

NIGERIA - THE LAND OF MICHAEL'S ANCESTORS

Michael studies in Houston in the United States of America. One day, Michael's mother called him, "Michael! Wake up! I had told you that a family from Nigeria was coming to the neighbourhood. They have arrived. They have a boy of your age. Why don't you meet him?" Michael was very excited because his mother had told him that his forefather had come from Nigeria.

About two hundred years ago his great grand father and grandfather were brought from Nigeria to America as slaves. You have already read that thousands of people were brought to America as slaves from Nigeria and surrounding places during that time. Slavery does not exist in America now, and Michael's family had not returned to Nigeria but settled down in America.

He had no friends in this new country. He said, "My name is Nabi. I have come from Lagos in Nigeria to stay with my uncle in America for a few months." Michael told him that his ancestors had been brought from Nigeria many years ago. Soon enough, Michael and Nabi became friends.

Michael would often ask Nabi to tell him about Nigeria and her people. He wanted to see and know more about the land of his ancestors.



SEASONS

One day it started raining. "It is cold in America and it rains only once in a while. In Lagos, however, it is never cold and it rains heavily throughout the year" Nabi said.

Michael wondered why this was so. Then Nabi took out an atlas and located the map of America. "Houston is in the Texas state, and is quite far north of the Equator, whereas Lagos is very near the Equator. Here, the sun shines overhead throughout the year and that is why it is very hot and it rains all the year round," said Nabi.

- **See how far Nigeria is from America on a map.**

Michael went over to meet his new neighbour. He had just opened the gate when he found a boy of his own age playing outside on the lawn.

"My name is Michael. I live next door. Have you just come from Nigeria?" Michael asked. The boy was happy to see Michael.

- **Locate Houston and Texas state in a map of America. Similarly locate Lagos on a map of Africa.**

"Oh! Then Nigeria has an equatorial climate," Michael said.

"I used to think so too, till I went to a city named Kano in north Nigeria." Nabi contradicted him. "Then I realised that only southern Nigeria has equatorial climate. Northern parts of Nigeria have a mild winter season also. And it rains only from May to October. It does not rain all the year round like it does in Lagos."

He took out another book and showed him a map of rainfall in Nigeria. A similar map is given below.

- Locate the cities of Lagos and Kano.
- Which city is near the Equator and which one is farther away?
- Which part of Nigeria gets maximum rainfall?
- Which part gets less rainfall?

Map 1 Nigeria: Distribution of Rainfall

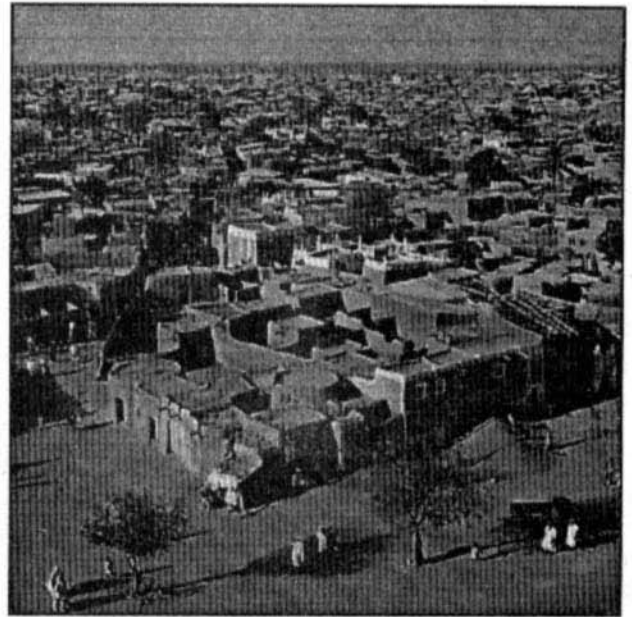
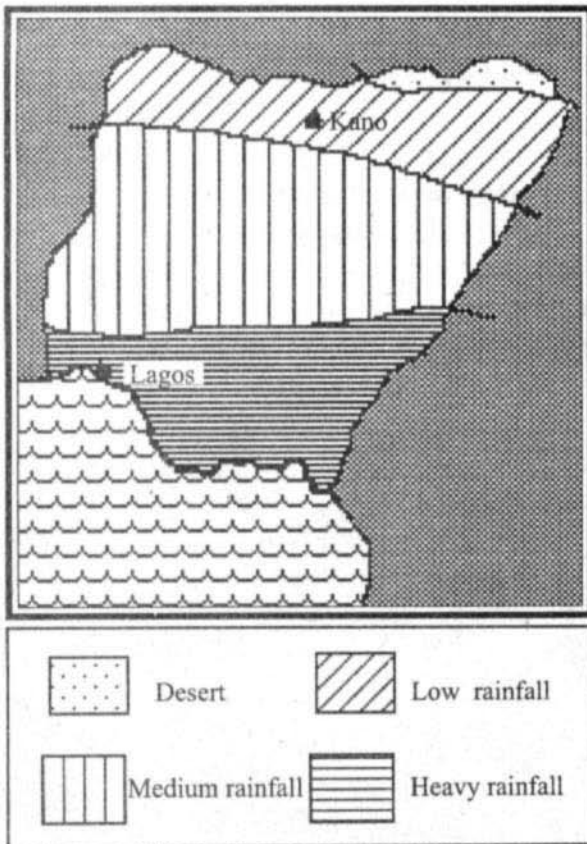


