



INVESTIGATION: Corruption, extortion reign at Nigeria Immigration passport office (Part 1)

August 18, 2017 Kemi Busari



*Pretending to be an applicant, reporter **Kemi Busari** investigates Lagos passport offices where Nigerians pay as much as double the approved fees to obtain an international passport.*

I arrived at the Alausa, Ikeja passport office of the Nigerian Immigration Service, NIS, at 6:50 a.m. on Friday June 23 in heeding to the advice of a friend who initially kicked against my mission.

‘You have to get there early, people start to queue as early as 5:30 a.m.,’ my friend had said.

The cloud was pregnant on this day, thus creating a gloomy picture of the sky; a picture which largely mirrored my seemingly impossible mission – fact-finding on the dichotomy in the amount quoted online against the real amount of acquiring an international passport; and uncovering other acts of corruption in the passport offices.

Almost every time I informed a colleague or relative of my intention to acquire an international passport, I was usually greeted with an all-too-familiar reaction: “Can you pay this amount? I got mine in just one day through so, so, so and so person.”

Other times, the conversation took the form of “Okay, I know one immigration officer who helped my friend facilitate his and he was issued the next day, here’s his number – ring him up or brace yourself up for a long, long wait at their office.”

The day’s business was yet to commence as the door of the main building remained shut when I arrived at the office. However, there was a security guard, a middle-aged man wearied by the pressure of age, checking prospective applicants in, giving them numbers. The numbers made them eligible to a tag which determined how early they would be attended to.

It was now 7:20 a.m. and photographers who also operate as touts in the surrounding buildings had started arriving.

THE IDEAL

According to the Act establishing it, the Nigeria Immigration Service has as its core mandate: control of persons entering or leaving Nigeria; issuance of travel documents to bona fide Nigerians in and outside Nigeria; issuance of residence permits to foreigners in Nigeria; and border surveillance and patrol.

However, the second mandate, which includes the issuance of international passport – a traveling document required by Nigerians to gain access to and cross other country’s borders – has reportedly been fraught with barefaced racketeering over the years.

According to the information posted on NIS website, a 32-page passport for ages 0-17 and 60 years and above goes for ₦10,750 (₦8,750 for Passport Booklet, ₦2,000 for Address Verification Fee) while that of citizens between ages 18-60 is issued at ₦17,000 (₦15,000 for Passport Booklet, ₦2,000 for Address Verification Fee).

The 64-page booklet passport, on the other hand, goes for ₦10,750 and ₦22,000 for persons between ages 0-17 and 60 years and above and 18-60 respectively.

This is the paragon, but the reality which stared me in the face on this early Friday morning transcended the imaginable.

THE MORE YOU LOOK, THE LESS YOU SEE

I approach one of the photographers on ground called Sunday and told him I needed a passport. Sunday, who combines photography with ‘touting,’ explained how he would ‘help’ me, from registering online to filing and capturing, all to be supervised by an ‘officer’ who would get me the passport in little or no time.

“We have the 32-page passport and the 64-page, but I advise you go for the 64-page if you want it quick. For the 32-page, I can do it for N28, 000 but the 64-page is not less than N35, 000,” Sunday explained, smartly prodding his first customer for the day to paying the maximum.

THE 64-PAGE ‘ABOVE’ 32-PAGE?

“There is a scarcity of the 32-page booklet in Nigeria, and it’s not as if they didn’t produce from the country where it is being imported. They are producing it but the dollar rate has prevented Immigration from buying more, and the price we charge here is still

the same.”

To get more out of Sunday, I assumed the role of an agent.

I informed him that my customers were four but that he had to give me some level of assurance before we finalised the deal.

“I want to do more than one but the only problem I have with you now is the price and I will like to meet the officer who works for you so that I will be assured that I’m in safe hands,” I said.

Sunday was quick to answer, switching between English and Pidgin with seamless ease: “I want you to do it with me not because of the money but because of customers you’ll bring for me after today. Believe me ‘bros’, I can do this thing better and faster than officers,” he said, referring to immigration officers.

“A photographer processes a passport better and faster than civil servants paid to do the job?”

But how? I wondered in silence.

“Most of them can’t finish the bulk of work they have at hand,” he offers what seems like an escape from the reality. “They won’t tell you when you approach them of course. If they say one week, expect your passport in two weeks. Some are even afraid of adding up to what they have at hand. But for me, I will handle it well.

You’ll even see everything from the beginning till end.”

Some minutes of insistence to speak with Sunday’s “officer” proved futile and so, I decided to end the conversation.

“Here is my number, save it with Sunday passport and ring me up whenever you are ready,” he concluded.

Armed with this information, I headed for the entrance of the passport office. The time now was 7:40 a.m.

POWERFUL TOUTS

“Good morning sir!” I said.

“What can I do for you,” the stern voice of a man in mufti greeted me as I got to the gate.

The middle-aged man whom I took for a security guard who was holding the forth for the immigration officers, had been wearied by the task of checking people in.

He asked me to follow him to the registration point after I explained that I needed a passport for myself.

The Alausa Ikeja NIS office is a one-storey building with adjoining makeshift structures built with planks and iron linings on the space between the main building and the fence.



Registration shops at the Alausa passport office

Each of the shops had similar gadgets, including a computer system, a photocopying machine, a bench that can take as much as three people at once, and some folders.

We stopped at the first shop where we met a lady. The security man explained my intention to acquire an international passport to the lady and went back to his duty post.

