

## **PRAISED VOTE CHIEF TO HEAD OBSERVER TEAM IN LIBERIA**

ABUJA - Nigeria's electoral chief widely praised for organising his country's April polls will head a regional observer mission for Liberia's vote on October 11, a statement said on Tuesday.

Attahiru Jega, an academic who supervised Nigeria's presidential and general elections in April seen as significant improvements in a country with a long history of vote fraud, will head the mission for West African bloc ECOWAS.

The Economic Community of West African States mission is to include 150 members who will be deployed in various parts of Liberia.

## **Bomb suspects charged**

ABUJA - Six suspected members of Boko Haram pleaded innocent on Friday to charges of engaging in a recent string of deadly bombings near the capital.

In an Abuja high court, the six were hit with a five-count charge of throwing bombs in and around the federal capital between March and May.

Eight suspects were charged with similar offences before a (lower) magistrate's court in Abuja on September 13.

## **Underwear bomber vows 'US cancer' will be wiped out**

DETROIT, USA - A Nigerian man accused of trying to blow up a US-bound airliner in 2009 vowed Islamic militants would wipe out "the cancer US" and hailed a slain Al-Qaeda cleric as his trial opened.

"Anwar is alive," Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab shouted out in the Detroit court in reference to Anwar Al-Awlaqi, the US-born cleric who was killed in a suspected US drone strike in Yemen last week.

And in another equally virulent outburst before the judge entered the courtroom, he said "the mujahedeen will wipe out the US, the cancer US."

Abdulmutallab, who has insisted on representing himself on charges of trying to blow up a Northwest Airlines flight from Amsterdam to Detroit on Christmas Day 2009, also swore at the start of the hearing: "I will defend Mohammed."

# **Nigeria marks independence**

ABUJA - Nigeria marked 51 years of independence on Saturday amid a security lockdown over fears of fresh attacks by an Islamist sect that claimed a recent deadly bombing of UN headquarters in the capital.

President Goodluck Jonathan pledged to secure the country in a broadcast to the nation as security personnel blanketed Abuja, where the streets were otherwise mostly deserted.

The government held a ceremony on the grounds of the heavily guarded presidential villa that included a military parade to mark 51 years of independence from Britain. Prominent Nigerians and diplomats attended.

"My administration will spare no effort in fighting crime, building peace, and securing our homeland against internal threats and infiltration by violent groups from outside our borders," Jonathan said in his broadcast.

There has been mounting speculation over whether the Islamist sect known as Boko Haram

has formed links with outside extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda's north African branch.

"We condemn all acts of violence and declare that such acts of mindless savagery shall not be allowed to define our country. We will not be deterred. Our resolve is strong," he said.

He said he had put in place a new national security strategy to protect the nation, but did not provide details.

During last year's independence day events, twin car bombs went off near Eagle Square, the venue where Nigerian officials and foreign dignitaries had gathered, killing at least 12 people. MEND claimed responsibility for that attack.

A statement this week attributed to MEND threatened another attack at Eagle Square this year, but no events were planned for the venue. The same threat was sent out again on Saturday morning.

## **Gunmen kill three**

KANO - Gunmen suspected of being members of Boko Haram on Monday shot dead three people at a market in Maiduguri, state police chief said.

"I have received report of an attack this morning by suspected Boko Haram gunmen in Baga market where a tea seller, a drug store owner and a passer-by were shot dead by the attackers," Borno state police commissioner Simeon Midenda said.

"The fact that nothing was taken from the tea seller who was shot in the chest and the head and the drug store owner rules out robbery," Midenda said.

## **Seven arrested over killings**

KANO - Police in Zamfara have arrested seven people suspected of involvement in a weekend raid on a village that left 19 people dead, the state governor said on Monday.

Dozens of attackers suspected of belonging to a gang of robbers armed with guns and machetes on Saturday raided Lingyado, a remote farming and herding village, killing at least 19 people, wounding six others and burning homes.

## **Two shot dead in central village**

JOS - Unknown assailants have shot dead two people in an attack on a village in Plateau State, a government spokesman and a witness said.

The assailants late on Tuesday attacked one house in Tanjol village in Riyom municipality and shot dead the two people, the witness said.

Plateau State Information Commissioner Yiljap Abraham confirmed the attack, saying police had arrested nine suspects in connection with the incident.

## **14 die in road crash**

KANO - Fourteen people died when a bus in which they were travelling in Yobe state rammed into a petrol tanker truck, a senior road safety official said on Monday.

The accident occurred late on Sunday when the driver carrying 16 traders from a local market lost control and rammed into the truck at Sabongarin Bukar Abba village, 10 kilometres from Damaturu, the state capital, Maitazuma Gwani said.

**FOOTBALL RESULTS****AFRICAN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE****Semi-finals**

WAC Casablanca 1-0 Enyimba  
Al Hilal Omdurman 0-1 Esperance

**Bosnia, Gabon, Nigeria to decide Palestinian fate at UN**

UNITED NATIONS - Bosnia, Gabon and Nigeria are the unwitting kingmakers in the desperate Palestinian battle for UN Security Council votes to back their campaign for membership of the world body.

