

Onitsha crisis: Obi extends curfew again, dispels rumours of planned bombing

JOHN AMEH

THE Anambra State government has extended the curfew it imposed on Onitsha by one more week, as the full enforcement of the proscription of the National Association of Road Transport Owners and the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra begins on Sunday (today).

The state governor, Mr. Peter Obi, who announced this in his third broadcast in less than 20 days to the people of the state on Saturday, said that the curfew would be in place till July 9.

The extension of the curfew, however, coincided with

rumours that the joint military and police team deployed in Onitsha in the wake of the ongoing violence in the city had concluded plans to bomb it on Monday.

Fegge, a part of Onitsha-South Local Government Area, believed to be one of the biggest strongholds of MASSOB, was reported to have been identified as the area the team had planned to drop the bomb.

It was speculated that the team was working on a security report that many residential buildings in crowded Fegge were serving as hide-out for hoodlums.

Last week alone, two persons were shot dead, while 69 others were arrested during a clash between MASSOB and the team on Silas/Works Road, Fegge.

On Wednesday, hoodlums attacked the Methodist Archbishop of Onitsha, Bishop Chibuzor Opoko, and took members of his family hostage for five hours.

The cleric was accused of spying for the team and offering information on the operations of MASSOB and other armed groups. Opoko denied it.

Sunday Punch learnt that the bomb scare had forced residents to flee Fegge in droves to avoid being killed.

But, in his broadcast, Obi

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the very same maladies of conflicts and lack of peace and security that he was sorting out in foreign lands, he used vast undisclosed resources of our country on keeping peace and resolving crises abroad all aimed at winning the Nobel prize for peace", he explained.

He advised Obasanjo's aides to help the president to restore his image, which, he said, had been badly damaged nationally and internationally as a result of the ill-fated third-term agenda.

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man beings who are not your house boys or dependants.

ity borne out of frustration," Ojo added.

Obi extends curfew again

Continued from Page 6

dispelled the rumours and held those behind NARTO, MASSOB and other armed groups responsible for the development, "for the simple reason that they do not want to leave."

Some portions of the text of the broadcast read, "I regret, however, to note that our success in restoring peace is being blighted by unfounded rumours clearly calculated to again disrupt public order.

"I wish to assure you, my dear people, that Onitsha is not under any threat from any quarters. The only threat that raised its ugly head has been smashed.

"It came from criminals who seized our motor parks, markets and streets, collecting revenue that should accrue to the state and pocketing same; seizing motorists and travellers and relieving

them of their personal items."

Elsewhere in Nnewi, Ekwulobia and Igbo-Ukwu towns, reports said the combined military and police team engaged suspected NARTO members in a shoot-out on Saturday morning.

The team was said to have gone to the towns to chase out members of the group who relocated from Onitsha amid the mop operation there to terrorise motorists in parks and markets.

Casualty figures were not known at press time. Though Obi confirmed the latest development, he referred questions on casualties to the police.

Efforts by *Sunday Punch* to get the comments of the state police command's image maker, Mr. Fidelis Agbo, however failed. His mobile

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Obi extends curfew again

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phone was switched off.

Meanwhile, a Transition / Caretaker Committee of the apex Igbo socio-cultural organisation, *Ohanaeze* Ndi-Igbo, led by Admiral Ndubuisi Kanu (rtd), has called on Obi to implement the government white paper on past Anambra crises.

Kanu, who led members of the committee and many top officials of the group on a visit to Obi at the Government House, Awka, on Saturday, observed that the implementation of the document would bring lasting solution to the Anambra situation.

"We state without equivocation that the law of the land must take its due course as a way of ensuring that this type of thing does not happen again", he stated.

He revealed that the

group was in Anambra State to hold a meeting as part of its resolve to find a focused leadership for *Ohanaeze*, which the Igbo people would be proud of.

Obi, however, replied that since his predecessor, Dr. Chris Ngige, declared publicly that he had forgiven the perpetrators of previous crises, there was no way he could revisit the issues.

MASSOB's Director of Information, Eastern Region, Mr. Mac David, claimed on Saturday that so far, over 20 members of the organisation had been killed since last week by the team.

His claim was, however, denied by the commander of the team, Col. John Eneche in Onitsha.

According to him, only about five persons have lost their lives.

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