“Take this form and fill. We do 32-page for N28, 000 and 64-page for 35, 000,” said the lady whose identity, either as a shop owner or attendant, could not be ascertained immediately.

She was obviously not willing to attend to a customer who would ask so many questions and when she realised that I was one, she told me to ‘just fill the form and ask questions later.’

By her explanation, the form after it was filled would be used to register for applicants online before handing it over to immigration officers.

In essence, the shops as shanty as they appeared perform the crucial functions of registration and bank transactions for applicants on behalf of NIS. And without passing through these shops or that of other touts around, one may not be registered for an international passport.



Registration point used by touts as Ikoyi office

After scanning through the form, I informed her that I didn’t have the required documents at that moment and that four other people whom she would register were on their way if only she would reduce the price and at least introduce me to an immigration officer who would handle the processing.

She declined.

“32-page is N28, 000 and you’ll get it after six weeks,” she replied with no further explanation.

“What’s your name so that I can ask when I come,” I asked in a final attempt to get her attention.

“Just ask for Bola passport,” she replied, not taking a second off the keyboard from which she was typing on the computer.

“Just make sure you tell that person who brought you here that you haven’t registered so he won’t think I’m working ‘behind’ him,” she added quickly.

I left Bola’s shop and was jolted by the crowd of applicants in the premises, which was now more than double what I left just over 20 minutes ago.



In the last attempt to speak with an officer who worked with the touts, I decide to join the crowd. I made my way to the side of the tent – a structure constructed by NIS to shield the waiting applicants from the sun or rain – where I found an abandoned tyre obviously unoccupied due to its level of dirt. This would serve as my seat for the next hour.

FINALLY, I GET TO SPEAK WITH AN OFFICER

As the clock ticked, more applicants trooped in. This time, the number of people in standing position had comfortably doubled the ones seated.

By 8:58 a.m., a female officer emerged from the main building. Speaking through the microphone erected under the tent, she opened the business of the day.

“Good morning all. On behalf of the management of the Alausa passport office, you are most highly welcome. My name is Grace, I’m the Public Relations Officer, PRO, of this passport office and I’m here to familiarise you with our activities for today.”

In the next 10 minutes, she would explain the process of fresh application, renewal, capturing, the collection of passport and other intricacies.

She explained that applicants billed for the collection of their passports were the ones the office would attend to while those who were around for other purposes were to come back in the next five hours. She added that names would be called in batches of 50 people at once.

As she reeled out the names of those to be attended to, I observed some immigration officers come out of the main building, hand over passport booklets to applicants amid the final exchange of naira notes, without questioning.

She came back for the second round of announcement by 10:50 a.m. This time, her announcements, mostly repetitions, had become of little interest to me but her last sentences finally gave me access to an officer.

“We do not condone backdoor processing of passport here in Alausa office,” she said.

“If you meet any of our officers to do this for you, you’ll be embarrassed and you’ll still not get your passport. In case you have any question, you are free to meet me or any other officer.”

After the second round of name calling, I had my first experience with an officer.

TOUTS AS ‘AUTHORISED’ AGENTS



Corruption in Alausa passport office does not only exist with the officers but in the structure and administration of the office.

The office has no inquiry or customer service desk, the sort you have in banks, where one could learn the procedures for applying or renewing an expired passport. If there was any such desk, they did a masterful job of hiding it.

The best and alternative way of transacting with touts is to meet immigration officers who offer ‘official help’ at a cost, mostly determined by the size of an applicant’s pocket.

Also, the actual registration has a lot of complications as I would be tutored by Mr. Halliday, my first officer contact.

“Follow me,” he said after telling him that I was a fresh applicant.

Mr. Halliday, a good-looking officer, perhaps in his 40s, led the way to the shops where I was first directed to by the security guard.

Once I realised he was leading me to one of the touts, I protested and demanded a direct transaction with NIS.

The three-minute tutorial that followed confirmed the impossibility of my request.

“Young man, let me explain to you how we work here. You see these people here, they are our authorised agents. They work hand in hand with the immigration. They collect the money on our behalf, get you registered and after that hand you over to us for other processing,” he said.

“You don’t need to be scared of them, they can’t dupe you. I will take you to someone now and after your payment, I will help you to do everything without stress.”

Mr. Halliday led me to a shop, just beside the one I visited earlier. The attendant, a female, informed me that I had to pay N28, 000 for 32-page passport and must first apply for mine, even if I was expecting ‘100 people.’

“Take my number and call me when you are through,” Mr. Halliday, now “Halliday passport” on my phone contact list, said as he left the shop for his duty post to hunt for more applicants.

I took the form and as I filled it I saw two other officers heading for the next shops with intending applicants. With their movement, the corruption intricacies at the registration stage become clearer to me.

HOW IT WORKS

Each officer with the NIS has one or more touts whom they work with.

The touts receive cash on their behalf, do online registration and hand over the applicant to the officer he or she works with.

In this kind of arrangement, the applicant is asked to pay more, say about N12, 000, above the approved price and this excess payment ends up in the hands of the tout, his or her affiliated officer and others who help in facilitating the deal.

But who gets what? How? In the next hour, I arrive at another passport office for a more revealing bout.

