

Nigeria - [419 Coalition](#) 2003 News on Nigerian Scam / 419 Operations

31 DEC 2003

From ThisDay, a Nigerian newspaper:

Nigerian 419ers Surface in Baghdad
Fraud

By Ayodele Aminu

There appear to be no depths to which Nigerian 419ers will not go in order to feed their lust for riches beyond the wildest dreams of avarice.

Indeed, they are now masquerading as coalition troops stationed in Baghdad who claim to have unearthed one of Saddam's treasure hordes. It's sort of like "Kelly's Heroes" but relocated to Lagos and the sun-kissed banks of the Tigris.

Still, it looks like a good business opportunity for someone with an immediate need for huge amounts of ready cash. Your own haulage company would probably be handy, too, judging by the proposal: "Hello Dearly, We are teams of American coalition troops writing from Baghdad Iraq!

"We are urgently seeking for your willingness to secure the below consignments as shown in the attached photos!

"The goods were captured here in Baghdad, abandoned in one of the Saddam Hussein's Treasure House. However, the contents of the box are Gold Bars, Gold coins and huge amount of fund in the sealed boxes!

"At moment, we are intending to ship these goods outside Iraq for safekeeping on our behalf but due to law and restriction order, we are unable to transport these goods to AMERICA .We hereby seek for your assistance to receive the box in Europe.

"We are offering you 25 per cent of the entire goods either in cash or in value. Therefore, we will appreciate your effort to get back to us via email confirming your interest to assist us receive the consignment.

"As soon as we receive your positive reply, we shall furnish you with further details.

"Please, note, this issue must be handled with utmost confidentiality as to avoid publicity!

"Yours truly. Capt. STELLA .A (Team Leader)

"Anyone interested in taking up Captain Stella's offer should forward their credentials and full details of their bank accounts (including sample signatures, etc.) to us at El Reg and we will ensure that they are delivered to the relevant military authorities.

"We will keep you fully posted on any further dictators/bullion/gold coins unearthed in palaces or small holes in the ground, and any business

opportunities which may arise from such discoveries," stated the proposal.

419 Coalition Note: The 419ers have always been very creative in their "tales" and often use current events worldwide in an attempt to make them sound more credible. But it is important to note that no matter what the "tale" told, or the actual or ostensible origination of the 419 communication, the vast majority of 419 solicitations are of Nigerian origin or are connected to syndicates operating from Nigeria. There are local copycats, of course, in other countries etc., but they tend not to fare very well. In essence, 419 is a Nigerian "thing". There is much speculation on why that is so, but there it is.

4 DEC 2003

From Vanguard, a Nigerian newspaper:

Money laundering: EFCC seizes \$100m properties

By Babajide Komolafe

LAGOS The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) said it has seized properties worth \$100 million from over 100 suspected money launderers across the country.

Executive chairman of the chu Ribadu disclosed this in Lagos yesterday at a seminar on "anti-money laundering", organised by Travelex, issuers of Thomas Cook travelers cheques. Speaking on "Progress and problems in the anti-money laundering crusade," Ribadu stated that the properties were seized in order to send signals that there would be no sacred cows in the assault launched by the commission against money laundering and other economic crimes.

The anti-money laundering statutes, he pointed out allows anything to be seized and forfeited if it was used to facilitate the commission of a range of crimes, or if the assets are shown to have been acquired through the proceeds of crime. Seizing properties of money launderers, he stated have been discovered to send a message that Nigeria is not a safe haven for proceeds of crimes. Ribadu indicted banks for not forthcoming in disclosing customers' transactions to the authorities, stating that some banks argued that bank business is based on trust and confidentiality which the Bank Secrecy Act protects. "Hence some banks when requested to submit records, hesitate and in some cases erroneously demand orders of court."

These practices, Ribadu noted runs contrary to the money laundering law which provides an exclusion clause for the Bank Secrecy Act. Speaking on the pitfalls in the anti-money laundering crusade, the crime commission boss noted that enforcement of the provisions of the money laundering statute is a major problem militating against effort to eliminate the crime. According to him, "the legal regime as it is currently couched is prone to manipulation."

"The law ought to have anticipated and boldly address key issues relating to the manipulation of the criminal justice system." Issues such as bail, adjournment, spurious motions, unduly long trials and underhand tactics for which lawyers are notorious in employing to delay the legal process ought to have been addressed in the light of the experience of the ICPC, which is yet to secure up to three definite convictions four years after establishment", he explained.

3 DEC 2003

From ThisDay, a Nigerian newspaper:

419: Crimes Commission Recovers \$200m
FG reads riot act to banks

From Agaju Madugba in Kaduna

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has so far recovered \$200 million from various advance fee fraud suspects otherwise known as 419 from both within and outside the country.

This is apart from an additional sum of N1 billion the commission retrieved from oil bunkering syndicates that defrauded the Federal Inland Revenue Services (FIRS).

The EFCC chairman, Nuhu Ribadu, who announced the recovery of money from the fraudsters yesterday said the commission had also arrested over 200 suspects, with over 40 cases currently pending in the law courts.

Also, Minister of State for Finance, Mrs. Nenadi Usman, has vowed that the Federal Government would clampdown on banks and financial institutions obstructing its plans to curb corruption and other financial crimes.

However, there was a blistering indictment of the judiciary by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), whose chairman, Justice Mustapha Akanbi, yesterday accused the judiciary of complicity in delay in the prosecution of accused fraudsters.

"Unnecessary adjournments, frivolous orders of stay of proceedings, all manners of legal chicanery are used to frustrate efforts of the commission to bring corrupt people to book," Akanbi lamented.

Ribadu, Usman and Akanbi spoke at the on-going workshop on corruption, economic and financial crimes, organised by the African Diaspora Initiative in collaboration with the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), in Kaduna.

According to Ribadu, his commission had "passed through the valley of the shadow of death" in the past eight months in trying to enforce economic and financial laws.

He said, "at the moment, we are investigating several cases of illegal oil bunkering where we are in custody of several suspects. We are very happy that just in the last two months, we have succeeded in destabilising these illegal oil bunkerers and we are going after them and we will smoke them out to face the full wrath of the law."

"At the international level, we are very proud of our modest achievements. The whole world is talking to us and we are receiving full support and cooperation of all," he said.

Ribadu regretted that economic and financial crimes in the country have assumed alarming proportions. He noted that the development had tended to reduce the rate of foreign investment in the country.

"There is resultant economic instability and the attendant business failures and accentuated unemployment. The effect of high unemployment level will continue to haunt our populace until we eradicate the malaise of economic and financial crimes," he said.

While announcing government's preparation to descend on bankers who pose obstacles to the plans to stem the tide of financial crimes, Minister of State for Finance, Mrs Usman, told the workshop that government has identified some financial institutions as constituting an impediment to the realisation of the war on corruption and other financial crimes.

Describing the financial subsector as the livewire of the nation's economy, the minister explained that its sanitisation must therefore begin with the banks and other financial institutions.

According to Usman, "it is a clear breach of trust and a disgraceful corporate conduct for a bank

duly authorised to collect taxes for government to fail or neglect to remit such payments as at when due, or even convert collected government revenues to its use.

"It is sheer greed and an unethical conduct for banks to engage in foreign exchange racketeering. If our banking and financial institutions cannot be trusted, our economy will be in serious jeopardy," she said.

As part of measures to check unwholesome financial misconduct, she said government had outlined a number of processes and procedures to tackle "corrupt practices and fraudulent tendencies which inhibit national development."

She said the Ministry of Finance was committed to its role as the vanguard in government's quest to achieve and sustain macro-economic stability.

Usman said, "the Federal Ministry of Finance is proud to be in the forefront of the economic and governance reforms that are currently being implemented by the Federal Government.

"The administration is determined to break out of the cycle of under-development which is largely self-inflicted through corruption and economic crimes.

"Gone are the days public officers would get away with inflated contracts to the detriment of the national treasury.

"There is in place the Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit (BMPIU) which deals with contract award review and certification, commonly referred to as the due process.

"Through this mechanism, value for money is elevated as the fundamental premise for public expenditure," she said.

But Justice Akanbi who absolved the ICPC of some of the common allegations being levelled against it noted that the commission only acts within the Act establishing it.

According to him, "the commission has also been accused of not having put anyone behind bars yet. It must be made quite clear that the powers of the ICPC stop at the prosecution of offenders. Our courts determine the cases. Quite sadly, some of these courts constitute themselves into obstacles to expeditious hearing of corruption cases as they encourage the use of the judicial process to delay justice."

He said the National Assembly had already begun to consider the amendment of the ICPC Enabling Act to enable the commission apprehend suspected fraudsters, without necessarily waiting for petitions from the public.

Akanbi confirmed Transparency International rating of Nigeria as he said, "granted that this assessment is based on a perception index, there is no running away from the glaring fact that we are a very corrupt society."

"The commission is presently working with the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) and bankrolling the development of an anti-corruption curriculum which will be infused into subjects at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education," he said.

419 Coalition comment: We applaud the recovery of 419ed monies and await the repatriation of the recovered funds.

27 NOV 2003

From silicon.com, located at <http://www.silicon.com>

419 crackdown must get to the source, say UK police
Andy McCue

A proposed new crackdown on '419' email scams by the Nigerian government must give police powers to arrest the wealthy and well-connected criminals at the heart of the operation, according to the UK's National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS).

The 'advanced fee fraud' 419 emails promise recipients a share of the huge fortune of some dead politician or businessman in return for letting the transaction pass through their bank account. Victims end up sending their ID and financial details and an up-front 'processing' fee running into thousands of pounds, which the perpetrators then disappear with.

NCIS claims the fraud is responsible for the theft of £150m a year from the UK and Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo said at a presidential committee on email scams this week that he plans to increase measures to crackdown on 419 criminals in his country.

A committee has been set up to consider recommendations including new legislation and a new agency to deal with the problem.

A spokesman for NCIS told silicon.com that the move will be welcomed by law enforcement agencies around the world but that any measures will need to go to the heart of these operations and target the powerful, rich and well-connected criminals in the region.

"We pick up the small fry and regional co-ordinators but what to date has eluded law enforcement are the really big boys, and some of them are very wealthy and well-connected," he said.

419 is still very much a problem in the UK with the average victim conned out of over £50,000. The NCIS spokesman said that the bigger picture is that this money is used to fund much more serious organised crime.

"We know the criminals are involved in heroin trafficking, immigration crime, vehicle theft and credit card crime," he said.

NCIS will wait to see what recommendations are proposed but said anything that gives law enforcement the chance to disrupt a link in the chain of organised crime is like "pulling the tail of a rather large tiger".

The Nigerian High Commission in London was contacted but was unavailable for comment.

Story URL: <http://www.silicon.com/management/government/0,39024677,39117106,00.htm>

27 NOV 2003

From the Daily Times, a Nigerian newspaper:

Appeal against EFCC's powers: Court suspends Ade Bendel's trial

ANGELA NKWO

AN Ikeja High Court has suspended the trial of Lagos socialite, Adedeji Alumile, aka Ade Bendel, for alleged advance fee fraud popularly known as 419, pending the determination of his appeal against the court's ruling that Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) chairman, Nuhu Ribadu, is empowered to initiate criminal proceedings against suspected fraudsters.

Suspending Ade Bendel's trial on Wednesday, Justice M.A Obadina said she was doing so to enable the accused exercise his right of appeal and know the outcome.

Last November 12, Obadina had, while ruling on an application brought by Ade Bendel, declared that Ribadu had powers to charge suspected fraudsters to court, either alone or in collaboration with the Attorney-General of the Federation and Justice Minister, on behalf of the Federal Government.

Obadina held that going by provisions of section 171 (IB) of the EFCC Act, Ribadu could charge persons to court and struck out the application brought by Ade Bendel's lawyer, Lekan Ojo, on grounds that it was ill-conceived and unmeritorious.

After the ruling, Ojo told the court that his client had appealed against the ruling and urged Obadina to stay proceedings, pending the decision of the appellate court.

Ade Bendel and one Shina Olowoake (a.k.a Abdullahi Abdulsalam) were charged with 419.

Ade Bendel is being held at Kirikiri Maximum prisons, while Olowoake Shina is in the custody of the EFCC.

The duo are accused of allegedly swindling a Nigerian of N28 million, an offence which is contrary to section 8 (a) and 1(3) of the Advance fee fraud and Other Related Offences Act 13 of 1995 as amended by Decree 62 of 1999.

419 Coalition comment: ***** Sigh ***** Is anything
EVER going to come of any of these cases?

25 NOV 2003

From the Daily Times, a Nigerian newspaper:

419: Ibekwe collapses in prison, may go blind

By ANGELA NKWO

EMBATTLED re-elected House of Representatives member, Morris Ibekwe, being held over allegations of financial crimes, may soon go blind, just as he collapsed in prison on Monday, after a meal of jollof rice and beans.

The DAILY TIMES gathered that Ibekwe had, after the meal at 4.30p.m. on Monday, collapsed and was assisted to the prison clinic by prisoners for medical attention.

It was learnt that the food was prepared at the prison.

When contacted, his wife, Helen, said she suspected that the meal was poisoned. I fear he has been poisoned, or how else could he have collapsed after a meal which he is not new to, she queried.

As at press time, Ibekwe was still at the prison clinic, while medical authorities at the place were making efforts to contact their superiors to transfer him to the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) for proper medical attention. He is said to have lost weight considerably.

Also, it is feared that his hypertensive condition may have greatly impaired his sight, which not a few people suggested may lead to blindness.

Already, the suspect has been diagnosed to have glaucoma, a disease of the eyes, while there were fears within his family that he might soon go blind.

It would be recalled that for two consecutive times, Ibekwe was taken to court on wheel chair to face trial before Justice Kudirat Kekere-Ekun of the Ikeja High Court.

419 Coalition note: We're not so sure that his victims give much of a damn about Ibekwe's health, but are sure they want their monies recovered and repatriated. We're waiting for a story on that, which would be interesting indeed.

23 NOV 2003

From Reuters:

German woman leads fight against Nigerian fraudsters

Five years ago, three Nigerian men tracked Frieda Springer-Beck to her village in Bavaria, put a gun to her head and told her to drop charges against a man she accused of staging an elaborate international fraud.

Now the 54-year-old German woman's fight against Nigeria's notorious junk-mail conmen is starting to see results.

Since May, Nigeria's new anti-fraud unit, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), has arrested more than 200 people for junk mail scams, including the man Springer-Beck says duped her out of \$360,000 in 1993.

The so-called 419 scam, named after the article in Nigeria's criminal code outlawing it, has become so successful over the last 20 years that campaigners say it is now one of the African country's biggest exports after oil, natural gas and cocoa.

The fraud swindles hundreds of millions of dollars every year from people across the world, who respond to junk e-mails promising them a share of non-existent fortunes in return for an advance fee.

"I know through my own experience how you feel when you say you have been cheated. Nobody is in a position to help you or wants to listen at all," said Springer-Beck, who moved to Lagos last year to push ahead with her campaign.

In 1994 Springer-Beck formed the International Nigerian Interest Group, an association of fraud victims battling the swindlers through Nigeria's notoriously slow and corrupt justice system. The association is currently handling 89 cases.

None has led to a conviction and, up until May, the association had brought about only one arrest.

Nigeria's inaction over the fraud helped earn it the dubious distinction of the world's second most corrupt country after Bangladesh from the sleaze watchdog Transparency International.

Nuhu Ribadu, who heads the EFCC, said property worth \$200 million has now been confiscated in connection with more than 30 cases now before court.

A member of parliament was among those arrested, and others are being held for the biggest ever 419 swindle, which was worth \$180 million and brought down a Brazilian bank.

"Our intention is to bring them to justice for the first time...to return the money to the victims," said Ribadu.

"419 has destroyed the credibility of our country. As a result of this it is almost impossible to do business. No one takes us seriously," he said.

FAKE CENTRAL BANK

Springer-Beck's own 419 saga began in 1993, when a letter arrived for her recently deceased husband asking him to come to Nigeria to collect his interest on an investment in a Nigerian electricity plant.

She got in touch with the author of the letter, who recommended a lawyer to help her get all the information she needed. She took on the lawyer only after checking his credentials with the German embassy.

On her first of several trips to Lagos, Springer-Beck was taken to what she thought were the offices of the Central Bank of Nigeria. Officials presented her with documents displaying her late husband's letterhead, showing he had invested a large, but undisclosed, amount of money in the country.

"Today I know it was the building in front of the Central Bank of Nigeria," she said, adding that she was fooled by security guards wearing CBN uniforms at the gate.

Although doubtful at first, she eventually paid her lawyer the \$360,000 he requested as a down-payment for staking her claim to the investment. After five months she realised she had fallen victim to a scam.

In August 1993, she tracked the alleged fraudster to his home in downtown Lagos and confronted him.

"He laughed at me, called me a snake," she said. "I told him if you don't give me back my money I will find a way you will never forget me."

In 1995 the lawyer was arrested and held on remand for two years only to be released without standing trial, and the case has been adjourned repeatedly since.

But in May this year, he was arrested again by the newly created EFCC, and charged with defrauding a Dutchman of \$1.7 million.

Springer-Beck is optimistic.

"The cases will be successful. It is only a matter of time. You can't change things at once which grew up over 20 years."

419 Coalition note: We hope that the \$200 million in assets that Ribadu says have been recovered will be repatriated ASAP without the absurd delays that CBN is inventing in the Ghasemi case?

23 NOV 2003

From Vanguard, a Nigerian newspaper:

ECONOMIC CRIMES: Why we haven't arrested ministers

By Habib Yakooob, Abuja

Apprehends 200 '419' kingpins, recovers \$100m

DESPITE the high rating of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) over the successes it has recorded in its prosecution of the war against money laundering and advance fee fraud (419) among other economic crimes, the body has explained why it could not bring to book ministers and top government officials that may have run foul of economic crime laws.

Reason, according to the EFCC executive chairman, Alhaji Nuhu Ribadu, is that the law

establishing the commission clearly bars it from entertaining cases pertaining to the public officials.

However, the cheering in formation from the Financial Crimes Commission is that at least 200 advance fee fraud kingpins had been taken out of circulation with over 100 million U.S. Dollars recovered from money laundering syndicates paid into government coffers.

Two of the high profile Nigerians already being prosecuted by the EFCC for alleged advance fee fraud offences are Chief Morris Ibekwe, a re-elected member of the House of Representatives and Chief Olumide, a Lagos-based socialite, otherwise known as Ade Bendel.

Ribadu, a former high ranking police officer, while explaining the EFCC's constraint in putting ministers, governors and other top ranking public officials on the list of those that could be arrested and prosecuted for economic crimes last week, said: "The ICPC deals with corruption in the public circle while we deal with same in the private sector".

"I am, by this responsibility, in charge of all financial and economic crimes ranging from '419' to money laundering, we deal with corporate Nigeria including the banking sector and others, not public corruption", he told Sunday Vanguard exclusively in Abuja, saying there was a lot of misunderstanding over the commission's role in this regard. Although the EFCC's boss lamented that the twin problems of slow dispensation of justice by the judiciary and suspects bribing their way out of prosecution were hampering the commission's efforts, Ribadu disclosed that at least 200 advance fee fraud kingpins and money launderers had been arrested and made to face prosecution or in the process of being made to face it.

"I must tell you that since we started, it has not been easy. We began active work just May this year and we went after the biggest 419ers in this country and we have so far arrested at least over 200 of them", he disclosed.

According to the EFCC boss, the commission had been able to push in billions of monies back to government's coffers.

"For instance", he said, "over 100 million dollars has been recovered from individual syndicates while over a billion Naira has been turned into the coffers".

"We embarked on the arrest of crude oil thieves and we got a lot which we could not quantify in Naira terms", Ribadu added.

419 Coalition comment: And how much of these \$100 million plus in recovered 419ed monies has been returned to the victims to date? None that we know of. And how come these monies are being "push[ed] back into government's coffers"? The Nigerian Government has no right to to keep recovered 419ed funds. To do so would make it basically a 419er itself, the monies merely changing hands from one bunch of 419ers to another.

14 NOV 2003

From The News, a Nigerian newspaper:

Ibekwe: Judge descends on Ribadu

ACHILLEUS UCHEGBU

JUSTICE Kudirat Kekere-Ekun of the Lagos High Court, Ikeja, yesterday descended on Chairman of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, for alleged contempt of court, fixing December 5 for commencement of hearing in the matter.

Ribadu had in defiance of a July 18 court order prohibiting him from further granting press interviews or noting statements against the character and person of accused persons standing trial on alleged financial crime charges, granted a 30 minute interview to Radio Nigeria.

One of the accused is House of Representatives member, Chief Maurice Ibekwe, standing trial on charges of forgery and advance fee fraud (419).

Instituting the charge against Mallam Ribadu, the complainant, Chief Ibekwe said the press interview allegedly granted by the EFCC boss painted him in bad light and was capable of prejudicing his trial.

According to him, Ribadu, had during the interview, made remarks to the effect that he (Ibekwe) ought to be in jail for financial crimes, adding that with such comments and belief, fair trial cannot be guaranteed for him.

Ibekwe, who for the second time, was brought to the court in a wheelchair yesterday, also urged the court to reprimand the EFCC boss as his alleged action was in direct contravention of a court order.

Though the lawmaker appeared in court with a white polyethylene bag containing several pharmaceutical drugs, his counsel, Prof. Taiwo Osipitan (SAN) told the court that being present is quite different from having the ability to stand trial.

"Being in court is one thing, being fit to stand trial is another thing. The medical report says he is not mentally and physically fit to stand trial. You can see he is here on wheelchair, he told the court charge was, however, not properly brought before the court.

Meanwhile, an earlier contempt charge against prosecution witness in the trial, German Klaus Munch was yesterday dismissed by the court on technical grounds.

Dismissing the charge filed by another accused person in the trial, Chief Chrystogonus Okoro, trial judge, Kekere-Ekun observed that while the alleged contempt was criminal in law, and ought to be punished, the charge was, however, not properly brought before the court.

She held that it was the police who ought to have arrested and prosecuted Mr. Munch, adding that counsel to Chief Okoro, Mr. Kehinde Pinheiro, was not competent to frame charges and recommend punishment for the alleged crime.

However, fixing December 5 for trial of Ribadu, the court was guided by prosecution counsel, Mr. Rotimi Jacobs who said that the EFCC boss just returned to the country from the United States of America (USA) where he had gone for training at the world famous Harvard University.

The court also fixed December 15 for the continuation of trial in the substantive matter concerning Ibekwe and Okoro in which Mr. Munch is expected to conclude his evidence-in-chief.

419 Coalition comment: A little vignette on the absurdity of Nigerian "justice".

This does not bode well for the outcome in the Ibekwe case etc.

13 NOV 2003

From ThisDay, a Nigerian newspaper:

Crimes Commission Sets-up Financial Intelligence Unit

* Seeks amendment to criminal procedure law

From Kunle Aderinokun and Iyefu Adoba in Abuja

Economic and Financial Crimes Commission will any moment from now establish the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) to monitor financial activities in and out of Nigeria.

Also, the Commission has proposed an amendment to criminal laws operating in the country in order to make it simpler to prosecute cases.

While soliciting for assistance in the fight against corruption, the commission also urged Western nations to freeze monies stolen by looters so that they will not be able to enjoy the funds or invest and take their families to spend them.

Executive Chairman of the EFCC, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, spoke Tuesday night in Abuja at a parley with the Head of Italian National Anti-mafia Bureau, Piero Luigi Vigna after the latter signed an agreement for Italy with Nigeria, on anti-mafia, financial crimes and other related issues. The Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Mr. Akinlolu Olujinmi, signed on behalf of Nigeria.

Ribadu said the FIU will avail the country a database of information on the flow of money in the entire Nigerian business sector including government businesses.

"We will have it in the form of data. We will establish a data base where such information will flow in, and then we will analyze it. We will follow the source of the money and what such money is used for," he said.

He revealed that already groups whose membership include representatives of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation, Customs and Excise and the Nigerian Police, are already working on this.

He explained that the EFCC, through the agreement signed with Italy, will receive support and assistance towards the establishment of the FIU.

According to him, "we are learning from them how to go about establishing this thing. We have gotten assurance from Italy. They are available to assist us. Whatever assistance they have to offer, they are ready and available to help us. We are looking at how they have been making it work in their country."

He noted by the time the FIU is established any questionable money going out of the country, we will know. "If somebody is sending money through Moneygram, we will know who he is sending the money to. If you transfer money to somebody if it is proceeds of crime, if it is from drug, if it is money from prostitution, if it is money from corruption, may be it is 419 money, we will follow it. And also if it has anything to do with terrorism."

He said "what we are going to learn is how Italy and other countries are operating. In their countries, they have it. In Nigeria we will establish our own. There must be reports everyday from the banks, from financial institutions, from insurance companies, from casinos, from everybody who is spending money. You must report to me.

"When we get these things, we now feed it into our system, we have analysts who will sit down and analyze. We have investigators who will follow up. If we see anything questionable we will get to the root of it."

He expressed the belief that the establishment of the FIU is one of the most important steps in addressing the problem of financial and economic crimes in the country.

419 Coalition comment: Sounds very promising! However, in terms of repatriation of seized monies to 419 victims, what good does all this do if Central Bank of Nigeria continues to Refuse to return recovered monies to victims as it has done for over two years in the Ghasemi case? How

can any Nigerian Government counter-419 efforts have credibility without convictions for 419 offenses and the routine repatriations of large amounts of recovered monies?

6 NOV 2003

From 1010 WINS Newsradio NY (Danbury CT):

Connecticut Woman Lures Spammer to Police

(1010 WINS) (DANBURY, Conn.) A Bethel woman, fed up with suspicious e-mail pitches promising millions, is taking credit for helping catch a Canadian man accused of fraud.

Like many other e-mail recipients, Heide Evans received numerous messages purporting to be from Nigeria and promising millions of dollars.

But unlike others who delete the e-mails, Evans said she led the U.S. Secret Service and Bethel police to Nicholas Horvath-Howard, 24, of Toronto, who met her hoping to receive a reward.

"Over several months I managed to convince them I was gullible enough to go along with them, and surprise of surprises, they were stupid enough to send a messenger to see me to collect the money," Evans told The News-Times of Danbury.

Evans met Horvath-Howard in Bethel, where she said he expected to pick up more than \$200,000. Instead, Bethel police were waiting for Horvath-Howard and charged him with first-degree attempted larceny.

Horvath-Howard was arraigned in Danbury Superior Court on Monday. Bond was set at \$250,000 and his case was continued until Nov. 10.

The Financial Crimes Division of the Secret Service says it receives about 100 calls daily from victims or potential victims and between 300 and 500 correspondence daily about the scams.

The e-mails, which have become common in recent years, should be ignored, said Bethel police Detective Ron Ashker.

"If it sounds too good to be true, it is," he said. "The easiest way to avoid this thing is don't buy into it."

3 NOV 2003

From the Straits Times (Singapore):

Duped of \$2m

Five Singaporeans fall for Internet cheats

By Ben Nadarajan

FIVE Singaporeans have been duped of almost \$2 million, after falling for Internet cheats offering shares in non-existent family fortunes or shady investment deals.

The four men and a woman, aged between 25 and 50 lost between \$50,000 and \$400,000 each. Four of them are in sales and the fifth is an insurance agent.

Why did they fall for the e-mail con?

One blamed his greed while the others felt they were too gullible, said the police, who are investigating all five cases.

So far this year, members of the public have forwarded to the Commercial Affairs Department (CAD) almost 700 e-mail messages, originating mostly from Africa and promising big rewards in return for money up front.

Assistant Superintendent Milkeet Singh cautioned: 'These people are clearly out to cheat. Don't expect handsome returns. Expect a rude awakening instead when you discover your hard-earned money cleaned out.'

The scams, which originated more than two decades ago in Africa, used to be sent via letters or faxes, but e-mail versions began appearing in 1996.

The con men are mainly from African nations like Nigeria, Ghana, Botswana, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Liberia and their recipients are picked at random.

Victims around the world fork out enough money to sustain an 'industry' which is the third largest in Nigeria.

Some estimates say these con men earn US\$1.5 billion (S\$2.6 billion) a year, with the money financing African drug lords.

Before the five Singaporeans fell for the Internet scams, many others were duped by earlier versions.

For example, in March at least 50 Singaporeans fell for a Spanish lottery scam when they received letters saying they had won prizes and were asked to send money to cover expenses for sending the winnings to Singapore.

Police are still investigating these cases, which involve about \$150,000 in all.

Police have had some success in arresting suspects, when they come here to meet their victims.

Since 1997, 19 men aged between 20 and 45 have been arrested for such scams, most of them Africans.

The most recent court case, in March, saw a Liberian man who cheated his victim of US \$105,000 sentenced to five years' jail.

The maximum punishment here for cheating is seven years' jail.

The CAD said that it is working closely with various international counterparts to tackle these fraudsters.

The Nigerian authorities, long accused of not doing enough to fight these con men, prosecuted three nationals this year for cheating foreigners of more than US\$2 million.

Despite police efforts, the e-mail messages keep coming, and many of the fraudsters are now believed to be operating from South Africa.

ASP Milkeet Singh's advice: 'Be wary when offered such get-rich-quick offers that promise exorbitant returns. If it sounds too good to be true, then it probably is.'

30 OCT 2003

From the Daily Trust, a Nigerian newspaper:

Presidency insists on prosecuting Ajudua, Ibekwe

By Reuben Yunana

Pressures being mounted on government to release alleged advanced fee fraud (419), kingpin, Chief Fred Ajudua, Hon Morris Ibekwe and others currently in detention seem to have hit the rocks as the presidency yesterday vowed to ensure their successful prosecution.

President Olusegun Obasanjo is said to have vowed that "if Ajudua or any of them is guilty, he will go to jail," insisting that the war on economic and financial crimes was just beginning,

The presidency had alleged that pressure had, in the past weeks, mounted from various quarters for the release of the suspects with various media reports criticising President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku Abubakar for alleged insensitivity.

Presidential sources hinted yesterday that government had kept tabs on such publications. "The publications are wildly speculative and factually deficient. The publications recently called the president a liar over his nationwide address on October 1, 2003. "They followed with another cover story calling him a failure and a deceiver. The vice president got his own dose in a cover story titled, "Atiku and his bribery gang," alleging the falsehood that Atiku bribed the Senate to the tune of N50 million to have Nasir el-Rufai cleared for the position of minister", said the source.

He said the full wrath of the law was on course and must consume those found guilty of defrauding anybody whether Nigerians or foreigners.

419 Coalition: Any "pressures" to release Ajudua et. at are absurd. They have been charged. Therefore they must stand trial. Their assets at home and abroad should already have been frozen as well pending the outcome of the trials. The Nigerian judiciary needs to get moving on these matters. And what right would the President have to release them anyway? Nigeria.... na wa oh :) :)

29 OCT 2003

From ThisDay, a Nigerian newspaper:

419: Judiciary Used to Frustrate Trial, Says Ribadu
* 38 Nigerians jailed in S/Africa

From Josephine Lohor in Abuja and Victor Efeizomor in Lagos

Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission, (EFCC) Alhaji Nuhu Ribadu, has accused financial crime suspects (419ers) of using the judiciary to frustrate their trail.

Ribadu who spoke on Monday in a Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) programme "Eagle Square," monitored in Abuja, also noted that the advance fee fraud (419) would remain unabated in Nigeria until there are convictions, which will serve as deterrent to others.

Argued Nuhu, "How can it be that in South Africa, there are 38 Nigerians convicted for 419, but in Nigeria there is no single conviction. How do you think that the international community will take us serious."

Continuing he said, "there must be conviction for the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to take us serious."

Ribadu who noted the role of the judiciary in frustrating prosecution of crime suspects in Nigeria, said, "Any time we commence full prosecution, lawyers to these 419 kingpins will use the courts to stall prosecution. They will file one motion or the other at the Court of Appeal."

"We need to set example by actual conviction. In this country, there is no single case of conviction, yet there are over 27 Nigerians in detention for crimes of 419," he said.

The EFCC boss also criticized the judicial system in Nigeria regretting that,

"It is only the poor that go to prison." He added: "it is high time we brought the rich who are criminals to justice. They have money and use their money to buy their way out. Today there is no rich man in Nigerian prisons."

Ribadu revealed that his commission has secured witnesses from Holland, Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom to enable it prosecute several cases of 419 against some prominent Nigerians currently in jail.

He lamented that, "these witnesses, who are victims of 419 are being threatened by the 419 kingpins." But he assured them that, "we will give them adequate protection, if only to tell the world that we are serious."

On the allegation against Fred Ajudua, Ade Bendel, and Maurice Ibekwe currently in detention for Advance Fee Fraud offences, Ribadu said, " Fred Ajudua has twelve cases pending against him. The latest was advance fee fraud to the tune of 1.6 million Euros and another \$1.5 million. Both offences were committed in 2001."

Ade Bendel, he said duped an Egyptian General and some group of people in Calabar. According to the EFCC Boss "Ade Bendel has three cases against him," while Maurice Ibekwe is being charged for defrauding a German. The offence, he said was committed in 1992.

On the deportation of the Vaswani brothers, Nuhu Ribadu accused them of corrupting the security agencies by compromising them in the course of their duties.

Ribadu added that the deportation of the Vaswanis became necessary since they claimed to be British citizens and therefore expected to face trial in a British court.

"We need to set example with them," Ribadu stated, noting that there is no big deal about their deportation because over three hundred Nigerians are being deported per week from all over the world.

Meanwhile, the presidency has vowed not to interfere in the on-going prosecution of Ibekwe, a member of the House of Representatives, Ajudua and others accused of advanced fee fraud (a.k.a 419).

This declaration is in response to pressures mounting on the presidency to release the kingpins who are currently on trial for several 419 cases.

A presidency source stated yesterday that government has been keeping tabs on the various media campaigns accusing President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku Abubakar of insensitivity over the matter.

The source, who said the President has insisted that "if Ajudua or any of them is guilty, he will go to jail," added that Obasanjo has also vowed that the EFCC has just begun its job.

The source added that "the publications are wildly speculative and factually deficient." He said "the damaging falsehood peddled against the President and the Vice President were intended to pressure them to release a particular 419 kingpin now that all the legal manoeuvres and powerful lobbying had failed to stop their trial. But we are not bothered."

Emphasising that the law will definitely deal with people found guilty of defrauding any Nigerian or foreigner, the source noted that "the publication recently called the President a liar over his nationwide address on October 1, 2003. They followed another cover story calling him a failure

and a deceiver."

"The Vice President got his own dose this week in a cover story titled 'Atiku and His Bribery Gang,' alleging the oft repeated falsehood that Atiku bribed the Senate to the tune of N50 million to have Nasir el-Rufai, Minister of the Federal Capital Territory," the source added.

Meanwhile, an Ikeja High Court was yesterday told that Ibekwe who is standing trial for alleged involvement in Advance Fee Fraud is critically ill and has been referred to the University of Lagos Teaching Hospital (LUTH) for treatment.

This prompted the trial judge, Justice Kudirat Kekere-Ekun to adjourn further hearing on the matter to tomorrow to enable the defence counsel Professor Taiwo Osipitan to furnish the court with medical reports from the Nigerian Prison Authority and the hospital.

When the matter was mentioned for hearing yesterday, Ibekwe's counsel told the court that due to the deteriorating health condition of the detained lawmaker, the prison authority could not bring him (Ibekwe) to court as he has been referred to for proper medical attention.

419 Coalition note: Mr. Ribadu has it Partly right - no-one will take Nigerian counter-419 operations seriously until there are Convictions AND Recoveries and Reparations of funds. Convictions alone won't do it without monies being returned to the victims. And Ribadu could help with That process by calling Usman, Deputy Governor of CBN, and telling him to wire victim Shaha Ghasemi's recovered funds to her. CBN announced the recovery well over two years ago and is still sitting on the funds, even though CBN has a letter from the US State Department's Office of West African Affairs stating that "the Nigerian Government may dispose of the [recovered] funds as it deems appropriate" to include sending the monies back to Mrs. Ghasemi as CBN has publicly pledged to do. The hassle CBN has been making out of returning her monies is absurd and that sort of behaviour is certainly counter-productive concerning Any Nigerian Government claims of "effective" counter-419 operations. 419 Coalition calls on CBN to quit stalling and send the woman her money! If you don't people will think (many do already) that the reason CBN isn't returning it is because CBN staffers have stolen it for themselves. That certainly doesn't do much for CBN or government of Nigeria credibility.

25 OCT 2003

From the Nigerian newspaper THE GUARDIAN, sent in by a concerned Nigerian:

Fraudsters Go Under As Commission Tightens Noose
By Godwin Ijediogor

FRAUDSTERS who hitherto had a free reign are gradually going under as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) bares its fangs on them.

At the last count, three kingpins of the Advance Fee Fraud 419 had been arraigned in court by the commission while others have been declared wanted.

Among those on the wanted list of the commission are the chairman of a cocoa processing firm over his company's failure to repay over N2billion debt to a consortium of banks.

Another suspect identified as Chief Olafemi Ayeni, an accomplice of Alumile Adedeji aka Ade Bendel was yesterday declared wanted by the commission. .

The duo allegedly defrauded an Egyptian General Abdel Azim Attia of over \$500,000 (N65 million)

Ayeni, the first suspect purportedly posed as Hakeem Sadiq Fulani in the nefarious business deal along with Adedeji. The 43 -year- old suspect hails from Ilesha, Osun State.

Adedeji is already facing trial in the court for obtaining under false pretence, about \$305,000 (N39 million) from the Egyptian to fund a farming project.

In a statement yesterday, the commission explained that "Ayeni was initially charged to an Abuja Magistrate Court, which released him on bail. He has since broken the bail conditions and gone into hiding He is wanted in connection with incriminating evidence discovered by investigators at his home, and to shed more light on his role in the 419 heist."

Interestingly, banks, which have been unable to recover huge debts from prominent Nigerians and corporate entities are taking their plight to the commission.

Also a few weeks ago, the EFCC beamed its searchlight on two top executives of Ebun Industries Limited, Messrs. Tope Bakare and Ayo Bakare.

Trouble began for the executives of one of the nation's cocoa processing companies about three years ago when their outfit sought and obtained loan facilities of about N2.3 billion from a consortium of seven banks to finance its line of business, including export of cocoa beans and processed products.

The company reportedly failed to meet its financial obligation to the banks and instead promised to pay a paltry N600,000,000 of its N2 billion indebtedness to the creditors over a five-year period.

Dissatisfied with the proposals, representatives of the banks after a meeting on July 16, 2002 demanded a review of the offers. They set up a seven-man committee to "further look at the options and come up with an action plan."

After due consideration and evaluation of the amount involved and the implications for their operations, some of the creditors rejected the proposal.

A participant at the meeting said that "it would be very stupid of us to accept N600,000 million in place of over N2 billion. I mean, what would the public think of us?."

By the proposal, one of the banks, for instance was offered about N60 million against its total exposure of N242 million as at July 31, 2003.

"To cut over losses and move on, we made a counter offer of immediate

payment of N85m as full and final payments by Ebun Industries", he said.
"Our said offer was turned down without any show of remorse or regret."

Piqued by the company's antic, some members of the consortium backed out of the arrangement and wrote to the financial crime body for assistance in recovering the debt.

In a letter dated September 18, 2003 addressed to the commission's chief, one of the creditors alleged that the promoters of the company "boast of their contacts within the Nigerian system and their ability to abuse legal loopholes to their advantage."

The banks, therefore, appealed to the commission to "use your good offices to thoroughly investigate this matter and bring the culprits to face the consequences of their action."

Consequently, the commission arrested the chief executive of the firm, Mr. Ayo Bakare, while its chairman Tope Bakare is said to be at large.

The commission has so far arrested and arraigned lawyer and businessman, Chief Fred Ajudua, Ade Bendel and a member of the House of Representatives, Mr. Maurice Ibekwe for defrauding some foreigners. Their cases are pending in different courts in Lagos.

22 OCT 2003

From The Register, a UK news site:

How to beat the 419 scammers
By Jan Libbenga

So you think those wacky Nigerians who promise you compensation for assistance in moving funds from foreign countries to banks in Europe, are operating from scruffy cyber-cafes in Lagos?

Think again. When the police last year raided a flat in the Amsterdam suburb of Bijlmer as part of an investigation, they couldn't believe their eyes: faxes and phone lines everywhere. Mobile phone cards abound. And in one of the bedrooms a fully operational PBX telephone system, programmed to be The Anglo American Bank or The City Express Finance & Trust. Companies, you guessed it, formed solely with the purpose to rake in victims.

Some of us are all too familiar with those emails in which an alleged former dignitary of the Nigerian government proposes to set up a bank account where millions of dollars - often a fallen dictator's ill-gained fortune - can be kept safely. In return, you'll get a percentage of the stash.

Most people laugh at these pleas. Some read them out loud at parties. At least a half a dozen web scam bait sites poke fun at these get-rich-quick schemes, and engage in often hilarious dialogues with the scamsters.

Regrettably, victims fork over enough money to sustain an industry that ranks in Nigeria's Top five. Officials estimate that Britons alone lose £150 million a year to such frauds. Globally, experts put the annual take at a staggering \$1.5 billion, money that is often used to finance heroin smuggling and other criminal activities.

Nigerian scammers used to operate from the UK, but combined police efforts have driven them to continental Europe, in particular to the Netherlands, which not only has a liberal immigration policy and a large African community, but also offers easy Internet access.

Recently we reported on 419 lottery scams. People are still getting conned. Recently, a businessman from Harrogate, Yorks signed over a handling fee of £3500 for a £1 million prize in a computer lottery to three men at a plush office in Amsterdam; he never saw his money again.

The Dutch anti-fraud squad estimates that at least 300 Africans are engaged in email frauds from Amsterdam. "The city has become central hub for these scams in Europe," Cees Schep of the Dutch National Criminal Intelligence Department told The Reg. "Sometimes criminals travel from Germany to operate here temporarily. Some enter the country pretending to be students, often paying for their education with stolen credit cards."

Along with Interpol, Cees Schep is now looking for new ways to fight the scams. "Throwing these people in jail won't help a lot," he says. "They will be replaced by others in no time. We need to cripple their means of communications. Shut down their mobile phones and email boxes relentlessly." Schep has collected over 950 mobile phone numbers to do just that.

The Dutch Internet cable operator Chello is already helping: it booted dozens of subscribers spewing 419 email letters without warning. That seem to have some effect: scammers are seeking refuge in the Easy Internet Cafe in Amsterdam, where you can see them laboring over long lists of email addresses.

All you have to do is delete their email.

419 Coalition Note: On deleting the mail, that's not the case. In the US for example No Loss 419 letters are to be forwarded with their headers to the Secret Service at 419.fcd@usss.treas.gov and Loss 419 cases are to be reported to the nearest office of the Secret Service. Please see the What To Do sections on our main page for these and other reporting instructions etc.

14 OCT 2003

From the Guardian (UK):

Spain Breaks Up Sweepstakes Fraud Ring

MADRID, Spain (AP) - Madrid police broke up a fraud ring that cheated hundreds of Americans and Canadians out of \$35 million through scams such as a lottery simulating a Spanish Christmas sweepstakes, officials said Tuesday.

A total of 103 people - mostly Nigerians - were arrested during raids in and around Madrid, police said.

The ring allegedly swindled 500 people, mostly residents of the United States and Canada, this year through different methods, police spokesman Jose Maria Seara told national radio.

Fifty people were arrested this month, a police statement said. It did not provide any details about the other arrests.

The Madrid-based lottery scam was reported this summer in the United States by the Better Business Bureau, and the attorneys general of several states - including Arizona, Missouri and Texas - warned residents.

Victims typically received a letter saying they had been picked at random and won about \$580,000 in a Spanish lottery called El Gordo. That's also the name of a real lottery Spain holds every Christmas, with winnings reaching \$2 billion last year.

The letter urges people to send money to cover taxes and handling fees, and some of those

duped mailed more than \$20,000, police said.

Spanish police began investigating after several embassies received complaints, Seara said.

In another scam, victims are told \$20 million in cash is languishing in an African country or Iraq, and they are urged to pay fees to help sneak it out in return for a hefty share.

Some people traveled to Madrid and were shown trunks holding dollars stained with a special ink, supposedly to prevent them from being placed in circulation. Victims paid for what they were told were expensive chemicals needed to clean the bank notes.

Some people paid as much as \$500,000 in fees and money for chemicals, the police said.

5 OCT 2003

From the the London Sunday Telegraph

Simpson on Sunday: Had I won the Spanish lottery?

Apparently, yes

By John Simpson

Journalists, like any other profession, come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. There are grand commentators, and adventurers and reporters who confront wrongdoers on their own doorsteps. I've never been much of a foot-in-the-door man myself, but when the opportunity arose last week I couldn't ignore it.

It began with a fax. "We happily congratulate you [on] being one of the lucky winners of our yearly International Promotions Program." I had, it seemed, won a big prize in the Spanish state lottery, and was told to ring a number immediately to claim my prize. It was slightly surprising since I had never bought a Spanish lottery ticket in my life. But the prize was impressively precise, at ?705,366 (£494,000), and I could do with the money.

All hope evaporated the moment the call went through, however. There was a Mr Bobby Williams at the other end, and he obviously came from Nigeria. Nigeria is one of my favourite countries on earth, but it has more than its fair share of scoundrels, and they have spread worldwide. Mr Bobby Williams was delighted that I had won the prize; all I had to do to get it was to pay a facility fee. Could I pay it in person, I asked? A wary pause; it was highly irregular, but I could.

There was something of the Sherlock Holmes short story, The Red-Headed League, about it all, though, and as it happened I had an unused ticket to Madrid. Two days later, with my brother-in-law for support, I arrived in Madrid. I was supposed to ring Mr "Greg Williams" in the "protocol department".

Mr Greg Williams, who sounded exactly like his namesake, Mr Bobby Williams, said a driver would come to meet me. We were taken to a rough-looking office block near the city centre. On the 14th floor it got more like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's story than ever. Two bored secretaries at a reception desk pointed us to a suite of empty offices that were probably rented by the hour.

In one of the doorways stood Mr Greg - or it might have been Mr Bobby - Williams. He looked very Nigerian: he wore a superb tan suit, and his hands glittered with gold rings. The office, by contrast, was spartan: no pictures, no certificates. Even the filing trays still had the prices on them.

We got down to business: meaning that Mr Williams started filling out a receipt form for the facility fee I had to pay before collecting my ?705,000. It was ?2,800 (£1,900). Where was he from, I asked conversationally. "South Africa." And where in South Africa? "I don't have to tell you that," said Mr Williams, instantly defensive.

Did he have some certificate to show that he was working on behalf of the Spanish Lottery Commission? Not just at the moment; they were held by his associate. And the associate? He picked up the phone, and spoke in a language that was certainly not South African.

At this point Mark, my brother-in-law, took a photograph of him with one of those new mobile phones. Unfortunately it made an artificial camera-shutter sound, and Mr Williams jumped up and walked across the room, speaking louder

and more nervously than ever to his friend.

In the meantime, I was able to get a look at the previous pages in the receipt book. There were five carbon copies ahead of the page he'd filled out for me. All were for even larger sums than the ?2,800 he wanted me to pay, and all were signed with British names. The fact that the top copy had been torn out in each case made it a fair assumption that the money in question had been handed over.

I totted up the figures roughly in my head: they came to around ?18,000 (£12,500), and the payments had all been made during the previous month. No wonder Mr Williams could afford his gold rings. He didn't like the fact that I was looking at the receipt book, and he especially didn't like having his picture taken. Reinforcements were clearly on the way. It seemed like a pretty good time to go, so we shook hands and left without money changing hands. I suppose a genuine foot-in-the-door journalist would have had a showdown with him there and then.

A colleague checked with the real Spanish Lottery Board, which has a reputation for being well-run, efficient and honest. They'd had several complaints about the scam which was being run by Nigerians working out of Madrid.

It doesn't take Sherlock Holmes to realise that Mr Greg (or Mr Bobby) Williams will long since have checked out of his office suite, and if you call his home number, an operator tells you the number is no longer in use. But there will be another office, another phone, and another fax machine. There has to be: the scam is too profitable to give up.

[John Simpson is the BBC's World Affairs Editor]

2 OCT 2003

From the Daily Times, a Nigerian newspaper:

419: How Ade Bendel took \$500,000 from me: Egyptian General

BY SAM POPOOLA

AN Egyptian general, Ali Addel-Azim Attia (Rtd), on Tuesday, told an Ikeja High Court how he came into the country with \$500,000 in his bag, which he alleged was fraudu-lently taken from him by Alumile Adedeji, a.k.a. Ade Bendel.

Attia is the complainant in the ongoing trial of Ade Bendel and one Olafemi Ayeni, a.k.a. Sadiq Fulani over Advance Fee Fraud, a.k.a. 419.

In his evidence, Attia said he travelled to Nigeria through the Lagos airport with his money which, according to him, he did not declare at the immigration department.

He said his failure to declare the money was not because he was carrying a diplomatic passport as he did not carry any.

According to the witness, he had earlier had a contact with Ade Bendel, who introduced himself as a manager in Worldwide Organisation, with the name of Ibrahim Ahmed.

He testified that Ade Bendel gave him a document which bore his (Egyptian General) name with a credit of \$500 million in Worldwide Organisation.

Attia said Ahmed also faxed to him in London another document, which corroborated the earlier information, as well as asked him to remit \$2.15 million, to facilitate the payment of the \$500 million credited to him in the organisation.

After much arguments from both the prosecution and defence, the court admitted the two documents as exhibits, saying they were relevant in the matter.

The witness further said that of all the money given to the accused, only \$2,500 paid through a bank had receipt.

The accused are standing trial on a two-count charge of duping the Egyptian General between May and December, 2001, at Ikeja, to the tune of \$500,000 by various acts of false pretences.

Further hearing has been fixed for October 2.

19 SEP 2003

From The Guardian, a Nigerian newspaper:

Welcome to Room 419

By Hope Eghagha

IN an imaginary office building complex, next to the Managing Director's office is an unnumbered room, an office reserved for Special Assistants. The MD's office is marked '418'. Often he refers some visitors to see his team of aides next door. When they get there, they find that the room is not numbered. But inside, some very busy men and women are doing things to help the business grow. They are smartly dressed and remind one of those crazy fellows we see at the Stock Exchange who make dashes as if the fate of the entire world depended on their speed. Upon inquiry, the MD's personal assistant replies that the room remains unnumbered because of the negative connotations of Room 419.

In a sense the idea of Room 419 has been obliterated from decent society, thanks to the

crookedness of some Nigerians. Unfortunately, 419 has not been wiped out of our hearts! Just as we do not find the 13th floor in some buildings, so we may begin to obliterate Room 419 from labels on doors. Where I teach, there is a standing joke about course codes. Most departments are wary of naming any course 419. Who, for example, who would like to teach Philosophy 419 or Business Administration 419? Who would like to teach Law 419 or Islamic religion 419? Any Nigerian who sees the last code would think that the lecturer is a good teacher of 419 tricks.

Room 419! In Nigeria, the figures 419 have come to be associated with advance fee fraud. Certainly, this form of business, if business one should call it, has been on in the country for many years. It is an open secret that some of the super rich men in the country got into stupendous wealth through this dark tunnel. Under this practice, a greedy man is made to part with goods, services or money to a phony deals' man. It is a multi-million dollar business. In the past, I have received letters from the felons and scoundrels who go about with ridiculous or fabulous stories. In one of such letters, the villain declared that he was the son of late President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire. According to this rogue, his father left some money in an account somewhere and he wanted me to give an account number where the money would be paid into. I had been singled out on the recommendation of somebody he refused to mention and he did not want me to miss out on this golden opportunity!

Yet another letter came through from a baboon who called himself the illegitimate son of the late Attorney-General and Minister for Justice. His father, according to him, left some money in a bank which he did not declare before he was assassinated. My role was to provide an account number into which this money would be paid. There was another that came from a man who called himself the DMD of one of the big three banks. According to him, a white man who worked for an oil company had died in an air crash. Because he did not leave a next of kin address, the crook wanted me to pose as a relation of the deceased to claim over two million dollars. For my trouble in posing as a relation, I would be paid a healthy 30% of the said sum. Now, what kind of human beings fall for such cheap tricks except the greedy and fraudulent?

Of course, there are different forms of 419. Apart from the straight manipulation of figures, there is also 419 in the churches, in universities, in mosques, in banks and of course in the parastatals. Sometimes, government officials carry out 419 tricks on citizens. This they do by claiming to have the power to award contracts or move some big fellow somewhere to do something. 419 is now synonymous with devilish tricks. When a pastor promises and fails to heal a sick person, we all say 'Dis na 419! When the government asks citizens to vote in an election and the results run counter to the wishes of the people, we say it is 419. Now, how on earth can a 419 government fight the petty 419 boys? I really don't know. The other day, Kingpin Ajiduah threatened that hell would be let loose if he mentioned some names of highly placed persons involved in the game! I have continued to wait for that list to come. I simply hoped against hope. Nigerians would really like to know them.

