

# Buhari commissions 2 trains, 10 coaches

From Andrew Agbese & Chris Agabi (Kaduna)

President Muhammadu Buhari yesterday commissioned the two locomotives and 10 executive passenger coaches procured by the Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC) to be deployed on the Abuja-Kaduna train service.

The president who commissioned the rolling stocks promised that all economic zones across the country and the states' capital will be linked to the railway to facilitate businesses, human movements, and cargo.

The Abuja-Kaduna train line service was previously commissioned in July 2016 by President Buhari. It currently runs four trips per day and transports about 1280 passengers daily to and from Abuja and Kaduna.

"The government is committed to linking all major commercial and production centers by rail for rapid social economic development and

improving the quality of life of the citizens and improving the national integration," he said.

President Buhari promised further investments on the service. "Other supporting projects that have been approved is the procurement of more locomotives, coaches, wagons, workshops, and equipment that would be used for standard gauge lines," he said.

The president also promised to ensure all the other railway expansion projects across the country are executed.

He said the government would further focus on coastal rail from Lagos-Calabar with branches to Benin, Agbor, and Onitsha to Port Harcourt. He also said another standard gauge line will be built from Port Harcourt to Maiduguri with branches to Owerri, Akwa, Abakaliki, Makurdi, Yola, and Damaturu.

The federal government will also focus on Kano-Kazaure, Daura, Katsina, Jibiya to link to Maradi in the Niger Republic as part of regional railway inter-connectivity of the ECOWAS

sub-region, he said.

Buhari said the concession for the narrow gauge to General Electric should be completed this year even as he said the railway laws will be amended and regulations strengthened to attract private sector investments into the rail sector.

The minister of transportation Mr. Rotimi Amaechi said at the commissioning that the government will do everything possible to ensure that the Lagos-Ibadan double gauge railway is completed in December and commissioned first quarter of 2019.

The minister also announced that other railways projects will commence this year. He said the government will need between \$36 billion to \$40 billion to complete all the slated railway projects.

The minister also confirmed that the train fares will go up following improved services and rising cost of operations. He said the new fares which will soon take effect will see economy coach travelers pay N1,200 per trip

(previously N900) from Kaduna to Abuja while the business class coach travelers will pay N3,000 per trip (previously N1500) from Kaduna to Abuja.

The minister also revealed that the Warri-Itapke standard gauge line abandoned for over two decades will be completed by September 2018 even as the seven coaches procured for the service will soon arrive the country from China.

With a total 14 coaches (previously four) and four locomotives (previously two), the NRC is targeting two hourly train services and at least eight train services (previously four) daily. That means there will be four train services from Abuja and Kaduna daily.

Our correspondent further gathered from Engr. Niyi Ali, the director of operations of NRC that after about two months of operating the eight trips, the service will move to 12 trips daily adding that when that happens, an hourly train service will be possible on the route.

"We will start with eight this

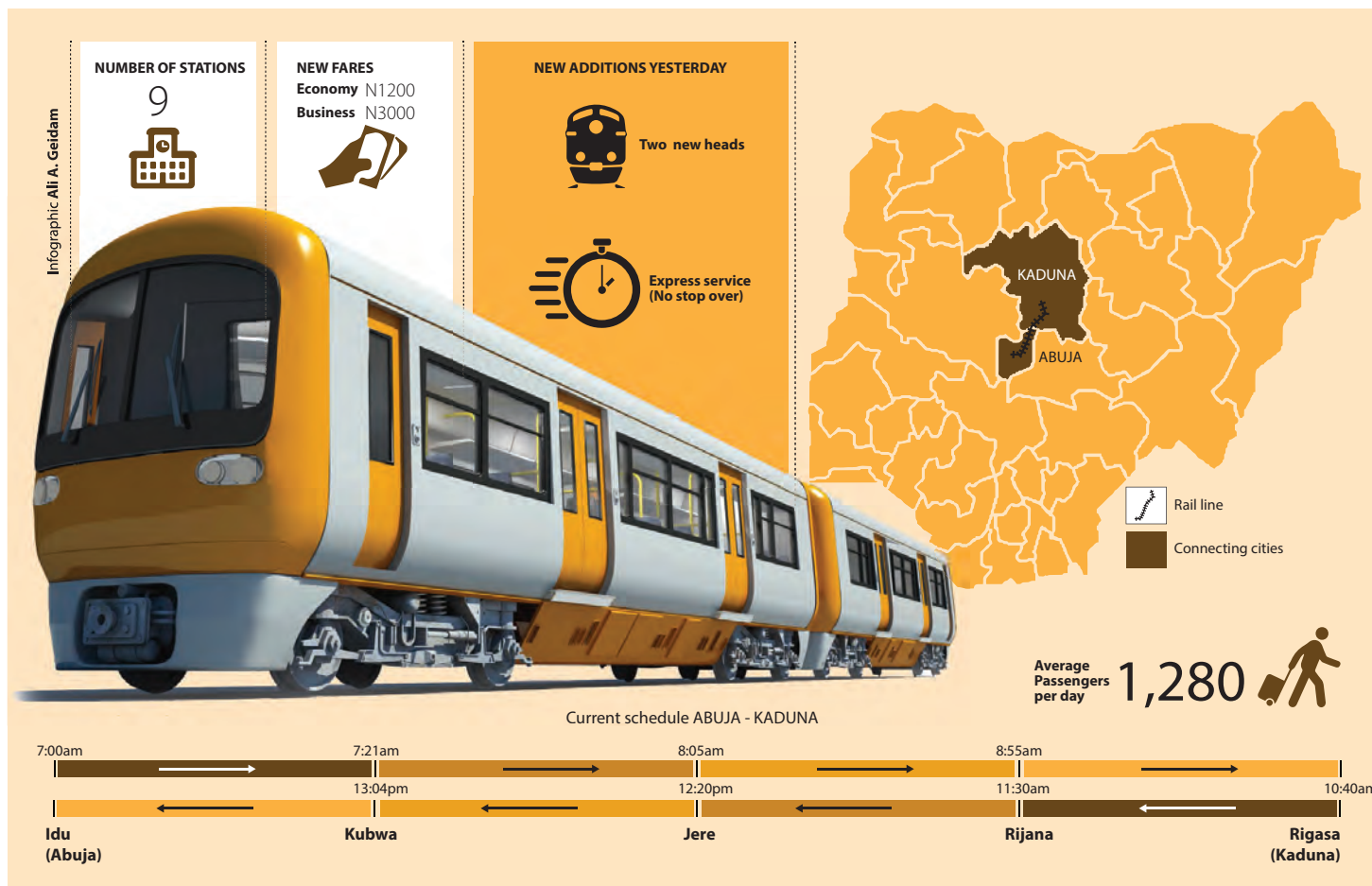
Friday and run for about two months. Within the period, we will study the passengers' flow and technical operations. Then we will go to 12 services daily" he said.

