

NEWS

Panic as youths kill 4 officers, 12 soldiers in Delta

Emmanuel Onani and Francis Ogbuagu

In a scenario, reminiscent of military reaction in Zaki Biam in Benue State and Odi in Bayelsa State, panic has enveloped Bomadi Local Government of Delta State following the killing of 16 soldiers in the area.

Residents fear military reaction similar to the cases of Odi (Bayelsa State) in 1999 and Zaki Biam (Benue State) in 2001 could be reenacted in the area.

In 1999, Odi, a community in Bayelsa State was leveled by soldiers following the killing of soldiers in the community. The same was repeated in 2001 in Zaki Biam in Benue as reprisal over the killing of 19 soldiers in the community.

Yesterday, the Defence Headquarters (DHQ), announced that "some youths" surrounded and killed the Commanding Officer (CO) of 181 Amphibious Battalion in Bomadi Local Government Area of Delta State, two Majors, a Captain, as

well as 12 soldiers, who were on a peace mission.

In a statement signed by the Acting Director of Defence Information (DDI), Brig-Gen. Tukur Gusau, the Military said the officers had hardly responded to a distress call about a communal dispute between the Okuama and Okoloba communities, when the fatal attack occurred.

Consequently, the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), Gen. Christopher Musa, has ordered an investigation into the incident, with a view to arresting and prosecuting the perpetrators.

The statement read: "The troops of 181 Amphibious Battalion, Bomadi Local Government Area of Delta State while on peace mission to Okuama community in Bomadi LGA of Delta State were surrounded by some community youths and killed on Thursday, March 14.

"The unfortunate incident occurred when the troops responded to a distress call after the communal crisis between the Okuama and Okoloba com-

munities both in Delta State.

"The reinforcement team led by the Commanding officer was also attacked, leading to the death of the Commanding officer, two Majors, one Captain and 12 Soldiers.

"The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General Christopher Gwabin Musa, has directed the immediate investigation and arrest of those involved in the heinous crime. The occurrence has been reported to the Delta State government.

"However, the military remains focused and committed to its mandate of maintaining peace and security in the country. So far, a few arrests have been made while steps are in place to unravel the motive behind the attack."

Army recovers 14 lifeless bodies in Delta Community

Fourteen lifeless bodies of killed soldiers were in the early hours of Saturday recovered by soldiers of the joint task force under the supervision of the General Officer Commanding

6 division Nigerian Army, Major General Jamal Abdussalam, at Okuama community, in the Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State.

Some of the recovered corpses were said to have been beheaded, while the stomachs and hearts of others were ripped off.

At the NDCC jetty in the coastal Delta community, the bodies of the commanding officer and the two killed majors were seen floating by the river bank as others were separated on land.

Meanwhile, the entire communities in Bomadi and Ughelli south local government areas of Delta State have been cordoned off by operatives of the 6 Division Nigerian Army, Port Harcourt, which also oversees the 63 brigade in Asaba, the Delta State capital.

The Chief of Defence Staff, Christopher Musa, has ordered a probe into the tragic killing of the four senior officers and 12 soldiers.

Edo PDP Chair kidnapped in

Benin

Meanwhile, the Edo State Chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party, (PDP) Dr Tony Aziegbemi, was kidnapped by gang of armed men few metres to his Government Reservation Area residence in Benin City, the Edo State yesterday.

His kidnap came less than a month after the party conducted its governorship primaries which produced Mr Asue Ig-hodalo as the candidate of the party in the forthcoming September 21, 2024 governorship election.

Aziegbemi was said to have been trailed by his abductors, who were in two Toyota Corolla cars, over took his SUV at a speed breaker point along Osaro Street, off Country Home road close to his house at about 11pm Friday night.

Aziegbemi, who is said not to have police protection, was said to have left after a night meeting in government house, trailed by his abductors.

The driver to Aziegbemi, narrating how his boss was kidnapped said, "When we left government house, heading home at about 11pm, I noticed a car trailing us. So, I decided to take another diversion. We never knew they were kidnappers.

"Few minutes later, the same cars appeared behind us at a speed breaker point and blocked our car in the front and immediately, the gunmen pointing gun at us, ordered our Chairman to enter their car and took him away."

The gunmen were said to have abandoned Aziegbemi's car along Sapele road and took him away in their own cars.

As at the time of filing this report, some top government officials and security agencies were sighted at the spot Aziegbemi was kidnapped.

The Edo State Police Public Relations Officer, SP Chidi Nwabuzor, when contacted, confirmed the incident. However, he said it fell under the

New Etete Police Division.

Nwabuzor said: "That is confirmed. It is in the jurisdiction of New Etete Police Division, also known as Godwin Abbe Police Station. That is where it happened.

"The Commissioner of Police has given marching orders to the tactical teams of the operatives to go after the hoodlums and we pray that by the grace of God, all hands are on deck and we will be able to rescue him unhurt."

Edo Govt We're working on his rescue. Meanwhile the Edo State Government said it was doing everything possible to rescue the party chairman.

The Commissioner for Communication and Orientation, Chris Nehikhare, in a press statement yesterday said the government was working closely with security agencies to ensure his safe release and return to his family.