It was during the Abacha days that I learnt that some so-called traditional rulers in the South East are indeed chieftains in this form of business. How do they manage to get the titles? What can we say has become of our respect for the little decencies that held our communities together? How did a 419 man get into the Federal Legislative House? Was there no screening? Did he bribe his way initially? How many other crooks are in the legislature across the country? Are there some big time crooks in the executive arm of government? Are we ever going to ferret out these miserable worms of humanity?

There is sense in which getting one's objective by tricks has become fashionable in the country. People call it being smart. Some communities honour these brigands with chieftaincy titles. Recently, the revered Oba of Benin turned 80. As a true son and grand keeper of the great Benin tradition, he has never, and will never honour any brigand with some concocted title. We cannot say this for all traditional rulers. Some have been known to give such hopeless titles as 'The Main-Source-of-Wealth of the Kingdom' or 'The Barking Dog' of the kingdom. It is a disgrace that some of our traditional institutions still find a place for such scoundrels. It is my view that any emir or Oba or king who honours an acknowledged crook with a chieftaincy title be jailed along with the criminal.

If we manage to obliterate all rooms 419 but fail to wipe out the scourge from our society, we would be deceiving ourselves. Government itself is guilty of 419. Although the pump price of PMS has been increased, Nigerians are yet to experience a regular supply of the product. These rogues and tricksters have messed up the value systems of our land. Back at home, a little rat shows up after a brief absence with so much wealth that even his parents are stupefied. Next day, he is given a title and invited to all the big events. What message are we passing? The crook ends the day with a thanksgiving service where he donates a luxurious car to the Bishop! The bishop then blesses him with infinite gusto and commends the faith of this sharp and generous businessman! So with the Church, the government and Big Business, it is 'Welcome to Room 419'!

19 SEP 2003

From ThisDay, a Nigerian newspaper:

Alleged 419: Ibekwe, Okoro's Trial Kicks Off

By Victor Efeizomor

The trial of re-elected Federal House of Representatives member, Morris Ibekwe and the proprietor of York Shine Hotel Lagos Christopher Okoro commenced yesterday before an Ikeja High Court, in the forgery allegation levelled against the duo, with the star witness Klaus Munch, a German national testifying before the court.

Klaus who mounted the witness dock at about 10.30 a.m. told the court that in 1992 he received a letter from Nigeria offering him a business proposal to supply airport and navigational equipment.

"I received the letter in an envelope and was addressed in my company's name which is Munch System Operation and I was very happy and interested in the business.

"I contacted them through the telephone number on the letterheaded paper and a man introduced himself as a government official and offered to help secure the contract saying I should forward a copy of my company's registration paper as well as the private telephone number and the details of my bank account which should be opened in Germany."

He said he never suspected any foul play as the man he spoke with introduced himself as Dr Iseral and a staff of the Federal Ministry of Aviation. He added that further correspondence were done on Federal Government letterheaded paper some of which were from the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) as the official institutions were involved in the business.

Klaus explained that in November 1992, he received a fax message, saying that his presence was needed in Nigeria as he was asked to bring along 75,000 US dollars and was asked to come through Cotonou because it was easier to get visa.

"I received a fax on the 17th November 1992 and I was told my presence was needed in Nigeria to meet with some business partners. He asked for 75,000 US Dollars, I was asked to come in through Cotonou on the ground that it is easier to get visa.

"I called him by the telephone number contained in the letter telling him that I will come to Nigeria. I agreed to come to Nigeria and asked of a proof of his activities. he replied and showed me paper of registration of my company, a letter from the Ministry of Aviation and Central Bank of Nigeria saying that the official institutions of Nigeria are involved in the business.

However, when asked by the judge, Justice Kekere-Ekun to identify the Dr Iseral in the court

room in an identification parade, Klaus pointed at Christopher Okoro, the second accused person.

The defence counsel, Professor Osipitan while objecting to the line of argument stated that all the documents emanating from prosecution were public document as its not admissible in law to accept fax and forged copies. He added that all such documents should be original to qualify themselves to be original, that the prosecution should produce the original certified true copy for evidence as provided in Section 17, 2 Paragraph C of the Evidence Act.

The prosecution, Mr Jacobs objected to the defence counsel's line of argument, saying that a public document tendered in evidence must not necessarily be a true certified copy as the fax documents are admissible because the facts of the issue as contained in Section 6 and 7 of the Evidence Act.

Under this section, Jacobs pointed out that Section 6, the court is empowered to admit the document as the Corporate Affairs Commission has already denied knowledge of the document "hence it behoves on the court to say if it was forged or not."

Further hearing on the matter has been fixed for today.

14 SEP 2003

Here is a photo of 419er Paul Oseni, who was recently arrested in Belgium.



If you have more information on him Ultrascan in Holland is interested, see our Links section for their site and email addy.

4 SEP 2003

From 1010 WINS Radio, New York:

Two Admit Roles In West Africa Money Scam

(1010 WINS) (NEWARK) Two African men pleaded guilty Thursday to scheming to sell a useless counterfeiting scheme to someone they believed was a wealthy businessman.

The businessman actually was an undercover FBI agent investigating the "black money scam," a swindle that prosecutors said used sleight of hand to make victims believe they can create copies of currency using iodine and white sheets of paper.

Both men who pleaded guilty are cooperating with investigators. One of the men, Omar M'Bamina, implicated three of the four African immigrants charged in the plot in June, Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard E. Constable III said.

The scam originated in West Africa, and the charges against the group were the first brought in New Jersey for the swindle, Constable said.

M'Bamina, 41, of Cameroon, and Mababa Gaye, 27, of Senegal, each pleaded guilty to a conspiracy charge and face up to five years in prison when sentenced Dec. 11 by U.S. District Judge Faith S. Hochberg. They are being held without bail.

Indicted and arrested in June were Jacque Taphehon, 51, and Rostand Tchinda, 29, of Cameroon, and Assani Mara, 39, of Mali. They pleaded innocent and face trial Oct. 29. Taphehon is free on bail. A fourth defendant, Jean Wabo, 33, of Cameroon, is a fugitive.

A superseding indictment in August accused them of conspiracy to alter U.S. currency, which carries up to five years in prison, and three counts of altering currency, each of which carry up to 20 years in prison.

All had lived in Newark, where they are accused of convincing people they could transfer the image of a \$20 or \$100 bill onto white strips of paper cut to the size of U.S. currency. One victim paid \$5,000 in the hope of getting counterfeits, Constable said.

The victims were told the white paper was the actual kind used to make real currency. The defendants put iodine on the paper, causing it to darken, and then put a real \$20 or \$100 bill in between the nearly black strips, the U.S. attorney's office said.

The scammers would then wash the strips, supposedly revealing two bills that looked identical to U.S. currency. They would then take cash from the victims with the understanding that it would be used to create more money for them in a few days, but never deliver, prosecutors said.

The bills that were "created" looked like actual bills because they were real currency. The scammer swapped the blackened strips of paper with blackened bills, which were washed to reveal the greenbacks, prosecutors said.

2 SEP 2003

From the Daily Independent, a Nigerian newspaper:

419: Crime commission intensifies search for fraudsters

By Oguwike Nwachuku,

Operatives of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) have intensified their search for suspected fraudsters following reports that such persons have gone underground. The search for the 419ners, Daily Independent learnt, was sequel to directives which the commission received recently from the authorities.

"But most of them have gone under, including abandoning their families and businesses for fear of being arrested," a member of the commission told this newspaper in Lagos.

It was learnt the government has charged the Nuhu Ribadu-led commission to ensure that the suspected fraudsters are fished out, particularly before the meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government slated for Nigeria in December.

Daily Independent learnt that following the arrest and detention of some of the suspects, including Chief Maurice Ibekwe and Chief Fred Ajudua, among others, whose cases are already in court, other suspects believed to be close to them have gone underground. While some of them have fled the country for fear of being arrested, others are said to have abandoned their businesses and other places where they used to be regular callers.

But the manhunt for the fraudsters is not restricted to Nigeria as our source said that the commission has been keeping a close eye on those on its wanted list in some parts of Europe and America.

419 Coalition note: Though we appreciate the efforts of the EFCC, 419 Coalition does not agree that the evidence supports the points made by the EFCC spokesman in the article above. In fact, we sent a note to EFCC on that which included the following self explanatory remarks:

"...regarding the recent news article on how the 419ers have been "driven underground" there, we beg to differ and note that continued release of "bull" press releases like that does Nothing whatever for EFCC credibility. Arrests, convictions, recovered funds, and repatriations to victims, now Those things do something for EFCC credibility."

31 AUG 2003

From ThisDay, a Nigerian newspaper:

The New Anti-Crime Czar

From a simple background, despite having a cabinet minister as a father, Nuhu Ribadu, chairman of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, has been thrust to national limelight going by the nature of his job. Samuel Ajayi looks at this man, his acts and deeds since he took up the job on May 9 this year

Were Nuhu Ribadu, chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, to believe in the Signs of the Zodiac, then perhaps those around him might have been able to establish a correlation between his exploits at the Commission and his zodiac sign. Ribadu was born on November 11, 1960 and that makes him a Scorpio. And those who know how to gaze into the Crystal Ball will tell you that one of the behavioural assets of those born under this sign is their never-say-die spirit and firm belief that anything worth doing at all is worth doing well. A Scorpio could be aggressive, and at times for the good reasons. And if this is so, then Ribadu has an antecedent.

It might not be his star that has been having influence on him. Perhaps his parentage. His father became a minister of the Republic when Nuhu was five years old. Then his father was named the Commissioner of State for Finance and Economic Planning, under the regime of the late Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. But that did not guarantee any special privilege for Nuhu and his siblings. They had to learn about life the way ordinary kids in the hot streets of Yola were learning then. And it was around this time, when his father was named a minister, that he started schooling at Mustapha Primary School, Yola,

in 1966.

Going to school was always bare-footed, just like the son of the roadside cobbler who also wanted his son to learn the ways of the white man. He confirmed this himself when he said, during an interview to a weekly newsmagazine: "We went barefoot to schools. I am not different in terms of privilege. And my father was such a person that in our compound alone, we had so many people of different backgrounds and different religions coming to stay with us." And as child, there were no holidays abroad. His father would never give that to his children.

Even when he went to Yelwa Government Secondary School, in the same Yola, it was still a continuation of the same Spartan life that he had been introduced to years earlier when he was at the primary school. Even if the father was a man of means, the sheer number of children was enough to make sure that none was likely to get any special attention. Alhaji Ahmadu Ribadu, Nuhu's father, had three wives and thirty children. There were a score less one males and eleven girls. Nuhu's mother, Fadimatu, was the eldest of the wives but she is now deceased.

Nuhu did not just rise up to where he is today. Though Mother Luck can claim have played a role, but he himself has assisted Providence to play a good role. After studying law at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, between 1980 and 1983, he came to Lagos, where there was the only Law School then, to be called into the Bar. Completing his compulsory one-year National Service in 1984, he did the unusual; he opted for the police.

He did not just join the police. Gambo Jimeta, a former Inspector-General of Police and Nuhu's Adamawa kinsman, played a role. He knew he would be an asset to the police and he prevailed upon him to take up the job. He rose to become an Assistant Commissioner of Police, ACP, and today the head of the agency responsible for fighting the scourge of sleaze in the country.

His appointment as the head of the Commission did not come easy. There was opposition. And this hovered around the fact that he was too junior in the police to head such a very sensitive agency. However, impeccable sources told THISDAY that apart from his own pedigree, he was said to have been in the good books of the Vice President, Atiku Abubakar, and the National Security Adviser, NSA, Lt. General Mohammed Aliyu Gusau (rtd). And these top government officials played a role in making sure he got the job. In fact, when he was even nominated, he was outside the country on an official assignment.

"I was out of the country. I was on an assignment outside the country. Then I heard that I was one of the people pencilled down for the appointment. I think it was done primarily, because the law itself said the chairman has to be a member of the security service, serving or retired who will head the Commission," Ribadu explained.

And then the job started.

The Job

Fighting financial crimes needs a lot of guts. And the reason is there. Those who engage in Advance Fee Fraud, otherwise known as 419, have money, plenty of it. And oftentimes, they are able to buy justice. For instance, Morris Ibekwe, a serving member of the House of Representatives, was arraigned by the EFCC on May 30 this year. Ibekwe was not alone that day. With him were Ade Alumile, otherwise known as Ade Bendel, and Fred Ajudua, a Lagos

socialite.

For Ibekwe, had he not been arrested by operatives of the EFCC, he would have been one of those presiding over the passage of the law setting up the Commission. Trailing him in his Abuja official residence at Block 64, Flat 2, and his Okwelle hometown in Imo State, it was not long before Ibekwe discovered that trouble might be lurking in the corner for him.

Ibekwe had allegedly posed as a top official of the Federal Ministry of Transport and Aviation to a company based in Germany that was into electronics. He said the ministry would want the outfit, Munch Systemorganisation, to provide some materials such as computers, monitors and landing aides for the Abuja Airport. This was as far back as 1992. By 1993, the German outfit's pointsman came to Nigeria, believing that it was a juicy offer which they could not resist. Little did they know that they were in to be done in.

After the German had been given a lavish reception, his swindlers, reportedly led by Ibekwe, knew he had been hooked. Even before he entered the country, he had parted with over \$100,000 and later, after he had been taken to Abuja and lodged at NICON Hilton, he coughed out another \$100,000 which, according to Ibekwe and his co-travelers, was to be for "security." Whatever that meant, the German never asked.

By the time Klaus realised what was happening, he had been made to part with over \$300,000. And by this time, Ibekwe and his men had run away. The German reported to the police and it was discovered that the "top Ministry of Transport and Aviation official" was no one other than the same Ibekwe now representing Okigwe North Federal Constituency at the Lower Chamber of the National Assembly.

During investigations, Ibekwe had told men of the EFCC that he was being persecuted because of his political leanings, especially over the face-off between former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Ghali Umar Na'Abba, and President Olusegun Obasanjo. Ribadu's men were not impressed. And it served as a fore-taste of what to expect from this top police officer from Yola.

But before Ibekwe, there had been other financial crime suspects like Fred Ajudua and Ade Alumile. In fact, Ajudua had always behaved like a king and an untouchable for that matter. Their arrest and subsequent appearance in court was as a result of weeks of hide and seek between the 419 lynch-pins and security agents, especially men of the EFCC. If the duo and another of their co-traveler, Emmanuel Nwude, are eventually convicted, it would be a great achievement for Ribadu.

However, it would not be with these fraudsters that the battle will start and end. The brief of the Commission also extends to banks. And here, Ribadu would be on a familiar ground. He, alongside former Attorney-General and Minister of Justice and now a Presidential Adviser, Kanu Agabi, were members of the Failed Banks Tribunal set up by the regime of the late Sani Abacha to probe the rot that were banks in the early to mid nineties.

Those who know say it is not going to be an easy job for Ribadu. The reason being that banks hoard information so much that even the Central Bank, the body that is supposed to supervise the banks, at times is hoodwinked through cooked up figures which do not reflect the situation of things in the banks. Sleaze in banks is not really discovered until the banks have become distressed. And distressed is often caused by unpaid loans, outright fraud and

false financial health when the real situation is otherwise.

Will Ribadu be able to tackle this?

During the inauguration of the Commission on May 9 this year, Ribadu said there was no point saying what financial crimes have done to the image of the country. "You see, this 419 thing has caused a lot of embarrassment for the country. The image of the country had been destroyed. We now have a situation where Nigerians are regarded as common criminals wherever we go all over the world. So we feel we should start from that point. We know these people. They have been feeling very free, like nothing can ever happen to them. So we felt that probably we should start from that point. Let's bring them to justice," he told THISDAY.

Ribadu has every reason to be worried. Last year alone, over N15billion was estimated as the value of cases of fraud and forgeries by banks doing business in the country. This covered only three months. And it was like there was an arithmetical progression in the figure. In 1990, the figure was N2.85billion; 2000 it was N7.40billion and in 2001, the figure had risen to N11.24billion.

While many know it is not going to be an easy fight, they are equally impressed with the fact that Ribadu seems determined to make sure that success is achieved in the battle against financial crimes. Unassuming man determined to make a name for himself, Nuhu Ribadu had represented the police at the Oputa Panel which probed human rights abuses under the military. At the Panel, he held his own high. To him, death could come anytime. And that is why he says he sees his assignment at the EFCC as a man who has gone to the join the army. "It is either they kill you, or you kill someone. That is how it is," he says. His first job, probably, would have been as an Assistant Secretary at the Corporate Affairs Commission, CAC. In fact, he also got a job at the household itmes giants, Pattersons and Zocchonis, PZ, and United Bank for Africa, UBA. But he left all these because "all these places were not for me. I am not a man who is moved by money or business. I always wanted to serve, a public service kind of job, having come from a public service family. And I believe that is the right place for me to be, and that is where I can get satisfaction of life. I decided to join the police in spite of all family protestations." Speaking to THISDAY on the man Nuhu Ribadu, Danladi Bako, former Director-General of the National Broadcasting Commission, NBC, said he is a man that is not afraid of death. "He is a hardworking man who has paid his dues. I am aware that when he was to be appointed, there were those who thought because of his rank, he should not head such a sensitive agency, but I think he has proved them wrong. He is quite humble and I believe he will succeed. He is ready to give anything to the job; including his life."

If Nuhu Ribadu looks back today, perhaps he will always thank his star, the Scorpio, that he made the right choice of career.

29 AUG 2003

From ThisDay, a Nigerian newspaper:

419: FG Investigates Bank Accounts

By Ayodele Aminu

The Federal Government in its bid to track down money laundering and fraudulent transactions perpetrated through the Nige-rian banking system, has spread its dragnet to the bank accounts of the suspected fraudsters.

THISDAY checks revealed yesterday that the government has launched a major investigation into the pattern of transactions carried out through the accounts, with a specific interest in knowing the sources of some of the large scale financial dealings in which Nigerian banks are involved both locally and abroad.

A top government official told THISDAY yesterday that the perpetrators of Advance fee fraud, otherwise known as 419, had perfected a way of evading scrutiny by colluding with the staff of some banks to hide the nature of their businesses.

"In most cases," the source said, "the managements of the banks are kept in the dark on the nature of the transactions. We discovered that it is usually the staff that collude with the money launderers."

He revealed, however, that many of the banks are "co-operating with us and helping to track those accounts." The suspected fraudsters are expected to be charged to court as soon as the courts resume from their current recess.

The Federal Government had in response to international pressure, established the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) three months ago, in order to battle economic and financial crimes perpetrated by Nigerians. The activities of the fraudsters had drastically affected the efforts of the Federal Government to bring foreign investors to the country.

THISDAY also learnt that the EFCC is currently investigating two ailing banks in order to begin prosecution of all those indicted in the activities that brought the banks to the present condition.

Early in the year, Fred Ajudua, a lawyer from Ibusa, Delta State and Adedeji Alumile, a Lagos socialite popularly called Ade Bendel and Morris Ibekwe, a member of the House of Representatives representing Okigwe North Federal Constituency of Imo State were arraigned in a Lagos High Court with an eight count charge that border on forgery and impersonation slammed on them.

Ibekwe, former House Committee chairman on Police, was said to have defrauded one Munch Klaus, a German national of about \$300,000 and DM 75,000 in 1992. He had allegedly deceived Klaus into believing that German Electronics, which Klaus heads would be awarded a contract to deliver computers, monitors, radar systems accessories and other needed equipment at Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja. Ibekwe allegedly posed as the Accountant-General of the Ministry of Transport and Aviation.

Ajudua who has been in and out of detention on several cases of Advanced Fee Fraud, was arraigned at the Lagos High Court in connection with a N234 million scam against Remy Cima and Pierra Vijgen, two Dutch between 1999 and 2000. The two Dutch citizens had allegedly fallen to the proposition by Ajudua and his group to transfer a sum of N36 million to their accounts from the Federal Ministry of Aviation.

Ajudua, who allegedly posed as Isa Audu, the Auditor-General of Nigeria, had visited London three times but did not take note that he was being filmed by a BBC reporter. It was only when the tape was shown on BBC television that Cima knew that \$1,698,338 he and his colleague had paid him had been a fleece.

Ajudua and Ade Bendel, who are facing several charges are also said to be involved in the case of Frieda Springer-Beck, 54, a German national who was duped of about \$300,000. Springer-Beck was so devastated by the fraud that she packed her bags and moved to Nigeria, where she has settled down to form an association to help victims of fraud.

Also arrested two months ago by the EFCC was Emmanuel Nwude - Odenigwe, the kingpin who allegedly masterminded the defrauding of Nelson Sakaguchi, a Brazilian Bank manager, of the sum of \$242 million.

Nwudu, and Ikechukwu Anajemba (now late) had in 1995 embarked on the journey to defraud Sakaguchi which not only turned out to be the greatest yield in Advance Fee Fraud for any Nigerian but also allegedly led to the collapse of Banco Noroeste, a bank in Brazil.

Sakaguchi was a director of the International Department of Branco Noreste, with its headquarters in Sao Paulo, Brazil. In the said deal, Nwude posed as Paul Ogwuma, then Governor of Central Bank of Nigeria. His accomplice, Ikechukwu who played out as Rasheed Gomwalk, Director of International Remittance in CBN died some time in 1998.

23 AUG 2003

From the Nigerian publication Weekly Trust:

Nigeria on verge of complete destruction

Nuhu Ribadu, Financial Crime Commission Boss

By Abdul Fattah Olajide, in Lagos

Weekly Trust: The task before you is a very daunting one. Do you think we have the political will in this country to fight corruption and economic crimes?

Ribadu: I hope so and I pray that we do have. We have reached a stage where we either act or do something, or else all these things are going to destroy the country. We are almost on the verge of being destroyed completely; you could see our image outside. Now we are almost reaching a stage where the international community, particularly the finance sector, is threatening to sack Nigeria out completely. So whether we have the political will or not, we have reached a state of emergency. Something must be done to sort of bring us back. Otherwise, we are heading for a complete collapse.

WT: Recently, Transparency International adjudged Nigeria as the second most corrupt nation in the world and it noted that corruption in the country was most prevalent in the Presidency itself. With this scenario, how are we going to combat economic crimes effectively?

Ribadu: I don't want to hold that view myself personally. No, I wouldn't subscribe to that. Although I wouldn't say that there is no corruption in the country, but definitely, things are not as terribly bad as being portrayed. One of the indices people are using, particularly this Transparency International, is that they look at our record of conviction. They look at how much money we are spending and see what is the level of development and things like that. They look at our relation with the outside world. What are they saying about us? And then they will come back and say yes, agreed! At least, the government is doing something. It is fighting that corruption. This ICPC thing was established at the beginning of this administration. Unfortunately, it has not been able to have a successful record of conviction, which is a very serious set-back. But on the other hand, there are so many other measures the government took, particularly controlling, minimising and reducing corruption, at least in the government and government establishments. What is left now probably is to work hard in punishing those people who are also liable for corruption and corruption-related offences. This is what we should concentrate on.

WT: In your own opinion, why has it been difficult for the ICPC to get anybody convicted since it was set up?

Ribadu: That is one of the bugling questions (laughs). That I will not be able to understand myself. But I think principally, the issue of conviction is with the court. Basically, the job of the ICPC is to arrest people, prosecute and investigate them and then get them to court. I don't know how many cases they have in the court, but convicting or punishing people is with the court. So whatever the case is, I believe it is not just the ICPC, it is the entire people of the country. How

are we going to face this problem? How are we going to face it? All the institutions will have to come together-the judiciary, the legislators did their own part by passing that law, the executive is doing their own by implementing and enforcing the law. And then the remaining part is for the judiciary to award punishment, convict people, and send people to jail. Anything short of that will render the entire work that the legislators and the executive are doing absolutely fruitless. When they are there in court, if the court frees them, it will render all the work they have done useless. So that is where some of the problems are; it is not just the ICPC.

WT: With the establishment of your own commission and its comprehensive power on financial crimes, do you think the ICPC is still necessary?

Ribadu: Yes, it is operating differently. My own is the financial and economic crimes. What that means is if you go by what our law says, we are specifically assigned to enforce some laws already in existence. Like the advance fee fraud law, the money laundering law, the failed banks and other banking related offences law, the miscellaneous offences law. And we are also responsible for co-coordinating and regulating the entire sector, advise the government to be able to come out with programmes that will minimise and reduce the incidence of economic and financial crimes. On the other hand, ICPC is on public corruption, telling of government money. Basically, that is their own responsibility, involving public officers and protecting public funds. My own is not just public funds only, it also involves private funds, more particularly the private sector aspect of it. So you can see the difference. I don't think they (ICPC) will be irrelevant so long as they do their work; I hope and pray that we will start seeing results from them.

WT: Sure your commission is empowered to co-ordinate and enforce all economic and financial crime, laws. Is there a kind of overlap and duplication of responsibilities between your commission and the ICPC?

Ribadu: If it involves economic and financial crimes, yes. What I'm trying to do is to give you a simple nutshell distinguishing our responsibility. They are more or less going to be in charge of the private aspect of it. I will also, because if there is a case involving corruption and it is brought to me, and it has a relation with the economic and financial crimes, definitely I will go into it. I will handle it, but I think basically to assign specific responsibility, we are in charge of the private sector, and they are in charge of the public corruption. The police are going to be in charge of violent crimes, community policing like maintenance of law and order, fighting armed robbery and things like that.

WT: Recently, a case of bribery and tax evasion involving Halliburton was recorded.

Ribadu: I am waiting for someone to bring that case to me, I will take action.

WT: You mean you cannot get on the case yourself?

Ribadu: I can, but you know we are just three weeks old (at the time of interview). We have just started working. In this country and this is probably a record-breaking phenomenon, we were commissioned about three weeks ago, and we have got cracking so soon. You can see the work we have done so far. You can see the number of arrests we have been able to make. We have sent people to court today; I have several people now that are being investigated here and there. These cases you are talking about are things that we will go into. But my immediate worry and concern is this 419 thing, which has done so much damage to Nigeria. Any Nigerian who travels knows what I am talking about. We have no honour, we have no reputation and we have no dignity. I mean no respect outside the country. If you call yourself a Nigerian, first and foremost, they look at you as a thief, as a crook, as a fraudster. Certainly, it is the biggest problem and I am looking at it as a sort of emergency, something that we must address. I don't have many resources to be able to go into full war that will stop everything at once.

WT: But are you promising Nigerians?

Ribadu: Definitely! But like I told you, there are so many things to do. The place is so rotten. So many bad things are going on, so you must take one thing at a time. I have very few people with me now, extremely few. We don't have many resources.

WT: I was just going to ask you. How prepared is your commission for the task ahead?

Ribadu: Right now, we are just starting. We don't have much but I have this belief that we will get big support from the government. The president is extremely concerned about this problem. He gave me the confidence that "look go and do this work, I'm ready to give you a hundred per cent support." Already, I have started seeing the support. I believe that in this assignment, we will get all the necessary support that we require from the government. So far, it has been quite positive. All the indices show that. Right now, I'm at the stage of coming out with my blueprint, my organogram, my structure. This is what we are doing. I have assembled a quality number of people who are working on that, with the active support of the Bureau of Public Enterprises. We will soon start looking at the implementation stage. While we are doing that, I have started the operational aspect of the work which I believe is more or less like I told you an emergency thing. I must face this problem immediately; I have my skeletal operational staffs that are doing what we have been doing so far. But you know, it is going to be very difficult and an expensive task.

WT: The 419 kingpins who have just been arrested have been regular customers of the police and the law courts. But surprisingly, many of the cases against them have been thrown out. Will your own case be any different?

Ribadu: This is one of the biggest problems we've been facing in this country, dishonesty! People are terribly dishonest. People don't do their work; institutions that are assigned to do their work do not do it. They allow themselves to be compromised. That is why this people have been having their own way, doing what they like, getting away with that. We are different. We want to be different and we will not be compromised. We will be honest with what we are doing. We will have the fear of God in what we are doing and what we are going to do is going to be tactical, thoughtful and transparent. Every Nigerian will see and we will try to carry everybody along. If we get someone, we are going to arrest him. We are going to tell Nigerians what he has done. We are going to take him to court and Nigerians will know the court he is going and I pray and hope that everybody will follow such trials, so that everybody will see where the problem is. Because every office you go, everybody is ready to get compromised. These people are extremely rich, very rich people and they can afford to pay their way out. That is what they have been doing in the last fifteen years. They have had a good sort of control since about 1996, 97, 98. But ever since, the whole thing has turned back again and the belief is that we are going to be different. We will not be corrupt. Corruption is the main problem and that is why we have not been able to achieve anything. Corruption is within the agencies. Corruption is in the judiciary. Corruption is all over. If we will be able to tackle that, I assure you that these cheap criminals, these crooks will not have their way. We will deal with them.

WT: However hard you work, the success of your commission still depends on the judiciary. Are you sure of getting the necessary cooperation of the judiciary?

Ribadu: What you have said is true, because my commission does not have the power of punishment. We don't award punishment to offenders. Our own like I told you is to investigate, prosecute and take them to court. And that is where it stops. We have no power to confiscate anybody's property or permanently keep it away from them. We don't have the power to send anyone to prison, unlike agencies like NAFDAC that can ban. Otherwise, it will not be possible for us to solve this problem at all. So my prayer goes to the judiciary. We are appealing to the leadership of the judiciary, from the chief justice of the federation down to the different divisions we have in this country, the Federal High Court, the Court of Appeal, the State High Court, because this is the time for us to start doing what is right for this country. So let us give justice to Nigerians. The biggest problem we are facing in Nigeria today is lack of justice. No social justice. No criminal justice. You do what you like and you go free. Anybody who is cheated in Nigeria today takes extra-judicial measures to get his money back. This is simple logic. Everybody knows you will not go to court and say you will get justice and that is the reason why

we have difficulty in getting any foreign investment into the country. Who will bring his money into a place where he doesn't even have guarantee for not only his property, but his life? The moment we establish the rule of law further where people will have the confidence in and feel the protection of the law, I assure you, not only will foreign investments come, but you'll see a complete change, a reversal of our fortunes. Unless we do that and the only institution that can do that is the judiciary. If the judiciary today will start doing their work, giving justice to people, ensuring that people are protected, I assure you things will change. Their work even has a direct link with the law enforcement agencies. If the law enforcement agencies know that there is justice in the court, I assure you, they themselves will do justice. But in most cases, people believe that if you take a case to court, that is where it will end. That makes even the policeman take bribe and finish the case at his own level. This is what is happening. When I was in the police, we used to have people insisting on going to court, attempting to bribe us to take their case to court, because they believe that the moment it goes to court, that is the end of the case, and this is almost true. Look at Nigeria today. You talk about us being ranked as the second most corrupt country in the world, but we don't have even a single conviction for corruption cases in Nigeria! Look at the advance fee fraud, we don't have people serving jail terms and we are the number one nation of advance fee fraud in the world. There are 419ers who are in jail all over the world. You go to England, you go to America, they are being sent to jail. In Nigeria, none! No one is serving any jail term for 419. At least not convicted by a Federal High Court in Nigeria. There is something wrong with us. There is a big problem here, so that is what we must address. Unless we do that, unless the judiciary changes, there is no hope for us. We must start punishing our offenders, otherwise, we will not be able to stop others from copying them. This is the best form of deterrent. Punish those who have offended, then it will now be less attractive for people to go into that area. But the moment you celebrate them, the moment you now make your offenders, as the celebrities, as the big people in the society, they are the ones who get all whatever is good in the society always - chieftaincy titles and so on. They are the ones who are recognised wherever they go. Then you are telling your entire incoming generation to go into the same thing. Because they will always see who is there to copy and then they will see these people as the most flashy and the most attractive in the society. Look at this 419 thing, it started like a joke, but everybody, all those boys you see around one way or the other are involved in it. And unfortunately we don't punish our own offenders.

WT: Why has it been difficult for the judiciary to live up to its responsibilities?

Ribadu: It is corruption, sorry to say. What else? There is nothing apart from corruption - in the police, the judiciary and institutions like that. All the agencies that are responsible for the dispensation of justice, it is just corruption. The corruption starts from the investigation stage. The case will both be properly investigated. If it goes to court, it will not be properly prosecuted. Even if it is done, there will be no justice at the end of the day.

WT: So what can be done to make judges incorruptible?

Ribadu: I believe there are some good ones. The good ones should take over to be able to give proper image to the judiciary. I know so very many incorruptible judges in this country and there are a lot of them around. Hopefully, people like them will take over, not to allow these bad ones to give them bad image.

WT: Some of the foreigners defrauded by the 419ers are all craving for justice. Shouldn't they also be treated as accomplices for the fact that they also had the intention of defrauding the country before advancing money to the 419ers?

Ribadu: What is the intention when there is no contract? Most cases, there is nothing. No contract for you to say that they want to defraud the country. If you say yes, from whom do they want to take money? NNPC or CBN? (Laughs). There is no money there. Even if you want to go after them, there is nothing for you. The whole thing is a scam. Assuming that this thing is real, that is, if there is a contract, then you will say yes. Then you could go after them for conspiracy or co-conspirators or whatever you want to term or regard that. But in this case, it is a scam; the whole thing is fictitious, false. Nothing is in existence, so you just don't go catching in vain. If I go

to court, they should know why. That he wants to cheat CBN, where is the money? Which contract? That is the first thing they will ask. So you can't hold them at all and it is not even good for us to look at it that way. These people are Nigerians. They are the ones who are giving us bad names and image. Giving false thing to the international community. If we start looking at it from the point of also punishing their own victims, I doubt very much if we will be able to solve this problem. Let's concentrate on punishing our own people here first.

WT: But they are also liable because they fell for it!

Ribadu: (Cuts in) If you say they are greedy, that is a human factor, and you don't punish people for being greedy. It is not in our criminal law to press for that. If you say they are greedy, I agree with you and they are victims of their own greed. Fine! But that does not mean we are going to leave our criminals. And for your information, it will be very difficult for you to successfully punish or convict the 419ers unless you get the support of their victims, including the possibility of coming to testify. So if you say you are going to punish him, you are destroying the case. You should punish the fraudster himself. But if there is a foreigner involved in the 419 case, good! I will go after him; I will arrest any foreigner involved.

WT: Have you secured the support of the victims of 419 in the cases you are prosecuting currently?

Ribadu: Yes! So far, we have been able to do that. If it will even involve paying for them to come and testify. Even if means that I will give them a hundred per cent security. They will come here, they will testify and they will go, and I will try and see if it is possible for me to even retrieve their stolen money and give them back. I will work on that, with the support of the court.

WT: If it is not possible for you to retrieve the stolen money, is the government going to compensate the victims?

Ribadu: I don't think so, because the government has nothing to do with that. You cannot take public funds and pay for such a thing. The 419er must pay. And if he fails to pay, he will be liable for it for the rest of his life.

WT: What is the highest punishment for 419?

Ribadu: We have different measures, but the average has 10 years in jail and so on. There is this provision for restitution in the law. You must pay back the money to your victim, and I intend to really implement that aspect strictly. If you take somebody's money, I will not leave you. I will go after you, whoever you are, I will retrieve it. I will take back and give it to the person with the support of the court.

WT: Why do you think the case of the 419 is still prevalent and a lot of people are still falling victim to it despite the general level of awareness about it?

Ribadu: I think it is basically because in Nigeria, we fail to punish them. We have not addressed the problem at all, so it is encouraging so many people to come into it. I'll give you an example. From the statistics, more than 80% of firms or houses in America have received scam letters from Nigeria. More than 90% of houses in Germany or firms receive these scam letters. There was a time when I was in the police and we arrested someone with over one million scam letters. So it is a matter of trial. One person will send so many letters and now with the availability of addresses, we can get them from the internet, from telephone directories, from business catalogue and so on. So many! They will just copy all these things to somebody. Now they use e-mail, it is very easy. In a short distance, you can send so many letters through that. The chances are that they will catch one or two out of them. Most of the letters that are sent don't get replied but the chances are there. Even though it is slim, it will be there. But because of this human factor, the greed is there, and there are so many innocent people in the world who can just easily fall victim to whatever you tell them. So if you send about 10,000 letters, probably about five will get replied and that has been the case of what is going on. But our big problem is

that we in Nigeria fail to address the problem at all. I think now they are going to be serious about it. We tried around 1995, 96, 97 and 98. To some extent, we succeeded and some of them started leaving the country for Benin Republic, Ghana, and South Africa and so on. But after that, when we came to democracy, they came back. But now, I have amendment before the National Assembly that will help us address the problem seriously and with this commitment and the will to fight it, we believe that this time, we will be able to address the problem. You can see clearly that already, they have started running out. Most of them are just selling their properties and getting out. Things will not be the same again.

WT: What is your commission doing in terms of public enlightenment about economic and financial ...?

Ribadu: (Cuts in) We are going to make serious and massive publicity to educate Nigerians of our activities on the evil of these crimes and how to prevent them. So far, we have been getting very positive response from the press. People are extremely enthusiastic about it. In Nigeria, one thing I've realised is that if we are doing what is right, people will come along and support it, particularly the press. They are more concerned that any group in this country is doing what is right and I think if they identify anything that is right or done properly, they will always give it support. Hopefully, it is going to continue that way. The assurance I will give is that we will continue to be honest with what we are doing. We will continue to be transparent. Publicity is central to our own activities. We intend to be at the centre of everything and we pray that we will be able to continue.

WT: Personally, how equipped are you to handle this job?

Ribadu: It is just my resolve and will to do what is right. I will assure you that I have been doing this work for a long time and I will continue to do it. The will is there, the determination is there and I believe the understanding is there as well.

WT: Since you took over this job, have there been any threats to your life?

Ribadu: I have started receiving them from text messages (he brought out some copies). Even telephones. Funny enough, I'm not afraid. I'm used to this. I have handled so many cases even while in the police. I'm not scared of any criminal and I will not be scared of a cheap crook. I'm doing what is right for this country and I will continue to do it. Nothing will deter me. I will not go out to anybody for the sake of that. No way. I have the fear of God in me. I will do what is right and believe that I will have God on my side. Nothing will happen to me insha Allah.

18 AUG 2003

From the Sacramento Business Journal:

Elk Grove man admits Nigerian scam conspiracy

Roland Adams, 37, of Elk Grove, entered guilty pleas to charges of conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud and to launder money as part of an international "Nigerian bank scam" that defrauded its victims of more than \$2.1 million, federal prosecutors said Monday.

Adams admitted that from February 2001 to June 2002 he and conspirators in Nigeria, South Africa and Canada operated the scheme, also known as an advance fee fraud or "4-1-9 fraud" after the section of Nigeria's penal code that covers fraud, according to the U.S. Attorney's office in Sacramento.

In such scams, victims agree to help government officials remove millions of dollars from African bank accounts in return to a share of the proceeds. They typically are asked to provide information about their bank accounts and pay an upfront "fee," typically 1 percent of the total "transfer" amount. In reality, the accounts don't exist and the "fees" are siphoned to the conspirators.

Adams admitted that he and international co-conspirators sent solicitation letters that appeared to be from African government officials or agencies, according to a statement by U.S. Attorney McGregor Scott.

The recipients who took the bait typically were asked to front 1 percent of the cash in the fictitious accounts -- an amount that could reach several hundred thousand dollars -- as a fee to facilitate the diversion of cash. Some sent the fees to individuals in South Africa or Canada, while others were told to wire the cash to international bank accounts. Some of the cash collected was sent back to Adams, investigators said.

Adams registered Web site domains for several fictitious banks and had Web sites set up so that victims could "track the progress" of the fictitious fund transfers.

He faces up to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud and up to 20 years and \$500,000 for conspiracy to launder money, plus mandatory restitution. Sentencing is set for Oct. 27.

A separate trial is scheduled for Sept. 22 before U.S. District Judge Edward Garcia on the government's motion to seize Adams' Elk Grove home, more than \$87,000 seized from his accounts, a computer and the Internet domains used in the scheme.

Adams was the owner of Sacramento-based Adams Business Services, which had an office on J Street downtown. There was no answer Monday at the phone number listed for the business in an Internet phone directory. The directory listed the business as a marketing consultant, although prosecutors said Adams has also said he was in the textile importing business.

In addition, the Nigeria-born Adams faces charges that he made false statements during his May 2001 interview to become a naturalized U.S. citizen, when he said he had not been involved in any crime for which he had not been arrested. If convicted, he could face up to 10 years in prison, be deported and have his citizenship revoked.

17 AUG 2003

From The Observer, UK:

A world wide web of fraud

Conal Walsh reveals how gullible UK businesses may be losing £200m a year to West African con artists

George Agbinone and Monsulu Adeko can consider themselves pretty unlucky. They don't know each other, but both are West African confidence tricksters. Both took part in 'begging letter' frauds - raising an estimated £500,000 and £1.2 million, respectively. And both, unusually, got caught.

The convictions of Agbinone and Adeko followed lengthy investigations by the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) and the City of London police, and were rare victories for law enforcement. Privately, detectives concede they are fighting a losing battle against a widening array of scams masterminded from West Africa.

Londoners alone are now receiving an estimated 100,000 different 'begging letters' a year, most believed to be sent from Nigeria, and the National Criminal Intelligence Service believes British companies and individuals could be losing up to £200m a year from the fraud.

Other businesses have gone bust after Nigerian hoaxers stole their mail to obtain their financial details and persuaded their banks to transfer large sums out of their accounts.

'We're dealing with very clever people here,' says a senior Fraud Squad detective. 'In their dealings with potential victims, they come across as trustworthy, well mannered, well educated. Most West Africans living in Britain are respectable, and these criminals trade off the good names of their community.'

How anyone could fall for a Nigerian begging letter must be a mystery to most people. Email missives - known to detectives as '419s', after section 419 of the Nigerian penal code - make lurid, ungrammatical offers of huge rewards to their recipients in exchange for an up-front 'administration' fee. If you deposit £25,000 in a specified offshore account, say, or hand the cash over at an 'official meeting', you are promised several million from a Nigerian privatisation, or a dead dictator's slush fund.

Only the most gullible could be fooled. The emails are sent indiscriminately - Rosalind Wright, director of the SFO until this year, is among the more unlikely recent recipients of a '419'. But it is precisely this 'scattergun' approach that makes the frauds work.

'Like spam, the emails cost nothing to send, and they go to thousands or tens of thousands of people around the world,' says the Fraud Squad detective. 'If only one or two people are mug enough to fall for it, then the whole scam is worthwhile.'

The world wide web has been a boon to the fraudsters. 'It's really internationalised the problem. The Americans, for example, are really starting to suffer from it now.'

A recent police operation in east London led to the arrest of a suspect who had ripped off two victims who lived as far afield as Alaska and Australia. Both had thought they were communicating with the Central Bank of Nigeria in Lagos, rather than a bedsitter in Leytonstone.

'Many of the ringleaders are out of our reach, though,' says the detective. 'We've positively identified a few so-called "businessmen", with Mercedes saloons and large mansions in Abuja, whom we'd be very keen to talk to if they ever set foot on British soil.'

Co-operation from Nigeria is improving. The country regularly tops Transparency International's league table of sharp business practices, but the government of Olesgun Obasanjo is less tolerant of corruption than its predecessors. It is engaged in costly and interminable legal attempts to recover billions plundered from state coffers during the rule of Sani Abacha, the late military dictator. And it recently set up a 100-man squad of 'untouchable' police officers tasked with cracking down on fraud.

But police forces across Britain remain concerned at the steady growth of another scam organised by West African gangs: the clearing house automated system, or 'Chaps' fraud.

'Gangs are systematically stealing company documents from rubbish bins, postrooms and Royal Mail sorting offices, and trying to get hold of tax and national insurance paperwork,' said the fraud detective.

The aim is to identify a company's account number, sort code and signatures. Pretending to be a company representative, the criminal then contacts the company's bank, telling it to transfer £50,000 to a numbered offshore account. This account, of course, belongs to the criminal himself, who empties it before the defrauded company realises its money has gone missing.

To assist the fraud, gang members and associates - many not from African backgrounds - are thought to have secured jobs in Royal Mail depots, banks, tax offices and at the Department for Work and Pensions. 'Of course, the fraud doesn't work most of the time, because somebody, usually the bank manager, gets suspicious,' the detective said. 'But the point is to try it hundreds or even thousands of times.'

'It's the same as with the 419 letters: you only need a few people to fall for the scam to make a fortune.'

Law enforcement agencies express a grudging admiration for the versatility of the West African gangs.

'You might think that it would be easy to identify these guys who fly in from Nigeria and can hardly speak English, but in fact the gangs are almost uniquely difficult to crack,' says the detective.

'It's not just the fact that they're absolute masters at travelling with fake passports and devising multiple identities, it's also very difficult to predict what kind of fraud an individual is likely to be working on, and with which associates. It always seems to change.

'In a lot of cases, Nigerian "gangs" turn out not to be gangs at all, or not permanent ones. Many of these guys are freelancers, who dip in and out of different frauds on an ad hoc basis.'

West African gangs have formed alliances with English criminals - something that is apparently unusual among ethnic minority gangs in the UK.

At their core, however, most 419 and Chaps frauds tend to be controlled by Africans.

These scams are often concocted by members of the same family or tribe, using local dialects, and are therefore exceptionally difficult for authorities to penetrate. 'It's a perennial problem,' said the detective. 'The fraudsters are always one step ahead, so it's going to be a long hard fight.'

6 AUG 2003

From the Nigerian newspaper The Guardian:

Nigeria blacklisted again over financial crimes

Alifa Daniel, Abuja

CITING the country's anti-money laundering law as insufficient to meet international standards, 29-member countries of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has again blacklisted Nigeria, Chairman, Senate Committee on Drugs, Narcotics and Financial Crimes, Senator Lawal Shuaibu, has said.

Shuaibu in his inaugural speech yesterday, added that the country lacked any reliable record of reported cases of money-laundering and prosecution.

"When the FATF evaluation team visited Nigeria, they received little co-operation and interpreted that to mean that many information were hidden," Shuaibu said.

It would be recalled that in November last year, the United States, Britain and France among others, had concluded plans to sanction Nigeria for its inability to stem the worsening tide of financial crimes. A December 15, 2002 deadline was given to Nigeria to take action on enacting an internationally acceptable law or be blacklisted.

It was a worried President Olusegun Obasanjo who pushed for the Economic and Financial Crimes Bill 2002, which was passed with little or no alterations. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was set up in December 2002, with an Assistant Commissioner of Police, Nuhu Ribadu as head.

Shuaibu disclosed that the Senate committee intended to push for the enforcement of every provision of laws related to drugs, advance-fee-fraud (419), anti-money laundering, corruption and other financial crimes.

The committee chairman, however, said that in the last two years, Nigeria's image in the international community has improved in view of the activities of government.

"Our law enforcement agencies must be commended for their ability to achieve so much with so little funds at their disposal and under very peculiar socio-political circumstances. We are very proud of them and every Nigerian should be proud. They changed the wrong impression about the country's image", he added.

Shuaibu stressed that the Senate would push for the amendment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Law, adding that the membership of the EFCC was faulty with its head, Ribadu, being made to report to his senior and other security agencies.

Senate President, Adolphus Wabara, while inaugurating the committee, observed that financial scams have given Nigeria a bad image abroad.

"Every Nigerian is deemed guilty until proven otherwise. Many of our nationals have had to endure demeaning searches at many airports abroad on account of this unfair stigmatisation on account of the nefarious activities of a few Nigerians. This stigmatisation hurts the pride of our people and limits their potential," Wabara added.

1 AUG 2003

An Editorial from the Nigerian newspaper Daily Champion:

Internet scams

The circumstances surrounding the recent arrest in Enugu of a suspected internet fraudster bring to mind the worrying increase of cyber scams in Nigeria and the negative effects on the nation's image.

The suspect, allegedly pioneered a fake charitable fund on the web, seeking assistance for German, Italian and Swiss nationals in Nigeria. He was said to have written to several European companies soliciting funds to improve the standard of living of Swiss nationals living in Nigeria.

Luck ran out on him when a Swiss company made inquiries from the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), which, in collaboration with the Swiss police, apprehended the young man.

Before this arrest, several companies and associations had raised alarm over the looting of their treasuries and other scams perpetrated against them through the internet.

To date, at least five banks have had to leave warnings on their websites after fraudsters cloned them or created alternate sites through which they siphoned out huge sums of money.

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) also had cause to leave an alert on its website warning about non-existent banks and other activities of scam artists most of which are now carried out on line.

Advance Fee Fraudsters, known in local parlance as 419ners, have also relocated to the internet from where its perpetrators inundate the rest of the world with scam messages.

The result of these untoward activities is a further erosion of the credibility of Nigerians outside our shores. With the bulk of cyber traffic from Nigeria consisting of scam mails, Nigerian companies and individuals are experiencing even greater credibility problems abroad.

In this era of e-business, Nigeria might also experience problems joining the rest of the world of modern international business if urgent efforts are not made to curb the activities of the fraudsters. It stands to reason that e-banking and other forms of e-business will not thrive in an environment of unbridled cyber crimes.

Legitimate charities and non-governmental organisations in Nigeria stand the danger of being viewed as scam outlets due to the activities of fake on line charitable organisations.

It follows from all these that the growing rate of internet fraud, presents a clear danger to Nigeria's economy and image and constitutes a serious threat to her concerted efforts to be a major player in the international finance system.

The government, individuals, internet service providers, and corporate bodies therefore cannot afford the present low level of efforts to halt cyber crimes.

The Nigerian police should, as a matter of urgency, set up a team, modelled after the cyber cops operating in several developed countries. The special squad should be trained in cyber policing and be equipped for the job. The team, alongside other interested parties, should link up with other agencies worldwide to share information and track culprits.

Corporate bodies especially those in e-business, also need to team up and pool resources together to ensure security of their websites and internet resources. It is also the duty of corporate organisations to explore all avenues to safeguard their e-operations and secure their sites through the use of expert advice and appropriate protection mechanisms.

The Nigerian government and its regulatory authorities also need to urgently make laws and prescribe punishment for cyber crimes as well as provide funds and other resources needed to monitor cyber operations without infringing on the basic rights of citizens.

We also believe that increased knowledge of computer and cyber operations among Nigerians will reduce susceptibility to cyber frauds. Thus, more efforts should be geared in the direction of improving computer knowledge among the populace.

With unrelenting, vigilance by members of the larger society and adequate policing of cyber activities, by the law enforcement agencies, internet scams would reduce very considerably. Our country will be better for it.

28 JUL 2003

From www.ghanaweb.com: General News

Six nabbed in connection with Kabila "419" legacy

Accra, July 28, GNA - The Police has busted a gang that defrauded a German of 10,000 dollars and 20 million cedis with a promise of making available to him millions of dollars being the legacy Ex-President Joseph Kabila of the Democratic Republic of Congo bequeathed to it. The gang of five foreign nationals and a Ghanaian was arrested when they were found loitering at the AFGO Village, apparently waiting to clear boxes containing the millions of dollars.

Chief Superintendent, Patrick Timbila of CID Operations, told the Ghana News Agency that Charles Kokou Fatondji, 36; Kelvin Onome, 28; Elias Adike, 32;

Lucky Brown, 35; and Odibo Abayomi Emuebe, 36 from Benin and Nigeria and Stephen Addo alias Richmond Addo, 27, the Ghanaian, were arrested upon a tip-off.

He said when information got to the CID Headquarters men were despatched to the Afgo Village where the six and their German victim were found loitering.

Mr Timbila said the Police then invited them for questioning and during the interrogation it was discovered that the six were involved in advanced fee fraud and had already duped Walter Neumann, the German. The German told Police that he had already parted with of 10,000 dollars and 20 million cedis as fees for facilitating the clearing of the boxes, which the gang alleged, contained millions of dollars bequeathed to them by the late Ex-President Kabila.

The Police realised it was a 419 scam and quickly apprehended the six while another suspect Nicky Yeboah, a Ghanaian, is at large. Mr Timbila said when the Police searched the room of Elias Adike they found 100 dollar bills with a face value 20,000 dollars, suspected to be counterfeit.

He said that all the suspects are in Police custody pending further investigations.

Mr Timbila appealed to the public and foreigners in the country to be wary of the 419 scams and avoid becoming easy preys, adding that the Police would deal drastically with any suspect arrested in that venture.

25 JUL 2003

From the Daily Independent Online, a Nigerian publication:

Four fresh charges for Ajudua

By Folorunsho Ogunnekun

The trial of a Lagos lawyer, Fred Chijindu Ajudua before an Ikeja High Court, over charges of involvement in Advance Fee Fraud, a.k.a "419" took a dramatic turn yesterday, when the prosecution included an additional four-count charge.

