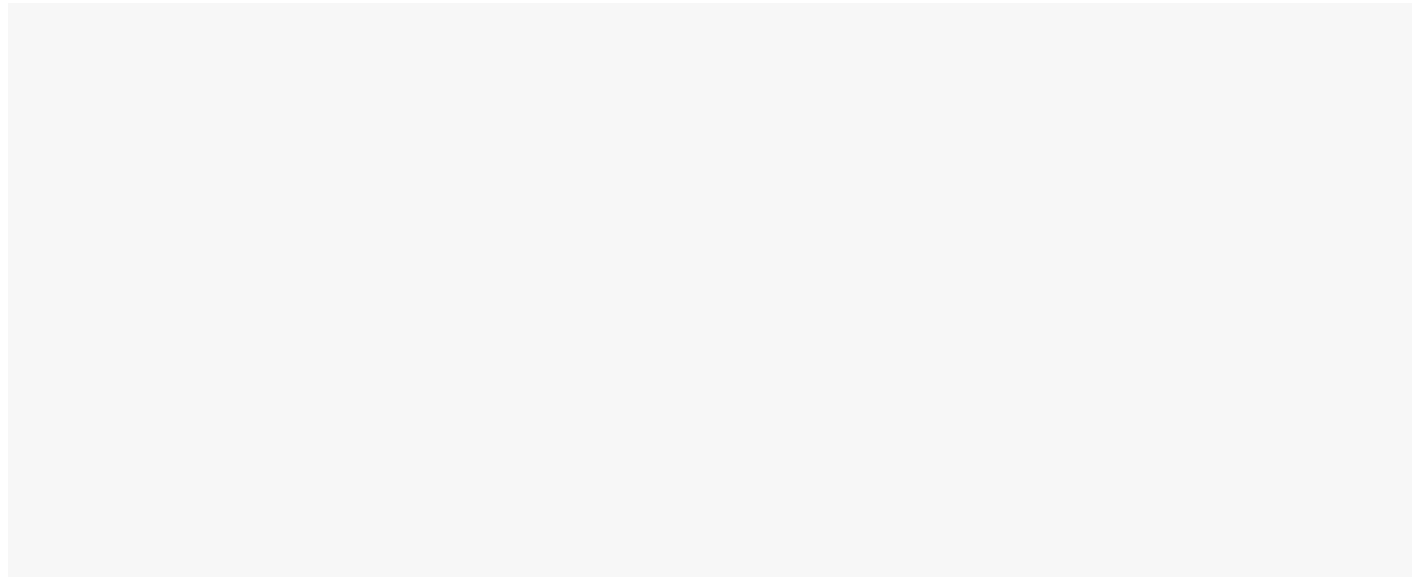


Two killed as INEC holds by-elections in Lagos, Bayelsa, Zamfara, others

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By Eric Ikhilae, Abuja/Pius Mordi/Alao Abiodun/Simon Utebor, Yenagoa/David Adenuga, Bauchi/Damian Duruiheoma, Owerri/Kolade Adeyemi, Jos/Sani Muhammad Sani, Gusau

- ***APC kicked out of Imo senatorial poll as courts disqualify Araraume, Ibezim***
- ***Dogara, Mohammed poised for supremacy battle in Bauchi***

Two persons were confirmed dead in clashes between party supporters in Bakura Local Government Area of Zamfara State ahead of Saturday's by-election in the area.

Consequently, Governor Bello Matawalle has imposed a 24-hour curfew in Bakura and Talata Mafara local government areas.

The by-election to fill the Bakura constituency slot in the state House of Assembly is one of the six senatorial and nine state constituencies such polls are taking place in some of the states today.

The All Progressives Congress (APC) was thrown into shock on Friday after a Federal High Court sitting in Abuja and the Court of Appeal, in separate rulings, disqualified Mr. Chukwuma Francis Ibezim and Chief Ifeanyi Araraume from the race.

Both party chieftains had been laying claims to the party's senatorial ticket for Imo North.

Governor Bala Mohammed of Bauchi State and former House of Representatives Speaker Yakubu Dogara will also be putting their political strength to test today in the Baraza Dass Constituency by-election into the state House of Assembly.

The two of them were allies in the run-up to the 2019 elections only for Dogara to dump the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in July to return to the APC.

Governor Matawalle said in Gusau, the Zamfara State capital, that the imposition of curfew was meant to safeguard lives and property.

Government, he declared, would not fold its arms and watch people engage in a breach of the public peace.

He accused unnamed politicians of taking advantage of political rallies ahead of the by-election in Bakura to foment trouble.

He said that apart from the two casualties, six other persons were injured in the clash.

PDP to Buhari: Call APC stalwarts to order

Also speaking on the violence in Bakura LGA, the Chairman of the PDP By-election Committee in the area, Senator Lawal Hassan Daniya, asked President Muhammadu Buhari to call APC stalwarts in the state to order.

He claimed that APC chieftains instigated the violence that led to destruction of lives and property.

Giving his own account of the incident, Daniya said: "When the supporters of PDP started trooping to the venue of their rally, they came across APC thugs who were well armed with dangerous weapons including but not limited to daggers, axes, cutlasses bows and arrows and Dane guns, chanting war songs, uncomplimentary remarks and innuendos with a view to inciting disturbance of public peace against the PDP supporters."

He said some APC leaders then "instructed its thugs to destroy all the tents erected by PDP and replaced same with their own. This happened at about 12:30 am on 3/12/2020."

He said the APC leaders "arrived the venue of the campaigns rally in clear violation of the suspension of the rally and the curfew imposed."