Fig. 2 Kano - Why do the houses here have flat roofs?

NATURAL VEGETATION OF NIGERIA

Nabi added that the trees found in southern Nigeria could not be found in northern Nigeria. In fact in the extreme north east no trees could be seen at all.

"The northern region of Nigeria is almost a desert. It is a part of the Sahara desert, which is the largest desert in the world." Nabi said.

- The natural vegetation of Nigeria is shown in Map 2. Compare this with the rainfall map and answer:
 - Regions with heavy rainfall have vegetation.
 - Regions with medium rainfall have vegetation.
 - Regions with low rainfall have vegetation.
 - Desert regions have vegetation.

Michael borrowed the book from Nabi to read. The book contained several photographs of Nigeria. Michael discovered many interesting things about Nigeria from the book.

Mangrove Forests

Nigeria's coast is not much above sea level. During high tide, salty seawater floods these coastal areas, small gulfs and deltas of rivers. When the tide subsides, the water recedes.

There are saltwater marshes in these coastal areas. Mangrove trees are found in large numbers in these marshy areas. In figure 3, look how the roots of the mangrove trees are sticking out of a marsh. They serve a number of purposes. They help the tree to remain above water during high tides. These roots are submerged under water when the tide comes in. They also help the roots to breathe, as the



Fig. 3 Roots of a mangrove tree

marshy soil does not contain much oxygen. They also help to anchor the tree to the loose soil. Mangroves are the only kind of trees that grow in salty soils and are very important for preventing the spread of saline marshes along the coasts. The wood of the mangrove tree is very strong and heavy. Its fruit is sweet. Mangrove forests form a 16-96 km wide belt in the coastal region of Nigeria.

The coastal areas of India too have mangrove forests. The Sunderban forests of the Gangetic delta (in West Bengal) are the most important mangrove forests in the country. Sunderi is the typical tree of this forest in India.

Equatorial Forests

Dense Equatorial forests begin where the saltwater marshes end. These forests contain tall trees, creepers, etc. like

mahogany, ebony, rubber, sapele, obeche, African walnut and oil palms. Since there is no dry season the trees here are evergreen and never leafless. Raffia palm is also a very important tree of this belt as its fruits yield cooking oil. Coconut trees can also be found in the entire belt. Equatorial forests form a 80-160 km belt after the mangrove forests.

• Which other country that you have read about has such forests?

See Figure 4. Have you seen such trees in the forest around you? Some of these trees grow 60 meters high. An interesting thing about these trees is that they give wood of different colours. Ebony has black wood, mahogany is reddish brown and obeche tree has white wood. In contrast, most of the trees in our country yield brown wood.

