

FEATURE

Is President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua sick? Unlike the first time when this question was left to speculation after attempts at masking, the Federal Executive Council (FEC) has admitted that, yes, Mr President is sick.

Is the ailment serious? This is the question now tearing Nigerians into camps. To answer this question, the term serious is subjective. Cold and catarrh can be 'serious' to a soldier stationed at enemy watch-point but diarrhea may not be serious to a clerk in the ministry of agriculture in a country such as Nigeria who virtually does nothing. So, we may say that 'serious' depends on what the patient needs his health for at that point in time.

So, is the seriousness of President Yar'Adua's ailment debatable? To attempt an answer, we must first express regrets that Nigerians like to kill every issue with endless debate. Sociologists say positive debate is when the objective is to reach informed decision and enlighten the path to progress. It is negative when the aim is to defeat the opponent or becloud the minds of the people and confuse the path to progress.

Now, let's review this, what really is wrong with Mr President? The media, quoting experts, have identified the ailment as Churg Strauss Syndrome (CSS), one or many forms of vasculitis-diseases characterized by inflammation of blood vessels especially small arteries and veins. It occurs in patients with a history of asthma or allergy and features of blood vessels in the lungs, skin, nerves, and abdomen and very rarely the kidney and brain.

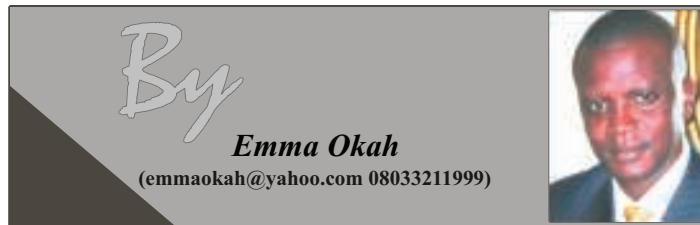
It is a rare kind of kidney disease known which can lead to many other downstream ailments. A pan-African news magazine once reported that a CSS patient may encounter other medical and socio-political challenges. "He may require regular mental evaluation to detect any loss of memory due to the CSS and steroid psychosis which occurs as an adverse reaction to taking large doses of steroids. The most common symptoms are emotional liability, anxiety, distractibility, pressured speech, sensory flooding, insomnia, depression, perplexity, agitation, auditory and visual hallucinations, intermittent memory impairment, mutism, disturbances of body image, delusions, apathy and hypomania, etc".

Many think this ailment is terminal but medical science says "with aggressive treatment and monitoring, it can be quieted and total remission is possible". What frightens many is that remission is at early stage. Complication and terminality status is at downstream stage where a multiplicity of associated ailments can be the case.

In severe cases, "it is likely to have severely affected other more vulnerable organs such as the lungs, abdomen, skin, prostrate, nerves and/or muscles. Furthermore, there is high likelihood of infections (bacterial, fungal and/or viral), due to the medicines used in CSS, which depress the body's ability to fight infection."

Now, many newspapers reported last week that Mr President's CSS has led to a growth on the covering of the heart. They claim this is the cause of the latest hospitalization in Saudi Arabia, for which he may not come back quicker than anticipated.

Back to the relativity theory of the question of whether Mr President's ailment (CSS) is 'serious', let us consider the burden he carries for Nigeria at the moment. The 7-Point Agenda which the new CBN helmsman and many others think should be reduced to just one agenda covers virtually all aspects of Nigeria's national life and the economy. Those who say he should reduce it must miss the greater point; which is the F2020. This means a determination to lift Nigeria from 46th to one of the 20 most



Yar'adua's Health And National Interest

viable economies. To do so, Nigeria will not grow in just one facet but in all facets, thereby requiring an all encompassing agenda.

The international newsmagazine quoted Dr Ogbo Okiti, the Chief Economist of Nigeria's most influential business newspaper, BusinessDay, published in a serial in June 2008, where Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 115,334 (2006) is described as a far cry to that of the 20th economy in the world, Switzerland with 380,412. The report went on: Whereas the number one economy, the US, posted 13.2m then, countries like Turkey, Holland, Mexico and Korea ranged between 400,000 and 888,000 while Brazil was high up at 1.067m. Japan is 2nd with 4.4m. The report ended by thus; "Playing catch-up is not by falling ill every often."

This is because Nigeria's hope to hit 11 per cent growth rate in 2008 so as to begin a climb into the 10+ GDP rate may suffer big setbacks. This is because an ailing president is being expected to contend with the global financial meltdown that has affected foreign direct investment (FDI) rate drastically.

Already, oil prices and revenue has been crashing from \$130 to \$35 before climbing to hover around \$75 per barrel. The income for 2010 is estimated at N2.5Trn while salaries and overhead alone is N2.7Trn. Capital projects that would grow the economy and make his presidency count is N1.3trn, but where is this coming from? It requires the perspirations of a sound mind to figure this out and control this declining economy. Growth is compulsory but the energy to drive this growth in the face of a hugely deficit budget is the issue.

