

Gunmen On Rampage In

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Awka (Anambra), Benin (Edo) and Enugu (Enugu) at the weekend played hosts to gunmen who went on rampage in the states, kidnapping people without molestation, as the gale of abductions continues to sweep through the Niger Delta region.

It was a black weekend so to say for the police as they lost five of their officers to the gunmen in the Awka and Enugu incidents.

While the Anambra State police commissioner sees the development as "war" the governor, Peter Obi told the state in a broadcast that the fresh cases of insecurity were politically-motivated.

In Awka, the gunmen had at about 6:30 p.m. trailed and kidnapped a multi-millionaire, Chief Paul Amamchukwu Okonkwo, the owner of popular

Awka, Benin, Enugu

Kill DPO, Four Other Policemen - Kidnap UN Official, Owners Of Pokobros, Bob Izua

Pokobros group of companies, shooting the wife in the process.

A popular Benin-based transporter and a palace high chief, Chief John Osamede Adun (alias Bob Izua) was abducted on Friday night in his guest house in Benin City by an 18-man gunmen; an incident that has created tension and anxiety in and around the Edo State capital.

The multiple-investor and managing director of Bob Izua

Transport Company, according to report, was kidnapped at about 9:00 p.m. Friday night at his guest house behind Oba market in the ancient city of Benin.

Also at the weekend, the Coordinator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Enugu State, Mr. Uche Ani was abducted from his Enugu residence by suspected

kidnappers. Ani has not been seen at press time on Saturday.

It was a black Friday of terror in Awka, Anambra State capital when dare devil armed bandits in a convoy of vehicles held residents of the area siege for more than four hours.

The gunmen had not only kidnapped Okonkwo, but shot the wife in the process.

The hoodlum later took a victorious tour of major streets in

Awka capital shooting indiscriminately through Arthur Eze Avenue to Awka main market, snatched a Hilux van belonging to Power Holdings Company of Nigeria (PHCN) and vanished.

But the incident was more of a dress rehearsal to what happened about an hour later as the gunmen returned to Awka and

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caused stampede at the Arroma junction along Awka-Enugu express way.

At the Arroma junction about four buses full of gunmen sacked people in the area with the sporadic shooting of general purpose machine gun, while another detachment of gunmen that had been at UNIZIK junction passed through Arthur Eze Avenue joined Zik Avenue and headed towards Agu-Awka through old Awka-Enugu road.

But the Police Mobile Force (PMF) on patrol at the Arroma junction took on the gunmen with the assistance of policeman at the "B" Division in the state secretariat.

On getting the wind of the incident the State Police Commissioner, Mr. Amusa Bello led a counter attack with his officers and men which led to the death of a Divisional Police Officer (DPO) and two other policemen.

Bello who was seen siring with both hands however had one of his vehicles riddled with bullets while three of the gunmen were hit by the police counter attack.

After sustained exchange of gunfire at the Arroma junction which lasted for about two hours, the hoodlums took off on-sighting a platoon of soldiers on combat uniform.

When Bello spoke with reporters he confirmed the death of the policemen but announced that after a call to the Inspector General of Police, Mike Okoro, the Force Headquarters ordered the deployment of two more PMF units to Anambra to beef up police formations in the state.

"What we have in our hands is a war situation. They have declared war in Anambra State. You can see my vehicle as it is riddled with bullet holes, you can also see that we battled these criminals to a stand still and you know that about three or five of these people were hit.

"What we need now is more Armoured Personnel Carriers (APC) and more of the general purpose machine

guns. I spoke with the Inspector General of Police and he ordered the deployment of two more mobile police units."

In a statewide broadcast on Saturday, Obi described the incident of kidnapping and arm robbery as politically-motivated to create an untrue sense of insecurity.

He said: "Since this Administration came into office in 2006, Anambra has been adjudged as one of the most secured states in the country. This fact has been severally testified to by the Inspector-General of Police, the Army top hierarchy in 82 Division, Enugu as well as the State Security Services in Awka.

"The pertinent question is: why is this trend of peace and security suddenly changing? The answer to this question is the desperation of politicians to create a semblance of insecurity and lawlessness with a view to giving the impression that the Governor has failed as the Chief Security Officer of the State. There is also the effect of the Niger Delta crisis.

"With the crisis in the Niger Delta, some characters who can no longer operate in that part of our country, have infiltrated neighbouring states in the South East, with sophisticated fire arms not known to the police. In this connection, it is necessary to stress that other states within the South East geopolitical zone have had their own share of this threat to security.

