

## 2 feared dead, Abia boils as soldiers launch crackdown on IPOB

FROM CELESTINE IHEJIRIKA  
AND COLLINS NNABUIFE

**C**ONFUSION has continued to rage in Umuahia and Abia, Abia State, as banks, shops and other businesses hurriedly closed for business as the army launched massive crackdown on members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). Two people were feared dead.

Also, youths were said to have set the Ariaria police station on fire on Thursday.

This came as the state governor, Okezie Ikpeazu, said soldiers would be withdrawn from the streets of Umuahia and Aba today.

**Nigerian Tribune** gathered that as of 10.23 a.m., major roads in the capital city were empty as people were seen running helter-skelter following gunshots heard within the city centre.

However, eyewitness accounts disclosed that two people suspected to be members of the IPOB were, allegedly shot dead, creating tension in the capital city which enjoyed a relative calm on Wednesday.

According to the eyewitnesses, the two men, dressed in black attire were gunned down at Diamond Bank on Akanu Ibiam Road, 50 metres to the Government House gate and their bodies immediately picked up and dumped inside a army vehicle.

The third victim, said to be a bank customer, was hit on his arm by a stray bullet and was also whisked away.

When **Nigerian Tribune** visited the scene of the alleged killing, a black cap said to belong to one of the victims was on the ground.

At the Afaraukwu area of Umuahia, where the home of IPOB leader is located, residents have deserted their houses, leaving only IPOB members, who were seen around Kanu's residence.

There were also unconfirmed reports that troops from the Nigerian Army broke into the Afaraukwu, Umuahia country home of the leader of the IPOB, Nnamdi Kanu.

About 15 other persons were said to have been arrested during the "invasion" of Kanu's house by soldiers.

In Aba, residents of the city said gunshots rent the air throughout the night.

The state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mr Geoffrey Ogbonna, confirmed the incident, saying the police station had been razed.

It was gathered that po-

lice had closed the gate leading into the Central Police station in Umuahia.

Reacting to the incident, a human rights activist and constitutional lawyer, Dr Anthony C.B. Agbazuere, has called on the Federal Government and the Chief of Army Staff to immediately withdraw the troops from the state in the interest of peace and tranquillity.

According to him, deployment of soldiers was uncalled for, saying section 217 of the Nigeria Constitution condemned the act.

### Residents remain indoors in Aba over renewed crisis

Following a resurgence of crisis in Aba, Abia State, on Thursday, some residents have remained indoors, while others are leaving the city in fear.

In areas around Uratta junction, Ariaria junction, Tonimas junction and fly-over Enugu-Port Harcourt highway, some people were seen carrying loads and waiting for vehicles to leave town.

At Bakassi bus stop on the highway, policemen threw tear-gas canisters at some youths who gathered at a nearby street.

Medical Director, Holy

Wounds Hospital, Faulks Road, Aba, Dr Uchenna Anyanwu, said two persons suspected to have been shot in Ariaria area were brought in dead to his hospital.

He told **NAN** that a mob, who believed he was on the side of the police, came to his hospital and vandalised his office because he accepted to treat some injured persons.

He wondered why the mob should vandalise his hospital when he was trying to save lives.

At the city centre, shop owners closed their businesses, while commercial banks halted their operations.

Banks, including First-Bank branches at Abayi and Asa Road, Skye Bank on St. Michael's Road, Union Bank and Ecobank on Factory Road were closed.

Only Heritage Bank close to Ochendo Motor Park was open but with heavy security presence.

**NAN** learnt that the closed banks received instructions from their state headquarters offices to close and watch events.

Ariaria Market which had been opening for skeletal sales since Wednesday was shut own Thursday morn-

ing, following the attack on the Ariaria Police Station by unknown persons.

### Soldiers'll be withdrawn from Aba, Umuahia today - Ikpeazu

Ikpeazu speaking at the Government House, Umuahia, while reacting to the security situation in the state, said soldiers would leave the streets today.

He said the situation in the past few days, which led to the deployment of soldiers ahead of 'Operation Python Dance II', had generated concern from both the government and the people.

"I will also be meeting the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, President Muhammadu Buhari, to discuss possible ways of relaxing 'Operation Python Dance II' in the state for now."

He added that the withdrawal would not affect pre-existing military checkpoints at various locations in the state and warned mischief-makers to stay away from Abia, as agitations and protests would not be tolerated.

"Mischief-makers who want to use Abia as their base, let me announce to

you that henceforth, Abia will be too hot for you to carry out your wicked acts.

"The state government will work with security agencies to ensure the protection of lives and property without fear or favour. There will be no hiding place for you," he said.

He also urged residents of Aba to fully observe the current curfew in the city and ensure that they cooperate with security agents to maintain peace and order.

Ikpeazu said it was in the interest of the people of Abia for peace and security to be restored, as meaningful progress could not be achieved in an atmosphere of violence and anarchy.

He further advised members of the public to stop spreading rumours capable of throwing the state into disorder, warning that anyone caught perpetrating such acts would be dealt with according to the law.

