Nigeria: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY URGED TO PASS INFORMATION BILL
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> MEDIA IN NIGERIA is a weekly publication on developments within and affecting the media/communication/freedom of expression sector in Nigeria.
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> NATIONAL ASSEMBLY URGED TO PASS FOI BILL
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> The Nigerian parliament, the National Assembly, has been called upon to promote transparency and accountability in the country by urgently passing the Freedom of Information Bill currently before it.
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> The call formed part of the resolutions of a recent workshop on 'Contentious Issues in the Review of the 1999 Constitution' organised in Abuja by the Citizens' Forum for Constitutional Reform (CFCR), a network of civil society organisations.
> Participants at the workshop implored the law makers to
> approach their oversight functions with higher sense of
> responsibility, and to ensure that the National Women
> policy which provides that at least 30 percent of all
> positions should be occupied by either sex, is supported by
> law.
>
> The workshop identified the contentious issues in the
> review of the 1999 constitution to include Federalism,
> Affirmative Action, Political Parties/State Independent
> Electoral Commissions, Resource control, Religion, State
> Police, and National Conference. It appealed to the Federal
> Government to revisit the review of the constitution by
> appointing an Independent Commission and issuing a time
> table to guide the exercise.
>
> DELE GIWA: OPUTA REPLIES CRITICS
>
> The Chairman of the Human Rights Violations Investigation
> Commission (HRVIC), Justice Chukwudifu Oputa (Rtd), has
> said that he is not disturbed by comments of those who are
> imputing political motives to the recommendations of the
> commission, especially as they affect the murder of the
> late Editor-in-Chief of Newswatch magazine, Mr. Dele Giwa.
>
> “With my experience in life, I don’t think
> things like that bother me again… What is important
> is that an assignment was given to us by our country and we
> did it very well to the best of our knowledge, without fear
> or favour from any quarters,” Justice Oputa said in
> an interview with The Punch newspaper.
>
> Loyalists of former military president, General Ibrahim
> Babangida, had sneered at the commission’s report,
> claiming that it was a hatchet job, targeted at combusting
> the presidential ambition of the former military leader.
>
> Oputa refused to comment on the politics of the report,
> contending that the matter was subjudice.
>
> Babangida and two of his erstwhile security chiefs, General
> Haliru Akilu (Rtd) and Colonel Kunle Togun (Rtd) had gone
> to court, seeking orders to stop the implementation of the
> commission’s report as it affects the murder of late
> Dele Giwa.
>
> NAWOJ WARNED AGAINST HOLDING CONGRESS
>
> More than a month after it banned beats associations
> operating in the establishments of its affiliates, the
> Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN) has
> warned female journalists operating under the umbrella of
> National Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ) against
> holding a congress slated for later in the year.
>
> Mr. Ray Ekpu, President of NPAN, who gave the warning in
> Port Harcourt, South-East Nigeria, said NAWOJ and similar
> beat associations operating as an arm of journalism
> industry remained banned.
> 
> The NPAN president affirmed that the only body recognized
> by the Nigeria Press Council within the media industry
> remains the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ).
> 
> "In other words, NAWOJ and all the others that are
> parading themselves as an organisation within the media
> industry are doing so without recognition, and they will be
> stopped," Ekpu said.
> 
> Despite the ban, it is common knowledge in the media
> circles that beat organizations still thrive in Nigeria.
> 
> PRINT MEDIA
> 
> PUNCH RAISES ALARM OVER POLICE HARASSMENT
> 
> The management of Punch Newspapers has raised alarm over
> alleged intimidation and harassment of its staff by
> officers and men of the Nigeria Police.
> 
> In an editorial in its edition of Tuesday July 16, 2002 The
> Punch said it was disturbed by “evidence that some
> members of the Nigeria Police Force may have identified
> Punch as the deadly foe of the police.”
> 
> The newspaper noted that “almost daily, in the last
> few weeks, staff of the newspaper have been harassed,
> abused and threatened at various check points in the Lagos
> metropolis. The trend is so noticeable that it is now
> hazardous for staff of the company to produce their
> identity cards on demand by the police.”
> 
> It attributed the police hostility to their grouse over the
> critical coverage of the recent police killings at
> checkpoints in Lagos. It, however, observed that no aspect
> of its report on the killings had been refuted by the
> police authorities.
> 
> “What sections of the police probably resent about
> the paper is its commitment to publishing the facts as they
> are. But the police would be fighting the wrong enemy if
> they direct their aggression against Punch for dutifully
> holding up a true mirror to them,” the paper
> declared.
> 
> In a related development, the Lagos State Council of the
> Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), has appealed to the
> State Police Commissioner, Mr. Young Arebamen, to stop the
> harassment and intimidation of journalists by policemen,
> especially those mounting roadblocks and those conducting
> “stop-and-search” operation in Lagos.
> 
> The union, in an open letter to Arebamen, complained that
> policemen had made it their duty to harass journalists
> especially those carrying Punch identity cards.
The Daily Times of Nigeria Plc. (DTN) has dragged a judge of the Kogi State High Court, Justice S.I. Leslie, to the National Judicial Commission over alleged professional misconduct in a Libel suit brought against the newspaper by the Kogi State Governor, Prince Abubakar Audu.

