

FCT battles banditry amidst decayed infrastructure

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of Finance, Zainab Ahmed, disclosed that Nigeria was still paying China for the loan on the failed project.

Worried by the development, an advocacy group, the Social-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP), sued the federal government over its failure to address the problem.

In 2023, a Federal High Court judge, Emeka Nwite, ordered the Buhari administration to account for the spending.

However, the present National Assembly has vowed to probe the failed CCTV contract.

The senator representing the FCT, Ireti Kingibe, said the legislators would get to the root of the botched CCTV camera scandal.

"On the botched CCTV camera contract totalling \$470m, the Chinese had done their bit, but unfortunately, Nigeria did not make any provision to operate the cameras. The Senate will get to the root of the matter," she said.

Tinubu approves procurement of tracking equipment

At a recent media interface in Abuja, FCT Minister Nyesom Wike said President Bola Tinubu had approved an emergency procurement of digital tracking tools to help halt kidnapping.

Disclosing that lack of adequate equipment in the past led to recent unpleasant events, Wike said that with the emergency procurement approved by the president, the story would change.

"So many facilities were not provided. Vehicles for security agencies are not there. You cannot believe that equipment to track criminals are not there. When anything happens, they go back to the Office of the National Security Adviser or the Force Headquarters. That is not the way it is supposed to be.

"Mr President has given us approval for an emergency procurement of equipment. We have been able to identify what each of the agencies need and we will be able to provide them.

"Again, before we came on board, the police said they had requested the procurement of a certain number of motorcycles for places where cars could not get to, as well as mountainous areas. Unfortunately, they were not provided, but we are going to do that now.

"Security is not just this equipment; you also have to motivate the personnel. I don't want to talk about the strategies because we are talking about security now.

"Assuming Mr President did not approve this emergency procurement. We had been to the Bureau for Public Procurement since December to allow us procure under emergency. If you had to go through the whole hog of the processes, it can take you two months; and that is not what you tell members of the public. The procurement process is a problem.

"The next thing is to set up a joint security outfit here where they have their structure and equipment so that if anything happens, the task force would know that it is their function to move in.

"Yes, it will cost us some funds and take us some time, but what is important is that we have identified that this is a lacuna we have to cover," he said.

It is not yet clear how soon the equipment would be delivered, but a security expert, Abdullahi Umar Salihu, said the major problem with Nigeria was impromptu arrangements that rarely worked.

"It is indeed a good initiative, but it is at the same time unthinkable that this is the time they are revisiting the issue of the CCTV project. This is the FCT and not a certain far-flung village. If we cannot secure the capital territory, it means we cannot secure any place in Nigeria.

"My advice to the FCT Administration is to approach the security architecture holistically. There should be a marshal plan that will outline those who install the CCTVs, police stations, rail lines and buses that would be procured," he said.

Comatose public transport as gov't bans unpainted buses, taxis



■ Security operatives and locals during one of the town hall meetings with the FCT Minister at Kwali recently

Daily Trust Saturday reports that the collapse of the FCT urban mass transit system, occasioned by a lack of proper monitoring of private operators, has been linked to the dwindling security challenges in the federal capital city.

One noticeable impact of the population explosion in Abuja, the country's capital, is in the area of public transportation.

Many people have been abducted or robbed after boarding unregulated buses or taxis within Abuja and its environs.

For long, there have been calls for an efficient transport system that will make movements easier, safer and sustainable.

Different ministers of the territory had come and gone with ambitious plans for the transport sector, only for the dream to go with them at the end of their tenures.

In the heat of the present security situation in the territory, Wike said unpainted taxis and buses would soon be banned as part of measures to address the issue of criminal gangs disguising as commercial drivers.

"We are not going to allow vehicles that are not painted with FCT colour and registered by the FCTA to ply commercial routes in the territory. That way, you would know that the driver is certified by the FCT and the buses and taxis were also approved.

"When this is done, you as the passenger will not take the risk of going to board any vehicle you don't know," the minister said recently.

But some residents who spoke with our correspondent decried the high cost of transportation to their places of work since the subsidy removal by the federal government, and feared that disbanding the few unpainted taxis would further aggravate their plight.

This is as some professionals who own private cars for their daily commutes have turned their cars into mini taxis to augment their income amid harsh economic realities.

Mrs Audu Funmilayo, a resident of Bwari, said it had been hectic coping with the transport situation in the country's capital amid the security challenge.

She said that apart from transport fares, the struggle to get a vehicle to the city centre had always been difficult, especially during rush hours.

She advised the FCT Administration to put in place an effective public transportation system before banning the unpainted buses and taxis.

Madam Esther Emmanuel from Kubwa, a satellite town in Bwari Area Council, shared a similar experience and warned of the consequences of banning any form of vehicle without providing alternatives.

Failed light rail project

To find a better alternative to reduce the transportation challenges of the residents of the country's capital, the federal government came up with the light rail project for the city, which has also failed.

The multi-billion-naira Abuja Rail Mass

Transit, also known as Abuja Light Rail, is rotting away after being abandoned for years.

