Abiola, the presumed winner of the last presidential poll, annulled by the army in 1993.

"This is it. The game is up," said one Western diplomat. "It is too soon to tell whether there will be any more international action than there has been, but clearly Abacha is not too concerned about the possibility."

LAGOS — Nigerian newspapers said yesterday the military government's transition to democracy had been effectively cut short by Gen Sani Abacha's adoption as sole candidate for presidential elections.

On Monday, Abacha won the backing of all five political parties as their candidate for elections on August 1 under a much-criticised plan to

Single candidacy 'a blow for Nigeria'

restore civilian rule.

"The political parties have not provided the requisite avenue for choice-making by Nigerians. They have not been made habitable for forces not inside the military government's pocket," the independent Vanguard said. "Abacha has not yet

said he would take part in elections, but is expected to. If he does, he will face a simple referendum with Nigerians voting either for or against him staying in office. The transition to democracy, begun in 1995, has long been attacked as unfair by opposition groups and supporters of detained presidential claimant Moshood Abiola who is believed to have won annulled 1993 elections.

"Whatever government may say and do in the next couple of months, one thing is obvious. The transition programme could be said to have ended with yesterday's statement," said the National Concord, a paper owned by Abiola.

The state-owned Daily Times said "while things might not be perfect it did not mean democracy had been abandoned. "There could be a slip here and there, but this does not detract from the making of democracy." — Reuter

Comment: Page 13

Britain slams Abacha

Page 2
LONDON 22/11/98

In a human rights report issued yesterday, Britain condemned Nigeria's military leader General Sani Abacha for securing the sole nomination in presidential elections and hinted at sanctions even before an October deadline for Nigeria to return to civilian rule.

"An election with one candidate is not a free and fair election," Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said. "Democracy requires a free and open choice." Cook spoke at a news conference to launch the year-old Labour Party government's first report on human rights, which it has pledged to make the main plank of its foreign policy.

The 45-page report focused on what Cook called "dialogue". It cited as practical achievements "closer Chinese integration into the international human rights system," "partnership" with Indonesia and the "tough" Commonwealth position on Nigeria.

On Monday, after the British report had been supplied, Nigerian military dictator

Bold project to help Maputo's former refugees

TRONCE SCALE
INDEPENDENT FOREIGN SERVICE

LONDON Most of the 300 000 Mozambican former refugees who live in South Africa want to remain in the country and only 75 000 to 100 000 want to go home.

This is the finding of Refugadio, a foundation founded and supported by the Dutch Refugee Council and the Africa-European Institute. At the request of the Africa-European Institute and European Parliamentarians for Africa (Awepa), Refugadio has launched a four-year project to support Mozambican former refugees of the conflict in that country.

The project was launched in London on Monday by its patron, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who said the refugees should not be regarded as mere statistics. "We are dealing with

people with God's children," he told an Awepa seminar at Westminster.

He said that the former refugees were entitled to human rights, but the reality was that they were being exploited as cheap labour and were living in horrendous circumstances.

Around 300 000 Mozambican former refugees live in the rural eastern and northern border area, having fled the provinces of Maputo, Gaza and Inhambane in their own country.

The majority cultivate grain and vegetables on small plots allocated by South African traditional chiefs. Most families have members who work on farms and in shops or mines and others try to earn an income by producing beer and other home-made products such as textiles and baskets.

The Catholic Bishop of Witbank, the Rt Rev Mogahe Nkhumisho, said many of these families were unable to return because of a lack of jobs and essential services in Mozambique.

While the shortage of jobs in rural areas on the South African side of the border occasionally led to conflict between the former refugees and South Africans, it was also true that a large number of Mozambicans and South Africans in the affected area shared tribal origins and were blood relatives.

He said that among the violations of rights to which Mozambicans were frequently subjected were arrests and forced repatriation, often just before the former refugees were to be paid for work done for various employers.

Between 1993 and 1996, 63 000 refugees returned to Mozambique from SA. The Refugadio project will last four years, during which its backers aim to secure a legal status for the former refugees. The project has been bolstered by a promise from Home Affairs Minis-

ter Mangosuthu Buthelez that the government wishes to solve the problems of former refugees by legalising their status or supporting voluntary return to Mozambique.

Refugadio hopes to stimulate local development initiatives in Mozambique to increase the success of their reintegration into communities there.

In addition to support for voluntary returns to Mozambique and for those applying for legal status, Refugadio hopes to establish a rehabilitation programme in SA for former refugees who wish to settle permanently.

This year, the project will concentrate on the opening of a period during which the Mozambican former refugees are able to apply for a legal status, and on the voluntary return of 5 000 former Mozambicans who will choose not to wait for a legal status.

Next year the programme will start with a rehabilitation programme in South Africa and in the following two years the rehabilitation programmes on both sides of the border will be incorporated into long-term development plans in both countries.

Tutu said yesterday that xenophobia among South Africans living alongside the Mozambican former refugees would remain a reality as long as unemployment was at current levels.

Mr Fernando Fazenda, national director of Mozambique's department for refugees, said his government was in regular contact with the South African High Commission in Maputo to promote the reintegration of former refugees.

To this end, South Africa had already provided technical and financial support for small-scale farming in the areas in Mozambique which had originally produced refugees.

Inventory finds error

Abacha's rubber-stamp poll slammed

(226)

Holding of one-candidate vote, rather than democratic elections, might result in Commonwealth censure

Star 22/4/98

REUTERS AND SAPA-AFP
Lagos

Nigeria's presidential election will be a simple "yes" or "no" vote for military ruler General Sani Abacha after no party put forward a rival candidate, a senior government official said yesterday.

Hassan Yusuf Khalifa of the Transition Implementation Committee, overseeing Nigeria's much-criticised plan to restore democracy, said Abacha would still need to face a ballot even after securing the backing of five parties.

The five parties are the only ones officially recognised by the military regime, and are all financially supported by the authorities. They are not considered by many political observers to represent the real opposition to the regime - widely criticised for the parlous state of the economy, as well as widespread human rights abuses.

During Nigeria's last attempt at civilian elections, the apparent winner, Moshood Abiola, was jailed for declaring himself president, after Abacha staged a bloodless coup and cancelled the voting.

The latest developments have already been condemned by Nigerian opposition and democracy groups, which dismiss the transition plan for restoring democracy to the oil-producing country.

Abacha has not yet said he will contest the poll, but a vast campaign on his behalf has left few Nigerians in doubt that he

hopes to move from military to civilian rule, as most of his fellow west African rulers have done.

Nigeria's main opposition group, the United Action for Democracy, on Sunday called on Nigerians to boycott all elections under the transition programme, starting with April 25 National Assembly polls.

The National Democratic Coalition, which supports Abiola, said Nigerians should be prepared for strikes and civil disobedience to persuade Abacha to go.

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook indicated yesterday that sanctions may be imposed on Nigeria over its political move to impose a one-candidate presidential poll.

Speaking at a London press conference, Cook said the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Edinburgh had "empowered a ministerial action group to trigger the list of sanctions agreed" if Nigeria did not move towards democracy.

But he indicated that steps to censure Nigeria might not be taken until the October deadline agreed to by the Commonwealth had passed.

In the United States, White House spokesman Michael McCurry declined to say whether the administration was considering sanctions or other measures to pressure Abacha.

"The US government strongly objects to that form (of election) and is disappointed by the lack of democratic procedures in Nigeria," he said.

Oil-rich Nigeria's bounty squandered propping up its army

Not only do communities in Nigeria's Delta state not benefit from oil money, they also have to endure sitting in petrol queues, writes Ian Stewart

THE blazing equatorial sun ships below the horizon, but the sky over the Niger delta flickers with the roaring orange exhaust flames of a dozen oil rigs.

After dark Juliet Udenne, a struggling high school student, reads her homework by the eerie glow. Her shanty village sits just a few hundreds metres from an enormous gas flare at the foot of an inland Shell oil relay station. "What we need is electricity," she says, "but at least this gives us some light."

In the face of tremendous natural wealth — Nigeria is the world's sixth-largest oil exporting country — villagers from the marshy delta are living in subsistence poverty, often without electricity, clean water or even petrol.

In the area's principle city, Port Harcourt, hundreds of short-tempered motorists sit for days in a motionless queue at a filling station where the pumps have run dry.

An oil-rich country that somehow just ran out of petrol — Nigeria's petroleum paradox is fuelled by endemic corruption and mismanagement. Despite earning about

\$4.45bn in oil exports last year, Nigeria's bounty is squandered, pilfered or spent propping up the country's ruling army.

Since oil was first discovered offshore in 1958, Nigeria has emerged as a leading crude oil exporter of about 2-million barrels a day. Shell, Mobil, France's Elf and several other international companies have rushed in to reap the benefits from the fossil fuel reserves.

Through it all, the state-run Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation — the lead partner in all foreign joint ventures — has taken about 75% of the oil revenues. The remainder goes to maintenance, administration fees and the foreign partners.

Left out of the equation, said villagers in the delta, were the communities whose homes were built on top of the vast oil reserves. "They take from us, but we don't get anything," said Tony Okpokparovo, a farmer from the town of Ome, just outside of Port Harcourt. "This is our land they are exploiting."

Nigeria's military government has, however, decreed

that land situated on top of oil and other natural resources is federal property. In return, the government, either unwilling or unable, has done little to help the people of the delta. Civil unrest, protests and violent clashes are often the result.

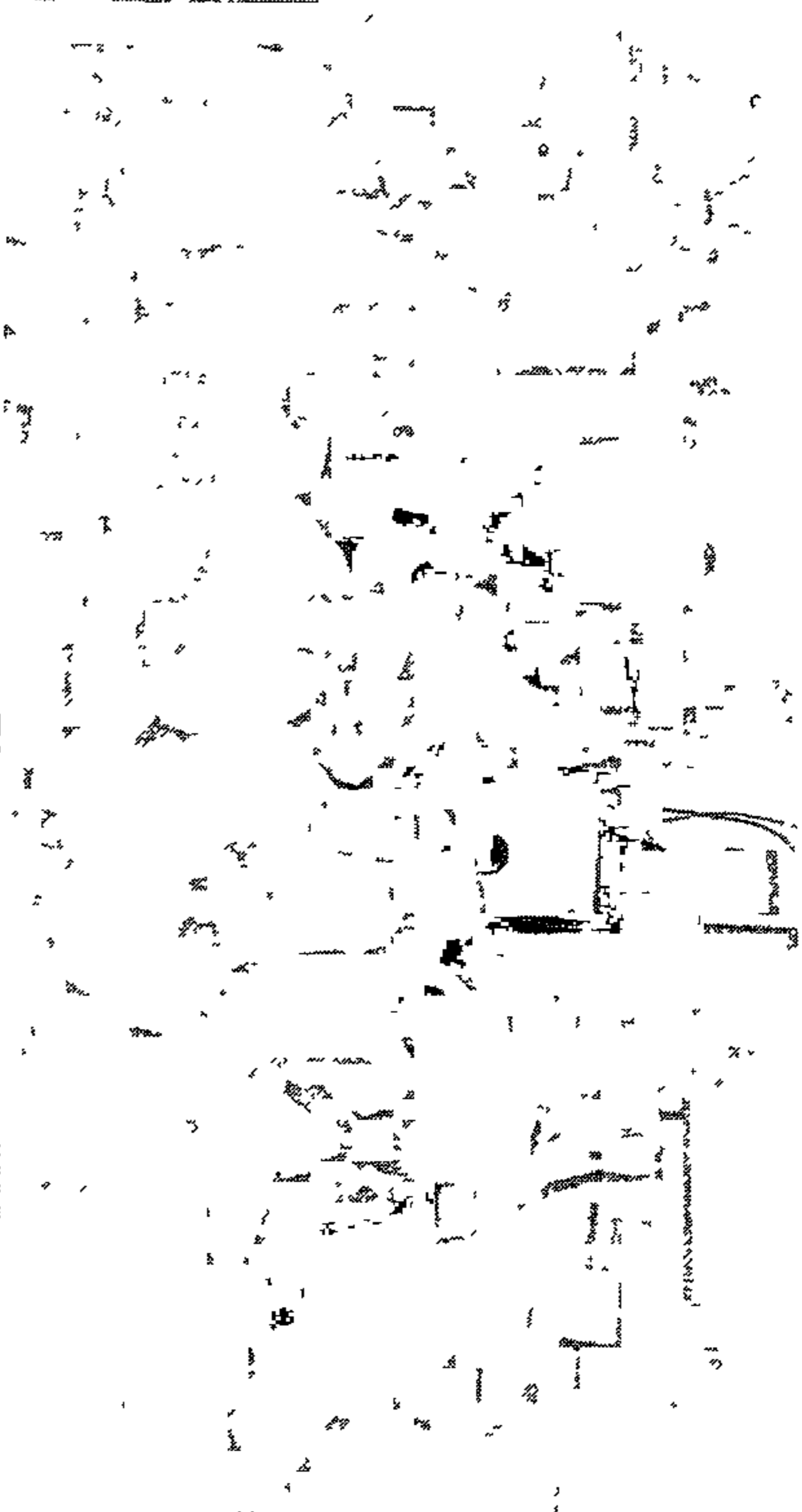
"The main problem is the perception of inequity in the distribution of the nation's wealth," said Victor Dama, the community relations manager at Shell's Nigeria joint venture.

"Each community sees they don't have a road, don't have a hospital, don't have a school and they want us to provide that," Dama said.

Throughout the delta region, there are more than 1,500 villages and hamlets with about 4-million people looking to the oil companies for handouts that the government either cannot or will not provide.

Apart from countless military and police checkpoints along deteriorating roads, the government seems to have virtually washed its hands of the delta states.

"The oil companies are the



Muslim men pray at a filling station in Kano, Nigeria, while waiting all day for petrol

Picture AP

closest thing to government they see in many communities and they see us responsible for them," Dama said.

Indeed, Shell and other foreign oil companies play a larger role in community development than Nigeria's own government. Shell last year spent about \$36m on community as-

sistance programmes in education, infrastructure and medical care. The motivation, company officials concede, has less to do with altruistic humanitarian-

ism and more with trying to quell sabotage and unrest that inhibits operations.

Of the 173 oil spills — most minor — along Shell's network of pipelines in Nigeria's Rivers State last year, about 79% were caused by sabotage, the company said. Even spilled oil, some villagers believe, can earn them more than their cassava and corn crops thanks to compensation paid out by Shell and other oil companies after a leak.

Never far from the surface is the spectre of violent uprisings similar to the Ogoni ethnic tribal clashes in 1993 and 1994. The Ogoni have accused Shell and the government of fouling the environment through oil exploration and extraction.

Environmentalist and author Ken Saro-Wiwa along with eight other Ogoni activists were executed in 1995 by Gen Sani Abacha's military government for allegedly inciting open revolt and encouraging the killings of four electoral candidates. The international community struck back with sanctions against Nigeria, but by

and large, they left their foreign oil operators intact.

Today, the Ogoni territory is still troubled by continuing violence, arson and killings. A bird's eye view of the region from a helicopter reveals burnt out buildings and vandalised oil facilities.

Although the National Petroleum Fund says about \$563m worth of oil revenues last year went toward road work and another \$270m went to the health sector, there is little evidence the money is going to the delta.

It may have gone the way of \$200m allocated last year for the maintenance of Nigeria's four refineries. The cash went missing, according to the finance ministry. Petroleum Minister Dan Etete denies the claim, but can not explain why all but one of the refineries sit idle due to disrepair. As a result, Nigeria, flowing with oil, must import refined fuel.

Nigeria's suspended constitution stipulates that 13% of oil revenues must be channelled back into the oil communities. Shell, however, says that has not happened — Sapa-AP

OPINION

Abacha rules, whatever the guise

General or president at helm, democracy in Nigeria is still the loser, writes Ian Stewart in Abuja

General Sani Abacha



The dictator's expressionless face gazes out from a million posters plastered on government buildings, in hotels and along public walls. His chest covered with self-awarded medals, his khaki uniform neatly pressed, General Sani Abacha rules Nigeria from behind dark sunglasses.

The quintessential army strongman, from atop a dais, or over grainy flickering state-run television broadcasts, Abacha personifies his country's repressive army regime.

Many Nigerians hoping for a shift away from his harsh reign were disappointed on Monday when the last of five government-sanctioned political parties nominated Abacha as its presidential candidate.

Abacha, who seized power in a 1993 coup and has since moved to crush all dissent, now appears poised to win August elections uncontested.

How will General Abacha - who has jailed more than 7 000 dissidents and

critics in his five years in power - remake himself into President Abacha? And, can Nigeria expect change more meaningful than a swop of wardrobe from army clothes to civilian robes?

"Strictly on political grounds, how can he put himself forward to contest for the presidency?" asks democracy activist Olsa Agbakoba. "Nigeria has not moved forward under Abacha, let alone benefited from his administration."

Abacha has yet to formally declare his intention to run for president, but his iron fist is already guiding the electoral process in that direction.

In a bow to pluralist politics, the Abacha government last year authorised the creation of five political parties selected for their tacit support of the military junta.

The government gave all five parties \$250 000 (about R1,25-million) and instructed them this month to nominate Abacha for the presidency. All complied. If the method by which Abacha engra-

neered those nominations is a fair barometer, Nigeria is certainly in for more of the same from their leader in his new civilian role.

It's little surprise Abacha will now stand uncontested during the August elections. His army colleagues and a core of loyal supporters insist that's best for the country. His varied and numerous opponents say he has to go.

"General Abacha is disqualified on every ground, morally, constitutionally and in every other respect," says Solomon Lar, a former member of Abacha's cabinet and a leading politician in Abacha's home northern region.

Whether as military dictator or civilian president, critics say Abacha has failed to lead Nigeria away from wholesale corruption and nepotism. Moreover, government statistics show he has driven the economy into the ground, leaving the nation with staggering debt. "We live in poverty," says Civil Liberties Organisation vice-chairman Nwabueze Okoro. "The present government has made it impossible. There are

no job opportunities, no infrastructure, no amenities to encourage growth or development. The government has totally failed us."

Up to 80% of the people live in poverty, government's own figures indicate. From the sprawling commercial hub of Lagos to countless countryside shanties, most Nigerians live without clean water, reliable electricity or even basic health care.

The world's sixth-largest oil exporter, Nigeria can't even fill its own gas tanks. Corruption and bureaucracy have put the country's refineries out of business.

One positive result for which Abacha can take credit is his success in unifying this normally stratified and ethnically divided country. Muslims and Christians each make up about 45% of the population, and tension between them is often high.

Abacha has at least been able to keep the country from descending into mass ethnic fighting.

Backing him is "Youth Earnestly Asks for Abacha", or YEAA, a group solely dedicated to keeping their military strongman in power. Although leaders of YEAA say they represent a spontaneous uprising among Nigeria's youth, the organisation is almost wholly funded by the military regime, a former government adviser said in an interview.

YEAA organises rallies and holds seminars to extol the benefits of "Abachaism" - a term coined by the time pro-Abacha author Yomi Tokunbo who now stands accused of treason.

"The issue is who do you want," says Kenneth Nwachukwu, a spokesman for YEAA. "If it's not going to be Abacha, don't know who it is."

With most prominent political opponents in prison or exile, Nigeria doesn't face a shortage of political alternatives, said Lar, the former Abacha cabinet minister.

"In the transition process to so-called democracy, almost every key politician is either dead, in detention or in exile," Lar said - Sapa-AP

Star 23/4/98

Carb

Scrapped poll may be last straw

DD 24/11/98

(226)

NO GOVERNMENT is openly saying so yet, but the Nigerian military regime's decision to scrap presidential elections in favour of a yes-no referendum on the premiership of military leader Sani Abacha may end up being a bridge too far.

Both the British and US governments quickly criticised the move by the Nigerian government, but held back on the announcement of any new sanctions.

The apparent lull may, however, be illusory while different governments and activist groups discuss their options behind closed doors after embarrassing differences of opinion and strategy emerged on previous occasions.

Commonwealth secretary-general Emeka Anyaoku, said the Commonwealth Action Group, set up to monitor Nigerian and other human rights abusers would discuss the move.

The action group is considered pivotal because it represents a broad cross section of countries, representing African and non-African countries and representatives from the first and third worlds.

At present it comprises ministers from Barbados, Botswana, Britain, Canada, Ghana, Malaysia, New Zealand, and Zimbabwe.

At the Edinburgh summit of the Commonwealth last October, Commonwealth leaders warned Nigeria of the possibility of sanctions if it did not restore democracy. Commonwealth lead-

The fallout from the latest events in Nigeria, which could derail its transition to democracy, is just beginning, writes London correspondent **Tim Cohen**

ers also empowered the group to impose limited sanctions if the pre-election mechanisms were not consistent with the Harare principles.

The initial set of limited sanctions include most measures already enforced by most European governments such as visa restrictions on members of the regime and bilateral sports sanctions.

To these could be added investment restrictions which are thought to include an asset freeze imposed on members of the regime on funds invested outside Nigeria and restrictions on land-

ing rights.

The Commonwealth group is scheduled to meet again in July and could implement the sanctions after that. It could ask Anyaoku to canvass the opinions of member countries on the expulsion of Nigeria from the Commonwealth.

Anyaoku hinted at the Commonwealth's thinking on the matter. He said it had urged the Nigerian government to "create a political environment where the people's right to express their political opinion and to choose a government can be exercised in a free and unfettered way".

Both the British and US governments have issued similar statements saying that a referendum in no way constituted a fair, open and democratic election



ANYAOKU

from "medium" to "high" for the country as a whole for the September-October period with "extreme" warnings possible for Lagos and Kaduna state.

According to Control Risks analyst Tara O'Connor, the Nigerian regime's decision to hold a referendum rather than an election has shown the pre-election preparations up to be the sham that they have always been.

O'Connor said the decision was "dinosaur era" politics reminiscent of the era of former Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda.

Even among the military, Abacha was increasingly viewed with suspicion, while popular resistance was increasing in the southwest provinces, she said.

Tensions could be exacerbated with the sentencing next week of Abacha's former deputy, southwesterner Lt-Gen Oladipo Diya and twenty five others may face death by firing squad for allegedly plotting a coup against the regime.

There have also been signs of disaffection in the north, from which Abacha draws his key support, where police shot dead three Shi'ite Muslims in the town of Kaduna.

The trio were part of a group protesting against the arrest of the wife and children of their radical leader, Ibrahim El-Zak Zaky, who preached against Abacha

UK Foreign Secretary Robin Cook and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright are due to discuss the present political situation in Nigeria at a bilateral meeting in two weeks.

However, according to analysts, the problems for the Abacha government lie more inside the country than out.

Risk analyst group Control Risks increased its five-point political risk measure by a point

Abacha looks to remake

image

By Ian Stewart

ABUJA, NIGERIA – The dictator's expressionless face gazes out from a million posters plastered on government buildings, in hotels and along public walls

His chest covered with self-awarded medals, his khaki uniform neatly pressed, General Sani Abacha rules Nigeria from behind dark sunglasses

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The government gave all five parties about R1.2 million and told them this month to nominate Abacha for the presidency All five complied

If the method by which Abacha engineered those nominations is a fair barometer, Nigeria is in for more of the same from their leader in his new civilian role

It is little surprise that Abacha will now stand uncontested in the August elections His army colleagues and a core of loyal supporters insist that is best for the country His varied and numerous opponents say he has to go

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Whether as military dictator or civilian president, critics say Abacha has failed to lead Nigeria away from wholesale corruption and nepotism Moreover, government statistics show he has driven the economy into the ground, leaving the

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YEAA organises rallies and holds seminars to extol the benefits of "Abachism" – a term coined by one-time pro-Abacha author Yomi Tokoya, who now stands accused of treason

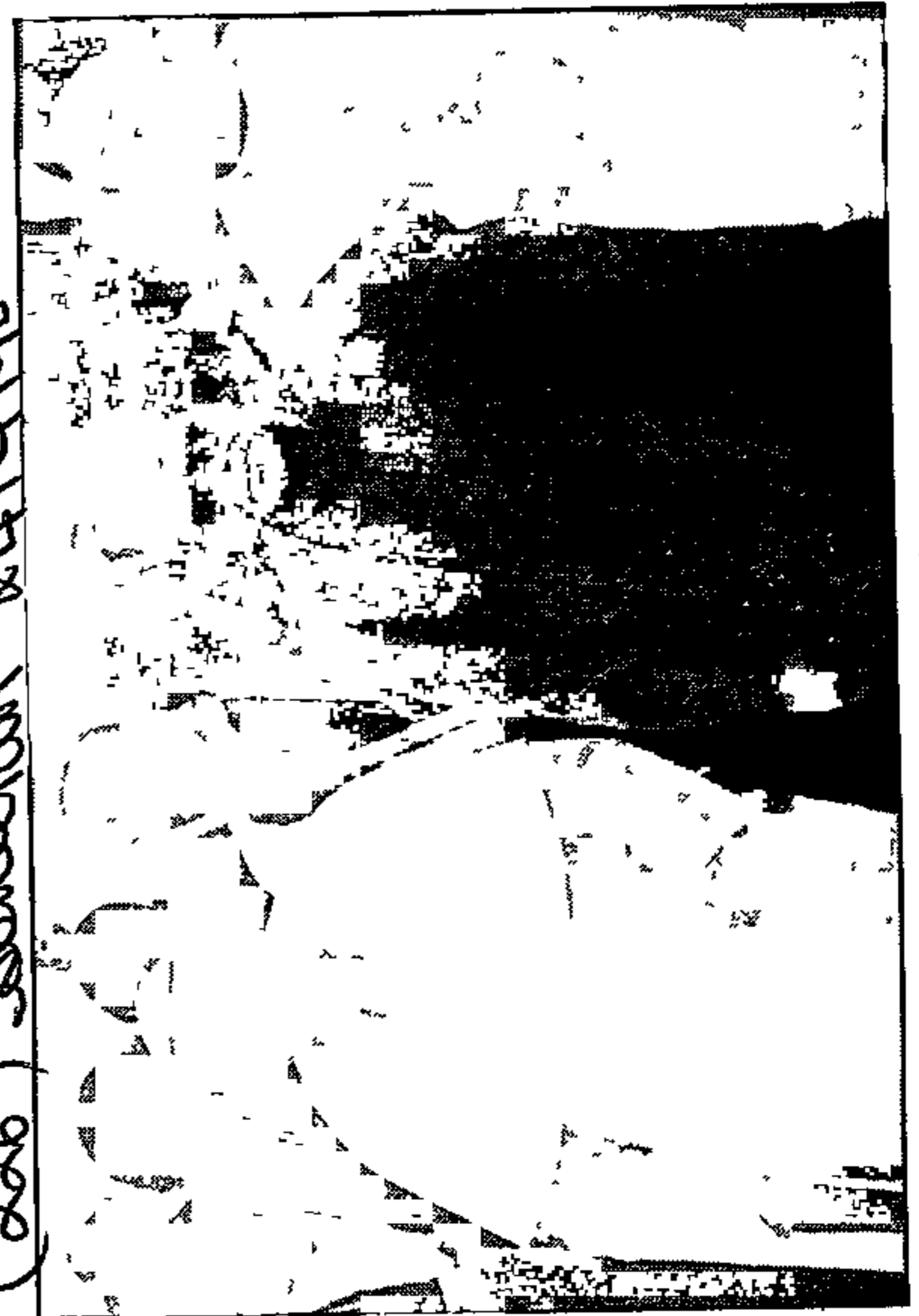
"If it's not Abacha, I don't know who it is," says Kenneth Nwachukwu, a spokesman for YEAA With most prominent political opponents in prison or exile, Nigeria does indeed face a shortage of political alternatives, said Lar, the former Abacha cabinet minister

"In the transition process to so-called democracy, almost every key politician is dead, in detention or in exile," he said

● "We call on all Nigerians to boycott all elections within the sham political transition programme," said a statement issued this week by the Lagos-based United Action for Democracy – *Sapa-AP*

Flashback ... Nigerian dictator General Sani Abacha escorts Pope John Paul II after the pontiff's arrival in Abuja, Nigeria, last month. PIC AP

(226) Nwabueze 2/11/98



Nigeria's elections 'a sham'

(226)
MTG 24-29/4/98
Gilbert Da Costa in Abuja

With General Sani Abacha the sole candidate and his opponents vowing to boycott the vote, Nigeria's planned presidential elections are a sham, pro-democracy groups and opposition leaders said this week.

Still four months away, the elections — now tantamount to a ratification of Abacha's nomination — have been tainted before campaigning even begins, the groups said.

Abacha obtained the presidential nomination of the last of Nigeria's five official political parties this week. The general's military advisers had ordered the parties to hold their conventions this month and to name Abacha as their candidate.

Opposition leaders have urged Nigerians to stay away from the polls.

"We call on all Nigerians to boycott all elections within the sham political transition programme," said a statement issued by the Lagos-based United Action for Democracy. "Nobody should vote, since voting would only assist Abacha in imposing himself on the nation."

Critics say Abacha, who seized power in a bloodless 1993 coup, engineered the nomination process for the August presidential elections to ensure he would be the only candidate.

Even Abacha's senior aides now say an election would be a waste of resources — although it will be held to try to give his nomination legitimacy.

"Under the present circumstances where all the five political parties have unanimously adopted General Abacha as their presidential candidate, the August 1 election will be converted to a referendum," said Hassan Yusuf, a member of the military junta's government policy team.

For years, Abacha has been promising to hand the government over to a civilian administration, but has repeatedly reneged on the pledge. Although the general has yet to formally announce his presidential bid, critics say his military colleagues hijacked the electoral process to ensure Abacha's rule would continue. — AP

Vote of no-confidence for Abacha

CP 27/14/98 (226)

LAGOS: Nigeria's military rulers were disappointed by the low turnout for Saturday's national assembly elections after the opposition called a boycott to protest against strongman General Sani Abacha

Coming less than a week after Abacha was picked by five parties as the sole candidate for presidential elections, the success of the poll had been flagged by local media and analysts as a key test of public support for the 54-year-old infantry general and his plan to restore civilian rule.

"I expected to see a large turnout from voters. I don't really know the reason for this turnout," said Lieutenant-General Jeremiah

Useni, minister for the capital Abuja and one of Abacha's closest aides and most enduring allies

Official figures for turnout are often not released in Nigeria, but members of the government's electoral commission said privately it could have been the lowest participation in any poll since independence from Britain in 1960

At many of the polling stations, less than 30 voters had cast their ballots from an average of more than 500 on the register

The opposition United Action for Democracy group took the low turnout as a sign of support for their campaign to prevent Abacha keeping hold of power in the oil-producing country of 104 million

through an unopposed presidential ballot on August 1.

"We shall continue with discrediting this transition process and hope that we can end military rule before August," UAD leader Mr Olesa Agbakoba said.

Abacha, who seized power during political turmoil in 1993, has not said he will stand in the election.

But most Nigerians believe his supporters would not have ensured his selection by all five parties as their presidential candidate if he had not given them the green light

National radio said collation had begun of results for the 109 seats in the new Senate and 360 in

the House of Representatives

Since all parties have adopted Abacha, political analysts see turnout as generally more significant than results. The United Nigeria Congress Party, the first to back Abacha, is expected to do well

Opposition to the military has centred on the south-western homeland of Moshood Abiola, the presumed winner of annulled presidential elections in 1993 who has been detained since 1994 for declaring himself president

"Nigerians passed an overwhelming vote of no-confidence in the ongoing transition to civil rule programme," said the *Sunday Concord* newspaper, owned by Abiola.

— Reuter

Tension smoulders under Nigerian despot's rule

Lagos - The United Action for Democracy coalition called yesterday for a nationwide mass protest on Friday, May Day, against the regime of military ruler Sani Abacha

"On this historic day, we call on the Nigerian people, workers, farmers, traders, professionals, students and youths, to organise and participate in mass actions all over the country to free our nation from dictatorship and chase out the Abacha junta," the coalition said at a press conference

The group of 26 pro-democracy and human-rights bodies said workers should demonstrate and march on Friday, vendors and merchants should close their stalls and drivers should keep their vehicles off the roads

The opposition group also listed a number of demands, including the "immediate and unconditional release of all political detainees," including the presumed winner of the annulled 1993 presidential elections, Chief Moshood Abiola

It also demanded the "immediate end to military dictatorship and the transfer of power to a Transitional Government of National Unity" to be headed by Abiola, as well as the lifting of a ban on trade unions

The UAD appealed to the security forces "not to allow themselves to be used against the supreme will of our people in the service of a paranoid military dictator"

"Remember always that you are paid with the taxpayers'

money for you to protect and defend them, and not to kill them," the statement said.

The opposition coalition took credit for the low turnout for parliamentary elections on Saturday, after it called for a massive boycott

The boycott call was made after Nigeria's five authorised political parties adopted General Abacha as their sole candidate in presidential elections set for August 1, a decision described by the UAD as a "tragic farce" - AFP

(226) Star 27/9/98

Call for new sanctions on Nigeria

(226) Soulekan 28/4/98

By Jim Lobe

WASHINGTON - Human rights activists want the administration of President Bill Clinton to end a protracted policy review on Nigeria and impose new sanctions on the military regime of General Sani Abacha.

This is necessary in the light of confusing statements by United States officials and Abacha's nomination last week by all five legal political parties in Nigeria to stand for president in elections this year, they say.

"If ever there was a time to finish the policy review, the time is now," says Learned Dees, African director of the National Endowment for Democracy.

"The administration should use the most effective tools it has at its disposal because the situation is deteriorating in Nigeria,"

adds Salih Booker, who directs African programmes at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Washington has spoken out against Abacha in recent days. State Department spokesman James Rubin declared last Monday that the transition to democratic government which Abacha pledged to carry out when he seized power in November 1993 was "seriously and fatally flawed".

He urged Abacha "to refuse the nomination, so that a genuine transition to civilian democratic rule may take place in the August elections".

But the administration is not clear what, if anything, it is prepared to do about the situation - other than consult other countries, notably Britain, in the coming weeks.

The administration's vagueness reflects a continuing split between hawks, who favour new economic sanctions against the regime, and doves, who have argued for a policy of greater engagement.

The hawks are led by assistant secretary of state for African affairs Susan Rice, while doves include Clinton's special envoy on democracy, Reverend Jesse Jackson, and

Rice's immediate superior, under secretary of state for political affairs Thomas Pickering.

"The question is whether (secretary of state) Madeleine Albright has any strong feelings about this," says Booker, who noted that Albright is scheduled to meet British foreign secretary Robin Cook early next month.

In statements that heartened anti-Abacha forces here, Cook has declared that London "cannot accept a one-candidate election (in Nigeria)" and he has raised the possibility of imposing new sanctions.

Pickering, a former US ambassador to Nigeria, is a formidable bureaucratic operator. On the other hand, Rice has close personal ties with Albright and also served as

Clinton's main guide on his unprecedented trip to Africa last month.

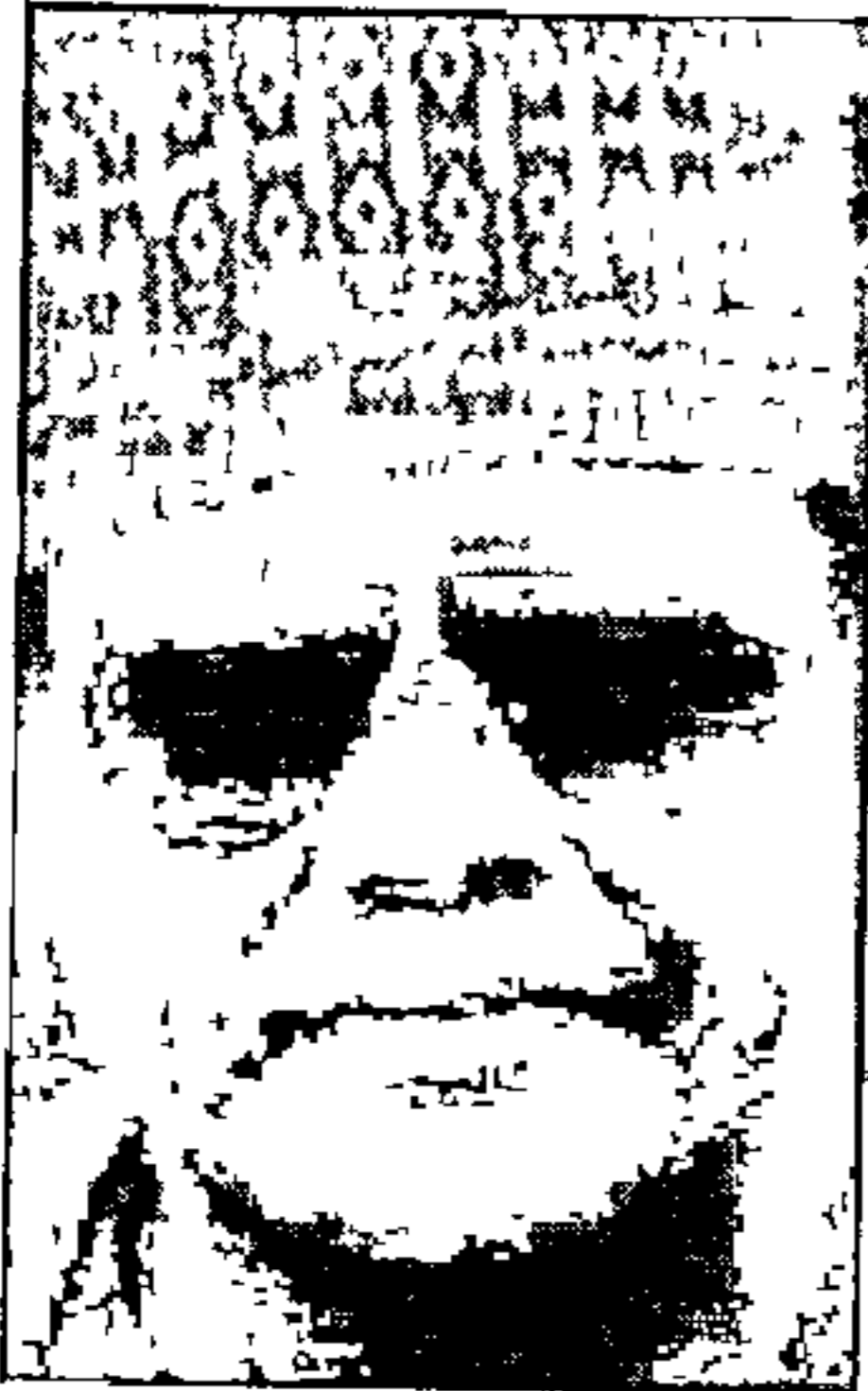
It was during that trip that Clinton, inadvertently, pulled the rug out from under Rice's efforts to toughen US policy.

Just before the trip, Rice delivered a policy address in which she warned

that "electoral victory by any military candidate in the forthcoming presidential election in Nigeria would be unacceptable".

Her remarks were the strongest anti-Abacha statement by Washington since November 1995 when the military regime executed internationally known writer Ken Saro-wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists.

Those hangings launched the administration's policy review that has continued for more than two



General Sani Abacha PIC AP

years

Just days after Rice's statement, however, Clinton appeared much more flexible when he spoke at a news conference in Cape Town. "If (Abacha) stands for election, we hope he will stand as a civilian," he said.

"There are many military leaders who have taken over chaotic situations in African countries but have moved toward democracy, and this can happen in Nigeria."

Muddying the waters further, Jackson told a TV audience a week later that Washington should use the same kind of "aggressive, assertive engagement" in Nigeria that it uses towards China.

Leaders of the Nigerian pro-democracy movement here believe this confusing series of statements

has actually emboldened Abacha.

That is one reason Booker and other activists believe that half-steps are no longer adequate.

"The administration has sown this confusion," he said, "and that's why only stronger action can clear it up."

Such action would go beyond imposing a freeze on the US assets of the regime's leaders and their main supporters, or even a ban on new investment in Nigeria - sanctions which have been considered in the past.

These forces believe it is time to impose a ban on buying Nigerian oil, of which the US consumes about 40 percent.

A letter currently circulating among leaders in the African-American community here calls on Clinton to adopt a four-pronged policy - a clear denunciation of the transition process as "illegitimate", a major increase in US funding of the democratic movement in Nigeria, a unilateral oil embargo and a diplomatic dialogue with the regime on these issues.

"We hope this (letter) can be used to build momentum for Congressional action," says Adotei Akwei, who heads Africa work for the Washington office of Amnesty International USA.

He expects legislation that would codify existing sanctions, which include a ban on military aid and exchanges on non-humanitarian economic aid, and open the door to further sanctions.

"The situation in Nigeria calls for more than pious statements," say Nigerian opposition groups led by exiled leaders Chief Anthony Enahoro and writer Wole Soyinka. "It requires decisive and measurable actions" - Sapa-IPS



Campaign posters for dozens of candidates running for governor are posted along a city market wall in Kano, northern Nigeria. For many the last chance for a semblance of democratic rule in Nigeria rests with gubernatorial elections scheduled for August. Picture AP

Pro-Abacha party wins majority of seats

LAGOS — The United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP) had won an overwhelming majority of the seats in both the Nigerian senate and the house of representatives, according to unofficial results reported yesterday.

It was reported that on results from 24 states out of Nigeria's 36 after elections on Saturday, the UNCP was well ahead of the other four parties authorised by Gen Sam Abacha's junta to take part in political activity.

The UNCP was the first party to nominate Abacha as its sole candidate for a presidential election due on August 1, an example followed by all the other legal movements.

The opposition United Action for Democracy coalition had called for a boycott of the polls, arguing that they would serve only to help perpetuate a military dictatorship, while many of Abacha's main foes are behind bars or in exile.

The Nigerian opposition has largely dismissed the whole military plan for a transition to elected civilian rule by October 1 this year as a scheme to perpetuate the reign of the clique in power since Abacha took over after staging a coup in 1993.

Partial election results cited in yesterday's Nigerian press showed that of 72 senatorial seats contested in 24 states, the UNCP had won 53 seats, while also taking 198 seats for the house of representatives in the same states.

Saturday's elections were for a total of 109 seats in the senate and 360 in the house of representatives.

In March last year, the UNCP took more than half the votes in Nigeria's municipal elections.

The party also carried a majority in voting last December for seats in the state parliaments.

Meanwhile, a special adviser to

Abacha, Wada Nas, has admitted that Nigeria's "vaunted leadership position in Africa was ridiculed by the low turnout in Saturday's national assembly elections."

However, he charged in an interview published by the independent national daily Concord "Those who did not come out to exercise their civic responsibility are not helping the nation."

"Those making the (boycott) call are not only unpatriotic, but great enemies of the nation."

"Besides affecting the credibility of the nation, the mass boycott of the national assembly poll will also affect our stand not only in west Africa, but also in the whole of Africa where we are being regarded as a leading nation."

The United Action for Democracy, called for a boycott of the poll which was characterised nationwide by apathy and low turnout — Sapa-AFP

SD 29/4/98

(226)

Nigerian leaders get death

CT 29/4/98

(226)

ABUJA: A military tribunal yesterday sentenced six people to death after they were convicted of plotting to overthrow military leader General Sani Abacha

The condemned include former deputy leader of Nigeria, General Oladipo Diya, four other soldiers and a civilian. Of the 26 original defendants, four received life sentences, including a newspaper editor.

It was not immediately clear whether the defendants would be given a chance to appeal against their sentences

Fifteen other defendants were found innocent and released after the closed-door tribunal.

Diya, 54, had maintained his innocence throughout the hearing, insisting he had been framed.

On the first day of the trial — the only occasion journalists were permitted to

attend the hearings — Diya denied the charges and said he had been framed

"This whole thing is a set-up," Diya told the court, his hands and feet in chains

The original 26 defendants were rounded up over the past two years, after Abacha claimed to have unearthed a plot aimed at toppling his ruling military regime

Several more suspects were later added to the list, while dozens of people were under investigation

Last week, 10 soldiers were released after a lengthy investigation found they were not involved in the alleged coup

Abacha, who seized power in 1993, has on more than one occasion purged his military ranks of potential threats by claiming senior officers were aiming to overthrow him — Sapa-AP

CHECKING OUT

Nigerian tribunal sentences six to death over coup plot

1 Jos, Nigeria - The former num-
2 ber two in Nigeria's military
3 regime was sentenced to death
4 by a military court yesterday
5 along with five other defen-
6 dants found guilty of plotting a
7 coup in December.
8 General Oladipo Diya (54)
9 was sentenced to die by a special
0 military tribunal along with four
1 other soldiers - two of them past
2 ministers - and one civilian.
3 Two further people were
4 sentenced to life in prison.

5 The group are among 26
6 civilians and soldiers, tried in
7 secret by the tribunal, accused
8 of plotting the overthrow of the
9 regime of General Sani Abacha.
0 The military government
1 announced in December that it
2 had uncovered a plot to over-
3 throw the regime, which took
4 power in November 1993.
5 The government has said
6 that no appeal is possible
7 against the tribunal's verdict.
8 Judgments given by the

9 court can only be modified by
0 the Provisional Ruling Council,
1 the junta's highest decision-
2 making body, headed by
3 Abacha.
4 On the opening day of the
5 trial, Diya proclaimed his in-
6 nocence and said the accusa-
7 tions were a "set-up".
8 The regime has maintained
9 its claims, seeking to convince
0 a sceptical diplomatic commu-
1 nity that this time the claims of
2 a coup plot are genuine.

3 More than 40 people were
4 charged and found guilty in
5 the 1995 trial against a coup
6 against Abacha, despite wide-
7 spread scepticism then.
8 Those found guilty yester-
9 day of treason and conspiracy
0 against the state include, along
1 with Diya, Generals Abdul
2 Karim Adisa and Tajudeen
3 Olarewanju, respectively for-
4 mer ministers of public works
5 and communications.

6 Diya's security aide, was also
7 found guilty as was Bola Ade-
8 banjo, a civilian said to be close
9 to Diya.
0 Journalist Niran Malaolu,
1 editor of the independent daily
2 newspaper The Diet, and Shola
3 Shoinde, a woman, were both
4 found guilty and sentenced to
5 life in prison.
6 Another woman charged
7 with plotting against the re-
8 gime, Halima Bawa, was ac-
9 quitted. - AFP

(226) Major Olusegun Fadipe,
Star 29/4/98

Porta Martini

Low poll cheers Nigerian opposition

Opponents of Abacha hope the breadth of last weekend's election boycott might help nudge Nigerians towards active resistance, reports

James Rupert from Lagos

Opponents of Sani Abacha, Nigeria's ruling general, this week called for strikes to resist his effort to retain power as civilian president. They declared themselves energised after Nigerians boycotted legislative elections last Saturday that Abacha had called as part of his transition to civilian rule.

Most Nigerians have appeared apathetic and unwilling to actively resist Abacha, whose government readily jails dissidents. But opponents of Abacha said the breadth of the boycott — with turnout observed by journalists at between 0% and 8% in parts of Lagos — might help nudge Nigerians toward active resistance.

Election officials said last Saturday's turnout might have been the lowest ever for a Nigerian election. "The message of the people of Nigeria is that they no longer want [Abacha] to continue as the ruler," said Gani Fawehinmi, a lawyer who leads opposition to military rule.

The main anti-Abacha movement, United Action for Democracy, called on Nigerians to observe a general strike and attend rallies on Friday in hopes of reviving a civil disobedience campaign that troubled Abacha's regime in 1994. Abacha's military governors typically have banned opposition rallies and, at times, have used troops or police to break them up.

In the run-up to the poll, all five political parties authorised by the Abacha government nominated him as the sole candidate for the civilian presidency. Some Nigerians, as well as some United States policy-makers, earlier had expressed hope that Abacha might permit a degree of political competition during the transition.

Last month, 18 prominent northern figures wrote an open letter urging Abacha to relinquish power. Since last week, a former Abacha police official and scion of a traditional northern ruling family, Muhammad Yusufu, has led the calls for civil disobedience. Yusufu had declared his candidacy for the presidential election.

The campaign included elements of the farcical. The electoral commission did not announce the final list of approved candidates until less than two days before voting started.

And no one knows the exact duties of the legislature being chosen, because Abacha is keeping secret the 1995 draft Constitution under which the civilian government is to oper-



Political parade: Campaign posters for some of the candidates running for governor are posted along a wall in Kano, northern Nigeria. Elections, scheduled for August, aim to replace military rule at the state level with civilian governors. PHOTOGRAPH: AP

ate. Still, the government-owned *Daily Times* declared that the election "is considered crucial because of the elevated status which [the legislature] is believed to have been accorded by the Constitution".

"Abacha has set the stage to install himself as the next president," said Emma Ezeazu, a leader of Democratic Alternative pro-democracy lobby. But deep discontent among citizens and many military officers means "the stage also has been set for the transition process to be overthrown", he said.

Abacha is sure to respond forcefully to new resistance because any sign of weakness might encourage younger officers to try overthrowing him, Nigerian analysts and Western diplomats said.

In a country ruled by the military for 28 of its 38 years, the decisive constituency is the officer corps. "There are signs of discontent among military officers" over the imprisonment of alleged coup plotters, a Western diplomat said, "but it's not clear that [Abacha] is losing" any significant amount of control over the military.

Evidence of the boycott's psychological impact came in a rare concession from Abacha's

camp that it had suffered a setback. "I am disappointed," Lieutenant General Jeremiah Useni, one of Abacha's closest aides, told reporters. "I expected to see a large turnout from voters. I don't really know the reason for this."

A subtler sign of disaffection with Abacha has been dissent among the northern elites. Northern Hausas have long backed army rulers as a bulwark against the political ambitions of ethnic Yorubas and Ibos from the south.

Such ethnic strains have led to feuds over land or political patronage, leading to violence. Two unexplained explosions in public markets in Lagos and the south-western city of Ife killed nine people last week — a reminder of waves of bombings in 1996 and 1997.

This week, a military tribunal in the central city of Jos is to rule in the case of 26 military officers, most of them Yorubas, accused of joining a coup plot against Abacha. Analysts say the trial has raised discontent among officers, many of whom disapprove of the 1995 conviction and imprisonment on similar charges of a former military ruler, General Olusegun Obasanjo. Obasanjo also is a Yoruba.

In interviews, Nigerians express frustration at what they say is Abacha's derailment of

any democracy and fatigue at their struggle to survive in a collapsed economy. They say that the main reason they do not actively oppose Abacha is fear of the police under his control.

During last Saturday's voting, Lagos was still. The government ordered businesses closed and prohibited traffic during voting, instructing residents to walk to voting stations placed in each neighbourhood. Under a broiling sun, downtown boulevards stretched empty to the urban horizon, except for a few pedestrians and an occasional carload of police officers or election workers.

At most polling places, a pair of election workers sat at a street-side table, near a transparent ballot box. A few policemen at each site sought what shade they could. Election officials said polling places typically were assigned 600 to 800 registered voters. But the polls were mostly deserted, with only a few ballots at the bottom of their ballot boxes.

Late in the day, journalists in Lagos surveyed dozens of polls, finding most with between 15 and 40 ballots cast. In Abuja, the capital, journalists reported most stations had seen fewer than 100 voters. — *The Washington Post*

(226) M/G 30/4-7/5/98

SA leads international condemnation of

LONDON — SA and Britain yesterday led international criticism after six men were sentenced to death for plotting to overthrow Nigeria's military ruler and the country's main opposition promised protests

SA called on Nigeria not to carry out the death sentences and said the government of military ruler Gen Sami Abacha should consider the repercussions of executions

A military tribunal found 26 Nigerian military officers and civilians guilty by a military tribunal on Tuesday of plotting a coup d'etat against the Abacha military government in December last year

The special tribunal was required to submit the sentences to the provisional ruling council for confirmation. If they were confirmed, the accused could be executed by firing squad, the SA foreign affairs department said yesterday.

It said the trial had not taken place in an open court of law, and that the defendants had been represented by military lawyers.

"In this light, accusations that the trial process was fundamentally and seriously flawed gain added credibility. The SA government would therefore strongly urge the Nigerian military government to refrain

from carrying out the six death sentences handed down.

"It also calls on the government of Gen Abacha to consider the effects, should these sentences be carried out, on Nigeria at this critical juncture in its history. It is likely that there may be an adverse reaction, both inside Nigeria and internationally," the department said.

A British foreign office spokesman said London was appealing to Nigeria to respect the civil rights of the six, who include Abacha's former deputy, Lt-Gen Oladipo Diya. "We are appealing to the Nigerian au-

thorities to treat the alleged coup plotters fully in line with the international convention on civil and political rights," she said. "This includes an undertaking for convicted persons to be given the right to seek pardons and the right to appeal."

Nigeria's main opposition group, the United Action for Democracy (UAD), said it would mark Friday's traditional May Day holidays with strikes and demonstrations.

"We hold the firm view that the so-called verdict is the culmination of a process of elimination by the regime of perceived threats within the military to its agenda of

self-succession," the UAD said. "We call on Nigerians to rise up against this cheap disposal of human life in furtherance of the vain ambitions of one man."

The UAD, an umbrella for 25 opposition groups, said markets would be closed and roads would be barricaded by its militants.

Commonwealth secretary-general Emeka Anyaoku said the Commonwealth would be "seriously concerned" at the prospect of the death sentences being carried out.

"I am confident that this is also the view of many in the larger international community, including friends of Nigeria," Anyaoku

said. "I strongly plead with the government of Gen Sami Abacha to exercise utmost restraint and humanitarianism on this occasion. Given the present circumstances in Nigeria, this is the hope and expectation of the Commonwealth and the wider international community," he said.

The Commonwealth has already suspended Nigeria over its human rights record and has threatened to expel it unless it sticks to a promise to restore a democratic system by October 1 — Sapa, Reuter

Junta denounced: Page 13

Nigerian death sentences
(226) 08 30/4/98

Demonstrators shot dead in riots in Nigeria

(226) Star 2/5/98

Nigeria - Seven opposition demonstrators were shot to death yesterday in Ibadan in clashes with police, witnesses said.

Several other people were wounded, while 17 vehicles and several buildings were set on fire.

Clashes erupted in the morning in a market in Ibadan when protesters tried to force merchants to close their stalls in response to strike calls from the opposition.

Police fired tear gas to disperse the protest. Plainclothes police officers fired into a crowd of thousands of youths rampaging through the southern Nigerian city to demand General Sani Abacha's ouster.

The shooting began after the rioting crowds began setting cars, shops and houses ablaze. Police said more than five thousand people massed in the city centre and began marching along the main streets, calling for the release of detained politician Moshood Abiola.

Abiola, the apparent victor in 1993 elections, was jailed after declaring himself president when Abacha cancelled the polls.

The violence came as Nigeria's ruling military junta claims it has uncovered a terrorist bombing plot aimed at destabilising the country's leadership and disrupting elections later this year. - AFP

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Righting Nigerian human rights abuses is not easy

By CHIARA CARTER

(226) CP-3/5/98

ABACHA television sets and soap powder are the ridiculous face of the military regime of Nigerian dictator Sani Abacha

But the farce is underwritten by misery and bloodshed. Mass repression, corruption and nepotism are as much a hallmark of Abacha's regime as the churning out of consumer goods with his name emblazoned on them.

Abacha's antics pose a major challenge for South Africa as a proponent of human rights, and indeed all countries who believe that tinpot dictators have passed their sell-by date.

Bluntly, Abacha is a disgrace.

He is a ghastly reminder of an era when trumped-up soldiers ruled countries by the gun, oiling the palms of a corrupt military elite.

But Nigeria's size, history and, most of all, importance to international oil companies makes decisive action by the international community to end the Abacha regime tricky.

Nigeria's 104 million people make up 80 percent of West Africa's population and its economy is 75 percent of the region's trade and industry.

Little wonder that there is a saying that when Nigeria sneezes, West Africa catches a cold. Should events in Nigeria degenerate into chaos, the entire continent will have more than a passing ailment.

Thus far, attempts to isolate the Nigerian regime have been of little substance. The greatest constraint is the power of the oil companies, who do not want sanctions imposed on Opec's fourth largest producer.

Abacha was given an ultimatum to return Nigeria to civilian rule by the end of this year by the Commonwealth, which suspended Nigerian membership after author Ken Saro-Wiwa was hanged in 1995.

This has turned into a farce. Abacha has emerged as the only candidate for the presidency, chosen by the five parties allowed to contest National Assembly elections.

Not surprisingly, opponents to Abacha's rule boycotted last weekend's polls. The low voter turnout was an embarrassment to the regime but this should not be seen to indicate massive support for the opposition but rather a sign of voter apathy and a breakdown in the usual machinery which bribed voters to go to the polls.

Abacha is a master of the "phantom coup" and has even accused Nobel laureate and Nigerian exile author Wole Soyinka of masterminding a

plot to overthrow his regime.

Earlier this week, a military tribunal sentenced his former deputy, Lieutenant-General Oladipo Diya and five others to death for plotting to overthrow Abacha. South Africa and Britain led an international chorus of protest but stopped short of saying just what they would do if the government proceeded with the executions.

The tribunal again underlines the blatant disregard for basic human rights and rule of law in Abacha's Nigeria.

Probably as a sop to Western opinion, Abacha this week announced the release of some 140 detainees including several journalists.

But those still incarcerated include the presumed winner of the 1993 elections, businessman Moshood Abiola.

Nigeria's second most prominent political figure, Sheha Musa Yar Adua, is serving a 25-year jail sentence. Just how they are faring in prison is unknown, since the United Nations has been denied access for its human rights envoy to investigate conditions in the country.

An interim UN report is damning: it says Nigeria does not have rule of law. There are widespread human rights abuses, killings at roadblocks, repression of political thought and expression, and detention without trial in bad conditions.

Meanwhile, as the Nigerian economy continues to decline with state enterprises unable to provide the country's needs, a four-year bombing campaign has hotted up with explosions taking place in Nigeria's commercial capital, Lagos, as well as other areas. The Abacha regime blames the explosions on outside forces plotting treason but observers believe they are probably the work of a group within the military whose agenda is unknown.

Soyinka has said that whether Nigeria goes the way of bombs or ballots depends on how far the military can be removed from politics. Despite growing opposition at home and abroad, Abacha is sitting cosy with the knowledge that he has the backing of the army and his rivals are behind bars, dead or in exile.

The challenge for the world is to make it clear that Abacha's regime is unpalatable and that the country's oil is not enough to buy implicit support for continuing a system where ordinary Nigerians endure mismanagement and misrule as Nigeria declines.

Wake up to Nigerian crisis

CP 7/5/98

(226)

ONE OF the most sobering lessons of recent events in Rwanda, Somalia and Zaire is that early warnings on conflicts can only be ignored at the peril of all

The Nigerian situation is a case in point

The current crisis constitutes a major threat to international and continental security. Its potential for escalation should therefore be a cause for anxiety and deep reflection

Evidence abounds that the rule of law in Nigeria is in freefall, if it has not virtually collapsed

The situation has necessitated a UN Secretary General's mission into the country with, however, no let-up whatever in human rights abuses

Although the case of Nigeria has become recognised within the international community as one that might potentially result in a conflagration, hope is still nursed among African leaders that the Nigerian junta will heed international advice and pull the country back from the brink

For example, the current chairman of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) President Robert Mugabe, recently lauded the removal of the military rule in Sierra Leone, and expressed the view that Nigeria would learn the lesson that military rule is no longer fashionable on the continent

The OAU chairman still clung to the optimistic expectation that this lesson would be learnt via that sham, discredited transition programme in which the Nigerian junta is currently engaged

There is no doubt that African leaders are concerned about the problems in Nigeria

At least three senior African leaders, Presidents Mandela, Mugabe and Museveni, have visited Nigeria specifically to appeal to the junta to ease the suffocating noose around the

Storm clouds gather over Abacha's regime

necks of the citizens

Others have shown their concern in various other ways, but most have avoided any discussion of the Nigerian question in the open. There is no better example of a conspiracy of silence about a disaster waiting to happen than the current response to the Nigerian situation

The regime's elitist and expensive propaganda within Africa and the international community provide it with the opportunity to distort the broad similarities between the causes and consequences of the crises in Nigeria and Zaire.

Fortunately, while this might have helped in staving off direct interest from African leaders, the brutal excesses and incorrigible nature of the Nigerian dictatorship have made it impossible for any right-thinking person to ignore the fact that it constitutes a direct threat to the stability of the entire continent. It is close to five years since General

Sani Abacha took over power in Nigeria through a bloodless palace coup

Since then, the regime has demonstrated its determination to erode the rights of Nigerians to decide how they will be governed of their own free will as expected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Harare Commonwealth Declaration

The politics of permanent transition has taken on a wider manipulative strategy, even as pressure on the military to quit assumes renewed vigour in the local and international communities

Backed by the machinery of repression, its record of human rights violations, and the strategy of suffocating civil society, there remains little confidence in any quarters that this is a government willing to put in place a people-centred, pluralistic democracy - assuming in the first place that it were possible for such an undemocratic institution like the military to do so

In spite of numerous appeals from

well-meaning leaders in Africa, a cursory look at recent developments in Nigeria shows that the Abacha regime has not changed its diabolical ways and has no plans to respect the right of Nigerians to choose their own leaders in a free and fair election

The latest in the spectre of rape of democratic practice and principles by Abacha is that, through intimidation and manipulation, he has secured the nomination of his five hand-picked and sponsored political parties to stand for presidential election as the only "consensus" candidate

Thus, while laying the foundation stone of a new parliament building in Abuja, Abacha, with excited boldness, announced to a stunned world that the proposed presidential election due in August this year has been scrapped and a referendum where citizens will vote "yes" or "no" to the continuation of his dictatorship will be organised instead

In sum, the Abacha junta has continued to defy all international demands and expectations on the Nigerian crisis

It continues to terrorise the people of Nigeria, subject political prisoners to torture and abuse, close democratic spaces, force thousands into exile or underground, harass the media and social critics

In the absence of a principled, civil, and democratic challenge of the legitimacy of military rule, the individualisation of political power under General Abacha has seriously raised the very worrying likelihood of a violent challenge

Let us stop pretending that Nigeria is slightly indisposed. If anything Nigeria is dying, although in slow motion. It was former US president John Kennedy who said, "those who make peaceful change impossible make violent change inevitable"

AFRICA

Zimbabwean govt to cut 33 000 jobs

Reneé Grawitzky

BD 4/5/98

ZIMBABWE faced further job losses as 33 000 of 171 000 jobs in the public service were being eliminated, a senior official of the Zimbabwe Civil Service Employees' Association said last week.

Zimbabwean trade union leader, Christopher Nharo Gwatidzo, said in an interview at the National Education Health and Allied Workers' Union national congress in Durban that increased job losses as a result of globalisation was causing insecurity among workers. This affected unions' collective bargaining power, while the government's use of "dirty tactics" was ensuring that "workers are now scared to join unions".

Government implemented structural adjustment programmes promoted by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, Gwatidzo said. Once these were introduced, "there was a great demand for unions not to be vocal" Over the years a number of workers had been arrested during strikes. However, the recent black-out of news coverage of trade union activity reflected President Robert Mugabe's desperation as he failed to deliver on promises, Gwatidzo said.

The black-out comes in the wake of the mass action in March. Workers

wanted to embark on another stay-away to force government to respond to a range of demands.

Public service workers, he said, did not have the same rights as those in the private sector and could not join unions legally or bargain collectively.

The situation in Zimbabwe, he said, could not be compared with SA, as there was no agenda by the ruling party to make space for unions to operate.

Two former trade union leaders had gone to parliament "on their own accord". Despite this, "one would have thought" they would represent worker interests. But this did not happen and one of the leaders was subsequently appointed labour minister.

The establishment of the National Economic Consultative Forum, based on SA's National Economic, Development and Labour Council (Nedlac), had not provided labour with a voice. Gwatidzo said labour boycotted the forum when it became evident it would be a talk shop. Representatives were hand-picked by the government.

His union is affiliated to the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions which claims a membership of 400 000 out of a workforce of 1.2-million. Recently an alternative trade union federation was formed, which he believed was sponsored by the government.

Nigeria gives nod to new minerals policy

Kingsley Kubeyinje

LAGOS — The Nigerian military government has approved a new national policy on solid minerals and has broken the monopoly exercised by the state-owned Nigerian coal corporation.

Solid Minerals Development Minister Kaloma Ali said that with the break up of the monopoly enjoyed by the coal corporation in the areas of prospecting, mining, processing and marketing of coal, private investments would be attracted to the country.

He said the policy was created to facilitate decision making about investment placement and to ensure smooth operations in the mines and minerals trade.

The minister said that the new policy took cognisance of the roles of the state and the private sector, deregulation of minerals exploitation, manpower development and incentives to potential investors.

BD 4/5/98

20 activists held after bloody protests in Nigeria

Star 4/5/98

(226)

Lagos - Nigerian police have detained 20 opposition activists and are hunting others following anti-government protests in which at least seven people died in the city of Ibadan, opposition leaders said yesterday.

"They have arrested 20 of our people," said Femi Falana, spokesman for United Action for Democracy which called the May Day protests against military ruler General Sani Abacha

Witnesses in Ibadan said seven people were killed when police opened fire to disperse rampaging demonstrators. An

undetermined number were wounded

Military authorities in the south-western city accused "foreign collaborators" of stoking the Ibadan violence, during which militants set ablaze houses and cars belonging to suspected Abacha supporters

"Evidence abounds to show that those acts are backed by our arch foreign enemies," the semi-official Sunday Times newspaper quoted local governor Colonel Ahmed Aminu as saying

Similar accusations in the past have been directed at the

United States, former colonial ruler Britain and other European Union members that have imposed symbolic sanctions against Abacha's government over human rights abuses

Aminu confirmed that police were holding at least 20 people in connection with the mayhem

He vowed "ruthless" action by security forces, saying he expected Friday's unrest would be the last in Ibadan.

Residents in Ibadan, just north of Lagos, said the charred remains of cars littered the streets.

Opponents of continued

military rule in Nigeria had called for the protests nationwide on Friday

Opposition anger has been building since five legal political parties all chose Abacha as presidential candidate for a poll on August 1, making a one-man race of his promised return to civilian rule in October

Demonstrators in Ibadan also demanded that authorities spare the lives of six men sentenced to death on Tuesday for plotting against Abacha. The six include Abacha's former deputy, Lieutenant-General Oladipo Diya - Reuters



Black gold brings Nigerians no joy

Oil wealth that should sustain the nation seems to be doing the opposite, writes Ann M Simmons

Reuben Onyewikpe Loveday, a farmer in the depressed swamplands of the Niger River delta, nostalgically remembers the days when he could make a healthy living off his three acres of land

Bountiful yields of yams, cassava and plantains and reliable catches from his fish pond used to guarantee him about R40 000 a year – a handsome sum in a country where the annual per capita income hovers around R1 600

Now those days are gone, the victim, contends Loveday, of a government oil policy that enriches politicians and foreign oil ventures at the expense of local communities “Oil is supposed to bring wealth, but, for the local communities, it has been doom,” said the veteran farmer, who says that his soil can no longer sustain crops and that his pond has gone stagnant from oil poisoning

Loveday's complaints are part of a growing chorus in the huge Niger delta, home to about seven million people and the primary source of billions of dollars' worth of Nigeria's black gold.

Local observers say the increasing tension is threatening to explode as it did in the early 1990s, when the delta's Ogoni people began campaigning for political self-determination and ownership of the lucrative resource beneath their land. Their efforts ended in a wave of violence and killings and the 1995 execution of prominent writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other dissidents

“The situation has gotten worse. Now, everybody here is suffering,” said Loveday (56), who is surviving off the goodwill of friends

Nigeria's military regime, led by General Sani Abacha, has sole ownership of the country's mineral rights, a number of oil companies also share profits through joint ventures

The stakes are huge. The Niger delta produces about two million barrels a day, worth about R35-billion a year. That accounts for about 90% of Nigeria's foreign exchange and about 80% of the government's total revenue. The US, which imports about 50% of Nigeria's oil output, has been criticised for helping to prop up a regime that Washington has itself branded one of Africa's most oppressive

Local activists say that protests are intensifying in the delta, especially among young people seeking a bigger share of oil industry jobs, improved living conditions and respect for their environment. In the last several months, demonstrators have occupied and closed down oil platforms, shut

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down pumps, picketed production facilities and taken workers hostage

Local observers fear a recurrence of the kind of violence that occurred after Saro-Wiwa's execution – an action that drew limited sanctions from some Western nations and resulted in Nigeria's immediate suspension from the Commonwealth.

In the three years since, more than 2 000 Ogonis have been killed for protesting against the government's oil policy and 50 000 have been displaced, according to the Port Harcourt-based Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law

Today, spurred by deteriorating living standards and a general dissatisfaction with the Abacha regime, the protests have spread beyond the Ogonis to include the delta's 20-plus other ethnic groups.

But pro-democracy leaders say that authorities have tried to stifle dissent by intimidating and arresting suspected activists.

At least 13% of oil revenues are supposed to go towards developing the infrastructure in oil-producing areas, industry officials say. But community leaders say the government reneges on this task, leaving the oil-rich southern delta without such basic amenities as running water, electricity, sanitation, paved roads, health clinics and schools.

Locals also complain that oil exploration is a menace to their health and their environment, and they blame both the government and the foreign companies that are its longtime partners including Shell, Texaco, Mobil and Chevron

“One would think that with the oil companies here, there would be much improvement, but there isn't,” said Isaac Uchechukwu of the Egi Youth Federation, a civic and environmental pressure group. Officials at Shell say their company never puts wells on arable land, and they even complain that efforts to introduce development into certain communities have been thwarted. They say residents often steal electrical generators, vandalise water tanks and sabotage the 6 000km of company pipes. – LA Times

Nation in search of a leader as Nigeria slides into decay

ARG 7/5/98

(226)

JAMES RUPERT

Lagos – For Africans hoping that their continent's most populous country can avoid slipping into violent upheaval, the last two weekends have brought bad news

On April 25, Nigerians underscored the unpopularity of General Sani Abacha, boycotting an election crafted to help him prolong his tenure. And this weekend, Nigerians largely ignored a call by pro-democracy groups to begin peaceful protests to force General Abacha to surrender power.

Little peaceful protest was seen. Instead, riots erupted on Friday in Ibadan, Nigeria's second-largest city, reportedly leaving seven dead.

The broad failure of the protest call underscored the fact that, like General Abacha, opposition leaders carry little real political authority among Nigerians.

General Abacha maintains his rule by force, no credible alternative leadership has coalesced – and the energy-starved economy is decaying towards the pre-industrial level.

As a result, Nigerian and other analysts say, the country is sliding toward a violent upheaval that could destabilise and further impoverish much of the region.

Tensions rose sharply last month, when General Abacha's aides engineered his nomination as the sole candidate for the presidency of a civilian government scheduled to take over from the military in October.

By dashing Nigerians' hopes for peaceful political competition, General Abacha's camp raised the risk of violence, said the analysts.

For a peaceful political resolution, "what Nigeria needs is a lot of prayer. That's the point we are at now," said Stephen Olugbem1, a professor of political science at the University of Lagos.

Analysts disagree about exactly how far Nigeria may be from the brink.

The government has scheduled a referendum for August 1 to ratify General Abacha's selection for continued leadership.

"I'm not sure we'll make it even as far as August (without an upheaval)," said one diplomat.

"I'm very worried about stability", said another ambassador. But, he added, Nigeria could well muddle through its crisis for some time.

More than four years after General Abacha seized power in a coup, Nigerians are frustrated by steady economic decay.

Corruption, always a problem, is worse than ever, said most Nigerians interviewed. Wealthy in oil and farmland, the country can neither fuel nor feed itself.

Many factories and businesses have closed. One western analyst guessed unemployment might be 25% to 30%.

In Lagos, unemployed Nigerians try any conceivable enterprise to survive – running restaurants, repair shops, plant nurseries and barber shops from the pavements.

Many say the exhausting struggle for economic survival is one reason that people are slow to move to protest against a government they oppose.

But Nigeria simmers with conflicts, mostly over power and money, that periodically ignite violence. Friday's riot in Ibadan was the latest eruption among the Yorubas, main ethnic group of south-west Nigeria.

Yoruba youths marched through the city, then went on a rampage after confrontations with police.

They burned vehicles and businesses belonging to Abacha supporters, including a newspaper building. Police fired at protesters, killing seven, according to Nigerian newspapers.

Independent Nigeria is dominated by Hausa-speaking northerners, including ethnic Hausas and Fulanis.

Yorubas consider themselves disenfranchised, especially since 1993, when General Abacha and fellow military officers scuttled a presidential election that, by all evidence, had been won by Yoruba businessman Moshood Abiola.

In 1994, Mr Abiola was jailed on treason charges, for which he has never stood trial. On Friday, the protesters in Ibadan demanded his release.

Throughout the country, feuding over land or local government authority is common – and General Abacha's camp says he is

the only leader strong enough to control such outbreaks.

One diplomat said he worried that a flare-up of any such conflict could prompt a military coup "by younger officers – majors and captains" who have not shared the spoils of power that have enriched senior officers.

While Nigeria has a vigorous civil society and intellectual class, it has no leader with broad moral authority.

The emergence of such a leader is complicated by the extremely diverse nature of Nigerian society.

"We have 40 or 50 major ethnic groups," said Ayo Obe, president of the Civil Liberties Organisation.

There was no Nigerian equivalent to the Philippines' Corazon Aquino or Haiti's Jean-Bertrand Aristide – leaders who gathered broad coalitions to overturn dictatorships – conceded Ms Obe.

"Abiola ought to have been that figure."

Unlike Mrs Aquino, a housewife, or Mr Aristide, a former Roman Catholic priest, Mr Abiola did not enter politics as a modest populist.

He is a multimillionaire with a publishing firm and an oil company and was a key ally of former President Shehu Shagari, who was widely criticised for corruption.

The 1993 returns gave Mr Abiola a nationwide victory that broke Nigeria's usual tribal voting patterns.

But after the coup by the northern-based General Abacha, Mr Abiola lost considerable support in the north.

Some say he adopted a narrower, Yoruba agenda, while his supporters say he was tarred by government propaganda.

Ms Obe's organisation belongs to an umbrella alliance, United Action for Democracy, that calls for Mr Abiola to head a broad-based government of national unity.

Such a government would sponsor a national convention to draft a new constitution and then hold elections for a permanent civilian government.

The Abacha government has jailed or exiled other figures cited by Nigerians as possible opposition leaders – The Washington Post.

'What we need is lots of prayer', says analyst, as terminal economic decay and corruption bring oil-rich land to its knees

Nigeria slides toward new violence

Journalists hounded and jailed

By Howard W. French
Lagos

Very week without fail since General Sani Abacha seized power in 1993, Kola Ilori has somehow managed to put out Tell, Nigeria's most influential and combative news magazine.

For some issues this has meant scrambling to secretly reprint the magazine after an entire press run has been seized by the country's military authorities, who routinely smash up printing shops and arrest their owners to block publications. Other times it has required desperate last-minute efforts to patch together an issue after seeing the bulk of the staff carried away in police sweeps. Once, Ilori said, he eluded capture by state security agents only by posing as a lowly truck loader during a police raid.

