

## Alan Pays For Printing Of Albums For Over 200,000 NPP Delegates In Fulfilment Of Pledge



**Ken Ofori-Atta, Minister Of Finance**



**P**residential Candidate hopeful for the New Patriotic Party (NPP) Hon Alan John Kwadwo Kyerematen has redeemed his pledge to the national leadership of the party by funding the printing of delegates album for over 200, 000 party voters. The former Trade and Industry Minister pledged

*Cont. on page 5*

# ECONOMIC CRISIS

## Why Govt's Growth And Sustainability Levy Will Collapse Businesses

*By Mike Kofi Afflu*

**G**hana is one of the Countries in the World that has very high tax rates. It is true that every country in the world needs to raise revenue through taxation

and other means of raising revenue for growth and development. However, every effective and efficient tax system calls for stakeholder engagements to discuss and agree on various tax rate in

various sectors of the Economy. Many African Countries have now resorted to the imposition of Levies in addition to the known tax types to raise the needed revenue for

*Cont. on pages 6&7*

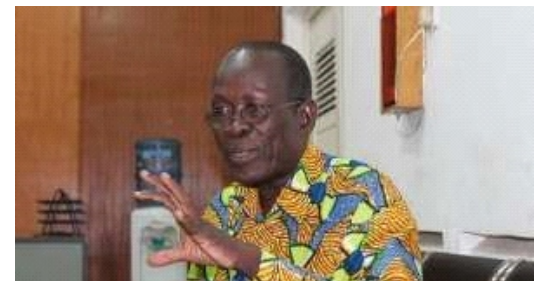


## Emmanuel Drah Vows To Wrestle Upper West Akim Seat From NPP

**...As He Files Nomination To Contest On Ticket Of NDC**

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## Organized Labour Says Akufo-Addo's SONA Did Not Address Plights Of Businesses



**Mr. Abraham Koomson, Secretary General of the Ghana Federation of Labour (GFL)**

**M**r. Abraham Koomson, Secretary General of the Ghana Federation of Labour (GFL) has expressed worry that the 2023 State of the

*Cont. on page 2*

**I Hope Dr. George Akuffo Dampare Leads Ghana One Day As President -- Kokrobite Divisional Chief Nii Ofei III Says As He Eulogises IGP**



**Nii Ofei III, Divisional Chief of Kokrobite**

# The INSIGHT

## — EDITORIAL

### THIS IS WORRYING!

Recent happenings in the state of Palestine regarding the annexation of lands and the committal of atrocities by Israeli forces to say the least is highly repugnant.

Never a day passes without one form of violence or assault being perpetuated by Israel against the people of Palestine.

These acts including seizure of Palestinian lands have been carried out with the highest level of impunity, apparently due to the support provided by America.

Across the West Bank and other occupied territories, there have been protests over plans by Israel to annex more of such lands.

Clearly, this show of impunity and disregard for international law is highly condemnable and unacceptable.

There is no denying the fact that the Israeli authorities' constant destruction of Palestinian homes in Occupied West Bank for new Jewish settlement has been done with the full support of the United States, in spite of persistent international condemnation of such lawless and dastardly acts. Apart from the West Bank's Area C, Gaza has also been turned into a huge killing field as Israel has over the years committed acts of genocide with impunity.

Nobody has been spared the atrocities of the Zionist state which has killed women and children, the old and the young, abled and bodied persons and people with disability.

We firmly believe that Israel is emboldened to carry out these atrocities because of the support it receives from the US and its surrogates around the world.

Undoubtedly, what the world expect to see is the easing of tension and an end to the brutalities in Palestine.

# Organized Labour Says Akufo-Addo's SONA Did Not Address Plights Of Businesses

*from front page*

Nation Address (SONA) did not address the plights of privately operated businesses in Ghana.

Mr. Koomson noted that the expectations of the business community were not met nor reflected in the SONA presented to Parliament by President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, on March 8, 2023.

He said this when reacting to the SONA during an engagement with newsmen in Tema.

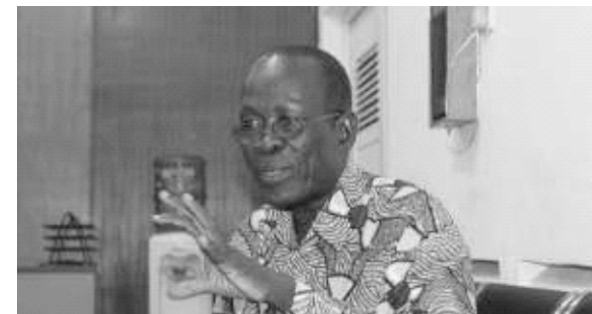
The GFL Secretary-General said it was unfortunate that President Akufo-Addo failed to offer any hope through the address to the business community saying, "the President adopted self-praise of his administration's self-claimed achievements, we need the President to offer hope in these difficult times.

"The best delivery could have been to assure investors and the business community that the government will deal with the many issues confronting them to enable them to maintain their operations, what the government has done we all know it but what we don't know is how they are going to turn the economy around and that is what Ghanaians want to know".

