

By Mustapha Isah Kwaru

The sudden defection from the All Nigeria Peoples Party, (ANPP) to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) by the immediate past House of Representatives Minority Leader; Hon. Mohammed Ali Ndume, representing Chibok, Damboa and Gwoza federal constituency of Borno state, has signaled a major setback to the party, not only in the state, but at the national level, as its victory in the next general election is not certain. Ndume, who was adjudged as the major financier of ANPP in the Borno-South senatorial zone, was elected into the National Assembly for two consecutive terms, from 2003 to date. He is also seen as the most vibrant lawmaker from the entire North-East geo-political zone and left the party few months after he actively participated in the conduct of a successful convention that brought in the new national leadership of the party.

It was learnt that Ndume's defection to the PDP was the fallout of a meeting held in Abuja, between Vice-President, Namadi Sambo, the PDP National Chairman, Dr. Okwesilieze Nwodo, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Dimeji Bankole, the ANPP Minority Leader in the Senate, Senator Maina Ma'aji Lawan, among other PDP principal officers at the National Assembly.

Our correspondent gathered that the lawmaker, who is contesting the Borno-South senatorial seat come 2011, against the current state Commissioner of Women Affairs, Dr. Asabe Villita Bashir, who is believed to have the strong backing of Governor Ali Modu Sheriff, dumped the party, for suspecting that Governor Sheriff may have favoured the emergence of Villita as the party's consensus candidate or influenced the delegates to elect her in the primaries, thereby blocking his chances, alongside other aspirants. So, fearing what he termed as planned 'injustice' against him, Ndume resolved to cross carpet to the opposition PDP, where he believes all aspirants would be treated equally.

Investigation has revealed that, Sheriff is unhappy with the growing popularity of Ndume, which he earned due to his generosity, kindness, improving the well-being of the people, through various developmental projects and poverty alleviation strategy, as he (Sheriff) allegedly vowed to thwart the senatorial ambition of Ndume, fearing that he may take over the control of the party when the Governor finally vacates office.

Further finding indicates that the while Governor Sheriff neglected Southern Borno, in terms of developmental projects due to political reasons, Ndume on the other hand, mapped out effective mechanisms to alleviate their sufferings.

For instance, while, the Sheriff-led administration failed to improve water supply, construct schools and provide medical facilities to the area, the legislator voted huge funds to ensure improvement of such sectors. Sheriff has also allegedly shunned several invitations to commission various projects executed by the lawmaker.

Some ANPP supporters described the defection of Ndume as a serious blow to the party. "ANPP may soon lose its grip of the state if certain crucial decisions are not rightly taken" an

official of the party told our correspondent, on condition of anonymity.

Speaking to newsmen at his residence in Maiduguri, the aggrieved lawmaker said his defection was mainly because Chief Ogbonnaya Onu, National Chairman of the ANPP, told him to drop his quest to contest for senatorial seat on the basis that Governor Sheriff was against the aspiration.

The former Minority Leader added that he was rudely shocked by Onu's remark, which made him conclude that the party's national leadership cannot guarantee free and transparent primary elections nationwide.

"I have defected to the PDP, as I had to do this because everyone knows that for a long time, my governor has been doing everything to frustrate my senatorial ambition, basically because, he is also preparing grounds to return to the Senate and he doesn't want me and him to be at the floor; maybe he thinks I may be outspoken and make him unnoticed," he said.

However, reacting swiftly, stakeholders of the ANPP from Southern Borno, including his colleagues at the National Assembly, state House of Assembly members, commissioners, special advisers and local government chairmen, distanced themselves from Ndume's controversial decamping.

Speaking at a crowded press conference, spokesman of the group, Hon. Ishaku Shara, representing Askira-Uba/ Hawul constituency at the National Assembly, explained that Ndume acted alone in his personal capacity and that the legislator's action is unjustifiable.

"If Hon Ndume has grievances against anybody, he should pursue it amicably and through the party's laid down procedures. It is not true, that the party plans blocking his political aspiration by favouring his opponent.

"We wish to express our unalloyed loyalty and support to Governor Sheriff-led ANPP administration, as we have struggled to build our great party over the years and we do not have any reason to abandon it because of the selfish interest of an individual.

"The ANPP, as a party, is greater than the interest of any person; we, the people of Southern Borno would ever remain grateful to the present leadership of Governor Sheriff, for delivering his exemplary leadership qualities and delivering democratic dividends," Shara declared.

He assured that the constituency would be a no-go area for any party, pointing out that arrangements were on top gear, to deliver the zone to ANPP at all levels of elections in 2011.

Similarly, since Ndume announced his departure, stakeholders from Southern Borno, including his state, local Government and ward co-ordinators have been trooping into the Government House in Maiduguri, with each one of them disassociating themselves from the actions of the lawmaker, while pledging loyalty to ANPP and Governor Sheriff.

However, observers opined that, with the Ndume's defection, it seems that the battle line for the 2011 elections in the state has been drawn, as it is turning out to be a blessing of a sort to the party. Those who had been reluctant to identify with Governor Sheriff seem to suddenly change their opinions.

Those who may be displaced by Ndume in the national calculation, are also discussing with the governor on possible ways to survive the seeming putsch. As the polls draw nearer, certain things will tend to define how each of the gladiators in the new political war will remain relevant or go into obscurity. Ali Sheriff is fighting a familiar battle with Ndume, and appears even more determined to sustain the control of the ANPP over the state. So far, he has kept his political

Ndume's defection and the fate of ANPP in Southern Borno

Written by Administrator

Sunday, 09 January 2011 20:21 -

game close to his chest. It was this suspense, over who gets which position in the next dispensation, that seems to have unsettled the likes of Ndume.

Analysts are of the view that perhaps Ndume has committed political suicide, changing camps at this eleventh hour. How can his defection affect the fortunes of the ANPP on one hand, and how could it enhance that of the PDP, on the other? Does Ndume has the financial war chest to fight Governor Sheriff, in the struggle for the control of the politics of Southern Borno? Will his solid campaign structure in the ANPP be easily collapsed into the PDP? Given the near solid grip of the ANPP on the politics of the state, can Ndume survive beyond the automatic ticket promised him by his new party? These and many others are some of the questions being asked. It may sound reassuring to him, if the reports are true, to the effect that he has been granted an automatic ticket to contest for the Senate by the PDP. The question, again, is, how far can the automatic ticket carry him, in the face of the anger his departure has generated, even amongst his followers? Only time will show.

While the national leadership of the PDP may be rejoicing over this big catch, Ndume's entry has already caused ripples in the party in the state; as it is, the PDP has waived its own rules by re-opening the sale of nomination forms to accommodate Ndume. Alhaji Sanda Garba, who, hitherto, was the sole aspirant for the Senate seat from Southern Borno, has voluntarily stepped down, making Ndume to be the only aspirant.