Tell is officially published in Lagos, but Ilori uses printers all over the country. Until late last year, Ilori was mostly responsible for production matters at the magazine. But the abduction of a top editor and the forced exile of another has left him virtually alone at the head of the enterprise.

For many of its 38 years of independence from Britain, Nigeria had the freest and most diverse press in Africa. But for the last several years, independent journalists have been arrested, beaten, forced into exile and even assassinated.

Nigeria has experienced the "most extreme deterioration of conditions for the press in Africa" according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, a US-based advocacy group.

To keep the police off balance, Ilori changes sleeping places regularly, sees little of his family, rarely uses the same printing press for more than two weeks in a row, and meets secretly with other reporters and editors to hash out story ideas only under the cover of religious services in churches and mosques.

Despite its hit-and-run existence, Tell consistently manages to beat the competition, revealing details of coup plots, tensions inside the armed forces and corruption scandals that make it a must read

for the masses, the Nigerian intelligentsia and foreign diplomats.

"That we come out every week is the result of sheer ingenuity," said Ilori (48), who spoke at a carefully arranged meeting place. "We have had to perfect a fleet-footed art of mobile production. It takes your brain, it takes your blood and body, but it is the only way to survive."

Each week Tell publishes a photograph of its last managing editor, Onome Osifo-Whiskey, under the stark headline, "Where is Onome Osifo-Whiskey?" He was abducted at his Lagos home last November as he dressed to go to church, and has not been heard from since.

Having already spent six months in prison, Tell's editor-in-chief, Nosa Igebor, fled the country for Britain in November when state security agents raided his home after the publication of an article that discussed runarounds of a serious illness afflicting Abacha.

One journalist, Christine Anyanwu, was jailed for 15 years in 1995 as an "accessory to treason" for publishing a story debunking official accounts of a coup plot. Anyanwu (46) is reported to be going blind for lack of medical care.

Another reporter, Oni Egbunine, was beaten into a coma by police last July in punishment for an article that reported corruption by state government officials in the provincial capital of Owerri.

As widespread as press repression has become in Nigeria, the harshest focus remains on Tell, and a small number of competitors, among them The News and Tempo—all known for their credibility.

Dapo Olorunyomi, Ilori's counterpart at The News, was forced to flee to the United States in 1996 after repeated attempts to arrest him. Once he had left, security agents focused on his wife, Ladi Olorunyomi, who fled to the US a year later after being arrested twice and held for three months without charge.

"If you walk through newsrooms in Nigeria they are mostly empty because to stay at your desk is to face arrest," she said. "Even the clean-up men get arrested. That is what is happening to the press under Abacha." — New York Times

By James Rupert
Lagos, Nigeria

For Africans hoping that their continent's most populous nation can avoid slipping into violent upheaval, the last two weekends have brought bad news.

On April 25, Nigerians underscored the unpopularity of General Sani Abacha, boycotting an election crafted to help him prolong his tenure. And last weekend, Nigerians largely ignored a call by pro-democracy groups to begin peaceful mass protests to force Abacha to quit.

Little peaceful protest was seen. Instead, riots erupted Friday in Ibadan, Nigeria's second-largest city, reportedly leaving seven dead. The broad failure of the protest call underscored the fact that, like Abacha, opposition leaders carry little real political authority.

Abacha maintains his rule by force, no credible alternative leadership has coalesced—and the energy-starved economy is decaying toward the pre-industrial level.

With all that, Nigerian and foreign analysts say, this nation is sliding toward a violent upheaval that could destabilize and further impoverish much of the already parlous surrounding region.

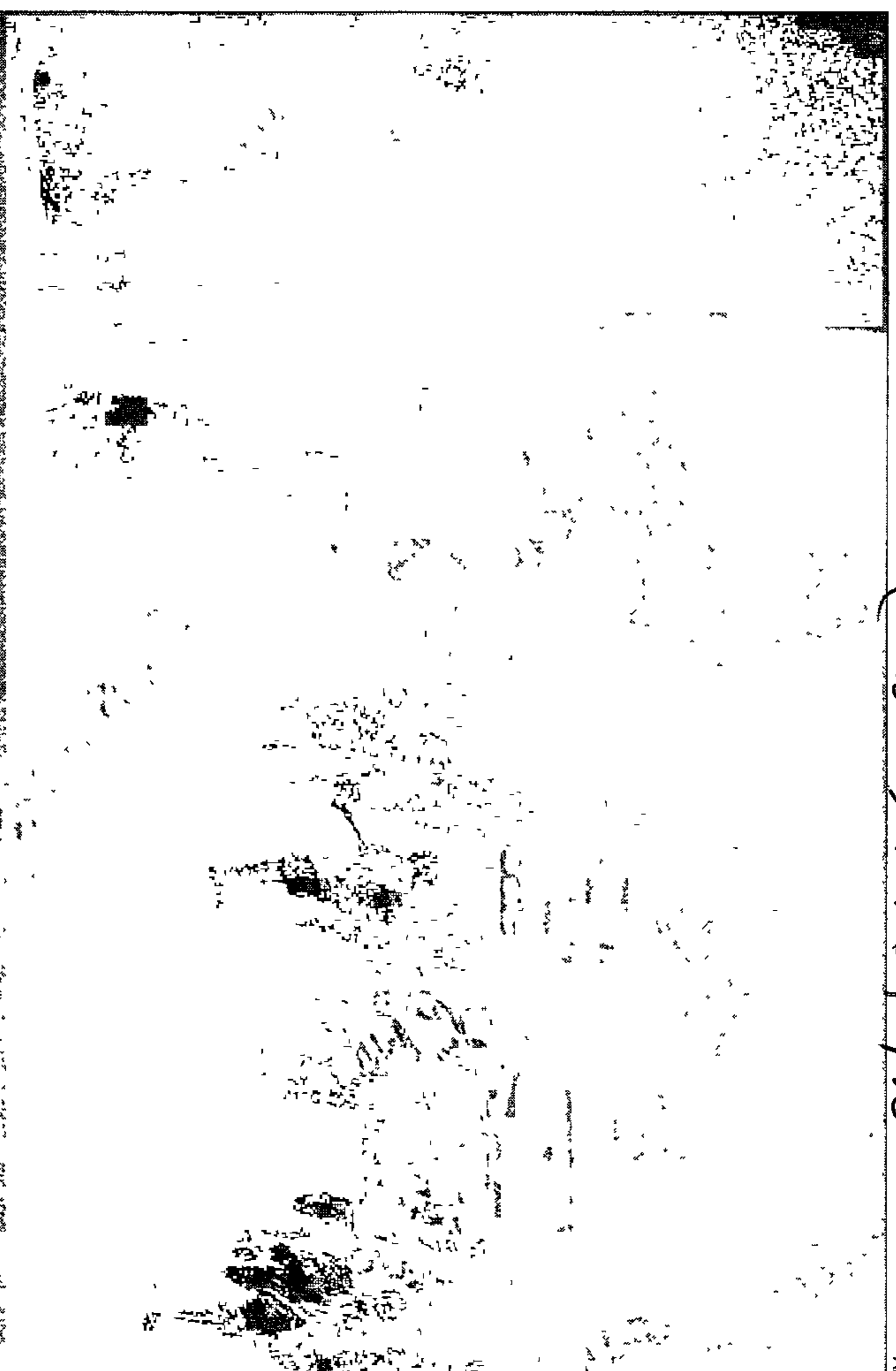
Tensions rose significantly last month when Abacha's aides engineered his nomination as the sole candidate for the presidency of a civilian government scheduled to take power from the military in October. By quashing Nigerians' hopes for peaceful political competition, Abacha's camp raised the risk of violence, analysts said.

For a peaceful political resolution, "what Nigeria needs is a lot of prayer. That's the point we are at now," said Stephen Oluqem, a political-science professor at the University of Lagos.

Analysts disagree about how far Nigeria may be from the brink. The government has scheduled an August 1 referendum to ratify Abacha's selection as the continuing leader. "I'm not sure we'll make it even as far as August" without an upheaval, said one diplomat.

But another thought Nigeria could well "muddle through" its crisis for some time.

More than four years after Abacha seized power in a coup, Nigerians are frustrated by steady



AP

Fury... Nigerians run through the streets as pro-democracy demonstrators burn homes and cars in Ibadan on Friday. Government troops opened fire on civilians killing seven after members of United Action for Democracy protested against the military rule of General Sani Abacha.

economic decay. Corruption, always a problem, is worse than ever, most Nigerians interviewed say. Wealthy in oil and farmland, the country can neither fuel nor feed itself.

Many factories and businesses have closed. One Western economic analyst guessed that unemployment might be 25 to 30%. In Lagos, unemployed Nigerians try any conceivable enterprise to survive—running restaurants, repair shops, plant nurseries and barber shops from the curb sides. Many say the exhausting struggle for economic survival is one reason people are slow to move to protest a government they oppose.

Nigeria simmers with conflicts, mostly over power and money, that periodically ignite violence. Friday's riot in Ibadan was the latest eruption among the Yorubas, the main ethnic group in the south-west.

Yoruba youths marched through the city, then went on a rampage after burning vehicles and businesses belonging to Abacha supporters, including a newspaper. Police fired on protesters, killing seven, according to Nigerian newspapers.

Independent Nigeria is dominated by Hausa-speaking northerners, including ethnic Hausas and Fulanis. Yorubas consider themselves disenfranchised, especially since 1993 when Abacha and fellow military officers scuttled a presidential election that, by all evidence, had been won by Yoruba businessman Moshood Abiola.

In 1994, Abiola was jailed on treason charges, for which there has never been a trial. On Friday, the protesters demanded his release.

Throughout the country, fighting between communities over land or local government authority is common—and Abacha's camp says he is the only leader strong enough to control such outbreaks.

One diplomat said he worries that a flare-up of any such conflict could prompt a military coup "by younger officers—majors and captains" who have not shared the

spoils of power that have enriched senior officers.

While Nigeria has a vigorous civil society and intellectual class, it has no leader with broad moral authority. The emergence of such a leader is complicated by "the extremely diverse nature of Nigerian society."

"We have 40 or 50 major ethnic groups," said Ayo Obe, a Lagos attorney and president of the Civil Liberties Organisation.

"There is no Nigerian equivalent" to the Philippines' Corazon Aquino or Haiti's Jean-Bertrand Aristide—leaders who gathered broad coalitions to overturn dictatorial regimes—conceded Obe.

"Still, Abiola ought to have been that figure," she said. Unlike Aquino, a housewife, or Aristide, a onetime Catholic priest, Abiola did not enter politics as a modest populist. He is a multimillionaire who owns a publishing firm and an oil company and was a key ally of former President Shehu Sha-

garu, who was widely criticized for corruption.

The 1993 returns gave Abiola a nationwide victory that broke Nigeria's usual tribal voting patterns. But after the coup by the northern-based Abacha, Abiola lost considerable support in the north.

Some say he adopted a narrower, Yoruba agenda, while his supporters say he was tarred by government propaganda.

Obe's organisation belongs to an umbrella alliance, United Action for Democracy, that calls for Abiola to head a broad-based government of national unity. Such a government would sponsor a national convention to draft a new constitution and then hold elections for a permanent civilian government. Abacha's government has jailed or exiled other figures cited by Nigerians as possible opposition leaders. A prominent Abacha rival, Major-General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, died in prison last December. Others have retreated to private life. — Washington Post

FROM WASHINGTON

World must move against Nigeria

Dictator Abacha treats citizens
worse than blacks under
apartheid, writes Rich Mkhondo

Abacha 7/15/98
US and banning the sale of arms to the country, but has avoided disturbing big US oil investments or US purchases of Nigeria's oil

After two years of deliberations, the US will opt for another set of "constructive engagement" policies, particularly because American policy makers argue that, without support in Europe, US sanctions would not be effective. The oil market is flexible, officials argue, and Nigeria could easily find new outlets if the US is closed. But, experts say, the current glut in the oil markets would make it more difficult for Nigeria to replace US demand.

There is no doubt that the US, which imports 50% of Nigeria's oil output, has a keen interest in continued stability in Nigeria, one of its major sources of crude oil and potentially an important supplier of natural gas. With 105 million people, it is not only the dominant power in volatile West Africa but also the most populous African country.

But to gain credibility for its current and upcoming policy on Africa, the US needs to confront more courageously the tyrannical rulers responsible for Nigeria's decline. Unfortunately despite the low-level sanctions and toothless condemnations, the US still buys Nigeria's oil - and oil money is all that keeps the Abacha regime afloat.

Nigerians' feelings were dramatically displayed during the April 25 legislative voting. Most people boycotted the election, with reports of zero turnout in parts of Lagos. Anti-Abacha groups have taken heart, calling for strikes and a boycott of the August 1 balloting aimed at whitewashing his rule.

Ordinary Nigerians deserve support from abroad. SA and the US can orchestrate an international embargo against sales of Nigerian oil, which earn its government R50-billion a year. With roughly 80% of Nigeria's budget from oil, it is oil which props up the dictatorship.

Without that revenue, the Abacha regime would probably crumble, and Nigeria could rebuild its democratic institutions. Until that is addressed, nothing will move Abacha - Star Foreign Service.

Nigeria explains slow privatisation record

(226) (MR) ET 11/5/98

GILL TUDOR

Cairo — Nigeria was deliberately taking its time in privatising state assets to ensure the benefits were fairly shared, Tom Ikimi, the foreign minister, said at the weekend.

“One of the fundamental problems of Nigeria is the distribution of wealth,” Ikimi said. “This is what has consistently caused instability in Nigeria. In order to ensure that this does not occur again these things have to be taken carefully and worked out very well.”

Nigeria’s vocal business community and foreign lenders have long demanded a prompt privatisation programme for Africa’s second biggest economy, but there has been scarcely any sign of progress on government pledges to sell off the state phone company this year and prepare the power utility for sale.

Ikimi, in Cairo for ministerial meetings ahead of the G15 summit, said such industries had been built up over the years and belonged to the Nigerian people as a whole.

“A framework now has to be developed where the privatisation will touch

every Nigerian. The slow pace is to establish a permanent framework of privatisation, where these shares can be distributed nationwide and will go to all parts of our country.”

He expressed caution at foreign involvement in privatisation, saying Nigeria did not want to repeat the mistakes of the “indigenisation” policy of the late 1970s when many foreign business owners were forced out.

“A handful of their (Nigerian) friends quickly grabbed those enterprises, and since then they have produced nothing. They were just glorified middle men. They shared the profits in England, and the Nigerians were totally impoverished.”

Foreigners are not queuing up to put their money into Nigeria, which is notorious for bureaucracy, corruption and crime. Most of its 104 million people remain desperately poor in spite of the country’s rich oil resources.

The country’s infrastructure is crumbling from lack of investment and the economy is being sapped by weak consumer purchasing power and low government spending — Reuters

Anger, resentment simmer in Nigeria's one-time

Star 12/5/98 (226)

Biafran war veterans are left to beg at the roadside and corruption rules in a country where natural resources could have

By IAN STEWART
Enugu (Nigeria)

Broken soldiers at the side of the road: they are the rejected remnants of a catastrophic civil war nobody wants to remember, but few can forget

In wheelchairs and propped up on crutches, a dozen Ibo tribesmen - veterans of the Biafran war of 30 years ago - come every day to sit by the kerb of a two-lane highway on the outskirts of Biafra's erstwhile capital, Enugu. They have nowhere else to go.

They gave their legs and their arms, and by the hundreds of thousands their compatriots gave their lives for an independence from Nigeria that lasted only 31 months. In return, they say, they got nothing

For Nigeria's military dictatorship, the Republic of Biafra is a bad memory best left in the past.

But the underlying rage, that same sense of betrayal that provoked the secessionist war in 1967, is alive and simmering among the largely Christian Ibos of south-eastern Nigeria.

"Look at me," says Francis Joku, a former foot soldier in the Biafran People's Army. He leans forward in his rusting wheelchair and points at calloused stubs where his legs once were. "None of us can walk. We're crippled like our homeland."

It's a lament that echoes Ibo sentiments as old as independent Nigeria.

A country of ethnic fault lines, Nigeria has had limited success in incorporating di-

verse and often jealous tribal groups under one flag. Economic problems are making the task increasingly difficult, and the ethnic rift is again spreading.

Under the five-year dictatorship of General Sani Abacha, a northern Muslim, Nigeria's economy is in disarray. Corruption dictates in place of fair competition. Patronage contracts doled out to the loyal determine success in the private sector.

The prospects are particularly grim for the Ibos, whose long-standing enmity with Nigeria's northern Muslim tribes persists.

A generation after the Biafran war, Ibos complain that their oil-rich land is exploited by Abacha's regime while they are neglected and treated like

an underclass.

Although Nigeria is one of the world's largest oil-producing countries, little of its \$22.5-billion in yearly oil revenue has been put towards nation-

Ibos complain their oil-rich land is exploited by Abacha govt

building. The Ibo homelands, known casually here as "Iboland," sit over the vast majority of Nigeria's oil reserves, but have seen scant returns.

"The federal government always wanted what was in

Iboland, but they never wanted the Ibo man," says Joseph Akani (54). A war veteran paralysed from the waist down, he smartly snaps his hand to his brow in a military salute to passing motorists from the side of the Enugu highway.

Ibos have virtually no representation in the upper echelons of Nigeria's government.

If the presidential election takes place later this year, the Ibos, who account for about one of every four Nigerians, will influence voting in only two of the country's 30 states.

In Onitsha, the sprawling Ibo market town along the Niger River, electricity service is sporadic, roads are in disrepair and most people live in subsistence poverty.

The bitterness sounded by the veterans on the roadside is

provided for all

separatist enclave

shared by many in their community.

"We're treated like second-class citizens," says businessman Casper Muba. "If Biafra had survived, could you imagine? We could have built a wonderful state with the resources God has given us. Instead it is taken from us and wasted."

Biafra was conceived in early 1966 when five young army officers from the Ibo tribe toppled the national government in a violent coup, killing the premier and kidnapping several senior cabinet ministers.

For the northern Muslim tribes, the uprising signalled an Ibo conspiracy to wrest control of the entire country.

Old suspicions and ethnic hatreds boiled over and blood-letting began. When it was over,

tens of thousands of Ibo migrants living in the north had been massacred and their churches burned. Bodies lined the side of the railway linking the Ibo's south with the Hausa north.

More than one million Ibos across the country returned to their tribal homelands to heed the call of their leader, General Odumegwu Ojukwu, for an independence struggle.

Describing the Ibo killings as "a premeditated and deliberate act, diabolical in concept and maniacal in execution", Ojukwu proclaimed a sovereign Republic of Biafra for the Ibo people in May 1967.

More than a million people were killed or died of starvation in the three-year civil war that followed, before Biafra surrendered in ignominious defeat.

to government troops in 1970.

Today, the Biafra war veterans, like most Ibos, must fend for themselves.

"Just look at what our land has," says Benson Nwonoh, a former teacher who joined the Biafran People's Army to defend his homeland. "All the states of Iboland have oil, but we have nothing. They cannot even give us working wheelchairs."

A metal fragment from a hand-grenade lodged in Nwonoh's skull back in 1968. Left partially paralysed, he lives with about 120 other veterans at a small camp near the side of the Enugu highway.

"The government just abandoned us," he says. "Nothing has changed. They say they want reconciliation, but they give us nothing." - Sapa-AP

'Election uncertainty' sends Nigeria's naira into steep dive

Kingsley Kubevirije

(27b)

LAGOS — Nigeria's currency, the naira, has plunged against major currencies and some dealers attribute this to uncertainty in the run-up to August's scheduled presidential election.

In addition, Switzerland has ruled out possible debt relief for Nigeria, saying the diminishing rate of foreign investment in the country can be blamed on political instability and the problem

of fraud in business.

Nigeria, a key player in the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec), has officially admitted it has external debt of \$27bn.

However, unofficial sources say that the debt could be even heavier.

On Monday, 90 naira would be exchanged for \$1 at the unofficial but heavily patronised parallel market. Last week, the exchange rate was 85 naira to

the dollar in the same market. Other hard currencies also gained value against the Nigerian currency. The British pound sterling now exchanges for 145 naira, compared with 143 naira recently.

Nigeria operates a dual exchange rate because official government transactions are carried out at the rate of 22 naira to the dollar. The Central Bank of Nigeria, the nation's reserve bank, sells at that rate to mun-

istries and parastatals. Foreign exchange dealers are unsure why the naira has fallen so rapidly, but seem to agree that the decline is linked to uncertainty about the future.

A foreign exchange dealer in Lagos, John Chukwu, said that investors were "panic buying" as the country moved towards the final lap of its political transition programme, which ends with a presidential election on August 1.

BD 13/5/98

Nigerian envoy defends military regime's human rights record

Vuyo Mvoko
 CAPE TOWN — Nigerian ambassador Al-haji Shehu Malam yesterday rejected a possibility posed in Parliament that his country's military regime could be stifling democracy and creating a smokescreen on the country's return to civilian rule.

Nigeria was being "maligned in sections of the SA media who sheepishly echo the prejudices of their western counterparts," Malam told the parliamentary foreign af-fairs portfolio committee which had invited him to address Parliament's concerns on re-cent events in Nigerian general elections.

Elections at local government level took place in April last year, in the State Assem-bly in December, and in the National As-sembly and Senate last month. Elections for the posts of state governors and of the pres-ident would take place on August 1 as scheduled, Malam said.

A committee member said he could not understand how a country of a 100-million people could nominate only one candidate, military chief Sani Abacha. A question was also raised about whether it was not per-haps suicidal for anyone to dare put up an alternative name to that of Abacha.

Malam said Nigeria has demonstrated its commitment to a human rights culture. The country was involved in peace-keeping operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone and had set up a human rights commission that drew its membership from nongovernmen-tal organisations and the media.

Common criminals turned into human rights activists overnight, Malam said.

The execution of activist Ken Saro-Wiwa a few years ago came after Saro-Wiwa "grew impatient with the nonviolent ap-proach favoured" by his organisation when, together with some youth, Saro-Wiwa "un-leashed a reign of terror" on Ogoniland and neighbouring communities resulting in the deaths of four people.

Moshood Abiola, imprisoned since 1994, remained in detention because he declared himself president "despite warnings and advice not to do so".

Gen Olusegun Obasanjo, head of the Ni-gerian state between 1976 to 1979, was still languishing in jail after being implicated in a coup plot against Abacha African leaders, including President Nelson Mandela, had called for his release but such interventions contributed only to "a multiplication of sen-tences passed" on Obasanjo.

"This was the first ever exercise of le-mentary shown to those found guilty of such offences," Malam said.

On a verdict given to alleged coup plot-ters recently, Malam said the foreign af-fairs department asked him why military officers involved in the alleged coup were not tried in a regular court. "Nowhere in the world has any serving military officer been taken to a regular court for mutiny or rebellion against authority".

Malam said he would, however, convey all Parliament's concerns to Nigerian mil-itary rulers.

MFC 'inefficient or rampant'?



Nigeria's Christian leaders warn of national upheaval

Hilary Andersson

LAGOS — Nigeria's Christian leaders warned on Tuesday that the country was on the brink of a national crisis because a sole presidential candidate, military leader Gen Sani Abacha, had been adopted by all five of the government-registered parties

The Christian Association of Nigeria asked Abacha to "think hard" before accepting the parties' nominations, and begged for clemency for Abacha's former number two, Gen Oladipo Diya, who was among those recently sentenced to death by firing squad for involvement in an alleged coup plot in December

The statement reflects a wider feeling of unease in the nation over how the military is going to handle growing pockets of unrest. SA and the international community have also expressed concern about whether a democratic system will be introduced

The Christian Association of Nigeria is an influential parent body to Nigeria's 50-million Chris-

tians. The church has become increasingly outspoken, particularly since Pope John Paul's visit in March. The pope called for the release of key political prisoners during his meeting with Abacha, but no important prisoners have been released yet

The Christian association said "We strongly advise them (the military) to re-examine their conscience on the action they have taken in order that Nigerian may be fast withdrawn from the calamitous precipice to which she has been dragged"

In the southwest — traditional opposition territory — the biggest riots in recent years left seven people dead just over a week ago. The military's response has been to raid opposition offices, and arrest many of its opponents

The riots, which were centred in the city of Ibadan, reflected not just anger against the government's political agenda, but frustration over the hardships of everyday life. An incessant fuel crisis has crippled economic activity in many major cities, a humilating

fact in one of the world's biggest oil-producing nations

The north of Nigeria, usually the bastion of support for the military, has been worst hit economically. There, political opposition, which used to be minimal, is now centred on MD Yusuf, the man who had hoped to stand against Abacha in presidential elections

Yusuf has raised the hopes of some northerners by filing a suit in court claiming that Abacha's adoption by the Grass Roots Democratic Party was unconstitutional. Antigovernment court cases in Nigeria rarely get far, however, as has been proved on several occasions in the past when government ignored court rulings

Many people who were in Nigeria during the last political crisis in 1994, sparked by the military's decision to annul presidential elections the year before, say the atmosphere now is just as dangerous. Commentators seem unsure whether the military's strategy of jailing its enemies will succeed in ensuring stability, or whether it will just make matters worse

MD 14/5/98

(226)

Kingsley Kubeyinje

(226)

Nigerian insurance industry 'very sick'

LAGOS — Nigeria's insurance industry is in trouble and many companies are operating in an alarmingly "deficient manner", the country's federal commissioner for insurance said this week.

Oladipupo Bailey said an investigation by his organisation had found the industry was "very sick". There was evidence that many of the more than 140 insurance companies and 500 broking firms were performing badly.

Gen Sam Abacha's military government was bent on flushing out all the

quacks in the industry, as well as the unhealthy firms operating illegally. About 17 firms were operating illegally, he said.

In 1996, government directed all insurance firms to shore up their capital base to 20-million naira. However, few were able to meet the requirement, even after the government extended the deadline last year.

On several occasions government has threatened to withdraw the operating licences of firms who were unable to comply with regulations — as it did with commercial and merchant banks.

PD 14/5/98

AFRICAN BUSINESS

Some multinational companies have cut back on drilling plans, and others are likely to follow

Funding problems plague Nigeria's oil industry

MATTHEW TOSTEVIN

Lagos — A shortage of funds continues to dog Nigeria's oil industry, causing some multinationals to cut back drilling plans, industry officials said on Tuesday.

Expectations that 1998 will be a better year for the industry are fading as monthly cash-call payments are still being paid at the 1997 level.

Mobil, Nigeria's second biggest producer, said last week that it had cut back one drilling rig because of the shortage of funds. Chevron also said it was expecting cutbacks next month if the funding problem continued.

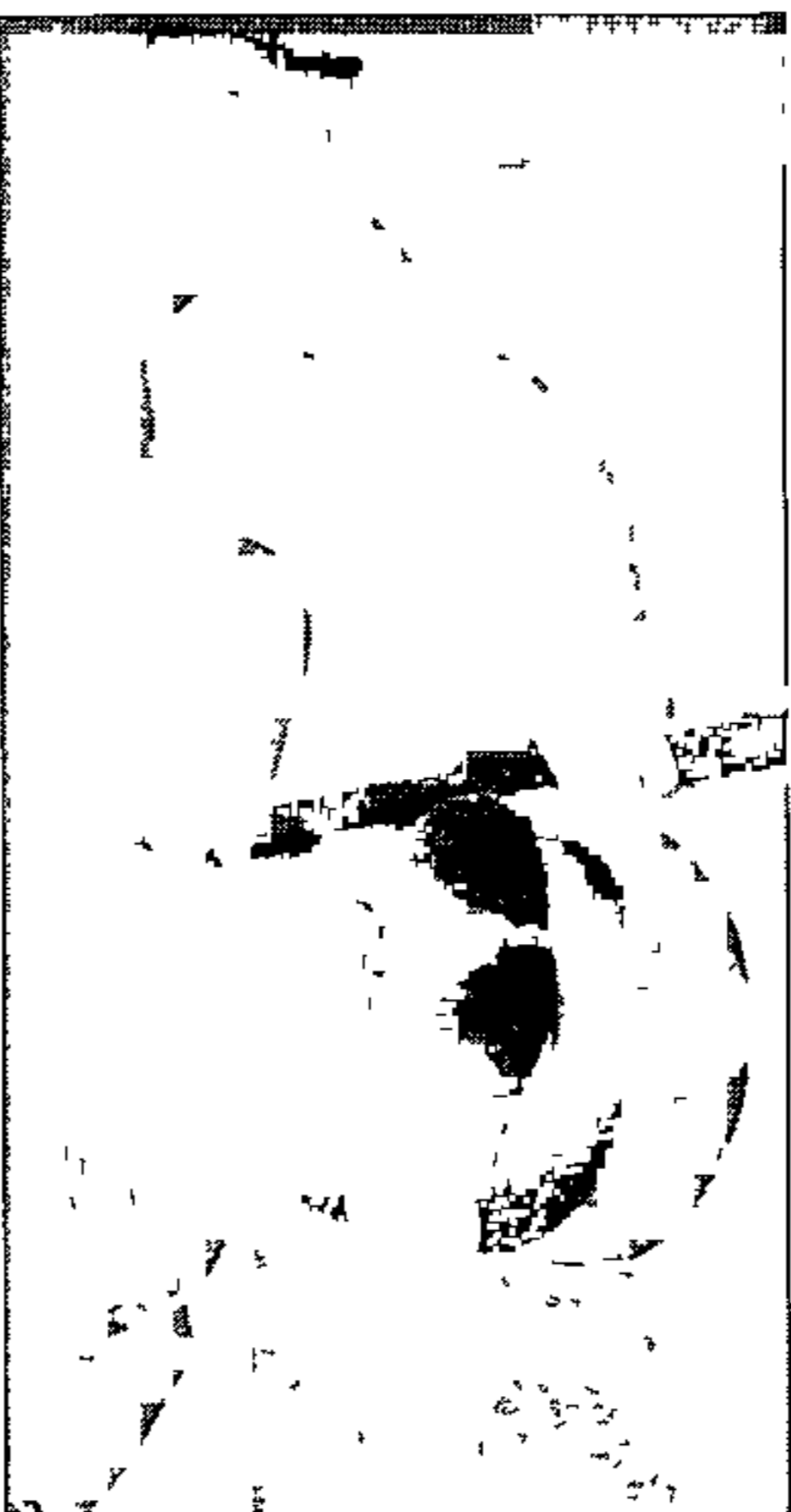
George Kirkland, the managing director of Chevron, said "We haven't released a rig yet,

but we may do that in June if the funding situation does not improve."

Royal Dutch-Shell said it had not yet been forced to cut back drilling or release rigs, but it cautioned that development plans would fail to benefit if budget promises were not met.

A Shell official said "We're hopeful that since something was agreed then, that is what we will get. The hope is there, and it is on that basis that plans have been made."

Last year, multinationals complained that if funding was not increased in 1998, there would be a reduction in Nigeria's capacity to produce crude oil. Crude oil accounts for more than 95 percent of export earnings.



BIGGER PLANS Military ruler General Sani Abacha

PHOTO: AP

But Nigerian officials, who in the past accused foreign companies of greed, said that since oil prices have stayed well below this year's budget predictions of \$17 a

barrel a day, in line with the Opec cut, then it's clear we are producing considerably below capacity in any case." But he said "We will still try to meet the budget demand at some stage."

Under the revenue-sharing agreement, if world prices fall but stay above \$12 a barrel, and assuming production is steady, the government takes the brunt of the price weakness. If output goes down, whether or not prices rise, the companies also lose.

During last month, Nigerian output averaged 2.15 million barrels a day. According to an economic master plan released last year, the government's target is to expand capacity to 2.5 million barrels a day by 2000 and to 4 million barrels a day by 2010.

Industry officials said these targets would go by the board if the government did not pay more attention to its investment needs.

One senior industry executive said "I know they say we were crying wolf when we warned that capacity could drop. What they have to realize is that capacity is definitely lower than it could have been by now if the investment had been made."

But political analysts say military ruler Sani Abacha has more important concerns than the oil industry.

Abacha is widely expected to stand as the sole candidate for the presidency in August, drawing opposition protests and condemnation from Western countries. — Reuters

(226) CR(PK) 14/8/98

Idaban court charges 37 with conspiracy in wake of protests

(226) BD 15/8/98

LAGOS — A Nigerian court in southwestern Ibadan charged 37 people on Wednesday with conspiracy, rioting and arson in the wake of May Day protests against Gen Sani Abacha, local newspapers said yesterday.

The papers said all of the accused pleaded not guilty to the charges. They included Ola Oni, local leader of the United Action for Democracy opposition group, which called for the protests.

At least seven people were shot dead by police during the rioting as protesters tried to attack property belonging to supporters of a campaign to ensure Abacha an unopposed run at August 1 presidential elections.

"The police officer handling the case said investigations were continuing while the state police command has intensified efforts to round up the remaining suspects," the majority state-owned Daily Times said.

National United Action for Democracy leader Ohsa Agbakoba and prominent politician Bola Ige were also arrested following the

riot but have not yet been charged. Five parties adopted Abacha last month as the sole candidate for presidential elections.

Press reports said yesterday the regime was promulgating a decree that would allow Abacha to stand. Two officials of the regime's transition implementation committee, in charge of the military programme to restore rule to elected civilians, told This Day newspaper the measure would invalidate a decree banning soldiers and police from standing for political office.

The proposed new decree was announced by the committee members after the five authorised parties had given Abacha their backing to run.

The officials said the decree would put to rest the controversy over Abacha's adoption by the political parties.

Opposition groups, lawyers and some of the media had said this choice flew in the face of the 1996 law disqualifying all military, police and other security officers, as well as public servants,

from registering as political party members and thus as potential candidates. While there has been a crackdown on opposition groups, government agencies have allowed presidential rallies on Abacha's behalf.

Observers said remaining arguments against Abacha's presidential candidacy were that he was not a member of any political party before his adoption and the parties did not follow due process in amending their constitutions for his nomination.

London-based human rights group Article 19, meanwhile, urged the Group of Eight yesterday to take co-ordinated action against Abacha's government.

The group said the international community was doing nothing to improve human rights in the state. Deputy director Malcolm Smart called on Britain to show resolve in applying what Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said would be an ethically based foreign policy — Reuter, Sapa-AFP.

The Nigeria question: Page 16

Nigeria gives green light to gas pipeline feasibility study

BD 15/5/98

(226)

Hilary Andersson

LAGOS — Oil companies Shell and Chevron have been given the go-ahead to embark on a joint feasibility study for the proposed \$260m west African gas pipeline, in what is seen as a breakthrough marking Nigeria's approval for private participation in the project.

Development of the proposed pipeline, which would run from Nigeria through Benin and Togo to Ghana, has been stalled since 1995 when the governments of the four countries originally signed a protocol agreeing to the idea in principle.

"The whole proposal might never get off the ground without private sector involvement and this has been the problem until now," said a gas industry source in Nigeria.

The proposed pipeline would carry gas from Nigeria to its main market, Ghana, which would use the gas for power generation. Ghana relies on hydroelectric power and the proposed gas pipeline would depend on the start up of a major gas power generation project in the country.

An industry source said most of the gas from Nigeria would be channelled

off from oil flares which resulted in gas being wasted. Shell Nigeria aims to eliminate 90% of the gas flaring done by Nigeria by the year 2008.

Potential revenues of the west African pipeline project stand at an estimated \$500 000 a day, if the gas is sold at the cost price of about \$2.50 a 1 000 standard cubic feet of gas.

Once the pipeline was operating, running costs were estimated at about 3% to 5% of the initial capital investment of \$260m, industry sources said.

The four-month feasibility study, which will be carried out jointly by Shell, Chevron, the Nigeria Gas Company and the Ghanaian National Gas Company, will propose a definite time-frame for building the pipeline from the date of investment guarantees, estimated to be about three years.

The pipeline will run offshore from Nigeria to Ghana, or overland.

Reuter reports that Nigeria is considering a plan to establish a strategic fuel reserve to prevent perennial supply problems. Petroleum Minister Dan Etete blamed spells of fuel scarcity on the sabotage of pipelines, diversion and other malpractices by marketers and law enforcement agents.

Nigerian police ban 'mass-action' protests

(226) BD-18/5/98
LAGOS — Nigerian police have slapped a blanket ban on a series of "mass action" protest days against military rule which have been planned by a broad opposition coalition to start from June 4.

The Joint Action Committee of Nigeria, a group of 35 human rights and prodemocracy organisations, announced on Thursday that it had chosen June 4 and other dates for "mass action" against the regime of Gen Sam Abacha.

Lagos state police commissioner Abubakar Tsav announced at the weekend that his forces would not allow such action to be held and warned parents not to allow their children to associate themselves with the protests.

The opposition coalition selected June 12, the date in 1993 of civilian presidential elections held and then annulled by a previous military junta, as another protest day, together with August 1, when Abacha plans to stage a new election as part of his own democratic transition programme.

Both the domestic opposition and foes of the military in exile have condemned the whole programme, particularly since Abacha authorised five parties to reappear on the political scene and every one of them called this year for the general himself to run as their only candidate for the presidency.

June 4 was the date in 1996 of the murder of Kudirata Abiola, the wife of the business and press tycoon widely believed to have won the 1993 vote. She was shot dead by gunmen in Lagos, while her husband languished in jail in the federal capital Abuja.

The opposition wants Nigerians to boycott the poll in August. Many of Abacha's main foes are in jail or have been forced to flee abroad.

Abacha has not formally said he will stand for his own succession, but the junta is said to be preparing changes to decrees that will enable him to do so by its own constitutional criteria — Sapa-AFP

Nigeria falters on growth

Hilary Andersson

LAGOS — The head of Nigeria's central bank has blamed the country's worsening economic woes on government's lack of progress with privatisation

"Without privatisation, our quest for rapid industrialisation and economic growth will continue to be frustrated," said central bank governor Paul Ogwuma

He said the main sectors which would benefit from privatisation were power generation, steel and the downstream oil sector

Nigeria's military government committed itself to privatisation in this year's budget, promising to privatise state telecommunications company Nitel within a year and to prepare power company Nepa for sale next year

Limited progress toward liberalisation has been seen — except in telecommunications where some companies have been grant-

ed licences to compete with Nitel

Ogwuma painted a grim picture of the economy, complaining of low growth, overreliance on oil for foreign exchange earnings, a huge debt overhang and high unemployment

Nigeria's external debt is officially estimated at \$27bn, but international financial organisations fear the real figure is higher. Unemployment levels are said by industry sources to have risen more than 6% in a year

Ogwuma blamed the situation partly on the bank's inability to implement an effective monetary policy because of fiscal deficits, distress in the financial sector and inadequate autonomy for the bank to regulate interest rates

As the year drags on, it appears less likely that government will achieve its official target of a 5.5% economic growth rate. A crippling fuel crisis, which has pushed up transport and food prices, lower-

ing living standards and consumer buying power, has added to the country's economic woes

A recent report by Nigeria's manufacturers' association pointed to a 25% decline in capacity utilisation in Lagos since the beginning of this year. This it blamed on the government's failure to implement key elements of the 1998 "growth" budget. Average industrial capacity stood at 40%, meaning 60% unused capacity, the association said

There have been some positive economic developments under Gen Sani Abacha's military rule. Inflation is down. The Naira, the country's currency, is more stable. External reserves are larger

However, these victories have been at the expense of growth

Economic commentators are concerned that government has so far failed disastrously to grow the economy and improve economic conditions of the ordinary people

Former Nigerian (226) strongman critical of military rule 20 23 1998

LAGOS — Former Nigerian strongman Gen Ibrahim Babangida has attacked military rule in his first public speech since giving up power after annulling the country's 1993 elections

Babangida, who ruled Nigeria for eight years, said at a lecture in the central town of Jos that military rule was unfashionable, authoritarian and without appeal

Current military ruler Gen Sani Abacha, who seized power in political turmoil after Babangida annulled the 1993 vote, is widely expected to stand as sole candidate in forthcoming presidential elections which have been condemned as undemocratic by opponents and Western countries

"Democracy emphasises government based on the consent of the people," Babangida said "Personalisation of state power, abuse of human rights, violation of the rule of law, failure to exhibit accountability and transparency, and the inability to meet the welfare and basic needs of the people are now seen as undemocratic and are also regarded as bad governance," he said

Babangida made no direct mention of Abacha or of his own plan to restore civilian rule to Nigeria Nigeria is poised on a political razor edge after Abacha was adopted last month by all five registered parties as their candidate for the presidency, although he has yet to say he will run

Babangida's attempt to restore democracy ended in fiasco in 1993 when he ordered the annulment of the vote, regarded by observers as one of the fairest in Nigeria's history, as southwestern tycoon Moshood Abiola was poised to win

Abiola has been detained by Abacha since 1994 — Reuter

Nigerian oil spill claim runs into billions

CT (PR) 25/5/98 (226)

GODDY IKEH

Lagos — Mobil Producing Nigeria, an affiliate of America's Mobil International, is facing a compensation bill of about 4 trillion naira (R234,6 billion) from the communities affected by the company's oil spill in January this year

The company said it spilled 40 000 barrels of crude oil from the pipeline that connects the Idoho platform to the offshore Qua Iboe terminal in the south-eastern Akwa Ibom state of Nigeria. Officials of the US affiliate said the company would start payment of claims next month

But claims, counter-claims and possible outright rejection of the report of a verification team set up by the company, in conjunction with officials of the seven affected coastal states and local governments, might stall the exercise

The communities in the affected states of Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Bayelsa, Rivers, Delta, Ondo and Lagos have accused

state officials of blocking their chances of getting adequate compensation from the oil company, while the officials have accused the communities of submitting bogus claims

Of the 292 villages in Ondo state, claimed by the communities to be affected by the spill, the verification team accepted only 135. In Lagos state, over 7 000 people from 150 affected communities demanded between 800 and 1 billion naira. A compensation bill of about 3,5 trillion naira was forwarded by the affected communities in Rivers state

Celia Onitiri, the spokesman for Mobil's claims assessment team, warned that bogus claims might affect compensation payments by the company. Onitiri, for example, found it difficult to accept that a fisherman could lose 50 fishing nets in a single day because of the oil spill

But CT Odu, a lecturer at the University of Science and Technology in the southeastern city of Port Harcourt, disagrees with Mobil's compensation estimate of

750 million naira for communities affected by the oil spill. Odu estimated the damage caused by the spill at billions of naira

He expressed reservations about Mobil's claim that only 40 000 barrels of oil was spilled. "By my estimation, the spilled oil should not have been noticed as far away as the Lagos area. The effect would have been seen as just films of oil in the range of parts per billion if just 40 000 barrels was spilled"

Odu, who has carried out studies in conjunction with Rockefeller and Ford Foundation Cell Institute at Cornell University, said the effect of the oil spill would take 10 years to abate. It would have its greatest effects in the creeks that drain into the Atlantic ocean

Government officials are not pleased with the way oil companies handle oil spills in the country. John Dungs, the military administrator of oil-producing Delta state, recently indicted oil companies in Nigeria for disregarding internationally accepted

standards when dealing with oil spills in the country

Reacting to studies that revealed some shocking results about unwholesome practices by oil companies in the country, Dungs condemned the practice of burying spilled oil in shallow pits without consideration for the effect on underground water and the environment

According to Dungs, an improved environment and honest dealings with hosts would ensure a crisis-free operation for oil companies. It was necessary to support security arrangements with good relationships

He also condemned all the agencies set up to monitor the activities of the oil-producing companies, calling on them to show more commitment to their duties. If the agencies carried out their assignments, companies in the oil industry would become cautious and strive to prevent oil spills and other accidents that damage the environment, he said — Independent Foreign Service

AFRICA

State rations fuel in oil-rich Nigeria

Kingsley Kubeyinje

LAGOS — In what is an admission that the government cannot provide enough petrol for the nation's motorists, a state government in Nigeria has started rationing fuel

Lagos State, home to more than half the total vehicles in Nigeria's 36 states, has introduced a new policy in which motorists buy fuel on alternate days

Other states may soon join the bandwagon

Vehicle owners are also expected to show their vehicle documents at gas stations before being served

The state government has directed that vehicles with number plates beginning with odd numbers can now buy fuel only on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, while those with even numbers can do so on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays

The new measure will, however, not affect Sundays and public holidays

Essential vehicles like ambulances, and those belonging to the electricity and telecommunications corporations, as well as those of diplomats and security agencies, are exempted from the rationing system. Also exempted are

taxis and buses which can buy fuel from designated filling stations

"Those who break this rule will have themselves to blame as security agencies will arrest offenders and deal with them," said the administrator of Lagos State, Col Mohammed Marwa

The state government warned that offenders would have their vehicles impounded and would be subject to a fine of one thousand naira (about \$12).

The energy crisis, which has gripped the nation for more than four months, had resulted in motorists spending several hours at gas stations, with many stranded motorists abandoning their vehicles at filling stations for days

The fuel crisis has constituted a source of embarrassment to oil-rich Nigeria, Africa's largest producer of petroleum and a key member of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Vehicle owners in the state, who have adopted a wait-and-see posture, have expressed their doubts that the rationing policy will succeed.

Some vehicle owners said given the level of corruption in the system, the new policy might not achieve its goals

No 26/5/98

(226)

Nigeria withdraws licences

BD 26/5/98 (226)

LAGOS — Nigeria has withdrawn licences granted to 12 telecommunications companies for failing to meet operating requirements, a local newspaper reported yesterday

The independent Thisday newspaper said those affected included firms which were initially authorised to provide very small aperture, Internet, paging and pay-phone services

"The licences were revoked because the affected firms did not comply with the stipulated conditions," head of the Nigerian Communications Commission, Cletus Iromantu, was quoted as saying

Some had not paid the required fees, while others were sanctioned for failing to start operating on time, the newspaper said.

Nigeria's telecommunications industry was deregulated in 1992 to allow private operators to compete with state-run Nigerian Telecommunications. The government plans to float 60% of the state-run body this year under its privatisation programme — Reuter

Court blocks bid against Abacha

(226) PD 27/10/98
LAGOS — A Nigerian court has dismissed a bid to block the presidential nomination of military dictator Gen Sam Abacha

The federal high court ruled on Monday there was no reason to dismiss Abacha's nomination by all five state-backed political parties since he had not officially accepted the presidential candidacy.

The court did not decide, however, whether Abacha's candidacy was legal

The court also said there was no evidence of government involvement in the nomination process, although critics say the ruling military junta manipulated the political parties to ensure Abacha was the only candidate in the national election.

Senior Abacha aides last month told all five parties when and where to hold their national conventions and gave each of the parties \$125 000 to fund the gatherings

The parties were then instructed to nominate the general during the conventions, opponents and critics have alleged

The legal suit aimed at annulling the nominations was filed last month by Lagos lawyer Gani Fawehinmi, who argued that Abacha should not be allowed to stand for president as he was a military officer and not a member of any political party.

Two other potential candidates have filed similar legal challenges against Abacha's presidential bid

Although Abacha has not said he will run in the country's elections,

to be held in August, it is widely believed he intends to transform his military junta into a civilian administration

Nigeria's military rulers have been accused of widespread human rights abuses, including jailing, executing and trumping up charges against pro-democracy campaigners and political opponents such as human rights activist Ken Saro-Wira — Sapa-AP

Europe rebukes Nigeria on human rights abuses

(226) 20 28/5/98

LONDON — The European Union (EU) reiterated its deep concern about human rights in Nigeria yesterday and noted a marked increase in harassment of activists striving for democracy.

A statement issued by Britain's foreign office on behalf of the 15 EU nations, specified several recent incidents, including a raid on the office of the Civil Liberties Organisation; the arrest of Olisa Agbakoba, co-ordinator of the United Action for Democracy umbrella organisation, and the deaths of seven people when security forces broke up a democracy rally in Ibadan earlier this month.

The EU welcomed the release of 142 people under military strongman Gen Sani Abacha's November amnesty, in-

cluding five journalists and democracy activists detained without charge.

However, the EU reiterated its demands that the Nigerian authorities "use this opportunity to release Chief (Moshood) Abiola, Gen Obasanjo and the other 1995 alleged coup plotters, leading trade unionists Frank Kokori and Milton Dabibi and other political prisoners".

The statement complained that the trial of alleged coup plotters by a special military tribunal did not follow international norms and urged the government to commute death sentences of six defendants.

"The EU recalls that under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, of which Nigeria is a signatory, anyone convicted of a crime shall have the

right to have his conviction and sentence reviewed by a higher tribunal and anyone sentenced to death shall have the right to seek a pardon and commutation of the sentence," the statement said.

In Kaduna, Nigeria, a group of 200 academics from northern Nigeria universities has urged Abacha not to run in presidential elections for which he is sole candidate. In a statement issued yesterday, they also called on the military rulers to hand over power to a democratically elected government by October 1.

"Abacha should not contest the presidential elections under any guise," said the statement, signed by Attahuru Jega, the former president of the banned Nigerian university teachers' union.

"Doing so will complicate rather than resolve the political crisis in this country. We believe that Abacha should be honourable and keep his words and earlier promise about handing over to a democratically elected civilian regime."

Abacha has not publicly said he will stand in the presidential elections on August 1 after being nominated as sole candidate by all five legally approved political parties last month.

Africa's most populous country has been in crisis since the 1993 elections were annulled by a military government in which Abacha was influential.

Abiola, a southwestern millionaire, was poised to win the elections. He has been detained since 1994 when he de-

clared himself president in defiance of Abacha who is from the north.

Opposition to Abacha, 54, who seized power in the turmoil after the 1993 annulment, was centred in Abiola's southwestern stronghold.

The stand by the academics is one of several signs that resistance to Abacha is spreading to the north which has produced most of Nigeria's rulers since independence from Britain in 1960.

In February, leading northern politicians urged Abacha not to run for election.

Several Western countries have condemned Abacha's democracy plan and are threatening to tighten limited sanctions imposed in 1995 to force the pace of reforms in Nigeria — Sapa-AP, Reuter

Work begins on gas plant

Kingsley Kubeyinje (276)

BA 29/5/78

LAGOS — Preliminary engineering work on the multimillion dollar, 20 000 barrel-a-day gas-to-liquids plant, to be financed through a joint venture arrangement between Chevron Nigeria Limited and SA's Sasol, will take off soon

Chevron's operations manager, Scott Davis, said in Lagos that the preliminary work would be undertaken in London during the year

He said the project, estimated to cost between \$600m and \$700m, would be located near Chevron's Escravos Gas Plant in Delta state, Nigeria

Chevron Nigeria Limited is the local subsidiary of Chevron Petroleum, a multinational based in the US

Davis, an American, was speaking to a two-man delegation from the An-

golan petroleum resources department which was on a visit to understudy how Nigeria ran its oil facilities

He said that the new Chevron-Sasol project would turn natural gas into synthetic carbon and ultimately into high-quality diesel and naphtha

Davis said that gas-to-liquid projects were highly desirable as a route to achieving the optimum exploitation of Nigeria's large gas reserves.

Owing to the abundance of natural gas resources in the country, Scott described Nigeria as a "gas province" and not merely an oil producing nation

Davis told the Angolan team, on a tour of Chevron's \$550m Escravos Gas Plant and other oil and gas installations, that despite the capital intensive nature of a gas-to-liquids plant, his company would strive to get gas to the world market through investments

Nigeria blames lower cash calls on falling world petroleum prices

Oil groups stalk Abacha on shortfall in payments

GILBERT DA COSTA

Abuja — Senior executives of oil-producing companies in Nigeria are to meet General Sani Abacha, the military ruler, next week over the government's underfunding of the key oil industry.

Chief executives of Shell, Chevron, Mobil Elf, Agip and Texaco are expected in Abuja for the meeting — which could have profound implications for Nigeria's ailing oil sector.

The companies want an explanation from Abacha why they are being paid a monthly cash-call payment of \$170 million (since the beginning of the year) instead of the \$208 million promised by the government in its 1998 budget.

The money represents the government's equity contribution to the joint venture partnership with leading crude oil exploration and production companies. The government controls 60 percent equity under separate joint venture agreements while the operating firms (in each case) control 40 percent.

The government paid \$2.05 billion last year in fulfilling its financial commitment under the agreement. It undertook to increase its contribution to \$2.5 billion this year to meet the expected increased investment by the oil companies.

George Kirkland, the managing director of Chevron Nigeria, said: "The time has come for us to hear from the government what they are up to. It is quite unfortunate that we are still getting paid at last year's rate, yet we have been spending based on the approved budget of \$2.5 billion for this year, which is not good for business."

"We have been seeking a meeting with them for so long on the



OVER A BARREL Nigerian leader Sani Abacha will meet oil groups

issue. The meeting will determine what direction we are going to move. Maybe we may have to cut back on certain activities."

Paul Caldwell of Mobil Nigeria Producing Unlimited warned that oil companies may be compelled to withdraw more drilling rigs from the country as part of the cost-cutting measures.

"We have started to experience the brunt of the reduction in Opec's (Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries) production quota. Another unfortunate incident of cash call problems will not do the industry any good," he said.

The other companies involved in joint venture deals with the Nigerian government have also expressed similar disquiet.

However, Nigerian petroleum officials attribute the shortfall in its cash contributions to the decline in international oil prices this year.

Nigeria, which produced 2.25 million barrels of crude daily last month, has cut back production

by 125,000 barrels a day as part of Opec's overall production roll back.

Nigerian oil officials insist the government's tardiness in making good its promise was compelled by the falling oil prices.

Nigeria derives more than 80 percent of its national revenue from foreign sales. The 1998 national budget was pegged to oil selling at \$17 a barrel, and the steep decline in prices has created a severe financial crisis.

Abacha is expected to bring the government's predicament to the attention of the oil executives during their meeting next week.

Nigeria has announced plans to increase oil production to 2.5 million barrels a day by 2000 and 4 million barrels a day by 2010. But reaching this target will depend on an investment profile of between \$8 billion and \$10 billion annually compared with current investment levels of less than \$3 billion.

In addition, Chevron Nigeria Limited has announced that preliminary engineering work on the 20,000 barrel-a-day gas-to-liquid plant would begin shortly in London. The project is a joint initiative involving Sasol, the South African gas-to-fuel company.

The project, which is estimated to cost up to \$700 million, will turn natural gas into a synthetic carbon and ultimately into high-quality diesel and naphtha.

Meanwhile, Scott Davies, Chevron's operations manager, told a delegation of the Angolan ministry of petroleum on Wednesday that gas-to-liquid technology was highly desirable for the optimum exploitation of the country's gas reserves, estimated at 160 trillion standard cubic feet. —Independent Foreign Service

ET (PM) 29/5/98 (226)

World Bank halts Nigerian schools' loan

(226)
Kingsley Kubeyinje

LAGOS — The World Bank has suspended a 10-billion naira loan package for Nigeria's primary schools because the government has failed to pay its agreed share of the funds

Ali Adamu, the executive secretary of the national primary education commission, said the matching set of funds should have been provided by government to renovate primary schools

He said after World Bank officials expressed dissatisfaction with the poor state of primary schools, the bank opted to put the interest-free loan on hold. "Nigeria cannot afford to forgo this facility considering that the government's annual expenditure for each primary school pupil is small compared with other countries"

Commission revokes licences

Kingsley Kubeyinje

(226)

1/6/98

LAGOS — Twelve private telecommunications companies lost their operational licences for failing to start services, two years after they were granted the licences by the Nigerian government

The licences were revoked by the Nigerian Communication Commission. CE Ogbonna Iromantu said that of the 150 telecommunications companies licensed so far nationwide, fewer than 20 had provided services to their clients

He warned that more licences would be revoked

Following the deregulation of the Nigerian telecommunications industry last year, the government threw the

industry open to private investors

It was hoped that by privatising the industry there would be more competition and the quality of services would improve

Before that, the government-owned Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (Nitel) had a monopoly on providing telecommunication services and was severely criticised for the poor quality of its services

Some of the companies whose licences were revoked by the commission were Tele Africa Nigeria, which originally got its licence to operate a mobile cellular network throughout the country, Vantage Technologies, Kalandas Nigeria, Bod-Gee Ventures, Associated Telecommunications Company, and Dotts Communications

ANALYSIS

Oil producer Nigeria facing the irony of fuel shortages

There seems no end in sight to the critical shortage in Nigeria which has now almost become a way of life, writes **Dulue Mbachui** in Lagos

NIGERIAN newspapers barely comment on the irony of fuel shortages in Africa's biggest oil producer. These days it is no longer news.

Queues of cars and taxis as long as 1.6km choke the streets of the commercial capital Lagos as the drivers struggle to get whatever drops of fuel are available at filling stations lucky enough to get a delivery.

"Most times we queue overnight at fuel stations just to get some litres above normal prices to run around for a few hours," said Rasaki Lateef, a Lagos taxi driver. The fuel queues absorb the best part of his life.

"For those few hours we have to increase the fares not only to cover the hours we spend waiting but because we're not sure when we will next get fuel," he said.

Nigeria produces enough crude oil to meet the demand of all its vehicles at least eight times over. In theory.

For 104-million Nigerians who ask why the theory cannot be put into practice, official reasons that blame smuggling to neighbouring countries and hoarding by "selfish and unproductive individuals" are rarely satisfactory.

Most analysts blame an unhappy cocktail of factors ranging from the failure of four state-run oil refineries and an inefficient distribution network to poor planning of imports and sub-

sidised fuel prices which mean there is little return for refineries, marketers or the state.

The consequences are streets blocked with queues, higher fuel prices on the black market, higher transport prices, wasted time that could be better employed and an increase in inflation.

"The shortages have been very bad for business," said Lawrence Adekunle, the director-general of the National Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture.

"You have a situation where industries suffer power cuts and cannot even find fuel to power their private electricity generators."

The national requirement is estimated at 280 000 barrels of crude oil a day and Nigeria's four refineries have a combined capacity of 445 000 barrels a day. Lack of maintenance means it has been years since they approached that level.

Warri refinery, which has a capacity of 125 000 barrels a day is one of the better ones. On May 18 it was forced to close because of power supply problems experienced only a few days after reopening after a two-week outage for the same reason.

The 110 000 barrels a day refinery in northern Kaduna has been shut since July last year. Wrangling between different government ministries and agencies about who should get the repair contract and release the money meant repairs started only last month.

"The refineries are not being maintained on schedule. We are being forced to improvise while less important things are made priorities," said a senior official at Warri.

Businesses, international donors and many officials of the state-run Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation see only one solution to the crisis — liberalisation.

They argue that if prices were freed up then the refineries would take a large enough slice of the fuel pump price to be able to support their own maintenance and running costs which they cannot with the 2 naira a litre they get from the 11 naira price charged on the streets.

If private imports were allowed, fuel marketing companies would be able to bring in enough to meet demand. And if the refineries were privatised or put under private management they would not get tied in the circle of inefficiency

and graft which strangles Nigeria's state enterprises.

"The government could hold 60% equity in the refineries and allow private investors 40%," said Yusuf Ali, the MD of the fuel marketing company Unipetrol.

"On the other hand, oil marketers could be allowed to purchase crude oil and pay refineries appropriate prices for processing the crude, which would provide enough funds for maintaining the plants."

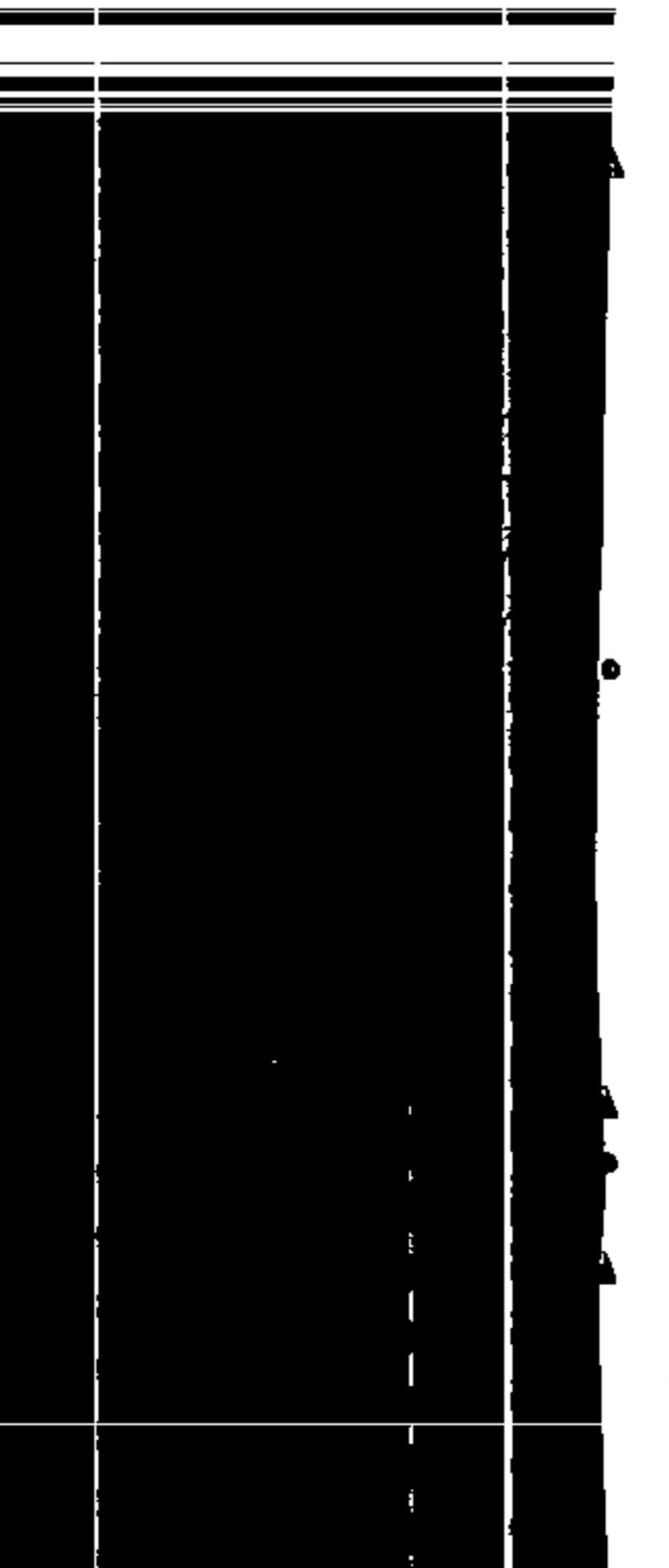
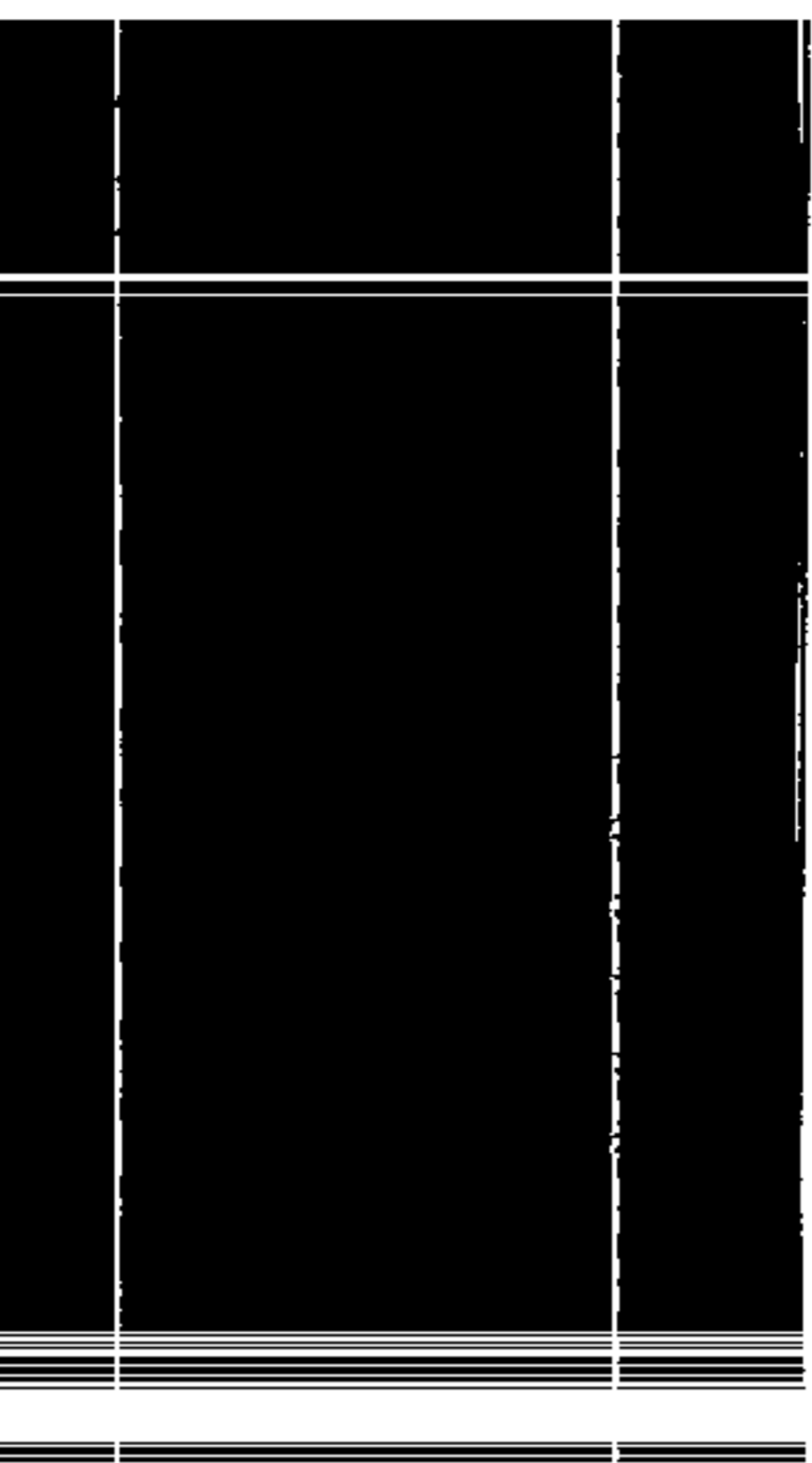
But liberalisation is difficult at the best of times and even more complicated in an election year when Nigeria's military ruler, Gen Sani Abacha, is widely expected to stand as the sole candidate for the presidency despite opposition protests.

Few believe he would take the risk of raising fuel prices and exacerbating popular discontent, while privatisation could require disrupting powerful ethnic and military interests which are tied to the status quo.

"Good solutions have been prescribed, but it appears the political will has been lacking to take effective action," said Aret Adams, one time MD of the national petroleum corporation.



Lagos streets are clogged by hundreds of cars and taxis waiting for fuel in an oil producing country



SA 'in plot to oust Abacha'

CT 3/6/98

226

GILBERT DA COSTA
INDEPENDENT FOREIGN SERVICE

ABUJA Nigeria has accused South Africa of plotting with the United States and Ghana to destabilise the regime of military ruler General Sani Abacha

Wada Nas, special adviser to Abacha, made the allegation in Abuja on Monday at a press briefing "We are fully aware of the collaboration between some countries, namely America, SA and Ghana with human rights pro-democracy groups in Nigeria to destabilise Nigeria," he said

According to Nas, a confidant of Abacha, the US held a meeting in Accra, Ghana, between May 6-8, that was attended by at least 15 Nigerian anti-government groups "The meeting was organised by the Americans while the trainers were from South Africa and Ghana was the host," he said.

He said the US was represented at the Accra meeting by Stephen Bowen, programme director of the International Human Rights Law Group "The South African trainers were Mr K Bowen and (a) Mr Zane, who were prominent members of the ANC and they were jailed many times during the apartheid era," said Nas

The forum discussed "the new strategies to be adopted by pro-democracy and human rights organisations in Nigeria to ensure the termi-

nation of the present government in Nigeria and the revitalisation of the cancelled 1993 presidential ballot as well as the formation of a government of national unity to be headed by Chief Moshood Abiola"

Strategies to carry out a sustained campaign of civil disobedience were also reportedly discussed "Armed struggle was proposed if the head of state, General Sani Abacha, insisted on succeeding himself," said Nas

Each of the groups in Accra was, according to Nas, given a grant of \$50 000 (R257 500) "to ensure effective implementation of the agreed strategies and method of the struggle"

The European Union was also accused of offering monetary incentives to Nigerian opposition groups to "subvert the political transition programme" Nas said one such group, United Action for Democracy was given \$250 000 (R1,28 million) in April to finance a campaign of terrorist attacks and civil disobedience

In addition, the Nigerian opposition had sent about 10 000 e-mail messages to Nigerians living in the US to solicit individual contributions of \$500 (R2 575) to "mobilise Nigerians against the government"

Meanwhile the Nigerian regime has alleged that 45 anti-Abacha groups under the umbrella of a new group Joint Action Committee on Nigeria (JACON), are fine-tuning plans to cause widespread civil disturbances on June 12, the fifth anniversary of the election annulment (in 1993) as well as tomorrow — the anniversary of the murder of Mrs Abi-

ola, believed to have been killed by government agents

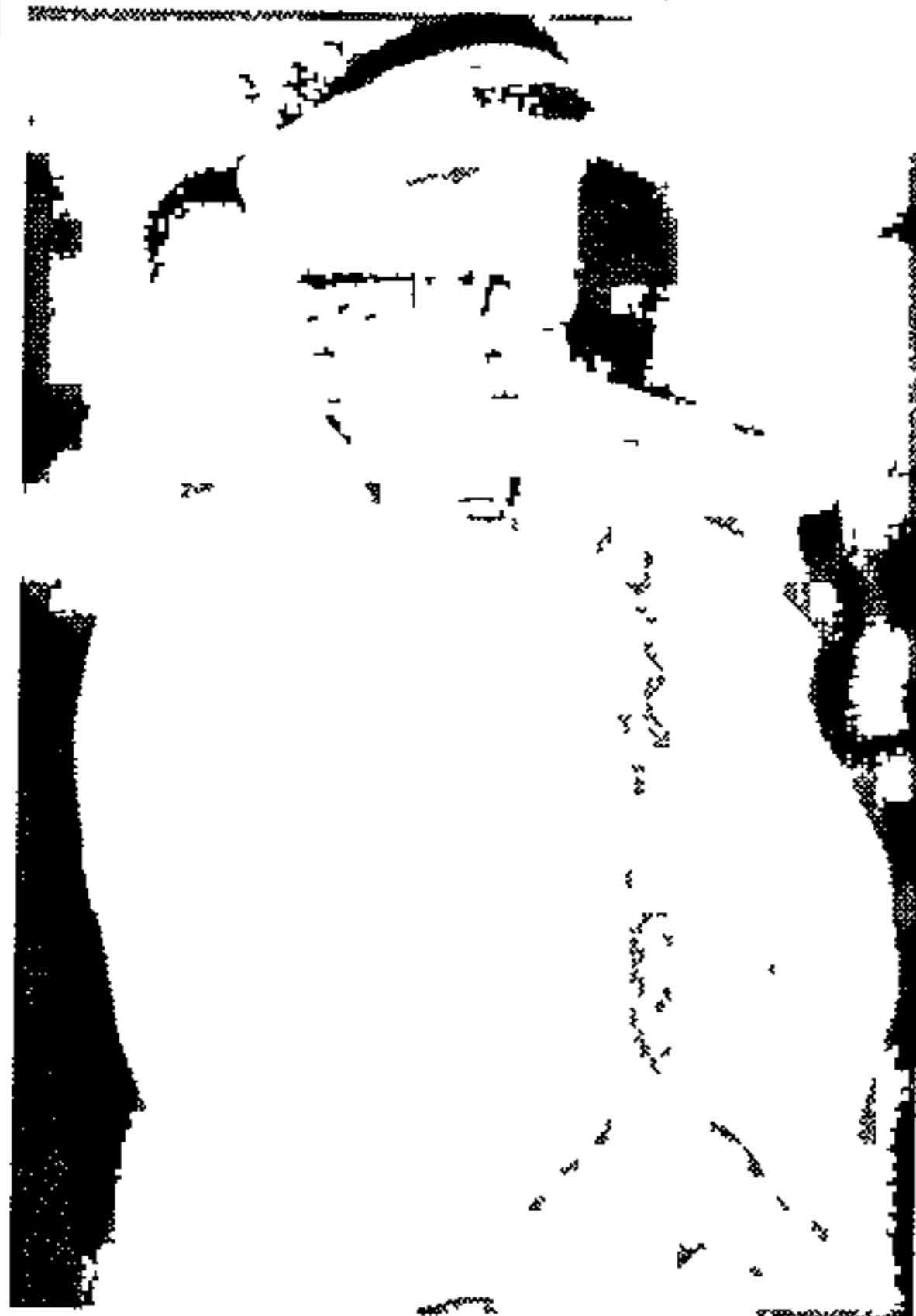
According to Nas, 15 Nigerian cities including the capital Abuja, have been targeted for the mass action "In view of the unpatriotic activities planned by JACON I am calling on all the

great people of Nigeria to shun them "

The allegations are not new but the implication of Ghana came as quite a surprise considering the close personal relationship that has existed between Abacha and the Ghanaian leader Jerry Rawlings Observers say it reflects an unprecedented sense of paranoia in the face of growing opposition to Abacha

Recent military exercises and training programmes involving Ghana and the US were said to have enormously displeased Abacha, whose relations with Washington is at an all-time low

Armed struggle was proposed if General Sani Abacha insisted on succeeding himself



ABACHA

Nigeria's Abacha dies

BD 9/6/98 (226)

LAGOS — Nigerian military ruler Gen Sani Abacha died suddenly yesterday, leaving no obvious successor

His death gives an abrupt wrench to the turbulent politics of Africa's most populous nation, where army rulers have repeatedly promised and delayed a return to democratic rule

Abacha seized power in 1993 during political turmoil after the military cancelled a presidential election in mid-count. He had been expected to transform himself into an elected civilian president in a one-candidate election planned in August

Western diplomats in Lagos, who heard the news before the official announcement, said Abacha had died of a heart attack

It was not immediately clear who would take charge of the west African nation of at least 104-million. Abacha's former deputy was sentenced to death

in April for plotting to take power and was never replaced

Political tension was already running high in Nigeria in the run-up to August 1 presidential elections in which Abacha was the only candidate after his adoption by all five officially approved political parties in April

Abacha, who rarely appeared in public and kept to the tight security of his Aso Rock presidential villa in the capital Abuja, did not say he would run for the presidency. However, he did nothing to stop supporters mounting a huge campaign on his behalf with the backing of state agencies.

Abacha's transition to civilian rule, announced under pressure from at home and abroad in 1995, has been criticised as undemocratic by both local opponents and western countries that imposed limited sanctions to press for reform. — Reuter



Suspected heart attack ... Nigerian strongman General Sani Abacha died at dawn yesterday.

Strongman Abacha dies in Abuja

(226)

Star 9/6/98

Abuja - Nigerian leader General Sani Abacha died at dawn yesterday, army chief of staff General Abdulsalam Abubakar announced.

"The head of state and commander in chief of the Nigerian armed forces, General Sani Abacha, died at dawn," Abubakar said in a communique issued on national radio. "He was to be buried today in Kano, his native town, in accordance with Muslim rites and tradition." The statement did not specify the cause of death but news reports said he died of a heart attack.