The Equatorial forests merge with monsoon forests towards the north. In these parts there is a dry season and the trees shed their leaves to conserve water. Leaves sprout again in these forests when it begins to rain in May or June.

There is a great demand for Nigerian wood in many countries, especially in Europe, because it is heavy and strong. Earlier, ships and boats were made out of such wood. This wood was also used as sleepers under railway lines. Nigeria earns much foreign exchange by exporting wood. However, this has also led to rapid depletion of forest resources.

Fig. 4 Felling mahogany trees in a tropical forest



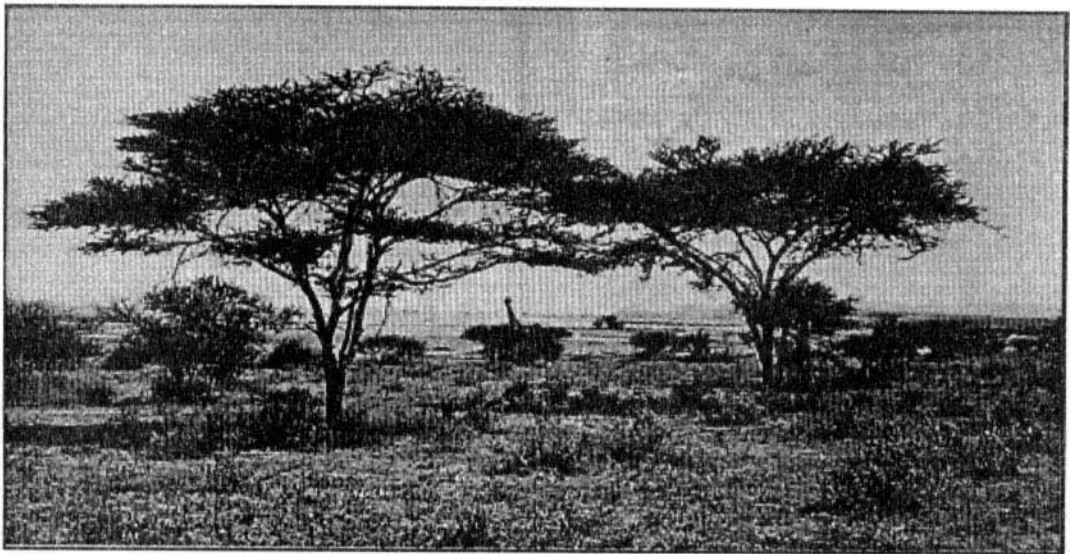


Fig. 5 Savanna region with umbrella-like trees

The Savanna

So far we have been talking about southern Nigeria near the coast. As we move inland, the rainfall declines. The trees are few and far between. Tall grass grows between the trees. The typical trees of this region are acacia, boababs, etc, which do not grow very tall. This is the Savanna region.

Trees grow closer together along the two major rivers, Niger and Benue, as more moisture is available there.

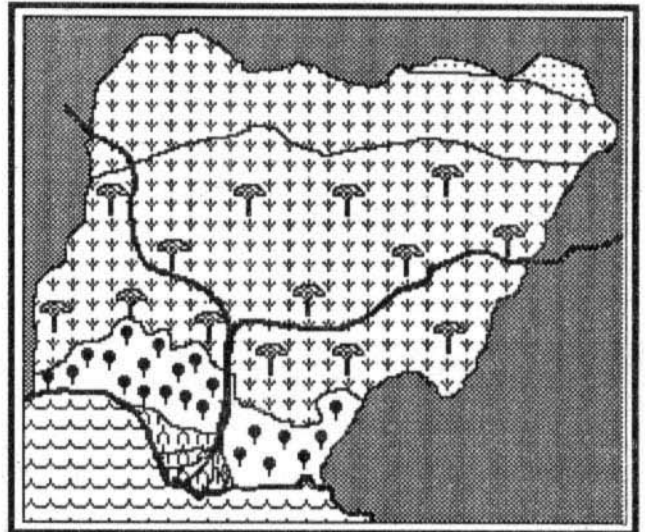
Have you wondered why there is more grass and fewer trees in the Savanna region? Trees need a lot of water. Grass grows in regions with low rainfall. You must have noticed that grass grows rapidly during the rains, after which it dries up very fast. In the next season, new grass comes up. This happens in the Savanna region also.

