

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WATCH

**(A twice-monthly focus on Nigeria's National Assembly.
Period ending December 29, 2012)**

National Assembly passes budget proposal:

On December 27, the National Assembly passed the 2013 proposal, setting a record as the first time the federal legislature would approve the spending proposal before the beginning of the spending period.

Both the House of Representatives and the Senate separately accepted the harmonised report to approve the budget of N4.987 trillion as against the N4.924 trillion presented by President Goodluck Jonathan, thus increasing the amount by N63 billion. The two chambers also fixed the oil benchmark price at \$78 per barrel as against the \$75 proposed the executive arm.

The approval also rolled over all unutilized capital expenditure in the 2012 budget to form part of the 2013 Appropriation Act. The budget also stipulates N387.9 billion for statutory transfers and N591.7 billion for debt services.

Reps blame aviation authorities for Dana Air crash:

The House of Representatives has accused the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority for negligence for the June air crash involving Dana Air in Lagos. It has in fact called for the removal and prosecution of the Director-General of the agency, Dr. Harold Demuren and the NCAA inspector, Mr. Suleiman Akwuh, who inspected and cleared the plane.

This follows the adoption by the House of the report of the Senate and House Joint Committee on Aviation that investigated the crash.

Chairperson of the House Committee on Aviation, Rep. Nkiruka Onyejeocha, said several faults were reported on the ill-fated aircraft before the crash, but alleged that NCAA continued to clear it for flight operations.

She said, "The aircraft had five air returns before the crash. Only one was due to bird strike; the others were caused by faults in the aircraft", adding that the agency ought to have grounded the aircraft but failed to.

The report noted that there was no certified engineer for the MD83 aircraft in Nigeria, yet NCAA approved it for flight operations in the country. It also observed that the tenure of the current DG of the NCAA had expired three months before the Dana crash occurred on June 3, 2012.

The report added that "the staff strength of the NCAA should be totally overhauled with a view to injecting technically and professionally qualified personnel to enhance its regulatory role in accordance with international best practices."

Senate yet to resolve pension fund scam:

The Senate Joint Committee on Establishment and State and Local Council Affairs investigating alleged abuse of pensions fund seems to have been exasperated with the Head of the Pensions Task Team, Abdulrasheed Maina following his continued failure to appear before the committee to answer questions.

Even after threatening Maina with and indeed obtaining a warrant of arrest against him, the latter still failed to appear before them and the committee said it would no longer invite Maina because he had shown disrespect for the panel.

Committee chairperson, Sen. Aloysius Etuk (PDP, Akwa Ibom) said at the last sitting of the committee that he had been told that Maina was at the entrance to the National Assembly addressing his supporters.

A disappointed Sen Etuk told those present: "We've been sitting and adjourning for the sake of making sure that he is here so that we can give him fair hearing because in the other pension areas he said he didn't have fair hearing...the committee will know what to do. Nigerians are watching, we are open and sincere; we wanted this on record; God knows we have tried."

Senate to consult more on anti-terrorism bill:

The Senate has stood down the consideration of the Anti-Terrorism Amendment Bill following arguments over the status of the Office of National Security Adviser (NSA), as the coordinating office of the fight against terrorism.

The Senate was already considering the report of the conference committee of the two chambers of the National Assembly which had adopted the version by the House of Representatives which recommended that the NSA's office should coordinate the war against terrorism.

But a point of order raised by Sen Ita Enang (PDP, Akwa Ibom) questioned the constitutionality of the office of the NSA, saying: "the Office of the NSA does not exist in law. The National Assembly cannot make laws for the office."

Sen. Enang asserted that the legislature could not dictate to the President on which of the agencies should coordinate the activities and called for the rejection of the section of the report, leading the

President of the Senate, David Mark, to point out that the report could not be reviewed because it was a conference report between the two chambers.

Further discussions on the bill remained stormy and led the Senate to step down consideration of the report for another legislative day.

Yakowa's death in air crash stirs Senate probes:

As has become the norm after every air crash, the death of Kaduna State governor, Patrick Yakowa and the former National Security Adviser (NSA), Andrew Azazi in a helicopter crash stirred the legislature to action as the Senate considered a motion on "Urgent need to investigate the recent crash of Naval Helicopter Augusta 109 Helicopter in Bayelsa State."

Sponsor of the motion, Sen Chris Anyanwu (PDP, Imo) argued that the recent crash led to another agony resulting from the aviation sector. She was supported by Sen Ahmed Makarfi (PDP, Kaduna), who called for a 'holistic view' of all the aircraft in the country and urged the executive to ensure a proper investigation.

On his part, Sen Clever Ikisikpo, said Nigeria has the highest number of plane crashes in the world, and that investigations had always been conducted without their outcomes being made public and asked that the investigation to be set up should be 'total' with "no soft spot for any individual."

For Sen Danjuma Goje (PDP, Gombe) foreign experts should be engaged to handle the investigation since previous efforts had not yielded results while the Deputy Senate President Ike Ekweremadu said Nigeria had lost over 50,000 people to plane crashes, road accidents and kidnappings in the last couple of years and it was time to halt the drift.

At the end of discussions, the Senate mandated two separate committees headed by the Deputy Senate Leader, Abdul Ningi (PDP, Bauchi) and Senate Minority Leader Ganiyu Solomon (ACN, Lagos) were mandated to lead condolence visits to Bayelsa and Kaduna states.