



Wednesday September 5, 2007 5:16 PM .

NEWS:

Soldiers storm burial ceremony at Bodo

...Many wounded, others arrested

By Alloy Khenom

For the past five months, the coastal town of Bodo City in Gokana local government area of Rivers State has virtually returned to its former old, joyous state where legal businesses and social activities hold at appreciable rate. This new posture is contrary to the experience during the last two years when the good image of the place was battered through vices perpetrated by rival youths groups divided against each other under political influence.

Consequently, activities in the area since February this year were done without fear of molestation or arrest from any quarters.

However, that scenario was shattered in the afternoon of last Saturday, September 2 when armed military personnel in full regalia arrived the place in about seven buses and fired automatic rifles ceaselessly in various directions. It was a mission least expected hence their arrival with continued gun firing around a home where burial activities was in progress heightened panic and casualties.

Our reporter, who witnessed the incident said, the action which ensued among the attendants was a clear symbol of confusion and pain as adults trampled on children while scrambling for safety.

Lying in state with about 30 minutes separating interment, was the body of a 28-year-old young man, Na-ara Nte who, the security agents might have been told, belonged to one of the youth factions.

The body was abandoned until women returned late in the evening and buried it. From precisely 1.28 pm when the infantry commenced operation in that section of the town popularly called '32,' so also a military helicopter kept hovering above the entire place with fearful precision. Two hours later, the scene of action shifted to School Market (some call it Ashawo market) where the soldiers suspected to be a detachment of the Joint Military Taskforce currently stationed in the state increased the tempo of the bombardment.

All men, exception of a negligible few took to their heels when it was discovered that the combing might also cage in even the innocent.

The home of one late Mr. Ntao around Teneol Area of the town (part of which houses extension of the Assemblies of God Church) was set ablaze with an explosive suspected to be hand-grenade by the charging soldiers who, this paper learnt, were searching for alleged cultists.

A young woman above 25 years was abducted and taken away from her widow mother who kept wailing all night long. There are evidence of forceful entry and damage to some homes, while returnee owners complained about lost of money running into hundreds of thousands of naira.

The exact number of persons picked away could not be ascertained at press time, but inside sources said none of them fell in the class of those the soldiers actually came looking for.

No fewer than 15 persons received treatment for various degrees of wounds sustained while hobbling to places considered as safe when the military personnel charged.

There was also no evidence that the force men gunned down any person in the operation.

But, two expensive cars namely a Peugeot 307 model (popularly called Odili taxi) with registration No. AA 289A74 and a Mazda 626 model with registration No. CP479 MUS had their windscreens and some vital parts damaged completely and abandoned at the venue of the burial.

Nobody interviewed was willing to comment on the incident.