Nigeria Loses Three Great Men

Contributed by Achimugu Ojima
Friday, 17 February 2012

Three eminent Nigerians take a final bow in one week

Death came striking in a hurry last week and went away with three eminent Nigerians, Matthew Tawo Mbu, foremost diplomat; Sam Aluko, prominent economist and Abdullahi Sanusi Dantata, a notable industrialist. Mbu fell first on February 6. The 82-year-old diplomat died after a prolonged illness at Royal Free Hospital in Hampstead, London. He was a great Nigerian nationalist who made the yet-unbroken record of being posted to the United Kingdom as Nigeria’s ambassador to the Queensland at 23. He had also served Nigeria in many capacities as pioneer foreign affairs minister, civil servant and politician. His death generated reactions from many Nigerians. President Goodluck Jonathan expressed sadness at the demise of Mbu, whom he described as a nationalist, elder statesman, a globalist, and a true diplomat. Mbu’s contributions to the development of Nigeria were enormous and he was indeed one of Africa’s major voices in the global arena. “His death is a great loss not only to the Mbu family of Boki in Cross River State, his immediate family and his extended political family, but an irreparable loss to Nigeria as a nation.” Mbu attended Okundi primary school in Cross River State from 1937 to 1940; Kwakwagon Seminary School from 1941 to 1943. He then proceeded to Middle Temple and University College in London, 1955 to 1959, where he earned an LLB and LLM in law. He was a visible politician during the first and second republic. He served in the Constituent Assembly between 1977 and 1978 which produced the 1979 Constitution. Mbu had a prolonged career in the civil service. He was a parliamentarian from 1952 to 1955 and was Nigerian’s ambassador to the United Kingdom in the Court of St James in 1955. He was also commissioner to the UK from 1955 to 1966. Incidentally, a day after Mbu’s death, Aluko exited the world in the same British capital. Aluko, a renowned economist, died on February 7, 2012, in a hospital in London at the age of 82. In a condolence message, Emeke Ihedioha, deputy speaker of the House of Representatives, said the demise of the foremost economist was a setback to the nation. “The legacy he left behind is a fountain of inspiration to present and future generation of scholars and policy makers to invest concerted efforts in translating the numerous potentials of our country into concrete realities,” he said. Adams Oshiomole, Edo State governor, also mourned the passing away of the erudite scholar. “Nigeria has lost a great patriot, a progressive social thinker and an illustrious public servant,” he said. Emmanuel Uduaghan, governor of Delta State, said the country is yet to achieve the level of growth and prosperity which Aluko struggled and lived for. Uduaghan noted that the best way to immortalise Aluko was for Nigerians to strive to attain the vision of the deceased. “I hope that those in authority would find the work of the renowned economist as invaluable tools for stimulating positive development in the country,” he said. Richard Akinjide, SAN, former minister of justice and attorney-general of the federation, described Aluko’s deah as a great loss to the country. Aluko attended St Mary’s primary school, Ado Ekiti, from 1936 to 1940; Emmanuel School, Ado Ekiti, 1941, Christ School, Ado Ekiti from 1942 to 1945, Yaba Technical Institute, Lagos,1948 to 1949; London School of Economics, England from 1955 to 1959. The late economist was a lecturer in the department of Economics, University of Ife, Ile-Ife and University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1959-1966. He was also a visiting scholar, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, USA, in 1962 and a professor of Economics at the University of Ife, Ile-Ife, from 1967 to 1980. The late scholar was Economic adviser to the governor of the old Ondo State from1980 to 1983. He was also chairman, National Economic Intelligence Committee from 1994 to 2000 and served the country in many other capacities as an economist. He had published many books, some of which are Problem of Self-Government for Nigeria and Christianity and Communism. Abdullahi Sanusi Dantata, a Kano-based foremost businessman, died in a German hospital on the same day with Aluko. Until his death, Dantata was the chairman of Dantata and Sawoe Construction Company. He was an uncle to Aliko Dangote, a Nigerian business mogul. Dangote confessed that the initial start-up capital of his business empire came from Dantata. In his condolence message, Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso, governor of Kano State, said Dantata would be sorely missed because of his contribution to the economic development of the nation. Junaid Mohammed, a doctor and former classmate of the late Dantata, said the deceased was “an astute businessman, who made his mark,” both locally and internationally.