

Credit crunch: NEC approves \$2bn for FG, states, LGs

**Ihuoma Chiedozie,
Abuja**

THE National Economic Council on Tuesday approved the withdrawal of \$2bn (more than N300bn) from the Excess Crude Account to buoy the economy.

It took the decision after a presentation by the Central Bank of Nigeria at its meeting in Abuja on Tuesday. The CBN's presentation had indicated that liquidity problems in commercial banks had led to a credit crunch.

The Minister of National Planning, Dr. Shamsudeen Usman, told journalists after the meeting that President Umaru Yar'Adua had requested that the \$2bn should be made available to the three tiers of government to mitigate the impact of the liquidity crisis.

Usman disclosed that the \$2bn would be distributed next week after the sharing formula would have been worked out at a meeting of the Federation Account Allocation Committee.

"Because of the tight liquidity in the capital market and as a result of the credit crunch, there is a need to ensure more liquidity to avoid recession," Usman said.

It was not clear on Tuesday if the Central Bank of Nigeria will disburse the \$2bn to the three tiers of government in dollars or in naira.

is need for an amendment of details of the Public Procurement Act as passed by the Federal Government to avoid it becoming an impediment to economic growth.

"Some states are awaiting Federal Government's amendment."

Although NEC did not give any deadline for the states to pass the Act, Imo State Governor Ikedi Ohakim said that political problems were responsible for the inability of some state Houses of Assembly to pass the law.

"No time lag was set; very few states are yet to enact the law mostly due to political problems between the executive and legislature," he said.

The NEC also approved the draft of the Vision 2020 Economic Transformation Blueprint for Nigeria after a presentation by the NPC.

The blueprint will be subsequently presented to the National Assembly, after which it will be brought before the Federal Executive Council for final approval.

"We believe that finally we have a long-term plan that will help this country develop itself," Usman said.

In another development, the NEC advised that all stakeholders should support

the post-amnesty agenda in order to ensure its success.

The council gave the advice after commending the President for initiating and executing the amnesty programme for militants in the Niger Delta.

It also assured the repentant militants that they would be fully rehabilitated and reintegrated into the society.

Akpabio said, "The NEC looked at the issue of amnesty whose period ended on the 4th of October. NEC was very

satisfied with the handling of the programme and commended Mr. President for initiating the programme.

"NEC was very happy with the militants for surrendering their arms. It advises that every hand should be on deck to support the agencies of government and the Niger Delta states in the post-amnesty period.

"NEC assures militants that they will be totally rehabilitated and reintegrated into the society; they will have no cause

to regret."

The Ministry of Police Affairs also made a presentation on the funding requirements for the proposed police reforms programme.

The presentation was based on the recommendations of the Muhammed Yusuf Police Reform Committee report.

The NEC discussed the draft report and agreed that "very soon, the necessary laws would be put in place to make it implementable."

French national feared killed in Ogun

**Ademola Oni,
Abeokuta**

A French national with the Lafarge Cement WAPCO Nigeria Plc, whose name could not be immediately ascertained, was feared killed on Monday by suspected kidnappers.

Details of the incident remained scanty as at 8pm on Tuesday but a source said the French national was kidnapped between Ifo and Ewekoro on the Lagos-Abeokuta Expressway.

The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that some officials of the cement company and some security agencies mounted a search for the

'missing' man.

He added that the man was found dead at an undisclosed location around Papalanto at about 6pm on Monday night.

But a source in the company, who also did not want his name in print, claimed that the bandits, who kidnapped the Frenchman were armed robbers.

Efforts by our correspondent to confirm the story, however, did not succeed as the top echelon of the state Police Command, led by the Commissioner, Alhaji Hashimu Argungu, was said to have travelled to the United States on an official duty.

The mobile telephones of

Argungu, that of the Police Public Relations Officer, Mr. Olumuyiwa Adejobi, and the Assistant Police Commissioner, State Criminal Investigation Department, Mr. Yemi Omojola, were switched off.

The Communications Manager, LCWNP, Mrs. Temitope Oguntokun, did not confirm the incident but informed our correspondent that the company would clarify the situation on Wednesday (today).

Oguntokun, who spoke on the telephone, said she was not aware of the incident, but promised to get in touch with relevant authorities.