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Gunmen kill 13 footballers, supporters in Delta

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Thirteen footballers and their supporters were on Friday evening murdered by some unknown gunmen in yet unclear circumstances near Ughelli, Delta State .

Sunday Punch learnt that seven others sustained varying degrees of gunshot injuries during the incident which the Joint Task Force in the Niger Delta, Operation Restore Hope and Delta State Police Command were still trying to unravel as at press time on Saturday evening.

It was gathered that the remains of the deceased have been deposited in the morgue of a medical centre in Ughelli while the injured were receiving medical attention at the same hospital.

The Commander of JTF, Brig.-Gen. Wuyep Rimtip and the Commissioner of Police, Delta State Command, Mr. Joshua Oshiomogor, who confirmed the incident, described it as a mystery.

The deceased identified as footballers and supporters of Ocean Boys Football Club in Bayelsa State, were said to be travelling for a football match slated for Sunday in Ughelli before they were ambushed by the assailants at Uvweru community, near Ughelli in Delta State.

The Chief of Staff to the Bayelsa State Governor, Mr. Sam Ugbuku, who spoke from the scene of the incident, confirmed seven bodies had been deposited at a mortuary in Ughelli, Delta State .

Ugbuku said he had already gone to the General Hospital in Ughelli to make arrangements for blood transfusions for the injured people that had been rushed to the hospital.

At the Yenagoa club house of the team, the imposing building on the usually busy Imgbi Road was deserted as all the supporters and back up players had deserted the hostel for safety.

Sunday Punch gathered that clash between rival cult gangs had started on Friday night when a member of the supporters club belonging to one of the rival gangs was shot dead around 8pm in the Opolo area of the state capital.

Later in the night, there was a reprisal attack at the popular night club in Kpansia, where another person was killed.

Several cars were riddled with bullets in the attack that took place shortly after midnight.

Survivors identified a black four-wheel drive vehicle in the attack.

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Sunday Punch findings revealed that the gun battle at the night club extended to the supporters who were on their way to Ughelli for a match involving their club on Saturday afternoon.

Survivors said the Infiniti SUV car that the gunmen used at the night club incident was the same jeep from which armed men opened fire on the supporters at a village called Uwhru, near Ughelli.

A source, who pleaded anonymity for safety reasons, said Ocean Boys who were members of the cult gang Green Landers, were attacked in a revenge attack by their rivals in the Icelanders over the incident on Friday night in Yenagoa.

There was gloom in the state capital as it was not yet clear how many of the supporters of the football clubs survived the violent attack.

Reliable sources in JTF and the Delta State Police Command told our correspondents that the unidentified gunmen, who emerged from the bush along the East/West Road, forced the bus conveying the footballers and their fans to stop a few kilometres to their destination in Ughelli.

The security sources stated that the gunmen, who were apparently aware of the vehicle and the identities of its occupants, instantly opened fire on them.

Sources further revealed that the gunmen, who operated unhindered along the ever-busy highway, disappeared from the scene apparently after they wreaked maximum havoc on their victims.

Some motorists thereafter alerted the policemen operating at a nearby check-point on the sad development.

Information on the incident was sketchy from security sources as at 6pm on Saturday.

Rimtip and Oshiomogor said their men were on the fields to ascertain the masterminds of the unwholesome act and their motive.

The security chiefs, who described the incident as unfortunate and inhuman, said they were unable to establish the reason for the gruesome murder as at Saturday evening.

They expressed optimism that fresh facts might emerge on the incident before Sunday.

However, unofficial security sources told Sunday Punch that the incident might be a reprisal attack by a rival team and their supporters.

The source stated, "There was a scuffle between the players and supporters of Ocean Boys and another team based in Bayelsa State (name withheld) on Friday. One of the supporters of the other team was killed in the fracas.

"The players and supporters of the team were said to be aggrieved by the killing and it was learnt that they vowed to avenge the killing. The security agencies are looking into that possibility but it is too early to draw conclusion yet.

"We (security agencies) are looking at the direction of the team because of the killing of its fan but that is not the only possibility. We are also looking beyond the team because it cannot be explained that a rival team would mobilise heavily to eliminate another team just because of a misunderstanding after a football match in which one football fan was killed.

"Thirteen persons, identified as players and supporters were killed in the Friday's incident and seven others sustained serious gunshot injuries. The remains of the deceased have been deposited in the morgue of a hospital in Ughelli. Those who sustained injuries are also receiving treatment in the hospital.

"We are going to unravel the mystery. It is a novel approach in criminality. That some gunmen would just stop a bus and shoot everybody inside it. The detectives have swung into action and we are going to get to the root of it," added a police source, who craved anonymity.

The Police Public Relations Officer, Delta State Command, Mr. Charles Muka, said police had begun investigations into the incident.

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He said the CP had detailed the Divisional Police Officer in Ughelli to unravel the mysterious incident.

Rimtip also added that his men were on top of the matter.

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