

Southeast shuts down as residents obey IPOB's 'sit-at-home' order

- Three policemen killed in Enugu, five residents in Ebonyi • Again, gunmen burn Imo police station
- Gulak's death is clear political assassination, says Uzodimma • Wike: It's too early for Uzodimma to assume cause of killing
- IPOB spokesman rates Biafra Day observance 100% successful • Arewa leaders warn Northerners to limit travel to Southeast

From **Lawrence Njoku** (Enugu), **Charles Ogunbusaja, Collins Osuji** (Owerri), **Gordl Udeajah** (Umuahia), **Nnamdi Akpa** (Abakaliki) and **Saxone Akhaine** (Kaduna)

It was a 'tale of two worlds' in yesterday's Remembrance Day observed in the five Southeastern states – Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo – and in the United States of America.

While U.S. President Joe Biden saluted the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in memory of its fallen service members at the National Cemetery, streets in Southeast Nigeria were deserted as the former separatist region commemorated the death of over one million people who died in the Biafra war half a century ago.

Markets and roads were empty in the major cities of Aba, Owerri and Awka, heart of the former 'Republic of Biafra', in a renewed push by the separatist Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), to remember the war victims and heroes with a strict order for people to remain indoors yesterday.

In Imo, economic and so-

cial activities in all the 27 local councils suffered a serious setback as everyone remained indoors. Apart from those who opted to respect IPOB's 'sit-at-home' order, many others stayed

away for fear of being arrested by security personnel, who had been deployed to keep the peace after Sunday's gruesome murder of ex-presidential aide, Ahmed Gulak.

The roads were deserted, markets were closed and public transport services were withdrawn by operators. Some school owners announced compulsory mid-term holiday to enable

pupils remain at home with their parents.

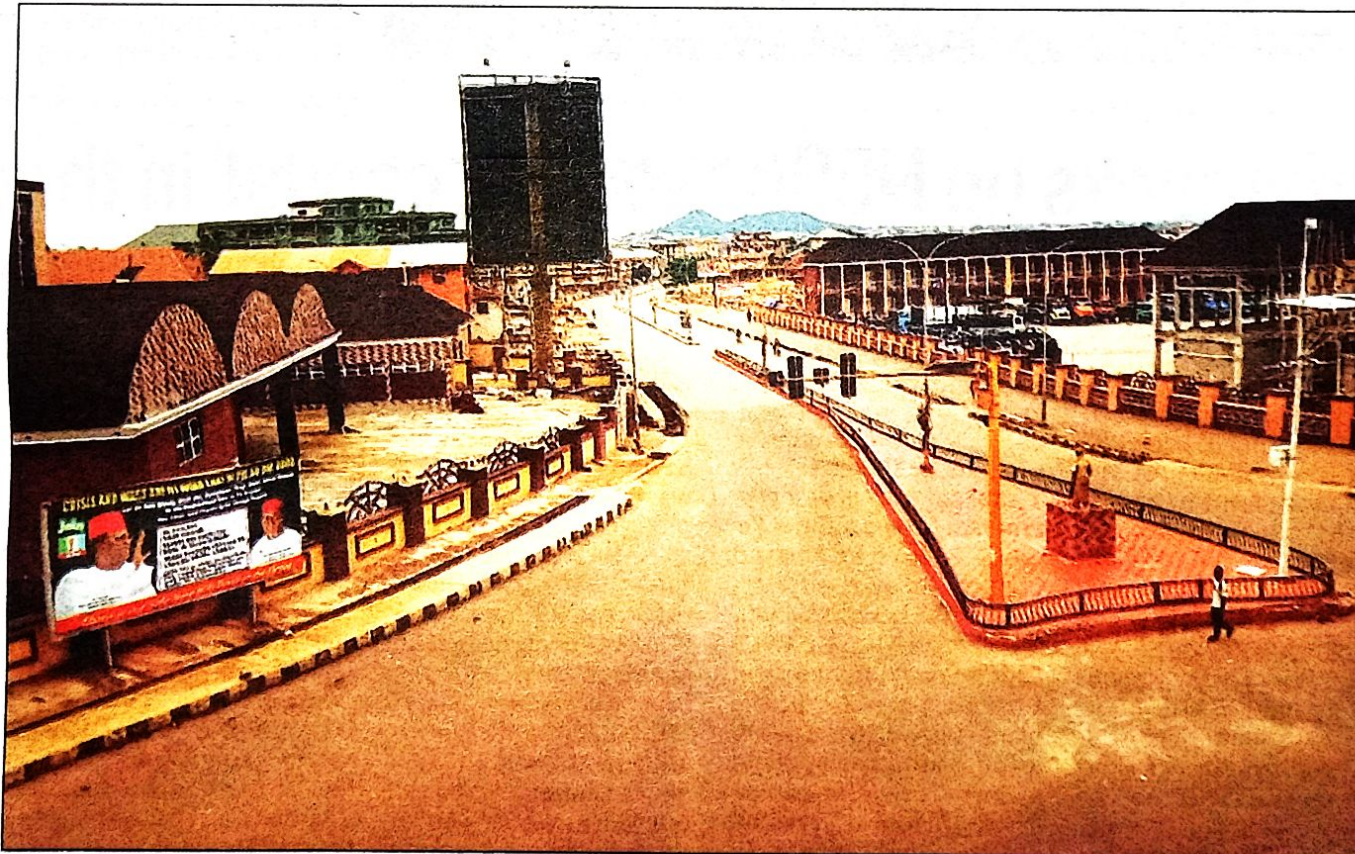
Areas with heavy security presence include Akachi, Oligwe, and Dick Tiger Roads, Imo State University Junction, Control Junction,

