politics

How anxiety over hunger protest triggered FG's emergency policies

Given how the hunger protest has played out in different locations across the country, IMOLEAYO **OYEDEYI** examines the Federal Government's failed attempt to stop the mass demonstration through a series of emergency policies

TGERIANS are angry, and their apparent fury was demonstrated across the country on Thursday when they hit different cities to protest against the prevailing economic hardship plaguing them under the current Renewed Hope administration of President Bola Tinubu.

Despite frantic efforts, threats, and a series of court orders from the Nigerian Police, the military, and the Federal Government to force them into confined demonstrations, the angry protesters thronged major streets in key states of the federation to register their displeasure, displaying placeage with

displaying placards wi various inscriptions such as #EndBadGovernance, #TinubuMustGo, etc.

They demanded an end to bad governance in the country and the reversal of some of the

defining policies of Tinubu's government, which include the removal of the fuel subsidy and the floating of the naira.

In an apparent displeasure with the socio-economic state of the country, the protesters

economic state of the country, the protesters chanted various solidarity songs, defying spirited efforts from the police to silence them through the firing of teargas canisters. The protests had begun peacefully but later took a violent turn in some cities as confrontations intensified between the police and the irate throng.

Amid the ensuing violence, no fewer than 17 persons reportedly lost their lives in Kano, Niger, Borno, Kaduna, Jigawa states, and Abuja during the #EndBadGovernance mass demonstrations. demonstrations.

demonstrations.

One person was shot dead in Abuja and Kano, two were killed in Jigawa, six others were reportedly gunned down by security forces in Niger, while four died in Borno and three in Kaduna.

The protests paralysed economic activities in most states of the country as businesses, banks, shopping plazas, and some markets were shut on Thursday over the fear of mass looting and carnage, which later enveloped the demonstrations, especially in some porthern states.

According to observers, flashes of growing mass discontent had hit the country days before the protest, sending jitters down the spines of the Federal Government. Amid the development, the state governors and ministers held various emergency meetings to prevent the August 1 showdown, but all to

no avail.

Like the 2012 #OccupyNigeria protests and the 2020 #EndSARS demonstration, during which the pushback against government insensitivity and profligacy resounded breathtakingly across the country and even among Nigerians in the Diaspora, many observers believe that the August 1 protest was another avenue for the Nigerian youths to peacefully and collectively register their anger and displeasure with the misery enveloping the country under the present

administration. predicted, the protest initially



snowballed into heavy violence, arson, and carnage. Though the All Progressives Congress had accused the opposition parties of instigating the protest to undermine the Renewed Hope administration, the Nigerian

Labour Congress faulted the position.

The NLC said Nigerians wouldn't have considered hitting the streets in August with placards displaying anti-government hashtags if the current administration had not renewed their dejection and depression with a series of badly implemented economic policies that have toughpened the ages of doing policies that have toughened the ease of doing business in the country and consistently spiked both food and general inflation.
"The truth is that millions of Nigerians are angry about the state of the national economy. A situation where most Nigerian families are forced to eat one miserable meal

families are forced to eat one miserable meal a day and eating from the dustbin is now seen as luxury beckons for serious intervention by the government," says the NLC President, Joe

In a press statement issued on Monday, the NLC president cited recent statistics to underscore the scale of the current crisis. He quoted the National Bureau of Statistics, which said approximately 133 million
Nigerians live below extreme poverty lines.
Meanwhile, the International Rescue
Committee also reported that in the first three

quarters of 2024, about 32 million Nigerians had been exposed to acute hunger.

With this, Ajaero said, "It is, therefore, condescending and dismissive to describe the

daily brutish ordeal that Nigerians are going through as a sponsored political dissent." Hesaid every Nigerian had the constitutional

right to express their grievances, saying, "During these very difficult times, the right of Nigerians to complain must be fully

labour leader further urged a conciliatory approach from the government. He said, "These are dire times. Nigerians are He said, These are thre times, regenans are angry. The times require the government to jaw-jaw and not war-war with Nigerians. The truth is that you cannot smack a child and at the same time ask the child not to cry. A stitch in time may still save nine.

Even though the United Nations Department of Safety and Security had expressed worries that the planned protests could be hijacked by groups with ulterior motives and turned into a violent adventure, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar threw his weight behind the mass action,

declaring it constitutional.

President Tinubu, however, issued a mass appeal, assuring that his administration was already working to address the grievances of the seething masses. And truly, the President carried out some emergency carried out some emergency measures to appease the displeased youths.

Less than 48 hours to the planned mass action, Tinubu created centres across the country where Nigerians can purchase a 50kg

bag of rice for N40,000.