The polity is in need of reforms: The National Assembly that should stand firm is divided over superiority squabbles; gas road map need action now, deregulation breeds turbulence needing firm control; elections are knocking but the reformed laws are nowhere in sight; the economy needs an Obama or a Hercules; ASUU has a huge agreement that can hardly be funded; Niger Delta has got amnesty but not the funds, requiring ingenuity; corruption is high with thieving officials who need iron fists of the Crusader; etc. This is no time to fall sick. Now, is CSS with complicated downstream cascading ailments 'serious'? The ruling



PDP alone can fill Nigeria with storms as the primaries approach. They hardly follow due process and every primary leads to hundreds of protests and tens of court motions. Mr President must be alert day and night to tract and halt these gladiators, else..!

Many have forgotten that each policy of the FG requires tons of memos to arrive at, and each memo must be carefully read by Mr President himself before appending his signature. Many would recall that bills sent to the NASS often get items smuggled into them, etc. Chief Obasanjo was wide awake, yet something went wrong with the PTDF account, until stench from the US Congress reached Nigeria. What if the President is sick?

Another point to consider is that Obasanjo had a great chance to become a legend by doing just one term and hand over. This would have created a tradition of one zone one term. Now, each zone is insisting on two terms. This is where a man becomes a statesman like Nelson Mandela or remains a politician.

Yar'Adua has all the attributes of a statesman. No one can fault his honest records in Kastina State and as President of Nigeria. He had also honourably wanted to leave politics and go back to teaching before this cup was forced on him. He is patriotic, no doubt. He did not bring this pain upon himself and so he deserves our sympathy

and understanding. It could have been anybody else.

Yar'Adua can complete this by saving Nigeria from this crisis. He can ignore his enemies urging him on and resign. This must be handled politically by the ruling party. In-house, the steps would be guided thus:

Yar'Adua resigns with full guarantee for his medical and general upkeep for life; Goodluck Jonathan takes over, takes a northerner as vice president who is ordained to be next president; after less than six months in office, Jonathan resigns on personal grounds and the new VP becomes new president and picks Jonathan's nominee as VP. Jonathan is welcomed to the party as a hero with certain guarantees which we know the North very well can handle.

Before long, Jonathan becomes an international figure for helping Nigeria to climb out of this quagmire. He will have a huge CV propelled by luck: deputy governor, governor, vice president. He may even become the PDP Board of Trustees (BOT) chairman or may serve in some important international panels on behalf of Africa as a new African statesman.

This way, the nation would have successfully passed all democratic huddles and tested almost all items in the 1999 Constitution and in democracy; election, re-election; succession, rotation and finally incomplete term hand-over. What stars Nigeria in the face is a constitutional bridge but the ladder is political. This is the patriotic way starring President Yar'Adua in the face. This is a status Obj could not achieved. This is what would set Yar'Adua apart in Nigeria's political history.

This is the context in which calls for Mr President's resignation or otherwise can be domiciled. Unfortunately, many of those who have called for his resignation do so on selfish grounds. After all, a highly placed bureaucrat in the presidency was once sacked for nurturing inordinate presidential ambition while his principal was seriously sick abroad, a moment when this VIP's support was highly needed.

Most of those, also, who urge Yar'Adua to stay put are either pretending or have their own ass to protect. The FEC has stoically stood behind their master, but most Nigerians think that this is to protect their jobs. Consider this; if Yar'Adua resigns and someone else steps in, the first action would be the dissolution of the cabinet. Job ends.

The Attorney-General gave a statement saying Mr President was "hale and hearty". A man battling with aggravated form of CSS can hardly be hale, let alone hearty. On the other hand, those who think Yar'Adua is about to leave this planet have also appropriated more authority than they should. Only God knows when a man leaves this planet. In between, the truth is that Mr President is sick to the extent that he may need much rest and may not be burdened with reading mountains of memos to reach informed decisions.

If he continues, he may still carry on but feebility is no asset and Nigeria will drag slowly, and even more lowly. Should he resign, he would have chosen a path of honour and Nigeria would sort out the rest and move on with greater speed.

Those who call for prayers for either Mr President or for Nigeria are true citizens, because, truly, that is what both Yar'Adua and Nigeria need right now. It is un-Nigerian and un-African to rejoice over the ill-health of any man, not even our enemies let alone our father. The path of honour for citizens is path of prayer. The main prayer point should be for Yar'Adua to be permanently healed or have the courage to transform to a national hero by reigning if he cannot effectively continue in office.

“Most of those, also, who urge Yar'Adua to stay put are either pretending or have their own ass to protect. The FEC has stoically stood behind their master, but most Nigerians think that this is to protect their jobs. Consider this; if Yar'Adua resigns and someone else steps in, the first action would be the dissolution of the cabinet”