

By Abdullahi Garba

In this season of campaigns, it is an open field for all manner of media onslaughts on the leading lights of Nigeria's democratic dispensation. The higher the position of responsibility, the more vicious the vendetta, all in a futile bid to circumvent the electoral process by misleading the people in order to get through the media what cannot be obtained in free and fair elections.

This glaring abuse of the media is most rampant in the Press where arm-chair critics and hired hack-writers gate-crash into the once respectable ranks of columnists and wreak havoc on the ethics of journalism. Instead of the objective analysis and logical arguments expected of seasoned journalists, we are daily assailed by a barrage of mud-slinging mercenary slanderers. Among these is one Dan Omale, whose discharge from the Nigerian Air Force many years ago, forced him to steer clear of any aviation-related vocations.

The disquiet in the aviation industry became a convenient opportunity for him to don the garb of "aviation columnist" and launch into a series of jaundiced commentaries later exposed to be the sponsored submissions of feuding airlines and aviation agencies, disguised as "expert opinion".

Dan Omale, then converted his column into a platform for the most preposterous propagation of political propaganda, bereft of any journalistic quality but awash with the prejudices of his barely concealed sponsors.

In his latest commission, it is Vice-President Namadi Sambo that he has been hired to scribble against and, typical of him, he could not even conceal his sponsor. In fact, by delving into the intriguing intricacies of Kaduna state politics of which he knows next to nothing, Dan Omale crash-landed severally even before he took off on his master's mission of rubbishing the impressive political career of the VP. With the elections around the corner, the mercenary columnist is only now seeking to find another running mate for President Goodluck Jonathan in the person of Ahmed Mohammed Makarfi, whose political imprint is all over the column. As if this is not enough of a blunder, the so-called columnist based his improbable objective on a combination of stark ignorance, deliberate distortion of settled issues and outright falsehood. Considering Architect Namadi Sambo's meteoric rise to the commanding heights of Nigeria's democratic dispensation, from governor to Vice President, it can only be by dint of exclusive excellence in personal and professional qualities if indeed, as Omale claims, Namadi Sambo lacks a political base and was not a politician before 2007. Of course, given the delicate circumstances following President Yar'adua's death, the choice of Architect Namadi Sambo has proved to be the most strategically effective political decision which significantly diffused tension, facilitated smooth transition of power and stabilised the Jonathan Presidency. But the fact of the matter is that VP Sambo has come a long way in politics to justify his competence to hold even the Presidency of Nigeria, a fact known to Makarfi but obviously concealed from his gullible megaphone. Namadi Sambo made enough political waves in Kaduna state to emerge as the Democratic Peoples Party (DPN) governorship candidate in the Abacha era, a feat which saw Makarfi scampering to the United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP) in the face of imminent defeat! True Kaduna politicians know that Makarfi relied a lot on Namadi Sambo for his political attainments, which is why the latter's Kaduna and Abuja offices hosted most of Makarfi's

strategy meetings and also explains why Makarfi had to prefer Namadi Sambo as his successor. Omale's brief is to rewrite history and portray Makarfi as Sambo's "disowned godfather" !

Even more absurd is Omale's ridiculous references to the 3-year tenure of Arch. Namadi Sambo as Governor of Kaduna state as "wasteful" when in actual fact those three years were more eventful and had a greater socio-economic impact than Makarfi's eight years. In this context, it needs to be noted that Makarfi laid mines as he left office with the intention of sabotaging his political benefactor and successor, by embarking on a last minute contract bazaar that committed the incoming government to the tune of N23.5 billion while also increasing the state's wage bill by 15%. Yet Governor Sambo took it all in his stride and deployed his business acumen not only to evade the mines but to unveil and implement a purposeful and people-oriented agenda that is still the reference point for good governance today.

Completion and commencement of academic programmes of the Kaduna state University, launching of the bold and potent security initiative, "Operation Yaki", which transformed the state from crisis-prone to a haven of peace and prosperity, the development of the new Millennium City with mass housing and an ultra-modern specialist hospital to replace the ABUTH and a package of cost-free services for the common people in health and education are among the indelible achievements of the Namadi Administration that even Makarfi is humbled by. None of these could have merited mention by the mercenary-columnist Omale, who instead, chose to refer only to the "resuscitation of a few railway coaches' emblem"-whatever this means.

What cannot be denied is that the intercity and intra-city rail rehabilitation project of the Namadi Administration involved the entire infrastructure including locomotives, coaches, rail tracks, stations, level crossings and 425 kilometers of rail tracks linking up major cities and towns. A total of 876,308 passengers booked the Intra-City Train Service Phase I and 159,993 boarded the trains on the Statewide service from Kaduna Junction to Kuya Station from inception in June 2008 to May 2009 alone and by paying a paltry N20 fare, commuters on the intra-city service collectively saved as much as N157,735,440 while on the state-wide service, passengers paid N80 fare from Kaduna Junction to Kuya Station and N240 from Kaduna Junction to Wasa Station which would have cost N200 and N650 respectively, on road transport. Makarfi by contrast, spent eight years without even thinking of the abandoned railroads in Kaduna state. In the absence of any tangible grounds to convince anyone of his sponsored campaign of calumny against VP Namadi Sambo, Omale drifted into the pedestrian sentiments about Namadi Sambo's "indigenisation", insinuating the false and the irrelevant. That Namadi Sambo is a bona fide citizen of Kaduna State from Zaria City where his family roots and base is situated is beyond conjecture, as is the fact that he was a commissioner for 5 years under the Dangiwa and Sarki Muktar administrations of Kaduna state. If all these cannot substantiate his citizenship, certainly one Dan Omale of supposed Idoma extraction, an unassimilated alleged resident of Kaduna, lacks the locus standi to raise any question lest we interrogate his own "indigenisation stereotype". Quoting the VP out of context on the issue of being university graduates only makes matters worse for a Dan Omale whose "Captain" title is not upheld by the cumulus clouds still hovering over his ejection from NAF or wherever he claims to have served. The real challenge both he and his masquerading sponsor should face is the disparity between their "graduate" claims and the less than laudable legacy they left behind in their respective careers. Specifically, "graduate" Makarfi's eight-year tenure cannot make any university proud

of him on account of the lack of purposeful, people-oriented focus of projects that made his successor outstanding. He could not even ensure the take-off of the Kaduna State University in spite of his last minute spending spree!

At the end of the day, our busy-body pseudo-columnist should henceforth regard politics in general and politics of the North and Kaduna state in particular as the Bermuda Triangle of his misadventure into column writing. In fact, Dan Omale should be advised to either limit himself to the aviation articles for which he got a column or go to journalism school to learn the art of responsible writing for newspapers because his pedestrian arguments, motor-park language and undisguised mercenary campaigns are distasteful and unworthy of even junk journals. Abdullahi Garba, wrote in from Kaduna. abdullahigarba@yahoo.com