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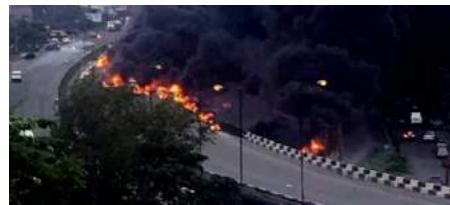
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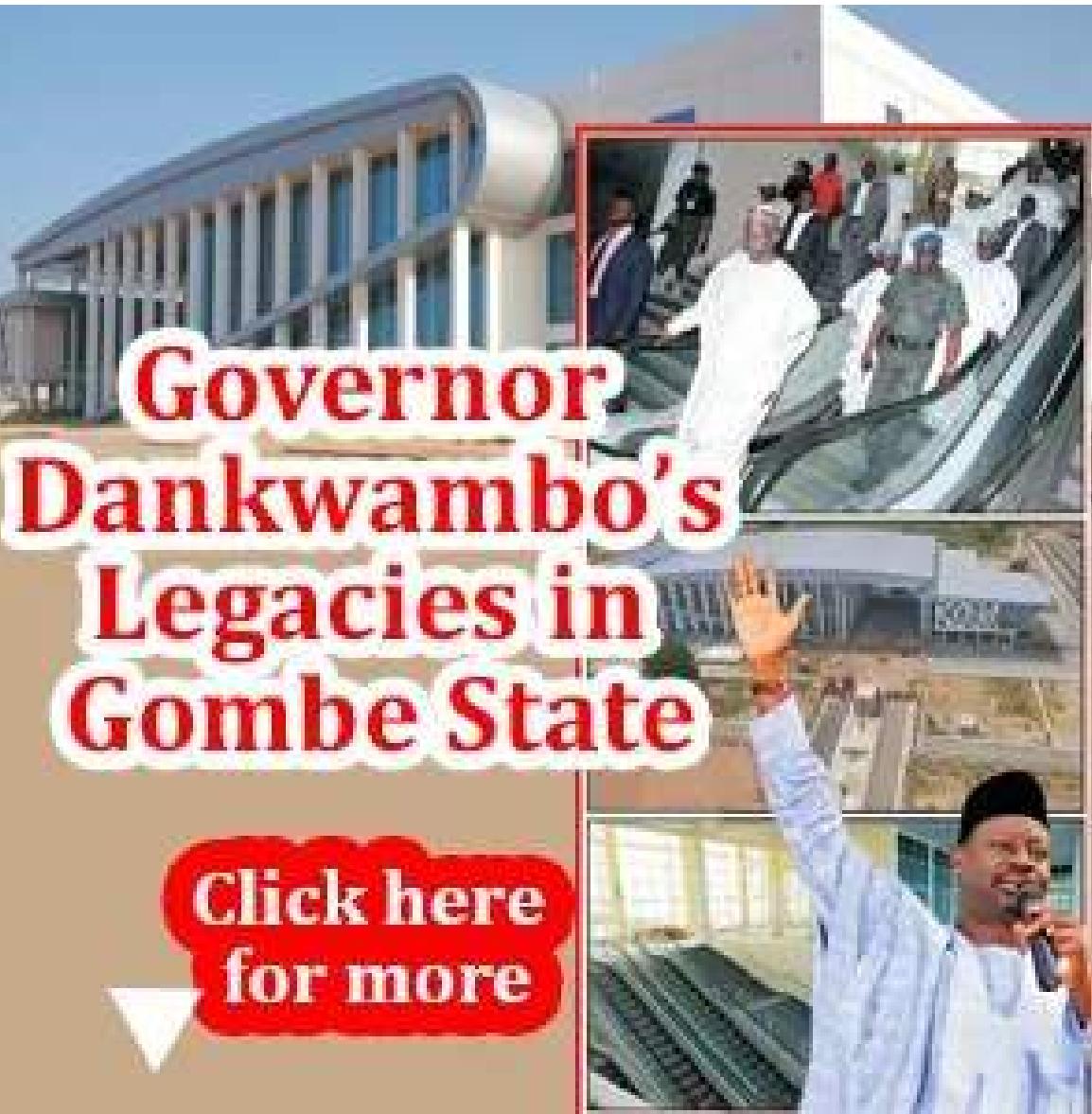
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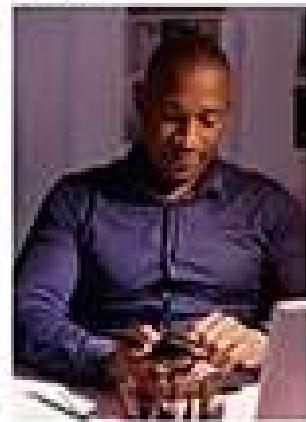
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INVESTIGATION: Corruption, extortion reign at Nigeria Immigration Passport Offices (Concluding Part)

August 27, 2017 Kemi Busari



PREMIUM TIMES - Kemi Busari

This is the second and final part of the investigation. Read the first part [here](#).

Welcome to Ikoyi, Nigeria's oldest passport office

'Hello sah,' 'passport sah,' 'I can help you to get it fast sah,' pleading voices, obviously deceived by my appearance, beckon as I moved closer to the premises of the Ikoyi passport office.

In the next minute, I was with Ade, the one who appeared most suitable for my mission.

After the usual 32, 64 booklet explanation, 'why one is scarce and the other is in abundance', Ade offered to take me to his capturing office even before I explained my mission in details.

The process of passport acquisition at the Ikoyi office is divided into parts and each part is handled by immigration personnel or an affiliated tout.

