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TWO persons were feared dead yesterday in Rivers State as youths besieged the headquarters of many local government areas, following the expiration of tenure of chairmen of the 23 LGAs in the state.

This is coming as the state governor, Sir Siminalayi Fubara, thanked the ex-chairmen for their service and directed the Heads of Local Government Administration in the 23 LGAs to take charge of the administration in their various LGAs.

Fubara also assured residents that he will fearlessly lead the way to ensure that peace continues to prevail in the state, while also protecting all patriotic supporters for standing on the path of truth.

Reacting to the crisis in the state, elder statesman, Chief Edwin Clark, blamed former Governor Nyesom Wike for the precarious situation in the state, insisting that "Godfatherism must die in Rivers."

Police confirm killing of cop, vigilante member in Rivers LGA crisis

Meanwhile, the Police in Rivers State last night confirmed that two people were killed yesterday.

The Police Public Relations Officer of the Command, Grace Iringe-Koko, a Superintendent of Police, who confirmed this in Port Harcourt, said investigation into the killings has commenced.

Iringe-Koko said: "Following the breakdown of law and order in the various local government council secretariats in Rivers State where supporters of the two political factions clashed over the tenure of local council chairmen, a case of death was recorded at Eberri-Omuma, Omuma LGA, where a Police officer and a vigilante were killed. "To forestall more bloodshed and prevent a further breakdown of law and order, the Police have taken over all the 23 council secretariats and some critical government infrastructure in the state. Conventional police officers and anti-riot police officers have been deployed to these facilities."

"While urging all groups and individuals to be law-abiding, the Command also warns anyone who intends to cause mayhem as we will not hesitate to impose the full weight of the law on them."

"We also wish to ask the law-abiding residents and visitors in the state to go about their lawful businesses without fear. We are resolved to carry out our constitutional duty of protecting lives and property."

The political tension in Rivers had heightened on Monday as some of the 23



ROBOTICS — From left: Director, Terrhaptic Robotic Factory, Dr Nnamdi Chife; Chief Operating Officer, Engr. Maxwell Maduka and Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Nathaniel Nwachuku during the official launch of Terrhaptic Robotic Factory in Abuja at the weekend. Photo: Rotimi Osasona

Mayhem in Rivers as Wike, Fubara feud spills to LG HQs

ex-local council chairmen vowed to remain in office, citing an amended local government council law by the embattled 27 lawmakers loyal to former Governor Nyesom Wike, which empowered them to remain in office for six months after the expiration of their tenure.

Although the law had been repealed by the State High Court, some of the ex-chairmen threatened to remain in office, raising tension of a likely breakdown of law and order.

To forestall the anticipated breakdown of law and order, Governor Fubara in an early morning broadcast yesterday, thanked the ex-chairmen for their service and directed the Heads of Local Government Administration in the 23 LGAs to take charge of the administration in their various domains.

He said: "On behalf of the Government and the people of Rivers State, I thank you all for your sacrifices and commend your commitment to public service and our dear Rivers State. I congratulate you all for the successful completion of your tenure and wish you well in your future endeavors....."

"Heads of Local Government Administration (HLGAS) are hereby directed to immediately take charge of the Councils with renewed vigor and readiness to serve and await further directives as we navigate towards even greater accomplishments together."

Youths protest, take over LG secretariats

Despite the governor's broadcast, some of the ex-council chairmen were reported to have attempted to resume work at their council secretariats but were chased out by youths.

At the Port Harcourt City LGA Council Secretariat, the ex-chairman, Ihundah, was reported to have tried to gain access to the secretariat with his retinue of security personnel but was prevented by youths who invaded the council.

Despite sporadic gunshots by the security personnel, the youths stood their ground. It was also learned that there were shootings at Obio/Akpor, Emohua, Eleme, Khana and Omuma LGAs by unidentified persons.

At Eleme Local Government Area, youths occupied the council secretariat, stating that the governor was the only authority they knew.

The youths reportedly chased away all council officials who were opposed to the directive issued by the governor.

In their hundreds, the youths moved round the council premises, stating that they would not allow anyone to take away what belonged to the council.

Protesting youths pull down Wike's statue

At Obio/Akpor the LGA, the protesting youths pulled down the statue of the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Chief Nyesom Wike.

The angry youths also pulled down billboards and banners that had the image of Wike and the outgoing Chairman of Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Barr. George Ariolu, within the council premises.

In a viral video sighted by our correspondents, youths were seen struggling to drag the statue down.