Daily Trust Saturday reports that the metro rail, which was commissioned by ex-President Buhari on July 12, 2018 and opened for passengers the following week, has since been abandoned, paving the way for criminals to feast on the facility.

The project was originally meant to solve the perennial transportation problem in the FCT and its adjoining towns and cities.

When the metro rail was opened for business in 2018, only the section from the Abuja Metro Station in the Central Business District to the airport was put to use, with an intermediate station at Idku.

The entire project was proposed to cover a total distance of 290 km (180 mi) to be developed in six phases or lots.

It was to cost US\$824million, with 60 per cent to be funded with loans from the Exim Bank of China.

After all the paperwork, which was not made public, was completed, construction work on lots 1 and 3 commenced.

Sadly, the train service soon folded up, and therefore, did not add value to the citizens, who are in serious need of an efficient transportation system.

Thousands of commuters who were aware of the planned light rail project and anxiously waiting for it to mature are still in shock at the wisdom behind constructing the first phase of the multi-million-dollar project in an obscure location.

Although there were expansion plans, most of the people who spoke to Daily Trust Saturday said the ideal thing was for the government to first construct the rail line in areas it was needed before expanding it to other locations.

Some of the areas identified by the residents included Bwari-Dutse, Nyayan-Mararaba, Kuje and Kwali-Gwagwalada axis.

Lack of adequate streetlights

Wike, on assumption of duty as FCT minister, identified the restoration of streetlights as one of his cardinal agenda to light up the city as part of efforts to make Abuja a befitting capital city and curb criminality.

Residents believe that apart from the initial efforts seen to restore the streetlight system, everything seems to have gone under, and many roads, even within the city centre, are now dark at night.

Some experts said dark streets would encourage all forms of crime, and called on the authorities to work towards fixing streetlights in the city centre, as well as provide new ones in major satellite towns in the area councils.

Soft infrastructure key to redeeming FCT

Mallam Umar Shuaibu noted in his piece that because of the population surge in the country's capital, the number of police stations was inadequate to curb the rising crimes in the territory.

Many districts are opened up without the

required police presence to secure the districts.

Recently, the Aguma of Gwagwalada, Alhaji Muhammad Magaji, also appealed for more police stations in his domain.

He said the Gwagwalada divisional police headquarters was battling to get good vehicles to curb insecurity in the area, which hosts federal government institutions and attracts influx of people into the council.

In his remark during a recent town hall meeting attended by the minister, the monarch urged the FCT Administration to provide more patrol vehicles to the police division to enhance their patrol in the area.

"The honourable minister sir, I want to say something; and I think the FCT commissioner of police is here. The Gwagwalada divisional police have one patrol vehicle, which is painful," he said.

Responding, the minister directed the council chairman to liaise immediately with the FCT commissioner of police, CP Haruna Garba, for two additional police stations to be established in the council.

Wike said new patrol vehicles would be provided to all the divisional police headquarters across the six area councils.

Police kill wanted kidnap kingpin terrorising FCT, hideouts destroyed

Operatives of the Nigeria Police Force attached to the Department of Force Intelligence - Intelligence Response Team (DFI-IRT), as well as anti-violent crimes and anti-kidnapping units and other state commands, have neutralised the most wanted kidnap kingpin, Mai Gemu, also known as Godara.

The kidnap kingpin was killed at 1:40am on Friday, alongside two other members of his gang after a fierce gun-duel.

Olumuyiwa Adejobi, the spokesman of the Nigeria Police Force, disclosed this to journalists during a press briefing at the headquarters of the IRT located in Guzape, Abuja on Friday.

Adejobi, an Assistant Commissioner of Police, explained that some of the bandits were terrorising and kidnapping innocent citizens from Bwari, an outskirts of the country's capital, Kaduna and Nasarawa states.

The senior police officer stressed that this was another significant stride towards fortifying the security landscape of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) following the recent launch of the Special Intervention Squad (SIS).

According to the police spokesman, security operatives would not relent in combing bushes and shanties in border areas between the FCT, Niger, Kaduna and Nasarawa states.

"In the early hours of today, about 0140hrs, operatives of the DFI-IRT engaged some armed bandits within the axis in a fierce gun battle and neutralised three of them, including their gang leader, Mai Gemu, also known as Godara.

"We can say without mincing words that the gang and its camp have been destroyed. The gang members and many others who ventured into crime and kidnapping in Bwari, border communities linking to the Kaduna axis would never know peace as our concentrated efforts are being intensified," Adejobi told journalists at the briefing.

'Suppliers of ammunition to bandits nabbed'

Giving further update, Adejobi also disclosed that some people suspected to be suppliers of ammunition to the terrorists were apprehended on the Abuja-Kaduna highway on January 24.

He said operatives of the DFI-IRT working based on intelligence subsequently intercepted groups of persons on their way along the Abuja-Kaduna expressway.

Specifically, the senior cop noted that they were suspected to be major suppliers of arms and ammunition to bandits operating in Niger, Zamfara and Kaduna states.

"The suspects, upon arrest and consequent interrogation, confessed to the crime. One of them, Ibrahim Hussaini, is currently in custody while the other two are leading IRT operatives to their hideouts, where they stored their weapons for distribution," he added.