The first part, which is the actual registration, is done under the trees, inside abandoned vehicles, gate corners and a large shopping complex situated beside the passport office.

"This is where we do the registration. Let me bring the form for you so that we can talk," Ade said while helping me to a seat in one of the shops in the complex.



Registration shops at the Alausa passport office

The form is almost like the one offered at the Alausa office, except for a few grammatical errors. And after feigning a careful look of it, I explained to Ade how he may 'help' me.

"I work in a big firm and in our last meeting, the management mandated us (workers) to get passports. In fact, they have started deducting it from our salaries. I told them I would handle it because I have a brother who does the runs but when I called him, he said the officer that helps him has been transferred. I want you to give me a cheaper price and explain how this money will be distributed so that you and I can do business."

My explanation worked like magic. Almost instantly, Ade's countenance brightens, his eyes grow wider at the prospect of making brisk money.

Nobody would have doubted me anyway. While I explained to him, I presented an A-4 paper with a flourish on which I had listed 18 names of would-be-applicants; all fake names of course.

Now seeing me as a partner in the business, Ade would in the next 30 minutes take me further into the ring of money-making passport business at Ikoyi office.

“I will do the 32-page for N30, 000 and 64-page for N35, 000. The official payment is N18, 000 for 32-page while it is N23, 000 for 64-page but I advise you do the 64 so that all of you can get it the day you applied or the next. You will pay for it here and I will help you do all the running around from registration till you get your passport.”

“If the official payment is N23, 000, what do you use the remaining money, N12, 000 for?” I ask, adding that I needed to know to enable me convince my ‘superiors’ who would want to know why such the sum is being paid.

“The N23, 000 is the official price, government price. I will still have to give your file to someone who will run it, after they run it, they will still take it to the production room, the capturing room and other stages. These stages will cost me N7, 000.

“The officer I will hand your file over to will collect the N7, 000 and pay N5, 000 to a junior officer at the production room who will distribute the money and handle other stages. That is how it works.

“Sometimes, the people at the production or capturing room also request for extra pay which I would have to remove from my own ‘workmanship’ (remaining N5, 000).”

After this explanation, I informed Ade that I will give him the ‘contract’ of applying for the 18 of us, but on a final condition that I spoke with the officer he works with.

“I have a senior officer nah,” he smiled, obviously to douse my fear.

“Before I can do anything, I must pass through him. He is a two-star officer and his price doesn’t go below N7, 000. I can make you talk to him since you want to do more than one but that is when you are ready and I have the money with me.”

With this, it was a done deal between me and Ade as he gave me his mobile number and I quickly save ‘Passport’ as his surname again.

At Ikoyi, your money buys you a guarantor

After this discussion, Ade asked if I had my documents with me, so he could help with my application before others.

“Let me tell you all the documents you need so that you will bring everything next time,” he said after I replied in the negative.

“You will need a birth certificate, state of origin (certificate of origin), four passport photographs, and for your guarantor, your money has covered for that. We’ll provide you a guarantor so you don’t need to worry about that. Once you bring all these and pay, you will have your passport.”

“But where will you get a guarantor for me,” I probed.

“Just don’t worry about that,’ Ade replied, now sounding pissed off by my query.



MAXIMUM SECURITY

Like Alausa, the Ikoyi passport office has no front desk for a new applicant to make inquiries. The office is always under heavy security with men of the Nigerian Army and combat-ready immigration officers on guard.

The officers are strategically placed such that it would be tedious, almost impossible for even a bird to pass through the main gate without their permission.

I decided my mission would not be complete until I had my way into the main premises and I was determined, so sure that I would be granted entrance. With this mind set, I headed for the main entrance.

I was wrong. No sooner had I stepped into the pathway than I was accosted by an immigration officer who demanded to know why I was there.

With what many would call a ‘tush’ accent and demeanour, I explained to him my intention of facilitating passport application for multiple persons.

I was lucky to have his audience, unlike other officers who usually hand over their ‘customers’ to touts after a short conversation, probably for fear of being caught in the act or to make way for other ‘customers.’

In the next few minutes, the immigration official (name withheld) would explain to me, like others, the basic knowledge required by applicants. He agreed to N30,000 for the 32-page passport and assured of the provision of a guarantor.

“You don’t need that,” he replied after I ask if I needed to first get my guarantor informed. “Just apply now, we’ll have it sorted,” he added.

I hesitated and told him I will make some calls for cash and come back shortly. He offered me the use of his phone number and asked me to ring him up whenever I’m ready.

“Save my number with (name) passport,” he said.

CORRUPTION, FRUSTRATION IN ONLINE REGISTRATION

Written on the home page of the NIS website, immigration.gov.ng, are instructions on how to make fresh applications for a passport.

Applicants are enjoined to follow three simple steps: complete passport application form online; make payment and obtain Application ID and Reference Number; print out Guarantor’s Form to be signed by a guarantor and commissioner of oath in a competent court of jurisdiction; and then submit completed passport application form with other requirements in person at passport office selected during online payment process for further processing.

Simple, you’d call it. But it doesn’t turn out to be so.

DIFFERENT STATES, DIFFERENT AMOUNTS

Even though the prices of passports are quoted on the website of NIS, as N17, 000 for 32-page booklets and N22, 000 for 64-page booklets, officers charge different prices in different states.

Investigations revealed that officers at the Ikoyi office charge between N28, 000 and N32, 000 for the 32-page booklets while the price of the 64-page booklets is fixed at N35, 000.

