

The cost of The cases of Aba robberies and Onitsha mayhem

FOR Governor Oji Uzor Kalu of Abia state and his Anambra State counterpart, Gov. Peter Obi the times, indeed, can be distressful.

Reason: Whereas Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) had almost made Onitsha, the commercial nerve centre of Anambra State ungovernable, daylight robbery had rendered Aba, also the commercial nerve centre of Abia State insecure for meaningful living. Both Onitsha, the commercial nerve centre of Anambra and Aba, are altogether the commercial nerve centres of the region

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east of the Niger. The cities share a lot in common. Their position make them gateways-Onitsha to the entire east, Aba for the South-South states of Akwa Ibom and Cross Rivers. This explains their propensity to attract visitors and commercial interest.

Unfortunately, events in the two cities in recent times have thrown them into cities of discomfort perhaps, that is the cost good citizens are paying for keeping mum in the face of buildup for anarchy. Indeed, for the past one week, residents

of Onitsha and Aba had been forced to remain in-doors by strange fellows represented by the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra and armed robbers respectively.

For the two cities, business operations have been forced into hiding. Whereas MASSOB had taken over Onitsha, perhaps with dubious collusion with miscreants allegedly belonging to the National Association of Road Transport Owners (NARTO), Aba had been laid siege to by robbers, most of whom operating with deadly AK47 and LAR rifles.

As at last week, the state commissioner

of police in Abia State whose office is in Umuahia, the state capital, Mr. Charles Akaya, has since relocated to Aba, while Assistant Inspector-General of Police (AIG) for zone 9, Mr. Adewole Aikawo, whose office is also at Umuahia has been



• Police Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) set ablaze by a

ordered by the Inspector-General of Police (IGP), Mr. Sunday Ehindero to relocate to Onitsha. The mission of the duo, as it were, is to bring sanity to the cities and to restore public confidence in the ability of the police to protect lives and property in the Nigerian state.

Indeed for Aba, the lawlessness would have continued, perhaps, but for the banks, whose staff had to embark on a two-day strike to express their anger against the discomfort armed robbers had brought on them and their jobs, nobody would have blinked an eye.

Yes, banks in Aba, the commercial nerve centre of Abia State and, indeed, the eastern region, had early this month gone on strike in protest to what they called the inability the Nigeria Police to protect and safeguard them and their banks from the activities of men of the underworld, who had consistently raided their banks and even private homes. In most of the cases, the robbers had adequate time to do their business while calls made to the police were either not heeded and where heeded, very late - after the robbers would have perhaps reached their destination and loots possibly shared.

Take for instance, the case of two supermarkets located on Compost road by Ikot Ekpene road. On the fateful day, a gang of robbers had called at the supermarket one evening and thoroughly disposed their victims of earnings of that day, carting away gift items-expensive wrist watchers, beauty accessories, among others.

That was the first day. The same robbers were to come the following day at the same time to the same victims. This time around



• Uwazuruike, MASSOB Leader

• Some armed suspects arrested and paraded by police

their victims were roundly and viciously beaten as a reprisal for their effrontery to have put up phone calls to the police and other supermarket operatives to alert them of the robbers presence at their supermarket. After duly humbling their victims, leaving them to wallow in their own blood and pains, the robbers' then encouraged them (victims) to again phone the police and their other colleagues that robbers were around. They waited for a long time before disappearing.

Though the incident appears like a James-Bond best seller thriller, yet, residents of Aba affirmed last week that had been their lot in

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licking their pain, in deep bewilderment, disbelief. He also confirmed that two suspects - Obiona Nwagungwu and Chidi Nwagungwu had, been arrested in connection with the dastardly act. The suspects had also made confessional statements to the effect that they actually participated in the alleged robbery, which also claimed the life of the lad.

These cases are not isolated. This explains why the public and indeed Aba residents are worried. For instance, before the bankers went on protest strike, two banks were attacked in one week, with several millions stolen. And one man who captured the worry of the public and the business community is the president of the Aba

trailing him until luck ran out on them. When we got to his house, we got them as they were trying to escape, we shot them and on the way to the station, the three gave up the ghost."