Abacha, who has seldom ap-

peared in public in recent weeks, had pledged to hand over power to a civilian government in October.

Rumours that he was in ill health had been circulating in the Nigerian capital, especially after Abacha cancelled a highly publicised trip to Lagos at the last minute last Tuesday.

Abacha, who seized power in November 1993, promised presidential elections for August 1 as the last stage in a programme to transfer power to civilian rule by October 1, but there were hints that he might be planning to stand as a candidate himself.

Trouble following the cancellation of a presidential poll on June 12 1993, gave him the opportunity to take over, without violence, from the interim government of civilian leader Ernest Shonekan. This had been put into place by the previous military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida, who triggered widespread unrest when he cancelled the presidential election.

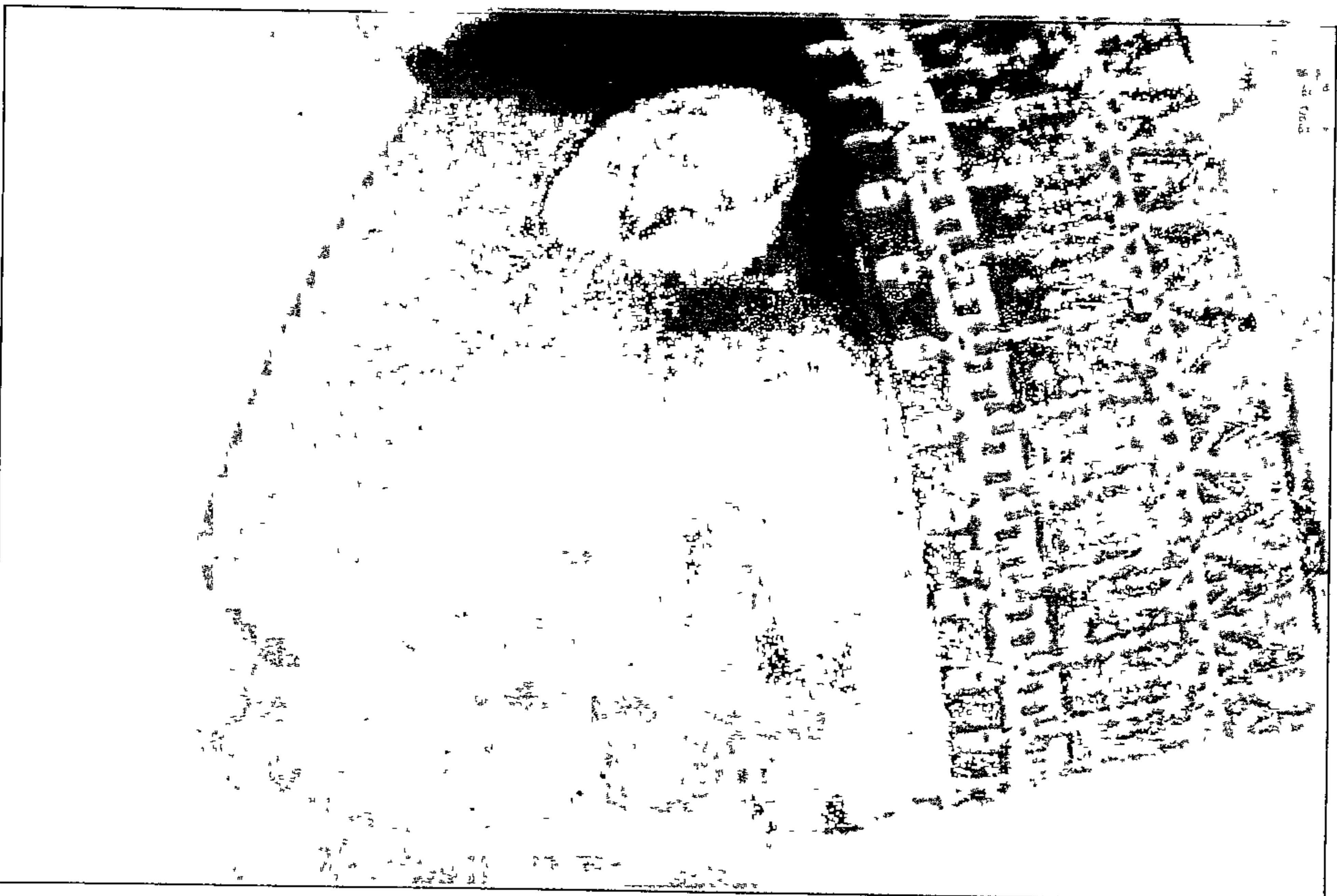
Abacha was Nigeria's seventh military head of state since it won independence from Britain in 1960. The country has spent a total of 27 years under military rule - AFP

AFTER DICTATOR ABACHA DIES ...

Nigeria holds its breath

Record of a strongman

- Nigerian head of state General Sani Abacha, who died yesterday aged 54, was a ruthless military strongman who ruled Africa's most populous country for four years.
- Abacha, who seized power from a short-lived Interim Civilian Government on November 17, 1993, scrapped democratic institutions, placing the country once again under the sway of the all-powerful military.
- His pledges to hand over power to an elected civilian government appeared less and less credible as opposition leaders landed in prison or in exile and the five authorised political parties all adopted Abacha as their sole candidate in presidential elections set for August 1.
- Abacha never confirmed that he would stand in the elections, and had spent long periods out of the public eye in recent weeks, amid rumours that he was ill.
- Born on September 20, 1943, in Kano, in the Muslim north of Nigeria, which has produced most of the country's military and political elite, Abacha belonged to the Kanuri ethnic group.
- A soldier since 1963 with a reputation for strong action, he was named defence minister in 1990 and became the number two in the previous military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida.
- Abacha seized power five months after Babangida's regime staged presidential elections and then voided the poll, generally held to have been won by Muslim millionaire businessman Moshood Abiola.
- The Abacha regime cracked down on pro-democracy movements and jailed Abiola on treason charges when he declared himself head of state a year after the poll on the strength of the result, which was never officially released.
- The elections had been meant to end eight previous years of military administration.
- Abacha pledged to hand over power to an elected civilian administration on October 1, the anniversary of Nigeria's independence from Britain.
- The junta has come under repeated international criticism for halting moves to restore democracy and for its human rights record. — Sapa-APF



END OF AN ERA: General Sani Abacha, who died yesterday morning. There were immediate calls by opposition leaders for the restoration of democracy in the country

THERE ARE FEARS that the next few days, following the sudden death of Nigerian military dictator Sani Abacha, will be a period of uncertainty, filled with fear of in-fighting in the military over who will succeed him as leader.

NIGERIAN army troops were out in force yesterday in Kano, birthplace of Nigerian dictator General Sani Abacha, who died at dawn yesterday

While opposition leaders in exile called for the immediate restoration of democratic rule, there were fears that there would now be a military struggle for power

Abacha had earned a reputation as an iron-fisted dictator who throttled Nigeria's nascent attempt at democracy and became a pariah outside Africa for his regime's human rights abuses

His most notorious act was the 1995 execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other minority rights activists, despite an international outcry. The Commonwealth reacted by suspending Nigeria, while the European Union, the United States and Canada imposed sanctions, including an arms embargo

In a telephone interview, a resident of Kano said: "Soldiers are everywhere, but there's no trouble — it's calm. Townspeople are going about their daily business and traffic is normal"

In the capital Abuja, army chief Abdulsalam Abubakar said the 54-year-old military leader had died at dawn and that his body had been flown to Kano aboard a presidential plane. Several thousand Nigerians gathered there last night for the burial

At 6.45pm, prayers preceding the burial were said by Muslim leaders, residents said. No further details on the burial were available

In the commercial hub, Lagos, many people honked car horns and cheered in the streets when news of Abacha's death was broadcast over state-controlled radio

"Today is another independence day for Nigeria," said Bisi Alayi, an unemployed university graduate. "Suddenly we are free again"

Commonwealth Secretary-General Emeka Anyaoku said "I wish to convey my condolences to the members of his family"

"I have no doubt that all Nigerians would wish to ensure that peace prevails and that the succession arrangements are based on genuine national consensus"

Bolaji Akinyemi, spokesperson for the National Democratic Coalition of Nigeria, said "It's an opportunity for Nigeria to make its way out of the political cul-de-sac into which it is

ET 9/6/98 (226)

"The death of any man is a tragedy for the family and there is no gloating by the coalition"

"But this is an opportunity for us to address the crucial political issues. It is not a time for a new military regime, but a time to put in place a political programme that ensures a national government headed by the president-elect"

Kayode Fayemi, director of the Centre of Democracy and Development for Nigeria, said the next few days would be a period of uncertainty, filled with fear of in-fighting in the military

He continued "It is at least an opportunity for the military to seek a reprieve for all the atrocities it might have committed against the Nigerian people over the past five years"

"Thus it can do by assisting in the process of setting up a national government, headed by the person who won the election of 1993"

Nigerian opposition leader Moshood Abiola was jailed in 1994 after declaring himself head of state on the basis of a June 1993 presidential election which was annulled by the military

He is awaiting trial for treason

Ostun Abada, spokesperson for the Cape Town branch of United Action for Nigeria, a pro-democracy and human rights organisation, said Abiola should be released immediately

"The 1993 election must be de-annulled and Abiola must form a government of national unity. Only then can Nigeria establish a lasting peace," Abada said

Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka also called yesterday for Abiola to be installed as president of a transitional government

The South African government expressed its condolences with Abacha's family and with the Nigerian nation. It paid tribute to the positive contribution which Abacha, as leader of ECOWAS and FCOMOG, recently made towards the return of democracy in Sierra Leone

The European Union called for a swift restoration of democracy and the "election of an accountable civilian government which will restore and respect human rights"

Persistent rumours of ill-health dogged Abacha's rule. Several newspapers reported that he was suffering from a fatal illness — perhaps cirrhosis of the liver — Sapa-APF

Abacha - the

And now Nigeria gets military ruler No 9

ART 9/6/98

(2ab)

STORY

In nearly five secretive years in power, Nigeria's Sani Abacha built a reputation for authoritarian, sometimes brutal rule

He was less known - but in terms of his legacy to Nigeria, perhaps more important - for overseeing a web of corruption that Nigerians and oil industry sources say has plundered billions of dollars from the country

General Abacha died yesterday at 54 and a career serviceman, Abdusalam Abubakar, became the country's ninth military ruler since the country gained independence from Britain in 1960

General Abubakar was promoted from major-general to the full rank of general during a ceremony to appoint him the new head of state

General Abubakar, 55, who is married with two sons and three daughters, joined the national political scene in 1993 as General Abacha's chief of staff

While General Abacha ruled Nigeria from a fortified presidential villa in Nigeria's capital, oil industry sources said, he and a circle of aides and business partners tapped virtually every stage of the oil business, Nigeria's most important industry and the source of 80% of its government revenue

They took kickbacks from foreign companies for licences to search for oil in the basin and delta of the Niger river or offshore. They got bribes from construction firms that won contracts to build drilling rigs and pipelines

And, in a business that generated a daily river of cash, General Abacha and several associates supervised every aspect of Nigerian

oil companies by the state-owned oil companies, the sources said, sluicing off an unknown percentage of the \$10-billion a year that Nigeria earned on average in crude oil sales

In recent years, General Abacha, allies and top officials have added a new form of corruption that is draining the Nigerian economy the siphoning of money used by Nigeria's refineries to turn crude into more usable petrol

Finance and Oil Ministry officials have openly in the Nigerian press who has diverted more than \$2-billion from the four state-owned refineries in recent years, but the refineries' run creates an artificial shortage for this nation of more than 100-million people

Nigeria is thus forced to import refined fuels such as petrol and, sources say, General Abacha and his associates controlled that trade too, siphoning off a percentage

The government subsidises the price of petrol and other fuels, Abacha loyalists among the officials in the police and civil service divert some of the available supply to sell on

Under General Sani Abacha, corruption took Nigeria further into economic collapse than in the past, writes JAMES RUPERT from Abidjan, Ivory Coast

the black market or to neighbouring countries. The fuel shortage has forced the economy into near depression, leaving millions of people poorer and sicker

"In Nigeria, corruption isn't part of government, it's the object of government," said a Nigerian political scientist who asked not to be named

For 28 of the 38 years since Nigeria gained independence from Britain, the country has been ruled by the military, and Nigerians say corruption has grown steadily.

For the past two years, Transparency International, a Berlin-based organisation that monitors corruption, has conducted surveys of businessmen that have proclaimed Nigeria the world's most corrupt place to do business

Since the growth of Nigeria's oil industry in the 1970s, military rulers have controlled the trade. But where earlier rulers doled out the graft to key supporters, "Abacha has increasingly monopolised the trade himself", said John Bearman, a London-based oil industry analyst

"There is no deal that does not go through the presidential villa"

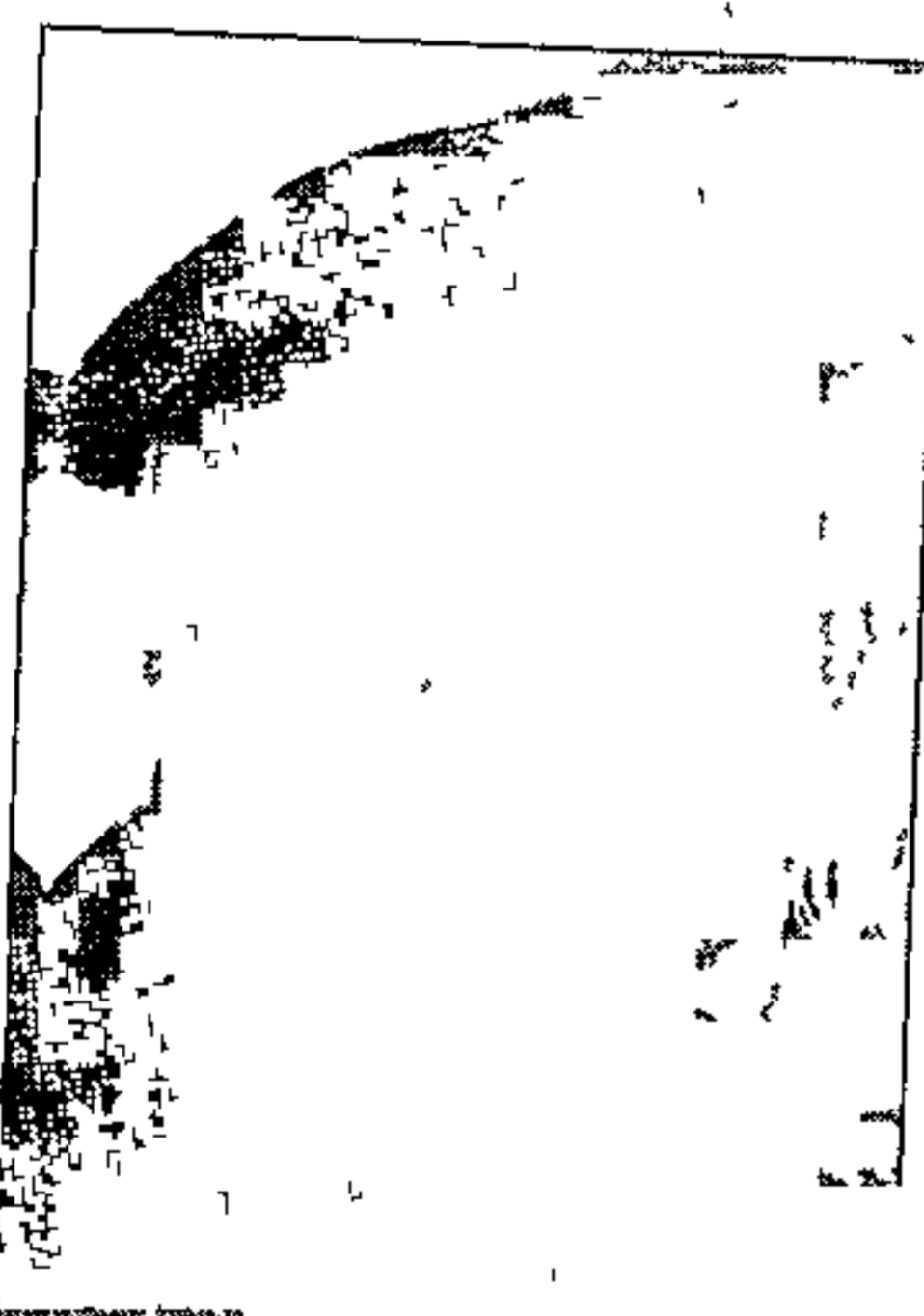
Under General Abacha, corruption took Nigeria further into economic collapse than in the past. Besides the collapse in fuel distribution, the telephone network and electrical grid are failing

Business is mired by a thousand such failures, and unemployment is estimated by analysts at 25%

General Abacha avoided broad publicity about his corruption by keeping a low profile abroad. His face was ubiquitous on Nigerian television and in government publications but little known internationally

"He is a recluse," a Western diplomat said in Lagos last month. "He seldom leaves Aso Rock (the presidential villa), and he says very little in public for a head of state"

Nigerians and international economists say General Abacha appears to have hidden his wealth well. Nigerian journalists who have investigated corruption say he appears to have particular business interests in the Persian Gulf and the so-called "tiger" economies of Asia and Brazil - Washington Post and Sapa-AP



New ruler: Abdusalam Abubakar

Abacha - the recluse who stole billions

CAPE ARGUS ISSUES

CAPE ARGUS, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 9, 1998

Abacha - the

And now Nigeria gets military ruler No 9

ART 9/6/98

(226)

THE STORY

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And, in a business that generated a daily river of cash, General Abacha and several associates supervised every sale of Nigerian crude by the state-owned oil company, the sources said, sluicing off an unknown percentage of the \$10-billion a year that Nigeria earned on average in crude oil sales

In recent years, General Abacha, his allies and top officials have added a new form of corruption that is killing the Nigerian economy: the siphoning of money used by Nigeria's oil refineries to turn crude into more valuable petrol

Finance and Oil Ministry officials argue openly in the Nigerian press over who has diverted more than \$2-billion from the four state-owned refineries in recent years, but the refineries' ruin creates an artificial fuel shortage for this nation of more than 100-million people

Nigeria is thus forced to import refined fuels such as petrol and, traders say, General Abacha and his cronies controlled that trade too, skimming off a percentage

The government subsidises the sale price of petrol and other fuels, but Abacha loyalists among the officer corps and civil service divert much of the available supply to sell on

Under General Sani Abacha, corruption took Nigeria further into economic collapse than in the past, writes **JAMES RUPERT** from Abidjan, Ivory Coast

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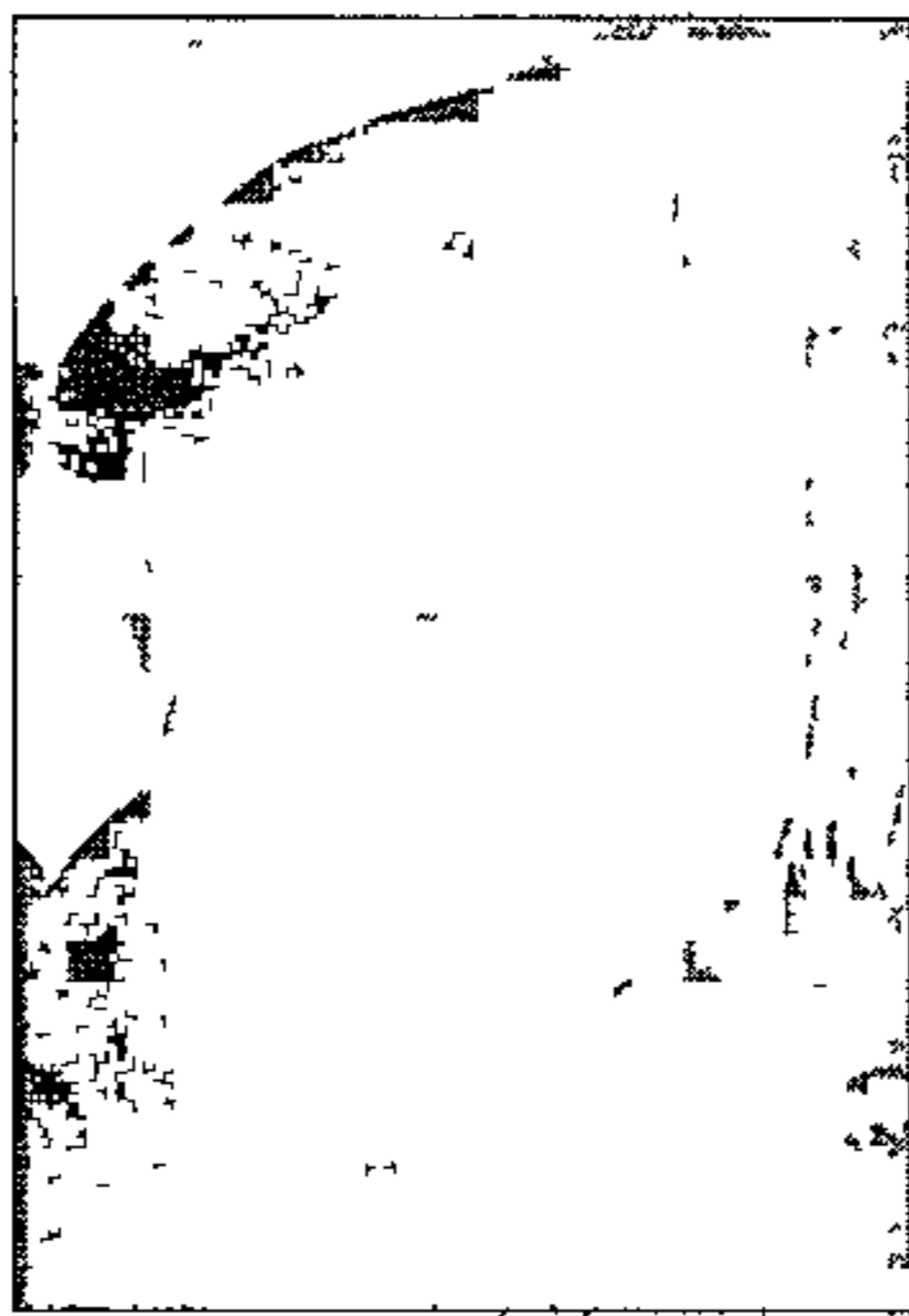
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New ruler: Abdusalam Abubakar

he reclusive who stole billions

CAPE ARGUS ISSUES

Military man is sworn in as new Nigerian leader

LAGOS — Gen Abdusalam Abubakar was sworn in yesterday as Nigeria's ninth military ruler following the death of strongman Gen Sani Abacha

Abacha's death from a heart attack was celebrated overnight in some southern strongholds of opposition to military rule, but it was business as usual across most of Africa's most populous nation

In a brief acceptance speech to the ruling military council in the capital Abuja, Abubakar — a quiet, bespectacled career soldier who became chief of defence staff but has never held high political office — described his appointment as a personal challenge

"All hands must be on deck to move this nation forward. I will address the nation in due course," he said, declaring seven days of national mourning for Abacha during which flags will fly at half mast

Abubakar made no mention of presidential elections looming on August 1, for which Abacha was the sole candidate

Nigerian army rulers have repeatedly promised — and delayed — the restoration of democratic rule in the country of more than 104-million people

Abacha's death has thrust oil-producing Nigeria deeper into political uncertainty

World powers and Nigerian opposition leaders urged the ruling clique to ensure democracy is given a chance in the former British colony, ruled by soldiers for all but 10 years since independence in 1960

The US State Department, which had been critical of Abacha's arrangements for the August election, said it wanted to see a "genuine" transition to civilian rule by October 1

"Our hope, among others, would be that an accountable civilian government that is able to lead the Nigerian people will emerge from what has been a very horrific episode in which basic, fundamental rights have been suspended," White House spokesman Mike McCurry said

The European Union called for an accountable civilian government that will respect human rights

Opposition groups in ethnically divided Nigeria's Yoruba southwest had said they wanted detained local millionaire Moshood Abiola, the presumed winner of annulled 1993 elections, made president of a national unity government

Abubakar, like most of Nigeria's rulers since independence, is a northerner. He is from the same region and is close to former military president Gen Ibrahim Babangida, the man who annulled the 1993 polls and paved the way for Abacha's takeover

"He is not the kind of man who I believe is likely to want to keep hold of office. He is thoroughly professional," said one former colleague in Lagos

Worries over Nigeria's future have already cost the naira currency more than 14% of its value against the dollar this year. The stock exchange index has dropped more than 7.5% since January 1, with traders blaming political fears

"There is real fear that all of a sudden the problems that Abacha managed to suppress in the past five years will resurface with a vengeance," said one Nigerian politician resident in London — Reuter

Small businesses hit by energy crisis in Nigeria

Kingsley Kubeyinje

(22b)

LAGOS — The energy crisis plaguing Nigeria has forced 53 manufacturing companies — most of which are small- and medium-sized enterprises — to close this year

A top source at the secretariat of the Manufacturers' Association of Nigeria, who wished to remain anonymous, said the companies could no longer continue their operations because the power supply from the government-owned National Electric Power Authority was so erratic

The power authority has a monopoly on the generation and distribution of power in Nigeria. The source said many companies had resorted to using their own generators because the electricity supply was so erratic

While this was an expensive alternative, it was also not a solution because generators were affected by the nationwide fuel shortage

The source predicted a total collapse of the industrial sector if the energy crisis was not addressed by government immediately

His predictions were supported by the chairman of the domestic, plastic, rubber and foam sectoral group of the Manufacturers' Association of Nigeria, Godson Adrukwu, who said his association received distress calls daily from members affected by power problems

He called on government to take steps to assist the small- and medium-sized enterprises which represented the backbone of government efforts to industrialise Nigeria.

He said the crisis had further increased manufacturers' production costs, putting prices beyond the reach of the ordinary consumer.

DD 10/6/98



Former Nigerian military ruler Gen Sani Abacha died on Monday, leaving the country adrift, divided and indebted

Abacha's sudden death may give Nigeria a fresh chance

Michael Holman and David Buchan look at the less than illustrious career of former Nigerian military ruler Gen Sani Abacha, who died on Monday

(226) PD10/16/98

MILITARY ruler Gen Sani Abacha's death may give Nigeria a fresh chance. Few Nigerians expected Abacha to die in his bed because, of all the country's military leaders, he was by far the most unpopular, and he leaves behind a country adrift, divided and indebted.

When he seized power in November 1993 he brought a unique quality to the job.

After 25 years of oil exports worth more than \$210bn, the country's per capita income of \$320 is no higher than it was before the oil boom, and its external debt has reached \$37bn, including arrears.

Rescheduling this debt would depend on an International Monetary Fund agreement that in turn would require Nigeria to end its two-tier exchange rate system, whose manipulation has been a valuable perk for the leadership.

The country's name has been tarnished by business scams and corruption and its citizens are accused by the US government of playing an increasing role in the world's drugs trade.

What modest support Abacha may have enjoyed when he seized power in November 1993 was steadily lost as his autocratic government presided over the decline of Africa's most important economy.

Evidence of deep discontent in the army surfaced late last year when Gen Oladipo Diya, deputy head of state, was arrested along with 11 others, among them Maj-Gen Tajudeen Olarenwaju and Maj-Gen Abdulkareem Adisa, formerly ministers of communications and public works.

An earlier challenge to Abacha came with a coup attempt in 1995. That led to the arrest of the former leader, Gen Olusegun Obasanjo and retired Maj-Gen Shehu Yaradua, who later died in detention.

One of the first deci-

sions the new regime will have to take is whether to release Obasanjo and Chief Moshood Abiola, the man who won the aborted presidential elections in 1993. These two men are from the Yoruba tribe in the mainly Christian south, while Abacha is from the Muslim north.

Abacha's years in office have been marked by detentions, dismissals, transfers, forced retirements and trumped-up charges, with 200 officers sacked between 1995 and 1996, including Maj-Gen Chris Ali, the chief of staff. In mid-1996, 120 officers were retired, and in August the same year military administrators in all 36 states were redeployed or retired. A year later, 64 air force officers were sacked.

In spite of all this, opposition leaders have accused the international community of failing to take a consistent line. When they suspended Nigeria at their summit in New Zealand in 1995, Commonwealth leaders threatened to expel Nigeria if Abacha failed to restore democracy by the time they met again.

They retreated from this at the Edinburgh summit last October. At the same time, the summit gave Nigeria a pat on the back for its role in Sierra Leone's troubles, as the leading contributor to the west African force that restored the civilian government ousted by rebels.

Washington and London have also mixed their signals at times. During his recent tour of Africa, US President Bill Clinton appeared to soften the blunt warning given by a senior official that Nigeria's transition programme was fatally flawed.

Meanwhile, Britain has recently been doing its best to restore British Airways' air links with Lagos, suspended by Nigeria in retaliation for the UK ban on Nigeria Airways flights to the British capital.

Abacha's death may do his beleaguered country a service, for it could break the stalemate between his military regime and the international community.

Equally, however, the demise of Nigeria's strong man could embolden the international community to step up threats of sanctions against his successor, and thereby actually sharpen the simmering confrontation.

So far only Britain, other European Union countries, the US and some Commonwealth countries such as Canada have imposed on Nigeria an arms embargo and a ban on visas to members of the Abacha regime and their families. By contrast, the Commonwealth has done virtually nothing — because of the deep reluctance of its black African members to act — except in 1995 to suspend Nigeria from membership and all participation in the 51-nation organisation following the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa, the leader of the Ogoni minority.

In theory, a series of interim Commonwealth sanctions including visa

restrictions, an end to military training and attaches, an arms embargo and a downgrading of diplomatic missions, have been hanging over Nigeria like a Damoclean sword since last November's Commonwealth summit in Edinburgh. That meeting authorised a special eight-nation "Commonwealth ministerial action group" to "invoke" any or all of these measures if Abacha failed to carry out what he had promised would be a transfer to democratic rule this summer.

Such failure was already evident from the regime's decision to restrict the presidential election to five political parties, and the clearly orchestrated move by all five parties to nominate Abacha.

Far from imposing sanctions, however, the action group consisting of Britain, Canada, New Zealand, Malaysia, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Botswana and Barbados, never even issued a collective condemnation. The fact that the secretary-general of the Commonwealth, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, is himself a Nigerian, has not made the

situation any easier to handle. On Monday he called for a peaceful succession "which is based on a genuine national consensus".

The Edinburgh summit had agreed that if, by October, Nigeria had not made "a credible transition to democratic government", the Commonwealth would consider more drastic sanctions such as a tough oil embargo, a ban on all air links and a freeze on its financial assets.

Although Abacha's death will refocus international attention on Nigeria, it remains highly doubtful whether such steps would ever be taken. A ban on buying Nigerian oil would work only in concert with the US which purchases a quarter of the African country's oil exports, while many of Nigeria's immediate neighbours would resist a severing of economic and transport links.

Abacha's death may usher in a fresh chance, but in Nigeria the international community is dealing with a fragile multi-ethnic state that could just as easily crack up as democratise. — Financial Times



Del Monte Royal Holdings Limited

(Incorporated in the Republic of South Africa)
(Registration number 88/05984/06)

("Delhold")

Del Monte Royal Corporation Limited

(Incorporated in the Republic of South Africa)
(Registration number 84/05988/06)

("Delcorp")

Results of general meetings

At the respective general meetings of Delhold and Delcorp

Nigerian bank woes multiply

Kingsley Kubeyinje

(226)

MD 10/6/98

LAGOS — Seventeen Nigerian banks are deemed to be in serious distress and the Nigerian Deposit Insurance Corporation has called for a review of the financial sector.

Nigerian Deposit Insurance Corporation CE John Ebhodaghe said last week that the review was necessary to find ways of reducing distress in the nation's banking system.

Early this year, 26 distressed banks — 13 commercial and 13 merchant — were liquidated by the government for being unable to carry out simple banking functions. Billions of naira were subsequently trapped in the liquidated banks and depositors have yet to be compensated.

Ebhodaghe said the high rate of nonperforming loans and advances was one of the main causes of the banks' problems. Regulators and supervisors had to be proactive to try to set up more effective banking.

Ebhodaghe expressed alarm at the problems in the financial sector and said the number of distressed banks had grown from nine in 1990 to 60 in 1995.

INSIDE

Spotlight on Nigeria

Abacha left his land in ruin

Star 10/6/98 (226)

The bloody dictator's death has deepened chaos in an embittered country, writes Dele Olojede

The military ruler of Africa's most populous nation appeared to have conquered all. He had succeeded in killing, jailing or forcing into exile virtually all his opponents.

His deputy was awaiting execution by firing squad, allegedly for plotting to take power.

The acknowledged winner of the last democratic elections held in Nigeria, in 1993, has been placed behind bars, without trial, for four years.

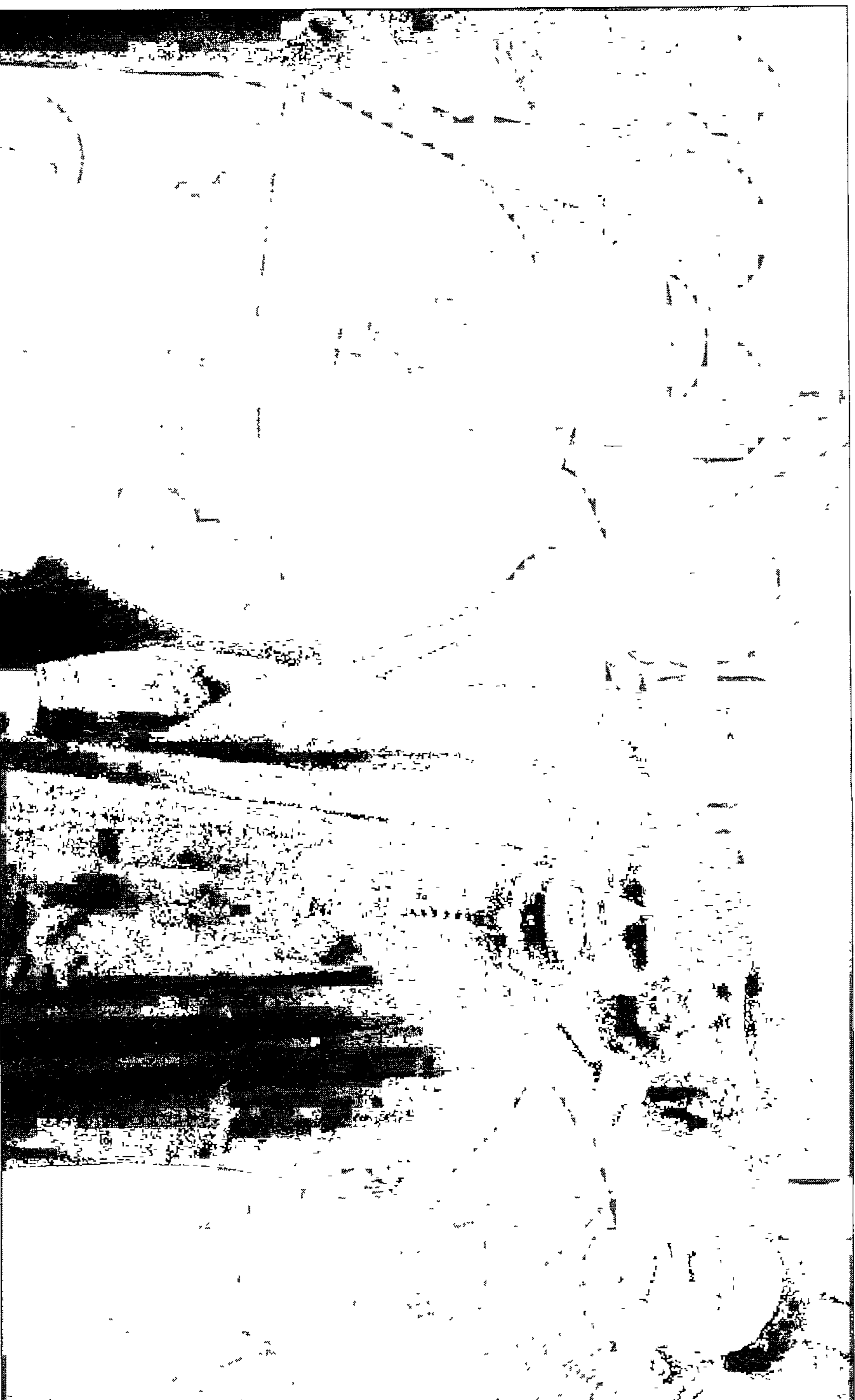
The country's most internationally recognised pro-democracy campaigner, the Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka, also faced a treason sentence and was exiled in the United States.

One human-rights campaigner, the writer Ken Saro-Wiwa, was hanged by the regime in 1995, along with eight others. Protesters routinely were shot and killed in the streets. Opponents' homes were fire-bombed, and shadow assassins killed activists in traffic in Lagos, Nigeria's commercial capital. The nation of 120 million people had been bludgeoned into submission.

For General Sani Abacha, a dictator who used silence as a terror weapon and rarely was seen in public, the *coup de grace* was to have come this August, when he magically would have transformed himself into a "democratically elected" civilian leader. The five parties he officially recognised had nominated him as their sole candidate for the presidency. And even the Clinton administration, whose mild economic and diplomatic sanctions had produced no result, was beginning to send signals that it could live with such an arrangement.

But then came his sudden demise.

Abacha left a country in political chaos and economic ruin. He left no credible political programme that can rally a badly fractured and embittered nation. Remnants of the ruling junta



Catholicism meets a dictator ... Pope John Paul II with Sani Abacha during a papal visit to Nigeria in March this year

has destroyed civil society. The hum and his senior aides

only two of its 10 leaders were mired about relinquishing power. He

After Saro-Wiwa and other hu-

War on drugs may be doing more harm than good

By CHRISTOPHER S WREN
United Nations

A drug reform institute, financed by billionaire philanthropist George Soros, has amassed signatures of hundreds of prominent people around the world on a letter asserting that the global war on drugs is causing more harm than drug abuse itself.

The signers include the former UN secretary-general Javier Perez de Cuellar, the former US secretary of state George Shultz, the Nobel peace laureate Oscar Arias of Costa Rica, the former CBS television anchorman Walter Cronkite, two former US senators, Alan Cranston and Claiborne Pell, and noted South African human rights and anti-apartheid activist Helen Suzman.

The signers also include Soros, who has spent millions of dollars trying to change the way Americans think about illegal drugs.

In the past, he helped finance referendums in California and Arizona in support of medicinal use of marijuana and programmes that distribute clean needles to those who take illegal drugs by injection.

The move was timed to coincide with the UN General Assembly's special session on combating drug abuse.

The letter was organised by the Lindesmith Centre in New York, which advocates more liberal drug policies. It is addressed to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, whose spokesman said on Monday that he had yet to receive it.

The letter also ran as a two-page advertisement in The New York Times.

It says in part "Persisting in our current policies will only result in more abuse, more empowerment of drug markets and criminals and more disease and suffering."

How an untouchable master of corruption ripped off his country

By JAMES RUPERT
Abidjan, Ivory Coast

name a successor. But although a new leader was named quickly, few would wager he will last. Some suggest a transitional government of national unity, headed by the imprisoned presidential-elect Moshood Abiola, as the only option to guarantee both legitimacy and stability.

"With all the people who have been killed and all the people jailed, there is too much bitterness in the country now," said Kayode Soyinka, publisher of the journal Africa Today.

"Nigeria has been going through hell for the past five years of Abacha's rule," Soyinka said. "He

shootout is not impossible."

Potential chaos that would imperil Nigeria's neighbours is one of the fears of the Clinton administration, which only lately decided to reopen dialogue with a dictator who had become an international pariah.

But impervious to international pressure and unconcerned about his own image, the general effectively cancelled a planned visit by a Clinton delegation that was to be led by Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Pickering, who once served as ambassador to Nigeria. Abacha insisted Washington first had to lift visa restrictions on

four sub-Saharan Africans calls home, the current crisis actually began even before independence from Britain.

Nigeria suffered from a built-in instability arising from the reluctance of its three major ethnic groups - the Yoruba in the west, the Ibo in the east, and the Hausa in the north - to live as one nation.

What followed was a bloody civil war in the 1960s in which more than one million died. A series of military coups guaranteed political instability, and in nearly four decades the country has never managed an orderly transfer of power from one elected leader to another. In fact,

wealthy businessman, but was forced out in the ensuing confusion. His appointed successor lasted only nine months before Abacha, then the defence minister, elbowed his way into Aso Rock, the presidential fortress in the capital, Abuja.

Abacha swiftly locked up Abiola when the latter proclaimed himself the elected president. Abacha set about destroying any opposition. He rebuffed American and European entreaties to restore democracy. With a vast oil reserve that enables him to sell nearly two million barrels a day, including 10% of US imports, he hung tough and responded with increasing repression.

the regime in 1995, Nelson Mandela became the only African leader openly to condemn the Nigerian dictator, calling for the country's expulsion from the Commonwealth of Britain's former colonies.

Abacha would not be moved. He virtually barricaded himself in his jungle capital, sleeping all day and meeting aides only at night, according to those close to him.

Ken Saro-Wiwa Jun, son of the slain writer, said by telephone from London this week, "You get no sense of justice, no personal satisfaction whatever from the latest events. Abacha's death does not bring my father back to life" - LA Times

open debate, rigorous analysis of current policies, and serious consideration of alternatives, are accused of 'surrendering'. But surrender is when fear as well as inertia combine to shut off debate, suppress analysis, and dismiss alternatives to current policies."

The letter proposes no clear alternatives beyond asking Amman to take the lead in "stimulating a frank and honest evaluation of global drug control efforts."

Soros said in a telephone interview that he did not contribute directly to the cost of the Times advertisement but the Lindesmith Institute, which he bankrolls, did.

"I was happy to sign it," he said in a telephone interview.

"Firstly, it expresses my views and secondly, I hope it will foster an open discussion. By having so many distinguished people sign on, it should at the very least make people want to discuss whether our policies are counter-productive or not."

Career soldier takes over reins

Abuja, Nigeria - A career serviceman, Abdulsalam Abubakar became Nigeria's ninth military ruler since the country gained independence from British colonial rule in 1960.

Promoted from major-general to the full rank of general during a Monday ceremony to appoint him Nigeria's new head of state, Abubakar (55) joined the national political scene in 1988 as the late General Sani Abacha's chief of staff.

Born June 13 1942, in the town of Minna near the capital, Abuja, Abubakar was sent off to secondary school from 1957 to 1963 in the nearby town of Bida.

Growing up during the heady buildup towards independence

From British rule in 1960, Abubakar later graduated from secondary school and went on to study at the Kaduna Technical Institute before joining the air force.

In the mid-1970s he switched service and joined the army which sent him to the US for formal training. Details of his US training were not immediately known.

In 1981, Abubakar was appointed commander of a Nigerian contingent attached to a UN peace-keeping force in Lebanon.

Rising through the ranks, he became a senior officer in the army during the late 1980s, finally drawing Abacha's attention in 1993.

Abubakar is married, and has two sons and three daughters. - Sapa-AP



Main man ... new Nigerian leader General Abdulsalam Abubakar

Star (226) 10/6/98

hotel for several days before being summoned - often after midnight - to the presidential villa to sign contracts with Abacha's aides. Abacha "works all night and sleeps all day," said the former trader, who asked not to be named.

Nigerians and international economists say Abacha appears to have hidden his wealth well. Nigerian journalists who have investigated corruption say he appears to have particular business interests in the Persian Gulf region, and the so-called "tiger" economies of Asia and Brazil.

Much of the oil that Nigeria pumps each day goes to the major international oil companies - Shell, Mobil, Chevron and others - which operate the oil fields. But the largest single share goes to Nigeria's state oil company which, under the direction of Abacha's camp, sells its oil to independent traders.

According to official announcements of oil sales and reporting by the London-based oil newsletter Energy Compass, Nigeria's main trading partners in the Abacha era have been the London-based firms Arcadia and Addax, and the Swiss-based company Glencore, which was under the control of Marc Rich, an American commodities dealer.

Unlike the late Zairian strongman Mobutu Sese Seko, who flaunted palaces and villas he owned throughout Europe and elsewhere, Abacha has revealed no foreign assets.

Nigerian journalists and business sources in Abuja and the northern city of Kano said the Abacha family keeps palatial private residences in both cities. The family's home in Kano is concealed far behind fences and soldiers standing guard and "is truly opulent and spectacular" - Washington Post

Corruptions not part of govt, it's the object of govt

99

tracts of the city of 8 million never get power at all.

Business is mired by a thousand such failures, and unemployment is estimated by analysts to be at least 25%. Millions of Nigerians survive on ingenuity and doggedness as street vendors, curbside fix-it men, prostitutes, subsistence farmers.

Abacha avoided broad publicity concerning his corruption partly by keeping a low profile abroad.

"He is a recluse," a Western diplomat said in Lagos last month.

"The seldom leaves Aso Rock (the presidential villa), and he says very little in public for a head of state."

Abacha and his entourage "live a pretty weird lifestyle," said one former trader who has dealt in oil with Abacha's family. He and others told of traders arriving in Abuja, the capital, and waiting at a luxury

lapse than in the past. Besides the collapse in fuel distribution, the telephone network is decaying. The electrical grid is failing. Almost no part of Lagos - the steaming teeming financial and commercial capital - gets electricity all day and

And Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala added, "There's just no chance that we're going to throw up our hands and walk away from what we think is a predominantly public health issue." - New York Times

In nearly five secretive years in power, Nigeria's General Sani Abacha built a reputation for authoritarian, sometimes brutal rule.

He was less known - but in terms of his legacy to Nigeria, perhaps more important - for overseeing a web of corruption that Nigerians and oil industry sources say has plundered billions of dollars from the country.

Abacha died Monday at 54. While he ruled Nigeria from a fortified presidential villa in Nigeria's capital, the sources said, he and a circle of aides and business partners tapped virtually every stage of the oil business, Nigeria's most important industry and the source of 80% of its government revenue.

They took kickbacks from foreign companies for licences to search for oil in the basin and delta of the Niger River or offshore. They got bribes from construction firms that won contracts to build drilling rigs and pipelines.

And, in a business which generated a daily river of cash, Abacha and several associates supervised every sale of Nigerian crude by the state-owned oil company, the sources said, slushing off an unknown percentage of the about \$50-billion per year which Nigeria earns on average in crude oil sales.

In recent years, Abacha, his allies and top officials have added a new form of corruption that is killing the Nigerian economy: the siphoning of money used by Nigeria's oil refineries to turn crude into more valuable gasoline.

Finance and oil ministry officials argue openly in the Nigerian press over who has diverted more than \$10-billion from the four state-

owned refineries. In recent years, and the refineries' ruin creates an artificial fuel shortage for this nation of more than 100 million people.

Nigeria is thus forced to import refined fuels such as gasoline and, traders say, Abacha and his cronies controlled that trade too, skimming off a percentage. The government subsidises the sale price of gasoline and other fuels, but Abacha loyalists among the officer corps and civil service divert much of the available supply to sell on the black market or to neighbouring countries. The fuel shortage has forced the economy into near depression, leaving millions of people poorer and sicker.

"In Nigeria, corruption isn't part of government, it's the object of government," said a Nigerian political scientist who asked not to be named. For 28 of the 38 years since

Nigeria gained independence from Britain, the country has been ruled by the military, and Nigerians say corruption has grown steadily.

For the past two years, Transparency International, a Berlin-based organisation which monitors corruption, has conducted surveys of businessmen that have proclaimed Nigeria the world's most corrupt place to do business.

Since the growth of Nigeria's oil industry in the 1970s, military rulers have controlled the trade. But where earlier rulers doled out the graft to key supporters, "Abacha has increasingly monopolised the trade himself," said John Bearman, a London-based oil industry analyst.

"There is no deal that does not go through the presidential villa."

Under Abacha, corruption took Nigeria further into economic col-

NO MENTION OF COMING POLL IN SPEECH

New military ruler sworn in for Nigeria

CT 10/6/98

(226)

LAGOS: Analysts say the new military ruler in Nigeria would have to take a big personal gamble to restore democracy to the country.

Abdusalam Abubakar was sworn in yesterday as Nigeria's ninth military ruler following the death of strongman Sani Abacha from a heart attack on Monday.

Abacha's death was celebrated overnight in some southern strongholds of opposition to military rule.

In a brief acceptance speech in the capital Abuja, Abubakar — a quiet, bespectacled career soldier — described his appointment as a personal challenge.

"All hands must be on deck to move this nation forward. I will address the nation in due course," he said, declaring seven days of national mourning for Abacha.

He did not mention the presidential elections looming on August 1, for which Abacha was the sole candidate.

Neither did he mention the scores of political detainees, including presidential claimant Moshood Abiola, whose plight, combined with scepticism over Abacha's democratic credentials, has earned Nigeria panache status.

Abubakar could rehabilitate a democracy plan poisoned by suspicion, but would have to take a big personal gamble to get away with it, analysts said yesterday.

On the one hand is his credibility as a career officer who has never sought office, and the possibility

Sierra Leoneans mourn

FREETOWN: News of the death of Nigerian dictator Sani Abacha sent shockwaves through the Sierra Leonean capital, where many saw him first and foremost as the man who made a return to constitutional rule in their nation possible.

One group calling itself "Sierra Leoneans in support of General Abacha" announced late on Monday that it was holding a vigil and would be in mourning for a week.

Thousands attended a pro-Abacha rally two weeks ago in the Sierra Leone capital — evidence of the popularity enjoyed

here by the late Nigerian strongman, who was chairperson of the Economic Community of West African States (Ecomog).

Abacha's popularity in Sierra Leone stemmed from the fact that in February, the Ecomog Monitoring Group (Ecomog), a predominantly Nigerian intervention force, ousted the extremely unpopular military junta that had seized power in Freetown in May last year.

People here are now wondering whether the new Nigerian leadership will continue giving the same support to Ecomog. — Sapa-IPS

that if Nigeria fails to reform, it may be written off as a basket case.

On the other are the pleasures of power which Abubakar has never tasted and the difficulty of persuading his fellow officers of the need for democracy in a country ruled by soldiers for all but 10 years since independence from Britain in 1960.

The business-as-usual attitude which took most Nigerians back to work yesterday concealed grave fears of the rot at Nigeria's core.

"From one problem we just go to 10 problems," said one businessman here. "Who is going to organise elections? Who will stand in them? Can the detainees be released? Who will prevent someone else from taking power? Can this new man really answer those

questions? I am not convinced."

One Western diplomat said: "If there's one quick move Abubakar could make that will secure support both locally and internationally, it's freeing detainees."

But even without the mess of the plan to restore civilian rule, Nigeria faces enough problems with economic decline given a shunt by low oil prices, ethnic division, insecurity and corruption.

Those democracy campaigners who have not dismissed Abubakar out of hand, as many of Abiola's supporters have done, say the only workable solution is for Abubakar to reinstate democracy and leave the rest of the mess for the resulting civilian president. — Reuter

● See Page 19

New Nigerian leader fails to plot course on civil elections

(226) ARG 10/6/98

Lagos - Nigeria remained under a cloud of uncertainty after a broadcast by its new military ruler gave no clue as to how he will defuse tension over the election of a civilian president.

General Abdusalam Abubakar's maiden broadcast last night also raised the prospect of renewed opposition protests after he pledged to press on with a much criticised political programme of his predecessor, the late dictator Sani Abacha.

General Abacha died on Monday and General Abubakar was sworn in yesterday as new head of state.

General Abacha promised to

return Nigeria to civilian rule next October, but he was the sole candidate for presidential elections in August which have been denounced at home and abroad as a ploy to perpetuate the military's hold on power.

Nigerians had been waiting anxiously for the broadcast for signs of how General Abubakar, 56, intended to rescue the transition programme after General Abacha's death.

In the end his six-minute broadcast was short on specifics and made no mention of the release of scores of political prisoners - a key demand by internal opposition groups and Western governments that shunned Gen-

eral Abacha's regime

"We remain committed to the socio-political transition programme of General Sani Abacha's administration and will do everything to ensure its successful implementation," said the general, faltering over his text

Nigerian human rights campaigner Gani Fanwehinmi said General Abubakar's broadcast showed he was "nothing but an incarnation" of General Abacha.

"For him to say he wants to pursue General Sani Abacha's programme - a dead programme - means he has nothing to offer," Mr Fanwehinmi said. - Reuters

Nigerian oil embargo urged if leader does not shape up

Simon Barber

SD 11/6/98 (226)
WASHINGTON — The Rev Jesse Jackson, the US special envoy for the promotion of democracy in Africa, is calling for a unilateral US oil embargo on Nigeria unless its new leader, Gen Raman Abubakar, shows a "commitment to human rights"

US officials were quick to stress that this did not represent US policy and to insist that Jackson was merely "expressing a view"

Jackson's response to the death of Gen Sani Abacha came after returning from helping Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Susan Rice mediate the border crisis between Ethiopia and Eritrea

"American purchases of Nigerian oil should be contingent on their demonstrated commitment to human rights. We must not stand idly and be 40% of Nigeria's oil market and not insist upon a relationship consistent with our values of democracy and human rights," Jackson said

The administration has avoided any sanctions talks in the wake of Abacha's death, which the state department is calling "a historic opportunity to open the political process and institute a swift and credible transition to civilian rule"

Plans to send a high-level delegation to Nigeria headed by Under-Secretary of State Thomas Pickering are under consideration after being cancelled when Abacha said he would agree to a meeting if the ban on travel to the US by his own officials was lifted

Under a cloud: Page 11

Nigerians sceptical of

promise of democracy

LAGOS: The country's military ruler has promised democracy, but many Nigerians — accustomed to political deceit — were reserving judgment yesterday on their newest generalissimo

In his first address to the nation Abdulsalam Abubakar vowed to support a transition to civilian rule, but gave no details on how the process would be carried out

In Lagos, which was officially in mourning, there were few signs of tears over Abacha's death

"There's no reason to be upset," said Kehinda Suleman, 40, a Lagos resident "We're happy he's gone. He was not such a good leader"

"We don't want another Sami Abacha," said 25-year-old shoe repairman Joseph Akpan "We've had enough Sami Abacha"

Opposition leaders said they would go ahead with demonstrations tomorrow to mark the fifth anniversary of the day in 1993 when presidential elections were cancelled "We are under no illusion that by Abacha's death, military rule has come an end," the

United Action for Democracy said

The legacy of Abacha's leadership is visible everywhere in Lagos, from the lines for gasoline that stretch for blocks to the flickering electricity and the phones that can't call across town

Abubakar, speaking on national television hours after he was appointed, said "I invite all Nigerians in self-exile to return home to join the process of reconstruction and reconciliation"

Such well-known exiles as Wole Soyinka, a writer and Nobel laureate, have warned of "armed insurrection" if the military did not give way to civilian rule

Although Abubakar gave no specifics on how the military would hand power to a civilian government, he said his administration was committed to a transition process introduced by Abacha

Abacha, a dictator known for his brutality, had long promised to end military rule. But he was also seen as manipulating the system to have himself transformed into a civilian ruler — Sapa-AP



PROMISES: Nigeria's newest military leader Abdulsalam Abubakar says will honour commitments to put in a civilian government **PICTURE: AP**

TOP ARGUS ISSUES

Nigerian turmoil has roots in elitism

Age-old north v south rivalry

(aab) ART 11/6/98

THE STORY

While the sudden death of General Sani Abacha does not necessarily provide occasion for the re-organisation of Nigerian politics the way it was with the demise of dictators such as Suharto of Indonesia, Papa Doc of Haiti and the Philippines' Ferdinand Marcos, it gives the chance to present the difficulties of Nigeria.

The present crisis arose out of the annulment of the federal presidential elections of June 12 1998. When it was realised by the northern Nigerian political elite that Mashood Abiola was going to win the election, the civilian and military leadership of the elite annulled the poll.

With Abiola winning the elections and becoming the president of the country, political power would have been taken legitimately from the northern elite for the first time in more than three decades of the independence of the Nigerian federation. That elite could not accept this situation since it left them without any control of the country.

The need of the northern political elite to govern the country has always been paramount.

Against the economic and professional advantage of the two main ethnic rivals of the northern elite - the Yoruba and the Ibo - the Hausa-Fulani of the northern political elite have always felt they needed to have political control of the government of the country.

The southern ethnic nationalities opted for western education when the northern elite did not particularly appreciate it, preferring their Muslim educational system.

As a result of this virtual birth right of the northern elite to rule the country, there has always been a crisis and political instability each time that right is challenged by any one person or group of people from the south.

After the first military coup d'état of January 1966 in which five majors from the south attempted to take over political power from the civilian arm of the northern elite, there followed a

counter coup d'état by northern young officers during July and August 1966.

In his first public broadcast, the leader of the emergent military government thanked God that once again the reins of power were in the hands of another northerner.

Thus, either through civilians or through the military, the northern elite has continued to rule Nigeria all the years of its independence.

It was within this understanding that the elections of June 12 1998 were annulled.

After the annulment, Abacha seized power and then announced his own programme for a return to democracy.

Knowing that one return to democracy process had ended in the annulment of the democratic election by Ibrahim Babangida, not much faith was placed on Abacha's programme.

What would be important to him and his backers, military and civilian alike in the north, would be the water-tight arrangement in which he or anyone from the north could be certain to "win" the election before it even took place.

That is, it had to be an election "fore-won" or else it would not be acceptable to the northern elite.

What is important therefore in the discussion of Nigerian political difficulties is that at the crises and the instability have been created by ethnic and tribal rivalry for the control of the politics of Nigeria.

This is the major issue in the politics of Nigeria - the fight to the death among the three major ethnic nationalities to have control of Nigeria or else to destroy Nigeria.

It needs to be stated that in this rivalry the northern political elite has always been cleverer than their two competitors in the south.

They have been, as one of the princes of the north told me, more courageous in staging military coups d'état than the soldiers from the south.

They use both their civilian members as well as their military counterparts.

They also co-opt southerners with various forms of enticements.

A good example is the fact that when the Ibo found they had been marginalised in 1967 and decided to secede from the federation, the northern elite successfully bribed the Yoruba to support them in defeating Biafra and forcing the Ibo back into the federation.

Now that the Yoruba are saying that they want to secede, it has not been too difficult for the Ibo to say they will fight to the death to keep the country together and defeat the wishes of the Yoruba to destroy the unity of the country.

That means they will join their erstwhile enemies in order to defeat the Yoruba.

What is the way forward in all this?

The example of South Africa is very pertinent.

First of all, it would never have made sense to discuss the politics of South Africa without mentioning the Broderbond and the Afrikaner ambition to control South Africa for ever.

But, more importantly, South Africa has shown that it is not impos-



Reaction: youths in Lagos, Nigeria, hold newspapers headlining the death of General Sani Abacha, who died of a heart attack on Monday at the age of 54

sible for people who are not by nature democratic to create democracy, (apologies to Dr Frederick van Zyl Slabbert)

The implications of these two points is that the political difficulties of Nigeria cannot be discussed outside the competition for political control by the three main ethnic nationalities - the Hausa-Fulani, the Yoruba and the Ibo.

Secondly, democracy as the only political formula that would ensure the participation and inclusion of

everybody, be they from the majority ethnic groups or from the minority ethnic groups such as hanged activist Ken Saro-Wiwa's Ogoni movement.

How can the combination of the military and civilian membership of the northern elite - the Hausa-Fulani - and their collaborators from the south be persuaded to sit down with the rest of the country and discuss the future of a stable Nigeria?

First of all, the opposition groups must open up the discussion of the ethnic rivalries that bedevil Niger-

ian politics.

As long as they pretend that the problem is an Abacha or the Nigerian army, they will always be up-staged by the northern elite.

They also would fail to win international understanding.

They need to be able to say that, in spite of the northern elite monopolising political power for almost 40 years, these self-anointed rulers of Nigeria have failed to create a viable country befitting the resources, both human and material, of a country

such as Nigeria.

Secondly, the international community needs to understand that an oil boycott is the only instrument that the opposition has in its arsenal to try and force the northern elite to talk to the rest of the country.

It is the billions of dollars corruptly cornered by the ruling elite of the north and their southern collaborators that are used to achieve support within and outside of the country.

This is the only way out of the menace of Nigeria in its present form

Nigeria's new ruler faces protests

ARL 11/6/98

(226)

Lagos - Nigeria's new military ruler, Abdulsalam Abubakar, appeared today to be on a collision course with opposition groups calling for protests against his three-day-old regime.

Political uncertainty weighed heavily on the oil-producing country after General Abubakar prepared to follow the discredited democracy plan of late dictator Sani Abacha, while giving no sign of appeasing opposition anger.

Instead, the military governor of Nigeria's biggest city, Lagos, warned would-be protesters they should beware of provoking a heavy response

He told them to instead mourn Mr Abacha, who died on Monday.

"I would like to call on the organisations to call it off ... to avoid any situation that will invite the use of force," said Lagos governor Colonel Mohammed Marwa, a close aide of Mr Abacha, said on television last night.

So far, western countries, which were exasperated by Mr Abacha's failure to establish a semblance of democracy, have given the new ruler the benefit of the doubt, while financial markets have been unperturbed. - Reuters

Nigeria turmoil has roots in elitism - page 12

Nigeria to open second exchange

Kingsley Kubeyinje

(22b)
BD 12/6/98

LAGOS — Nigeria's controversial second stock exchange, which is proposed for the federal capital of Abuja, opens on July 17 despite business's view that the country is being served adequately by the Lagos exchange

Nigerian Finance Minister Anthony Ani said the new exchange was being registered with a share capital of 1-billion naira and an issued share capital of 500-million naira. The building was being prepared.

He said as soon as the arrangements were completed, the exchange would be registered with the nation's security and exchange commission to

enable it to begin business

However, the proposed exchange has caused controversy. Stockbrokers believe the exchange will be an "unnecessary duplication", and that the move is based largely on political motives. Government has long tried to persuade business to relocate to the new capital

Meanwhile, Nigeria's new military leader, Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar, has assured the country's foreign creditors, as well as the international community, that all obligations will be met by his administration

Abubakar said Nigeria would honour all its international obligations and that the military would return the country to civil rule on October 1, 1998

Study shows megacity is nearly a fait accompli

Johannesburg is heading towards a megacity system even before the white paper on local government was released, writes Erica Emdon

nd 12/6/98

(266)

THERE has been much debate recently on the white paper's notion of local government, particularly the megacity concept for metropolitan areas.

This article is the culmination of a research study on greater Johannesburg that investigated whether the megacity concept could be applied successfully here.

The conclusion reached is that the city has already been rearranging its administration into a unitary city organisation, even prior to the white paper on local government being published. Attention has been given as to how best to arrange the administration of greater Johannesburg so as to improve its service delivery role and financial viability. Historically, the strong central metropolitan system of government was preferred among the major role players.

In this context, the megacity concept expressed in the white paper may be highly appropriate.

The research project indicates that during 1994 and 1995 local negotiations that took place among the four local councils and the metropolitan council favoured a strong metropolitan council with key powers and functions. A series of agreements was reached on the allocation of powers and functions between the metropolitan council and the four local councils. These agreements gave the metropolitan council the most important powers, including the power to determine the overall policy framework for the area and the budget and the allocation of funds in greater Johannesburg.

Unfortunately the proclamation that set up the four councils after November 1 1995 removed the powers from the metropolitan council and gave them to the local councils, ignoring the agreements that had been reached.

This devolution of powers to the local councils has had a damaging effect in greater Johannesburg. It created the situation of a high degree of duplication of functions, a top-heavy administration and deterioration in service delivery.

By the middle of last year it became clear that all was not well in greater Johannesburg. The chairmen of the executive committees knew that an organisational restructuring was needed and that something had to be done to avert the looming financial crisis. The fiscal problems facing Johannesburg were caused by a number of factors, including the lack of loan finance for capital expenditure and inadequate credit control mechanisms.

The culmination of the crisis in the city has been the issuing of two provincial notices — one last October, which was reissued in April with some

amendments. These notices have effectively given power to a committee of 10 (now 15) and stipulated that there must be centralised decision-making on budgeting, credit control, information management, organisation design and public-private partnerships.

The effect of the notices has been to avert a financial crisis in the city by cutting the budget drastically (capital and operational), clamping down on defaulters, managing the finances more coherently and starting to put better information and organisational systems in place.

An organisation restructuring is being implemented on the basis of the Price Waterhouse study, that will give the metropolitan administration the most important strategic roles, including the task of setting service standards and defining overall policy for the area and controlling the budget. Service delivery will be decentralised into a number of functionally sensible areas (these may be quite different to the present council boundaries).

Given these local imperatives that are already under way, to centralise major functions, the white paper concept of the megacity makes sense and mirrors what is taking place administratively in Johannesburg. Most importantly, the reality we all have to face in greater Johannesburg is that there is extreme poverty in the south of the city and extreme wealth in the north. The city government must be able to use resources and income for the benefit of everyone in this area. There are 3.8-million people, which is not large for a metropolitan area internationally, and the municipality must service them all. By having one city that is well managed and sets its policies and standards centrally but delivers at a local level, we are moving towards a situation where this can happen successfully.

The white paper envisages that local councils will be set up in parallel to the metropolitan council, with certain powers being devolved to them. This will allow local communities, through their ward councillors, to have a voice in the metropolitan council.

In greater Johannesburg there could be as many as 10

The Centre for Development and Enterprise's Ann Bernstein recommends the creation of a commission to investigate local government, as she believes that there is a crisis in local government.

There has been, and still is, a crisis in greater Johannesburg. It is being addressed by role players as described above. But where Bernstein is correct is that there needs to be an investigation into other sources of finance for



Debate rages about whether the megacity route is the right one for Johannesburg

greater Johannesburg. The revenue generated locally is not enough and the intergovernmental grants are also insufficient. Alternative revenue sources will have to be investigated if Johannesburg is to deliver the level and standards of service required. She says that what is required is multiclass and multirace coalitions for growth, development and redistribution of services and opportunities. Centralisation of Johannesburg will do this. It will allow

for broad planning and resource distribution across the metropolitan area but will also reflect local opinions through the decentralised committees that will be established.

□ Emdon is an attorney and development consultant. The article is part of the findings of a study into local government commissioned by the provincial affairs and constitutional development ministry.

Neglected commodities hold key to Nigeria's post-Abacha growth

FROM DOW JONES

Ibadan — Nigeria's former military ruler, General Sani Abacha, who died in Abuja on Monday, did little to revive the flagging fortunes of the country's key agricultural commodities sector in nearly five years in power.

He bequeathes to his successor a sector which has the potential to drive the recovery of Nigeria's rural economy, but is marred by falling production levels, poor management, serious

underfunding and state neglect.

Abacha's regime ignored commodities such as cocoa, rubber and palm oil to concentrate on Nigeria's multibillion-dollar oil and petroleum industry.

Anthony Ani, Nigeria's finance minister, said collective earnings from the oil sector this year would exceed \$9.8 billion.

Despite their potential, Nigeria's leading cash crops earn only \$300 million a year from exports. Cocoa, the country's most important export earner after oil, nets a

little more than \$200 million.

Once the world's largest producer of palm oil, Nigeria has long been overtaken by Malaysia. Cocoa output has declined from more than 300 000 tons a year in the 1960s to less than 150 000 tons.

Rubber production reached a peak of 150 000 tons in 1991 but has slipped back to about 105 000 tons now.

Those working in the commodities sector think it could do better, but say there has been a policy vacuum since the govern-

ment abandoned old-style commodity marketing boards in the mid-1980s. These have never been effectively replaced.

In the cocoa industry, production rose as farmers started receiving a larger share of the world market price.

Quality, however, deteriorated as inexperienced businessmen piled into the business, hoping to use cocoa beans to circumvent the harsh foreign exchange rules in place. Prices of key inputs rose on

the basis of the tumbling value of the naira, Nigeria's currency.

Private sector groups like the Cocoa Association of Nigeria have tried to impose some order but, more than 10 years later, are still battling a lack of funding and internal divisions.

"There is no cocoa policy for Nigeria at present," said Olumide Aroloye, a member of the association's executive committee.

A special committee set up by the government to draft such a policy tabled its report four years

ago, but the government has never ratified its findings.

"Unless we put our heads together, everything will elude us," said Emmanuel Ijewere, the chairman of a new cocoa industry forum.

Funding remains a problem for Nigeria's commodities sector. Abacha's regime did not put in place a policy to promote agricultural credits, and commercial banks which had opened agricultural departments in the 1970s soon closed them.

helicopters could be staging bombing practice runs near Kosovo's borders with Albania and

heavy artillery and shelling of whole villages, have stirred fears of another Balkan conflict, less than

the region and on Milosevic to fighting and seek Reuter

Opposition to protest in Nigerian trial of strength

LAGOS: Nigeria's opposition was preparing for a test of strength yesterday with a nationwide day of protest against the new military regime headed by General Abdulsalam Abubakar.

The protests today, which will be the fifth anniversary of democratic presidential elections that were voided by a previous junta, have been banned by police, who have warned the opposition against any attempts to disrupt public order.

The nerve centre of the protests will be the working-class Lagos neighbourhood of Yaba, where several opposition figures are expected to speak.

The day will be a test both for the opposition and for Abubakar, who took over on Tuesday, the day after the military dictator Sani Abacha died suddenly of a heart attack.

Abacha seized power in November 1993 to set up Nigeria's seventh military regime since independence from Britain in 1960. His coup followed the staging and subsequent voiding of civilian presidential elec-

tions by a previous junta in June that year. The opposition has been largely in disarray since its last push in 1994.

The nine weeks of campaigning brought the country to its knees but failed to force Abacha to hand over power to the now detained millionaire businessman Moshood Abiola, who won the voided 1993 elections.

The opposition campaign of 1994 served only to galvanise the Abacha junta, which ordered the arrests of key opposition and labour figures, prompting many others to flee into exile.

In recent weeks the decision by Nigeria's five legal parties to select Abacha as their sole candidate in elections set for August 1 sparked a change in political winds. The opposition heaped new scorn on the planned elections, having already ridiculed Abacha's pledge to hand over power to a civilian democratically elected government on October 1 — which the new regime has promised to honour — Sapa-AFP



Goodbye to him:
Nigerian strongman
General Sani Abacha's
death this week has
increased pressure for
the country to
establish democracy

The Nigerian death march

(236) MHG 12/6/98

James Rupert in Abidjan

Nigeria, with its corrupt economy paralysed and its populace sullen under military rule, looms over much of Africa like a stumbling giant that just can't seem to order its affairs.

The death of the country's military ruler, General Sani Abacha, on Monday, coming on top of deepening economic and political woes, renews the questions that Nigeria seems regularly to pose to itself and its region: why has this continental heavyweight, richer than its neighbours in land, resources and human capital, persistently been one of Africa's biggest national disappointments?

And what are the risks to the region if, one day, Nigeria should slip over the brink of instability into violent conflict?

Nearly a century after white Europeans invented Nigeria by piecing together a varied collection of African principalities, kingdoms and tribes, the resulting state remains in many ways an artifice hobbled by ethnic divides.

A nation which at independence in 1960 seemed destined to be West Africa's most powerful and progressive has since given the region its bloodiest war — the 1966 to 1970 Biafra conflict. An economy that in 1960 easily fed itself and promised long-term oil riches now must import food and gasoline.

A society that became one of Africa's most vibrant, literate and civil has changed its government six times by *coups d'état*, once by assassination and only twice by election. A culture that yielded Africa's brightest literary talents, such as Chinua Achebe and Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka, now finds them largely in exile — or, in the case of playwright Ken Saro-Wiwa, executed — after opposing the military regime.

Nigerians share an idea that they are, or at least should be, a great and respected country. But that theory is tough to square with the broad realities of poverty and political repression here, leaving many people sounding embarrassed, frustrated and perplexed at their country's condition.

"In the 1960s, we took a lot of pride in being Nigerian, we saw ourselves leading Africa," said a political scientist who asked not to be named.

"But that Nigeria has been hijacked. We have not won the benefits that this state promised. For most Nigerians, the

Nigerian idea has failed," he said.

But, the scholar said, there is no other option, no attractive, neighbouring state to join or create as an alternative. And despite the frustrations, many in Nigeria's vigorous civil society and democracy movements still hope that the failures of the past can be reversed.

"In Nigeria, patience is a cheap commodity," said another scholar, Stephen Olugbemi of Lagos University.

With somewhere between 100-million and 120-million people — a sixth of Africa's population — plus the wealth of the world's sixth-largest oil export industry, "Nigeria should be a great nation that everyone sees with respect," said James Anya, a part-time taxi driver in Lagos.

But the country is diplomatically isolated and under sanctions for human rights abuses.

Worse, Anya says, "We cannot feed our children or give our men jobs or make fuel from our oil. We are not respected."

All this has befallen his country, he said, because "we live under greedy people who want to keep everything for themselves."

But why does Nigeria seem to suffer such pronounced corruption and repression while democratisation appears to have taken root in many parts of Africa?

"I don't know," said Anya. "Maybe we have gone too far from God."

Nigerians agree in blaming much on their country's artificial creation as part of the European dissection of Africa and the colonial exploitation and repression that followed.

The British mashed together the Hausa-speaking, Muslim principalities of the north with Yoruba kingdoms and Ibo agricultural communities in the south. While yoked under the same administration, the regions remained disparate — and to hear many members of the different ethnic groups talk, they seem hardly to understand each other.

The British colonial rulers discouraged any real democracy that might have forced an equitable sharing of the country's earnings.

Trade, infrastructure and education were developed mainly in the south, but Britain's divide-and-rule tactics left political power at independence in the hands of the Hausa-

speakers of the north, said Olugbemi, a political science professor.

"We cannot blame everything on colonialism," he said. Since independence, "Nigerians have simply consolidated the same system."

The military has ruled for 28 of Nigeria's 38 years, and the north's grip on the government — exercised mostly through rule by northern army officers, such as Abacha and his successor, General Abdusalam Abubakar — has hindered the development of a meritocracy, Olugbemi said.

In recent years there have been unexplained bombings. Two bombs exploded earlier this year in the cities of Lagos and Ife, people were quick to whisper the question: which ethnic group was the target?

The victims of the bombs were mostly

Hausas, according to local reports. Hausas assured a foreign visitor that it was a Yoruba terrorism campaign to drive Hausas out of the country's economic centre, Yorubas insisted it was a government plot to justify a crackdown on Yorubas.

Yorubas repeatedly voice anger at their political marginalisation. Leaders of a prominent Yoruba cultural organisation, Afenifere, frequently declare that "the south-west" — a code phrase for Yorubas — has a natural right, after so many years of Hausa leadership, to provide the next civilian ruler of Nigeria.

Yorubas have been particularly angry since the military leadership nullified the apparent 1993 presidential election victory of Moshood Abiola, a Yoruba businessman. Nigerian newspapers have nicknamed the Yoruba homeland "the wild, wild west" because of frequent riots there against northern authority.

Anti-Abacha rioters burned homes and businesses of his supporters last month in the city of Ibadan. In the northern city of Kano, Hausas speak of the Yoruba south-west as an unlivable region. They mention the choking traffic and humidity of Lagos, the country's commercial centre, and disdain its people as loud, pushy and uncouth — a Hausa stereotype of Yorubas.

