

Bandits kill 15, bomb NNPC, radio stations

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Bandits on Saturday bombed two government facilities in Port Harcourt and killed no fewer than 15 persons on the sixth day of their onslaught on the state.

Four of those killed were policemen, who were shot at their duty posts in Trans-Amadi, Garrison and Diobu.

The gun-wielding youths reportedly detonated dynamites on the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Mega Station and Radio Rivers on Degema Street before daybreak.

They killed a security man in a house close to the radio station, but could not gain access to the transmitters of the station.

The gunmen later moved towards the main industrial area of the state, Trans-Amadi and killed three riot policemen.

In Garrison, they gunned down a riot policeman and a civilian, who were apparently unaware of the invasion of the city by the attackers.

No fewer than 15 bullet-riddled corpses had been recovered and deposited at the Rivers State-owned Braithwaite Memorial Hospital near the Government House Port Harcourt, by daybreak.

The Nigerian Army moved in soldiers to check the festering security situation.

The soldiers deployed from the 2nd Brigade of the Nigerian Army in Port

Harcourt, immediately mounted roadblocks from the entrance of the Government House to the Old Port Harcourt Township and frisked motorists and pedestrians.

The police came out with more Armoured Personnel Carriers and deployed their men in all the roads to curtail the excesses of the militias.

As the stop-and-search operations began, soldiers intercepted a Carina Toyota car loaded with arms and ammunitions just as it was heading towards the Government House, Port Harcourt.

The occupants reportedly opened fire and wounded a soldier on the leg, while the soldiers in turn killed two of them and destroyed the car.

The relics of the car was left at the Government House Road Junction with one of the head lamps still on for sometime and was later towed away by policemen from the Governor's Office.

Some posters of a former member of the Rivers State House of Assembly were reportedly found in the car used by the militants and taken away by security agents. It was not clear at press time if the former lawmaker had been questioned.

Worried by the worsening situation in Port Harcourt, the Chief of Defence Staff, General Andrew Azazi, and the Inspector General of Police, Mr. Mike Okiro, flew into Port Harcourt and held a closed-door meeting with the state Governor, Mr. Celestine Omehia, on the development

in the state.

Addressing newsmen at the end of the meeting, Okiro said the security agencies were set to battle the criminals in Port Harcourt and bring an end to the killings in the state.

He said the killings were unacceptable to the Federal Government and that the government was all out to put an end to the lawlessness in the city.

Okiro said, "We want to confront these hoodlums head on. On the lawlessness we see in Port Harcourt, we are here to make sure that it is stopped. The hoodlums have been confronted by the JTF today."

Okiro, who attributed the violence, which started in Port Harcourt since last Monday, to the clash by rival gangs, disclosed that the JTF had drawn up strategies to deal with the growing insecurity in the state.

The IGP said that the situation on the ground did not warrant the declaration of a state of emergency, as the security agencies were in full control of the situation.

The police boss stated, "The mere fact that we are here should tell you that the Federal Government has already taken action."

Okiro said also that the security agencies were in possession of how arms were moved into the state and vowed that the arms would be retrieved once the hoodlums were dealt with.

Rivers State Government has in the meantime rejected calls for the declaration of a state of emergency, saying

that the situation did not warrant it.

The Chief Press Secretary to the Governor, Mr. Paulinus Nsirim, who spoke on a special radio programme in Port Harcourt on Saturday, said that those calling for a state of emergency were disgruntled elements bent on discrediting the state government.

Nsirim said the governor was operating an all-inclusive government and had taken steps to improve the security situation in the state by setting up the Peace and Rehabilitation Committee to assist repentant militants in the state.

The Federal Government had deployed soldiers to strategic government facilities on Wednesday following the escalation in cult violence in Port Harcourt.

Senate President, David Mark, said that the National Assembly had no plan to declare a State of Emergency in Rivers State.

He told aviation reporters on Saturday that government was seriously discussing with interest groups to stop the bizarre killings in Port Harcourt.

He said, "The Port Harcourt killings is not the best for this country. We're really looking into it. We should be able to calm the nerves of the people. The government is working with various interest groups for the violence to stop. It's really bad."

On assets declaration he said, "We've already declared our assets before we came into office. The only thing left is for us to make it public and that to me is no big deal. We'll make it public soon."