

Treason trial overthrows pandemic fight in Sierra Leone!

*Augustine Sorie-Sengbe Marrah Esq.
June 30, 2021*

Our nation is not new to treason trials, famous ones in history were the treason trial of M. S. Forna, Bash-Taqi and others in 1975; the treason trial of Vandi Minah of 1987 and the most recent was that of Kula Samba and others in 1998. A Now, over two decades, we have another treason trial at hand. This time it is in a pandemic that has spewed out on every part and everyone in the world much angst and uncertainty. I shall not comment on the facts of the case since it is being adjudicated and comments might be construed as obstruction of justice. I know better!

Few days ago on 21st May 2020, military tanks and security personnel teemed the major streets of the central business district of Freetown barricading the law court building and abutting streets. The ensuing traffic disrupted business, obstructed many personal engagements and simply disfigured the decorum of our health emergency. A client of mine couldn't make our appointment, they were, like so many others, stuck in the gridlock for more than an hour. In addition to the strains of the pandemic, security tensions are adding another tier of edginess.

Our country earnestly prayed away Covid-19 but eventually succumbed many months after the rest of the world had been smitten with the virus. The government assured us of every syllable of preparedness to combat the disease, when it eventually penetrates our territory. Ironically, to the praying nation, it was just a question of 'when' and not 'if', even the President tolled the inevitable bell. Reassured we were ready to roll, but no sooner had the pandemic hit, than our health workers started to complain about unavailability of necessary medical equipment; folks in quarantine facilities lamenting the inhumane conditions of their isolation; the response fraught with unreasonable delays of payment of stipends to frontline workers etc. How were we ready for Covid-19 then?

Since the announcement of the index case, it's been a soap opera in our nation. The inter-party fights over whether regulations are to be placed before parliament and the indefinite suspension of parliament by the clerk of parliament started to distract our nation's focus on the fight against Covid-19. The recent incidents of hostilities between the police and irate youths in Tombo and Lunsar and the attempted 'prison break' also shifted the prism of

concentration. The episodes of violence were becoming a thumping cadence in what should be stillness of concentration on a common enemy. The President had to address the nation very tough, characterizing the folks who are alleged perpetrators of the violence, opposition terrorists. One might fault the politicization of the message but not the fact that violence was about to prevail over law and order and the Commander-in-Chief had to keep a tight rein on the nation's security.

But ultimately what has stolen the show from the fight against the deadly pandemic is the ongoing treason trial of Rtd. Major Paolo Conteh. The conversations around this have drummed out the jingles, announcements, press briefings and our collective strategies to fight Covid-19. The washing of hands and every other vigilance which once was prevalent have been swapped with gossips and bated breaths about the ongoing treason trial. As for the facial masks, the supposed enforcers of the measures (the police) are the biggest violators. The high-security paraphernalia are definitely needed in a treason trial of such nature, but the antithesis is that they weaken the much-needed coalition of focus, commitment and action in eliminating the coronavirus in Sierra Leone.

The world is still grappling with the pandemic; our nation's infection rate is steadily rising to a crescendo but its grave danger to the socio-economic spheres of our lives is falling through the cracks. Our healthcare system is in need of every attention that the treason trial is scoping for itself. Sadly, the fight against Covid-19 has been eclipsed. Like almost everything and every other day, politics is more important than even our people's lives and well-being. For now, the treason trial is the cynosure of our thoughts and attention. We 'd catch up with the rest of the world, after we're done!