

WEEKEND with Ibraheem Sulaiman

sa427420@gmail.com

By God, we do not appoint to a position of power anyone who asks for it, nor anyone who covets it [Prophet Muhammad]

The Ivorian crisis still persists. The reason is simply the ambition of just one man. Cote d'Ivoire has been completely paralyzed for several weeks now since the presidential elections by a political stalemate. The winner is known and recognized as such by the whole world including the United Nations which has spent more than four hundred million dollars to conduct the polls. The loser who wrongfully awards himself victory refuses to go; backed by the military, he feels he can force the nation into submission as if by military conquest. He sends the police and army against those who legitimately protest his brazen act of political robbery and treason. He knows very well that his country is on the precipice of another civil war, and we are often told that it is extremely rare that a nation survives two civil wars; he knows that the economy is on the verge of collapse; he knows that every day he hangs on to power against the will of his people and against the will of the world he brings more misery and anguish on the people and more harm and uncertainty on the nation; he knows that his ambition now means the possible death of the nation, not her survival, not her progress, not her prosperity; he knows that for all intents and purposes he is on a suicide mission. Yet he hangs on. Ten years now since this one man has held Cote d'Ivoire by the jugular vein, and he still would not let go. He is the nation! He is the law!

The tragedy of this nature is not rare in Africa, so close is it to Nigeria; indeed the mentality finds its incubation here. The worry is twofold. First, why is democracy so vulnerable to manipulation? We saw in our neighbor, Niger Republic, how easy it was for an elected government to seek to illegitimately perpetuate itself by using the very instruments of democracy. The pattern is familiar. Remove the legal impediments to self-perpetuation by amending the constitution accordingly. Then, if that alone is not sufficient, organize a referendum, which must be rigged and, therefore, won. Our neighbor's experiment succeeded, according to government, the people of Niger approved the new amendments to the constitution overwhelmingly. Not until the army dismissed the government did the world have the opportunity to fully appreciate the scale of fraud and treachery involved. The Government did not want to go as the constitution required because of the new discovery of oil, a veritable source of instant and unquantifiable wealth for nation and leaders. This reason alone, the prospect of self enrichment and self aggrandizement, triggered the attempt to abolish the constitutional rights of the people, deny Niger the privilege of a constitutional government and an orderly and lawful transfer of power, and set her on the perilous road to instability and uncertainty. Nigeria escaped similar fate only by a whisker, but at a terrible and horrendous economic and political cost.

What has been the cost of the Third Term Agenda to Nigeria? Economists might at some future

date make a more accurate assessment. Meanwhile think of the ransacking of Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation to finance the Political Reform Conference which started off the agenda. Add to it the robbing of Nigerians of the sum of over three hundred billion naira earmarked for roads but which found its way into one man's ambition; plus thousands of lives lost to bad roads since those days. Don't forget the billions of dollars earmarked for electricity, a sizable portion of which found its way to the Third Term Agenda depriving the good people of Nigeria the joy of steady electricity and industrial development. Add to it the numerous consequences of power failures and shortages to businesses, industries, health, education and other critical sectors, a situation which has set Nigeria back by many decades. Remember the constitutional amendment exercise financed through resources looted from the nation's treasury. Add to it the hidden expenses in form of bribes and sundry other dark payments and handouts. Think of donations from state governors, who steal from the treasury to fuel someone's ego. Add to it the contributions of the government-created billionaires and many other rich people. Then ponder over the political cost, when the senate abandoned its constitutional job for an absolutely dubious cause. Think of the moral cost of that Agenda, how many otherwise decent and honorable persons were compromised by bribes and promises of high office and fat contracts; how many traditional and other vital institutions, how many scholars? Then consider the cost of the vendetta that followed the failure of the Third Term misadventure. Many states are now saddled with governors they never elected, those who betrayed their people in favor of one man's ambition, and were adequately rewarded. And Nigeria still remains gripped by the jugular vein by a political contraption intended to cause irreparable damage to the part of Nigeria regarded as an enemy. The cruel irony is that it is the entire country, not merely the targeted section, that is now suffering sorely from the legacy of the Third Term Agenda. The future of Nigeria is today hangs in the balance thanks to the exploits of one megalomaniac! Such is the tragedy of Nigeria. And of Egypt. And of Cote d'Ivoire.

We should also worry that the most critical national institutions, the pillars of state on which the unity and integrity of the nation depends, are at the moment too fragile and too timid to withstand the ambition of a demagogue and a megalomaniac on a rampage. As we see in the Ivorian situation the armed forces abandon the nation in favor of just one person they now perceive as greater than Cote d'Ivoire, their country. Army loyalty must be to the nation, not the individual who holds political power at any point in time. As such the army, the main guarantor of national unity, must stay above politics; must remain neutral; can't be umpires in the power game; must not become sectional, ethnic or sectarian; otherwise it certainly risks disintegration and collapse. Yes, the army has weapons and can destroy and kill; but no army that is divided can stand, no army can ever defeat its own people. In the political sphere things are not better either. Political parties tend to behave as mercenaries, ever ready to fight all those who dare challenge the leader; in crucial moments they cave in to pressures, personal interests and expediency. In theory they are supreme in political matters where they exercise authority over all of their members. In practice however there is nothing like that. Parties all over breach their constitutions, agreed rules and procedure to satisfy the whims and caprices of governments they install. You wonder why, in the Ivorian case for example, the party under which platform and auspices the rape of the nation is being perpetrated maintains an awful silence, as though it doesn't exist at all. In Nigeria there are ruling parties at state and national levels. Polls are rigged and mandates robbed but no party has ever dissociated itself from such criminal acts; instead they take the credit for every successful robbery and hail the usurper and joyfully partake in the perquisites. In other words the structures these pathetic parties install as

‘Prevention is better than cure’

Written by Administrator

Saturday, 18 December 2010 02:10 -

governments are extremely fragile and flimsy; easily will they fall in the face of a determined quest for truth and justice.

So our nation is not safe from falling into the hands of a political desperado, bent on wrecking havoc on the body politic for personal gains. The state apparatus may prove too fragile to deal with the crisis and upheavals that may ensue in the event of an Ivorian-style adventure. So too the political institutions. If the entire polity is thrown into chaos and disorder, of what use and effect will be the law and the constitution?