Mr. Koomson urged the government to create a congenial environment to promote businesses as the private sector was the engine of growth for the economy, adding that compiling numerous taxes on businesses without any incentives would end up leading to their collapse.

The GFL Secretary-General said it was unfortunate that even though the government promised to move from over-taxation to the expansion of the manufacturing industry, it has ended up imposing more taxes on businesses with some still in Parliament awaiting approval.

According to him, coupled with over-



Mr. Abraham Koomson, Secretary General of the Ghana Federation of Labour (GFL)

taxations, companies operating in Ghana were not competitive as the goods of their competitors which were being imported into the country were cheaper due to the business policies they have in their country which facilitate cheaper production compared to Ghana's.

Mr. Koomson lamented that "the environment here for business operations is not good, leading to businesses folding up and some employees losing their jobs".

The GFL Secretary-General indicated that all these would lead to an increase in unemployment and its resultant high crime rates as the younger generations look for means to survive be it legally or illegally.

**Source -CDA Consult**

## THE INSIGHT

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# I Hope Dr. George Akuffo Dampare Leads Ghana One Day As President -- Kokrobite Divisional Chief Nii Ofei III Says As He Eulogises IGP

The Gazetted Divisional Chief of Kokrobite under the Ngleshie Alata Traditional Area in the Ga South Municipality of the Greater Accra Region, Nii Ofei III, has said that it is his wish and prayers that the current Inspector General of Police (IGP), Dr. George Akuffo Dampare becomes President of Ghana in the near future.

Nii Ofei III made the statement at a press conference on Monday March 20, 2023 at Kokrobite to commend Dr Dampare for making strenuous efforts to ensure infrastructural and environmental cleanliness of both the Criminal Investigative Department (CID) and police administration headquarters in Accra. The traditional office holder stated that looking at what the current IGP has done, coupled with the ongoing action plans to transform the police administration in Ghana, he became more than convinced that Dr Dampare has the requisite skills to lead Ghana as President in future.

"One day when you go on retirement because of what you have done for mother Ghana, if you come to stand on any political party's flagbearer-ship position we would vote for you to become President of this country," Nii Ofei III said eulogizing the current IGP. "Ladies and gentlemen of the media, I have invited you today to come to me so I that I use this opportunity to commend Dr. George Akuffo Dampare for the transformation he has brought to the police headquarters in terms of how he makes the place neat among other things, I have hoped, I have prayed that one day, Dr. George

Akuffo Dampare should lead Ghana," Nii Ofei III maintained.

Addressing the press to salute the IGP, Nii Ofei III could not hide his joy about the way and manner Dr. Dampare has ensured the general improvement of the environmental hygiene and sanitation in police administration headquarters apart from beefing up security in the country. "Today which is Monday March 20, 2023, when I went to the police CID headquarters in Accra, I was very impressed when I saw that there are total infrastructural and environmental cleanliness in the place. Some of the changes in terms of neatness level of the various offices I entered at the CID headquarters in Accra, particularly the room nine (9), coupled with how the police officers were discharging their administrative duties by way of attending to individual visitors have clearly showed that the current IGP has brought massive changes and transformation to police headquarters," the chief noted.

"I am aware that through the instrumentalities of Dr. Dampare and Director General of Criminal Investigations Department of Ghana Police Service, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCOP), Madam Faustina Agyeiwaa Kodua Andoh-Kwofie, I can say that there are massive improvement in environmental sanitation in police headquarters and that the place now looks like Garden of Eden, the traditional ruler for Kokrobite stated.

According to Nii Ofei III, the current IGP and management of police administration need to be commended because there have been general environmental sanitation

improvement in police headquarters to the extent that "now when you enter into the wash room facility of the police headquarters you can even eat while you are easing yourself."

Mincing no words, Nii Ofei III further commended the IGP, the Greater Accra Regional Police Commander, Commissioner of Police (COP), Dr. Sayibu Pabi Gariba and his deputy DCOP Mr. Henry Kodjo Otoo for helping to reduce the frequent "land-guard", criminal, shooting and killing menaces in Kokrobite and its adjoining communities. He said land-guards had been disturbing the peace of the area for the past years, forcefully taking over lands and threatening the lives of land developers with guns and other dangerous weapons.

However, Nii Ofei III stated that God being so good to them the IGP has been able to work with his team to reduce their activities to the barest minimum and now there are no disturbances by land-guards in Kokrobite. The Traditional ruler for Kokrobite however appealed to the government of President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo through the Ministry of Roads and Highways, Member of Parliament (MP) for the area, Mr. Sylvester Tetteh and Ga South Municipal Chief Executive (MCE), Mr. Joseph Nyarni to fix their deplorable road network from Kokrobite to Old Barrier.

The chief complained about the stress on their economic activities as a result of their bad roads and appealed to the government to repair them.

According to him, roads in the area were full of potholes and this made drivers especially, commercial ones often try to dodge, putting the lives of pedestrians and passengers in danger.