His statement reads in part: "The government is beefing up security and surveillance across the state to ensure that criminal activities are curbed.

"We encourage residents to go about their lawful businesses without fear and urge them to call the State emergency numbers 112 or 799 to report all suspicious persons or activities within their environs.

"The Government reassures that it is committed to protecting the lives and property of Edo residents and will spare no resources in ensuring that the perpetrators of this dastardly act are apprehended and made to face the full wrath of the law."

APC condemns kidnap

The Edo State chapter of the All Progressives Congress (APC) yesterday said it received the news of the kidnap of the state chairman of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Dr. Tony Aziegbemi, with a rude shock.

The party also called for the immediate release of the kidnapped Edo PDP Chairman, while attributing the incident on lack of a strong and well-oiled security architecture in the state.

The Acting Edo APC Chairman, Emperor Jarrett Tenebe, in a statement he signed and made available to journalists said: "This kidnap is one kidnap too many in the state, which signpost's an overt reminder and wake-up call on Governor Obaseki led administration in the state that all is not well, in terms of securing the state, which is the primary responsibility of government.

"That the chairman of the party of a sitting governor can be kidnapped is a testament of the very porous, ill-equipped, ill-motivated security machinery in the state in spite of the humongous security vote being collected by Governor Obaseki on a monthly basis.

"The APC, Edo State chapter uses this medium to demand of the abductors, the immediate and unconditional release of the PDP chairman, while we call on the security agencies in the state to leave no stone unturned in the quest to ensuring his release unhurt."



L-R: General Overseer, Citadel Global Community Church, Pastor Tunde Bakare; the celebrant, Pastor Chinedu Ezekwesili; his wife and former Minister of Education, Dr. Oby Ezekwesili; Pastor Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) Peculiar People Zone 2, Mrs Kate Onyeanakwe and former Minister of Information, Frank Nweke Jr. during the 70th birthday Symposium for purposeful Men in Abuja... yesterday

PHOTO: ELIJAH OLALUYI

Multiple court cases cripple PDP

Onyekachi Eze
ABUJA

The main opposition party in Nigeria, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) is at the moment held prostrate by court cases.

The party has been faced with about three court cases since 2023, challenging its leadership.

The court cases included the appeal by its former Chairman Dr. Iyorchia Ayu; suit No. FHC/ABJ/CS/1024 filed by its former governorship aspirant in Ogun State, Segun Sowummi, and another suit seeking the recognition of South East nominee, Sunday Ude-Okoye as the party's National Secretary. These cases, sources said were responsible for the inactivity of the PDP.

Ayu, whose suspension by his ward in March 2023 was

upheld by Benue State High Court, has appealed against the court decision before the Benue State Division of the Court of Appeal, which is still pending.

Sowummi's suit, which is seeking to restrain the PDP National Working Committee (NWC) members from parading themselves as officers of the party, for failure to call the National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting for more than one year, was heard on February 8 and adjourned.

Although, the secretarial position seemed to have been resolved by the decision of an Abuja High Court presided over by Justice Inyang Ekwo, which restrained the PDP from replacing Senator Samuel Anyanwu until the expiration of his tenure on December 9, 2025, the frayed nerves, especially in the South East have not been calmed.

Since Ayu's suspension, and eventual sack, the Deputy National Chairman (North) Ambassador Umar Damagum, had been occupying the position in acting capacity.

But he has not called any major stakeholders meeting except the weekly NWC meeting.

As a matter of fact, since May 2022, PDP has not convened any NEC meeting, which is in breach of its own constitution, to hold NEC meeting at least, once every quarter.

A former national officer of the party, who craved anonymity, admitted that there has been lull in the party activities but quickly added that the acting National Chairman believes that since Ayu was in court and has not withdrawn the matter, any action he (Damagum) takes could be subjudice.

The source however stated that, "the acting capacity doesn't limit him to what he

can do, because he functions like a substantive chairman."

He argued that Damagum may want to serve out the tenure of Ayu, who is from North Central, hiding under the litigations in courts.

Deputy National Legal Adviser Okechukwu Osuoha, last year, admitted that there was nothing the party could do until the Ayu exhausted his rights of appeal.

"PDP has to be patient till the apex court takes a final decision on Ayu's suspension before it could do otherwise. Else, the party could be accused of infringing on his fundamental rights," he told a national daily.

Another source stated that apart from sale of nomination forms for aspirants seeking election on its platform, "Technically, the party is comatose." He said that the NWC would

continue to hang around until their tenure expires.

According to him: "How can we call our party the main opposition party when we are not doing anything to show it. The face of the opposition today for Nigerians is Peter Obi of the Labour Party. Then, you ask, 'how is PDP preparing to challenge the APC in 2027? Is it with this dormant NWC. Are they talking to other parties? What are we doing to show we are ready to fight the APC in 2027? It means we are not even good in opposition. Let's cede our ticket for 2027 to Obi then."

PDP National Publicity Secretary, Debo Ologunagba, last year, stated that the party at its meeting on November 28, "thoroughly reviewed the state of the party and directed that all pending intra-party litigations across the country should be withdrawn forthwith."