

Four Killed, 20 Arrested As JTF, Gunmen Clash In P'Harcourt

Continued from A1

not panic because soldiers will protect them.

What provoked the attack from the gunmen was not clear at press time.

But what is known is that Governor Rotimi Amaechi is adamant that he will not negotiate with them.

July had recorded fierce gun duels between unidentified gangs and the JTF, as well as attacks on oil installations in what analysts believe were a backlash of President Umaru Yar'Adua entering into a military deal with British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, to quell insurgency in the deep South.

In an early morning raid on July 25, the JTF killed 12 militants and arrested 48 others in Bayelsa and Rivers States.

Troops had carried out a

cordon-and-search operation to apprehend the masterminds of the recent killing of three soldiers and four civilians in the coastal areas of Bayelsa.

Five corpses were recovered by the search parties raised by the JTF and the state government.

Findings at 93 Battalion, Effurun, headquarters of JTF Op RH, showed that 25 militants were arrested during the operation, during which homes were also burnt.

Those arrested were kept in the custody of JTF Op Flush Out 111 in Elele, Port Harcourt.

Meanwhile, the JTF, in the incident in Rivers State, arrested 23 militants and illegal oil bunkerers in the Elele, Alimini and Rumuji communities.

The raid was jointly carried out by troops from Operation Flush Out III, based in Rivers State and Operation Restore Hope, based in Delta State.

Over 30 armed men had on July 11 invaded a road camp belonging to Julius Berger and abducted two German nationals after killing a soldier.

The camp, located near the Rumuji police station, came under heavy attack as the expatriates arrived for work with military escorts.

The gunmen later escaped through the creeks with the German hostages.

But a source recalled that troops had arrived at the communities at about 1 a.m. and cordoned off some of the areas sus-

pected to harbour oil bunkerers and cult gangs.

He said the raid might have been carried out based on information that cult members and militants were operating in the three communities.

At least seven houses were raided in Alimini, including one which went up in flames.

Several drums of stolen fuel and condensate stored in the compound caught fire when troops tried to destroy the containers. But no life was lost.

Soldiers also raided another major bunkering location in Rumuekpe and arrested suspects.

On July 16, a similar gun fighting ensued between the militants and the JTF in Bonny, culminating in the killing of five. Several others were seriously wounded.