

Pushing Goodluck's good luck

Contributed by Soji Akinrinade
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The new national obsession is the People's Democratic Party's zoning formula. It is the mechanism that the party has devised to solve the age-old power sharing problem in Nigeria. And from what we read in the newspapers and hear in the news, it seems practically everyone, from PDP members themselves, to members of the opposition and ordinary Nigerians, have a view on the issue. The hoopla the issue has caused is an admission of the impotence of the other parties, more than 50 of them, as it is an admission that we are accepting willy-nilly that the only party capable of producing a successful presidential candidate in the next round of presidential elections next year is the PDP. What a pity! This zoning formula obsession has been stoked this time by the equivocation of President Goodluck Jonathan on his ambition beyond 2011, particularly during his visit to the United States of America. Jonathan, who had before that trip in April disguised his ambition well, let the cat out the bag during Christiane Amanpour's interview with him on CNN. At first he said, in answer to a question, "There are options for me if I want to contest election. I can contest as a vice-president to anybody." Later on, the gloves came off and he said: "I can contest as a president because the law allows me." Although he added that it was not his priority and that he wanted to make maximum impact in the short time he has to lead Nigeria, the genie was out of the bottle and there was no putting it back. You can't blame Jonathan. A man who has had a large dose of political luck is bound to be tempted, particularly after visiting the most powerful man in the world Barak Obama. In fact that had been predicted by a government insider at least four weeks before the visit. As the man said to a few of us who had a chat with him: "You never know. By the time this man goes on the trip we are preparing for him to the US, he may be tempted to want to run." Lucky Goodluck Jonathan! He became governor of Bayelsa state after a contrived impeachment of his admittedly thieving boss, Diepreye Alamieyeseigha. He didn't want to be vice-president, but with the pressure allegedly put on former President Olusegun Obasanjo by former Abuja minister, El-Rufai and former EFCC boss, Nuhu Ribadu, former Governor Peter Odili was dropped and substituted with Jonathan as the late Umaru Yar'Adua's running mate. Jonathan's good fortune did not end there. The death of Yar'Adua has put him at the pinnacle of power. So, if his good luck had held well till now why can't there be more? Why can't he run for his own full term as president next year? His ambition is the crux of this debate on PDP's zoning formula. The debate has been illuminating as it has been nauseating and devoid of principle. The greatest beneficiary of zoning, the man who was so annoyed that his deputy wanted to run in 2003, Obasanjo, says the PDP recognises no such thing. And some have argued that it is unconstitutional. They have even brought God into it, as it is usual with many of our unprincipled politicians. Former Senate President, Ken Nnamani who came to Newswatch Summit recently put the facts straight. Zoning is not a gentleman's agreement. It is written into the PDP constitution. It is under Article 7, Section 72c and it says: In pursuance of the principles of equity, justice and fairness, the party shall adhere to the policy of rotation and zoning of party and public elective offices and it should be enforced by the appropriate executive committees at all levels. What is former President Obasanjo thinking? I do not know why the provision is unconstitutional when the constitution itself enshrines the principle of federal character in recognition of the fact that power sharing is very critical to the survival of Nigeria. At this particular juncture in our history, it is delusional to believe that we have licked that problem of fair representation for all our ethnic groups. We have not and that is why every so often we want to know how power is shared in some ministries or parastatals and why we also want to know why there has never been a Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa/Fulani or Ijaw man heading one ministry, parastatal or the other. What PDP did by putting zoning in its constitution is to find a way to settle the controversy of power sharing, at least temporarily. It is why the party arrived at picking its presidential candidate in 1999 from the South-West. It is disappointing that those who should know better now want to rubbish that political masterstroke. Even in 2007 when the PDP picked its presidential candidate from the north, the other two main political parties (the ones that really matter) AC and ANPP picked their presidential candidates from the north. It was an acceptance (not voiced) that with a southerner Obasanjo just quitting power, the country's power reality would brook no other southerner as president in 2007. Should Jonathan then contest in 2011? I think not. I believe that PDP's zoning formula must run its course even if it has to be jettisoned later. And in that case, it must be expunged from the PDP constitution. We cannot build order and an effective system in our society if we find ways to short-circuit agreed rules and principles when they don't suit our self interest. If the situation had been reversed, there is no chance in hell that the south will agree for power to go to the north. For once, what this nation needs now is a selfless leader. Jonathan should be that leader, a leader that delivers on his promises and a leader that we ourselves would want to call upon to lead us. Goodluck Jonathan is young and his political star is rising. In the current circumstance, can he afford to push his good luck too far? SMS only: 08055001924