

Libreville, Gabon, December 22 (Infosplusgabon) - Nigeria is lifting the closure of borders with neighbouring Benin and Niger which it imposed in August 2019 to curb the smuggling of rice and other commodities, the government said Wednesday.

"Four land borders will be reopened immediately while the remaining borders are directed to be reopened on or before 31st of December," Finance Minister Zainab Ahmed told a press conference.

Under President Muhammadu Buhari's instructions, "the ban on importation of rice, poultry and other banned products still subsists and will be implemented by border patrol teams," she said.

Buhari stunned Nigeria's neighbours when he unexpectedly closed the country's borders to goods trade, saying the time had come to crush contraband trade.

The unilateral move was criticised for violating commercial and freedom of movement treaties signed under the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The closure had a major impact on Benin, a key exporter of foodstuffs to Africa's most populous country via its port of Cotonou.

It had a devastating impact on border communities in Nigeria and was blamed for pushed up prices for staples in domestic markets.

The government is seeking to bolster domestic agriculture as it looks to diversify the oil-dependent economy.

The country is heavily reliant on imports to feed a booming population of some 200 million people.

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