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## Rivers re-run: Fear of violence spreads

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- Gridlock as people desert Port Harcourt
- DSS operative feared dead during crossfire with hoodlums
- Wike tasks INEC, security agencies on rule of law
- Don't be intimidated, Peterside tells voters
- No electoral material missing – PDP, APC agents

By JIMITOTA ONOYUME &amp; DAVIES IHEAMNACHOR

**IN SPITE** of the huge presence of security men for today's rerun for some National and state Assembly seats in Rivers State, there is thick fear of

violence in the state.

And the fear that is hinged on the incessant violence and killings that have totally ruptured the peace enjoyed in the state prior to the 2015 general elections, may affect voters' turnout today.

The killings, allegedly instigated by some political gladiators, who want power by all means, had worsened after the Appeal Court annulled the election of the legislative seats that would be re-contested today.

Less than 24 hours to the scheduled polls, anxiety has enveloped the state leading some residents to leave Rivers for neighbouring states.

Some junctions in the state, yesterday, witnessed heavy gridlock as people were leaving Port Harcourt in droves.

The palpable fear deepened based on an interim injunction secured by the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, from a State High Court, Wednesday, barring the Nigerian Army from participating in the rerun elections.

Based on suit PHC/601/2016, filed by the PDP, Justice G O Omereji, ordered: "That an Order of Interim Injunction be and is hereby made restraining the 1st (Hon. Chibuike Amaechi) 5th ( INEC) and 6th ( REC) respondents from the use and deployment of the 2nd (Chief of Defence Staff) 3rd (Chief of Army Staff) and 4th (Brig-Gen. Steve Olabanji) respondents whether by themselves, their agents, servants, operatives or privies to conduct, monitor and supervise the state and National Assembly rerun."

The knowledge that the military may not be part of the elections today worsened the situation of voters.

Some residents told *Saturday Vanguard* that they would not take part in today's elections because of the fear that armed men may invade some polling units to unleash mayhem.

### One DSS operative feared dead



There was serious crossfire, yesterday, between security operatives deployed to Rivers State ahead of the today's legislative rerun elections and unidentified gunmen, and an operative alleged to be attached

to Department for Security Service was feared killed.

This is coming barely 24 hours after a major in the Army and two other soldiers were killed in a creek around Akuku-Toru LGA.

It was gathered that some masked gunmen had yesterday, evening, around Egi clan in the volatile Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of the state engaged the security personnel posted to the area in a gun duel.

It was learnt that during the heavy shootout that the security operative was gunned down.

At the moment, tension has heightened in the area as some communities

are already becoming lifeless at the time of this report. Confirming the development, the Assistant Director, Army Public Relations, 2 Brigade, Port Harcourt, Capt. Eli Lazarus stated that hoodlums engaged the joint security team in a gunbattle.

Voters from the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni, Gokana, Khana, Akuku-Toru, Asari-Toru, Ikwerre, Abua/Odua and Emohua local councils that were recently affected by killings or military invasions expressed deep fears.

A resident of Omoku in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA, Mr. Osere Rafter said: “I don’t want to vote in the election. We will not participate in the election because of the insecurity in ONELGA. We want to be apolitical because we don’t want to die.

“My wife was supposed to work as an SPO in the election but I asked her to turn it down. There is nothing special about it. What heightened the fear in the area before the people took the decision that they will not vote was the murder of Ward 4 APC chairman in ONELGA, Franklin Obi. He was beheaded and his wife and son were also killed.

“We know Obi very well as a gentle man who does not have problem with anybody. If they will kill him then they may just come to any polling unit and open fire.

“Although, Thursday night, some troops of soldiers, police and civil defence came into Omoku town and were patrolling that will not be enough to bring voters out. Me, I will not even come outside,” he stressed.

**Don’t be intimidated, Peterside tells voters**

However, Dr Dakuku Peterside, Director-General, Nigeria Maritime Administration and Safety Agency, NIMASA, urged electorate to ensure that they exercise their franchise in today's re-run polls in the state. He also urged the people not to be intimidated by any individual or group from voting in the elections.

Peterside told newsmen in Port Harcourt, yesterday, that the era of intimidating the people to manipulate the electoral system was gone.

"The Federal Government has assured of adequate security during the re-run elections on Saturday (today). Nobody should feel intimidated and I urge the people to go out and vote for their candidates. There is nothing to fear because security agencies are there to protect you," he said. Peterside, who was the governorship candidate of All Progressives Candidate (APC) in the 2015 general elections, said that people were still scared of the experience of the election.

"Our people were intimidated and scared to come out to vote last year; that fear is still there, but we urge them that there is nothing to fear. That era is gone; government has provided security for the election," he said.

He said that every voter had the right to cast his ballot without being intimidated. Peterside also described as barbaric, the killing of two soldiers by sea pirates along Abonnema creek on Thursday. He said that the incident was condemnable because the soldiers were carrying out their legitimate duties.

### **Be law-abiding, Wike tasks INEC, security agencies**

This is as Governor Nyesom Wike urged the INEC and security agencies to

work within the law in the conduct of the polls.

Receiving the Consul-General of the U.S., Mr John Bray, in Port Harcourt, Wike said that the people of the state were committed to peaceful and credible polls and that INEC and security agencies should work within the law. The governor also said that the call became necessary to avoid acts capable of provoking violence. Wike commended the government and people of the U.S. for showing interest in the election. He also urged observers to go round the state to effectively monitor the election. The governor condemned the death of soldiers during an encounter with sea pirates, saying that the incident had nothing to do with the election.

Speaking earlier, the Consul-General said that the team was in the state as part of the international observers to ensure peaceful and credible re-run elections.

### **We're short of observers – Group**

Meanwhile, some international observers have expressed worries over the number of observers accredited to monitor the rerun elections in the state.

Director West Africa Network, Prince Herbert, who spoke for the observers, yesterday, in Port Harcourt, said only 12 of them were accredited to cover the elections, adding that this was unusual. Besides, Herbert said observers don't have life jackets to travel through the rivers to observe the elections. Continuing, he said they observed that sensitive and non sensitive materials had been moved from the state office of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC on Aba Road to the various local government areas, adding that the commission had also resolved matters of missing result sheets. While appealing to voters to turn

out en masse to cast their votes, the observers enjoined security operatives to discharge their duties professionally.

“As observers we observed that there are only 12 groups including American Embassy in

stead of 20. There are shortage of observers. There are 44 observers group for FCT election group. INEC accredited only 12 for Rivers. INEC should always consider observers in their arrangement. They should consider security of observers, we have no access to life jacket to access riverine communities,” he said.

### **No electoral material missing – INEC, PDP, APC agents**

As the electoral materials were moved to the local councils, Party Agents for the PDP and the All Progressives Congress, APC, have confirmed that no electoral material was missing. There were rumours yesterday morning that result sheets meant for some LGAs were missing. This rumour which suggested that the material which included original result sheets caused uneasy calm at the state office of the INEC. However, the party agents told *Saturday Vanguard* that all the materials, sensitive and non-sensitive were intact, stressing that all were set for the election. Sir. Elenchukwu Obowu, the State PDP representative, said: “Our business here is to ensure that all the material, both sensitive and non-sensitive, get to their various LGAs.