Some of the protesters who trooped into the secretariat, joined forces and pulled the statue from its base, stating that the minister was no longer needed there.

Two die in Omuma

•Police confirm killing of cop, vigilante member •Ex-council boss chased out, Wike's statue, billboards, pulled down •Fubara directs HLGAs to take over LGA administration •Clark insists godfatherism must end in Rivers

At least two persons, a policeman attached to a politician and a vigilante member, who was among the protesters at Omuma council secretariat were reportedly shot dead during the protest.

A source in the area said a policeman attached to a politician in the area had shot the vigilante member who was among the Pro-Fubara protesters, adding that his men (vigilante members) retaliated and shot a policeman.

Another source claimed that it was the vigilante members that shot the policeman before furious security men attached to a pro-Wike politician fired back and killed the local security member.

Fubara summons emergency security meeting

Following reported threat by some of the ex-chairmen to stage a comeback, Fubara yesterday summoned an emergency meeting where he restated his commitment to protect residents of the state.

The governor, who later addressed journalists after the meeting, said: "It's really unfortunate that we started hearing some disturbing news from some LGAs of invasion of council secretariats, and it is really unfortunate. So, we have called the security council meeting, so the needful will be done."

"We are also aware that our enemy is planning a lot of things. But we will not fall into that plot. We will not also allow him or them to destroy the peace we are enjoying in the state."

He assured that he would be fearless in leading the way to ensure that peace continues to prevail in the state, while also protecting all patriotic supporters for their stand on the path of truth.

The governor vowed that no grand plan to arrest any of his patriotic supporters on trumped-up charges would be tolerated, adding that his administration would take every positive step to maintain law and order in the state.

Governor Fubara stated

that there was no extension of tenure of elected local government chairmen, adding that the law was unambiguous about it, clarifying that the court had also affirmed the position of the law.

"I'm also aware that there is a grand plan to come and arrest some of our supporters. This time around, you have to pass through me to arrest them because I don't think there is anything any of those people following us has done. Rather, they are standing on the side of truth."

"If it will cost us our lives to stand on the part of truth, we will do that. And I will be the one that will lead the course. Let me assure everyone, especially the great and peace-loving people of Rivers State: the law is the law. The law has said that there is no extension of tenure."

"The court said so, and whoever is assuring anybody anywhere of whatever, I advise them to desist from it because peace is what we need in this state. I assure everyone of you that whatever it takes to make sure that we maintain peace and order, we are not going back on that."

Ex LGA chairman accuses Fubara, CoS of instigating mayhem

Meanwhile, the former council chairman of Ikwerre local government area, Dr. Samuel Nwanosike, yesterday accused Fubara and his Chief of Staff, Edison Ehie, of hiring cultists and gunmen to cause mayhem in the 23 local government councils.

Nwanosike alleged that the governor and Edison sponsored gunmen and cultists to unleash terror on the people of the state, adding that the people of Ikwerre local government area will wait for the decision of the Appeal Court which earlier ruled that the status quo in the matter should remain.

He said: "They went and hired cultists, shooting and looting council properties in the name of governing a state."

They even shot the police. Is this the best for democracy?"

"We are calling on Mr President that this is the time to uphold the constitution of Nigeria. Governor Fubara has brought insecurity full blown into Rivers state."

But reacting to the allegation, the Commissioner for information and Communication, Waisembo Johnson, said the former chairman was merely trying to be clever by half, noting that there was no shooting anywhere in the state as alleged.

"His allegations or claims are very funny. We are not in any desperate mode to take over any council in the state. The constitution is very clear on this matter. It says that any law that is enacted at the lower level cannot supersede the constitution of the country."

"The judgment of Justice D.G. Kio of the state High Court is there for everybody to make references. The law No 2 that they made had been expunged and is not only invalid but is nonexistent. About insecurity in the state, you can see that Rivers State is very peaceful. There is no gunshot anywhere," he said.

Clark blames Wike for Rivers crisis

Reacting to the crisis in the state yesterday, elder statesman, Chief Edwin Clark, blamed Wike for the political tension in Rivers, stating that he should face his job at Federal Capital Territory, FCT, and allow Fubara to govern Rivers.

He said: "Politics of madness in Rivers State was started by Wike and his predecessor. They don't care about other people. So Wike should stay in Abuja to do his job."

"Let the young man rule his place. People said Wike made Fubara governor, yes, that is true. The man has acknowledged it. But he says, I can't worship a human being that I will worship God to show appreciation."

"But Wike said worship God through me. The man said no. That is the problem they have. Godfatherism has to stop in that state."