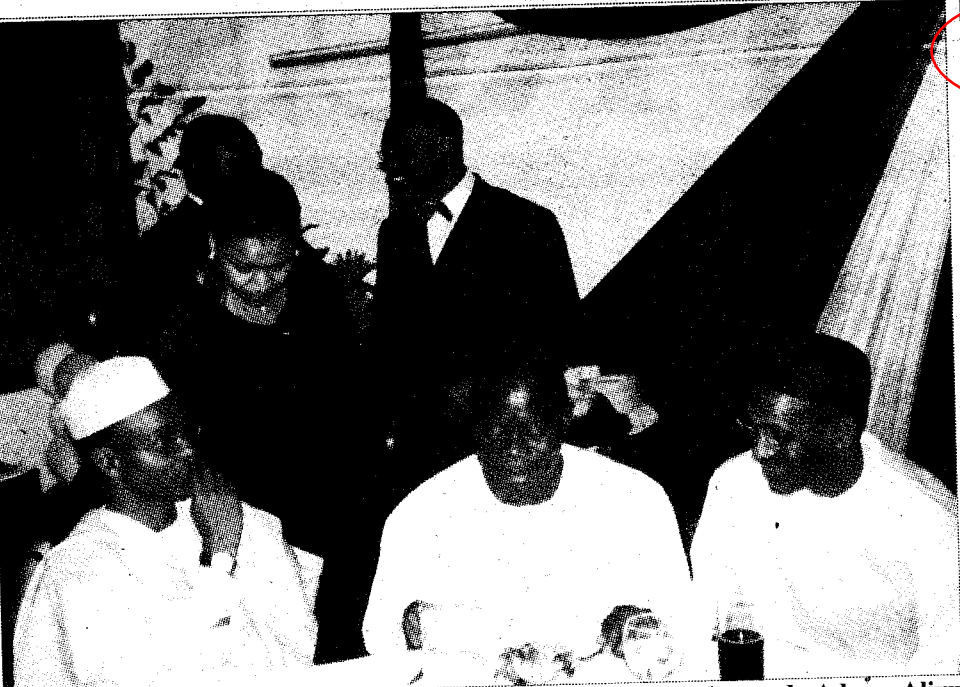


News



FCT minister, Malam Nasir el-Rufai, president of the NLC, Comrade Adams Aliyu Oshiomhole and the chairman of EFCC, Malam Nuhu Ribadu at a fund raising dinner for Oshiomhole's governorship campaign in Abuja...yesterday.

Atiku travels to US in commercial flight

Vice-President Atiku Abubakar yesterday left for the United States aboard a British Airways flight. His aides said he was denied his official presidential jet by President Olusegun Obasanjo. The vice president, who emerged as the consensus presidential candidate of the Action Congress, began his leave on Wednesday.

His aides however said his flight to the United States was put off until yesterday when he made another arrangement for his trip.

"In anticipation of the spiteful action of President Obasanjo, the vice president had earlier ordered for an alternative reservation on a commercial flight," a statement from his campaign organisation said.

They said President Obasanjo had earlier approved the trip and the use of the official presidential jet and that there was no explanation for the withdrawal. The vice president only knew about the withdrawal of the

By Jibrin Abubakar
jet on arrival at the Presidential Wing of the Nnamdi Azikwe Airport, Abuja at midnight of Wednesday, the statement said.

"No official communication was made to him about the presidential order, except for the verbal information passed by the airport commandant to the effect that the president had on landing from a trip personally ordered him to ground the VP's aircraft," the statement said.

The statement said the *Gulf Stream 11* aircraft was purchased in 2002 after the National Assembly appropriated funds for the purchase of the aircraft specifically for the use of the vice president, adding the president has now commandeered it.

"It will also be recalled that a brand new aircraft and a helicopter have also been bought for the president but for over a year now, he has taken personal control of the vice presidential jet's movement, approving trips and

explicitly ordering that the plane must return to Abuja after dropping Atiku be it at Yola, Lagos or any foreign country," it said.

