

# Armed youths kill 5 Soliders

•As militants abduct 5 Chinese

NAPOLEON EHIREMEN

FIVE soldiers were yesterday killed at Ekiugbo in Ughelli North local government area of Delta State by some armed youths in the area just as five Chinese working for a telecommunications firm in Port Harcourt were kidnapped by yet to be identified group.

The deceased soldiers attached to the Joint Task Force (JTF), code named, "Operation Restore Hope", also lost their service rifles to the youths who were protesting an alleged oppression by the invading soldiers.

This latest development has forced the JTF Command in Effurun near Warri to deploy additional troops and armoured tanks to the area as part of the measure to restore normalcy.

The reinforcement by the military has further heightened tension in the area as residents were seen abandoning their homes and fleeing the area in their hundreds for fear of a devastating reprisal by the military.

When contacted on the phone yesterday, the JTF Commander, Brig. Gen. Alfred Ilogho, stated that the reinforcement was to ensure that the lawlessness currently experienced in the area does not go beyond this level.

Investigation by our Correspondent yesterday revealed that the killing of the soldiers by the youths was an action carried out to avenge the last Thursday's killing of three of the community youths by the soldiers.

It was learnt that the community youths were invited to the residence of a lawmaker in the area (names withheld) who had wanted a third term in the State House of Assembly. According to the information made available to *Saturday Champion*, the lawmaker whose ambition to return to the house had failed, could no longer tolerate the youths request for settlements after they had worked for him.

The lawmaker was reported to have invited the youths to his house to collect the money they claimed he was owing them while at the same time alerted the military that some youths were invading his resident at about the same time.

Unknown to the youths that they had been setup by the lawmaker, the ensuing confrontation between the soldiers and the youths was reported to have claimed the lives of three of the youths while some of them who managed to escape sustained injuries. Consequent upon this, the youths also decided to attack the soldiers which led to the recent killing.

Chinese were kidnapped in Emohua local government area of Rivers State early hours of Friday, January 5 by an unidentified group.

The incident took place at Rumuakunge where the Chinese were working for a telecommunication firm.

Barasua said no arrest has been made and called on the members of the public and community to assist the police to trace the kidnappers.

As at the time of writing this report, no group has claimed responsibility for the hostage taking.

## Bring objection against candidates now, INEC urges

CLEMENT NWOJI, Abuja

INDEPENDENT National Electoral Commission (INEC) yesterday, appealed to concerned Nigerians to come forward with their objections to the candidature of any of the political parties in the forthcoming general elections.

INEC's appeal came on the heels of its conclusion of preparations to commence the verification of the particulars of various candidates forwarded to the commission by political parties for state Houses of Assembly, National Assembly, governorship and presidential elections.

The commission's national Commissioner and Chairman, Legal Services department, Mohammed A. Abubakar made the appeal yesterday while briefing newsmen at INEC's headquarters on updates on the electoral process.

He confirmed that so far, particulars of 29 presidential candidates, many gubernatorial, National Assembly candidates had been submitted to it by political parties in compliance with the provisions of the Electoral Act, 2006 Section 32, which stipulates that it must be forwarded not less than 120 days before election.

"The Act also requests the commission to first and foremost publish the particulars of the candidates to enable any concerned Nigerians to take a look with the view of drawing the attention of the commission or filing a suit in the high court of Nigeria in respect of the claims of any particular candidate to the election," the commissioner said.

Furthermore, he explained that Section 30 (4) of the Act also vested powers on the courts in event of any Nigerian lays a complaint before them against the candidature of any particular person. Abubakar said "the court can declare the candidate unqualified to contest and thereafter, a fine of N500,000.00 is awarded against the political party that sponsored that particular candidate".

Abubakar also noted that Nigerians have another opportunity by bringing their complaints before the commission against the qualification of any candidate, while INEC has power to scrutinise the particulars submitted by the candidates, pointing out that the 1999 constitution, Section 66 (1) (i) provided that no candidate shall give to INEC a forged certificate.

Given the circumstance, he said the commission would commence the verifications for National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly candidates in their various states, where they are well known as from January 17, 2007. The verifications of gubernatorial and presidential candidates would be done at the INEC headquarters, Abuja, from January 19 - 23, 2007.

