

Eight killed, 32 vehicles burnt in Southeast's bloody Monday

- Idemili secretariat, Magistrate's Court burnt • Two soldiers feared killed
- Firm knocks Fire Service for not responding to distress calls

IT was a bloody Monday in the Southeast as gunmen again went on the rampage, killing and destroying properties.

Worst hit were Imo and Anambra states, where gunmen and security agents engaged in shootouts, leaving deaths in their wake.

In Imo, the police killed six suspected members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its military arm, the Eastern Security Network (ESN).

The suspects were said to have attempted to burn down the Palace of Imo State Chairman of the Council of Traditional Rulers, Dr E. C. Okeke, in the Orlu Local Government Area.

It was chaotic in Anambra as gunmen engaged security operatives in a gun duel.

Two soldiers were feared killed, but this could not be independently confirmed.

Suspected arsonists stormed the premises of the Enugu Electricity Distribution Company (EEDC) at Ukwu Nwasike, Ogidi, Idemili North Local Government Area and set ablaze 32 of its vehicles.

Not done, they moved to the local government secretariat at Ogidi and set ablaze Magistrate Court and part of the secretariat building.

At least two persons enforcing the sit-at-home in Anambra were killed during a gun-battle with a police patrol team.

Police spokesman, Toochukwu Ikenga, a Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), confirmed the incident.

From Nwanosike Onu, Awka; Chris Njoku, Owerri; Damian Duruiheoma, Enugu; Sunny Nwankwo, Umuahia and Okungbowa Aiwerie, Asaba

How a bloody day unfolded

The attacks came three days after Anambra State Governor Charles Soludo visited detained IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu.

"He (Kanu) expressed sadness over what he described as 'sacriligious killings' of innocent persons, kidnappings and all forms of criminalities, including the brutal enforcement of the senseless 'sit at home' perpetuated by sundry groups claiming to be acting for or on behalf of IPOB," Soludo said.

But the governor's bid to find lasting peace in the region suffered a major setback yesterday.

The Imo incident occurred at about 8am when the hoodlums, in their numbers, advanced in three Hilux vans towards the palace while shooting into the air.

Police spokesman Michael Abattam, a Chief Superintendent of Police (CSP), said the Command's Tactical Team joined by the military mobilised to the palace.

"The hoodlums on sighting the combined team engaged them in a gun duel, throwing petrol bombs.

"The gallant team responded, positioning themselves professionally.

"In the exchange of gunfire that ensued, the hoodlums were overwhelmed due to the superior fire-power of the

combined team.

"In the process, six of the hoodlums were neutralised while others escaped with various degrees of gunshot injuries."

According to him, the operatives recovered one pump action gun, three blood-stained cutlasses and three Hilux Vehicles suspected to have been snatched from citizens.

He said calm was restored in the area and the corpses deposited in a mortuary.

The attack on the soldiers in Anambra took place at 3-3 Estate, Nkwelle Ezunaka, near Onitsha, during a gun duel, *The Nation* learnt.

It was gathered that the gunmen stormed the estate at midnight on Sunday where the soldiers were keeping guard.

Our correspondent gathered that the shooting, which started at about 10pm, lasted late into the night, with expended shells dropping on rooftops.

A resident, who pleaded not to be named for safety reason, told *The Nation*: "Gunmen attacked the military men securing us yesterday (Monday) night at housing estate gate."

"We were scared all through the night as sounds of gunshots rent the air. The gunshots lasted from 10pm - 12am."

But, Ikenga said he was not aware of the killing of any soldier during the attack.

The arson on the EEDC occurred early yesterday.

Head of Corporate Communications, Mr. Emeka Ezeh, described the attack as a setback to the company.

He said: "In the early hours of Monday, at about 1.45am, the Ogidi District of EEDC was set ablaze by unidentified criminal elements, leaving about 32 utility and operational vehicles all burnt, including other assets and equipment within the premises.

"Efforts made to reach the Anambra State Fire Service at the time to come and rescue the situation did not yield any positive result, leaving members of staff who were on ground to assist in salvaging the situation helpless, as they watched the office building and other assets go down in flames.

"It later took the intervention of the Commissioner for Utilities, Anambra State, Julius Chukwuemeka, at about 9.05am to bring the Fire Service team down to the scene of the incident.

"The management of EEDC expressed shock over this ugly incident which is happening at a time the company has invested so much to improve on its operations and transform the socio-economic landscape of the area.

"This is a big loss to EEDC and a great setback to the efforts being made by the company to strengthen its network and improve the quality of service to its customers within Ogidi and Anambra State at large.

"We have already brought this development to the attention of the relevant authorities and it is expected that proper investigation will be carried out and the perpetrators of this dastardly act brought to book."