

Buhari : A Deal with Destiny

Although a household name, President Buhari is the new kid on the block in Nigerian politics. Having ruled Nigeria for 20 months as a military Head of State between 1983 and 1985 and for 4 years as a democratically elected President between 2015

and 2019, Buhari is however not a novice in politics. Born in Daura, Katsina State, on December 17, 1942, Buhari, Nigeria's fifth post-independence military ruler, is famous as an unrepentant anti-corruption crusader. In his 20-month rule as a Military Head of State, he was reputed for his war against indiscipline, fight against corruption and drug trafficking, efforts to restructure the economy and for his poor human rights record. Since 2003 that he forayed into politics, he has been hunted by his poor human rights record, especially his Decree 4 of 1984, which allowed his government to detain journalists and human rights activists without trial.

Regardless of party manifestos, Buhari's two most important selling-points since 2003 remains economic restructuring and zero-tolerance for corruption. While his admirers and party supporters praise him for keeping with these two ideals, a number of Nigerians, especially members of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), score him low on economic restructuring and accuse him of being selective in his anti-corruption fight, with most people arrested and tried being former and current officers of the PDP, the nation's leading opposition party.

To be honest, in 2015, Buhari inherited a badly damaged economy. Crude oil, the mainstay of Nigeria's economy, experienced a price slump at the world market; hence, the first four years of Buhari's Presidency focused on trying to stabilize the economy with the meagre resources available to the nation. On the anti-corruption front, Buhari and his apologists have argued that given PDP's 16 years hold on power, its members cannot but be the focus of any anti-corruption efforts, since they were in government for those years. But as logical as this may appear, it is inadequate to explain why members of the PDP who decamped to the ruling APC-led government have escaped the anti-corruption telescope. Efforts to highlight this and other issues, especially the persistence of Boko Haram terrorist attacks could not sway the

With massive support for the new government, Buhari announced that (i) the economy would be given a new impetus and better sense of direction; (ii) corrupt officials and their agents would be brought to book; and (iii) in view of the drought that affected most parts of the country, the federal government would, with the available resources, import food stuffs to supplement the shortfalls suffered in the previous year's harvest. The new government however warned government workers against kick-backs and inflation of contracts, over-invoicing of imports and forgery, fraud and embezzlement, money laundering and smuggling, etc.

At the height of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's Presidency in 2011, Brent crude averaged \$111.26 per barrel, slightly below the 2010 average of \$111.67 per barrel. When Buhari was sworn-in as President, crude oil had tumbled from \$98.89 per barrel in 2014 to \$52.32 per barrel in 2015, sending Nigeria's economy into a tailspin. The situation got worse in 2016 when Brent crude sold for \$43.74 per barrel. Between 2017 and 2019, Brent crude had witnessed a resurgence from \$54.15 per barrel in 2017 to \$69.52 per barrel in 2018. Currently, in 2019, Brent crude averages \$63.00 a barrel and it is forecast to average \$62.00 per barrel in 2020. Compared to his predecessors, Buhari's chances of recording economic success in the face of dwindling national revenue would have to depend on an astute economic management.

Despite concerns about his age, especially as he struggled with health challenges in his first term, Buhari no doubt comes out as a fighter and an administrator that cannot be brushed aside. As a career military man, Buhari was Platoon Commander, 2nd Infantry battalion (1963-1964), Mechanical Transport Officer (1964-1965), Transport Company Commander (1965-1966), Battalion Adjutant/Commander of the 2nd Infantry Division (1967), Brigade Major (1967-1968), Acting Commander, 4th Sector of the 1st Division (1968-1970), Commander of the 31st Infantry Brigade, 1st Infantry Division (1970-1971),

Assistant Adjutant-General, 1st Infantry Division (1971-1972), Colonel (1974), Acting Director Supply and Transport (1974-1975), Military Governor of North Eastern State (1975-1976), Federal Commissioner for Petroleum and Natural Resources (1976-1978), Member of the Supreme Military Council (1976-1978), General Officer Commanding, 4th Infantry Division (1980-1981), General Officer Commanding, 3rd Armored Division (1981-1983) and Head of State, Chairman of the Supreme Military Council, Chairman of the National Council of States, Chairman of the Federal Executive Council and Commander-in-Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces (1983-1985). From March 1995 to May 1999, Buhari was Executive Chairman, Petroleum (Special) Trust Fund (PTF) under General Sanni Abacha.