Ajudua and Charles Orie were arraigned before Ikeja High Court for collecting a US \$1,698,338 (N216m) from a German, Mr. Remmy Hendrikt Luigi Lima.

According to the prosecution, the two accused persons fraudulently conspired and duped the German by presenting sundry payments US\$18,000,000 (about N2.286 billion) on contract FMA/PED/3040/x-92, purported to have been executed by the German and due for payment.

The fresh charges tendered by the State Prosecutor, Mr. Wole Ogunde, read as follows: That you Fred Ajudua did not only conspire with Orie to perpetrate the crime but also involved one Rasheed Adekunle Adeko (alias Steven William), Abisola Fawehinmi, Steven Joyner (alias Terry Walter) and some persons still at large to commit a felony to wit defrauding by false pretences.

Count 1 of the charge read: "That Ajudua (alias Isa Audu); Orie, Adeko, Wlliams, Fawehinmi and Joyner between July 30, 1999 and February 9, 2000 did with intent to defraud, obtained the sum of N216m from the German.

That the conspiracy was contrary to Section 8(a) and 1(3) of the Advance Fee Fraud

and other Related Offences Act No. 13 of 1995 as amended by Act No. 62 of 1999.

That Ajudua and his partners had induced the payment of money by false pretences, contrary to section 1(1)(b) and 1(3) of the Advance Fee Fraud Act.

Count four has to do with obtaining money by false pretences contrary to section 1(1) (a) 1(3) of the Advance Fee Fraud Act.

At yesterday's hearing, the state prosecutor told the court co-conspirators, Adeko, Fawehinmi, Joyner, Walter were at large. Ajudua and Orie were later remanded in custody at Kirikiri Maximum Security prisons to re-appear next week.

The accused persons had pleaded not guilty to the charges.

24 JUL 2003

From the Guardian, a Nigerian newspaper:

Ajudua's lawyer withdraws from proceedings

By James Dadzie and Olanrewaju Olusesi

ATENSED atmosphere enveloped the Ikeja High Court yesterday as Mr. Wale Adesokan, Counsel to Fred Ajudua, dramatically announced his intention to withdraw from the \$1,698,538 million fraud case brought against his client by the Federal Government.

In return, the presiding judge, Justice Joseph Oyewole accused Adesokan of blackmail, saying: "I don't want to give the impression that any counsel can intimidate the court."

Ajudua, a lawyer and one Charles Ovie were arraigned by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission on May 30, 2003 in the Federal Government renewed its clampdown on Advance Fee Fraud (or 419) perpetrators.

The dramatic development came seconds after, Justice Oyewole had rejected an oral application for an adjournment brought by Adesokan and ordered that the prosecution should continue with its case.

Two British Police Officers, Messrs Barry Bryan and Paul Blumson, who arrived in Lagos four days ago, were in court to testify for the prosecution under tight security mounted by about a dozen armed mobile policemen.

Before they could mount the witness box, however, Adesokan complained that he would be doing injustice to his client if he continued with the case because he had not been able to digest, read or confront his client with a 31-page document which the prosecution served on him earlier in the day, despite a 90-minute stand-down of the case.

He said the overriding consideration ought to be fair trial, justice to the accused, justice to the prosecution and justice to the entire society.

"I will not in my conscience, properly defend the accused person now. So, I would like to withdraw", Adesokan told the court.

The Court accordingly granted the request.

Adesokan said that although he was aware that the court had ordered an accelerated hearing, he would be sacrificing justice for speedy hearing if he agreed to a continuation of the trial yesterday.

He alleged that the new 31-page document had entirely altered the charge; that the character of the case had changed completely and that "it will prejudice the first accused (Ajudua) if I should continue with the case today."

Insisting on his right for an adjournment to enable him study the document, Adesokan cited Section 164(3) of the Criminal Procedure Law (CPL).

But the leading prosecution counsel, Mr. Oluwemimo Ogunde disagreed with Adesokan that the character of the case had changed.

"Our case remains the same; all we have done is to bring documents to show that the accused lived in London at one time, contrary to his claim that he was never in London." He submitted.

Ogunde, leading Mr. Wahab Shittu and other counsel for the prosecution, told the court that it would be cost the country a colossal sum to bring back the two witnesses whom he had brought from England at a huge cost.

Soon after Adesokan had withdrawn his representation, the accused, Ajudua, himself a lawyer told the Court that he needed time to get a counsel of his choice before the case could go on.

"My Lord, it is my constitutional right that I get a counsel of my choice. It is trite that I have a counsel of my choice and I will need an adjournment to do that or possibly convince my lawyer (Adesokan) to continue representing me", Ajudua pleaded.

Ogunde later conceded to the defendants' application for an adjournment saying: "At this, I will concede to the adjournment. We want to ensure that the integrity of the Court is not impinged upon in any way".

Before adjourning the proceedings to September 23, 2003, Justice Oyewole said: "I raised the issue of blackmail because you (Adesokan) as a very senior member of the Bar, know that withdrawal is not the only option open to you. I will record that you are likely to reconsider your decision to withdraw from the case".

24 JUL 2003

From the South African publication BusinessDay:

Scamming the scammers

The e-mail scams, often from the widow of an African dictator or a bank official, promise untold wealth in return for helping to transfer millions of dollars, but now the "scam-baiters" are hitting back.

They have even succeeded in scamming the scammers: one persuaded his contact to send him five dollars as a sign of good faith; another induced a scammer to send him a sample of the gold dust they were planning to launder - and used it to buy beer for his friends. And one even got a photo of his contact holding up a sign saying "I am a dildo".

They do it with humour - one anti-scammer said his funds would be available as soon as he had sold his shares in the Brooklyn Bridge - but they warn amateurs to be careful.

Victims of the scam have lost tens of thousands of dollars, and in some cases been attacked and robbed. They frequently fail to report their losses to the police - out of shame at their gullibility, and because they had been planning to act illegally.

"This could become a dangerous game, and some of these syndicates can be ruthless," said South African Interpol spokeswoman Mary Martins-Engelbrecht, who added that in South Africa alone some 60 cases of advance fee fraud were reported every day.

The message from the "widow" or the "official" will ask for your name, address, bank details, passport and telephone numbers and a promise that in exchange, you will receive a major cut from the deal.

But first, you will have to pay large amounts of money "to grease palms", for transfer fees, to open a bank account and in many cases, you must travel to the country from where the letter originated.

If you answer, chances are good that you may have just become the latest victim of what is known around the world as the 419 advance fee scam.

Named after a penal code in Nigeria - from where many of the letters originate - the scam works on a simple principle. The victim is being kept on the hook for as long as possible, paying money, with the carrot of a huge return at the end.

The cash never materialises and the scammer disappears into thin air. In some cases, victims are lured into a trap, kidnapped and held hostage for ransom.

Many of the victims are from Europe and Japan, some even from the Caribbean.

"In one of the latest cases, an operation was conducted after we received information that syndicate members lured a female Jamaican attorney to come to South Africa for a fictitious business venture," Senior Superintendent Martins-Engelbrecht told AFP.

"Overall, police here have arrested more than 130 people in connection with the 419 scam," she said.

But now a group of people calling themselves "scam-baiters" are stringing the scammers along at their own game.

One referred a scammer to the west African division of his country - an address that turned out to be the section of Britain's serious fraud squad dealing with the 419 scams. Another set up a fictitious bank account named "BITROPEY".

"A big part of scam-baiting is the humour but we recognise the seriousness of this fraud. We have to become bigger liars than the scammer to be believed by them," said Neil, a scam-baiter operating out of Australia.

"Some baiters decide to use a theme for one bait, others use made-up pathetic circumstances to tell the scammer, just to show how heartless they are," he said.

He gave an example where a baiter ran an imaginary "home for handicapped children" (the baiter also "confessed" he took regular advantage of the young girls in his care) and where "the roof was in bad need of repair but it would take two years before it could be replaced".

Despite the fact that the baiter told the scammer he only had 12,000 pounds sterling, the scammer persisted with the deal to steal the money from the "children's home".

But Martins-Engelbrecht warned e-mail users not to enter into any correspondence once a 419 proposition has been received.

"It just gives the criminal more information to work with. Rather alert the police and help

us catch the scammer."

And, adds one of the anti-scammers, who asked to remain anonymous: "I would not, considering the fact they are criminals, recommend anybody write to them."

"If someone does feel the urge to do this, exercise extreme caution. Under no circumstances give them your real e-mail, phone number, nor go to meet them."

19 JUL 2003

From the Nigerian newspaper, the Nigerian-Tribune:

How Ajudua Defrauded German, By Prosecution

By Friday Ekeoba, Lagos

The Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), yesterday chronicled the tricks allegedly employed by Lagos Lawyer cum businessman, Chief Fred Ajudua in defrauding a German national, Mr. Remmy Hendrick Luighi to the tune of \$1.6 million.

Representing EFCC before an Ikeja High Court at the resumed trial of Ajudua and Mr. Charles Orie, prosecution witness, Police Superintendent Adegbite Olaolu said the duo were arrested in line with investigation facts and figure traceable to them.

Olaolu narrated how the subjects used fake documents purported to have emanated from the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Aviation, the Central Bank of Nigeria, CBN, a letter from the Accountant General of the Federation and the National Intelligence Agency but were discovered to be false.

Also addresses on documents, telephones lines quoted and the signature said to be that of Dr. Adamu Ciroma who was finance minister in 1999, were found to be fake. Olaolu who was giving evidence in chief said their investigation was based on a petition sent to them by Luigi in Holland (fraud victim).

Another step taken was that we wrote formally to the Dutch police in respect of the case originally reported by the victim (Luigi), the IPO of the case in Holland, Mr. Schepp sent us a report. He faxed the report to us, absorbing the victims of any criminal records.

The fraud was committed in London and US but feelers from Luigi in the course of the business transaction were found in the possession of one Fawehinmi in London who later escaped while on bail. But the name Isa Andu was traceable to sue Ajudua and the phone lines to Charles Orie, Olaolu added.

EFCC also told the court that as informed by the IPO in Holland through a fax letter, the victim was defrauded of his personal savings through a bank in Nigeria (names withheld).

Besides, it was noticed yesterday that while giving evidence, Olaolu and first suspect (Ajudua) were making eye contact on what to say and not to say.

Ajudua, Orie, Ade-Bendel, Angunous Okoro and the re-elected member of the House of Representatives, Chief Maurice Ibekwe were arraigned severally at the Ikeja High Court on May 30 2003 by EFCC for Economic and Financial Crime matters to the tune of several billions of naira.

Meanwhile, Justice Kudirat Kekere-Ekun, has fixed 17, 18 and 19 September 2003, as definite dates for the trial of Murice Ibekwe.

15 JUL 2003

From The Guardian, a Nigerian newspaper:

Nigerian woman loses N500,000 to fraudsters

WHAT was meant to be a routine call to find out how a twin brother was faring in Abuja has cost a Nigerian woman based in the United States of America the sum of N500,000.

The woman, a Chicago-based nurse, did not know that some advance fee fraudsters had resorted to tapping mobile phone numbers to defraud people.

Narrating the incident, the twin brother of the victim, said that his sister was told by the fraudsters when she called last week that he and his wife had a motor accident and that the money was needed for medical treatment. The accident purportedly occurred around Shagamu when both of them were travelling to Lagos. The man, a civil engineer from Anambra State, said that the fraudsters talked his sister into sending the money to Nigeria because she was told that he sustained a spinal cord injury which needed immediate surgery.

The money which was remitted into a certain account in a Lagos bank was meant to pay for the surgery and other incidentals that could occur in the process of treatment. "They even told her the exchange rate, so that she will know exactly how much she will send in dollars," he said.

On how they got the telephone number, he said his sister said the fraudsters claimed that they picked him and his wife up from the scene of the accident and took them to the hospital.

According to him, the phone was one of the items recovered from the scene and is being kept to take calls from relations and friends, to intimate them on the development, since they were yet to show up.

They also told my sister that the car burnt as a result of the accident and that he and his wife narrowly escaped death.

On whether the victim did not place other calls to relations and friends in Nigeria to confirm the story, he said that luck was on the side of the fraudsters because efforts by his sister to get his wife and brother on their phones that same day failed.

"Because she could not get across to any other person that same day, she believed the cooked-up story, quickly raised and remitted the money to the agreed account in a so-called Lagos bank," he said.

On whether the matter would be allowed to die, he said he was making inquiries for now and would not want to disclose details of the account and name of the bank. The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reports that mobile phone users in Abuja have complained of receiving strange calls, asking them for one favour or trying to corner them into some shady deals.

11 JUL 2003

From The Register (UK):

Amsterdam: home of the 419 lottery scam

By Jan Libbenga

"Fortune Trust Finance & Securities opens a whole new world of opportunities providing you with that financial security you can count on," reads a brand new web site. Take a closer look and you understand why. Profiles of "our dedicated Executive Directors" make you laugh: the low res-pictures are noticeably copied from other websites. And the web site's visual effects are totally inappropriate for a trustworthy financial institution.

Fortune Trust Finance & Securities is one of many non-existent companies linked to congratulatory emails, advising victims of their good fortune in winning a million dollar lottery prize. A reply to the email yields a request for thousands of dollars or higher to cover payment of handling, transfer and insurance costs. You guessed it: they take the money and run.

The lottery scams are orchestrated by Nigerians operating from boiler rooms in Amsterdam suburbs. They don't target Dutch victims, but foreigners who do not know that companies such as Fortune Trust Finance & Securities could never be housed at Burdenstreet or Alfonstraat in Amsterdam, addresses mentioned in numerous emails. The phone numbers, however, are real; some will even connect to a satellite phone.

The Dutch fraud squad last year estimated that at least seven Nigerian syndicates - a group of at least a hundred people - are engaged with 419 frauds from Amsterdam; making it one the most important scam hubs of the European continent. Recently five Nigerian men were sentenced for e-mail crimes, including lottery fraud.

Nigerian lottery scams from the Netherlands are on the rise. Several lotteries recently began to put up bogus websites, some of them with pictures of bustling computer rooms or impressive office fronts, claiming to be working for Lee Towers Holdings, after a well-known Dutch Frank Sinatra impersonator, or Johannes Cruyff, the soccer star.

Others will let you believe they are accredited by the Dutch Council for Accreditation, prompting this organisation to issue warnings. Germany-based Waruno Mahdi is keeping an eye on several Dutch and UK scam lottery companies at his website. Even The London Metropolitan Police has issued warnings.

It is unknown how many people fall prey to these scams. The Dutch Council for Accreditation was approached by a Japanese victim who apparently lost €10,000.

Emails to Ready Hosting, the American company that host Fortune Trust Finance & Securities, remain unanswered at time of writing.

11 JUL 2003

From the Nigerian newspaper, Daily Trust:

Court refuses lawmaker bail

From Adelanwa Bamigboye, in Lagos

Justice Kudirat Kekere-Ekun, sitting at a Lagos High Court, yesterday refused bail to Honourable Morris Ibekwe, saying that as a member of the National Assembly, he was in a position to influence the trial and might not return to face trial if set free.

She said that since Ibekwe was arrested on accusation of advanced fee fraud, the complainant, Miss Springer Becks, a German national had received numerous telephone calls threatening her life should she venture to come to Nigeria.

Morris Ibekwe, a member of the House of Representatives who was

Chairman of its police subcommittee from 1999 to 2003, and Angumos Okoro were charged to court by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) on behalf of the federal government.

They were alleged to have conspired to commit forgery and obtained US\$330,000 and 75,000 Deutsch marks, pretending that the monies were sundry payments to various government officials for the payment of US\$30,000,000 on a contract No. FMT&AV/PED/5152/82.

The lawmaker who was led into the courtroom by two prison officials appeared fragile and the court later allowed him to sit down during proceedings.

The complainant, Miss Becks, was also in court yesterday.

Delivering ruling on the bail application, Justice Kekere-Ekun said the power of the court to grant bail was discretionary and must be exercised judiciously, pointing out that the first and eighth counts of the charge carries jail terms of seven years each while the second to seventh charge attracts 14 years in jail.

She held that in arriving at the decision not to grant Ibekwe bail, the court has taken judicial notice of the high incidence of offences like those alleged against the lawmaker.

She ruled that the state of Ibekwe's health was not a special circumstance and that medical experts' reports were not compelling as nothing suggested that prison officials could not manage his asthma illness.

Justice Kekere-Ekun however ordered that the prosecution must be diligent in prosecuting the case.

8 JUL 2003

From the Nigerian publication Newswatch:

Richest Crooks

By Olu Ojewale,

They are Nigerians who have made big money through dubious international channels as sale of fake and dangerous drugs

They are bedfellows. In their infamous empires, they are the linchpins, dangerous, crude, merciless, cynical and destructive in their operations. In fact, they hold the key to life and death of many people through their nefarious business.

They are also the nation's worst nightmares. With their operations cutting across the globe, the nation's integrity is rubbished and its dignity torn into shreds, all because of them. They are in the small minority, yet their bite is enough to categorise Nigeria as a nation of crooks. They are chillingly familiar: they are manufacturers and importers of fake drugs; traffickers of hard drugs and advance free fraud practitioners or 419.

They look and act as if they are untouchable because of their flamboyant lifestyles, array of friends in high places, using their ill-gotten wealth to intimidate and harass the masses. Their names also ring bell.

Until his arrest for advance free fraud recently, Emmanuel Nwude-Odenigwe, popularly known as Owelle of Abanga, looked and acted as just another businessman. His 11-storey high-rise business building in central Lagos stands out as one of the very modern buildings in the area. He occupies the last floor himself. The ground floor of the building houses a commercial bank while he devotes the rest of the building to his business concern, Euro-Holdings. Nwude-Odenigwe paints a picture of a very successful businessman. He has flashy and expensive cars, such as Mercedes Benz cars, a Brouster Porch, BMW saloon cars, an Acura Honda saloon and a Jaguar Vonder plas, among others. He has houses in eyebrow areas in Lagos, Enugu, Abuja, Port Harcourt, London and Abagana, his hometown. He also has mansions in California and Los Angeles, in the United States. Nwude-Odenigwe has friends in many high places. He is believed to be one of the major financiers of Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, especially in Anambra State. He is reputed to be a very close associate of Abubakar Atiku, the vice-president.

Nwude-Odenigwe has investment in many business ventures. He is the singular largest equity holder in Union Bank PLC, running to millions of dollars. He was member of the board of directors of the bank until December 2001 when he resigned. He owns Lamour sterile water, among other businesses.

But Newswatch learnt that Nwude-Odenigwe relies more on advance free fraud for his wealth. His present trouble is believed to be for masterminding the defrauding of Nelson Sakaguchi, a Brazilian bank manager, of the sum of \$242 million. Sources told Newswatch that Nwude-Odenigwe was picked up early June at his residence in Ikoyi, Lagos. Seven of his exotic cars were also taken to the premises of the EFCC on 15, Awolowo Road, Ikoyi.

Nwude-Odenigwe and Ikechukwu Anajemba, now late, had in 1995, duped Sakaguchi of the \$242 million, which led to the collapse of Banco Noroeste, a bank in Brazil, with headquarters in Sao Paulo. Sakaguchi was a director of the international department of the bank.

In striking the deal, Nwude-Odenigwe had posed as Paul Ogwuma, the then governor of Central Bank of Nigeria, while Ikechukwu, who posed as Rasheed Gomwalk, director of International Remittance in CBN, died in 1998. Amaka, wife of Ikechukwu, had acted as wife of Gomwalk in the scam. She inherited the share of her husband in the deal. She has a palatial residence each in Enugu, Abuja, Lagos and abroad. She is known to be a socialite, with friends in high places, especially among the politicians. She loves jewels, shoes as well as flashy and expensive cars.

The Awolowo Road office of the EFCC has also been playing host to no fewer than 26 advance free fraud kingpins since Nuhu Ribadu, retired assistant inspector-general of police, assumed office May 9. Prominent among them are Fred Ajudua, a lawyer from Ibusa, Delta State; Adedeji Alumile, a Lagos socialite popularly called Ade Bendel and Morris Ibekwe, a member of the House of Representatives representing Okigwe North federal constituency in Imo State.

Ajudua is a well-known socialite of his own right. He is arguably, the richest among those who are being charged for advance free fraud. His association with scam businesses dates back to about 15 years ago. Then, he went about in his exotic cars with police escort and siren. Despite his arrest and detention for about four years during the late General Sani Abacha regime, Ajudua's wealth does not appear to dwindle and neither is his flamboyancy. He owns a palatial house on Victoria Island with tunnel underneath. He owns other landed properties in exotic areas in Port Harcourt, Abuja, London and the United States. He lives like a king and enjoys being addressed as "chief." He likes expensive cars and likes to show off his wealth by spraying entertainers and celebrants in foreign currencies. At one of the parties thrown for his wife, Princess Ajudua, he was said to have sprayed more than \$100,000 and other currencies.

He is also known to have dabbled into publishing business. He once financed the publication of the defunct Mr, a newsmagazine. He is currently a principal owner of a weekly newsmagazine, based in Lagos.

Ajudua is believed to have made his money through scams. At the moment, he has eight charges of advance free fraud hanging on his neck. One of them is for N234 million worth scam against Remy Cima and Pierre Vijgen, two Dutch nationals between 1999 and 2000. Ajudua and his group had told his victims that they were going to transfer \$36 million to their account from the federal ministry of aviation.

Ajudua, who posed as Isa Audu, the auditor-general of Nigeria, had visited London three times to perfect the case. He allegedly collected \$1,698,338 from the Dutch men.

Another case involved Frieda Springer-Beck, 54, a German national whom he duped of about \$300,000. Springer-Beck was so wrecked by the fraud that she moved to Nigeria, where she is now helping other victims of advance free fraud. Springer-Beck now prepares meat pies, chicken pies and cakes, which she sells to make ends meet in Nigeria. She has been waiting for justice and judgement on her case for 10 years now.

Though caged, Ajudua is still his usual arrogant and self-important person. On his arrest, he told the anti-fraud security men: "I am a veteran in these cases. I have spent about four to five years in jail. What you should have done is to say, Chief Ajudua, tomorrow we are going to court and we will meet there...I have been dealing with the police for 12 to 15 years."

Indeed. But so is his colleague in crime, Ade Bendel, who has also been in and out of detention for several cases of advance free fraud. Like Ajudua, Ade Bendel is a socialite of note. He traverses the length and breadth of social gatherings in the country with reckless abandon. A good mixer, Ade Bendel has friends in high places especially among law enforcement officers.

Like others in his clique, Ade Bendel enjoys riding in flashy cars and owns beautiful houses in several places. He is believed to enjoy the company of bevy ladies.

Unlike some of his mates, Ade Bendel set his tentacles to defraud at home and abroad. One of his victims is Abba Kyari, retired brigadier-general and former military governor of North-Central State, whom he duped of millions of naira. Ali Abdul Atiah, 65, a retired Egyptian army general, similarly fell for Ade Bendel's scam and got about \$605,000 from him. The Egyptian had been told that \$500 million would be transferred into his account in respect of supply of agricultural equipment. To facilitate that, he was asked to pay the money.

Ibekwe, 51, like his comrades in fraud, acts and lives like a billionaire. A socialite of note, Ibekwe enjoys dancing to contemporary music and indulges in spraying money on musicians. In appreciation of that, Oliver De Coques, a highlife musician, waxed an album titled, "Okwelle Holdings Akuchinyerwata," meaning, "Okwelle Holdings: The Wealth Destiny Bestowed on a Child," in his praise. Wasiu Ayinde Marshal I, Kwam I, a Yoruba Fuji musician, devoted a part of an album to sing Ibekwe's praises.

The indicted member of Nigeria House of Representatives has at least seven houses in choice locations in Festac Town, Lagos. He loves expensive cars, watches, designer shoes and beautiful women. A third of seven children, Ibekwe is said to have a rich brother, Goddy, who lives in Spain. He holds a diploma in journalism from an unnamed institution. He has two wives from whom he has four children.

In the early 1980s, Ibekwe started as a trader, dealing in tyres, through his Okwelle Holdings. But that was said to be a front. During that time, he was said to have pulled off

a scam in Libya, which changed his financial situation. Through his social interaction, he dabbled into politics in 1995 and was elected into the National Constitutional Conference organised by the Abacha regime. That seemed to have paved the way for his election to the Federal House of Representatives in 1999.

In another dramatic twist of fate, Ibekwe crashed down from his exalted position as a lawmaker to become a major suspect in another scam for which he is now detained. The former House committee chairman on police affairs, is being accused of defrauding one Munch Klaus, a German national and Munch System Organisation, an electronics company, of more than \$300,000 and Dm 75,000 in 1993. He had deceived Klaus into believing that Klaus's company would be awarded a contract to deliver computers, monitors, radar system accessories and other needed equipment at the Nnamdi Azikwe International Airport, Abuja. Ibekwe allegedly posed as Anthony Israel, the accountant-general in the then ministry of transport and aviation, to pull off the scam. The lawmaker is now being asked to account for the scam.

Ibekwe is not the first legislator to be caught in the web of financial crime. Edwin Onwudiwe, medical doctor and a Second Republic senator, who defeated Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, in 1983, is another one. He was accused of defrauding Partnership Investment Limited the sum of \$345,000.

Before Onwudiwe went under, he was the chairman of a privately-owned bank. He had some houses in posh areas of Lagos and in the East. He also had some big cars in tow.

So is Toyin Abraham Igbira, a Lagos socialite, who was arrested in November 15, last year, for drug trafficking offence. Igbira is an unrepentant baron, who has been arrested many times for carrying drugs and for giving drugs to carriers. She had been the head of a group of drug traffickers since 1994.

Igbira owns comfortable houses in Abuja, Lagos and United States. She cherishes the company of highly-placed people and mingling with them. She lives life on a fast lane. She drives Mercedes Benz cars and other sophisticated cars. Igbira is believed to be worth several millions of naira and in foreign currencies.

She has sponsored many people abroad with drugs. One of the cases against her is in connection with the arrest of one Yekini Olalekan Salau with 2.6 kilogrammes of heroin concealed in his wheel chair, December 7, 1997. Salau was to take the drugs to the US, before he was arrested at the Murtala Muhammed Airport, Ikeja, Lagos.

On November 15, 2002 she was arrested again with a passport bearing Toyin Oluwasola Abikan and 675 grammes of heroin, which she ingested on her way to New York on Nigeria Airways flight. She was already facing multiple charges on trafficking before the last arrest.

The cartel similarly has Tajü Adeniji, 40, another drug baron. Adeniji is popular among Lagos socialites, where he belongs to many groups. Sleek cars, women and ostentatious living are part of him. He is also known to have houses in Nigeria and abroad, as well as a fleet of costly cars.

Adeniji was arrested in 1997 in connection with the arrest of one Abdullahi Mamman Tunbert from whom 592 grammes of cocaine was seized while he was to board a plane for the US, August 9, 1997. Tunbert confessed that Adeniji gave him the drugs.

One Rachael Adeniran, a resident of Lagos, similarly fingered the baron, December 5, 1999, when she was caught with 2.5 kilogrammes of cocaine. Adeniran was to take the drug to London, on British Airways flight. One Matthew Sunday Ojo, 46, was arrested July 27, 2002 on his way to London, having ingested 1.240 kilogrammes of cocaine. He too, claimed that Adeniji gave him the drug. With the help of one Ahmed Muraina, another

drug carrier, Adeniji was arrested July 29. According to the NDLEA zonal commander at the airport, Adeniji had been charged to court on various drug-related offences and was on court bail when he was arrested again July 29, last year. "In fact, Adeniji is being arrested for the third time in five years. He is no doubt an unrepentant drug baron that must face the wrath of the law accordingly," said Abdullahi Danburam, the commander.

The lure of stupendous money being realised from the illicit drug trades appears to be too much for the barons to resist, especially to maintain their flamboyant way of life. Arrested many times in the past is Olatunde Muniru Longe, a baron arrested April 14, this year, at the Murtala Muhammed Airport. He had ingested 940 grammes of cocaine with the aim of smuggling same to London. He was earlier arrested October 13, 2001 with 11.2 kilogrammes of heroin on arrival on aboard Kenyan Airlines from Bombay. His passport bore Omoruyi Pedro Obemwengie, but he told the NDLEA that his real name was Wahab Salami.

Chidoka Kenneth Williams, 43, also uses many aliases to deceive law enforcement officers. When he arrived Nigeria from Dakar, Senegal, June 23, 2003, Williams, who hails from Obosi in Idemili Local Government of Anambra State, had Nigerian and Guinean passports and three airlines tickets on him. He identified himself with the Nigerian passport and requested to make phone calls outside the arrival hall before coming back to pick his luggage. He came back shortly after. But when he returned for his four luggage, it was observed that he had dropped the winter jacket he had earlier worn. The tags on the luggage also bore the name Camara Boubacar, whereas the name on his passport was Chidoka Kenneth Williams. A surveillance officer outside the hall had observed that Williams had given his winter jacket to someone later identified as Basil Amadi, 38.

The two of them were taken to the NDLEA office at the airport and thoroughly searched. Williams' Guinea passport with his picture bore the name Camara Boubacar, two tickets and four claiming tags were found in Amadi's pant. A further search on the four luggage revealed concealment of cocaine in transparent nylons in the false wall of cream containers weighing 20 kilogrammes.

So far, Joe Brown Akubueze, who was jailed February 7, 1994, remains as Nigeria's most renowned drug baron. He was very flashy, with sleek cars and multi-billion naira empire spread across the country. He is still believed to have kept millions of dollars abroad and within, from where he is now financing the legal battle for his freedom. The Miscellaneous Offences Tribunal, Lagos zone, jailed Akubueze in 1994, for 115 years imprisonment with hard labour, for importation of heroine into the country in the early 1990s.

Akubueze had brought in four container loads of heroine concealed in water coolers before it was shipped to Nigeria. The consignment weighed 258 kilogrammes and worth about 651 pounds sterling. He was arrested December 30, 1993 by the NDLEA, which acted on a tip-off from the Thai police.

For decades, Marcel Nnakwe, chief executive of Marcel Pharmaceutical, Onitsha, Anambra State, held sway as a linchpin in drug faking business. He was also an untouchable because of the circle of friends he kept and the amount of influence he wielded.

In his vast empire, he was the king. He lived like one and acted to type-arrogant, cynical, and intolerant of any opposition. He owned acres of land where he built himself some palaces and assembled a fleet of choice cars, mostly used by his children, especially those in higher institutions.

But last year, the wind of change swept Nnakwe off his feet. The long arm of the law caught him and he became probably the biggest catch by the NAFDAC since the

renewed war on fake drugs started more than two years ago. NAFDAC impounded eight lorry loads of fake, expired and adulterated drugs from his two warehouses at 25 and 35 Uga Street, Onitsha.

Nnakwe had had four similar cases. But this time there was no way of escaping the law. He was forced to apologise publicly to the entire nation, while all the fake and adulterated drugs were destroyed in his very presence and those of the world captured on camera by the media. Before then, he had been taken to court three times, 1996, 1997 and 1999, for importing fake and adulterated drugs, without trial.

R.S.P. Yaro, a blind man billionaire, wielded a lot of power in illicit drug business in the North. Until he was arrested about three years ago, Yaro was the godfather to many people in the cartel. As a Muslim, Yaro lived a simple life, but was said to have used charms and mystical powers, to escape the wrath of the law.

NAFDAC on June 15 announced the arrest of Boniface Achoronwa, a big time baron, who specialises in clearing of fake pharmaceutical products at Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Ikeja. According to the agency, Achoronwa usually collects cargo tags from the importers of fake drug upon arrival and later collects the luggage and delivers to them at arranged spots.

Peter Onyeagba, another big-time fake drugs importer, was arrested by NAFDAC June 6, for importing fake Nizoral tablets valued at about N5 million. The import came in on Ethiopian Airline.

One of shock finds was that of James Wallace, a socialite and business mogul, who imported 17 containers purportedly containing maize starch. But physical examination by the agency revealed that two of the containers were filled with sand.

Initially, the law appeared to be slow. But now, steadily the long arm of the law appears to be having the upper hand in dealing with the barons and their cohorts. The combined efforts of Nuhu Ribadu, retired assistant inspector-general of police and chairman, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC; Bello Lafiagi, chairman and chief executive officer, Nigeria Drug Law Enforcement Agency, NDLEA; and Dora Akunyili, director-general, National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control, NAFDAC, seem to be sweeping the staple. Many of these crooks are now in the net. Many more have gone into hiding, forced to abandon their illegitimate trades.

But the law enforcement officers are unrelenting. They have commonly resolved to deal with the situation the best way possible, especially to save the country from being blacklisted by the comity of nations and save lives.

"Nigeria earned the dubious honour as number one on the world scale of fake and counterfeit drugs. Shops, motor parks, bus-stops, and moving luxury buses became veritable channels to distribute fake and adulterated drugs. It has not been easy to do this but as long as I know that God is helping me in this war, I will continue to fight it, not minding who is involved," Akunyili told Newswatch.

Ribadu concurred about Akunyili assertion about Nigeria's image abroad. "Earlier this year, I attended an Interpol meeting. The meeting had about 138 countries in attendance. Out of these 138 countries, about 122 of them complained against Nigeria and Nigerians. There is a report here saying 80 percent of homes in America receive scam letters from Nigerians. The same thing is said about homes in Europe and other countries. It has destroyed our reputation, our image, our integrity. It has also destroyed vital chances of people doing legitimate business with Nigerians. It has even reached the state that the country is being considered for blacklisting. We are under the threat from Financial Action Task Force, FATF, to shut out Nigeria from all economic and financial transactions worldwide," he warned.

Ribadu similarly referred to a remark made by Colin Powell, United States secretary of state, which once described Nigeria as a nation of crooks. "That is the impression of people around the world. So you see the damages these people have done to our image as a nation," Ribadu said.

Since Lafiagi assumed office about four years ago, Nigeria has gotten three United Nations certifications as one of the leading countries waging war against drug trafficking. "We do not produce or consume hard drugs. Ours is a transit nation because Nigerians especially those outside the country are used to trafficking drugs. Some people have double passports. That is why it is a global problem," Lafiagi told Newswatch last week. Lafiagi promised that NDLEA would continue to do its job to rid the nation of drug traffickers. But would the criminals who make financial gains from their illicit and nefarious business desist? Perhaps, as some Nigerians told Newswatch, that would only happen when the nation puts in place a good mechanism to check on sources of wealth of individuals and corporate bodies. That looks like a long time project, it is hoped that these three agencies would be strengthened to fight the scourge, which has made the nation a scorn among other comity nations.

26 JUN 2003

From the Guardian, a Nigerian newspaper:

Combating the scourge of '419'

By Okey Ndibe

TALK about crude irony. Last Thursday, I wrote a piece entitled "419 as National Culture." [see 419 Coalition2003 news for 19 JUN 2003] The same day, I received an e-mail from a 419-ner who called himself John Dike. This phantom identified himself as "the manager, bills and exchange at the Foreign Remittance Department of Zenith International Bank Ltd."

The purpose of his e-mail was to "ask for your support and cooperation to carry out a business opportunity in my department." The opportunity involved \$15 million left in "an account that belongs to one of our foreign customers who died along with his entire family of a wife and two children in November 1997 in a plane crash." Basically, "Mr. Dike" wanted my collaboration to ferry this money from his mythical bank to the United States. "Dike" gave his direct telephone numbers as 0802.337.8893 and 0803.721.4199. I was both saddened and bemused by his letter. I wrote him the following response: "Dear Criminal: Go and pick the Nigerian "The Guardian" of today and read my piece on 419. Bad luck to you!"

In the last few weeks, officials of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission have made great hay out of the trial of several suspected titans of the "419" scam craft. The suspects, all of them well known names in Nigeria's social circles, include Fred Ajudua, Morris Ibekwe, Alumile Adedeji and Christogonus Ugochukwu Okoro.

In setting up the anti-fraud commission, the government took a welcome, if grossly inadequate, step to combat a social cancer. To one degree or another, the four suspects are decidedly in the public eye. In many circles, they're held up as men of admirable achievement.

Ajudua is a car-loving, high-flying, dapper-dressing lawyer. Besides, he holds a number of chieftaincy titles from different parts of the country. These titles, bestowed by tragic characters posing as "traditional rulers" or "royal fathers," bespeak a society that is profoundly disoriented. Alumile Adedeji (alias Ade Bendel) is also a wealth-flaunting, hard-partying creature. Christogonus Ugochukwu Okoro, also a highly decorated

"chief," has an impressive business resume. He is the Chairman/CEO of Gorx Group of Companies and owns York Hotels, located at 17 Daddy Adeniran Street, Ire-Akari Estate in Isolo. Morris Ibekwe is an "Honourable" member of the House of Representatives. It's altogether in character that a sitting legislator would be accused of defrauding people. Nigeria's public scene, after all, is dominated by men and women who are masters at corruption, fraud, graft, deception and hypocrisy.

Far from being a discrete crime, "419" flows from a larger national fascination with unearned wealth. 419-ners belong to the same tribe as other public criminals. There is a strong bond of kinship between 419 and other public crimes. The governor or minister who routinely misdirects public funds to his private coffers is a scam artist extraordinaire. By comparison with such people, the Ajuduas of Nigeria are Little League players.

What the public narrowly identifies as 419 is but a small species of a more pervasive, more corrosive criminal enterprise. Nigerians have adopted the cynical view that public office is a feeding trough for gluttons. We have permitted the notion to take root that office holders need not be accountable to anyone, least of all in relation to how they dispense public funds. The going ethos of public service holds that the first principle is to serve oneself. When public officials speak of having "many achievements on ground," often they mean that they have amassed tremendous wealth, that they have used public funds to build grand mansions for themselves-and to buy imposing houses in Europe and North America.

After ruling Nigeria for eight years, Ibrahim Babangida emerged as a stupendously wealthy man. Public estimates of his assets are in billions of dollars. It is public knowledge that he lives in a 50-room mansion, that he owns a private jet as well as a fleet of expensive cars. Nobody in the Presidency or the National Assembly has ever sought to ask the man how he accumulated all that wealth. Sani Abacha once sent his security operatives to go to the Central Bank and pick up more than one billion dollars. I'm told that many governors, past and present, have imposing homes abroad.

Why does the public accept such glaring evidence of corrupt enrichment? Why does Mr. Obasanjo, a professed crusader against corruption, continue to insist that he has no evidence that Babangida stole public funds? How can the case be sustained that people like Ajudua, Ibekwe and Adedeji are different from Chinwoke Mbadinuju, the ex-governor of Anambra state, who (from emerging documents) broke all records in graft? By brazenly pocketing public funds, Nigerian leaders poison the moral health of the nation. They create an atmosphere that conduces to the thriving of all manner of 419 activities. It is no accident that 419-ners had their "golden" age during the Babangida era. More than any other Nigerian ruler, it was Babangida who carried moral devaluation to its apogee. The Babangidas and Mbadinujus of Nigerian society are the fathers of 419 scams.

Given the depths of depravity in the public arena, I suggest that Ajudua and co. are mere artisans in fraud. The real generals-the true consummate artists-are past and present rulers whose trademark is to raid the public treasury with impunity. If I were a lawyer defending Ajudua and Adedeji, I'd stand up in court and challenge the president, state governors and other public officials to demonstrate their moral superiority. I know: this is hardly a legally tenable defence, but it has undeniable moral cache. It would indict the leadership class whose theft of public funds fosters an atmosphere of hopelessness and despair-and helps recruit desperate young men and women into 419 activities.

Nigerian leaders have made their country into a space where primitive accumulation is a religion, where hard work not only doesn't pay but is openly mocked, where wealth is the only measure of a man's worth, where thieves are canonised, where probity and honesty are deemed diseases that afflict the naive and foolish, where the end always justifies the means. In that blighted landscape, the fight against scams is, from the outset, a lost cause.

Even if the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission brings an impressive dose of determination to the task of fighting 419, their impact is bound to be slim. It is akin to applying a palliative to a symptom of a malignant disease. The patient might experience some temporary relief, but he is far from recovered.

If President Olusegun Obasanjo and the National Assembly wish to address the scam scourge, here's a simple answer. Enact a law that would place the onus on Nigerians to prove that their assets are legitimately acquired. There's precedent for this kind of public policy. In South Africa, the state is empowered to confiscate any assets that appear to be beyond the reach of a person's legitimate income. It is up to the owner of the seized assets to convince a court that he came by them through legitimate means. Is anybody surprised that South Africa has the most robust economy in Africa. Or that investors from that country are providing much of the new investment capital flowing into Nigeria. South Africa's economic strength owes to fiscal discipline and prudence. It also has to do with a state alert enough to rein in rapacious tendencies among its citizens.

In its efforts to combat corruption, Nigeria can ill afford the judicial tenet that presumes a suspect innocent until he is proven guilty. South Africa's standard, it seems to me, is more suited to Nigeria, a country horribly trapped in corrupt practices. If South Africa's standard were adopted in Nigeria, then 419-ners, whether they come as public officials or private citizens, won't find it easy to flaunt their ill-gotten flashy cars. Or to advertise their astonishing homes in "Ovation" magazine. Or to attend parties and "spray" dollars and pound sterling on waist-wiggling women.

A few years ago, Mr. Obasanjo challenged Nigerians to show him proof that Babangida corruptly enriched himself. It was a silly burden to thrust upon poor, abused Nigerians. Since ordinary Nigerians are shut out when official stealing takes place, no poor Nigerian can provide the kind of proof that their president demanded. But Nigerians, being no fools, know a corrupt man when they see one. One virtue of tackling corruption South Africa-style is that the joke would be on the likes of Babangida. It would be up to him to tell a court where he won a lottery worth billions of dollars. A character like Mbadinuju would also have to come up with a narrative to explain how a struggling Onitsha-based lawyer came to be a sybarite after just four years as governor.

419 Coalition comment: This piece and its predecessor "419 as National Culture" [scroll down and see 419 Coalition News 2003 for 19 JUN] are among the best pieces ever done on 419. More grease to Mr. Ndibe's elbow! Readers should contrast these pieces with the "Money Laundering: How far can CBN, Police Go" piece immediately below in 419 Coalition 2003 News for 25 JUN 2003 and determine for themselves which is the more accurate picture of the reality of Nigerian 419 operations.

25 JUN 2003

From the Nigerian newspaper ThisDay:

Money Laundering: How Far Can CBN, Police Go?

Ayodele Aminu

The havoc caused by money laundering to any nation is better imagined than experienced. Not only do such high powered money paralyse domestic production and other legitimate business activity, it also, on the long run, drives away foreign investors since the illicit monies play a vital role in the allocation of resources of such a country.

This is so, because proceeds of drug sales and other criminal activities are used to import goods which are sold at prices below cost prices in the exporting countries due

to the desperation of the launderer to transfer dirty money into the country. This development depresses domestic production due to uncompetitive pricing of the imported products.

The resultant effect is that the financial market, which is the life-wire of any nations, economy becomes threatened, while both the monetary and fiscal policies becomes ineffective.

Money laundering is the process by which crooks or criminal organizations disguise the illicit nature of their proceeds by introducing them into the stream of legitimate commerce and finance.

Given this scenario, money laundering therefore, poses significant reputational, operational, legal and financial risk to a countries economy. This explains why the International Finance Action Task Force (FATF) threatened to blacklist Nigeria, which was one of the countries that did not comply with basic Anti-Money Laundering laws. FATF had in its report last year, classified Nigeria as a Non Co-operative Country and Territory (NCCT), claiming that there were a lot of lapses in its procedures for fighting money laundering and other economic crimes

Following the threat of the FATF, Nigeria's Money Laundering Decree was amended to bring the country to the same level of compliance with other jurisdictions.

The amendment imposed more disclosure and reporting obligations on financial institutions in their dealings with their customers. It also gave the CBN Governor power to deal with financial institutions that harbor or encourage money launders as well as freeze accounts of customers suspected to be holding proceeds of criminal activities.

Speaking recently in Lagos at a conference on "Anti-Money Laundering in ECOWAS" organized by Vichada Conferences & Wilson and Weizmann Associates, the CBN Governor, Chief Joseph Sanusi whose institution has been in the forefront of activities to prevent money laundering and other financial crimes in the West African Sub-region, noted that fraudsters have started moving out of the country following the onslaught launched against them by the combined efforts of the apex bank and the police.

Sanusi who was represented by the CBN Deputy Governor, Financial Sector Surveillance, Dr. Shamusuddeen Usman observed that the number of complaints received has reduced to 780 per month as against 4,500 as at July last year when its systems had not been computerised.

"Preliminary findings show that in the month of July 2002 when technology was installed, an average of 150 complaints on '419' transactions was lodged on the CBN web site, following which information on the activities of the scam groups and advice on what to do was given to the complainants.

"The number has reduced to an average of 26 complaints on '419' per day as at the end of March 2003. It has also been established that most of the crimes were committed using Multilink's telephone facilities and those of the GSM providers", he pointed out.

"419" refers to section 419 of the Nigerian Criminal Code, which regards obtaining money under false pretence as a criminal offence. Several foreigners including Nigerians have been defrauded through this means over the years

The governor who spoke on "Central Bank of Nigeria's Standpoint on Anti-Money Laundering Compliance", maintained the apex bank, from the little efforts made so far, has established the trend of activities of the advance fee fraud groups and collated information on the linkages and related lead information for analysis.

To nip this unwholesome development, which has continued to dent the image of the country in the bud, the banking watchdog boss said the Nigeria police have made it a point of duty to raid the internet cafes, many of which had been found to be used by the fraudsters.

Another bold step taken by the apex bank, according to Sanusi, is to inform the banks through a circular that any bank that is careless enough to allow a 419 transaction to go through its systems, will be held responsible for the refund of the amount involved to the bonafide claimants.

Already, the CBN, he maintained, "has enforced the provisions of the circular against one bank, and is ready to do it again where it is proven that the bank has weak systems, or failed to exercise due care, that will prevent the 419 transaction from going through".

He recalled that the CBN, in an attempt to identify financial crime trends and patterns, a couple of months ago, issued a manual on "Know Your Customers Directives" principles and practices to banks late last year.

The circular, he explained, had among other things set the standard in respect of the minimum information that should be obtained by financial institutions before a relationship could be established with any customer.

The manual, he further explained, indicated the vulnerability of receiving bankers/agents to money laundering.

In addition to this, Sanusi stressed that the CBN restructuring/reengineering initiative (project EAGLES) has established some level of information technology that is capable of identifying the methods and patterns used to commit these crimes, particularly the Advance Fee Fraud.

When the CBN is fully automated, he emphasised that it will provide the unique capacity to identify banking sector-wide trends and patterns associated with money laundering and other financial crimes.

Currently, the CBN according to the governor, works with the newly-introduced Economic and Financial Crime Commission and law enforcement agents, on the dissemination of information obtained through state-of-the-art data processing techniques.

"Going forward in the efforts of the CBN reengineering, it will be possible to expand the available techniques, using leading edge analytical tools for data mining and messaging", he explained.

He listed the CBN strategies to include the following:

Working closely with the law enforcement agents to identifying and disseminating current trends and patterns of information obtained through the system.

Continue to develop analytical methodologies, models and other technical tools that provide additional insights into suspicious activities and transactions through the banking system when the banking system and the Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) application software are installed.

Enhance efforts to assist the newly established Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the law enforcement agents tracking financial crimes and their perpetrators through information, workshops, seminars, conferences and bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

In view of these developments, the CBN, he emphasized, would continue to ensure

compliance with the FATF guidelines, in addition to other domestic laws of money laundering through :

_Ensuring that banks report adequately and in time as recommended

_Ensuring that the FSRCC incorporates the monitoring of money laundering activities as an agenda of its activity.

_Securing the judiciary's and the law enforcement agents cooperation and commitment to ensure compliance.

_Providing support for training of all stakeholders in order to upgrade their knowledge and awareness of financial crimes in order to achieve compliance with the standards set by the FATF.

Also speaking on "Organising Against Organised Crime : Do The ECOWAS Countries Have What It Takes ?", Inspector General of Police, Mr. Tafa Balogun, who decried the rise in the level of fraud and malpractices in banks and other financial institutions, called on all the regulatory bodies (CBN, Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation, Securities and Exchange Commission and the National Insurance Commission) to sharpen their regulatory and supervisory focus on the financial system from their respective perspectives.

Balogun, who was represented by the Assistant Inspector General of Police, Zone 2 Headquarters, Onikan Lagos, Mr. Adedayo Adeoye, also stressed the need for the regulators and supervisors to be more proactive in maintaining confidence in the system as well as ensuring the achievement of international standards.

Noting that the biggest source of illicit profits comes from the drug trade, he urged the newly constituted FCAT to put in place corresponding strategies, and agencies as in other corresponding international bodies, for the campaign against anti-money laundering and transnational organized crime.

"The commission, should, in collaboration with other stakeholders in the trans-border organized crime and anti-money laundering campaign, get together and make proposals to government for necessary legal and financial provisions that have been unduly exploited by these organized crime groups and how to address the burning issue of tracing and confiscating the assets of money launderers and of other organised stakeholders.

"They should be aware that the increasing integration of the world's financial system as technology has improved and barriers to the free movement drastically reduced, has resulted in money launderers exploiting this system to hide their ill gotten wealth/gains", he said.

A couple of months ago, the CBN announced that it had nabbed a Nigerian through its newly devised technique of tracking fraudsters.

The CBN, according to news release signed by its Acting Director, Performance Improvement Department, Mrs. O.O Akanji and made available to THISDAY in Lagos, said that the technique facilitated the tracking of a 36 year old man, Emmanuel Ekocho who allegedly defrauded an Indian national Dr. Balriukund Bhat of \$20 million (N2.6 billion). The fraudster according to her, has since been arraigned before a court in Lagos.

She stressed that the bank's "unrelenting fight against advance fraud, popularly known as 419 scam has continued to pay dividend both at home and abroad".

The CBN, she also explained, along with a parastatal and the Federal Republic of Nigeria recently won a case in the United States of America (USA) in connection with spurious 419 claims by a gullible victim.

The case she further explained, has demonstrated the resolve of the Nigerian authorities in letting the whole world know that financial crimes do not enjoy official support, contrary to insinuation in some quarters.

The apex bank had previously placed adverts in major newspapers around the world and at home as well as interacted with embassies and international community with a view to exposing various modus operandi of the 419 scammers.

Several years ago, the bank also constituted a committee to handle 419 scam inquiries and other related issues in addition to the setting up of a page on the same matter on its website (www.cenbank.org), which has been commended by internet surfers who found the site very helpful.

The CBN has also been sensitizing the international community on the danger inherent in conducting business transactions with people whose antecedents are unknown.

Specifically, the bank has asked people to always make enquires for offers involving the name of the bank and its officials.

In spite all these efforts however, the Nigerian Police it seems, still has lots of question to answer as regards its sincerity given the recent developments in the country. How can the police for instance, convince Nigerians that it does not know that a member of the House of Representatives, who was arrested recently with two other notorious fraudsters in connection with an advance fee scam, is a fraudster?

Is this the first time he would be arrested? Did the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) not do its homework before clearing him for election into the House of Representatives? Why were the other two notorious scammers left off the hook after it had been established that they committed the offences? Have all the law enforcement agents been sleeping all this while, since it was the newly established Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) that summoned the courage to apprehend and arraigned a well paraded the fraudsters?

Answers to all these questions would give and insight into how serious the law enforcement agents are in their fight against money laundering and other economic/financial... [crimes]

419 Coalition Comment: CBN is just never going to learn that the Big Lie technique they have been using for years no longer works. Using their pitiful CBN site for the source of stats on 419 is absurd, they should get them from USSS Task Force if they'd like to see how many complaints are being filed, the number remains Massive. Additionally, CBN's statements on how it is going to discipline and hold other banks responsible for 419 activity etc. are absurd when it hasn't even held itself responsible in 419 cases where CBN offices, personnel, and phone lines etc. have been used. In terms of CBN making other banks involved in 419 pay out monies to 419 victims, well Shahla Ghasemi's money was recovered two years ago and she is Still Waiting for CBN to send it along to her, which it can do any time it wants. This CBN as self-righteous 419 fighter bit is absurd, and Sanusi should be publicly reprimanded (perhaps horsewhipped would be too much) for lying his ass off Yet Again about all CBN is supposedly doing to fight 419. Hey there Sanusi..... where's the Money? Well, where is it? When will it be repatriated in anything like the amounts in which

it was stolen? And where are the mass Convictions of 419ers, who contrary to what you say above are Not fleeing the country in fear of the vigilance of CBN (what a joke that is :) :) Tell us Joe, old chum, would President Bush's next month be the reason you are putting out all this self serving nonsensical hogwash? Inquiring minds want to know, :) :) ROFL.

