

News

Newsline

Lagos task force raids Oshodi, arrests 146 'area boys'

Lagos State Task Force on Environment and Special Offences (Enforcement Unit) on Thursday morning arrested 146 social miscreants.

News... Pg 6

Between Geidam and former Yobe first couple

As the 2011 elections draw closer by the day so do political postulations get even more colourful. There is hardly a day that passes without the talebearers and political pundits sending out word about the future of politicians. The latest talk in town is that Governor Ibrahim Geidam, who for some cynics, is best known for his controversial statement that the State Security Service (SSS) operatives in his state uncovered a plot to assassinate him (which the SSS stoutly denied ever giving the governor the documents he presented as its report) is under intense pressure from his citizens with political ambition.

Ear Say... Pg 17

Okoya-Thomas strategises

The beautiful daughter of Chief Molade Okoya-Thomas and a member of the House of Representatives, Jumoke Okoya-Thomas, is currently strategising for the coming 2011 general elections. She ventured into politics in 2003, according to her, at the instance of the good people of her constituency representing Lagos Island Federal Constituency 1 and recently hinted that she has done quite well for herself as a politician and greatly impacted in the lives of the people around her.

About Town... Pg 29

October will never be the same again

I used to like the month of October when I was growing up in rusty city of Ibadan. September leading up to October 1 of every year throughout my five years in primary and secondary school was simply bliss; it was when we used to prepare to go to the Liberty Stadium for the traditional march and callisthenic displays. I did not like the callisthenics; I loved the parade instead and always dreamed of wearing the uniform, any uniform - police, army, air force, navy.

Dafe's Joint... Pg 34

Julius Agwu releases Great People, Great Nation

Julius 'D-Genius' Agwu has jumped on the bandwagon of entertainers, who intend to celebrate the country in a different way.

To celebrate Nigeria at 50 and further promote the image of the country in a positive light, the versatile entertainer has released a new music video entitled Great People, Great Nation.

Klieglight... Pg 3

16 killed as explosions mar golden jubilee

By Sam Akpe, Obiora Ifoh, Chesa Chesa, Rotimi Akinwumi, Chibuzor Emejor, Shola Shittu (Abuja) and Harris-Okon Emmanuel (Warri)

SIXTEEN people were feared dead and several others seriously injured, when explosives suspected to be bombs detonated on Shehu Shagari Way, one and half kilometers from Eagle Square, where President Goodluck Jonathan and other heads of state and government, gathered to celebrate Nigeria's 50th independence anniversary.

An eyewitness told *Saturday Independent* that a Mazda car stationed opposite Federal High Court, Abuja, exploded at about 11.10 a.m. killing several people, including women, children and security agents within the vicinity. After some minutes, another blast followed, killing more people, particularly those who rushed in to carry out rescue operation.

Another witness, who narrowly escaped death by the whisksers, Meli Lafia, said his wife sustained serious injury while his car was burned beyond recognition. Lafia, a teacher at LEA Primary School, lamented that so many people perished in the unfortunate incident while trying to rescue others.

Men and officers of the Police, Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC), Federal Fire Service, National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) made frantic efforts to convey the victims of the blasts to various hospitals in Abuja.

The police, led by the Deputy Inspector General of Police, Ivy Okoronkwo, cordoned off the scene of the accident. When reporters approached her for interview, Okoronkwo declined to comment, adding that the Anti-Bomb Squad Unit would carry out thorough investigations on the incident. The Anti-Bomb Squad arrived and picked up some debris from the blasts.

Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), has claimed responsibility for the bomb blasts.

MEND's spokesman, Gbomo Jomo, in a statement prior to the kick off of the event, expressed dismay that there was nothing to celebrate after 50 years of independence and urged the people to keep a safe distance from vehicles and trash cans.

MEND had said in a statement: "With due respect to all

invited guests, dignitaries and attendees of the 50th independence anniversary of Nigeria being held today, Friday, October 1, 2010 at the Eagle Square, Abuja, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta is asking everyone to begin immediate evacuation of the entire area within the next 30 minutes. This warning expires after 10.30 hrs.

"Several explosive devices have been successfully planted in and around the venue by our operatives working inside the government security services. In evacuating the area, keep a safe distance from vehicles and trash bins.