At the Alausa office, the booklets go for between N27, 000 and N30, 000 and N35, 000, respectively.

Further investigations into prices in other states show more disparities in the price regime of NIS.

The 32-page booklet goes for N25, 000 in Osun, N28, 000 in Oyo, N28, 000 in Ondo and N27, 000 in Ogun and Ekiti states.

The 64-page can be obtained for between N34, 000 and N42, 000 in these states.

NIS REACTION

Reacting to differences in fee and others allegations, the Public Relations Officer of NIS, James Sunday, said all the passport offices in the country operate “the same system.”

“As far as I know, all the passport offices throughout the Federation have the same rates and if anybody is doing something else, contrary to what we do at the headquarters, I cannot defend that,” he said.

“We don’t have discrepancies in passport fees. The Comptroller-General (CG) is magnanimous enough to have uploaded the fee on the service website and that is the correct fee. Since the introduction of e-passport, the prices have not been altered.

“The CG has vowed that no Nigerian should suffer in the hands of immigration officers and he won’t take it lightly with the officers who charged you (the reporter) high fee.

“The passport is the property of the Federal Republic of Nigeria so Nigerians are entitled to getting the best.”

He further debunked claims that the 32-pages booklets were scarce at passport offices saying “It’s not true.”

According to him, the offices had adequate supplies of the 32-page booklet and “at no time should officers dictate for applicants which to choose.”

On specific allegations that the PCO of FESTAC office Lagos demanded extra money from online applicants to ‘run the office,’ Mr. Sunday was quick to defend the service.

He said, “That is the opinion of the officer. There is no office that is directed to request for money to run its services. The service headquarters send funds to maintain offices throughout the country.”

On the Comptroller-General’s promise that official fees/categories of passports will henceforth be displayed at various passport offices to ensure transparency, he explained that the process “is in the pipeline.”

“It’s an executive order given to the service and there is a committee already set up to that effect, we call it SERVICOM. They are currently working on that,” Mr. Sunday said just as he assured Nigerians that once the committee swung to work, “the prices will be displayed.”

CORRECTING ANOMALIES

After the first part of this investigation was published, the Immigration Service made steps to correct some anomalies that allowed the passport scandal to continue, while [promising official investigations](#) to weed out corrupt elements within its ranks.

At the Alausa Passport Office, the Passport Control Officer, Abdullahi Dalhatu, has ordered the immediate closure of shops operated by touts within the premises.

When PREMIUM TIMES visited, the shops which initially housed touts who receive payments from applicants on behalf of NIS were under lock. The price board which displays different amounts for obtaining passports was also displayed at the entrance.

Similarly, authorities at the Ikoyi office have taken steps at checking corruption among immigration officers.

When a PREMIUM TIMES correspondent as conducted round the premises, new changes such as the display of permanent price board at the entrance, enhanced security and monitoring of officers’ activities through surveillance cameras had been put in place.

Also, the activities of touts around the premises had waned compared to when this reporter conducted the investigation.



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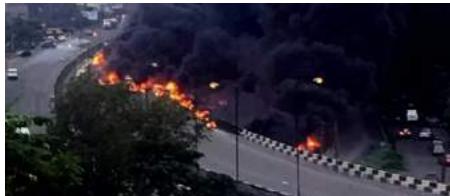
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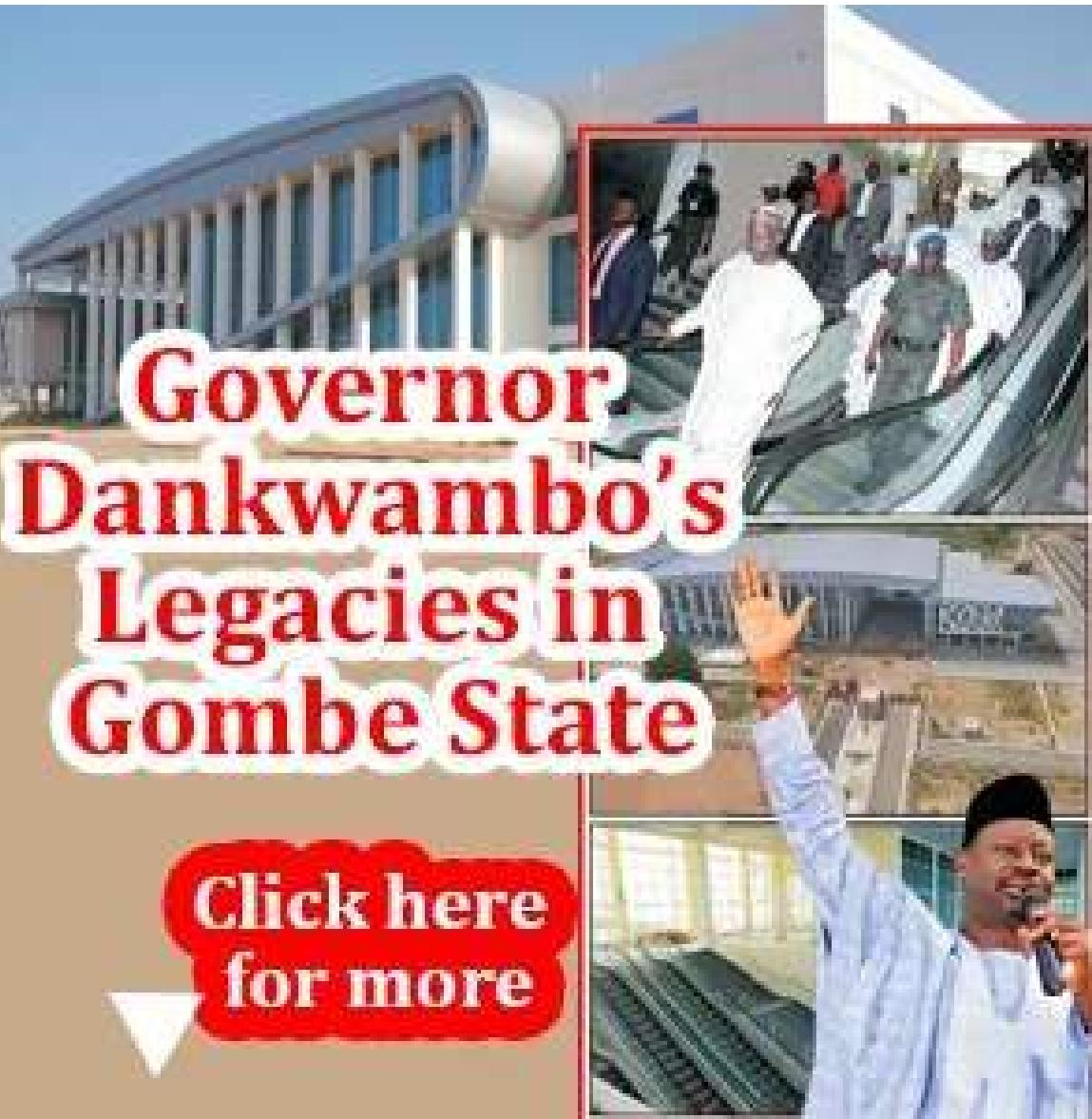
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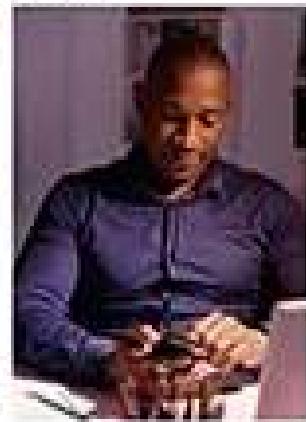
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INVESTIGATION: Corruption, extortion reign at Nigeria Immigration Passport Offices (Concluding Part)