"To address this ugly situation, government has set up a Special Task Force on security with members of the body drawn from the Army, the Police and the State Security Service. Expectedly, security has been beefed up generally in the state and in particular around banks and other sensitive places. I have also contacted the Inspector-General of Police on the matter, and he has promised to reinforce the police strength in the state.

"A reward of two million naira awaits anyone who volunteers any useful information that will enhance on security in the Government."

Police in Enugu said they

were desperately searching for Ani's abductors and that they have launched a manhunt for gunmen who attacked the Aninri Divisional Police Station, Enugu State, killing two of their personnel and injuring three others including a female police officer.

The gunmen did not only leave a tale of sorrow at the station but went ahead to set fire on all police patrol vans sighted within the vicinity at the time of their operation, which was reportedly executed in commando style.

Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) in Enugu, Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Ebere Amaraizu confirmed both incidents, saying they were being investigated.

Sources close to chief Adun's family disclosed that about 18 armed men in military uniform, all wearing mask stormed the guest house adjacent his imposing residential complex in an 18-seater bus in a commando style and whisked him away in what looked like an arrest.

The source said that the kidnap of the Peoples Democratic Party chieftain and chairman of the Oredo Local Government chapter of the party had dawned on those available when one of the armed men who tied a red cloth close to his nose and eyes swooped on him and took him away as others took vantage positions to avert any challenge from any corner.

One of his aides whose name could not be ascertained at press time was shot in the process as he attempted to protest the kidnap of his boss and is presently receiving treatment at an undisclosed hospital.

The ugly incident occurred barely one month after the four mobile policemen attached to him were withdrawn by the Edo State Police Command in compliance with the Inspector General of Police's directive to withdraw all policemen attached to

individuals and low ranking politicians across the country.

However, a member of the family told *Sunday Independent* on Saturday that no contact had been established since Chief Adun who holds the Benin title of "Ayobahan of Benin Kingdom" was taken away by the gunmen.

Chief Adun has been having a running battle with powerful and opposition forces in the state since April this year over the demolition of his private motor parks in the state capital by the state taskforce on environment and illegal structures.

It would be recalled that the state inter ministerial taskforce on the demolition of illegal structures had last month demolished his major motor park located at the Oba market near the kings square / ring road in the city.

The activities of the taskforce had led to the death of one of his aides and cashier, late Brown Aigbogu who was shot dead while four others including the transporter's wife sustained severe injuries.

He was later arrested and quizzed by police in the state in connection with the incident despite several millions of naira worth of property he lost in the mayhem as well as charged to court by the state government for alleged assault on a serving commissioner in the state.

The matter had later shifted to force headquarters Abuja as Chief Adun was invited for questioning on the orders of the police high command.

However, efforts to contact the Edo State Commissioner of Police, Mr. Daniel Yar Adua failed, but the PPRO, Mr. Peter Ogbot, also an ASP while confirming the incident said the family of Adun reported his kidnap at the Oba Market Police Station 30 minutes after he was taken away.

In the Enugu saga, *Sunday Independent* learnt that the gunmen stormed Aninri police station in exotic vehicles including a jeep and unleashed their superior firepower on policemen who were on duty on Thursday night.

Two of the policemen were caught by the bullets and they

died instantly while others including the female police officer escaped with bullet wounds. The DPO, Chief Superintendent of Police (CSP) O. Eneh, narrowly escaped from the gunmen.

The gang set the police patrol vehicles at the station on fire and escaped in their vehicles.

However, a source linked the shooting at Aninri police station to a disagreement between two rival groups in Mpu community, the home of Deputy Senate President, Ike Ekweremadu and Chairman of Aninri Local Government Area (LGA), Mathias Ekweremadu.

It was learnt that a self-acclaimed witch doctor in one group allegedly charmed a young man belonging to the rival group. In reprisal, the other group took laws into their hands and killed the said witch doctor.

Following the killing, the police moved into Mpu town and rounded up some young men, believed to have participated in the killing and who *Sunday Independent* gathered, were loyalists of some politicians in the area.

Even as controversy over the killing was raging, a report came to the police station that robbers were operating in a nearby community. The police reportedly swung into action and gave the robbers a hot pursuit but the bandits abandoned their operational vehicles at a point in the same Mpu community and escaped.

When the policemen could not get the robbers, they forcefully arrested some youths of the community and took them to the station. The arrest of the youths reportedly stunted up the shooting at the police station that led to the death of the two policemen.

However, Amaraizu said only one policeman died in the Mpu incident. The police spokesperson told this weekly on phone that the manhunt for the perpetrators was ongoing.

Amaraizu also confirmed that the UNDP official was kidnapped from his home at Achalla Layout, Enugu on Friday night and has not been seen but assured that the police would surely rescue the hostage and apprehend his abductors.