

# 32 killed as troops battle cultists in Port Harcourt

- Military launches Operation Child of Necessity
- Head of militants group Sogboma feared dead

**A**FTER a four-day lull, guns boomed again yesterday in Port Harcourt.

No fewer than 30, mostly cultists, were killed as the Air Force and the army pounded the oil city.

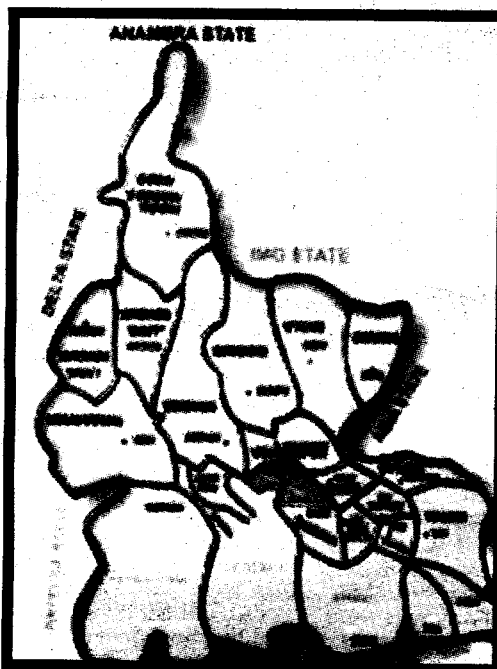
It was gathered that trouble started early in the day when Mobile Policemen accosted Mr Sogboma George, leader of a militants' group, and his convoy at a checkpoint in the Rivers State capital.

The Commander, 2 Amphibious Brigade, Port Harcourt, Brigadier Samuel Salihu had on Tuesday, while briefing the Press on the violence that rocked the metropolis last week, said that Sogboma and Mr Ateke Tom, leader of the Niger Delta Vigilante Movement, had been declared wanted in connection with the shootings.

It was said that when Sogboma was stopped, his men opened fire at the MOPOL men, killing one of them.

The Police reinforced with Joint Task Force (JTF) men and stormed Sogboma's camp in Marine Base. In the crossfire, a little girl was killed, *The Nation* learnt.

George reportedly sent a distress call to his men in



• Map of Rivers State showing Port Harcourt

By Clarice Azuatalam,  
Port Harcourt

Delta State "and in less than two hours, armed youths from that area invaded Port Harcourt in military uniform". This resulted in the barrage of gunshots that shook the city.

The gunmen who came from Delta State stormed Port Harcourt through Bundu Waterside at about

4am and started shooting indiscriminately, it was learnt.

Residents of Aggrey Estate could not sleep as the area came under heavy shooting. At daybreak, the rampaging youths moved onto Aggrey Road and started burning cars while shooting into the air. They also burnt a hotel on Ibeto Cement Road near Recla-



• Governor Omehia

mation Road.

Many people were feared to have died in the attack on the hotel.

A detachment of JTF - the special military squad for the troubled Niger Delta - men moved into Town where there was another round of shootings that crippled economic and social life all day.

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## Yar'Adua restates plan to tackle energy

**P**RESIDENT Umaru Musa Yar'Adua yesterday urged members of his cabinet to ensure success in all the critical areas of the economy. He also implored them to fight a small battle to provide the right leadership.

The President was speaking at a retreat for members of the executive in Abuja.

He promised to give priority to the development of agriculture and the real sector of the economy.

Noting that the Niger Delta was a problematic area, he said Vice President Goodluck Jonathan was leading efforts to ensure peace in the region.

For the nation to attain the lofty height of being among the top 20 economies by 2020, the president posited that some critical

From Vincent Ikuomola,  
Abuja

infrastructure must be put in place.

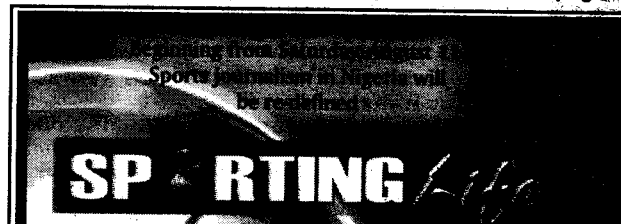
His words: "We know where we want to go. We know that by 2020, Nigeria would be one of the top 20 economies in the world. We are working to articulate this, to realize this vision and attain this objective."

He advised political officeholders to be conscious and aware of the agenda to develop the nation.

"For us to achieve our vision of transforming Nigeria from the current state of underdevelopment, there are certain things that must take place.

First, we must be a nation that respects the rule of the law, regulations and proce-

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# 32 killed as troops battle cultists in Port Harcourt

## Update on 'Child of Necessity'

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To prevent people from being caught in the cross-fire, the JTF men cordoned off Town from as far as Leventis bus stop on Azikiwe Road. People whose offices are in Town and Borokiri went home. Traders who had gone to buy food items to sell at Town and Creek road markets were stranded.

