

Three feared dead as thugs set three Rivers LGs ablaze after IGP orders withdrawal of policemen from secretariats

• Call Wike to order, should let Fubara breathe, Bode George advises Tinubu

• INC wants President to pay special attention to Rivers politics

• Tinubu orders police to restore security at LG secretariats

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RIVERS State, on Monday morning, witnessed widespread violence, involving shootings, burning and protests by persons suspected to be supporters of the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Nyesom Wike, across several local government secretariats, all in an effort to prevent the newly-elected chairmen of local governments from taking over the council secretariats.

The violence started a few hours after the Rivers State police command announced its withdrawal from the secretariats that it had sealed up since early July on the orders of the Inspector-General of Police (IGP), Kayode Egbetokun.

The new chairmen emerged following Saturday's election and were sworn-in on Sunday by Governor Siminalayi Fubara.

Some of the local governments that were torched included Elemo, which sections of the secretariat was reportedly discovered in flames by the chairman, Brain Gokpa, when he arrived the place with his supporters to assume office.

Ikwerre local government area was also torched by the protesters who set ablaze the recently-constructed administrative block, one of the celebrated achievements of Samuel Nwanosike, the former elected chairman.

Gunmen reportedly chased the newly chairman and his supporters out of the secretariat before setting the place on fire.

Same for Emohua local government, which was also reportedly set ablaze by the same set of hoodlums later in the day. Some youths were reported to have blocked the entrance of the secretariat, chanting songs in solidarity with the FCT minister, Nyesom

Wike, and insisting that the new chairman, David Omereji, would not be allowed to take office.

Violence also erupted in Obio/Akpor LGA, where bottles were thrown during a confrontation, although the police successfully contained the situation.

Shootings were reported in Khana Local Government Area, as one person was feared killed during sporadic gunfire on the road leading to the Rector's Lodge.

Members of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the Action Peoples Party (APP) reportedly clashed in a protest at Khana council secretariat following the withdrawal of the police from the area.

In Ahoada East Council Secretariat, the Army was said to have taken over the area as one person, suspected to be the brother of the Chief of Staff, Government House was shot dead and others injured by bullets.

Initial attempts by the thugs to block access to the secretariat were dislodged after a shooting incident, leaving three people injured with bullet wounds.

Also, a video emerged of shootings in Oyigbo local government area showing about three victims lying either dead or wounded, though it was reported that the chairman, Dr Gift Okere, has taken control of the council secretariat, with administrative activities commencing immediately following the swearing-in of the vice chairman and 10 elected councilors.

Meanwhile, no arrests have been made and the police are yet to release any statement on the situation, raising fear of a potential escalation of violence across the local councils in the state.

Earlier, the Rivers police command, in a statement, announced its decision to unseal the secretariats based on directives from the Inspector-General of Police (IGP),

Kayode Egbetokun.

Newly-deployed Commissioner of Police, Bala Mustapha, relayed the IGP's order to withdraw police personnel stationed at the secretariats to ensure neutrality and the smooth functioning of democratic processes. The police emphasised they would only return if a security threat emerged.

It urged residents to remain calm and assured them of maintaining peace.

IG orders unsealing of secretariats

Earlier, the IGP, Kayode Egbetokun, ordered the unsealing of the 23 local government area secretariats which had been under lock since July.

The order is not unconnected with the conduct of local government election on Saturday and swearing-in of elected chairmen on Sunday by Governor Fubara.

According to a statement signed by the state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Grace Iringe-Koko, the re-opening of the secretariats is "in view of the recent political developments in Rivers State."

The statement said; "the newly deployed Commissioner of Police, Bala Mustapha, hereby conveys the directives of the Inspector-General of Police (IGP) for the immediate withdrawal of all police personnel previously deployed to these locations in the local government secretariats in the state."

"This decision is in line with the commitment of the Nigeria Police Force to ensure neutrality and the smooth functioning of democratic institutions."

"Consequently, the IGP has ordered the unsealing of the local government secretariats, which were earlier secured by police personnel. The police will only be redeployed to these locations in the event of any crisis or breakdown of law and order, in which case, emergency measures will be

swiftly implemented to restore normalcy.