In the hot Savanna region, the grass is stiff and dry. It is not soft and juicy like in the cold regions of Iran, Poland or France. That is why animal husbandry is not very common in the Savanna region, except among a few tribes.







Rainfall declines as we move north and with it, the vegetation also changes. Both the trees and grass get shorter and shorter. Trees, typically, spread out just like umbrellas. (Fig.5)

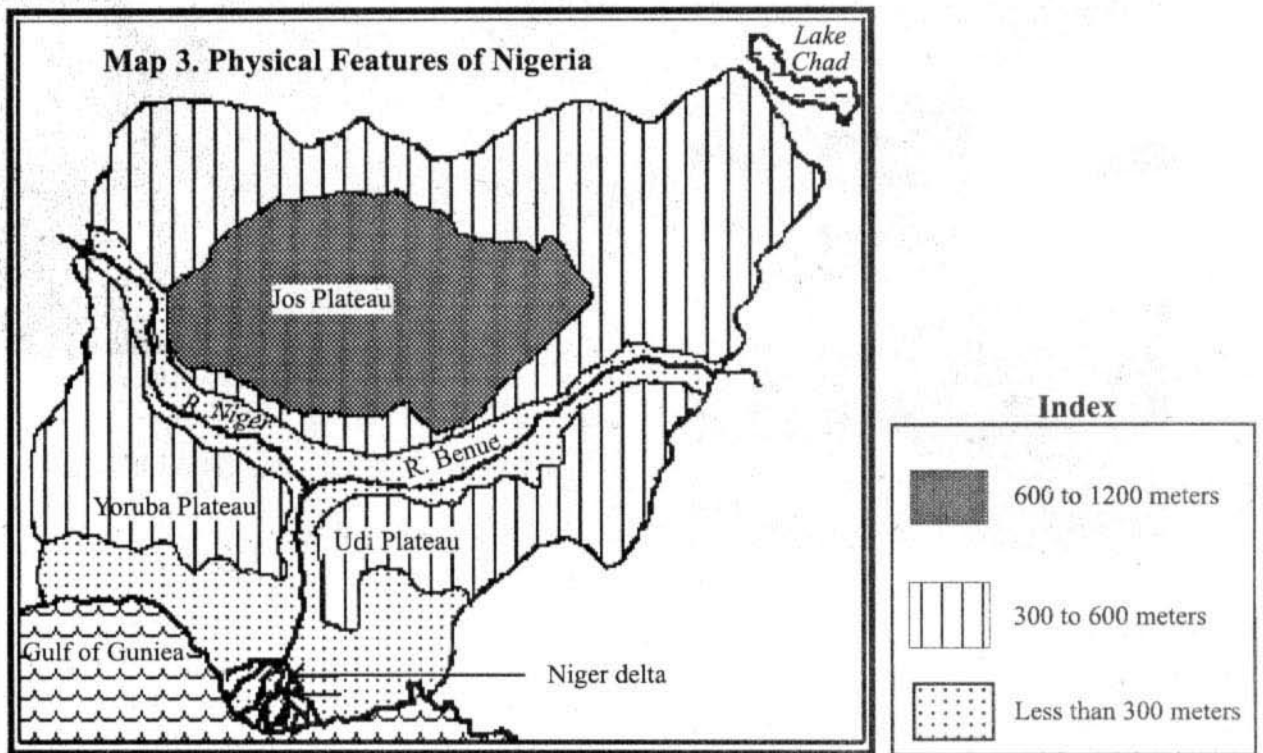
If you have visited Gwalior or Rajasthan, you would have noticed small thorny trees (*babul*) and shrubs with grass growing in between. That is because this region also gets very low rainfall.

