

MARITIME WATCH

Maritime operators want professional as new transport minister

WITH the maritime industry still in the throes of wholesale reforms, operators are seeking the appointment of a knowledgeable technocrat to head the Ministry of Transport.

The reform in terminal operations, liberalisation of ownership of ports and issues relating to streamlining of the cargo delivery, they said, make it imperative that somebody

acquainted with the dynamics in the maritime industry be appointed the next minister of transport.

"The industry needs an eligible man that by training and qualification knows the terrain and appreciates the enormity of challenges confronting the shipping industry," Abdulwaheed Kareem, chairman of the Port Consultative Council (PCC), said. "The

industry is vast and requires a man who will not have to learn the rope but understands the rope climbing tactics already," he said.

Noting that Acting President Goodluck Jonathan is in race against time with barely 14 months to May 2011, Kareem said that for the economy and the maritime industry to grow, "a man who knows the dynamics,

contending issues and challenges of maritime and help the acting president complete the race should head the transport ministry."

He called on Jonathan to consider the crop of people actively engaged in the various facets of shipping operations. "But if the government must overlook the present group of practitioners, they should pick somebody with adequate training to head

the transport ministry," he said.

Similarly, Kunle Folarin, chairman, Seafarers Welfare Board, said rail modernisation, dredging of River Niger and the country's obligations to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) are at crucial stages and may be scuttled by the appointment of somebody alien to the projects.

Government's decision should be guided by experience, expertise and commitment of the person, he said, adding that "due to the strategic nature of the projects that are pivotal to improving the transport sector, government's choice of minister should go beyond

political and party considerations."

Stating that there are capable hands among the crop of practitioners, he suggested that any of the accomplished master mariners, technocrats and shipping operators could be appointed to head the ministry.

"We need somebody who can get something done within the short time left for the Jonathan administration. The maritime industry is so peculiar that there is no room for abandoned projects," Folarin who is also a member of PCC said.

Also calling for the appointment of a professional, Olayiwola Shittu, chairman of the publicity committee of

the Council for the Registration of Freight Forwarders (CRFF), said the transport ministry should be given its rightful status as one that demands specialised knowledge.

"The industry is the backbone of the economy. More than 90 per cent of what we consume in the country is shipped in. The challenges are enormous and not something that we can afford to get somebody who will spend almost one year trying to understand the industry he should be making policies on.

"We can't be saddled with people who will come to learn on the job. There is no time for learning any longer," Shittu said.