The Atiku Campaign Organisation therefore called on the National Assembly to condemn the harassment and intimidation of the vice president.

"The vice president remains undaunted and confident that this crisis of democracy unleashed on Nigeria by anti-democratic forces shall come to pass," the statement said. Effort to reach Mrs. Oluremi Oyo, media aide of the president, was unsuccessful.

The phone number of the special assistance to the president on public affairs, Mallam Uba Sani, was not available as at press time.

However, when contacted, the political adviser to the president, Mr. Akin Osuntokun, said he could not comment on it. "I don't know anything about it. You should contact Uba Sani or Remi Oyo," he said.

Policemen killed in Ibadan bank robbery

Armed robbers yesterday in Ibadan killed two policemen in an attempt to rob some commercial banks. The incident happened around the Agbowo area, directly opposite the University of Ibadan, in the early hours of yesterday.

Apart from the two policemen who were killed, several other policemen were seriously wounded. The hoodlums also set several shops around the vicinity ablaze.

Witnesses' accounts revealed the robbers, numbering about 30, stormed the vicinity at around midnight from Ojo end of the road and fired three shots initially.

They subsequently operated between the hours of midnight and about 3:30 a.m., breaking into the vaults of two commercial banks within the vicinity and eventually carting away undisclosed sums of money.

According to sources,

From Samson Ojo, Lagos

the robbers, suspecting that some security operatives were on their trail, rained bullets at a police van marked 033, thus felling some of the occupants and fatally wounding others.

Sources living close to the area said some policemen jumped into the University of Ibadan premises for the safety. Two blood soaked police vans and a blue car marked Lagos CA 225 GGE littered the vicinity yesterday morning. One of the vehicles, a navy blue jeep with registration number PF 874 HQ was also stained with blood, while spots of blood littered the two entrances leading to the university.

Traders with shops at the precincts of the university gate also suffered immensely from the deadly acts of the robbers, as their goods worth millions of naira got razed down, following an explosion

that greeted the robbers' shot at the tank of one of the police vans. The police public relations officer of the state's command, Mr. Olu Akinmoladun, confirmed the incident.

He said two policemen were killed while the other four were rushed to the University College Hospital (UCH), Ibadan, where they are still lying critically wounded.

His said: "Around 1 a.m., we got a distress call that there was a bank robbery at Agbowo area. We mobilised our patrol team from the metropolis. But along the line, two of our police vans ran into the ambush laid by the robbers and we lost two of our men. We lost one patrol man and a driver."

The PPRO said the police, overwhelmed by the superior firepower of the robbers, used the armoured personnel carrier to the robbers away.

Appeal Court halts NLC planned strike

By Ruby Rabi

Ukeje on September 21, 2004.

Justice Odilli held that the appeal lacked merit. After reviewing all the arguments, she held further that what the NLC did in calling out workers to protest against the increment in the prices of petroleum products was not in line with trade dispute.

She said: "Having considered the facts from the record and the findings and conclusion of the learned chief judge, it seems necessary to say that no court will lend its aid to a man who founds his cause of action on an immoral or an illegal act. See *Holman v. Johnson* (1775 - 1802) All ER 98."

She held that NLC strike protesting against the N1.5k increment in petroleum prices in 2004 was an illegal act.

She upheld the arguments of Chief Babalola (SAN) that NLC could not shut down the airport and close the roads because it

wanted to protest against government's policy.

The court had earlier given an interim ruling on December 16th 2004 that there was no law in the country, which empowered NLC to embark on strike in protest against government policies.

The court also restrained NLC from embarking on any strike action pending the determination of an appeal filed by it, challenging a September 21, 2004 judgment delivered by the federal high court chief judge, Justice Roseline Ukeje. The chief judge of the Federal High Court, Justice Roseline Ukeje, had on September 21, 2004 made similar findings.