Map 2. Natural Vegetation of Nigeria



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| | | | |
|---|-----------------------|---|--------------------|
|  | Thorny bushes |  | Equatorial forests |
|  | Savanna grass |  | Mangrove forests |
|  | Savanna grass & trees |  | |



NATURAL REGIONS OF NIGERIA

Michael was keen to know about the landscapes of Nigeria. He once asked Nabi if there were any high mountains there. Nabi said, "There are no large mountains in Nigeria. There are only small hills. That doesn't mean that we have a flat and uninteresting landscape. There is indeed great variety." He showed him some pictures of the Niger valley, its delta, the Jos and Yoruba plateaus, the deserts of the far north.

- *Look at Map 3 and locate the different parts of Nigeria as Nabi describes them.*

1. Niger Delta: "When the Europeans came to Nigeria following the sea route, they faced difficulties getting to the interior parts of Nigeria," said Nabi as he began to describe the different regions of Nigeria. "There were the marshes with dense mangrove forests. It rained heavily and there were no safe harbours. Then a few ports were built, where ships could anchor and smaller boats could go further up the Niger. It was from here that slaves were sent to America. Later on, it was from these ports, that wood and other products were sent

out of the country." Michael took out a map to locate the Niger. Nabi pointed out how the river split up into many branches near the sea and that such formations were called 'deltas'.

- *Hang a wall-map of Africa in the classroom and identify the country from where the Niger originates. Into which ocean does it empty itself?*

Fig. 6 Settlement on the Niger Delta



- Which river in India has a very large delta?
- What could be the problems in carrying out agriculture on deltas?

2. Coastal Plains: The coastal plains of Nigeria stretch beyond the delta. These plains are about 120 meters high.

- Where has this height been measured from?

3 & 4. River Valleys and Plateaus: “As you move northwards of the coastal plains you would have to climb gentle slope to reach the Yoruba and Udi Plateaus whose height is around 300 meters.” Nabi continued. “Then you have to descend a sharp slope to reach the two river valleys of the Niger and the Benue. After crossing the narrow valleys you will have to climb a steep escarpment to reach Jos Plateau. This is the highest part of our country. It is 1200 meters high.”

“What lies beyond the Jos plateau? Is that the northernmost part of Nigeria?” Michael asked.

“No. If you descend a series of stepped scarps to the north-east you will reach Lake Chad. This is a vast lake and only a part of it is in Nigeria. The remaining part of the lake is in Chad, a country which has been named after the lake,” replied Nabi.

- Can you name the four major natural regions of Nigeria?

PEOPLE

One day Michael had called upon Nabi. There he found Nabi talking to his mother in a very different language. All along he thought that the people of Nigeria spoke English. “In which language were you speaking to your mother?” he asked Nabi. “I was speaking in Ibo language. It is my mother tongue. Ibo is



Fig. 7 Nigerian women selling yams in the market

the language of the Igbo tribe and I belong to this tribe,” replied Nabi.

“Are there other tribes in Nigeria?” Michael asked. “Yes. There are several. The Fulani, the Yoruba, the Hausa etc. They have their own languages and ways of life.” Michael wanted to know more about the tribes. Nabi told him that most of the tribes practised agriculture and lived in small villages in which most of the villagers were related to each other. Of course, recently a large number of young people were migrating to towns to take up new jobs in factories and offices.

AGRICULTURE

“What do the people of Nigeria eat normally?” asked Michael one day, as they were having their lunch.

“The food of the people consists of yam, cassava, guinea-corn, rice and beans. Cassava is a kind of tuber like the sweet potato. It features largely in the diet of the people there.” Nabi answered. (See figure 8 below)

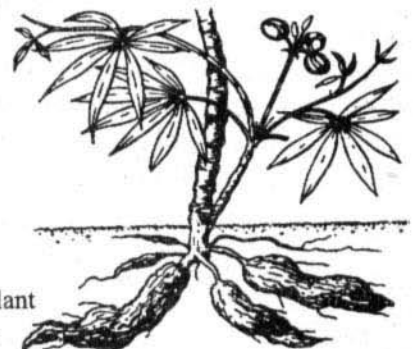


Fig 8. Cassava plant and edible roots



Fig. 9. Cocoa tree

Agriculture as practised by the tribes of Nigeria seemed so different that Michael listened to Nabi with rapt attention. Every year the groups of tribesmen cleared a small piece of forest land of its trees and burnt the wood. Then all the families distributed that piece of land among themselves. Often they shared the work and helped each other at harvest and other times.