Prior to his election in 2015, especially during his electoral campaigns, Buhari discountenanced the reality of fuel subsidy, calling it a fallacy and a scam. No sooner was he sworn-in as Nigeria's president on 29th May 2015 than his government told Nigerians that if pump price of petroleum products was increased from N97.00 to N145.00, market forces would come into play and with time drive price down. Four years down the line, prices still remain the same and rumours of humongous fuel subsidy payouts still ring in the air.

Ostensibly to put an end to petroleum product subsidization, Buhari made himself the substantive Minister for Petroleum. Four years after his claim, Nigerians are yet to see a downward slope in the cost of petroleum products. In fact, rather than decreasing prices, between 2018 and 2019, a whopping sum of 800 billion naira was allegedly spent on subsidizing petroleum products. Buhari would also need to explain what Nigerians gained with his management of the Petroleum Ministry.

The man, Buhari, is also not a stranger to controversial policy decisions. During his 20 months stint, he at the head of Supreme Military Council (SMC) banned party politics, retired many government workers, including 17 Federal

Permanent Secretaries, 34 Senior Police officials and 13 Naval Officers. Over 3000 federal and state government workers were compulsorily retired. He also probed activities of the Federal Capital Development Authority, the Nigerian National Petroleum Company, etc.

To reinvent the nation, his newly appointed military governors carried out similar purges within their respective states.

Notable examples include Navy Captain Samuel Atukum, the military governor of Plateau State, who sold off all Mercedes-Benz and Peugeot 505 cars in the state official vehicle pool and replaced them with Peugeot 504 cars. Lieutenant-Colonel David Mark, the Military governor of Niger State, pretended to be a patient at a government hospital and, after experiencing inadequate and disrespectful services, revealed himself and erring staff members of the hospital were dismissed. Commodore Akin Otiko, the Military governor of Ondo State dismissed 35 staff of NTS the state broadcasting station, for reporting late at their duty posts.

To curb opposition to his government, especially over the re-introduction of school fees and levies, excise duties on local manufactures and taxes such as poll and cattle taxes, hospital and market fees, etc. by peasants, artisans, workers, and the unemployed; Buhari proscribed student unionism in tertiary institutions while clamping down on human right activists across Nigeria. His government neither saw anything wrong in its decision not to increase personal taxation on the rich nor the impact of increased excise duties on domestic production/local industries.

For many, Buhari's government was better than the profligate and demonstrably corrupt Shagari regime. Many Nigerians recounted Buhari's appointment as the first Chairman of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) with nostalgia. It was under Buhari's leadership of the NNPC that all Nigeria's refineries were built and put to effective and efficient use. In addition, 20 oil depots were constructed

across the country, a project involving over 3200 kilometers of pipelines. Under his leadership, the blueprint for Nigeria's petro-chemical and liquefied natural gas programmes were also drawn. Although Buhari was cleared of any wrongdoing, the disappearance of some 2.8 billion naira from NNPC accounts between 1976 and 1979 remained a strong indictment on his leadership of the NNPC. Notwithstanding this, many Nigerians, including Buhari's critics, believe that he is trustworthy and financially disciplined.

Even if his electoral victory is a testament to his broad support, Buhari's reputation has suffered serious bashing these last four years. The first hurdle concerned was his educational qualification. Politicians, especially from the ranks of the PDP, argued that Buhari did not have the basic qualification to hold office as President. Journalists and political analysts in the media also joined the fray, with many requesting that the president made public his ordinary level West African Examination Council result.

For a fact, Buhari completed his secondary school education and passed all qualifying examinations into the then Nigerian Military Training School, Kaduna in 1963. He also attended Officer's Cadet School in Aldershot, United Kingdom in October 1963. In 1964, he returned to Nigeria for Platoon Commanders Course at the Nigerian Military College, Kaduna. In 1965, he left Nigeria for the United Kingdom where he attended the Army Mechanical Transport School in Borden, United Kingdom. In 1973, he studied at the Defense Services Staff College, Wellington, India and was, between June 1979 and June 1980, also at the United States Army War College. From the above, to argue that Buhari has no education to hold office as president smacks of either ignorance or politics or both.

Given his re-election to a second and final term in office as president, can Buhari salvage the economy? While the catastrophic slump in oil prices played a major role in the

economic hardship that characterized most of his first term, Buhari's government has, so far, demonstrated leadership in steering Nigerian economy on the path of true diversification. With its emphasis on developing the non-oil sector and a refusal to devalue the naira, Nigeria could well be on its way out of a monocultural economic system. Buhari's emphasis on developing the nation's capacity in agriculture is a necessary step, a foundation for a new self-sustaining Nigeria.

