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NEWS:

Operation flush out cultists:

War in Rivers villages

... JTF takes fight to Ogoni

With normalcy gradually returning to Port Harcourt and the authorities relaxing the curfew hours, the Joint Task Force of the military has taken the battle to rid the State of cultists to the countryside. Most cultists and militants had in the face of the onslaught by the armed forces and the police in the State capital withdrawn to the villages to seek refuge and probably re-organize their disjointed operations. But, the JTF which appears to be on top of the situation in terms of intelligence has gradually turned its attention to the villages as it spreads the dragnet in response to a presidential directive. Major Sagir Musa had told the Telegraph recently that what is going on is routine. He said the army would hit at targets suspected to be safe havens either for cultists or their armaments.

There was fighting in the Ogoni areas at the weekend between soldiers and cultists believed to be members of Deebam, precisely in Bodo in the Gokana Local Government Area.

Information about what happened in Bodo is sketchy for now and we cannot confirm how many persons may have lost their lives, but local sources said there was strong military presence in the area.

They also reported there were attempts by the boys to escape as it became clear they stood the risk of losing their lives to the well trained soldiers who were on a no-nonsense mission.

Bodo has been one of the trouble spots in the State, recording several cult uprisings that have been costly in terms of human lives and property in the last eight years of the Odili administration.

There were mixed reactions at the weekend as the JTF encamped round the ancient city and began an operation to flush out what is left of cultists who are operating in that part of the State.

Sources say they were armed with sophisticated weapons including vehicular fire power which is enhancing the maneuverability of the infantry.

Since security operatives turned attention to the Ogoni axis, no less than 21 cultists have been killed, according to information.

The Telegraph reported last week that several cultists have been killed in the Ogoni area

The death toll may have increased with the encounter at the weekend in which helicopter gunship hovered dangerously overhead, waiting to join the action below.

Penultimate week, the JTF struck at Rumuekpe.

It was a resounding success, military authorities say, with collateral damage said to be low, but for the villagers, it would be one memory of the Omehia administration that they would carry for a long time to come.

Initially, it was believed that cultists had been behind the raid at Rumuekpe. But it was later that a picture of what had happened began to emerge. Soldiers under the JTF had received intelligence that cultists were regrouping at the community.

They struck on land and in the air with devastating force, killing several cultists in the raid. The authorities eventually pegged the number of the dead in that operation at 12 but there were independent sources which showed that more than 24 persons may have died.