Another gang was shot at Okigwe Road, Faulks. They were robbing commuters of their handsets with locally made pistols when our men on patrol met them.

"The other group up there, Victor Nwala and the other Chidiadi, that is, the gang that was believed to have killed Inspector Allemen Friday Ehimaghe at Abuja on May 30."

With this trend, I believe Aba will be very calm and people will go back to their businesses."

Even then, residents of Aba have not heaved a sigh to relief because the robbers keep on robbing.

Meanwhile, the crisis in Onitsha has resulted in the imposition of a dusk-to-dawn curfew, in the city, a development that has taken its toll on both residents and travellers, curbing economic and social activities in the town.

According to sources, what really sparked off the trouble was the killing of a man by a mobile policeman attached to the NARTO officials who the state government through an Act of the State Assembly had banned from collecting toll fees from motorists in Onitsha.

This action made irate youths to embark on a rampage, setting ablaze the Onitsha prison and freeing about 204 inmates.

So far nine persons have allegedly lost their lives to the crisis in addition to the untold hardship the curfew has brought to the people.

For instance, travellers to and via the Onitsha are compelled to walk from the Asaba end of the Niger Bridge to Upper Iweka or vice versa depending from where the travellers are coming. This situation has clearly made life unbearable for inter-state

travellers, especially the aged, young, sick and those with substantial luggage.

Governor Peter Obi in justifying his invitation of the military to help to restore normalcy in the town blamed the absence of effective security on his predecessors who had

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Agriculture (ACCIMA), Chief Omoji Kalu Omoji, when he visited the AIG in Uaahia in the heat of the robberies, lawlessness. He had pleaded with the AIG through a save-our-soul (SOS) message to the President to intervene because their business have been grounded. Of course, Chief Omoji should know better.

But what is the police doing? Mr. Felix Kigba, chief superintendent of Police (CSP) Aba Area command gave an answer, when he confirmed the arrest one Chinedu Okugbo (alias TEM-TEM) from Ogingwa, the kingpin who was allegedly behind most of the robbers.

Expressing happiness at the level of support received from the public by way of voluntary information, as against

what used to be in the past, the police top brass elaborated thus: "We believe God has given the kingdom of armed robbers to us, that is why we are catching them. The second one is that we have to thank Aba residents who are now coming out with useful information. You know that was the cry of the commissioner of police. Now, I can tell you that people are boldly giving us information." He also explained how Okugbo was arrested.

"We went to his house and he escaped. Information we got from his colleagues was that he was recovering. We have been

recent times.

The sad reality of the matter is the fact that innocent souls are being sent to their early graves by these robbers. For instance, Sunday, a fortnight ago, a teenage son of an Aba-based medical practitioner was felled by the bullets of robbers, who also had invaded a luxury bus, on arrival from Lagos, shooting and robbing the occupants. The teenager unaware of what was going on ran into the robbers' gun shots. He was coming back from early evening mass from a nearby Catholic Church. Although Mr. Akaya had confirmed the incident, the families of the deceased, felled in his youth are still



• Gov. Peter Obi



• Gov. Orji Uzor Kalu

He said: "I had had Bakassi, Ngeje had had MASSOB. But I said no, we cannot hand over our security to miscreants". Following his crying for help, President Olusegun Obasanjo directed the Inspector-General of Police (IGP) to act immediately. The IGP consequently, ordered two Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Mr. Mike Okiro and Mr. Ogbonna Onovo to relocate to Onitsha until the situation is brought under control. This is in addition to AIG, Zone 9, Mr. Ajakaya.

It did not stop there, the General Officer Commanding (GOC), 82 Mechanised Division, Major General Abdulazez Adewunmi, despatched a contingent of soldiers to assist in restoring normalcy to the town. As at Wednesday, the curfew initially imposed on Oritsha was extended to Nkpor, Obosi, Nsugbe, Oba, Ogbaru, and Okpoko when the imposters regrouped in the night and burnt down a police station.

Although Governor Obi put the blame of the crisis squarely on the door steps of his predecessors analysts have tried to link the