In a petition sent to the Chief Justice of the Federation, Justice Mohammed Uwais, the Managing Director and Chief Executive of the DTN, Dr. Onukaba Adinoyi-Ojo, accused the judge of bias against the DTN, its managing director and the Sunday Times Editor, Mr. Tunde Ipinmisho.

Adinoyi-Ojo alleged that following the suit instituted against the DTN after its publication of the purchase by Audu of some exotic houses in Europe and America, Justice Leslie, against the tradition of fair hearing, proceeded to grant the injunction without ensuring that the parties in the suit had been served.

“In fact, we have been reliably informed that Justice Leslie was on a two-week casual leave to attend a course on pastoral work at Living Faith Church, Lokoja, when he signed the injunction in his house at 8 p.m,” the DTN alleged.

The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) is to work with all the Departments of Mass Communication in the nation’s universities to ensure quality manpower for the broadcast industry.

NBC’s Director General, Malam Danladi Bako, said in the latest edition of the commission’s in-house journal, that the research and planning department of the commission has been mobilized to liaise with such institutions in the country with a view to achieving its vision for the production of quality mass communication graduates.

Bako said the training programme would encompass the rules and codes of broadcasting, to familiarize the students with what they would be confronted with in real practice.
> MICROSOFT SEEKS COOPERATION ON PIRACY
>
> The private sector has been called upon to assist the
government to combat the scourge to piracy in Nigeria.
>
> Microsoft’s Marketing and Anti-Piracy Manager in
Nigeria, Meekam Mgbenwelu, who made the call, disclosed
that Nigeria has the highest piracy rate of 71 percent in
West Africa.
>
> “This shows that seven out of every ten personal
computers in use are running pirated software”, he
added.
>
> He noted that intellectual property (IP) rights in the
country have been relegated to the background, adding that
Nigeria may be hindered from enjoying the gains of the
information age if piracy is not tackled.
>
> According to him, “software piracy blights the
economic landscape, crippling opportunities for the viable
take off of the country’s software industry and sends
a negative message to potential foreign investors,
particularly those interested in information
technology,” he said.
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> IILL’s $100m LOAN: LONGE, FIRST BANK TRADE TACKLES
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> With the Federal High Court in Lagos fixing July 31, for
hearing in the suit brought against First Bank Nigeria Plc
by its former Managing Director, Mr. Bernard Longe, the
battle line is drawn between the two parties.
>
> Longe who was in the employ of First Bank for 33 years is
contesting his June 13 dismissal for allegedly unilaterally
disbursing $111.7 million to the promoters of Investors
International (London) Limited (IILL) in their bid to
acquire 51 percent equity share of the Nigeria
Telecommunications Limited, contrary to corporate financial
regulations.
>
> The former Chief Executive, through his lawyer, Chief
Rotimi Williams (SAN), is seeking among others, an order
that the bank’s board of directors erred in
dismissing him, a reversal of the decision as well as
compensation to the tune of N136,614,584.
>
> Longe, in a newspaper adversarial last week denied that he
acted alone in granting the loan to IILL, alleging that his
removal was a conspiracy.
>
> But the Bank insists that Longe stands guilty of non-full
disclosure on the credit to IILL.
>
> He was said to have failed to ensure full protection for
the bank on the transaction in which he was accused to have
overshot the bank’s lending.
> First bank, had last year granted IILL $111.7 million to enable it pay a mandatory deposit of 10 percent for 51 percent stake of NITEL.
>
> First Bank’s management have obtained the services of Chief Richard Akinjide, SAN, former Attorney General and Minister of Justice and Dr. Hameed Kusamota, to represent it in the case before the Federal High Court, Lagos.
>
> NCC BEGINS PROCESS OF LICENCING SECOND CARRIER
>
> The Nigerian Communications Commission on July 18, 2002 began the process of receiving applications from prospective operators of the Second National Operator (SNO).
>
> By the timetable contained in the “Information Memorandum and Application Instruments”, successful applicants at this stage will, on July 30, 2002 proceed to the financial stage, after payment of the stipulated deposit.
>
> Announcement of the three highest bidders is expected to be made on August 9, 2002 while the successful bidder has until Friday, August 30, 2002 to effect payment of the requisite license fee.
>
> The SNO license is made up of a National Carrier License, an International Gateway License and Digital Mobile License.
>
> REPS ACCUSE GSM OPERATORS OF FRAUD
>
> The leading operators of the Global System of Mobile telecommunications (GSM) in Nigeria, Econet Wireless and MTN, have been accused of defrauding subscribers to the tune of N12 billion.
>
> The Ad hoc committee of the House of Representatives, the lower arm of the Nigerian parliament, investigating the operations of the GSM companies, said the sum represented the losses incurred by subscribers on account of the GSM operators’ billing system.
>
> The committee led by Hon. Tony Anyanwu, in its report to the House, claimed that its computation of the cost to Nigerians of the average time loss per user, based on the pre-paid services of both MTN and Econet, showed that subscribers lose a third of the call-time guaranteed by their respective refill cards due to the arbitrantress of the billing system.
>
> “Consequently, for every refill card purchased, the subscribers lose on the average the sum of N500 in the case of MTN and N333 to Econet. It said when these base figures are applied to the declared profits by MTN recently, the firm would be seen to have defrauded its Nigerian
subscribers of about N6 billion.