August 27, 2017 Kemi Busari



PREMIUM TIMES - Kemi Busari

This is the second and final part of the investigation. Read the first part [here](#).

Welcome to Ikoyi, Nigeria's oldest passport office

'Hello sah,' 'passport sah,' 'I can help you to get it fast sah,' pleading voices, obviously deceived by my appearance, beckon as I moved closer to the premises of the Ikoyi passport office.

In the next minute, I was with Ade, the one who appeared most suitable for my mission.

After the usual 32, 64 booklet explanation, 'why one is scarce and the other is in abundance', Ade offered to take me to his capturing office even before I explained my mission in details.

The process of passport acquisition at the Ikoyi office is divided into parts and each part is handled by immigration personnel or an affiliated tout.

The first part, which is the actual registration, is done under the trees, inside abandoned vehicles, gate corners and a large shopping complex situated beside the passport office.

"This is where we do the registration. Let me bring the form for you so that we can talk," Ade said while helping me to a seat in one of the shops in the complex.



Registration shops at the Alausa passport office

The form is almost like the one offered at the Alausa office, except for a few grammatical errors. And after feigning a careful look of it, I explained to Ade how he may 'help' me.

"I work in a big firm and in our last meeting, the management mandated us (workers) to get passports. In fact, they have started deducting it from our salaries. I told them I would handle it because I have a brother who does the runs but when I called him, he said the officer that helps him has been transferred. I want you to give me a cheaper price and explain how this money will be distributed so that you and I can do business."

My explanation worked like magic. Almost instantly, Ade's countenance brightens, his eyes grow wider at the prospect of making brisk money.

Nobody would have doubted me anyway. While I explained to him, I presented an A-4 paper with a flourish on which I had listed 18 names of would-be-applicants; all fake names of course.

Now seeing me as a partner in the business, Ade would in the next 30 minutes take me further into the ring of money-making passport business at Ikoyi office.

“I will do the 32-page for N30, 000 and 64-page for N35, 000. The official payment is N18, 000 for 32-page while it is N23, 000 for 64-page but I advise you do the 64 so that all of you can get it the day you applied or the next. You will pay for it here and I will help you do all the running around from registration till you get your passport.”

“If the official payment is N23, 000, what do you use the remaining money, N12, 000 for?” I ask, adding that I needed to know to enable me convince my ‘superiors’ who would want to know why such the sum is being paid.

“The N23, 000 is the official price, government price. I will still have to give your file to someone who will run it, after they run it, they will still take it to the production room, the capturing room and other stages. These stages will cost me N7, 000.

“The officer I will hand your file over to will collect the N7, 000 and pay N5, 000 to a junior officer at the production room who will distribute the money and handle other stages. That is how it works.

“Sometimes, the people at the production or capturing room also request for extra pay which I would have to remove from my own ‘workmanship’ (remaining N5, 000).”

After this explanation, I informed Ade that I will give him the ‘contract’ of applying for the 18 of us, but on a final condition that I spoke with the officer he works with.

“I have a senior officer nah,” he smiled, obviously to douse my fear.

