

A Nation Still Toddling @ 47 [opinion].

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Oct 01, 2007 (Leadership/All Africa Global Media via COMTEX) -- Exactly Forty-Seven years ago, Nigeria became an independent nation, having been freed from the excruciating grip of colonialism. This threw the entire nation into wild jubilation and celebration.

It was a day when the British Jack was lowered down and the Nigerian national flag was gloriously hoisted in its stead. In a colourful ceremony, Nigeria sang a lyrically sublime National Anthem, so powerful and inspirational which was composed to continually remind both then and the future generations about the enduring spirit of nationalism and patriotism that brought about the independence.

The period that Nigeria secured her national independence was when Pan-Africanism was in its full strength across African continent. Arguably, Africa is the worst victim of the belligerent colonial and imperial incursion on the weaker nationalities and nation-states of the world by the Western nations led by Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, among others.

However, beyond the political freedom and the right to self governance in which the patriarchs of the Nigerian nation fought the colonial subjugation of Nigeria, the high vision for the colonial emancipation of Nigeria was that a gloomious, exploitative and repressive circumstances at that time would give way to the promise of a colourful and glorious future for Nigeria; a country nurtured by the rule of law, constitutionalism and democracy which are fundamental to peace, prosperity and socio-economic and political development.

When Nigeria got her independence, being the most populous African nation in the world, it became a beacon of hope to the rest of the African countries. Nigeria was seen as a country that would play a big brother role in African affairs deploying her enormous human and natural resources, and to a large extent, it has fairly assumed that status.

But the question still remains: wither the national aspiration and dreams of Nigeria that inspired the likes of Ahmadu Bello, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Tafawa Balewa, Anthony Enahoro, Herbert Macaulay, and the rest into the nationalist struggle to free the nation from colonial administration?

The national events in the early 1960s was really a crippling experience for the young nation's journey into self-governance when in 1966 the first Nigerian military coup struck, spilling the blood of prominent national leaders such as Ahmadu Bello, Tafawa Balewa, and others. This was to mark the watershed of the nation's meandering political history.

In other words, between 1960 when the nation got her independence and now, Nigeria has witnessed three military coups which upturned civil government and five military palace coups.

It was all observed and expected that with the abundant mineral and human resources, Nigeria was earlier predicted as a leading economy in Africa which would play crucial roles in the world economy, especially when she utilizes her enormous potentials. However, with the huge oil reserves and petroleum revenue, expansive agrarian land and water resources, the Nigeria's economy has continued to wobble.

Although, in the 1970s and early 80s, the oil boom had put the country's economy on a sound footing, but equally introduced a destructive culture of corruption, pilfering of government treasuries, misappropriation of public funds and a host of other socio-economic ills which till today have remained the bane of our national development.

Today, the unity, peace and progress of Nigeria are faltering. National values have been defined from a rather myopic lens of ethnicity, nepotism, religious fanaticism, regionalism, and warped sense of nationalism. There is an apparent promotion of self-aggrandizement over nationalistic and patriotic priority and zeal. Today, the nation's educational system is crest fallen, even as moral, social, cultural values necessary for the growth of our nationhood are daily trampled upon by a twin efforts of a generic disorder and failure in the system, as well as the re-coined western subjugation-neo-colonialism.

Eminent Nigerians like former Inspector-General of Police, Ibrahim Coomassie, Isyaku Ibrahim, Gen. IBB Hamna, who spoke to LEADERSHIP all expressed of reservations that it has been indeed a sad journey of nationhood for Nigeria since independence.

According to Gen. Hamna, the nation perhaps got independence too early. "There was a haste to become independent and of course, since Ghana had its own independence in 1957, the political leaders saw themselves as greater giants than the Kwame Nkrumah who brought about Ghana's independence in 1957. They didn't see why there should be a delay in a large country like Nigeria."

For Coomassie, corruption, negligence and the failure of the political class who were more "interested in what they can get from the public office, the search for the Golden Fleece" are part of the underdevelopment of the Nigerian State. Poverty is biting the citizenry very hard even as economic policies over the years have done little or nothing to help the daily needs of the common man.

Currently, with Nigeria at 47, a report says that about seventy per cent of Nigerians are living below the poverty line. The economic growth is still at an awful one digit of six (6) per cent, the social infrastructures are in abysmal decay against the backdrop of the annual rakes of oil revenues, there is the absence of any identifiable national value, people are hardly interested in positive legacy, visionary and exemplary leadership. Nigeria is currently in its Fourth Republic, now under the leadership of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. Would she make any difference under this dispensation? A popular saying goes that a fool at forty is a fool forever. Would this be the lot of Nigeria? And when will the nation grow from a toddler into maturity?.

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