### Group writes Buhari, UN over security threats in S/East

The South-East Renewal Group (SRG) has raised the alarm over what it described as security threat posed by the Indigenous

Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) to members of the public in the South-Eastern region of the country.

In separate letters to President Muhammadu Buhari and the United Nations (UN), the group drew the attention of the Nigerian leader as well as the world body to various atrocities being carried out by IPOB members in the region.

It expressed concern that if not quickly put in check, the activities of IPOB would cause sociopolitical dislocation and spark insecurity crisis of regional and national dimension.

The letter, signed by National-Co-ordinator of the group, Mr Charles Mbani, pointed at the recent formation of the Biafra Secret Service (BSS) by IPOB, led by Nnamdi Kanu.

### Mixed reactions trail army's 'Operation Python Dance II' in Abia

Different reactions have continued to trail the prosecution of 'Operation Python Dance II' in Abia by the Nigerian military.

Speaking with the **News Agency of Nigeria (NAN)** in Port Harcourt, on Thursday, a lawyer, Mr Paul Gbakpo, said deploying the military in Abia was in line with best global practice.

Gbakpo said the activities of the IPOB could be hijacked by miscreants to breach the peace.

A security expert, Samuel Perekeme, has described the operation as unnecessary.

Perekeme, who said the operation was capable of creating tension and suspicion among people, urged the Federal Government to order an immediate end to the operation.

Another resident, Miss Nkem Kinika, a lawyer, said deploying military personnel in a particular region could only create a feeling of insecurity among the people.

"I think there are other ways of handling the situation at hand, it is definitely not by deploying armed personnel in the region," he said.

## IPOB crisis: Tension in Jos, govt declares indefinite curfew

FROM ISAAC SHOBAYO - JOS

THERE was pandemonium in Jos, capital city of Plateau State, on Thursday, following rumour of imminent attack on the Igbo by the Hausa as a result of the alleged killing of some Hausa in the Eastern part of the country.

This was as the state government imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew (6.00 p.m. - 6.00 a.m.) within the Greater Jos-Bukuru metropolis until further notice.

**Nigerian Tribune** learnt that at about 4.48 p.m. on Thursday, there was a rumour that the Hausa in Katakao area of Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State were mobilising to attack predominantly Igbo areas of Katakao, Kwang Pam and Apata areas.

It was gathered that on hearing the rumour, the Igbo, mostly traders in these areas, decided to close their businesses and shops to avoid being caught unawares.

It was learnt that the speed at which the shops were closed heightened the tension and caused apprehension.

**Nigerian Tribune** reported that while other people within the vicinity started running, causing traffic gridlock in most business

areas, motorists were defying traffic rules and regulations to get to their destinations on time.

It was also learnt that some people were molested in some parts of the state capital and consequently injured.

Speaking with **Nigerian Tribune**, the state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), ASP Terna Tyopev, debunked the rumour of crisis between the Igbo and Hausa in Jos, adding that it was a rumour by some miscreants to cause breakdown of law and order and to cause disaffection among people of the state.

According to him, men of Plateau State Police Command had been drafted to all the likely flashpoints

withing the state capital to forestall any crisis and warned that anyone caught trying to disrupt the prevailing peace in the state would be dealt with accordingly.

Meanwhile, the state governor, Simon Lalong, has expressed dismay and shock at the sudden build-up of tension in Jos metropolis on account of the conduct of some disgruntled elements, who decided to throw the metropolis into confusion.

The governor, in a statement signed by his Director of Media, Mr Emmanuel Nanle, directed an immediate imposition of dusk-to-dawn curfew within the Greater Jos-Bukuru metropolis until further notice and ordered

deployment of security personnel to all flashpoints within the metropolis to ensure compliance with the curfew order and to avert any further breach of law and order.

He assured all citizens that the security and welfare as the primary concern of government was assured by the administration.

He enjoined all citizens to go about their businesses with the assurance that their safety was guaranteed.

The governor further appealed to all religious and community leaders, neighbourhood vigilance groups as well as all law-abiding citizens to ensure nobody was allowed to take advantage of this situation to engage in criminality.

## South-East Govs' Forum to hold meeting despite Kanu's absence

THE South-East Governors' Forum will hold its scheduled meeting today to discuss the face-off between the Nigerian Army and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in Aba and Umuahia, Abia State.

Director of Media and Communication of the forum, Mr Mike Udah, made this known in a telephone interview with **News Agency of Nigeria (NAN)**, on Thursday in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State.

Udah said he had not received any contrary information, even as IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu, had indicated in media reports that he would not attend the meeting.

Udah said he had not received any contrary information from my superiors on the convening of the meeting due to Kanu's reported ab-

sence. "The South-East governors are desirous to ensure that such an incident does not recur and bring lasting peace in the zone," he said.

**NAN** recalled that the forum, led by Governor David Umahi of Ebonyi State, had earlier inaugurated a seven-man committee to investigate the circumstances surrounding the clash and report back to it

during the meeting.

Udah also denied some media reports that the governors condemned the army's invasion of both cities, which portrayed it as being against the Federal Government.

He, however, said the governors were consulting with relevant stakeholders, including the military hierarchy, to permanently resolve the issue.