With no fear of electoral backlash anymore, Buhari is expected to give the fight against corruption more muscle than in his first four years. As military Head of State, Buhari used

tribunals probed anyone with links or anyone who aided contractors and businessmen and women, politicians and government officials, and many were jailed in the process. Anyone found to have fraudulently gained anything above one million naira of public funds was given life sentence while those whose proceeds were less than one million naira were given the minimum punishment of 21 years imprisonment. In this way, over 500 Nigerians went to jail for corruptly enriching themselves at the expense of the Nigerian state.

Besides the probable fear of electoral backlash, Nigeria is today a democratic nation, not a military autocracy. So Buhari cannot singlehandedly shove the laws aside and, like an autocrat, arrest people arbitrarily, jail them without trials or try them in kangaroo or military-style tribunals. He has to follow the due processes of the law the wheel of which grinds slowly.

Buhari cannot also, in the name of reconstruction and revamping Nigeria's economy, issue decrees or demand for obnoxious and anti-human Acts that would trample on people's rights to freedom of assembly, association and political activities. As military Head of State, series of obnoxious decrees were promulgated, the most controversial being the Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Decree No. 4 of 1984 and the Miscellaneous Offences Decree No. 20 of 1984. Under Decree 4 of 1984, Messers Tunde Thompson and Nduka Iraboh of The Guardian Newspapers, among others, were jailed for their writings.

Like Decree No. 4 of 1984, the Anti-Currency Trafficking, Anti-Smuggling, and Anti-Narcotics decree was also pivotal to Buhari's fight against corruption. Under this decree, Bernard Ogedegbe, Bartholomew Owoh, and Akanni Ojuolape were arrested and, after been found guilty of drug peddling, were publicly executed. Perhaps the most celebrated cases of drug peddling were those of Gloria Okon, a young lady, who was arrested at the Aminu Kano International Airport while trying to traffic

hard drugs, and one I kuoml a and a son of one of Kano bi g

property voluntarily. Others like Diezani Alison-Madueke, Nigeria's former Petroleum Minister, former National Security Adviser, Dasuki Sanbo and Mr. Iyorchia Ayu and former Nigeria's Chief of Defence Staff, late Alex Badeh were compelled to forfeit different landed properties and monies by the court. Others whose landed properties were taken away by the court are former Chief of Air Staff, Air Marshal Adesola Aмосu, ex-Ekiti State Governor, Mr. Ayodele Fayose, ex-Bauchi State Governor, Mr. Isa Yuguda. In addition, retired Col. Bello Fadile and Alhaji Ibrahim Shema, the former governor of Katsina State, who forfeited 20 landed properties.

In the same Punch publication, the trio of Mr. George Turner, Alhaji Babangi da Aliyu and Alhaji Garba Birnin-kudu had 17, 17 and 14 properties respectively under interim forfeiture. Others who have forfeited monies, houses and other landed properties to government are Mr. Emmanuel Ozigi and two of his accomplices (three properties, including a seven-storey building under construction in Abuja), Mr. Oni Ademola (six properties located in Ibadan, Oyo State), Alison-Madueke (a multi-storey building on Banana Island, six flats in Ikoyi and 21 mixed housing in Lagos, 16 terrace houses in Port Harcourt and 13 terrace duplexes in Abuja); and Mr. Jamiu Anifowoshe (buildings in Ikorodu, Agege, Lagos-Ibadan Expressway; Cranbel Court, Citiview Estate, Arepo).

Between May 29, 2015 and May 25, 2016, the Buhari-led government had recovered a total of N115,792,760,499. As Alhaji Lai Mohammed, the Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism noted, these recoveries comprised of N78,325,354,631.82; \$185,119,584.61; £3,508,355.46 and 11,250. While the importance of these recoveries is not lost on Nigerians, many have raised serious concerns over the use to which the government is putting the funds. Before the last general election, some argued that the monies were kept apart to prosecute Buhari's re-election. Others posited that the looted funds aided the government in recovering from the 2016

economic recession. To reassure Nigerians that the recovered loots have not been stolen or misused, government would need to officially address the issue.

As the above shows, some loots and looters could be identified while no one knows who owns others. Whoever owns and abandoned those monies, one cannot factually say? The question on the lips of many Nigerians is why were the monies abandoned?