"There is nothing worth celebrating after 50 years of failure. For 50 years, the people of the Niger Delta have had their land and resources stolen from them. The constitution before independence, which offered resource control, was mutilated by illegal military governments and this injustice is yet to be addressed."

In an interview, the Comptroller General of Federal Fire Service, Okebirun Olusegun, condemned the activities of those behind the blasts.

When reminded that MEND had claimed responsibility, he said: "It is a political issue. If anybody or group has claimed responsibility, the law will take its course."

He debunked rumour that the men of the Federal Fire Service died while trying to extinguish the fire from the blasts.

The Unit Commander of the FRSC, Central Business Area, Frank Agbakoba, confirmed that corpses were taken to mortuaries, while the injured were receiving medical attention.

Police Public Relations Officer (FPRO), Emmanuel Ojukwu, in his comment on the issue said that investigations into the bomb blasts will commence immediately.

At the Maitama General Hospital, where the dead and wounded were taken, it was gathered that 28 people were brought in wounded. According to a source at the hospital, the dead victims sustained injuries to the chest head and abdomen.

One of the victims, Mayowa Adeniran, an unemployed graduate said he got hit in his ear by an object he could not describe. He was on his way to the Millennium Park for a church event before he heard something like an explosion.

"I was hit on the ear and I

fell down," he said, adding that but for the swift response of the medical team to the scene of the accident the casualty would be greater.

An angry President Jonathan has described the bomb blasts as wicked and dastardly, vowing that the perpetrators will surely be caught and made to pay dearly for the crime.

Describing the blasts as the worst anniversary gifts any nation could get, presidential spokesman, Ima Niboro, added that Jonathan grieves with the families of the victims, whose deaths will not be in vain but water the tree of national freedom.

The statement reads: "The bomb explosions which occurred near the Ministry of Justice in Abuja, and which claimed several lives are a low, dirty and wicked act of desperation by criminals and murderers, who do not wish Nigeria well."

"Coming at a time that the world had gathered together to celebrate Nigeria at 50, these bomb attacks are the worst anniversary gifts any nation can get."

"Their purpose was to ensure that the celebration at Eagle Square was cancelled by all means. It is sad and unfortunate."

"President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan grieves with the families that have lost loved ones in the incidents. The President shares their consternation as they mourn, while the nation celebrates."

"The President wants these families to know that their loved ones have not died in vain. Rather, they have paid the supreme price for our unity; and in their death, they have watered the tree of our freedom."

Aside the ugly incidents that characterised the event, which started about 50 minutes behind schedule, the arrival of Jonathan, who was ushered into the arena with horse riders and pipers, saw the commencement of a lively programme.

Started with the prayers rendered by both Muslim and Christian clerics, the ceremonial parade proper began with detachments of the Armed Forces and the Police mounting a guard of honour for the President to inspect.

The President inspected the guard of honour in an open roof vehicle with applause from the stands.

The parade proper commenced with all uniformed or-

ganisations taking part, as well as school children, who also engaged in calisthenics display.

Combat march by men of the Nigerian Army and the Nigerian Air Force, followed by equipment display by the Army and the Police rounded off the parade before the 21-gun salute, after which the President signed the anniversary register before releasing pigeons, brining the event to a close.

Speaking on the ugly incident after the ceremony was brought to an end, Minister of Police Affairs, Adamu Waziri, urged Nigerians to remain steadfast and not allow the incident to dampen their spirits.

He stated categorically that the incident was a terrorist attack.

His words: "The information I have is that there were two explosions, what we can say is that the first explosion was apparently a taxi that exploded. Then there was another explosion, within the space of 10 minutes and that caught a couple of citizens both members of the uniformed cadre and civilians. The resultant effect is about eight people are confirmed dead and 18 are injured. And the casualty both the dead and the injured involve members of the police and other security agencies, as well as very innocent Nigerians."

On whether the incident was an act of terrorism, he said: "(A) bomb blast is not a tea party. It is definitely an act of terrorism."

A top security officer who did not want to be named, told our correspondent shortly after the blast that "We have been doing something quietly to put a finger on it. What I'm saying is that the intelligence community had information on it before today and took steps to prevent it."