Michael said, "Why only a small piece of land? In America holdings of land are sometimes as large as a few hundred acres."

Nabi answered, "In America, land is cultivated by machines such as tractors, and production is oriented towards trade. In Nigeria, farmers cultivate just enough to meet the requirements of their families. They use the hoe to plough their fields. Even the use of bullock or horse driven plough is very rare. So, production is also limited. However, things are changing fast these days. Even in our country we have started having large personal land holdings in which crops are grown for sale in the market."

A few days later Nabi visited Michael at his house. Michael told him that his parents had gone to work in the cotton fields and that he had to stay at home. Nabi asked with surprise, "Is cotton grown even in America?" Michael asked, "Is cotton grown in Nigeria, too?" Nabi said, "Yes, but you know that in our country north and south have different climates and that is why different crops are grown in different regions".

Crops and Plantations of South Nigeria

Michael took out some chocolate and offered it to Nabi. Nabi asked, "Did you know that chocolate is made out of cocoa?"

Michael said, "I knew that, but I have never seen this fruit" Nabi took out a book and showed him the picture of the cocoa fruit and said, "We have large cocoa plantations in Nigeria."

Nabi added, "In southern Nigeria, apart from cocoa, there are also rubber plantations. Oil bearing palm trees are also found there. Oil is extracted from its fruit. People reach these forests after crossing the River Niger by boat and then collect palm fruit.

"Earlier all these trees were found wild in forests. When the demand for these products increased, patches of forest were cleared and these trees were planted there. Cocoa, rubber, palm and palm oil are being exported and this enables Nigeria to earn foreign exchange." Look at the palm tree in figure 11.

• In Map 4, identify the region of Nigeria where these crops are grown?

Fig. 10 Cocoa fruit





Fig.11 Women taking cocoa fruits to the market. Oil palms line the roads

“Why were these trees grown in plantations when they already grew wild? Who planted them?” Michael asked. “Plantations were started by the British who were not satisfied with the quantity of wild products collected from the forests. They wanted to produce more and export them,” Nabi answered.

Plantations made many things easy for them. First of all, there was no longer the

difficulty of going into the forest and locating the trees. It was easy to look after the trees since the trees were all located in one place. Harvesting the produce also became much easier. Production, which was necessary for trade, increased.

Not only this, a number of processing units were also set up near plantations, such as units to separate seed from the cocoa fruit, to dry it, extract oil from palm fruit, extract milk from rubber plants, etc. Nigerian people started working in these plantations, while the British were their managers. In this way, commercial agriculture of palm, cocoa and rubber began in Nigeria.

Most of the profit from trade of palm, cocoa and rubber went to the British. The Nigerian people worked there only as agricultural labourers. Even in India during British times, plantations of tea and coffee were started for trade purposes. Nigeria was under British rule until 1960. In 1960 Nigeria won independence. After that the plantations and trade in plantation products have gradually come under the control of the Nigerians and they are able to benefit from these.

Map 4. Crops and Natural Resources



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| | |
|--|-----------|
| | Cotton |
| | Palm oil |
| | Corn |
| | Cassava |
| | Cocoa |
| | Groundnut |
| | Tin |
| | Crude oil |
| | Coal |
| | Rail line |

Agriculture and Animal Husbandry in Northern Nigeria

You know that northern Nigeria is the region of Savanna grass. It rains very little here and only grasses and some thorny trees are to be found. Cattle-rearing is an important occupation of the Fulani tribe which lives in the north. They also rear sheep and goats. Trade in hides and skins is an important commercial activity here.

Only crops that can be grown in low rainfall regions are grown in the north. Most common food crops are coarse grains such as millets, guinea corn and cassava. In some areas, wheat is also grown. Trees here are generally not cut down and can be seen standing in the middle of the fields.