Those who wanted to come to Mile One market from Town could not.

Civil servants at the state secretariat could not go to work.

The House of Assembly could not sit due to the heavy bombardment of Marine Base, a shouting distance from the Assembly complex.

It was gathered that in the attack, Sogboma's second-in command "Ayinla" was killed along with many others. Sogboma is believed to have escaped with injuries. But an official source claimed later in the evening that he may have been killed.

Other areas that came under heavy shootings are Rumuobiakani and Ogbunabali. Rumuobiakani is the host

AN official statement (unedited) explained the operation yesterday.

It said:

•The military operations that were carried out by combined force of the Army and the Air force successfully dislodged the cultists, who prefer to call themselves militants. The operations were decidedly a success and the cultists suffered heavily in men and material.

•The decision to carry out the operations was informed by the need to carry the war to the cultists and to their den. And the desired result was achieved, to say the least. Then, in the early hours of today (Thursday), and having lost substantial grounds, men and material, the cultists launched a counter-attack, and in the process, lost one of its key men, Sogboma George, a cult leader. There is unconfirmed report that Sogboma lost his life in the counter-attack. In the early hours of this morning (Thursday), the counter-attack was launched from the waterside where the cultists were pushed and confined to, since the military came into the scene to restore order to some streets of Port Harcourt, and to the oil-rich state.

community of Shell Industrial Area. It was said to have been attacked because when the JTF men went to fish out gun-totting youths suspected to have been hiding there, the youths opened fire on them; the

soldiers fired back. This is why guns continued to boom in the area till about noon.

Same reason was adduced for the shootings that occurred at Ogbunabali.

Soldiers blocked Mile 1 on

•In today's (Thursday's) operations, the military had to necessarily cordon off some portion of the city, to put the cultists in proper view as targets. This was done to minimize civilian casualties and to avoid any destruction of property. In all, and by the last count, 32 people are feared to have died - most of them cultists.

•The aerial bombing of Soboma George's enclave yielded the desired result because his ill-equipped and rag tag armed cultists were no match to the Nigerian soldiers and were easily smoked out and those that laid down their arms were arrested and taken into custody. But Soboma was feared dead. And residents of Port Harcourt are giving the military all the necessary support and cooperation as they continue to hail the successful military operations. The military has vowed to stay in the city, until all cultists are flushed out.

•The State Government, according to a reliable source at Brick House, is said to be satisfied with the calm that is fast returning to Port Harcourt and will issue a statement as soon as all the necessary information are assembled.

Ikwere Road with sand bangs. Motorists avoided the area, using instead Mile 2 and Mile 3 residents were forced to raise their hands.

Army spokesman Major Sagir Musa said of the battle: "It was a deliberate exercise to fish them out. In the course of going to fish them out, the boys responded, resulting to the gunshots."

Harcourt. They were released 10 days later.

Aug 9 - Two Norwegian

## ABOUT RIVERS STATE

**R**IVERS State, in the South-South, was created on May 27, 1967 by a Military Decree. Its capital and most populous city is Port Harcourt.

The governor is Sir Celestine Omehia. The state is bounded on the South by the Atlantic Ocean, to the North by Imo and Abia states, to the East by Akwa Ibom State and to the West by Bayelsa and Delta states.

The inland part of Rivers State consists of tropical rainforest; towards the coast the typical Niger Delta environment features many mangrove swamps.

The ethnic composition of the state is diverse but linguistic scholars have grouped these communities into six major linguistic groups, namely Ioid, lower Niger (Igboid), Ogoni, Central Delta, Delta Edoid, and Lower Cross.

Its main towns are Port Harcourt, Abonnema, Omoku, Okrika, Oyigbo, Elele, Bonny and Opobo.

The population of the state in the 2006 population census is 5,185,400.

Maj. Musa said that the JTF acted on tip-off and went to the hideouts of the boys.

While stressing that no casualty was recorded on the part of the JTF, he said that he suspected that Sogboma whom he described as "a factional leader of 'militant group' may have been killed.

But unofficial sources said that Sogboma escaped from the battle.

The Army spokesman also said that 20 suspected militants were arrested and that Operation "Child of Necessity" would be sustained, until Port Harcourt is rid of armed youths.

It was gathered that the JTF gave the operation this name because the earlier troops, deployment did not subdue the militant groups. The state government was said to have been giving the troops directives on how and where to operate.

"This time, JTF activities are being co-coordinated from Abuja and they have been told to take directives from there to ensure that nobody is treated as sacred cow," a military source said.

This explains why the lawmaker from the Assembly was arrested. He is still in JTF custody although an unconfirmed report said he had been flown to Abuja.

## Some key dates (2006) in the life of a region

**M**AY 10 - A U.S. oil executive employed by Baker Hughes is killed in Port

South Korean contractors. Militant groups kill them the next day by the