

Violence mars Rivers poll, Wike's aides, thugs arrested

By - March 20, 2016

	Senate	House of Reps	House of Assembly
Wike's unit	PDP -230/APC -14	PDP - 259 / APC - 14	PDP - 277 / APC - 14
Amaechi's unit	PDP - 4 / APC -474	PDP - 4 / APC - 472	PDP - 4 / APC - 474



(1)Wike's aide, Cyril Nwite (in purple), with other suspects. (2) A gunshot victim in a police van. (3)An injured voter during the elections on Saturday. Photos: Simon Utebor & Saharareporters

(1)Wike's aide, Cyril Nwite (in purple), with other suspects. (2) A gunshot victim in a police van. (3)An injured voter during the elections on Saturday. Photos: Simon Utebor & Saharareporters

Chukwudi Akasike, Simon Utebor and Friday Amobi

No fewer than seven persons were feared killed during the National and State Assemblies re-run election that was held in Rivers State on Saturday.

The election was marred by violence which forced the Independent National Electoral Commission to cancel the exercise in six out of the 23 local government areas of the state.

This was as the Secretary to the Rivers State Government, Mr. Kenneth Kobani, was arrested by soldiers in Gokana for allegedly stalling the distribution of election materials.

The local government areas where the election was cancelled according to INEC were Tai, Khana, Gokana, Andoni, Eleme and Bonny.

It was gathered that killings were recorded in Nonwa, Tai; Rumuokuta in Obio/Akpor; and Eleme LGAs, even as gunmen engaged security agents in fierce gun battles in Eleme and Akuku-Toru LGAs.

Two persons were said to have been killed in Asari-Toru Local Government Area.

One Gabriel Amachree was said to have been shot by unknown gunmen suspected to be political thugs in Abonnema, the headquarters of the LGA.

Also, a member of the Peace Corps was said to have lost his life after he was shot in Abalama, a community in the same LGA.

A man identified as John Nyenwe was said to have been shot in Omanwa in Ikwerre LGA while another person identified as an INEC official was reportedly shot dead by suspected thugs.

In Tai, one Tambari was said to have been shot by a soldier in Nonwa, the headquarters of Tai Local Government Area.

Meanwhile, nine persons with voting materials but without any police escort were arrested by soldiers in Port Harcourt.

Those arrested were members of INEC's ad hoc staff, who said they did not need any escort since their destination was not far.

A man, Lucky Sunday, who claimed to be one of the adhoc staff for the senatorial and House of Reps election, told reporters that they were distributing the election materials to different voting points.

"On our way to the RAC centre, with my Supervisory Presiding Officer, we were stopped by the military team who asked us why we were going about without a police officer. My SPO was trying to explain to them that our unit, Unit 23, Ward 1 at Tombia Street, was just close by.

"My SPO had taken us to so many centres and this was the last centre that we were

going; we had been dropping people in the other units.

"As a matter of fact, we had been to this particular unit before but we had to go back to the INEC Office at CFC in Port Harcourt when we discovered that there was no ballot box. It was while we were going back that we were arrested," Sunday said.

In Gokana LGA, suspected political thugs working for one of the major political parties reportedly threw an explosive device suspected to be dynamite into the INEC office in the area.

The Rivers State SSG, Kobani, had earlier complained about the delay in the commencement of voting and the presence of fake result sheets, insisting that in view of the anomaly the election should not hold.

Disturbed by the situation, a group of soldiers were said to have taken him away in order to allow the exercise to hold in the area.

However, not too long after this, a group of suspected political thugs stormed the area and engaged the security operatives there in a gun battle.

However, a military source told one of our correspondents that Kobani was not arrested and that his only his movement was restricted.

"No, we did not arrest him; we only restricted his movement and later allowed him to go," the source said.

In Rumuomoi Ward 12, Obio/Akpor LGA, some members of the National Youth Service Corps abandoned their duty posts for some minutes when the atmosphere became charged before security agents were called in to beef up security.

It took the appeal of some indigenes of the area before the corps members, who were sweating profusely, agreed to go back to their post and continue with the conduct of the election.

On the cancelled elections, the state INEC Public Relations Officer, Antonia Nwobu, told

SUNDAY PUNCH that the commission decided to "suspend" the polls in six LGAs due to high level of violence and security breach.

Nwobu, however, explained that a rerun would hold in the affected LGAs on a yet-to-be fixed date.

Earlier, Governor Nyesom Wike, who voted by 12.02pm, said the INEC was not prepared for the election, even as he expressed sadness over reports of fake result sheets being used in some parts of the state.

The governor also urged the commission to always speak out when confronted with challenges.

Wike said, "I stood for over five minutes before the card reader captured me. Generally, I am impressed with the security arrangement. On the part of INEC, I cannot give them a pass mark as far as I am concerned.

"We have said on several occasions that if you know that you have a problem, let the world know that you have a problem. Do not tell the world that you are prepared when you know that you are not prepared.

"Most people would have boycotted this election today because people are saying that there are fake result sheets and they have tried to call the INEC commissioner to ascertain the truth. INEC is not properly prepared but security is doing their best."

Responding to the claim that fake result sheets were seen in some areas, the State Resident Electoral Commissioner, Mr. Aniedi Ikoiwak, dismissed the allegation, saying it was not possible for the commission to distribute fake materials.

"I don't think there was anything like fake result sheets; I have said that times without number. What we know in the commission is that only a result sheet was produced and you cannot say a thing that does not have a duplicate is fake, because fake must be compared with the original.

"What we had was the original; the fake may be in the imagination of those making such

an allegation. I did mention it clearly that if by act of commission or omission, we are not allowed to occupy the RACs, we cannot actually guarantee that we can deliver 100 per cent.

"Today, we had the experience where most of our materials were not even allowed to move in; some were returned on the way. Even when we tried to move to the RACs in some of the places this morning, certain people with excuses also tried to prevent us.

"There were accusations of not believing in the materials we brought and so and so forth. There were issues of violence; there were issues of insecurity of lives. After all we let the people know, but at the end of the day, we were still prevented from moving out.

"From 12pm to 1pm, we did not see that it was necessary for us to continue to press to go to the field. Even some of our people who were able to get to the field turned back because of sporadic shootings.

"It is better for the life of the personnel to be preserved than trying to conduct the election, even when the environment is not conducive," the INEC REC added.

The election was also characterised by delay in some parts of the state and voter apathy as less than 50 per cent of registered voters turned out for the exercise.

The House of Representatives candidate for Obio/Akpor Federal Constituency, Tony Okocha, expressed sadness over the alleged hijacking of election materials in one of the wards in Obio/Akpor LGA.

Okocha, the candidate of the All Progressives Congress, stated that thugs had accosted a bus conveying the materials to their destination, chased away INEC officers before carting away the materials.

"We cannot continue to allow this criminality to happen in Rivers State. We must be able to hold election without violence. I don't know why they are afraid of a free and fair election," he said.

Copyright PUNCH.