

Imo attacks: Seven IPOB members, three security agents killed, gov's house burnt

• Uzodinma cancels trip, stays back in Abuja

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THE growing unrest in Imo State persisted on Saturday as seven members of the Indigenous People of Biafra and three security men were killed, while gunmen torched the residence of Governor Hope Uzodinma in the Omuma, Oru East Local Government Area of the state.

Police operatives and their counterparts from the Nigerian Army and the Department of State Services had reportedly killed one Commander Ikonta and six other IPOB members in a raid on the militants' hideout at Awomama village in Oru.

In what appeared like a reprisal, some gunmen stormed Uzodinma's residence in Omuma, about 20km from Awomama, killing three operatives, including an officer of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps and a policeman attached to the building.

The Saturday crisis has heightened tension occasioned by recent attacks on seven police stations, police headquarters in Owerri, two court buildings, an army checkpoint, two council secretariats and a correctional centre during which gunmen reportedly freed 1,884 inmates.

Sunday PUNCH learnt that a joint security team and IPOB members engaged in a gun duel in the early hours of Saturday.

Commander Ikonta and six other IPOB members were said to have been fatally shot in the crossfire while three policemen and a soldier sustained serious bullet injuries.

Three suspects were also reportedly arrested by the operatives.

A top security source explained that the slain militia members were responsible for the attack on the Imo State police headquarters and the Nigerian custodial facility on April 5, 2021.

The source said, "As the security forces approached the base of the insurgents, they came under rapid fire from the group. In a bold response, the joint security forces fought back gallantly.

"The forces eventually neutralised the overall commander of the insurgents in the South-East popularly known as Commander Ikonso and six other armed fighters of the insurgent group.

"Commander Ikonso is known as the Vice President-designate as well as the coordinator of all the militia operations of the group. He was the mastermind and coordinator of the attack on the Imo police headquarters and several other attacks on security and military personnel and facilities."

It was learnt that after the gun battle, the security team recovered the remains of Ikonso and his fighters, including six AK-47 rifles, hundreds of ammunition of different calibre and charms.

The Force spokesman, CP Frank Mba, could not be reached for comment on the ongoing operation.

Hours after the team's raid, gunmen reportedly attacked the country home of Uzodinma and killed three security men on duty who put up a resistance.

They allegedly hauled petrol bombs at the building, resulting in a fire that burnt cars parked at the compound and destroyed part of the

house.

A source in the village told one of our correspondents that the military had taken over the community.

The state Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Declan Emelumba, confirmed the incident to *Sunday PUNCH*.

He said, "It is true but information is still not clear. About two security men on duty at the governor's house were killed. An NSCDC official was among the security men who lost their lives during the attack."

Spokesperson for the state police command, Orlando Ikeokwu, also disclosed that the gunmen killed a police sergeant and two NSCDC officials.

He said, "Yes, I can confirm the attack on the governor's house. The hoodlums attacked the governor's house by throwing petrol bombs as a result of which two cars were burnt, but they were successfully repelled and none of the buildings was set ablaze.

Meanwhile, Uzodinma on Saturday afternoon cancelled his flight to Owerri, the state capital, from Abuja, following the attack on his residence.

The governor who was to have returned to the state on Saturday from Abuja after visiting the President, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (ret'd), in Aso Villa on Friday, abruptly cancelled the trip.

The governor's advance protocol and security men, including Government House officials had already arrived at the Sam Mbakwe International Cargo Airport, Owerri, in anticipation of Uzodinma's arrival when news filtered in that the governor had terminated his trip back to the state.

A Government House source confided in our correspondent that the governor was advised by security chiefs not to embark on the trip to the state.

The source said, "The governor was advised not to come back to the state today (Saturday) because of the prevailing security situation in the state. It was top security advice and the governor had no option but to cancel the trip to Owerri."

However, the Imo State

Government said the attack on the governor's house may be politically-motivated.

The state Commissioner for information and Strategy, Emelumba, in a statement on Saturday, said the state government had charged security agencies to arrest the suspected sponsors of the attack and the fleeing gunmen who carried out the attack.

IPOB threatens reprisal after commander's killing

Meanwhile, following the killing of one of the commanders of its Eastern Security Network, the proscribed IPOB says it has just begun its "madness."

Reacting in a statement signed by its spokesman Emma Powerful, IPOB said, "The killing of the heroic innocent Biafrans protecting our communities and towns from Fulani terrorist herdsman masquerading as cattle herders in cold blood is very painful."

IPOB also threatened that Uzodinma and all those who had a hand in "this wickedness will pay dearly."

"Uzodinma decided to kill Ikonso because he refused his offer to head Ebube Agu ghost security outfit formed by South-East governors. Uzodinma has tried without success to lure ESN operatives into Ebube Agu. He made irresistible offers to them which were turned down, hence his resorting to elimination of these patriotic heroes who vowed never to betray Biafra.

"Hope Uzodinma has murdered sleep, so he should be ready to stay awake! Fulani terrorists pretending as cattle sellers in Enugu destroyed police vans and attacked government officials on lawful duty with AK-47 but no Army, police or DSS attacked them till now. But ESN operatives defending our communities against the terrorists are being hunted like game every day. The world has kept quiet over this atrocity until we begin our own madness," the statement partly read.

Poly lecturers reject FG's N15bn offer, continue strike

ADELANI ADEPEGBA

POLYTECHNIC lecturers have said they will continue with their ongoing strike, despite the promise by the Federal Government to release N15bn to them for infrastructural revitalisation.

The National President, Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics, Anderson Ezeibe, who spoke at a press briefing in Abuja, stated that the strike would be sustained until the grey details in the offer were sorted out in the coming weeks.

The union commenced an indefinite strike on April 6, demanding implementation of a new salary scheme for polytechnic lecturers, revitalisation of the dilapidated state of polytechnics, and implementation of new national minimum wage, among others.

ASUP had explained its decision to down tools was to draw the attention of the government to the nine basic needs of the union.

But giving an update on the industrial action on Friday, Ezeibe said, "Our union received offers from the government during the meetings for the release of an infrastructural revitalisation fund of N15bn for the sector and this is in lieu of the NEEDS Assessment report of 2014.

"Following the consideration of the offers as presented, the National Executive Council of our union yesterday resolved to sustain the strike action until the unresolved details in the offer as presented are sorted out in the meetings expected in the coming days."

Ezeibe further noted that two out of three scheduled meetings with the Federal Government were held and some of the demands met, including the release of 10 months' salary arrears for members among others.

The demands met also included the reconstitution and inauguration of the governing council of all federal polytechnics, which were dissolved in 2020.