

Rivers After Ibok-Ette Ibas What Next?

By Reuben Abati



On Thursday, 18 September 2025, the six months' state of emergency declared in Rivers State on 18 March would have expired and this has led to high expectations among the people. The hope that this would be the case was further raised when Nyesom Wike, Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), former Governor of Rivers State and a major architect of the crisis in the state announced a few weeks back that the state of emergency will end and the suspended Governor Simi Fubara would be reinstated. It was not clear whether Wike was speaking for the Presidency of Nigeria or the National Assembly – the two major institutions that have a say in the matter within the purview of Section 305 of the 1999 Constitution or he was simply speaking for himself, characteristically assuming an authority that does not belong to him. The people's expectations were hitched higher when last week the appointed Sole Administrator, Vice Admiral Ibok-Ette Ibas embarked on a series of valedictory activities to announce his impending exit from a government he refers to as “our government.” Except there is any strange development between now and Thursday, that is the next two days, the end of the state of emergency is certain in the light of Section 305 (6) (c) of the Constitution. It is unthinkable that the proviso in that section, that is a possible extension by the National Assembly, would be contemplated under any circumstance. In any case, the National Assembly is on recess till September 23.

As he prepares for his exit and the return of the legitimate, elected Governor of Rivers State, Vice Admiral Ibas allowed himself the indulgence of boasting that he has fulfilled the mandate given to him by President Tinubu on March 18 which is: to stabilize Rivers State, re-establish its institutions and return Rivers state to full democratic governance.” He referred to what he called “the successful conduct of the polls and the swearing in of elected chairmen and councilors across

the 23 LGAs” as evidence. Indeed, the state held its local government elections on August 30. It was largely boycotted by most of the political parties and the electorate. It was shabbily conducted by the Rivers State Independent Electoral Commission (RSIEC). Out of the 23 LGAs, the All Progressives Congress (APC) won 20 seats while the People's Democratic Party (PDP) won three seats. Is it not ironic and worrisome, that in a democratic dispensation, it is a retired military chief who is now talking about democratic transition within a democracy to restore a democracy. He says he has fulfilled the mandate President Tinubu gave him. In a democratic dispensation, the mandate belongs to the people not to the President of Nigeria. The powers of the President to declare a state of emergency in any part of the Federation has been widely dismissed in the case of Rivers state as totally unjustifiable, and thereby illegal and unconstitutional. Those who are quick to cite precedents as justification refer to Plateau State (2004) and Ekiti State (2006) when President Olusegun Obasanjo appointed General Chris Alli and General Tunji Olurin as sole administrators in both states respectively. These precedents were wrong to the extent that there is nowhere in Section 305 where the President of Nigeria or the National Assembly is given the powers to unilaterally suspend the democratic structures in a state.

Besides, the extreme circumstances whereby a part of the federation descends into war or there is a threat of war or complete breakdown of law and order did not apply to Rivers state. When the Jonathan administration declared a state of emergency in some local governments in Borno and Plateau states in 2011 and in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states in 2013 -2014, no Governor of State House of Assembly was removed, which was the constitutionally appropriate thing to do in both instances. The background to the tension in Rivers

state was the refusal of the former Governor of the state, Nyesom Wike to allow his successor, Simi Fubara to govern the state. He openly boasted that he put Fubara in the position, made him Governor, and that as his Godfather, it was his prerogative to control him and the state. Fubara was at best a figure-head. His commissioners, with the exception of maybe only one, were appointed for him. Members of the House of Assembly and all the Local Government Chairmen were all Wike's boys. The state Governor was elected on the platform of the PDP, but Wike who had one leg in the PDP and another leg in the APC had pledged his loyalty to the APC and President Tinubu, without resigning from the PDP. This amphibian posture made the politics of Rivers state all the more difficult. Rather than call Wike to order, the President apparently took his side, and helped to humiliate the elected representatives of the people. Fubara was punished for trying to assert himself. Now that President Tinubu and his hit man in Rivers state have achieved their objective: with 20 out of the LGAs in the hands of the APC, and the House of Assembly also pro-Wike, obviously the people of Rivers state are the big losers. Two days after the state of emergency in Rivers was declared, 11 PDP Governors rushed to the Supreme Court to file a case (SC/CV/329/2025) challenging its constitutionality. Six months after nobody has heard anything about the case, and similar cases about Rivers state before the Courts. It is democracy that has been dealt the biggest blow.

Vice Admiral Ibok-Ette Ibas says he has restored peace in Rivers state. He over-praises himself. What they have in Rivers state at this moment is not peace but the peace of the graveyard, as well as anxiety and uncertainty about what would happen next. The Sole Administrator held an inter-denominational thanksgiving service on Sunday, September 14. If that thanksgiving proved anything, it was his lack of popularity among the people of Rivers state. The event was boycotted by prominent leaders in the state. Those in attendance were government officials, local government chairmen, service commanders and a band of hangers-on. Traditional rulers stayed away, but the Chairman of the Rivers State Council of Traditional Rulers, fulfilling all righteousness, managed to show his face. Vice Admiral Ibas quoted Bible passages and thanked God. He should not blackmail God. The crisis in Rivers state was caused by the greed and vaulting ambition of men. The Pastors who officiated at that interdenominational service also just showed how pastors are part of the problem in Nigerian politics.

