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Curfew in Onitsha, soldiers, police patrol streets

A DUSK to dawn curfew has been imposed in Onitsha, the commercial nerve centre of the South-East geopolitical zone of the country, which has been engulfed in violent social unrest since Thursday.

The state governor, Peter Obi, yesterday in a state broadcast expressed hope that the curfew would end the crisis.

From Chuka Collins and Uzoma Nzeagwu (Awka)

He also announced the ban on the National Association of Road Transport Owners (NARTO) and the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB).

The activities of both groups, according to the governor, are inimical to the peaceful co-existence of the citizens.

Meanwhile, soldiers have joined policemen in keeping the peace in the commercial city. The 7 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew will be for an initial period of one week, from yesterday to next Saturday.

The governor "urged parents and guardians to advise their wards to desist from actions that can only earn them unpleasant consequences." He also disclosed that soldiers had been brought in to help maintain law and order, thereby complementing the

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NEWS

ay get report on Bakassi July 12

River states, Chairman of Bakassi Local Council, Customs, Immigration, National Intelligence Agency (NIA), Chief of Defence Staff and the Nigeria Boundary Commission (NBC) on the most effective strategy to

implement the withdrawal", the statement added.

Ojo and Ehindero will meet on June 30 in Abuja to make a preliminary assessment of the withdrawal plan, after which, they will consult with the governments of Akwa

Ibom and Cross River states, the Bakassi Council chief and the security and defence agencies on July 3, 2006.

It disclosed that on July 5, the representatives would present a report to the Cameroun - Nigeria Mixed Commission on the

status of the implementation of agreement, which would be followed up by a meeting of the follow-up committee on Nigeria's withdrawal from Bakassi.

At the end of the meeting, a report will be presented to Annan on or before July 12, this year.

Curfew in Onitsha, soldiers take over security

Continued from Page 1
efforts of the police and other security groups.

Obi noted that his broadcast "underscores the fact that government is doing everything possible to ensure that normalcy returns to Onitsha." The governor said that he had already "briefed His Excellency, President Olusegun Obasanjo, on the situation in Onitsha" and that the President had called him on return to Nigeria on Saturday, "and was fully briefed. The President immediately

and graciously took necessary actions". While assuring that the state was now on the verge of a new era of peace that could not be negotiated or compromised by anybody or group, Obi appealed to those he referred to as "miscreants attempting to disrupt Anambra's peace to desist." The governor also confirmed that he would continue his consultations with the various stakeholders and security agencies, within the week, on further ways to ensure lasting peace and a cordial environment for the people to dwell and carry on their lawful businesses unmolested.

While fielding questions from reporters who accompanied him on the tour of the "war zone", the governor said that the situation had reached an intolerable level where the lives of residents, passers-by and visitors to the commercial city were being imperilled. An eyewitness, a commuter bus driver who gave his name as Mr. Ikwuka Offia, accused NARTO, an outlawed body of commercial transport workers, of being behind the attacks. He stated that the bone of contention was the control of motor parks in the city and its environs. He pleaded with the Federal Government, through Governor Obi, to get the police to withdraw their men whom he accused of aiding the outlaws. He claimed to have witnessed brutal shooting to death of three persons and the setting ablaze of two others within the Okpoko-Upper Iwaka Owerri Road axis between Friday and Saturday. The governor acknowl-

edged that reports confirmed that 90 per cent of those masking under various names to wreak havoc in the state were actually not from Anambra State. Obi also warned those behind them to desist and counselled them to go into farming, small-scale industry or come forward for soft loans through micro-credit. He blamed the development on the aggregate result of all manner of local and private armed groups by previous administrations, under various names like Bakassi Boys, Vigilante's or bodyguards. He advised anyone who was interested to join the Police or army, which are legitimate and recognised bodies. "I am not putting them out of job, rather I want to change their conditions and focus on something better to give them a guaranteed future," Obi stated.

The governor inspected only two out of the four police stations at "33" area of Nsugbe; and the People's Club police post. He could not visit the Inland Force Police Post and the Marine Police Station, which were razed down.

At the "33" police station which was newly commissioned, Obi was confronted with charred police uniforms, documents, exhibits, personal effects and completely burnt down building. An assistant Superintendent (ASP) Ikechukwu Egbuchukwu told the governor that his men were subdued by the superior fire power of the miscreants who set the station ablaze with petrol

bombs. He also confirmed that one of the detainees set free by the rioters had been re-arrested.

At Owerri Road where more casualties were reportedly recorded, one of the newly-acquired Armoured Personnel Carriers (APC) and another police duty truck were completely burnt beyond recognition.

In a sharp reaction, the PDP state secretary, Chief Rueben Okpaloka, distanced the party and its South-East leader, Chief Chris Uba, from the incidents. He told newsmen that the allegation that the crisis was masterminded by the PDP was "absolute falsehood." Okpaloka said: "We are a party of respected people and have no relationship with miscreants." The state government, he added, "has our full co-operation and support", querying: "so how can we be part of this ugly scenario?"

The Guardian learnt that the fight for supremacy and control of the money spinning Onitsha motor parks was the bone of contention between NARTO and some nameless persons who claimed to be MAS-SOB members. This has disrupted life and commercial activities in the city since Thursday as vehicles coming into or going out of Onitsha, from either the Owerri Road end or the Niger Bridge were kept stranded for more than 48 hours.

lines call to legislators

Atilola denied claims of any police invasion, saying he was the one who directed some officials of the House to go to Adeleke's home to recover two official vehicles attached to the office of the Speaker still being kept by Adeleke.

The pro-Adedibu Speaker said the House decided to make efforts to recover the vehicles after all entreaties to make Adeleke return them willingly failed.

As part of efforts in this direction, Atilola said the leadership of the House wrote to the state government and security agencies in the state to assist in recovering the vehicles to no avail.

He alleged that some household property like ceiling fans, gas cooker, rug, and stabiliser were discovered missing from the official residence of the former Speaker during an inventory.