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Tribute to Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto

"...here in northern Nigeria we have people of many different races, tribes and religions who are knit together to common history, common interest and common ideas. The things that unite us are stronger than the things that divide us..." - Sir Ahmadu Bello

40 years have gone by since the sun set on the inimitable icon of Northern and national unity, the late Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto, but enough can never be said or written about him. As the teeming members of Arewa Association, UK, a lot of us children, grandchildren and even great-grandchildren of the beneficiaries of the Great One's vision, foresight and astuteness, we can not fail to reflect on the great legacies he bequeathed to the north in particular and Nigeria in general.

It would not be stretching the truth to say that the late Sardauna would turn in his grave in revulsion at the callous ineptitude masquerading as leadership in his beloved nation today. The principle of leadership as a call to selfless service championed by Sir Ahmadu Bello has long been replaced by that of "rulership as a license to plunder and oppress". Sardauna's cherished ethic of achieving success by dint of hard work and self-application has sadly been thrown to the dogs in a mad frenzy by power-grabbing apparatchiks whose sole preoccupation has become that of amassing obscene wealth for themselves to the detriment of the majority. It is instructive to note that the late Sardauna's house in Rabah, Sokoto State, now serves as the secretariat of Rabah local government council.

His openness, directness and simplicity defied the conventional laws and practice of power relations. At a time when Nigeria has become politically, socially and economically paralyzed by fear of the unknown as a direct consequence of deliberate brinkmanship by a "leader" seemingly afraid of his own shadow, the legacy of Sardauna's policy of honesty, candour and integrity rings ever more loudly. His unjustly maligned "Northernization policy" was intended to unite Nigeria not to divide it, as he fervently believed that uplifting the North would make for a healthier united Nigeria. Identical policies of "regionalization" were surreptitiously pursued by leaders of the

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Southern regions, without the courage to spell it out. The Sardauna, with an unwavering belief in the justice of his cause, was fearless of political foes, blunt to a fault and never afraid of telling it as he saw it.

He had a clear sense of direction and purpose, and his openness, forthrightness, candour and honesty in pursuing his objectives were legendary. He was vigorous in his pursuit of balance of growth in the country, believing as he did, that the long term unity of Nigeria would be compromised if one leg of the tripod was shorter than the others.

His zeal for accountability and probity in public life has stood the test of time. He not only condemned corruption, but made it abundantly clear that there were no sacred cows; not even amongst members of his own family. The present administration's half-hearted "fight" against corruption, commendable as it may be, falls far short of Sardauna's unalloyed contempt and total intolerance for graft in public office. The current situation where some retired and serving public officers with questions to answer regarding missing public funds and their sources of immense wealth are being treated as "untouchables" gives the tint of a political witch-hunt to the whole campaign.

Friends and foes alike revered Sardauna. Chief Simon Adebó, the great administrator and one-time Nigerian Permanent Representative to the United Nations, once remarked that had the Sardauna opted to be at the federal level with the whole country as his constituency, Nigeria would have risen to greater heights, and that he would have given Nigeria a greater sense of unity on his avowed principle of one people, one destiny, just as he did with the north. In 1961, when the Sardauna was being awarded an honorary doctorate degree of law at University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe described him as a "*spiritual and political leader, a statesman, an educator and a distinguished administrator*". Coming from a political rival, this was truly remarkable.

He was indeed a man of enormous charisma and personal magnetism. He was easily approachable and wielded a positive influence on everyone who came into contact with him. As we commemorate another anniversary of his untimely death, we must once again resolve to focus on the cardinal principles that underpinned his life and made him stand out like the colossus he is today remembered as.

May Allah grant him eternal peace, Amin.



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