

Many feared killed as IPOB marks 'Biafra Day'

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Many people including some soldiers were reportedly killed yesterday when a reign of terror was unleashed on the South East geopolitical zone.

Vehicles and Keke Napep were also set ablaze by rampaging terrorists during the enforcement of a sit-at-home order by the outlawed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

IPOB had earlier in the month announced that there would be a sit-at-home on May 30, across the South-East states, to mark what they called 'Biafra Heroes Day', which is celebrated annually in the region.

Streets in major towns of Abia, Imo, Enugu, Ebonyi and Anambra states were deserted even as commercial activities were grounded across the region.

Daily Trust reports that during the rampage, some military men were attacked at Obikabia junction in Aba, Abia State, by over 15 masked gunmen who also set their patrol van on fire.

A trending video showed the assailants shooting sporadically before setting the military van ablaze.

Commenting on the incident, a male voice was heard saying: "This army man is the only surviving person here. He was the only person that ran away."

"Does anybody here have a motorcycle?" another person in the video asked.

Witnesses said the gunmen operated with an SUV jeep and a Sienna bus.

Another eyewitness said casualties were recorded during the gun duel but there was no official confirmation yet on the actual number of those killed or injured.

Another video showed how some vehicles and tricycles were set ablaze in Igboeze South of Enugu State.

In Imo State, two persons were reportedly shot dead as residents obeyed the sit-at-home order.

Witnesses said they were killed in Okwe community in Onuimo Local Government Area of the state.

One of those killed by the assailants was Nbechi Ndu, a former councillor in the area.

The spokesperson for the police in the state, Henry Okoye, had not responded to an inquiry from our correspondent as of the time of filing of this report.

Banks, markets, shops, companies, and corporate establishments in the state capital were shut.

The ever busy Douglas, Owerri - Okigwe, Okigwe Road, Control Junction, Orji, World Bank, Egbu road and others in the state capital were shadows of themselves.

The Umuonyeali Wood Market, Naza Industrial Market, Alaba International Market, Relief Market, and Owerri main market were all shut.

A resident, Kingsley Madu said that it was better to sit at home than to go to his shop and meet his death.

An artisan, Samuel Kalu said that he would continue to observe any sit-at-home order issued by IPOB in the region. Our correspondent reports that there was total compliance by residents of Ebonyi State yesterday with the sit-at-home order.

Banks, shops, filling stations, including private and public schools, markets, government and private offices were under lock and key. There was no vehicular movement as travellers were left stranded.

The situation, as learnt, caused the ruling party in the state, the All Progressives Congress (APC), to postpone its 5-man delegate congress election scheduled to hold yesterday across the 13 local government areas of the state.

Attacks on our troops unhealthy- Military

There was no immediate response yesterday on the renewed hostility on the military in the South East, as the Director, Defence Media Operations, Edward Buba, could not be reached.

However, reacting to previous attacks earlier in the morning yesterday during a press briefing at the Defence Headquarters in Abuja, Buba described attacks on troops as unhealthy, adding that such occurrence would not be tolerated again.

Buba, a Major-General, specifically said the type of incidents that happened in Okuama, in Delta State, coupled with the recent assault on unarmed personnel in Banex Plaza, in Abuja, might diminish the morale of the personnel.

"These occurrences are unhealthy for our national security, counter-productive and amount to self-sabotage."

"Surely, there is no way to treat any human, certainly not a military personnel that places self in harm's way to protect citizens or to safeguard the nation. The military has demonstrated a high sense of discipline and professionalism in the face of the untoward attacks."

"Our professionalism must not be mistaken for weakness. Indeed, we know that to win this war, we need the support of the people. We also hope that the people would equally realise that they need the military to win the war to guarantee their safety."

"Accordingly, it goes without saying that this must not repeat itself as it jeopardises our common interest. If troops err, report them and the military justice system will address the matter."

"We are at war, and citizens

must realise that they also have a responsibility by their actions and utterances to support troops to keep the morale and fighting spirit of troops at optimal at all times", he said.

South East govts condemn attack on soldiers

The South East Governors' Forum has also condemned the attack which reportedly left soldiers dead at a checkpoint at Aba, in Abia State.

Addressing newsmen in Owerri on Thursday, Chairman of the Forum, and Imp State governor, Hope Uzodimma, described the attack as "unfortunate".

He said: "On behalf of my brother governors in the South East Governors' Forum, I condemn that incident and loss of the lives of soldiers who were on their duty posts."

"Without any provocation, they were attacked by the men of the underworld."

"The unfortunate thing is that it is going to act as a major setback to the peace process being pursued by the governors from the zone with the federal government, security agencies and other critical stakeholders on how best to resolve the problem of security in the region," he said.

According to him, "the incident will also portray our people in a bad light as if we do not have sympathy for human beings."