Many church leaders have lost their prophetic calling. The leadership of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Pentecostal Federation of Nigeria (PFN) were among the first set of persons to visit and pay homage to the Sole Administrator on his arrival. No one should be surprised if the same set of Pastors show up at Brick House when Governor Fubara returns and they would also gladly officiate at a Thanksgiving Service to welcome him back! Ibas told the people of Rivers state: "Let us forgive, let us reconcile and let us heal..." Does he even know the people whose resources he managed for six months without accountability? How many LGAs did he visit? How many town hall meetings did he hold outside the government House? What projects did he complete? He promised to rebuild the Rivers State House of Assembly? Did he do so? When the House of Assembly reconvenes, the members would probably have to start looking for space, and they will nurse memories of conflict and division. Sole Administrator Ibas apparently spent the last six months sitting on his hands. He should be careful with his victory laps. He should sneak out of the state, Nicodemously perhaps, lest his exit is greeted with boos and jeers by the angry people of Rivers.

The people are asking for a probe of his tenure. Former Senator Lee Maeba (Rivers South East) articulates the concerns when he says "What has happened in Rivers is not gone. We will stand up to demand all the money that came to the state and the power of the Administrator to just jump into a state and start spending state money in the name of an emergency that does not exist. The State of Emergency that we hear is to restore security breaches or the breakdown of law and order. Now in this case, the man just came for politics because there was no case of insecurity. He came and started using state resources without any constitutional powers or law allowing him to do so." The same

sentiments are expressed by the South-South Youths Initiative, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the Ijaw Youth Council. In the absence of any oversight structure during the six months of emergency, the people want to know how "their money" was spent.

Their demand is legitimate. What happens next would depend on the return of Governor Simi Fubara, and what he elects to do. In the past six months, he has kept a low profile avoiding any kind of association that could lay him open to another charge of insubordination by his political masters. It was reported that he met with President Tinubu and Minister Nyesom Wike on more than one occasion. In June, he and the Minister were seen sitting together at the funeral service of the Minister's cousin, Elder Temple Onuoha. He also met with his supporters and other stakeholders to preach peace and unity. He dissolved his support groups and also warned the women not to protest on his behalf. His Twitter (X) handle (@SimFubaraKSC) has focused mostly on such greetings as "Happy Eid-ul-Mawld" "Happy this, Happy that" and "Welcome to the month of..." He has tried, as it were, to lie as low as possible. With six months taken from his four-year tenure and the humiliation to which he has been subjected, Governor Fubara has been taught some very serious lessons about the game of power. His best option when he returns is to avoid any further confrontation with his Godfather and the Godfather's local hitmen, who will be watching him closely so they can resume their usual game of rushing to Abuja to report everything that he does. He should be more worried about his political survival, the minimum in that regard being the completion of whatever remains of his tenure. He should seek reconciliation and focus more on serving the people of Rivers state to the best of his ability.

He should stay away from those elders and youths, and those commissioners and aides who advised him to stand up and fight. When he was removed as Governor, many of those leaders went underground or became visible on the other side. They are worse than the Pastors. If Fubara wants to breathe better when he returns, he should declare support for and pledge loyalty to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, and the APC, and remain only for as long as is possible in the PDP. It is unfortunate but this is the way, the manual and the grammar of Nigerian politics. It is the very reason this democracy is stillborn. However, let Nyesom Wike, the self-styled Godfather, not see himself as a conqueror. He has won nothing. He must learn not to be overbearing. He should not make demands that would be detrimental to Rivers State going forward. He should advise his tale-bearers to find better things to do with their time, and if they do not know what to do, he can find them an occupation as land agents in the Federal Capital Territory! Fubara must be allowed to work. He must be protected. President Tinubu must discourage a situation where any Minister behaves like a co-President and rides roughshod over any state.

Never again should an illegal route be adopted to address a national problem of malice. The Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Nyesom Wike, has praised President Bola Ahmed Tinubu for restoring democratic governance in Rivers State following the lifting of the emergency rule earlier imposed on the state. Wike, in a statement issued in Abuja by his Senior Special Assistant on Public Communications and Social Media, Lere Olayinka, said Tinubu's decisive action once again proves his commitment to peace and the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. According to him, the president's intervention was timely and effectively saved Rivers State from further political tension. The former two-term governor of Rivers State also applauded the people of the state for their faith in Tinubu's leadership and for their continued support of his drive to return the country to the path of growth and stability. Calling on stakeholders in Rivers to work together in the overall interest of the state, Wike stressed the need for unity and cooperation. He also warned against the activities of "fifth columnists" and troublemakers who, he said, seek to benefit from crises. "From Rivers State going forward, the only news that will emanate will be that of peace, progress, and development," the minister said.