Yorubas "are naturally aggressive, which has led to them taking over the economy", a Hausa-speaking officer with a government

security agency said. "So we have to control the politics" of the country, he said.

"Otherwise, we would have nothing, and they would have everything."

And in the south-eastern city of Port Harcourt, the centre of the oil industry, Ibos of the Niger River delta region say it is they who are oppressed and exploited for the oil wealth of their lands.

"The government does not care for the people who live here, as long as it gets its profits from the oil beneath us," said a local environmental activist who asked not to be named.

Ibos remember the war that broke out when their region seceded from Nigeria in 1966 as the state of Biafra. After four years of grinding warfare, Nigeria won largely by imposing a food blockade that starved hundreds of thousands of civilians — perhaps the majority of the estimated one million people who died in the war.

Perhaps in part because of the horrors of that conflict, "secession is not an option that Ibos entertain anymore", said an Ibo political scientist in Port Harcourt who asked not to be identified.

Biafra is remembered with fear by Nigeria's neighbours as an example of the country's most threatening effects on West Africa's security. During the war, "all of West Africa was full of Nigerian refugees", said Charles Mensa, an economist who heads the Institute of Economic Affairs in Accra, Ghana.

However, Nigeria has in some ways acted as a force for stability. In claiming regional leadership, it has promoted the Economic Community of West African States, which has become the region's leading international forum.

Throughout the 1990s, Nigerian troops led the organisation's peacekeeping force in Liberia, which last year helped to halt the seven-year civil war there and ensure election of a new government.

In February, Nigerian troops went into Sierra Leone to reverse the 1997 military coup that had ousted that country's elected president. But at home, Nigeria repeatedly has convulsed in ways that have bruised neighbouring states and endangered their stability. "All West Africans are very sensitive to what happens in Nigeria," Mensa said.

"When Nigeria coughs, West Africa gets a fever," he said — *The Washington Post*.

Showdown begins in Nigeria as police teargas protesters

Opposition sceptical that new regime will end military dictatorship

By GILBERT DA COSTA
INDEPENDENT FOREIGN SERVICE

The long-awaited showdown between the four-day-old regime of Nigerian military leader General Abdulsalam Abubakar and the opposition began yesterday when police fired teargas to disperse demonstrators and arrested an activist during protests to mark the fifth anniversary of the 1993 elections which the military annulled.

The firing of teargas caused the crowd of several hundred youths to stampede. They dropped their banners and placards as they ran from the lower-class Yaba bus-stop market area of Lagos, the traditional meeting place of demonstrators.

There were no immediate reports of serious injury, although activist Gani Fawehinmi was overcome by teargas and arrested by police along with other unnamed demonstrators.

The demonstrations marked the start of what opposition leaders hope will build into a concerted campaign of public pressure on Abubakar to force him to implement a genuine programme of returning the country to civilian democratic rule.

Abubakar was installed as leader on Monday after the sudden death of Sani Abacha, who had ruled Nigeria with an iron fist since shortly after the military annulled the 1993 elections when it seemed certain they would be won by Chief Moshood Abiola, a politician not favoured by the military or its northern backers.

Abubakar has promised to honour Abacha's promise to return the country to civilian rule by October 1, but many considered Abacha's promise a fraud as he seemed certain to succeed himself, only in civilian clothes.

The big question now is whether Abubakar will, like Abacha, ensure that he is the only candidate for the planned August elections, or whether he will allow a genuine contest to occur. The opposition remains highly sceptical.

"Nigerians should not be hoodwinked by Abacha's death into believing that victory has been won," an opposition statement said, and, insinuating that Abacha may have been helped on his way, added. "The death-propelled palace coup is not acceptable to us."

Sealed off

Several detachments of police and soldiers, backed by helicopters and armoured personnel carriers, had been deployed on the streets of Lagos since Thursday and had sealed off the demonstration area in Yaba yesterday to try to stifle the protest, but the demonstrators gathered anyway, although not in the numbers many opposition leaders would have liked.

"See how they open fire. It is the same bullets they are firing now as they fired under Abacha," shouted one protester running from the scene.

"If we are not joining in, it is not because we support the army, it's just that we don't want to get shot," said trader Chuks Chukwu as he fled the protest with the armful of

second-hand shirts he had been hawking

In the capital Abuja there was no sign of disturbances, but business had yet to regain its usual pace as Abubakar continued meetings with Abacha's ministers, officials and politicians to determine his next moves.

And there were welcoming signs for Abubakar from local financial markets

Figures for demand at the central bank's weekly sale of hard currency dropped to US\$86-million from \$131-million. Bank dealers said it was an indication of a drop in capital flight since Abacha's death.

Western countries, concerned with the plight of scores of political prisoners jailed by Abacha, have not so far been heavily critical of the new regime.

But opposition groups, mainly based in southern Nigeria, are demanding the release of Abiola so that he can head a national unity government.

Abiola, an ethnic Yoruba from the south-west, who was jailed by Abacha in 1994 for declaring himself president, has become a symbol of decades of struggle against military rule in Nigeria.

Abubakar, like most of Nigeria's rulers since independence from Britain in 1960, is a northerner.

Politics has become a luxury for most of Nigeria's people, who are cynical about the goals of politicians and face a daily struggle to survive economic depression which economists blame on years of misuse of oil wealth by the country's military rulers.

Riot units on alert in Nigeria

Opposition protests feared

Lagos

Police in riot gear and soldiers armed with assault rifles have taken up positions throughout Lagos in anticipation of protests against Nigeria's ruling military junta

About 15km west of the city yesterday a crowd of students from the Lagos State College of Education clashed briefly with police after pouring into the streets and setting tyres on fire, witnesses said.

There were no immediate reports of arrests in that protest, which authorities broke up using teargas

In Lagos, the normally cluttered congestion of morning traffic had fallen off to a trickle of vehicles as many people stayed at home to avoid a confrontation with either the authorities or opposition activists who were planning to march on the city

Their strength ravaged by years of government harassment, their leaders in prison or exile, Nigeria's opposition movement is defiantly pressing ahead with plans for the pro-democracy protests - the first major test of the new military regime of General Abdulsalam Abubakar

Early in the morning, about 60 youths marched through a Lagos

neighbourhood, handing out pro-democracy leaflets and heading toward a major bus terminal. Some carried a large banner reading "The Struggle Continues The Military Must Go Abiola For President"

Yesterday's protests were organised to mark the five-year anniversary of the annulment of the country's last presidential elections, on June 12 1993, and to call for freedom for Moshood Abiola, the imprisoned billionaire businessman, who is believed to have won that vote

But the demonstrations have taken on added significance, coming just a few days after General Abubakar was appointed leader of this oil-rich but poverty-stricken West African country following the heart-attack death on Monday of dictator General Sani Abacha

"Certainly these demonstrations will go on," said Gani Fawehinmi, a Lagos attorney leading calls for Nigerians to take to the streets

Mr Fawehinmi expects few changes from the new leader. General Abubakar has already infuriated the opposition by offering only a vague pledge to move forward with General Abacha's flawed democratic reform programme "Abubakar is becoming the reincarnation of Abacha," he said - Sapa-AP

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Time for change in Nigeria is now

By GUINNESS OHAZURUIKE
Media Affairs Director (SA) United Democratic Front of Nigeria

CITY PRESS 14/6/98 (226)

THE UNTIMELY death of a human being in any circumstances is a painful incident. So when General Sani Abacha, Nigeria's foremost military dictator, died of cardiac arrest at the age of 54, this naturally excited genuine feelings of sympathy for his family and friends. Yet at the same time there was among many people a certain amount of relief.

In keeping with African culture, we rarely speak ill of the dead, so not much will be said here save that General Abacha was comprehensively corrupt – a ruthless tyrant who did everything to secure his business interests and political ambition.

In light of this, his death was noted by many as a blessing in disguise. While no one is rejoicing over his death, it is an ideal opportunity for the ruling military to right the wrongs of its ignoble past and to resolve once and for all the lingering political crisis that has virtually crippled the economy and reduced people's social lives to times of fear and tears. Those who mourn should do so with some hope that on the grave of this tyrant the flower of freedom could blossom.

In Chinese writing the symbol for misfortune is also the symbol for opportunity. So the expectations of drastic changes bringing about democracy – expectations the military by their nature might find difficult or unable to meet – are not misplaced. Unfortunately, the very first step of the ruling military council moved against these expectations. Against the democratic aspirations of the people and grassroots desire for a civilian government, General Abdulsalam Abubakar – another brand of dictator – was imposed on the people instead.

Nigerians have been taken for a ride one time too many and can no longer invest an iota of trust in the military.

For there to be any meaningful move away from the dictatorship and manipulations of the past towards genuine democracy more pressure from home and abroad should be applied to this regime now.

So far there is nothing to suggest that the present regime, headed by a beneficiary of military dictatorship, will be different from the previous ones, and unless the international community checks them from the onset we might be in for another round of human rights abuse.

The so-called transition to civil rule programme which the new regime has pledged to continue, is famous for crass abuse of democratic principles, and is the most cruel and expensive joke ever visited on a people in their quest for political emancipation. It will be naive to equate the completion of the present transition programme, discredited as it is, with the arrival of political stability in Nigeria. Any peaceful resolution to the festering crisis must recognise the need for change which cannot be hinged on the current transition programme, but only on an inclusive process which takes us back to June 12, 1993.

The continuing fear of an unorthodox challenge to the military regime is becoming increasingly imminent. While most Nigerians are still in favour of a truly federal union,

there is no gainsaying the fact that the nation-state project is in jeopardy. Many Nigerians of

erstwhile unimpeachable nationalist credentials now question the viability of the nation, especially if left in the destructive hands of the military. Sadly, the international response to Nigeria's romance with national suicide has been characterised by extreme caution, genuine confusion and economic self-interest. This regime will try to take advantage of the lack of decisive international support.

The critical point here is that the input the international community can offer will be the effective roadblock to Nigeria's blind march to damnation. The pro-democracy movement believes that the military can still save face by adhering to some irreducible benchmarks for genuine transition to democracy. The international community should use these benchmarks as a yardstick in measuring the democratic intentions of the new regime.

The following represent the minimum benchmarks for measuring democratic change in Nigeria.

□ Firstly, the unconditional release of all political prisoners. As an act of commitment to reconciliation the military regime must free unconditionally all those held without charges, as well as those charged or convicted under questionable legal procedures.

□ Secondly, national reconciliation and genuine progress towards democracy must include what to do with the June 12 presidential election. While the annulment of that election cannot provide explanation for all the ills afflicting Nigerian society, it was indeed a cause of the current crisis, including recent manifestations of cracks within the military.

□ Thirdly, the only durable solution is a negotiated settlement with the winner of the June 12 election and the leading representatives of the people. This should lead to the formation of a government of national unity.

□ Finally, in addition to any help that might move the regime in the right direction, the international community should direct efforts towards the restoration and strengthening of democracy advocacy groups, the media, labour unions, human rights groups and so on.

Should the military regime, sufficiently weakened by its current situation, refuse to adhere to these benchmarks, the international community will be failing in its obligations if it does not institute appropriate measures to coerce the regime to do so. Failure to do this will only make the international community, especially African leaders who ought to be very concerned about the situation in Nigeria, culpable accessories to Nigeria's relentless march to the junkyard of defunct nations.

Nigeria is a disaster waiting to happen. Yet a combination of these measures listed will help retrieve the country from the brink, although they will not solve the ultimate problem of democratic development, respect for human rights, and alleviation of poverty. With that opening though, a full-fledged dialogue process on the basis of a Sovereign National Conference can begin to shape the future of Nigeria in a post-military dispensation. Now is the best time to reset the nation's clock.

Perhaps we should listen to William Shakespeare: "There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to fortune – omitted, all the voyage is bound to misery and shallows. On such a full sea are we now afloat and must take the current when it serves, or lose our ventures."

The time for democratic change in Nigeria is now!

IT LIKES to call itself the "giant of Africa" It talks about one day having a seat on the UN security council It sends troops to restore democracies abroad But burdened by debt, debilitated by corruption and victimised by decades of military mismanagement, Nigeria has long been a symbol of continental failure

Now, under yet another khaki-clad president, it faces the possibility of something much worse — being not merely adrift, but a disaster The country, which yesterday swore in its eighth military leader since independence, has already seen its income per head whittled down from \$1 000 (about R5 000) in the early 80s (when it was categorised as a middle-income country) to only \$300 (about R1 500)

Total oil revenue of more than \$210-billion (about R1,05-trillion) over 25 years has proved a curse, not a blessing, as successive military regimes have squandered it on white elephants or diverted it to bank accounts abroad Self-serving policies have laid a once-powerful agricultural sector to waste

Yet Nigeria is no ordinary African basket case With an estimated population of at least 100 million, an oil industry that exports 2.2-million barrels a day (making it the world's seventh largest exporter) and a large, potentially disruptive army, Nigeria matters to Africa — and the wider world The country, still the second-largest sub-Saharan economy, after South Africa, has debts to the tune of \$35-billion (about R175-billion), making it a serious worry for the international banks

Now Nigeria is at a turning point Under the leadership of Major-General Abdulsalam Abubakar, thrust into office this week after the unexpected death of General Sam Abacha, it has the opportunity to arrest the drift of three decades If it fails, it could slip further towards the fate of the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), a country where the civil and physical infrastructure has collapsed and which has fallen so far it may no longer have the capacity to engineer its own recovery

Nigeria might just drift on wearily as a pariah state with an impoverished, increasingly detached hinterland and a still-functioning, oil-based economy (After all, Angola managed to keep exporting oil during the bloodiest years of

Africa's sick giant no ordinary basket case

ST 14/6/98

2298

Nigeria's new leader under pressure abroad and at home

its debilitating civil war) But Nigeria could just as easily fulfil the nightmare of long-time observers by breaking up along ethnic and religious lines It threatened to do so during the Biafran war of 1967, when its oil-rich south-east declared independence One possibility is that the Muslim north, which controls the army, could commandeer the south-east and expel the Yoruba-dominated south-west from the federation Lurking in the background is the danger of a resurgence of Muslim extremism, which could spread beyond Nigeria's borders (nearly half the country is Muslim)

What further complicates matters for outsiders is Nigeria's regional security role in Africa Only recently, the Commonwealth (whose relationship with the Abacha regime was at an all-time low) felt obliged to pat Nigeria on the back for its military efforts in restoring the exiled government of Sierra Leone

Perhaps the most serious consequence of Nigeria's malaise is the damage it may do to Africa's image The changeover comes at a time when President Bill Clinton and others have been portraying Africa as on the verge of economic and political renaissance under a new generation of democratic leaders

That optimistic view already looks naive given the disappointment over Laurent Kabila's administration in Congo and the unexpected war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, three of Africa's supposedly rising democratic stars If Nigeria drifts into chaos, the vision of a new Africa will be all but dead

For the international community, no African country has proved so frustrating But for all the tribulations, there is still money to be made by foreign companies The oil and gas operations of Shell, Mobil, Chevron and Elf are among the most profitable in their sprawling empires After the execution of the activist Ken Saro Wiwa in 1995, the Commonwealth threatened to expel Nigeria and introduce sanctions, but national divisions and lobbying by multinationalals ensured this was never carried out

Unenviable as Abubakar's inheritance is, the fact the international community has never entirely severed links provides a glimmer of hope If Abubakar is to stop the post-independence rot, he must accomplish two things

First, he must re-establish a semblance of political legitimacy, destroyed by the previous regime when it cancelled the 1993 election, won by Chief Moshhood Abiola Abiola, along with Gen-

former military leader, are now prominent political prisoners An initial clue to the intentions of Abubakar will come from his treatment of these two men

It is not clear how Abubakar will act He has wider experience of the outside world than Abacha, who spent his last years closeted in Abuja, seldom emerging from his heavily guarded presidential compound Abubakar trained in Britain and the US and also served with UN peacekeeping forces in Lebanon

Optimists hope his international experience will free him of the bunker mentality of the Abacha regime, and that he will begin to make gestures such as the release of prisoners That, though, is to assume he commands the full allegiance of an army which Abacha kept in check by clamping down on coup plotters — real or imagined

Like authoritarian leaders elsewhere contemplating reform, Abubakar will be fearful of initiating a process he may not be able to control If he keeps opponents in prison, his credibility will be damaged and pressure at home and abroad will mount Yet if he releases them, he runs the risk that accumulated popular frustrations and deep loathing of the military will sweep him from office That may prompt a clampdown by his fellow officers, repeating Nigeria's post-colonial pattern of coup and counter-coup

Nor is there a risk-free answer to Nigeria's economic woes Abubakar's second challenge is to reschedule the country's debt, which requires striking a deal with the International Monetary Fund In 1993, the fund in effect severed relations with Nigeria for repeated violations of agreements A new deal would require painful decisions at home A key condition would be abolishing the two-tier exchange system, a form of patronage that has helped the military stay in power by allowing favoured allies to buy dollars at a discount Even if he wanted to, Abubakar's power base may not be strong enough to allow such a move

If there is no deal with the fund, Nigeria's future is bleak It would continue to be cut off from international capital and forced to survive on oil exports, which make up 90 percent of its foreign exchange earnings With oil hovering at around \$14 (about R70) a barrel — far below the \$17 (about R85) on which this year's budget was based — that could prove to be a near-impossible task

Abacha died in his bed If Abubakar can't resolve Nigeria's woes, he may not be as lucky — *Financial Times, London*

SUNDAY WORLD

Sunday Times, June 14 1998

ST 14/6/98

19



GENERAL ALERT. Abdulsalam Abubakar, sworn in this week as Nigeria's new ruler, has an opportunity to stop the post-independence rot

Picture: AP

— (226)

Multinational firms pull out of troubled Nigeria

(226)
Kingsley Kubeyinje

LAGOS — At least 150 multinational firms have disinvested from Nigeria over the past five years due to the country's political crisis which was triggered by the annulment of a presidential election in 1993

Some of the companies included well-known groups such as Wellcome, Pfizer International, President Industries and Western Textile Mills, said Kayode Familoni, a senior economist and analyst

Nigeria lost at least \$800m in realisable foreign capital inflow in the energy sector alone due to the crisis.

The political crisis was sparked off by the cancellation of the election believed to have been won by billionaire businessman, Moshood Abiola

Familoni said the crisis had also resulted in a "phenomenal decline in industrial capacity utilisation"

Familoni, former head of the economics department at the University of Lagos, said the crisis had also led to "deepening" unemployment, with the loss of more than 250 000 jobs in the manufacturing sector

Political crisis had negatively affected the rate of economic growth, he said, and the crime rate and level of social disharmony had increased

The effect, he said, was felt more in cities such as Lagos where there were a lot of protests, rioting, factory closures and absences from work, as well as closure of ministries and parastatals because of heavy rioting

The chairman of the Manufacturing

Association of Nigeria Ikeja branch George Akinnawo, said the crisis had denied Nigeria "offshore capital and assistance and gives the impression of an unstable future"

He said offshore capital inflow lost in the energy sector included about \$50m which the World Bank offered to the state-owned Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation to part-finance the \$550m Escravos gas project

The amount, he explained, was to be granted from the Global Environmental Facility, a joint environmental funding vehicle of the World Bank and the United Nations

Other foreign capital inflow that Nigeria forfeited in the sector included \$300m in loan and equity finance offered by the International Finance Corporation, and a \$220m industrial power development project for the rehabilitation of six power stations.

Economic players say the dwindling inflow of offshore capital and technical assistance forced some of the multinational companies to relocate to SA, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Togo and Ghana

However, the situation in Nigeria's oil prospecting sector has been mixed. At least seven of the world's oil giants and a dozen independents have plunged into new investments

However, the crisis is believed to have made it difficult for most indigenous companies to secure foreign technical partners

"Investors have abandoned the manufacturing sector, which is the engine of real growth, to buying and selling," Familoni said

FLICKER OF OPTIMISM FOR NIGERIA

Abubakar has talks with political leaders

LAGOS: A report that Nigeria's new ruler has met a wife of political prisoner Moshood Abiola suggests a shift in thinking that contradicts Friday's use of force to quell protests.

NIGERIA'S new military ruler met leaders of the five official parties and the electoral commission for night-long talks that ended early yesterday — a sign that tensions may be easing in the country

Abdulsalam Abubakar, a general, had also met one of the wives of Nigeria's No 1 prisoner, Moshood Abiola, the imprisoned businessman considered to have won the 1993 elections, it was reported yesterday

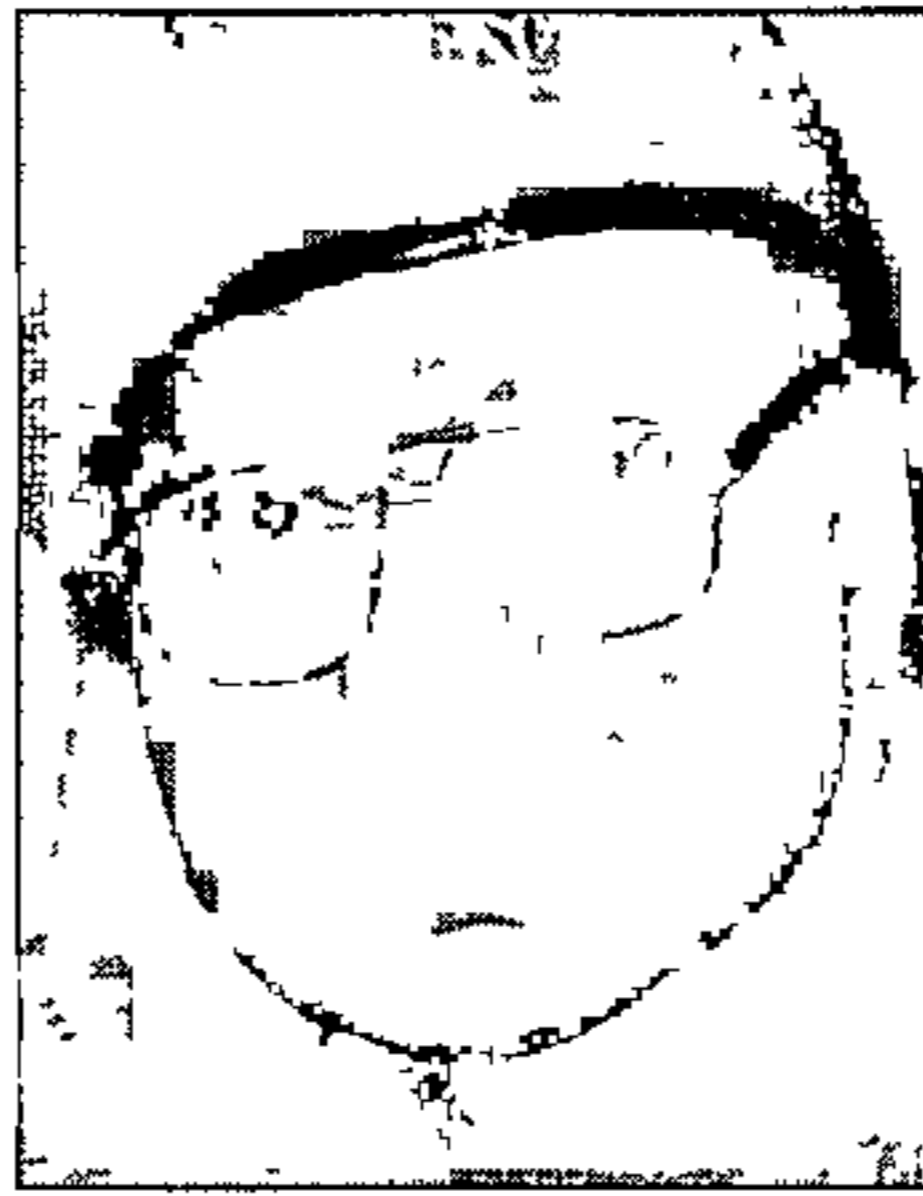
An official statement said his meeting with party officials fulfilled Abubakar's pledge, made last Tuesday as he was sworn in after the death of dictator Sani Abacha, to continue the transition to civilian rule

He said that, as a first step in charting a course for the oil-rich yet impoverished West African country, he would meet government agencies

He has yet to say how he intends to meet the October 1 deadline for a switch to a civilian government, prompting angry opposition leaders to demand details as proof of his sincerity

State radio said Abubakar and party leaders had discussed aspects of the transition programme "with frankness and without rancour"

"It is time to reflect, co-operate



KEEPING PROMISE: Abdulsalam Abubakar

and combat the ever-present threats of instability," Abubakar told them at the presidential villa in the capital Abuja on Saturday evening

"The vicious cycle of threats of instability and their attendant disruptions should not be allowed to persist"

Abubakar has come under fire for using soldiers and not police to quell attempts on Friday to stage protests supporting democracy. Fifty-five people were arrested, but it is believed all have been released

The protests had been intended to mark the fifth anniversary of

annulled 1993 presidential elections, but assumed added significance as the first test of the new regime

Dissidents are watching to see if Abubakar goes ahead with the presidential elections scheduled for August 1 and, more important, who will be allowed to run. Abacha manipulated the system so that he was the only candidate nominated by Nigeria's political parties

Brushing aside criticisms, Abubakar urged Nigerians wanting political change to "examine issues critically and dispassionately, leaving no room for the casting of aspersions or the apportioning of blame on any person or group"

A Lagos newspaper said yesterday that Abubakar also had met Doyin Abiola, one of Abiola's wives, late last week. If this is true, it could reflect an easing of tension between Nigeria's junta and its opponents, for whom Abiola is the central figure

This Day reported that an intermediary had been sent to see Ms Abiola just hours after Abubakar took power. The report could not be confirmed independently

Freedom for Abiola — and his eventual ascension to the presidency — has become the main rallying cry for Nigeria's opposition

Another one of Abiola's many wives, Kudirat, died in an assassination-style attack in 1996

She had been an outspoken critic of Abacha, who took power in a 1993 coup — Sapa-AP

Obasanjo among Nigerian prisoners freed

Lagos - New military ruler General Abdulsalam Abubakar yesterday ordered the immediate release of nine of Nigeria's best-known political prisoners, including former president General Olusegun Obasanjo.

Nigeria's most prominent detainee, presumed 1993 election winner Moshood Abiola, was not on the list.

But the releases are certain to go a long way to persuading Western countries and opposition groups that Abubakar's week-old regime is more serious

about human rights and democracy than his predecessor General Sani Abacha, who died on June 8

A statement from the presidency said Abubakar had ordered the releases "to facilitate the process of national reconciliation, reconstruction and successful completion of the socio-political transition programme"

"He reiterated his call on the international community to appreciate efforts at solving our problems and show greater understanding and sensitivity in

our internal affairs."

Abubakar's pledge last week to continue Abacha's discredited democracy plan sparked anger from opposition groups who dismissed him as no better than the army rulers who have repeatedly promised and repeatedly failed to bring political freedom

Obasanjo (61) was serving a 15-year sentence for his part in an alleged 1995 plot to overthrow Abacha. The others released include well-known journalist Chris Anyanwu and activist Beko Ransome-Kuti - Reuters

Star 16/6/98

(226)

Nigeria frees nine leading politicians

(226)

CT 16/6/98

LAGOS: Nine of Nigeria's best-known political prisoners, including former president General Olusegun Obasanjo, have been released by new military ruler General Abdulsalam Abubakar

However, Nigeria's most prominent detainee, Moshood Abiola, assumed winner of the 1993 elections, is not among them.

The releases are certain to go a long way in persuading Western countries and opposition groups that Abubakar is more sincere about human rights and democracy than his predecessor, General Sani Abacha, who died on June 8.

Abubakar said he had ordered the releases "to facilitate reconciliation and the successful completion of the socio-political transition".

Obasanjo, 61, was serving a 15-year sentence for his part in an alleged 1995 plot to overthrow Abacha

Ibrahim Dasuki, spiritual leader until 1996 of most of Nigeria's majority Muslims, has been freed on condition he does not return to Sokoto, where he was once sultan. — Reuter

APR 16/6/98

Nigeria's new ruler frees nine

(226)
Lagos - Former military ruler Olusegun Obasanjo was among nine leading Nigerian political prisoners whose release has been ordered by new military ruler Abdulsalam Abubakar

Opposition leaders and Western diplomats welcomed the releases yesterday and said General Abubakar had sent a clear signal that his regime would differ from that of his predecessor General Sani Abacha, whose human rights record made Nigeria a pariah state.

They are now pushing for the release of the most prominent detainee, Moshood Abiola, presumed winner of aborted 1993 elections.

Washington said it hoped the releases would help lead to civilian rule in Nigeria. - Reuters

Abubakar draws praise for freeing prisoners

(271b)

PM 17/6/98

LAGOS — Nigeria's new junta leader, Abdulsalam Abubakar, won cautious praise yesterday for ordering the release of nine political prisoners a week after taking over from the late dictator Gen Sani Abacha.

Nigeria's new military regime moved to defuse the country's political crisis by ordering the release of nine prominent detainees, including the former head of state, retired general Olusegun Obasanjo.

The decision, which followed a telephone call on Sunday to Abubakar by US President Bill Clinton, is likely to pave the way for a visit to Nigeria by senior US officials in an attempt to break a political impasse which dates back to the annulment in June 1993 of presidential elections intended to return the country to civilian rule.

Abubakar was appointed successor to Gen Sani Abacha, who died last week.

Although the detained winner of the 1993 poll, Moshood Abiola, is not among those to be set free, the release of Obasanjo is likely to be seen as an encouraging first step.

"This news is very positive, very positive indeed. It is a very good start," said a western diplomat after hearing of the detainees' release. Others to be freed include Ibrahim Dasuki, who until his removal in 1996 by the military regime as sultan of Sokoto, was the spiritual leader of Nigeria's Muslims who make up nearly half the country's 100-million population.

A statement from the presidency said that the releases had been ordered "to facilitate the process of national reconciliation." Abubakar

reiterated his call to the international community to appreciate efforts at "solving our problems and to show greater understanding and sensitivity in our internal affairs."

Obasanjo presided over the 1979 elections that returned Nigeria to civilian rule, brought to an end by a coup in 1983. He was serving a 15-year prison sentence for his part in an alleged plot in 1995. Widely respected both inside Nigeria and abroad, where he has been considered as a potential candidate as United Nations secretary general, Obasanjo could play a key mediating role in the months to come.

Abacha, who triggered Nigeria's expulsion from the Commonwealth in 1995 when he ordered the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other minority rights activists, had

pledged a return to civilian rule by October this year.

The process lost all credibility when the country's five official political parties all nominated Abacha for the presidency. Both the structure and the timetable of this transition are now expected to come under review.

Abubakar said he hoped those released would "reciprocate" his gesture by co-operating with the transition programme, under which presidential elections are scheduled for August 1.

Meanwhile, in what appears to be a reaction to Abacha's death, the national currency, the naira, has appreciated by five points at the foreign exchange parallel market from 95 naira to 90 naira to the dollar. — Financial Times, Sapa-AFP, Own Correspondent

Another major African city now 'beyond repair' (226)

In Lagos electricity is off for weeks at a time

By TIM SULLIVAN
Lagos

Star 18/6/98

Every morning, battered tankers rumble into quiet walled compounds in the wealthy neighbourhoods of this seaside city, dispensing thousands of gallons of water for rich businessmen, diplomats and members of the ruling junta

In a city where the water supply can be even less predictable than the haphazard electricity, it's the only way to ensure a bath.

Lagos is beyond breakdown. Electricity stays off in some neighbourhoods for weeks at a time, universities are besieged by violent, well-armed student groups

Small mountains of garbage bury entire street corners and petrol is desperately scarce - even though Nigeria is one of the world's top oil producers. The police are better known for demanding bribes than for stopping the city's rampant crime

But suddenly, there's reason to hope. The five-year dictatorship of General Sani Abacha ended last week with his death and the new military leader has ordered some of Nigeria's most prominent political prisoners freed

It may not mean the power will be switched on any time soon, but at least there are signs of change

"I'm on the moon without riding on Sputnik," raved Gani Fawehinmi, a Lagos attorney and activist, after the nine prisoners were ordered released on Monday

Fawehinmi - normally given to scathing criticism of the new junta leader, General Abdulsalam Abubakar - quickly backed off from his exaltation. He noted that dozens of political prisoners remain in jail, including Moshood Abiola, the presumed winner of 1993's annulled presidential elections

Still, many people across this city of 10 million are hoping Abubakar will bring change. He has a reputation for honesty, for wanting to bring honour back to Nigeria's military

"We are expecting (Abubakar) to do well," said Ahmed Hakeem. He makes a living hand-pushing a rusting, six-seat ferris wheel at Lagos's Lekki Beach, where a rusting shipwreck hulks above people playing in polluted surf

Lagos is a crowded, tumbledown

city full of modern office buildings and rancid slums, but a place where even in the worst of times people know how to enjoy themselves

"Lagos is everything - positive and negative," laughed Taiwo Adedaji, a law student standing under a shade tree at Lagos State University

The only people who manage to live easily are those who can afford generators, black-market petrol and guards. They live behind walls, shop at stores packed with imported goods and eat at fine restaurants

Nigeria, which once swam to prosperity on a sea of oil profits, has been drowning for years, pulled down by corruption and mismanagement

Abubakar has sent contradictory signals so far. Authorities quashed pro-democracy demonstrations last week and he has vowed to forge ahead with the highly flawed democratic transition programme begun under Abacha

Some also fear the prisoner releases may be a smokescreen

"I'm obviously very happy," said Nike Ransome-Kuti, whose father, activist Beko Ransome-Kuti, was among those ordered released

"But I'm taking the news with caution because I'd hate to see something where he only releases a few people as a publicity gimmick"

Such scepticism is understandable in Lagos, a city often so unlivable its residents quickly run out of adjectives trying to describe it

"It's really bad," said Tokumbo Ogonlesi, a 46-year-old caterer. She shakes her head "It's really bad, it's really bad"

She is most terrified of the city's crime "A chicken is more likely to go out and come home than a human being," she said

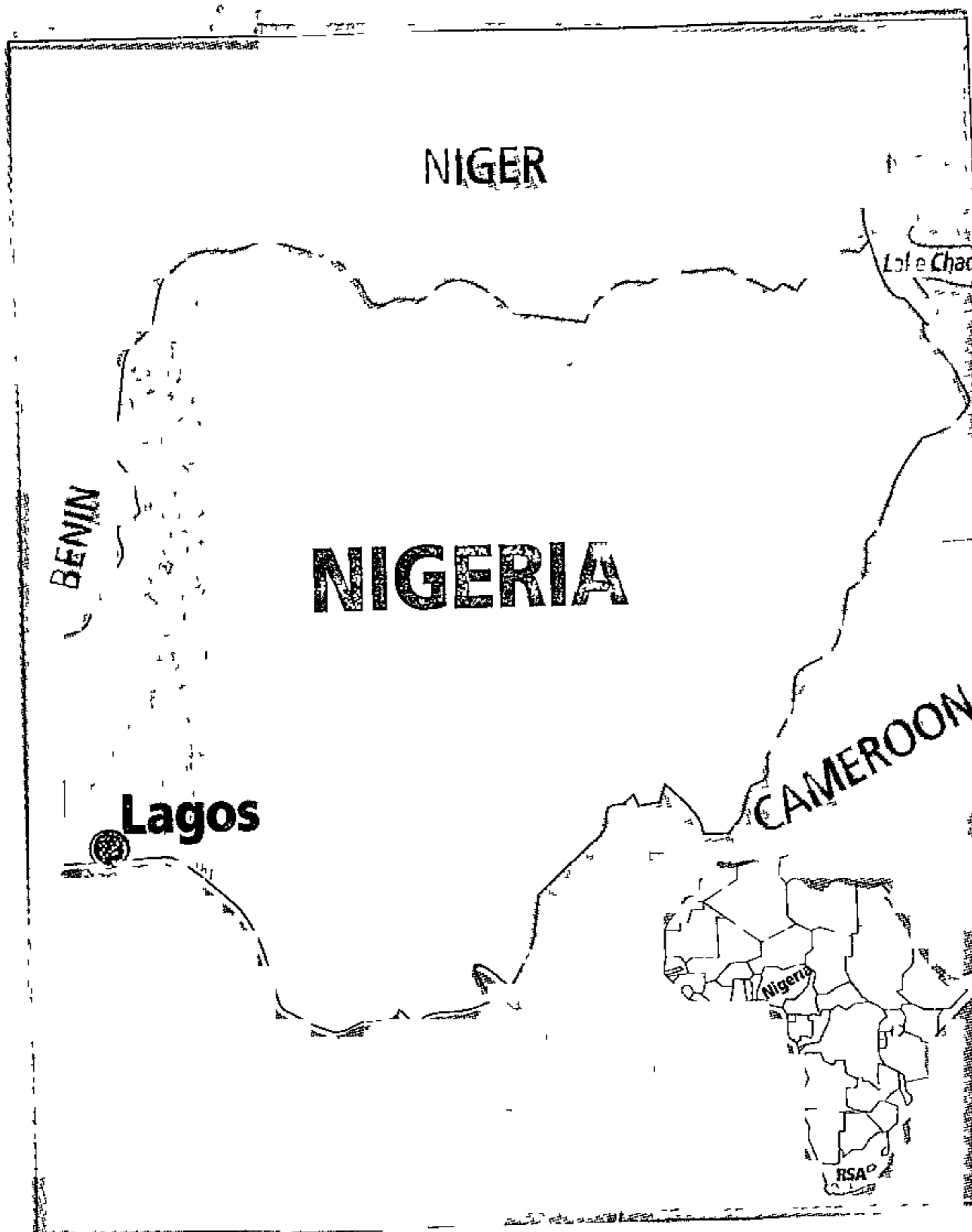
And yet perhaps the most surprising thing about Lagos is that despite its mountain of difficulties, it still has fun. Nigerians are crazy for music, voracious readers and avid movie-goers, and Lagos is the cultural centre of Africa's most populous country

Publishers pump out hundreds of titles and gossip newspapers are filled with the loves of TV and movie stars. Nightclubs swell with music lovers - Sapa-AP

Hope that Abubakar will make difference

STAR

18/6/98



Prisoner release raises hope of an end to Nigeria's crisis

BD 19/6/98 (228)

With Olusegun Obasanjo's release from a Nigerian jail, Hilary Andersson looks at Moshood Abiola's prospects

LAGOS — When Nigeria's former military leader, Gen Olusegun Obasanjo, arrived home from prison yesterday, it sent out a signal of reconciliation from the new military government and raised hopes that the government was trying to find a solution to the country's long-standing political crisis

Obasanjo was among nine political prisoners released by the new military government in its first few days in office. Already their release has done much to change the mood in Nigeria.

On the streets people say that for the first time in four years they feel safe to speak their minds openly, without fear of being hunted by the ever present security police

"Now there is a certain euphoria in the air," said political commentator Onyema Ogwachukwu

Gen Sani Abacha was a leader who ruled by repression, which went far beyond anything Nigerians had experienced before in the last three decades of military rule

By releasing key political prisoners the new government has distanced itself from Abacha, but it has also heightened the debate about why Mas-

hood Abiola, the country's most famous political prisoner, is still in detention

Abiola, whom many believe won the last presidential elections of 1993 which were abruptly annulled by the military, has been under lock and key for four years and is awaiting trial on charges of treason for allegedly declaring himself to be Nigeria's rightful president. Any elections the new government holds while he is locked up will lack credibility

The military has given clear signs that it does not want Abiola to become president and there are indications that it may now try to broker a deal with him.

However, the opposition has already said that any deal would be unacceptable

What Abiola himself wants is another unknown factor

The new government has committed itself to handing over to democratic rule, but notably has not said when it will do so. It faces the decision of whether to scrap the political parties inherited from Abacha or to stick to the former government promise to hand over power by October 1.

Abacha murdered, bush telegraph suspects

(22b) M+G 19-27/6/98

A special correspondent in Abuja

There were few tears and fewer obsequies for General Sani Abacha, the late and brutal president of Nigeria

Wrapped in a sheet and carried to his home town of Kano in the cargo hold of a Nigerian air force jet, he arrived too late even to be buried before evening prayers according to Islamic convention, and was tipped into a hastily dug grave. Abacha made his own departure as he had ordered that of so many others, secretly and without ceremony. The only question now is whether he was helped to relinquish his grip on life and power. Questions are being asked about both the contradictory accounts of his passing and the rush to bury him.

A suspicion is growing on the bush telegraph was Abacha, who sent so many to their deaths, murdered himself? According to the official version, Abacha succumbed to a heart attack on June 8 at around 6am at his discreet and well-guarded Aso Rock villa. The first indications to the world at large that something was amiss came as members of his staff at the villa arrived for work only to be turned away without any explanation.

Abacha's personal staff were not the only ones who were being kept in the dark. Chief Ikeobasi Mokelu, the minister of information and culture,

was also being kept out of the loop. Mokelu had been told by the general that he would personally open a conference on information management and nation building at the International Conference Centre in Nigeria's administrative capital, Abuja, at 9am.

When the general failed to show up by 11.30am, the minister — still unaware of Abacha's death — went to the conference centre to assure the delegates that the head of state would soon arrive.

When Chief Anthony Ani, the minister of finance, held a media briefing at his ministry at noon, which was attended by Chief Ayo Ogunlade, the minister of planning, they too were unaware of Abacha's death. Even when Nigeria's Provisional Ruling Council — its supreme governing body — assembled for a meeting at 1pm, many were under the impression that they had been summoned by General Abacha himself.

Only when they had all arrived did General Abdulsalam Abubakar, the chief of the defence staff, accompanied by navy chief Admiral Mike Akhigbe, and Lieutenant General Jerry Useni, the minister of federal capital development, emerge from an inner chamber. Abubakar announced the news

It has not only been the manner of his burial and the delayed announcement of his death by Nigeria's new ruler, Abubakar, that have fuelled rumours of a possible assassination. Contradictory accounts of how he spent the hours before he died have inevitably fanned the flames.

These include the — perhaps inevitable — speculation that Abacha died after entertaining two young women at Aso Rock. A more official account, however, is provided by those close to Abacha's regime.

According to this version of events, Abacha had returned from the airport on Sunday evening, where he had been to see off Yasser Arafat, who stopped on his way to the OAU summit in neighbouring Burkina Faso.

Abacha returned to Aso Rock accompanied by Useni, his close associate and confidant, and they spent an hour or more chatting in one of his private apartments. Later he received a visit from Lieutenant General TY Daryuma, and then asked to see a family member who had come from Kano that afternoon.

When an aide came to check on him around midnight he was informed Abacha was tired and had already gone to sleep. At about 3am the general rang for his night valet and re-

quested a drink of water with which to take some painkillers that he kept by his bedside.

The same aide stayed close to his bedroom for the rest of the night, and may have been the last person to see him alive. After performing his 5am prayers, Abacha told the aide that he was not to be woken up at 8am as usual, but at 9.30am. When the aide came to wake him, however, there was no reply.

When the room was opened they found Abacha dead. According to one version, he was found crouching in a corner of the room.

Most pressing of all the questions facing the new regime, however, is the lack of an autopsy on Abacha's body to determine the cause of death. Officially it was his wife who ordered his burial without a post-mortem. Few, however, are happy to accept this version of events.

What is certain is that Abacha, a robber baron of Nigeria, was hastily buried.

The plane carrying the body was supposed to arrive in Kano at 5.35pm, but it did not leave Abuja until 6.38pm. When it got to Kano, the military guard of honour had been dispersed and only a handful of commissioners and the state governor's entourage were on hand to meet it.

Without ceremony — almost without mourners — Abacha was taken to his grave. It is unlikely, however, that he will be forgotten.

Signs of hope for Nigerians

But Abubakar 'needs to speed up change'

APR 22/6/98

The release of nine prisoners of conscience by Nigeria's new military leader Abdulsalam Abubakar is a step in the right direction, but the new leader needs to quicken the pace of change, say political analysts and human rights activists

General Abubakar announced on June 15 the release of Frank Ovie Kokori, Milton Dabibi, retired General Olusegun Obasanjo, Dr Beko Ransome-Kuti, Chris Anyanwu, Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki, Chief Olabiyi Durojaye, Uwen Udo and Chief Bola Ige

Notable lawyer and human

STORY

The release of Nigerian political prisoners appears to have paved the way for dialogue and change, writes **REMI OYO** in Lagos

shows the government may be serious about wanting to negoti-



War in his sights: newly mobilised Ethiopian militia take turns at target practice at a training camp in the mountains of northern Tigray. The Organisation of African Unity is negotiating with both Eritrea and Ethiopia to try to avoid a full-scale war between the two former allies

REUTERS

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ARO 20/6/98

rights activist Gani Fawehinmi told journalists here. "I am so happy and delighted. This is a great event of monumental proportion. It is an epic event."

Mr Fawehinmi, arrested for several hours last Friday after demonstrations to mark the June 12 anniversary of the 1993 annulled presidential elections, added "We can now see a new beginning."

While General Obasanjo, a former head of state, was released on "compassionate grounds", he has been confined to his large farm in Otta, 40km north-west of Lagos.

Senior newspaper editor Mr Anyanwu and Dr Ransome-Kuti, who is a medical doctor, also have been put under house arrest.

It is widely believed that Mr Dasuki, regarded as the most powerful monarch in the north, and pro-democracy activist Dr Ransome-Kuti, were released due to failing health.

The 74-year-old Mr Dasuki, who is the former Sultan of Sokoto, was released on condition that he did not return to Sokoto where he was deposed by the late Sani Abacha in April 1996.

"I would be very happy to see my father home," said Nike, Dr Ransome-Kuti's daughter, "but I hope it is not a cosmetic measure."

"It is something I expected. It

ate, but I still have my reservations about General Abubakar, because he was part of Abacha's regime," she said in a statement.

Human rights activists, however, are still awaiting the government's decision on the release of Moshood Abiola, the presumed winner of the 1993 controversial presidential polls, and the other political prisoners.

"The fact that nothing has been said about Mr Abiola has put me in doubt about a genuine attempt at reconciliation."

"The government has to recognise that Mr Abiola and June 12 are crucial in the resolution of the political crisis," said Dr Ransome-Kuti's daughter.

More than 42 people, including senior military officers and journalists, are still in prison for the March 1995 and the December 1997 alleged coup plots to oust General Abacha who died on June 8.

The former governor of the eastern state of Anambra, Chukwuemeka Ezeife, said that Nigeria's new leader must quickly reveal his style of leadership.

"Indeed, I expect him to move faster and stamp his own personality on the governed."

"He has no business inheriting Abacha's liability," Mr Ezeife told the Vanguard newspaper.

"Abubakar may have the shortest reign of all political rulers in Nigeria, but he may become the hero of a new Nigeria and the best remembered," he added.

The spirit of dialogue and change appears to be prevalent in the country after General Abacha's death.

On Tuesday, for example, Mohammed Marwa, the military administrator of Lagos State, ordered the withdrawal of court charges against Mr Fawehinmi and 17 other pro-democracy activists.

Mr Marwa said the withdrawal was in line with the spirit of national reconciliation declared by General Abubakar.

While many Nigerians seem to be welcoming this new spirit, 76-year-old Omotola Falua is worried about "the bats in politics."

"You see, bats are neither birds, nor rats. When birds are eating, bats will join, pretending they are birds. . . they do the same when rats are eating," she said.

"My prayer, however, is that the rains of the Almighty will drench the bats who are beginning to change sides after the death of Abacha," said Mrs Falua.

Western envoys in the West African nation are watching the situation cautiously - Sapa-IPS

World Bank 'forcing poor from their homes'

(226) PD 23/6/98

WASHINGTON — Nigerian human rights workers are seeking an independent probe of charges that the World Bank is trying to force thousands of poor people out of their homes without compensation

At issue is a Bank-financed project to prevent flooding and improve sanitation in Lagos, Nigeria's teeming business capital

Bank statements say the scheme — it involves clearing slums to make way for storm drains — is a model of "how living conditions for the poor can be improved at an affordable cost"

In fact, says the Lagos-based Social and Economic Rights Action Centre, more than 2 000 people have been forcibly evicted and "thousands of others face the imminent threat of eviction" Evicted families that "have attempted to build makeshift homes in neighbourhoods around the project site have been constantly terrorised by armed security agents", the centre asserts in a complaint filed with the bank's independent inspection panel In addition, the drainage channels "have become a receptacle of waste water which overflows regularly into living spaces and endangers the lives of residents", it says

The group argues that "demolition of homes and destruction of properties without compensation, resettlement, or rehabilitation constitutes a massive violation" of a litany of internationally accepted human rights These include rights to "adequate housing, education, adequate standards of living, a healthy environment and respect for dignity inherent in a human being" — Sapa-IFP

Abacha's allies could lose oil import contracts

MD 24/6/98 (226)

LAGOS — Fuel imports to Nigeria will get a thorough shake-up in the wake of the dictator Sani Abacha's death, and his former partners stand to lose lucrative contracts

Officials of Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, who met in Lagos to finalise a new strategy on Monday, said the key would be to try to cut the cost of imports by increasing competition and cutting out "middlemen"

"The country was paying extra charges of \$50m on each cargo of fuel imported," one corporation executive said "We expect that costs of importation will come down because there will be competition among the firms chosen"

Another official said Shell, Mobil, Total and Texaco, all of which had oil-producing operations in Nigeria, were firms the oil ministry was considering as possible reliable fuel importers, although they had not yet been consulted

He said the dominance of Swiss-based Glencore and German Wintershall in importing fuel looked far from secure, although he would not say they would be excluded from future bidding

Traders said Glencore won a tender to supply 32 cargoes of petrol between June and September after the state oil import agency said it would need between 10 and 14 cargoes a month

Attacking Nigeria's chronic fuel shortages is likely to win quick popularity for new military ruler Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar, who took over after Abacha's death

from a heart attack on June 8

Harouna Abubakar, the former head of the fuel importing Petroleum Products Marketing Company who had close links to the Abacha family, was the first senior official to be publicly fired after Abacha's death

The fuel shortages are seen by Nigerians as one of the most blatant symbols of military misrule, given that Nigeria is Africa's biggest oil producer

Four state-run refineries, only two of which are active, fall woefully short of supplying domestic demand of about 280 000 barrels a day (bpd), and face severe maintenance problems

Capacity

On Sunday, Oil Minister Dan Etete said the crude allocation for the refineries — with theoretical 445 000bpd capacity — would be increased to 300 000bpd from 250 000bpd at the moment. He ordered refinery managers not to leave their posts until their plants were on the road to improvement

Industry sources say Etete's quick moves to distance himself from the fuel crisis — for which he has often been blamed — could also help to buttress his position in the event of an expected government reshuffle

"While maintaining that the fuel scarcity was not deliberately caused by the government, the minister would like to express his appreciation to the public for their understanding," his ministry said

Meanwhile, the new government had been holding talks with a range of political leaders, including the detained politician Masood Abiola, to try to chart a way forward for the country, sources said yesterday

Government officials met Abiola, the presumed winner of the annulled elections of 1993, last week, diplomatic and government sources said.

Senior military officials were holding talks yesterday with political leaders in the southwest of Nigeria, where support for Abiola was strongest

There was speculation that the government was trying to negotiate Abiola's release, perhaps by offering him his freedom if he agrees to drop the subject of the 1993 elections. Abiola has been in detention for four years on charges of treason for declaring himself to be Nigeria's rightful president

His detention is a major reason for Nigeria's international isolation — and if he was released some sanctions would almost certainly be lifted

Gen Abubakar has made it clear he wants the international community on his side, and that he wants to reform Abacha's transition programme.

Observers say the government is likely to realise that any elections held in Nigeria while Abiola is in detention will lack credibility, and it is trying to find a way of freeing him without manouevring itself out of politics at an early stage — Sapa-DPA

Blair, Abubakar talk about human rights

MO 25/6/98 (226)

LONDON — British Prime Minister Tony Blair held talks yesterday with Nigeria's new leader, Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar, according to Downing Street sources

In a telephone conversation, Blair made first contact with Abubakar to raise concerns about human rights abuses, political prisoners and the need to establish democracy

Abubakar, a former army chief of general staff, took power after Gen Sani Abacha died on June 8 of a heart attack

The talks came ahead of a visit by Foreign Office Minister Tony Lloyd to Nigeria later this week — the first by a British minister in recent years

Nigeria has been suspended from the Commonwealth because of its human rights record under Abacha

One of Abubakar's first acts was to release former head of state, Gen Olusegun Obasanjo, 61, and eight other detainees

Obasanjo, Nigeria's first and only military ruler to hand over to an elected civilian, was convicted of plotting a coup against the Abacha regime

Abubakar said that cases of other detainees would be "given due consideration"

Under Abacha, the Nigerian military acquired an appalling record on human rights and for cracking down on the pro-democracy movement.

Meanwhile, Hilary Andersson reports from Lagos that the new government has held talks with Nigeria's top political prisoner, Mashood Abiola, to try to negotiate his release

The meeting took place last week in the capital Abuja

The subject of the meeting was not made public. It is speculated that the government is trying to negotiate Abiola's release, perhaps by offering him freedom if he agrees to drop the subject of the 1993 elections

Sanctions

Abiola was believed to have won those elections and has been in detention for four years now on charges of treason for declaring himself to be Nigeria's rightful president

His detention is a major reason for Nigeria's continued international isolation and if he was released, some sanctions would almost certainly be lifted

Limited sanctions, including visa sanctions for govern-

ment officials and cuts in bilateral aid, were imposed on Nigeria following the execution of nine activists including Ken Saro Wiwa in 1995.

Abubakar has made it clear that he wants the international community on his side, and that he wants to reform Abacha's controversial transition programme

For these reasons, his government has been holding talks with various sections of opinion in the country

Senior military officials are due to hold talks on Tuesday with political leaders in the southwest of Nigeria, where support for Abiola is strongest

The government is likely to realise that any elections held in Nigeria while Abiola is still in detention will lack credibility, and it is probably trying to find a way of freeing him without manoeuvring itself out of politics at an early stage

Abiola's supporters want him to lead a transitional government which will move the country towards a lasting democracy

The military has said that it would prefer to oversee a transition to democracy itself — Sapa-AFP

Nigeria's economy at a crossroads — WTO report

pp 25/6/98

(226)

John Dlodlu

THE World Trade Organisation has called on the Nigerian authorities to implement WTO agreements and to improve government transparency in a bid to restore international confidence

In a report reviewing the Nigerian trade and investment policies, the WTO also notes that Nigeria will have to start regularising payments on its external public debt, including mounting arrears, with the Paris Club of official creditors if the country is to increase the portfolio of much needed foreign investment outside the oil sector

Figures released by the African Development Bank showed that Nigeria was, by far, the main recipient of foreign direct investment in 1996. It accounted for 32% of foreign capital to the continent, while Egypt trailed behind with a respectable 14%.

The WTO secretariat's report says the Nigerian economy is at a cross-

roads, with policy priorities divided between dependence on the public sector and import substitution strategies on the one hand, and greater reliance on the private sector and market-based reforms on the other

A range of export incentives has failed to reverse the anti-export bias of the economy

Instead, these instruments have resulted in a failing infrastructure and cumbersome export procedures

The planned privatisation of state-owned companies, a precondition for export expansion, will have to be accompanied by a competition law to "ensure that public enterprises are not merely replaced by private monopolies". The review says that inefficient parastatals, propped up by grants and other commercial advantages, have, over time, "seriously handicapped other sectors and imposed high costs on the economy". The report also shows that cases of corruption still exist.

Whiff of freedom for Abiola

Chris McGreal

Nigeria's new military leader, General Abdulsalam Abubakar, appears close to releasing the imprisoned presidential election winner, Moshood Abiola, after the two men held talks ostensibly aimed at agreeing on conditions for the restoration of civilian rule.

But opposition sources say the army is pressing Abiola to renounce his claim to the presidency and to agree to fresh elections run by the military as a precondition for his freedom after four years in jail. The new military government says it is searching for ways to break the political impasse created by the heavy-handed tactics of Abubakar's predecessor, Sani Abacha, who died suddenly a fortnight ago.

Some opposition leaders fear Abiola may strike a private deal with

the army at the expense of the broader campaign for democracy. The British government is encouraged enough by the negotiations and the release of some political prisoners to despatch Foreign Office Minister Tony Lloyd for talks with Abubakar in Abuja on Friday June 26.

Last week Tony Blair, the British prime minister, ended the European Union's diplomatic isolation of Nigeria by telephoning the general to urge an end to military rule and to discuss Abiola's fate. Abubakar has twice held talks with the 60-year-old chief, who won the 1993 presidential election annulled by the army. He was jailed for treason a year later after unilaterally declaring himself president.

Abiola's whereabouts are uncertain amid reports that he has been moved from prison to a house in the capital, Abuja. Government officials have also met leaders of the opposi-

tion National Democratic Coalition, according to its leader, Abraham Adesanya.

"I don't see any reason for refusing to attend the talks," he said. "If somebody in authority says he needs your advice, you give it. It is a different thing if he does not use it."

But other mainstream democracy groups say the military has made no approach to them, and fear that Abubakar may be falling back on the army's well-tried tactic of co-option and creating division. It seems unlikely the military will just concede power.

Although most opposition leaders publicly demand recognition of the June 12 1993 presidential ballot because they believe it is the only way to lever the military from power, some politicians consider Abiola susceptible to co-option by the army.

"The military's talking but we don't know where it's going," said

one opposition source. "There's a lot of suspicion that they want to get Abiola to agree to new elections which they can manipulate or that they will promise to make Abiola a nominal leader in a government still controlled by the army. Our big fear is that Abiola comes to his own deal with Abubakar and that will undermine the whole claim for June 12."

Last week the army released nine prominent political prisoners, including former military ruler General Olesegun Obasanjo, pro-democracy campaigners, trade union leaders and a journalist. But dozens, if not hundreds, more remain in prison. The leader of the Campaign for Democracy, Beko Ransome-Kuti, was among those freed.

He said the army has not made any approach to him for talks and he is sceptical about the military's intent. "I'm neither encouraged nor discouraged about what is going on ex-

cept that I don't know why they've only released only a few out of hundreds of political prisoners. I think it's all the same old game. The military says it has consulted, as it puts it, and then they say that after widespread consultations they are going to stay in power or run elections their way," he said.

While much is made of Abiola's 1993 election victory, the race was neither free nor fair. The military permitted only two political parties to compete in the ballot, and barred a slew of potential presidential candidates from standing.

But Ransome-Kuti says that whatever the concerns about Abiola there is little alternative.

"There's problems with fresh elections. Who would head an interim government if not Abiola? If the military wants to head it again we're just back where we were. What we want is that the army should go back to the barracks and Abiola should organise his own government around a sovereign national conference which would draft a new Constitution and sit as Parliament. Abiola cannot do worse than the army, and he has a mandate," he said.

(226) mtg 26/6 - 2/7/98

Nigeria wants no foreign insurance

MD 29/6/98 ab
Kingsley Kubeyinje

LAGOS — To stem the tide of premium flight from the country, the government is considering barring foreign underwriting firms from insuring Nigeria-based assets.

In a separate development, a top insurance executive has concluded that it would take "light years" before a Nigerian insurance concern acquired enough financial muscle to invest in either the SA or British market.

Razaq Hamza, CEO of the Towergate Insurance Company plc, blamed this on the low value of the national currency, the Naira, and said it was militating against the nation's efforts to globalise.

A senior source in the federal finance ministry said the mooted control measure would be used to conserve scarce foreign exchange and to enhance the growth of the local insurance market.

He said the plan had been accepted by the government and would be included in the proposed amendments to the insurance decree that Finance Minister Anthony Ani promised would be effected before October.

According to the source, developments in the insurance industry in recent times have shown that insurance consumers, particularly the multinationals, have been pa-

ronising foreign insurance firms.

The source said investigation had also revealed that some local brokers now facilitated the deals in order to earn some commission in hard currencies.

Recently, notable insurance practitioners in the country, including the president of the Chartered Insurance Institute of Nigeria, Ogala Osoka, had raised an alarm over increasing patronage of foreign insurance firms by Nigerian-based concerns.

Hamza said the nation was bedevilled with a low and fluctuating currency. As a result of this, Nigeria was having problems pushing its business frontiers beyond its national boundary.

Hamza said although the Nigerian insurance industry was relatively strong on the continent by the time the premium was converted from naira to a convertible currency, it became unattractive to foreign-based insurers.

He said with a weak currency, unstable policies and depreciating infrastructure, it would be very difficult for Nigerian insurance companies to target even the sub-regional market.

"Globalisation is a phenomenon that is real and the Nigerian insurance market should re-engineer and reposition itself to meet the emerging challenges," he said.

Abubakar 'sets (226) ET 29/6/98 change rolling'

LAGOS: Nigeria's new military ruler, through freeing political prisoners and holding talks with opposition leaders, appeared to be seeking a new political beginning, diplomats said yesterday

Abdulsalam Abubakar, 56, has made his mark quickly since his appointment after the death of hardline predecessor Sani Abacha on June 9 — freeing 27 political detainees, including leading opposition figures, journalists and a former military ruler, all jailed by Abacha

He has also consulted the heads of five political parties set up under Abacha, representatives of the media, and opposition leaders, on the way forward for the country

Abacha seized power in November 1993, after elections hailed as free and fair by international observers were declared void by the military.

His subsequent crackdown on opposition created a political crisis that appeared to be worsening this year when he was nominated sole candidate in elections scheduled for August 1 and supposed to lead to a change of regime on October 1.

On Friday, Abubakar met a group of 34 leading politicians, who urged him to scrap the August 1 elections and form a one-year transitional government to pave the way for genuine elections

He is also widely reported to be preparing the release of Moshood Abiola, detained since 1994

On Friday, Abubakar met British Foreign Office minister Tony Lloyd — the highest-ranking British official to visit the country in years

A Western diplomat, who asked not to be named, said "It is undeniable that there has been a change"

Abubakar's actions have won cautious support from the international community. — Sapa-AFP

UN chief flies to Nigeria amid thaw in relations

AD 20/6/98

(226)

ABUJA — Nigeria's diplomatic isolation appears to be coming to an end as key international players enter negotiations with the country's new leader amid expectations that political prisoner Moshood Abiola will soon be freed.

The United Nations, the Commonwealth, the European Union and the US have all made significant moves to engage with military ruler Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar since he pledged to hold free elections and end Nigeria's pariah status.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan arrived in Nigeria last night and his visit is the biggest sign yet of growing foreign confidence in Abubakar. The visit is also part of a concerted international effort to keep Nigeria from

missing a chance to end domination by its politicised generals.

"I will do everything I can do to return Nigeria to democratic rule," Annan told a news conference in Vienna before departing. "I have been much encouraged by my talks with Gen Abubakar."

Abubakar has begun a rapprochement with Nigeria's traditional allies since the death on June 8 of Gen Sani Abacha, who ignored pleas from home and abroad to respect human rights and democratic norms.

Junior British Foreign Office minister Tony Lloyd, on behalf of the EU broke Nigeria's diplomatic isolation by visiting on Friday. The US has promised to send a high level delegation soon, and Emeka Anyaoku, secretary-gener-

al of the Commonwealth which suspended Nigeria in 1995 and imposed sanctions after the execution of nine minority rights activists, arrived on Sunday. Anyaoku is expected to meet Abubakar today.

Abubakar has already set free more than 30 political prisoners locked up under Abacha's rule, among them former military ruler Gen Olusegun Obasanjo. Releasing Abiola, detained in 1994 for declaring himself president on the basis of annulled 1993 elections, is seen as the next big step.

After meeting Abubakar at the weekend Abiola's most loyal supporters in the opposition National Democratic Coalition said they were convinced he would be set free in a matter of days — Reuter

OK for Annan to meet top detainee,

(726)
says Nigeria

APR 30/6/98

Abuja - UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan will be allowed to meet detained politician Moshood Abiola and help negotiate his possible release, a senior government source said today.

The source, who would not be named, said Mr Annan and Commonwealth Secretary-General Emeka Anyaoku would be given the chance to speak to Mr Abiola after separate meetings with military ruler General Abdulsalam Abubakar today.

The source said the government's condition for releasing Mr Abiola was that he should renounce his claim to the presidency, which is based on 1993 elections annulled by the military as he was poised to win. He was detained in 1994.

"If he agrees, Abiola could be released very soon. It will show that Nigeria respects world opinion," the source said.

Mr Annan and Mr Anyaoku are on simultaneous visits to Nigeria as part of a co-ordinated international strategy to persuade General Abubakar of the need to restore democracy and respect human rights after the June 8 death of dictator Sani Abacha.

General Abubakar has so far shown willing by freeing at least 30 political prisoners. He has also pledged to end Nigeria's pariah status and organise free elections.

Hopes have been raised for Mr Abiola's release after he was last week moved from the safe house where he was being kept in Abuja to a mansion, where he has had access to television, newspapers and a wrist-watch for the first time in four years.

Mr Abiola was held in 1994 for declaring himself president on the basis of 1993 elections, the annulment of which goes to the root of Nigeria's political and economic crisis.

Mr Annan had been "encouraged by what Abubakar has done so far in releasing political prisoners", said the secretary-general's spokesman, Fred Eckhard, in Abuja.

"He would like to discuss in general terms how the UN can help in Nigeria's transition to democracy."

Mr Anyaoku, a Nigerian, said at the weekend that his country was on track to normalise relations with the Commonwealth.

Nigeria was suspended from Commonwealth ranks in 1995 over the execution of author Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists - Reuters

John Diudlu

NIGERIAN authorities have pledged to take steps aimed at opening the economy, cutting external debt and implementing their multilateral trade obligations.

In a recent review of the country's trade and investment policies by the World Trade Organisation (WTO), a Nigerian government official

Nigeria's govt promises to open up economy

also asked for technical assistance to integrate its informal business sector into the economic mainstream and to bring its regulations into line with WTO rules.

The growing volume of informal trade in west Africa was cited as one of the hindrances to Nigeria's active participation

in the regional trading bloc, Ecovas. The government official also said that all laws stifling competition and reducing transparency were being reviewed.

Gaps had been identified in public policy areas including intellectual property, government procurement, antidumping

ing, safeguards and customs valuation.

In an earlier report, forming part of the review process, the WTO secretariat said the Nigerian government had not addressed concerns the Geneva-based trade watchdog had raised in 1991.

Other participants in

the review process, which encourages members to follow market-based trade policies, deplored lack of transparency in state procurement in Nigeria where parastatals have 40% dominance in the economic sector.

Crucially, the Nigerian government said the

stock of foreign debt had been reduced to \$28bn in 1996 and the country's total debt to the Paris Club of nations had fallen to below \$19bn by the end of last year.

Nigeria, which plans to begin privatisation of the telecoms company before year-end, had begun a review of the minerals act to encourage foreign investment in the minerals sector.

20177198

Nigerian detainees call for immediate release

Kingsley Kubeyinje

LAGOS — About 100 former top executives and customers of Nigerian banks, detained in connection with their roles in bringing the banking sector into disrepute, have appealed to the new head of state, Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar, to release them immediately

The detainees are being detained under the provisions of a failed banks decree

In a letter to Abubakar, the detainees said they had been kept in police cells for more than 20 months without being prosecuted at the failed banks tribunal

They said five of them, including an American, Arthur Helper, had died in custody. Cases of paralysis, kidney, liver and heart failure, and other complications were prevalent among them.

They also complained about delays in their trial, saying it took between two years and nine months before one case was concluded.

According to the detainees, slow investigation, stringent bail conditions and delays in the trial have resulted in detainees spending their possible jail terms in detention

The failed bank tribunal was promulgated under the late Gen Sani Abacha to stem the tide of malpractice in the banking sector

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3374

Nigeria's Abiola says he will swop claim to presidency for his freedom

(226) 20 2/19/98

ABUJA — Moshood Abiola, Nigeria's best-known political detainee, had given up his claim to the presidency and admitted it would be "naive" to press it, United Nations (UN) secretary general Kofi Annan said yesterday.

Annan, who met Nigeria's new military ruler Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar privately yesterday to press for the release of Abiola, said the government had agreed to release "all political prisoners".

Annan told reporters that he talked to Abiola on Tuesday and "found him

quite realistic".

Abiola, who was jailed in 1994 by Abubakar's late predecessor Sani Abacha after claiming to have won 1993 presidential elections, told the UN chief he could not now claim the presidency.

"I'm in jail. I'm not in touch with the outside world. I don't know what my supporters are doing over there. What I know is that I will want to get on with my life," he told Annan.

However, Nigeria's main opposition group, the National Democratic Coal-

ition, said it would continue to demand that Abiola become president even after he reportedly renounced his claim.

Abubakar has already freed at least 30 of his predecessor's critics from Nigerian prisons.

Commonwealth secretary-general Emeka Anyaoku welcomed news that Nigeria would release its political prisoners, but warned that it could only return to the Commonwealth when it became a full democracy.

Britain also welcomed Annan's announcement. "This has been one of the

key demands which we, together with our European Union and Commonwealth partners, have made in the search to restore democracy and human rights to Nigeria," foreign secretary Robin Cook said.

"I hope that these prisoner releases will happen as soon as possible."

The Organisation of African Unity and the governments of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda praised the move, calling it a good omen for a return to democracy.

"This is very welcome news and we

think the Nigerian leadership is moving in the right direction," said a Kenyan foreign ministry spokesman.

A high-level US mission would meet Abubakar on Tuesday, US state department spokesman James Rubin said yesterday.

"The purpose of the visit is to offer our support for the new leadership's recent release of political prisoners and to discuss steps we think could facilitate the transition to democratic civilian government in Nigeria," he said. —
Reuter, Sapa-AP

UN, Commonwealth in behind-the-scenes talks about Abiola's freedom

(22/6) Xmas 2/1/78

Abuja - UN secretary-general Kofi Annan met detained Nigerian opposition politician Moshood Abiola yesterday as intense behind-the-scenes diplomacy continued in an effort to secure his release, a senior Nigerian official said.

The official, who would not be named, said talks over Abiola's claim to the presidency on the basis of the annulled 1993 elections were inconclusive. Commonwealth officials

said secretary-general Emeka Anyaoku had also met Abiola for more than one hour.

UN officials said they would not confirm or deny that any meeting had taken place between Annan and Abiola.

"It must be understood that these are continuous negotiations and they are trying to find a way to secure his (Abiola's) release," a UN official said. "The announcement about any meeting will take place tomorrow."

Expectations that Abiola (60) could regain his freedom has grown since the June 8 death of hardliner General Sani Abacha, who was replaced by his defence chief General Abdulsalam Abubakar.

Abubakar met Annan on Tuesday for almost an hour and again at a regional security summit yesterday.

Abubakar (56), a career soldier, has released at least 30 detainees who had been locked up

for challenging Abacha's plan to ensure he won the August 1 presidential elections as the sole candidate.

Abubakar has also taken swift action to demolish Abacha's legacy of a corrupt economic system which has deprived many Nigerians of basic necessities, particularly refined petroleum products.

The News Agency of Nigeria said he had cancelled all government contracts since

Abacha's death and announced that "henceforth, laid-down procedure should be followed in considering new contracts."

Abubakar still faces political chaos, with his predecessor's plan for transition to civilian rule shattered. The five state-approved parties have lost - in Abacha - the only man they said was fit to rule Nigeria.

Above all is the question of Abiola's release. Despite the government's

efforts to persuade him to abandon his claim to the presidency, Abiola's supporters say that putting him at the head of a national unity government is the only way to resolve the impasse.

Observers say Abubakar would have difficulty persuading many civilian politicians and some of his military colleagues that handing over power to Abiola would be a sensible move. - Reuters

DEMAND FOR NEW ELECTIONS

Nigeria agrees to free all political prisoners

(226) CT 3/7/98

ABUJA: The agreement by jailed Nigerian leader Moshood Abiola to relinquish his claim to the presidency, made after the aborted 1994 elections, may see him freed.

UNITED NATIONS Secretary-General Kofi Annan said yesterday Nigeria's military government had agreed to free all its political prisoners

A senior government source said agreement had been reached at late night talks that the country's most prominent prisoner, Moshood Abiola, would give up his claim to the presidency, opening the way for his release

Annan did not specifically name Abiola as among those to be freed but said the opposition politician no longer believed he could claim the presidency, the reason for his detention in 1994

Annan's visit has been seen as the biggest sign yet of foreign confidence in military ruler Abdulsalam Abubakar, who took over after dictator Sani Abacha died suddenly on June 8

World leaders have seized the chance to try to re-establish good relations with oil-producing Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, which soured because of Abacha's refusal to respect human rights and establish genuine democracy

"The government has agreed to release all political prisoners and I believe the announcement will be made at the appropriate time," Annan said at a news conference

"Abiola said he would want to be released to get on with his life. He told me 'I am not naive enough to think I can come out and be president' "

Abiola, 60, claimed the presidency on the basis of 1993 elections, regarded at the time as some of the fairest in Nigeria's history, and in defiance of Abacha

The elections were annulled as south-western tycoon Abiola was poised to win, dragging the nation into political confusion from which it has yet to recover

Hopes have been raised for Abiola's release since Abacha's death and replacement by Abubakar, who has already set free more than 30 political prisoners "By agreeing to give up his mandate Abiola has paved the way for his own release," a government source said

Annan said Abiola was in good health but had complained that he had lost touch with the outside world and what his supporters were doing

Abubakar has shown his willingness by releasing political pris-

oners and trying to get to grips with the economic problems bequeathed by Abacha's chaotic government

Abiola's case has been the most difficult and the one Abubakar must clearly solve to win credibility for any plan to restore civilian rule.

Abacha's own scheme was discredited by the fact that he was the only candidate for presidential elections set for August 1.

A European Union envoy last week gave a clear indication that many outside Nigeria do not see an

Abiola government, as demanded by his supporters, as the solution to the political crisis.

"There was no one saying we have a president who should come and take over. Everyone was saying we want new, free and fair

elections," said Annan, who met a number of political and civic groups during his visit.

Abiola's supporters, mainly based in his home region around Lagos, say foreign countries should not be taken in by Abubakar's apparent openness. They insist that only by giving Abiola power will the popular mood be satisfied

Analysts consider that unlikely and say Abubakar, a northerner, would find an Abiola government impossible to sell — Reuter

*I am not naive
enough to think I
can come out and
be president,
— Moshood
Abiola*

Abiola's walk to freedom 'is imminent'

New Nigerian ruler wins praise as jailed foe gets himself ready

(Ab) AKG 3/7/98

Abuja - Nigerian officials say the release of top political detainee Moshood Abiola is imminent because he has agreed to give up his claim to the presidency.

Chief Abiola has been asked to prepare his bags and tidy up his things, one senior government official said in Abuja after the ruling military council met, with the Abiola case at the top of the agenda.

"We cannot give an exact time for his release but it will be soon and there will be an official announcement."

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, after four days of frantic diplomacy involving military ruler General Abdulsalam Abubakar, said Abiola had realised it would be "naive" to expect to leave detention and become president straight away.

The 60-year-old Muslim tycoon was locked up in 1994 for proclaiming himself president on the basis of a 1993 vote.

The scrapped elections, which Chief Abiola is widely believed to have won, have been at the heart of

political confusion in Nigeria.