“Before I can do anything, I must pass through him. He is a two-star officer and his price doesn’t go below N7, 000. I can make you talk to him since you want to do more than one but that is when you are ready and I have the money with me.”

With this, it was a done deal between me and Ade as he gave me his mobile number and I quickly save ‘Passport’ as his surname again.

At Ikoyi, your money buys you a guarantor

After this discussion, Ade asked if I had my documents with me, so he could help with my application before others.

“Let me tell you all the documents you need so that you will bring everything next time,” he said after I replied in the negative.

“You will need a birth certificate, state of origin (certificate of origin), four passport photographs, and for your guarantor, your money has covered for that. We’ll provide you a guarantor so you don’t need to worry about that. Once you bring all these and pay, you will have your passport.”

“But where will you get a guarantor for me,” I probed.

“Just don’t worry about that,’ Ade replied, now sounding pissed off by my query.



MAXIMUM SECURITY

Like Alausa, the Ikoyi passport office has no front desk for a new applicant to make inquiries. The office is always under heavy security with men of the Nigerian Army and combat-ready immigration officers on guard.

The officers are strategically placed such that it would be tedious, almost impossible for even a bird to pass through the main gate without their permission.

I decided my mission would not be complete until I had my way into the main premises and I was determined, so sure that I would be granted entrance. With this mind set, I headed for the main entrance.

I was wrong. No sooner had I stepped into the pathway than I was accosted by an immigration officer who demanded to know why I was there.

With what many would call a ‘tush’ accent and demeanour, I explained to him my intention of facilitating passport application for multiple persons.

I was lucky to have his audience, unlike other officers who usually hand over their ‘customers’ to touts after a short conversation, probably for fear of being caught in the act or to make way for other ‘customers.’

In the next few minutes, the immigration official (name withheld) would explain to me, like others, the basic knowledge required by applicants. He agreed to N30,000 for the 32-page passport and assured of the provision of a guarantor.

“You don’t need that,” he replied after I ask if I needed to first get my guarantor informed. “Just apply now, we’ll have it sorted,” he added.

I hesitated and told him I will make some calls for cash and come back shortly. He offered me the use of his phone number and asked me to ring him up whenever I’m ready.

“Save my number with (name) passport,” he said.

CORRUPTION, FRUSTRATION IN ONLINE REGISTRATION

Written on the home page of the NIS website, immigration.gov.ng, are instructions on how to make fresh applications for a passport.

Applicants are enjoined to follow three simple steps: complete passport application form online; make payment and obtain Application ID and Reference Number; print out Guarantor’s Form to be signed by a guarantor and commissioner of oath in a competent court of jurisdiction; and then submit completed passport application form with other requirements in person at passport office selected during online payment process for further processing.

Simple, you’d call it. But it doesn’t turn out to be so.

DIFFERENT STATES, DIFFERENT AMOUNTS

Even though the prices of passports are quoted on the website of NIS, as N17, 000 for 32-page booklets and N22, 000 for 64-page booklets, officers charge different prices in different states.

Investigations revealed that officers at the Ikoyi office charge between N28, 000 and N32, 000 for the 32-page booklets while the price of the 64-page booklets is fixed at N35, 000.

At the Alausa office, the booklets go for between N27, 000 and N30, 000 and N35, 000, respectively.

Further investigations into prices in other states show more disparities in the price regime of NIS.

The 32-page booklet goes for N25, 000 in Osun, N28, 000 in Oyo, N28, 000 in Ondo and N27, 000 in Ogun and Ekiti states.

The 64-page can be obtained for between N34, 000 and N42, 000 in these states.

NIS REACTION

Reacting to differences in fee and others allegations, the Public Relations Officer of NIS, James Sunday, said all the passport offices in the country operate “the same system.”

“As far as I know, all the passport offices throughout the Federation have the same rates and if anybody is doing something else, contrary to what we do at the headquarters, I cannot defend that,” he said.

“We don’t have discrepancies in passport fees. The Comptroller-General (CG) is magnanimous enough to have uploaded the fee on the service website and that is the correct fee. Since the introduction of e-passport, the prices have not been altered.

“The CG has vowed that no Nigerian should suffer in the hands of immigration officers and he won’t take it lightly with the officers who charged you (the reporter) high fee.

“The passport is the property of the Federal Republic of Nigeria so Nigerians are entitled to getting the best.”

He further debunked claims that the 32-pages booklets were scarce at passport offices saying “It’s not true.”

According to him, the offices had adequate supplies of the 32-page booklet and “at no time should officers dictate for applicants which to choose.”

On specific allegations that the PCO of FESTAC office Lagos demanded extra money from online applicants to ‘run the office,’ Mr. Sunday was quick to defend the service.

He said, “That is the opinion of the officer. There is no office that is directed to request for money to run its services. The service headquarters send funds to maintain offices throughout the country.”

On the Comptroller-General’s promise that official fees/categories of passports will henceforth be displayed at various passport offices to ensure transparency, he explained that the process “is in the pipeline.”

“It’s an executive order given to the service and there is a committee already set up to that effect, we call it SERVICOM. They are currently working on that,” Mr. Sunday said just as he assured Nigerians that once the committee swung to work, “the prices will be displayed.”

CORRECTING ANOMALIES

After the first part of this investigation was published, the Immigration Service made steps to correct some anomalies that allowed the passport scandal to continue, while [promising official investigations](#) to weed out corrupt elements within its ranks.

