Nigeria’s half full Cup II

Contributed by Soji Akinrinade
Sunday, 14 March 2010

The best thing would be to remove our invisible President Yar’Adua so no room is left for those who want to profit from our current predicament to manoeuvre...

Like many Nigerians, I have been waiting to be educated on the events surrounding the smuggling of our invalid president under the cover of darkness, like a thief, back into the country after his long sojourn in Saudi Arabia. By the look of things, it is going to be a long wait. We are unlikely to have any meaningful explanation on the issue. Even our legislators, who said they were not aware of his return since they were not so informed, now believe we should move on. They don’t even want to talk about the issue again. Nevertheless, the deployment of troops to strategic places and the Abuja airport on that night rankles and it is still being criticised by all and sundry. Some people want the head of the commander of the brigade of guards, while some would even want the chief of army staff, General Abdulrahman Dambazzau removed. The defence headquarters dissociated itself from the action, although the army itself said it was no big deal, particularly in relations to its rules of engagement. These two lines of thought haven’t satisfied Nigerians who somewhat believe the action of the commander of the brigade of guards is somewhat treasonable. In this circumstance, the only thing to do is to find someone with sufficient knowledge to explain the situation. Is the deployment of the soldiers that night high treason as some people claim? Does the commander of the brigade of guards really need permission of General Dambazzau or other bosses to do his job? My search for an explanation took me to a former chief of army staff who told me the whole issue is a storm in a tea cup. As he explained it, the commander of the brigade of guards did the right thing, BUT (emphasis mine) in the wrong way. Mark you, this is not gibberish. Not at all. Here goes the explanation. The brigade of guards’ commander was right to have deployed the troops to welcome our ailing president without permission from his bosses. It is within his power to do so, particularly since it is a normal deployment. This type of deployment is done every time the president travels or returns to base and also when government is welcoming some other leaders into the country or seeing them off. The problem with this one is how the cover of darkness was used to carry out the duty. Was it necessary to have cleared workers from the presidential wing of the airport for the arrival of the president? Was it necessary to have virtually locked up those at the local wing of the airport? Why was it important to switch off the light at the airport? These unanswered questions have made events surrounding the deployment murky. Yes the brigade of guards is attached to the presidency, but it should have occurred to its commander that once there was an acting president in place, and there should have been a clear attempt to brief him about what was afoot. It smacks of utter disregard for the acting president that security officials around him didn’t pay him any mind at all. And it begs the question whether there could be a repeat of this type of behaviour again. The hope is that with the appointment of General Aliyu Mohammed Gusau as the new National Security Adviser, the security mess around the acting president can finally be sorted out. However, what is good about the hue and cry over the behaviour of our military men this time is that a side of Nigerians which we haven’t seen for a while has come to the fore once again. We have been so complacent and uncomplaining that our leaders have been riding roughshod over us. I am glad that we are once again ready to make our views known to our governments through direct action. We must encourage Pastor Tunde Bakare and his Save Nigeria Group, a coalition of civil society and human rights group, to continue to remind us about how to take control of the governments that rule us. It is in all our interest that we stop being passive about the actions and inactions of our governments. It is exactly for this reason that our leaders continue mouth accountability and rule of law, when in fact they are unaccountable to us the tax payers and the voting public and have utter contempt for the rule of law. Recent protest marches organised by the Save Nigeria Group bring back memories of the NADECO days when that group fought the Abacha government to a standstill. They also bring back memories of how the civil society led by the likes of Gani Fawehinmi and Beko Ransome Kuti and Nigerian students’ NANS had running battles with the Babangida regime over good governance. If we’d had strong and proactive pro-democracy groups when President Obasanjo dreamt up his Third Term gambit, maybe he would have given it a second thought. Thank goodness, the media stood firm against the gambit and emboldened scores of Nigerian civil and political leaders to take the former president on and, in the process, derail his plan. We must all be active in ensuring that Acting President Jonathan and the National Assembly do the right thing. The best thing would be to remove our invisible President Yar’Adua so no room is left for those who want to profit from our current predicament to manoeuvre. If this is impossible, as the weakness of our political system shows, we the people, must egg Jonathan on to show courage and deal decisively with issues and without undue rascality from some ministers or unwarranted interference from our governors who have so much to do in their own states but are too busy junketing all over the place, wasting precious resources. Three issues are very important in the days before the next election: fixing the electoral system; fixing our power problems, and ensuring that the peace process in the Niger Delta works. Jonathan will write his name in gold if he can deliver on these three issues. SMS Only: 08055001924