"The Rivers State police command assures the public of its readiness to maintain peace and order across the state and will continue to act professionally in discharging its duties."

Call Wike to order, he should let Fubara breathe, Bode George charges Tinubu

A former deputy national chairman of the PDP, Chief Olabode George, has called on President Bola Tinubu to call the Minister of FCT to order and allow Governor Fubara work and deliver dividends of democracy, warning that the president would be the biggest loser should the country's democracy be truncated due to ongoing crisis in the state.

George gave this warning on Monday in a statement made available to newsmen, saying now is the time for former Governor Wike to allow Governor Fubara work and deliver dividends of democracy "now that the people of Rivers State have boldly asserted their civic and constitutional rights by coming out to vote in the local government election on Saturday."

The PDP chieftain said that political happenings in the oil-bearing state in the last few months, if allowed to continue, could lead to a re-enactment of the crisis in the defunct Western Region between 1962 and 1966.

According to Chief George, that sad event eventually led to the first military coup of January 15, 1966, with many notable persons killed, and consequently "to a second coup on July 29, 1966, when scores of military officers were killed."

"Now that the people of Rivers State have boldly asserted their civic and constitutional rights by coming out to vote in the local government election on Saturday, this is the time for former governor of the state and now FCT minister, Nyesom

Wike, to allow Governor Siminalayi Fubara work and deliver dividends of democracy to the people.

"This is also the time for President Bola Tinubu to advise Wike, who is one of his ministers, to allow the governor to work."

"I say this with all sense of responsibility because if this democracy is truncated, God forbid, Tinubu, as the Commander-in-Chief, will be the biggest loser," George warned.

INC wants Tinubu to pay special attention to Rivers politics

The Ijaw National Congress (INC) Worldwide has urged President Tinubu to pay close attention to political developments in Rivers to avert a breakdown of law and order, the *News Agency of Nigeria (NAN)* has reported.

President of INC, Professor Benjamin Okaba, said this in a statement on Monday in Abuja, that "Rivers is of special interest to the INC as lots of Ijaw people are indigenes of the state."

"The INC believes that the issues we are dealing with in Rivers are far beyond political godfatherism, but that of desperation for state capture by all means and at all cost."

"The extent to which some of the *dramatis personae* are going with their self-seeking adventurous activities is quite worrisome as it appears that they do not care if democracy is truncated in Nigeria."

"Local government elections are not new in Nigeria. Indeed, it is a constitutional requirement that falls within the legislative purview of the states," he said.

He said three states in Nigeria, Akwa-Ibom, Benue and Jigawa, conducted local government elections at the same time as Rivers with less rancour.

Okaba further said INC could not comprehend how a Federal High Court would restrain the police from performing

their constitutional responsibilities.

"It is the opinion of the INC that the Rivers local government election has come and gone and so it is time to now give peace a chance in the state."

"Since elections are periodic exercises, we advise those who disagree with Gov Fubara to wait for next election."

"Let everyone be reminded that a similar situation in the defunct South-Western Nigeria between Obafemi Awolowo and Ladoke Akintola led to the truncating of Nigeria's first republic."

"History can brutally repeat itself if people refuse to learn," Okaba also said.

Tinubu orders police to restore security at Rivers LG secretariats

President Tinubu has directed the police to restore and maintain peace, law and order immediately following reports of arson in some local government secretariats in the state.

He has also called on Governor Fubara, political leaders and their supporters in the state to exercise restraint and uphold the rule of law.

According to a statement issued on Monday by Bayo Onanuga, Special Adviser (Information and Strategy), in response to recent tensions following last Saturday's local government council election, the president expressed concern over reports of arson and explosions in the state.

He urged all political actors to de-escalate the situation and discourage their supporters from engaging in violence or destructive actions.

While instructing law enforcement agencies to bring the situation under control, he emphasised the need to ensure the security of public institutions.

According to President Tinubu, the judiciary can settle all political disputes, and the outcome of this election should be no exception.

Rivers crisis: Wike should let go — Fubara