24 JUN 2003

From the Vanguard, a Nigerian newspaper:

Court gags financial crimes commission boss

By Ise-Oluwa Ige

LAGOS: AN Ikeja high court yesterday stopped chairman of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), Alhaji Nuhu Ribadu from making further public comments on financial crime-related cases involving Lagos-based businessmen, Fred Ajudua, Alumile Adedeji aka Ade Bendel, Maurice Ibekwe and others until the determination of such matters. Justice Kuburat Kekere-Ekun who gave the order yesterday following observations from legal practitioners appearing in the matter, explained that the order was necessary to preserve the integrity of the court. Also to be affected by the order are all interested parties in the cases. According to the judge, none of the accused persons standing trial in the cases nor their relations should also make public comments on the court proceedings in respect of the matters, being presently a subject of litigation.

It would be recalled that on May 30, this year, the Economic and Financial Crime Commission under the chairmanship of Assistant Commissioner of police (ACP), Alhaji Nuhu Ribadu arraigned about seven persons before two separate high courts sitting at Ikeja on multiple charges of conspiracy, forgery and obtaining money under false pretext. The accused persons, some of who were charged in absentia, were docked in batches. For instance, a re-elected member of the House of Representatives, Chief Maurice Ibekwe was charged alongside one Augunos Okoro over conspiracy and obtaining a large sum of money from a German in 1992 under false pretext.

Fred Ajudua, a Lagos-based businessman was also charged alongside one Charles Ovie. Ade Bendel was also docked alongside his alleged accomplice. But since their arraignment, the chairman of the commission (EFCC) which recommended their prosecution to the Federal Government had allegedly granted interviews, on the activities of the accused persons before they were arrested and the proceedings before the court. The accused persons, Vanguard gathered, complained to their attorneys, opining that the commission chairman, by his utterances, had convicted them before the court hears them out. At the Ikeja High Court yesterday where a bail application by Ade Bendel was argued by Mr. Festus Keyamo, his counsel, a strong position was made to the court in respect of the alleged "unguarded utterances of Alhaji Ribadu" to the effect that such comment amounted to subjudice and should be stopped.

The commission counsel, Mr. Wemimo Ogunde however agreed with Mr. Festus Keyamo on the argument that Alhaji Ribadu's comment in the media could undermine the integrity of the judiciary especially when the matters were properly before the court. Following the observations by the opposing counsel in the matter, the presiding judge ordered that public comment on the cases must stop. Meanwhile, Alumile Adedeji, aka Ade Bendel yesterday prayed the Ikeja High Court to admit him to bail on sundry grounds including health. But the prosecution is opposing the application. Justice Kekere-Ekuru has however fixed July 8 for ruling on the bail application.

419 Coalition comment: It figures..... starting to look like yet another case where

money talks and everybody walks from our vantage point..... We shall see.

23 JUN 2003

This was posted to the Naijanet Topica listerv today:

Man pleads guilty in 'Nigerian Scam' case

Canadian Press

HAMILTON — A career con man has been convicted for tricking investors out of millions of dollars in an Internet fraud scheme.

Henry Statz, 61, pleaded guilty Wednesday to fraud charges in a plot that bilked at least \$6-million from about 20 investors who were solicited through e-mail to help "free" a fictitious Nigerian fortune.

Victims were promised a vast fortune in gold, diamonds and property deeds allegedly tucked away in a Toronto vault awaiting a Nigerian man's arrival in Canada. When he arrived, victims were told he would share his wealth with them.

Police said the total losses could be as much as \$15-million for victims across North America.

Solicitations from thousands of similar plots litter the inboxes of people all over the world, generally known as Nigerian e-mail scams.

This particular fraud is just the tip of the iceberg, said Hamilton detective Mark Simchison, who investigated the case.

"I truly feel sorry for the victims. They've lost everything. There is no further down to go. They're in the gutter," said Mr. Simchison.

Mr. Statz, who has a history of fraud convictions dating back to the 1960s, is a smooth, convincing and cool con artist, said Mr. Simchison. He lived the high life, spending \$100,000 in one month in Toronto hotels and restaurants.

Mr. Statz, an Alberta native, was sentenced to 18 months probation, and was given credit for 10 months he already spent in custody.

20 JUN 2003

From the Vanguard, a Nigerian newspaper:

Ibekwe jumped bail in 1994, FG tells court

By Ise-Oluwa Ige

LAGOS: POLICE granted bail to Maurice Ibekwe, a re-elected member of the House of Representatives sometime in 1994 in a criminal matter wherein he was alleged to have conspired with another Nigerian to swindle a German but chose to jump it, the Federal Government yesterday told an Ikeja High Court.

Mr. Rotimi Jacobs, leading some lawyers to prosecute Chief Ibekwe on behalf of the Federal Government over the matter also told the court yesterday not to consider the plea by the legislator for bail on the grounds that he would abuse it, saying "he has been

on the watch list of the police for sometime now."

His alleged accomplice on the matter, one Augunos Okoro whom police had declared wanted for sometime now was also arraigned yesterday by the Federal Government alongside the legislator.

Both of them, in the dock, entered plea of not guilty to the eight- count charge pressed against them.

Augunos who was appearing on the court for the first time since the Federal Government declared war on people suspected to be fraudsters was handcuffed.

Lawyers, litigants and passers-by struggled spiritedly with one another yesterday to catch a glimpse of Augunos the procreator of a Lagos York Hotels. Honourable Ibekwe and the Lagos businessman, Augunos did not exchange any greeting while in the dock. But both look strikingly similar.

Specifically, the 8-count charge pressed against them was that Ibekwe conspired with Augunos on or about October 13, 1992, to obtain the sum of \$330,000 US dollars and DM 75,000 from an unsuspecting German.

The money collected was purportedly meant for payment of various government officials over a contract. Shortly after their plea, the presiding judge in the matter ordered that both of them should be reminded in prison custody upon the request of the prosecution. The prosecution succeeded in arraigning both accused persons a fresh yesterday after a legal battle to amend the original charge pressed against Ibekwe who was already in police net. The high court judge who indicated that there was nothing wrong in the prosecution amending the charge or filing additional proof of evidence to the ones already in the casefile, also took arguments yesterday on why Chief Ibekwe should not be admitted to bail. Mr. Rotimi Jacobs who canvassed this position for the Federal Government lined his arguments on the following premises: Nature and gravity of his offence, character of the evidence before the court, the likelihood of presenting himself for trial, health ground and sundry reasons.

On the nature and gravity of Ibekwe's alleged offence, the federal government said that the least penalty for each of the eight-count charges is 7 years imprisonment while some of them are 14 years term. According to the prosecution, the combined effect of the penalty attached to each of the offences pressed against him is that he is facing a very serious charge to which court could decide to sentence him to several years jail term if convicted.

On the character of the evidence against him, the prosecution said that the proof of evidence before the court showed that the two telephone lines used in defrauding the German belonged to the legislator and that one of it was the one he uses in his closet and that he had not denied it.

"If added that even the handwriting of the person alleged to have received the controversial money has been analysed by expert, saying "it belonged to him."

On the likelihood of his jumping bail, the prosecution confronted court with documents to the effect that he was arrested and bailed in 1994 over the same matter but that he jumped it and had since been on the watch list of the police.

20 JUN 2003

From the Daily Independent, a Nigerian newspaper:

Ibekwe loses bail bid

By: Folorunso Ogunekun

Hopes of Morris Ibekwe regaining his freedom dimmed yesterday as an Ikeja High Court adjourned ruling on whether to grant him bail or not until July 4.

State Counsel, Mr. Rotimi Jacobs prosecuting criminal charges preferred against Ibekwe, before an Ikeja High Court, vehemently opposed bail application filed on Tuesday by his counsel, Professor Taiwo Osipitan.

Ibekwe, who has just been re-elected into the House of Representatives, was charged before the court with conspiracy with one Augumos Okoro with intent to defraud and obtained US\$330, 000 (about N6million) by falsely pretending that the monies were sundry payment to various governments officials on contract No FMT/AV/PED/512/82. The offence was allegedly committed between October 1992, and June 30, 1993 at Lagos within the Ikeja Judicial Division

Shortly after his arraignment, and pleading not guilty to the charge, his counsel prayed the court to admit him to bail on the following reasons:

"His deteriorating health, because he is an ulcer patient,

"He is a law maker who can never breach the bail conditions to be stipulated by the court,

"He has credible sureties who could guarantee his regular appearance for the trials and that

"The allegations levelled against him were bailable offences.

But Mr. Jacobs urged the court to discountenance Professor Osipitan's pleas because the charges pressed against the Law Maker are grievous, because it attracts minimum of seven years imprisonment. Jacobs further argued that if Ibekwe was granted bail, he might likely commit other crimes.

According to the State Counsel, evidence against Ibekwe is overwhelming. The State counsel also disclosed that as at May 8, 1998, Ibekwe has been on Police Wanted list.

"He went underground, and it took a long time for the police to effect his arrest. Therefore one may conclude that he will certainly jump bail conditions," he told the court.

Mr. Jacobs also prevailed on the court presided over by Justice (Mrs.) Kuburat Kekere-Ekun to ignore pleas that Ibekwe's health is getting worse in the prison where he is being currently held.

20 JUN 2003

From ThisDay. a Nigerian newspaper:

419: Ibekwe Knows Fate on Bail July 4

By Victor Efeizomor

An Ikeja high court judge, Justice Kudirat Kekere-Ekun, will on July 4 decide whether or not to grant bail to the re-elected House of Representatives member, Hon. Morris Ibekwe, over alleged involvement in advance fee fraud a.k.a. 419.

Ibekwe, representing Okigwe North Federal Constituency in Imo State, a Lagos-based

businessman and lawyer, Chief Fred Ajudua and three others were a fortnight ago severally arraigned at the Ikeja high court by the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) over alleged economic and financial crimes.

Ibekwe, through his lawyer, Professor Taiwo Osipitan (SAN), brought an application for bail arguing that his client was suffering from asthma and hypertension.

Osipitan told the court that Ibekwe would attend court regularly if granted bail adding that the charge over which he was being detained was not a capital offence.

He urged the court to hold that there would be no imprisonment before conviction.

Opposing the bail application, the lead state counsel, Mr Rotimi Jacobs, argued that the applicant was not entitled to bail.

He said the nature of the offence, character of evidence, health of the accused and the likelihood of the accused jumping bail should be considered in rejecting the request.

Jacobs, who relied on various counter-affidavit said the charge, though not a capital offence, contained serious allegations of conspiracy to commit felony contrary to Section 516 which attracts seven years imprisonment and forgery which attracts 14 years imprisonment.

"The seriousness of it should be considered by the court because the right to bail is not absolute", he argued.

On the character of evidence Jacobs submitted that from the proof of evidence there was a prima facie case against Ibekwe.

He said ownership of the two telephone lines used in committing the alleged crime was admitted by the accused submitting that the phone lines were said to belong to the Special Task Force of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN).

Jacobs submitted that the evidence was overwhelming, explaining that the trial of the accused was not political.

The state counsel said the applicant would not make himself available if granted bail, arguing that when similar freedom was granted to him following his earlier arrest in 1998, the accused person absconded until he was declared wanted on May 8, 1998.

"There is a strong likelihood that the accused person will interfere with prosecution if granted bail," he said, adding that the victims of the fraudulent act had been reached with the threat that should they come to Nigeria to give evidence they would lose their lives.

19 JUN 2003

From ThisDay, a Nigerian newspaper:

Another '419' Suspect Arrested, Appears in Court Today

Chairman/Chief Executive Of-ficer of Gorx Group of Companies, Chief Christogonus Ugochukwu Okoro, has been arrested by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) for his alleged roles in the case for which Hon. Morris Ibekwe was arrested.

Okoro, who is the owner and proprietor of Yorks Hotels, Lagos, according to a statement from the EFCC signed by Ibrahim Lamorde, will be arraigned today before

an Ikeja High Court, sitting in Lagos.

The statement said "This is to inform you that another notorious fraudster in the person of Chief Christogonus Ugochukwu Okoro, the owner and proprietor of Yorks Hotels, located at 17, Daddy Adeniran Street, Ire-Akari Estate, Isolo has been arrested by the operatives of this commission.

"The fraudster, who is also the chairman/CEO of Gorx Group of Companies is wanted for his role in respect of the case for which Hon. Morris Ibekwe is standing trial before an Ikeja High Court. The said Okoro will be arraigned before Justice Kudirat Kekere-Ekun of the Ikeja High Court on Thursday, June 19 at 9 a.m."

It would be recalled that Ibekwe, a legislator representing Okigwe North in Imo State, Lagos lawyer, Chief Fred Ajudua, and two others, Alumile Adedeji a.k.a. Ade Bendel and Charles Orié, were on May 30 arraigned before an Ikeja High Court for alleged advance fee fraud.

Efforts by their lawyers to secure their release have not yielded result as the bail application filed by Ajudua was last week refused by the trial judge, Justice Joseph Oyewale, who instead, ordered last Tuesday, that he (Ajudua) be transferred from Milverton, Ikoyi cell to Kirikiri Maximum Prison, where Ibekwe was being held.

The detained House of Representatives member has continued to battle for his release, as he has enlisted the services of a Senior Advocate of Nigeria, (SAN) Professor Taiwo Osipitan, to defend him in the matter.

19 JUN 2003

From The Guardian, a Nigerian newspaper, Viewpoint section, comes an excellent piece:

'419' as national culture

By Okey Ndibe

ABOUT a year ago, a Nigerian academic told me, half in jest and half-seriously, that his country has made three entries to the harvest of globalisation. One is the intriguing phenomenon known as home videos. The second is the exportation of "the word of God" by a brigade of dapper, smartly dressed and fast-talking "men of God." About these two, I intend to offer my reflections at some other time. The third entry, however, has to do with what Nigerians simply describe as 419, but much of the foreign media identify as Nigerian scam. More than anything else, this scam bedevils the way Nigeria is perceived as a nation, and taints the image of Nigerian nationals living abroad. A few anecdotes would serve to underscore the scam's scope and dolorous impact.

Three weeks ago, I attended a meeting of a social organisation on whose board I sit. As soon as I walked in, one of the board members announced that his wife, who owns a publishing company, had fallen prey to a Nigerian scam artist. As the story went, a man rang up his wife's company and ordered books worth more than \$1,000. He gave an address in Nigeria where the books should be shipped, and gave a credit card number for payment. As is the practice in America, the company promptly mailed the books to Nigeria-and sent in the credit card information to collect payment. Instead, the credit card company denied payment, and informed the shocked publisher that the credit card was stolen. It was too late for the hapless publisher to recover her books.

More recently, I dialled the GSM number of a long-time Nigerian friend, a woman who was my classmate in elementary school. A strange female voice answered the phone and told me that my friend had been seriously wounded in an accident. She asked me

to take down the telephone number of the hospital where my friend was supposedly taken. She then gave me another GSM number, 0803.300.2784, as the telephone contact "for St. Nicholas Hospital." Since I had heard stories about such scams, I knew immediately that I was dealing with criminal impostors. Even if I didn't know this, my suspicion would have been raised by one detail: the interceptor referred to the alleged accident victim, a woman, as "he." I decided to play along, so I dialled the number "of the hospital." A male voice answered and introduced himself as "the medical director of St. Nicholas Hospital." He asked: "Are you calling for the victim of the armed robbery attack?" "Armed robbery?" I asked, in feigned surprise. "I was told it was an accident." "Yes," said the fake doctor. "Armed robbers shot him in the shoulder and then he had an accident."

For six minutes, I sustained the charade. This "doctor" told me that, "thank God," my friend had been stabilised. The only problem, he said, was to quickly operate and remove the bullet lodged in my friend's shoulder. "We need 80,000 Naira-about 700 to 800 dollars-to buy blood and other items to perform the operation. We must have the money within one hour or something bad could happen." He asked me to hasten to Western Union and immediately wire the money to be picked up by his accountant, "Olayinka Yusuf." Still acting the "mugu," I promised to wire the money the next day. "Look," he scolded, "I'm telling you that we must operate within an hour and you're talking about tomorrow."

This man may not survive if this operation is not done immediately." When I insisted that I could only send money the next day, the "doctor" told me that his hospital would have paid for the needed supplies, "but we just paid our taxes this morning and we're out of cash." It was then I decided to deliver the coup de grace. "Doc! Doc!" I shouted in mock anguish. "Let me tell you what I'll do." He paused to listen. "I know you're a bloody 419-ner," I said, laughing mockingly. "I have been fooling you all along." "Me too, I have been fooling you," he retorted unabashedly, before we both hung up.

A day later, on a trip to Washington, DC, I stopped over in Willingboro, New Jersey to visit with my cousin. As I told him of my encounter with the phone scam artists, he ran to his fax machine and pulled a 419 letter he'd received from a "Mrs. Mary Bayemo," claiming to be the "executive Secretary to the Commissioner for Contract, Office of the President, Federal Republic of Nigeria." In the fax, addressed to no one by name, my cousin was asked to contact one "Ibrahim Umar Kida," allegedly director/head auditor, at 011-234-803.344.1992, to collect his "CBN draft of US \$15 million." It was one of several 419 faxes my cousin has received in recent months.

These are but a few samples of the impressive torrent of 419 scams, disseminated by e-mail, fax, telephone and (less frequently) surface mail. They are representative of the scams with which many 419-ners bombard prospective clients and victims in the U.S., Europe, Latin America, Asia, the Middle East and elsewhere. It's rare these days to meet Americans who haven't received one form of scam proposal or another. Whenever I speak to Americans, many in the audience later come up to me to reveal that they receive tons of scam letters from Nigeria.

For many Nigerians in the United States and Europe, these scam entrepreneurs pose a present and often insurmountable challenge. I've met many Nigerian professionals here who have suffered untold hardship because of the general perception that Nigerians are highly clever con artists. Banks and investment companies have told some Nigerians that the FBI has cautioned financial institutions against employing Nigerians. Many Nigerians who attempt to open bank accounts are compelled to go through punishing steps to establish their integrity. Thanks to the ever-widening loop of 419-ners, Nigerians abroad are now held as criminals, until they prove themselves to be of irreproachable character.

Last year, when my wife and I taught as Fulbright scholars at the University of Lagos, I

went to several cyber cafes to read my e-mail messages. Men and women busily sending 419 mail around the world besieged the cafes. I saw youth claiming to be Abacha's widow. Or the governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria. Or some other top gun at the apex bank. Or some big official in a ministry. Some of them were university graduates, cast into desperation, hopelessness and fraud by lingering joblessness-or jobs that paid too little. Some were uneducated loafers. All of them were united by one thing: their dream to make it big in the spectacular way that many Nigerians seem to cherish and celebrate.

Clearly, any project to clean up Nigeria's image in the world must seriously address the 419 scourge. Few people are going to take a nation seriously when too many of its citizens are associated with seeking fortunes without investing the requisite hard work. Of course, the gullible and greedy people who succumb to 419 schemes are less victims than part of the problem. I recently told the correspondent of the Financial Times of London that Europeans and Americans who greedily covet millions from an impoverished nation like Nigeria are guilty of a species of racism. Only a foolish glutton would encourage a Nigerian "official" to wire millions of dollars abroad. Still, the Nigerian society faces an arduous challenge in combating the scourge of 419. What must the government do, as a minimum, to demonstrate its serious resolve to tackle this festering cancer?

419 Coalition note: As to what the Nigerian Government must do "to demonstrate its serious resolve to tackle this festering cancer" the answer has always been obvious, though successive Nigerian governments for nearly two decades have simply refused to implement it. And that answer is: In order to show tangible, quantifiable, sustained results against 419 the Nigerian Government must mass arrest 419ers, mass prosecute 419ers, mass convict 419ers, seize the assets of 419ers, and repatriate money stolen by 419ers in something approaching the massive amounts in which it was stolen and keep doing these things until 419 operations are reduced to nuisance level.

18 JUN 2003

From ThisDay, a Nigerian newspaper:

Alleged 419: Morris Ibekwe Begg for Bail

By Victor Efeizomor

Detained House of Representatives member, Morris Ibekwe, has urged an Ikeja High Court judge to grant him bail based on health grounds, just as the embattled Lagos businessman and lawyer, Chief Fred Ajudua, has been reminded in Kirikiri Maximum Prison.

Ibekwe, Ajudua and two others are currently being prosecuted by the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) for alleged involvement in advance fee fraud (a.k.a. 419).

Ibekwe alongside Ajudua, Alumile Adedeji a.k.a. Ade Bendel and Charles Orie were on May 30, arraigned before two separate judges at the Ikeja High Court, Lagos.

At the resumed hearing yesterday, Ibekwe, through his lawyer Professor Taiwo Osipitan (SAN) prayed the court to grant him (Ibekwe) bail on the grounds of his failing health resulting from constant attack from asthma and hypertension arguing that his client need for regular medical attention was imperative.

Osipitan said it was reasonable for the court to grant Ibekwe bail based on personal recognition as he remains innocent until he is found guilty, adding that the offence upon

which he (Ibekwe) was being held was a bailable offence.

Reacting to the bail application, the prosecution led by Rotimi Jacobs asked the trial judge, Justice Kudirat Kekere-Ekun to adjourn the case to enable them prepare their reply to the application.

Meanwhile, Justice Joseph Oyewale has ordered that Ajudua be transferred from his former Milverton Ikoyi cell to Kirikiri Maximum Prison.

The state prosecution, Hassan Suleiman, in an oral application urged the court to order the transfer of Ajudua to Kirikiri Maximum Prison as the Ikoyi cell is congested, stressing that the police cannot cope with the situation of the growing number of detainees in the cell.

Earlier, Ajudua's counsel, Wale Adesokan, had brought a motion on notice urging the court to quash the two count charge against their client.

16 JUN 2003

From the Athens Review, Texas:

Athens couple avoids falling victim to 'Nigerian scam'

By Jennifer Stone

An Athens couple is breathing a sigh of relief after realizing they came close to being scammed.

For years, scams originating from Nigeria have been in place, and many Americans have fallen prey. But now there is a new twist, which almost caught George and Shanley Robertson of Athens off guard.

Mr. Robertson restores pinball machines and sells them on the Internet as a hobby. His latest restoration was advertised on the Mr. Pinball classifieds Web site for \$2,500.

So when he received a call from a gentleman with a foreign accent asking him if he would sell it for \$2,200, he thought nothing of it and agreed to the price.

Then things got weird. The buyer, who identified himself as Mr. Edwards, explained that he had a friend in the United States who owed him -- Edwards -- \$5,500. Rather than Edwards sending the money for the pinball machine directly, he said he would like the friend to send the Robertsons the \$5,500, and then have the Robertsons wire Edwards the excess.

"That's when it got suspicious," said Mrs. Robertson.

Some state attorney general's offices are already putting out warnings about the new scam. As of Friday, no notice had been put on the Texas Attorney General's Office or the U.S. Attorney General's Office Web sites. But according to the office of Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller, the scam is set up the same way each time.

The victim is selling a used car or some other high-dollar item over the Internet. A buyer based in Africa tells the seller he wants to buy the item. The buyer says he will pay with a cashier's check from a bank in the United States.

At the last minute, the buyer has some story explaining why the cashier's check will be more than the asking price. After the cashier's check clears, the seller is to wire the difference to the buyer.

The victim thinks the cashier's check is good when it's accepted by his or her bank and the funds are provided, but in a week or so, the check turns out to be counterfeit. Unfortunately, the victim has already wired thousands of dollars to Africa, never to be seen again.

That's exactly how it began for the Robertsons. But, after they received a check for the \$5,500 and called the issuing bank -- Korea Exchange Bank's New York Branch -- they wisely attempted to verify the account. There was no such account, the bank told them, and no such person holds any account there.

Then they tried to verify the address from which the check had been sent by Federal Express, a Maryland address. The address was fake, too, and the country code on the Fed Ex envelope identified the check as being sent from Nigeria.

"If he wanted to do a scam, you would think he would have given a legitimate address," said Mr. Robertson.

The couple declined to cash the check, and has been receiving e-mails since from both Mr. Edwards and a woman identifying herself as Christina Edwards asking for the check to be cashed.

"He's consistent," said Mrs. Robertson. "He's even called us back."

When he was accused of being a scam artist, Mr. Edwards hung up. Then the couple received another e-mail politely asking that the check be cashed and the pinball machine sent, as if the phone conversation had never occurred.

"He keeps pressuring us, saying 'trust us, trust us,'" said Mr. Robertson.

This kind of scam isn't uncommon, said Athens Assistant Police Chief Tom Underhill.

"Many people just throw them in the trash," said Underhill about the false e-mail offers. "That's been an ongoing ordeal from several of those African countries. But there are still people who fall prey to it."

If anyone receives a check they think may be false, Underhill says they can bring it to the police station and Athens police will try to authenticate it.

Any false checks will be forwarded to the Federal Trade Commission or the Securities Exchange Commission to investigation, said Underhill.

As for the Robertsons, they have reported their experience to the authorities and say they will be more careful than ever from here on out when dealing with online sales.

"We get fishy hits on our online items all the time, but this one really looked real," said Mrs. Robertson.

14 JUN 2003

From Vanguard a Nigerian newspaper:

419: Ajudua, Ade Bendel's trial stalled

Prosecutor in auto-crash

By Ise-Oluwa Ige

LAGOS: Trial of two Lagos-based businessmen, Messrs Olafemi Ayeni and Alumile Adedeji, otherwise called Ade Bendel, arraigned on May 30, this year, by the Federal Government before an Ikeja High Court for allegedly defrauding an Egyptian Army General, Ali Abdel Azim Attia, of N63.5million, could not go on yesterday following the absence in court of the lead prosecution in the matter, Mr Wemimo Ogunde.

Ogunde was said to have been involved in an auto crash a week ago on his way to the Praying Ground of the Redeemed Christian Church of God along Lagos-Ibadan Expressway. He was said to have escaped death by the whiskers.

According to Mr M. S. Hassan, one of the four counsel that announced appearance for the Federal Government, yesterday, Ogunde is currently on admission at Maryland Specialist Hospital, Lagos. Hassan consequently prayed the court to adjourn till June 27, this year, to enable Ogunde convalesce well so that he could lead other lawyers in prosecuting the case.

But when news of Ogunde's involvement was broken to the court, some of the relations and sympathisers to the accused persons jubilated on the premises of the Ikeja High Court where the trial was scheduled to kick off yesterday.

One of them, a lady, who refused to disclose her name to Vanguard said of the incident: "Ogunde's involvement in the auto crash was the Lord's doing because they are not out to prosecute my brother (Ade Bendel) but to persecute him."

Lagos lawyer, Mr Festus Keyamo is defending Mr Alumile Adedeji alias Ade Bendel in the matter. Ade Bendel, himself was present in court yesterday. He spotted a gray suit, looking radiant.

Unlike the last time when he was brought to court in Black Maria, looking ruffled, he was brought in yesterday in a prison service 504 station wagon saloon car marked with registration number PS051A. He was also neither leg-chained nor handcuffed yesterday. In fact his relations, friends were allowed unfettered access to him.

Keyamo, his lawyer did not oppose the prosecution's application for adjournment in the matter in view of the explanation given but lamented that the grant of the prosecution's prayer would amount to his client staying longer in detention.

He, however, said that he would not like to be given another excuse at the next adjourned date, saying the matter would have to go on.

He wondered aloud why the Economic and Financial Crime Commission which is behind the trial, should in the first instance, hand-over all their cases to just a chamber, saying the commission is a big one and should have many lawyers to handle their cases.

The presiding judge in the matter, Justice Kuburat Kekere-Ekun, adjourned hearing in the matter till June 27 and July 8, this year, warning that both parties must attend court to ensure that the matter proceeds.

Arguments on the bail application already filed by Ade Bendel has also been adjourned till July 27, this year.

12 JUN 2003

From Vanguard, a Nigerian newspaper:

Court rejects Ajudua's bail application

By Ise-Oluwa Ige

LAGOS: LAGOS-BASED businessman, Chief Fred Ajudua, is to remain indefinitely in detention while his trial over allegations of conspiracy and obtaining \$1.69 million from a German about three years ago, one Remmy Hendrick Luigi Cima, under false pretext lasts, an Ikeja High Court, yesterday, pronounced. But the court promised to give the matter an accelerated hearing. The high court judge, Justice Joseph Oyewole, who refused bail to Ajudua premised his decision on his (Ajudua) antecedents, saying if granted temporary freedom, there was likelihood that he could commit similar crime. It would be recalled that attorney to Ajudua, Mr Wale Adesokan, argued a bail application for his client on June 6, this year. But the Federal Government prosecuting the businessman opposed the bail application vehemently.

Adesokan, while moving the bail application for Ajudua urged the court to admit him to bail on grounds of ill-health, saying he would need urgent medical attention outside the four walls of the prison. Besides, he told the court that since his client was detained his only child had been lonely at home. According to him, if Ajudua was admitted to bail he would not abuse it because he had a lot of criminal matters hanging on his neck at the Lagos High Court and that in each of the criminal matters, he was granted bail and had never jumped it. Responding, the prosecution accused the defence of being economical with facts in that bench warrant was issued recently against Ajudua in one of the said criminal matters hanging on his neck by a Lagos High Court.

The Federal Government said that if Ajudua was granted bail, he might not only refuse to attend court, he would use the opportunity of his temporary freedom to engage in further financial crime, being his usual practice. According to the prosecution, the defence never denied that Ajudua had several similar cases hanging on his neck which goes to show that each time he was granted bail in one criminal matter, he was using the opportunity of his temporary freedom to commit fresh financial crimes.

On Ajudua's argument bordering on ill-health, the prosecution alleged that Ajudua seemed not to be serious with his bail, saying if he were, he could have tendered a documentary evidence to convince the court that he was sick.

He added that the supreme court was clear on this issue that where an allegation was made that an accused person was sick, enough documentary evidence should be gathered to confront the court as to persuade it to grant bail other than oral evidence being given by Ajudua. Ruling on the arguments yesterday, Justice Oyewole held that in considering bail in cases of this nature, the court should consider the interest of the accused, the victims and the society. He said that in the instant case, there was the likelihood of the accused person unleashing similar crime on the society if granted bail more so when he never denied having several cases (of 419) against him in different courts.

419 Coalition comment: Now THIS is a step in the right direction. Since 419ers tend to evaporate, it might be a good idea to deny bail to most elleged 419ers or to put them under house restrictions when on bail and equip them with monitoring systems or somesuch.

11 JUN 2003

From Vanguard, a Nigerian newspaper:

IBEKWE: FG raises alarm over plot to kill star witness

By Ise-Oluwa Ige

LAGOS: FEDERAL Government, yesterday, raised an alarm before an Ikeja High Court

that some Nigerians suspected to be business associates of the detained member of the House of Representatives, Chief Maurice Ibekwe, were plotting to derail the trial of the legislator by threatening to kill a star witness, one Klaus Munch, resident in Germany, if he dared come to Nigeria to give evidence against their colleague. Munch was said to have alleged that since the arrest of the embattled legislator over financial crime, he had been receiving strange phone calls in Germany, warning him not to dare come to Nigeria, in his own interest, to expatiate on how he was allegedly defrauded by Chief Ibekwe and his accomplice, now at large.

Ibekwe is presently facing a 9-count charge of conspiracy, forgery and defrauding a foreign national, a whopping sum of US \$330,000.00 and DM 75,000.00. It was the Economic and Financial Crime Commission that arrested Chief Ibekwe upon receiving and investigating a complaint from the foreigner, one Munch, before the legislator's prosecution was recommended to the Federal Government. The lawmaker has since been arraigned May 30, this year, by the Federal Government before Justice Kuburat Kekere-Ekun of an Ikeja High Court who ordered his detention at the Kirikiri Prisons in Lagos.

Detained Ibekwe appeared briefly before the court yesterday. Unlike the day of his arraignment, he was neither handcuffed nor leg-chained. He was also driven into the court premises some minutes to 9.00 a.m in a cosy prison service 504 saloon ambulance car with tinted glass unlike the last time when he was brought into the court premises with Black Maria. At the resumed hearing of the matter, yesterday, the prosecution team comprising Messrs Rotimi Jacobs and Kunle Wahab Shittu told the court that they have a counter- affidavit to the bail application filed by the detained legislator wherein it was alleged that some Nigerians suspected to be business associates of Chief Ibekwe were threatening to kill their star-witness.

The lead counsel in the matter, Mr Rotimi Jacobs, said there were fresh facts they would want to incorporate into the proof of evidence and would want a short adjournment to put their house in order. But trial in the multiple charge pressed against the accused did not commence, yesterday, as the matter was just for mention. However, shortly after the matter was adjourned by the presiding judge till June 17, this year, for arguments on the bail application, one of the lawyers on the 9-man defence team of Chief Ibekwe, Chief Mike Ozekhome, told newsmen that he had no problem with the Federal Government prosecuting those into money laundering, but he asked the government to take a leap forward by prosecuting not only those defrauding people but also the defrauded because they are both criminals.

419 Coalition Note: Ah, the victims as criminal issue surfaces yet again. Apparently nobody has told Mike Ozekhome that there are many types of 419 in which there is no question of victim as criminal including various forms of goods and services 419, real estate 419, charitable organization 419, lottery 419, contract repurchase 419 etc. and also that there is no nation in the world that considers its victims of even Classic 419 to be criminals. The man apparently has a lot to learn about 419 especially since he is apparently a lawyer in a 419 matter :) :) No point in beating a dead horse there, Mike old chum :) :)

11 JUN 2003

From ThisDay, a Nigerian newspaper:

419: 'CBN, Police chase Fraudsters Out of Nigeria'

By Ayodele Aminu

The efforts of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to rid the country of financial crime have

started yielding dividends, as fraudsters have started moving out to other ECOWAS countries, as a result of the aggressive on-slaught launch-ed against them by the combined efforts of the apex bank and the Nigeria Police Force.

Governor, CBN, Chief Joseph Sanusi, who made this known in Lagos recently, also disclosed that the number of complaints received has reduced to 780 per month as against 4,500 as at July last year when its systems had not been computerized.

'Preliminary findings show that in the month of July 2002 when technology was installed, an average of 150 complaints on '419' transactions was lodged on the CBN web site, daily. He said subsequently information on the activities of the scam group and advice on what to do was given to the complainants.

'The number has reduced to an average of 26 complaints on '419' per day as at the end of March 2003. It has also been established that most of the crimes were perpetrated using Multilink's telephone facilities and those of the GSM providers", he explained.

'419' refers to section 419 of the Nigerian Criminal Code, which regards obtaining money under false pretence as a criminal offence.

The CBN governor however, said that with the help of the Nigeria Police, so many of the fraudsters routing their transactions through ECOWAS countries had been arrested.

To nip this unwholesome development which has continued to dent the image of the country in the bud, the banking watchdog boss said the Nigeria Police have made it a point of duty to raid the internet cafes, many of which had been found to be used by the fraudsters.

From the little efforts made so far, Sanusi stated, that the apex bank has established the trend of the activities of the advance fee fraud groups and collated information on the linkages and the lead information for analysis.

While assuring that the CBN would do everything within its powers to rid Nigeria of the fraudsters, he said the it has taken another bold step by informing the banks through a circular that any bank that is careless enough to allow a fraudulent transaction to go through its system would be held responsible for the refund of the amount involved to the bonafide claimants.

To show that the apex bank is serious about fighting the scourge, the governor said one of the banks in operation (name withheld) was sanctioned and mandated to refund the amount involved to the bonafide claimants.

The CBN, he further explained, has already enforced the provisions of this circular against one bank, and that it is ready to do it again where it is proven that a bank has weak systems, or failed to exercise due care, to prevent the dubious transactions from going through.

419 Coalition: Yet another example of the Nigerian Government Big Lie propaganda technique in action. The 419ers haven't been run out of the ECOWAS states or Nigeria. In terms of complaints about 419er operations emanating from Nigeria, CBN or Nigeria Police can get information from the USSS 419 Task Force database, which shows that complaints remain at unprecedented levels. In terms of any 419ed monies being repatriated from Nigeria, the record is still dismal. Victim Shahla Ghasemi is still waiting for CBN to send along her monies which were recovered nearly two years ago, which CBN can send directly to her at any time, but all CBN does is come up with various hogwash reasons why they can't send it. You know,

it got to where CBN under Paul Ogwuma had no credibility at all in 419 matters, and CBN under Sanusi is rapidly approaching the same nadir.

6 JUN 2003

From the Daily Times, a Nigerian newspaper:

Police chiefs, held over 419 deal

SAM POPOOLA

SIX persons including a Superintendent of Police (SP), and a Deputy Superintendent of police (DSP) have been arrested over an advance fraud a.k.a. 419 involving over \$150,000 (N19.16 million)

Sources close to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) disclosed that a syndicate of 419 perfected a strategy of using the police chiefs as a strong backing in duping their unsuspecting victims, mostly foreigners.

Their modus operandi was to strike a deal with their victims and invite them into the country after which they then invite the police chiefs who would threaten to charge them for illegal entry into the country they could settle for their discharge.

The syndicate was believed to have successfully duped a German national of the sum of US\$100,000 before inviting him to the country for the balance of \$50,000.

On getting to the country the victim was handed over to the police chiefs who immediately demanded the payment of the \$50,000 from the [victim]....

5 JUN 2003

From the Tribune, a Nigerian newspaper:

RIBADU : I WILL MAKE THINGS DIFFICULT FOR FRAUDSTERS

KOMOLAFE Rasheed engaged the new Chairman of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Alhaji Nuhu Ribadu, a lawyer and Assistant Commissioner of Police, in an interview that reveals that it is no longer business as usual for fraudsters and their collaborators. Excerpts:

Sir, in your acceptance speech at the press conference you promised to meet force with force with the 419 ers and their collaborators. Don't you think you might be stepping on powerful toes? Are you not afraid of your life?

This is part of the problem, because they feel they can intimidate me and through that I'll give up, they would have won the war. They will always do what they like, we must have people who can say enough is enough. I am a human being, I want to live, I want to have a peaceful life, but that will not deter me from doing what is right. We have people who are soldiers, who go to battle, this is my own responsibility, this is how God wants me to serve my country and if I become afraid, I doubt very much if I will be able to achieve much in that regard.

It is hard for people to get justice in the Nigerian courts today, and this has affected the public confidence in the Nigerian judiciary. What do you think should be done to effectively prosecute offenders knowing that your

success will be measured in terms of the co-operation you receive from the judiciary?

That is true, it is my hope that things will be difficult for the fraudsters this time. One thing I want to assure you and assure Nigerians, is that we intend to do a very good job, we want to carry everybody along to the extent that when we go to court people will see what it is, what we are talking about. We want to be transparent. My intention is to insist that things must be done correctly, properly, because it is the court which has power to order for detention. We don't have that power, but I will make a strong case, that such people should not be allowed to go freely. If you allow them, they will go back to what they were used to, and these judges are urged to stop giving them bail pending the completion of the case. The possibility of their getting back to doing exactly what they were doing should be a strong case, that the court should refuse them bail, I want the court and Nigerians to understand the damage this 419 thing is causing Nigeria. By way of comparison it is what terrorism is to Americans and Europeans, and if anybody is caught under the offence of terrorism, you know what will happen to him. Let's see if we can do the same thing with this 419 of a thing. The damage they are doing to us is worse than what terrorism is causing the Western world.

Since the inception of the present regime, it is on record that no government official has been to jail for corrupt practices despite all the noise about fighting corruption, some say it is lack of political will on the part of government to punish its corrupt officials. How do we get out of this situation. And why do you think government is not willing to prosecute its corrupt officers?

You know, it is a long historic thing. This government is doing fairly well to see if it can change that attitude, I mean look at the fight Mr. President had with the legislature on the anti-corruption Commission, FG have done fairly well, and if you see what the President is doing, he is more or less leading by example, he has been able to prove beyond any reasonable doubt that corruption is nowhere close to his seat of power and that one also serves as an example for others to follow. He also introduced strong measures like due process in government which is also one step of fighting corruption. But still the thing is, let us all build this country, we have 36 state governments, including the Federal Government, over 700 Local Governments. It is not easy for one person to police the entire country. If you see what is going on in the states, in the Local governments, it is just unbelievable, with the little government is doing with ICPC and now we in the Economic and Financial Crime Commission, remaking judiciary to really leave up to his responsibility, things will change, I want a total resolve from us, not just government to face this problem fairly and frontally. It is going to be real difficult for us to fight the corruption. Unfortunately, those who are supposed to fight corruption themselves participate in the corruption. This is a fact. What I mean by those who are responsible are institutions who are supposed to bring people to justice, themselves, but somehow cannot completely claim to be free from the crime itself. Talking about these institutions - Nigerian Police Force, Customs, Judiciary, Immigrations, all government institutions are supposed to be there, to be the ones to fight this war, somehow they have not been able to fight the war.

Has it ever bothered your that a crime that took two parties to commit suddenly becomes a one man affair simply because the originator happens to be a Nigerian. Don't you think foreigners who are the victims but who also

gave subtle support to the scam before the scam went against them ought to be brought to justice also?

There is a problem here, it maybe a technical one. You see the whole thing is a scam, for example if there is any 419 person who is trying to dupe someone abroad, he will send a bogus letter, claiming that there is a letter or some money somewhere, which is non-existent. To hold somebody who is a victim, an accomplice you must first establish that the thing is real, assuming that you say yes, this man is also a party to something which is fraudulent, but there is none, the whole thing is a scam prepared to get him or her. So for you to get to court because the first thing you will have to prove is that there is a contract first before duping. But it is not that the whole thing is a scam and it is originated by the fraudsters themselves. So there is no way for you to have something strong to establish a case against the victims.

Secondly, we are concerned with our own image, our own reputation. This fraudsters are Nigerians, our jurisdiction is in Nigeria, I want to go after those who have committed offence while they are in Nigeria. For those people over there is a different jurisdiction and this image that has been destroyed is caused by the fraudsters, not by the victims, so if we say we are going after the victims, we are going to the wrong direction.

Thirdly, for us to succeed in this fight, we need the co-operation of the victims, for instance in case we intend to go to court, I need them to testify. Without their own testimony it will be difficult to prove my case. If now I start going after them and say yes they are also accomplices. It is possible you will never get anybody to come and testify, so this is the point I am trying to buttress.

Sir the force (Police) you belong to is seven centuries back in time, a force that people perceive as more of friends to fraudsters than their enemy. And with electronic fraud (E-Fraud) which is a high class fraud at the disposal of the fraudsters, how do you intend to fight this high class fraud with the type of decayed institution you belong to?

My belief is that, so long as we allow institutional structures, that are supposed to do their own work, and fail to do that and encourage the 419 ers to do this type of activities, for example the communication industry must come up and start doing their job, they must not allow their facilities for criminal activities.

Secondly, Internet Cafes must take steps to ensure that their own cafes are not used for criminal activities.

Thirdly, banks should not allow facilities to be used to defraud any individual, if they do that they would also be held liable.

I have also initiated the process of amending the law, banking fraud law and money laundering. Hopefully very soon, it will be passed. It is my own initiation, I am just few days old in the job but all these are fundamental, we must put all these regime of laws in place to be able to counter these things. The best form to make the institution live up to its own expectation is to let them do their own work, if the banks will not allow any fraudster to use their banks to con or dupe people, then the chance are it will reduce. If the telecommunication industry will not allow their own facilities to be used, somehow we will reduce this thing. Same thing with internet cafes, this institution must police their own activities, must

control, must not allow their own offices, or their own facilities to be used for criminal and financial offences, failure to do so, will get them to account for it even if it means paying for all the losses the victims suffered.

Nigeria is recently placed as the 4th most dangerous shipping nation in the world after (Indonesia, Bangladesh, and India) and as a matter of fact Nigeria recorded pyrates attacks between January and March this year alone. How do you intend to tackle pirates in the Nigeria waters?

That aspect is best left to be addressed by the government, I know about that development, I know what is going on, my responsibility is to first and foremost, fight the financial crime, I intend to take my time, I want to first of all concern myself with that aspect of my responsibility which is to enforce ant-terrorism law and pyrates attacks can comfortably be placed and tagged as terrorism, but for the meantime, I am just beginning, I have less than 100 people working for me, now. I want to take my time to do a very strong structure that will be able to go out and tackle this financial crime but to be able to venture into other areas, I indeed need a strong structure, strong foundation.

419 Coalition comment: Commissioner Ribadu sounds like a man who had his head screwed on straight to us, a man who might actually have a chance of making a real impact on the 419ers. Kudos to him so far! We would like to remind him, however, and many, many of those who write about 419 that there are Many kinds of 419, NOT just the Classic 419 type of 419 to which articles most often refer. In many types of 419, there is no question whatever of victims as collaborator or criminal, they are merely victims. Bad Check 419, a form of Goods and Services 419, is one such example of so called "legal" 419. There are also versions of Real Estate 419, Will Scam 419, other Goods and Services 419, Charitable Organization 419, that also qualify as "legal" 419 in which there is no question of victim as criminal. It is important for the media -- especially the Nigerian media, which somehow seems to assume as the writer of this piece did that Classic 419 is the Only form of 419, to realize this. As we have said before, the often repeated old saw of "It takes two to tango" implying that both the 419er and the victim are criminals simply does not always apply to 419, where often it takes only ONE to tango.

5 JUN 2003

From Reuters:

Obasanjo vows war on Nigerian graft, fraudsters

ABUJA, June 5 (Reuters) - President Olusegun Obasanjo declared total war on Thursday against corruption and fraudsters who have extorted millions of dollars from foreigners and scared many investors away from Nigeria.

"There will be no hiding place for these criminal individuals who tarnish the image of Nigeria," Obasanjo declared as he inaugurated a new parliament that emerged from disputed elections last month.

Obasanjo, re-elected for a second term, said his top priority would be salvaging Nigeria's oil-dependent economy, battered during 15 years of military dictatorship that ended in 1999.

He called on the new National Assembly, packed with members of his Peoples Democratic Party, to join the executive in fighting corruption after the failure of a similar campaign to make any impact in his first term.

The president, sharply criticised at home for failing so far to end prolonged economic stagnation in Africa's most populous country, said corruption and fraud were the major obstacles.

In the past four years, Nigeria has featured at the top of an index of most corrupt nations compiled by Berlin-based Transparency International, whose board Obasanjo sat on before his first election in 1999.

But his much publicised first-term campaign against corruption achieved little. Critics noted that hardly any high ranking officials had been successfully prosecuted.

Obasanjo has accused parliament of undermining his effort by passing a law watering down the powers of his special Anti-Corruption Commission. He has refused to sign the new bill into law.

Lawmakers say they amended the law to prevent executive abuse of the commission.

Obasanjo singled out Nigerian conmen who send out fraudulent letters to foreigners promising a share of large sums of money in return for help moving out corruptly held funds in Nigeria, usually in the form of over-invoiced government contracts.

Western governments have been pressing Nigeria to tackle financial crimes, including money laundering.

Obasanjo appeared to signal that Nigeria was in no hurry to renew any monitoring arrangement with the International Monetary Fund, which he ended in March 2002 citing national interest.

Nigeria needs a deal with the IMF in order to win relief on its \$30 billion of foreign debt, mostly to the Paris Club of government creditors.

419 Coalition Note: Uncle Sege, let's be accurate, that should be "fraudsters who have extorted BILLIONS (not millions) of dollars from foreigners"..... and we expect that it will take hundreds of millions of \$\$'s to be repatriated before anyone takes Nigerian counter-419 efforts too seriously..... Heck, Government of Nigeria can't even get Shahla Ghasem's \$400K or so repatriated to her that it says it recovered going on two years ago, so OBJ certainly does have a long way to go in seeing to it that stolen funds are recovered and repatriated. He met Mrs. Ghasemi in person at the Big "counter-419" function in New York last year, BTW, so he does know Personally about her case.

5 JUN 2003

From ThisDay, a Nigerian newspaper:

Court Fixes June 12 for Ajudua's Case

By Chika Amanze-Nwachuku

Federal High Court in Lagos will on June 12 ascertain it by and his continued detention.

Before his arraignment at an Ikeja High Court last Friday, Ajudua had through his lawyers, Wale Adesokan and Olakunle Ojo, sought and obtained the leave of the court to enforce his fundamental rights.

Following this development, the presiding judge in his case at the Federal High Court, Justice Chris Senlong, yesterday asked his counsel to address the court on whether or not it still has the jurisdiction to entertain the suit in view of the arraignment of the plaintiff before another High Court.

Subsequently, he adjourned the case to June 12, even as he fixed a new date for hearing on another application brought before the same court by the detained lawyer's wife seeking the release of her property allegedly impounded by the police.

It would be recalled that Ajudua and three others including a House of Representatives member, Chief Morris Ibekwe, were last Friday arraigned before an Ikeja High Court for alleged advance fee fraud a.k.a. 419.

Ajudua, according to a statement by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, allegedly led a syndicate of international fraudsters to swindle two Dutch nationals of US \$1.698.338 (about N234 million).

4 JUN 2003

From the Nigerian newspaper Daily Independent Online:

419: CBN Governor alerts on fraudsters' fresh tricks

By Fabian Ozor
[with 419 Coalition comments between lines]

Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Chief Joseph Sanusi yesterday alerted the nation on the new dimensions to the advance fee fraud also known as "419" perpetrated by some Nigerians.

Sanusi said most of the fraudsters operating from Nigeria now route their correspondence through telecommunications facilities of other ECOWAS countries.

[419 Coalition: That's not what we see, and CBN can't prove this assertion, Plus the Home Office for most 419ers continues to be Nigeria regardless of the "routing" of their telecommunications]

But the CBN boss also has some cheery news: The number of "419" complaints the apex bank receives on a daily basis has reduced drastically.

[419 Coalition: Then they must be Deaf as complaints to nearly every other public or private agency worldwide dealing with 419 matters have gone through the roof over the last three or four years]

Speaking on the touchy issue at a forum in Lagos, he listed the facilities of telecommunications firms other than NITEL as well as internet cafes as the most patronised by the fraudsters.

[419 Coalition: And gee, they still can't trace the 419ers phone numbers back to the account owners, na wa oh! And it's everybody else but Nitel involved. How fortunate for NITEL, wonder what the 419ers were using before the new telecommunications firms arrived :) :)]

Sanusi made this known while presenting a paper at the conference on "Anti-money

laundering in courts: Bringing the anti-money laundering require in compliance with international standards", yesterday in Lagos.

[419 Coalition: Ah yes, the annual G8 etc. inspired flurry of "activity" to avoid sanctions for not doing enough to control 419]

In the paper entitled: "Central Bank of Nigeria's standpoint on anti-money laundering compliance", Sanusi said the CBN had established that the pattern of "419" crimes was constantly changing.

[419 Coalition: Yes, but the more it changes the more it remains the same...]

"A substantial part of the 419' correspondence moved out of Nigeria, using ECOWAS countries telephone and fax numbers", he explained, adding that the CBN, through joint operations with the Nigeria Police, arrested some of those behind the correspondence.

[419 Coalition: The home office remains Nigeria regardless of whatever phone numbers etc. are used]

He assured that when the CBN is fully automated, it would have the capability to identify trends and patterns associated with money laundering and other financial crimes in the nation's banking sector. "It will, moreover, facilitate the interaction of the banks with the CBN and the tracking of anonymous and/or fictitious accounts and transactions", he added.

[419 Coalition: Gee, if Government of Nigeria can't trace phone calls to account numbers we don't reckon that ANT amount of automation is going to deal with the problem...]

"There are efforts by the police to sweep on the overnight surfers at the internet cafes, mostly in Lagos, many of whom have been found to be perpetrating the 419' crimes", said the CBN governor.

[419 Coalition: Then where are the mass arrests?]

Sanusi said the CBN had informed the banks through a circular that any of them found with "419" transactions would be made to refund the amount involved in the deal to the bona fide claimants.

[419 Coalition: Then where is the flow of repatriated funds?]

Saying the apex bank had already enforced the provisions of the circular against a bank, Sanusi warned that the CBN "is ready to do it again where it is proven that the bank has weak systems, or failed to exercise due care. That will prevent the 419' transactions from going through".

[419 Coalition: Let's see, they've done something to One bank? How brave! And can it be independently confirmed the monies have been repatriated to the victim?]

In his paper, the Inspector-General of Police, Mr. Tafa Balogun, represented by Assistant Inspector-General Adedayo Adeoye, advised the newly constituted financial crimes and anti-terrorism commission to start functioning and map out strategies to combat money laundering and trans-national organised crimes.

The commission, he added, should collaborate with other stakeholders in the trans-border organised crimes and anti-money laundering campaign, as well as making a proposal to the government for the necessary financial amendments to the existing

legal and financial provisions exploited by organised crime groups.

419 Coalition comment: Overall, the same type of self serving malarkey that has been being put out by CBN for many years. Haven't they learned that when they do this everyone just Laughs at them? Guess not.