He also directed the Nigerian National
Petroleum Company Limited to sell crude to
the Dangote Refinery and other upcoming

the Dangote Refinery and other upcoming refineries in naira.

Although the President had earlier announced that he might stop the importation of import duties on food and essential commodities, he later suspended import duties to cushion the effect of the inflationary trend in Nigeria. However, on Monday, he removed the duties on food importation.

The Federal Government also unveiled the

The Federal Government also unveiled the Youth Internship Scheme initiated by the MDDC for 10,000 youths of the Niger Delta region and approved N50,000 monthly stipends for them.

This was just as the Nigerian

This was just as the Nigerian Communications Commission directed telecommunications operators to immediately restore all blocked phone lines due to the non-linkage of National Identification Numbers to

President Tinubu also on Monday signed the new Minimum Wage Act into law. However, the catalogue of emergency directives failed to deter the protesters.

to deter the protesters.

But despite the moves from the Federal Government, the question on the lips of some observers is whether most of those in the corridors of power in the current administration have the moral standing to caution the masses against an antigovernment demonstration, despite being the driving forces that triggered the 2012 #OccupyNigeria protests against the Goodluck Jonathan administration for removing the fuel subsidy. removing the fuel subsidy.

This was just as some other political watchers felt the protest was ill-timed because it is still early to start crucifying the present administration for the current state of the country, which they largely blamed on the brazen and clueless economic mismangement exhibited by the standard country.

mismanagement exhibited by its predecessor.
Speaking with Sunday PUNCH, a constitutional lawyer, Dr Tunji Abayomi,

protest, the demonstration must be done with caution, so as not to violate the conditions that underpin their legal freedom to protest.

They (the government) have a right to say people should not protest. But a protest is evidence of discomfort. But that doesn't stop the people from protesting. So, what I am saying is: the government has a right as a matter of self-preservation to ask people not

to protest.

"It is like the husband asking the wife not to fight. Even if the husband has done something wrong, it is normal and that's why he can ask the wife not to fight. Likewise, the government

can ask the citizens not to protest. It is within the nexus of self-preservation.

"But if the people have a case, they can protest. However, I think what the government should do is to guide the protest in a way that is not turned into an abuse. This is because freedom to protest is a conditional right. It is not absolute. So, it is important for the youths not to violate the conditions. Abayomi stated.

He noted, "Every government will obviously be worried because of the energy of the youths be worried because of the energy of the youths and their limited tendencies for reflection, control, and soberness. We all saw what happened in Kenya. But having said that, the solution to Nigeria's problems is not protest. "When a protest occurs, especially when it becomes uncontrolled, it worsens the situation of any country. Come to think of it what will be the expense of the protein the protein that the protein the protein the protein that we have the protein the protein that the protein the protein the protein that the protein the protein that the protein that the protein the protein that the protein that the protein that the protein the protein t

it, what will be the essence of the protest? It is that we are unhappy, discontented, and dissatisfied. But these are all well-known

"Even the President has said that he knows the pains of the people. So, what will then be the essence of the protest? Will it be to repeat the obvious? And then, those youths with genuine agitation also need to be careful, lest it is perceived as recklessness. I say this because the guaranthe says. because we currently have a situation where political figures in the opposition are backing

However, a public interest lawyer, Inibehe Effiong, said the protest was long overdue because the government had been depleting scarce public resources on irrelevant and

scarce public resources on irrelevant and extravagant expenditures.

"The protest is long overdue. Nigerians are experiencing excruciating economic hardship. At the same time, the government is depleting scarce public resources to fund the extravagant lifestyle of the President and other people in government. The prices of basic commodities have gone up exponentially. exponentially.

We have not seen any major efforts towards institutional reforms. Corruption is still rife. Nepotism is also now fully entrenched. So, there are 1,001 reasons Nigerians should protest, but to say that there have to be clearly defined demands before people can protest is just misguided," Effiong stated.

In a similar vein, another lawyer, Festus Ogun, told Sunday PUNCH that the protest was very consequential and symptomatic of the bad governance and insensitivity of the

the bad governance and insensitivity of the current administration to the people's plights.

"Protest is a constitutional right that is guaranteed under Sections 39, 40, and 41 of the constitution. You cannot beat a child and the constitution. You cannot beat a child and expect that the child will not cry. The people of Nigeria have been cheated and oppressed for too long. So, the protest is only a consequence of bad governance and leadership that we experience on a daily basis. It is simply consequential. For every action, there must be consequences," the lawyer said.

As Abayomi stated, the government will likely not back down on its resolve to see an end to the protest. Amid the rising calls from

end to the protest. Amid the rising calls from the government quarters, only time will tell whether the organisers of the protest will bow to the rising pressure anytime soon.