

Rivers: Two killed as chaos erupts over forceful takeover of councils

·Ijaw youths protest continued stay in office of LG chairmen, destroy Wike's statue ·Fubara meets security chiefs ·Gov directs administrative heads to take charge of LGs ·Police take over council secretariats ·G60 lawmakers ask gov to file treason suit against 23 ex-council bosses

From Amaechi Okonkwo and Kehinde Akintola

FOLLOWING the Local Government crisis rocking Rivers State, two security operatives have lost their lives in the line of duty.

It was gathered that the sad deaths which occurred in Omuma Local Government Area on Tuesday, might not be unconnected with the invasion of the council headquarters at Eberi-Omuma.

Confirming the incident, the spokesperson for the Rivers State Police Command, Grace Iringe-Koko, said two deaths were recorded.

She said a policeman and a vigilante operative lost their

lives in the crisis.

She also said "to forestall more bloodshed and prevent a further breakdown of law and order, the police have taken over all the 23 council secretariats and some critical government infrastructure in the state."

However, following the tense atmosphere at local government secretariats in Rivers State on Tuesday, Governor Siminalayi Fubara met with security chiefs behind closed doors at the Government House, Port Harcourt.

The security council meeting had been convened after the battle to take charge of local council secretariats took a chaotic dimension on Tuesday, with gunshots rending

the air amid confrontations involving pro and anti-Fubara supporters, with security agents battling to restore peace.

It was also reported that the statue of the former governor, Nyesom Wike, was destroyed by those who invaded the secretariat.

While the 23 local government chairmen insisted that their tenure was yet to expire, Governor Fubara, had in a statewide broadcast, directed Heads of Local Government Administration to take charge of their councils, reiterating that the tenure of embattled local government chairmen expired on Monday.

Addressing journalists after the security council meeting,

Fubara said the discussion was to deliberate on strategies to contain the invasion of local government secretariats.

He cautioned the embattled council chairmen against harbouring hopes of returning to their positions.

Speaking further, Fubara alleged there was a plan by his opponents to arrest his supporters.

He pledged to personally protect them, saying anyone attempting such arrests would have to confront him first.

Among councils where skirmishes were recorded was the Port Harcourt Local Government secretariat when its embattled chairman, Allwell Ihunda attempted to enter the council secretariat.

Gunshots were fired when Allwell attempted to enter the secretariat while he was chased away by some youths when he tried to make his way to the premises.

Under canopies and in jubilant mood, outside the secretariat, some youths of Ijaw origin waved the Ijaw Youth Congress flags, while others held placards with solidarity messages for Fubara amid heavy security presence.

In various addresses, the Ijaw youths maintained that they were out to ensure that no chairman stayed after expiration of his three-year tenures.

In Obio/Akpor, a vehicle belonging to its outgoing chairman, George Ariolu was vandalised.

Across the various councils, there was heavy security presence.

The embattled chairmen were holding on to the Local Government Amendment Bill passed into law and vetoed by the Martin Amaewhule led Assembly.

According to the embattled chairmen, the law empowered the Rivers State Assembly to extend the tenure of council chairpersons, their vice, and councillors where it is deemed impossible to hold elections before the end of their three-year tenure.

But a court nullified the amended law, prompting an appeal.

The appeal court is set to deliver a ruling on the matter on June 20, 2024.

Meanwhile, opposition federal lawmakers under the aegis of G60 on Tuesday rose from an emergency meeting in Abuja describing the attempt by 23 former Local Government Chairmen in Rivers State to forcefully

retain their seats after the constitutional expiration of their three years tenure as a treasonable act.

The group led by Hon. Ikenga Imo Ugochinyere at a press conference held at the National Assembly, Abuja therefore called on the Rivers State Government to immediately prepare treason charges against the local government chairmen and their sponsors over the committal of the alleged act.

Ugochinyere who was flanked by Honourable Aliyu Mustapha (Kaduna), Hon Matthew Nwogu (Imo) and Honourable Midaila Usman (Borno), accused the former LGA chairmen of breaching the provisions of Section 37 (1) of the Criminal Code Act, Section 39 of the Nigeria Police Act; Section 12 of the Criminal Procedure Code; Section 23 of the Criminal Procedure Code and Section 1(2) of the 1999 Constitution that frowns at anybody or group of persons that attempts to unlawfully occupy position of power in the country or forcefully attempt to take over government in any part of Nigeria.

He, therefore, called on the judiciary to remain vigilant in curbing the activities of persons desperate to take over institutions of governance in Rivers State or any part of the country.

The lawmakers frowned at what they referred to as attempted treason organized by the former local government chairmen who wanted to use magistrates/ judges from neighbouring states to conduct a kangaroo swearing in ceremony around 5am this morning despite the fact that their tenure expired since 17th of this month.



Rivers State governor, Sir Siminalayi Fubara (middle); State Director, DSS, Clara Olike (third right); Commander, 6 Division Garrison & Commander, Sector 3, Joint Task Force (JTF), South-South Operation Delta Safe, Brig.-Gen. Eddie Effiong (second right); Commander, 115 Special Operations Group, NAF, Group Captain Ali H. Idris (right); Commander NNS Pathfinder, Commodore Desmond O.C. Igbo (third left); Commissioner of Police, Olatunji Disu (second left), and State Commandant, Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps, Mr Basil Igwebueze (left), shortly after the State Security Council Meeting in the Government House, Port Harcourt, on Tuesday.

Cholera: Lagos govt, physicians task schools, parents on personal, environmental hygiene

Lagos govt task schools, parents on preventive measures