4 JUN 2003

From the Daily Independent, a Nigerian newspaper:

On the trail of fraudsters

By Adetutu Folasade-Koyi,

As the U.S. blacklisted Nigeria and 16 other nations for having a high incidence of fraud and financial crimes, a major multinational, Halliburton, is enmeshed in a \$2.4 million tax scam in the country, would the nation's economic commission bares its fang?

It had all the trappings of a soap opera. Whereas the opera is designed to thrill and entertain, the opera of economic crimes currently playing out in Nigeria portends deadly results for the psyche and image of a nation reeling under the negative influence of scammers.

Last month, Halliburton announced that a Nigerian worker, who held out as a tax consultant, misled the company into believing that he could act on its behalf, where tax returns are concerned. Money paid through the consultant went into private pockets rather than government coffers.

Halliburton is one of the world's largest providers of equipment and services to the oil and gas industry and also has a large engineering and construction business.

When contacted by Daily Independent to respond to 12 questions, which sought to resolve some glaring anomalies in the payment and rumoured tax evasion by the company, Zelma Branch, Halliburton's spokesperson, said because the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC's) investigation of the matter is still on, any direct answers would be subjudice.

"The SEC investigation is not complete, we believe it is inappropriate to provide any further details at this time. Here is what I can provide.

"For the first quarter of 2002 and each filing thereafter, Halliburton has included in its report to the SEC a footnote that one of our foreign subsidiaries operating in Nigeria made improper payments of approximately \$2.4 million to an entity owned by a Nigerian national who held himself out as a tax consultant when, in fact, he was an employee of a local tax authority. The payments were made to obtain favourable tax treatment and clearly violated our Code of Business Conduct and our internal control procedures. The payments were discovered during an audit of the foreign subsidiary. We have conducted an investigation assisted by outside legal counsel. Based on the findings of the investigation, several employees were terminated. None of Halliburton's senior officers were involved. We are co-operating with the SEC in its review of the matter. We plan to take further action to ensure that our foreign subsidiary pays all taxes owed in Nigeria, which may be as much as an additional \$5 million, which has been fully accrued. The integrity of our Code of Business Conduct and our internal control procedures are essential to the way we conduct business.

"Over a year ago, we self-reported this issue to the SEC and it has been in each of our publicly filed financial statements since then. While this is an unfortunate situation, the real story here is that our system works. Our existing processes uncovered the issue, it

was immediately reported to the SEC, we immediately investigated the issue, and all the necessary actions were taken when the facts were uncovered, including the termination of those involved. Of course, we all wish these things didn't occur, but with over 92,000 employees worldwide, we know they occasionally do. We can all take comfort, however, that on those rare occasions where our employees act improperly, we discover it, we get to the bottom of it, we hold people accountable for their actions, and we do the right thing by our shareholders, our customers, and our host governments around the world," branch said.

Besides, Branch's claim that Halliburton self-reported to the US SEC falls flat on its face when investigations revealed that it was actually the US SEC which discovered that the \$5 million the company had claimed was paid as tax in its Nigerian operations was not reflected in its balance sheet, and so had made this public, forcing the company to own up.

Moreover, while Halliburton claims that the \$5 million tax was for the year 2001 and 2002 operating period, investigations at the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) and the Niger Delta states where Halliburton operates indicate that the company has been short-changing the authorities for years, according to reports.

"It is a criminal case of tax evasion, which deprives the country of badly needed foreign exchange for developmental projects. For another, the evasion is compounded by bribery and corruption, the twin monsters pillaging our social and economic foundations. The Halliburton scam is a window of opportunity for the government to undertake a thorough investigation of the multinational companies doing business in the oil and gas sector," an oil expert said.

At the FIRS, mum is the golden watchword. Halliburton is the second largest US oil service firm operating in Nigeria, after another US service company, Schlumberger. Halliburton also has another Nigerian subsidiary, Landmark Graphics.

Although industry operators have urged the Federal Government to institute an inquiry to ascertain the culprits behind the scam, the indicted officials have suddenly discovered that silence is golden.

Without doubt, the Halliburton case is a challenge to Nuhu Ribadu and his team at the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission. Coming so soon on the heels of the arrest and prosecution of czars of Advanced Fee Fraud, the Halliburton matter also involves an economic crime of which unmasking the culpable Nigerian officials would go a long way to assure foreign partners that in Nigeria, it is no longer business-as-usual

In a telephone interview with Daily Independent, Ribadu indicated his commission's readiness to address the tax matter, even while he admitted that the commission was monitoring it.

He said: "The commission is waiting for a formal report. This is just the beginning. We are looking at it. For now, the commission has not been invited, but if there is any formal complaint, particularly by the Federal Government, we would immediately swing into action. The commission is keenly watching the case and once we get our facts correct, I assure you that we would take action," he assured.

Recently, at a formal takeover ceremony of the commission, Commissioner of Police (CP), Ribadu, vowed to make life unbearable for fraudsters unless they desist from the act.

Stating that the problems of economic and financial crimes were commonplace, Ribadu declared: "Suffice it to state that these crimes have done tremendous damage to our national integrity and national image abroad. Advance Fee Fraud, that we sometimes

refer to as 419, has caused our dear country and innocent citizens a lot of embarrassment abroad. Just because of the unpatriotic acts and greed of a few misguided citizens, the country suffers while undertaking legitimate businesses."

He regretted that the situation has become so appalling that the country was being treated as a nation of criminals and dishonest people, reiterating that the need to fight fraudsters could not be overstated as vices like corruption, greed and financial malpractices gradually overwhelm and weaken institutions and other structures of the society. The cumulative effects of these misfortunes, he said, cause tremendous social and economic strains on the polity.

The commission is charged with the enforcement and administration of the provisions of the Economic and Financial Crimes' Commission (Establishment Act 2002), investigation of all financial crimes, including Advance Fee Fraud, money laundering, counterfeiting, illegal cash transfers, futures market fraud, fraudulent encasement of negotiable instruments, computer credit card fraud, and contract scam, among others.

It is to also ensure the co-ordination and enforcement of all economic and financial crimes laws and enforcement sanctions conferred on any other person or authority; enforcement of the provisions of the Money Laundering Act 1995; the Advance Fee Fraud and other Fraud Related Offences Act 1995; the Failed Banks (Recovery of Debts) and Financial Malpractices in Banks Act 1994, as amended; the Miscellaneous Offences Act and any other law or regulations relating to economic and financial crimes.

Ribadu assured that the commission would work judiciously without any fear or favour, affection or ill will and would, most importantly, protect its sources of information.

"Any body that transgresses the laws will be punished according to the laws. These criminals, as we all know, are not spirits. They live among us and many people are aware of their nefarious activities. We promise to handle all information given to us in strict confidence, as we will religiously protect our sources of information," he said.

But beside the charges of alleged human rights breaches in the way it goes about its assignment, followers of the commission strongly believe that the recent change in its leadership may not help the commission in the long run. Security experts query why a Commissioner of Police (CP) should be removed as chairman of the commission and replaced with an Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP). "The replacement of Akaya, a CP, with Ribadu, an ACP, would not work out well for the commission," one security expert noted, arguing: "By the Act establishing the commission, all the services are supposed to be represented; with an ACP being made to chair the commission, no higher officer of any of the services would want to come on board. We must realise that in Nigeria, status matters."

Already, Ribadu has had to contend with bad publicity. His agents, in apprehending Mrs Anajemba, a suspected fraudster, were reported to have employed crude methods, reminiscent of the dark days of despotic military rule. As of Tuesday, May 27, Fred Ajudua and Chief Emmanuel Nwude, suspected 419 scammers, had secured court injunctions against their prosecution at a Lagos Federal High Court.

Also, last week, Morris Ibekwe, member, House of Representatives (Imo State), was arrested for alleged involvement in financial and economic crimes. The arrest, said Ribadu, was specifically carried out to ensure that Ibekwe did not attend the inauguration of his colleagues on June 4. The erstwhile Minister of Justice and Attorney-General of the Federation, Mr Godwin Kanu Agabi, inaugurated the 19-member board of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission set up by the Federal Government to fight economic crimes, especially Advanced Fee Fraud.

Mr. Emeka Ifesulike, Mallam Dahiru Ado-Kurawa and Alhaji Abdullahi Odeh Attah make

up the team. Other members of the commission are representatives of the Central Bank of Nigeria; Ministries of Foreign Affairs; Finance and Justice; National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA); National Intelligence Agency (NIA); State Security Service (SSS) and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Others are representatives of National Insurance Commission; Nigeria Postal Services; Nigerian Communications Commission; Nigeria Customs Service; Nigeria Immigration Service; Police Force and Mr Emmanuel Akomaye who is to serve as the director-general and Head of Administration.

A joint task force called the National Committee on Financial Crime and headed by Inspector General of Police, Mr. Tafa Balogun, has, however, been set-up to fight all aspects of financial crimes especially Advance Fee Fraud otherwise known as 419.

Speaking at a news conference to herald the second national seminar on economic crimes, Dr. Shamsudeen Usman, a deputy governor at the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) stated that business outfits in the US had been alerted on 17 countries blacklisted, of which Nigeria is one.

He disclosed that the warning was issued by the financial crimes enforcement network, an arm of the US treasury, which urged the outfits to be careful when dealing with any businesses originating from Nigeria.

He also said in the drive against financial crimes, the bank examination department of the CBN, had directed local banks to "do more of know your customers procedure", in a bid to stem the wave of economic crimes originating from the country, with the CBN setting up a committee, already charged with "checking these 419 people. We have sent out a search light to the banks that if a 419 transaction is successfully completed through any bank and we investigate and find out that the bank was careless in not stopping that transaction, that bank would pay the money."

2 JUN 2003

From The News, a Nigerian newspaper:

Running Them Scared

Ebelo Goodluck

The crackdown on advance fee fraudsters has many barons on the run.

Representative Maurice Ibekwe had come to love the safety Abuja provides.

That safety was almost shattered last week when detectives of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, came calling in the wee hours of Wednesday. The team had taken up positions round his Apo Village residence and were about knocking on the door when a call came through halting the operation. Their quarry, the detectives were told, was in his Okigwe North constituency tidying up political matters. The security freak that he is, Ibekwe was worried that he had been traced to his Okwelle hometown. So he called a far more influential politician in Abuja to intervene.

Ibekwe, also known as Dr. Anthony O. Israel, was told the decision to arrest him was a grievous error and had been rescinded. But the detectives only withdrew to re-organise a far more sophisticated way of tailing their quarry. And when the Senate finally passed the new Money Laundering Act, they closed in on him. But he escaped. The alleged crime that is finally catching up with Maurice Ibekwe is buried deep in the political and economic uncertainties thrown up towards the end of Babangida's reign.

Dr. Anthony O. Israel's references were impeccable. So were the circumstances he set out in the business proposal he marked "urgent." As accountant general in the defunct Ministry of Transport and Aviation, he had contacted Munch Klaus, the head of Muench Systemorganisation - a German electronics company to do an existing delivery contract for standard computers, monitors, accessories, radar systems and landing lights for the Abuja International Airport. A local company awarded the contract had failed to carry it out. The ministry was in a hurry to pay 30 per cent of the \$30m contract before December 1992 because of political changes that could affect the award of the contract.

Dr. Israel had some partners, one Mr. Bello Moussa who was a director general of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Dr. (Mrs.) Louisa Gambo of the foreign exchange department of the same bank and one Idris who was described as secretary of state. When Klaus arrived Nigeria through Cotonou around 1993, he was lodged in a guest house allegedly owed by Dr. Anthony Israel who was also called prince. He was chauffeured round Lagos in a Mercedes with siren. He gave his host the \$30,000 and DM 75,000 before they drove in to Lagos from Cotonou because he was told the money would be seized by customs at the checkpoints.

At Nicon Hilton, Abuja he parted with another \$100,000 as security payment for (our) common future business connection." He paid another \$200, 000 fee to get the government release the contract. By the time Dr. Israel was through with Klaus, he had lost everything. The matter was reported to the Anti-fraud unit of the police in 1995. The police was able to establish the identity of Dr. Anthony Israel. He is Maurice Ibekwe who today has been re-elected to the House of Representatives on the platform of the People's Democratic Party, PDP. Back in 1997, the federal director of prosecutions had recommended that Ibekwe and his accomplice should be arrested but the police lacked the will. By 1999, Ibekwe had run a well-funded campaign and got elected into the House. In the House, he was violently pro-Na'Abba, always reacting violently to any attempt to impeach the out-going speaker.

Perhaps, to ensure that the police never get tempted to dust the file of his alleged crime, he got appointed chairman of the sub-committee on Police Affairs and successfully kept the lid on the police until the coming of the EFCC Rep. Ibekwe is not the only one watching from his shoulders. Amaka "Rose" Anajemba has been on the run since she abandoned her GRA Enugu residence and her kids when detectives came calling last week. Rotund and fair complexioned, with a birthmark on her upper lip that enhances her beauty, the Anajemba widow is a study in placidity. But her calm exterior hides a ruthless business mind. Sample: in a culture extremely disdainful of women inheriting anything, Amaka sits on billions of naira since her husband's death with the in-laws unable to exert the traditional rights on their son's estate. That may be because, Amaka was at the heart of the greatest 419 hit in Nigeria's history of the Advance Fee Fraud - a \$254 million scam.

The deadly trio of Amaka, Christian, her late husband, and Emmanuel Nwude were introduced to Nelson Sakaguchi, a director of a Brazilian bank, Banco Noereste by whistle blower, Dr. Ukeh. The Anajembas and Nwude, who posed as Rafindadi Rasheed and Paul Ogwuma, the CBN governor under Abacha and Mrs. Agbakoba had told the Brazilian banker they had won a contract to build the Abuja airport.

Dr. Ukeh, the whistle blower has since been arrested because the police

suspected he was part of the theft and only reported the matter because he was schemed out. He contested the last gubernatorial election under the Justice Party in Enugu State and people there seem to remember his exotic cars than any campaign issue.

Christian Ikechukwu Anajemba died just after he became a millionaire in dollar terms. The widow, TheNEWS learnt, has shown incredible talent for business. In the real estate sector market, she is said to have developed a very lucrative business in the major cities of Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt and Enugu. Her latest structure still under construction along Cooper Road, Ikoyi is block of luxury flats valued at over N385 million. She was said to have made an 80 per cent down payment to the construction firm.

Detectives who thought they had her in the bag two Sundays ago were shocked she slipped through their cordon. Not the lure of the three kids she abandoned has brought her out of her hiding. And sources close to the team believed she has always been on the move with good disguises.

In Enugu, when the locals drool over Emmanuel Nwude's wealth they recall an incident of dubious origin. A presidential convoy driving through Enugu had come to a stop at the instructions of the president. The president came down and pointed at a massive project and complained aloud why his minister had not completed the project. Shocked aides were said to have told Mr.

President that it was not a federal project but the house of Emmanuel Nwude-Odinigwe. (The president they said was OBJ and the aides, Governor Nnamani's. More unreal than true, it however underscores Emmanuel Nwude's wealth and predilection for the grandiose. Either in Enugu, Lagos or Abuja, Emma Nwude lives in implausible wealth. His marble high rise in Apongbon serves as the headquarters of his conglomerate.

Nwude has not sought any elective office and is said not to welcome any appointment. But this magazine learnt he understands how power works to protect wealth. He is said to have contributed millions of naira in the last campaign season especially to the PDP.

Perhaps it was because of this that he was said to have been shocked and angry at the efficiency of the EFCC officers coming for him at the break of day. His decision to send an attorney to negotiate a surrender was said to have been because his friends have not been forthcoming on protection he has taken for granted.

There is a long list of scammers that detectives are hot on their trail. A group of scammers, led by one Ohams Chikelu was apprehended in 1995 by the police in a sting operation. They had successfully duped a German businessman. The Germans contacted Frieda Sprinier-Beck who had relocated to Nigeria to pose as a relation of the duped Germans. They met her in her hotel room in Eko hotel and were arrested by detectives who were waiting for them in the toilet. Chikelu jumped bail and is said to have left Lagos but still in the country.

Also Gerhard Buelau lost \$550,000 to another syndicate of Ibrahim Ali, Dr.Abdullah Williams and Dr. Douglas.

Another German, Hans-Peter Kloss lost \$231,120,000 to one Francis Olisah.

Operatives of EFCC would not say if Chikelu, Abdullah and Olisah were the real names of the fraudsters. But they said it was a matter of weeks before

the suspects are rounded up.

The Senate's scrapping of the old and weak Money Laundering Decree and the passing of the new Money Laundering Act is supposed to give teeth to the operation of the commission. But what remains to be seen is how deep the commission could bite.

With reporting by Uba Aham, Desmond Utomwem and Emeka Ibemere.

419 Coalition: All excellent news, we await the Convictions of the 419ers, the seizures of their assets at home and abroad, and the repatriation of the stolen funds to the victims.

2 JUN 2003

From The News, a Nigerian newspaper:

Making Fool of Fraudsters

Oluokun Ayorinde
Lagos

Just as many Nigerians have gained notoriety all over the world as merciless conmen who deprive their victims of their savings and leave them in the cold without caring a hoot, some foreigners have also been wise enough not to get hoodwinked. Such people have not allowed greed and the desire to reap where they did not sow cloud their sense of judgment. For them, beating the conmen at their own game is a favourite pastime.

Consider the case of Hussam A. Al-Abed, a journalist based in Jordan and also the international correspondent of Bankersonline, a web based magazine.

With 10 E-mail addresses, Al-Abed is a good prospect for "419iners," and as he himself confessed, he received an average of 30-50 "419" fraud mail on weekly basis. He even now touts himself as a "white collar crime consultant," based on the experience he has garnered in dealing with these fraudsters.

Recently, Al-Abed posted on Bankersonline website the details of a failed attempt by a Nigerian fraudster to involve him in a scam. According to him, the Nigerian fraudster had presented himself as one Dr. Daniel Ajayi, branch manager, Ecobank International, Idumota branch, Lagos.

The proposal presented to Al-Abed is typical of most conmen stories: a certain Mr. Chris Bohen, a Chinese who has a deposit of \$25 million in his bank had died intestate in a plane accident and did not name anybody as his next of kin in the bank documents. Meanwhile his \$25 million had been in the bank's vault gathering interests. It was, according to the conman, in danger of being reverted to "corrupt Nigerian government officials, if nobody shows up to claim the money at the end of five years." And Al-Abed, played along with the name, "Ninorta" The fraudster asked the journalist to send his name, and addresses to the bank's branch manager who would then with the help of forged documents present "Ninorta" as a relation of the deceased Chinese millionaire. The so-called manager will also help Ninorta repatriate the funds to an international account that is to be opened by Ninorta. For his "troubles," Ninorta will be given 25 per cent of the repatriated funds, while the fake bank manager will get 70 per cent and five per cent will be for other legal expenses.

But Al-Abed alias Ninorta knows there is no money to be repatriated. Indeed, he immediately identified the proposal as a "traditional 419 offer." Nevertheless, he decided to play the fool and between Saturday, 18 January 2003 and Saturday 1 February 2003 when he decided to stop playing the fool, both men had exchanged a total of 14 mail between them.

While Dr. Ajayi urged haste and confidentiality in the transaction in his mail, and consistently demanded for the phone numbers and other personal details of Ninorta, Ninorta, on the other hand obviously taking the whole transaction as a game kept asking irrelevant questions intended, to make a fool out of the conman. He was careful enough not to supply the required information.

Al-Abed eventually got to the stage of addressing his Nigerian game, (for that is what he has turned the Nigerian conman into) "Jaja Ibon Deek," an Arabic phrase which when translated means "Mr. Chicken, son of a Rooster." The journalist even asked Jaja if he could consult his lawyer on the issue.

Although he suspected being taken for a ride, the conman, Daniel Ajayi, did not relent.

But he seemed to at last get really pissed off when Ninorta, on announcing his decision to personally visit the country in a letter laced with a lot of sarcasm, asked him to provide answers to some 15 questions bothering on such things as the availability of striptease Night Clubs in Nigeria, the AIDS rate and whether Nigerian hotels can cater for his nagging mother-in-law.

To Daniel Ajayi, he has had it, it's either this victim decides to play ball or he has to look for another victim and this he stated in unmistakable terms in his mail to Ninorta. Al-Abed too seemed to have had his thrills making a fool out of this Nigerian conman. The journalist waved off the phony business proposal as "good riddance to rubbish." And Al-Abed reported his experience with the conman; "Never con a conman?" Well, why not? It's fun, and all it needs is a sarcastic tone and some meaningless phrases and questions that will let them bite their tongues and think one thousand times before even approaching you again with their stupid chance of a life time offers." Al-Abed is however not the only one who derives pleasures from making fools out of fraudsters. A 60 year old retired major, Owen Hotts, has received so many scam e-mails that he is pissed off with the similarity in the plots of their stories. He also enjoys making fools out of the fraudsters.

In a recent instance, Owen received a scam mail from one Lucky Garbi in Zimbabwe in which he was asked to help facilitate the movement of a box containing \$5.8 million family fortune from South Africa to Netherlands. The treasure according to Garbi, (the fraudster) belonged to his father who was recently murdered in Zimbabwe in the crisis generated by the land reform programme of President Robert Mugabe. Garbi, who informed Hotts that his family members are now refugees in Netherlands, told the retired major that his help is needed because the Netherlands law forbids refugees from opening bank accounts. The retired major will therefore be required not only to help move the money to Netherlands, but also to help open an account where the money will be deposited for his 10 per cent share.

And just like Al-Abed, Major Hotts played along or pretended to play along but was also careful enough not to give the fraudster information about his residential address and other personal details.

But like all fraudsters, Lucky Garbi would not give up. Thinking he can get the retired major more interested in the deal by providing him with documents, he faxed a certificate of Deposit & Power of Attorney to Major Hotts on 28 April 2003. When the retired major duly acknowledged the receipt of the document, Lucky was further convinced that his victim would eventually do his bidding.

It's therefore not a surprise when he got a "company" to fax a demand of 12,530 Euros to the major as administration, handling and security charges to be borne by the major as part of the deal. Hotts who had agreed to travel to Netherlands was expected to bring the money with him.

But this is the ultimate decoy, for Major Hotts had no plans of travelling to Netherlands or making any such payment. When Lucky went to receive him at the airport, he didn't meet Hott. In an e-mail Hotts rubbed in the salt, asking Lucky to have a name change. That was when it dawned on Lucky Garbi that he had been beaten in his own game.

419 Coalition: Here is a link from our "Fighters" section to Hussam Al-Abed's material:

[BankersOnline.com\(US\)](http://BankersOnline.com(US))

2 JUN 2003

From the Daily Independent, a Nigerian newspaper:

Ajudua, Ibekwe, Ade Bendel, others remanded in prison

By Folorunso Ogunekun,

Justices Joseph Oyewole and Mrs. Kuburat Kekere-Ekun of the Ikeja High Courts, on Friday in their separate courts at different times ordered that Fredrick Chijindu Ajudua; a one-time chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Police Affairs, Messrs Maurice Ibekwe, Olufemi Ayeni; Alumile Adedeji (a.k.a Ade Bendel); Dr. Ibrahim Ahmed and Charles Ovie should be remanded in Ikoyi prisons until June 10 and 13 respectively.

The orders were made sequel to the arraignment of the accused persons before the judges over allegations of Advanced Fee Fraud, otherwise known as "419". Ajudua and Charles Ovie were arraigned before Justice Oyewole, while Morris Ibekwe, Olufemi Ayeni and Ahmed were docked before Justice Kekere-Ekun.

The state prosecutor, Mr. Sule Hassan told the court that Ajudua and Charles Ovie, on or about May 19, 1999 in Lagos within the Ikeja Judicial Division conspired to commit felony to wit money by false pretences.

Hassan said that on the said date, they allegedly collected US \$1,698,338 (N216million), from one German, Mr. Remmy Hendrick Luigi Cima, by pretending that the said money represented sundry payments to various government officials for the payment of US \$18,000,000 (about N2.286 billion) on contract FMA/PED/3040/X-92 dated May 30, 1999.

Morris Ibekwe, who hails from Imo State was alleged to have conspired with one Augunos Okoro still at large on or about October 13, 1992 to obtain money by false pretences at Ire Akari Estate, Isolo Lagos. The second count alleged that Ibekwe, on or about November 17, 1992 at Ire Akari Estate forged a letter numbered FMT&AV/PEP/5152/82 purported to have been written by the Federal Ministry of Aviation with intent to defraud.

The third, fourth, fifth and six count charges stated that Ibekwe also forged and altered a certificate of Incorporation RC No 103035 purported to have been issued by the Corporate Affairs Commission and a letter No FTFO (CBN)/D/1/693 purported to have been written by the Federal Task office, Central Bank of Nigeria, Tinubu Square, Lagos. The eight and ninth counts accused, Ibekwe and his accomplice (at large), of obtaining under false pretences the sum of US \$330,000 (N41,910,000) and DM75,000 (N4.02million) purporting to pay the sum to various government officials for a US \$30million (N3,81 billion) contract payment.

Ayeni and Alumile Adedeji (a.k.a Ade Bendel) were accused to have obtained US \$500,000 (N64million) from one Alli Abdel-Ayim Attia under various false pretences.

All the accused pleaded not guilty to the charges which were contrary to Section 8(a) and 1(3) of the Advance Fee Fraud and Other Related Offences No 13 of 1995 amended by Decree No 62 of 1999. And application for bail filed by all the accused persons counsel, Messrs George Onwubuya and Wale Adeosun were refused by the courts and were subsequently ordered to be remanded in prison custody.

Investigation revealed that Fred Ajudua was detained at the Ikoyi prisons between 1994 and 1998 over allegation to have defrauded one German Woman, Mrs. Spring Beckhingham of multi-million dollars. In addition, Ajudua has criminal cases hanging over his head at Ikeja and Lagos High courts, and Igbosere Magistrates court.

While Ade Bendel had been detained at various police stations over 419 allegation. All the accused persons were handcuffed amidst tight military police escort.

1 JUN 2003

From the Guardian, a Nigerian newspaper:

Fraud: Ibekwe Gets INEC's Nod As Kolade Urges Sanctions For Victims

BY ADELEKE ADESERI AND CHARLES OGUGBUAJA (OWERRI)

IN what may be termed a capricious display of paradox, while the Nigerian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Dr Christopher Kolade, was busy at a seminar in London, making frantic calls for the prosecution of foreign victims of advanced fee fraud (419), a re-elected Nigerian law maker, Mr. Maurice Ibekwe, with other alleged kingpins of the crime, was being arraigned before a Lagos High Court for alleged financial crimes.

Ibekwe, a Federal House of Representatives member representing Okigwe North, who was arrested just as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was concluding plans to issue Certificate of Return to re-elected members of the House of Representative, was whisked by security operatives of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) on Wednesday for allegedly defrauding Munch Klause, a German \$300,000 and DM75,00.

However, despite Ibekwe's arrest, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) said it will still issue him with Certificate of Return.

Ibekwe's arrest according to media report on Friday was executed to possibly prevent him from been inaugurated into office.

Speaking exclusively to The Guardian about 6 pm on Friday, shortly after presenting the Certificate of Return to seven out of the 10 elected members of the Federal House of Representatives in the state, the national

commissioner of the INEC in charge of Imo, Abia and Ebonyi States, Mr. Ishmael Igbani, stated at the INEC headquarters, Orlu Road Secretariat, Owerri that the commission would not succumb to any newspaper reports that the legislator was arrested by security operatives and thereby deny him of the certificate.

He remarked that the court is the only competent institution that can give the commission such an order not to issue the certificate to Mr. Ibekwe.

Meanwhile, in an address at a seminar on "Nigeria as a Victim of Fraud" organised by the British Nigerian Law Forum in London, Kolade argued that prosecution of '419' foreign collaborators would go a long way towards eradicating the scam.

"When people are aware of the legal implication of responding to unsolicited mails hinting at defrauding governments and stay away from it, the perpetrators would lose their larger audience", he stressed.

Kolade added "If people are not too gullible and so greedy, they would expect to reap where they did not sow. It takes two to tango."

The Nigeria envoy pointed out that the menace posed by advance fee fraud and other financial crimes had assumed wide dimension that the international community must cooperate and work together to eradicate it.

"Fraud has become a virtual crime that knows no boundary and respects no jurisdiction; it is global and requires a global approach," he said, lamenting that Nigeria and Nigerians "have been receiving unenviable publicity from the international community over varying degrees and forms of criminal activities, particularly fraud."

The Nigerian government had been responding to the menace that had given the country undeserved notoriety by enacting laws such as decrees 67 of 1992 and 13 of 1995 which established the presidential task force and the police special fraud unit respectively, he said.

Kolade disclosed that between 1993 and 2001, the special fraud unit had treated 1,830 cases, arrested 1,9958 persons, recovered N110 million, \$12.6 million, DM870,000, £48,882, and recovered property estimated at N163 million.

The National Commission for Financial Crimes, which succeeded the Special Fraud Unit, had entered into partnership with UK's national crime intelligence service which curbed unsolicited mails, as well as prosecution and conviction of fraudsters in Nigeria and Britain.

The government recently enacted a legislation which meets the requirement of the financial action task force, which he said, demonstrated Nigeria's commitment to fight money laundering and all forms of financial crimes.

Kolade's address was read by Mr. Akin Fayomi, minister and head of trade and investment at the Nigeria High Commission.

On Maurice Ibekwe, the INEC commissioner, Igbani submitted: "Being a member of the National Assembly does not mean that INEC will go and disqualify him (Ibekwe). INEC is to conduct elections and declare a winner. What happens after that, if he committed an offence he has to face the law and must be judged properly.

"His name is on my list (pointing on the list). We have a certificate for him but he was not present. So since he is not present, if he has to collect this certificate he will come to Abuja and collect it.

"If the law court says don't issue we are law abiding citizens, but for the elections, the electoral act says we must. That's why I have come here. Whatever happens after that, I don't know. If he were here I would have given him a certificate".

Igbani continued: "We don't publish things we read on newspapers. We publish things concerning the elections and how the people won. It is the people that decide those who win. We are here today to give certificate to those who won. We are not here to give certificate to whatever happened in my newspapers. Thank you," Igbani said.

Igbani said he issued them the certificates in compliance with Section 66 of Electoral Act 2002 and apologized for the seven-week delay in performing that.

He commended the press for the objective role in covering the election, adding that the foreign observers were not competent to issue reports of elections instead of observing only.

He maintained that no elections in the entire world was perfect, adding that what happened in Florida and some parts of the United States of America would vindicate his argument of imperfection in elections, even in developed democracies.

Responding on behalf of other recipients Chief Osita Izunaso said they were poised to give quality representation that would make both the executive and legislature and improve the lives of the people.

Izunaso thanked the INEC for conducting elections, adding that electorate played pivotal roles.

419 Coalition Note: Apparently someone has forgotten to inform Kayode, the Nigerian Ambassador to UK, that the victims as criminals approach he advocates has been deadlier than a doornail for many years. He also knows little about 419 apparently, or he would not be dragging out that silly "it takes two to tango" old saw, as in many types of 419 it does indeed take only one to tango. The man needs to get someone to write him some new material :) :)

31 MAY 2003

From the Nigerian newspaper the Vanguard:

Hon Ibekwe, Ajudua, Ade Bendel arraigned

By Innocent Anaba

House of Representatives member, Mr Morris Ibekwe alongside Lagos Lawyer, Fred Ajudua and Olumide Adedeji (aka Ade Bendel) were yesterday arraigned before an Ikeja High Court sitting in Lagos, charged with obtaining money under false pretence (419) and Forgery.

Meanwhile, Mr Ibekwe who said that he has been without food or water and has been

tortured in detention, since his arrest four days ago from his Apo Legislative quarters in Abuja maintained that his arraignment was politically motivated.

Mr Ibekwe who had eight count charges preferred against him, was refused bail by the presiding judge in the matter, Justice Kekere-Ekun, who directed the accused counsel, Mr George Onwubuya to formally file an application for bail and depose to an affidavit, canvassing the reason he had adduced earlier for the bail. The court adjourned the matter till June 10. 2003.

Similarly, Olumide Adedeji who had two count charges of obtaining money under false pretense, was also refused bail by the same judge, who insisted that a formal bail application should be filed, with an affidavit in support of the motion and adjourned the matter till June 13, 2003. Justice Joseph Oyewale, before whom Lagos Lawyer, Fred Ajudua was arraigned on a two count charge of felony and obtaining money under false pretense was also refused to grant Aguda bail insisting that a formal motion and affidavit should be filed, while further hearing on the matter was adjourned till June 17, 2003.

The accuse persons were brought to court at about 12.09pm in a pick-up Black Maria, with registration number NFF 3821B and a bus with registration number FG 400 A. The accused persons who alighted from the Black Maria were ushered into the court at about 12.15pm. As Mr Ibekwe entered the court, he directed his attention to the press, showing his handcuffed hands, saying "I have been on detention for the past 72 hours. I have been handcuffed for the past four days."

"When I beg for food, they will not give me, a federal legislator. Look at my back, I have been sleeping on the floor. I am asthmatic and I was just discharged from the hospital. I don't know why I was brought here. How can I be detained under Decree 2. My opponents are using them and nothing more."

When Fred Ajudua was ushered into the court, he reacted angrily to the attempt by an official of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to stop journalist from speaking to the accused persons, saying "why should I not talk to the press, you people (EFCC) spoke to the press on the whole matter. You can't stop me from talking to the press. You were the first people that spoke to the press."

Olumide Adedeji (aka Ade Bendel) narrating his ordeal said "I have been in detention for the past 20 days. I was not told why I was arrested and I have not been told why I was arrested."

Counsel to all the accused persons, during the arraignment complained that they were not served with the charges before the arraignment as provided by the relevant laws, noting that the commission was in a hurry to arraigned the accuse persons.

419 Coalition: It has come to our attention that Fred Ajudua is allegedly responsible for 419ing counter-419 activist Frieda Springer-Beck, among many others.

31 MAY 2003

Here is the Reuters take on the recent 419 arrests in Nigeria:

Nigerian fraud scam alleged swindlers in court

LAGOS, May 31 (Reuters) - Three people have been charged in a Nigerian court with defrauding foreigners of over \$2 million in a move which authorities said signals the start of a crackdown on a notorious international junk-mail scam.

The so-called "419" scam, named after the article in the country's criminal code outlawing it, has become so successful that campaigners say it is now the third to fifth largest foreign exchange earner in Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation.

Nuhu Ribadu, the Chairman of Nigeria's newly created Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), told Reuters the court cases, which are being prosecuted by the EFCC, are only the beginning of its fight against the scam.

"We are trying to bring all of them to justice...including highly placed members of society," he said. "Some of them are outside the country. We will go after them. We want to see that there is no haven for them anywhere in the world."

Campaigners have for years accused Nigerian authorities of not doing enough to fight the 20-year-old con act, which has advanced from mass-mailing methods to junk e-mail distribution.

The scam swindles hundreds of millions of dollars every year from people across the world, who respond to junk e-mails promising them a share of non-existent fortunes.

The commission has arrested 20 people so far -- including the three already charged -- and investigations are being carried out overseas in cooperation with Interpol, he said.

One of the three charged was Nigerian businessman Fred Ajudua, who was arrested by the EFCC two weeks ago and accused of defrauding a Dutchman of \$1.7 million.

"As far as we are concerned he does not know anything about this allegation," said Ajudua's lawyer, Olalekan Ojo.

An investigator from the commission said Ajudua had promised the Dutchman \$36 million from Nigeria, which had supposedly been put aside by the aviation ministry after over-invoicing for a contract.

The Dutchman said in an affidavit seen by Reuters that he was asked to pay a series of bribes and fees in order to get the money transferred into his bank account, but the money never arrived.

419 Coalition comment: We say, go get 'em Mr. Ribadu, more grease to your elbow!

31 MAY 2003

For those who read Dutch, here is a piece from the news concerning 5 419ers convicted in Amsterdam last week, sent in by an associate of ours in Holland:

Rechter doet uitspraak Nigeriaanse e-mailoplichters

AMSTERDAM - Er is al veel over de 'Nigerian Money Scam' gesproken en geschreven. Ondanks de aanhouding van een vijftal verdachten, blijven de frauduleuze e-mailtjes mailboxen teisteren. Het vijftal wordt verdacht van oplichterij, witwassen en deelname van een criminele organisatie. Op woensdag 28 mei 2003 doet de Amsterdamse rechter uitspraak in het zogenoemde 'dossier Bliksem'.

Het is niet zo gek dat er nog steeds e-mailtjes binnenkomen van 'arme, zielige, rijke' staatsmannen (of andere geloofwaardige personen) die tegen een ruime vergoeding hun vermogen bij u op bankrekening willen zetten. Slechts vijf personen zijn tot nu toe gearresteerd. De groep oplichters is echter vele malen groter. Veelal opereren ze vanuit Amsterdam.

Degenen die op het aanbod per mail ingaan, moeten eerst zelf over de brug komen. Voor het voldoen van administratieve kosten, of om een speciale chemische vloeistof te bekostigen om de veiligheidslogo's op de bankbiljetten te kunnen verwijderen.

Fraude

Een lezeres van NU.nl heeft al enige tijd contact met een van de oplichters: "Ik gooide in eerste instantie het mailtje met de hulpaanvraag weg, maar haalde het terug en besloot het spelletje mee te spelen." De lezeres Jacqueline kreeg zo'n soort mailtje.

Ze vraagt een internationale bank-accountnummer aan bij de Rabobank. En geeft deze door aan haar oplichter Kenny. Kenny is verschrikkelijk blij met haar banknummer: "Jacqueline, you are part of my freedom and it will be soforever hence it will always be celebrated as an annivassery. I feel so much involved Jacqueline, even with the dogs and cats. I will be waiting for your always encouraging mail, love Kenny". Uit voorzorg heeft de lezeres er wel voor gezorgd dat er maar 20 eurocent op haar rekening staat...

In de mail vertelt oplichter Kenny dat zijn bank contact met Jacqueline zal opnemen. Een paar dagen later krijgt Jacqueline een fax van een bank uit Abidjan.

"Ik stuur de fax terug met ingevuld formulier. Een paar dagen later word ik gebeld door de bank dat de fax goed is doorgekomen en dat zij ermee aan de slag gaan." Weer een dag later krijg ik opnieuw een fax, maar dan van een advocatenkantoor in Abidjan. Ik hoef maar 4800 dollar te betalen en als ik dat niet kan betalen, dan kan ik in Ivoorkust een lening afsluiten."

"Ik mail de advocatenkantoor weer terug en vraag om geloofsbrieven om aan te tonen of hij wel advocaat is. Direct krijg ik telefoon van die advocaat, dat hij begrip heeft voor mijn vraag en hij adviseert mij om zelf een advocaat in Nederland in te schakelen en dat die contact met hem opneemt en dat hij "zijn collega" alle officiële stukken e.d. toe wil faxen of mailen."

"Als ik in Nederland op zoek ga naar een advocaat loop ik tegen dichte deuren aan. Weinig advocatenkantoren willen meewerken. Eentje belt terug en vermoed dat het fraude is. Maar als ik een paar duizend dollar vooruit betaal, willen zij ter plekke wel polshoogte nemen. Jahoor, zover was ik zelf ook al."

Wanhopig

Ondertussen wordt Kenny behoorlijk wanhopig: "Please Jacqueline, if it warrants calling the bank today I want you to do just that and know from the every details of when they will do the transfer. I hate the way I live now. But what can a poor boy do. I know that is the world ups and down, today on the table, tomorrow on the ground. But only God knows my innocence because I do not deserve all this torments. Just me alone, because it hurts that it burns my heart and made me to shed dry tears when I think of my beloved parents."

Jacqueline gaat er niet meer op in.

Een hoogleraar uit Zwitserland is wel wat stapjes te ver gegaan. De Zwisterse professor vloog van Bern naar Amsterdam. Hij ging met twee verschillende oplichtersgroepen in zee en dacht met zijn vermeende verdiensten bij de ene groep de deal met de andere

te kunnen financieren. Het resultaat was twee aangenaide oren. De prof had het grootste deel van het geld dat hij gebruikte van vrienden geleend.

Beide groepen bedienden zich van de vloeistof-truc. Een zeer exclusief en peperduur goedje. De prof moest er bij de ene groep niet minder dan 350.000 dollar voor neertellen, bij de andere 'slechts' 65.000 dollar. De verdachten demonstreerden de werking ervan en stuurden de hoogleraar met een schoongemaakt dollarbiljet naar een wisselkantoor. De stof had gewerkt, want het kantoor wisselde het probleemloos.

Het begon de professor pas te dagen dat hij zich grof liet uitkleden toen hij, alleen in een Amsterdamse hotelkamer, zelf met een fles biljetreinigingschemicaliën aan de slag moest. Volgens instructies had hij de fles eerst in de leeggemaakte minibar geplaatst, om hem daar na een tijdje weer voorzichtig uit te halen en op een tafel op kamertemperatuur te laten komen. Na een minuut of veertig explodeerde de fles met kracht - het schuim zat tot op het plafond.

31 MAY 2003

From ThisDay, a Nigerian newspaper:

Morris Ibekwe, Ajudua Docked over Advance Fee Fraud

By Victor Efeizomor

The Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) has finally arraigned a House of Representatives member, Honourable Morris Ibekwe, representing Okigwe North constituency, in Imo State and Barrister Fred Ajudua, before an Ikeja High Court over advance fee fraud, a.k.a '419'.

The Federal Government recently inaugurated the EFCC commission to arrest and prosecute 419 suspects whose activities have given Nigeria a bad image internationally.

The commission headed by Nuhu Ribadu, Assistant Commissioner of Police and son of Nigeria's first Minister of Defence, had vowed to crack down on Nigerians who are involved in 419.

It has arrested suspected notable 419 kingpins like Fred Ajudua, Maurice Ibekwe and Ade-Bendel and has confiscated some of their state-of-the-art cars.

Ibekwe, who is also the chairman of House Security Committee and the two others were brought to the court at about 12 noon with a small pick-up black maria with registration number NPF 382B escorted by a Mercedes Benz with registration number FG400. They were in sober mood as they were brought during the heavy downpour.

Ajudua who was arraigned on two count charge before justice Joseph Olubunmi Oyewole, pleaded not guilty to the charges. The charges read: "Fred Drinjinju Ajudua (m) and Charles Orie on or about the 19th of May 1999 in Lagos within the Ikeja judicial division conspired to commit felony to wit to section 8(a) and 1(3) of the advance fee fraud and other fraud related offence, decree No. 13 of 1995 as amended by Decree 62 of 1999."

He was also charged to have obtained money by fake pretense between July 30, 1999 and February 2000 with the intent to defraud, obtained the sum of US \$1,698,330 from Rememy Hendrick Luigi Cima a German national.

30 MAY 2003

From BBC World News:

Nigerian MP on fraud charges

Ibekwe is the first legislator arrested for financial crimes

A member of Nigeria's House of Representatives has appeared in court, charged with conning a German businessman out of \$350,000.

Morris Ibekwe was arrested on Wednesday by the anti-fraud commission in connection with a so-called "419" scam.

Nigerian conmen have become notorious for duping foreign businessmen into handing over large amounts of money, on the basis that they would receive millions of dollars later on.

President Olusegun Obasanjo, who began his second term on Thursday, has promised to fight corruption but was criticised for not doing enough in his first term.

Re-elected

Nigeria is routinely ranked among the world's most corrupt countries by watchdog Transparency International.

Mr Ibekwe was remanded in custody, along with three other suspects, by a court in Lagos.

The BBC's Bala Ibrahim in Lagos says Mr Ibekwe is the first legislator to be arrested for financial crimes since the return of civilian government in 1999.

He was re-elected as a ruling People's Democratic Party Representative from the southern Imo State in last month's parliamentary elections.

Police sources told Nigeria's Guardian newspaper that he was arrested to stop him taking part in the inauguration of the new legislature.

He allegedly obtained "the sum of \$300,000 and 75,000 deutschmarks (\$45,000) under false pretence from one Munch Klause, a German national," said a statement from the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission.

419 Coalition Comment: Here is the BBC's take on the story reported by ThisDay immediately below. We say again that 419 Coalition finds these developments to be encouraging news and hopes that Nigeria improves on its convictions for 419 total of only 22 since 1993. We also hope that the monies stolen by 419ers are promptly repatriated in something approaching the massive amounts in which they were stolen. The URL of this piece, for as long as it lasts, is: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2950696.stm>

30 MAY 2003

From ThisDay, a Nigerian newspaper:

419: House Member, Ibekwe, Arrested

To be docked for obtaining \$.3m under false pretences

By Joseph Ushigiale

Operatives of the newly constituted Economic and Financial Crimes Commission(EFCC) have arrested a House of Representatives member, Hon. Maurice Ibekwe, for allegedly obtaining \$300,000 and 75,000DM under false pretences.

A release signed by the chairman of the commission, Alhaji Nuhu Ribadu, and made available to THISDAY yesterday stated that "the re-elected member of the House of Representatives, Hon. Maurice Ibekwe from Imo State, has been arrested by operatives of the commission".

According to the commission, Ibekwe was arrested "for allegedly obtaining the sum of three hundred thousand dollars (US\$300,000) and seventy five thousand Dutch Mark (75,000 DM) under false pretences from one Munch Klause, a German national and head of Munch Systemorganisation Company, Germany."

Ibekwe, who was arrested last Wednesday, in his Apo Village residence, Abuja, will, according to the commission, be arraigned alongside other "419 suspects currently in detention, including Fred Ajudua and Alumile Adedeji (alias Ade Bendel) before the Ikeja High Court today.

It will be recalled that only last Tuesday, Nobel Laureate, Prof. Wole Soyinka had challenged President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration to address the growing menace of financial crimes in the country.

Soyinka lamented that the activities of financial crime syndicates have continued to cast a slur on the country's image and have remained one of the major disincentives to foreign capital inflow to the country.

" I want to call on the Obasanjo government to explore all possible avenues to ensure that activities of advanced fee fraudsters are curtailed. It is embarrassing and works against the efforts of genuine Nigerian businessmen and women," he said.

Soyinka stressed that " until government renews its determination to mobilise all its resources to wipe out this menace, its quest for foreign investment will remain an illusion. This is because no single foreigner will be interested in investing in Nigeria under this condition".

He regretted that the possession of the country's international passport abroad, automatically makes the holder an object of laugh and scorn, adding that "foreigners are more concerned with the activities of these people than our democracy and efforts to revamp our economy".

419 Coalition: Encouraging news, and let us hope that Nigeria improves on its conviction total of only 22 for 419 since 1993 when records began being kept and that the monies stolen by 419ers are repatriated in something approaching the large amounts in which they were stolen. To Mr. Soyinka's remarks we say Hear, Hear!

25 MAY 2003

From The News Journal, Delaware US:

Victims of online scams hit hard

More consumers fall prey to con artists

By TERRI SANGINITI
Staff reporter

Jim and Kay Perry said they never had any problems buying or selling cars over the Internet.

So when Jim Perry put his brother's 1938 Packard up for sale in January, he had no reason to be suspicious when a buyer who said he was from another country contacted him to buy the classic car for \$19,500.

What the couple from Hartly did not realize was that they had just been snared in an international scam that costs American consumers \$100 million a year, according to the U.S. Secret Service, which enforces federal laws related to counterfeiting and other financial crimes.

And, by depositing the buyer's \$45,000 cashier's check into their Dover Federal Credit Union account, the Perrys took the first step toward losing the money they had been saving for 17-year-old daughter's college education. The deposit also sparked a battle between the Perrys and the credit union over who is liable for their financial loss.

Secret Service officials say more people are falling for the scam. The con artists typically use fake cashier's checks to purchase items that individuals are selling online. The scammers overpay for the goods and later ask that the difference be returned to them before the victim or bank realizes the cashier's check is counterfeit.

Kay Perry said when the \$45,000 check arrived Jan. 15 by Federal Express, she immediately e-mailed the agent for the buyer, who identified himself as Samuel John, that he sent too much money.

John telephoned the Perrys. Speaking in a thick accent that Kay Perry said was hard to decipher, he apologized repeatedly for the mistake by his client's secretary, she said.

John followed up with an e-mail to the Perrys, saying there was a "simple solution" to the problem, which was to have the over-payment wired back to his client. On Jan. 18, Kay Perry said, he called again to report his client had not yet received the money.

The couple wired the \$24,460 in overpayment to the buyer in the United Arab Emirates. Only later did they learn the cashier's check was worthless. The 1938 Packard never changed hands.

An authentic look

Officials said the counterfeit checks being used are well-crafted fakes. It is difficult to confirm their authenticity without calling the banks whose names are on the checks. Both certified checks and cashier's checks have been used.

Federal Reserve rules require banks to make money from cashier's, certified or teller's checks available within one to five days of deposit. In some cases, that is less time than it takes for the check to be cleared in the financial system, a process in which the check is routed back to the bank of origin, where the check can be verified and an account can be debited. That leaves time for a victim to wire money to a scammer before anyone realizes the check is worthless.

Banking officials say depositors need to find out whether a cashier's check cleared the issuing bank before they use the money.

"It's important to not only ask whether the money is available, but also whether the check has cleared," said David Barr, a Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. spokesman.

The FDIC also recommends that Internet sellers verify a buyer's name, address and

home phone number, and make sure that the check is drawn on a local bank, or one with a local branch.

U.S. Secret Service Agent Robert Sica, who is in charge of the agency's Wilmington office, said the current scam is a new twist on the Nigerian 419 money transferring fraud, named for the section of the Nigerian penal code on fraud.

In that scam, individuals were contacted by unsolicited faxes, e-mails or letters promising a one-third cut of \$60 million if they provide a U.S. bank account number where the money could be deposited. The victim, who thinks he has been singled out for a lucrative proposition, typically deposits \$25,000 into a new account as instructed. While he's waiting for his cut, the scam artist withdraws the money the victim deposited using the account information provided.

In this new scheme, which surfaced late last year, the con artists are posing as potential buyers of high-price merchandise advertised for sale over the Internet.

Sica would not release the number of Delaware residents scammed in this sting. He would not discuss the Perrys' case.

The money consumers send to these scam artists goes through multiple overseas bank accounts until it ends up in Nigeria, where the money is used to finance heroin smuggling, Sica said. The Secret Service has set up an office in Lagos, Nigeria, to work with law enforcement there to combat the problem. But arrests are infrequent and victims are rarely reimbursed for their losses, he said.

"The scope is significant," Sica said. "The problem is following the money."

Lori Sitler, spokeswoman for the state Attorney General's Office, said the office has received 10 complaints in the last eight months.

Sites such as The Classic Car-Nection, where the Perrys listed their vehicle, are posting warnings in bold red text to alert sellers to the scam.

"I am getting extremely upset that so many scams are being perpetrated on innocent enthusiasts of old cars," said Norm Nicholson, who operates the site. "My site is intended to be a big help, not a means of getting ripped off."

Nightmare continues

The state Attorney General's Office issued a consumer alert about the scam March 24. Two days later, the FDIC alerted financial institutions about it.

But the warnings came too late for the Perrys.

Kay Perry said when they deposited the \$45,000 cashier's check Jan. 16 at Dover Federal Credit Union, the teller told them they could conduct business on the check that day.

The credit union would not comment on what the teller told the Perrys, or any other details of the case. The teller, who could not be reached for comment, no longer works at the credit union.

The next day, Jim Perry wired the \$24,460 overpayment to Peter O. Akande in an account in the United Arab Emirates.

It wasn't until Perry tried to use his MAC card on Jan. 23 that he learned there were insufficient funds in the couple's account. The Perrys said the credit union had frozen

their assets Jan. 22 to cover the counterfeit check.

Credit union officials have demanded the Perrys repay about \$17,000 immediately or they say will take legal action, the Perrys said. The amount represents the difference between what the Perrys had in their account and the amount wired to the buyer.

The Perrys contend it is the credit union that should be held liable for the loss.

Kay Perry said the cashier's check, which bore the name of National City Bank of Indiana, was improperly deposited by the teller as a cash transaction, as is noted on the Perrys' bank receipt, rather than as a check.

The Perrys claim their check deposit should have had a hold on it for at least five business days, a procedure they claim is the credit union's policy for handling checks.

A booklet on account information for Dover Federal members says that money from cashier's checks will be made available on the first business day after deposit. However, the booklet, provided to The News Journal by the Perrys, also notes "safeguard exceptions" that may delay availability of some deposits, including a deposit of checks totaling more than \$5,000.

"They will generally be available no later than the 11th business day after the day of your deposit," the booklet says.

The credit union would not comment on its policies.

The Perrys contend the "safeguard" hold on the funds would have prevented them from wiring the money. They said they were never notified by the credit union that the \$45,000 in cash was not in their account.