The NLC was dissatisfied with Ukeje's judgment and filed an appeal at the court of appeal. Ukeje had ruled that NLC had no power to engage in any collective strike bargaining involving Nigerian workers' interests and their respective employers in both public and private sectors.

...Gunmen attack his aide's home

By Abdulfattah Olajide

Gunmen yesterday attacked the Abuja home of Vice President Atiku Abubakar's personal assistant, Mr. Umar Pariya, shooting a police corporal guarding the house and Pariya's cook Ibrahim in the attack.

Although Pariya was away from home during the attack, the Atiku Campaign Organisation said in a statement yesterday that the attack was an assassination attempt on him. But the Abuja commissioner of police, Lawrence Alobi, said it was an armed robbery case.

The gunmen who were six in number, broke into Pariya's home at Gwarimpa estate around 7am and shot the policeman and Ibrahim on their right hands and left thighs respectively.

The police corporal was said to have returned fire and shot one of the assailants dead.

Owing to the challenge from the corporal, the gunmen were said to have fled with the body of their dead colleague.

The Atiku Campaign Organisation's statement reads: "Umaru Pariya, who has been at the centre of allegations and counter-allegation between President Chief Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice-President Atiku Abubakar survived an assassination attempt yesterday in Abuja. A security aide to Pariya killed one of the assassins."

Pariya was not at home when the suspected assassins called because he stayed in Abuja after returning from the airport at 2am, following the presidential order that denied the vice president access to his official plane for a scheduled trip at about mid-night. It is the second attempt at 'armed robbery' within the last 12 months.

A team of armed men estimated at about five arrived at Pariya's Gwarimpa residence at 7am and gained entry into the compound when they put a gun to the head of a household staff member named Ibrahim.

He was abducted on his way back to the house after purchasing a GSM recharge card in the neighbourhood. Each armed with a pistol, four of the assassins broke into two groups upon entry into the compound.

At gunpoint, two of them attempted to force Ibrahim to lead them into the main house through the side kitchen entrance. When they became convinced that he had none of the keys, they allowed him to proceed to the boys' quarters to make a phone call to the main house for the door to be opened.

While this drama unfolded, the mobile police (mopol) on duty who had changed into mufti and was preparing to go off-duty, encountered one of the armed men who had hidden his gun as he walked aimlessly in the compound.

The hoodlum pretended to be a casual worker as he mumbled a greeting and exited the compound when challenged. After bolting the small door at the gate, the mopol was immediately confronted by a second gunman who demanded his surrender by pointing a cocked pistol at his face. But the policeman with lightning reflexes dived into the security post to retrieve his gun. In that split of seconds, he was shot twice by the assassin - once on his left arm and once on his right thigh.

Once he grabbed his gun, the mopol turned and opened fire on the hoodlum, killing him

instantly. He then took cover and called for back-up from the Gwarimpa police station.

In the minutes he took to make the call, the two other assassins attempting to gain entrance into the main house, fired two shots at Ibrahim, one grazed a finger on his left hand and the second penetrated his thigh.

They then retreated towards the gate, taking the corpse of their fallen colleague but leaving the pistol, tentatively identified as belonging to a class normally issued to the Nigerian Armed forces. They were heard driving away with a roar immediately afterwards, a pointer to a fifth hoodlum who must have kept the engine of the run-away car running.

The two casualties of the attack are now in a private hospital and are said to be responding to treatment, according

ing to Mr. Pariya, who was seen anxiously pacing the hospital corridor.

It would be recalled that Mr. Pariya, who featured in several instances in the now quashed allegations against the vice president by the Bayo Ojo Panel, had on 15 September alerted that he was being followed around Abuja by some men in dark suits and dark sun glasses inside an unmarked Peugeot 504 Station Wagon.

In many instances, he had to take extraordinary measures to shake off his pursuers. The personal assistant in fear of his life had in a letter through an Abuja lawyer detailing the specific threats he has received written to the commissioner of police, FCT, the Inspector-General of Police and the Director-General, SSS.