Government officials said it was only after meeting Mr Annan and Commonwealth Secretary-General Emeka Anyaoku that Chief Abiola had considered giving up his claim to the presidency.

Chief Anyaoku said he detected a "new mood" in Nigeria. "So I don't think in terms of Nigeria not releasing these prisoners or not moving to democracy I think we can now look forward to that happening." Foreign countries were quick to

congratulate General Abubakar's regime after Mr Annan said political prisoners would be freed.

The United States said it would send a high-level mission over the weekend to meet General Abubakar and encourage him to keep his promise to restore democracy.

"There is a moment of opportunity here, and General Abubakar has an opportunity to help bring Nigeria out of the isolation it's found itself in," said State Department spokesman James Rubin in Washington.

General Abubakar has tried to make a clean break with the old regime of General Sani Abacha, who recently died of a heart attack.

Political analysts say the release of Chief Abiola, if he publicly renounces his claim to the presidency, would take the quiet, 56-year-old career soldier a long way to a plan for the return to civilian rule accepted both at home and abroad.

But Chief Abiola's followers, many of whom themselves suffered detention or beating at the hands of

the security forces, are still wary of General Abubakar and say Nigerians and foreigners should be as well.

Chief Abiola's case stretched regional tensions near breaking point in Nigeria. He and most of his supporters are from the south. General Abubakar and most other military rulers have been from the north.

"I am happy over the decision to release my husband. Within a couple of days he will come out," said Titi Abiola, one of the chief's dozens of wives - Reuters

Outrage over pending conditional

Supporters say that renouncing his 1993 election victory in exchange for freedom was not taken in consultation with them

Nigerian officials said yesterday the release of celebrated political detainee Moshood Abiola was imminent only because he had agreed to give up his claim to the presidency.

United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan's said yesterday. "I am convinced that General Abdulsalam Abubakar is determined to return Nigeria to democratic rule in the shortest possible time and everything must be done to encourage him in this direction."

But backers of Abiola said they did not believe he had renounced his claim to the presidency, won on the

basis of 1993 elections

They said Annan's remark on Thursday that Abiola had said he was not "naive" enough to believe he could leave detention and become president had caused a great deal of confusion within opposition ranks

"I don't see where in the statement where Kofi Annan stated categorically that Abiola had renounced his mandate and he certainly couldn't have done it without consulting his supporters," said Abraham Adesanya, leader of the opposition National Democratic Coalition

"Chief Abiola has been asked to prepare his bags and tidy up his things," one senior government offi-

cial said in Abuja after the ruling military council had met, with Abiola's case at the top of the agenda

"We cannot give an exact time for his release but it is fair to say it will be very soon, and there will be an official announcement."

Annan, after four days of frantic diplomacy involving military ruler Abubakar, said Abiola had realised it would be "naive" to expect to leave detention and become president straight away

The 60-year-old Muslim tycoon was locked away in 1994 for proclaiming himself president on the basis of a 1993 vote.

The elections, which Abiola is

widely believed to have won, have been at the heart of political confusion in Nigeria since they were annulled by the previous military government

Government officials said it was only after meeting Annan and Commonwealth secretary-general Eneka Anyaoku that Abiola had considered giving up his claim

Anyaoku told the BBC after his Nigeria trip that he had detected "a new mood" in the country

Foreign countries were quick to congratulate Abubakar's regime after Annan said prisoners would be freed, a stark contrast to the condemnation heaped on the oil-produc-

ing country under dictator Sani Abacha, who died on June 8

The United States said it would send a high-level mission over the weekend to meet Abubakar and encourage him in his promise to restore democracy to the west African state, which has been ruled by soldiers for all but 10 years since independence from Britain in 1960

Abubakar has tried to make a clean break with Abacha's way of government and has been sacking advisers who were particularly close to the former strongman. He has also taken fuel imports out of the hands of Abacha's cronies

(226) Mar 4 17:198

What still eludes Abubakar is putting in place a credible plan to restore civilian rule

Political analysts say the release of Abiola, if he publicly renounces his claim to the presidency, would take the quiet, 56-year-old career soldier a long way to a plan accepted both at home and abroad

But Abiola's followers, many of whom suffered detention or beating at the hands of the security forces, are still wary of Abubakar and say that not only Nigerians but foreigners should be cautious too.

Abiola's case stretched regional tensions near breaking point in Nigeria, which fought an ethnic-

based civil war in the 1960s when more than a million died.

Abiola and most of his supporters are from the south. Abubakar and Abacha are from the north, like most of Nigeria's rulers since independence

The first pictures published of Abiola for four years show him grinning broadly. He appears physically fit although he has lost some weight

"I am happy at the decision to release my husband," said Tit Abiola, one of dozens of wives Abiola has had, as she waited for his release

"The presidency is not a do-or-die affair," she added. Others, however, may not agree - Reuters

Release of Abiola

Another 21 Nigerian banks 'in distress'

0226
Kingsley Kubeyinje

BD 6/7/98

LAGOS — Twenty-one more Nigerian banks are classified as in distress, according to the latest report of the Nigerian Deposit Insurance Corporation

The banks, which are still operating, are unable to meet the prescribed 30% minimum prudential liquidity ratio

Twenty-six distressed banks — 13 commercial and 13 merchant banks — were liquidated by the Nigerian military government early in the year for being unable to perform basic banking functions.

The corporation reported a deterioration in the liquidity position of the 21 distressed banks. It said the deterioration of the liquidity ratio accounted for the industry's dismal average liquidity ratio of minus 31.93%, against the minimum requirement of 30%.

The stable microeconomic policy environment under which the banks operated last year led to appreciable improvement in the industry's overall financial conditions, the report said. The banks' net interest margin increased from 7.9% in 1996 to 9.13% last year with yield on earning assets, rising from 15.68% in 1996 to 16.19% last year.

The corporation also said adjusted shareholders' funds had improved significantly from 791.2-million naira in 1996 to 12,234-billion naira last year.

The report said this was attributable in part to the injection of fresh capital into the industry as a result of the upward review of the minimum capital requirement for banks last year.

The corporation is a federal parastatal, set up to insure the deposits of banks' customers. It is also the undertaker of all distressed banks in the country, as well as those earmarked for liquidation. The deposit insurance corporation is battling to pay about 1-million depositors a percentage of their 15-billion naira trapped in the 26 banks closed early in the year.

Economic sanctions on the African state do not keep the US and neighbours from boosting fuel imports

Lion's share of Nigeria's oil heads west

GODDY KEH

Lagos — Despite limited sanctions imposed by the US in protest at Nigeria's poor human rights record and to pressure the military government to democratise, the US and other countries in the Americas accounted for the lion's share of Nigeria's crude oil exports last year.

The 1997 annual report of the Central Bank of Nigeria, released yesterday, says the Americas as a group topped other countries in imports of crude oil from Nigeria.

The report says exports of crude oil to the Americas increased from 311.7 million

barrels in 1996 to 368.6 million barrels in 1997.

The bank attributes Nigeria's growth of crude exports to the additional supply of crude oil for offshore refining for domestic consumption in Nigeria.

The country's four ailing refineries, with a total installed capacity of 445 000 barrels a day, are being refurbished.

According to the report, total crude imports from Nigeria to American countries, which had dropped consistently in the last four years, had increased significantly by 6 percent to 47.8 percent in 1997.

A global look at the statistics showed that the US emerged as the biggest buyer of Nigeria's

crude oil in 1997, accounting for 34.6 percent of Nigeria's total crude oil exports.

In contrast, the western European share of total crude oil purchases from Nigeria, which rose from 30.5 percent in 1995 to 36.3 percent in 1996, declined by 8.7 percentage points to 27.6 percent in 1997.

Spain remained the largest western European buyer of Nigeria's crude oil, with the purchase of 62 million barrels in 1997.

It was followed by Italy and France, which bought 46.7 million barrels and 45.8 million barrels respectively in 1997.

The volume of crude oil exports to countries of the west

African subregion dropped from 32.9 million barrels in 1996 to 27.3 million barrels in 1997.

The member countries of the subregional Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas), of which Nigeria is the chairman, continued to dominate African oil purchases from Nigeria, mainly because of existing bilateral agreements targeted at promoting trade within the region.

In the Ecowas subgroup, Cote d'Ivoire remains the largest importer of Nigeria's crude oil, with a share of 2.5 percent, down from 2.8 percent recorded in 1996.

Nigeria, Africa's leading oil producer, depends on the sale of

crude oil for over 85 percent of its foreign exchange earnings.

With crude oil reserves of about 30 billion barrels and daily crude oil production of over 2 million barrels, Nigeria projects oil revenue of \$11.6 billion in fiscal 1998 at a reference price of \$17 a barrel.

The international oil price has been on a downward trend, hovering between \$13 and \$15 since the beginning of this year.

But Anthony Ani, Nigeria's finance minister, said recently that the country would rely on its foreign reserves of about \$8 billion to ensure that the execution of its budget of over \$1.8 billion was not derailed — Independent Foreign Service

Nigeria: Time to decide

CT 7/7/98

(276)

LAGOS: One month after the death of Nigerian strongman Sani Abacha, his successor is this week expected to set out a modified scheme to restore democracy and lay to rest the dictator's discredited legacy.

Abdulsalam Abubakar, who inherited power after Abacha died on June 8, has taken big steps by freeing some detainees and dropping many of Abacha's cronies from key positions.

What remains is to set down the timetable and rules for the restoration of democracy.

Nigerians expect momentous changes as official mourning for Abacha ends today.

By setting free at least 30 political prisoners and getting to grips with some of the most obviously damaging of Abacha's policies, Abubakar has won much good will. World leaders have jumped at the chance to normalise relations with Nigeria.

Following on visits from UN, Commonwealth and EU leaders, a large US mission led by Undersecretary of State Thomas Picker-



MEDIATOR: Kofi Annan

ing arrived in Nigeria yesterday in a continuing sign of the country's rapid reintegration with the world community.

Now Abubakar faces the tough task of juggling the political ambitions of a society divided along ethnic lines and between civilian politicians and the soldiers who have held power for all but 10 years since independence in 1960

One of the first things Abubakar has to do to is end the

controversy caused by the army's annulment of the 1993 elections, popularly believed to have been won by Moshood Abiola who was jailed in 1994.

Abiola loyalists reacted angrily when UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan last week implied that Abiola had given up his claim to the presidency.

This reaction may delay his release and has ruled out the national unity government which opposition groups say is the only way forward.

However, an interim government would be unacceptable not only to many in the army, whose loyalty Abubakar must ensure, but to many Nigerians who want a new start.

The military's Provisional Ruling Council meets today

"This is the moment of truth," said one Western diplomat. "It's up to them to decide whether to try to end this thing quickly and restore some respect to their own profession, or to stifle the hopes Abacha's death has raised." — Reuter

10 die in rioting over Abiola

ARG 8/7/98

(226)

Lagos - Police fired in the air today to disperse hundreds of protesters after at least 10 people died in violence triggered by the sudden death in detention of opposition leader Moshood Abiola.

Protesters marched through the Ikorodu Road district of Nigeria's biggest city chanting and accusing the military government of murdering southerner Chief Abiola, who died of an apparent heart attack yesterday.

Protests sprang up in other parts of the city after a night of violence in which 10 people were confirmed dead in the Agege and Mushin districts.

"You who killed Abiola will pay for what you have done," the mobs shouted, as hastily mobilised police units moved to intercept them and fired shots in the air.

Chief Abiola, the man most Nigerians say they voted president in 1993, collapsed and died of a suspected heart attack while meeting a United States delegation to dis-

cuss the military government's conditions for his release from prison.

His family have called for an international autopsy to establish the exact cause of his death, saying the timing was "too convenient" for the government.

But officials at State House said Mr Abiola would be buried at his home town of Abeokuta, 60km from Lagos, according to Muslim rites within a day.

The ruling military council was due to meet today to discuss the situation and a new transition to civilian rule.

Mr Abiola's death came one day short of a month after a heart attack killed General Sani Abacha, the man who locked him up in 1994 for laying claim to the presidency.

His release had been widely anticipated.

■ A US-based group, Physicians for Human Rights, said today they warned the Nigerian government on June 22 that Mr Abiola was suffering from a "life-threatening" health condition - Sapa-AP, Reuters



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Heart attack: Moshood Abiola

Abiola dies after collapsing in meeting

BD 8/7/98

(226)

ABUJA — Detained Nigerian politician Moshood Abiola, with his release imminent, died of an apparent heart attack yesterday shortly after collapsing during a meeting with US and Nigerian officials, the government said. He was 60.

He died "apparently of cardiac arrest", said a statement from the chief media secretary to Nigeria's military ruler, Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar.

"With the consent of his family, the federal government has ordered a full post mortem to ascertain the actual cause of death with the full participation of his personal physicians," it said.

A US delegation led by Under-

secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Pickering met the Nigerian leader earlier yesterday, and after Abiola's death extended his stay to today.

A US state department official confirmed that Abiola had collapsed during the meeting. Another official said the US had no reason to doubt that Abiola had died of natural causes.

Doctors had often warned of the millionaire businessman and politician's failing health after four years in detention under the military regime.

Abubakar came to power on June 9, hours after the death of his predecessor, Gen Sani Abacha, also of a suspected heart attack. Speculation had been

mounting that he was about to release Abiola. He told UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan last week he would soon release all political prisoners.

Abiola was Nigeria's foremost opposition political figure. One of only two candidates in elections in 1993, judged by the international community to have been free and fair, he became the figurehead of the opposition after the polls were annulled by the military.

After the army crushed protests against the cancellation of the vote, Abiola announced in 1994 that he considered himself the rightful president. He was almost immediately arrested by Abacha — Sapa-AFP, Reuter

Nigeria jittery after Abiola dies in jail

(226)
8/7/98

Violence predicted as leader's
demise leaves conflicts unresolved

REUTERS
Abuja

Panic gripped the streets of Lagos yesterday as news broke that Moshood Abiola, Nigeria's most famous political detainee and presumed 1993 election winner, had died suddenly.

Witnesses said people shouted and screamed, and many rushed to get to their homes as soon as possible as night fell.

"They have killed Abiola. There will be trouble in the country," shouted one youth as he tore past the Reuters office in central Lagos.

An official statement from the presidency said Abiola died of an apparent cardiac arrest at 4pm (5pm SA time) during a meeting with Nigerian officials and members of a United States delegation.

"With the consent of his family, the federal government has ordered a full postmortem examination to ascertain the actual cause of death, with the full participation of his personal physicians."

A senior US official said in Washington there was no reason to doubt that the death was due to natural causes.

But one of the main Nigerian foreign-based opposition movements predicted there would be unrest in the country.

"Let no one be in any doubt

that there will be tragic consequences. A hero of the people has just died under incarceration. Do you think people are going to take this as another act of God?" said Professor Bolaji Akinyemi, spokesman for the Nadeco-Abroad movement.

Abiola (60) had been detained since 1994, when he declared himself president on the basis of partial results from a 1993 poll, whose annulment by the military plunged the nation into political turmoil.

Abiola's death came at a moment when his release had been widely expected, following the death - also from a heart attack - of dictator Sani Abacha on June 8. Abacha was replaced by General Abdulsalam Abubakar, who began talks with Abiola.

Resolving the crisis over the annulled election was the biggest task facing Abubakar, who set free at least 30 political prisoners and tried to patch up relations with old friends abroad, who had shunned Abacha for human-rights abuses.

The visit of US Under Secretary of State Thomas Pickering, which was immediately extended after Abiola's death, was the latest sign of the rapid improvement in relations with the international community.

The ruling military council is to meet today to discuss the death and the question of a new transition to civilian rule.

Abiola promised democracy

JAMES ROBERT

Chief Moshood Abiola, who died yesterday, was not a Nelson Mandela, but his imminent release heralded, in Nigerian terms, a giant retrospective stride in the direction of democracy

THE complexities of Nigeria, the dangerous drama of its cultural contradictions, the life-and-death power struggles, the extremes of wealth and poverty, all combine to make what happens there as important for the future of Africa as what happens in South Africa

The personal history of Chief Abiola — the journey that took him from a humble home in the state of Ogun, near Lagos, to fabulous wealth and to election as president of his country and then, instead of assuming office, to four years' imprisonment — touches on most of the forces that make Nigeria what it is

The decision he was to make — to regain freedom if he renounced his victory in the 1993 general election — would in part have determined whether this country of hugely gifted people and enviable natural resources, but minimal social and economic achievement, would begin to achieve its potential for cohesion and prosperity

For the young Abiola, as for most of his countrymen, the road to wealth was through education. As a successful tycoon, he would reminisce with his daughter, Hafsah, now 23, about a boyhood of collecting firewood and walking kilometres to school, where he would copy down everything because his family did not have money for books

His family was Muslim but this did not prevent them from sending him to a Baptist school in Abeokuta. Such decisions are not uncommon in West Africa, where the collision of religions is not always as inflammatory as outsiders might expect

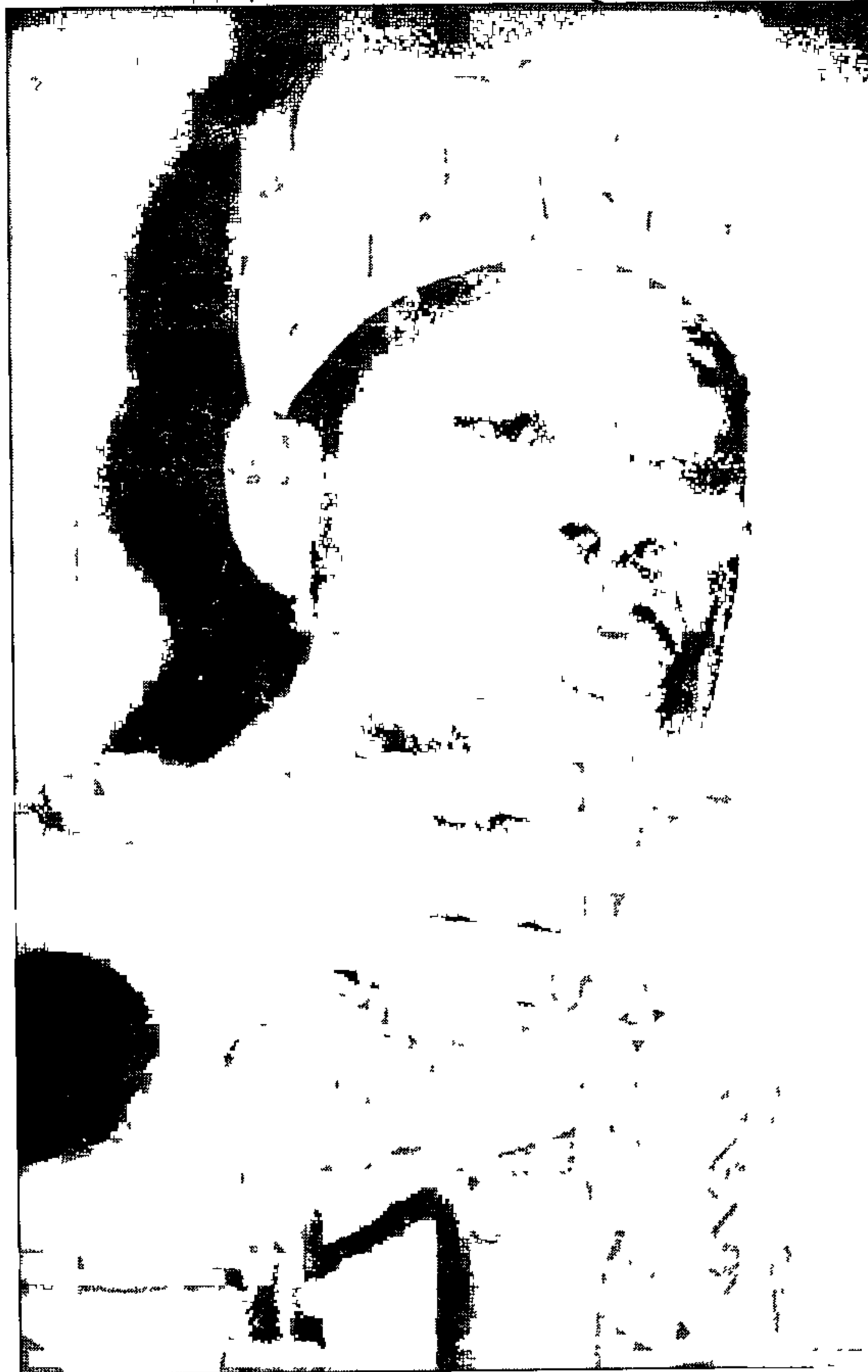
In 1960, his resolve bore fruit and he won a scholarship to study accountancy at Glasgow University. In 1993, after the suppression of his election victory, he paid tribute to the elected government of Western Nigeria, of whose enlightened educational policy he was a beneficiary

"Without democracy, where would I be today?" he asked. "I want all the people of Nigeria to be able to ask that question of themselves some day"

One also might surmise that the choice of accountancy was indicative of a man with very practical ambitions rather than a calling as such. The road to salvation led through the mastery of money. Later, when Hafsah asked his advice on what to study at Harvard, the question of her own particular talents did not enter into the equation. He sent her a postcard with the recommendation "Finance and computer science". In the event, not entirely at home with economics, Hafsah created her own major, adding politics and history

But for Abiola, the choice of accountancy paid off. He began his career as a hospital accountant in Lagos, then moved to join the US multinational ITT, where he became Africa director. This proved a launch pad for his ascent into the world of stratospheric riches

There is no quicker route to wealth in corrupt Third World economies than through the allocation of lucrative contracts. He built on his relationships with men in the top echelons of the military whose support is a prerequisite for the



Chief Moshood Abiola who died yesterday while still in prison on treason charges

What Abiola did reveal during his political ascendancy was an appreciation of the fact that a ruler is under an obligation to deliver material benefit to those who elect him.

advancement of any significant project in Nigeria. It is said he even took responsibility for the care of some of the children of Sani Abacha, the military dictator who eventually jailed him

The ambivalence of relationships among the powerful gives some credence to the account of military officials last month that Abiola broke into tears on hearing of Abacha's death. Dupe Abiola, one of his surviving wives, said this account rang true

"Most of Abacha's children are like

Abiola's children," she said at the time. "Because of the depth of their relationship, that was the sentiment he must have felt"

Indeed, the relationship was deep. The corrupt rulers who were to jail him first eased his path to riches. Without these friends he could never have acquired an airline, publishing house, farms, factories and interests in more than 2 000 companies ranging from banking to oil exploration. Neither could he have acquired his 50-room estate in the Lagos suburb of Ikeja, with its swimming-pools, razor wire-topped walls and stretch Mercedes in the garage

However, Dupe Abiola denies her husband was a creature of the military. "They did not make him. He made them," she insists. "They were coming to him for money. That's how they became so close"

To Ibrahim Babangida, military dictator at the time of the 1993 elections, Abiola must have seemed to represent a way out of a political impasse. Under fierce national and international pressure to restore something resembling a democratic system of government, he engineered the creation of both a centre-left and a centre-right party. Abiola, leading the Social Democrats, achieved a more than respectable 58.4% of the popular vote, taking 20 of the country's 30 states and the federal capital, Abuja

There was also a constitutional requirement that the winner should gain

one-third of the votes in two-thirds of the states, which Abiola satisfied as well

However, it was probably this unexpected ability to cut across religious and tribal lines that led to his imprisonment

It is the military that benefits from the minefield of Nigerian politics and the military that became alarmed when some of its mines appeared to be defused. Abiola revealed a worrying ability to cross the lines dividing the mainly Christian Yorubas in the south-west from the Christian Ibos in the east and the Hausa Fulani in the Muslim north

Ultimately, it was the northern Hausa generals, who run the army, who balked at the idea of a southern Yoruba president

However, Abiola didn't need to go to jail. He may have miscalculated. When he declared himself president in 1994, he knew that this would lead to his imprisonment, but probably hoped that the ensuing popular unrest would bring about his release and the assumption of power. Abacha was able to ensure that this did not happen

Nevertheless, it is hard to argue that a man who spent four years in jail when he could, if he had compromised, have enjoyed all that money could buy, is entirely without principle. Moreover, Abiola had maintained his resolve in the face of physical suffering

He had been maltreated in jail while suffering from a weak heart as well as diabetes and its complications — eye problems, swollen feet

He also had to endure the loss of one of his many wives, Hafsah's mother, Kudirat, who was assassinated. She was shot on a Lagos street in 1996

Kudirat had led a vocal campaign for Abiola's release and to have him named president

"My role is to give leadership and that will come in due course," he said in 1993

Whether a President Abiola would have been a saviour or not is almost impossible to say. During the 1993 campaign, his Lagos house was reported to sport two gilded thrones marked President and — in honour of his running mate, Babagana Kingibe — Vice-president. It is unlikely that the display was intended as an ironic comment on the tendency towards the grandiose of so many African leaders

What he did reveal, during his political ascendancy, was an appreciation of the fact that a ruler is under an obligation to deliver material benefit to those who elect him. On the campaign trail, he chose to travel by road rather than helicopter — a brave decision in pot-holed Nigeria — and announced "There is no point in flying over problems when we come to solve them"

Unfortunately, most African leaders have taken the first option of flying without conscience over their countries' problems

True, Abiola had shown a capacity for self-sacrifice — but then many men who became dictators first did their time in prison. But his story had revealed one nice paradox. Like many of his countrymen, he gave his all to the acquisition of wealth. But, when the chips were down, he decided there was a higher goal to aim for

Whether this was political power pure and simple, or a genuine desire to change his country for the better, we will never know. If the latter, his parents would have been prescient. His second name, Kashimawo, given with typical African fatalism, means in Yoruba "Let us hope this one survives" — The Independent, London

NATION PLUNGED INTO TURMOIL

Nigeria's Abiola dies

ABUJA: Detained political leader Moshood Abiola, the man widely believed to have been elected president of Nigeria in 1993, collapsed and died during a meeting with visiting US officials yesterday.

ABIOLA died of an apparent heart attack at 4pm yesterday, plunging Africa's most populous nation into fresh turmoil. Abiola, 60, was "taken ill during a meeting which was being held by Nigerian and United States officials with him", a statement released by President Abdulsalam Abubakar's chief press secretary said. Panic gripped the streets of Lagos shortly after the news broke.

Late last night hundreds of youths took to the streets in the Ikorodu district of the city and erected barricades, set fire to tyres and threw stones at security forces. Police were put on emergency alert and Abiola's home was cordoned off to prevent crowds gathering, witnesses said.

"They have killed Abiola. There will be trouble in the country," shouted a youth as he tore along Broad Street in central Lagos.

A State Department official in Washington said last night there were no signs of foul play. "We have no reason to believe it was anything but natural causes," he said.

One of the main Nigerian foreign-based opposition movements yesterday predicted that unrest would follow Abiola's death.

"Let no one be in any doubt that there will be tragic consequences. A hero of the people has just died under incarceration. Do you think people are going to take this as another act of God?" said Bolaji Akinyemi, spokesperson for the NADECO-Abroad movement.

The Nigerian government issued a statement saying a post-mortem would be carried out to establish the cause of death if the family permitted it.

President Nelson Mandela last night expressed his "deep shock" at the news. Presidential spokesperson Parks Mankahlana said the government was trying to get more information from the Nigerian authorities about the circumstances surrounding Abiola's death.

"We are unable to make a comprehensive statement at this stage, but there is no doubt that Abiola was a critical factor in pro-

pellung Nigeria to democracy," he said.

The unexpected death last month of dictator Sani Abacha, the man responsible for jailing Abiola in 1994 after Abiola laid claim to the presidency, saw hopes rekindle for a return to democracy in Nigeria. Abacha's successor, Abdulsalam Abubakar, a career soldier, had appeared to be preparing the country to move towards democracy and was widely expected to order Abiola's release.

His openness led to visits by leaders from the UN, EU and Commonwealth and most recently a US mission led by Under Secretary of State Thomas Pickering.

Last Thursday, visiting UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan hinted that Nigeria's military government would release Abiola and all other political prisoners. Annan said Abiola was prepared to give up his claim to the presidency.

At least 30 political prisoners were released but Abiola's release may have been held up by the demands of his supporters, and members of his immediate family, that Abiola be made president.

Abiola had retained a strong following, particularly in his south-western homeland around Lagos, the commercial capital of the oil-producing West African country of about 108 million people.

The annulment of the June 12, 1993 polls in which Abiola had been set to become Nigeria's first elected president in a decade, made him the cause celebre of a pro-democracy movement opposed to the army's manipulated return-to-civil-rule programme. But Abiola had owed his candidacy to his good connections with the military — particularly once-good friend President Ibrahim Babangida.

It was only after Babangida banned 23 presidential hopefuls in two army-created political parties, that Abiola joined the Social Democratic Party, now scrapped, and made a bid for its ticket.

Abiola's critics said he was an improbable social democrat, having been a top member of the right-wing ruling party in

Fact File:

(226) CT 8/7/98

AFRICA'S most populous country borders the Gulf of Guinea between Benin and Cameroon south of Niger.

The land is rich in petroleum, tin, columbite, iron ore, coal, limestone, lead, zinc, and natural gas.

There are about 108 million Nigerians and the country's population grows by 3% annually.

Like South Africa, Nigeria has several indigenous ethnic groups: Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, Ibo, Kanuri, Ibibio, Tiv, Jav. The country's predominant religion is Islam (50%) followed by Christianity (40%), and indigenous beliefs making up the rest.

English is the official language but Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo, and Fulani are dominant.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria as it is formally known obtained independence from British colonial rule on October 1, 1960 but has been ruled by successive military regimes since December 31, 1983.

The country has a GDP of \$143 billion, (R879,45bn) sustained mainly by oil revenues, but is mired in corruption.

The largely subsistence agricultural sector failed to keep up with rapid population growth, and Nigeria, once a large net exporter of food, now imports food.

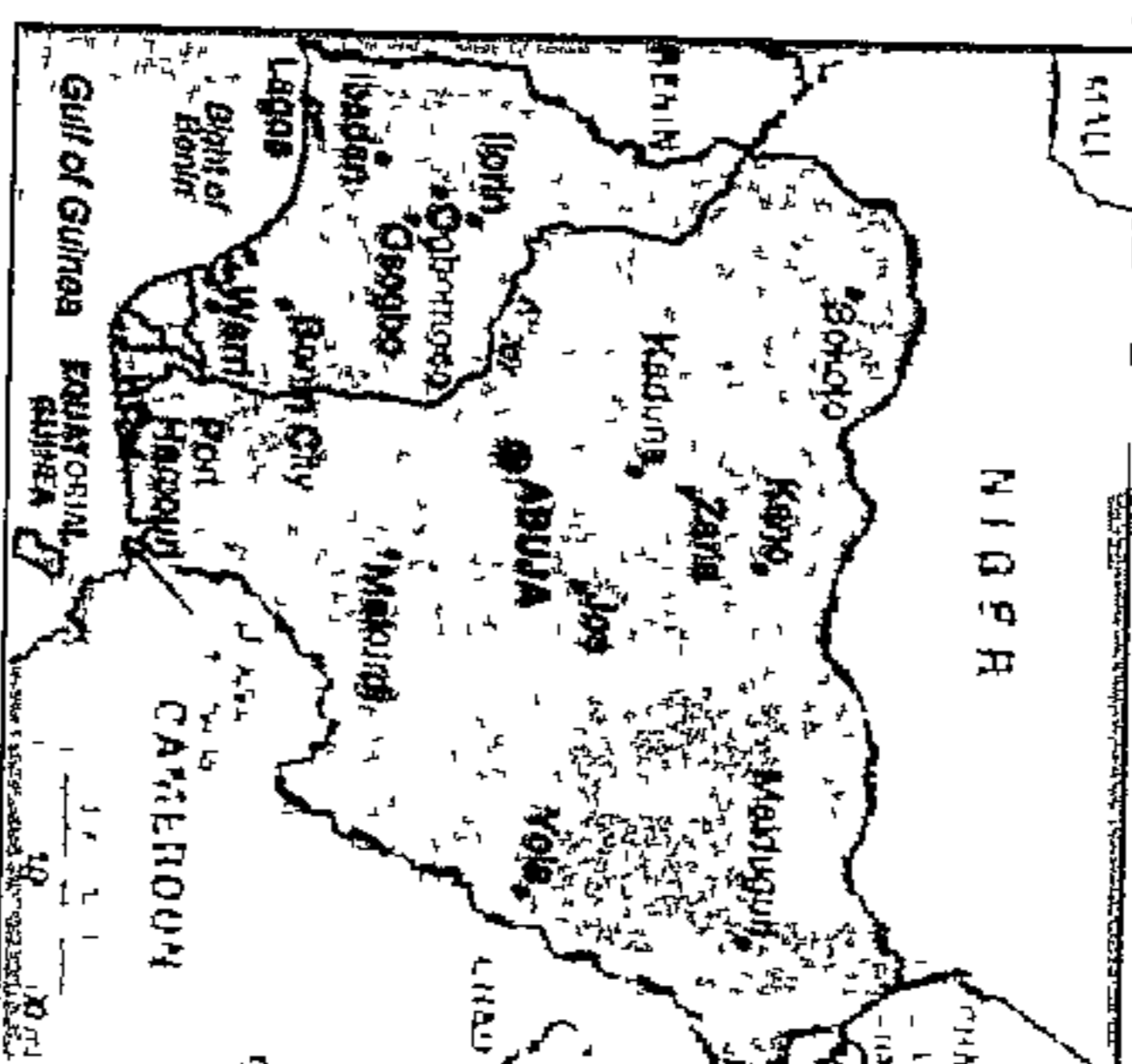
the 1979-83 civilian republic

But the philanthropist with a common touch could cite membership of the British Labour party during his 1961-63 student days at Glasgow University to show his left leanings.

Abiola, an accountant, rose from poverty to become a philanthropic patron of communities and individuals throughout Africa, earning widespread popularity. He also owned an airline and a newspaper.

He joined the US International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation (ITT) in 1969 and became vice-president for Africa and the Middle East in 1971.

Until his retirement from ITT in 1988, Abiola was a ready target for critics who had painted him as the unacceptable face of



Petroleum and petroleum products make up 95% of the country's exports, 52% of which goes to the United States.

Nigeria is the only country in sub-Saharan Africa that's militarily rated as strongly as South Africa.

The country is acknowledged to be a key centre for illicit drugs, facilitates movement of heroin en route from Southeast and Southwest Asia to Western Europe and North America, and is increasingly a transit route for cocaine from South America intended for European, East Asian, and North American markets.

Western imperialism in Africa

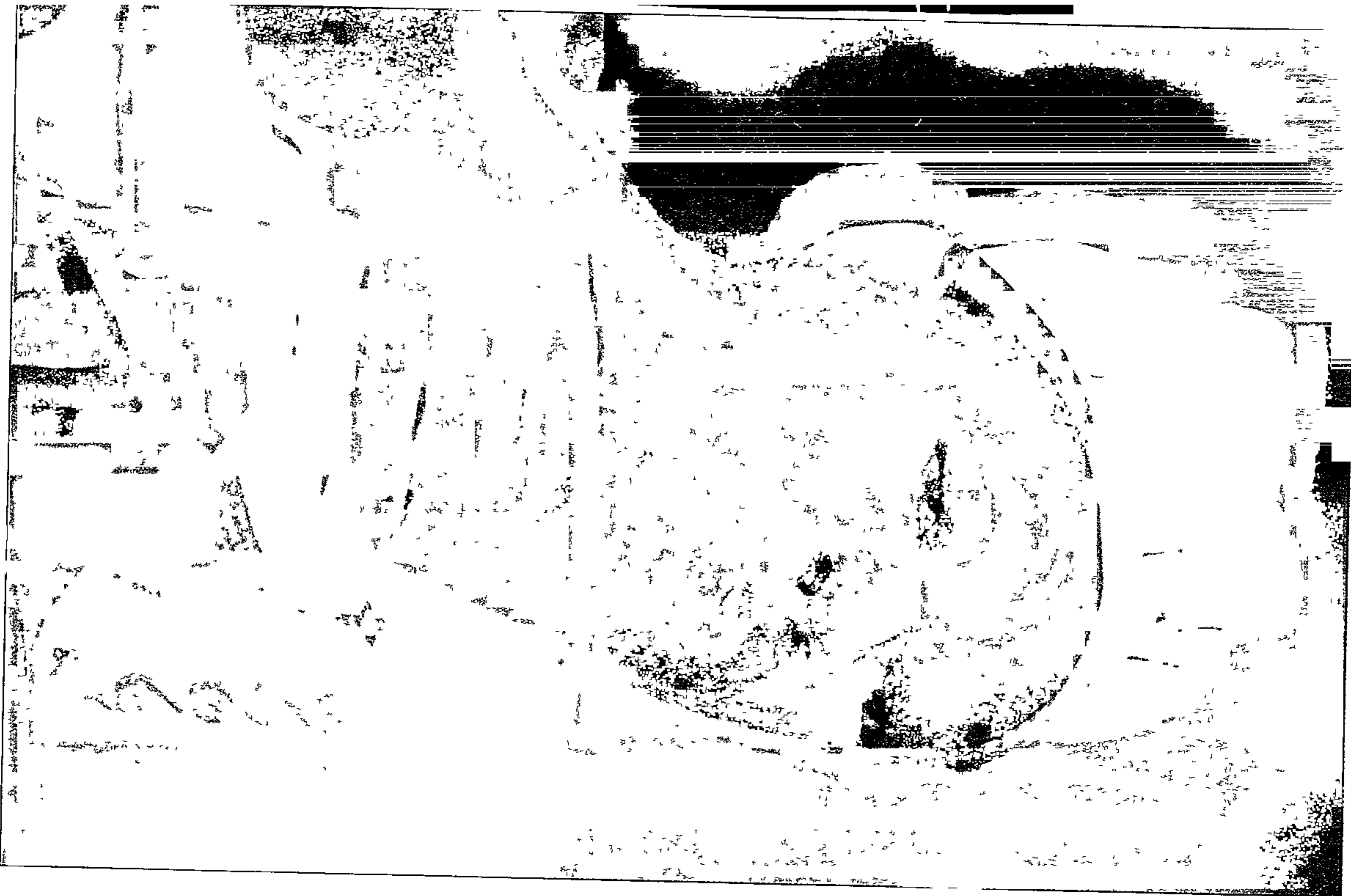
He was the mentor of a campaign for Western reparations to compensate Africans for 500 years of slavery and colonialism.

His contacts in the West helped him in lobbying for international support for his fight against the government.

But over the years of his detention, and especially after Abacha's death, the feeling grew overseas that while Abiola should be set free, he could no longer claim to have a mandate from the 1993 elections and that new elections should be held.

Abiola's main political constituency, the Yoruba-speaking south-west, was anxious to see northern political dominance ended —
Reuter, Staff Writers

● See Page 17



UNEXPECTED DEATH: Presidential hopeful Moshood Abiola died yesterday while still in detention, plunging Nigeria into a new state of turmoil. His supporters had expected him to be released soon. **PICTURE AP**

Mbeki to push Nigeria towards democracy

CLIVE SAWYER AND SAPA-AFP

Deputy President Thabo Mbeki is expected to use his visit to Nigeria today to urge its military rulers to press ahead with speedy preparations for democratic elections, including the further release of political prisoners and the unbanning of political parties.

However, he would not be prescriptive in his discussions on the detail of how this was to be done, a top aide has disclosed.

Mr Mbeki arrives amid great uncertainty and deep public suspicion of the military government after the death in detention of opposition leader Chief Moshood Abiola earlier this week.

Nigerians are anxiously awaiting the outcome of an international autopsy on Chief Abiola, whose sudden death triggered rioting in which many have died.

Local newspapers today announced a toll of between 24 and 45 from the outburst of anger which tore through southwestern Nigeria after the news broke. A night curfew has been imposed in Chief Abiola's birthplace town of Abeokuta after rioting there.

This morning, Chief Abiola's personal physician said an autopsy could begin within hours of the arrival of a team of five foreign pathologists, due late today. This means that Chief Abiola's burial in Lagos is unlikely to take place before tomorrow.

Last night, Nigeria's ruling generals huddled in talks through the night, discussing

ARG 9/7/98 (226)

how to manage their exit from power after the deaths of Chief Abiola and dictator General Sani Abacha a month earlier have left a plan to end decades of military rule in tatters. The opposition coalition has been pressing for a government of national unity.

The first, and so far only, outcome of the protracted meeting of the ruling generals was General Abdulsalam Abubakar's sacking of the 34-member cabinet of civilian and military ministers who deal with much of the day-to-day running of government.

Observers had been expecting that the military council would be dissolved at the end of the period of official mourning for the death of General Abacha.

Mr Mbeki is expected to advise General Abubakar to take urgent steps towards democracy, including involving opposition parties in the setting-up of a transitional government.

Mr Mbeki is also expected to call for the release of political prisoners, the unbanning of all political parties, and the return of exiles, free from arrest or harassment.

A top Mbeki aide said today the deputy president was visiting Nigeria at the invitation of the Abubakar administration.

"The deputy president did live in Nigeria for some time, knows quite a number of people there, the country's political life and history, and there is a trust that he understands the complexity of this large country," he said.

See picture on page 2

Fourteen die in violence triggered by Abiola's

LAGOS — At least 14 people died in violence triggered by the death of detained opposition politician Moshood Abiola and police fired shots into the air to disperse protesters in Lagos yesterday.

Protesters marched through the Ikorodu Road district of Nigeria's biggest city shouting "You who killed Abiola will pay for what you have done," and accused the military government of murdering southern tycoon Abiola, who died of what appeared to be cardiac arrest on Tuesday.

Separate protests sprung up in other parts of the city after a night of violence in which 11 people were confirmed dead in three districts where large numbers of northerners live.

Three people died in Abeokuta, Abiola's hometown, during rioting, residents said.

They said buildings belonging to people thought to be opponents of Abiola were set on fire by demonstrators.

In Nigeria's second city of Ibadan bonfires built by protesters with burning tyres blocked the streets.

"Ibadan is on fire. Those who venture out have to chant slogans in support of

Abiola and carry green leaves to symbolise their resistance to the military," one resident said from the southwestern city of 2-million residents.

Abiola, the man most Nigerians believe was elected president in 1993, collapsed and died while meeting a US delegation in the inland capital of Abuja to discuss the military government's conditions for his release from prison.

Officials at state house said Abiola would be buried in Abeokuta, 60km from Lagos, according to Muslim rites which stipulated the body should be buried

within a day.

US Undersecretary of State Thomas Pickering, who headed the US delegation, told reporters Abiola's family had asked for an international autopsy.

"We were very supportive of this and the response we got from senior officials when we spoke to them about this procedure was very positive," Pickering said.

It was not clear how waiting for an international autopsy would affect burial plans.

Pickering was with Abiola in detention on Tuesday when the 60-year-old op-

position politician was taken ill.

He was driven to a clinic, where doctors were unable to save him.

"Up until now we saw no evidence that there was any reason to believe he died of unnatural causes," Pickering said before boarding a plane at Abuja airport for home.

Abiola had been detained since 1994.

His death came one day short of a month after a heart attack killed Gen Sani Abacha, the man who locked him up in 1994 for defiantly laying claim to the presidency — Reuter

death

Nigeria's Abubakar sacks cabinet

Stephen Laufer

NIGERIA's military ruler, Gen Abdul-salam Abubakar, sacked his cabinet yesterday, as Deputy President Thabo Mbeki announced he would meet Abubakar in the Nigerian capital Abuja this afternoon.

Abubakar left Nigerians guessing on his plans for a new administration, saying he would announce his political plans "in due course"

Mbeki is to travel to Nigeria at the invitation of Abubakar for a series of political meetings aimed at encouraging moves towards democracy. His trip comes in the wake of rioting in Nigeria following the sudden death in detention of opposition politician Moshood Abiola.

Mbeki said he would tell Abubakar and opposition leaders that SA was interested in seeing democracy in Nigeria as soon as possible. Happy at the release of political prisoners, SA felt moves towards democracy should include politicians from all sides and be accompanied by the release of further political prisoners, the unbanning of restricted individuals and organisations and the return home of exiles.

Nigerian officials said the 34-member cabinet, grouping civilian and military ministers, had been dissolved. Public servants would "take charge of affairs until further notice".

The purely military Provisional Ruling Council, the ultimate decision-making body, was not affected.

Opposition parties called for a government of national unity including opposition parties to pave the way for elections.

Chief Emeka Anyaoku, general secretary of the Commonwealth, said the October 1 deadline for elections could be extended by three months if this was required.

Some observers suggested that Abubakar's dissolution of the cabinet, as the mourning period for Gen Sani Abacha ended yesterday could

signal a willingness to shed his predecessor's legacy in favour of moves towards an inclusive political process.

The ruling council met in Abuja as riots gripped southwestern cities where Abiola loyalists blamed the ruling generals for his death.

Abubakar appealed to Nigerians last night for calm and said Abiola had been on "the brink of his release from



ABUBAKAR

Continued on Page 2

Nigeria

Continued from Page 1

detention" when he died. He did not mention any plan to free other political prisoners or any concrete measure to restore democracy.

An autopsy on Abiola, who died suddenly after taking ill during a meeting with US Undersecretary of State Thomas Pickering on Tuesday, is to be conducted today by forensic specialists from the US and UK.

The SA government said Mbeki would use his visit to convey the condolences of President Nelson Mandela to Abiola's family. It called on Nigerians to act with restraint following the death of Abiola while also reinforcing

moves towards democracy.

Mbeki "has been reassured by Nigeria that they are doing their best to assure that the democratic process will continue," government spokesman Joel Netshitenzhe said.

Besides Abubakar, Mbeki is expected to meet a number of opposition leaders during his two-day visit in an effort to persuade them to participate in moves towards the establishment of a stable democracy.

Home Affairs Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi was due to accompany Mbeki to Nigeria, but a meeting tomorrow of the Inkatha Freedom Party's ruling body to prepare next week's conference prevented his participation in the mission — Reuter, Sapa-AFP-AP.

Fourteen die: Page 11

Abiola's family fuels suspicions of foul play

Conspiracy theories abound as death of jailed leader provokes speculation

Nov 9/7/98

THE TIMES
London

The sudden death on Tuesday of Chief Moshood Abiola has raised suspicion that he was murdered by Nigeria's military regime on the eve of his release from prison. The conviction that foul play was involved is held by family members and by members of the Yoruba ethnic community in the south-west.

Abiola is reported to have suffered bouts of illness since being detained by General Sani Abacha, who died last month. But both Kofi Annan, the United Nations secretary-general, and Chief Emeka Anyaoku, the Commonwealth secretary-general, said Abiola was in good health when they saw him last week.

That a 60-year-old prisoner under pressure to renounce his claim to the presidency should have a heart attack is not beyond the bounds of credibility. Abiola is said to have suffered from diabetes and other medical complaints, and Dr Mitchell Feinman, his American doctor, had said his condition could be fatal.

The most graphic account of Abiola's final hours comes from Thomas Pickering, the US Under Secretary of State, who was with him when he collapsed at the presidential compound at Aso Rock in the capital Abuja. Pickering said Abiola appeared to be "very disturbed and in some significant pain".

After he was taken to a nearby clinic, doctors worked

on him for 90 minutes but were unable to save his life. Like Annan and Anyaoku, Pickering said afterwards he had no reason to suspect a crime.

Is it possible that Abiola was poisoned by the military before going into Tuesday's meeting? The gangs of youths who marched through Lagos yesterday believe so.

Members of his family, in particular his daughter Hafsah, who lives in Washington, claim he was either poisoned or that he died of medical neglect. "It was too convenient," she said. "All of a sudden on the eve of his release, he dies." Another daughter, Wuru, denied he had ever suffered from a heart condition.

The charge of neglect is not difficult to sustain. Dr Ore Faloma, his Lagos doctor, had not seen Abiola since last year. He said his efforts to visit his patient were thwarted by bureaucratic obstruction.

The cause of Abiola's death will not be ascertained until a postmortem examination has been performed. The government has agreed to an Abiola family request that an international team of pathologists be present at the examination. This is to be carried out in the British High Commission clinic in Lagos with the participation of Dr Richard Shepherd of St George's Hospital in London.

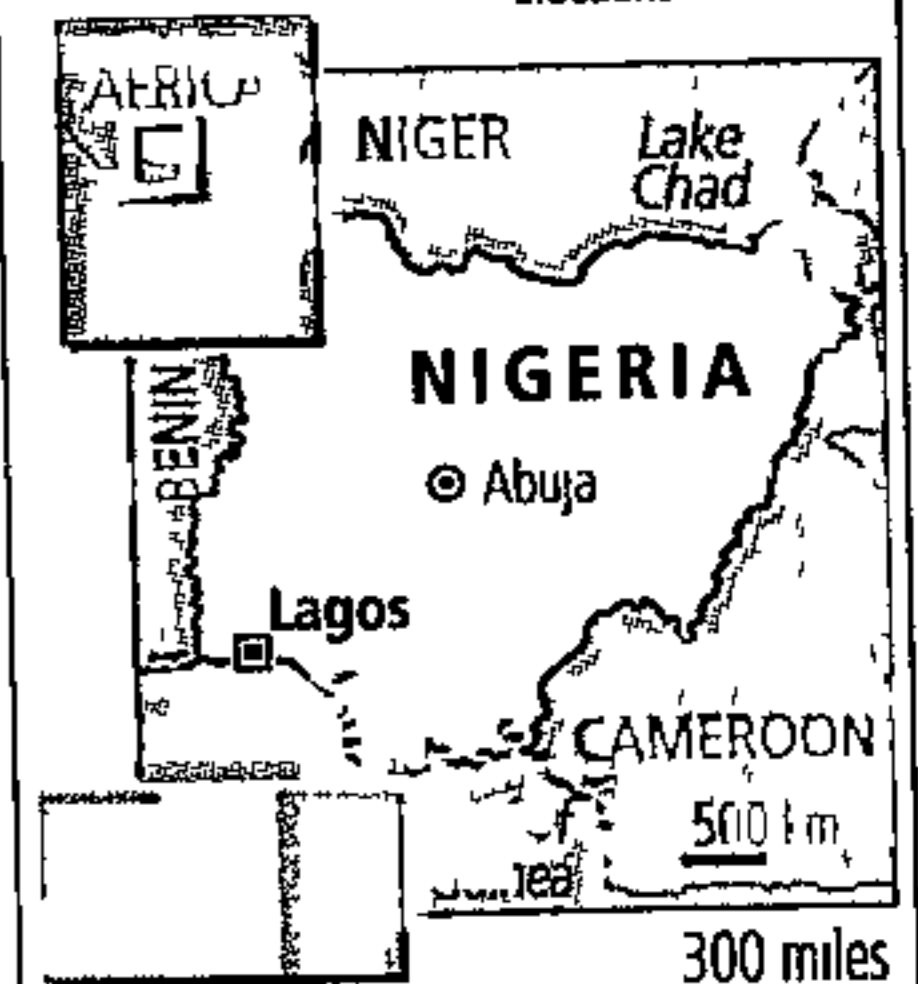
To add to the conspiracy theories, the death of Abacha, the man responsible for Abiola's detention, is likewise rumoured to have been caused by foul play.



Death in detention ... Moshood Abiola, seen by many as Nigeria's best hope for unity

NIGERIA PROFILE

At least 16 people were killed in riots after the announcement of Chief Moshood Abiola's death. He had been detained since 1994 for declaring himself president on the basis of 1993 elections.



1993 Military ruler Babangida cancels civilian rule presidential election after Moshood Abiola takes lead. Violent riots erupt in south west Nigeria. Babangida steps down. General Sani Abacha seizes power and promises elected president in 1996.

1994 Abiola proclaims himself president. He is arrested and charged with treason. Army suppresses riots and strikes.

1995 Commonwealth suspends Nigeria. United States, European Union and South Africa impose arms and visa restrictions following murder of members of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People.

1996 First non party local government elections since annulment.

1997 Abacha's deputy, Lieutenant General Oladipo Diya, arrested in December accused of plotting a coup, sentenced to death by a military tribunal.

1998 Abacha adopted as only candidate for April August 1 presidential election.

May Seven people shot dead in south west city of Ibadan during May Day protests against Abacha.

June 9 Abacha dies suddenly. General Abdulsalam Abubakar sworn in as 9th military ruler.

June 15 Nigeria orders release of prominent political prisoners.

June 25 EU talks with Abubakar. Nigeria orders release of 17 more political prisoners.

June 30 UN meets Abubakar, government sources say Abiola could be released.

July 2 Nigeria agrees to release all political prisoners. Abiola renounces claim to presidency.

July 7 US delegation leader meets Abubakar, lifts sanctions and normalises relations.

Abiola dies of apparent heart attack during meeting with US delegation

Graphic by Reuters

Nigeria on brink of an abyss

(206) Mon 9/9/9

Military leader goes on national television to appeal

for calm as riots over Abiola's death claim more lives

REUTERS
Lagos

Nigeria's military ruler has appealed for calm after at least 19 people died in riots triggered by the death of detained opposition politician Moshood Abiola.

General Abdulsalam Abubakar also dismissed the 34-member cabinet of civilian and military ministers who deal with much of the day-to-day running of government business. The all-military ruling council, however, was left untouched.

"I appeal to you all to be calm despite your understandable grief. Our national grief cannot be assuaged by recourse to lawlessness, threat to lives, and the wanton destruction of innocent people's property," Abubakar said in a broadcast address to Nigerians.

He described the 60-year-old Muslim tycoon's death as tragic, "particularly as he died on the brink of his release from detention".

Abiola, jailed in 1984 after claiming to have won the 1983 elections which were annulled by the army, died on Tuesday after being taken ill during a meeting with a US delegation.

An official announcement attributed Abiola's death to a heart attack and American officials said there was no reason to suspect foul play.

But riots swept Lagos and other towns in south-western Nigeria, with protesters accusing the government, which is dominated by generals from the north, of murdering Abiola.

"You who killed Abiola will pay for what you have done," the mobs shouted in unison as hastily mobilised police units moved to intercept them and fired shots in the air.

Calm returned to most of Lagos by evening, but fear kept the bulk of its 8 million inhabitants off the streets.

Abiola was seen by political analysts as the key to ending the political crisis which has bedevilled Nigeria since the annul-

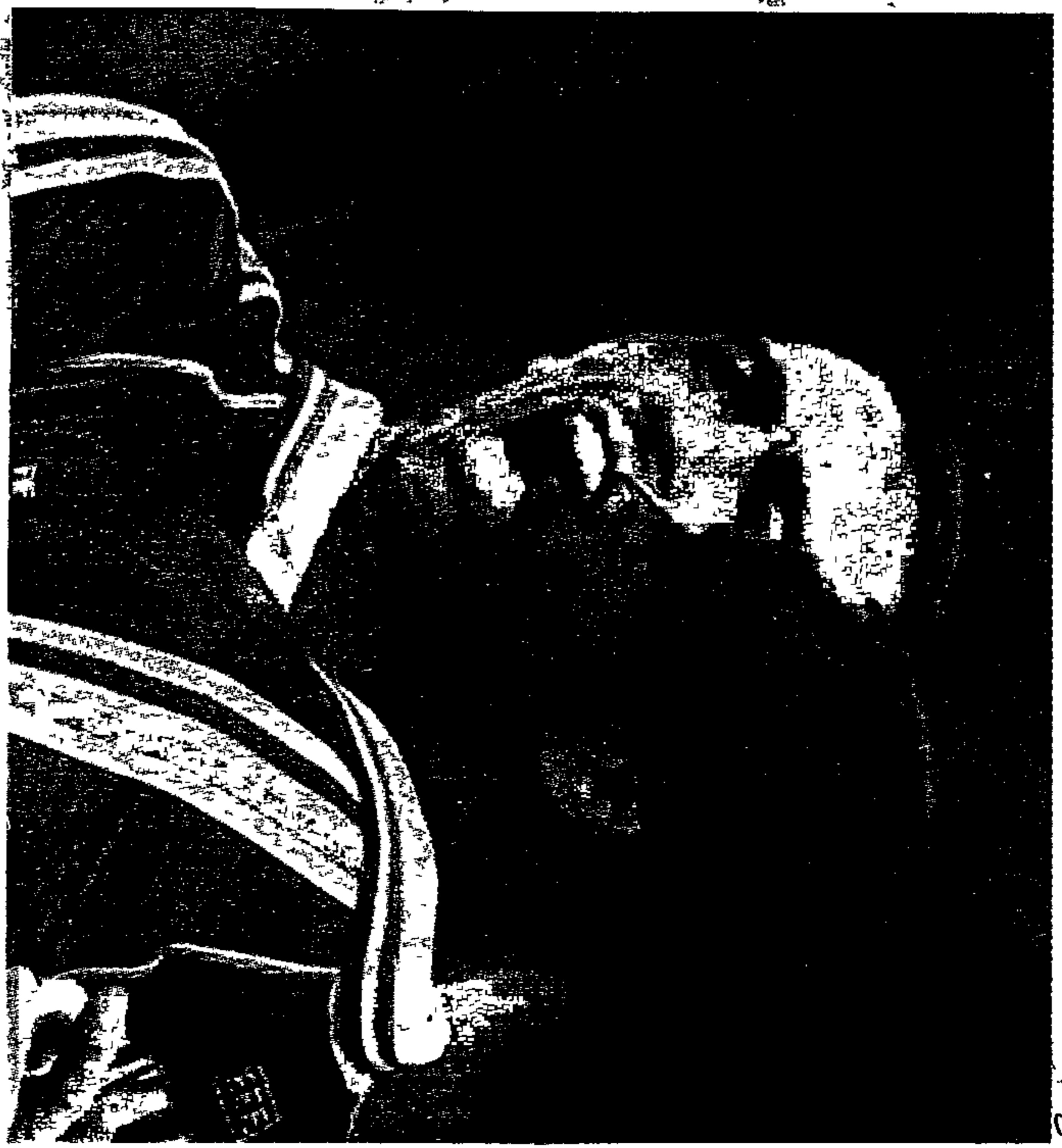
ment of the 1983 elections fanned the fires of ethnic mistrust.

His release had been widely anticipated after United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan implied that he had dropped his claim to the presidency. Abubakar had already set free more than 30 detainees, among them many of the military regime's fiercest critics.

United States Under Secretary of State Thomas Pickering - who headed the US delegation pressing for a return to democracy, and who was with Abiola when he fell ill - told reporters after Abiola's death that the US wanted the immediate release of all detainees.

But while stating one of his goals as returning Nigeria to democracy, Abubakar yesterday gave no hint as to how it would be done. Nor did he say when political prisoners would be released.

An Abiola family member said a team of foreign pathologists were due to arrive in Nigeria today to do an autopsy.



DEATH LEAVES A LEADERSHIP VACUUM

Looking beyond Abiola

CT 9/19/98

(Gal)

THE DEATH of Moshood Abiola has left a leadership vacuum in the Nigerian opposition movement that is going to be hard to fill, say analysts and diplomats.

THE sudden death of Moshood Abiola at 60 has robbed the Nigerian opposition movement of its sole figure of national standing, analysts and diplomats said here yesterday.

Abiola, a Muslim tycoon who belonged to the Yoruba ethnic group in the south, was presumed to have won elections in 1993. But he saw victory denied to him by the military which voided the results and detained him in 1994.

He was, said one Western diplomat, "the only person the opposition had of national standing. He was the only one they had that everyone had heard of."

Nigeria does not lack for opposition movements, but, as London-based analyst Kayode Fahemi said recently, "It is not a united opposition like there was in South Africa with the ANC."

The main opposition groups are based in the south, where rioting broke out in several cities on Tuesday and continued yesterday.

They include the National Democratic Coalition (Nadeco), United Action for Democracy (UAD) and the recently formed umbrella group, the Joint Action Committee on Nigeria (Jacon).

"All want to see the military leave after so long a time but beyond that they do not have a very united programme," Fahemi said.

The Western diplomat said that only Abiola had had countrywide support. "There is nobody very obvious who could replace Abiola."

"He might have lost some of that (1993) support while in prison but there was nobody else who had that level of recognition."

Among those figures who have national standing and have not been discredited by past service in military regimes, only three people "spring immediately to mind," said an African diplomat based in Lagos, agreeing with his colleague. Those were "Obasanjo, Enahoro and Soyinka," he said.

It was an assassination — opposition

JUDITH SOAL

"It was murder, I have no doubt," Mbolaji Aluka, the US co-ordinator for the United Democratic Front in Angola, was in Cape Town when he heard that Moshood Abiola had died in jail in Nigeria on Tuesday.

The exiled Aluka echoes all Nigeria's pro-democracy movements when he says he was incensed by the "assassination."

"For him to die on the day before he was supposed to be released is just too convenient for the military government."

General Olusegun Obasanjo, the military ruler from 1976 to 1979, gained respect for handing over power voluntarily to a civilian regime. He was released from jail last month after three years' detention by the previous military regime and has said he wants no future role in politics.

Anthony Enahoro, seen as one of the fathers of Nigeria's independence from Britain in 1960, and Wole Soyinka, a Nobel laureate for literature, are both in exile and not as widely known among the youthful population as Abiola.

"It is going to be difficult for the opposition now. They wanted Abiola to head a transitional government. If he doesn't, who is going to? A soldier?" asked a political analyst at a university here.

Nigerian military leader Abdulsalam Abubakar had said he would release Abiola, on condition that he give up his claim to the presidency. There were rumours that Abiola was to have been released yesterday.

"We believe that (UN secretary general) Kofi Annan and all the other delegations were there to be on TV when he (Abiola) was released, but it seems their plans fell through."

"Abiola told them that he wouldn't renounce his claim without first consulting his people, so

Jacon had called for a 15-month transitional government headed by civilians, including Abiola, to restore democracy.

"The ball is now in the government's court. We have to wait and see what it does," the Western diplomat said.

Femi Falana, a fiery human rights activist and lawyer who works for the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights here, admitted the opposition was "still shocked but this cannot be the end of the struggle for democracy."

"The military has proved itself incapable of leading us in the direction of democracy."

The opposition has "yet to prove" it has anyone capable of doing so either, responded the diplomat — Sapa-AFP.

they (the military government) decided to bump him off. In the absence of other facts it is the only thing we can believe.

"Annan had seen him the week before and he was fine. Then, in front of the American delegation, he was given a cup of tea. After he drank the tea he started to feel unwell. He died before he could get to hospital, and we are certain he was poisoned."

"This assassination, and we can only call it that, has set my country back tremendously. I don't know what will happen now."



HAMBA KAHLE: Moshood Abiola votes in Nigeria's last elections. He claimed he had won.

FILE PICTURE AP

SA flag at half-mast

JOHANNESBURG The South African national flag will fly at half-mast for seven days from today in Pretoria to honour Nigerian opposition detainee Moshood Abiola who died on Tuesday.

And Deputy President Thabo Mbeki will visit Nigeria today to convey the condolences of President Nelson Mandela and the government to the Abiola family, a government communications office statement said.

Abiola collapsed and died of a suspected heart attack on Tuesday while meeting a US delegation to discuss conditions for his release from prison.

He had been detained since 1994 for declaring himself president on the basis of the 1993 elections, which were annulled by the army as he was poised to win.

At least 10 people were killed when rioting erupted in Lagos after Abiola's death was announced.

Mandela, in an earlier statement, expressed the country's dismay over the death, saying "Chief Abiola would have been a key player in Nigeria's democratic process and his death is a loss to Nigeria."

The SA government appealed to Nigerians to respond to Abiola's death with restraint, to reinforce efforts to bring about the earliest possible transformation of the country into a stable democracy.

The government said it had been in talks with the government of Nigeria's recently appointed head of state, General Abdulsalam Abubakar, to discuss the "very complicated situation" that had resulted from Abiola's death — Reuters.

APPEAL FOR CALM AFTER DEATHS IN RIOTS

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
SALDRU LIBRARY

Nigerian ruler dissolves government

LAGOS, NIGERIA. The military ruler here dissolved his cabinet of civilian and military ministers yesterday after at least 19 people died in riots following the death of opposition politician Moshood Abiola.

NIGERIA'S military ruler appealed for calm yesterday after at least 19 people died in riots triggered by the death of detained opposition politician Moshood Abiola, 60.

General Abdulsalam Abubakar also dismissed the 34-member cabinet of civilian and military ministers who deal with much of the day-to-day running of government business. The all-military ruling council was left untouched.

But in an address broadcast to Nigerians, Abubakar made no mention of plans to restore democracy, or to release more political prisoners.

"I appeal to you all to be calm despite your understandable grief. Our national grief cannot be assuaged by recourse to lawlessness, threat to lives and the wanton destruction of innocent people's property," Abubakar said, a month after taking office following the sudden death of dictator Sani Abacha.

Abiola, jailed in 1994 after claiming the presidency on the strength of elections in 1993 which were annulled by the army as he was poised for victory, died on Tuesday after being taken ill during a meeting here with a US delegation.

An official announcement attributed Abiola's death to a heart attack and US officials said there was no reason to suspect foul play.

But riots swept Lagos and other towns in south-western Nigeria, with protesters accusing the military government, which is dominated by generals from the north, of murdering Abiola, who comes from the south.

At least 19 people were confirmed dead by eye-witnesses, 11 of them in districts of Lagos where large numbers of northerners live.

Abubakar said the ruling generals had been due to decide yesterday when Abiola might be freed. He described Abiola's

death as tragic "particularly as he died on the brink of his release from detention."

"You who killed Abiola will pay for what you have done," mobs shouted as hastily mobilised police units moved in.

Calm returned to most of Lagos by evening, but fear kept most people indoors. Three people died in Abeokuta, Abiola's home town, residents said.

Abiola was seen by political analysts as the key to ending the political crisis which has bedevilled Nigeria since the annulment of the 1993 elections fanned the fires of ethnic mistrust.

His release had been widely anticipated after UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan implied that he had dropped his claim to the presidency. Abubakar had already freed more than 30 detainees.

Under Secretary of State Thomas Pickering, who headed the US delegation pressing for a return to democracy and who was with Abiola when he fell ill, said that after Abiola's death the US wanted the immediate release of all detainees.

**LOOKING
BEYOND ABIOLA
— PAGE 5**

Asked what Nigeria must do for sanctions to be lifted, he said "An early — I would say immediate — and unconditional release of remaining political prisoners and a rapid, open, free and fair transition to civilian, democratic rule."

Commonwealth Secretary-General Emeka Anyaoku, a Nigerian, said in London that he hoped the 53-nation group would be willing to drop its October 1 deadline and give Abubakar until the end of the year to restore democracy.

But while stating one of his goals as returning Nigeria to democracy, Abubakar gave no hint in the broadcast as to how it would be done.

Abubakar said the autopsy on Abiola would be carried out in co-operation with the family by pathologists from Britain, the US and Canada.

They are expected to arrive here today, a family member said — Reuters



RIOTS: A crowd gathers around a burning barricade on a street in Lagos. Riots rocked Nigerian cities yesterday after the death of politician Moshood Abiola. Nigeria's military ruler Abdulsalam Abubakar dissolved his cabinet yesterday but left the junta intact. **PICTURE AP**

SA to help pave way for democratic settlement

JOVAL RANTAO
POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

DEPUTY President Thabo Mbeki arrives in the Nigerian capital Abuja today to spearhead South Africa's intervention to assist in the country's return to democracy and stability.

He arrives on the day opposition leader Moshood Abiola, who died in detention, will be buried and a day after Nigerian military leader Abdulsalam Abubakar dissolved his government.

Mbeki is scheduled to meet Abubakar to encourage him to put in motion processes that would expedite the democratic process. He is expected to insist that any process should be inclusive of all

opposition groups, most of whom have called for a government of national unity.

Soon after the death of Sani Abacha and the appointment of Abubakar, South Africa made contact with the new military ruler to impress upon him the need to return to civilian rule.

When he meets Abubakar in Abuja today, Mbeki is expected to table a plan which would include details of a process that would be inclusive of all opposition political parties. South Africa would also encourage Abubakar to release remaining political prisoners, urban political parties and allow for the return of exiles without any fear of being arrested.

"We're going to Nigeria to listen to Abubakar. We also plan to meet General Olusegun Obasanjo

and other opposition political parties," he said.

Mbeki's arrival will mark SA's willingness to play a leading role to help resolve Nigeria's political problems. It is believed it has the support of many African countries as well as France and the US.

In Pretoria last night, Mbeki said the government was encouraged by Abubakar's actions but shocked by Abiola's death.

He said SA and the rest of the world had expected Abiola to be released and to play an important role in bringing about political stability in Nigeria.

"We're concerned that his sudden death might create political tension with the feeling among some people that he might have been killed." SA had urged Abubakar to appoint a team of

independent doctors to perform a post-mortem on Abiola. The Nigerians obliged and a team of foreign doctors are expected to perform the autopsy today. Results were expected to be published soon.

As a token of respect the SA flag will fly at half-mast at the Union Buildings in Pretoria from today to July 15.

Relations between SA and Nigeria have been strained since President Nelson Mandela led the call for sanctions against the West African country following the execution of Ogoni activist Ken Saro Wiwa and several other political prisoners.

Mandela, the government, opposition political parties and Cosatu have all expressed deep shock at the death of Abiola.

Mbeki upbeat after Nigerian talks

Stephen Laufer (226)

NIGERIA's military ruler, Gen Abdul-salam Abubakar, has given Deputy President Thabo Mbeki an undertaking to release all political prisoners and allow exiles to return home.

SA high commissioner to Nigeria, George Nene, said in a telephone interview last night that Mbeki and his staff had left a meeting with Abubakar "feeling optimistic".

Mbeki had asked for undertakings

on human rights, the release of the remaining political prisoners, the return of exiles and press freedom.

The Nigerian military had consulted a variety of social and political forces and appeared committed to a transitional process leading to free and fair elections and the restoration of democracy, he said. The talks had shown that the military government was serious about moving Nigeria

Continued on Page 2

Nigeria (226)

Continued from Page 1

away from its pariah status.

Mbeki, who is due to meet senior opposition leaders, including former military rulers Olusegun Obasanjo and Ibrahim Babangida today, had told Abubakar that Africa was missing Nigeria's full contribution to the continent's affairs.

Nene said it was not yet clear whether Mbeki would attend the funeral of Moshood Abiola, the detained

opposition leader who died on Tuesday. His death sparked widespread unrest. An autopsy by international forensic experts could delay the burial until after Mbeki's departure later today.

Sapa-AP reports Nigeria was in the midst of a flawed transition to democracy programme when former dictator, Gen Sani Abacha, died early last month. His successor, Abubakar, has vowed to move the country to democracy, but has said nothing about how this will be carried out.

Death toll: Page 9
Comment: Page 11

EU

At least 15 die in Nigerian unrest

LAGOS — Up to 45 people died in riots that broke out in Nigeria following the death of Moshood Abiola, the Nigerian press reported yesterday, although details were still sketchy

Sources confirmed 15 dead but said more could have been killed. The newspaper Vanguard said up to 45 people had died in the riots that broke out in Lagos, Abeokuta and Ibadan, three major cities in the southwestern region from which Abiola came

Reports indicated that 15 people were killed in Lagos and in Abeokuta and 10 in Ibadan, the newspaper said, and 58 prisoners in the town of Ife, also in the south, were set free after rioting there

The newspaper Champion was more cautious, putting the death toll at 20. No official toll has been announced and hospitals were unable immediately to provide reliable figures

Meanwhile, Nigeria's government has promised a state funeral in Lagos for Abiola after an autopsy has been carried out in the capital, Abuja, one of his wives said.

"The government has promised us a state burial and it is great because that will show to everybody who was the chief in this country," said Dube Onitri-Abiola, the youngest wife

New junta chief Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar pledged on Wednesday a "dignified burial" to Chief Abiola, whose death he called a "national tragedy, particularly as he died on the brink of his release from detention"

The timing of his funeral was not certain, Onitri-Abiola said, but it would take place in Nigeria's national football and athletics stadium, probably today or tomorrow. The stadium in the Surelere district of central Lagos was the only place of a suitable size

BD 10/7/98 (226)
 Relatives expected Abiola's body to arrive in the city today after an internationally conducted autopsy has been performed, Onitri-Abiola said

She had "complete confidence" in British, US and Canadian pathologists, who were due to arrive in Lagos later yesterday and then fly to Abuja for the autopsy

Government sources would neither confirm nor deny the funeral report but preparations were under way yesterday at the family home for the burial

Onitri-Abiola maintained that her husband had been murdered

"We know the cause of death. He had been poisoned," she said. This had probably been done "several weeks ago" — before Tuesday's meeting with US officials during which he fell ill

Onitri-Abiola, among the most politicised of the Abiola family members, said she was determined not to ease the campaign for democracy in Nigeria. However, asked if she would herself stand in polls if they were organised, she was evasive. "It's up to the people of Nigeria to decide"

People close to Abiola were still expressing anger yesterday about his imprisonment, Abacha's refusal to allow them to see him in jail and their conviction that he was killed by the military, either directly or by the conditions of his detention. Tunde-Babaagba Abiola, the family's official spokesman, said they had not been impressed by Abubakar's broadcast address to Nigeria on Wednesday, in which he expressed his condolences and urged calm

He did not comment on Abubakar's announcement that he had dismissed the junta-appointed government and would present plans "in due course" to restore democracy — Sapa-AFP

Abiola's death shows up the cracks in a fragile land

BD 10/7/98 (226)

The death of Chief Moshood Abiola highlights the traditional fault lines in Africa's biggest country, write **Michael Holman and Michela Wrong**

AS THE former minister and member of Nigeria's northern elite warmed to his theme over lunch, he cleared his place, took a pen and pad from his briefcase and sketched his vision of his country's future

The map was rough but the intent was clear — it represented the break-up of Nigeria.

Within the curve of the Niger river, embracing the south, was what he called "Yorubaland", dominated by cocoa producers and boasting the commercial capital, Lagos "Let them have it," he snorted.

The rest would remain Nigeria, stretching from the river bank to Kano in the north, through to Enugu in the heartland of the Igbo people and down to Port Harcourt in the southeast, centre of the oil-fields that pump out more than 2-million barrels a day.

Outlined in the early 1990s, this scenario has long been every Western government's worst nightmare. The break up of Africa's most populous state and the region's policeman would be an event far-reaching in its possible consequences.

With feelings running high among an enraged southern community, it has undoubtedly been brought closer by Chief Moshood Abiola's death. But at the same time that sudden demise, by removing the man the Yorubas insisted was the rightful president, presents an opportunity to put to an end what seemed certain to be divisive squabbles over the conditions of his release.

The mutual dislike, verging on loathing, between the Muslim-dominated Hausa-Fulani north and mainly Christian Yoruba south predates Nigeria's independence in 1960.

Yet in spite of the strains, Nigeria held together. A federal constitution that devolved power to an ever increasing number of states, all of them entitled to a share in the country's oil revenue, was partly responsible.

Unity was also assisted by the so-called "federal concept" in



Moshood Abiola, seen voting in the 1993 presidential elections. Abiola died of a heart attack on Tuesday after falling ill during a meeting with a visiting US delegation to discuss his possible release. Picture AP

which government appointments in the civil service, the state-owned sector and the cabinet reflected the country's ethnic diversity. And the risks of succession had been seared into the nation's memory by the Biafran war of the 1960s, eastern Nigeria's break-away attempt in which up to 1-million people died.