Holly M. Whitney, an attorney for the Perrys, sent credit union president David Clendaniel a letter Jan. 31 contending the Perrys should be liable for a bounced-check fee only.

Credit union attorney David T. Pryor responded by letter on Feb. 6, saying it was irrelevant whether the check was processed by the teller as cash or a check.

"As sympathetic as the Credit Union may be to the Perrys' predicament, the Perrys as the indorser of the check are legally liable for its dishonor," Pryor wrote.

In a written statement May 12 to The News Journal, credit union president Clendaniel said the credit union "has always treated our members' financial information with the highest confidentiality; therefore, out of respect for our members' privacy, we are not able to comment on specific situations."

Clendaniel said the credit union "has always complied with applicable state and federal regulations in the processing of negotiable instruments, and will continue to do so."

The credit union said it is taking additional steps to ensure members are aware of the scams.

The Perrys have filed a complaint with the National Credit Union Administration, an independent federal agency that charters and supervises federal credit unions. The credit union administration, in turn, asked Dover Federal Credit Union to investigate the complaint the Perrys lodged against them.

A spokesman for Rep. Mike Castle, R-Del., said the congressman is not satisfied with the credit union administration's response. Castle on May 15 sent a letter to the credit

union administration asking the organization to tell him what steps it planned to take to resolve the dispute between the Perrys and the credit union.

'The luckier ones'

Shawn and Jeff Mosch, of Bloomington, Minn., who said they lost \$7,200 in the same car scam as the Perrys, posted their story on the Internet. In the Mosches' case, the agreed-upon price for the car was \$1,600; the purported buyer sent a check for \$8,800, and convinced the Mosches to send back the difference.

The Mosches disputed their liability for the money deducted from their account. Eventually, their bank settled out of court.

"We're one of the luckier ones," Shawn Mosch said.

"Everybody thinks that banks check these certified checks before they deposit them," she said. "The bank told me that I should have called the bank the check was issued from to verify it."

Officials agreed that public awareness is the key to combating scams.

"If you present a check for a large amount, I would speak to a banker to verify there are existing funds in the account so if there is a problem it can be addressed right there," Sica said.

Kay Perry said she will keep on fighting to get her money back.

"We can't afford not to," she said.

PROTECT YOURSELF

Scam Victims United cautions that if you are selling online, be skeptical of offers:

From overseas parties you do not know

To make a purchase by cashier's check (there is no guarantee that a cashier's check is authentic unless the drawn-upon bank verifies that the funds are available)

From buyers sending more than the price of an item

From buyers who are more concerned about return of the overpayment than shipment arrangements

If you are victimized, notify the online site involved to post a warning to other sellers about the scam.

If you have any questions about a suspicious cashier's check, contact the U.S. Secret Service in Wilmington at 573-6188.

CASHIER'S CHECK

A cashier's check is one that is drawn by a bank on itself, authorizing payment to the person or entity named on the check.

A certified check is one that is stamped with the paying bank's certification that the signature on the check is genuine and there are enough funds in the account to cover the check. Once certified, like a cashier's check, it becomes an obligation of the bank and is paid out of bank funds.

Officials said the con artists' counterfeit checks appear to be authentic issues of the banks named on the supposedly official checks.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Federal Trade Commission offers helpful consumer-protection information in the online brochure: Online Scams: Potholes on the Information Superhighway. The FTC also recommends the following resources:

The National Fraud Information Center maintains a toll-free Consumer Assistance Service, 1-800-876-7060, to provide information about telephone or mail solicitations and online scams. They also tell consumers how and where to report fraud and how to file complaints.

The Federal Trade Commission publishes free brochures that explain fraudulent sales practices and how you can avoid them. For a complete list of publications, write for Best Sellers, Public Reference, Federal Trade Commission, Washington, DC 20580; (202) 326-2222; TDD (202) 326-2502.

Reach Terri Sanginiti at 324-2771 or <mailto:tsanginiti@delawareonline.com>

419 Coalition Note: Of course, the standard procedure in reporting 419 matters is to send them to US Secret Service 419 Task Force at 419.fcd@ussf.treas.gov marked Loss or No Loss whichever is the case. And do keep in mind, as the article notes, that BOTH cashier's checks AND certified checks can be fraudulent. Here is the URL of this article for as long as it is good:

<http://www.delawareonline.com/newsjournal/local/2003/05/25victimssofar.html>

23 MAY 2003

From the Nigerian newspaper The Guardian:

GUARDIAN 5/23

'419' and the new sheriff

By Reuben Abati

HIS name is Nuhu Ribadu. He is an assistant commissioner of police. He is in addition, the chairman of the 19-member Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). This body was set up in March to deal specifically with cases of fraud, popularly known as '419', which for years has given Nigeria a bad image in the international community. Ribadu looks young, he is bespectacled, from his photograph in the papers, he seems to sport a lean and hungry look. But this is not about his looks. It is about the assignment that Ribadu has been given. He has spent only about two weeks in office, but the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, according to one newspaper, is "off to a roaring start". What this means, in real terms, is that as soon as Ribadu assumed office, he launched what is now known as "Operation Redemption". This new project is meant to redeem Nigeria's battered image as the principal territory for the promotion and protection of financial crimes.

Previous administrations had tried to address the problem but in part, due to lack of commitment, the war against financial crimes was somewhat half-hearted. Ironically, it was the Abacha administration that showed the highest level of enthusiasm when it sought to give teeth to the Money Laundering and Financial malpractices law. Bank directors were sent to jail. Fraudsters, and drug kingpins were forced out of town, or underground. But the

rot had gone so far, so deep. Across the world, Nigeria became famous as a nation of skilful fraudsters. American General Colin Powell was so astonished with the creativity of the Nigerian fraudsters, he wasted no words when he dismissed the country as a nation of "marvellous scammers". Foreign governments, embassies and the international media soon began to focus on our marvellous group of con-artists, by providing information to prevent their citizens from falling victims in the hands of the "Nigerian professionals".

'419' kingpins belong to an underground network of influence that is characterised by evil, violence and daredevilry. The machine of their trade is oiled by an over-arching determination to get wealthy by any means possible. The morality of their operation is akin to the code of ethics among thieves, assassins and the Mafia. Detailed descriptions of their operations point to a sadism that is beyond human comprehension. These are men and women who have chosen to live dangerously, a step beyond the law. They dare the law. They manipulate the system. The tragedy is that they are good students of human psychology: they play on their quarry's greed. They exploit the insecurity of law enforcement officers. It is such a sophisticated game that ropes in the police, the judiciary and every other level of society: '419' kingpins patronise hotels, they have their own taxi drivers, curiously they provide employment for both the innocent and the guilty. Problem is: fraud is seen as a profession. Subjected to close interrogation, the '419' operator may even mouth an uncanny ideology: namely that he is into fraud as a Robin Hood. He steals from the rich what they have stolen from society; he is also engaged in a form of reparation" many of his victims are unsuspecting foreigners, by robbing them, he insists that he is correcting the injustice of colonialism.

Some of the 419ers are well-educated products of the Nigerian education and social system; there are a few illiterates among them, but the trick of their trade is to make money crookedly, and then seek social legitimacy. This is so to the extent that fraudsters are automatic celebrities in the Nigerian society: they have their praises sung to the highest heavens by hungry musicians; they ride the best cars in town; they live in palatial mansions, surrounded by the most expensive gadgets that money can buy. They even set up businesses and foundations. In recent times, they have been collecting chieftaincy titles, and traditional rulers are always willing to decorate thieves with local garlands. Fraudsters have also found their ways into politics: there are many of our elected representatives whose lives cannot be subjected to the test of a mirror. When fraudsters are not seeking legitimacy in this manner, they marry the most beautiful women in town. They have Godfathers in high places as well. They have men of power and authority on their pay roll. The other irony is that fraudsters are easy to know: they do not even hide their trade. These men and women who spend money for a living are beyond shame. Whereas other human beings toil to make a living, they have opted for the fast lane. They use fax machines, the telephone, the internet, and the banks. They have their own codes of operation. When they identify a target, they swoop on it with the cunning of a fox. Listening to the stories of their victims fills a man of conscience with a curious blend of surprise and excitement. The more celebrated stories include the experience of a Brazilian banker who practically emptied the vault of his employers into the hands of Nigerian con-artists. Or the Egyptian General who transferred his entire life-savings into a dubious account, led on by deceit. Or the rich widow conned into parting with an entire fortune.

The 419 kingpin is ruthless. He is prepared to kill to protect his loot. He is constantly surrounded by the threat of violence. The more successful ones are the role models of the underground world: they have apprentices who while waiting for their own big break, function as part-time robbers or assassins.

When the boy also hits it big, he is required to respect his masters in the trade, and he soon acquires his own apprentices who help to build around him, a cult of influence. The ingenuity of the fraudsters is magical; I assume that it is sustained by sorcery and cynicism. Past governments could not tackle financial crimes because of the extent of its spread. '419' kingpins were apprehended on many occasions, but they always managed to beat the system. They would return soon after to boast, that no man born of a woman, can stop them. One fraudster was once quoted as saying that he is a much better citizen than those who loot the state's treasury.

By August last year, the international community could no longer tolerate Nigeria's attitude towards financial crimes. The International Financial Action Task Force, a Paris-based organ of the G-8 group of industrialised countries issued an ultimatum that Nigerian should strengthen its laws on financial crime, or get blacklisted by the international financial community. The IFATF was concerned about how Nigerian banks are so easily used for money laundering purposes. In yet another development, the World Bank/IMF also declared that the Nigerian financial system is under-developed, shallow and porous. The National Assembly was required to make tougher laws. After an unsuccessful attempt to use this to blackmail the Presidency, the lawmakers eventually passed the laws. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, led by Nuhu Ribadu, is meant to give effect to these laws. The EFCC is to financial crimes what the National Agency for Food and Drugs Administrations and Control (NAFDAC) is to drug trafficking. On the surface of it, the Commission has been set up to impress the international financial system. Nigeria's image as a haven for corruption and fraud affects investment flows into the country; and robs the nation of needed integrity and mileage.

Within a week of assuming office, Ribadu was already drawing a line in the sand. He told The News magazine: "We are dealing with human beings and they naturally would want to exploit everything to their advantage. But you see, Nigeria's image has been severely battered by the very few people who engage in these unwholesome acts. The Obasanjo administration says it can't allow that to continue. Our job is not just to tackle established fraudsters, but to make fraud unattractive. And by God's grace, we shall succeed. We won't concede an inch; we shall battle them all the way." Ribadu is enthusiastic, optimistic and self-assertive, but he sounds innocent. His innocence may be his undoing. By last week, his commission had moved against the known '419' kingpins, arresting two of the fat cats; by so doing, the Commission sent a signal to the community of fraudsters: "A New Sheriff is in town".

When a new Sheriff comes to town, it is natural for him to create a storm in the waters. It is the tradition. In due course, the Sheriff settles down, he is "settled" by his targets and he begins to enjoy the office. Would Ribadu be different? Does he have the courage to take on the 419 Mafia; with their network of influence, so closely interlocked with the nature of the Nigerian State? Ribadu's commission can only arrest the kingpins; the challenge is one of prosecution. If the fraudsters cannot beat Ribadu's trap, can the same be said of the larger Nigerian police system? Or the courts? Besides, fraudsters are assisted by the banks, and what is worse: the laws on money laundering and financial malpractices have so many loopholes which bankers and fraudsters always manipulate for their own purposes. The war against '419' is like the war against corruption: the extent of its success will depend invariably on the strength of the institutions of state, and the political will to sustain the process. "Operation Redemption": Is it so easy to redeem Nigeria? I doubt.

The tap root of '419' is to be traced to the moral depravity of our society. By the mid-80s, Nigeria had lost its moral centre. The people, pressed by

poverty and creeping anarchy, either took their case to God, or took to crime. In a nation where everyone has lost faith in a system that can neither provide employment nor social infrastructure, persons have had to resort to self-help, which in many instances is built on a foundation of criminal creativity. The fraudster soon became a social king as an example of a citizen who has managed to escape from an uncertain destiny. Nigerians have lost their capacity to be shocked by fraud of any description" be it financial crime or electoral malpractices. Ours is a curious society: a man may be as poor as a church rat in January; by April, he could be as rich as Adnan Kashoggi. The point is: nobody will ask any questions. Instead, the nouveau riche will become a celebrity. He could even in due course be elected as Governor. Nigerians will continue to seek the easy route out of poverty for as long as the state remains inefficient. Society needs to rediscover its moral anchor. I wish Nuhu Ribadu well, but whenever he dresses up for work in the morning, let him remember the following words by one of the '419' barons, now, in his custody, as reported by The News magazine.

The fellow may be a titled crook but consider his words: "Why do you want me to fill a form", he reportedly told the Anti-Fraud officials. "The people stealing money are in Aso Rock. They are stealing billions of Naira. I am a veteran in these cases. I have spent between 4 to 5 years in jail. What you should have done is to say ... tomorrow we are going to court and we will meet there... I have been dealing with the police for 12 to 15 years. Everyday, they come to my house. If I tell you what I have been giving to the police, will you believe it, enough is enough. I have not done any business in the last 10 years. I think the time to include everybody has come. It's time to mention names... What have I done to this country? I have fed more than 10 million people. I have declined a war path... I'm not a thief and I can't take this insult any more". Now, what more can anyone add?

419 Coalition note: This is one of the best pieces on 419 ever done in the Nigerian press, kudos to Mr. Abati, and may we also wish the subject of this piece, Mr. Nuhu Ribadu the Chairman of the 19-member Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) more grease to his elbow with "Operation Redemption". Of course, the best way to proceed with "Operation Redemption" is to arrest 419ers, prosecute 419ers, convict 419ers, strip 419ers of assets, and repatriate the stolen funds in something approaching the magnitude in which they have been stolen. From his initial actions in office it seems like this is Commissioner Ribadu's plan, to which we say Go For It!

20 MAY 2003
From Reuters:

Nigerian fraud scam now trades on Zimbabwe woes

LONDON, May 20 (Reuters) - An infamous Nigerian bank scam is now invoking Zimbabwe as criminals try to trade on sympathy for victims of unrest in the former British colony.

Over the past few years, thousands of people have received letters and e-mails from "Nigerian businessmen" asking for financial help to transfer large sums to a foreign account.

The hook is the offer of a significant slice of the transferred funds.

Now e-mails being sent around the world are asking for donations to help get money out

of Zimbabwe.

"These letters have been coming out of Nigeria for ages," said a spokesman for Britain's National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) on Tuesday.

"They purport to come from any country where there is trouble, and unfortunately there are a lot of them in Africa," he added. "This is the first I have heard of them claiming to come from Zimbabwe."

The e-mails, all bearing different names, have identical wording starting with the phrase: "You may be surprised to receive this letter from me, since you don't know me..,"

They go on to claim that the writer is the eldest son of a leading black businessman or farmer, killed for allegedly supporting the Movement for Democratic Change opposition party to President Robert Mugabe's ruling ZANU-PF.

The letters say the man managed to secretly deposit a large sum of money ranging from 12 to 20 million U.S. dollars in a Johannesburg bank and offer 15 percent for help in moving it to the Netherlands.

Police said that if anyone takes the bait they are then asked to make a pre-payment to show good faith.

"You would be surprised at the number of millionaires who have been taken in by the Nigerian scam," said the NCIS spokesman.

He said it was impossible to say how much had been lost to the scams, but estimated that in Britain alone the Nigerian fraud took at least 150 million pounds (\$245 million) a year.

419 Coalition note: As the article notes, the "tale" told by the 419ers varies with global current events. There are "tales" from Sierra Leone, Cote D'Ivoire, and many other African nations, and also "tales" from the Philippines, Bosnia, and now lately Iraq and even ostensibly from the US servicemen in Iraq. The "tale" can concern anyplace.

The black Zimbabwe farmer "tale" this article references has been circulating for at least six months now and for equal opportunity purposes (we reckon) there is a similar "tale" making the rounds about a white Zimbabwean farmer.

19 MAY 2003

From Thisday, a Nigerian newspaper:

US Court Absolves FG in 419 Case

By Luke Oyawiri and Daniel Okeleke with agency reports

The Court of Appeal of the United States (US), has rejected an attempt by two Southern Colorado businessmen and their attorney, to reinstate a lawsuit aimed at recovering \$500,000 from the Nigerian government.

The US appeal court upheld an earlier district court ruling that dismissed the case based on the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act (FSIA), which prevents Americans from suing foreign governments for governmental actions other than commercial activity.

The Nigerian government and the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) have always maintained that the Colorado business men had been dealing with impostors and that all documents with government stamps they had received from the fraudsters were forged.

The businessmen had earlier instituted a lawsuit against the Nigerian government, to recover certain amount of money which they lost to some Nigerian con-men.

The Nigerians who organised the fraud had told the businessmen that they had \$21 million in an offshore bank account which they would share with Americans willing to set up an escrow account to settle some claims by subcontractors and suppliers.

The offshore bank account was later discovered to be false after some amounts of money had been siphoned from the escrow account of the Americans. Even though press reports have been warning people against the scam since the 1980s, the con artists have made away with billions of dollars and continue to do so.

419 Coalition Note: This is known colloquially as the Southway case. The 10th US Court of Appeals case number is 01-1436 and the opinion in its entirety can be read (for as long as the addy is good) at:

<http://pacer.ca10.uscourts.gov/cgi-bin/getopn.pl?OPINION=01-1436.wpd>

17 MAY 2003

From the Nigerian newspaper The Guardian:

Fred Ajudua In Detention Over Fresh \$1.69m Fraud

BY ODITA SUNDAY-FORTUNE

DELTA State-born businessman, Chief Fred Chijiudu Ajudua was among those arrested for defrauding two Dutch businessmen of \$1.69 million.

He was detained again at the former State's Security Services office, Ikoyi, Lagos by men of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission.

Briefing journalists at the office of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, the new Executive Chairman of the commission Mr. Nuhu Ribadu, explained: "The Dutch businessmen Mr. Remy Cina and Pierre Vijgen, were defrauded of the sum of US \$1,693,300 between July 1999 and September, 2000 by a syndicate of international fraudsters headed by the notorious 419, Fred Ajudua."

According to Ribadu, "The victims were contacted sometime in May, 1999 by the fraudsters, who falsely sought to pay a sum of US\$36 million to Mr. Cina, being the proceeds of over-invoiced contracts from the Federal Ministry of Aviation.

"Mr. Cina, Ribadu noted, fell for this scam and ended up paying a sum of US\$1.69 million with his partner to the fraudsters in various instalments.

Ribadu further told reporters that Ajudua, in the course of the crime impersonated Dr. Isa Audu, the Auditor-General of Nigeria, and met Cina three times in London between June 22, 1999 and February, 2000.

The meetings, he said, took place at the Lower Bridge Hotel, Thistle Hotel and Hilton

Hotel all in London.

Ribadu added that Ajudua's gang was, however, covertly filmed by a reporter of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) during which Ajudua called himself Mr. Morgan.

The Financial Crime boss also disclosed that "the tape was shown all over Europe on a BBC programme McIntire Under Cover, which was watched by Mr. Cina in the Netherlands."

According to him, "It was then Mr. Cina realised that he was being conned and he immediately reported to the Dutch Police."

Other sister agencies, Ribadu disclosed further, were currently involved in the investigations. They included the National Fraud and Money Laundering Unit or Interpol Netherlands, the Fraud Squad, City of London Police and The United States Secret Service, New York.

Ajudua, being the mastermind of the crime, Ribadu said, was picked up in his residence at the Victoria Garden City, Lekki, Lagos on May 10, 2003 and would be taken to court next week.

Five others are also being held for "conspiracy and stealing" the sum of \$242 Million from a Brazilian, Ribadu said.

The suspects were arrested at Enugu, he said. Toyota Hiace, Peugeot 406 and Bora Volkswagen, weapons ranging from Double-barrel guns, pump-action gun, three packets of cartridges, various bank documents and several posh cars were recovered from the suspects, Ribadu said.

419 Coalition comment: Excellent! Let us hope that prosecutions, convictions and recovery and reparations of funds in these cases follow in a timely manner. We, along with others of course, helped out on that BBC piece mentioned in the article, BTW.

15 MAY 2003

From the New York Times:

Online Sellers Fall Victim to Counterfeit Cashier's Checks

By Susan Stellan

In a new twist on a fraudulent money-transferring scheme, a growing number of people who sell goods online are falling victim to con artists who locate their victims through mass e-mailings.

So far, at least seven state attorneys general have warned about the new ruse, in which the perpetrators, often from Nigeria, use the counterfeit checks to purchase items for sale online, typically overpaying for the goods and asking for the difference to be sent back before the victim or the bank realizes that the check is fake.

It is a new version of an old scheme known as advance fee or 419 fraud, a reference to the Nigerian statute that makes this type of activity illegal. While 419 fraud has often been perpetrated over the phone or by fax, mass e-mail has in recent years been a preferred method for finding victims.

It is impossible to say how many people have lost money through this type of fraud. But one victim, Shawn Mosch of Bloomington, Minn., who with her husband started an

advocacy group called Scam Victims United (scamvictimsunited.com), estimated that she had heard about more than 500 cases since November. In March, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation warned banks about the use of counterfeit official checks to defraud online sellers.

Mrs. Mosch said that she and her husband, Jeff, had advertised a 1961 Buick for sale at several Web sites and were contacted in October by a man purporting to be a car dealer in Africa, Adebisi Julius. After agreeing on a price of \$1,600, the buyer told the Mosches that a friend in the United States owed him \$8,800 and that this friend would send them a cashier's check for that amount. They agreed to refund the difference to the buyer once the check cleared.

Although Mrs. Mosch said she was aware of other forms of Nigerian fraud and thought the terms of the transaction sounded suspicious, she deposited the check - seemingly issued by a Bank of America branch - and asked the teller when she would know it was good. "He said, 'Twenty-four hours ma'am, no problem,' " Mrs. Mosch recalled. She said she then waited 48 hours "to be extra safe" before withdrawing \$7,200 and wiring it to an address in Lagos, Nigeria.

"When he said Nigeria, yes, red flags went up," Mrs. Mosch said, describing a phone conversation with the man who deceived her. "But then we looked at the cash in our hands and said, well we have the cash, they said the check had cleared."

But the check had not cleared: the Mosches got a call about a week later from their bank informing them the cashier's check turned out to be counterfeit and that the bank was deducting \$8,800 from their savings account. (The Mosches still have the Buick, in which the fraudulent buyer was evidently not interested despite having promised to arrange shipment.)

Mrs. Mosch said she and her husband disputed their liability for the money deducted from their account, ultimately reaching an out-of-court settlement with the bank. The terms of the settlement prevent her from naming the amount or the bank, she said.

"The best way to stop the scam right now is to educate people about it," she said. Although a big part of that effort is alerting Internet sellers to be wary of buyers who overpay for an item and ask for the difference to be wired back - or those who, after sending a check, back out of the deal and ask for a refund - another goal is to dispel some misconceptions about cashier's checks.

"The tellers are looking at that check as if it were a legitimate cashier's check and not even considering that it might be fraudulent," Mrs. Mosch said. She argues that consumers and bank employees need to be educated about the difference between when funds from a cashier's check are available and when the check actually clears.

By law, banks are required to make funds available the next business day if an individual deposits a cashier's check into their own account, in person, dealing with an employee of the bank; if the bank later finds out the check is counterfeit, it can deduct the money from the depositor's account.

So the burden is largely on Internet sellers to make sure that any check they accept is legitimate before spending the money or sending any merchandise. Donna Gambrell, deputy director of the F.D.I.C.'s division of supervision and consumer protection, said, "One of the reasons why these scams can be so successful is because crooks know consumers trust these cashier's checks and money orders."

The F.D.I.C. advises Internet sellers to confirm a buyer's name, address and home phone number independently and insist that the check be drawn on a local bank or a bank that has a local branch. If that is not feasible, Ms. Gambrell said, the depositor

should ask the bank if it will inquire about the check or directly contact the issuing bank to confirm that it is valid.

Beyond these measures, Ms. Gambrell said, "Don't wire money or hand over any merchandise until you deposit the check and your bank confirms that it was paid - even if that takes days or even weeks."

At least seven states - Delaware, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Missouri, New Mexico and Pennsylvania - have issued warnings to residents about the scheme. In April, the Internet Fraud Complaint Center, which refers victims to law enforcement agencies, noted the emergence of this variation on 419 fraud in its annual report, saying that based on the reports it received last year - a fraction of actual losses - 74 individuals lost \$1.6 million to some form of 419 scam.

Although automobile sellers seem to have been the initial targets of the counterfeit check variation, there have been reports of attempts to defraud people who are selling boats, furniture, horses, dogs and cats. Trading sites like americandreamcars.com, puppydogweb.com and equine.com have warned users about the scheme.

Mrs. Mosch said she had heard that people selling items on eBay had been targets of such ruses. Kevin Pursglove, an eBay spokesman, said he had not heard much about the trend and that eBay had not issued an advisory on that type of scheme.

11 MAY 2003

From the Nigerian newspaper ThisDay:

'T'll Wipe out 419, Corruption and Related Offences'

The Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Alhaji Nuhu Ribadu, has pledged to rid the nation of Advance Fee Fraud, corruption and related crimes, warning fraudsters, economic and financial criminals that their days were now numbered in Nigeria.

Ribadu who took over the headship of the commission yesterday from Charles Akaya, Chairman, National Committee on Economic and Financial Crimes, regretted the bad image such activities have given the nation over the years, stressing that the time has come to make a change.

"The problems of economic and financial crimes are too well known to be recounted here. Suffice it to state that these crimes have done tremendous damage to our national integrity and national image abroad. Advance Fee Fraud that we sometimes refer to as 419 has caused our dear country and innocent citizens a lot of embarrassment abroad. Just because of the unpatrotism and greed of a few misguided citizens, the whole people and the country continue to suffer while undertaking legitimate businesses.

"You could see from the foregoing that the responsibilities assigned to our commission are very challenging and quite enormous. But our resolve and commitment are unshaken. We shall succeed. It is in this regard that we wish to warn against any attempt to bribe any member or staff of the Commission", he declared.

The new chairman took the judiciary to task, saying that while it is the responsibility of the Commission to arrest, investigate, and prosecute culprits, the Judiciary is to convict offenders and sentence them accordingly.

He frowned at a situation where the nation's image went bad due to activities of fraudsters and other financial and economic crimes, while the nation's Judiciary was unable to convict anybody to serve as deterrent to others.

419 Coalition Comment: Hear, Hear! But we've heard it so many times over the years from successive Nigerian Governments and a whole panoply of officials. But we remain hopeful and welcome any sustained, tangible, and quantifiable effort by the Nigerian Government that arrests 419ers, convicts 419ers, seizes their assets, and repatriates stolen monies to the victims of 419ers. Speaking of which, it is high time the Central Bank of Nigeria returned the recovered 419ed monies of victim Shahla Ghasemi to her, since the recovery was announced with great ballyhoo over eight months ago and CBN has yet to send her a dime. Recoveries are Rare in and of themselves, and recoveries in which the victim doesn't get their recovered monies back in a reasonable amount of time (if ever) are exercises in futility, our view.

7 MAY 2003

It is important to note that Nigerians themselves are often victims of 419, a fact which is often overlooked. This was sent in from the Nigerian newspaper Daily Trust by a concerned Nigerian, and we hope that the alleged 419ers are punished if found guilty and that the victims' monies are recovered and returned:

419: Six in court over N.25m

From Habiba Adamu

Six men have been arraigned before the Chief Magistrate's Court 20 Gyadi-Gyadi for alleged advanced fee fraud (419) involving N25 million belonging to a businessman, Alhaji Ado Ibrahim and one Jamilu Ahmed.

The suspects, who included Datti Sa'idu, Alhaji Abdulkadir Yakubu Lamu, Balarabe Maikano, Muhammad S. Muhammad, Isah Ibrahim and Garba Mohammed were alleged to have tricked the complainants into investing their money into a business with a promise of additional interest when they refund the money.

Appearing before the court, the principal witness number one (PWI) Alhaji Ado, disclosed that Balarabe Maikano, the 3rd suspect, was introduced to him as a supposed judge who was to share an inheritance among the survivors of a deceased person.

He added that he was told that among the inheritance were some cattles which the Fulani cattle rearers refuse to release until their due was given to them.

He further stated that the supposed judge collected the money from him in the presence of the other five suspects with the aim that the money would be used to settle the Fulani. Adding that himself together with the other complaints and the six suspect went to Miya village in Bauchi State where the said Fulani survivors, and the cattles are.

Alhaji Ado stated that during the three trips they took to the village they were shown the herd of cattles, the Fulani and the said survivors.

Though he gave the supposed judge the money in Kano, during their last

trip to Miya village, the suspects told the complainant to return to Kano and they will bring the cattle to them. Two days after he said, when they did not see any of the suspects nor the cows, they decided to go to the house of the 5th suspect at Sheka quarters where they were told he had packed out.

Alhaji Ado narrated that he had to spend a whole day waiting outside the house of the 1st suspect after which he took him to Kwalli police station when he returned after dark. The rest of the suspects were subsequently arrested by the police.

During a cross examination of the PWI by the defence counsel, Kasim Abdulhamid, Alhaji Ado disclosed that though he was told that Balarabe was a judge as at the time the incident transpired between them, he has never been in any court nor does he presides in Kano or in Miya village.

The Chief Magistrate, Abdullahi Muhammad Bayero, who presided over the court, adjourned the case to June 12, 2003 for continuation of hearing.

4 MAY 2003

An associate from Europe sends these photos of alleged 419ers. He says "They are 419-fraudsters who work in West Africa, East Africa, South Africa, all over Europe as well as HongKong, Japan, South Korea, and Australia."



To see more photos of these alleged 419ers [Click Here](#).

29 APR 2003

From the Fort Lauderdale (South Florida) Sun-Sentinel:

Ailing Pompano man, 68, pleads guilty in 'Nigerian 419' scam

By Ann W. O'Neill
Staff Writer

A 68-year-old Pompano Beach man who wears a hearing aid, walks with a limp and takes 13 different medications each day pleaded guilty Monday to conspiracy to commit wire fraud in connection with a "Nigerian 419" scam.

It's a modern mutation of one of the oldest schemes around, taking its name from a section of the African nation's fraud law. Once carried out by letter, the confidence game now involves unsolicited e-mail and fax invitations to get rich quick by helping move millions of dollars out of Nigeria. The victims pay thousands of dollars in phony "fees" but never see a dime in return.

"Sounds like an old-fashioned pigeon drop to me," observed U.S. District Judge William P. Dimitrouleas during a brief hearing in Fort Lauderdale federal court on Monday.

Defendant Joel Feinstein entered the plea less than a month after being named in a federal grand jury indictment.

The judge repeatedly asked Feinstein if he was sure he wanted to plead guilty so quickly.

"Yes, sir, please," Feinstein responded, and listed his infirmities.

He faces five years in federal prison and a \$250,000 fine, but his punishment could be reduced if he cooperates and provides "substantial assistance" with the ongoing investigation into the scheme. Sentencing is set for July 10.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Jeff Kay outlined the evidence in court. A Bridgeport, Conn., man Kay identified only as "Mr. Owens" helped the government gather evidence against Feinstein by wearing a hidden recording device. "Owens" complained to federal authorities after receiving e-mail solicitations from a man identifying himself as Dr. Usman Bello, a high-ranking official with the Central Bank of Nigeria.

"Owens" was told a man with a name identical to his had died in an accident in Nigeria, leaving behind a multimillion dollar fortune. "Owens" would get a cut of \$10 million if he'd help "expatriate" the money, Kay said. All he needed to do was lay down \$17,000 to cover fees and expenses.

He then was put in touch with Feinstein, who identified himself as the bank's American representative. The two men negotiated a fee of \$3,000 in cash and a \$7,000 promissory note. "Owens" insisted on handing over the money in person. He flew to Florida in January to meet with Feinstein -- wearing the wire and accompanied by agents with the U.S. Secret Service.

A search of Feinstein's apartment and computers turned up the names of more victims, one from as far away as Denmark, and evidence he'd tricked them out of nearly \$78,000.

Kay said in court this version of the 419 scheme involved co-conspirators who identified themselves as Nigerian lawyers, bank executives, and oil company officials.

It is the third 419 fraud prosecuted in Broward County since 1996, Kay added.

According to an organization called The 419 Coalition, perpetrators buy bulk e-mail directories and send out tens of millions of solicitations each year. They take in an estimated \$100 million from the gullible and greedy.

Brian Wizard, author of the book *Nigerian 419 Scam: Game Over*, said people who receive such solicitations should ask themselves a simple question: "Of all the people in the financial world who are good at moving money around, why are they talking to me?"

Ann W. O'Neill can be reached at awoneill@sun-sentinel.com or 954-356-4531.

419 Coalition Note: That is \$100 million per annum confirmed losses and \$300 plus million estimated losses in the US Alone per annum, overall losses Worldwide have been estimated at \$750 million per annum.

29 APR 2003

From the May/June 2003 issue of Foreign Policy Magazine:

NET EFFECT

You've Got Fraud!

By Nicholas Thompson

Mobolaji Aluko, a Nigerian who chairs the department of chemical engineering at Howard University in Washington, D.C., has a devil of a time convincing Americans to invest in his entrepreneurial business ventures back home. Nigeria's political and social instability don't help. But equally important, says Aluko, are the endless e-mail scams originating from Nigeria that are always at the back of [investors'] minds.

Termed advance fee fraud, or 419s after a section in the Nigerian penal code, these e-mail cons rake in hundreds of millions of dollars globally per year, according to estimates by the U.S. Secret Service (www.ustreas.gov/usss/). The scam is indigenous to Nigeria, where it originated in letter form in the 1970s, and has experienced little export. Generally, recipients are asked to facilitate large wire transfers via their bank account in return for a cut of the action. But first, victims fork over advance fees to cover processing or customs costs. If the victim stays on the hook, more fees pop up. Globally, the problem is difficult to quantify precisely, mainly due to victims' embarrassment. The impact is probably severe, as some figures show. Britain's National Criminal Intelligence Service (www.ncis.co.uk) says Britons lost roughly \$13.5 million last year alone, with the average individual loss coming in around \$91,000.

Seventeen people have been killed since 1992 in Nigeria trying to recover their lost funds. Nigeria's government has been lax in responding to advance fee fraud, in part because the scams help finance Nigeria's fledgling Internet sector. In a recent press release, the Central Bank of Nigeria said simply, you have been warned, and then blasted the so-called victims who seek legal retribution against the bank. But a handful of Web sites are helping combat the problem. Iceland-based International Investigation Services (IIS) operates a fee-for-access site (www.superhighway.is/iis/) that includes an index of known scammers. As of mid-March, IIS had catalogued 2,784 suspected criminals. A Bangkok, Thailand based Web site (www.2bangkok.com/2bangkok/Scams/Nigerian.shtml) run by unknown entrepreneurs includes photos of fraudulent Nigerian government documents and sells Nigerian scam-letter T-shirts for the bargain price of \$15.99.

419 Coalition Note: We assisted with this piece, of course, which we are told was shortened quite a bit before publication.

17 APR 2003

From MSNBC.com:

Fake bank site part of Nigerian scam

Well-known Internet con gets more elaborate

By Bob Sullivan

They're certainly persistent. Another flavor of the well-known Nigerian scam has popped up, this one even more elaborate than the familiar e-mail solicitation. The scam appears to target former recipients who were initially drawn in by an e-mail offer, but abandoned the scheme half-way through. To ease potential victims' fears, scam artists have set up a fake online bank, and even deposited funds into a bogus account there. One pair of victims has reportedly lost \$100,000 to such a fake bank scam. And now, thanks to a private citizen who did a little sleuthing of his own, here's a chance to see it in action.

SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, Bill played out the con with e-mail suitors who offered him a percentage of \$45 million for helping move it out of Nigeria. Bill cut communications with the solicitors, as many potential victims do, when they requested some up-front payment. He forwarded all e-mail correspondence to the U.S. Secret Service, and figured that would be the end of it.

But on April 9, Bill (who requested that his identity be withheld) heard from his suitors anew. A writer identifying himself as Larry Peters was eager to meet Bill's long overdue contract payment.

I crave your indulgence not to treat it as one of those 'HOAX' letters you do receive, Peters wrote.

And the good-will proof?

The welcome relief is that you are NOT to pay a cent UPFRONT. Please be informed that your outstanding payment will be paid through ONLINE BANKING which will be given to you on your response to this e-mail.

Sure enough, when Bill wrote back, he was directed to open an account at AlliedTrustCompany.com, supposedly an online bank. Two days after opening the account under the pseudonym Joseph Cipriani, a \$45 million deposit was reflected on the bank's Web page.

The bank setup is sophisticated, requiring a user name and password to access the account information. But a careful Web user would notice that surfers are quickly redirected to a site located at VOSN.net, a small Internet hosting company.

THE REAL SCAM

The account application process is thorough, and at first Bill supposed he was merely the target of an identity theft scheme. But four days later, the real intentions of the scammers were revealed.

The money is sitting in the Allied Trust Company account but cannot be transferred yet, wrote someone calling himself Michael Edwards. First, the Financial Transaction Reporting Agency Of North America (FinTRAN) must be satisfied that the money is clean. There is no such agency, though the U.S. Treasury has a similar-sounding division called the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN).

A North American Certificate of Circulation will supposedly be enough assurance to clear the money. But getting the necessary documentation from the mythical agency will cost \$9,600, Edwards wrote. And, perhaps anticipating Bill's next question, Edwards continued:

We then asked if there any way we could be authorized to temporarily unfreeze the account to enable withdraw at least the

required amount to cover the cost of getting this document but the appeal was refused.

Edwards' appeal to Bill came about a week after he was first contacted by Peters, and as the con wore down, Bill once again planned to share his e-mail exchange with authorities.

The people behind the con are indeed brazen. When Bill mentioned offhand in an e-mail that he didn't know what he would do with the money he was set to receive, the con artist suggested sending a laptop computer to him as some form of compensation.

And while Bill wasn't taken in by the fake bank, other people have fallen for similar schemes. Two Canadians lost \$100,000 to Nigerian con artists after they were taken in by a fake bank site that mimicked a major British financial institution, the BBC reported in October.

Nigerian scams continue to thrive

RELOADING

It is noteworthy that con artists appear to be revisiting old potential victims.

I am as certain as can be that they are targeting people who had at one point been in their process, Bill said. The e-mail address they contacted me through is one I created and used only to communicate with them earlier.

C.A. Pascale, who runs the 419 Coalition against the Nigerian scam, said re-victimization has long been a common tactic for the con artists. The number 419 refers to the relevant criminal code in Nigeria that's broken by the con artists.

When someone loses money to the Nigerian scam, the victim will often hear from another con artist claiming they can recover the lost funds. And those who contacted con artists once or twice before ditching them are very likely to get a fresh pitch later on, he said.

We here call it 'Reloading' after a term used in the timeshare sales industry, where the resort marketing people go back over their list of 'ups' who did not buy and develop a marketing ploy or strategy to get them back up to the resort for another go at them, Pascale said. People who have heard once from a 419er are most likely going to hear from 419ers again. They will either hear back from the same group with the same tale, or from the same group using a different tale. Or, an individual in the group will 'branch out' for himself, tell them that the original group just didn't have the juice to get the job done, but he does.

Here is the URL of the piece for as long as it is good:

<http://www.msnbc.com/news/900824.asp#BODY>

There is also a link from this article to one done on 5 MAR 2003 concerning Cashier's Check Goods and Services 419, FYI, 419 Coalition.

2 APR 2003

From the Sydney Morning Herald (Australia):

Life ban for adviser over Nigeria scam

By Kirsty Needham

A financial planner who took \$700,000 of his clients' money and sent it overseas to a Nigerian letter scam has told the corporate watchdog he will cease acting as an investment adviser.

The Australian Securities and Investments Commission yesterday accepted the undertaking from Robert Andrew Street, which permanently bars him from the industry, as it continues an investigation into whether criminal charges should also be laid.

The commission has already wound up Mr Street's Victoria-based business, Tira Pty Ltd, after complaints from investors who lost their money. It has never been recovered.

The commission's acting director of enforcement, Mark Steward, said that while a number of Australians had become caught up in the notorious Nigerian scams, "what makes this unusual is that he was someone who is a participant in the financial services industry".

The commission is still investigating whether Mr Street was himself been duped by the scam, which promised a return of \$US65million (\$107 million), or was acting as a go-between.

Mr Steward said: "What appears to have happened is he has facilitated the provision of this money. The extent of his involvement is still being investigated."

Estimates suggest victims have lost \$5billion to \$12billion to similar scams.

25 MAR 2003

From the Delaware News Journal:

African Internet scam robs unsuspecting, state warns

Ten Delawareans have fallen prey while selling items on auction sites

By TERRI SANGINITI
Staff reporter

State and federal officials warn consumers who sell goods over the Internet to beware of buyers from Nigeria or West Africa who offer to pay by cashier's check for the sale item.

At least 10 Delawareans have fallen prey to this Internet scam in the past six months, officials said.

The cashier's checks turn out to be counterfeit and the seller ends up with a bank account frozen by the authorities.

State Attorney General M. Jane Brady also said the unsuspecting seller may even be suspected of fraud for passing a counterfeit check.

"This new scam is sucking in people who have items for sale on e-Bay and other Internet sites," said Lori Sitler, spokeswoman for the state Attorney General's Office.

Brady and U.S. Attorney Colm Connolly said the scam is a new twist on the original Nigerian scam, which has been defrauding U.S. citizens for the past 15 years.

The original scheme lured victims with a 30 percent commission for allowing a bogus Nigerian civil servant to deposit millions of dollars allegedly overpaid from a government procurement contract into the bank account of a "reputable foreign company or individual," Sitler said.

According to the U.S. Secret Service, that scam still grosses hundred of millions of dollars annually.

In the latest scam, consumers selling goods on Internet sites are approached by a potential buyer from Nigeria offering to buy an item at or above the asking price. In return, the seller is asked to wire the balance of the inflated cashier's check after it clears the bank.

The counterfeit check bounces after the "extra" money is wired to the buyer, Sitler said.

Brady said although the seller's bank may make funds available after the check initially clears, the seller will be held accountable for the full amount of the check when it's determined to be counterfeit.

Anyone who has been a victim of one of these scams is asked to call senior investigator Paul Kane in the Consumer Protection Unit at (800) 220-5424, or report the incident to the U.S. Secret Service at 573-6188.

Reach Terri Sanginiti at 324-2771 or tsanginiti@delawareonline.com.

419 Coalition Notes: What is given above may be considered an Additional reporting procedure. The preferred reporting procedures are given in the What To Do section of our main page.

The URL of this article, for as long as it is good, is:
<http://www.delawareonline.com/newsjournal/local/2003/03/25africaninternet.html>

18 MAR 2003
From the Akron OH Beacon Journal:

What would you do with a 419?

By Laura Ofobike, Beacon Journal
chief editorial writer.

Every week, I spend a few minutes weeding out of my e-mail inbox several urgent requests, supposedly from Nigerians who want to give me a lot of money for a little help from me.

The scam is more than a decade old, and comes in many varieties. Usually, I have no sympathy whatsoever for anyone taken in by these "419" operations, named after the section in the Nigerian criminal code on mail fraud.

A bunch of crooks figured out they could make a pretty good living by fleecing foreigners who fit all the following categories: gullible, greedy and willing to defraud a foreign government.

By now, anyone with an e-mail address should be familiar with the pitch. The requests usually purport to be from the state-owned national petroleum corporation or some equally prominent institution such as the central bank or a state university.

If mangled English isn't enough of a tipoff, the pitch is. Typically, it states blatantly that the person soliciting help acquired the funds illegally (overbilled the government on a contract is one popular line; another is that a former head of state stowed funds that surviving confidants want access to. One particularly impertinent writer, claiming to be a son of Tanzania's late President Julius Nyerere, smeared that modest and transparently honest man).

The more dangerous versions are like the one a small congregation in Minnesota

received some years back. The letter informed the church an unknown benefactor had died in Nigeria, leaving the church a sizeable bequest. All that was required to release the funds was the presence of the bishop, documentation and cash to pay processing and sundry fees.

The mail asks for you to help the crooks cash in on the booty. Your percentage cut amounts to millions. If your honest heart takes the bait, you provide your bank account numbers, personal information and, as the hook sinks deeper, some of your own money, which is supposed to ease the release of incredible sums of money.

Takers have found their accounts drained one way or another -- by extortion or unauthorized transfers. The racket worked so well for years that "419 millionaire" is the none-too-subtle title locals have for the hundreds of super-rich people strutting around Nigeria with no visible source of income.

The scam went global with the Internet. They come in now from South Africa, Kenya, Britain, Ghana, everywhere. (Simply type "Nigerian scams" into any search engine for updates on the resilience of this racket). Anyone who thinks it OK to get rich helping some foreign official swindle a government of large sums of money deserves to lose the last shirt on his or her back.

One can only lament the damage that's been done to Nigeria's image and the suspicion of corruption that hangs over its nationals, even when they are engaged in legitimate business or solicit charity for genuine and numerous needs for people shortchanged by a series of disastrous governments.

For the most part, these 419 letters are so laughably stupid, there's no wasting time stewing over them. Every now and then, however, a 419 version shows up that breaks new ground and threatens to do further damage. The new crop of letters turns the criminals' focus on professionals, and it isn't simply the borderline unethical person or the greedy (though there's still a little bit of that in the new line) who is the target.

Nigeria is awash in new colleges and universities. A few are legitimate operations; many are imaginary. Recruiting faculty and teachers is the latest wrinkle in this long-running international swindle. The target is university faculty and those with professional degrees who can teach subjects from A to Z. The pitch goes something like this:

"The Unity University is a new Project of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.... The University will start its inaugural session in June 2003; Qualified and expatriate teachers are therefore required to facilitate the grand takeoff of the new University. Bumper and very attractive salaries and fringe benefits await you."

The bumper salary "is in excess of USD250,000 per annum." Not a bad payoff for a college professor. What do you do to get in on such professorial largess? Forward your resume by e-mail immediately. Absolutely no resumes sent by attachment or fax. Why not? The university that doesn't want to handle attachments or faxes nonetheless requests your full contact details, including your fax and phone numbers.

There are many more concerns today greater than scam artists looking for easy prey on the Net, but information is gold these days, and people will try to make money off anyone and everything. The trouble is that Nigeria, like many other developing countries, does need all kinds of external help, including university faculty. It makes a bona-fide appeal that much more difficult for legitimate purposes.

Besides, there is no predicting the level of greed or gullibility in some quarters. The vitality of a 419 scam lies in the fact that somebody somewhere will bite. Last September, the Detroit Free Press reported on the case of a book-keeper in a law firm indicted on wire-fraud charges. She was accused of draining the firm's bank accounts of

\$2.1 million in 419 transfers to South Africa and Taiwan. The transfers, supposedly, were to loosen \$18 million from a South African bank. Her promised fee? \$4.5 million. Maybe \$250,000 a year for a teacher isn't such a good deal, after all.

419 Coalition Note: An excellent piece. However a few corrections - 419 is primarily advance fee fraud, the 419ers don't really reach into victims accounts and empty them, this is a common canard. Secondly, 419 was Global long before the internet. Essentially 419 has been Global since day One, using snailmail and telephone, then fax, and now email, and even now uses a combination of all four. Thirdly the piece seems to imply that Classic 419 is the only form of 419 though it gives examples of Charitable organization 419 and a couple of others, this is a bit confusing. But overall a very good piece!

13 MAR 2003

Here is a longer version of the Okafor story, which we originally reported in our 9 FEB 2003 News below. This story is also from 9 FEB 2003, but it is from the South African Sunday Times newspaper:

Legal adviser to Obasanjo's party sought for 419 scam

Nicki Padayachee

A businessman believed to be standing in the Nigerian elections is wanted in South Africa for trying to con wealthy foreigners out of more than R97-million.

Phil Okafor - the legal adviser to the South African branch of Nigeria's ruling People's Democratic Party - is wanted on at least nine charges of racketeering and fraud .

This week, the National Directorate of Public Prosecutions was granted a court order to seize Okafor's R1.8-million home and two luxury cars registered in the name of his South African wife, Yogandrie Naidoo.

Scorpions spokesman Sipho Ngwema said an arrest warrant was expected to be issued tomorrow for Okafor, who, according to a forged ID, is 28 years old. He is believed to be campaigning in Nigeria for the parliamentary elections scheduled for May.

The Scorpions believe Okafor is one of the South African kingpins of the "419" scam, an advance-fee fraud in which foreign businessmen are lured to South Africa by e-mail or fax with promises that they will receive millions of US dollars in return for paying hefty sums upfront.

South Africa has become known as one of the 419 capitals of the world.

The 20-month investigation into Okafor was sparked by South African Finance Minister Trevor Manuel after two US companies alleged that the would-be member of parliament had defrauded them using documents purporting to be from the South African Presidency and the Reserve Bank.

In papers before the Johannesburg High Court this week, the Scorpions alleged that Okafor swindled at least nine foreigners with the help of David Seabi, an employee of the German international finance house Commerzbank in Johannesburg .

Sporting expensive clothes and a charming manner, Okafor allegedly conned foreigners from as far afield as India, Australia and Canada.

His alleged scams included:

Convincing Frenchman Joel Loosli that he would receive a safety deposit box containing \$23.7-million (about R196.7-million) if he paid Okafor \$540 000 (about R4.5-million);

Persuading Qasim Abbas, a businessman from Bahrain, that he would receive a shipment of stolen Nigerian oil in return for paying \$5-million (about R41.5-million) upfront; and

Luring Canadian Christopher Tomiak to South Africa and convincing him that he was conducting a joint venture with Anglo American to set up "Aids centres" around the country.

Okafor also allegedly conned Warren Fletcher, an American living in Australia, out of about R134 000.

This week, Debo Sodeke, national secretary-general of the People's Democratic Party's South African chapter, said Okafor was being expelled for "anti-party activities" - which included campaigning to stand in the elections for the opposition party, the All Nigerian People's Party.

"[Nigerian] President [Olusegun] Obasanjo will not be happy to know that one of his members has been bringing down the name of his party," he said.

Meanwhile, in affidavits before court, Seabi said a friend of Okafor's had told him that he wanted to enter Nigerian politics because it was "big money".

Seabi also told how Okafor had boasted that he paid R1.8-million in cash for his plush Sandton home.

The Scorpions claim Okafor paid R170 000 in cash for a new Alfa Romeo and R56 000 in cash for a Ford TX5.

11 MAR 2003

From The Register, an English newspaper:

419 scammers take US con artist for \$750,000

By Lester Haines

A businessman in Winona, Minnesota, has been taken for a cool \$750,000 by Nigerian 419 scam artists, the Winona Daily News reports.

Nothing new there, you might think, but \$250,000 of the cash did not actually belong to victim Carl Fratzke. Incredibly, Fratzke had pulled a scam of his own and defrauded seven friends to raise the capital. The balance came from his own savings.

Tempted, as ever, by promises of riches beyond the wildest dreams of avarice, Fratzke asked chums to invest in a scheme whereby he would buy gloves and sell them to Wal-Mart at a hefty profit. He promptly sent the cash straight to the 419 scammers.

"They sent me a facsimile of the check they were going to send me," Fratzke later testified before a presumably astounded judge. "They said: 'This is coming'."

Well, it didn't, and now Fratzke faces sentencing on 31 March on "two counts of theft by swindle and one count of theft by check". If he's lucky, the bench will hand down a stiff sentence. Jail is probably the only place he'll be safe from his friends and investors -

and his own stupidity. [Note; See the Winona Daily News story on this immediately below]

419 Coalition Note: That's right, the US authorities do not take kindly to people getting money from other people under false pretences to send to the the 419ers. In short, their position is that if you want to lose your own money in a Classic 419 type deal etc. it's not criminal. If you explain the "deal" Exactly as it is to others and they choose to invest and they lose their money too, it's not criminal. But if you Lie in order to get monies from other people, then that's a crime and you are prosecutable. That's been the position of the US authorities in this matter for many years now.

11 MAR 2003

From the Winona Daily News, Minnesota (US):

Winona man pleads guilty in \$750,000 scam

Nigerian scam artists took Winona businessman Carl Fratzke for \$750,000.

Unfortunately, a third of that money didn't belong to him.

By Jerome Christenson

On Monday morning in Winona District Court, Fratzke, 59, 412 W. Fifth St., admitted to using a scam of his own to raise \$207,000 from seven friends and bouncing a \$49,259 check at a local business to send to the Nigerian con men.

Testifying before Judge Lawrence T. Collins, Fratzke said he also drained more than \$500,000 from his own savings and retirement accounts before he recognized the fraud for what it was.