Nii Ofei III noted that movement on the roads were extremely difficult and dangerous especially as the roads become muddy and slippery anytime it rains.

The chief noted that the bad nature of the roads from Kokrobite to old barrier are affecting the smooth health delivery services to residents in the area, adding that it was more disheartening when they had health emergencies.

"We have been making these series of complaints about the deplorable nature of our roads to the state road networks regulatory institutions but they refused to fix the roads for us. I am using this platform to appeal to the government to fix the road before we vote for the 2024 general elections.

The chief reiterated the call on politicians and the Assembly to fulfil numerous promises made to fix the roads in the area for them as it was negatively hampering on their lives and source of livelihood.

Speaking in an interview with journalist when he visited Kokrobite, Stella Yaa Mensah, a fruit seller noted that her wares always got dirty and she had to wash them several times before she could attract buyers because of the dust from the road, and lamented that they inhaled the dust leading to most of them getting respiratory problems, especially flu.

Many artists, hoteliers and fisher folks in the community also told the journalist that the deplorable state of roads in the area had rendered their businesses in distress as

economic activities had slowed down because of the difficulty of their clients to access them. Particularly for the hoteliers, they raised concerns that their hotels were not mostly patronized because of the bad roads, rendering most of the hotels in the community deserted. They, however, indicated that while the use of motorcycles was high in the area, fares were mostly increased particularly for people transporting their wares. "What bother us in this community are the bad roads and because of that drivers double the fares for us as their cars get faulty after a journey on the road. A few people use motorcycles because of the fear in using them," Affoley Adotey, a fish monger also said distressingly. She lamented that she and others most of the time ended up with stale fishes because they could not pay the fares to get their fishes to their customers, and this had made their customers resort to other fish mongers. She noted that cars had to park when it rained heavily till it subsided before they could continue with their journeys. "When it is raining heavily drivers have to park their cars and wait till it subsides, and we struggle to get to the hospital when there are health emergencies," she said, adding that numerous skeletal promises had been made, she called on government to fix





# INTERNATIONAL NEWS REPORT

## Compiled By Peoples Dispatch

### Anti-Fascists In Bulgaria Protest Bid To Relocate Monument To The Soviet Army



*Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) leaders in front of the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia. (Photo: via BSP). Russophobia has spiked across Europe as the Russia-NATO war in Ukraine continues. Right-wing groups and governments in Eastern Europe have intensified their attempts at decommunization*

Leftist and anti-fascist groups in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia have protested the city council's decision to relocate the Monument to the Soviet Army to the Museum of Socialist Art. Right-wing parties hold the majority in the city council. On Thursday, March 9, activists from the Bulgarian Anti-Fascist

Union, along with hundreds of activists from the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and its youth union, formed a human chain to defend the monument. Subsequently, people also demonstrated in front of the offices of the Sofia municipality. On Thursday, the Sofia city council—dominated by the conservative Citizens for

European Development of Bulgaria (GERB)—voted in favor of relocating the monument from the city to the Museum of Socialist Art. Councilors from the BSP opposed this move. Several groups have decided to move to court to challenge the city council's decision, as the monument is protected by several national and international agreements. Meanwhile, caretaker Prime Minister Galab Donev has reportedly said that it is better to further look into the matter only after the general elections scheduled for April 2, once greater consensus is reached. According to reports, pro-European Union (EU) forces, against the backdrop of the ongoing Russia-NATO war in Ukraine, have targeted the statue in order to take advantage of Russophobia in

the upcoming general elections. It may not be easy for them to relocate the monument—as has already happened to many Soviet Red Army monuments across Eastern Europe—as there is strong opposition to the move. Bulgaria has been experiencing a political crisis, marked by back-to-back snap elections, and has [not had a](#) stable government since April 2021. The Russia-NATO war in Ukraine has led to a spike in Russophobia and anti-communism across Europe, especially in eastern Europe. Right-wing groups and governments have also intensified their attempts at [decommunization](#) in the region. In 2019, the European Parliament had passed a controversial [resolution](#) calling for the erasure of all memorials of “totalitarianism” across

Europe, including memorials dedicated to the Red Army. The leader of the Socialists in the Sofia Municipal Council and leader of the Sofia organization of the BSP, Ivan Takov, [told baricada.org](#): “we will not allow the Monument of the Soviet Army to be demolished or in any way desecrated. The decision of the Sofia City Council has no legal value, as the monument is the property of the state.” Boyko Klechkov from BSP [told duma.bg](#): “It is a pity that here we are trapping ourselves by trying, under external dictation, to destroy our monuments and history and thus to break the link with the Russian people. A people who liberated us from Ottoman rule and saved not only Bulgaria but the whole of Europe from the Nazis and fascism during World War II.”

### Earthquake Hits Afghanistan And Pakistan, Kills 13 And Injures Over 100

At least nine people died and 44 were injured in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province on Tuesday, March 21, following an earthquake whose epicenter, according to the US Geological Survey (USGS), was near Jurm town in Afghanistan's Hindu Kush region.