Airport Junction, Obiangwu-Ngor Okpala, Amakohia-Akwakuma Flyover, and the World Bank/Umuguma Junction.

Military helicopters were seen hovering around the Sam Mbakwe Cargo Airport as part of the security surveillance in the area.

It was the same story of empty streets, closed shops and deserted roads in Umuahia, Abia's capital city, and Aba, the commercial nerve centre. Residents fully complied with the sit-at-home order.

The Biafra Day this year was marked differently. The regular street parades that usually attract heavy response from security agencies was missing. The leader of IPOB, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, had while giving directives on the observance of this year's Biafra Day, strictly warned against any street protest, saying that people should stay indoors and mourn the fallen Biafra heroes who died in the 30-month civil war and those that have been killed



Deserted road due to stay-at-home order in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State...yesterday.

PHOTO: NNAMDI AKPA

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Three policemen killed in Enugu, five residents in Ebonyi

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by security forces in the ongoing crackdown on separatist agitators.

Though there was no official

sanction of the day in the Southeast, government institutions were grounded by the sit-at-home directive. Banks and other

corporate businesses equally shut their gates to customers for fear of being attacked by hoodlums.

Investigation by The

Guardian revealed that residents decided to stay indoors after reading and listening to several statements from pro-agitators

that its monitoring team "will move round and deal with anybody found to violate the sit-at-home order."

A source stated that the inability of security operatives to arrest and prevent several attacks on their facilities by unknown gunmen heightened fears in the people, adding that the guns snatched from security agents could be deployed to enforce compliance. And true to the threats, gun-carrying and masked men moved unrestrained through major streets in the zone yesterday.

In Anambra, the sit-at-home was successful. The roads from Awka to Onitsha to Nnewi and Ekwulobia were deserted, looking like ghost cities, while vehicles were equally not seen, despite security presence everywhere.

IPOB spokesman, Comrade Emma Powerful, expressed

delight that this year's sit-at-home order recorded 100 per cent success throughout Biafra land. In a statement made available to *The Guardian*, he commended Biafrans, Southeast governors and lovers of Biafra freedom, whom, he said, made the exercise a huge success.

The exercise in Enugu recorded major casualties as three policemen were killed yesterday in various parts of the metropolis. It was gathered that one policeman was killed near CBN along Okpara Avenue and two at Mgbeme area of Coal Camp.

Also in Ebonyi, the exercise led to the violent death of five persons. There was a gun duel between the police and IPOB agitators within Ebebe junction in Abakaliki, the capital city.



Deserted Mayor Market in Enugu...yesterday.

PHOTO: LAWRENCE NJOKU

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Arewa leaders warn Northerners to limit travel to Southeast

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Gunmen yesterday burnt the Amandugba Divisional Police Headquarters in Isu Local Government Area of Imo State. The latest development had increased to four the number of Divisional Police Headquarters razed in the state in less than one week.

The development heightened the tension in the state as residents totally complied with the sit-at-home order. The burning of the police facility was the only violent development in the state.

A Shell facility located at Obiakpu-Egbema in Ohaji/Egbema Local Council of Imo State was set ablaze by suspected gunmen at the weekend. The inferno destroyed both oil pipes that supply oil to other locations and other equipment.

IMO State Governor, Hope Uzodimma, yesterday, also expressed shock over the killing of APC stalwart, Ahmed Gulak, describing the incident as an unfortunate clear case of political assassination.

Addressing Imo people in a broadcast at the Government House in Owerri, the governor said he is really saddened by the gruesome murder, which underscores the ugly security situation in the state in recent times.