At the Alausa Passport Office, the Passport Control Officer, Abdullahi Dalhatu, has ordered the immediate closure of shops operated by touts within the premises.

When PREMIUM TIMES visited, the shops which initially housed touts who receive payments from applicants on behalf of NIS were under lock. The price board which displays different amounts for obtaining passports was also displayed at the entrance.

Similarly, authorities at the Ikoyi office have taken steps at checking corruption among immigration officers.

When a PREMIUM TIMES correspondent as conducted round the premises, new changes such as the display of permanent price board at the entrance, enhanced security and monitoring of officers’ activities through surveillance cameras had been put in place.

Also, the activities of touts around the premises had waned compared to when this reporter conducted the investigation.



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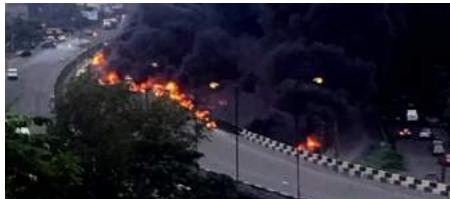
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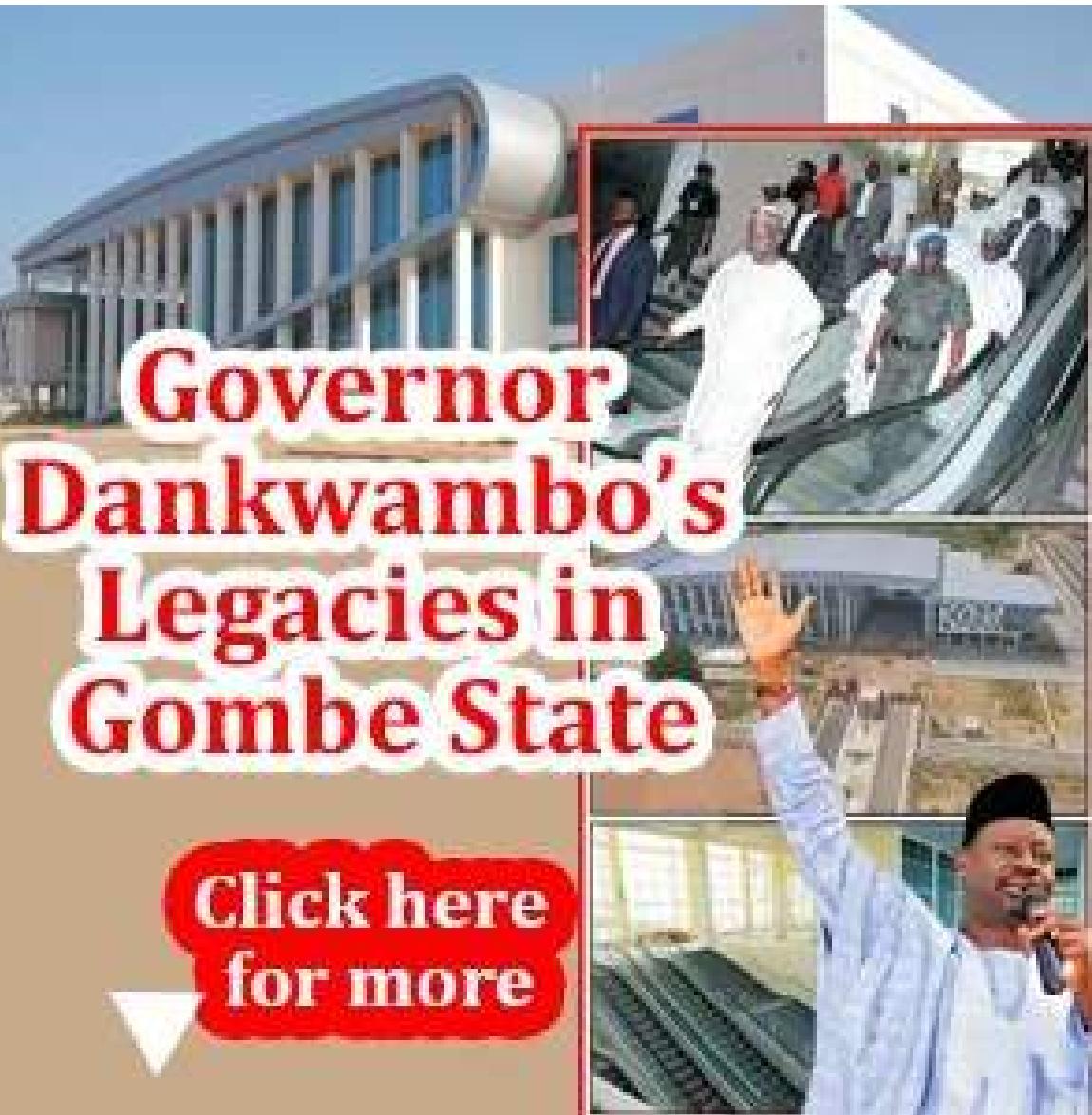
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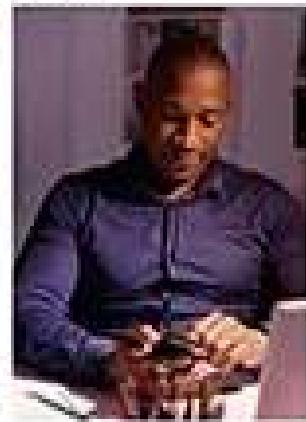
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