In Afghanistan, four people lost their lives and 50 were injured. The USGS estimated that the shock emanated from a depth of 187 km.

According to [Reuters](#), at least 19 houses were damaged in KP due to the impact of the earthquake. Strong tremors were felt in several districts of north Pakistan, including in Rawalpindi, Islamabad,

Peshawar, and Abbottabad. The earthquake also triggered landslides in the Swat district, leading to several injuries. [The Express Tribune](#) reported that a statement from Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's office had put the National Disaster Management Authority and other government institutions on alert. An emergency was declared in hospitals in the federal capital Islamabad. Afghanistan's Health Ministry also instructed all healthcare facilities to be on standby, said Taliban government spokesperson [Zabiullah Mujahid](#).

Tremors from the quake were felt in several South Asian and



*(Photo: Express) The entire seismically active region has been placed on high alert*

Central Asian countries, including in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, India, and Turkmenistan. The region is seismically

active and prone to frequent earthquakes due to the presence of the Chaman geological fault. In June 2022,

Afghanistan was hit by a massive earthquake that killed around 1,000 people and injured at least 1,500.



# Alan Pays For Printing Of Albums For Over 200,000 NPP Delegates In Fulfilment Of Pledge



from front page

to fund the printing of albums for all the 276 constituencies in Ghana starting from the polling station level upwards, when he called on the national executive last year. With a

total voter pool of 210, 348 delegates, each of the 276 constituencies is mandated to print five copies of the Constituency delegates' album. Hon Kyerematen redeemed

his pledge on Wednesday March 23, 2023, at the Party's National Headquarters in Accra, when high ranking members of his team, led by Dr. Samuel Yaw Annor, handed over the amount to Mr. Justin Kodua Frimpong, General Secretary of the Party.

Accompanying Dr. Annor were Nana Yaw Adutwum and Mr. Kwarteng Asare Bediako, both leading members of Team Alan. The album include the list of delegates of all constituency executives, council of elders, Members of Parliament, polling station executives among others who are classified voters.

The party is expected to announce the timeline for the primaries to elect its flagbearer for the 2024 elections in the coming months, as it prepares for life in the post Akufo-Addo era.

Hon Alan Kyerematen is

expected to be joined by HE Dr Mahamudu Bawumia, Hon Kennedy Ohene Agyapong and other top ranking members of the Party when nominations for the primaries open.



## Adenta MP To Go For Second Term



By Florence Anim

**H**onourable Muhammad Adamu Ramadan, the incumbent Member of Parliament (MP) For the Adenta Constituency has filed his nomination to contest the upcoming parliamentary primaries in May on the ticket of his party the NDC calling on the delegates to retain him as the parliamentary candidate. Addressing the media after filing, the MP said he has done a lot in the last two years and that the people should give him another

chance. Adenta has a one term narrative but he is very certain that with the show of love from the constituents, victory is going to be his for a second term. MP's, he mentioned, do not construct roads but are punished when roads' are not being done due to which he committed his car loan to buy a grader for his constituency to give his people a temporary relief as they wait for Government to come and fix the roads in the constituency. As a matter of interest he added that, being the fifth MP and the first MP in Adenta whose party is not in Government, the people can attest to the numerous work he has done for the constituency. He expressed confidence in becoming victorious in the May 13<sup>th</sup> primaries

considering the work he has done. Some delegates gave their full assurance to the MP adding that he would be the preferred candidate to help the NDC win and retain the seat in the constituency due to the work he has done amongst which was buying a grader for them. They opined that, "Ramadan is exceptional and hence the delegates have come out bold to declare their support and campaign for him and ensure that he wins. "Nobody can come from outside to tell constituents that, Ramadan hasn't done anything "Ramadan has done it, he will do it and will continue to do it" they added. The constituency executives called on all the nominees to ensure a peaceful campaign to avoid divisions in the party.

## Emmanuel Drah Vows To Wrestle Upper West Akim Seat From NPP

...As He Files Nomination To Contest On Ticket Of NDC

**T**he parliamentary candidate Hopeful for the National Democratic Congress (NDC) in Upper West Akim constituency of the Eastern Region Mr Emmanuel Drah, has filed to contest on the ticket of the NDC in the upcoming 2024 parliamentary candidate position with the aim of unseating the member of parliament for the area who doubles as the Deputy Minister for Transport, Hon Fredrick Adom Obeng. Speaking to the media at Upper West Akim NDC party office in the Upper West Akim District after filing at the party office, Mr Emmanuel Drah said that his main aim for contesting to be elected as NDC parliamentary candidate is to rescue the good people of Upper West Akim constituency from being deprived of development by Nana Akufo-Addo's government of which their own MP is a minister, but can't boast of any better thing over the past two years of being in government.

He added that many youths within the Upper West Akim constituency have completed tertiary education through teacher training, nursing and university but finding it very difficult to get employed especially those who are perceived to be NDC party followers which shouldn't be so but due to bad leadership. In summary, Mr Emmanuel Drah appealed to all Upper West Akim constituency NDC party delegates to entrust him with the mandate by voting to elect him to lead the party to unseat the current MP in 2024 election and to also bring development into the Upper West Akim constituency.