Since that impromptu lunchtime presentation, much has occurred in northern politics to both test and strengthen those ties. If the late Gen Sani Abacha's rule strained relations with the Yoruba, it also helped destroy northern hegemony. His autocratic style and blatant favouritism not only antagonised army officers but provoked unprecedented public opposition from northern academics and traditional leaders.

Significantly, the candidate who emerged as a last-minute challenger to Abacha's presidential candidacy — former police chief Mohammed Yusufu — is a prominent northerner.

Despite the violence in Lagos, Ibadan and Abeokuta that has followed Abiola's death, it falls well short of the tit-for-tat ethnic killings seen in the run-up to the Biafran civil war.

Diplomats in Abuja say everything depends on how Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar weathers the next few days. The man struggling to steer Nigeria safely past the deaths of the country's two most important men must convince the population that he is serious about a handover to civilian rule, even if he extends the October 1 deadline to breathe new life into the parody of a democratic system established by his predecessor.

Abubakar still has some room to manoeuvre. While no one rules out protest strikes in the oil sector, the country's fractious opposition has always appeared to count more on western pressure than their own activities to effect political change.

A leading National Democratic Coalition member this week revealed to what extent his movement was floundering following Abiola's sudden demise.

"There is nobody else," said Prof Bolaji Akinyemi. "This is not to say that Nigeria is not full of eminent, capable, credible personalities with lots of experience, but Abiola was the only one who had the democratic legitimacy. I don't know what we will do." — *Financial Times*

WHO WAS . . . MOSHOOD ABIOLA?

Rags to riches: Moshood Abiola was known for his extraordinary generosity in building schools and financing the education of many children of the elite, as much as for his penchant for marrying more than the usual numbers of wives allowed by Islamic custom. PHOTOGRAPH: AP



Generous man

Richard Syngé

The extraordinary life of Moshood Abiola, who has died aged 60, apparently of a heart attack, while meeting an American delegation, matches the tumultuous pageant of Nigeria's political life in which he played such a pivotal role.

Abiola first came to prominence as an accountant for the American telecom- munications multinational ITT's Nigerian offshoot, which he joined in 1968. He developed a knack for getting contractual cheques signed by the highest-ranking military officers under the 1970s regime of General Murtala Muhamamad.

This relationship with the military hierarchy both secured Abiola control of ITT's Nigerian operations and gave him the platform to pursue his always flamboyant ambitions.

His direct influence on the political

process began with the constitutional conference of the late 1970s. The then military government had lifted the ban on political parties and Abiola became chair of the Ogun state branch of the National Party of Nigeria in the time of the Second Republic civilian rule which lasted until the end of 1983.

At the conference he donated pocket calculators to all participants. His political career began to flourish with the launch of his Concord newspaper group in 1980. He hoped it could influence his campaign for presidential nomination within the then ruling National Party.

It was in that brief phase of democratic government between 1979 and 1983 that Abiola became a truly public figure, known for his extraordinary generosity in building schools and financing the education of many children of the elite, as much as for his penchant for marrying more than the usual numbers of wives.

With too many wives

MTG 10-16/7/98

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allowed by Islamic custom. Tension between the different families of which he was head was something he later began to regret.

Abiola's ambition never faltered, and when his friend General Ibrahim Babangida took power in 1985 he had access to the innermost machinations of the military as they moved cautiously and uncertainly into the new phase of democratic transition that eventually unfolded in June 1993.

When Abiola won presidential nomination for the Social Democratic Party in 1993, he campaigned convincingly and tirelessly, his "rags-to-riches" progress serving as an inspiration for ordinary Nigerians across a notoriously ethnically divided nation.

Despite, and more likely because of, this popular appeal, Abiola was a threat to others in the military, who prevailed upon Babangida to annul the most democratic presidential election the country had witnessed, in which Abiola won almost 60% of the popular vote.

He was potentially the first southerner to hold the presidency in a civilian government since Nigerian independence. His ousting provoked the political crisis which Nigeria has been struggling to overcome ever since.

In private, Abiola was both surprisingly humble and enormously engaging, with a mischievous sense of fun. In 1988 he bought *Africa Economic Digest*, for which I worked. It was his first foray into publishing outside Nigeria.

Although some expected him to develop his publishing profile on the world scene, as an African equivalent of Rupert Murdoch, his heart was clearly more in providing political leadership within luckless Nigeria than in the world of publishing. He attempted to establish a publishing house with the ANC in South Africa but this came to nothing.

Before long he was engulfed in the Nigerian political crisis. His imprisonment by General Sani Abacha in 1994, for daring to claim the mandate he had won the

previous year, removed him from public life but in no way diminished his potential to cross the ethnic divide.

Chief Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola was born in poverty on August 24 1937 in Abeokuta in the south-west of Nigeria, and was the first of his father's many children to survive. He was a Muslim and a Yoruba, a member of one of the largest ethnic groups in the country.

Educated at the Baptist Boys' High School in his home town, he went on to study accountancy at the University of Glasgow from 1960 — the year that Nigeria achieved independence from Britain.

He had never forgotten, he observed five years ago, that it was the educational policy of Western Nigeria's democratically elected government which had provided him with the scholarship.

Back in Nigeria, he worked as an accountant, having joined ITP in 1968 and by 1971 was ITP Nigeria's chief executive

and chair, posts he held until 1988.

It was in 1985 that his sometime friend Babangida came to power, leading eight years later to the fateful campaign. By then Abiola had an airline, a publishing house and a vast portfolio of foreign investments.

By June 1994 Abiola's challenge to Babangida's successor, Abacha, had confirmed his emergence as a symbol of the democratic movement. He declared himself president in defiance of the military at a clandestine ceremony, and soon after was arrested and charged with treason.

Within a year it was reported that Abiola was in solitary confinement, and had lost more than 40kg. His physician reported that he had been cut off from the news, that he was no longer aware of the time, or whether it was day or night.

Meanwhile, the senior of Abiola's three official wives, Kudirat, was gunned down by "unidentified gunmen."

Abiola was no saint but his love for Nigeria and all Nigerians was unquenchable. The sporadic reports of his poor health, and the lack of treatment provided by his captors over the past four years, have been disquieting. The country he hoped to save from disaster is almost certainly once again on the brink.

His first wife Sunbriat died in 1992. He had 18 unofficial wives and more than 60 children.

AT LEAST 15 DIE IN RIOTING

Calm restored to Nigeria

LAGOS: Commentators have warned that if autopsy results show that Moshood Abiola did not die of natural causes, severe unrest could be expected.

NIGERIAN security forces appeared to have restored an uneasy calm to the south-west yesterday after riots sparked by the death of Moshood Abiola left at least 15 people dead and many wounded.

In Lagos the previous day, armed units of the special mobile police force patrolled the district of Agege, scene of the worst rioting, dispersing crowds of youths as they gathered.

Schools and many businesses were closed, but bridges and roads that were blocked on Wednesday by burning barricades re-opened.

There were no reports of shooting or deaths.

North of Lagos, the governor of Nigeria's Ogun state, which includes the town of Abeokuta, Abiola's birthplace, declared a dusk-to-dawn curfew overnight on Wednesday following nine hours of rioting.

Police shot and killed at least

four people in Abeokuta on Wednesday as disturbances broke out as news spread of the death of the presumed winner of the annulled 1993 elections.

Several buildings were burnt and barricades had been set up.

Yesterday the situation was described as quiet.

The situation in Ibadan, another scene of rioting on Wednesday, was also reported "tense but quiet".

Reports on the overall numbers of those killed in Wednesday's rioting were sketchy, with some accounts saying up to 45 people had died, but the real figure is believed to be lower.

Sources yesterday confirmed 15 dead but said more could have been killed in the chaos. The newspaper *Champion* put the toll of the rioting at 20 and the state-run *Daily Times* put the number at 24. No official toll has been announced.

Nigerians were meanwhile left

guessing about government plans for the days ahead and the country's future following a broadcast to the nation on Wednesday night by new military ruler Abdulsalam Abubakar. In the broadcast Abubakar had promised he would announce plans "in due course" to restore democratic rule and return the army to a "traditional role in a democracy".

Abubakar took over as head of state only one month ago, in the early hours of June 9, after the death of his hardline predecessor, the man who jailed Abiola, Sani Abacha.

Abubakar on Wednesday dissolved his cabinet, named by the armed forces Provisional Ruling Council, and is expected to announce a transitional government, possibly for 15 months, to restore democracy.

Tunde-Babaagba Abiola, official family spokesperson, said the family had not been impressed by Abubakar's speech. "No, we are not encouraged. They should have released him before a dialogue. The only thing they can do now is go back to the barracks and prove that

they meant what they said."

An autopsy on Abiola by a team of pathologists from Britain, Canada and the United States is expected to be carried out today.

Much hangs on the results of the autopsy, a Western diplomat said. Any indication of foul play in his death "would be very bad news." "I think we could expect major rioting, very major," he said.

Preparations were meanwhile being made for Abiola's funeral and burial.

"The government has promised us a state burial and it is great because that will show everybody who was the chief in this country," Dube Onitri-Abiola, his youngest wife, said.

● Deputy President Thabo Mbeki met Abubakar in Abuja yesterday to discuss Nigeria's transition to democracy. "The leaders discussed questions of human rights, the release of political prisoners and detainees, the return of exiles and the creation of an atmosphere conducive to free political activity," South African Foreign Affairs director-general Jackie Selebi said. — Sapa-AFP

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Civilian rule for Nigeria put on hold

(226)

Abiola family calls for calm

AKU 10/7/98

Abuja - Nigeria's military rulers have put off a decision on how to restore democracy to this West African country, which has been racked by three days of rioting after the death of opposition politician Moshood Abiola.

Up to 60 people have died in the violence, with local newspapers today reporting 11 more deaths in Lagos and four in the university town of Ile-Ife, where student protesters set fire to the local high court building.

A new scheme to restore civilian rule is eagerly awaited by Nigerians and the international community after the oil-producing country of at least 104-million people was plunged into political confusion by the sudden death of General Abacha and then Chief Abiola a month later.

Rear-Admiral Victor Ombu told reporters after a two-day meeting of the council that a small working group would report to military ruler

General Abdulsalam Abubakar in a few days after examining different views on restoring democracy.

"In the very near future the way forward will be announced by the head of state," said Admiral Ombu.

He said that General Abubakar's broadcast could take place at the earliest on Tuesday next week.

The ruling military council said late yesterday that it had commuted death sentences on six of Chief Abiola's Yoruba kinsmen who were convicted of plotting to overthrow late dictator Sani Abacha.

A team of foreign pathologists began to assemble in Lagos yesterday to prepare for an autopsy on Chief Abiola.

"We want to approach the autopsy with an open mind and come to our own conclusions," Canadian doctor James Young told reporters.

Chief Abiola's personal doctor, Ore Falomo, said the post-mortem

would not take place before tonight because of the delayed arrival of two members of the group

Deputy-President Thabo Mbeki met with General Abubakar yesterday and said the military ruler had reassured him of Nigeria's commitment to restoring democracy.

"We are very reassured indeed about the commitment of the government to moving speedily forward with this process of democratisation to ensure it brings in everyone," Mr Mbeki said after the meeting.

Meanwhile, the family of Chief Abiola today appealed to Nigerians to remain calm following several days of violence in the wake of his death.

A statement issued overnight said that violence contradicted Chief Abiola's legacy of peace and democracy.

The family is preparing his funeral and hopes that it will take place without incident. - Reuters-Sapa-DPA

CHIEF Moshood Abiola was not a standard-bearer of democracy, being little less mired in corruption than his country's rulers. But he was the most likely alternative and he will be a hard man to replace.

As leaders of Nigeria's opposition in exile met in London to discuss the way forward, the irony of 60-year-old Abiola's life did little to help anyone — least of all those stunned Nigerians who saw him as a symbol of resistance to decades of military rule — come to terms with their country's descent into chaos.

"If Abiola had become president at the head of a transitional government of national unity, bringing in fresh elections, that might have worked. There might have been some hope," said Ken Wiwa, the son of the writer Ken Saro-Wiwa, whose execution in 1995 led to Nigeria's expulsion from the Commonwealth. "All that is gone now. Now I just don't see what can be done."

Emeka Azeze, editor of Nigeria's Guardian newspaper, said "Everything is in a state of flux. The government will have to call for elections. I can't imagine that they could find any way to avoid that. But they will have to be genuine. We cannot afford to have another hand-picked leader."

Abiola had never been seen in Nigeria as a natural democrat. A multimillionaire with business interests across the country, he had far more in common with the regime he came to threaten than with Nigeria's destitute masses.

"Abiola was not really an opposition man. He was hand in hand with the military all his life, and left them only after a business deal went wrong," said the deputy editor of the Guardian, Harriet Lawrence.

"But he was a symbol. We had an election that was free and fair, and that Abiola won with support from the whole country."

What made Abiola unique was that he straddled the great divides in Nigerian society that have made the country so hard to govern. A Yoruba from the south, he was also a Muslim, giving him popularity in the mainly Muslim Hausa north. He was perhaps the first politician to command support from all tribes.

Abiola had been in prison since 1994, a year after the government of General Ibrahim Babangida had annulled the result of presidential elections which Abiola had won.

But there was more to this than a simple case of a regime breaking its word, for Abiola regarded Babangida as his friend and patron. The general had led the mourners at the funeral of the chief's senior wife, Simbiat Shoaga, in 1992, and one of his daughters was the girlfriend of Abiola's son.

Indeed, Abiola, who had made a fortune from business deals sanctioned by successive Nigerian governments, entered the

In mourning for a leader less tainted

(226) ST 12/7/98

Moshood Abiola was an arrogant multimillionaire who rose to power on the back of his military connections. Yet he became a symbol of resistance and was the best prospect for democracy in a troubled nation

CHRISTOPHER LOCKWOOD reports

elections only after Babangida had banned most contestants.

Some 13 political parties had sprung up after Babangida promised a return to civilian rule on taking power in 1985. But, by 1993, the general deemed them divisive, being too closely rooted in ethnic groups. Instead he created two more parties, the National Republican Convention and the Social Democratic Party, with manifestos drafted by civil servants.

Abiola announced his candidacy after Babangida forbade the 13 original candidates on the grounds of electoral fraud.

He became the leader of the SDP, campaigning on a centre-left ticket and a programme of privatisation and agricultural reform. He had the funds, he seemed to have Babangida's backing, and his chances appeared good.

In early June 1993, Abiola duly claimed victory in the election, saying he had taken 58 percent of the vote and won every electoral zone. Even if not everyone believed the depth of his commitment to democracy, his free election was an important symbol of democratic progress.

But, two weeks later, Babangida abruptly suspended the transition to civilian rule, claiming electoral malpractice. Many suspected his regime felt threatened by a president who seemed to have enough popular support to resist their influence.

Stunned by the turn of events and by Babangida's betrayal, Abiola fled first to Britain and

then to the US to try to drum up support.

Returning to Nigeria in June 1994, he recklessly declared himself the head of a government of national unity. He was arrested by Babangida's successor, Sani Abacha, and charged with treason.

Abiola was never brought to trial, and the conditions in which he was detained broke his health. His doctor, before his own arrest, reported that Abiola had lost 38kg and had injured his spine in a scuffle with guards.

All news was denied him. Kofi Annan's recent visit was the first time Abiola learnt that his fellow African had become UN head. And a month passed before he was told of the death of his wife, Kudirat, an ardent campaigner for his release, who was murdered in 1996.

Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola was born in Abeokuta in southwest Nigeria on August 24 1937. He was the 23rd of his father's children (Abiola himself fathered 63 children) but the first to survive to his first birthday.

He was educated at the local Baptist Boys' High School and awarded a grant to study accountancy at Glasgow University. He did well, and remained profoundly grateful for the opportunity, later funding the building of several schools in Nigeria.

On his return he soon became deputy chief accountant at Lagos University's hospital.

In 1969 he joined the giant US communications firm ITT, and within two years was its chief ex-

ecutive in Nigeria and vice-president of its African and Middle East operations. His success owed much to his friendship with the regime and his consequent ability to bring ITT's needs to the attention of its senior officers. As ITT in Nigeria flourished, Abiola prospered.

In 1978 he founded a publishing house, Concord Press, and over the next 15 years built up an empire that embraced radio stations, newspapers, large foreign investments and an airline.

He entered politics in 1979, becoming a branch chairman of the National Party of Nigeria.

He was no political messiah, having acquired his standing by unscrupulous use of the money that lubricates public life in Nigeria. He was also arrogant. His autobiography bore the title *Legend of Our Time*. But he had charm and generosity and might have provided Nigeria with a worthier style of government.

The bloodied opposition now desperately needs a leader who will be able to negotiate on equal terms with the government of General Abdulsalam Abubakar.

Since the early 80s, democratic restoration has been repeatedly promised by Nigeria's army — and repeatedly denied.

Babangida, president from 1985 to 1993, stalled for years until allowing the election that Abiola looked certain to have won.

Abacha, who seized power in a 1994 coup, promised elections with five parties. It came as no surprise, however, when all five nominated him for president.

Abubakar has to demonstrate that, unlike his predecessors, he can be trusted. Said an opposition leader: "He has to show he is not doing what every military regime does — buying time."

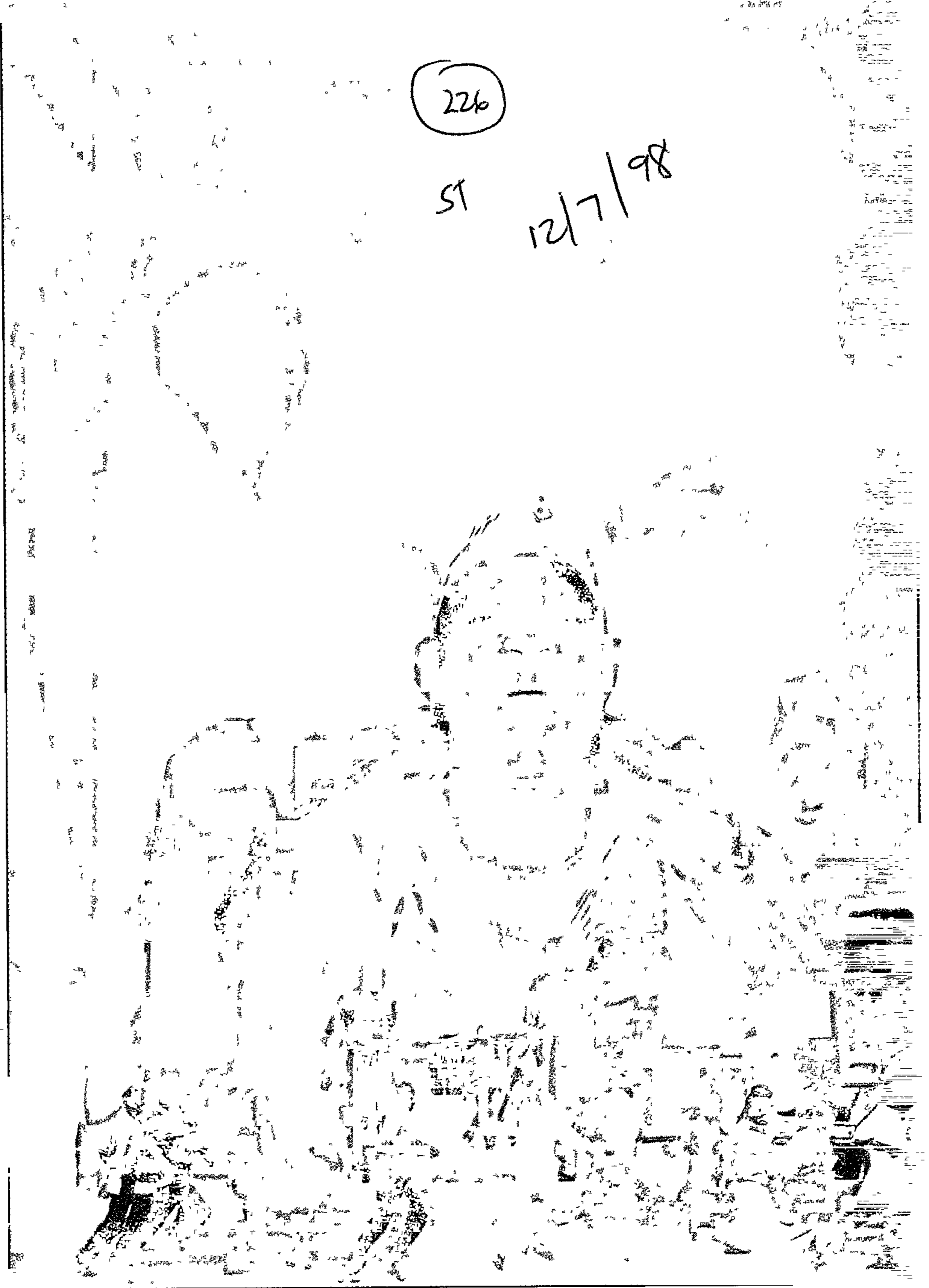
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'What made Abiola unique was that he straddled the great divides in Nigerian society'

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12/7/98



Nigerian military eager to get out of government

CP 12/7/98 (226)

THE NIGERIAN military was eager to get out of government as soon as possible, Deputy President Thabo Mbeki said in Pretoria yesterday.

He said Nigerian military ruler General Abdulsalam Abubakar told him this week "If I could be out of this place tomorrow, I would."

Mbeki added "We are fully convinced that a very important window of opportunity exists in Nigeria to move the democratisation process forward"

He was briefing reporters after a two-day visit to Nigeria, which has been cast in turmoil following the death on Tuesday of Moshood Abiola, the presumed winner of the 1993 elections which were annulled by the military.

Abiola's death came in the midst of indications that the military government was about to release him from prison. He had been in detention since 1994. His death led to violent demonstrations in Lagos this week, which claimed the

lives of at least 45 people

Mbeki left for Nigeria on Thursday and met Abubakar as well as leaders of the Nigerian pro-democracy group during his visit.

He said Abubakar's own view was that all people in detention for political reasons should be released. This process had already started, and the military junta had asked opposition groups to help identify political prisoners.

The military also agreed that Nigerians in exile should return and that charges of a political nature against such individuals be dropped. "This is in part to ensure that everybody is able to participate in the process of transition to democracy," Mbeki said.

The military junta was currently discussing issues such as the composition of a government of national unity to bring about democracy.

"Our sense was that they were very sensitive to the fact that such a government would have

to be broadly based and broadly acceptable to the Nigerian public."

An announcement in this regard would be made soon.

Mbeki said the military recognised that government should be in the hands of civilians as soon as possible, and that a civilian administration should handle issues such as a review of Nigeria's constitution.

Abubakar was intent on engaging in extensive consultation about these matters with the opposition groups. Some groups had already started talks with the military administration.

"We sought to encourage them to intensify that contact," Mbeki said. "There is very much an open door on the part of the military government to engage these groups in that process."

Mbeki also said Nigerian opposition leader Olesegun Obasanjo would visit South Africa this Friday. - Sapa

Nigeria buries Abiola - and faces a struggle to survive

PRG 13/7/98 (226)

Lagos - After burying opposition leader Moshood Abiola, whose death in prison last week set off unrest, oil-producing Nigeria faces a decisive week.

New military ruler Abdulsalam Abubakar, who has been trying to reconcile his multi-ethnic country, is due to announce a democracy plan soon, possibly tomorrow.

Democracy leaders are hoping he will ease the military out of power by

accepting their demand for an all-civilian transitional government of national unity to be installed on October 1, Independence Day.

"If we don't have a government of national unity, we shall crash," said Olisa Agbakoba, a prominent activist and one of the political detainees recently freed by General Abubakar.

"It is impossible to move from military rule to civilian democracy" - Abraham Adesanya, chairman of

the National Democratic Coalition, which championed Mr Abiola's presidential claims, urged a transitional government to serve four to five years and which would be composed of 24 respected Nigerians, four each from the six main regions. They would meet and choose a chairman.

Mr Abiola died last Tuesday while discussing the military government's terms for his release from prison with Nigerian and American officials. His

death sparked riots in his south-west political stronghold in which about 60 people were killed, most of them from the north, which dominates Nigeria.

An autopsy by pathologists from the United States, Britain and Canada, demanded by Mr Abiola's family and sanctioned by General Abubakar's government, found he died of natural causes and this has gone some way to assuaging the anger in the south-west.

Commentators believe Nigeria has an opportunity to launch a democracy process on a clean slate.

The new leader has tried to repair relations with the West that were strained by General Abacha's human rights abuses. Analysts expect General Abubakar to free all other political prisoners, ask exiled opponents of his predecessor to return and scrap the five tame political parties that were allowed by General Abacha - Reuters

Nigerian opposition demands government of unity

LAGOS — Nigeria's main opposition group called yesterday for the military government to step aside to make way for a government including representatives from all regions

National Democratic Coalition (Nadeco) chairman Abraham Adesanya said in a newspaper interview that after the death of presidential claimant Moshood Abiola, such a system remained the only way to end military rule

Nadeco had been the main power behind Abiola, who was buried at his Lagos home on Saturday after dying in jail on Tuesday while meeting a US team to agree on terms for his release

His sudden death sparked rioting in which an estimated 60 people died. The fact that foreign pathologists who performed an autopsy on Abiola said he died of natural causes is expected to douse the anger of his supporters, who said he was killed by the authorities

Military ruler Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar is due to announce a new democracy plan this week, possibly as early as tomorrow, that is expected to close the chapter on the 1993 presidential election the government annulled as Abiola was set to win

Since coming to power on June 8 after the unexpected death of dictator Gen Sani

Abacha, Abubakar has been trying to put together the pieces of Abacha's widely discredited plan to restore civilian rule by October 1

Adesanya said the national unity government would rule for four to five years and set up a new electoral commission that would call for the creation of new political parties

"It is a transition government by civilians, not military," he said

The oil-producing nation of more than 104-million, Africa's most populous, is eagerly awaiting the broadcast by Abubakar, who has tried to improve ties

with western and other nations with whom relations had been strained over human rights abuses and attempts to turn Abacha into an elected president

Abiola was buried in his Lagos home as some of his followers struggled at the graveside to seize his body. Other family members restrained the activists

Overnight fighting erupted in the Agege district, where many northerners live. But residents said it was soon quelled by police and there were no serious casualties

Calm reigned early yesterday at Abiola's mansion, where his body lay under a 0.8m-high mound of Africa's red earth,

planted with a single stick of greenery

"What we want now is a national unity government run by civilians," said student activist Olufemi Michael, delayed on his journey to pay respects from the opposition stronghold of Ibadan by a night's police detention

The autopsy performed at the family's request by experts from Britain, the US and Canada showed Abiola died of natural causes as a result of long-standing heart disease — as an earlier government statement had suggested.

Abiola's first son, Kola, dismissed the findings of the foreign team of pathologists as irrelevant — Reuter



Muslims pray at the graveside of Moshood Abiola at his family house in Lagos yesterday. Abiola, who was jailed shortly after the annulment of the presidential elections in 1993 that he was believed to have won, was buried on Saturday

Holomisa said he had never attempted to recruit her
visual presentation
picture, drawing or painting of a

Commentary

Mbeki meets OAU head over Nigeria

Stephen Laufer

DEPUTY President Thabo Mbeki met Organisation for African Unity secretary-general Salm Ahmed Salm in Pretoria at the weekend to discuss the Nigerian transition.

Mbeki, on his return from a brief visit to Nigeria, said there was a "window of opportunity" for a return to democracy in Nigeria.

SA would continue to play a significant role in helping Nigeria to re-establish an elected and accountable government, following the death of military leader Sani Abacha and opposition leader Moshood Abiola.

International pathologists announced on Saturday that Abiola, who collapsed during a meeting on Tuesday while still in detention, had died of "rapid deterioration of

a diseased heart".
An SA source said Nigerians from all sides regarded SA as an honest broker. There was suspicion about the direct involvement of the US, Britain or France in the transition because, unlike SA, they had major commercial interests in Nigeria.

Mbeki said opposition leader Olesegun Obasanjo was due in SA on Friday.

He said the ruling military's agreement to the return of exiles without fear of prosecution and the release of all political prisoners signalled a major opportunity for change. Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar had told him of the military's desire to get out of government as soon as possible.

Mbeki said he could not judge how united the military was about

relinquishing power, but Abubakar had said he did not expect resistance from fellow officers.

Mbeki said the military agreed that a constitutional review and moves towards democratic elections would be best handled by a civilian authority.

He expected announcements this week on the composition of a transitional government which was currently under discussion by the military.

Opposition leaders had told Mbeki of their desire for a broad-based government of national unity and reconciliation which they believed was the only way to inspire confidence in the transition.

Both sides wanted to avoid a drift into ethnic tension.

Government of unity: Page 7

DD 13/7/98
(226)

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Nigerian opposition group calls for transition government of national unity run by civilians

Lagos - Nigeria's main opposition group Nadeco called yesterday for the military government to step aside to make way for a government called Yes-Nationalism including representatives from all regions.

National Democratic Coalition chairman Abraham Adesanya said in a newspaper interview that after the death of Abiola, such a system remained the only way to end military rule.

"It should be four members from each region, making it 24 members. The 24 members would meet in Lagos, making it 24 members in total," he added.

"Once they do that, they will choose themselves to be the interim government," he added.

Nadeco had been the force behind Abiola, who was buried at his Lagos home on Saturday.

The fact that foreign states who performed an autopsy on Abiola said he died of natural causes is expected to douse the anger of his supporters.

Military ruler General Abacha announced a new democracy plan this week that is expected to close the chapter on the 1993 presidential election on the government annulled as Abiola was set to win.

Since coming to power, Abubakar has been trying to put together the pieces of former dictator Sani Abacha's discarded plan to restore civilian rule by October 1.

Adesanya said "The best thing is for them (the military) to go, and since they chose for themselves to stay, they should go on that day and hand over the government of this country."

Adesanya said the national unity government would run for four to five years and set up a new electoral commission of new political parties and a transition government for the creation of Nigerians managed by civilians, not the military. "It is a national unity government run by Nigerians are eagerly awaiting the broadcast by Abubakar."

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Who has tried to improve ties with Western and other nations strained over human rights abuses? "What we want now is a national unity government run by civilians," said student leader Michael, "delayed on his journey to pay respects on his journey from the opposition stronghold of Ibadan by a night's police detention - Reuters

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Nigeria urged to seize opportunity for reform

ET 13/7/98 (226)

LAGOS: A unique opportunity has arisen to restore democracy in Nigeria with the removal from the scene of two key political actors, analysts said yesterday

Within a month, dictator Sani Abacha and presidential claimant Moshood Abiola have died suddenly

"When the shock is over we will see that this is a perfect opportunity to end military hegemony and embrace civilian rule again," said one senior Nigerian politician.

"We must seize this God-sent opportunity to reform at the least cost," said Lateef Owoyemi, president of the Nigerian Association of Management Consultants

Few mourned Abacha, who seized power and ruled with an iron fist when Nigeria was plunged into political chaos after the army annulled a presidential poll in 1993 that Abiola was winning

More upheaval followed when Abiola proclaimed himself president in June 1994 and was arrested and detained.

When Abacha died suddenly in June, there was relief that his plan to turn himself into an elected president next month was dead

"It was like a huge albatross lifted from the nation's shoulders," said Lagos lawyer Jide Akani.

His successor, Abdulsalam Abubakar, has freed a number of

prominent political detainees

Negotiations were under way for Abiola, the most important detainee, to be freed, provided he renounced his claim to the presidency, when he died last Tuesday

Controversy erupted when UN secretary-general Kofi Annan, after meeting Abiola, said the politician had told him he wasn't expecting to walk out of jail and be installed as president

Pro-democracy groups interpreted this to mean that Abiola had renounced his claim to the presidency

They insisted that Abiola, a southerner, must be installed so the south, long dominated by the north, could taste power

Now that Abiola is out of the way, many Nigerians believe there can be a way forward without his supporters and those of Abacha losing face

The talk in political circles is that Abubakar is to announce a plan this week to ease the military out of power from Independence Day on October 1, 1998

Many believe Abubakar's plan would be to install a government of national unity on October 1

"If we don't have a government of national unity, we shall crash," said Olisa Agbakoba, a leading pro-democracy activist released after Abacha's death — Reuter

Poison claim in

Abacha death

ARL 14/7/98 (226)

Washington - The United States said yesterday it had reports that General Sani Abacha, the Nigerian dictator who died suddenly last month, was poisoned, but the information was not conclusive.

"We do not have conclusive evidence that General Abacha was poisoned," State Department spokesman James Rubin said. But "we're aware of reports to that effect" and did not discount them, he said.

Nigeria's military rulers reported after General Abacha's death on June 8 that he had died at his villa after a sudden heart attack.

After his death, hope grew that the new ruler, Abdulsalam Abubakar, would release the jailed victor of the aborted 1993 presidential elections, Moshood Abiola.

But last week Mr Abiola died in prison, also reportedly of a heart attack - Reuters

Chance of a clean slate for Nigeria

Star 14/7/98

(226)

Lagos - After burying opposition leader Moshood Abiola, whose death in prison last week set off unrest, oil-producing Nigeria faces a decisive week

Rioting sparked off in Abiola's south-west home turf faded at the weekend after an autopsy by international experts from the US, Britain and Canada found he died of natural causes

In the opposition bastion of Lagos, Nigeria's largest city of 8 million, people returned to work yesterday.

"Banks and many businesses have reopened," said a dispatch rider for a courier company

Nigeria's new military ruler General Abdulsalam Abubakar, who has been trying to recon-

cile his multi-ethnic nation, is due to announce a democracy plan soon, possibly today.

Democracy leaders are hoping he will ease the military out of power by accepting their demand for an all-civilian transitional government of national unity to be installed on October 1, Independence Day

"If we don't have a government of national unity, we shall crash," said Olisa Agbakoba, a prominent activist and one of the political detainees recently freed by Abubakar

"It is impossible to move from military rule to civilian democracy," he added

Abraham Adesanya, chairman of the National Democratic Coalition, which championed Abiola's presidential

claims, urges that a transition government to serve four to five years be assembled from 24 respected Nigerians, four each from the six main regions. They would meet and choose a chairman

With both strongman General Sani Abacha and Abiola deceased, commentators believe Nigeria has a unique opportunity to launch a new democracy process on a clean slate

Analysts expect Abubakar to free all political prisoners, ask exiled opponents to return home and scrap the five tame political parties that were allowed by Abacha.

This would allow politicians frozen out under the Abacha regime to rejoin the race for power - Reuters

Nigerian electoral bodies disbanded

(226)

Star 16/7/98

Several committees formed by military regime get the chop as new leader prepares to address nation on reform

AFP
Lagos

Nigeria's military ruler General Abdulsalam Abubakar yesterday disbanded three of the country's discredited electoral bodies, ahead of a nationwide broadcast setting out his political plans.

He dissolved the Transition Implementation Committee, the National Reconciliation Committee (Narecom) and the National Committee on the Devolution of Powers, said Narecom chief Alex Akinyele.

"We have completed our assignment and therefore we have been congratulated and commended," Akinyele said.

There was no immediate indication of the fate of the National Electoral Commission of

Nigeria, which earlier reports said would also be dissolved.

The agencies are all widely viewed as discredited by their close association with the late dictator Sani Abacha, who died on June 8.

All this comes ahead of a broadcast by Abubakar, now scheduled for today, military sources said, setting out his plans for a return to democracy.

Abacha, who took power in 1993, had in 1995 promised a "transition" to democracy by the end of this year. However, he was the only nominee expected to stand in a presidential election next month, which as a result was dismissed as a farce in advance by the opposition and international critics.

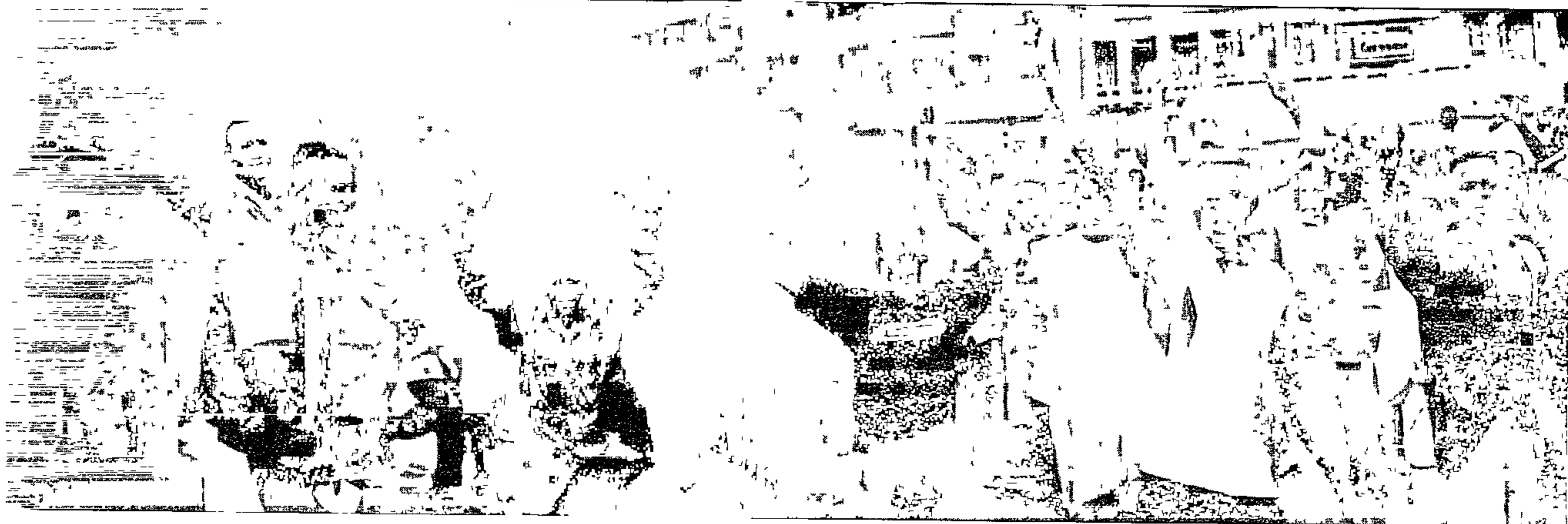
Since Abubakar was sworn in as the new head of state on

June 9, he has proclaimed his determination to restore democratic rule and return the army to barracks.

Speaking to reporters in South Africa, where he is on a private visit, former Nigerian head of state-turned-opposition activist, General Olusegun Obasanjo, expressed confidence in Abubakar, saying he was committed to civilian rule.

"Abubakar is a well-meaning man and out of the meetings that I have had with him, I am convinced that he is a gentleman committed to handing over power to civilians," he said.

"What is required is the establishment of certain mechanisms, such as an independent electoral commission, so that we should not point fingers at each other," Obasanjo added.



Street power: Riots on the streets of Lagos mark Moshood Abiola's death. PHOTOGRAPH: PETER OBE

Nigeria haunted by Rwanda

(226)

M+G 17-23/7/98

Karl Vick in Lagos

Behind all the talk of returning democracy to Nigeria looms the burned wreckage of the Paki Trading and Transport company. As word spread last week that Moshood Abiola, the man Nigerians five years ago thought they had elected president, had died just as he was to be released from prison, the muggy streets of Lagos filled with angry young men.

At Paki Trading and Transport, a crowd methodically brought down its towering concrete wall, stripped and burned 16 big rigs inside, incinerated the offices and looted the warehouses. In the tin-roofed shelter that serves as a workplace mosque, security guard Garda Ali Paki was sliced to death.

Company co-owner Alhai Abdul-lahu Usman Dan Inn stood beside the bloodstain and announced "The whole problem here is ethnic. We are from the Hausa tribe. They came here attacking our people."

In Lagos, "they" could only be Yoruba, the tribe that dominates south-western Nigeria as the Hausa dominate the country's north and the Ibo its south-east. The three ethnic groups account for most of the population of Africa's most populous coun-

try, and in the mythology of nation-building they are supposed to be equals. But the increasingly perilous reality is that Nigeria has been dominated through nearly its entire history by Hausas — usually Hausas wearing green berets and epaulets. The military regimes that have ruled the nation for 28 of its 38 years have been overwhelmingly northern.

The democracy movement, not coincidentally, is dominated by southerners — and mostly by Yorubas, who blame the government for everything from the nation's economic plight to the decision to move the capital from Lagos north to Abuja.

Abiola, who was winning the 1993 presidential election when the military annulled it, was a Yoruba. And in the wake of his extraordinarily untimely death the cry for democracy in Nigeria — though heard in all parts from members of all ethnic groups — is loudest in Lagos and is more than ever a cry for Yoruba power in the face of Hausa domination.

Analysts say the fear is that ethnic tensions that so far have been channelled mostly into the democracy movement might — if that movement is again blocked — find an outlet elsewhere. "It is too terrible to contemplate," said Abraham Adesanya, a

leading democracy activist.

"The road to Kigali", reads the headline in the latest edition of *The News*, a Nigerian weekly. Nigerian readers immediately recognised both the capital of Rwanda and the pointed reference to the tribal violence that left up to a million dead in that country four years ago. Although not nearly on the scale of the Rwandan genocide, Nigeria has known communal violence itself. In 1966, tensions between Hausas and Ibos climaxed in mass killings and mass exodus. The Biafra war — with one million people dying in the famine that came with it — was fought over the Ibos' attempts to form their own republic.

"The experience of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia are object lessons for us in this country not to assume that the unity of Nigeria is a given," said Stephen Olugbemi, a leading Nigerian political scientist.

"People can see the benefit of living together and being one. But they will say, if worse comes to worst, if we can't get what we want, we will go our own way."

Many are already saying it on the streets of Lagos. "The northerners have dominated, all the advantages are on them," said Ide Kaffo (57).

"We are fed up in the south," said

Christopher Abiodun (44). "I believe 50% of us want war. I believe it, because we cannot send our children to school any more. No food. No shelter. We cannot continue."

Outside Abiola's home, a separatist group hung a banner reading "Now We Stand on the Republic of Oduduwa," the historical name for the western region.

Inside the Abiola compound, however, separatism had not yet ripened. "We are going to douse it, because when all is said and done, we don't want our country to fragment," said his eldest child, Lola. "I like our country. I like the size of it. We need a totally detribalised country, like the man that just died." Indeed, Abiola was much more than a Yoruba. He was also a Muslim like most northerners. In 1993, before the ruling generals decided to call off the presidential balloting, he was carrying even the far-northern home district of his Hausa opponent.

"We voted for him," said Aliyu Asman Dan Inna, a partner in the Hausa trucking company destroyed by Yoruba rioters.

"All the cleavages which had bedevilled this country seemed to have all vaporised in 1993," said Ibo Alex Ekwueme, who was vice-president in

Nigeria's last elected government and now heads a political reform group.

Some see the way to a Nigeria united even without Abiola's charisma and largess. "Abiola was only a symbol," said Soji Onafediji (27), a Lagos hotel clerk. "The struggle is about June 12," the date of the annulled 1993 election — the first time Nigerians had voted for president in 14 years.

Abiola's closest allies are saying that rather than mount a search for another messianic figure, the focus should be on reshaping the structure of government. Nigeria, founded as a loose federation that allowed each region room to breathe, has developed a rigidly centralised government under military rule, noted Olugbemi, the political scientist.

"We have to start with a clean slate," said Adesanya, who chairs the National Democratic Coalition, a leading democracy group. The group is urging military ruler General Abdulsalam Abubakar, who has vowed to return the nation to civilian rule, to endorse a government of national unity, composed of representatives from each region, who would rule while a new Constitution is drafted and parties formed. Adesanya, who met with Abubakar, said elections would follow in four or five years.

Abubakar, however, is said to be cool to that suggestion. One diplomat said that the general may schedule elections for the end of the year. The military regime would retain power in the meantime, the diplomat said, but to lend credence to the election plan, Abubakar might free all political prisoners, replace a significant number of state military administrators and name a new Cabinet that includes civilian "statesmen." Whatever the plan, few in this fractious country expect things to go easier without Abiola to unite it. "We are being forced to play Hamlet without the prince," said long-time supporter Olabiyi Durjayeye at Abiola's burial.

A reporter, not sure he had heard right, asked "To be or not to be?"

"That is the question," Durjayeye replied. Then with the smile of a man just released from almost two years' detention he predicted Nigeria's answer: "To be," he said. "We're always optimistic. We will be."

Tinkering with a military machine

(226)

M+G 17-23/7/98

Roger Cohen in Lagos

Nigeria's military ruler, General Abdulsalam Abubakar, took several steps to dismantle the elaborate apparatus put in place by his predecessor to create a veneer of democracy.

General Sani Abacha, who ruled Nigeria with an iron hand for almost five years until his death last month, had created a five-party system while insuring that he became the sole candidate of all five parties for a presidential election that was to be held on August 1.

Without criticising his predecessor's acts, Abubakar dissolved the Transition Implementation Committee, the National Reconciliation Committee and the National Committee on the Devolution of Powers,

agencies that had been created to prepare the ground for the one-candidate election.

Abubakar did not say what would take their place. But he is widely expected to address the nation soon and lay out plans for the country's return to a genuine multi-party democracy. Nigeria has been ruled by the armed forces for 28 of the 38 years since its independence. Given the extreme impatience of most Nigerians with what has amounted to ruinous military rule, Western officials believe that Abubakar must promise a return to democracy by early next year at the latest.

So far he has convinced the United States and other Western officials that he is acting in good faith.

But there are disagreements as to whether Nigeria should go straight

to elections, or first should put in place a civilian government of national unity to organise the voting, and the discord appears to be delaying an announcement.

The army's cancellation of 1993 elections which Moshood Abiola appeared to be winning, has left many Nigerians convinced that, as one opposition leader put it, "the armed forces cannot be the midwife of democracy."

Abiola was imprisoned in 1994 and died in detention last week. But there is concern among some Western diplomats that a large and diverse government of national unity could degenerate into squabbling and chaos, providing a pretext for yet another military intervention.

Abubakar also announced the release of more than 300 prisoners who

have completed their jail terms — normal practice in most countries, but something of a departure in Nigeria. He did not say whether these included political detainees. A government statement said the move was "part of the total efforts of the administration to decongest our prisons and its determination to defend and protect the freedom and basic rights of individuals".

Although more than 30 political prisoners have been freed since Abubakar took office, many more remain in jail.

Among these are several journalists, including George Mbah, an editor at *Tell* magazine, Kunle Ajibade and Begauda Kaltho of *The News* magazine, and Ben Charles Obi of the now defunct *Weekend Clarique*. — *The New York Times*

Burning question: Was Abiola murdered?

(226) mtG 10-16/7/98

William Shawcross and
Mail & Guardian reporters

Was Chief Moshood Abiola murdered? That was the question on everyone's lips in the villages, towns and cities of Nigeria as the human rights organisation Amnesty International demanded a full independent inquiry into the circumstances around the death in detention of the country's lost president

"Of all the conditions he had, [a heart condition] was not one of them," said his daughter, Wuru, fighting back tears in a BBC television interview immediately after the stunning news of his death was released to the world.

The United States said that it would suspend diplomatic moves until it had the autopsy results. Amnesty International stressed the need for a post-mortem beyond any challenge, noting that Abiola was the third prisoner of conscience to have died suddenly in recent months.

And suspicions remain about the circumstances surrounding the recent

death of General Sani Abacha, who died last month of a "heart attack"

It emerged at the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission into South Africa's chemical warfare programme that the "holy grail" of the scientists responsible for developing assassination techniques for the apartheid government was a drug which would kill without leaving any trace of poison.

The deaths of both Abiola and Abacha were suspiciously fortuitous for Nigeria's military rulers. Although he was reported to have abandoned his claim to the presidency, Abiola still remained a potential rallying point in Lagos for resistance to the military regime. Abacha was seen as a major obstacle for the military in resolving the Nigerian crisis. He was also deeply feared by the other senior army officers, having just sentenced his own deputy, Oladipo Diya, to death for allegedly plotting a coup.

The United States Under-Secretary of State, Thomas Pickering — who was meeting Abiola when he collapsed

after drinking a cup of tea — said he was impressed by the willingness of Nigerian officials to conduct an autopsy with outside doctors present.

"It was a Nigerian government doctor in attendance who said everyone must insist on an autopsy," he said. "I think this autopsy will be done in a way that clearly protects the integrity of the scientific process."

The US diplomat, who travelled with Abiola to a nearby hospital and watched as doctors tried to revive him, said the timing of the death was extraordinary. But he said it was known that the 60-year-old multi-millionaire businessman was in a poor state of health after four years of often brutal imprisonment. "He had some record of hypertension," Pickering said. "Both of his legs were swollen and he showed them to us."

The circumstances in which Abiola was being detained were surreal. The UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, was one of the last people to see him alive. He has described how Abiola was watching the England-Argentina World Cup match on tele-

vision without the sound on when Annan entered the room. When Annan asked the guard to turn up the sound, he was told this was not possible.

When Annan greeted him, Abiola said "Who are you?" On hearing he was the UN's secretary general, Abiola was overcome with emotion and kissed his hand.

"What happened to the Egyptian [Boutros Boutros Ghali]?" he asked. Annan explained he had taken over the position in January last year. Abiola had no idea that the pope had visited Nigeria and had pleaded for his release. He had only heard the day before Annan's visit that his jailer, Abacha, had died. He had been almost completely isolated from the world for nearly four years.

Abiola said he had been allowed a radio in prison for his first month, but in mid-1994 was cut off completely. His guards refused to talk to him and he had stopped trying to get information from them. He had no newspapers and was only given two books — the Bible

and the Qur'an. Hoping he was near freedom, he told the Annan that he wanted to visit Mecca to give thanks for his salvation.

Nigerian President General Abdulsalam Abubakar had asked Annan to get a written assurance from Abiola that, if released, he would not immediately declare himself president as a result of the 1993 elections. Abubakar feared massive disruption, with Abiola being hailed in his home area in the south-west, while the northern Hausa controlled the army.

Abubakar wanted Abiola to support a period of transition until new presidential elections in which he and others could compete and Annan found Abiola modest in his ambitions.

Abiola appreciated much had changed since 1993 and he did not want to come straight out of prison into the state house. But he was apparently reluctant to give a signed undertaking. Instead he preferred to meet Abubakar and give his word.

Abiola seemed philosophical. One need not be president to have a life, he told Annan.

Nigerian endgames

(226) mtG 10-16/7/98

Chris McGreal

Many will remember Chief Moshood Abiola as a political martyr denied presidential power even though he came to prominence as an opportunist businessman prepared to do deals with Nigeria's soldiers until the very end.

In the days before he died, Abiola had been ready to forsake his presidential claims, according to the various visitors who saw him. The winner of the now infamously annulled 1993 election had even told the late General Sani Abacha he was prepared to renounce his claim to the presidency in return for his freedom after four years in prison.

Democrats, angry at this unilateral deal they considered a breach of faith with most Nigerians, began edging away from Abiola and talking up other alternatives to military rule. Nigerians wanted to see what their new government, led by General Abdulsalam Abubakar, was planning if it wasn't to make Abiola president.

Abiola's death undoubtedly provided the army room for manoeuvre. One of Abubakar's first acts was to dissolve his Cabinet, although he left untouched the Provisional Ruling Council — the core of the junta regime.

For the military's opponents it is both a blow and a potential source of strength. The army's enemies clung to the tainted businessman of dubious democratic credentials because his cause was their best hope of levering the army from power.

The military clearly feared Abiola's potential as a rallying point,

albeit a reluctant one.

While many political prisoners were released after Abubakar took power a month ago, the army kept hold of Abiola. It wanted a signed, and presumably public, renunciation of any claim to the presidency in the hope of neutralising any possibility he could be used as a weapon against military rule. Many democrats were not entirely comfortable with Abiola as their cause.

Pro-democracy groups were forced, some reluctantly, to back a man they would have viewed extremely sceptically in different circumstances. Abiola did not have strong democratic credentials. He was embroiled with the military for years, until he fell out with it over a sour business deal. And while he had a strong ambition to be president he had no vision of building a representative government.

The 1993 election is endlessly trumpeted as free and fair even though it was rigorously controlled by the military which permitted only two political parties and banned a host of potential presidential candidates from running. But Abiola provided a focus for demands by major opposition groups for an immediate transition to civilian rule. With Abiola claiming the presidency it would be that much harder for Abubakar to extend military rule on the pretext of requiring time to lay the ground for elections.

In Abiola, Nigeria had its elected leader. Why not hand power to him, the democrats argued. It was a difficult one for the military to answer.

Many democrats secretly feared the prospect of Abiola as president



Smoke signals: Chief Moshood Abiola's death has sparked rioting in Nigeria, with at least 19 people killed. PHOTOGRAPH: PETER OBE/AP

only marginally less than the army hanging on to power. After four years in prison, none of them were sure what sort of physical and mental state he was in. His initial period in jail had been tough, and reports emerged that he was virtually begging to be released on almost any terms. And while Abiola was a rallying point for opposition groups, he was hardly a unifying figure across Nigeria.

In his anger at the annulment of the 1993 election he turned to the very people who gave him victory and legitimacy — the northern Muslim voters. It was the first election in which the north backed a southerner, albeit a fellow Muslim. But Abiola's principal mouthpiece, his *National Concord* newspaper, loudly denounced northerners in general as conspiring with the army to deny him power. In an instant, his support shrank away in cities such as Kano which had overwhelmingly backed Abiola. And in

that instant it became possible for Abacha to seize power and imprison Abiola. Nigeria was once again riven along regional lines.

After it was known Abiola had bowed to pressure to renounce his presidential claim, some democracy activists again started backing away from him. They re-emphasised a call for the swift installation of a civilian-led government of national unity in which the military would play a part but only until elections are held.

With Abiola gone, that option may suit Abubakar — especially if he can get away with handpicking any new government. To most Nigerians' dismay there are all too many politicians ready to play the military's game for the right price, as Abacha again proved when the only five political parties he allowed to exist all chose him as their presidential candidate.

Abubakar is wooing top international diplomats, in part by appearing

so much more civilised than his thug-gish predecessor. Nigerians are more sceptical. They have been down this road before. General Ibrahim Babangida spent hundreds of millions of dollars on a decade-long transition to democratic rule only to wreck it at the finishing post when he cancelled the 1993 election won by Abiola.

Abacha made much the same promises and then rigged the whole process so as to step right into the presidency. Abubakar will not easily extend his rule indefinitely. If nothing else, Abacha reunited Nigerians in their resentment of the military.

Nigerians across the spectrum are now pressing for an end to the perpetual bouts of military rule. If they can find a unifying voice with more credibility than Abiola the army may be forced to step aside for good.

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A generous man, PAGE 22

BY INVITATION

J 'Kayode Fayemi

PM 17/7/98

NIGERIA: STILL A LONG WALK TO FREEDOM

Watching the events of the past month in Nigeria, even an incurable optimist would conclude that the country has a fortuitous knack for snatching despair from the jaws of optimism. With the passing away of the venal dictator, General Sani Abacha, things had begun to look up for the traumatised country.

But the death of Moshood Abiola — the country's most unifying political figure — after four years in jail has slowed down the pace of opposition activities while rekindling old embers of ethnic and religious polarisation. No-one is sure what the future holds.

As expected, an independent panel of pathologists looking into Abiola's death has said that there is no sign of foul play. But there is little evidence that this will help douse the fires of dissension and anger in the country. Most Nigerians are convinced that the military bears responsibility for the cumulative neglect of Abiola, and some go further to insist on their culpability in a homicide case — despite the outcome of the full autopsy.

Without doubt, Nigeria's nation-state project is on a life-support machine, but the illness is not necessarily terminal. The country's leadership — in the military and in the democracy movement — must tackle the task of national revival and reconciliation with a sense of urgency, courage and justice to retrieve Nigeria from this dangerous precipice.

Though the steps taken by the current ruler have endeared him to the international community, local feelings are yet to be assuaged by what are seen as largely cosmetic steps. As with past regimes, General Abdulsalam Abubakar has freed some prisoners, promised reforms, talked to the opposition and displayed a better understanding of public relations.

Yet the structure of repression remains intact, and there is little to show that the

character of military rule has changed.

Abubakar's greatest challenge therefore comes from within the country. For him to be seen as a success of sorts, he needs to preside over the dismantling of the military's hold on power. His ability to do this will depend on how swiftly he can purge the military of its oligarchic tendencies.

The opposition is not without its own challenges, the greatest one being the choice of a leader now that the most legitimate symbol of the democratic struggle is dead.

The international community is promoting the view that the military should move swiftly to elections as a way of settling the leadership question. This line takes little account of the view on the ground, which ranks elections low on any priority list. Abacha's fatally flawed transition cannot be the basis of any electoral process. Besides, as Nigeria's former vice-president, Dr Ekwueme, recently said, elections organised by the military are no longer

credible.

Informed watchers of Nigeria's descent into crisis are convinced that it will not be solved by simply recreating democracy by fiat.

The international community will be well advised to support the opposition's demands for a period of respite to enable Nigerians to address the most pressing issues concerning the structure of the State, the bastardisation of its federalism and the overcentralisation of power. To address them, the most plausible suggestion that has gained currency is the convocation of a sovereign national conference of elected representatives of the people — a Codesa-type arrangement. This conference would produce a constitution within a designated time frame, which would be put to a referendum.

The military certainly cannot act as midwife for this process.

To be credible, only a government of national unity and reconciliation, to which

the current military ruler must hand over power by October 1 1998, can oversee the process. Though there is no unanimity of views as to who should head this government, it must represent all shades of opinion, including the military.

The current head of State gives the impression that he is aware of the size of the task before him. He has repeatedly said he is committed to "taking the military back to its constitutional and professional role of defending the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the nation".

He has to convince a sceptical populace that he is Nigeria's FW de Klerk. Like De Klerk, he has a choice-less task. The Nigerian military can continue business as usual only at its own peril, since this will invite a fiercer campaign of civil disobedience leading to a deepening crisis, and possibly civil war.

While it is possible for the military to still divide and rule, the likely revolt from within its ranks heralds a potentially dangerous situation, reminiscent of Ghana in 1979. Knowing the deep-seated desire for self-preservation among the top-ranking military officers in the country, it is difficult to imagine that they will choose the option to self-destruct.

But the exit of the military will not necessarily herald a new dawn for Nigeria. After 28 years of predatory military rule, Nigeria has become a byword for crony capitalism. The military is dominant in virtually all sectors of Nigeria's society as oil magnates, majority shareholders in financial and banking sectors and key players in recently divested manufacturing and service industries.

In addition to political reform, Nigeria needs a genuine economic transition that will reward hard work and innovation. This will not be easy, but with the military out of the way, it is not an insurmountable task. With a free democratic space and a restructured society, the much-admired creative spirit of Nigerians can be harnessed in a more productive way.

But the task is a marathon, not a dash. There is still a long walk to freedom. ■

□ Dr Fayemi heads the Centre for Democracy & Development in London, a research institute that monitors democratic development in the West African region.



Abubakar has to convince the populace that he is Nigeria's De Klerk

Obasanjo has great hopes for Nigeria

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But former leader is adamant he will not play any role

By ROSS HERBERT
INDEPENDENT FOREIGN SERVICE
AND NEWS AGENCIES

Former Nigerian leader Olusegun Obasanjo, recently released from political detention, told Deputy President Thabo Mbeki and his southern African counterparts in Pretoria yesterday that he was "generally positive" that the Nigerian military leadership would allow a transition to democratic civilian rule

But Obasanjo ruled himself out as a potential candidate for the Nigerian presidency. Some speculation had focused on him as a possible successor to Moshood Abiola, the detained leader who was believed to have won the annulled 1993 elections but who died last week, apparently of a heart attack, just as he seemed likely to be released.

Obasanjo briefed Mbeki and the other leaders in Pretoria yesterday and was reported to be going to brief the British government later. A British Foreign Office spokesperson was reported from London yesterday as saying that Nigerian military ruler Abdulsalam Abubakar was expected to outline plans for the country's return to civilian rule, and announce cabinet changes, on Monday.

Obasanjo refused to specify whether his preference for a transition formula was an abrupt election or some other transitional mechanism. "From the time General Abubakar came in, he indicated clearly that he wanted to pursue a new way of

doing things. If he hadn't, I would not be here.

"I believe that the most important issue today is democracy. There are two ways people are considering going about it." The one was to get rid of the military government abruptly, and the other was for Abubakar to stay at the helm so that he had enough time to ensure there were democratic elections.

About his preference, Obasanjo



CONFIDENT General Olusegun Obasanjo (in this file picture) met Thabo Mbeki in Pretoria yesterday.

would only say "I would want it done by the end of this year if I were doing it, and I have done it before."

Asked whether he was hopeful, he said "To be hopeful takes an element of faith, but I will say that I am hopeful."

On his own possible role, he

referred to his statement, before Abiola died, that he would not participate in politics. "I have not changed my mind. I am not a politician. I was not a politician before Abiola died and I am not a politician after Abiola died."

But he added "Whatever I have I will use to ensure stability, justice and fair play."

Obasanjo assumed power in 1976 when General Murtala Muhammed was assassinated, oversaw a transition to civilian democratic rule that was overturned by the military in 1983, and again witnessed the overturn of an attempt at civilian rule in 1993.

He remarked dryly yesterday "There is a saying that once bitten, twice shy. In Nigeria we have been twice bitten, so we are four times shy."

He added that if there were a slower approach to transition, the government would have to take measures to prevent "the type of interference and type of dirty-fingers-in-the-pie" that happened in the past.

Obasanjo, who looked fit, was dressed in traditional Nigerian garb with robes and cap.

Abubakar is expected to announce a new cabinet on Monday. He dissolved the previous cabinet last week following Abiola's death.

Barring any statement late yesterday, Monday was the most likely time for an announcement of his plans, according to a spokesman for the Nigerian High Commission in London.

18/7/98

Nigerians keenly await leader's transition plan

(226) Star 20/7/98

Abuja - Nigerian military ruler General Abdulsalam Abubakar was expected to unveil his plans for democracy in a broadcast early today, after juggling the demands of bitterly conflicting interest groups.

The broadcast, due earlier this month, was postponed because of the death of detained presidential claimant Moshood Abiola and ensuing riots which radically changed the political landscape of the oil-producing country.

Abubakar's plan will replace the discredited scheme of strongman Sani Abacha, who died on June 8 as he was preparing for presidential elections as the sole candidate of five state-approved parties.

"The principal items of interest in the speech will be on the transition plan to restore civilian rule, the timetable and the fate of the parties," a presidential official said.

The deaths of Abiola and Abacha appeared to remove the two personalities obstructing a new bid to restore democracy.

Abubakar has been subjected to a barrage of demands from different interest groups, many with a strong ethnic flavour, each pressing its own cure for Nigeria's political ills.

Abiola loyalists from the south-west want a sovereign national conference to take over the running of Nigeria and organise elections independently of the military, which annulled the elections that the 60-year-old tycoon was poised to win in 1993.

Up to 60 people were reported killed in ethnic unrest

after Abiola's death. The disturbances subsided only when a postmortem conducted by international pathologists said he was a victim of long-standing heart disease, not foul play.

Many politicians from the north, traditionally the dominant region in Nigerian politics, say they want elections organised by Abubakar's government as soon as possible.

Five parties registered under Abacha's transition are fighting for survival, fearing they may be abolished because of a lack of credibility.

Even more important, Abubakar must find a way to satisfy his own colleagues in the military who are not all keen to give up the power held by soldiers for all but 10 years since independence from Britain in 1960.

"The long wait for Abubakar's broadcast, which has been postponed many times without explanations, has thrown the nation into deep anxiety as groups battle to put their positions on the government's agenda," wrote the independent newspaper *Thisday*.

Abubakar last week paved the way for the restoration of democracy by abolishing three of the agencies set up by Abacha to supervise the transition. The main electoral commission has not yet been touched.

Abubakar dismissed the mostly civilian cabinet of ministers responsible for day-to-day affairs. A new team has yet to be appointed.

With his pledge to approach democracy seriously, the general has won much goodwill at home and abroad. - Reuters

Abubakar

5 wipes the slate

(226) CT 21/7/98
ABUJA: Nigeria's new military ruler, mapping out his plan to return Africa's most populous nation to democratic rule, says national elections are to be held and a civilian president will take power on May 29.

Abdulsalam Abubakar, speaking in a nationally televised address yesterday, swept aside the flawed transition programme initiated under late dictator Sani Abacha and pledged to lay the foundations of a truly representative government.

"Nigerians want nothing less than true democracy in a united and peaceful country," he said. His plan would "breathe into the conduct of government a fresh air of openness and accountability".

Abubakar disbanded the country's widely criticised national electoral commission and cancelled all elections conducted during the Abacha years. He said he would give independence to the judiciary, often criticised for its close ties with the previous regime.

Regional and local officials elected after Abacha came to power in a bloodless 1993 coup would lose their jobs and charges against all political prisoners would be quashed.

Earlier yesterday, Abubakar pardoned 10 prisoners sentenced in connection with a 1995 coup plot, widely suspected to have been a trumped-up charge. They were to be freed immediately. They include prominent journalists Ben Charles Obi, George Mba and Kule Ajibade and human rights activist Shehu Musua.

Abubakar paid tribute to Moshood Abiola, the apparent winner of 1993's annulled presidential elections who died earlier this month while still a prisoner. However, refusing calls by Abiola supporters for a transitional government of national unity, he said the government would not "substitute one undemocratic institution for another".

The five state-sanctioned political parties, which had been pressured to nominate Abacha for president in national elections originally scheduled for August, were dissolved. "Our most recent attempt at democratisation was marred by manoeuvring and manipulation," Abubakar said.

Elections would be held in the first three months of next year.

Abubakar said he would appoint a new cabinet from a wide spectrum of Nigerian society, but did not say when. The cabinet was dissolved earlier this month. — Sapa-AP

AP

Plan for swift reform in Nigeria

ARLT 21/7/98 (226)

Abuja - Military ruler Abdulsalam Abubakar has unveiled an eagerly awaited plan to end decades of military rule in Nigeria and improve living standards in Africa's most populous country

In a national broadcast last night, General Abubakar ditched the widely discredited transition programme of his predecessor, strongman Sani Abacha, who died unexpectedly on June 8, and promised to install demo-

cratic rule on May 29 next year. If implemented, his would be a short transition to democracy in Nigeria, which has been ruled by soldiers for all but 10 years since its independence from Britain in 1960

General Abubakar announced that he had freed all detained opponents of the Abacha regime, a long-standing demand of Western governments and pro-democracy activists at home and abroad - Reuters

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General Abubakar announced that he had freed all detained opponents of the Abacha regime, a long-standing demand of Western governments and pro-democracy activists at home and abroad. - Reuters

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UK rethinks Nigerian sanctions

LONDON — Britain said yesterday it wanted to relax sanctions on Nigeria by removing a visa ban on the west African state's military leadership travelling to the European Union (EU)

The move, announced in a foreign office statement, followed a commitment from Nigeria's military ruler, Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar, to restore democracy in the country by May next year

"We will be working to secure our EU partners' agreement that members of the Nigerian government should be allowed to visit EU member states where this would help Gen Abubakar's programme and promote constructive dialogue," the foreign office said

Members of the Nigerian military government have been banned from entering the EU under sanctions imposed because of Nigeria's poor human rights record

The foreign office said it welcomed Abubakar's commitment to restoring democratic government, releasing political prisoners and reinstating human rights

"This is the best news we have had from Nigeria for a long time," said Foreign Office Minister Tony Lloyd

The US, SA and Commonwealth all wel-

comed Abubakar's speech

"The SA government supports the new initiatives which have been announced in this regard and urges all Nigerians to seize this window of opportunity and to work together to ensure that Nigeria is returned to democratic civilian rule," the SA foreign affairs department said

Meanwhile, politicians fixed meetings to discuss their next moves after Abubakar ditched the widely discredited transition programme of Nigeria's military dictator Sani Abacha, who died unexpectedly on June 8 and promised to install democratic rule on May 29 next year

If implemented successfully with elections in the first quarter of next year, it would be the shortest transition to democracy in Nigeria, which has been ruled by soldiers for all but 10 years since its independence from Britain in 1960

Abubakar also announced that he had freed all detained opponents of the Abacha regime, a longstanding demand of western governments and prodemocracy activists at home and abroad

All five political parties formed under Abacha and elections held before his death, were scrapped, as was the national elec-

(226) BO 22/7/98
tions commission which organised them

Many mainstream politicians have leapt at the chance to form new political parties with the first being launched today

Emmanuel Nnabuife, formerly of the United Nigeria Congress Party which dominated elections under Abacha, said two political groups known as Vision 99 and Friends on Way Forward would "adopt a party name and elect committees to draw up a party constitution and manifesto"

Barnabas Gemade, the party leader of the Congress for National Consensus said Abubakar's decision to scrap all parties was expected and he had arranged his own meeting to form a new party

However leaders of the southwestern National Democratic Coalition, which supported the presidential claim of Moshood Abiola until his death in detention on July 7, met against a background of disappointment that their demand for a national government of unity had been rejected

Radical followers of Abiola, whose death sparked ethnic riots, dismissed Abubakar's plan as no better than many failures in the past — Reuter

Comment: Page 7

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22/7/98
Sawetan

Abubakar paves way for Nigerian democracy (22b)

ABUJA, Nigeria - Mapping out his plan to return Africa's most populous nation to democratic rule, Nigeria's new military ruler said this week that a civilian president will take power on May 29 1999 after national elections

Speaking in a nationally televised address, General Abdulsalam Abubakar swept aside the flawed transition programme begun during the rule of the late dictator, General Sani Abacha, and pledged to lay the foundations of a truly representative government

"Nigerians want nothing less than true democracy in a united and peaceful country," he said

He disbanded the country's widely criticised national electoral commission, cancelled all elections conducted during the Abacha years and said he would give independence to the judiciary, which was often criticised for its close ties to the previous regime

He also dissolved Nigeria's five state-sanctioned political parties which were pressured earlier this year to nominate Abacha for president in national elections originally scheduled for August

Regional and local officials elected after Abacha came to power in a bloodless 1993 coup will lose their jobs, said Abubakar, who remained straight-faced throughout the speech and was dressed in full military regalia, including a green beret

He said his administration had released all political "detainees" - a term that in Nigeria means prisoners arrested without charge - and charges against all political prisoners would be quashed

He paid tribute to Moshood Abiola, the apparent winner of 1993's annulled presidential elections who died earlier this month while still a prisoner - Sapa-AP

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Nigeria's moment has come

Power 22/7/198

By Mathatha Tsedu
Political Editor

THE fate of the democratic experiment under way in Nigeria will become clear before next week when military ruler General Abdulsalam Abubakar announces his new federal executive, diplomats told *Sowetan* yesterday.

Abubakar announced on Monday that he would "constitute a new federal cabinet which will reflect the various shades of political opinion across the land", to oversee the transition of Nigeria from military to civilian rule.

He rejected the appointment of an elected government of national unity, which was demanded by some opposition parties, saying conditions for a proper election of such a body did not exist.

The military would remain formally in charge until the handover was assured, he said.

Elections would be held in the first quarter of next year, supervised by an independent electoral commission and

foreign observers. The civilian president elected will be installed on May 29, he said, emphasising that his regime had no "desire whatsoever to succeed itself and is steadfastly committed to hand over to a democratically elected government".

Abubakar also announced the further release of detainees and said people facing political charges would no longer stand trial.

He promised an independent judiciary and scrapped five puppet political organisations legalised and manipulated by former ruler Sani Abacha.

Abubakar also said free political activity was now permitted. He said a constitution drawn up by a national conference under the military regime, which was never published, would be made public for comment.

The announcement was cautiously welcomed yesterday from inside and outside Nigeria.

The South African Government said in a statement that it supported "the new initiatives that have been announced and urges all Nigerians to seize this window of opportunity and

work together to ensure that Nigeria is returned to democratic civilian rule".

The United Nations' top human rights official, Ms Mary Robinson, welcomed the announcement yesterday. Nigeria has "an opportunity to embark on a transition process achieved through broad consultation and full respect for fundamental rights and freedoms", she said.

Robinson said she was "heartened" by Abubakar's statement that

Nigerians want nothing less than true democracy in a united and peaceful country".

"I fervently hope that these encouraging words will soon be translated into reality," she said.

In London, Commonwealth secretary-general Chief Emeka Anyaoku welcomed the speech and said "The release of political prisoners and detainees by the Nigerian authorities and the new programme of transition to democracy announced by Abubakar, provide further evidence of his commitment to national reconciliation and the establishment of a credible process to democracy in Nigeria."

Anyaoku, a Nigerian himself, said the Commonwealth, which had suspended Nigeria in 1995 over its human rights record, would now "consider positively" Abubakar's invitation to send monitors to the polls next year.

The executive director of the Constitutional Rights Project in Nigeria, Clement Nwankwo, gave Abubakar a cautious welcome.

"The wording of the speech shows good intentions. We have now to see if



General Abdulsalam Abubakar.

they carry them out," he said.

Nwankwo said he was particularly pleased that Abubakar had promised to publish a draft constitution drawn up in 1995 by a constitutional conference and never made public, "proof of consideration and approval" by the military authorities.

But one of the opposition groups that had agitated for a government of national unity, the Joint Action Committee of Nigeria (Jacon), condemned Abubakar's speech as "a rehash of the lacklustre transition-to-democracy programmes of the previous military regimes".

"Jacon will not accept any part of the speech. We condemn it outright. It is sterile. It is a shame. There is nothing in it to please anybody. It is another military regime," he said.

However, the National Democratic Coalition (Nadeco) is known to have given support to Abubakar and has submitted eight names for consideration in the new federal executive.

Diplomats said Abubakar was expected to announce the executive before the end of the week.

Nigerian opposition considers proposals

(22b) CT 22/7/98

LAGOS: Nigeria's main opposition National Democratic Coalition (Nadeco) met yesterday to discuss its response to military ruler Abdulsalam Abubakar's democracy plan

"Nadeco will give its reaction to the new plan after the meeting," spokesperson Tunji Adebisi said

Under the plan unveiled in a national broadcast on Monday night, Abubakar discarded the discredited scheme of late strongman Sani Abacha for a programme that will lead to an elected civilian government by May 29, 1998. But he rejected Nadeco demands for a national unity government to oversee a transition to democracy and a sovereign national conference on Nigeria's future. He said they would be undemocratic and delay the handover to civilian rule.

"Two fundamental issues were not addressed properly, one is that of a national unity government and the other is the sovereign national conference. We shall discuss them at the meeting," Adebisi said.

Radical opposition veteran Gani Fawehinmi has dismissed Abubakar's plan as no better than what was in place before.