The committee advised the Minister of Communications and the Nigeria Communications Commission to design the best possible means for the GSM firms to ensure a refund of the fraudulently obtained N12 billion to subscribers, while all incentives to them be withheld until their tariffs are slashed to N10 per minute.

Reacting to the report, Afam Edozie who is in charge of MTN’s marketing operations said the move to regulate prices for GSM services was against free market enterprise, adding that “it does not make business sense.”

Stressing the promise of a free market environment at the beginning, Edozie said, “it is very important that when we set rules in an industry we have to stick to the rules.”

Similarly, Mr. Titi Omo-Etu, the Chief Executive of CyberchUIL, cautioned the House against the use of executive fiat to force down GSM tariffs, as it could be counter productive.

He said that rather than using legislative might to enforce GSM tariff review, the House of Representatives should monitor the activities of the executive arm of government with a view to ensuring the provision of infrastructure needed for the smooth operations of the telecom sector.

Meanwhile, the NCC has promised to set up an arbitration panel to protect GSM subscribers in the country.

NCC’s Chief Executive, Mr. Ernest Ndukwe said the panel will look into complaints by consumers and give redress to complaints while guilty operators would be fined.

ADVERTISING

Advertising agencies indebted to members of the Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN) have been given two weeks to settle their debt.

The ultimatum, which expires at the end of July 2002, was the high point of the National Executive Council (NEC) meeting of the association held in Port Harcourt, South-East Nigeria.

Total indebtedness of the agencies to the print media is put at about N800 million. “Our rough estimates is that the print media is owed about N800 million by the advertisement agencies. A lot of the debts have remained unpaid for a long time, and the agencies have been riddling the media on this stage and we thought it was time to take
firm action to recover our money”, Mr. Ray Ekpu, president of NPAN said.

He said the ultimatum was merely to reiterate a position earlier adopted at a media summit in Abuja, some months ago.

LETTERS

(We begin, this week, to publish the feedback we have been receiving from our readers).

MIN, A REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENT

The issues you report in MEDIA IN NIGERIA are judiciously chosen and the reports themselves quite illuminating. Overall, a remarkable achievement.

Keep up the good work.

- Prof. Olatunji Dare
Bradley University, USA

CUTTING OFF CORRUPTION

I enjoyed the MEDIA IN NIGERIA edition of 01 July 2002, especially its news analysis titled “Journalism in Danger”. I believe that the gangrene of corruption needs to be totally cut off from Nigerian journalism if our democracy must survive.

- Dr. Tunde Babawale
Dept. of Political Science
University of Lagos, Nigeria.

TO CONTRIBUTE:

Participation by way of contributing ideas to MEDIA IN NIGERIA is encouraged. Opinion articles should focus on issue(s) reported in this publication and be at most 1000 words (for full articles) and 200 (for letters). Contributions should be sent to Akin Akingbulu at:

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