Among the new services to be introduced on the route is an express service that will not stop at all the nine stations like the normal services. But it's not immediately clear if the express service will cost more. The express service will only stop at Idu, Kubwa, and Rigasa train stations.

Also, an additional baggage carriage van has been introduced on the service.

At the launch of the inland dry port, the President urged Customs and ports officials to make these facilities work and not to frustrate business, commercial and industrial enterprises with unnecessary bureaucracy.

He said that will inflict delays and hardships in the process thereby defeating the object of the whole exercise as has happened in the past.



## Killings in Benue, Rivers, Kaduna heinous - Saraki

By Ismail Mudashir

Senate President Bukola Saraki has said the recent killings in Benue, Rivers and Kaduna states are heinous and reprehensible.

Saraki in a statement by his media aide, Yusuph Olaniyonu, called on all Nigerians to remain united in their condemnation of violence.

"The recent killings in this new year that have left many families without their loved ones, and several communities in distress was a reprehensible act of violence. As Nigerians, we must all remain united in our condemnation of violence. Such actions have no place anywhere in our culture," he said.

He said the killers and perpetrators of this callous act must be caught and brought to justice.

"The Senate will continue to render all necessary support to ensure that this happens. I call on our security forces to continue to work around the clock to ensure the safety of the affected communities — and all communities across the nation.

"Such random and widespread acts of hate and disorder are part of the reasons why last year, we inaugurated an Ad-Hoc Committee to Review Nigeria's Security Infrastructure for better delivery across the board.

"The committee is still at work, however, now it is clear that we need to review, re-vamp and reposition our security apparatus across the nation to be able to respond to the diverse nature of the crises and concerns of various communities. I still believe that the intelligence gathering aspects of our security system is not measuring up to standard," he said.

## 30,000 Nigerians living in France - Envoy

The Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to France, Dr Modupe Irele, has announced that no fewer than 30,000 Nigerians are currently living in France.

Irele told the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) on Thursday in Lagos that the number included Nigerians living in France as business owners, as well as those studying in various French educational institutions.

"The estimated population of Nigerians currently living in France is 30,000.

"Some are business owners, some students who came here to study either privately or on

scholarship, while others have started outfits that promote trade, culture and other forms of interaction," she said.

According to her, many Nigerian professionals resident in France are also actively engaged in promoting socio-cultural and economic ties between Nigeria and France.

Irele said that Nigerians in France were enjoying a positive relationship with her embassy, and described them as law-abiding in their various French communities.

The Ambassador also said that the French government was

working closely with her embassy in encouraging more English-speaking Africans to study in France.

Irele said that there were signs from the French government for deepening more positive future relationship toward Africans in general, especially with Nigerians.

"Although Nigeria is Anglophone and the general perception is that France has closer links with Francophone Africa, Nigeria/France relations have been strong and good.

"We at the embassy foresee a further deepening of this relationship, given the new

French government's positive disposition towards Africa in general, especially Nigeria.

"The French authorities are also working with the embassy to help it explore opportunities offered to Nigerians to study in French tertiary institutions in the English Language.

"The embassy is also actively engaging with the French public and private sectors, with a view to expanding existing relations and ensuring sustainability," she added.

Nigeria is the largest recipient of French exports and its second largest trading partner.