Nadeco backed the presidential claims of the late Moshood Abiola, presumed winner of annulled 1993 polls. Nadeco's support is concentrated in the south-west of Nigeria. Abubakar is from the north — Reuter

Analysts caution that problems are immense, and talk is not implementation

Cautious optimism greets Nigeria's economic reform and growth plans

GILL TUDOR

London — Plans by Nigeria's military leader to match political reforms with an economic overhaul drew approval from analysts yesterday, but their reactions were hedged with scepticism

In a speech on Monday night detailing a new timetable for democratic rule, General Abdulsalam Abubakar also announced steps to reform Nigeria's sick economy, including partial privatisation, talks with multilateral lenders and an end to subsidies and the dual exchange rate

"With the best will in the world — and it seems Abubakar is showing goodwill — however hard he tries it's going to be very hard to uproot a deeply embedded system of patronage and nepotism," said Peter Bartlett, the senior vice-president for Africa and Middle East at Banque Nationale de Paris in London

Key reforms pledged by



OVERHAUL

Abdulsalam Abubakar, the military leader of Nigeria, seen at the press conference he held yesterday to announce a new timetable for democratic rule in the country and radical economic reforms

PHOTO AP

Abubakar included a review of state enterprises to abolish monopolies and encourage competition. Oil joint ventures would be assured adequate funding and the joint venture model applied to other businesses, with stakes of up to 40 percent in state-owned firms offered for sale

"It's all very encouraging," said Chris Portman, a senior ana-

lyst at ANZ Investment Bank

"It's what investors in Nigeria have been wanting for a long time, although clearly in Nigeria talk is rather different from implementation," he said

Bartlett said the business reforms would enable Nigerian investors to exercise their entrepreneurial skills, long hamstrung by red tape and the grip of

ruling military cliques on key resources. But he doubted change would be swift, noting the huge scale of the problems

Abubakar also promised to cut Nigeria's hefty foreign debt, which the government put at about \$28 billion, but which independent analysts estimated could be as high as \$36 billion, and open talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank on a medium-term economic programme

London analysts were divided on whether Nigeria could expect sympathetic treatment, because about \$6 billion of the country's foreign debt stock is composed of arrears to the Paris Club of official, bilateral creditors

Bartlett said the IMF was unlikely to provide fresh funds for Nigeria while it remained in arrears to the Paris Club

Analysts were also divided on prospects for the Nigerian markets — Reuters

CT (MR) 22/7/98 (226)

AFRICA

Oil firms welcome Abubakar's decision to pay arrears

(226)
LAGOS — International oil companies welcomed the decision by Nigeria's new military government to pay £380m in arrears owed to the joint ventures that produce two-million barrels of oil a day — the country's main source of hard currency

"This administration recognises the importance of oil exploration and production activities to the future of the country," Nigeria's military ruler, Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar, said in a speech on Monday night.

Royal Dutch/Shell, the Anglo-Dutch group that produces about half of the country's oil, said it was "pleased that the cash call has been paid"

The decision comes after several of the joint ventures began reducing their operations because of cash constraints and the low crude price. Over the past few months Mobil of the US announced plans to reduce the number of drilling rigs operating on its offshore acreage from five to one.

The Nigeria National Petroleum

Corporation, the state oil group, accounts for 57% of funding under the joint venture arrangements, it holds 55% of Shell Nigeria and 60% in the other five ventures with Agip of Italy, Elf Aquitaine of France and Mobil, Texaco and Chevron of the US

In recent years the Nigerian finance ministry made deep cuts in the budgets proposed by the petroleum corporation and its foreign partners, even though the government wanted to see the industry expanded — Financial Times

DD 27/7/98

Nigerians prepare to launch parties

2011 08 23/7/98

(226)

ABUJA — Democracy-starved Nigerians prepared to launch new political parties yesterday in readiness for a promised end to military rule

Many politicians said scores of new parties could emerge in the coming weeks following military ruler Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar's decision on Monday to make a fresh start at installing democracy in Nigeria

At least two political groups said they would launch a new party and many political leaders are pressing the military to register as parties emerge

"I hope a new independent elections commission will register all parties and I mean all parties," politician Edwin Obeku said on national television

He said since Abubakar had decided against government funding of political parties, there was no reason to limit how many were allowed to contest the promised elections "The small parties will fade away naturally," he argued

Many Nigerians have accused previous military regimes of allowing only promilitary parties to emerge — one reason they have cited for the failure of attempts to end rule by soldiers

The way to democracy was opened by the sudden death of Gen Sani Abacha on June 8 as he prepared for elections as the sole candidate The death in detention of Moshood Abiola, presumed winner of the 1993 election, removed his presidential claim from the political equation

Abubakar has scheduled the presidential poll for the first quarter next year and the handover of power for May 29

"Democracy is the in thing," he told a group of officers at the National War College in comments broadcast on state television "The sooner we do it the better for the country and the better for us in the service"

Many Abacha-era politicians gathered in Abuja to adopt a party name, elect committees and draw up a party constitution and manifesto

Other interest groups said they had called meetings to discuss party formation or to try to pressure Abubakar to keep to his handover promise.

However leaders of the National Democratic Coalition, which supported Abiola's presidential claim, met against a background of disappointment that their demand for a national unity government had been rejected

A prominent opposition group, United Action for Democracy, said the Nigerian military had no intention of leaving power as promised

The group's leader, Ohsa Agbakoba, said the military should announce a sovereign national conference to determine the country's future

"The military by their essence are incapable of engineering a genuine democratic transition," Agbakoba said

Meanwhile, Nigerian police have sealed off the headquarters of the five political parties Abubakar dissolved on Monday, the state-owned Daily Times newspaper reported yesterday

Officials of the five parties, set up and funded by Abacha, were stopped from entering the buildings by four or five armed police, the paper said

The move was aimed at ensuring that nothing bought by public funds for the state-created parties went missing, the paper said

The five parties, authorised under Abacha's plans for restoring civilian rule, were already largely discredited in many Nigerian and foreign circles for their funding and because they had all backed Abacha as a candidate — Reuter, Sapa-AFP

ANALYSIS

Many Nigerians still wary of military-engineered election

The world has cautiously applauded the latest plans for Nigeria's return to democracy but the people's deeply rooted suspicion of the military could undermine these efforts. Features editor Dianna Games looks at the situation

NINE months in Nigerian politics is not a long time to wait for democracy, but for many Nigerians it is too long.

The announcement this week by the country's new leader, Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar, that he would hold elections next year and hand over power to a civilian government by May 29, while receiving international applause, has not erased the deep suspicions many Nigerians hold about the military's intentions.

The plan has been well received in some quarters of Nigeria and cautiously in others. Many have questioned the reasons for such a long election buildup. They say it gives the military too much time to get com-

fortable again, to find new ways of holding onto power or to somehow meddle in the election process.

They have reason to be suspicious. The world has quickly forgotten that former head of state Gen Ibrahim Babangida promised democracy in 1985, eight years later Nigerians were still waiting. Gen Sani Abacha promised reform in 1993. Five years later, Nigerians are still waiting.

Abubakar's press secretary David Atkrah has said the government was not just tan-

kering with the political process. "The wind of change that is blowing across Nigeria is very positive."

However, the fact that Abubakar has already ruled out a transitional government of national unity is seen as a sign of bad faith by opposition groupings.

Abubakar said "This administration has given considerable thought to the calls for a government of national unity. But such an arrangement is full of pitfalls and dangers which this administration cannot accept. We will not substitute one undemocratic institution for another."

Geni Fawehinmi, the leader of the Joint Action Committee on Nigeria and a fiery opponent of military rule, said he considered the rejection to be "reopening old political wounds." The Campaign for Democracy, a Lagos-based pressure group, said the crisis of nationalhood Nigeria was experiencing could not be reduced to the announcement of an election timetable.

"Nigerian people should not swallow hook, line and sinker Abubakar's bait of another transition programme as it will lead nowhere," it said.

Dare Aiyi Dare, an SA-based member of the United Democratic Front of Nigeria, said Abubakar did not have any mandate to refuse to consider a transitional national unity government.

"Who put him there?" he asked. Since Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960 it has had nine changes of

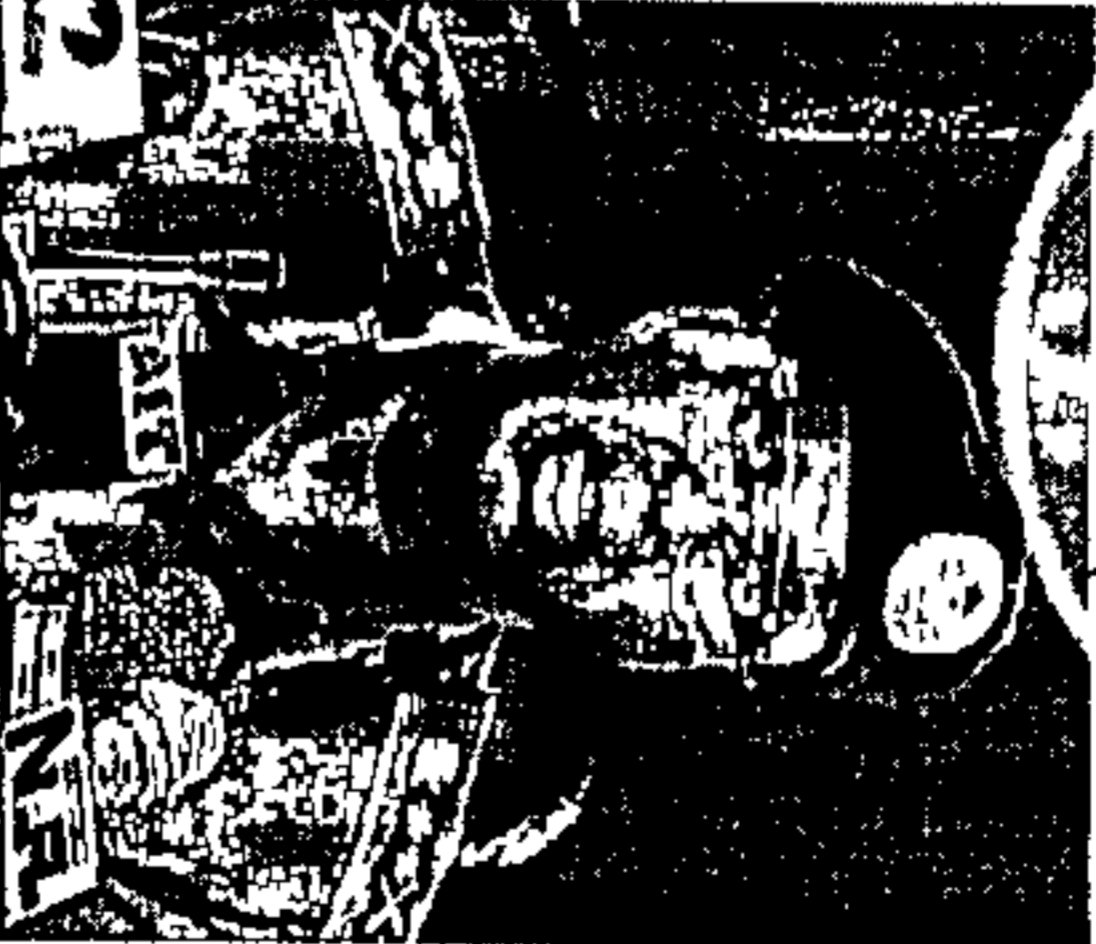
government, all of which were inspired or led by the military. Built into this were brief periods of civilian rule and military takeovers were generally accompanied by a promised return to democracy. The 1993 election, said to be won by recently deceased Moshood Abiola, showed the military's colours.

When the election was annulled, Gen Sani Abacha stepped in and told the nation "I must stress the unfinished commitment of this administration to an early return to civil democratic rule." He proceeded to set up a constitutional conference to write a new constitution that would guarantee democracy and set a timetable for his own exit from power. The constitution went with him to the grave.

The question of the constitution is one of the hurdles still to be cleared. The country is guided by a constitution drawn up in 1979 when Shehu Shagari, a civilian leader, took over the reins for a brief stint. However, it has been significantly amended by military decrees since then.

Guidelines for the voting process are also still to be unveiled. The electoral commissions set up for this year's planned elections have been dismantled and those five parties Abubakar has given an undertaking that there will be no interference with the setting up of parties.

This is also not a new scenario. For example, in 1979 more than 60 parties applied



Nigerian military leader Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar addressing the nation on television earlier this week. Picture: AP

to take part in elections and only five were legalised. In 1993 only two state-decreed parties were allowed to stand and last year only five parties, out of the 15 which applied, were allowed to register.

Even as the dust settles on Abubakar's announcement, the scramble to set up po-

litical parties has begun and many political figures are re-emerging from enforced "retirement." Some organisations are refusing to take part.

Dare says the election could herald more trouble for the politically battered country particularly if the winner, even in a free and fair election, is a northerner. "They have power for so long and look what they have done with it. Whether people accept or elected president under the current situation depends entirely on who it is."

He said the only way to override ethnic tensions was to set up a transitional government, which cut across ethnic lines, to oversee a representative sovereign conference to map the way forward by consensus.

The next step is expected to be the announcement of a new cabinet which is likely to show the direction the military is moving in. The previous 34-member cabinet had a two-thirds civilian majority holding most of the key portfolios, but its members were discredited by their links to Abacha.

News reports from inside Nigeria say many people are less concerned with the announcement of an election date than with promises by Abubakar of pay reform for public servants and the provision of better electricity and telephone services.

The daily conditions Nigerians live under have worn people down as much as successive military governments.

For most Nigerians an election is not synonymous with democracy. But their expectations have been raised and this time any betrayal by the government could lead them out of a disaffected complacency and onto the streets.

Nigeria still on amber as far as democracy goes, observers believe

Star 23/7/98

Half the nation wonders whether their new ruler will have both the will and power to deliver what he has promised

By ROGER COHEN
Abuja, Nigeria

The signs in Abuja scarcely bolster Nigeria's latest plans for democracy. The House of Representatives is a construction site. In this mixed Muslim and Christian nation, a lavish mosque is completed, but the cathedral lacks walls.

Unfinished, a capital yet in the making, Abuja is in many ways suggestive of Nigeria as a whole, a country of 105 million still seeking a firm basis for democracy and unity 38 years after independence.

If new ruler General Abdulsalam Abubakar breaks the habits of his military predecessor and fulfils the commitments made in a speech to the nation on Monday, his achievement will be an enormous one, for Nigeria is the giant of the continent.

"Nigeria has ceased to be a rallying point of continental appeal," the Nigerian journalist Egbuns Kemakola lamented, comparing the state of what he said should be "the epicentre of black humanity" to one of "refurbished feudalism".

Poorer and angrier, Nigerians unquestionably want democratic change. Abubakar seems to be aware of this. But broken promises have been the staple of the armed forces.

Of eight vows to return to the barracks since the first military coup in 1966, only one has been honoured, and that was back in 1979 when General Ibrahim Babaginda, who ruled from 1985 to 1993, set no fewer than five dates for a transition

that never came.

The dribbling led to a brick wall - Babaginda's annulment of the apparent presidential election victory in 1993 of Moshood Abiola, the opposition leader who died in detention this month.

In appearance, Abubakar is a very different man, pensive, painfully solemn, unused to the limelight, married to a high court judge who is said to have been gravely troubled by the plundering of the late dictator, General Sani Abacha.

"Nigerians want nothing less than true democracy in a united and peaceful country,"

Inertia born of misrule will be hard to shake

he said on Monday, peering out from behind thick spectacles.

But there are nagging questions about him. In his maiden speech on June 9, one day after Abacha died, Abubakar indicated he would hand over power on October 1, so he has already accorded himself one extension by prolonging military rule until next May.

And although he remained in the background, he was very much part of Abacha's regime, the most repressive and ruinous in Nigeria's history.

Abubakar's very modesty and apparent shyness prompt the questions: how independent is he and, if somebody is pulling the strings, who is it?

Insistent reports here sug-

gest that none other than Babaginda has considerable influence over him.

Overall, though, many Nigerians seem ready to give their new ruler the benefit of the doubt, for the moment.

"I was watching the speech on television with friends and everyone spontaneously started applauding," said Marilyn, a Lagos lawyer who declined to give her family name. "We are used to two, three, even five-year transitions, so 10 months seems bearable."

Abdulrahman Odunowo, a young man with a start-up telecommunications company, said "I want democracy. But I certainly do not want the chaos of an over-rapid transition."

In the decaying ministries here, where most public servants work for salaries of about R250 a month, the murmurings were generally approving.

But the peeling paint, the files marked "secret" scattered on the floor, the staff clocking in for work around midday, spoke of an ingrained inertia born of misrule that will be very hard to shake.

Virtually everything remains to be done: the formation of new parties, the raising of funds for those parties, the establishment of a credible electoral commission, a decision on the constitution, and the forging of a wavering nation threatened with dislocation by the anger over Abiola's death.

Some believe that none of these dreams will ever happen.

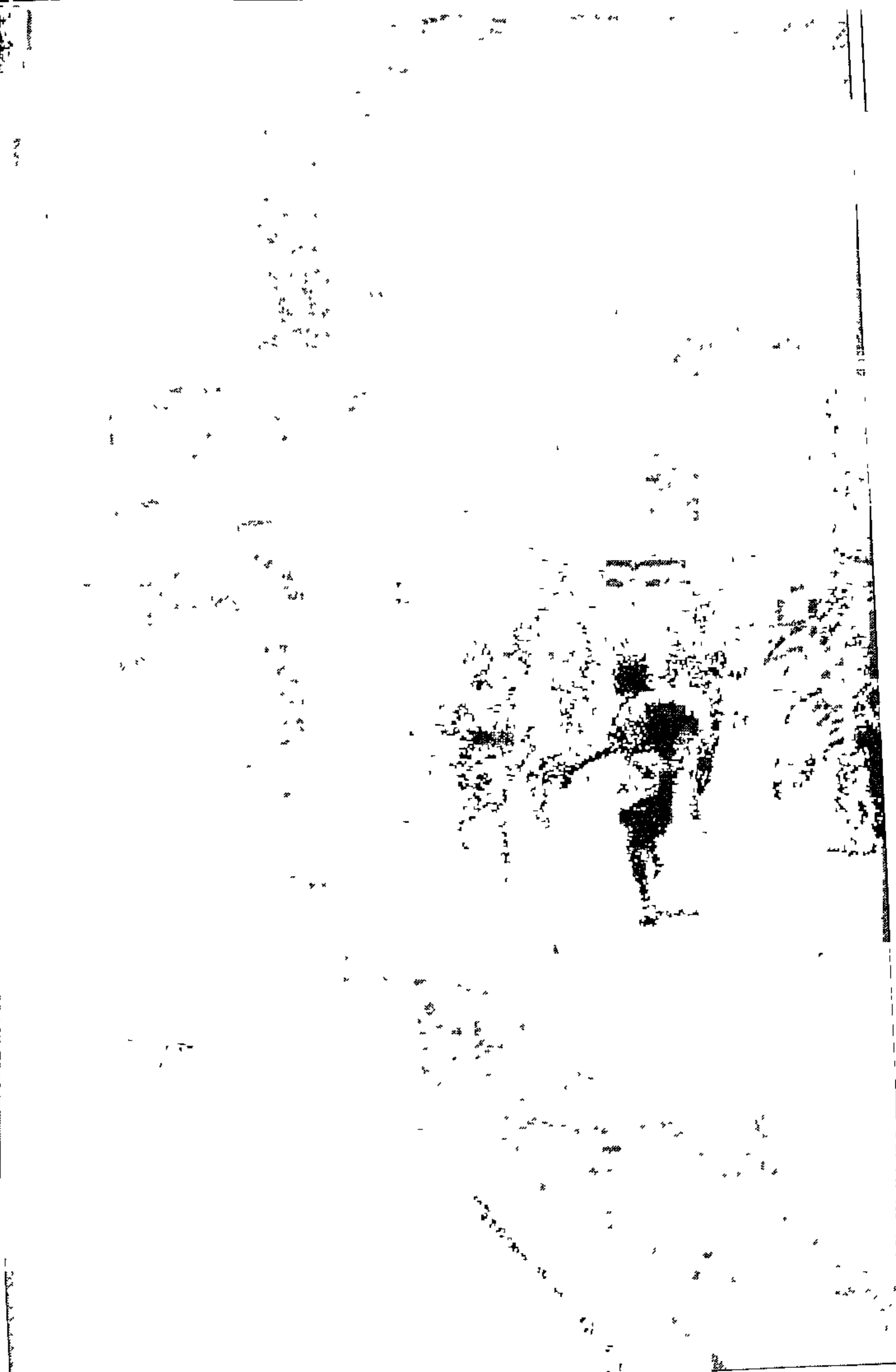
"The whole speech is very sad and dangerous," said a leading opposition figure, the lawyer Gani Fawehinmi. He

So much promised, so little delivered... Nigeria has been described by one of its leading journalists as potentially 'the epicentre of African humanity' but in reality one of 'refurbished feudalism'. The continent now waits to see whether its latest military ruler can translate words into deeds.

heads the Joint Action Committee of Nigeria, made up of 55 democracy groups which wanted a national unity government to decide Nigeria's democratic future, an idea that Abubakar rejected.

In Abuja, the enormous road to a real transition is clear enough. Power now lies in the Asa Rock presidential complex, a huge compound where Abacha placed his signature, for a price, on virtually every

business deal. It was there that Abubakar spoke on Monday. By contrast, at the half-completed House of Representatives the cranes were immobile and there was no sign of activity - New York Times



Nigerian youths lay siege to oil companies

(226) BB 24/7/98
LAGOS — Growing numbers of disturbances are being reported from Nigeria's southern oil-producing region, where the operations of multinationals are under threat by disaffected youths.

In recent weeks Royal Dutch-Shell has been forced to shut flow stations, Texaco has been a victim of hostage-taking, and equipment belonging to Agip has been stolen or destroyed.

Yesterday Shell said flow of 40 000 barrels a day had been shut down at its Nun River flow station after trouble with villagers. Last week the community at Nembe Creek hijacked a helicopter, and Agip is now operating largely from houseboats near its Brass Terminal, where facilities were attacked by youths demanding money after a spill in May.



Peeping: Iraqi women in Baghdad mark the 40th anniversary this month of the coup that overthrew King Faisal II and created a republic. PHOTOGRAPH: KARIM SAHIB

Democracy and other Nigerian jokes

M+G 24-30/7/98

(226)

General Abdulsalam Abubakar has promised democracy, as Nigeria's military rulers have always done. But will he, unlike his predecessors, deliver, asks **Karl Vick** from Lagos

In the Museum of Nigerian Governments, a ramshackle little gallery tucked into the shady corner of a downtown parking lot, there is but a single free-standing exhibit. It is the bullet-riddled limousine that General Murtala Muhammad had the misfortune to be in one day in 1976 when assassins decided Nigeria needed a new head of state.

"If you bend over," the guide said, with a gesture toward the back seat, "you can see the bloodstain on the ceiling." Warning and artefact rolled into one, the death car documents the most dramatic departure from the way power in Africa's most populous country normally changes hands.

Nigeria has had plenty of coups, but they have almost always been bloodless. More in keeping with the mainstream tradition of Nigerian governance are the display cases that line the walls around Muhammad's limo. In a martial rhythm that rings loud and clear, they recount Nigeria's political history: Military regime (January-July 1966), Military regime (July 1966-July 1975), Military regime (July 1975-February 1976).

It's a dispiriting monotony that extends to the present, interrupted at roughly 15-year intervals by eras dubbed "transition period."

This week Nigeria entered another one of those. The transition is to civilian rule, and Nigeria's latest military ruler, General Abdulsalam Abubakar, promised that, at 10 months, it would be the briefest in the Nigerian military's long history of promising to return to the barracks.

Abubakar, who became an apparently reluctant head of state following the sudden death of General Sani Abacha last month, vowed that an elected president will take office on May 29, 1999. The new president is to emerge from political parties formed by citizens, Abubakar

said, not by the military rulers who tailored recent legislative elections in which fewer than 10% of Nigerians bothered to vote.

Many here say they have heard all this before. "Old wine in new bottles," sniffed Gam Fawehinmi, a leading human rights attorney.

Indeed, as the *Vanguard* newspaper noted the morning after Abubakar's speech under the headline "The military's endless transition", Nigerian military officers in the past 22 years have set eight different dates for their exit — and so far have kept one. Abubakar's vow has hardly been greeted with euphoria.

"He says what he likes," said Rami Adisa, who supports six children on the \$50 a month he makes driving a hired car in Lagos. "I'm not really sure if it will come true."

Still, Nigerians want very much to believe that it will. "It's promising, but it's difficult to trust military people," said Census Ekpu, also of Lagos, Nigeria's largest city and commercial capital. "They come along promising all kinds of goodies but end up giving you something else. The situation is very, very dicey."

Ekpu's first name goes a long way toward explaining the risk. In a nation in which many people are named for the day of the week they were born — it's not uncommon to meet a man named Monday — Census happened to be born on a day on which all Nigerians had their hands stamped October 21, 1963.

That national census turned out to be the last reliable tally of Nigeria's population, which now is variously estimated between 100-million and 120-million. No one knows for sure because ethnic tensions are such that the

government has found no advantage in determining exactly how many people live here.

The assumption that a majority reside in Nigeria's north has been used to justify the prolonged rule by a military elite drawn largely from northern, Hausa-speaking ethnic groups.

That dominance, meanwhile, has caused immense resentment among Nigeria's other major tribes — the Ibo of the south-east and the Yoruba of Lagos and the rest of the south-west.

The initially suspicious July 7 death in prison of Chief Moshood Abiola, a Yoruba who apparently won a 1993 presidential election that the military annulled, was a flashpoint for those resentments, some of which flamed into ethnic violence.

With that in mind, Ekpu said he was relieved that Abubakar had brushed aside demands to convene a constitutional convention aimed at decentralising Nigeria's rigid structure of governance.

"That would be a time bomb," he said. "So many sentiments have been bottled up. The country would break into pieces."

Others say it is too late already.

"It's hard to find people who are proud to be called Nigerians, except when the Super Eagles play," said Abdul Oroh, executive director of the Civil Liberties Organisation, referring to the national soccer team.

Nigeria, he said, is "like a field experiment. It has not lived up to the expectations of its own people."

In his address, Abubakar appealed for political parties to form on a national basis, rather than along regional or ethnic lines. And by establishing a new electoral commission, he may disqualify those that do not.

But even as he urged countrymen to think

of themselves first as Nigerians, the head of state also acknowledged that the designation carries a certain amount of baggage.

Nigeria has long been associated with pervasive corruption — in government, in business and in daily life — and Abacha is widely seen as having taken the practice to new heights, bleeding a personal fortune from the nation's two-million-barrel-a-day oil exports. Abubakar conceded that "this administration is concerned about the level of corruption in public life", and he detailed a list of reforms, including open bidding on public contracts.

Frowning, Abubakar also cited the continued "embarrassment" of fraud in a society so fraught with bribery that parents pay extortion to get their children into school.

Adisa said the going rate is \$150 for the principal and \$60 for the teacher. "Does he talk about ending corruption in Nigeria?" Adisa asked. "Can it be possible?"

That question may be the largest facing Abubakar. Diplomats here say the general — a reserved, cautious figure who betrays no visible appetite for public life — appears to be sincere about restoring civilian rule. His motivation, they suggest, is a desire to restore professional pride to Nigeria's armed forces.

"There's been an interest expressed in massive military education programmes from the West," a diplomat said.

But during the 23 years the military has ruled a country that has been independent for only 33, some senior officers have grown accustomed to a great deal of power and money. And although Abubakar has dismissed several senior officers who were widely considered corrupt, Nigerians say their country's history shows how precarious his current position is.

A quick transition to civilian rule, they say, might be the only transition possible. "The thing is, he has to move fast," said Oroh, the civil rights activist. "Because if he doesn't, someone around him is going to say, 'Hmm. This man is weak. I'm going to test him.'" — *The Washington Post*

A quick transition to civilian rule might be the only transition possible. He has to move fast. Because if he doesn't, someone is going to say, Hmm. This man is weak. I'm going to test him!

Nigeria to increase forex trade

(226)
FROM AFP
188/7/98

Lagos — The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) had begun direct trading in foreign currencies at the Interbank Foreign Exchange Market (IFEM), the bank said yesterday.

The CBN said it planned to increase the volume of transactions at the IFEM, the market in which banks lend to one another, and sustain a stable exchange rate regime for the national currency.

The currency, the naira, has suffered constant fluctuations in the past, once falling to an all-time low of 94 to the dollar.

The current rate of 85 to the dollar was determined at the weekly foreign exchange market last Wednesday.

The bank said the development would enable the central bank to buy foreign exchange from commercial and merchant banks and sell on the interbank market.

"This system will enable the CBN to monitor and moderate the exchange rate of the naira to other foreign currencies," the bank said.

Previously, banks dealt in foreign exchange at the weekly autonomous foreign exchange market, where the CBN intervened to determine the exchange rate.

The autonomous foreign exchange market was set up to sell foreign exchange at market-determined rates, but the government regularly intervened to fix the rate.

Nigeria currently practises a dual foreign exchange rate regime: the autonomous rate is market-determined and the official or government rate is fixed at 22 to the dollar.

Critics have called for the abrogation of the official rate and urged the government to allow the market to determine the rate. Some government officials have been accused of buying at the official rate and reselling on the parallel market.

Two weeks ago, new military ruler General Abdulsalam Abubakar promised to merge the two rates.

Angry Nigerians take Texaco workers hostage

Tugboats belonging to the company were also taken in the raid by the protesters from six communities in the Delta region Bayelsa State, the paper said.

Texaco officials were not immediately available to confirm the newspaper's report.

The paper said the communities were angered by the way the oil

company was negotiating over compensation for an oil spill in the region on July 13.

The company was negotiating directly with the local government and community leaders were demanding a direct role in the talks, the paper said.

It said the spill had affected the coastlines of all six communities —

(226) P20 30/1/198
which survive from fishing in the area — and had poisoned local wells and creeks.

A spokesman for the communities, named only as NM Amadein, told the paper that in the past when the company negotiated directly with the local state authorities over compensation, those affected never actually received the compensation

that was paid.

Oil spills are common incidents in communities where oil companies operate, leading to regular disputes between the companies and the communities.

Last week the Nigerian subsidiary of Anglo-Dutch group Shell had to evacuate its staff at the Nembe Creek flow stations in the same state, after community groups seized a community helicopter and its crew — Sapa-AFP.

Call for the renewal of SA-Nigerian relations

Kingsley Kubeyinje DD 30/7/98 (226)

LAGOS — Nigerian former military president, Gen Ibrahim Babangida, has called for the speedy renewal of relations between Nigeria and SA, saying it would be a "fundamental step toward the much needed African renaissance".

Addressing a symposium in Abuja on Monday on African renaissance to mark the 80th birthday of SA President Nelson Mandela, Babangida said Africa looked up to the two countries to provide the "torch of leadership and development".

"It has become very essential for the two nations to take fundamental steps to put their differences behind them in order to provide effective leadership for Africa," he said.

Nigeria's foreign policy should dovetail with that of SA so as to uplift the continent and the black race, he said.

Babangida, who ruled Nigeria between 1985 and 1993, said the two countries had suffered an unnecessary lull in their relations as a result of differences that could be addressed.

He paid glowing tributes to Mandela, saying he radiated the unbroken will of the African people for freedom and development.

He said Mandela would remain a model of African leadership.

Nigeria-SA relations nose-dived after the execution of human rights activist and environmentalist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and eight of his colleagues for the alleged murder of four prominent Nigerians.

Mandela was particularly disappointed because he claimed to have secured the personal assurances of the late head of state, Gen Sam Abacha, that Saro-Wiwa would not be executed.

Nigeria's political crisis is traceable to Babangida, who annulled a presidential election in 1993 which the late Moshood Abiola was set to win.

No tomorrow in Nigeria's eldorado

M+G 31/7 - 6/8/98 (226)

Cohen in Abuja

Look, the human rights here in Nigeria are terrible," Theodore Luttwak says, "but the opportunities are just fantastic where else in the world do you have so much money?"

Good question Abuja, Nigeria's capital-under-construction, is full of the whiff of oil money, and not just at the exclusive golf course said to absorb 25% of the city's water supply just to keep the greens smooth Luttwak — "just call me Teddy" — is out to get his share of the \$10-billion that Nigeria earns each year from oil

His logic is simple The military officers who have ruled Africa's most populous nation for two decades, and siphoned off a good share of its oil revenue, are building vast mansions on their Abuja real estate They want gold-inlaid basins for their bathrooms and jacuzzi baths, sophisticated water purifiers and huge quantities of Italian marble that Luttwak imports

"One man from the national petroleum company just gave me \$100 000, only for the marble in his house," Luttwak said "My company started three years ago, and I'm now the major importer of Italian marble This is Africa's land of opportunity "

Somehow it is a surprise to find the older brother of Edward Luttwak, a former defence policy adviser to the Ronald Reagan administration and a senior fellow at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, hustling imported marble in Abuja, Nigeria But then this place is full of surprises

There is, for example, the National Human Rights Commission "created by presidential decree" It is just off Sani Abacha Way, an avenue named after the late dictator whose flouting of human rights, including the execution of writer Ken Saro-Wiwa, turned Nigeria into an international pariah

Or, not far from Luttwak's premises, the Sani Abacha Foundation, a palatial enterprise whose aim, its prospectus says, is "to immortalise the name, ideas and achievement of General Sani Abacha in relation to his efforts in promoting peace, unity, conflict resolution and the universal brotherhood of mankind"

Abacha plundered Nigeria with single-minded zeal during his nearly five years in power before his abrupt death, apparently from a heart attack, in June His wife, Maryam, was stopped

Maryam Abacha was stopped at the airport on her way to Saudi Arabia with eight suitcases full of cash

trying to leave the country on a flight bound for Saudi Arabia with eight suitcases full of cash Western officials estimate that the late general may have more than \$3-billion stashed away in foreign bank accounts, a sum that Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire took decades to accumulate

All this, for Teddy Luttwak, is no surprise He deals every day with "the Nigerian factor"

— the bribes needed to get anything done "Abacha was tremendously corrupt, more than than any mafia you can imagine," he said "The general took a share in every contract, everybody, everything He was a ruthless warrior But the fact is, you probably do need a soft-spoken dictator here "

Born in Transylvania in 1939, Luttwak has a scar on his head from the years of Nazi oppression A post-war move to Italy brought a fortune in plastics, notably in the production of plastic beach balls, but the good times ended when he was kidnapped and held for ransom in 1972

While his brother Edward made his way in Israel and the United States, Luttwak, an Italian citizen, washed up on Nigeria's shores, where he has been wheeling and dealing for two

decades A day spent at his company Pated — "mirror polished granites and marbles at very, very, very, very competitive prices" — is instructive in the ways of this country

As Luttwak, sweat glistening on his brow, blue eyes gleaming, rushes around his premises looking for a driver to make a huge marble delivery to the northern city of Kano, he walks Ahmad Agberankhe (34), who has a university degree in physics He works for Nigerian Radio for a monthly salary of about \$40

Agberankhe's assignment for the day is to work on a jingle for an advertisement for Pated

"In the 1980s a graduate like me could have a car," Agberankhe lamented as he played a proposed jingle focused on the "very, very, very, very competitive prices" for Luttwak "But now it's difficult to make ends meet You have the knowledge, but there are no openings If you strive, you should be given a chance "

There are millions of downwardly mobile Nigerians like Agberankhe whose chances of making it have evaporated as this potentially rich country has succumbed to sweeping decay, mismanagement and corruption on a scale so vast that it has made people despair of a fair reward for a fair day's work Per capita income is now a quarter of what it was a decade ago

Luttwak once spent several days in prison for refusing to pay a bribe, and has learned his lesson His Nigerian wife Patience (28), formally speaking, owns the company Under Nigerian law, majority ownership of corporations must be in Nigerian hands

Looking on in admiration, and mild dismay, was Marino d'Ermo, a major Italian marble producer, visiting Nigeria to examine the business possibilities "Teddy is fantastic," D'Ermo said, "and the potential in this town is crazy "

Of course, the town in question is supposed to be home to a democratic government by May 1999, under commitments made this month by Nigeria's military rulers If so, the boom in marble-bedecked mansions could evaporate

As he sees it, a northern, Muslim ruling caste controls the country through the military and is unlikely to be budged Disciplined, God-fearing and determined, this caste, for Luttwak, stands in contrast to what he sees as an impossibly unruly south He is unconvinced that change is imminent In any event, he is wasting no time "There is no tomorrow at this company," he shouts at a worker who has made the mistake of saying something will be done tomorrow "Tomorrow does not exist "

Nigeria has huge reserves of marble and granite But, as in the oil industry, mismanagement has led the domestic industry to ruin State-owned factories are idle So Nigeria imports marble and granite, just as it imports petroleum And disaster for the majority translates in to opportunity for a few — *The New York Times*

A Mercedes blocks democracy

Alex Duval Smith in Kaduna

If General Abdulsalam Abubakar fails to lead Nigeria towards civilian rule, it is less likely to be a tank that stands in his way than a gleaming Mercedes belonging to those who would lose out from democracy — the Kaduna mafia

The military leader's pledge, made last month, to have a civilian president installed on May 29 next year has been broadly welcomed. But for democracy to work, Abubakar must first eradicate the country's secretive alternative government, which is based in this neat city of covered sewers and no potholes, created by the British as part of their divide-and-rule strategy

Some claim the mafia no longer exists. But others argue that its corrupt influence is more pervasive than ever "Democracy is less urgent for Nigeria than ending the corruption and monopoly of power of the bourgeoisie. Elections can only work if there are no moneybags involved," said Balarabe Musa, a former governor of Kaduna state

He inhabits one of the humbler homes of

Kaduna, a bungalow surrounded by a low fence. It is a startling contrast to the white marble and gilt which hide behind the high walls of other Kaduna homes

He drives a battered Peugeot 504, hardly the norm in a city where the everyday headaches of some residents involve what to choose from the car port — the Nissan Pathfinder, the Mercedes or the other Mercedes.

Musa's untainted reputation puts him in a minority in a city whose name means "crocodiles" in Hausa

Kaduna, in the Muslim north, is where the kickbacks from the wealth of the world's fifth-largest oil producing country are most visible

While the city's 300 000 populace queues for hours for fuel, former ministers furnish their mansions with wealth diverted by their military connections in the capital, Abuja, two hours away

Every Nigerian knows how it works Businesspeople, and some with political ambitions such as the late Moshood Abiola, give favours to the military leaders for supply contracts Utilities such as transport, hospitals and oil refineries are controlled by friends of the lead-

ership They receive allocations from the state — oil barrels or a grant for medicines — which they pocket

For example, it is believed the late General Sani Abacha sacked one sultan for "abuse of power" though his crime was anything but that The sultan had laundered money for General Ibrahim Babangida's regime, but refused to do the same for Abacha

The claims to democracy will remain hearsay until Nigeria sets up tribunals to deal with those who, during 38 years of independence, have diverted the country's wealth

Many of those are from the north and they retire to Kaduna A former presidential candidate lives here, as does a one-time Abacha minister

Not that anyone will admit being part of the mafia. Musa said: "We have reached such a total state of decay that the system is collapsing on the heads of those who created it There are people, even within the system, who have a conscience The corruption and monopoly of power has reached its limit Everything is so bankrupt that they cannot squeeze it for any more "

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Nigeria's rulers to reveal personal assets

(226)
ABUJA — Nigeria's military rulers has decided to make their personal assets open to public scrutiny, reports the state radio. Radio Nigeria said the decision was taken at a meeting of the highest decision-making body, the provisional ruling council, and military administrators chaired by head of state Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar.

"This administration is very interested in accountability," Lt-Col Anthony Obi, military administrator of Abia state, one of Nigeria's 36 states, said on the radio.

DD 1/10/98
"And so it was decided that those council members and military administrators that have not declared their assets should do so immediately," Obi said.

Abubakar, who came to power following the sudden death of late dictator Sani Abacha in June, has initiated moves to reform the government system renowned for corruption and mismanagement.

He quietly began a probe into the affairs of his predecessor and early in September announced that successes had been recorded with the recovery of huge sums of

money from Abacha's detained former security chief, Ismaila Gwarzo.

Political tension in Africa's most populous country of 104 million people has eased after Abubakar discarded Abacha's scheme to entrench himself in power for a new democracy plan to restore civilian rule next May.

Obi said the meeting also decided to review a law on Nigeria's dormant code of conduct bureau to give the bureau powers to tackle corruption and personal enrichment — Reuter.

Nigeria vows to scrap dual exchange system

Hilary Andersson

LAGOS — Nigeria's recent pledge to scrap the controversial dual exchange rate system will go a long way towards appeasing financial bodies who for years have been demanding an end to the dual exchange rate system

Late last week Nigeria's military leader, Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar, said on national radio and television that the dual exchange rate system would be scrapped by the year end

The system is controversial because it allows certain parts of the government to buy foreign exchange at extremely cheap rates, leading to confusion in the national accounts, and allowing a loophole for government corruption

Nigeria's new military leader also promised to continue the privatisation programme with vigour — a pledge which is also part of his effort to improve Nigeria's image in the world

"We cannot remain toddlers forever in the global community," he said. He said his government had a rare opportunity to bring about long-awaited

reforms. In his speech Abubakar said his government was on a campaign to reintegrate Nigeria into the international community, with a particular view to encouraging foreign donors to agree to grant relief on growing debts of more than \$30bn

He reiterated his promise to hand over power to a democratically elected government next May, and made other commitments to political reform which are likely to be appreciated by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank

From the perspective of ordinary people, Nigeria's economy is in dire straits. Living standards have dropped dramatically in recent years, largely due to poor maintenance of infrastructure, a decline in productivity in the manufacturing sector and massive government corruption

The government said it was time for even more austerity in the short term, as the drop in world oil prices, which account for 90% of the country's foreign exchange earnings, would have a "moderately severe impact" on the domestic budget

(226)

DD 5/10/98

Nigeria starts privatisation bidding (22b)

LAGOS — Nigeria's military government flagged a huge privatisation programme of state enterprises by advertising for expressions of interest from potential bidders yesterday.

Up for sale are state telecommunications and power firms, plus sugar, cement, steel and car factories — almost everything except oil production joint ventures and refineries.

The advertisements from the Bureau of Public Enterprises that give notice of the government's plans are the first concrete step toward fulfilling military ruler Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar's promise that long-awaited privatisation of ailing enterprises would be started soon.

Some sceptics had worried that Abubakar's pledge would come to no more than that of his late predecessor Sani Abacha, who often paid lip service to demands from business and the World Bank to privatise but never acted.

Advertisements said the government would sell 40% of the enterprises to strategic investors who would have an interest in running the business and 20% to Nigerian investors through the stock exchange.

The state will keep the balance.

"Expression of interest must be entered by no later than October 31, 1998," the advertisements said — Reuter.

Nigerian youths take control of 10 oil-producing installations

Hilary Andersson

LAGOS — Nigeria's oil industry appears to be under siege with armed youths in taking control of more than 10 oil-producing installations, stopping one-fifth of the country's oil production

Oil industry spokesmen say Shell-Nigeria is losing 260 000 barrels a day (bpd) in production due to the forced closure of five flow stations in the Nembe area and five more in the western side of the Niger Delta. Italy's ENI says it is losing 130 bpd in production due to similar community tensions in the Niger Delta.

The trouble began when community activists in the western section of the oil-rich Niger Delta told Shell to close five of its oil installations in the area on Sunday. On Monday youths started boarding the flow stations armed with automatic weapons, forcing oper-

ations to stop

At the same time on the eastern side of the Niger Delta, large groups of armed youths took control of five more oil flow stations in a similar manner and the stations have been closed since

A Shell spokesman said yesterday Shell had evacuated all its staff from the stations

Shell says the attacks — some of which it believes are co-ordinated — are part of a campaign by communities in the delta to draw government's attention to their political demands.

"They are doing it to draw attention to the problems they have because they know elections are coming," the spokesman said

Ethnic groups on the western side of the delta are locked in a long-running fight for control of the local government headquarters. Both ethnic groups involved in the dispute, the Ijaws and the

Istekern, want control of the headquarters because local government is one of the few ways they can access scarce resources

Across the delta, the lack of resources is the main political problem, with communities now demanding a share of the oil

In most parts of the delta people live in squalid conditions. Their makeshift huts are surrounded by ankle deep mud, there is often no electricity, or public water supply

Yet from their homes inhabitants of the densely populated delta can often see multimillion-dollar oil installations operating

Since the Ogoni crisis came to a head in 1996, when community leader Ken Saro Wiwa and eight others were executed by the military government, the people of the delta have become more politicised and the security situation is now out of hand

8/10/98 (226)

Decrees will make it easier to invest in Nigeria

(226) 8/10/98
ABUJA — Nigeria's military ruler, Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar, has signed 15 new decrees to make foreign investment easier in the oil industry and other sectors, it was announced yesterday.

The justice ministry said the new decrees affected investments in the oil sector — which accounts for at least 90% of export earnings — as well as mining, power, steel and communications.

It said 11 of the decrees "amend or repeal existing laws which in-

hibit investment in certain sectors of the Nigerian economy" It did not give further details of how the decrees had been amended.

The other decrees amend tax laws, some in connection with the oil and gas industry, but full details were not available.

Since taking office on the death of his predecessor in June, Abubakar has promised to liberalise the economy by privatising state enterprises and removing anti-competition laws

Nigeria's Bureau of Public Enterprises, in charge of privatisation, on Monday flagged a huge divestment programme by calling for tenders from potential bidders.

Among companies listed for sale in line with Abubakar's promised reforms were telecommunications, power, steel, cement and sugar firms and vehicle assembly plants.

But oil-production joint ventures and refineries were not listed. — Reuter

Attacks cut
Nigerian

oil output
CT 8/10/98

LAGOS: A wave of attacks on flow-stations and pipelines in the Niger Delta has slashed oil exports by more than one fifth

Oil firms said the protesters' grievance was with military ruler Abdulsalami Abubakar's government rather than their own activities. However oil firms have regularly been cited as causing pollution.

Optimism has surged through much of Nigeria after Abubakar's promise of elections, but there is not much sign of enthusiasm in the Niger Delta

Instead, mostly ethnic Ijaw communities grumble that whichever government is in power, they do not get their share of revenues from oil exports

In New York Nigerian environmental activist Oronto Douglas urged international oil firms to leave his country and warned that action by protesters was likely to become more militant.

He said land and water pollution linked with oil production had taken a drastic toll on fishing and farming in the region.

Abubakar's promise to reform a body which was supposed to share 13% of revenue among oil producing communities was treated with cynicism by the Delta people — Reuter

Nigeria being pauperised by illegal mining activity

Kingsley Kubeyinje

(226)

LAGOS — Nigeria loses 90% of its potential revenue from its mining subsector to illegal activities.

Retired Brig-Gen Stephen Ikya, the first vice-president of the Solid Minerals Association of Nigeria, described the situation as "sad" and said the problem needed to be addressed urgently. "Nigeria is being pauperised by illegal miners," he said in Nigeria's federal capital, Abuja.

Ikya put the net value of the nation's annual export of solid minerals at about \$2bn.

Of that amount, only about \$100m worth was being exported officially. The balance of \$1.9bn was being smuggled out of the country by illegal miners, he said.

Ikya was angry about the "enormous loss" and said if the subsector was properly harnessed, solid minerals would outpace liquid minerals in foreign exchange.

Nigeria, Africa's largest crude oil producer, earns about 90% of its for-

ign exchange from sales of petroleum products. In its bid to reduce dependence on oil, the Nigerian government created the solid minerals ministry to oversee the proper co-ordination and development of the more than 30 solid minerals found in commercial quantity in the country.

To attract investors, Nigerian officials were sent abroad regularly to market the subsector.

John Hirse, the permanent secretary in the solid minerals ministry, said on Monday that 43 North American companies had "requested additional information on Nigeria's solid minerals to enable them to determine the commodities with the most viable investment potential".

Hirse, who recently returned from a mining conference in the US, said the vast investment opportunities available in the subsector had attracted "serious attention" from the international community.

He said 30 of the companies seeking information were based in the US, while 13 others were from Canada.



Nigeria's military leader, Gen Abdulsalami Abubakar, right, greets Congo President Laurent Kabila at the start of a two-day visit. Kabila has appointed Denis Kalume Numbi as his deputy defence minister as part of moves to deal with a growing rebel threat in the east of the country.

Picture AFP

Civil war looming in oil-rich Niger delta

(226) Star 13/10/98

By **Obi Nwakanma**
Star Foreign Service

Lagos - The Niger Delta, where most of the oil exploration in Nigeria takes place, is set to explode into a dangerous civil war, and all foreign embassies in Nigeria were advised to remove their employees by yesterday as their safety could no longer be guaranteed.

In a press statement issued by the Federated Niger Delta-Izon communities, and a letter sent to the Nigerian military leader, General Abdulsalam Abubakar, they declare they have resolved to go into a full-scale war to address the question of their nationality.

The letter, copies of which were sent to the ambassadors of the United States, the Netherlands and the British High Commission in Lagos, advised all embassies in Nigeria to ask their citizens working in the oil-producing region to leave, as they could no longer guarantee their safety.

On Friday night a group of armed men forcefully gained access to the Forcados terminal and held hostage and injured about 167 staffers of the Shell

Oil Company.

The brewing crisis in Nigeria's Niger delta is likely to forestall the democratisation process. Although the military government has not issued an official statement, sources indicate there have been moves by government to initiate peace or alternatively to declare a state of emergency in the area.

The threat of war in the oil region may also affect the price of crude in the international market, following cutbacks from Shell, which on Thursday declared it could not meet its daily production output. It re-

The threat of war may affect prices

ports a daily loss of about 370 000 barrels of crude daily as a result of the occupation of the flow stations by the armed youths. Nigeria is a major international supplier of crude.

Many of the people living in the oil producing states feel neglected and exploited. The huge wealth which has come from oil

in Nigeria has been salted away into personal accounts outside Nigeria by the generals, mostly from the North of Nigeria, and their civilian cronies.

No one has yet accounted for \$12-billion (about R80-billion) which Nigeria earned in the Gulf War.

A public inquiry declared that the money was misappropriated by the government of General Babangida.

The recent clamour for a sovereign national conference to restructure Nigeria, and for public inquiry into the affairs of government officials in the last 10 years is as a result of the frustration felt by Nigerians, especially those living in the areas where years of oil exploration have affected the ecology and marine life.

"We think that oil is a curse rather than a blessing. We have no benefit from it. We can no longer sleep because of the gas flares.

"Food which used to be cheap is so expensive. While the oil workers can pay for it, we from whose land they take oil live in hunger. Our women have become prostitutes to them," said a local resident.

SA investment in Nigerian communications welcomed

Kingsley Kubevinje

(a2b)

BD 16/10/98

ABUJA — SA is prepared to invest in Nigeria's telecommunications industry, according to George Nene, Pretoria's high commissioner to Nigeria.

Nene told newsmen in Abuja this week, shortly after paying a courtesy call on Nigerian Communications Minister Canice Umenwaliri, that SA would take advantage of the proposed privatisation of Nigeria's telecommunications sector to invest in the West African state.

"We would work to promote and encourage both the public and private sectors in SA to bid for the privatisation stakes in Nigeria," Nene said.

The envoy said it had become imperative for the two African states to

enhance their level of co-operation in the light of the recent visits to SA by Nigerian military leader, Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar.

"Telecommunications in SA is more developed than in most countries in Africa. It is very vibrant and the private sector has lots of shares in the industry," he said.

Nene said SA was prepared to share its experience in the telecommunications field with Nigeria. He said there was much that both countries could gain from such co-operation.

Nene, who visited the minister as part of SA's effort to further strengthen existing cordial relations between Abuja and Pretoria, pledged his country's readiness to co-operate with Nigeria "at anytime and at every level to break

new ground."

Umenwaliri said the envoy's visit complemented Nigeria's foreign policy thrust of sustaining friendship and co-operation with African countries.

He told the SA diplomat "Any type of association by way of telecommunications development will be accepted by us."

During his maiden official visit to SA in August, Abubakar called on private investors to seize the opportunity created by the prevailing economic climate in Nigeria to invest.

Nigeria has recently deregulated its telecommunications sector, a move which has prompted the emergence of private telecommunications firms.

Six of such private operators are providing wireless telephone services

in the country, while more than a dozen others are Internet service providers.

Until now, the government-owned Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (Nitel) had a monopoly of telecommunications services in a nation of 110 million citizens.

For decades, Nitel, a revenue loser, has been criticised for its below-average performance.

Under the privatisation bid, the Nigerian government intends to sell a substantial portion of its shares in Nitel to foreign investors, who will also be required to have a say in its day-to-day management.

Nigeria has also said that it requires about \$6bn to appreciably develop the subsector.

Abacha regime made vast profits importing fuel and selling it to neighbours

Disastrous fuel shortages continue in oil-rich Nigeria

PETER CUNLIFFE-JONES

Lagos — Nigeria's military government has promised to tackle the fuel shortages that led at least 700 people to their deaths in a pipeline inferno at the weekend — but so far with little effect

Sitting over vast oil and gas reserves that have made Nigeria the world's sixth largest oil exporter, Africa's most populous nation has suffered from crippling fuel shortages for more than five years

And the people of Nigeria are the primary victims

Nigeria exports about 2 million barrels of high-grade crude oil a day to Western markets

But it does not have the working capacity to refine that crude into petrol or diesel oil

Of the four Nigerian oil refineries, one at Kaduna in the north and three in the oil producing delta, none have been fully functioning for about five years

One, at Warri, not far from the scene of Saturday's deadly pipeline explosion, is currently working at about 20 percent capacity while the other three are closed and undergoing maintenance

The regime of late military dictator General Sani Abacha awarded a contract to French group Total in 1997 to repair the Kaduna refinery. But the work has taken longer than first expected

Total officials said last month that the way the refinery was constructed — using bits and pieces of machinery taken from different engineering systems, much of it unlabelled and all in bad condition — made the job "enormous"

Other contracts have been awarded for the two plants in



PRIMARY VICTIMS Burnt remains of some of the more than 500 killed Nigerians still lie on the ground yesterday around the flaming pipeline valve which locals opened near Warri to collect free petrol at the weekend. They died when the site was ripped apart by an explosion

PHOTO AFP

Port Harcourt, neither of which is working

To replace the fuel which was once produced at the refineries, Abacha and his associates started importing fuel by the shipload

This move gave the government little incentive to end the fuel crisis because of the fortune it was making on the imports of the fuel

And then there was another factor. The official pump price of fuel in Nigeria is 11 naira (8c) a litre

Sell that same fuel in neighbouring Benin or other countries and you get three times or more the price

So fuel imported into Nigeria is smuggled abroad by black

marketeers to neighbouring countries, which export no oil but have no fuel crisis

As fuel in Nigeria became increasingly scarce, the people and the economy both suffered

To get to work in a country with limited public transport, people in towns around Nigeria need fuel. But queuing for fuel at regularly empty fuel stations can take up to a day at times

The impact of the crisis on the economy is also disastrous

The question of the fuel shortages tops the list of demands presented recently by Nigerian industrialists to the government

General Abdulsalam Abubakar, Nigeria's new military leader who replaced Abacha in

June, promised to immediately tackle the crisis

He ordered an increase in imports, demanded that the repairs to the refineries be speeded up, and ordered a new and cleaner set of contracts with companies importing fuel

This action was applauded. But the fuel crisis persists

In a nationwide broadcast on October 1, Abubakar pleaded for time, saying an "entrenched" crisis would "inevitably" take time to solve, but held out hope something would be done by the end of the year

He said the government was making considerable investments to improve the situation — AFP

Oil ghost back to haunt Nigeria

BY TOYE OLORI
Lagos

Behind the gruesome deaths of 500 people in the oil-rich area of Nigeria's Delta state is a story of dire poverty, desperation, exploitation, in-fighting and accusations and counter accusations as to who is responsible

And while vested interests try to find answers, entire villages are in mourning as the country sits back and counts the cost and takes stock of the ultimate price of being blessed, or cursed, with the black gold.

The death toll in the weekend's burst oil pipe in Jesse, 5km from the oil-producing city of Warri, in Nigeria's Delta area, has so far claimed 500 lives. Many more people who are critically injured, could still die in hospitals in Delta state

According to eyewitnesses more than 1 000 people were involved in the catastrophic illegal drawing of fuel. They are not sure what exactly led to the fire which some claim was caused by a lit cigarette.

The injured and dead are said to be saboteurs or illegal bunkerers, alleged to have used sharp objects on the pipeline carrying refined petroleum from the Warri Refinery to Benin city depot of the National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) for transportation to the northern part of Nigeria.

Delta state military administrator, Commander Walter Feghabo, who visited the area on Sunday, advised communities in the area against vandalising oil facilities, and attributed the burst pipeline to sabotage

The fire which followed the explosion left the presumed bunkerers and people in the vicinity burnt beyond recognition. Their charred remains, jerry cans, plastic containers and basins littering the area bear grim testimony to their dreadful demise. The management of the Warri Refinery, in a desperate effort to stop the continuing blaze, cut fuel supplies to the pipes.

This is not the first time that burst pipes have resulted in the deaths of bunkerers in Nigeria. During fuel shortages last year, 14 people were burnt to death when a burst pipe in the Western state of Ogun attracted villagers who rushed to the scene to scoop up petrol to sell to motorists in need of the scarce commodity

Two months ago, two people fell into a fuel tank and drowned. Another six people died in a similar incident in the eastern town of Isialangwa in Imo state during that period

Last year in Lagos, several people were burnt to death when a tanker carrying

Nigeria counts the cost of being blessed, or cursed, with vast quantities of black gold



Aftermath ... Nigerian health officials carry the decomposing remains from Saturday's massive fuel fire to a nearby mass grave. CLEMENT NTAYE/AP

fuel overturned. Bunkerers including men, women and children who had rushed to the scene with plastic containers to scoop up fuel were burnt in the ensuing blaze.

Apart from the scarcity of fuel which has prevailed for more than eight years, the oil-producing communities have been at loggerheads with oil companies and the government which they accuse of polluting their farms and communities without developing their areas

The accusations from the oil-producing areas of the south are more political since the communities believe the northern oligarchy has exploited the resources of the south to their own advantage leaving the south highly deprived

A similar situation led to the chaos in Ogoniland during the late General Sani Abacha's regime. Soldiers were drafted to the region to put down protests by youths in the area, which later led to the alleged killing of some prominent people and the hanging by the military regime of activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight of his

supporters in November 1995.

Restive youths of Ijaw in south-west Nigeria last week forced the closure of three flow stations belonging to Chevron Nigeria as the spectre of violence spread in the Niger delta. The shutdown of stations is said to have pegged output at 60 000 barrels off a possible 400 000 barrels per day from the Chevron joint venture with the state-run Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation in which Nigeria has 60% participatory interest

Combined output of two other multinationals, Shell Petroleum development and Nigeria Agip has been cut by about 500 000 barrels per day in a new wave of community unrest launched by Ijaws - an ethnic group in the Niger Delta - against the Ijajes, another ethnic group in the Western State of Ondo, over a yet-to-be developed oil rich parcel of land, to which both lay claim

In a statement, Chevron said that irate Ijaw youths sacked two of its flow stations, last week Monday in continuation of a protest over perceived marginalisation of oil-producing communities

However, the protesting youths said the action was not directed at Chevron, but to draw government's attention to the state of things in the Niger delta

A group of Ijaw youths under the aegis of "Egberu Boys of Africa" last Tuesday declared a "ceasefire" on disruption of oil-production activities in the Niger Delta. The group had declared "war" on oil companies operating in the Niger Delta since August 19 this year

Its leader, Alex Preye, said the "cease-fire" was to allow the Nigerian government time to resolve the fate of the Ijaw in the Niger delta. "The truce is on condition that government constructs dual roads linking all oil-producing communities, creates more local government areas in Bayelsa state and relocates the headquarters of the Warri south local government area to Ogbe-Ijoh, its original location from Ogidigben from where it was taken," Preye said

He said the truce was also predicated on conditions that government establishes a federal university and polytechnic in Bayelsa state, pays US\$235 000 (R1,645-million) compensation to the Ijaw and provides pipe-borne water, electricity, cottage hospitals and a telecommunications network in all oil-producing communities

The Ijaw ethnic group spread throughout the Riverine area in the Niger delta cutting across, Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, Ondo and Lagos states in southern Nigeria. It is the fourth largest tribe in Nigeria after the Hausa-Fulani of the north, Yoruba of the south-west and the Igbo of the south-east - Star Foreign Service

Move to Abuja disrupts private sector

Kingsley Kubeyinje

(22b)

pp 28/10/92

LAGOS—Faced with high operational costs, business operators in Nigeria are kicking against the relocation of federal agencies from Lagos to the new federal capital, Abuja.

The Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture, the apex body for the country's organised private sector, has decried the relocation, saying it was escalating the cost of doing business.

Centrally located Abuja is about 1 000km north of Lagos, the nation's commercial nerve centre and former federal capital for more than 80 years.

Kola Dasi, the association's president, urged relocation of some government agencies back to Lagos "for operational efficiency and to reduce current pains of the business community". Dasi said this was needed if Nigerian businesses were to be competitive in their foreign and domestic trade. In particular, the business commu-

nity has expressed frustration at the relocation of the headquarters of key maritime organisations, such as the Nigerian Shipper's Council, the National Maritime Authority and Nigerian Ports Authority to Abuja, in spite of the fact that the new capital is landlocked, as against Lagos which fronts the southern Atlantic Ocean.

The association said the agencies were relocated by the government without "due consideration for the operating cost of the many business units

that regularly patronise them."

The business community said merely seeking a renewal of licence now entails going to Abuja by the C/E of the firm concerned. The association said federal ministries and agencies which frequently dealt with the private sector "should be decentralised forthwith".

"The spirit of cost saving and effectiveness in business should inspire the opening of operational headquarters of all service agencies nationwide," the association said.

AFRICAN BUSINESS



LIGHTING UP West African heads of state, led by Nigeria's General Abdulsalam Abubakar third from right), at the opening of the Ecowas summit in Abuja, Nigeria, on Friday, touch torches to a bonfire of more than a ton of marijuana, cocaine and heroin seized from couriers in the Ecowas region. Abubakar delivered a solemn declaration of 'the affirmation of our resolve to protect the future generations from the dangers of drug abuse' He and the other heads of state then fired up the heady concoction. The bonfire was still smouldering deep into the night as a resumed session of the summit proceeded inside, while giggling junior Ecowas staff and neighbouring youths milled around outside

PHOTO AP

Nigeria to defy Opec by raising oil output

FROM BLOOMBERG

Cape Town — Nigeria, Africa's biggest oil producer, plans to increase its oil production capacity by 50 percent to 3 million barrels a day by 2000, the oil adviser to the Nigerian head of state said here in a speech at the weekend

Aret Adams, whose speech was delivered at the 6th International Energy Conference in Cape Town by Jackson Obaseki, the general manager of crude oil marketing for the Nigerian National Petroleum, said Nigeria would increase its oil reserves to

30 billion barrels from about 25 billion barrels by 2000. It would also sell government stakes in oil refineries in a bid to increase production.

Nigeria depends on oil sales for 95 percent of its export earnings, 85 percent of government revenue and 20 percent of its gross domestic product.

Earlier this year head of state General Abdulsalam Abubakar said the government planned to sell 60 percent of Nigerian National Petroleum, which controls 55 percent of the Nigerian oil industry through joint ventures with internation-

al oil companies, to improve the industry's efficiency.

"Improving the efficiency of the downstream sector is of paramount importance in light of the current problems with our refineries," said Adams.

"These problems are however receiving special attention and have given rise to a radical policy of privatisation of our four domestic refineries."

Nigeria's plans to increase output come at a time when members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and other major oil producers are mulling further

production cuts in an attempt to raise the price of oil, at its lowest in a decade.

The energy conference has brought together the oil ministers of the world's biggest oil-exporting states, such as Saudi Arabia and Venezuela, and the biggest consuming states, such as the US and Japan.

The conference takes place only three weeks before 11-member Opec is due to meet in Vienna for the third time this year.

On the previous two occasions the group agreed to cut oil supplies by a combined 2.6 million barrels a day.

ET (BR) 2/11/98 (226)

Nigerian ethnic militants refuse to vacate oil field facilities

LAGOS — The seizure of several Nigerian oil facilities by protesting ethnic Ijaw youths entered its fourth week yesterday with calls by their leaders to end the occupation unheeded, sources said.

"The youths are still holding most of the facilities although some have been vacated," an official of Royal Dutch/Shell said.

About 250 000 barrels a day of Shell's output and about 110 000 barrels a day of the production of US-based Chevron are still affected by the protests by armed youths demanding amenities and more say in government.

Leaders of the Ijaw, Nigeria's fourth-largest ethnic group which occupies most of the oil producing Niger Delta, have called repeatedly on militants to leave the seized facilities, without effect.

Representatives of the Ijaw and Itsekiri ethnic groups, who have been involved in clashes linked to the protests around the oil town of Warri, have been meeting government officials in the capital, Abuja, to resolve the conflict.

At least 28 people are believed to have died in renewed clashes that erupted between the two groups in the past fortnight over the relocation of a local council headquarters from an Ijaw to an Itsekiri area.

An Ijaw demand for a separate local government for their kin around Warri is at the heart of ongoing protests. — Reuter.

AG 24/11/98

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Is real change afoot in Nigeria?

(226)

Two events in Nigeria recently have raised questions about what is happening in the country — the return of novelist Wole Soyinka and the announcement yesterday by a former military head of state that he is to stand in next year's elections. **Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem** takes a look at the situation

DD 5/11/98

WOLE Soyinka, Africa's first Nobel laureate in literature, finally returned to Nigeria "on a working visit" this month after four years of exile from the sadistic rule of the late Gen Sani Abacha. Even military administrators were falling over themselves to welcome "the professor" back home. A few months ago he was regarded as state enemy number one, wanted for "terrorist activities", "high treason" and accused of "levelling war against the Federal Republic of Nigeria". All dissidents (with a cause) in the world must take heart. Their time will come.

This change has been brought about by Nigeria's over-praised new military ruler, Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar, a man who seems to have no history before June 8 1998 when Abacha died. The new military leader seemingly can do no wrong. His flurry of concessions here and there are warmly received by an over-grateful world. He has secured immunity for the generals as a price for returning to the barracks in May next year.

But for how long? Neither the general nor the professional politicians scampering for power like vultures after a dead body can say.

And this is why, despite the hysteria that surrounded Soyinka's recent visit, some of his supporters in the exile and refugee communities and locally are asking whether it was worth it. The gain for the government is clear. If the best known critic of the military can return home, who else can say they cannot?

Yet thousands of those forced out of the country are not Soyinkas. Take the example of thousands of Ogonis in refugee camps in Benin. And the majority of the military officers and some civilians charged along with Gen Olusegun Obasanjo in the 1995 coup that never was are still serving time.

There is anxiety that Soyinka's visit was a propaganda boon for the regime. As such, it may discourage the exacting of more concessions from an unwilling cabal of generals who are still influential in the ruling clique. Tactically, could it not have been better for Soyinka to delay his return as a bargaining chip?

Whatever the case, the fuss over Soyinka's return demonstrates a number of things.

One, it is a recognition of the positive role of the prodemocracy groups in forcing a change in tactics, if not overall strategy, by the military.

Two, the external campaign made some significant contribution to undermining the confidence of the military.

Three, the pariah status acquired by



Nigeria's former military ruler Gen Olusegun Obasanjo talking to the media at his Otta farm earlier this week to unfold his presidential ambition for the next presidential election to be held in February

Picture AFP

Nigeria was most uncomfortable despite the bluster of the Abacha regime.

In spite of Soyinka's apparent endorsement of the Abubakar transition, he was carefully cautious, warning that "there is work to be done". The centre of that work

is in having a democracy set up that will be meaningful to the people of Nigeria.

There are many questions about the transition. Is a transfer of power by politicians in uniform to their cousins in civilian clothing equal to democracy? What

about the role of wealthy retired generals like the infamous former president, Ibrahim Babangida, who are bankrolling the new political parties?

Do the political parties represent anything more than machines for the acquisition of power by the same elite? What is one to make of a bunch of professional politicians who kept quiet or actively collaborated for most of the 15 years of military misrule, but are now born again democrats?

What is the role of the courageous civil society that bore the brunt of repression and oppression by the military but cannot effectively participate in the politics of the elite?

The main question is about former military head of state Obasanjo. He is being sponsored by a cabal of the military and ethnic and regional powermongers as a "consensus candidate" for the presidency. It seems there is shortage of leadership in a country of more than 100-million people, when someone who left office almost 20 years ago — albeit the only Nigerian military ruler to hand over power voluntarily to elected civilians — plans to return to power.

Two main reasons are given by his supporters: he is the only one the military will accept, and he is the only person the north will accept.

Both reasons are false. Where was this military when he was hounded into jail by Abacha? When did they discover he was the saviour? And when they talk of the north, who and what is this north? Is it the Hausa-Fulani, Idoma, Jukun, Kaje or Kanuri peasant, worker or urban poor whose conditions are as miserable as those of his counterparts in the south?

Will Nigerians be electing a president for the military or the north or the south — or for Nigeria?

During Babangida's whimsical transition in 1992/93, another former military ruler, Gen Yakubu Gowon (1966-1975), stupidly hoped to become a presidential candidate. Obasanjo was one of his critics. He asked Gowon "What did you forget to take from State House?"

It is time for Obasanjo to answer the same question: what did you leave behind in State House in 1979 that you wish to retrieve in 1999?

Now that the general has finally announced his candidature under the platform of the People's Democratic Party, there will be plenty of time for him to answer this question.

□ *Abdul-Raheem is head of the Pan African Movement based in Uganda.*

Corruption probe fails to please all

LAGOS — Anti-corruption groups blasted the Nigerian government investigation into the theft of millions of dollars of public funds and demanded a public, judicial inquiry yesterday to track down the "missing billion."

Mohammed Haruna, spokesman for military ruler Gen. Abdulsalamu Abubakar, announced late on Monday that the authorities had recovered \$750m so far from members of the family of the late dictator Gen. Sani Abacha. The money — returned in cash in dollars and pound sterling in recent weeks — was handed over by four leading members of the Abacha family to investigators acting on orders issued by chief of general staff Rear-Adm Mike Akhigbe.

Despite the staggering sums recovered from the Abacha family, and the return of about 37 government properties illegally appropriated by the Abacha security chief, campaigners condemned the official investigation as secretive and incomplete.

"What we need is a public inquiry, a judicial inquiry, to establish exactly what is missing and who is responsible," said Soji Apampa, executive director of the anti-graft group Integrity. "Even with \$750m, this is just scratching the surface. We really have not even started."

Apampa said something that people tended to forget was the massive corruption of the regime of Gen Ibrahim Babangida from 1985 to 1993. "Why are they not looking into that as well?" Over the period of military rule, from 1985, he said, "we are talking, conservatively, about \$15bn to \$20bn being stolen."

Nigeria has for years been known for corruption but, according to campaigners at the anti-graft group Transparency International, it has seen nothing before like the theft of public funds perpetrated during the Babangida and Abacha regimes. Abacha died in June, but Babangida is still alive and has never been formally investigated for corruption.

According to Haruna, the investigation was continuing and was targeting people outside the narrow circle of the Abacha family and his former security adviser, Ismaila Gwarzo.

"Certainly other senior members of the former government are being investigated as well," he said.

Asked whether prosecutions could follow for any of those found to have stolen public money, Haruna was cautious. "All options are open. The investigation is still going on. At the end of the investigation, government will determine whether to prosecute them or not," he said.

Speaking to reporters in September, Abubakar promised he would seek to run an open regime. Many people in the Abubakar regime were closely associated with the past governments. None of his senior officials has yet publicly declared personal assets as previously promised. — Sapa-AFP

Nigeria seeks to diversify

(226)
Kingsley Kubeyinje

LAGOS — The Commonwealth secretariat has pledged to help Nigeria develop its considerable solid mineral potential in a bid to diversify the largely oil-driven economy.

Nigerian Minister of Solid Minerals Development Patrick Yokowa said the association had volunteered to help the west African state attract foreign entrepreneurs to its growing solid minerals subsector.

Nigeria has a monolithic economy with receipts from crude oil sales annually accounting for more than 90% of its foreign exchange earnings.

The Nigerian government, determined to diversify its revenue base because of the highly unpredictable oil market, has identified huge reserves of about 30 different solid minerals, including gold, which it says are in commercial quantities.

It is believed that gold alone could fetch the nation as much as \$2bn a year.

The minister said that more than 30 foreign mining and investment companies had shown an interest in taking part in the subsector.

Meanwhile, about 100 British firms have signalled their intention to invest in the Nigerian economy.

A source at the British High Commission in Lagos said many of the companies were pulling out of southeast Asia, because of the economic crisis there.

\$750 MILLION IN LOOTED FUNDS RECOVERED

Call for public probe to find 'missing billions'

264,
(226)
CT 11/11/98

LAGOS: Nigeria's new military ruler's promise of clean, accountable government has come under pressure for not allowing a public probe into corruption.

ANTI-CORRUPTION groups yesterday blasted the Nigerian government's probe into the theft of millions of dollars of public funds and demanded a public, judicial inquiry to find the "missing billions"

Mohammed Haruna, spokesperson for military ruler Abdulsalam Abubakar, late on Monday announced that authorities had so far recovered \$750 million from members of the family of the late dictator Sani Abacha

The money — returned in cash in dollars and pound sterling in recent weeks — was handed over by four main members of the Abacha family to investigators working for a probe set up under Chief of General Staff Mike Akhigbe, Haruna said

During his five-year military dictatorship, Abacha diverted hundreds of millions of dollars in government funds to his personal accounts

Others in Abacha's government also siphoned money from the state to amass personal fortunes

Despite the staggering sums recovered from the Abacha family, and the return of some 37 government properties illegally appropriated by Abacha's security chief, protesters yesterday condemned the official probe as being "secretive" and incomplete

"What we need is a public inquiry, a judicial inquiry, to establish exactly what is missing and who is responsible," Soji Apampa, executive director of the anti-graft group Integrity said

"Even with \$750m, this is just scratching the surface

"We really haven't even started. This is just the tip of the iceberg"

What people tend to forget is the massive corruption of the regime of Ibrahim Babangida from 1985 to 1993, Apampa said

"Why are they not looking into that as well? If we are to really tackle this, we need a larger, broader inquiry, judicial, international

"Over the period of military rule, from 1985, we are talking, conservatively, about \$15 to \$20 billion being stolen"

Nigeria has for years been known for corruption but, according to campaigners at the anti-graft group Transparency International, it has seen nothing before like the theft of public funds perpetrated during the Babangida and Abacha regimes.

Abacha died in June, apparently of natural causes, but Babangida is still alive and has never been formally investigated for corruption

"There is currently a culture of impunity and unless not just the

Abacha family, but all the rest are tackled, it will remain," Apampa said

According to Haruna, the investigation is continuing and is targeting people outside the narrow circle of the Abacha family and his former security adviser, Ismaila Gwarzo

"Certainly other senior members of the former government are being investigated as well," he said

Asked whether prosecutions could follow for any of those found to have stolen public money, Haruna was cautious

"All options are open. The investigation is still going on. At the end of the investigation, the government will determine whether to prosecute them or not."