Court disqualifies Ibezim as APC's candidate for Imo North

A Federal High Court in Abuja on Friday disqualified Mr. Chukwuma Francis Ibezim as the candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in the Imo North Senatorial by-election.

Justice Inyang Ekwo based his judgment on the grounds that Ibezim made false statements/declarations in the affidavit and documents he submitted to the APC and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), wherein he presented falsified and uncertified photocopies of the West African School Certificate (WASCE).

The judgment was in respect of suit FHC/ABJ/CS/1229/2020 filed by Asomugha Tony Elebeke, with Ibezim, APC and INEC as defendants.

Justice Ekwo found that the WASC certificate Ibezim submitted to his party, which the APC in turn handed to INEC, contained different and irreconcilable names – Ibezim Chukwuma Frank and Ibezim Francis Chukwuma.

The judge said: “There is something wrong with these results. The defence of the 1st defendant per the averments in paragraphs 26, 27, 28 and 29 of his counter-affidavit has not explained the variations in the three respective result sheets, neither have the said averments debunked the fact that Exhibits A26, 27 and 28 were submitted to the 3rd defendant by the 2nd defendant or that the certified true copies of these exhibits were not obtained from the 3rd defendant.

“The 1st defendant, having not taken any step to controvert the case of plaintiff concerning the falsity of Exhibits A26, A27 and A28 has therefore allowed the case of the plaintiff to remain uncontroverted.

“I therefore find that Exhibits A26, A27 and A28 submitted are not authentic results and are self-contradictory. Therefore, they are false in all material particular and I so hold. I resolve issue one in favour of the plaintiff.

The judge found that Ibezim failed to prove that the various names in his credentials are one and the same.

The court faulted Ibezim’s claim that it was his senior brother, Emmanuel Ibezim, who signed the declaration of age he submitted, noting that the signatures in the age declaration document and other documents he (Ibezim) admitted signing look the same.

“I find that the allegation that the 1st defendant signed the statutory declaration of age for himself (Exhibit A25) as the declarant/deponent, but purported to do so as his elder brother, Emmanuel Ibezim, is established with uncontroverted evidence in this case.”

Justice Ekwo also faulted the affidavit and newspaper publications Ibezim submitted in support of his claim that the names were all his.

“Again, I do not think that the 1st defendant can use affidavit to correct the names. It is common sense to state that the certificates were not issued by the court but the institutions authorized to issue them.

“If there is any error on any academic certificate, it is the institution that issued it that has the power to correct the error not the High Court Registry. It is in this regard that I find that Exhibit SF16 which is

the affidavit of conciliation of name is bereft of probative value and I so hold.

“Now that I have found that the information contained in the affidavit and other documents submitted by the 1st defendant to the 2nd and 3rd defendants is false, I enter judgment as follows:

* A declaration is hereby made that the 1st defendant is not qualified/eligible for nomination to contest Imo North Senatorial by-election, having made false statements/declarations in the affidavit and documents he submitted to the 3rd defendant for the purpose of contesting Imo North Senatorial by-election.

*An order of injunction is hereby made restraining the 3rd defendant from accepting the nomination of the 1st defendant as the 2nd defendant’s candidate for Imo North Senatorial by-election.

“This means that this court has issued an order disqualifying the 1st defendant from contesting the Imo North Senatorial by-election,” the judge said.

He proceeded to rebuke INEC for the way it went about defending Ibezim in the case, querying its impartiality.

“I must rebuke the 3rd defendant (INEC) for obvious partisanship in this case. It is not in the place of the 3rd defendant to work so hard like a paid labourer to defend the 1st defendant.

“By the name of the 3rd defendant, it is an independent being. It must never allow itself to be tied to the apron strings of any person natural or artificial. Even though the labour of the 3rd defendant in this ended in vain, such vigour merely to defend a party in a case questions the impartiality of the 3rd defendant and I will say no more.”

Appeal court sacks Araraume as APC candidate

Simultaneously, the Court of Appeal sitting in Owerri sacked Senator Ifeanyi Araraume as APC candidate and declared Frank Ibezim as the authentic candidate of the party.

The court faulted the November 6, 2020 judgment of the Federal High Court which sacked Ibezim and announced Araraume as the rightful winner of APC primary election.

The justice ordered INEC to immediately enlist Ibezim’s name as the candidate of the party for the by-election.

He said that the revalidation of the candidacy of Ibezim was in tandem with the Electoral Act, having won the APC primary in September.

Araraume had represented the district between 1999 and 2007.

The Nation gathered that Araraume was going to the Supreme Court to appeal the judgment.

Dogara, Mohammed poised for supremacy battle in Baraza Dass

The by-election in Baraza Dass State Constituency in Bauchi is being touted as a test of political strength between Governor Bala Mohammed of Bauchi State and former House of Representatives Speaker Yakubu Dogara.

The duo had worked together in the 2019 elections only to pull apart in July when Dogara returned to the APC.

Their campaigns have been particularly intense in Dass Local Government Area.

Flying the APC flag is Bala Lukshi, a four-time former councillor in Bogoro Local Government Area, while the PDP is fielding Bala Lawal Wandì.

The PDP, which currently has 10 members in the state assembly as against APC's 20, is pulling all strings to win the election and Governor Mohammed intent on neutralising Dogara's influence in Bogoro, Dass and Tafawa Balewa federal constituency.

The by-election is meant to replace Musa Mante of the APC. Mante was assassinated at his residence in Dass Local Government Area four months ago.



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