Tinubu and the "Gbaja-Adeyemi" Moment

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According to investigation by Nigerian Presidency, this man (with photo of Prince Adeniyi Matthew) created a fake government agency called Presidential Foreign Intervention Promotion Council, appointed himself as Director General, secured office space at the Federal Secretariat in Abuja, opened multiple Central Bank accounts, got N1,302,978,784 (that's almost a million dollar) allocation in the 2026 budget, summoned ambassadors to meetings, held strategic sessions with ministers, and even represented Nigeria at international conferences. Nigeria is a different country! My powerful Ghanaian friend, Mustapha Sanah (HRH Dalun-Lan Tapha Muhammadu II) forwarded the foregoing message to me last Friday before adding his own terse line: "Above is circulating widely on WhatsApp in Ghana. Is it a credible tale?" I responded with one word: 'Yes!' Apparently shocked, he also replied with one word: 'Wow!' Based on my little experience from another life, I would have located this scandal in the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (OSGF). But it is the Chief of Staff to the President, Mr Femi Gbajabiamila, who Adeyemi has named as an accomplice while accusing the presidency of shrouding the entire saga in "a cloud of public misrepresentation, institutional denial, and deliberate attempts to silence legitimate questions that concern a matter of public interest."

That serious questions are being asked about the integrity of Nigerian institutions and the credibility of systems designed for oversight in our country is no longer in doubt. A man publicly declared a "scammer" by the federal government was able to access the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to open TSA accounts, secure a government domain account from the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), receive a waiver from the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation (OHCSF) to employ 300 staff members, and get the Office of the Accountant General of the Federation (OAGF) to second three senior officials to his 'office'. He also had a tete-a-tete with the Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), secured office space at the Federal Secretariat, held sessions with the House of Representatives Deputy Speaker, hosted ambassadors and performed many other 'official' functions at home and abroad. Most of these events happened after he had reportedly been flagged, which points to the fact that Adeyemi did not act alone. There are many layers to this controversy but I will restrict myself to just four. The first is the immediate issue regarding the allegation against Gbajabiamila. This is no longer about the credibility of Adeyemi, whatever anybody may think about him. It is now about the credibility of the presidency that should be, like Caesar's wife, above reproach. So, on that score, President Tinubu has a decision to make. The second issue is about a job racketeering ring that sells public appointment slots in Abuja—from the "juicy" political offices to regular jobs.

This, of course, predates the Tinubu administration. A former desk officer at the Federal Character Commission (FCC), Haruna Kolo, once told an ad hoc committee of the House of Representatives that he indeed fronted for a former Chairperson, Ms Muheeba Dankaka, to sell employment slots. Although Dankaka denied the allegation, she similarly accused other commissioners of selling jobs. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) confirmed this emblem of shame in its report that 32 per cent of Nigerians who secured jobs in the public service in 2019 claimed to have paid a bribe. The submission, according to then UNODC Country

Representative, Dr Oliver Stolpe, was not based on mere perception but rather on empirical findings backed by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). In fact, Stolpe co-signed the 92-page report titled, 'Corruption in Nigeria: Patterns and Trends', with the then NBS Statistician General, Dr Yemi Kale.

Meanwhile, during the August 2023 scandal involving the dropping of a ministerial nominee, Ms Maryam Shetty, then All

Progressives Congress (APC) National Chairman and former Kano State Governor, Dr. Abdullahi Ganduje, said something very revealing: "The president asked whether I had nominated Shetty. I said no. He asked how then her name appeared on the list. I told him I had no idea whatsoever." Although I defended Shetty at the time because I believed (and still do) that she was unjustly treated, I made this point: If the president knew nothing about his own ministerial nominee, you begin to wonder how many names got on the list behind his back, which then raises questions about the credibility of such appointments. The third issue is about how Adeyemi succeeded in getting an allocation of N1.3 billion into the 2026 budget which was assented to by President Tinubu in April. With my little knowledge of how Abuja works, this scam doesn't require much rigour. That's why I have written more than a dozen columns on the need to reform the budgeting process in Nigeria. Notable are 'Ningi and the Underground Budget', 'The Illusion of Budget Performance', 'Budget War and Dysfunctional Envelope System', 'Buhari and the Budget Palaver', 'Nigeria's 2016 Zero Budget!' and 'Of Government and Budget Blues'. The kernel of these interventions has always been to underscore the fact that what we call budget in Nigeria is essentially the sharing of money. I have also repeatedly referenced a Twitter thread by 'Laolu Samuel-Biyi who once concluded: "If you want to keep hope alive in Nigeria, don't look at the budget". Bottomline: Adeyemi is not the first Nigerian to write his way into our budget and will definitely not be the last until we do something about it. Now to the fourth issue of establishing a 'fictitious' agency. Anybody who has read the report of the Presidential Committee on the Restructuring and Rationalization of the Federal Government Parastatals, Commissions and Agencies will not be surprised by this scandal.