# Sri Lanka Secures Its 17th IMF Bailout Package Of USD 3 Billion

Sri Lanka has secured a bailout package of around US\$ 3 billion from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The loan under IMF's Extended Fund Facility (EFF) had been in the pipeline after Sri Lanka defaulted on its foreign debt of US\$ 51 billion last April.

This rescue package would be Sri Lanka's 17th program with the IMF and comes six months after a staff-level agreement was signed. China, India, and Japan—Sri Lanka's top three bilateral creditors—reportedly played a critical role in ensuring that the bailout gets approval. The immediate disbursement of US\$ 333 million as part of the loan has been approved by the IMF.

The office of Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe said that up to US\$ 7 billion in loans can be secured—from the IMF as well as other international financial

institutions—with the approval of the package.

Progressive sections in the country have long warned that the IMF package will not solve the structural issues of Sri Lanka's economy. Writing in March, analysts Devaka Gunawardena, Niyanthini Kadirgamar, and Ahilan Kadirgamar [predicted that](#) “Compared to its sixteen previous IMF agreements, Sri Lanka's adjustment this time around will cause an entirely different scale of suffering. The country is now at the whims of its creditors, while the elites counsel “bitter medicine” to people who are nearing an economic cliff. After a contraction during 2022 on the order of a tenth of its GDP, the economy could shrink on a similar scale in 2023. This so-called solution will have dire political consequences.”

Meanwhile, the IMF-mandated austerity measures implemented

by the government, including increased taxes and privatization of state assets, have invoked a series of protests across the country. On March 15, thousands of workers from the public sector—including railways, hospitals, schools, and ports—observed a complete nationwide shutdown on a strike call announced by more than 40 trade unions.

The Wickremesinghe-led government has been justifying the increase in taxes as necessary to strengthen state revenues, and the increase in electricity charges as a means to cover the cost of production. On March 8, Wickremesinghe told the parliament that such difficult reforms were needed to remain on course for the IMF bailout.

For over a year, Sri Lanka has been reeling under a severe economic crisis, marked by



(Photo: TRT World). The bailout package for Sri Lanka under IMF's Extended Fund Facility (EFF) has been in the pipeline after the country defaulted on its foreign debt last April

severe shortages of essentials like food, fuel, and medicines. The working class has faced the maximum brunt of high inflation. However, workers are continuing their resistance against the government and demanding the rollback of the [new income tax policy](#) and an end to [state persecution](#).

As [@RW\\_UNP](#) & his cohorts; arrogant public officials celebrate

receipt of debt, let us grieve burdens imposed on next generation & the lack of accountability & justice for millions of Lankans who were robbed by the [@GotabayaR](#) [@PresRajapaksa](#) [@basilrajapaksa](#) regime! [@whatsnextlk](#) [pic.twitter.com/Hjnox6Yeni](#) — Soraya M. Deen, MA (@SooMD) [March 21, 2023](#)

# Lula Government Relaunches 'More Doctors' Program To Recruit 15,000 Professionals In Marginalized Areas



By *Brasil de Fato*

The Brazilian government officially launched on Monday, March 20, the new version of the More Doctors (*Mais Médicos*, in Portuguese) program—now formally called More Doctors for Brazil (*Mais Médicos para o Brasil*, in Portuguese). There will be 15,000 new vacancies for professionals with a degree in Medicine, which should raise the number of people hired by the program to 28,000 by the end of this year.

The hiring will take place mainly to meet the demand in places of extreme poverty. According to government estimates, more than 96 million people will have

guaranteed primary care, especially in Basic Health Units, fundamental for disease prevention and damage reduction in serious situations.

Launched in 2013 by [then President Dilma Rousseff](#) (Workers' Party), the program was a historic step in improving healthcare in the country, with the expansion of the availability of professionals. However, the initiative was always criticized by the opposition (which would later come to power under Jair Bolsonaro). In recent years, the program had been weakened. Bolsonaro even launched a supposed alternative, called “Doctors for Brazil”, but [it never became a reality](#).

“Bolsonaro's government proposal did not guarantee doctors where they were most needed. By the end of 2022, more than 4,000 family health teams were without doctors, the worst scenario in ten years,” said [Health Minister Nisia Trindade](#), at the program launch event on Monday.

## Brazilians as priority

Brazilian doctors will have preference in the selection, but foreign professionals with a Health Ministry Registration will also be able to participate. Financial incentives will be offered to professionals who stay at least 36 months in the same municipality. Doctors who have taken the Student Financing Fund (FIES, in the Portuguese acronym) will also receive a bonus for participating in the program.

“The More Doctors came back to answer the challenge of guaranteeing the presence of doctors to Brazilian people in the most distant municipalities and on the outskirts of the big cities, who suffer from lack of access to such an important attention,” said Nisia Trindade.