Fratzke, president of Fratzke Sales, pleaded guilty to two counts of theft by swindle and one count of theft by check.

In March and April 2000, Fratzke approached seven Winona-area people, individuals he described as friends, and offered them an "investment" opportunity that would double their money in a month. He claimed he had a chance to purchase \$500,000 worth of gloves that he had arranged to sell to Wal-Mart for \$1.2 million.

There was no such glove deal. Fratzke admitted he sent the money to individuals he believed to be officials in the Nigerian government who had invited him to participate in a scheme that promised to yield "quite substantial profit."

"They sent me a facsimile of the check they were going to send me," Fratzke testified. "They said, 'This is coming.' "

In February 2001, Fratzke wrote worthless checks for \$49,259 to the Winona Yellow Cab Co. for money orders that were wired overseas to his Nigerian contacts. When the checks were returned, the owners of the cab company went to the police.

"After the (Yellow Cab) thing, the whole thing collapsed right there," Fratzke said. "I didn't know until the bubble burst and the money didn't come."

In the end, Fratzke didn't realize a cent from the scheme.

Winona County Attorney Chuck MacLean said that over the years "hundreds, perhaps thousands" of people had fallen for the Nigerian scheme. The scam promises the eventual victim a sizable percentage of tens or hundreds of millions of dollars for supposed assistance in getting the funds out of the country. Once the scammer has

gained his mark's confidence, the mark will be asked to send money for fees, bribes or other expenses in order to bring the multi-million dollar gambit to fruition. When the victim becomes suspicious, the Nigerian accomplices and the money vanish.

The scheme, often referred to as the "419 scam," the name drawn from the section of the Nigerian penal code that deals with it, has been investigated many times, MacLean said. The scam that involved Fratzke has been investigated by federal authorities, he said, and Fratzke has been classified as a victim in the scam. Since there is no extradition agreement between the United States and Nigeria, the authorities have decided not to attempt to prosecute the Nigerians involved.

On March 31, Fratzke will be sentenced for the crimes he committed while attempting to satisfy the demands of the con artists.

He remains free on bond awaiting sentencing.

9 MAR 2003

Nigeria Pays High Price for Its Con Artists

LAGOS (Reuters) - Nigerian banker Anthony Owuye loses no opportunity to voice his bitterness after failing to clinch promising partnership deals with British banks.

He blames it all on Nigeria's legion of con artists who have gained worldwide notoriety for their 419 scam letters -- so-called after a section of the Nigerian penal code.

"The first British counterpart I spoke to warned me that this would not be easy, and that the likelihood of success was very low," recalled Owuye, chairman of Lagos-based Personal Trust Savings and Loans Ltd.

"Foreigners will always think first of 419 when it comes to Nigerians. The process can be a humiliating one," Owuye told Reuters in his office in the Surulere district of Lagos.

A photo on a wall of the modest office shows the banker in an embrace with Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, whose declared war on corruption has apparently failed to deter those perpetrating the scams.

Nigeria's image took a further battering on February 19 after a 72-year-old Czech who lost his life savings in an apparent oil investment scam shot dead a Nigerian diplomat in the country's embassy in Prague.

Czech police have not elaborated on the killing of consul Michael Lekara Wayid in the most high-profile murder linked to Nigerian white-collar crime.

Nigerian conmen have swindled hundreds of millions of dollars from gullible Americans and Europeans responding to 419 junk letters promising recipients a share of non-existent fortunes, according to international crime agencies.

[419 Coalition Note: Make that several Billions of dollars, 419 Coalition has heard as high as 9 Billion dollars mentioned]

The scams come in a variety of forms including money transfer schemes, charitable donations, fake government contracts, cheap oil deals, black market currency deals and fraudulent business tenders.

Begun in the early 1990s when the economy of the world's seventh largest oil exporter headed downhill, 419s are now probably Nigeria's biggest foreign currency earner after oil and ahead of cocoa exports, according to some estimates.

DIGITAL FRAUD

The criminals running the scams have leapfrogged from using faxes to using digital technology, exploiting the power and anonymity of the Internet and its mailing lists to churn out millions of solicitous letters.

A proliferation of cyber cafes in Lagos has slashed the start-up costs for digital fraudsters among Nigeria's teeming army of bright, young unemployed graduates, telecom experts say.

"If you haven't received any of the Nigerian letters, you probably haven't got an e-mail or other mailing address," said a diplomat in the commercial section of a Western embassy here.

A typical letter, with trademark grotesque grammar, would come purportedly from a senior director of the Nigerian central bank who has incredibly just uncovered hundreds of millions of dollars of illegal contract money.

He needs a foreign partner with a bank account to transfer the funds, in return for a fee, typically about 35 percent, for the foreigner.

Those gullible enough to respond end up losing anything from \$5,000 to \$100,000 in advance fees before they realise no such fortune or central bank official exists.

[419 Coalition Note: These figures are not accurate. Victims can lose anywhere from hundreds to Millions of dollars.]

Officials of the U.S. Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs put the value of an average 419 scam at \$6,000.

[419 Coalition Note: Nobody knows the value of an average 419 scam, not even INL :) :]

According to official United States figures on 419, only 16 Americans reported cash losses amounting to \$345,000 in 2001. But they said this was likely to be a tiny fraction as most scam victims are too embarrassed to come forward.

[419 CoalitionNote: Sigh... here is it again... that worthless stat of 16 Americans reporting losses of \$345,000.00 This stat is from the National White Collar Crime Center's Internet Fraud Complaint Center. It represents ONLY those complaints filed with IFCC. IFCC is NOT the proper place to report 419 matters so they only receive a small Fraction of the reported complaints. The Correct Place to report 419 matters, and the Correct Place to obtain stats on 419 matters is the Joint West African Fraud Task Force, also known as the United States Secret Service 419 Task Force. What has happened here is that awhile back some lazy reporter gave the bad stat and others have been picking it up ever since. The actual stat is more like tens of thousands of loss cases reported each year in the US alone with reported losses the the \$100 million range in the US alone, \$300-350 million estimated losses

per annum in the US alone, according to the Proper authority, the USSS 419 Task Force.]

COSTLY SCREENING

Kojo Bedu-Addo, senior Africa analyst at the London-based Control Risks Group, says the need to screen potential partners is increasing the cost of doing business with Nigeria.

"There is no guarantee even if you do have an official company or government letterhead that you are dealing with the right people," Bedu-Addo told Reuters. "Only face to face contact and due diligence will prevent outright fraud."

As a result, foreign companies wanting to do business in Nigeria have to be helped by Nigerian consulates abroad who often have to set up special task forces in association with other international anti-fraud agencies.

[419 Coalition Note: There are cases reported where victims did try to clear through Nigerian missions abroad and were 419ed anyway. There is even a case where a lady reporting a 419 to the US Embassy in Nigeria was 419ed by the man on the other end of the line (and yes, it was the US Embassy number she was ringing). In short, vetting through Nigerian missions or even the missions of one's own country in Nigeria can also be meaningless.]

The Nigerian central bank says those it terms greedy foreigners are equally guilty of 419 crimes. But as its own image became soiled in the scam, it placed prominent advertisements in major international publications with the message: "If it sounds too good to be true, it's probably not true."

[419 Coalition Note: That is because CBN considers only Classic 419 matters and NEVER includes the so called "legal" forms of 419 like Goods and Services 419 etc. into the equation in which there is no question whatever of victim as criminal etc. Also, one must note that there is NO country in the world dealing with 419 that considers its citizens who are victims of even Classic 419 to be criminals and prosecutes them. None. The CBN position on these matters was discredited long ago.

Additionally, the CBN advertorials were largely worthless in terms of countering 419 since they were aimed at the Demand side of the 419 equation, which is already being addressed by other governments and public service organizations like 419 Coalition at NO cost to the Government of Nigeria. What CBN Should be doing is funding a Nigerian Government sustained, tangible quantifiable attack on the supply side 419ers operating with impunity from within Nigeria's borders. ONLY Nigeria can do that, so it would be a much better use of CBN money than the advertorials, which really are not more than cover-their-ass pieces anyway.]

"They were punishing our image," central bank spokesman Tony Ede said of the scam letters. "We were getting calls from reputable international companies accusing the CBN (central bank) of being implicated in 419."

[419 Coalition Note: That's not surprising, given that there has been testimony before a committee of the United States Congress by a former Special Agent in Charge of USSS 419 Task Force and others that Central Bank of Nigeria offices

have been used to perpetrate 419 frauds.]

According to the Special Fraud Unit of the Nigeria Police, only 22 convictions between 1993 and 2001 were related to 419 offences. Roughly 30 arrests have been recorded this year.

"The judicial process in this country is very slow, so convictions may take some time," fraud unit chief Charles Akaya, a police commissioner, told Reuters.

Tackling fraud in Nigeria is complicated by the country's reputation for corruption in general. Berlin-based Transparency International has consistently put Nigeria at the top or in second place of its annual global corruption index over the past five years.

Obasanjo, who used to sit on the board of Transparency International before he became Nigeria's president in 1999, has publicly confessed he is embarrassed by the corruption ranking.

28 FEB 2003

From the Direct Marketing News, via the Nigeriaworld website:

Twist on Nigeria Scam Targets Online Auctions

By: Scott Hovanyetz
Senior Reporter
scotth@dmnews.com

The Pennsylvania Attorney General's office yesterday urged people who sell items online through Internet auction services to beware a new Nigerian scam aimed at fooling them into wiring money abroad.

Three victims in Pennsylvania already have lost about \$26,000 to the scam, the state Attorney General's office said. The attorney general of Idaho issued a similar warning earlier this week.

The scam targets people selling big-ticket items online such as boats, cars and motorcycles. The seller receives an e-mail from a "buyer" in Africa expressing interest in purchasing the item offered.

Later, the buyer concocts an excuse to send a bank cashier's check in excess of the purchase price if the seller agrees to wire back the difference. The seller receives the cashier's check and, assuming the offer is legitimate after the check clears, complies with the request to wire back the money.

One to three weeks later, the seller learns from the bank that the check is counterfeit. The bank demands the check amount be returned in full, so the seller loses both the purchase price and the money that was wired to the buyer, who then cuts off all contact.

In one case in Pennsylvania, a woman lost \$12,500 to the scam after a man in Lagos, Nigeria, offered to buy her car. The Nigerian con artists even targeted a deputy attorney general in the Idaho Attorney General's office, who recognized the scam and did not wire money.

26 FEB 2003

From ThisDay, a Nigerian newspaper, sent in by a concerned Nigerian:

Slain Nigerian Diplomat Honest, Says Czech Writer

The Nigerian diplomat shot dead by a 72-year old Czech pensioner in Prague last week reportedly "got a smack" from fellow Nigerians for being honest. Mr. Iva Pekarkova, a Czech national and writer, said the late Mr. Michael Lekara Wayi was despised by "less scrupulous Nigerians because he tenaciously adhered to the rules and laws".

In an article in the Czech leading daily newspaper, Pekarkova said Wayi was a "nice man who reached up to the shoulders of majority of other people". His refusal to concede to the demands of the less-scrupulous on issues relating to the issuance of false passports, for instance, put him at cross-croads with such deviant characters, Perkarkova noted.

He accused some Czech nationals of greed and being naive enough to fall victims to fraudsters.

"It is true that there are foxes among Nigerians, always trying to defraud some gullible people," he wrote, stressing that in addition to their naivety, the victims appeared to be greedy to have fallen prey to such fraudulent tricks.

"Wayi cannot be blamed for anything that happened to the outraged pensioner who did not hesitate to become a murderer," he charged.

Pekarkova acknowledged that the Nigerian government had been using all means to bridle the country's "brigands" who were harming the country's image all over the world, but noted that there were still dozens of crooks and conmen in the country.

419 Coalition Note: Of course the last paragraph is really nothing more than a crude attempt at Diplomacy here, as the Nigerian government most certainly has not been "using all means available to bridle the country's brigands (419ers)" and never has to date.

25 FEB 2003

From The Guardian, a Nigerian newspaper:

Embassy denies slain Nigerian envoy's involvement in fraud

REPORTS in some national dailies, which quoted the Czech polices linking the murder of a senior Nigerian diplomat to advance free fraud (419), [appear to be erroneous]. The Czech man, Mr. Pavovsky, who killed Mr. Lekara Michael Wayi on Wednesday last week, had no business dealings with the embassy [said the Nigerian Embassy in Czechoslovakie, apparently].

It stated that the 50-year-old victim was only assisting Pacovsky on how to handle his financial misadventure in Nigeria in a "get-rich-quick business he fraudulently entered into with some faceless Nigerians".

And speaking on how to curb the illicit trade, the Nigerian Ambassador to Czech Republic, Mrs. Julie Ayorinde, has asked foreign governments to prosecute their

nationals who collaborate with Nigerians in the scam.

She told the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) at the weekend that the foreign collaborators are as guilty as their Nigerian accomplices are.

But giving details of Pacovsky's interaction with the embassy, the statement explained that:

"It is on record that any time Pacovsky was in the embassy, the deceased would spend hours attending to him, advising him against getting involved in fraudulent business dealings with people he did not even know."

It claimed that the fraudulent activities of Pacovsky in Nigeria were well-known to the Czech authorities.

"The deceased had on several occasions attempted to stop Pacovsky from continuing with his fraudulent activities, but to no avail."

The embassy lamented that instead of heeding Wayi's advice, the Czech murdered him "in cold blood" and shot another embassy official who attempted to assist the deceased.

"Pacovsky shot both his victims several times at point blank range, which shows a clear premeditated intent on his part," it added.

Ayorinde, however, said that it is criminal for anybody to want to get easy money through dubious mean, and asked, "is investing money to steal someone else's money not criminal enough for the authorities?"

She lamented that at present, the onus is on diplomats to pay for the crimes committed on both sides, and noted that prosecuting the collaborators by their home governments will drastically reduce the scale of the scam.

The envoy disclosed that some recipients of '419' letters were difficult to convince that the letters were fraudulent, adding that some of them still obliged the fraudsters even after being warned by the embassy.

"Some of them don't believe these letters are fake. When they burn their fingers, they come back to us. Why should an educated person fall prey to faceless fraudsters?"

"Why should people send their account details to someone they do not know, or go to another country to deposit money?" she queried.

419 Coalition comment: Ambassador Ayorinde is either ingenuous, uninformed or both. Nigeria has been pressing the victim as criminal philosophy on target nations for many years, and all have rejected it. No nation is going to further punish its own people who have already been punished by losing money when Nigeria continues to do nothing substantial, sustained, quantifiable, and tangible to punish its 419 criminals who Make the money. This shooting, tragic as it is, does nothing whatever to change the overall situation, which is: No target nation currently considers its victims of Classic 419 to be criminals and none are going to in the foreseeable future.

21 FEB 2003

From The Guardian, a Nigerian newspaper (an earlier

BBC news piece on this up in 19 FEB 2003 news):

Czech police link murder of Nigerian envoy to fraud

THE Czech Republic police have adduced probable reasons for the killing of a Nigerian diplomat, Mr. Michael Waidi, by a 72-year-old retiree in Prague on Wednesday.

Acting on their preliminary investigations into the murder, the police said that the suspect, whose name was not disclosed, may have been seeking revenge after being swindled of his life savings in a get-rich-quick scheme.

The 50-year-old envoy was murdered inside the embassy by the elderly Czech, who had reportedly paid several visits to the office to demand the refund of his money.

The scheme is possibly tied to the so-called 'Nigerian letters' scam, otherwise known as advanced fee fraud (419).

Prague police said the pensioner had confessed and was being detained pending a murder charge in connection with the shooting at the embassy.

"The man stated that his motive for the crime was a financial transaction, from which the Nigerian reputedly owed him financial assets, said a police statement.

Investigators said the pensioner allegedly killed Waidi and wounded a 37-year-old embassy clerk, before surrendering to the embassy guards.

The shooting broke out while the gunman and Waidi were arguing in the consul's office. The victim was pronounced dead at the scene.

Although police won't comment on details of the pensioner's gripe, an embassy official disclosed that the man had lost his life savings in a scam.

He had also visited the embassy "regularly for almost a year" in hopes of getting back his money.

419 Coalition Note: We know that there are a lot of pissed off 419 victims out here, many many more than most Nigerians seem to think that there are. But this is beyond the pale. Shooting people is not an appropriate punishment for theft. Nobody deserves to die over 419. Plus it's already very difficult to get one's money back from a Live 419er, so we'd reckon that it's pretty much impossible to get it back from a dead one.

20 FEB 2003

Harvard Crimson online

Published on Thursday, February 20, 2003

Villainous Victims

The Worldfront

<http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=272708>

By JONATHAN P. ABEL

What do you call someone who engages in dozens of surreptitious transactions to steal tens of millions of dollars? Sometimes they're called criminals, other times they're called victims.

Enron executives steered the company's funds into a series of complicated tax shelters to inflate its profit reports while at the same time evading tax obligations through a dizzying manipulation of the tax code. The scheme collapsed; the top Enron executives were reviled as criminals and subsequently prosecuted. This is how it should be.

But it's not just big business executives who conspire to swindle millions of dollars of other people's money. Thanks to the internet, ordinary Americans can now try their hands at big-time fraud. Propelled by a volatile mixture of cupidity and stupidity, many Americans engage in very shady business dealings, and yet, amazingly, our government treats them like victims.

In one recent scheme, an e-mail or letter arrives, supposedly from a member of the U.S. Special Forces in Afghanistan. The writer claims to have come across \$36 million in Taliban drug money, and he is looking for help sneaking it out of the country (apparently in the spirit of the movie, ³Three Kings²). Even more despicable are letters that offer a chance to get hold of cash found in the collapse of the World Trade Center or to collect on phony life-insurance policies for servicemen killed in the Pentagon attack.

Ten thousand of these letters go out everyday, tempting anyone with an inbox to steal what does not belong to them. It doesn't take more than a rudimentary understanding of morality to realize that this type of theft is wrong, but apparently the Secret Service (the branch of the Treasury Department responsible for investigating counterfeiting and fraud) doesn't possess even this threshold understanding. Instead of punishing or condemning these gluttons, our government treats them like victims.

The letters taking advantage of the war on terror may be new, but the basic scheme goes back to the early 1980s, when it first started to emerge in Nigeria. Named after this West African country, the ³Nigeria scam² presents itself as a way to steal millions of dollars from disorganized, foreign governments. Its myriad permutations all follow a general pattern: an unsolicited e-mail arrives from a stranger claiming to be a government official, usually in Nigeria. He has come across ten to 60 million dollars that are unaccounted for in the government's books, and he offers 20 percent of it in exchange for helping him remove the money from the country.

There are always some colorful details thrown in about the origins of the money. Sometimes it's a payoff from an outgoing government, sometimes it's an over-invoiced government contract. Other times it's pure graft. The only common thread is that the money does not belong to him, which is the very reason he needs to get it into a foreign account quickly.

So far, so good.

Sure, he's a stranger. Sure, he's trying to involve you in an international money-laundering scheme. But he's got a Yahoo! account so he must be legitimate.

All you have to do is forward him your address, phone number, bank account and other personal details. Later, of course, you'll have to sign some blank documents and send him a color photocopy of your passport, but no one mentions this up front. Eventually, if you succeed in jumping through all these hoops, the millions of dollars will be yours (once you fly to Nigeria and collect it in person).

As unbelievable as this scam sounds, the truly incredible part is that anyone believes it. In fact, the Secret Service's website even complains about the ³perception that no one is prone to enter into such an obviously suspicious relationship.² In fact, in 2001 alone there were more than 2,600 Americans who went along with this scam, some losing as much as \$70,000.

On some basic level these people should be pitied for their gullibility and financial losses, and that's certainly the tack taken by the Secret Service, which refers to these saps as ³victims.² To be sure, there are some victims like the American who was murdered in Lagos, Nigeria in 1995 while pursuing the Nigeria scam. Yet this exception only proves the rule. No one deserves to die for attempting to steal this money, but it seems fair that they lose their money, since they are, after all, attempting to take part in international fraud.

It's hard to feel too sorry for the vast majority of these crooks (who lose their money, not their lives). These so-called victims are greedy people willing to steal money from the coffers of a foreign government, willing to help corrupt bureaucrats cash out their bribe money, and even willing to take advantage of last year's terrorist attacks.

It does not matter that they are not the ones who initiated the scam, nor does it matter that they are often not legally culpable, since the money never appears. None of this diminishes the moral deceit of their actions. Like their Nigerian co-conspirators, the Americans who take part in this scheme should be dismissed as dishonest cheats, not pitied as victims.

Even if the Secret Service insists on calling them victims, these people are nothing more than would-be criminals. Instead of devoting precious investigative resources to these scams, our government should transfer that effort to tracking down Osama bin Laden, finding the anthrax mailer, or at the very least, scouring corporate tax statements.

Let the American and Nigerian crooks rob each other blind. This seems like a fitting way to deal with the Nigeria scam.

Jonathan P. Abel '05, a Crimson editor, is a history concentrator in Quincy House. His column appears on alternate Thursdays.

419 Coalition Note: The author is of course entitled to his views, as uninformed as they may be, and he does of course note that the Powers That Be do not agree with his position, for which 419 Coalition is thankful :) :)

19 FEB 2003
From the BBC UK edition:

Diplomat shot dead in Prague

Czech police have launched a major investigation after a senior diplomat was shot dead at the Nigerian embassy in the capital, Prague.

The dead man has been named as 50-year-old Michael Lekara Wayid, Nigeria's consul in the Czech Republic.

Police say they have arrested a 72-year-old Czech man.

According to unconfirmed reports, the man is suspected of opening fire because he was the victim of a financial swindle by a Nigerian group.

He is said to have been persuaded to give his bank details to someone posing as a senior Nigerian official.

In recent years, Nigerian-based organisations have been suspected of operating fraudulent schemes in several countries, promising large returns on financial transactions.

Bodyguards

Police spokeswoman Daniela Razimova said the suspect arrived at the embassy to discuss an unspecified business matter at 1030 (0930 GMT) and that shots were heard some time afterwards.

The embassy's 37-year-old receptionist in a next-door office went to investigate and was shot in the hand.

It was he who called embassy bodyguards, who detained the suspected attacker until police arrived.

The clerk is being treated in the Central Military Hospital, as is the suspected attacker, who reportedly collapsed at the scene of the shooting.

Police have been granted permission to enter the embassy, in the diplomatic quarter near the city centre, to investigate.

19 FEB 2003

From the Daily Times, a Nigerian newspaper:

Nigeria wins 419 case against six Americans

OLUDARE MAYOWA

The Federal Government has won a landmark advance fee fraud (aka 419) case in the United States in its quest to expose the menace of the scam and cleanse the country's image of any culpability in the crime.

According to the order of the United States district court for the Eastern District of Virginia, the case filed by Ford Wright and others against the federal government and others was dismissed by the presiding judge.

In the suit, the plaintiffs sued the federal government, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) on their refusal to pay the sum of \$35.68 million (N4.54 billion) being alleged contract fee executed by a company registered in the US.

It was alleged that the company, Kemax Limited executed a contract worth \$35.68 million on behalf of the NNPC in 1984 and payment was not due until 1993.

However, the plaintiffs claimed that in spite of several expenses incurred by both Kemax and themselves, in taxes, fees and other charge paid to representatives and agencies of the defendants, the defendants had failed to release the said sum.

The plaintiffs sought the permission of the court to claim from the defendants the sum of

\$38.19 million as special damages and \$1 million as punitive damages.

In their oral testimony at the court, the plaintiffs said they were invited by one Endel Peedo, a director of Kemax to participate in the recovery efforts of the company.

They claimed to have paid various sums, totalling \$831,179 between 1994 and May 2001 to Endel Pedoo for onward transmission to the defendants or their representatives.

In the process of cross-examination, the plaintiffs admitted that the alleged contract between Kemax Limited and NNPC did not involved any of them.

They also admitted that the payments made to the defendants were made by Endel Peedo and not themselves.

However, the defence counsel moved the court to dismiss the plaintiffs case as they had failed to establish a nexus between themselves and the defendants.

In his ruling, the preisdng judge upheld the defence counsel's application to dismiss and struck out the plaintiffs claims in thier entirety.

12 FEB 2003

From The Guardian, a Nigerian newspaper:

Govt releases list of fraudsters phone lines

INCREASING surveillance by Federal agents on fraudsters, who use the telephone to dupe unsuspecting Nigerians and foreigners, is yielding fruit.

In fact, the Federal Government has begun to release lists of local and foreign telephone lines suspected to have criminal links with fraudulent operations.

Sixty of such phone/fax numbers were released yesterday by the National Committee on Financial Crimes in the Presidency. However, owners of the lines are suspected to be using assumed names.

A statement issued by Mr. Jimoh Kittu Lawal, the committee's Director of Public Enlightenment, said:

"In pursuance of the Federal Government objective of sanitising the nation's business environment and restoring the trust and confidence of the international community, it has become necessary to expose all telephone and fax lines within and outside Nigeria that are suspected to have criminal links with fraudulent operations or owned by financial crime suspects.

"As massive investigations are already being finalised, all members of the general public and the international community are advised to assist the National Committee on Financial Crimes with further useful information on any of the listed lines with which you are familiar.

"The committee also seizes this opportunity to advise all law abiding citizens against co-operating with any callers, who ask respondents to guess who is on the line, as this may be a ploy for impersonation and fraud.

"Latest investigations have revealed that scammers now use such guessing games on telephone to successfully impersonate close friends or relatives and dupe unsuspecting victims of money running into millions of naira.

"Children, dependants, and house maids should be advised against responding to any caller who tries to engage them in a guessing game on telephone, as it may be a ploy for extracting vital information about 'daddy' or 'mummy.' Which may facilitate the operation of criminals."

The list of suspected telephone lines is with the committee's office at 15A, Awolowo Road, Ikoyi, Lagos Tel 01-2621293.

419 Coalition Note: Useful, and long overdue. USSS 419 Task Force has a list of over 60,000 such numbers which has been available to the Nigerian authorities for years. We trust the Nigerian authorities are shutting down these 60 lines immediately, with more to come. And just maybe Nitel etc. ought to require positive proof of identity before issuing phone lines since they seem to have so many problems with "impersonators", they should have been doing this for years, of course, but noooo.....

10 FEB 2003

From the Southeast Missourian:

By Mike Wells

For anyone selling pricey merchandise on the Internet, beware greetings from Nigeria.

After years of flooding mailboxes, fax machines and e-mail accounts with artfully written letters promising lucrative profits from money transfers, Nigerian thieves are putting a new spin on an old scam.

Many people grew wise to advance fee frauds coming out of the west African nation during the '80s and '90s, largely thanks to warnings from consumer groups and law enforcement. The crimes are also called "4-1-9" scams, referring to a portion of a Nigerian penal code about fraud.

Because the United States has no criminal extradition treaty with Nigeria, law enforcement can do next to nothing to bring the Nigerian con artists to justice.

In the newest variation on the theme for stealing cash, criminals pose as potential buyers of large items for sale on the Internet, such as cars, furniture or even purebred dogs.

The fake buyer informs the seller he has an associate in the United States who owes him money and will mail the seller a cashier's check made out for more than the amount of the item, typically several thousands of dollars. The buyer requests the seller withdraw the extra amount after deposit and wire it to the buyer.

But days later, when the checks are determined to be counterfeit, the bank holds the customer responsible for the entire amount, even if the bank assured the victim the funds were good.

FBI Special Agent Mike McComas of Cape Girardeau has been familiar with 4-1-9 scams for nearly 10 years. Most originate in Nigeria, but some have come from other African countries.

Recently a man living outside St. Louis selling a trailer was contacted by a Nigerian con artist. The fake buyer sent a bogus check with an additional few thousand dollars, and he then called the man saying it was an accounting mistake and asked for the difference back immediately.

Some people won't listen

But the letter scheme prevails as the most common Nigerian fraud, McComas said.

"We have people come in here weekly with those letters," he said.

He warns people to avoid such deals, but some won't listen.

"I got a call one day about this and told the guy it was a bogus deal, but he went ahead and did it anyway," McComas said.

The man lost more than a quarter of a million dollars. The FBI ultimately decided not to pursue charges against him for conspiracy, McComas said.

Smuggling money into the country is considered conspiracy and depositing a bogus check, whether or not a victim knows the check was fraudulent, is considered bank fraud. Both come with fines and prison time.

"It comes down to the old adage that if it looks too good to be true, it probably is," he said. "It's sad how some people are led into becoming victims by their own greed."

That's exactly what happened to Shawn Mosch and her husband, Jeff, of Bloomington, Minn., who were swindled by a Nigerian con artist.

In October, the couple was selling a 1961 Buick Special online. They had offers, including some from out of state and one from Brazil, but none worked out.

"Then we got a call from a guy claiming to be a car dealer in Africa," she said. "He said he knew he would be able to sell it very quickly at twice the price there. At first, I thought we'd never really get a check."

The buyer called himself Adebisi Julius of Lagos, Nigeria. He told Mosch an associate in the United States owed him \$7,200 and that person would send a \$8,800 check to the Mosches. They were to deduct the price of the car, \$1,600, and then send the balance to Julius in Africa -- \$7,200.

When the cashier's check arrived in the mail, Shawn Mosch was still skeptical. She took it to her bank, where a teller told her because it was a cashier's check the funds would be available within 24 hours.

"I asked him if he was sure," Mosch said. "Because I wanted to make positive it was not bite-me-in-the-butt money, and he laughed and said, 'Of course, ma'am, 24 hours.'"

Sued the bank

Mosch actually waited 48 hours before she took out the portion of the money to be sent to the buyer.

A week later the check turned up as bogus. When the bank tried to make them cough up the \$7,200, the Mosches sued claiming the teller misinformed them. They have since settled out of court with the bank but cannot disclose the amount.

Shawn Mosch wasted no time in warning others. In November, she formed an online support group for scam victims that now has 170 members, and she built an informative Web site called Scam Victims United at www.geocities.com/scamvictimsunited/.

"I tend to get right on top of things when I feel there's an issue to be addressed," said the stay-at-home mom. "I get 30 e-mails a day from people thanking me for putting together this site and sharing their stories. We've had 11,000 hits since the first week."

Mosch is contacting U.S. senators to ask them to make changes in banking laws to protect customers from fraud by requiring mandatory holding periods on all checks of a substantial amount, unless the customer signs a release, and setting a time period in which by law all banks must verify the funds are good on all cashier's checks.

But ultimately, it's up to individuals to avoid becoming victims, she said.

"The only good way to catch this is to call the bank a check was issued from, armed with the account number, the name of the account holder and the amount of the check, and ask them if it is a good check," she said.

'Blinded by greed'

Ben Blankenship of Seattle was wise enough not to go through with such a deal. In December, he was selling a 1967 Volvo on eBay, an Internet auction Web site. The lowest selling price of the car was set at \$2,500.

"I was desperate to sell it to pay for Christmas," he said. "Things weren't going so well until I got this e-mail."

The e-mail came from a supposed buyer interested in the car who offered Blankenship \$3,000. The buyer identified himself as James Norman in Cotonou, Benin, a small West African country west of Nigeria. He said his accountant, Bamidele Samuel, in Nigeria would receive the money.

"Wow! I thought," Blankenship said. "Someone wants to give me too much money for this car -- must be some rich sultan or something. Always suspicious, but blinded by greed, I wrote back and said, '\$3,500 and it's yours, pal.'"

Norman told Blankenship an associate of his in the United States owing him \$7,800 would issue a cashier's check to Blankenship to save time. He asked Blankenship to subtract the car's price and send the difference to him via a Western Union money transfer.

But Blankenship smelled a rat.

"Now super-suspicious, I didn't cancel the auction and did a search for 'African car scam' on Google," he said. "Page after page describing this and other variants of the 4-1-9 scam came up."

He took the check made to him to a bank, where it was recognized it as counterfeit.

"The check was a good fake but not great," Blankenship said. "It had a security pattern on the back but not on the front. They said that if I had tried to cash it I could have been arrested for fraud."

Aware he nearly became a victim, Blankenship told Norman that after he had cashed the check, the car was struck by a garbage truck and crushed by a trash container full of glass bottles. Eventually, the fake buyer lost interest.

"All in all, I didn't lose any money," Blankenship said. "I never asked for any help from any authorities, as I didn't expect them to do much."

mwells@semissourian.com

Here is the URL of the article for as long as it is current:

[http://www.semissourian.com/story.html\\$rec=101255](http://www.semissourian.com/story.html$rec=101255)

9 FEB 2003

From the South African Press Association (Johannesburg)
as reported on allafrica.com:

Nigerian Businessman, Politician Wanted On Fraud Charges

A businessman believed to be standing in the upcoming Nigerian elections is wanted in South Africa for trying to con wealthy foreigners out of more than R97-million as part of the infamous "419" scam, the Sunday Times newspaper reported.

Phil Okafor -- the legal adviser to the South African branch of Nigeria's ruling People's Democratic Party -- is wanted on at least nine charges of racketeering and fraud.

The report said the National Directorate of Public Prosecutions was granted a court order this week to seize Okafor's R1,8-million home and two luxury cars registered in the name of his South African wife, Yogandrie Naidoo.

Scorpions spokesman Sipho Ngwema said an arrest warrant was expected to be issued on Monday. The Nigerian is believed to be in his homeland campaigning for the parliamentary elections scheduled for May.

The Scorpions believe Okafor is one of the South African kingpins of the "419" scam, an advance-fee fraud in which foreign businessmen are lured to South Africa by e-mail or fax with promises that they will receive millions of United States dollars in return for paying hefty sums up front.

The article mentioned that in papers before the Johannesburg High Court this week, the Scorpions alleged that Okafor swindled at least nine foreigners with the help of David Seabi, an employee of the German international finance house Commerzbank in Johannesburg.

This week, Debo Sodeke, national secretary-general of the People's Democratic Party's South African chapter, said Okafor was being expelled for "anti-party activities" -- which included campaigning to stand in the elections for the opposition party, the All Nigerian People's Party.

Ngwema was not immediately available for comment on Sunday.

Here is the URL of the article for as long as it is valid:

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200302100349.html>

30 JAN 2003

From The Guardian, a Nigerian newspaper:

Group condemns rising financial crimes' profile

By Perpetual Azigere

Rising cases of financial crimes in the country's banking system and society at large has been condemned by the Shelter Rights Initiative (SRI).

SRI, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) advocated on Economic, Social and Cultural (ESC) rights stated in its forth quarter review of 2002 of ESC rights in Nigeria that "bank frauds and advance fee fraud cases otherwise known as 419 scams (were) running neck to neck."

The report presented by Mr. Eze Onyekpere, executive director, SRI, noted that an interim report released by regulatory bodies made public revealed that in the months of June and July alone, 12 banks had already reported fraud cases worth N10.3 billion to the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the National Deposit Insurance Corporation (NDIC).

"The different forms of these fraudulent acts gives an insight into the criminal ingenuity of those who perpetrate these crimes," the report stated.

Among fraudulent acts used to perpetrate these crimes include, the forgery of cheques, granting of unauthorised loans and posting of fictitious credits.

"Suppression of cheques, fraudulent transfer and withdrawals are other forms.

"Added to these is the use of Nigerian banks as conduits for laundering money, the issuing of dud dividend warrants by banks to shareholders and the connivance of banks staff in bank robberies," the review continued.

International finance regulatory bodies such as Britain's apex finance regulatory authority, the Financial Service Authority (FAS), is said to have warned British banks to be wary in their dealings with Nigerian banks.

Another international financial regulatory body, Financial Action Task Force (FATF) based in Paris is also unsettled by the development and has strongly demanded that these crimes be checked, Eze said.

"Advance fee fraudsters are not letting up. They are literally on the rampage, financially wrecking their local and international victims.

The picture that emerges is that of a country where neither its individual citizens nor its banking industry can be trusted," he said.

The Shelter Rights Initiative noted that such a picture where neither the individual citizens nor its banking industry can be trusted has grave implications for a developing country like Nigeria with a comatose economy, a country that is in desperate need of foreign investors, will be an understatement.

The group realised that other grave implications which seems to have been down played or completely ignored is the effect of bank crimes on the local banking population.

Analysing an old banking system of Nigeria where its people has lots of money in circulation and the banking culture is low, lots of money do not pass through the banking system but were saved under their pillows.

With banks where people's money were supposed to be safe now heavens for crooks, how can people who have all along distrusted banks be persuaded to embraced the banking culture, the group stated.

Aware however of the implications of these crimes which has eaten deep into the

financial sector of the economy, the government has through president Olusegun Obasanjo sent the "Economic and Finance Crimes Bill 2002" to the National Assembly for consideration.

Among other things, the bill seeks life jail terms for persons convicted for financial crimes.

In its official statutes, the Shelter Rights Initiative (SRI) states that, "We consider this bill superfluous and unnecessary. We already have enough laws in our statutes to take care of almost every conceivable crime, especially of financial nature. It is the strict enforcement of these existing laws, not the enactment of new ones that will stem the tide of these crimes."

29 JAN 2003

From Vanguard, a Nigerian newspaper:

FG plans offensive against cyber-crimes ... embarks on review of IT legislation

By Godfrey Ikhemuemhe

To mitigate the impact of cyber-crimes on the image of the country, the federal government has laid out an elaborate plan which it hopes would check the ignoble vice amongst notorious Nigerians.

Many countries have threatened to blacklist Nigeria severally because of this menace.

In the private sector too, internet hosts abroad have on many occasions threatened to cut-off some Nigerian ISPs from their network due to the same problem.

Prof. Gabriel Ajayi, director-general of the Nigeria Information Technology Development agency(NITDA) said last week in Lagos that the government was aware that internet cafes in Nigeria and especially Lagos were being used to perpetrate cyber crimes on the internet.

The crimes, which Ajayi said that Nigerians indulge in with the internet, include amongst others 419 mails, computer crimes, and other general cyber-crimes

He said that the impact of such crimes on the country have the devastating. The federal government have in the past years been contending with complaints about such crimes from friendly nations leading to the current effort to deal with it frontally.

He warned that the implication of these actions on the Nigerian IT sector could better be imagined. That is why, he said, that the Nigerian government is determined more than ever before to fight the menace frontally.

He contended that by the time the federal government finishes drawing up a comprehensive plan for fighting the crime it would be unprofitable for people to indulge in it.

Part of the federal government offensive against the problem is the review of the current legislation on IT. Ajayi said that his agency had already forwarded a bill to the National Assembly for a comprehensive review of Nigeria's IT legislations. He said that the bill which is awaiting the final reading in the National Assembly will make adequate provisions for dealing with internet 419.

Ajayi, however, reiterated the urgency of the bill. He said that given that the current National Assembly will be winding up in about four months, it was imperative that the bill

be passed expeditiously if it is not to experience some reversals again at a time Nigeria most urgently needed it. He said that the bill should be given as much priority as those political bills which usually necessitate a recall of members from holidays.

[Additional nonrelevant material edited out - 419 Coalition]

419 Coalition Note: Sounds good, but we submit that there are already Plenty of laws in Nigeria on the books dealing with 419 and other financial crimes, and the Problem is that Nobody Enforces Them. It is the lack of Enforcement of the existing laws which is the primary counter-419 problem in Nigeria. The new laws proposed will of course also be useless if Nobody enforces Them. If this does not change, this announcement etc. and the new laws it proposes really can be considered, at best, merely to be nothing but more well-meant propaganda. We say again that there are Three things which need to be done to control 419 in Nigeria, and they are:

1. Enforcement.
2. Enforcement.
3. Enforcement.

28 JAN 2003

From the Santa Cruz Sentinel (CA)

International e-mail scam ensnares get-rich dreamers

By Jyllian Kemsley

Laurent Mpeti Kabila needs your help. His father, a government official of the Democratic Republic of Congo, was murdered and Kabila needs to get \$10 million out of the country. In exchange for your help, you'll get 5 percent of the money.

Or so the e-mail promises.

Such requests are the latest in a long line of scams referred to as Nigerian advance fee fraud, or "4-1-9" schemes (the 4-1-9 comes from the Nigerian law relating to fraud). They began as a mail campaign in the 1980s, then moved to faxes and now flood e-mail boxes.

Robin Gysin of the consumer affairs division of the Santa Cruz County District Attorney's Office has experienced the onslaught firsthand.

"I probably got maybe 10 Nigeria faxes, but I've had about 1,000 Nigeria e-mails," she said.

One recent e-mail claims that the recipient's e-mail address was provided by the chamber of commerce.

"Absolutely not," Gysin said. "Nobody would do that."

Gysin said she receives complaints daily from recipients of the e-mails and letters asking if they're scams and whether they can be stopped. She directs them to the U.S. Secret Service, which is responsible for investigating money fraud.

"The interesting thing is, as ludicrous as the whole thing sounds to most people, (the swindlers) must be getting some feedback on it - otherwise it

wouldn't keep going," she said.

Gysin said she's aware of only one local case in which someone may have lost money in the scams; the owner of a small business in Watsonville claimed \$10,000 was stolen from his bank account, though Gysin did not verify the theft.

The Secret Service keeps a database of all letters forwarded to them. They can sometimes identify the senders based on the writing style and grammar, said spokesman Brian Marr. Agents then work with foreign law enforcement to catch the culprits.

In 2002, Americans submitted 38,000 mailed or faxed letters, and 346,000 e-mails to the Secret Service, he said.

Approximately 250 cases of actual money loss were investigated, amounting to more than \$85 million, Marr said.

But the problem is probably much larger.

"I don't think we're receiving a fourth of the people who have lost money," Marr said. "Most people don't report it because they knew it was a get-rich-quick scheme, and they feel embarrassed that they've been taken in."

The schemes typically begin with a letter claiming that millions of dollars are trapped in a bank account in countries such as the Philippines, South Africa or Nigeria, and that an American bank account is needed to free the money. They often say the person receiving the letter was chosen for their "trustworthy" reputation and that a "God-fearing" person is needed. The writer emphasizes the matter is "urgent" and requires "absolute secrecy." When someone responds to the letter, the money requests start.

"Initially you're going to start up a dialogue," Marr said. "They say, I'm going to move \$30 million from this account to that account. To do that, I need \$1,500 to bribe someone."

After a few bribery-related exchanges, the swindler will try to get the victim to travel to another country, claiming the victim is needed in person to pay off the contacts. According to Marr, the victim is usually asked to bring \$10,000 to \$20,000, and is provided with a forged travel visa.

Once the victim arrives in the foreign country, Marr said, they're told to hand over the money or they will be turned in to the police for entering the country illegally. At that point the victim may be released, or more money may be extorted.

An American was murdered in 1995 in Lagos, Nigeria, while pursuing such a scam, according to the Secret Service.

Marr said the victims usually fall into two categories.

"One group is people who don't realize what's going on and really feel they're trying to help this individual. The other is people who do know it sounds like a get-rich-quick scheme, but they're willing to take a chance," he said.

And the number of people succumbing is increasing, though not necessarily

because Americans are becoming more gullible. It used to take more money and time to send out mailed or faxed letters.

"Now they can send out 500 (by e-mail) at the stroke of a key," Marr said.

He estimated two to three people respond per 100 scam letters sent. If the swindlers can send 1,000 letters a day instead of 50, they're going to snare many more victims.

"People need to understand what this is, that it's a criminal enterprise," Marr said. "The best thing to do is to forward it to us and then delete it."

Contact Jyllian Kemsley at jkem-@santa-cruz.com.

419 Coalition Note: Excellent article! However, it is necessary to point out that in fact the great majority of 419 cases do NOT involve travel elsewhere, though it is not uncommon. The vast majority of cases are Wire Fraud pure and simple. Also, the article does not stress that 419 is a Global problem rather than a purely American one, which is of course the case. Finally, it concentrates, as it should, on Classic 419, the most common type of 419, and doesn't mention the many other types of 419, including Goods and Services 419, which is becoming much more prevalent of late.

27 JAN 2003

From ThisDay, a Nigerian newspaper. For earlier articles on this story see News entries for 15 JAN from The Guardian and ThisDay.

419 : HOW AMERICAN BUSINESSMAN WAS DUPED \$5.5M

Committee on Financial Crimes parades a journalist for swindling a local firm, two others for impersonating Alhaji Umaru Shinkafi and his son to rip-off the American

By Andrew Ahiane

As the effort to rid the nation of financial crimes waxes stronger, the National Committee on Financial Crimes, penultimate week paraded two suspects arrested for their alleged involvement in Advance Fee Fraud aka 419.

Mr. Eze Udu Anakwe, an indigene of Anambra State and his brother, Kingsley Nnamdi Anakwe, still at large, were said to have impersonated Alhaji Umaru Shinkafi, a chieftain of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), and his son, Sani, to dupe an American businessman, Mr. Milton Bernox, of the sum of \$5.5 million.

Another paraded suspect, Mr. Bolaji Bode-Thomas, of Plot 17/18, Allen Avenue, Ikeja, Lagos, was alleged to have swindled Seafood, a private company in Lagos, of N3.7 million between April and May, 2002.

He was said to have deceived the company into parting with the money for him on the pretence that he would sell his plot of land at the Government Reservation Area (GRA), Ikeja, later discovered to belong to the Lagos State Government.

Parading the suspects, Chairman, Committee on Financial Crimes, and Commissioner of Police (CP), Special Fraud Unit, Milverton, Ikoyi, Lagos, Mr.

Charles I. Akaya, explained that syndicates of the Advance Fee Fraud comprise foreigners outside the shores of the country, and Nigerians, explaining that the nature of their network make investigations difficult.

Bernox was said to have been contacted by one Mr. Paul Oniama, who posed as a director of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) with the power to make the American go into the lucrative oil business.

As they intensified their efforts to convince Bernox of the genuineness of the deal, they invited him to London, where he met one Mr. Robert, who later introduced him to one Alhaji Sani, who posed as a representative of the Nigerian High Commission in Britain

The deal, Akaya said investigation further revealed, began in the year 2000, culminating in series of meetings during which Alhaji Sani at different times collected \$300,000, totalling \$5.5 million by the end of 2002, for the purpose of facilitating the oil business from Bernox.

The anti-Financial Crimes Committee boss said they were on the trail of a purported Nigerian chief, an accomplice in the fraud, whose name was yet to be ascertained. Bernox's son who was known to the Nigerian chief, living in Kent, United Kingdom, took Bernox to meet with the chief.

Obvious to Bernox that he had been duped, he was said to have demanded for his money but the fraudsters did not give in. They instead, continued to post him, deceiving and deriding him. They were said to have at a point given Bernox a \$7million fake cheque of the Central Bank of Nigerian (CBN).

Bernox, who discovered the cheque to be fake when he flew into the country to attempt to draw it, narrated his ordeal to Central Bank officials, who took him to the office of the Financial Crimes Committee, which immediately evolved strategies to round up members of the syndicate.

Bernox was advised to play low, go into renewed discussions with them and accept their terms of trade. He did. Bernox was later met by one of them, who claimed to be Alhaji Umaru Shinkafi, promising to help him to cash the cheque if he pays him \$2 million and another \$130,000 for what he called poverty alleviation fees.

Bernox offered to pay \$50,000 on the advise of the State Security Service (SSS).

They consequently agreed to meet at the Ikoyi Hotel, where he was to make the payment to one of them who posed as the son of Alhaji Shinkafi.

Luck, however, ran out for the purported Alhaji Umaru Shinkafi's son when he was picked up by locking security agents at the Ikoyi Hotel Venue of the meeting slated late into the night.

Answering questions from journalists, the fraudster, who gave his name as Eze Udu Anakwe, said his father was a herbalist. He said one Christopher, who posed as Alhaji Shinkafi, sent a message to their village in Anambra State to complain that his wife was having miscarriage, saying that he was subsequently sent to deliver medicine to Christopher for his wife.

Christopher, who later came home to inform the family of his wife's delivery, he said, asked him to follow him to Enugu to deliver some money. At Enugu, he said he lodged in a hotel, bought him some suits and other paraphnelia to make

him look like a successful businessman and took him to the airport, where he flew to Lagos, saying that he was asked to pass through CMS and then to Ikoyi Hotel, where he was to meet a white businessman.

"I was asked to introduce myself as Musa Shinkafi, son of Alhaji Umaru Shinkafi", he continued.

Asked how they came about the businessman and other things they were to do with him, Eze said only his brother, Nnamdi Anakwe, now late, knew him, explaining that he never met him even though they regularly communicated on phone.

Eze Udu, 21, confessed to having only primary education just as he told reporters that his relatives live in Ajegunle in Ajeromi/Ifelodun Local Government Area of Lagos.

He insisted that he never knew the details of the deal until he was arrested by the police.

On his part, Boalji Bode-Thomas, who claimed to be a journalist and a former press secretary to a one time civilian governor, said he was bundled to the press conference by the SSS, arguing that the allegations against him were false as he does not know any company called Seafood.

However, calling on all Nigerians to help government in the effort to stem the 419 menace, Akaya said the act was compounding the nation's woes as investors were shying away from coming to do meaningful business in the country.

He said legal processes for the prosecution of Eze Udu and Bolaji had begun, stressing that the law would follow its due process. Financial Crimes, as advance fee fraud, he said, carry grave punishments, ranging from 15 years to life imprisonment.

He advised people to always cross check business proposals before jumping at them as they could turn out to be fake, revealing that the agency handled 62 of such fraudulent cases as at November, 2002.

The agency, he said, was faced with the dearth of high technology equipment that could stand those of culprits, complaining that to keep a tab on them was no mean task.

In the wake of government's harsh legislation against such vices as drug peddling and trafficking and armed robbery, many youths had taken to the international act of defrauding institutions, particularly corporate businesses and individuals from the mid 1980s.

The act had assumed such international dimension that the international community not only raised alarm over the disturbing nature of the menace, it dealt a severe blow on the image of the country and terribly shook the confidence of the investing world on doing any business with Nigerians and the country.

Always transacted through mails, telephones and lately emails, with the computer and the internet increasingly assuming the centre stage in the country's activities, mails, as this recently sent to a target of one of such syndicates, are commonly received by business executives, the wealthy and even government institutions.

Targetted at a would be victim, it read: "From the desk of Dr. Franc Kouanda, Bill and Exchange Manager, African Development Bank (ADB), Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, West Africa.

"Dear, I am the Manager of Bill and Exchange at the Foreign Remittance Department of the African Development Bank (ADB). I am writing you following the impressive information about you through one of my friends, who runs a consultancy firm in your country. He assured me of your capability and reliability to champion this business opportunity."

"In my department, we discovered an abandoned sum of \$18.5million (US dollars) in an account that belongs to one of our foreign customers, who died along with his entire family in a fatal plane crash on 15th November, 1998. Since we got information about his death, we have been expecting his next-of-kin to come over and claim his money because we cannot release it unless somebody applies for it as his next-of-kin or a relation to the deceased, as it is our banking guidelines, but unfortunately, we learnt that all his supposed next-of-kins or relations died alongside with him in the plane crash, leaving nobody behind to make the claim...

"It is therefore upon this discovery that I and other officials in my department have now decided to make this business proposal to you and to release the money to you as the next-of-kin or relation to the deceased for safety and subsequent disbursement since nobody is coming for it and we don't want this money to go into the Bank's treasury as an unclaimed bill...

"We agree that 30 percent of this money will be for you as a foreign partner in respect to the provision of a foreign account, 10 percent will be set aside for expenses incurred during the business and 60 percent would be for me and my colleagues. Thereafter, I and my colleagues will visit your country for the disbursement according to the percentages indicated.

"Therefore, to enable the immediate transfer of this fund to you as arranged, you must apply first to the bank as the relation or next-of-kin of the deceased, indicating your bank's name, your bank account number, your private telephone and fax numbers for easy and effective communication and location.

"Upon receipt of your reply, I will send to you through fax or email the text of the application. I will not fail to bring to your notice that this transaction is hitch-free and that you should not entertain any atom of fear as all required arrangements have been made for the transfer. You should contact me immediately as soon as you receive this letter. Trusting to hear from you immediately. N.B.: My intention of writing you through email is because I believe it is very confidential".

While many people within and outside the country have fallen victims of the syndicates through mails as this, the other opinion is that such telephone calls and letters only appeal to those who equally have inordinate desire for wealth.

419 Coalition Note: Congratulations to the Nigerian authorities on this one! We look forward to the conviction of these 419ers and to the repatriation of the funds they stole. We are always pleased to report all successes of the Nigerian authorities in counter-419 operations - we Love success stories!

26 JAN 2003

From the Centre Daily Times, (Central Pennsylvania):

Web scam costs local woman her savings

Dog sale reveals international Internet scheme

By Lara Brenckle

REBERSBURG - A 5-month-old puppy remains at Arlene Adams-Stence's rural Miles Township home, the last of the litter and the symbol of a hard lesson in trust.

In early December, Stence sold her collie's puppies over the Internet via a pet adoption Web site. But, what began as a simple transaction might end up costing the single mother of five \$4,200.

