

Decision 2007: Presidential/National Assembly Elections

FOR residents of Katsina and Daura, yesterday's presidential and National Assembly elections could be described as different tales for different folks. Reason: while the elections went on peacefully in Katsina town, the story from Daura was that of destruction and burning.

However, on the general scale, the elections could be described as remarkably better organised, compared to the April 14 gubernatorial and state assembly. Again, unlike penultimate Saturday's polls, yesterday's election started began early enough.

When The Guardian went round in some parts of the state capital at about 9.am, the electoral officers were already on their seats awaiting voters. Among the places visited were Isa Kaita Primary School, Kofar Kaura, where electoral officers were seen collecting their voting materials.

The same occurred at Kofar Kwaya where anxious voters started forming queues, for voting, which commenced at exactly 10.am. Similarly, incidence of voting by minors was low, compared with previous elections, where they were so open and flaunting their cards.

The presidential candidate of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Katsina State Governor, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua voted at the polling unit located inside the Hassan Usman Model Primary School, located in Mododji, adjacent his personal residence at exactly 11.55 am, while Buhari voted at his Sarkin Yara Ward, in Daura at exactly 11.06 am.

But before Yar'Adua's arrival, voting had already commenced and some prominent indigenes of the state had cast their votes include former Inspector-General of Police and Secretary of Katsina Forum, Alhaji Ibrahim Muntaka Coomasie.

Clad in all white dress, the presidential hopeful drove into the venue in a green coloured Honda Car with registration number AM 108 FGE (Kano), accompanied by an array of dignitaries from the state, such as an elder statesman, Dr. Lema Jubrilu; the governor-elect, Alhaji Ibrahim Shehu Shema and Minister of State in the Federal Ministry of Education, Dr. Sayyadi Abba Ruma.

Yar'Adua, in a short interview with newsmen after casting his vote said it was a great moment for the country to be transiting from one elected government to another. He said he was grateful to God that everything went well saying, despite whatever pitfall that might have occurred, it was better than not having anything at all.

He said, "Everything went on well and we are grateful to God for that. Remember that it is only almighty God that does not mistake, so I can say that the arrangement made by INEC for the election, within the limit of human being is alright, I'm impressed."

Asked if he would accept the result, even if he loses, Yar'Adua said, he would gladly accept the result and even if invited by the eventual winner to join him in building the nation. According to him, the important thing about the election was not about individuals, but the process and the nation.

"This is a very important election, because for the first time in this country, we are attempting to make a successful transition from one civilian to another and if we succeed, the culture of democracy in this nation would have been established, so it goes beyond individuals. Therefore, all Nigerians ought to give their support, since what we are trying to achieve is unique in the history of this nation. I have no doubt in my mind that, if we succeed, it will put this country on the path to greater peace, stability and prosperity. So myself, I'm not important, other presidential candidates as individuals actually are not

important, what is important, is the process as the nation", he said.

However, in Daura the home town of Buhari the situation was quite different as some houses suspected to belong to PDP stalwarts were torched by irate youths who were enraged by inadequate supply of electoral materials to the council.

The Guardian gathered that the former Speaker of the State Assembly, a supporter of PDP, who hails from Daura Hon. Sani Saidu, whose house was located at Muhammadu Bashar road was torched. So also was the Chairman of Baure Local Government, Alhaji Nasidi Danladi. A car parked in the latter's compound was also burnt. Alhaji Umaru Margel, a businessman who was a known opponent of Buhari had two of personal houses burnt down in Daura. When newsmen visited the town, smoke was still coming out of the affected buildings.

In addition to the private residences, Margel also had his business interest situated very close to the Central Police Station in the town razed down completely. During the visit by journalists, heavily armed mobile policemen were battling very hard to contain the riots by using teargas canisters.

In Zango, a nearby local government, the office of INEC there was completely razed down by the irate youth, so much so, that it took the combined effort of mobile policemen and the army to rescue reporters who went there to observe the polls.

Unconfirmed reports yesterday indicated that at least, one person has been reported killed in Funtua local government council on the Northern fringe of the state, in addition to a Young man who was reportedly injured with arrow in Daura.

Speaking to reporters in his residence, Gen. Buhari said the people were angered by the shortage of materials to the council, particularly the ballot papers for the presidential elections.

"For example, for the Senatorial and House of Representatives, there are 96,000 ballot papers for each local government. But for the presidential election, there was only 56,000 ballot papers, so people felt that there was something wrong in cutting the presidential ballot papers by 50 %. So, I tried to speak to the INEC commissioner in Katsina, he refused to speak with me, but I spoke with his secretary, who assured me that the balance would be brought, and that it was not only Daura council that was affected. But I advised him to go to the FRCN Katsina and local FM to announce that the balance of the voters' card would come, as that would calm the frayed nerves," Buhari said.

Continuing he said, "I had to go and address the crowd, at the INEC office and immediately I voted myself and I asked people to go to their voting stations to queue up and vote. I think immediately I left, the situation was got out of hand".

Buhari expressed great disappointment with that arrangement for the elections by the INEC, saying that reports from many states indicated they had not received their materials for the elections well into yesterday. According to him, there were states where they were denied the materials and there were states where some council were not allowed to vote at all.

He cited the example of Gombe, where he said people were not allowed to vote; parts of Katsina where some people went about snatching boxes and tearing ballot papers in some local governments and in some others the materials were not provided at all. In Taraba, he said he got report that they have not got voting materials at all, while only about 37 per cent of the materials were delivered in Borno State.

In parts of Kaduna State Buhari said, "people are still standing under the tree shade waiting for the materials and INEC officials. This is the situation report from most the northern states. In Zamfara State,

the presidential ballot papers were not available at all.