

I lived in Eastern Africa for about 16 years, 11 of which were in Kenya but working on Somalia. My Kenya years were very impactful. I learnt a lot. Even though I was lazy on language, I was a big observant of the country, including its fauna. Many a time, I drove within the Kenya National Park in Nairobi and went beyond to Amboseli, Nakuru, Maasai Mara, etc.

I had observed carnivorous animals chase and subdued weaker herbivorous animals. As A Y O dot, my friend, tells me, an Impala or a Gnu a.k.a. Wildebeest, which are herbivorous animals, have no chance of making a plea to the Lioness not to kill them for food when they really never hurt any of the members of a Lion's pride. Once the Lioness has zeroed in on one, it is a case of snuffing life out of another living animal. There could be a thousand Wildebeest, once one is grabbed, the others flee. A similar situation is it between Crocodiles and Wildebeests, as the latter, in droves, annually cross the Mara River from Tanzania into Kenya to forage until time to instinctively all return to Tanzania. Zebras et al., join in the annual crossing. Once a Crocodile grabs a Gnu, the hundreds of crossing Zebra, Gnu etc., do not look back. The strength in number was never to be deployed in these situations.

The feeling was unmistakable - a sense of helplessness, like a Zebra caught in the jaws of a Lion or a Wildebeest pulled under by a crocodile. This



A Thousand Naira For Freedom On Nigeria's Third Mainland Bridge

BY BABAFEMI A. BADEJO

was exactly how I felt as I descended the Third Mainland Bridge going in the direction of Ibadan on October 30, 2024 at about 17:00 a.k.a. 5 pm. I left a 70th birthday party of a friend I grew up with that held at Ebute-Metta. It was a great opportunity to not only felicitate with the celebrant but also a reunion with old friends, especially Olusesan Ekiola. There is so much campaign to keep old social networks for longevity. We left the party at the same time for fear of traffic and its accompanying vicissitudes.

All of a sudden, I had several bangs on my car that was slowed down to about 5 km an hour. It was not stand still. It was moving. Three or four young men were hitting my car with their fists indicating that they were hungry and I must feed them. It was a command and nothing near a plea. I shouted back asking why am I responsible for their feeding. The one in front, grabbed the mirror part of the rear-view mirror casing indicating to me that he would pull it out if I don't immediately provide money for food.

I remembered what my

son said happened to his car on March 5, 2024. He had a meeting on behalf of his company with some foreign investors. The foreigners had another meeting on the Marina and he asked his driver to drive them there instead of using Uber. This was the type of hospitable behaviour I expected of him. As the driver and foreigners descended Eko Bridge towards joining Marina, some guy came begging for "feeding money". He was ignored. He yanked off the mirror of the rear-view mirror. It cost my son an arm and a leg to replace.

I had posted the experience of my son on a WhatsApp platform that I belong to which also has highly placed Nigerians, including at least one minister, several advisers and those we refer to as Awaiting Office or Awaiting Contracts in the current government of Nigeria. There were some expressions of sympathy for my son and Nigeria with the thinking that those foreigners will not invest here. To my dismay, a friend dismissed it - this was just daily life in Lagos. But I now know that he

was saying the truth. Another truth was that those foreigners would invest in spite of their experience if the returns would be good and their investment reasonably secured by all sorts of insurance, including sovereign guarantees in some cases with the interests of senior officials.

I was in the fastest lane that was moving at the speed of the Tortoise, meaning at least more than the Snail. Here I was, living that same "daily life," wishing the cars around me would notice my plight. I am sure they did but could not be bothered. I thought of crashing into the car next to mine in the middle lane as everyone drove on as if nothing was happening. I thought about the cost to repair two or more cars if I behaved instinctively. I could see the Governor Sanwo-Olu installed CCTV cameras ahead and wondered about the deception that those cameras would boost our security as people are supposedly watching over us 24/7. But realistically, even if someone was indeed watching at a control centre, what could have been done? Deploy armed drones or helicopters of

the Rapid Response Squad as would be the case in situations of governments that indeed govern? So much on the ruse on how the deployment of drones would sniff out kidnappers, who are known and given chieftaincy titles and digitalisation would reduce corruption, etc. A decadent and problem of lack of values and consequences for criminal behaviour cannot be solved by corrupt deployment of technology.

I beckoned to the guy viciously holding onto my mirror as I drove on, and he jogged along, to ask the other guys to stop following us so I can find something for him. He instructed them and they complied. It was not easy to grab my wallet from my tight Yoruba "Sokoto". My favourite late nephew had insisted to my wife that his tailor must sew my dresses and I should stop looking older than my age. He had joined all in my family to insist that I should no longer be driving myself. But that I rejected, insisting that I would stop driving only when my body gives me the message. My hands were shaking. I

was being violated even without a matchet or guns as I later learned that others do. I grabbed N500, which my special adviser said he learned as being called a Figo when he once faced the exact experience at Ketu a while and he did not even bother to tell me. He had also been cut with a matchet in Abuja in the past for daring to walk a short distance in search of salvation on a Christmas Eve. I wondered about what food could a Figo buy since we got the renewed hope government of Nigeria with its whopping devaluation. He was looking at me as I fiddled and my wallet dropped but I had grabbed another N500. He was patient with me; he knew he had subdued me and like the Impala, all other drivers would not assist me. I was literally, on my own.

I had learned from my days in the conflict zones that I had some level of protection while remaining in my car, more so a moving car even if slowly without any opportunity to bolt without damage to my car. I knew I was about to expose myself by handing the N1,000 over. I wound down a bit to the extent of allowing only the notes to slip through as we continued in motion. He left my mirror and grabbed the naira notes and expressed gratitude and said: "Baba, go on, you are free".