Stence fell prey to a variation of the Internet's newest and seemingly most popular scheme -- the Nigerian money transfer.

"He could have done it to someone who had money," Stence said. "But he did it to me. I had no clue."

Stence is not alone, according to state police at Rockview. The scam has been around in many forms for years. It has evolved from letters soliciting money to e-mail solicitations.

In Centre County, state police said a number of people have been taken for many thousands of dollars, including a State College resident who lost almost \$40,000 over a Nigerian oil-well scam.

Stence's puppy caper is the latest twist in the Nigeria scam, police said. It may be there is a group of individuals scouting online retail and auction sites and running the same con.

Thousands of complaints

Nigerian letter complaints comprised 15.5 percent of the 16,775 complaints referred to various agencies in 2001, according to the year-old Internet Fraud Complaint Center, a joint partnership between the FBI and National White Collar Crimes Center.

Internet auction scams comprised 42.8 percent of referred complaints.

In all, consumers in the referred cases lost \$17.8 million. The median loss was \$435.

You may have gotten an e-mail from an unknown person, stating he or she is a member of the Nigerian government or a member of the country's deposed president's family and needs help transferring a large sum of money -- usually millions of dollars -- to the United States. For your trouble, a percentage of the money will be deposited in your bank account.

Some messages will say they are selecting you -- even if you have never heard of this person -- to get in on oil-well profits. Others use emotional appeals, stating they are trying to escape the political turmoil of the country, but need help transferring assets.

All these, police say, are scams. A person should never give personal information or transfer money to an unknown person without consulting a professional financial adviser.

A reporter at the Centre Daily Times was recently solicited by such an e-mail, asking for help in transferring \$22 million in U.S. dollars to a bank account by someone calling

himself Peter Benson. A second solicitation, with the same information but different name, showed up a few days later.

Another reporter received an e-mail stating the person was working for the government in South Africa, as part of the country's mineral resources and energy department. Again, it was offering a percentage of funds for helping to transfer money from overseas.

Nigerian Nightmare

In Stence's case, a man from Nigeria said he wanted to buy one of the puppies.

He explained that a business associate of his in the U.S. owed him money; rather than wrangling with exchange rates, the third party would send a check for the amount owed to Stence. The man, too, would take the puppy back to Nigeria.

Stence could cash the check, take the money owed for the puppy and wire the rest to him in Nigeria.

For some people, a solicitation from a foreign country, especially one involving "giving change," might seem circumspect.

However, not for Stence, who had grown up with missionary parents in the African country of Eritrea.

Her parents had also served as missionaries in Nigeria. When Stence received what appeared to be a legitimate cashier's check for \$4,200 issued from the National City Bank, with a return address in Michigan, she took it to her father.

He examined it and related a story about a similar experience he had while serving in Africa.

"My dad was giving a music concert and a man approached him to say how sorry he was he was going to miss it," Stence said. "The man asked my dad if, when he returned to the United States, he would buy him a baritone saxophone.

"He handed my dad a check for a lot of money. My dad took it to the bank and the bank said it was fine, the man had a lot more money in his account than the check was for. So, my dad bought him the sax and gave it to him with the change. That was it. The man said 'Thank you' and they never saw him again. But still, my dad marveled that someone would trust him that much. He said 'I could have just walked away with that guy's money.'"

Don't trust cashier's checks

In further researching her case, Stence came across the Web site, www.puppydogweb.com. According to the site, which is devoted to the sale of purebred puppies, the scam has cropped up in different areas of the country and also includes horses.

A section on the site cautioned breeders of both dogs and horses against this very scam. It also posted numerous e-mails from other breeders, all of whom had a similar experience to Stence.

In each instance, the individuals were presented with phony cashier's checks. None of the sellers, however, reported losing money.

Soon after receiving it, Stence took the check to the Rebersburg branch of Omega Bank and asked to cash it.

Stence said she told the bank she did not have the money in her account to cover the check if it bounced, but was allegedly told "it's OK, we know you," she said.

"I asked them two times if this was a good check, because I knew I didn't have the money," Stence said. "I asked if I should deposit it first. But the woman said 'no, it's good, this is a bank check.' If they had any question with it whatsoever, I wouldn't have cashed the check."

She walked out the door with \$4,200, \$400 of which she kept as payment for the pet. She also purchased a leash, collar and crate in which she intended to transport the dog. The remaining money, more than \$3,500, was wired to the man in Nigeria via Western Union, to an address he provided.

A few days later, the check came back marked fraudulent.

Stence said the bank contacted her and told her she would have to pay the money back, plus charges for overdrawing her account.

On Jan. 10, the bank froze Stence's assets. Money in a savings account was transferred to her checking account. Stence said she received no notice of her assets being frozen, only a letter stating funds had been transferred.

"I think people should know, don't take the teller's word for it if the check is good," Stence said.

The Rebersburg branch manager declined to comment on Stence's case, citing privacy concerns.

David Lee, Omega's chairman and CEO, said while he feels bad for Stence, there is not much that can be done.

"If the woman has an account and she endorsed that check, she's on the hook for it," Lee said. "The responsibility falls on her, whether she cashed it or deposited it."

Lee said it is Omega's policy to notify its branches via the company's Intranet of any cases of fraud. Lee said they try to give as much detail as possible concerning forged checks, counterfeit money and the like.

"We don't pay much attention to the quality of the check," Lee said. "We rely on the person who is presenting it."

Lee said he has been seeing the Nigeria scheme for about 10 years now; however, the Internet component is very recent and the puppy scam an entirely new permutation to him.

Many victims of fraud

When "National City Bank of Michigan" is plugged into the search engine Google.com, thousands of hits come up.

The first hit was for National City Corp., a multibank holding company based in Evansville, Ind.

Another said "Catch these Counterfeits!" and had a link to BankersOnline.com, a resource page for financial entities.

The FDIC issued a list, which BankersOnline.com posted Jun. 19, 2002, with National

City Bank of Michigan/Illinois as among banks that had had fraudulent cashier's checks drawn on them.

According to the site, the fraudulent checks had either that name or simple National City Bank on them. A toll-free number was provided to report any of these checks.

A spokeswoman with National City Bank of Michigan/Illinois in Bannockburn, Ill., said the bank is affiliated with the Cleveland-based NatCity, also a legitimate institution.

State police said there really is no recourse for victims of such scams, other than to be careful ahead of time.

If the scammer were a Pennsylvania resident, felony charges could be filed. However, the Pennsylvania State Police are powerless in Nigeria. The best that could be done would be to identify the perpetrator, issue an arrest warrant and, should he come into the United States, have him arrested, police said.

Or, police said, the state attorney general's white-collar crimes office could be notified. If a list of victims were compiled and the perpetrators identified, a class-action suit could be filed.

Stence said she is unsure as to what she will do now.

"I don't have anything to spare," she said. "I live off child support, I home-school my kids and we live way up here in the mountains. That (the amount owed) is half my yearly income."

Lara Brenckle can be reached at lbrenckl@centredaily.com or phone 235-3902.

22 JAN 2003

From NewsDay.com (US):

Westchester charges 2 in alleged Nigeria-themed Internet scam

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y. -- A husband and wife claiming ties to the Nigerian government duped a Wisconsin businessman out of \$200,000 in a scam familiar to hundreds of thousands of e-mail users, the Westchester district attorney said Wednesday.

Chuks Nwogu, 32, of Mount Vernon, a Nigerian national, and Svitlana Nwogu, 25, of the Bronx, were arrested after the victim, expecting millions of dollars in cash, opened a chest and found only worthless paper, District Attorney Jeanine Pirro said.

The man had mortgaged his house to pay some of the fees that the couple demanded as they strung him along with promises of a one-third share in a \$50 million windfall, she said.

The Secret Service says similar Nigeria-themed mass e-mailings, which are sent to Europe as well as the United States, solicit enough trusting responses that Americans alone are losing hundreds of millions of dollars a year. Rafael Figueroa, who heads the White Plains office of the Secret Service, said there have been "many arrests around the country."

"If it looks too good to be true, it probably is," Pirro said. "I caution people to be very, very circumspect when it comes to these Nigerian letters and solicitations. ... Ignore them or call the Secret Service."

In the Westchester case, there was evidence of identity theft as well, Pirro said. She said

the scammers probably checked up on potential victims and by the time a second contact was made, "knew full well the people they're dealing with are capable of delivering the money."

The husband was arrested Jan. 14, the same day the businessman realized he'd been fooled and went to police in Ardsley. The wife was arrested _ and the couple was indicted _ Tuesday. They could be sentenced to up to 15 years in prison if convicted.

The victim, whose name was not made public, was solicited by e-mail last January to help get \$50 million from Nigeria into the United States. The couple claimed to represent the Nigerian government, though investigators have found no real ties, Pirro said.

When the businessman responded to the e-mail, he was told some payments would be necessary for transfer fees, document fees and the like. He was sent certificates purporting to certify the money as "terrorist-free and drug-free," Pirro said.

Finally, the couple told the man to fly in to LaGuardia Airport, where they met him and took him to Ardsley, where he handed over a final \$34,000. Svitlana Nwogu took off with that money, Pirro said, and the man was given the trunk full of black paper, cut in the shape of currency. He was told that if a chemical was added to the paper it would be revealed to be currency, which was not true.

Realizing he was duped, the man went to police, who with the help of the Secret Service arrested the couple and found their alleged storage space, which turned up fake driver's licenses, resident alien cards and Social Security cards, plus \$27,000 in cash and what appear to be credit reports of people from Louisiana, California, Texas and Indiana who may also have been victims.

"It is evidence of an identity theft and it is very disturbing that people from all over the country who probably don't even know about it had a credit check run on them based on information that we believe these defendants secured," Pirro said.

A Secret Service alert, posted on its Web site, says the Nigerian scam, also known as advance fee fraud, entices victims "into believing they have been singled out from the masses to share in multimillion-dollar windfall profits for doing absolutely nothing."

Earlier Wednesday, the Federal Trade Commission listed "foreign money offers" as its sixth highest category of consumer fraud complaints, with 4 percent of all complaints.

The Westchester County NY District Attorney's office also put out a press release on this case, here is the URL for as long as it is good:

<http://www.da.westchester.ny.us/detailp.cfm?page=793>

21 JAN 2003

From Razor Magazine (US) - January, 2003. Versions of this article also appeared in The Good Weekend (magazine of the Sydney Morning Herald and Melbourne Age), Politiken (Denmark), and Die Tageszeitung (Germany).

An Embarrassment of Riches: the Inside Story of the World's Biggest Con

By Russ Baker

When Shahla Ghasemi, a resident of Tampa, Florida, got a phone call about an inheritance coming to her and her husband from someone who had died in Nigeria, she almost laughed. She didn't know anyone in Nigeria. Truth be told, she had no idea

where Nigeria was. But the man on the phone was so persuasive that Mrs. Ghasemi and her husband Ali-Reza, a medical doctor, put their heads together and came up with a possible explanation. Perhaps one of Dr. Ghasemi's former partners from an import-export venture, who like the Ghasemis fled Iran's fundamentalist revolution in 1979, had ended up in Nigeria, and for some reason had decided to make them his beneficiaries.

In fact, the Ghasemis big mistake was not immediately hanging up the phone. For that mistake, they paid a huge price as victims of one of the world's most widespread and devastating swindles. They ended up mortgaging their house and losing \$350,000 to the so-called Nigerian Advance Fee Fraud.

Scams, from bogus land sales to pyramid schemes, are nothing new. Neither is the Nigerian scam (also called 419 after a Nigerian penal code section.) It has been around for about 20 years, but its original growth was limited by the costs and effort of promoting it by phone, letter, or fax. Via the Internet, however, millions of pitches can be pumped out effortlessly and at virtually no cost. According to the US Department of Justice, the number of 419 e-mail solicitations increased 900 percent from 2000 to 2001. (In Oslo, Norway, alone, police reportedly received more than 30,000 complaints in a single year.)

Altogether, thousands of victims, from Melbourne to Milan, have cumulatively lost an estimated \$5-12 billion. Many victims, including large numbers of elderly, have lost their life savings; some have been driven to suicide by their debts and their shame.

Scams for Every Taste

Many versions of the con exist, but all bring the welcome news that unanticipated riches await. The most common come-on is a request from a purportedly privileged African (often with a famous last name, and not necessarily a Nigerian) for help in moving a huge sum into a foreign bank account. I received one such pitch recently, from someone claiming to be the nephew of the late Angola guerilla leader Jonas Savimbi. Expressing weariness of perpetual civil war in his country, he said he faced death threats from his uncle's rivals, and was eager to transfer abroad \$18.5 million that Uncle Jonas had made in the diamond trade. Would I help, act as his agent, sign some papers, make my bank account available as repository? Easy as pie, and, for my meager efforts, I'd pocket \$2.7 million.

Most of us are wary, with good reason, of something-for-nothing offers and anything with a whiff of illegality. So it's tempting to dismiss 419 victims as, at a minimum, foolish, and, probably, greedy schemers. The problem is anybody who gets hooked into that obviously knows the whole thing is not right and is hoping to get away with it, says Njall Hardarson, retired owner of a sheet metal company who runs a website <http://superhighway.info/IIS/> on 419 scams from Manchester, England.

Yet many victims turn out to be essentially law-abiding, reasonably intelligent and generally responsible. Their ranks include successful, respected businesspeople and church congregation leaders. One explanation is that though the scam solicitations seem slightly incredible, they are also based in reality. For example, it's a common practice of powerful people in developing countries in Africa and elsewhere to accrue and transfer fortunes abroad. The former head of state of almost any African country has stolen billions, and moved it out of the country, says Hardarson, who began investigating the scam after being deluged by offers. People know this, they read about it, and they say, 'Why can't I get a piece of that?'

Among the myriad varieties are fraudulent solicitations of goods in fulfillment of nonexistent Nigerian government contracts, or offers to share in deliberate overbillings of invoices. These and others are described at the US government website http://travel.state.gov/tips_nigeria.html; actual solicitation letters are posted at the

private Norwegian website <http://www.sikkerhetstjeneste.com/scamletters.htm>. Many appeals push sympathy and urgency buttons, perhaps claiming that money intended for widows and orphans is being plundered by corrupt local officials, or warning that if help does not come soon, the money will be spent on weapons that spread death and destruction.

Even after victims realize they have been scammed, most are too embarrassed, or scared, to come forward. Mrs. Ghasemi is unusual in her decision to go public with the details of her ordeal, which provide insight into the sophistication of the plotters, who employ the classic tools of all manipulators: gradually increasing the stakes and the risks, and countering objections and doubts with increasingly implausible and audacious scenarios.

An Expensive Call

The Ghasemi saga began in August, 2000, when Mrs. Ghasemi, who works as registered nurse in her husband's medical office, took the call concerning an unexpected inheritance. Her initial doubts vanished when an impressive, official-looking confirmation document emerged from the fax machine. The name of the deceased party didn't look familiar, but it did appear to be Iranian.

The Ghasemis were advised that they would need a good lawyer in Nigeria to handle the paperwork. They asked their correspondent for a suggestion, and the next day received a call from an attorney named Williams. Mr. Williams said he'd need a standard fee of \$7,500, not a small sum but certainly modest given that the Ghasemis share of the \$27 million estate would be \$7 million. As requested, they wired the money, via Western Union, so that Mr. Williams could register their claim. A few days later they received word of a snag, confirmed by documents with a government seal: their deceased friend had failed to pay an environmental fine. The Ghasemis reasoned that the fine, \$40,000, was a pittance compared to what they were waiting to receive, so they again went to Western Union. The following Thursday, the lawyer called from Nigeria to report that the funds would be available to the Ghasemis by Monday. Paperwork confirming the impending funds transfer, via a Swiss bank, came through.

But on Monday, the lawyer called with a further complication. Their deceased friend had apparently failed to pay taxes of approximately \$70,000. Mrs. Ghasemi suggested that the government simply deduct that amount from the full bequest, but the lawyer said that Nigerian law did not permit that. When she refused to send any more money via Western Union, the attorney gave her instructions to wire it from her bank to an account in Nigeria.

Again, the Ghasemis were told that the funds had been released by the Nigerian government; a representative would soon call from Atlanta with final instructions for collecting it. When a man called from First Union Bank, he told Dr Ghasemi that, due to the size of the payment, the couple would need to fly to Atlanta to pick it up in person. When they arrived in Atlanta and went directly to First Union, they were mystified to learn that the bank had no such employee. When they called their contact on his cell phone, he angrily told them that they had misunderstood or not followed instructions, and that he was waiting for them at their hotel.

A half hour later, they were met by two Nigerians, one resplendent in ceremonial robes, the other in a designer suit, with an expensive watch, briefcase and cologne. The duo examined the Ghasemis' identification and verified their signatures. Told that they would have to pay a transaction handling fee of \$11,500, the Ghasemis offered to pay by credit card, but were told that would be unacceptable. And a check would take several days to clear. The Ghasemis went to First Union Bank, and were met there by one man, who took the fee, in cash. He said the money would be in their account by 4pm. It wasn't, and the Ghasemis, with mounting frustration, headed for the airport and home.

En route, their mobile phone rang. It was a man, angrily telling them that the fault again lay with them -- they had not finished the necessary paperwork. He insisted that the Ghasemis turn around and check back into their hotel, which the weary, increasingly dubious couple did. Around dusk, two other Nigerian men came. They informed the Ghasemis that the government had finally approved the funds release in cash. Mrs. Ghasemi told the man that she couldn't accept \$7 million in currency, that it sounded clearly illegal and impractical. The men offered to provide supporting paperwork. The Ghasemis proposed that the men show them the cash, that they would stay overnight and then travel with the men in the morning to First Union, where they would deposit it. The man agreed, and asked them to accompany him to the parking lot, and to his car.

Speaking of Money Laundering

Mrs. Ghasemi at this point had deep misgivings, but her husband went outside to the car. In a box where he expected to find greenbacks, he saw instead black, waxy paper. The men explained that it was diplomatic money, a specially treated currency which is temporarily blackened for security reasons. They returned to the hotel room, the man lugging a tin of chemicals. He proceeded to wash one of the black pieces of paper, and sure enough, it turned out to be a \$100 bill. However, there were many bills (around 70,000 of them) to be cleaned, the chemicals themselves expensive and the Ghasemis would have to pay a fortune for literally laundering the money: \$185,000.

At this, Mrs. Ghasemi got angry. Their Nigerian attorney had not told them of any such procedure or the cost attached, and so the couple flew back to Florida without their money. At 5am the next morning, they called their attorney in Nigeria. Mr. Williams expressed outrage about the diplomatic money ploy, and said he would call directly to the Nigerian President's office, where he had connections. Two days later, he called back. In a meeting at the president's office, he'd learned that because of budgetary restrictions, the government did indeed insist that recipients of diplomatic monies cover the cost of the chemical. The attorney suggested the Ghasemis keep a receipt, that at year's end the Nigerian government was going to be receiving aid from the US and Japan, at which time it would reimburse the chemicals fee. Meanwhile, the Ghasemis kept receiving phone calls from the man in Atlanta, who warned them that if they did not want to pay the cost of the chemicals, there were other recipients waiting for their money who would be given priority. Finally, the man offered to personally advance \$35,000 toward the chemicals, but that the Ghasemis would have to come up with the additional \$150,000, which they did.

There were, it seemed, two ways to collect their money. One was to open something called a Transit Account (but such an account would have to be opened with an initial deposit of \$350,000) plus the man wanted her to buy him a Rolex watch so he could give that to Nigeria's president in return for obtaining a plum job. Alternatively, the Ghasemis (and no one else he stressed that fact) could go back to Atlanta where a limo would pick them up from the airport and take them to the cleaning house so they could witness the money being cleaned. Dr. Ghasemi insisted, over his wife's objections, that they had no choice; otherwise they would lose not only the \$7 million, but all the fees they had already advanced.

Mrs. Ghasemi had had enough. Ignoring the Nigerians' warning not to violate the confidentiality of the transaction, Mrs. Ghasemi called an American friend, a professional, for advice. That's when she got the bad news: she and her husband had been taken for a very long and costly ride.

Mrs. Ghasemi called the Tampa FBI office; it was a holiday weekend; a duty agent picked up. Maybe it was because of my accent, but he told me he couldn't do anything, she recalls. The next day, she called the US embassy in Lagos. The man who answered the phone seemed to have a faint non-American accent, but said he was an

American named Dr. Mora, and came from Washington, DC. He listened to her story, took down her contact information, and excused himself to make another call. After a delay, he came back with startling news: It wasn't a scam after all. He'd confirmed that Dr. Ghasemi was in fact a beneficiary of monies held by the Nigerian government; he even faxed a confirmation on an embassy letterhead. And he said he would go personally to the Central Bank of Nigeria to find out what the problem was. Mrs. Ghasemi then called her brother-in-law, from whom they had borrowed \$150,000, with the news. But he insisted she call the State Department. At State, she was again warned about 419 scams. But when she explained how she'd just been assured by the US embassy that the monies were real, and after she confirmed that she had dialed a real number at the embassy, the State Department man became alarmed. He told her this meant that the criminal ring perpetrating the fraud actually had a confederate working inside the embassy. (Mrs. Ghasemi says that she was not the only person who got bad advice from the embassy, a situation that has apparently been rectified.)

Soon, the Secret Service had assigned agents to the Ghasemi case. She learned that she and her husband were in some ways lucky: they were still alive and in one piece. Some victims who had come to Nigeria to clear things up personally, had ended up in a bad way. Nigeria can be a dangerous place in general -- US consular staff travel in armored vehicles. But it's especially risky for 419 victims. Once the scam operators conclude they can't expect any more money transfers from their targets, they get down to basics: cash, jewelry, passport. As Annie McGuire, another 419 vigilante, who operates the website www.fraudaid.com, puts it: They beat people, shoot 'em, drag 'em into the jungle, drop 'em into a river, whatever.

Fighting Back

Victims and their advocates have been trying for years, with little success, to shut down the criminal rings behind 419 scams. But the perpetrators are hard to prosecute. They purposely work across jurisdictions, with members operating in various countries, and moving on frequently, often using false or stolen passports, before the law in any one place can catch up with them. A scammer may be in Paris one week, London the next. Their offices are typically Internet cafes -- in some of these, in West Africa, it's not uncommon to find rows of plotters simultaneously hard at work mass-emailing 419 pitches. They troll bulletin boards, buy e-mail lists, and use programs that grab e-mail addresses off the web. They close the initial e-mailbox within a few days after a bite, then have their victims contact a second and then a third mailbox. (In most cases the victims are not specifically targeted. The scammers figure that if they're contacting people in developed countries, there's a 50/50 chance they will find someone with savings or access to credit. Even comparatively poor people have been targeted; they can often find money by borrowing from relatives or mortgaging their house.)

The conspirators are highly skilled at what they do, having been educated at so-called scam schools where they learn legal and financial parlance and persuasion skills, overcoming doubts, handling unexpected crises, and playing a variety of roles, from lawyer to government official to banker. They learn how to vary their pitches. And they constantly compare notes and update their approaches to reflect changing world conditions.

Although not all of the fraudsters are Nigerian, the vast majority are. The country itself is a nonpareil in the crowded ranks of nations where corruption predominates. In fact, financial fraud is such big business that it is thought to rank between third and fifth among Nigeria's income sources. (Even would-be fraudsters get defrauded. For example, the most pathetic amateurs end up buying, unawares, used address lists of prospective suckers who have already been approached by others.)

Nigeria is still essentially a tribal country, with clan members protecting and assisting one another. Some experts speculate that the popularity of the scams there and

elsewhere in Africa is prompted by a psychology of revenge for the ravages of colonialism, whose legacy still leaves Africa far behind the rest of the world in almost every measure of development. The 419 operators surely see their leaders and foreign investors making fortunes while they live mired in poverty. Scammers may thus justify in their minds the victimization of others, but in the end, it is not just foreigners who suffer, but the vast majority of ordinary, hardworking, honest and extremely poor Nigerians, as the 419 scams further poison the climate for legitimate trade and investment in their country.

It seems to many that the scams could not continue in full force without the tacit or explicit approval of high Nigerian officials. The Nigerian government vigorously denies involvement, and says that it has taken increasingly aggressive measures to curb the problem, which it correctly argues has badly tarnished the country's image and damaged legitimate trade.

But the tiny number of arrests over the years tells another story. Unfortunately, local police and other officials have not provided assistance to those caught up in scams, according to the US State Department's website, Tips for Business Travelers to Nigeria. Occasional, highly publicized raids don't seem to make a dent, especially since most of those arrested are soon on the streets again. (A man who received wired monies from the Ghasemis was arrested but released.) Indicative of the official attitude, Nigerian authorities have on occasion arrested foreign victims and charged them with being involved in an illegal scheme. Meanwhile, there's the question of how the plotters manage to gain access to reams of impressively-forged government letterheads and bank seals. They even manage to gain access to government offices for the victims who actually can be persuaded to travel to Nigeria. Government officials may be full participants in the scam or simply renting their offices for the afternoon.

Mrs. Ghasemi learned the complexity of the web when she called a Nigerian senator in her efforts to recoup her money. His office gave her a private number for the office of the governor of the Central Bank, where a man promised to get to the bottom of things, and asked her to fax key documents. When she saw the number of the fax machine, she recognized it as that of the plotters themselves.

Meanwhile, most other governments have been slow to pursue the criminals or pressure Nigeria. Hardarson, one of the first to launch an anti-419 website, notes that the country continues to be an important income source for First World companies, notably large oil exploration firms like Shell and Texaco. If there was any urgency, something would have been done a long time ago. There's also little sympathy in law enforcement for victims who perhaps should have known better. And those who do want to take action are hampered in their investigations and prosecution efforts because of the range of jurisdictions from which the perpetrators operate and how frequently they relocate.

Lately, however, the situation seems to be improving. Many agencies, including the US Secret Service, Scotland Yard, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police now have special 419 task forces. First World banks, which for years did nothing to warn potential victims, now issue standard warnings to anyone transferring large sums to Nigeria. And the Nigerian government recently convened a high-level conference on 419 in New York City, attended by the president of Nigeria himself. At that meeting, the Ghasemis received the welcome news that the Central Bank of Nigeria had been able to identify the Nigerian bank where their money had ended up, and were preparing to refund it in its entirety.

But the larger battle shows no sign of being won. The practice has now spread all over West Africa, and, for that matter, all over the globe. One question of growing urgency is where the vast profits end up. Experts note that Al Qaeda and other terror outfits have partially funded their operations through financial fraud, and note that Nigeria is 50 percent Muslim. Interestingly, the money Mrs. Ghasemi's bank wired to the 419 conspirators landed in an account in Lebanon.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Ghasemi still gets calls from Nigeria, every week. The day before we spoke, she'd just gotten a call, purportedly from someone in the presidential palace, who apologized on behalf of the president. The man explained that he was the director of the government's anti-fraud operations. Mrs. Ghasemi checked, and he wasn't.

Ultimately, it is not that easy to help victims, many of whom cling to denial. When Mrs. Ghasemi asked one man who had already lost \$250,000 to join in a protest action, he explained that he didn't have the \$1000 for a plane ticket, then flew to Nigeria to find out what had happened to his promised millions. In Lagos, he was promptly relieved of another \$500,000. Even after that, the man's business partner still does not believe that they were victims of a scam.

This article can be found on Russ Baker's website, <http://www.russbaker.com> and the precise URL of the article is, until it changes, is <http://russ@russbaker.com/Razor%20Magazine%20-%20Bank%20Scam.htm>

17 JAN 2003

From ThisDay, a Nigerian newspaper:

Nigeria, US Sign Treaty on Crimes
From Ify Isiekwenagbu in Abuja

Nigeria and the United States of America on Wednesday exchanged the instrument of ratification of the treaty on mutual legal assistance on criminal matters.

A statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the exchange for both countries was carried out in Abuja between Nigeria's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and the United States Ambassador to Nigeria, Mr. Howard Jeter.

The treaty, which is expected to provide relevant instruments to enhance mutual cooperation in the fight against modern trans-national organised crime was signed in Washington D.C. on September 13, 1989.

The crimes covered under the treaty include drug trafficking, financial fraud, terrorism and human trafficking.

According to the statement, the minister said that the assistance envisaged under the treaty would include among others, the provision of documents, records and evidence, execution of requests for searches and seizures, obtaining of testimonies of witnesses and other forms of assistance.

The minister, the statement further noted, described the treaty as a "veritable instrument in the continued efforts of the present administration to sanitise the system and create a solid foundation for a transparent, more accountable and corrupt free society, which is a basic ingredient for attracting foreign investment and economic development."

419 Coalition Note: We hope that the ratification on this treaty helps and results in the arrest of 419ers, the conviction of 419ers, the seizure of 419er assets, and the repatriation of 419ed funds to victims of 419.

16 JAN 2003

From ThisDay, a Nigerian newspaper:

Okadigbo Loses N8m to Fraudsters
By Chris Anucha

Former Senate President and the All Nigeria People Party (ANPP), presidential running mate, Dr. Chuba Okadigbo, has lost about N8million to swindlers who posed as auctioneers.

THISDAY gathered that the mastermind of the fraud was Okadigbo's personal secretary, simply identified as Larry, who deceived him into believing that there were vehicles to be auctioned at the Apapa Wharf in Lagos by the Nigeria Customs Service.

The dupers were said to have presented forged documents to convince him they were the ones to auction the vehicle on behalf of the customs and that the fleet of cars shown to his (Okadigbo's) agents would cost N8 million.

Sources disclosed that the unsuspecting politicians, after studying the documents and based on discussions with the people directed that the amount be withdrawn from his bank account at Habib Bank, Apapa branch.

It was learnt that Okadigbo directed his personal secretary to withdraw the money in the presence of his driver, who was not part of the scam

Investigations showed that before he could realise that he was in wrong hands, the fraudsters had succeeded in carting away the N8million.

One of the principal suspects, John, has been detained at the State Crime Intelligence Department (SCID) as the police have spread their dragnet to track down the other two, Ode and Larry.

419 Coalition Note: It is important to note that Nigerians are also victims of 419 operations like everyone else, as in this case of Goods and Services 419. 419ers are equal opportunity thieves.

15 JAN 2003

From The Guardian, a Nigerian newspaper:

Fraudsters continue antics, swoop on foreign victims

FRAUDSTERS, operating under the guise of working for the offices of President Olusegun Obasanjo, and the National Assembly, are exploiting the nation's foreign indebtedness to dupe unsuspecting contractors based abroad.

The fraudsters, also known as 419 syndicates opened the new year by forging the headed papers of the President and that of the Senate to lure foreign contractors into their net with the offer of paying huge sums of money into their accounts running into \$2.3 billion, using Swiss banks.

According to one of the phoney letters, intercepted by the authorities, dated January 10, 2003, purportedly from the Office of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (GCFR), Aso Rock Villa, Abuja, the president was said to have "mapped out \$2.3 billion to offset all debt owed to foreign contractors by the past military government."

The letter continues: "I wish to inform all our contractors that since I assumed office on May 29th 1999 as elected President of Nigeria, I have in no small measure travelled to various countries, America, Europe and Asia to restore back (sic) the business relationship lost by our passed (sic) military regime due to their selfish interest.

"After my meeting with the United Nations and World Bank dignitaries, recently and the Federal House of Assembly have (sic) decided to ride of our economy of enormous

debt burden to enhance more international business relationship between the government and the international community...

"I have instructed the Federal Ministry of Finance (FMF) and Senate Committee on contract payment to submit the files of all affected contractors for proper authentication before I will pass president (sic) to our apex bank (CBN) for immediate credit of your account".

The fake document said to be signed and stamped by Dr. Dada Jacob, secretary to the executive president said one Dr. Iloka Wilson, paymaster General of the Federation, has been assigned to handle the payment and advised all contractors to deal with him directly on stated telephone and facsimile (fax) numbers "to enable me achieve my promise of paying all foreign contractors at this first quarter of the year 2003..."

For that said to have emanated from the National Assembly as the official gazette on 33, dated January 8, 2003, the fraudsters stated that a contract review committee in a petition to the senate sub-committee on foreign debts requested "immediate payment of foreign contractors within 72 hours as compensation of this first quarter payment schedule. We are sorry over the years you have been looking to receive (sic) your payment."

The 'gazette' purportedly signed by one 'Senator Ben Kalio' (Chairman Senator (sic) Sub Committee on Foreign payment) said the government had instructed UBS Bank of Switzerland whose Vice President. Olivia Anthonio, " in charge of America and Asia/Europe to his effect ref. Our payment authentication and authority order ref FGN/NAOX8Y Vol. 7.

"You are hereby warned not to inform anybody about your payment and you should call the Director Key Tested Wire Transfer of the Central Bank of Nigeria - Emmanuel Amuzie...

"With these instructions, the UBS Bank of Switzerland will credit your account within 24 hours into your nominated bank after proper verification of your contact date and reference code numbers."

The two letters exemplify the style of the fraudsters who dupe unsuspecting victims who mostly fail to cross check such information with Nigerian authorities.

Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) is currently leading the war against 419 fraudsters, which has yielded dividends with arrest of members of the some syndicates or foiling of attempts to dupe foreigners.

CBN had placed advertisements in pages of foreign newspapers and magazines in many countries to alert citizens of the 419 scourge.

419 Coalition: The efforts of The Guardian, ThisDay, Vanguard and other Nigeran media against 419 are useful and appreciated. This 419 schema above reprints a Classic 419 operation, the most common type of 419. United States Secret Service gets hundreds of complaints concerning Classic 419 every day. On the CBN "leading the war against the 419ers" we wish that were the case in fact, and also wish that CBN would tale the monies it spends on advertorials and use it to help fund Nigeria Police counter-419 operations instead. Anybody anywhere, including 419 Coalition and others like us, can educate and warn on 419, but only Nigeria police can attack in within the borders of Nigeria from which the bulk of 419 operations emanate. Therefore, the view here is that CBN's advertorial money would be better spent on directly combating supply-side 419ers inside

Nigeria itself. 419 Coalition has been saying that for about six years now, and CBN Still hasn't gotten the message.

Of course, CBN is also an organization whose offices (according to testimony before the US Congress etc. by Justice and Secret Service personnel) have been "rented" etc. for use by the 419ers in the past. To describe CBN as "leading the war against 419 fraudsters" is simply neither historically nor currently accurate. We wish it were!

15 JAN 2003

From The Guardian, a Nigerian newspaper (also see article from ThisDay immediately below):

Financial crime Panel hunts fraudsters over \$5.5m deal

By Oditia Sunday-Fortune and Alex Olise

A BIG manhunt has been mounted by the National Committee on Financial Crime (NCFC) for a Nigerian alleged to have duped an American businessman of a sum of \$5.5 million.

The suspected duper, said to live in London, allegedly identified himself to the 67-year-old American, Mr. Milton Bernos, as the director of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC).

Briefing reporters at the NCFC headquarters in Ikoyi, yesterday, chairman of the body, and commissioner of police in charge of the Special Fraud unit, Mr. Charles Akaya, said the suspected fraudster (names withheld) had struck a deal with Bernos to sell to the latter, an oil rig in Nigeria at a cost of \$5.5 million.

Bernos, subsequently met the suspect in London, according to Akaya, where he also met one Robert, son of a Nigerian chief resident in London.

Robert who also claimed to be attached to the Nigerian Embassy in London was said to have been given the money in respect of the rig.

In the course of investigations, a suspect from Anambra State who traced Bernos to Ikoyi Hotel where the latter was lodged by the NCFC was apprehended.

The suspect's appearance at Ikoyi Hotel followed series of telephone calls by the fraud syndicate who demanded for another \$50,000 and claimed to be one of the presidential aspirants recently screened.

The arrested suspect (names withheld) paraded before journalists however claimed ignorance of the \$5.5 million fraud.

According to him, he was asked to come and collect the \$50,000 by a friend whose identity or whereabouts he refused to disclose.

However, Akaya told journalists that Bernos had returned to America waiting for Federal Government's response.

The arrested suspect, he said, would remain in NCFC custody pending investigations to get other members of the syndicate.

According to him, "people like this have been spoiling the name of Nigeria abroad and

we are ready to stop them from further disgrace".

He added that the crime could earn the suspect 15 years imprisonment or life jail.

Another suspect who duped SeaFoods Nigeria Ltd of N3 million was also paraded.

According to Akaya, "the suspect (names withheld) had allegedly sold a property belonging to the Lagos State Government to SeaFood Industries under the pretence that it was his property.

The suspect however insisted on seeing his lawyer before he would speak to the press.

419 Coalition Note: Good work on the part of the Nigerian authorities, this is a hopeful sign. We trust that these men and their confederates will be tried and convicted if guilty and sent to jail; and that their assets and monies will be seized and repatriated to the victims. We'd also like to add that Nigeria has said many times (but has never really done it) that 419 arrestees etc. would be routinely named and put on Television and have their photos put in the newspapers, and we would urge them to follow through concerning those policies.

15 JAN 2003

From ThisDay, a Nigerian newspaper (also see article from The Guardian, immediately above):

419: Crime Panel Parades Two Suspects

By Andrew Ahianté

As the effort to rid the nation of financial crimes intensifies, the National Committee on Financial Crimes yesterday paraded two persons said to be Advance Fee Fraud (419) suspects.

The two suspects, Eze Udu Anakwe, and his brother, Kingsley Nnamdi Anakwe, still at large, were said to have impersonated Alhaji Umaru Shinkafi and his son, Sani, to dupe an American businessman, Mr. Milton Bernox of \$5.5 millions.

Another suspect, Mr. Bolaji Bode-Thomas allegedly under false pretence collected N3.7 million from Seafood Company, Lagos between April and May 2002 for a plot of land at the Government Reservation Area (GRA), Ikeja.

The plot of land was later found to be the property of the Lagos State Government.

Parading the suspects, Chairman, Committee on Financial Crimes and Commissioner of Police, Special Fraud Unit, Ikoyi, Lagos, Mr. Charles I. Akaya, said the syndicates featured Nigerians and expatriates, rendering fruitful investigations difficult.

Bernox was said to have been contacted by one Paul Oniama who posed as a director with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and imbued, with the capability to transact business in petroleum product in Nigeria.

As the deals intensified, Bernox was said have been invited to London where he reportedly met one Robert who later introduced one Alhaji Sani who posed a representative of the Nigerian High Commission in London.

Akaya said, investigations revealed that the deals began in 2000 and by 2002, \$5.5 million has been collected from Bernox before he came to his senses.

14 JAN 2003

From the The News Banner (Louisiana)

Abita woman victim of internet scam

ABITA SPRINGS - An Abita Springs-area woman was recently the victim of a Internet scam.

The 25-year-old woman, who wishes to remain anonymous, placed a piano for sale on an Internet auction site.

Last month the victim was contacted by a Nigerian man who wanted to buy the piano, said James Hartman, spokesman for the St. Tammany Parish Sheriff's Office.

She arranged to sell the piano to the man, who identified himself as Aliyu Mohammed, for \$1,000. Mohammed told her via e-mail he had a creditor in Florida who owed him \$5,000, and instead of collecting the debt from the creditor himself he would have the Florida man issue a \$5,000 cashier's check to her and trust her to send him the difference via Western Union.

According to Hartman, when the woman received the check she took it to her financial institution, and shortly after she withdrew the \$1,000 that was hers under the terms of the bargain and took \$4,000 to Western Union. The \$4,000 was collected in Nigeria.

"Most banks and credit unions regard cashier's checks as pre-verified, and the victim's establishment was no exception," Hartman said.

The next day the woman discovered she had a negative bank balance of \$5,000.

"The cashier's check she had deposited was counterfeit and worthless," Hartman said.

The victim reported the crime to the St. Tammany Parish Sheriff's Office, and Detective Ben Eshleman was assigned to the case.

The case has been turned over to the Federal Bureau of Investigations.

"There is little that law enforcement can do with regard to international scams," Hartman said.

The bank in Florida from which the counterfeit check was drawn has indicated to Eshleman that more than half a dozen additional checks bearing its institutional name have surfaced in recent months.

"In the age of instant communication, scams such as this one are increasingly common," Sheriff Jack Strain said. "Internet consumers and all users need to exercise extreme caution when conducting business online, particularly with unknown parties."

14 JAN 2003

From the Boston Globe:

Man allegedly duped by con artists arrested

He tried to wire money from forged check, police say

By Eun Lee Koh, Globe Staff Correspondent

A Sherborn man who police say "got used" now faces charges after authorities say he deposited a forged check and attempted to wire money to Nigeria - all part of a widespread scam that dupes hundreds of Americans a year into sending millions of dollars to overseas accounts.

Brian L. Frechette was arrested at a Sovereign Bank branch in Wellesley on Dec. 17 for allegedly trying to wire \$10,000 to an account in Nigeria from a forged check he had deposited several days earlier at another of the bank's branches in Sherborn, according to police.

Bank officials at the Sherborn branch closed Frechette's account after determining that the check, for \$65,325.69, was a forgery, police said. When he tried to wire money to the Bank of Nigeria from a Sovereign branch in Wellesley, bank officials in Wellesley notified the police.

Bank officials declined to comment and referred questions to the police.

Frechette, who has been charged with larceny over \$250, is scheduled for a pretrial conference Feb. 4 in Natick District Court. He declined to comment yesterday when reached by telephone.

"He was a poor soul who got used," said Sherborn Police Detective Richard Crosson, who is investigating the case.

"I think he thought he could make a quick buck, not knowing that the people on the other side are con artists," Crosson said.

Crosson added that Frechette has cooperated with authorities from the moment he was arrested, and has no prior record.

Police said the \$65,000 check to Frechette was from the Brown Chevrolet dealership in Devine, Texas, but that records at the Texas business show that no check in that amount was written to Frechette.

Authorities compared the check Frechette deposited to a legitimate check from the dealership and determined Frechette's check was a forgery, police said.

Sherborn police said he also tried unsuccessfully to wire money from Sovereign Bank branches in Sherborn and Holliston, but was rejected because the check had not yet cleared. As a result, he could face additional charges in those towns.

Agents from the Secret Service, which monitors the country's financial systems and watches for counterfeiting of US currency, interviewed Frechette shortly after his arrest and are also investigating the case, according to John O'Hara, a special agent in charge of the Secret Service's Boston field office.

O'Hara would not comment on specifics of the case, but said the scam has been around for at least 10 years, and has become more widespread as a result of the Internet. The Secret Service has agents in London and in Nigeria trying to track down the perpetrators, according to O'Hara.

The scam, which originated as letters sent to US residents on forged letterheads, is now mostly spread through e-mail, he said. They come in many forms but share a similar premise: Help a rich foreigner move millions of dollars into his homeland account, usually in Africa, and in turn, the person who helps is promised a share of the millions.

In the e-mail that Frechette received, Sherborn police said, a Nigerian official asked

Frechette to help him cash a check from the Brown Chevrolet dealership in Texas, and wire money to an account at the Bank of Nigeria. Frechette was promised a portion of the money he deposited, authorities said.

Wellesley police, who initially interviewed Frechette, said he told them he was trying to wire money to a bank in Nigeria, but added that he did not seem to understand that he was involved in a common scam, according to Wellesley police Detective Lieutenant Wayne Cunningham. That department transferred the case to the Sherborn Police Department upon learning that the original check was deposited there, Cunningham said.

"We've seen very rich, very intelligent people fall prey to these scams," O'Hara said. "It's easier to prosecute them if we know that they've entered the scam knowing it was larcenous, but sometimes, these people really thought it was a good way to make money. Usually, we tell people that if it sounds too good to be true, then you know the rest."

Eun Lee Koh can be reached at ekoh@globe.com or at 508-820-4238.

419 Coalition Note: Usually in cases like this one, the person attempting to wire money over to Nigeria etc. based on the deposit of a check that turns out to be fraudulent is not even charged, as it is not possible in most cases to prove that the individual knew that the deposited check was bad. There are cases, however, in which the US Bank has said that the Bad Check has Cleared, and in which money Was successfully sent to Nigeria. Then, of course, at a later date the Bank finds that the original check, which it said had cleared, is in Fact bad, and the bank comes back on the person who transferred the money over to Nigeria etc. for reimbursment of the transferred amount. Since most Bank depositor agreements allow them to do this, the sender of the money must, by Law, pay it back or else. In the case described the the above article, 419 Coalition expects that the charges will ultimately be dropped. That is the usual outcome in cases like the one the article describes.

9 JAN 2003

From CNN.com (AP):

Ex-congressman sentenced to 6 1/2 years for financial fraud

PHILADELPHIA (AP) -- Edward M. Mezvinsky, a former congressman from Iowa, was sentenced to more than 6 1/2 years in prison Thursday for defrauding business associates, friends and family -- including his mother-in-law -- of millions of dollars.

U.S. District Judge Stewart Dalzell rejected a plea for leniency from Mezvinsky, who blamed his actions on his manic-depression and the side effects of an anti-malaria drug that he took on trips to Africa.

"Whatever impairment Mr. Mezvinsky may have had -- and I am dubious in the extreme about that -- it simply did not contribute to the ... crimes which took place over 12 years," Dalzell said.

Through tears, the 65-year-old Mezvinsky told the judge that he still does not completely comprehend his actions.

"I went into a spiral that turned into the house of cards that fell," he said.

Mezvinsky and his wife, Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky, who also served in Congress,

were once high-profile Democrats in suburban Philadelphia who hobnobbed with Bill and Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Prosecutors said Mezvinsky began soliciting cash for fraudulent schemes in the 1980s and eventually collected millions for business ventures that never materialized, including an oil deal, a coin trading company and an effort to sell bracelets in Africa.

In the meantime, Mezvinsky fell victim to several Nigerian investment scams and lost much of his borrowed money.

He pleaded guilty to 31 counts of fraud in September.

Federal prosecutors called Mezvinsky a con man who faked mental illness to avoid punishment. They asked for nine to 11 years in prison.

Mezvinsky served in Congress from 1973 to 1977, representing his home state of Iowa. He served on the House Judiciary Committee that voted to impeach President Nixon.

He later became an ambassador to a U.N. commission and Pennsylvania Democratic Party chairman. He also ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. Senate in 1980 and Pennsylvania attorney general in 1988.

His legal troubles began in 2000 and stalled the political career of his wife, who served a term in Congress and ran unsuccessfully for Pennsylvania lieutenant governor in 1998. She dropped out of a Senate run in 2000.

Margolies-Mezvinsky was never charged in the case. She has said she left the family finances to her husband.

419 Coalition Note: Here is a link to the article as far as long as it remains good: <http://www.cnn.com/2003/LAW/01/09/mezvinsky.sentenced.ap/index.html>

9 JAN 2003

From Sierra Leone Web:

Three accused '419' scam artists, Nigerians Raphael Ajukwara and Richard Ekechukwu and Ghanaian Charles Doe, appeared in Magistrate's Court Wednesday, and were freed after posting Le 2 million bail each (about \$1,000), Awoko reporter Odilia French told the Sierra Leone Web. Ajukwara and Ekechukwu were arrested last December in a police sting set up after their scheme to use the internet to defraud a businessman in the Dominican Republic went awry. Doe was taken into custody shortly afterward when he showed up with a fraudulent document at the home of a Sierra Leonean banking official, claiming to be the son of a past Ghanaian finance minister. Two other Nigerian nationals were initially arrested during a search of Ajukwara's residence, but were later freed for lack of evidence. The three defendants face four charges, including two counts of conspiracy to defraud, attempting to obtain money by false pretense, and obtaining money by false pretense.

8 JAN 2003

From BBC Asia Pacific (Australia):

Nigerian conmen target watchdog

Fraudsters use e-mails, letters and faxes

Fraudsters have tried to dupe money out of the very organisation charged with stamping out the scam in Australia.

Financial regulators in Sydney estimate con artists have got away with more than \$5bn from people around the world who responded to get-rich-quick letters from Nigeria.

So when they received their own e-mails offering a slice of \$440m, they knew not to add to the profits.

"It's a scam and we know it," said Michael Dunn, the consumer communication director of the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (Asic).

Potential victims are sent letters, e-mails or faxes purportedly from someone with close links to the Nigerian Government or business community.

But Mr Dunn - who has himself received 11 Nigerian e-mails in the last three weeks - said: "You will never make any money out of this offer."

Once respondents get involved, they are asked to pay "advance fees" for customs, taxes and bribes, the commission said.

These fees - often adding up to tens of thousands of dollars - are the real purpose of the scam.

And if people do not pay, the fraudsters access victims' bank accounts and drain them of every cent, the commission said.

"Asic is issuing warnings about this scam because even though it's well-known, people are still getting ripped off," Mr Dunn said.

Governments around the world as well as Nigerian authorities have so far been unable to stop the fraud.

Mr Dunn urged Australians to keep their bank account details private and only to invest with licensed financial service businesses.

"That way, you're protected under Australian law if something goes wrong," he said.

"Whereas with unregulated overseas offers like Nigerian letters, you're entirely on your own."

419 Coalition Note: Good piece, though it includes the canard that 419ers routinely reach into and empty the bank accounts of its targets, which is simply not the case. 419 is an Advance Fee Fraud and the idea that 419ers routinely reach into and empty the bank accounts of their targets is more Urban Myth than anything else. Also, it is really not at all unusual for counter-419 Governmental Offices and counter-419 NGO's like 419 Coalition to get 419 solicitations. 419 Coalition itself, for example gets several Daily sent directly to our offices. The 419ers buy commercial emailing lists etc. and also generate their own from newsgroups etc. and other information available on the web. Then they sell these lists to each other just like other direct mail and email advertisers often do. But the 419ers, being thieves after all, sell the Bad prospects (like the 419 Coalition addy and the addies of the Authorities etc.) to each other along with the rest. Here is the URL of the article for as long as it is good:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/2638001.stm>

7 JAN 2003

From Sierra Leone Web:

Three "419" scam artists apprehended in Freetown last month are due to make their appearance in Magistrate's Court Wednesday morning on fraud charges. Two Nigerians, Raphael Ajukwara and Richard Ekechukwu, were arrested in a police sting last month after a Dominican businessman notified the Sierra Leone Web that the pair, posing as a former Sierra Leone government minister and his (non-existent) nephew, wanted him to send them money and documents which they claimed they would use to set up a front company for smuggling diamonds out of the country. Two other Nigerians, Frank Uche and Uche Okafor, were initially arrested at Ajukwara's home, but were later released for lack of evidence. A search of documents in Ajukwara's computer, however, led investigators to a third man, Ghanaian Charles Doe, who was attempting to defraud a former Sierra Leonean banking official by posing as the son of a one time Ghanaian finance minister. Doe was lured to the banker's home, where he was taken into custody after he presented the banker with a typed "mutual agreement" for a fictitious \$1.5 million transaction in the presence of undercover officers. Police Superintendent Foday Daboh, the Director of the Sierra Leone Police Criminal Investigations Division, told the Sierra Leone Web Tuesday that the three had each been charged with four counts of fraud, including conspiracy to defraud, attempt to obtain money by false pretence, and obtaining money by false pretence.

1 JAN 2003

INFORMATION REQUEST

[Bayhall Associates \(UK\)](#) asks for victims who have had losses to, dealings with, or knowledge of any of the below listed banks, companies, or individuals to contact [Bayhall Associates \(UK\)](#).

Transfers to accounts at the following Lagos banks (check your money transfer forms, they normally go via a US bank):

Fortune International Bank
Eko International Bank
Oceanic Bank International
United Bank for Africa
Peak Marchant Bank
IMB Securities

Referral to the following spoof internet banks:

UFH Bank
Continental Trust Bank

Transfers to accounts with the following names:

Prest Square Ltd
Global Goods and Supply Services Ltd
Multiple Yield Investments Ltd
Clark Investment Ltd
First National Security
Euroland Ventures
Claricop Green Ltd
MMB/CCD Ltd
SBNL Trading
General Metals Ltd

Dealings with the following individuals and companies
(assumed names and fictitious companies):

United Assets
Utinity Trust & Security Service Organisation
Utility Trust and Service
Edward Johnson
Gerald Madu Onuwa
Joe Lawrence
John Umeh
Michael Brown
Sam Beki
Dr Alibux
John Abu Baka
Milagro Fernandez
Greg Williams
John Sticken
Dr Roger Philips
Henry Anderson
John Nels
Lee Kwanghi
Alaji Mohammed
Yus Champollion
Kwang Myung Park
Christopher Davenport
David Stephens
Dr Koffi Steve
Ibrahim Camara
Offi Moses
Steven Richards
Veronique de la Vallase
Dr James Jones
Dr San H. Beki
Edward Johnson
Bassinkom M. Gerry
Dai Nguyen
Elroy Stewart
Evelyn Smith
Everton Stewart

or variations on these themes

419 Coalition Note: This a a repost, orginal request posted
in 17 DEC 2002 News.

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