- ***Make a list of crops grown in the heavy rainfall region of the south and the low rainfall region of northern Nigeria.***

Here also, some commercial crops are grown, such as kola nuts, groundnuts, tobacco and cotton. Kola nuts are of great importance in the lives of Nigerians. It is specially served to honoured guests. You may have tasted cola soft drinks. Kola nut is used in the production of many of these drinks. That is why the Kola nut is also exported on a large scale.

Northern Nigeria has been cultivating cotton for a long time. People weave cloth on hand-loom and also grow cotton for commercial use. Railways were built near cotton fields to facilitate easier transport so that trade becomes easier. Now cotton mills, too, have been set up in Nigeria.

Groundnuts are also grown in plenty in northern Nigeria. The British introduced groundnuts in this country, as the soil and climate were suitable for their growth. Factories have been set up in Kano and in Kaduna to extract oil from groundnut.

- ***Locate the regions growing cotton and groundnuts in the map.***

MINERAL OIL

One day Michael was very happy. "We went to see a mineral oil well from our school," he told Nabi. "We use petrol every day but today I saw an oil well. Have you seen one? I have heard that in Nigeria, too, mineral oil is extracted from wells."

"Mineral oil is the most important natural resource of our country. My uncle works in one of the oil rigs. So I have seen them too," replied Nabi.

- ***In the map, look for the mineral oil regions of Nigeria. Name the ports from where this oil would be exported.***

Since 1958, mineral oil has been exported from Nigeria. Oil refineries have been set up at Harcourt and Vari port. One such factory has also been set up in Kaduna city in middle Nigeria.

"In that case, Nigeria must be getting plenty of money from foreign countries in exchange for the oil," Michael said. "This industry is mostly in the hands of foreign companies. The Nigerian government has only a small share in this industry" Nabi answered sadly.

Michael started examining the map of Nigeria and said, "A number of minerals are mined in your country now." Nabi told him that the British had not discovered many minerals. These days, many minerals are being discovered and mined.

- ***Look at the map and list the minerals that are mined in Nigeria.***

Nabi told Michael that metals such as zinc, iron and lead are mined. Michael reasoned that if Nigeria is so rich in natural resources and agriculture, then its people must be rich, too. Nabi said, "Yes we are rich in natural resources and agriculture, but we have not been able to use these resources to their full capacity. Moreover most of our resources have remained in the hands of

foreign companies. Presently, the Nigerian people are slowly establishing industries. A number of small and large factories have been set up. We are trying to make full use of

our own resources. We are very hopeful that ultimately we will be successful in this effort of ours, no matter what problems come up or how hard we have to work."

EXERCISE

1. How are the equatorial forests useful to the people of Nigeria?
2. Name three cash crops of south Nigeria.
3. Name at least four crops, which the farmers of Nigeria cultivate for their food.
4. Why do some tribes in north Nigeria practice animal husbandry? What difficulties do you think they would be facing?
5. When you move from south to north Nigeria, what differences do you notice in a) terrain b) rainfall c) vegetation?
6. Separate the occupations of north and south Nigeria from the following list:

| Occupations | North Nigeria | South Nigeria |
|------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1. Coal mining | | |
| 2. Tin mining | | |
| 3. Mineral oil mining | | |
| 4. Animal husbandry | | |
| 5. Rubber plantation | | |
| 6. Palm plantation | | |
| 7. Groundnut cultivation | | |
| 8. Cotton cultivation | | |
| 9. Loading, unloading | | |
| 10. Extracting groundnut oil | | |
| 11. Extracting palm oil | | |
| 12. Cocoa cultivation | | |
| 13. Cultivation of yam and cassava | | |
| 14. Cultivation of kola nut | | |
| 15. Lumbering | | |

7. What differences do you notice between figure 2 and figure 6? Can you explain the reason for these differences?
8. What is the height of the Yoruba Plateau and the Jos Plateau?
9. Nigeria, like India, was a colony of the British till recently. Do you think there are any other similarities between India and Nigeria?