

# Hadi Sirika and the fraud called Nigeria Air

By *Ikechukwu Amaechi*

Some people believe that Nigeria, our dear country, is a criminal enterprise. Those who perceive the political ideology construct – patriotism – from the prism of the three wise monkeys, a Japanese pictorial maxim which embodies the proverbial principle of "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil" aver that such a portrayal is harsh. But in reality, the 'see no evil crowd' are only parodying the mendacity of the three monkeys in the Japanese folklore – Mizaru, who pretends to see no evil by simply covering his eyes; Kikazaru, who hears no evil, covering his ears; and Iwazaru, who claims to speak no evil by covering his mouth. Seeing no evil, hearing no evil and speaking no evil is not the hallmark of patriotism because a conniving attitude and willingness to turn a blind eye towards evil is tantamount to hypocrisy, which is antithetical to the feeling of love, devotion, and sense of attachment to one's country. This hypocrisy which the All Progressives Congress, APC, has elevated to an art is at the root of the country's extant woes. The party lied its way to power and sustained itself in power for eight year and still counting with more lies and insidious propaganda.

Former President Muhammadu Buhari who hitched a ride to Aso Rock on the anti-corruption wagon presided over what will go down in history as the most corrupt administration since Nigeria's independence in 1960. For those who wish to see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil, calling out Buhari and his very corrupt administration is a taboo. But the fact remains that even in the petroleum industry where he was the de-facto minister for eight years, many Nigerians are beginning to query the continued hounding and demonisation of his predecessor, Diezani Alison-Madueke. What crime did Diezani commit that was not committed tenfold under Buhari's watch?

Under Buhari, crude oil theft became a thriving industry and the cancer of oil subsidy metastasized. But the most blatant fraud seemed to have been committed in the aviation industry where Hadi Sirika conned an entire nation with a dubious Air Nigeria project, which the House of Representatives called a fraud. The Nigeria Air debacle epitomises the impunity that was the hallmark of the Buhari administration. Without due process, Sirika, ignoring entreaties from aviation experts and the Airline Operators of Nigeria, AON, forged ahead with this corruption-ridden white elephant project. Sometime in November 2022, when it became apparent that the minister would listen to no voice other than his own, the AON approached a Federal High



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Court in Lagos to obtain an interim injunction to prevent the Ministry of Aviation from progressing with the launch of the new national carrier. But impudently and I dare say characteristically, Hadi Sirika insisted in March, April and early May 2023 that the airline will commence operations before May 29 and "nothing would stop it". Then, on Wednesday, May 24, he doubled down on Channels TV when he insisted that despite the subsisting court order, an aircraft belonging to Nigeria Air will arrive the country on May 26, three days before the life of the Buhari administration came to a terminal end. "On Friday, in two days, the Nigeria Air airplane will land in Nigeria, as part of the processes to commence operations. We would, on that day, unveil the aircraft with delivery and everything in

Nigerian colours, belonging to Nigeria Air," he boasted. And indeed, an Ethiopian Airlines plane landed at the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja with much pomp and ceremony. But before Nigerians could fully take in the drama, the aircraft was flown back to its owners in Addis Ababa. Many questions have been raised concerning this project. Is Nigeria Air real or a scam? Industry experts insist it is a scam. But assuming, without conceding that there is, indeed, such a project, the question is: why the hurry? Is government no longer a continuum, more so when power was transferred from one APC government to another? Shouldn't the Buhari government have handed the project to the Tinubu administration to consummate?

But truth be told, the so-called May 26 launch of Nigeria Air is nothing but an orchestration of scam by people who have captured the Nigerian state and are daring all of us to do our worst. And this much was admitted by Captain Dapo Olumide, the interim Managing Director of the purported airline, when he appeared before the Senator Biodun Olujimi-led Senate Committee on Aviation. Captain Olumide, who admitted that the aircraft used in the unveiling was a chartered flight from the Ethiopian Airlines stable, also confessed that the costly gambit was undertaken simply to prove to Nigerians that the project was not a fluke. So enraged was the former House of Representatives Committee on Aviation that the Chairman, Nnolim Nnaji, after meeting with the stakeholders in the aviation sector who largely denied knowledge of the so-called launch, called the exercise a fraud. The Committee which decried the fact that Hadi Sirika went ahead to flag off the

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operations of Nigeria Air despite a standing Court order, and without any provisions for sustaining the operations of the airline, lamented that "the process indicates the exercise to be highly opaque, shrouded in secrecy, shoddy and capable of ridiculing and tarnishing the image of Nigeria before the international community." While putting it on record that "the Committee and indeed the National Assembly had no role in the purported launch of Nigeria Air or anything related thereof", the

House of Representatives urged President Bola Tinubu to "urgently constitute a high-level presidential committee to undertake a holistic review of the processes of the whole Nigeria Air project and ... ensure that all individuals, or groups, or organisation involved in the controversial shenanigan named 'Nigeria Air Take-Off' are brought to book, prosecuted and sanctioned." Before the damning verdict of the National Assembly on Tuesday an unsigned lengthy statement purportedly from the airline's media office made the rounds in Abuja on Monday, detailing the benefits derivable from a national carrier. Since then, a motley crowd of media personalities have surfaced, claiming to consult for the national carrier and sending out press statements. Who is paying them and from which funds? Only God knows. Shortly after the House of Representatives came down hard on Sirika, former special assistant on digital communications to Buhari, Bashir Ahmad, took to twitter to contradict the lawmakers.

"NigeriaAir is NOT a fraud, the Aviation Ministry has made significant progress towards its realisation. Branding unveiled, partnerships and agreements signed, most of the operational certificates issued, and operational offices opened. NigeriaAir

will fly to make Nigeria proud," he tweeted. Perhaps, Sirika took him into confidence and he smelt the coffee. But majority of Nigerians are not sold on his bogus claims. The Nigeria Air project has become a Gordian knot. Will Tinubu be able to untie it? I doubt. Sirika is a sacred cow from Katsina State and he is an APC chieftain. Above all, if his disclosure in December 2022 is anything to go by, even Tinubu knows where the filthy lucre from the Nigeria Air fraud was deployed. During a fund raising

dinner in Abuja on Thursday, December 15, 2022 for the then APC governorship candidate in Katsina State, Dikko Radda, Hadi Sirika boasted that the party had more than enough money to influence the outcome of the 2023 elections. Sirika, who spoke in Hausa, said: "Even if you are allan musuru (a magician), I don't believe you can go to Musawa and defeat Abu Ibrahim. You cannot go to Dutsi and defeat Hadi Sirika. Or you go to Kafur and defeat Aminu Bello Masari. Wallahi (I swear to God). It is not possible! "Election day will soon come. We will amass money and we will amass essential commodities. We have them already! You mean money? Wallahi we have it! Wallahil azim (Allah is the witness to what I am saying) we have money! We

have working tools, i.e. money. Wallahi we have them! I repeat, wallahi we have them!" That explains why Hadi Sirika won't get the Diezani treatment. Unlike Diezani whose party lost power in 2015, APC triumphed.

