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Today, January 3, 2021, the portals for taking applications for a new crop of teachers will go live. That begins a new process to fill our schools with qualified and competent tutors who will teach our children in basic classes and senior secondary schools across Kwara State.

It is an enormous task that we do not take for granted. It a task for which our administration will be judged — coming after we painfully nullified a process that had thrown up some 2,414 teachers.

Without mincing words, no patriotic person should defend the nullified process. It was egregiously faulty. Political interests had a field day dictating which individual got a place in our classrooms with scanty regard for merit.

So bad was it that they overshot the legal approvals to engage just 1,100. I do not dispute that a few great hands survived the process. My heart bleeds that those ones were caught in our decision to start the process anew. However, such great hands were exceptions.

A vast majority got the jobs because they knew somebody who knew somebody that knew somebody on Ahmadu Bello Way. Those affected knew this to be true. We couldn't in good conscience allow that to stand, particularly after we initially gave everyone a chance to prove their worth.

Those who messed up our efforts to reform the nullified process have been served their sanctions, mild or grave.

As the new process begins, I see it as a bold attempt to reposition teaching in Kwara.

It is a necessary complement to our ongoing infrastructural renewals (which will gulp over N14bn over the next two years) and the upcoming digital reforms of the education sector primed for the new year. We need everyone to support the effort.

We are trying our best within the circumstances to create an enabling environment for businesses to grow and create jobs.

However, I appeal to our people not to see the 4,701 teaching vacancies as an opportunity to just fix people up for jobs. It is not designed for such. Yes, 4,701 persons will get these jobs. But our sincere intention is that anyone who gets a slot does so because they merit it.

This is why the process is clearly designed to be rigorous. The first phase, like our bursary and scholarship schemes, will be entirely tech-driven.

Nearly 60 percent of the eligibility process will be determined online where applicants will fill in their details. Examinations and oral interviews, both physical, will be judged by competent hands who have clear instructions not to listen even to me.

This is because we plan to throw up candidates that are the best that ever applied for the jobs. What this means: my cousins or nieces who may want these jobs will have to prove that they truly merit it. I want everyone to do so.

I do not want to preside over a recruitment process for teachers where the outcome is predetermined or decided by partisan interests. That helps no one.

Kwara is a largely rural community. We recognise our peculiarities to do some balancing in who gets a slot in our job placements, especially in some disadvantaged communities. That is a practice not limited to Kwara or Nigeria.

However, geographical balancing will come only after the process has thrown up persons who cross reasonable thresholds of merit as determined by the team coordinating it. For instance, I expect that nobody gets a slot if they do not hit the minimum threshold of merit.

I believe each community possesses such persons. We only need to create an environment that allows them to emerge.

This step may seem odd in our environment. But it is a painful decision we must take at this time. It is a sacrifice we need to make for a brighter future. Let us encourage truly qualified hands to emerge.

The implication of this is that every community will get truly qualified teachers to train our children. It will help to reposition public education system while having domino effects on the economy.

My dream is to have pupils from Kwara State lead national examination score sheets in the coming years. I am prepared to allow a process that will make that happen. But it goes beyond me alone. I need everyone with powers to influence things to let this process work seamlessly.

Let us recognise that any attempt to influence the process to favour undeserving persons is a conscious effort to draw us back. This is a clarion call for all interests to be subsumed for the greater interest of our children and their right to qualitative teaching.

I wish everyone a prosperous New Year.