

Curfew in Onitsha

John Ameh, Onitsha

FOR the second time in about five months, the Anambra State Government on Sunday imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew on Onitsha.

The curfew followed escalating violent clashes in the commercial city.

The development came as five more persons were confirmed killed on Saturday night, bringing the death toll to around 12.

Seven persons were reportedly killed earlier on Thursday in the clashes, involving the National Association of Road Transport Owners, the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra on the one hand and the police on the other.

The Governor of the state, Mr. Peter Obi, who announced the curfew in a broadcast in Awka, the state capital, said that it would be in place between 7pm and 6am from Sunday, June 18, to Saturday, June 24 in the first instance.

The governor said that he was in constant consultation with President Olusegun Obasanjo over the situation.

He explained that the curfew was one of the measures being put in place to stop the ongoing killings and loss of property in Onitsha.

Earlier, on Saturday, a worried Obi, called on the Federal Government to deploy soldiers in Onitsha to assist the police.

He said, "Once again, I appeal to the microcosm attempting to disrupt Anambra's peace to desist."

"I urge parents and guardians to advise their children (and wards) to desist from actions that can only earn them unpleasant consequences."

He added that in addition to the joint police-military patrol of the city, he would meet with various stakeholders and "security agencies on further ways to ensure lasting peace."

Obi, who proceeded on an assessment tour of the scores of the clashes, was informed by residents of the affected parts of the city that NARTO and MASSOB were largely to blame for the violence.

At the Onitsha-Owerri Road, where the shooting between the groups and the police was heavier, a resident, Mr. Chukwula Ofo, told Obi that the first skirmish reported on Thursday was caused by MASSOB, while that from Friday to Saturday, was blamed on NARTO.

He said, "I saw it all. They killed five people at Eze-Iweka on Saturday, they set two of them ablaze."

people said they were fighting over the control of motor parts, from where they collect revenue."

That was the major cause of the whole thing, they have destroyed a lot of property and people are now living in fear."

During the administration of the immediate past governor of the state, Dr. Chris Ngige, NARTO was outlawed by a legislation of the state House of Assembly as Ngige had its members responsible for the November 10, 2004 mayhem in the state.

'I'll go next year'

Kaduna State, Alhaji Balababe Musa and a former Anambra State governor, Dr. Chris Ngige, alleged that Obasanjo had not reciprocated on his desire to extend his tenure in office.

"For as long as I live, I want to be of service to humanity and to God. I will be doing community service and I regard the whole country as my community now," the President's Senior Special Adviser on Media, Mrs. Remi Oyo quoted him as having told the Associated Press.

"When I took this job (the President of the country), I took it on the basis of the constitution which stipulates two terms of four years," Obasanjo added.

The group had however, continued to operate, clashing at times with MASSOB.

MASSOB has been advising the people of the state to reject the "illegal levies" being charged by NARTO in "The Republic of Biafra."

It was gathered that during such clashes, members of the group resorted to harassing innocent Nigerians plying the Onitsha-Owerri Expressway and the Niger Bridge, and extorted valuables from them.

In the latest clashes, the police were among the worst hit, losing one Armoured Personnel Carrier, one Indian-made Tata truck, four buses, two stations and with many of their men wounded.

Asked to confirm the exact cause of the agitation by NARTO and other groups, Obi replied, "They are agitating for nothing other than extorting money from the people of Anambra State and innocent law-abiding people."

On Sunday, some soldiers were seen stationed at the flash

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making in Africa and other parts of the world.

Obasanjo also said that he intended to campaign vigorously for the election of Peoples Democratic Party candidates during 2007 poll.

The Federal Government, he reassured would do everything possible to prevent crisis and ensure that the elections were transparently conducted.

He also dismissed claims in some quarters that Nigeria's foreign reserves were less than what the Federal Government disclosed.

Obasanjo said, "When we came in 1999, our foreign reserves stood at \$3.7 billion. Today, it is over \$34 billion. Some Nigerians confuse un-

points in Upper Iweka to ward off the surging combined forces of men believed to be loyal to NARTO and MASSOB.

In Awka, the Assistant Inspector-General of Police, Zone 9, Mr. Ade Aikaka, reportedly held an emergency meeting with riot police unit commanders to step up security measures.

Aikaka temporarily relocated to Anambra State on Saturday from Umuahia, the zonal headquarters.

expended income with foreign reserves."

He said that he would continue to energetically pursue efforts to recover funds stolen from Nigeria and stashed away in foreign banks.

"We will keep on putting pressure to get our money back. Whenever we locate such looted funds, we will fight tooth and nail to get it back," Obasanjo pledged.

The President also denied that there was a growing damp-down on the media.

"I believe that I am one of the most tolerant Presidents in the world and that responsible journalism has a role to play in development," he said.

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