The introduction and adoption of Banking Verification Number (BVN), an 11-digit number that acts as a universal ID in all commercial banking operations in Nigeria, by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) on 14th February 2014 allows the tying of account holders Biometric Identification System (BIS) to accounts. As CBN Director, Banking and Payment System, Mr. Dipo Fatokun, disclosed in a paper titled, Nigeria's Progress towards the Creation of a Robust, Trusted and Inclusive Financial Services Environment delivered at the annual meeting of the ID4Africa Movement in Abuja, that the adoption of the BVN has enabled the curbing of illicit wealth and illegal banking. It also increased access, convenience, and service levels across the industry. In addition, it enabled greater financial inclusion and integration of financial services into the economy, with its attendant positive impact on economic development. Fatokun also noted that BVN has promoted a safe and sound financial system in the country.

In the 30th April 2019 edition of the Punch Newspaper, it was reported that Mrs. Patience Jonathan, the wife of Nigeria's erstwhile President Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan was scheduled to forfeit two properties at Plot No. 1960, Cadastral Zone A05, Maitama District; and Plot No. 1350, Cadastral Zone A00, both in Abuja as well as allegedly stolen money ranging from \$8.4million, N7.4billion. Other supposedly ill-gotten monies traced to the former first lady include N1.085billion and N226.3million discovered in Finchley's Ecobank account, N39.4million also in Finchley's Diamond Bank account and N55.9million discovered in Pagmat Oil and Gas

Diamond Bank accounts. The former first lady has also forfeited N2.4 billion which was found in the Ecobank Plc account of La Vari Furniture and Baths Limited. As of Monday, February 11, 2019, the former first lady also forfeited \$153 million. With reports like these popping-up almost on daily basis in Nigerian newspapers about the former first lady and others who served under President Jonathan, it is difficult, if not impossible to convince anyone that Buhari's fight against corruption is not yielding any fruit.

Owing to the implementation of the BVN policy, stolen and dubious wealth could no longer be taken to the bank; hence, they ended up being abandoned in markets, apartments, and sundry places. In order to encourage Nigerians who knew who stole what money and where such monies were kept to come forward, government also adopted a whistleblowing policy that allows whistleblowers to anonymously provide information through a secured portal. Where the supplied information leads to the recovery of stolen public funds, government promised to give between 2.5 percent and 5 percent of the total money recovered to the whistleblower. According to the Minister of Information, Lai Muhammad, this policy has led to the recovery of over \$180 billion. Besides the case of Patience Jonathan mentioned above, a number of other high-profile cases have been nated under the new governance. The implementation of the policy has also led to the recovery of over \$180 billion.

resources. By adopting the TSA, Buhari successfully removed the organizational secrecy surrounding public finances in Nigeria. It successfully and, in one stroke, removed the most significant platform for institutional and systemic corruption in Nigeria. It removed the discretionary aspect of accounting officers and politicians who had always collaborated to carry-out all manner of business with government revenues, thereby financially benefiting themselves by deliberately delaying project execution, negotiating interests with banks for private gains.

Besides transparency and accountability, the TSA introduced efficiency into public finance management and effectiveness in government spending. As Jonah Ogunniyi Otunla, a financial accountant and former Accountant General of the Federation, noted that prior to TSA, Nigeria had

This fragmented banking arrangements made it impossible to establish government consolidated cash position and allow grafts within the system. Nothing drives home the implications of the TSA to eradicating corruption like the 2015 report of the Revenue Mobilization and Fiscal Commission, which indicted some banks for withholding about N12 billion collected on behalf of the Nigerian Customs Service and the Federal Inland Revenue Service. The revenue, as the report noted, was stashed away in 19 different banks between January 2008 and June 2012. Many of the banks insisted that pulling such money out of the banks will lead to their collapse.

While the BVN and TSA are significant milestones in its anti-corruption efforts, Buhari's government continues in its efforts at revamping the economy and ridding Nigeria of corruption. Even if the immediate outcomes of its anti-corruption crusade are unknown to ordinary citizens, no one can deny the fact that the government has chased Boko Haram away from all areas previously occupied by the terrorist group. Although Boko Haram is still carrying out attacks now

and then, these have become sporadic, signaling a gradual destruction of the group.

Nigerians, like the rest of Africa and the world, hope the re-elected President and his Vice would justify the confidence reposed in them by their re-election into another 4-year term in office.