The governor expressed condolences to the Chief of Army Staff and families of the soldiers who lost their lives in the unfortunate incident.

"We here in the South East will ensure that we leave no stone unturned to ensure peace in the region needed for development," he said.

Uzodimma urged security agencies to go all out to ensure that those behind the dastardly act were caught and prosecuted.

He said that people of the South East, out of fear of the unknown and memories of the past, obeyed the directive of the proscribed group.

He urged them, particularly those in Imo, to find courage and understand that a lot had gone to providing security for them.

"We have peace in Imo; I want people to go about their businesses without fear of being molested by anyone", he said.

Kalu too...

Also, the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, Benjamin Okezie Kalu has condemned the attack on the soldiers, describing it as unwarranted and outrageous.

In a statement on Thursday, the deputy speaker said that the killing of the military personnel, who were doing their lawful duty, was unwarranted, outrageous, unjust, cruel and absolutely condemnable.

Kalu, who represents Bende Federal Constituency of Abia State, said that Aba people, better known for their enterprising spirit and technical skills, cannot be hoodwinked to think that locking up their shops and closing their businesses to stay at home was in their best interest.

Kalu, in statement by his Chief Press Secretary, Levinus Nwabughio, reminded the people that Aba is the commercial nerve centre of the South East and as such plays host to people from all walks of life.

He stated that while efforts were ongoing to quell the rising wave of insecurity and restore peace in the whole of the South East region through a non-kinetic approach championed by Peace In South East (PISE-P), it was unnecessary to engage in acts capable of truncating the gains already made.

Ohanaeze distances Kanu from onslaught

Meanwhile, the President-General of Ohanaeze Ndigbo, Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu, has distanced himself and the detained IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu, from the killing of soldiers in some parts of the South-East.

He described the incident as "saddening", stating that Kanu was not behind the order for the sit-at-home.

Iwuanyanwu, who spoke shortly after he visited the detained leader in the custody of the Department of State Services (DSS) on Thursday, in Abuja, appealed to President Bola Tinubu to use his political power to free Kanu.

WAEC exam partially affected

The sit-at-home order and Biafra Heroes' Day coincided with the ongoing West African Examination Council (WAEC) examination, with some sources saying an unspecified number of candidates missed the Mathematics examination slated for yesterday.

Our correspondents learnt that candidates who managed to sit for the exam slept in their schools a day before, others disguised to get to their schools, while many stayed at home for fear of being attacked.

But another report by the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) indicated that in spite of few vehicular movements, students were able to sit for their mathematics examination slated for the day.

An SS3 student in Enugu, who pleaded anonymity, told NAN that they went to school and those writing their SSS examination also sat for the exams.

The student, however, lamented that most of them who were day students slept in the examination hall a day before the exams to enable them get access to the halls.

"We wrote general mathematics

both theory and objectives today (yesterday). Many of us that are day students slept in the classrooms to avoid missing the examination due to the sit at home order."

"As you can see, we are done with the examination and we are going back home to meet with our families," she said.

Another student in Awka, the Anambra capital, said that they walked to school in groups to meet up with the examination and nothing happened.

We're yet to get report on South East - WAEC

Officials of WAEC said yesterday that they were yet to get reports about how the mathematics examination across states in the South East fared.

In an interview with Daily Trust, WAEC's Head, Public Affairs, Moyosola Adesina, expressed confidence that exams were held in all states in the federation, acknowledging the commitment by the states in the South East to provide security.

"We got assurances from some of the states that examinations would be conducted. We got assurances there will be security presence for students," she said.

"In regards to the conduct of examinations, they were conducted in states today but there is something we do at the end of the examination, we get reports from all the custodians' centres. We are still getting reports of all the conduct of examinations but so far, there has not been any report from those states," she said.

The renewed hostility

IPOB's spokesperson, Emma Powerful, in a statement earlier this month, said the 'celebration' of Biafra Day was intended to remember IPOB members who died in "the fight for freedom."

Powerful said "...May 30 is a solemn memorial day for Biafrans to honour our heroes and heroines. Biafrans are asked to observe this one (1) day sit-at-home in reverence to the spirits of our departed heroes who fought for us to be alive today."

"Every Biafran in Biafra territory is expected to sit-at-home on this day and reflect on the danger of the forced unity called Nigeria that has taken millions of lives of Biafrans."

"To that effect, IPOB directs all schools, government offices, private offices, banks, transport unions, market unions and private individuals to shut down all operations in honour of our heroes and heroines on Thursday, May 30, 2024."

"IPOB directs all the residents of Biafra land to stay indoors from 6am to 6pm on the 30th of May 2024. IPOB warns residents in Biafra to avoid loitering about on this day. Those who intend to travel to and fro Biafra land must do so before the evening of May 29th", he said.