The federal government will invest R712 million (approximately US\$ 136 million) this year. The first public notice of the new program

will be issued in March, with 5,000 vacancies, while another 10,000 vacancies will be opened in the coming months, in what is a partnership between the federal government and the municipalities. The goal is to reduce the hiring costs for the municipalities.

“Only the mayor who wants to hire knows how much a doctor is needed in a town. Sometimes he pays a higher salary than feasible, and still can't find a doctor who is willing to go to a small town in the countryside, which has no shopping mall, no movie theater,” said [President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva](#).

The president also said that his first 100 days in office was being used to survey the reality of the country, to discover “the degree of destruction to which the country has been subjected in these last six years.” This Monday, day of the relaunch of More Doctors, is the 80th day of his term.

“In these 80 days of government, we have done nothing but try to recover

everything that had been done well, that had worked, and was destroyed. It is as if you came back from vacation and there was an earthquake in your house,” the President said.

## Educational opportunities

The new More Doctors program will offer educational opportunities, such as the possibility of pursuing a master's degree specialization. According to the Ministry of Health, which will work alongside the Ministry of Education in this area, more than 40% of participants drop out of the program to seek training and education.

“Today there is consolidated evidence that the program has managed to provide professionals for the most vulnerable areas, expanded access in family health, reduced hospital admissions and infant mortality. That's why it's back,” highlighted the Health Minister.

This article was originally published on [Brasil de Fato](#).



# A Nation Where Everyone Is Oppressed

By Owei Lakemfa

**N**igerians have the next 70 days to survive a regime that has chastised them with whips and is promising to further chastise them with scorpions. Minister of Finance, Budget and National Planning, Mrs. Zainab Ahmed, last week not only renewed the Buhari regime's threat to increase Nigerians heavy burden by piling far higher fuel prices, but also told the incoming administration to immediately raise the Value Added Tax from 7.5 per cent to 10 per cent.

While depleting all available resources and adding heavy local and foreign debts to the bargain, the regime seems determined to drain whatever finances are available. So, rather than wind down and start producing handover notes, it wants to conduct a census that promises to be controversial. But more importantly, the census will be used to legally take out N869 billion or \$1.88 billion from our national coffers. It is like a retirement package. No, the regime did not directly say it is increasing the cost of PMS, rather its claims it wants to remove an artificial fuel subsidy. But this may exist only because for eight years, the regime has been incapable of repairing even one of the four existing refineries, and has, of course, been unable to build a single new one.

Four years before becoming President in 2015 and being inducted into the subsidy scheme, Buhari, a former Minister of Petroleum had made the correct analysis of the situation. He said: "Who is subsidising who? The Nigerian oil industry was developed with Nigerian capital. Most of the experts are Nigerians, if

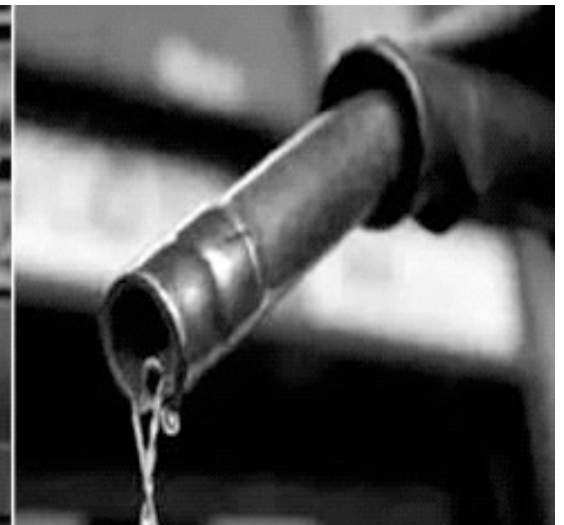
you go to the fields. It is Nigerian capital; it is Nigerian oil. What I understand that Nigeria should charge Nigerians is the cost of one barrel at the wellhead and then the cost of transportation to the refinery, the cost of refining it and its cost at the pump. If anybody says he is subsidising anything, he is a fraud. So all these people talking about subsidy, who is subsidising who?"

Those were the days of innocence when patriotism was key and issues were subjected to scientific analysis. Once in power, President Buhari went silent and allowed his aides to put forward unreasonable arguments some of which his Finance Minister last week repeated.

First, let me point out the incontrovertible, which was the basis of Buhari's old submission before seeing the new light. The country has the crude oil, the expertise and the resources to refine crude oil which would allow it make profit while selling the products to Nigerians and their neighbours.

The issue of subsidy comes in when refining is outsourced to foreign countries and consequently, local jobs are exported. In those shark-infested waters, anything happens from underhand dealings to unspeakable corruption and outright theft of funds in the guise of subsidy.