The INEC Commissioner warned that substitution could only be done by political parties, at least, 60 days before the election, adding that any substitution later than this would not be entertained by the commission. He stressed "We are not conducting screening, we are verifying the particulars of candidates submitted to us by the various parties".



• A new beginning... Motorists and commuters going about their business after the Christmas and New Year celebrations.

## The president Nige

LEONARD OKACHIE

NATIONAL Chairman of the African Democratic Congress, ADC, Chief Ralph's Okey Nwosu, has declared that the qualities of the next president should be such that would transform the nation.

Chief Nwosu has also said that the party would do more to the anti-corruption crusade if it wins the number one seat in this year's general elections.

The Chairman, who stated this recently while addressing newsmen in Lagos noted that the present government has failed to follow its reforms agenda religiously.

His words: Leadership is by example. The reform agenda should be properly followed. The

so called reforms are not well thought out. Our party intends to do differently everything they are doing. For instance, how can you have banking consolidation without adequate security? All Nigerians are stakeholders in project Nigeria. We need a well thought vision or plan to be done not by one individual alone but a group of professionals from different walks of life.

The ADC boss asserted that ADC is well positioned to win the polls thereby bringing about a change for a better Nigeria which the party advocates.

## New year tragedy: Midnight fire kills couple

• 70-year old man dies over pension

ODOGWU EMEKA ODOGWU, Awka

A STAFF of Federal Ministry of Commerce, Anambra State and an indigene of Nise, Awka South local government area, Mrs. Celina Osakwe and husband, Peter, were found dead in the same bed after being burnt by fire from unknown source around 11.30pm Thursday.

*Saturday Champion* gathered that there was no power supply in the community until around 10:25pm when Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), restored power whose upsurge possibly caused the fire disaster. And because there was light, people did not notice much the harm done inside the abode of the deceased until a young man washing his clothes nearby went to charge his phone upstairs only to notice the burning house and raised alarm.

His alarm attracted sympathizers to the scene, but there was nothing they could do as the couple had already been burnt beyond recognition. They could only mobilize to stop the fire from doing further damage to the family house.

When *Saturday Champion* visited the scene around 8 o'clock in the morning the following day, thousands of relatives and sympathizers thronged the Ngodo residence of the deceased discussing the ugly incident. The room was burnt beyond recognition with the mangled bodies of the couple still stocked in a manner suggesting that even in death nothing separated their love.

Sister to Peter Osakwe, one of the deceased, Mrs. Pauline Okpago, a teacher, told *Saturday Champion* that all her life, she had never witnessed where a husband and wife happily sleeping together despite the challenges of life were killed same day in such a mysterious fire disaster, saying that when she heard of the incident, she came with ointment that could reduce pain, only to see an ugly scene.

She said candle light or any other hurricane light was ruled out since Chidi, the last child of the deceased said there was nothing like that when the parents went to bed. He slept in another room but never knew what was happening to the parents even their neighbours did not know and would have been victims too if not for the alarm the young man raised to attract people. She said the cause of the fire must be from electric current surge.

Officials from the Federal Ministry of Commerce with a Peugeot car with registration number FG 046 AO4 have already visited the family to ascertain the veracity of the information they got about their worker.

The husband, Peter, was said to have suffered stroke and the upkeep of the family of four with one of the children abroad, two in the university and the last in secondary school, was left for the wife, Celina.

However, tension is high in the community as the woman was said to be a regular in church activities even to the extent that the Parish Priest announced the fire accident at the early morning mass causing traffic inflow of well wishers and sympathizers.

There was outpour of emotions by the two sisters who returned from the university following an urgent call from the elders, while youths were already digging the grave for burial of the couple.

In a related development yesterday, a 70-year-old man from Ichida, Anaocha local government of the state slumped and died at the Treasury over excitement that he received two months of the 16 months pension arrears owed by Mbadinuju administration.

Governor Virgy Etiaba had approved the payment of two months out of the 16 months arrears and the old man after receiving the arrears engaged others in banter on how he never dreamt of enjoying the money in his life time. He shortly gasped for air and then slumped but was rushed to hospital. He died on the way to the hospital without actually enjoying the money.