All three face a diplomatic offensive from the Palestinian leadership on one side, and the United States and Israel, which oppose Palestinian entry into the UN, on the other.

Even though Washington has vowed to veto any Security Council approval of Palestinian membership, garnering a majority of votes on the 15-member council would be a valuable moral victory for Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas.

Foreign Minister Olugbenga Ashiru has signalled support for the Palestinian bid, without saying clearly how the nation will vote, media reports say.

Nigeria will be in a delicate position as it chairs the Security Council for October, including the membership committee and the full meetings if a vote is held.

**SPORTS NEWS****Wydad grab late winner against Enyimba**

JOHANNESBURG - Pascal Angan headed a late goal to snatch a 1-0 first-leg lead for Wydad Casablanca of Morocco over Enyimba in an African Champions League semi-final on Saturday.

A home team backed by a capacity 80,000 crowd at the Mohammed V Stadium in the Moroccan commercial capital had virtually given up hope of cracking open a brave Nigerian defence when they were awarded an 89th-minute free kick.

Enyimba goalkeeper Paul Godwin, who had been outstanding under a relentless Wydad onslaught led by Congo-Brazzaville striker Fabrice Ondama, misjudged the kick and diminutive 25-year-old Benin midfielder Angan nodded home.

Godwin, who committed a rare blunder to gift Heartland victory in the Nigerian FA Cup final last weekend, was lucky not to be sent off a minute after the goal when he handled outside the box.

It was the first loss suffered by two-time African champions Enyimba in the competition this year after eight victories and three draws, including one at the same Casablanca stadium against Raja during the group phase.

**RACE FOR AFRICAN CUP PLACES REACHES CLIMAX**

JOHANNESBURG - The struggle for 2012 Africa Cup of Nations places reaches a climax this weekend with 21 countries chasing 10 tickets to Gabon and Equatorial Guinea next January and February.

Apart from the co-hosts, who participate automatically, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Senegal and newcomers Botswana have qualified for the biennial African football showcase that will be staged in an even-number year for the final time.

Countries who definitely will not be in Central Africa early next year include Egypt, winners of the last three tournaments but languishing at the bottom of Group G without a win in five matches, and four-time champions Cameroon.

There could be more big-name casualties to come with 2010 World Cup quarter-finalists Ghana needing a draw in Sudan to be sure of making it while Nigeria must defeat Guinea 1-0 or by at least two goals to replace them at the top of the table.

Enyimba host the return match on October 16 in Aba with 1992 champions Wydad seeking an away goal that would leave their opponents needing to score three to qualify for the two-leg November final.

**Mikel shrugs off Nigeria lateness fine**

ABUJA - Chelsea midfielder John Mikel Obi says he has drawn a line beneath the \$5,000 fine imposed on him for reporting late to the Nigeria camp ahead of Saturday's Africa Cup of Nations qualifier in Abuja.

"That's behind me. The focus should be on the match on Saturday, which we have to win to qualify for the Nations Cup," Mikel said after the team's training session on Wednesday.

The defensive midfielder was supposed to join up with the 22-man Nigeria squad on Tuesday but arrived at the team hotel early on Wednesday morning and was subsequently fined.

However, coach Samson Siasia has insisted that he remains very much a part of the team for Saturday's crucial match against Guinea.

Nigeria need to beat Guinea to finish top of Group B and qualify for the Nations Cup, which will be staged in Gabon and Equatorial Guinea in January.

The Super Eagles are second on 10 points from five matches, three points behind leaders Guinea, with only the overall group winners guaranteed a ticket to the biennial tournament.

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**Esperance take giant stride toward final**

JOHANNESBURG - Esperance of Tunisia look set to reach a second consecutive African Champions League final after winning 1-0 at Al-Hilal of Sudan on Sunday.

The second leg of the semi-final is scheduled for mid-October in Tunis and a draw will suffice for the 'Blood and Gold', who suffered a humiliating 6-1 aggregate thrashing from TP Mazembe of the Democratic Republic of Congo in the last final.

Wide midfielder Youssef Msakni scored the only goal at a sweltering Hilal Stadium in Omdurman just four minutes after the kick-off to end his seven-match goal drought in the premier Pan-African club competition.

It was the fourth goal scored by the 20-year-old in the Champions League this season, but his first since last April when he contributed one to a 5-0 demolition of Senegalese visitors Diaraf Dakar.

**Ranieri suspended over ref outburst**

ROME - Inter Milan manager Claudio Ranieri picked up a one match ban on Monday for an outburst directed at the referee in charge of Saturday's 3-0 home loss to Napoli.

Ranieri raged at referee Gianluca Rocchi at half-time over Joel Obi's sending off for a second yellow card.

Television replays showed the Nigerian's first yellow was given for a good tackle while his second, which resulted in a penalty, was for a foul that happened outside the box.

Obi also picked up a one match ban, while Inter players Ivan Cordoba and Diego Milito were fined 10,000 euros each and captain Javier Zanetti 1,500 euros for remarks they made to Rocchi.