Chaired by former Head of Service, Mr Steve Oronsaye, the committee (established in August 2011 by former President Goodluck Jonathan) identified 541 federal government agencies, 50 of which had no enabling laws! The report also identified 55 agencies that were not under the supervision of any ministry and many of them, according to the committee, "receive more budgetary allocations for personnel than they require because that component of their budget is usually inflated". Interestingly, dozens of such federal agencies have been added since the Oronsaye Report was submitted in April 2012. I have always believed there are many agencies that started as 'one-man business' before they found their way into the public record. For instance, until March 2017, most Nigerians (including this reporter) were under the impression that a paramilitary organization going by the name 'Peace Corps of Nigeria (PCN)' was an organ of the federal government given the visibility of its men and their offices in all the 36 states. Then in March 2017, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) filed a 90-count criminal charge against Mr Dickson Akoh who, as it turned out, founded the youth organization as an NGO on 10 July 1998. Akoh, the 'National Commandant' and PCN trustees were accused of money laundering and obtaining money under false pretense. More curious still, this development came after both chambers of the National Assembly had already passed the bill for formal recognition of PCN as a government agency! Although the late President Muhammadu Buhari refused assent on grounds of duplication of security agencies, then deputy senate president, Ike Ekweremadu, had in plenary enjoined his colleagues not to lend support to the organization.

"A lot of people have been deceived. The Senate should not be a stamp for fraud," Ekweremadu warned. But it was the contribution of the then Minority Leader, Godswill Akpabio (the current Senate President), that was the most brutal: "…Youth have been taken advantage of and people have lost money, millions of Naira and then someone brings a law to legitimize what we know is a fraud," Akpabio said. "Some of them are Field Marshals and they have not gone to any war. Many of them are Lieutenant-Generals. I have seen some saluting as Brigadier-Generals. I have seen them in public occasions where the youth use their clothes to clean the seats for the Commandant-General. This thing is 419. We cannot make a law for an individual to collect millions of Naira." Today, the Federal Government has many cases in court against Akoh who was arrested last December by the EFCC and arraigned over alleged misappropriation of N60 million. But PCN is still very much in business going by the information on its website: "…Recognizing the impact of its work, the Federal Government of Nigeria signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Corps to support and validate its operations nationwide…" The hyperlink then leads readers to a report of 18th July 2025 on the same website: "The Honourable Minister of Budget and Economic Planning, Senator Abubakar Atiku Bagudu, signed on behalf of the Federal Government, while the National Commandant of the Peace Corps of Nigeria, Dr Dickson Akoh, signed on behalf of the organization." The statement added: "This MoU represents the Federal Government's formal recognition of the Peace Corps of Nigeria as a vital partner in advancing key national development priorities particularly in peacebuilding, civic education, volunteerism, and youth engagement…" If the EFCC is prosecuting an organization for fraud and a Federal Government ministry is reportedly signing an MoU with its proprietor, it stands to reason that there is a disconnect somewhere. We cannot continue to run our government like this! And that is why Tinubu must not waste this moment. Yes, I am aware that the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) has been directed to investigate the Adeyemi/Gbajabiamila issue but apparently the presidency still doesn't understand that there is a difference between a scandal and a mirror, and Nigeria has just been handed the latter.

The greatest mistake would be to reduce this affair to a contest of narratives between two individuals. What has been exposed is a deeper institutional malaise. Long after recriminations between a sitting Chief of Staff and a man now on trial for allegedly forging the presidency's own letterhead may have faded from memory, one question will remain: How does a fake agency find its way into a signed Appropriation Act, operate for the better part of a year undetected by any internal safeguard, and be exposed only because a rival agency complained of an overlap in its own turf? Mr President, this is not a crisis to be managed until it passes. It is a mandate handed to you fully formed. In order to fix what allowed this to happen in the first place, we must strengthen budget scrutiny, insist that every appropriation is tied to a verifiable legal entity, and ensure that no office is too big to escape institutional checks. Therefore, to restore the integrity of the Nigerian State and its institutions, we need structural reforms, beginning with an audit of all federal agencies, their mandates and how they originated so that we can begin to separate the wheat from the chaff. A presidency that emerges from this affair having tightened its own house will have gained far more than it lost. One that waits for the news cycle to pass will have wasted a lesson that was written into the nation's own budget book