

Face2Face with Abdu Labaran Malumfashi

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To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible. Saint Thomas Aquinas

This subject is definitely not going to sit well with some people, because they have made up their mind or have it made up for them not to believe anything contrary to that mindset. The Hausa people put it thus; if people hate you, they will accuse you of raising dust even if you fall into water. However, the fear of profiling must not be an impediment to walking the talk of one's conviction.

I was coming back to Abuja from Katsina on Monday in the morning when the commercial vehicle I was travelling in broke down and, from the look of things, it was not a problem that could be fixed easily in a short time. Luckily, we were still within the metropolis. Not bothering to ask for the fare I paid, I picked my luggage and moved a little distance away from the broken down vehicle to get a taxi or commercial motorcycle to take me back to the motor park, a distance of about 10 kilometers from where I stood. Just as I was about to cross the road, I noticed someone standing by a car waving his hand at me. Even when I reached the car, I still did not recognise the person. It was only after he said, "Yallabai, you have not recognised me", that I did. It was almost 18 years ago when we last met. The two of us were Information Officers with the Katsina State Ministry of Information, before I left for the now rested Kaduna-based Democrat Newspaper in 1992. He too left around that time to join a federal agency, which I did not know then.

Another Hausa proverb came to my mind when he told me that he was going to Kaduna. "Wani hani, ga Allah baiwa ne" (Every disappointment is a blessing in disguise). He knew where I work, but I did not know his own until he told me.

As we rode, the journalist in me took control and I casually asked him how the "embattled" head of his organisation was faring. Going by what he told me, it would seem as if his boss was the best thing to ever happen to that institution since it was established before Nigeria became an independent nation.

He understood what I meant by referring to his boss as "embattled". He said that most of the staff of the organisation did not care what the outside world thinks about him because, as far as they are concerned, he is the best performing head their organisation ever had. I just could not believe what I heard, and I told him so.

My friend explained to me that he came back to Nigeria from Saudi Arabia two days earlier and was going to Kaduna, his new station, having been transferred from Lagos while he was away

on pilgrimage. According to him, his transfer allowance had preceded him and was waiting for him to report for duty to claim. This, he said was the first time a transfer allowance was paid to him or anyone else during the almost two decades he has been with the organisation. In May this year, 100% salary increase was effected for everybody, with the most junior staff now taking home N49, 000 monthly. And since the advent of the new leadership, salary was always paid between 15th and 19th of every month, a far cry from what was the norm whereby salary was never paid earlier than the 25th. Retirement benefits are now paid as and when due. All outstanding promotions and realignment of ranks in respect of those who obtained higher qualification, have been effected. The new leadership has also embarked on staff training at home and abroad and staff schools at all the commands in the country have been rehabilitated. Problem of staff accommodation, especially in urban centers like Abuja, Lagos, Enugu, Port Harcourt, Kano and Ibadan has almost been fully addressed as the leadership has embarked on the purchase of houses all over the country.

I asked my friend where the money for all these projects came from and he told me that the Nigerian Customs Service was permitted to retain 7% of whatever it generates as revenue. Sensing my scepticism, my friend, Iro Bala Batsari, asked me not to take his word for it. He urged me to confirm from others all the things he has told me about what he refers to as “the Dikko Phenomenum”. I did. I asked two friends, one a Controller of Customs and the other, a Deputy Controller. Both corroborated what Bala Batsari had told me.

To those who have known Abdullahi Dikko Inde for a long time, his exploits as Customs boss did not surprise them. They believe that it is very much in tune with his famed benevolent spirit, which made him a champion of the indigent in his home local government area of Musawa in Katsina State, long before he made it to the summit of his career as Comptroller General. He had, all that while, given a standing instruction to private clinics and dispensing chemists to attend to those in critical need of medical attention, and forward the bill to him afterwards. In addition to that, he periodically distributed free grains to the needy as well as paid for books and other essential needs of indigent primary and secondary students in and from the area. One of the people who know him very well, Malam Haruna Isa Jikamshi, a lecturer at the Isa Kaita College of Education, Dutsinma, asserted that but for the intervention of Dikko Inde, Senator Abu Ibrahim and Alhaji Abdullahi Imam, many youths in the area would have been without primary and secondary school education.

At a time when Nigerians are daily fed with news of the negative exploits of those in leadership positions, it is cheering to hear that someone is discharging his responsibility well, by providing the kind of leadership that the nation desires and which absence has kept it rooted down at the base of the developed societies.