- Dr Badejo is a legal practitioner and professor of Political Science and International Relations at Chrisland University, Abeokuta, Nigeria.

Northern Nigeria finds itself at a decisive turning point, facing complex socio-economic and security challenges, the leadership of Governor Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya, as chairman of the Northern States Governors' Forum (NSGF), shines as a guiding force of strategic action, foresight and deep understanding of the region's challenges in a manner reminiscent of the legendary Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello.

Governor Inuwa Yahaya's stewardship at the NSGF is a shift from symbolic leadership to practical problem-solving, addressing not only the lingering security crises of terrorism, banditry, and communal conflicts but also the structural challenges of poverty, youth unemployment, and inadequate education.

Recognising that youth restiveness is both a symptom and a warning, Governor Yahaya, through the instrumentality of the NSGF, is championing initiatives focused on education, job creation, and skills development to ensure that the younger generation in the northern region is equipped with opportunities to contribute meaningfully to society.

What sets Inuwa Yahaya apart is his ability to galvanise collaboration among political leaders, traditional rulers, and regional stakeholders. His tenure as NSGF chairman is indeed



Building On Sardauna's Legacy: Inuwa Yahaya's Blueprint For A Prosperous Northern Nigeria

BY ISMAILA UBA MISILLI

transforming the forum into a platform for unified action.

In these challenging times, Inuwa Yahaya's leadership serves as both an anchor and a compass - anchoring the region in shared values while charting a bold course for lasting progress. His actions resonate with the aspirations of millions across the North, proving that with unity, vision, and relentless effort, the region can rise to new heights.

His recent address at the joint meeting of the NSGF and the Northern Traditional Rulers Council in Kaduna on October 28, 2024, encapsulates the vision, urgency, and the resolve needed to chart a transformative course for the region.

The meeting symbolised more than a routine gathering of state executives and royal fathers; it underscored the weight of responsibility placed on the shoulders of these two supreme institutions.

Governor Inuwa Yahaya's words at the event reflected a deep understanding of Northern Nigeria's pressing issues and his determination to address them comprehensively.

His grasp of the region's challenges and the roadmap

he articulated evoke the spirit of the legendary Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, whose visionary leadership transformed Northern Nigeria into a cohesive force in the early years of Nigeria's independence.

During the meeting, Governor Inuwa Yahaya began his speech on a compassionate note, expressing heartfelt condolences to victims of the recent flooding in Maiduguri and other places and the tragic tanker explosion in Jigawa State. With empathy and a sense of urgency, he pledged continued collaboration with the federal government and other agencies to provide relief and rebuild lives. His emphasis on solidarity during times of distress is a reflection of his hands-on leadership style - one that sees the North not as a fragmented collection of states, but as a united community bound by shared challenges and aspirations.

Beyond sympathies, his message was clear: these disasters are not isolated events but part of a broader struggle against insecurity, poverty, and underdevelopment.

Inuwa Yahaya understands that solutions must go beyond

mere promises. "Our unity and commitment to the prosperity of the people remain our greatest source of strength," he noted, reminding his colleagues of the importance of collective will in the fight against terrorism, banditry, communal conflicts and other social vices.

A significant highlight of Governor Inuwa Yahaya's address was his candid assessment of youth restiveness, a growing concern exacerbated by poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment. He acknowledged that the recent "EndBadGovernance" protests in August, were a wake-up call. For Inuwa Yahaya, youth agitation is not a threat to be crushed but a cry for help that demands deliberate and sustainable solutions.

Rather than paying lip service to the needs of the youth, the NSGF chairman advocated for scalable interventions in education, skills acquisition, and job creation. His vision is to see a meaningful pathways for Northern youths - diverting them from crime and social vices and channelling their

energy into productive ventures. This solution-driven leadership not only mirrors the Sardauna's belief in developing human capital but also reinforces Inuwa Yahaya's deep understanding of where the shoe pinches.

The Gombe governor's speech also emphasised the enormous economic potential of Northern Nigeria's agricultural sector. In his view, agriculture should no longer be seen solely as a means to alleviate hunger but as a catalyst for industrialisation. His call for re-industrialising the North, particularly through reviving the textile industry and agro-allied enterprises, offers a clear pathway for economic recovery.

He stressed that providing farmers with access to financing, modern farming techniques, and rural infrastructure is non-negotiable. But even more critical, the governor warned, is the need to secure rural areas so farmers can work without fear. "Agriculture should not only be seen as a means to feed our people but also as a catalyst for industrialisation and job creation," he asserted.

His plans align seamlessly with efforts to foster food security while diversifying the region's economy. The governor's focus on reviving industries and attracting investments speaks to a practical understanding of Northern Nigeria's economic landscape - an approach reminiscent of the Sardauna's strategy of blending agriculture with commerce.

The NSGF chairman also showed foresight in environmental policies. The recent flood disasters, he explained, highlight the urgent need to adopt sustainable environmental practices. His proposal to build irrigation infrastructure, including canals and waterways, demonstrates a commitment to long-term solutions that serve both environmental and economic purposes. By channelling excess water toward irrigation, Governor Yahaya envisaged not only preventing future flooding but also enhancing rural livelihoods.

He further acknowledged that environmental degradation aggravates conflicts, particularly between farmers and herders. The governor's strategy to promote social harmony by addressing ecological issues holistically demonstrates an integrated approach to governance - one that recognises the intersection between environment, agriculture, and peac-building.

- Misilli is DG Press, Government House, Gombe