"There would have been five car blasts if nothing was done about it. For instance, the one at Hilton car park was demolished. Another one at the Villa car park was identified and demolished."

"The NSA had information. Every agency that should be involved was working on it. The fact that we stumble on the information and moved to prevent four out of five explosions shows that we are on top of the situation."

"Fingers are being pointed at MEND leader, Henry Okah. Security agents have already moved to search his houses in South Africa. That was on Thursday before the explosion,"

he said.

South African police invaded the Johannesburg home of Okah, apparently acting on the request of the Nigerian authorities who claimed that Okah was stockpiling weapons and arming fighters in the volatile Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

About 40 plainclothes police burst into Okah's hilltop home at 3 a.m. in the morning. They reportedly destroyed the heavy gates leading to the main house and used heavy equipment to destroy the main door leading to his living quarters and guest-house.

The policemen told him they had come to search for bombs and high calibre guns the Nigerian government told them were stockpiled there.

The Ijaw Youth Council has also condemned the attack. A statement signed by its President, Miabiye Kuromiema, described it as "a needless waste of lives".

According to Kuromiema: "We condemn in totality the senseless bomb blast that has claimed the lives of innocent Nigerians, whose only offence, it seems, is that they share the same nation-space with murderers."

"But if this was in service of the legitimate struggle of the people of the Niger Delta we like to state without equivocation that the planners are saboteurs of the struggle."

"Let's get this clear though: the fact of a Niger Delta as President of Nigeria does not begin to scratch the surface of righting the decades of devastation that the Nigerian State has visited on us, still it is insane, to kill people in the name of our struggle."

"We urge very strongly the security agencies to beam their searchlight far and bring to justice the culprits. The Izon people value life greatly and cannot be seen to abridge anybody's."

Niger Delta Coalition for Good Governance also expressed shock and urged security operatives to fish out those behind the act and bring them to book, stating that criminal elements were responsible for it.

In a phone interview, Coordinator of the group, Comrade Kingsley Otedi, carpeted the security operatives for the loose security arrangement at such a high calibre celebration, saying that the bomb blast would no doubt send a wrong signal to international community that Nigeria is insecure.

Joy as 15 pupils regain freedom in Abia

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Orji, who had earlier assured that the kids would be released unharmed shortly after visiting the camp of two dislodged kidnappers, where not less than 15 of them met their Waterloo, said he was a fulfilled man now.

He explained that his family had been in trauma since the incident and that his wife had to cancel the yearly independence party for children in the state owing to the abduction of the 15 innocent kids.

According to the governor, the activities of the kidnappers in going after hapless children had shown that they are com-

mon criminals who do not deserve any pity from the society. He vowed that the war against them by the state through the military would not relent until the evil is expunged from the state.

The governor maintained that "my day is made today. I thank God who has made today possible (and) thank the President (Goodluck Jonathan) for his concern for what happened in the state. All along I have been wondering how and why I should go to the stadium and start celebrating Nigeria's independence when my chil-

dren, 15 of them, are held in captivity".

Continuing he said he never stopped praying for the strengthening of the military and security agencies involved in the offensive against the kidnappers so that they would be able to fulfil their promise of seeking out and bringing the kids home safely.

"Let me say that those people who are doing this are not human beings," he said, adding, "these hooligans who are in the bush kidnapped these kids who have not done anything". He wondered whether the perpetrators of the act have kids.

Orji prayed that whatever experience the abductors had put the kids through will also be visited on them and that his administration will never stop supporting the JTF to completely uproot the perpetrators of evil out of the state, adding that nowhere in the state will there be a safe haven for them any longer.

The governor called on the Federal Government to use the same tactics to ensure that throughout the country, evil is confronted and security of lives and property assured all the year through, adding that "for Abia State the expiry date of

kidnapping and violent crime has come and anyone thinking of carrying out such illicit act in Abia State must be a fool."

He expressed optimism that all those that had abandoned home and business in the commercial city of Aba will soon head back and that government is aware of the tacit support the kidnappers were receiving from top politicians in the state.

One of the affected parents, Israel Afonne, whose three children were among the released kids, expressed joy at the turn of events, adding that government had succeeded in fulfilling its promise.

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