His words: "Alhaji Gulak was in Imo for a national assignment. He came to Owerri with the Senate Committee on Constitutional Amendment. Being a humble man, he chose to travel incognito according to his friend who

was with him. Someone must have trailed him from the hotel to the airport. That is exactly why his gruesome murder appears to be a clear case of political assassination."

He continued: "It is with a very heavy heart that I address you today. The pain of losing a person or loved one, the horror of holding your family member in his or her final moments, the anger of someone being so reckless, so thoughtless that their bullet destroyed your life, are emotions no individual should ever have to endure. "I sympathise with the families of those who lost their lives through stray bullets during this period. As you know, the death of anyone diminishes mankind. But the brutal and callous assassination of Alhaji Ahmed Gulak on Sunday, is painful because he did not deserve to die that way.

"His death is a personal loss to me because he was an invaluable friend and brother whose sense of justice, fairness and uprightness endeared him to me. I was getting ready to go to church when the sad news came and I could not attend the service again. It was simply one of the most devastating news I have had in my life and I am yet to recover from the shock. It remains a puzzle to me why anyone would want to murder him in this gruesome and vicious manner."

Uzodimma promised that efforts would be made by the security agencies to arrest and bring to book the deceased's killers and sponsors.

But Governor Nyesom Wike of

Rivers State has said that his Imo State counterpart, Uzodimma was hasty in pronouncing that the death of Gulak was a political assassination. While appearing as a guest on Channels Television's Politics Today last night, Wike said his Imo counterpart should have exercised patience and allow security agencies to do the job for which they were established.

"I think that the governor of Imo, my brother Hope Uzodimma should allow the security agencies to do their proper investigation for it is too early now for him to come out to say it is a political assassination. Having done that, it means that you already know those who committed the crime and that will not be fair. When things of this nature happen, allow the security agencies to really go into the matter and then say look, from our investigations, this is what we found out," Wike stated.

While commiserating with the Gulak family, Wike noted that there is no loss of life that is acceptable, regardless of the form it takes. He, however, warned against the politicising of Gulak's death, stressing that all extrajudicial killings of citizens in the country must be treated as unacceptable.

With the security measures put in place by the Southeast Governors to checkmate the activities of bandits and unknown gunmen in the zone, Ohanaeze Ndigbo Worldwide faction yesterday said it has confidence that the governors will win the fight against insecurity in the zone.

Similarly the leadership of Ohanaeze Ndigbo has thanked Ndigbo and Biafra agitators for peaceful observance of the sit-at-home order, noting that their actions have prevented another violent clash with security agents.

In a statement in Abakaliki, the Secretary General of Ohanaeze Ndigbo, Mazi Okechukwu Isiguzoro, charged Southeastern Governors to unite and search inward for lasting solutions and keys for the insecurity challenges in the region.

"This is a victory to all Igbos for observing the sit-at-home, those who had plotted to use the opportunity to unleash mayhem on innocent unarmed Biafrans had waited in vain as Ndigbo is wiser not to fall victims to our oppressors."

MEANWHILE, Arewa leaders under the auspices of Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) have issued stern warning to all Northerners to desist from traveling to the Southeastern part of the country, saying that their lives are no longer guaranteed in the light of Gulak's assassination.

The warning was issued yesterday by ACF Chairman, Chief Audu Ogbeh. He said unless such journey to East is absolutely necessary, security escort must be sought by such traveller.

Ogbeh said: "It was so bad at a point in February this year that Northern traders who normally supply the food needs of the south embarked on strike action to make the point that their lives also mattered.

"The need to issue this travel advisory has become necessary against the backdrop of history, wherein events such as the killings of northern leaders in 1966 triggered the events that led to a civil war that cost the country thousands of lives, and an untold sufferings to millions of innocent people. To be forewarned is to be forearmed, and a stitch in time saves nine!"

A civil rights advocate, Dr James Ngwu, told *The Guardian*, yesterday, that the sit-at-home succeeded beyond the expectations of those who kicked against it because "these people who were not armed before now are armed. What this means is that they have what your security men had and are ready to confront anybody with it. That is one thing I have feared in this agitation. I had always said that the day these people will start bearing arms, it will be terrible.

"They have succeeded in cowering security agencies to the point that the people no longer have confidence in them. The implication is that you either abide by their directive or you do the contrary to your peril.

"Again, they have almost succeeded in inciting the people against government, telling people why the government is bad and why they must fight for their liberation. The government by their actions have not helped matters but has kept making same mistakes and confirming the negative notion about them," he said.