

When a 'Gang' of 469 Lawmakers are taking over 200 Million Nigerians for a ride

By A.G.Abubakar

Obasanjo said it. The mass media shouted it. Shehu Sani, a former senator representing Kaduna State, confirmed it. A subsisting Senator Kawu from Kano, corroborated it. That, the individual Nigerian legislator costs the nation an average of N19 million (N21 m for Senators and about N17 m for House of Rep members) in monthly perk, made up of around N1 million personal emoluments and the rest constituency office up keep/running costs. This translated into about N2 billion monthly expenditure on the 109 Senators and 360 Representatives in the Nigeria bicameral National Assembly (NASS). The said monthly is aside the budgetary provisions for constituency / intervention projects which the legislators control "exclusively-indirectly." Funds that run into hundreds of millions depending on individual legislators bargaining power in the National Assembly. As if that was not enough, others criminally go the extra mile to insert/pad "activities" into the budget which they eventually access through "ways and means." These developments have literally turned legislators into mini parallel governments in their rights with self ascribed what could pass for executive functions.

A development that had turned the National Assembly into torch bearers of corruption and national shame bereft of

conscience and sense of proportion, where twisted arguments and semantics are employed to hoodwink society. This is while taking such establishments as the Budget Office and RMAFC on the sordid ride, at the collective expense of a citizenry highly compromised and made vulnerable by years of bad governance.

Listen to the sheepish defence of the legislative heist by RMAFC fooling Nigerians in subtle reaction to Obasanjo, Sani and Kawu, by saying a senator collects "...N1,063,860 a month consisting of a basic salary of N168,866, vehicle fueling and maintenance of N126,650, P.A N42,216, domestic staff N126,650, entertainment N50,660, utilities N50,660, newspapers N25,330, wardrobe N42,216, house maintenance N8,443.33(?), and constituency allowance N422,166."

Plus non regular add-on like furniture, vehicle purchase and severance as at when due. In the informed and naive opinion of the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) that was what the nation spends on individual full time senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. As simplistic as it is hypothetical. In the same vein, some legislators, while playing on people's intelligence shamelessly pledged to give up 50% of their basic salary (about N200k) as a mark of concern for the economic

hardships Nigerians are going through! There is an adage that says every society throws up a leadership it "deserves." Simply put, the quality of a leader or a representative is a reflection of the larger society.

After four decades of corruptive leadership, precisely from the early 80s to date, the Nigerian citizenry has invariably been corrupted, too. And with it, loss of conscience and sense of proportion. Else, how can one explain the empathy deficits on the part of a typical legislator in Nigeria? Nigerian legislators in awarding themselves a monthly perk of an average of N19



million a month in an environment where the minimum wage was N30, 000 until a few weeks ago!

A figure that many state governments are claiming inability to pay. Some actually pay less. Borno, Benue, Kogi, and a host of others are in this league. While the conditions of service of organizations such as the Research Institutes, River Basin Authorities, para military establishments like Correctional Services (Prisons), the VIO and NCDC are yearning for improvements. Pensioners have been worse off, as the value of the little pay that they access have been eroded by a phenomenon of galloping inflation at around 30%! Those outside the payroll system (farmers, traders, jobless individuals) could not produce or get hired because of insecurity, dearth of inputs/infrastructure, or opportunities. As a consequence, about 63% (some claim 80%) of Nigerians are estimated to be multi-dimensionality poor, living on less a dollar (N1, 500) a day.

The parliament in Nigeria has become a liability, so observed by some well-meaning Nigerians. To the extent that some are calling for a change from the presidential system to a parliamentary one. Yet others suggest that members of the national assembly should function on a part-time basis, just to underscore their concern regarding the stench in the National Assembly. Surprisingly, successive governments seemed helpless in the face of the developments, as if jinxed. May be the "moves" made by Obasanjo to fund and turn some elements into political tools sowed the seeds of the mess. Recall his self serving reproachments with the leadership of the Assembly in the persons of Okadigbo, Enwerem, Salisu Buhari, Ghali Umar etc-"The Third Term debacle." Add the "deals" that brought about the emergence of Jonathan as the president after the death of 'Yar Adua, through the "doctrine of necessity." There was also the politics of Buhari's ill health at the commencement of his administration.

These and similar developments like the deep rooted systemic corruption within the Executive may have defanged it when it comes to curbing the excesses in the Assembly. They, instead, as a duo, now operate in partnership. Many of which are unholy. A case of quid pro quo. And the instances are legendary. They include

- a) Series of external loans that total over \$42 billion according to the Debt Management Office (DMO) report of 2024, with little impact, while leaving the nation with a debilitating debt overhang
- b) Government having free hand to ineffectually prosecute its seemingly interminable war against insecurity at a mind boggling costs (human and materials) in trillions of Naira, and still counting
- c) allowing the government not to be accountable when it comes to addressing physical and social infrastructure such as power, health, education, etc, and to accord needed

support to the productive sectors.

d) Incurring multi-billion naira expenditure on renovations, furnishings of the presidential fleet (customized aircrafts and choice vehicles).

For, it's acquiesce the Legislators could have free hands to;

a) fix/manipulate their entitlements which average N19 million per month, have SUVs of choice, and run "mini governments" in the "parlours" and "questional spaces" in the name of Constituency Offices.

b) Get away with the brazen arm twisting and/or extortion of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) to "play ball" under the cover of legislative oversight. For illustration and to also underscore the scandal regarding a Nigerian senator's monthly official "package" of N21 million (courtesy Obj, Sani & Kawu), the said amount would in rough magnitudes cover the following: a) over 600 students in boarding school being fed each at N3,000 per day for a month,

b) 140 retired federal Directors on the Contributory Pension Scheme (CPS) for a month at N150, 000 (average) after working for 35 years,

c) Over 40 University professors,

D) 35 medical consultants.

All this at a time when schools, universities, hospitals etc and the plight of people are calling for serious attention. The system definitely needs rejig. With the above baggage the democratic experiment in Nigeria has a questionably future. Something needs to be done to save it. It's going to be easy as the two legs of the tripod (the executive and the legislature) are in bed fornicating. And the Judiciary that should "knock the door," has been sent on errands or given money to go buy its own "bread."

The arguments that sections of the legislature advance to the effect that they talk of "people's needs including projects," are not tenable. As law makers, they make laws and oversight government activities and related national issues. The principles of separation of powers designates the executive arm of the government as programme implementer while members of the assembly serve as eyes and ears of people they represent. They failed to let their constituents know about this because the claim provides them alibi to promote their self-serving interests. For, they use the public funds to buy and/or sustain loyalty in Nigeria's largely poverty-stricken and ignorant societies.

Legislative activities should not be a substitute for government executive roles and functions. The people should be made aware that such is not in consonance with democratic practices. They should also learn to demand accountability from leaders in the light of their constitutional roles. Enough of the confusions and corruptive tendencies. Governance should not be allowed to systematically keep breaking the citizens down. The nation deserves better.

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