In September, Abubakar promised to run an open regime, saying "This administration is committed to instilling transparency, accountability and probity in public life"

He proposed changes in government tendering practices and the overhaul of an official anti-corruption unit, set up under Babangida but never effective

He refused calls for a public inquiry, saying it would be better dealt with by the government

Many people in the Abubakar regime were closely associated with the past governments

None of his senior officials have yet publicly declared their own assets as previously promised — Sapa-AFP

● See Page 15

TOYE OIORI

Nigeria calls on foreign entrepreneurs to prepare bids for state

Lagos — The Nigerian government has called on foreign entrepreneurs who have shown willingness to invest in eight public companies earmarked for privatisation to undertake their own investigations about the companies and submit their bids

The bids will form the basis of a negotiated 40 percent equity stake reserved for foreign investors under the privatisation programme of the Nigerian gov-

ernment. Some public companies, including the National Electric Power Authority and Nigeria Telecommunications, were recently offered to private investors through local and international newspaper advertisements.

Addressing the opening of the fifth Nigerian Economic Summit in Abuja this week, the country's head of state, General Abdulsalamu Abubakar, said responses from investors after the advertisements had been encouraging. He said replies were received from South Africa, France, Britain, Canada, Belgium and some other European countries.

Abubakar said the government had made good its promise to amend all laws and regulations that conferred monopoly on public enterprises and thus frustrated competition.

"Now, domestic and foreign investors are free to invest in the various sectors. In the area of multiple taxation, the government has also enacted into law an approved list of taxes collectable by all tiers of government."

He identified three major obstacles to rapid socioeconomic development in Nigeria. These were in the energy sector, the financial sector and the laws inhibiting competition and investment.

Abubakar said the irregular supply of petroleum products had affected the performance of industries and agriculture, pointing out that this had also added to the costs of goods and services in the country.

"The administration has taken special steps to tackle these problems. The results will be visible very soon," he stated.

On the financial sector, Abubakar said distress had affected economic growth, but the government succeeded in stemming the tide of banking distress. It had paid insured and uninsured depositors in the collapsed banks. It had also recovered debts owed the failed banks.

"By end-September 1998, 2.8 billion naira (about R710 million)

had been paid to about 46 percent of the insured depositors of the 26 distressed banks closed in January 1998, while uninsured depositors in two of these banks were paid their deposit in full," he said.

In his address of welcome, the chairman of the summit, Pascal Dozie, said "whereas significant success had been achieved on the political front, the country's economic gains were minimal."

He said Nigeria was currently in a deep recession with suppressed demand and a very low level of private investment.

Dozie called on the government to use Nigeria's improved external relations to conduct serious negotiations with the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the Paris club of creditors for the incoming government to conclude debt relief and attract private sector investment — Independent Foreign Service

Nigerian politics is swallowing its tail

The military's grip looms large in the build-up to Nigeria's elections, writes Adewale Maja-Pearce

AD 23/11/98
(2/2b)

ARMY arrangement the title of a song by the late Fela Kuti, the Afro-beat musician who was an intransigent opponent of military rule in Nigeria, even in the days when soldiers were regarded as a saner alternative to corrupt politicians.

As far back as the late 70s, the regime of Gen Olusegun Obasanjo sent 1,000 soldiers to Fela's house because he called them zombies in one of his songs. Obasanjo's action was a clear enough case of the army waging war on the citizens of the country they were otherwise sworn to protect, but the subsequent case Fela brought against them was thrown out of court on the grounds that "government can do no wrong", which can itself stand as the enduring principle of military rule.

Obasanjo, of course, was soon to earn international respect for being the only military head of state — there have been eight since Independence in 1960 — to transfer power to an elected civilian government. He did this in 1979, 13 years after his soldiers first seized power by killing the prime minister and most of the cabinet, but it soon turned out that the military had become addicted to power.

The same officers that Obasanjo left behind allowed the civilians only one term before they struck again on New Year's Eve, 1984. Successive regimes put in place their various transition programmes but have only succeeded so far in handing over to themselves.

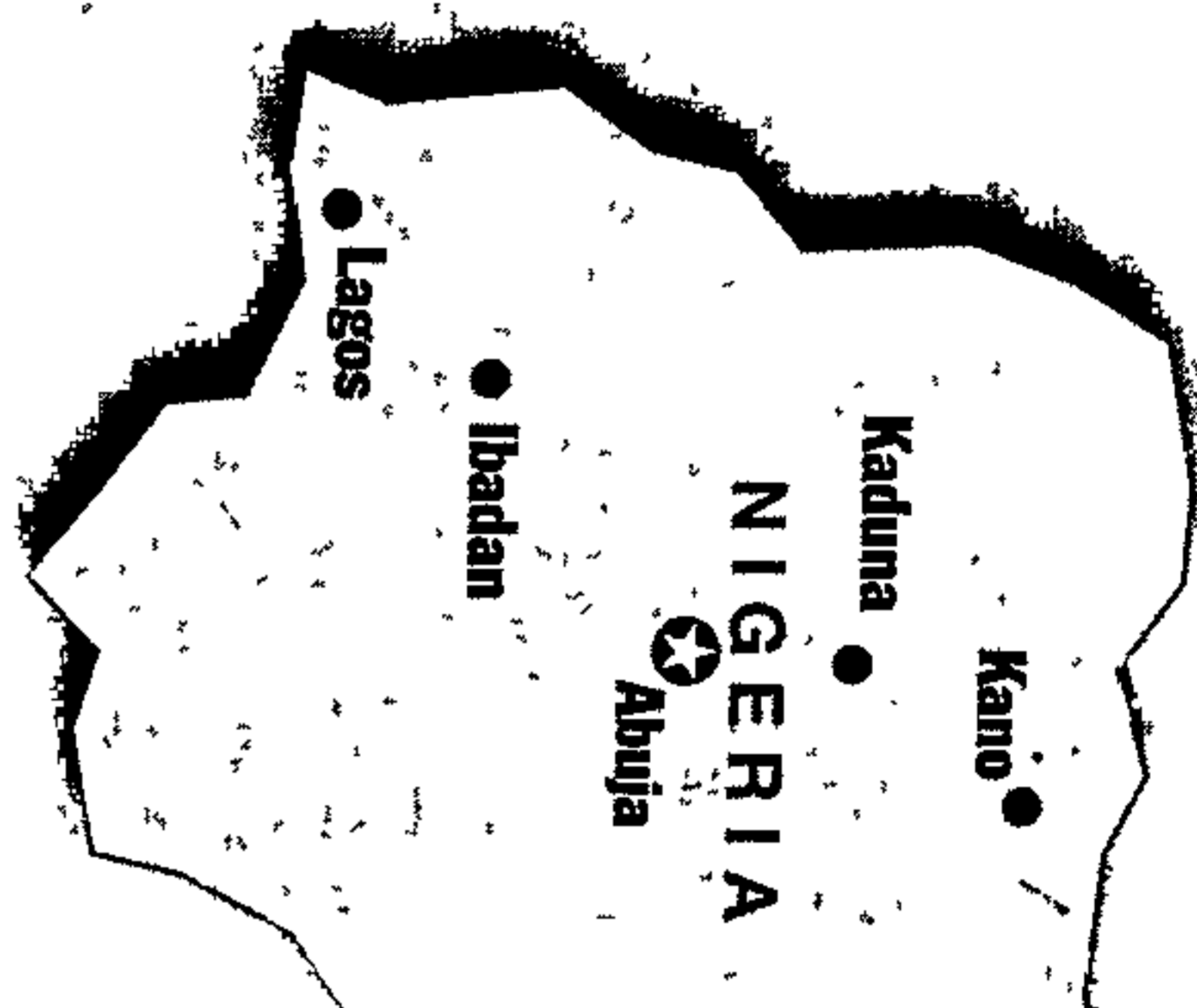
The first such programme was launched in 1987 by Gen Ibrahim Babangida. Six years, a new constitution, two military-funded parties and half-a-billion US dollars later, he annulled the results of the elections in order to pave the way for his deputy, Gen Sani Abacha.

Abacha, who began by stressing his "unflinching commitment to an early-return to civil democratic rule", promptly imprisoned Chieftain

Nigeria's election timetable



ABDULSALAMI ABUBAKAR



Election time-table	
* Local government	December 5 1998
* Governance/State assemblies	January 9 1999
* Senate/House of Representatives	February 20 1999
* Presidential	February 27 1999

KUBEN DAVID SOURCE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT

Moshhood Abiola, the presumed winner of the annulled elections, and proceeded to manipulate his own transition programme in an attempt to hand over to himself.

To this end, he ditched Babangida's yet-to-be promulgated constitution and wrote a whole new one, and then got the five parties he himself created and financed to elect him as their joint sole presidential candidate. All the electorate had to do was tick the box.

Abacha was to have achieved his metamorphosis on October 1, Independence Day, so closely had he come to identify the nation in personal terms. His unexpected death four months earlier, apparently in the company of two Indian prostitutes flown in from the subcontinent by presidential jet, was followed a month later by that of Abiola, ushering in yet another transition programme by Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar, former chief of army staff and number three man in Abacha's provisional ruling council.

Abubakar's programme, the shortest of them all, has already seen the registration of an estimated 40-million voters and the provisional

registration of nine political parties (out of 26) by the Independent National Electoral Commission. The parties were registered on the basis that they had working offices in 24 of the country's 36 states, with their main office in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Full registration will follow their performances in the forthcoming local government elections, scheduled to take place on December 5. Only those parties that secure a minimum of 10% of the vote in at least 24 states, as well as Abuja, will be allowed to go through to contest the state government and state assembly elections on January 9, and the national assembly and presidential elections in February. Final military disengagement will take place on May 29, with the swearing-in of the duly elected president.

As things stand, only two parties are likely to achieve full registration — the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Peoples Party (APP). These are the only parties known to have enough cash to maintain offices nationwide and to do the necessary politicking in a country of more than 100-million people and

about 350 different ethnic groups.

Of the two parties, the PDP is the more credible among the general public because it was founded by a cross-section of experienced politicians known as the Group of 17 (later expanded to 34) who had opposed Abacha's self-succession plans.

The personal risks they ran at the time were considerable. This was a regime which maintained a permanent hit squad, known as the K-Squad, whose sole purpose was to "eliminate" perceived enemies. It was they who were supposed to have assassinated one of Abiola's wives, Kudirat, because she would not keep quiet.

The APP, by contrast, is justly known as Abacha People's Party because of the preponderance of the late general's praise-singers, a number of whom could finance the party out of their own pockets.

The PDP's chances received a further boost earlier this month when Obasanjo announced his decision "to offer to serve our country again".

A few days later, The Guardian newspaper reported that Babangida had made a personal donation of \$50m to help him in his ambition, but

Finally, and most damaging of all, an Obasanjo presidency would mean that he was in effect handing over to himself 20 years after he was supposed to have ushered in a genuine democracy.

One of the many ironies of the army arrangement currently unfolding before us is that Abacha's tenure, which SA President Nelson Mandela once characterised as "illigitimate, barbaric and arrogant" following the judicial murders of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his fellow-Ogoni activists on the eye of the 1995 Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Auckland, should help rather than hinder the self-succession chances of a retired general who once sent the army to "discipline" an "unruly" citizen by burning his house to the ground and driving him off his land — and was acquitted by the courts.

Another irony is that Obasanjo should reap from the failure of others to do the patriotic thing and return to the barracks. But such is the continuing stranglehold of the soldiers — serving and retired — in the nation's political life.

□ Maja-Pearce is a freelance journalist based in London and Lagos

Nigeria given pat on back for 'magic'⁽²²⁶⁾ changes made

50 25/11/98
LAGOS — A senior envoy undertaking a human rights assessment mission to Nigeria for the United Nations (UN) said that the situation was "positive", according to press reports yesterday.

"The changes in your country have been positive and encouraging, and by these changes, the international community has developed new interest in the country," said UN special rapporteur Soh Sorabjee in Abuja to see top Nigerian officials.

The Indian former attorney-general, who arrived on Sunday at the invitation of Gen Abdulsalami Abubakar, said the military ruler should be commended for "his magic transformation of the Nigerian human rights situation".

Sorabjee said his UN team would visit Kaduna and Kano in the north and Port Harcourt, capital of the ethnically volatile southern Rivers State, to "feel the nation's pulse".

He said "We shall assess, listen and see for ourselves as much as possible, the current situation in the country."

Nigeria was widely criticised for human rights violations during the regime of former military ruler Gen Sani Abacha, who died in June this year.

Abubakar, who succeeded Abacha, has won praise from the international community by releasing scores of political prisoners detained by his predecessor. He has promised also to repeal laws which authorise detention without trial.

Sorabjee said also "Since the government is moving towards full democracy, it is very necessary that all laws impeding the quick dispensation of justice and the rights of labour be removed with immediate effect."

Sorabjee said Nigeria should repeal several decrees that in effect strip unions of any real power.

— Sapa-AFP-AP

Almost half Nigeria's insurance firms face ruin

(22)

Kingsley Kubeyinle

LAGOS — Nigeria's insurance industry is in trouble with 60 out of about 134 firms facing imminent collapse.

Joe Irukwu, professor of insurance and top member of the regulatory National Insurance Commission, said the companies were in bad shape as they were short of funds, and many were likely to be deemed undercapitalised in terms of new government requirements. He warned of dire consequences for the oil-

dominated economy if the firms collapsed.

Irukwu said the sector has been beset by the same "distress syndrome" which began plaguing many banks and other financial houses in the mid-90s. These included inadequate controls and insufficient capital reserves.

He predicted that the collapses which destroyed many of Nigeria's 115 commercial and merchant banks would soon hit the insurance subsector and that half of the government-licensed insurance firms could go under. He described the problems facing the in-

dustry as "self-inflicted" and slammed practitioners for engaging in corrupt or unethical practices. Many firms continued to undercut others with lower premiums despite receiving mounting claims and struggling with the high cost of business acquisition, he said.

The military government has given all insurance firms in the country a 50-day ultimatum to recapitalise or forfeit their operating licences. The move, according to industry sources, is to ensure that insurance firms have enough money to meet clients' claims.

by the insurance industry in Nigeria

199 95 11/98

Kingsley Kubeyinje

LAGOS — The Nigerian government has approved investment by 93 foreign firms in various sectors as part of its strategy to liberalise its battered economy.

The chairman of the state-owned Nigerian Investment Promotion Council, Lema Jibrilu, said the firms were given

Nigeria gives licences to foreign firms

licences to operate in engineering and the agro-allied, chemical and petrochemical sectors.

Jibrilu put the estimated net foreign investment from the 93 firms at 554-million naira (about R36.9m) and said the firms were mainly from Europe, Asia and the US.

He claimed the success in attracting foreign investment was the result of numerous incentives the government had put in place in recent years. Jibrilu said 16 of the firms were granted "pioneer status" which would enable them to

enjoy incentives which included a five-year tax holiday. He said the investment promotion council was also planning to strengthen the bond between foreign and domestic investors.

The council head said efforts would also be made to design an investment promotion strategy that would create awareness of potential investments in Nigeria. Nigeria, arguably the engine house of the West African subregion, is just coming out of international isolation which was foisted on it by the excesses of the discredited regime of the late military strongman, Sani Abacha.

BD 26/11/99



Sasol and Chevron wait for Nigeria's green light

PD 27/11/98 (226)

**Kingsley Kubeyinje and
Claire Pickard-Cambridge**

LAGOS — The Nigerian government hopes to give the go-ahead soon for a \$500m gas-to-diesel plant which is being planned by Sasol and US oil prospecting corporation Chevron

Top officials at Chevron (Nigeria) and the petroleum resources ministry in Lagos said the Nigerian government would base its decision on the final feasibility study it was waiting for from Sasol

Sasol and Chevron are proposing a joint venture which would be capable of producing about 20 000 barrels a day of high-quality diesel and naphtha products

The proposed site for the project lies next to Chevron's Escravos gas plant in Delta State. The plant is expected to be the first of its kind in Nigeria and Sasol and Chevron are expected to use complementary technologies to run it

Ministry sources confirmed, however, that Sasol had up until the first quarter of next year to submit the report. Indications had also emerged that the project might be enlarged to cater for increased production, they said

Nigeria is Africa's largest crude oil producer and the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries' (Opec's) sixth biggest producer

A Chevron official in Lagos said the plant would probably cost more than initially planned and warned that the debate revolved around whether it would be de-

sirable to increase production capacity

The plant is expected to incorporate Sasol's slurry phase distillate process to produce diesel fuel from natural gas, a process which energy analysts have described as "environmentally friendly"

It is intended to enhance the nation's revenue base because Nigeria's gas reserves — reputedly among the largest in the world — are being depleted through unregulated flaring

Chevron has said that it sees this partnership with Sasol as a cornerstone for future projects with Sasol, including the possibility of expanding their new technology to other worldwide applications

Although no official figure is available, it is believed Nigeria will earn billions of dollars from the plant. Nigeria earns more than 90% of its foreign exchange from the sale of petroleum products

Sasol said the project would complement another joint venture it had in Qatar with Qatar General Petroleum Corporation and Phillips Petroleum Company of the US, as well as a technology alliance between Sasol and Statoil of Norway

Sasol said in a recent annual report satisfactory progress had been made with the Qatar venture for converting natural gas into liquid fuels and hydrocarbon feed stocks. A scheduled feasibility study was complete and the partners were investigating the project's financing options. Basic engineering on the project was expected start at the year end with commissioning scheduled for 2002

In Nigeria fuel is scarce, but there are oil wells and

KULA, Nigeria: At ease in a speedboat shooting up a narrow mangrove creek in the Niger Delta, Anthony Diepirye, fuel smuggler, could not stop grinning.

The morning after arriving in the oil city of Port Harcourt, he explained, he would rise at seven, go to a petrol station and fill 10 drums. The next day, he would ship the petrol to his hometown — a small fishing village on the Atlantic coast, a stone's throw from oil wells where Shell and Chevron pump tens of thousands of barrels of crude a day — and resell it for a 33% mark-up.

How about the kilometre-long lines at petrol stations in Port Harcourt? Diepirye leaned back and flashed two rows

of teeth. A bribe of 500 naira per drum, or about \$6, would shorten any line, anytime, anywhere in Nigeria, Diepirye said. "They'll take my containers to the front and fill them for me."

When Diepirye, 39, gave up construction work in 1996 for the fuel-smuggling business — an illegal activity, though merely in theory — the career change was a response to broader economic forces sweeping Nigeria. Despite being the world's sixth-biggest oil producer, Nigeria suffers from chronic fuel shortages.

Under the rapacious government of Sani Abacha, who died suddenly last summer after five years in power, Nigeria's four oil refineries, including two in Port Harcourt, were left to fall into disrepair. Abacha forced Nigeria to import

fuel through his agents, pocketing commissions and charging inflated prices at the pump.

Hardest hit was the Niger Delta. In part because much of the delta tried to secede from the rest of Nigeria in the Biafra war of the 1960s, the northern generals who have ruled the country since independence from Britain in 1960 have kept it starkly undeveloped, without roads, bridges, electricity or running water.

So the villages and towns dotting the delta rely on men like Diepirye for fuel, because the delta — the region producing the crude oil that yields \$10 billion a year to Nigeria — suffers from the simple, though astonishing, fact that it has virtually no petrol stations. President Abdulsalamu Abubakar, who has

pledged to hand over to a democratically elected civilian government in May, has replaced Abacha's agents with oil companies like Shell and Mobil. He has said the country's refineries will resume operations.

Western oil industry officials said the four refineries, operating at full capacity, could meet domestic demand. But because two are still closed and the others are working at just 60% of capacity, Nigeria finds itself having to import refined oil from countries like Ivory Coast, which produces plenty of cocoa but no crude.

So even as Nigeria lurches towards presidential elections in February — without the emergence of any figure capable of unifying this country of 108 million people split along ethnic,

religious and regional lines — fuel shortages represent a potentially explosive problem.

Every conversation seems to lead to petrol in Nigeria, from international hotels in Lagos to mud shacks in the Niger Delta. Around noon in Kula, desperation was in the air in a small harbour where children swam among idle boats and boat-taxi drivers and fishermen stood listlessly on the shore.

Asifamabha Amakiri, 33, a boat-taxi skipper, said few residents here could afford trips to Port Harcourt now that he had been forced to raise the one-way fee to roughly \$9. "Because of that, I have no passengers," Amakiri said, his eyes blotted out by dark wraparound sunglasses. Nowadays, petrol costs about \$3,40 for 4,5

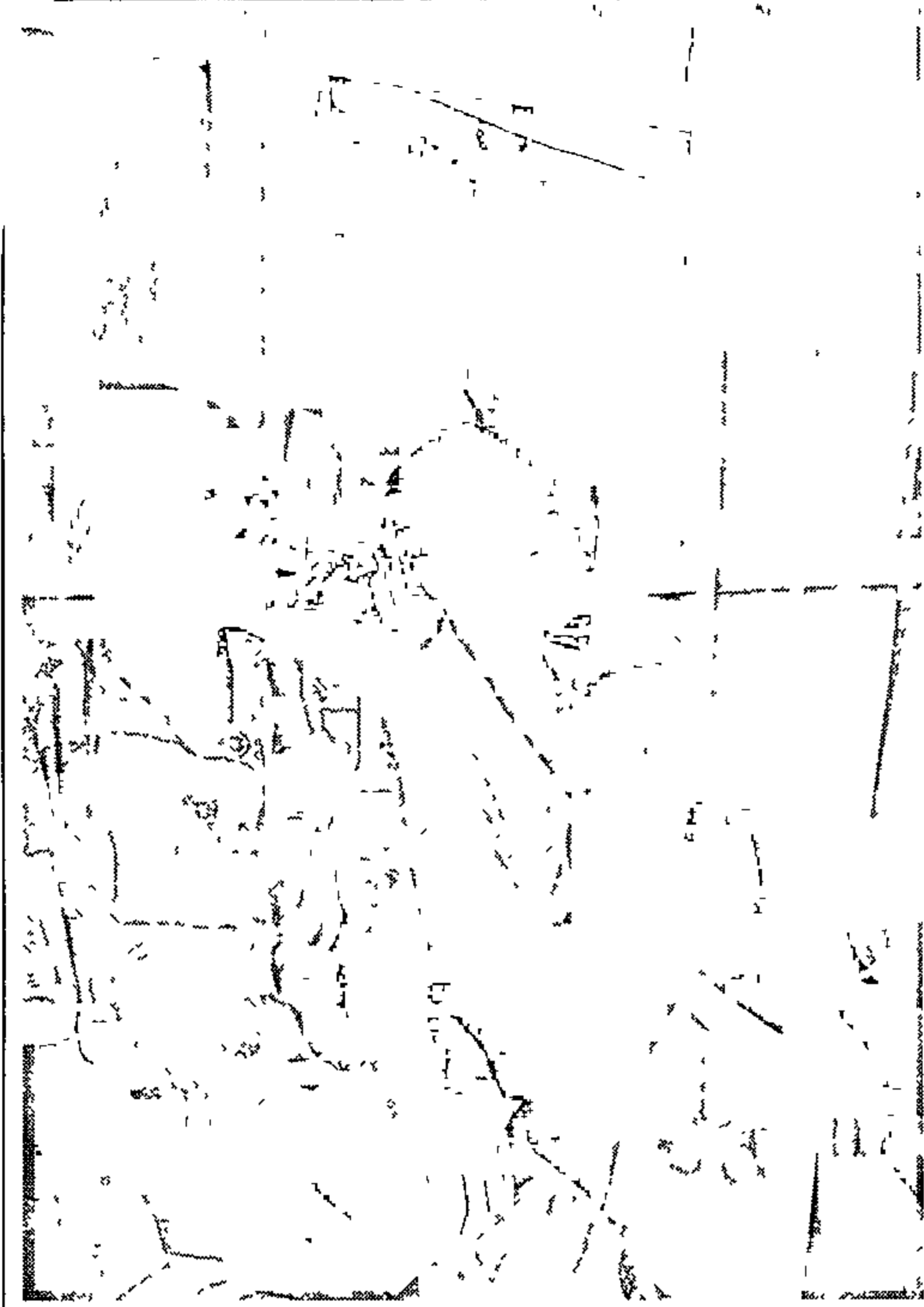
litres in Port Harcourt. After smugglers ship the fuel to Kula, they sell it to dealers for \$4,50. The dealers charge residents about \$6,80 — double the original price.

Politicians say the price has disrupted almost every facet of life in Kula, a poor town of 60,000. Inside the village clinic, nurse Ekime Tekekuro pointed to the empty medicine cabinet. The government, she said, could no longer afford to send her to Port Harcourt to buy drugs.

In the harbour, Prince Apiambo Dobuko, 28, said he could not afford to take his boat fishing. "Crazy!" he said. "Oil is produced here. We should buy oil cheaper, we are the oil-producing community. But we pay the highest price." — *New York Times*

smugglers aplenty

(226) CT 27/11/98



Women receive information on living with AIDS at Kikoshep, a Nairobi centre which houses children orphaned by AIDS Picture AFP

Nigeria to try new approach against spread of AIDS

Kingsley Kubeyinje

(226)

LAGOS — Nigeria's campaign to control the spread of AIDS has failed and HIV infection was spreading fast, Health Minister Debo Adeyemi said recently

Adeyemi said most Nigerians continued to ignore the obvious danger of infections — despite a concerted programme to educate the masses — and had carried on with "business as usual"

Speaking in support of the minister's claim, Sanj Gwarzo, the national co-ordinator of the AIDS control programme, said while only one Nigerian was known to be infected with the disease in 1986, today an average of one Nigerian was infected every minute

Gwarzo said Nigeria was expected to account for roughly 25% of the new infections recorded globally this year

This meant Nigeria would account for 570 000 out of the 2,4-million new cases reported worldwide over the year

Gwarzo said AIDS was a problem affecting virtually every aspect of national life. He said the problem had necessitated the adoption of a new approach, dubbed the "expanded national response to AIDS" programme which would involve every strategy that could possibly help in the campaign against the disease

According to Gwarzo, the approach would include the integration of HIV/AIDS control into all other disease control and health promotion programmes within the health sector

BD 1/12/98

Stanbic to play role in Nigerian privatisation

Kingsley Kubejinge

LAGOS — SA-owned Stanbic Merchant Bank of Nigeria Limited is repositioning itself to play an active role in the planned privatisation of key public enterprises in the country.

Steve Caley, MD of Stanbic, an affiliate of Standard Bank of SA, said the bank was mapping out strategies to play an important role in the proposed privatisation of the electricity monopoly Nepa, the state-owned telecommunications company Nitel, four state-owned oil refineries and a fertiliser plant.

Collectively, the earmarked firms are worth more than \$100bn.

Caley said that with the support of the SA group, Stanbic intended to serve as a custodian bank for foreign investors wishing to acquire shares in privatised enterprises.

Stanbic's plans are in line with its moves in other African countries.

It was announced recently that Uganda's Privatisation Unit had appointed SA's Standard Corporated Merchant Bank to draft arrangements for privatising the National Insurance Corporation. It is to examine options for privatising the insurer before recommending a course of action.

Meanwhile, a top source at the Central Bank of Nigeria said the regulatory institution was issuing licences to a number of foreign banks wanting to enter Nigeria. Their entry is expected to heighten competition in the upper end of the financial market, a development which analysts regard as healthy.

There are about 115 established commercial and merchant banks in the country. While many are healthy, a number are in distress.

Citizens International Bank MD Lawrence Osa-Ahiana said that although foreign entrants would have advantages in terms of capital mobilisation, access to technology and manage-

ment, they would also be disadvantaged by limited knowledge of the terrain.

Standard Trust Bank MD Tony Efunmelu warned that while Nigeria would not be a "bed of roses" for foreign banks, some indigenous banks might be forced to merge to give the foreign banks a run for their money.

To compete effectively in Nigeria, Stanbic would emphasise niche banking by targeting multinationals, large local corporations, the oil and gas sector and high net-worth individuals, Caley said.

The bank would expand its network of branches in the new year, with a branch being opened in the Nigerian capital, Abuja, by February.

Caley said Stanbic had also automated its operations and would introduce direct on-line links with its African affiliates through V-Sat.

The Standard group recently acquired 90% of shares in Stanbic.

(226) PD 4/12/98

First step to Nigerian civilian rule

By OBI NWAKANMA
INDEPENDENT FOREIGN SERVICE

Lagos - Like one of the favourite theme songs that characterised the other attempt at democracy, the result of which was annulled in 1993, it seems that Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, is on the march again.

Multiparty elections will be held across the country today to elect local government officials into the third tier of Nigeria's federal government.

It is a crucial gambit, which will be followed early next year by elections into parliament at the federal and state levels and the main presidential elections. It is expected that this will terminate military rule, with a democratically elected civilian president finally being sworn in on May 29 next year.

So once more the fever of polling and the drama of another political transition to civilian rule gripped Nigerians everywhere this week. People are excited as it becomes clear that the first real steps towards the democracy promised by the current military rulers soon after the death of the dictator Sani Abacha could be real.

The government announced that Nigeria's borders would remain closed from yesterday until tomorrow.

Nigeria's current military rulers have shown a commitment to restoring democracy in spite of initial scepticism by politicians and political activists, who have learnt to take promises made by the powerful military clique with a pinch of salt since the Babangida years.

General Ibrahim Babangida was the military strongman who annulled the results of elections in which a Southerner, the late Moshood Abiola, was elected president. He was succeeded by Abacha, who ruled the country with an iron fist until he died suddenly on June 8 this year, followed a month later by the mysterious death of Abiola himself, the acclaimed winner of the 1993 presidential election, whom Abacha had consigned to detention for demanding a validation of his mandate.

The new military head of state, General

8/11/98
Abdulsalami Abubakar, promised to return the country to democratic rule as soon as he took over - mostly to assuage tensions within Nigeria, which has had a history of military rule in 28 of the 38 years since its independence from Britain, and to placate international interests that have put pressure on Nigeria to reform its political structures.

As a first step, he set up an independent national electoral commission, which then registered political parties, most of which emerged soon after the government lifted a ban on partisan politics.



FRONT-RUNNER: Leading contender for next year's presidential election Olusegun Obasanjo and his wife on their farm

On Monday, Abubakar signed decrees which give legal backing to the transition programme, as well to the conducting of today's local government elections.

He also used the opportunity to warn the army. "Coup-mounting," said Abubakar, "has long ceased to be fashionable. Whatever might have been the merit of military intervention in earlier years, there is now overwhelming evidence that the coup-maker no longer enjoys any acceptance - and his actions, no matter how rationalised, can no longer attract public credibility"

Other fears regard the constitutional platform upon which the next republic might be established, because there is a certain amount of confusion regarding which constitution is currently operable in Nigeria.

Few people have seen the draft constitution Abacha commissioned, but which the current military rulers believe should be the basis for the next civilian government.

Only recently, however, the government

published in various newspapers part of the draft constitution, written in 1995 after a constitutional conference, and encouraged debate on it. Many expert observers have questioned the validity of that draft.

According to one leading critic, Dr Stanley Macebuh, "the draft constitution presented to Nigerians negates the principle of federalism which Nigerians are familiar with, and which current political morality supports, but rather creates too much arbitrary power at the centre. It is a document crafted to perpetuate one man in power."

This, in part, presents one of the knotty questions which the current political leadership faces.

Today's election is important in Nigeria's political transition in a number of respects: in one crucial instance it will be a testing ground for the parties whose futures will depend on their performance today.

The electoral commission specifies that any of the nine parties registered for this election must have about 5% of the votes cast in at least 24 of Nigeria's 36 states, or have its recognition withdrawn. The directive is aimed at making sure that political parties in Nigeria have a national spread. It is unlikely that all the parties will meet this require-

ment.

After the election, there will be a flurry of alliances and realignments, as parties that fail to meet the baseline requirements seek to tie up with bigger parties.

Another important factor that will be determined by the outcome is the standing of the leading contenders for the presidency.

One is Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria's one-time military head of state. Obasanjo conducted the first transition programme and handed over to civilians in 1979. He was jailed by Abacha, who accused him of planning a coup in 1995. He was released after Abacha's death and recently declared his intentions to run for president.

Another is Dr Alex Ekwueme, one-time vice-president of Nigeria in the second republic. Today's results might swing the tide towards either of their directions.

But whatever the outcome, the elections should be a watershed in Nigeria's march towards democratic government.

'IMPRESSIVE' TURNOUT IN NIGERIAN POLL

Three parties survive after local elections

(226)

ET 7/12/98

LAGOS: With only minor incidents marring the poll for local government, Nigerians took a major step toward democracy this weekend.

THREE political parties appeared to have survived local elections in Nigeria at the weekend. After a massive turnout each party gathered enough support to compete in state and national elections next year, according to early results.

The elections, which took place on Saturday, were characterised by the high turnout which military ruler Abdulsalam Abubakar said showed a solid backing for a return to democratic rule next year.

In early results, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) appeared to justify its label as the leading political force across the country.

The PDP is a leaderless coalition of former opponents of the late dictator Sani Abacha comprising 34 traditional chiefs, academics, businessmen and former generals.

Former military ruler Olusegun Obasanjo has donated \$2.5 million to the party and is campaigning for its presidential nomination expected later this month or in January.

The Alliance for Democracy (AD), from the mainly Yoruba south-west region, performed strongly in its own region, but less well elsewhere.

The All Peoples Party (APP) trailed the PDP nationally but appeared to do well enough to remain a force in upcoming polls.

With results for council leaders in from 18 of the 36 states, the PDP led in 12 states, the AD triumphed in five and the APP won in one. These results are considered a good indicator for the thousands of council seats also at stake.

Parties have to win at least five percent of the vote in at least two thirds of Nigeria's 36 states if they are to go on to compete in state



CHANGE: Abdulsalam Abubakar

elections in January and legislative and presidential polls in February.

Those polls will mark the passage of Nigeria from military to civilian rule and be followed by a handover of power on May 29.

Six of the nine parties which took part in the local elections are expected not to be registered for the later polls.

Reviewing the elections, Abubakar told visiting US Commerce Secretary William Daley a high turnout had been recorded and said it showed democracy was "here to stay" in Africa's most populous country, long ruled by military regimes.

Daley said he was visiting Nigeria at a "pivotal" time in the country's history. "The world is watching and the world is waiting."

Electoral agency officials meanwhile declared themselves "very happy" yesterday with the conduct of the landmark elections.

"It was beautiful. The turnout was very impressive. It all went well. We are happy, very happy and satisfied," Alhaji Adamu Bawa Mu'azu, secretary of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), said.

"It shows that Nigerians are anxious to have a credible, democratic government, at all levels, local and national. Nigerians have suffered too long," he said.

Foreign observers and local human rights groups were monitoring the poll.

Across the country, delays were experienced in many places in getting voting materials to polling stations, but this did not dampen the evident enthusiasm of the voters.

Mu'azu said that the problems were "marginal" and would not affect the overall results.

The delays would be ironed out for the state assembly and state governor elections due on January 9, he said. "By the grace of God, these delays will not be repeated."

Abubakar said that the next stage was for the politicians to calmly accept the results which are expected today.

Problems in vote counting were caused by a lack of logistics. Votes in some remote rural communities were being collected by donkeys and camels while polling stations in cities had to deal with a higher-than-expected turnout with a shortage of officials and materials.

Although polling took place peacefully across most of the country, 10 people were reported killed in incidents in the Niger Delta.

At least 19 ballot boxes out of more than 111,000 were stolen and local newspapers said scores of people had been arrested for attempted fraud. — Sapa-AFP, AP, Reuter

Obasanjo's party wins Nigeria's local elections

ABUJA — Leaders of the People's Democratic Party celebrated their victory in Nigeria's weekend local elections yesterday as results confirmed it was the country's leading political force

The party, an alliance of politicians from across Africa's most populous nation, won control of more

than 50% of the councils in the country in an election contested by nine political parties on Saturday

Other parties that did well were the All People's Party and the south-west-based Alliance for Democracy, according to results released yesterday, which cover most councils

The winning party was "delight-

ed" by the results, which put it in the prime position for state, legislative and presidential polls next year, said a worker at the party's Abuja office

The party's presidential hopeful and former military ruler Gen Olusegun Obasanjo was huddled with advisers to assess the results, officials said — Sapa-AFP

(226)

BD 8/12/98



INFLUENCE FROM THE GRAVE:
Anti-Abacha sentiment drove poll

Winning parties keep voters guessing on

LAGOS The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), an alliance of politicians from across Nigeria, swept the board in the weekend local elections, but left voters little the wiser about its planned policies.

Formed in August by a group opposed to late military ruler Sani Abacha, the PDP won around 60% of the vote in the local elections on Saturday.

The party, supported by a host of well-known politicians including presidential candidate and former head of state Olusegun Obasanjo, has kept all but silent on what it will do if it wins legislative elections early next year.

(AAB)

CT 8/12/98

Under electoral rules set out in August, the PDP and the other eight parties registered for the local polls were supposed to announce in advance what their policies would be in a party manifesto made available to the public.

The manifestoes, copies of which were never released by the parties, were to outline policies on the economy, agriculture, industrialisation, health, education and a host of other issues, the electoral agency decided.

For its supporters, the PDP has credibility because of its high-profile members.

One of these is Obasanjo, who in 1979

became the first military man in modern African history voluntarily to hand power to a civilian regime. Obasanjo opposed continued military rule in 1993 and was jailed in 1995 by Abacha.

Another is academic Jerry Gana, a former minister who headed the group of 34 which opposed Abacha's continued rule earlier this year.

Asked this week why the party has yet to publish a manifesto, Gana was evasive.

Diplomats say the PDP, like other parties, is still in the process of deciding what it should do on a host of issues and is not ready to make a detailed policy statement.

For the moment, it has contented itself with publishing posters carrying its slogans — *Power to the People and Justice, Unity and Progress*.

Pat Utomi, head of politics at the Lagos Business School, says the party is in the process of formulating policies dealing with the full range of topics confronting Nigerians, from privatisation to decentralisation.

Abdul Oroh, executive director of the Civil Liberties' Organisation, agreed that the political campaign to date had seen little the real debate of any substantive issues. "The real issues are not being tackled,"

he said. The only issue much discussed is a shift in power from the north to the south.

The PDP is not alone in its reticence or inability to enunciate policies on problems such as the budget, Nigeria's agriculture needs, the independence of the judiciary and the distribution of oil revenues.

The other two main parties, the All Peoples Party, seen by critics as including backers of the previous military regime, and the regionalist Alliance for Democracy, have also failed to detail policies.

"They keep saying they will come out with something, but all are being evasive," one diplomat said — Sapa-AFP

policies

Nigeria joins the fold

LAGOS — Nigeria's centrist People's Democratic Party (PDP) extended gains over eight rivals after local elections at the weekend and emerged as the dominant force in the military's plan to restore civilian rule

Six parties appeared unlikely to win registration from the Independent National Electoral Commission to qualify for parliamentary and presidential ballots before military ruler General Abdulsalam Abubakar steps down next May

The PDP, led by veteran politicians who took a stand against the late dictator Sani Abacha, won about 60 percent of the councils based on results from 635 of the total of 774 local government areas

In second place, with about 25 percent, was the rightist All People's Party (APP) and behind it the southwest-based Alliance for Democracy, positioned to the left of centre

The first three parties qualify automatically, but those that fall behind need to win five percent of the vote in two thirds of the states or lose their right to contest

Turnout was generally high for the elections, which marked the first step on Abubakar's scheme to ease the army's grip on power, held for all but 10 years since independence from Britain in 1960

The vote was peaceful in most of the country of at least 108 million people from more than 250 ethnic groups, but local newspapers said up to 14 people died in several incidents — most in the oil-producing Niger Delta where clashes occur almost daily

"Democracy is here to stay and it will stay," Abubakar told visiting United States commerce secretary William Daley, the most senior US representative to come to Nigeria since the army annulled elections in 1993 that were regarded as free and fair

Nigeria has rapidly opened up to the world since Abacha's sudden death last June as he was poised to stand as the sole candidate in rigged elections

Abubakar (56), a soft-spoken career officer from the Muslim north, has freed dozens of detainees and vowed to leave office

Nigeria's last military ruler to give up power to an elected government, southern Christian General Olusegun Obasanjo (61), is now among the front-runners for next year's presidential elections on the platform of the PDP party

Obasanjo moved quickly to smother feelings among his rivals that the defeat of the PDP in his southwestern home region could be used to discourage him from continuing his drive for the presidency he quit in 1979

"I am encouraged more than ever before by the local government elections to persevere on the path of seeking the mandate of our people

Nigeria's route to genuine democratic rule may soon reach its end with local elections being held in that country, writes **Matthew Tostevin**

(226) Sawyer 8/12/98



Residents display their voters' cards as they line up to cast their ballots on December 5 in Lagos in Nigeria's local elections. PIC AFP

and to serve Nigeria as the next elected president," he said in a statement

● **ABUJA** — Commerce secretary William Daley ended his four-nation African tour in Nigeria on Sunday and said reform in Africa's most populous country offered hope to the continent

"This is our final stop before going home, but it is perhaps the most important," he said

"So many have told me they believe Nigeria can be an economic powerhouse in West Africa. Indeed, it can be a leader and model for all of Africa"

Daley met Abubakar during a brief visit which would have been impossible before the

sudden death in June of Abacha, who found friends in Iraq, Libya and North Korea

Abubakar has begun economic as well as democratic reform, which Daley said must continue if Nigeria is to resume trading links properly with an outside world scared off by political instability and tales of drug-dealing and corruption

"There has to be a real commitment from Nigerian leaders to make this economy attractive for long-term trade and investment," he said

Daley recommended privatisation and the abolition of a dual exchange system which muddies public accounting

On previous stops in South Africa, Kenya and the Ivory Coast, Daley repeatedly advocated the need for legal and commercial transparency as well as political stability if the world's poorest continent is to develop

Nigeria's crude supplies to American refineries make it the biggest exporter to the US in Africa, US firms consume roughly half of Nigeria's more than two million barrels of oil a day

Nigeria is also an important buyer of American wheat

Total annual trade between the two countries is about R40 billion Daley remarked that this was almost R6 billion below where it stood 17 years ago, when the last commerce secretary visited

Relations between the two countries soured under Abacha, who locked up scores of his critics and rejected Western demands for democratic reforms

Washington cut direct air links in 1993, citing safety concerns. It also "decertified" Nigeria for failing to do enough to stop hard drug traders using the country as a staging point

Daley's visit came the day after local elections, which marked the first step of Abubakar's plan to hand power to an elected ruler next May to end 15 years of army rule

"Yesterday's election and especially the large voter turnout was a clear sign that Nigerians want to join the world family of nations, doing business with one another every day of the year," Daley said. This is a pivotal time for Nigeria" — Reuters

Nigerian polls:

alliance wins

majority votes

Powerman 8/12/98

ABUJA — Leaders of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) celebrated their win yesterday in Nigeria's weekend local elections as results confirmed it as the country's leading political force

The PDP, an alliance of politicians from across Africa's most populous country, won control of more than 50 percent of the councils in an election contested by nine political parties on Saturday

Other parties that did well were the All Peoples Party (APP) and the southwest-based Alliance for Democracy (AD), according to results released yesterday, which cover all but a few councils

"We are celebrating," a PDP official in Abuja said

The party was "delighted" by the results which put it in a prime position for state legislative and presidential polls next year, said a worker at the party's Abuja office

Party leaders were meeting and PDP presidential hopeful and former military ruler General Olusegun Obasanjo was huddled with advisers to assess the results, officials said

Obasanjo, who comes from a region of the country won by the AD, is considered the frontrunner for the presidency which will be decided on February 27

Meanwhile, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which organized the poll said it had decided not to announce final results from the elections until after a series of run-offs are held next Saturday in a few councils

INEC spokesman Mr Steve Osemeke said that while most results were now known, the final results, and the formal announcement of

which parties will go on to compete in polls next year, would not be made until next week

The PDP APP and AD are all expected to be allowed to compete in polls next year after emerging with a broad spread of support across the country

The PDP has emerged as the largest party followed by the APP and AD in that order Political observers said it was likely the AD would now seek to merge with another six parties that contested the elections but which are not expected to have done well enough to qualify for the next round of polls

Parties have to win at least five percent of the vote in at least two-thirds of Nigeria's 36 states if they are to go on to compete in state elections in January and legislative and presidential polls in February

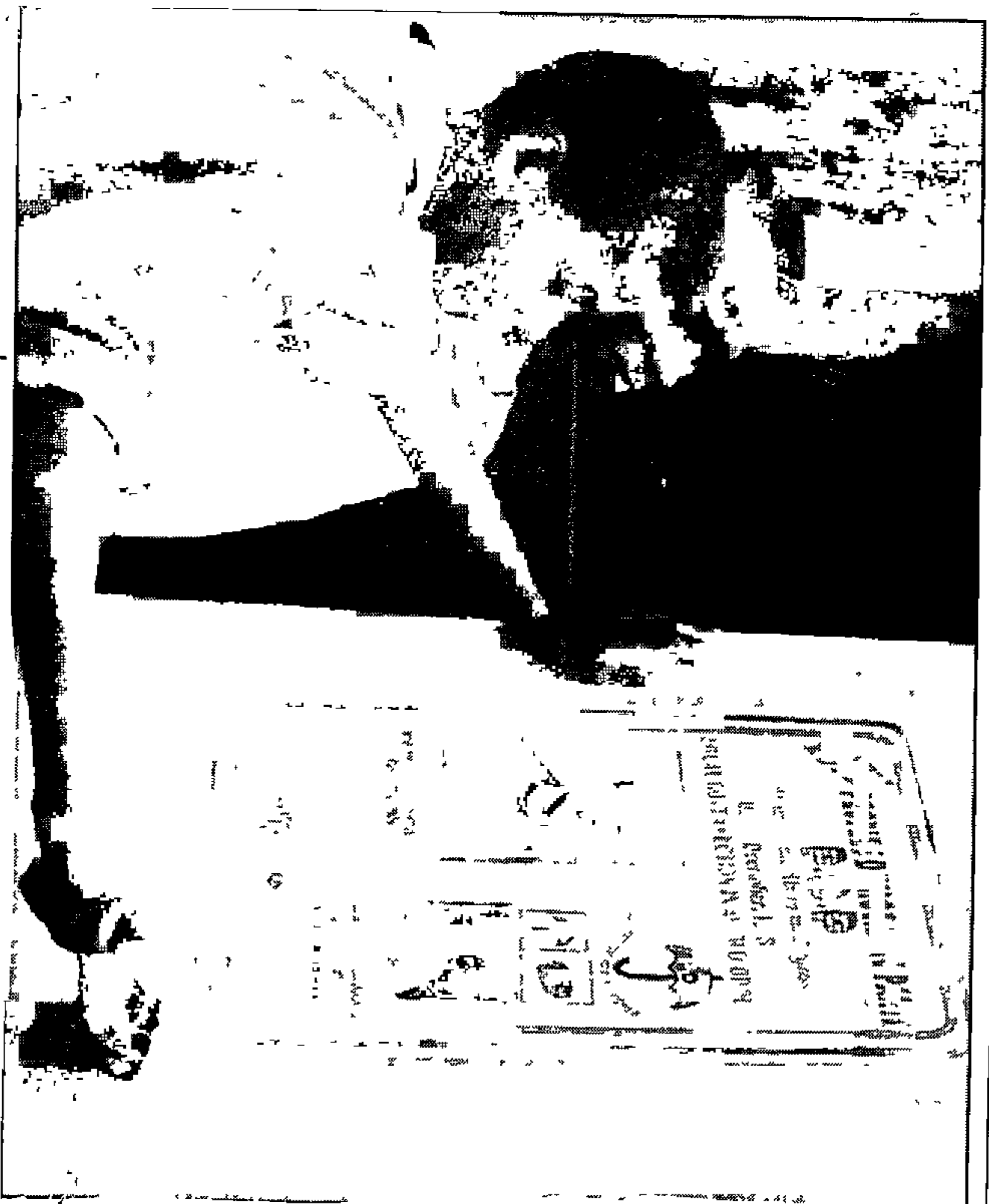
Parties of like minds

An AD spokesman Chief Mike Odunrude, head of the party's Abuja office, said his party was in talks with the other parties "We are in talks and I think that most of them are going to join us to fight APP and PDP," he said

Mr Abdul Okwechume, a spokesman for the Movement for Democracy and Justice (MDJ), confirmed that his party might join the AD, which it sees as aligned politically against those who supported military rule here

"We want to change the political terrain in Nigeria. If we must merge, we must align with parties of like minds, not with parties of all sorts of people

"We have been talking with AD," he said Election monitors meanwhile said the polls were "credible" despite a series of violent incidents and attempts at voter fraud — *Sapa-APP*



SOWETAN

Poll sounds death knell for military rule in Nigeria

AP/12/98 (2ab)



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Eager to vote: Nigerians streamed to the polls in last weekend's local government elections in what observers describe as the first move towards civilian government

JAMES RUPPERT
Libreville, Gabon - The high turnout in last weekend's local elections in Nigeria augurs well for the country's effort to end years of military rule - and is important in boosting efforts throughout West Africa to democratise, African analysts say.

While Nigeria's election commission has not released overall figures on voter turnout, the long lines at polling stations throughout Africa's most populous country underscored people's enthusiasm for the return to civilian government being led by the head of state, General Abdulsalam Abubakar.

Throughout the region - including Gabon, which held its own elections at the weekend - Africans have been closely following the Nigerian evolution.

As results accumulate from Saturday's voting for Nigeria's local government councils, it appears that state and national elections to be held in the next 12 weeks will be contested by three parties - two broad coalitions and a narrower, but powerful, party based mainly in the southwest and representing the aspirations of

the Yorubas, one of Nigeria's three largest ethnic groups.

African advocates of democracy applauded the vote "I congratulate the (Nigerian election commission) for the successful conduct of this first phase of the electoral programme, which bodes well for the elections still to come," said Emeka Anyaoku, a Nigerian who serves as secretary general of the London-based Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth, an association of current and former components of the British empire, took the lead in isolating Nigeria under the former military regime of General Sani Abacha, who died in June.

With about 80% of the local races tallied, the People's Democratic Party, a broad alliance of prominent political leaders from various regions, had won control of about 60% of the Nigerian councils, Reuters reported.

A more conservative broad coalition, the All Peoples' Party, had won about 25%, and the Alliance for Democracy - the Yoruba-dominated group - was in third place.

Six other parties trailed well behind and are unlikely to show

enough of a nationwide base to qualify for the state and national elections under electoral rules.

The showing by the People's Democratic Party will strengthen the perception that its most prominent political figure - former military ruler Olusegun Obasanjo - is the frontrunner in the presidential race.

Mr Obasanjo is a Yoruba, but he gets limited support from members of his own ethnic group, many of whom see him as too lukewarm in the pursuit of Yoruba political interests.

Mr Obasanjo faces a challenge for the party's nomination, notably from a powerful leader of the ethnic Ibo community, Alex Ekwueme.

Mr Ekwueme was vice-president of Nigeria's last civilian government, which ruled from 1979 to 1983.

Nigeria's elections and the emerging political line-up reflect broad demands for decentralisation and redistribution of the power that for years has been concentrated in the hands of ruling military officers.

This issue, in multiple forms, will be the central challenge facing the civilian government scheduled to take power in May - Washington Post

A nation's long road back to democracy

Last weekend millions of Nigerians queued for hours to vote in the first of a series of elections that should result in that troubled country's first elected civilian government after 15 years of often brutal military rule

CAMELS and donkeys carried the ballot boxes to far-flung polling stations in northern Nigeria. In the southern swamps boats were used

It may have been the country's biggest electoral turn-out. Normally bustling streets were deserted as people formed long lines in front of the 110,000 polling stations to vote for new local councils and an end to military rule.

These polls are to be followed by state elections in January, and elections for a new parliament and president in February. On May 29, if all goes well, the new president will take office and civilians will rule, from the lowest level to the top.

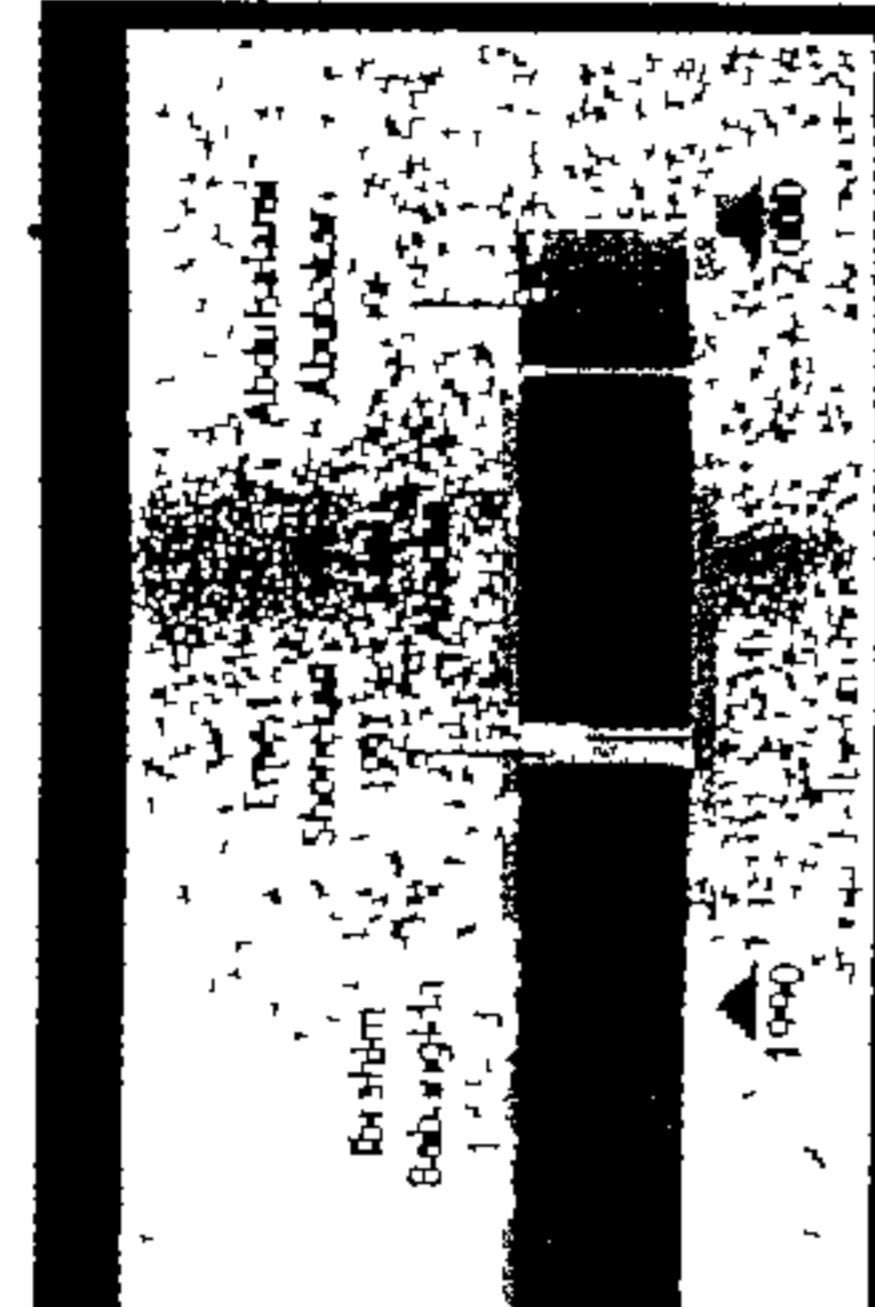
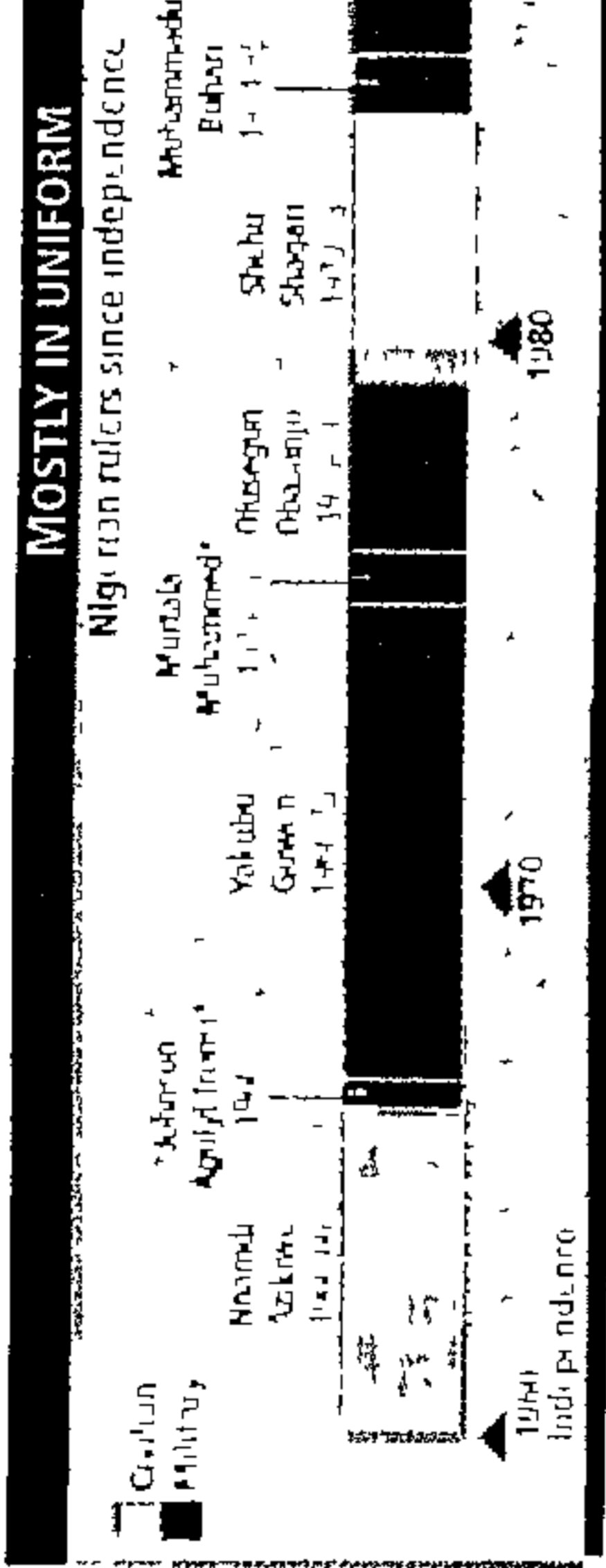
This election has been applauded on almost all sides. General Abdulsalam Abubakar, the head of state who called the polls, said it showed Nigeria

was ready for a return to democracy. The Commonwealth called it well conducted and sceptical human-rights activists called it "credible".

Since independence from Britain in 1960, Nigeria has known only one successful election. In 1979, when Shehu Shagari, a little-known northern politician, defeated veteran southerner Obafemi Awolowo.

The next election, in 1983, was rigged to return a by-then unpopular Shagari to power. Later that year he was overthrown by the army, which has ruled ever since.

The last presidential election, in 1993, appeared to have been won by a southern business tycoon, Moshood Abiola,



tribution of oil revenue. ending the much-criticised dual-exchange rate or speedier privatisation.

Its officials say that the party, formed only in August, is still in the process of formulating policies. Its formulations matter less than the realities that its candidate or any other winner of the presidency will inherit.

Huge problems await the next government: social unrest in the oil-producing areas of the Niger Delta, grinding poverty in the north and a general collapse of long-neglected infrastructure, particularly in telecommunications and electricity.

Tackling these at the best of times would be hard but with oil fetching low prices, the new government will have to sweat to persuade Nigerians that democracy makes sense. It is better off than military rule. — © The Economist

for the Alliance for Democracy, strong only among the Yorubas of the south-west, where the Peoples' Democratic Party hardly won a single council. For the fiercely self-regarding Yorubas, Obasanjo has committed the ultimate sin by rejecting Yoruba nationalism.

Victory in these local elections will probably mean victory for the Peoples' Democratic Party later at state, legislative and presidential levels, as new members flood in seeking to back the winner.

To learn what the Peoples' Democratic Party stands for is not easy. Like its rivals, it made no commitment to ideology or policies on important issues such as devolving power, changing the dis-

title to military rule, the party has eschewed regionalism, building support across the country. It won 60 percent of all councils, compared with 25 percent for the All Peoples' Party and 15 percent

the Peoples' Democratic Party, whose most eminent member is General Olusegun Obasanjo, a former military ruler and now a presidential hopeful. Recently formed by a group of politicians hos-

he appears to believe the general when he says he wants Nigeria under elected rule and the army back in barracks. Just whose elected rule is far from clear. The winner this week has been

istration was complete and voting started. This, and transparent ballot boxes, at least limited multiple voting and fraud. Still more important, the usually sceptical pub-

ing. Knowing that politicians had bought up millions of voter cards, the government ordered that voters had to queue up to register, and, once registered, had to stay in polling stations until reg-

but before all the results were out the soldiers annulled the polls. This time the elections appear to have been properly organised, with nine parties contesting this initial round of vot-

Govt pushes Nigerian banks to recapitalise

Kingsley Kubejinle

LAGOS — Desperate to meet the December 31 deadline given by the government to recapitalise or have their operational licences withdrawn, a number of commercial and merchant banks in Nigeria are negotiating with their high net worth investors to have their huge deposits converted into equities

Sources close to some of the banks disclosed that the financial institutions were seeking to confer ownership status on such investors whose deposits with them — and which run

Many clients are not willing to bet on the health of the organisations

into billions of naira — would be converted to equities

Depositors who agree to such an arrangement would lose their interest on the deposits and would in turn earn dividends and bonuses

According to a source, this move is being undertaken by the banks as a short-cut approach to the problem of inadequate capitalisation, considering the time and money in accessing the capital market for funds

However, banker Peter Adekunle

said it might be much easier for public quoted banks to raise such funds than the privately owned ones

This is because the prevailing market price of quoted banks could be used as a basis to determine how well they are doing

As for the private banks, which in the past had adopted restricted ownership structures, Adekunle said they might find it pretty difficult to convince depositors

However, he said they were ap-

proaching high net worth depositors who had "stainless track records and who would not rock the boat"

Industry watchers say the success of the deposit-to-equity conversion will depend on how many customers are ready to part with their funds for this kind of long-term investment

Many depositors in the class the banks are eyeing are not sure of the health of the banks

Owing to the distress syndrome which ravaged the financial institu-

tions in the early 1990s, the government directed each bank to raise its capital base to 500-million naira, up from the previous 50-million naira for commercial banks and 40-million naira for merchant banks

In spite of some shifts in the deadline for recapitalisation in the past, only 62 of the 115 banks in the country have been able to meet the new requirement

Last January 26 banks had their licences revoked by the central Bank of Nigeria and were subsequently liquidated as terminally distressed and unable to meet depositors' demands

(aak)

BD 14/12/98

Foreign investment in Nigerian shares soars

(226) 20 18/12/98
Kingsley Kubeyinje

LAGOS — Foreign investors staked a total of 4.2-billion naira on the shares of quoted companies in Nigeria this year, a 426% improvement over that invested last year

Nigerian Stock Exchange president, Goodie Ibru, said this year's investment was a significant improvement over the 799-million naira invested by foreigners last year

He said he was optimistic that the upswing in foreign investment would continue in the new year, owing to the openness of the new administration of Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar

Ibru said optimism had been "rekindled" in the business environment, pointing out that this had gone a long way to stem recent declines, especially in the first half of the year. In the first half of this year the late Gen Sani Abacha was still in power

In his four-and-a-half years in power, he ruled the nation of 110-million people with an iron fist and succeeded in setting the country on a collision course with the international community, and particularly with Nigeria's traditional trading allies in the west

A series of sanctions were imposed on Nigeria and it was treated as a pariah state as a result of the obstinacy of its leadership and its poor human rights record

Many foreign firms divested from the

country as a result of the unfavourable operational climate. Ibru said virtually all the stock market's performance indices had improved significantly in the second half of this year. "In turnover terms, a total of 1.9-billion shares worth 12.6-billion naira were traded at the end of November, in contrast to 1.3-billion shares valued at 11-billion naira traded on the exchange over the whole of last year."

Ibru also examined the new issues market and said it had performed well, with approval granted to 32 companies to issue fresh securities worth 15.9-billion naira. Market capitalisation fell below expectations, which he attributed to a fall in share prices

To sustain foreign investment in the market, he called for the creation of an enabling environment for the better performance of quoted companies

Ibru said Nigerian companies were looking forward to a 1999 budget that would be implemented with a high level of transparency and accountability

"The market also expects investment in infrastructure development and maintenance to receive a high priority next year, while steps should be taken to stabilise the interest rate regime, using the market mechanism," he said

According to Ibru, the security of life and property, fuel supply and taxation remained issues of major concern to management of quoted companies, and needed to be addressed in the new year

Demand for democracy in new-look Nigeria

By Guinness Ohazuruike

IT IS gratifying that there is no longer any ambiguity about the meaning of the word 'democracy'. Although it appears to have become a hackneyed term – abused and drained of meaning by dictators eager to pass themselves off as friends of freedom – today there is no longer any room for doubt as to what type of government Nigerians, and Africans, want.

They no longer ask for democracy in its general nature, but demand specifically the pluralist type, based on periodic competition among political parties in a free and fair election.

This is the only type of democratic order that can make Nigeria once again a respected member of the international community.

The journey to this promised land by all indications appears to have started well, when General Abdulsalam Abubakar took over the reins of government on the sudden death of former ruthless dictator General Sani Abacha without overt jostling for power.

Since then Abubakar, a shrewd officer and a gentleman despite his ponderous exterior, has been cautious but consistent in implementing fundamental changes towards a peaceful transition of power from the military.

The military regimes of the past 14 years were a period during which Nigeria descended to the very bottom of fortune's pyramid and now there is cause to be hopeful. The regime has taken laudable steps to create an enabling environment in which genuine democracy can thrive.

The regime opened up the political process with the immediate and unconditional release of political prisoners and the withdrawal of all politically related charges against those concerned, allowing them to return to politics and rehabilitate their stranded careers well ahead of the expected elections in February next year.

Another indication of genuine commitment to democratisation is the announcement that military rule will terminate in Nigeria come May 27 1999. This will be in recognition of the

rights of Nigerian people to freely elect their government in accordance with the standards established by international practice.

To further demonstrate its commitment the regime has created enabling institutions that will support the effective and transparent implementation of the transition to civilian rule, including the constitution of an Independent Electoral Commission under the able chairmanship of the Honourable Justice Ephraim Akpata.

The new electoral commission has already commenced an open and fair process for the compilation of a fresh voter's register and the screening and registration of political parties.

Among conditions conducive to holding free and fair elections, international observers will be allowed to monitor the elections as well as the entire transition programme.

On the basis of the above policies and more, the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) met and recommended that sanctions against Nigeria, which were agreed in April 1996, be lifted. The suspension clamped on Nigeria at the Auckland Summit in 1995, however, are still in force for the time being.

It is believed in the light of the above, that the basis of relationship with the present military regime should shift from diplomatic isolation to constructive engagement, from mild sanctions where they still remain to moral and material support. The Government of South Africa is doing a commendable job in this regard.

Though a series of betrayals in the past have eroded our faith in transition to civilian rule programmes, let's stretch confidence to the limits and suspend disbelief, weighing optimism and doubt in equal balance. Let's hope that honour will strongly urge this man on the right path, resisting the traditional distractions of vanity and selfishness.

Abubakar is currently the acceptable face of the unacceptable, in whom honour could overrule malicious treachery characterising the military class.

This flimsy certainty must fill the innocent with hope and optimism

despite the trauma and pain of the past, and the likely confusion of the present.

Where there is confusion, it must understand in the historical context. The damage of a long spell of military rule on the national psyche has indeed been of great magnitude.

There is not a single national sanctuary that has not been invaded and desecrated. The judiciary, the most sacreligious of the three arms of government, has suffered the worst rape, disgrace and decline of authority under the jackboot of the military.

The present regime must therefore take concrete steps to restore the dignity of the judiciary and the entire law enforcement system. But as matter of necessity and urgency, the regime must repeal all decrees and laws that suspended the constitutional protection of fundamental human rights, especially Decree No 2, of 1988 (as amended) which allows indefinite detention of persons without trial.

With such obnoxious decrees still in place the talk of genuine transition to democracy becomes an unpleasant joke, as political associations and the media cannot operate freely and effectively under such an oppressive and suffocating atmosphere.

The government must guarantee media freedom and ensure the state-controlled media grant political parties equal access and fair coverage so that, despite some odd restrictions that sap the quality of campaigning, parties are free and able to run vigorous races.

Although "there have been countless pretenders to the Nigerian throne but no genuine majesty", there are talks of a brilliant new beginning, of the military taking a new leaf.

Now Nigeria is basking in a new mood of optimism – that the present transition to a civilian rule programme could produce leaders willing and able to rise to the principles of a democratic culture and the great challenges of nation-building. Look back in anger but at long last there is reason to be hopeful.

(The writer Guinness Ohazuruike is based at the Human Rights Institute of South Africa in Sandton.)

(226)

23/12/98

Howeiran

Shaky start to Nigerian civil rule

Source: 29/12/98

(226)

By Sam Olukeya

WITH the successful conduct of the local government elections in Nigeria, attention has now shifted to the more crucial presidential elections scheduled for early next year.

And the outcome of the elections - a victory for the People's Democratic Party (PDP) - could put one of Nigeria's many former military leaders back on the throne, just as the current crop is preparing to back out (by Nigerian standards) relatively gracefully.

The overall result is to a large extent a reflection of the strength of the nine political parties that presented candidates for the elections.

The PDP won more than half the seats - relegating the All People's Party (APP) to a poor second because it includes most of the prominent politicians who opposed the dictatorial regime of the late General Sani Abacha.

Their opposition to the five-year rule of Abacha - which came to an end with his death in June and which was characterised by the worst human rights abuses and corruption in



General Olusegun Obasanjo

This is, in effect, a reflection of the strength of the nine political parties that presented candidates for the elections. In effect, members of the unregistered parties would prefer to join the PDP.

The PDP's apparent winning streak has further increased chances that former military ruler, General Olusegun Obasanjo could return to power as the next civilian president.

Obasanjo, who was military ruler between 1976 and 1979, is a major contender for the presidency on the platform of the PDP.

Obasanjo's main rival in the party is Dr Alex Ekwueme, who was vice-president from 1979 to 1983. But even though the PDP's presidential primaries are yet to be held, Obasanjo remains the front runner because he is the choice of the party's power brokers.

As with most Nigerian politics, it's easy to trace the lineage of Obasanjo's position. The power brokers behind him are political disciples of the late General Shehu Yar'Adua, who, incidentally, was deputy head of state under Obasanjo, then veered into civilian politics after retirement.

Yar'Adua led a formidable political group in a quest to be civilian president, but Abacha threw him in jail in 1995 - only days before Obasanjo himself was arrested - on charges of plotting a coup.

He died in jail in 1997 under questionable circumstances. Obasanjo was released within a week of Abacha's death this summer.

With the return of a credible transition programme following Abacha's death, Obasanjo inherited his former deputy's political machinery.

They feel Obasanjo has what it takes to deliver the presidency, partly because he has the credibility of being the only Nigerian military ruler



Nigerian military ruler General Abdulsalam Abubakar could be succeeded by retired military officer, General Olusegun Obasanjo, in the presidential elections early next year.

PIC MBUZENI ZULU

voluntarily hand over power to civilians.

That is remarkable enough, but also in his favour is the fact that in contrast to the country's current state of decay, Obasanjo left behind a legacy of universal primary education and a strong economy relatively free of black market operations.

Similarly, unlike the

‘The recently concluded local government elections have opened a fresh credibility problem for the regime’

shortage and failed banks which are prevalent in the country today were unknown during the Obasanjo era. As a result, some feel that under an Obasanjo presidency Nigeria's good old days will return.

In addition, Obasanjo scores on national and international name recognition, amidst a crowd of presidential aspirants most of whom are relatively unknown outside their home bases.

A newspaper advert in support of his presidential ambition cites his international exposure as one of several reasons why he should be Nigeria's next civilian president.

He was a member of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group on South Africa, chairman of the African Leadership Forum and a close associate of world leaders such as former American president Jimmy Carter.

His credentials as a retired army officer are in some ways a plus as well. His supporters argue that in a country where the army is always tempted to seize power, a retired military officer like Obasanjo could use his knowledge of the military to keep them out of politics.

But his military past is also the strongest point his opponents are using against him. His critics, especially pro-democracy activists like Lagos lawyer Femi Falana, believe any credible return to civil rule should be a clean break from military rule.

And that is something that an Obasanjo presidency cannot represent.

As a retired military officer, say Falana and many others, he is at best a military man disguised in civilian clothing.

As Richard Akinjide, a former federal attorney general, puts it, should General Olusegun Obasanjo succeed military ruler General Abdulsalam Abubakar it would amount to Caesar succeeding Caesar.

Some critics even say he is the *de facto* candidate representing a military that knows it cannot hold onto power officially. They also claim that some retired generals are backing him financially as a way of indirectly continuing military rule.

This controversy over Obasanjo's attempt to return to office is simply part of the larger problem the involvement of retired military men in Nigerian politics.

Nigeria, perhaps, has a higher number of retired army generals in politics than anywhere else, since the fashion for top military officers in Nigeria is to retire from the Army and start a new life as politicians.

The country's immense oil wealth makes its leadership attractive to the military who have ruled the country

for about 30 years since independence from Britain 38 years ago.

In the wake of the loss of credibility by past military rulers who wanted to perpetuate military rule,

‘The politicians’ opposition to the five-year rule of Abacha boosted their credentials in the eyes of Nigerians’

continuing military involvement is perhaps the key headache the Abdulsalam regime is having in proving its sincerity to return Nigeria to civil rule by May 1999.

The recently concluded local government elections have similarly opened a fresh credibility problem for the regime.

Shortly after the election results were announced the APP threatened to pull out of the transition programme citing gross irregularities in the conduct of the elections.

In a country where defeated politicians would rather scuttle an election than see their opponent take power, such allegations may come as little surprise.

But whether true or not, if such allegations continue in the next round of elections, they will seriously damage the credibility of the transition programme.

Any return to civil rule would have started on a shaky note. In that case, the military - so hungry for power - would be lurking around to seize the opportunity. - *Gemm News*

‘Obasanjo’s critics believe any credible return to civilian rule should be a clean break from military rule’

country's history, boosted their credibility in the eyes of Nigerians.

In contrast, the APP's most prominent representatives paid the price for having endorsed Abacha's bid to ensure his own succession to a civilian presidency. The APP has even earned the derogatory nickname Abacha's People's Party.

Going by past political trends, the voting pattern in the next elections will be influenced by the result of the just concluded local government elections.

The remaining elections are those to elect state governors for the 36 states, members of federal legislative assemblies, and the president - him or herself.

The PDP could enjoy a bandwagon victory in these elections, thanks to the Nigerian political dispensation where the winner takes all.

For many in the country the most convenient way to grab a share of the national cake is to identify the winning party as soon as possible and team up with it.