If the option of importing petroleum products is taken as the Buhari regime has done, it lays the country open to two primary variables over which Nigeria has no control. First, is the cost of oil which is determined in the international circuit with lots of manipulations. So the country is subjected to whatever cost the foreign



refineries claim they are purchasing a litre of crude oil. The second variable over which Nigeria would not have control is the foreign exchange. So even if you remove subsidy and the Naira is devalued as the Buhari regime does continuously, the so-called subsidy would resurface. In other words, if subsidy had been removed by Buhari when he became President in 2015 with the Naira at N180 to the dollar, now that it has devalued the Naira to N740 to the dollar, the subsidy would have resurfaced. So it is bad economics to run the country on imported petroleum products and turn around to claim you are removing subsidy. Minister Ahmed says what the regime is doing is the removal of subsidy and enthronement of a free market regime; if this were so, does the removal of subsidy translate to the removal of common sense? She made another fallacious statement: "When you remove the subsidy, then you have marketers that would be able to invest and bring this fuel product and sell it at market prices right now." Completely false assumption Madam. This same argument was made

some 15 years ago in the cases of diesel and kerosene. Until date, marketers have not invested to bring in these products. Finance Minister Ahmed made yet another assumption which is not borne out by our experience. She claimed with the funds saved from the so-called subsidy removal: "You can build more hospitals, more schools, provide more social services, improve infrastructure that will enhance the quality of life of the people, instead of just using it on a consumption item." The reality is that even the normal budget is frittered away, not to talk about an expected windfall. The fact that more money will be available does not mean more hospitals will be built because even the money spent on existing ones are not properly accounted. For instance, the budgetary provision for the State House Clinic from 2015 to 2021 was N14.886 billion. Yet, when the late Chief of Staff to the President, Abba Kyari contracted a COVID-19 related ailment, the clinic could not treat him. When First Lady Aisha Buhari had some neck challenges it was to the United Arab Emirate she was flown. If despite the huge sums made available to the State House Clinic annually, President Buhari has

to become a temporary resident of Britain on account of his medical tourism, can we believe the Honourable Minister that money she claims will come from removal of oil subsidy will be judiciously spent?

A major economic challenge the Buhari regime has subjected Nigerians is the contrived currency change crises. Twice did the Supreme Court speak, twice did the Buhari regime hear, twice did it pretend to be deaf and dumb until it was cornered. It took nine days after the second Supreme Court order that the old and new currencies should remain in circulation until December 31, 2023, for the regime to stir from its pretended slumber. It claimed to be unaware that the order had not been obeyed and rather than apologise for the added pains it caused Nigerians, it used the Central Bank of Nigeria, CBN, Governor Godwin Emefiele as fall guy. It declared that it did not tell the CBN not to obey the Supreme Court, but neither did the Presidency say it directed the CBN to obey the ruling. Given the unavailability of cash, even rich Nigerians were forced to live like paupers. The Buhari regime seems determined to leave the legacy of a Nigeria where everybody, except a handful, would be economically, politically and socially oppressed. Is this democracy?

# Foreign Devils On Road To Afghanistan

By M. K. Bhadrakumar

On March 7, the Western powers huddled together in Paris for a restricted meeting on Taliban and the Afghanistan situation. It was an exclusive meeting of the Special Representatives and Envoys for Afghanistan of Australia, Canada, the European Union, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The random pick was striking—on a need-to-know basis—Turkey out, Norway in. Presumably, the West won't trust the Turks to keep secrets. But Norway makes itself indispensable as a European country with a first-rate intelligence apparatus that has served Western interests. Curiously, Australia and Canada took part, but then, they belong to the Five Eyes. And the Five Eyes goes wherever an agenda to destabilize Russia or China is mooted. Washington decides such things.

The Paris meeting rings alarm bells. On March 7, the UN Security Council also held a meeting on women and peace at UN headquarters in New York, where, interestingly, US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield bracketed the “the violence and oppression of women and girls” in Afghanistan, Iran and “areas of Ukraine occupied by Russia.” France's excessive interest in hosting the meeting comes as no surprise. France is mentoring the so-called National Resistance Front of Afghanistan (NRFA) headed by the Panjshiris loyal to Ahmad Massoud, eldest son of anti-Soviet military leader Ahmad Shah Massoud. President Emmanuel Macron took a hands-on role to woo Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon to lend his country as the sanctuary for NRFA to stage an armed insurrection against the Taliban government in Kabul with Western help. Macron has a chip on his shoulder that Russia's Wagner

Group replaced the French troops in the Sahel region in north Africa, which used to be France's playpen since the deployment of troops in 2015 to Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger to set up military bases, ostensibly to fight 'jihadists'. But the French presence became increasingly unpopular in the region and the Islamist threat only spread while France dabbled in local politics in its former colonies, and eventually, Macron's motives became suspect in the African eyes and the perception grew that the French expeditionary force was acting more like an occupation force. As the African states began replacing the French contingents with Russia's Wagner Group, Macron announced in November the end of his celebrated 'Operation Barkhane'. Macron is looking for opportunities to hit back at Russia in its own backyard in the Caucasus and Central Asia. But he's punching way above his weight. Nonetheless, the Paris meeting on Tuesday expressed “grave concern about the increasing threat of terrorist groups in Afghanistan, including ISKP, Al Qaeda, Tehrik-i-Taliban-Pakistan and others, which deeply affects security and stability inside the country, in the region and beyond, and called on the Taliban to uphold Afghanistan's obligation to deny these groups safe haven.” The [joint statement](#) is carefully drafted—an alibi for Western intervention is available now. The Taliban has actually had considerable success on the ground in stabilizing its rule against heavy odds. But the Western powers are furious that the Taliban is no longer bending over backward to seek engagement. The West's sponsorship of NRFA antagonized the Taliban. Taliban sees NRFA as presaging the return of

warlords bankrolled by the West.

The NRFA has failed to get traction. Macron's personal diplomacy with Rahmon notwithstanding, the latter cannot afford to annoy Moscow—and the Kremlin's top priority is to somehow stabilize the Afghan security situation. The Russians and the Chinese are willing to work with the Taliban and make them stakeholders in the security and stability of their country. Indeed, on the same day the Western powers ganged up in Paris, [Delhi announced](#) that it was shipping another consignment of 20,000 tons of wheat to Afghanistan via the Chabahar route as humanitarian assistance. The Russian Ambassador in Kabul Dmitry Zhirnov also spoke about '[Russias deepening engagement with the Taliban](#), focused on economic ties. (Interestingly, the ambassador disclosed that Moscow may repair and reopen the hugely strategic [Salang Tunnel a Soviet legacy](#) connecting Kabul with northern Afghanistan and Central Asia.) [China recently signed](#) a \$540 million oil-and-gas deal reached an agreement to extract oil in the Amu Darya basin in northern Afghanistan. One of the first phone calls the new Foreign Minister Qin Gang made after his appointment was to call up the Taliban counterpart in Kabul to stress the security concerns in Afghanistan. No doubt, similar concerns were reflected in the [meeting in the Kremlin](#) between Russian President Vladimir Putin India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval recently. Russia is [very keen to work with India](#) regarding Afghanistan. China shares Russian concerns in Afghanistan's security and stability. On the contrary, the US and EU visualize that Russia's preoccupations in the Ukraine conflict is an opportune time to stir up the Central Asian pot. But that is a simplistic, self-



UN Security Council held a meeting on women and peace and security at UN Headquarters, New York, March 7, 2023. Looking ahead, the real danger is that, having failed to get the Taliban to bend while also unable to build an anti-Taliban resistance movement or incite the Central Asian states to decouple from Moscow and Beijing, the US and its allies may now be left with the only remaining option, which is to create anarchical conditions in Afghanistan where there are no winners

serving assumption.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who toured Central Asia last month, learnt to his dismay that the regional states are simply not interested in getting entangled in Washington's zero-sum games. The [joint statement](#) issued after Blinken's meeting with his Central Asian counterparts steered clear of any references critical of Russia (or China.) Prof. Melvin Goodman at Johns Hopkins and noted author who used to be a CIA analyst, has [described Blinkens Central Asian tour](#), first by a senior Biden administration official to the region, to be “a fool's errand that merely exposed the futility of US efforts to practice dual containment against Russia and China... All five Central Asian countries refused to support the United States in last month's UN resolution calling for Russia to withdraw its troops from Ukraine and to recognize Ukraine's full sovereignty over its territory. All five Central Asian countries will need support from Russia or China if faced with internal opposition in their own countries.”

The neutral stance of the Central Asian states is consistent with their independent position alike on the breakaway ex-Soviet regions of Abkhazia, Ossetia, Crimea, Lugansk, Donetsk, Zaporozhyya and Kherson. The salience is: Moscow never threatened the Central Asians that 'Either you're with us, or are against us.'

The Central Asians witnessed the retreat of the Western alliance from Afghanistan and will not regard them as dependable providers of security. They are also

wary of the West's dalliance with extremist groups. The widely held belief in Central Asia is that the Islamic State is an American creation. Above all, the Western countries pursue mercantilist foreign policies eyeing the region's mineral resources but take no interest in the region's development. On the other hand, they are intrusive and prescriptive. At the Paris meeting, behind closed doors, the American input would have been that the Central Asian states will not support a regime change project in Afghanistan. Even Tajikistan, which has ethnic affinities with the Tajik population of Afghanistan, will mark distance from the NRFA lest it got sucked into an Afghan civil war. Macron fancies himself to be a born charmer, but Rahmon is a hardcore realist. Looking ahead, the real danger is that, having failed to get the Taliban to bend while also unable to build an anti-Taliban resistance movement or incite the Central Asian states to decouple from Moscow and Beijing, the US and its allies may now be left with the only remaining option, which is to create anarchical conditions in Afghanistan where there are no winners. The ascendance of the Islamic State and its [open threats](#) to the Russian, Pakistani, Chinese, Iranian and Indian embassies functioning in Kabul are signposts. The Paris meeting of Western spies and 'diplomats' was an exercise in stocktaking. **MK Bhadrakumar** is a former diplomat. He was India's ambassador to Uzbekistan and Turkey. The views are personal.