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10 suspected cultists shot dead in Rivers

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PORT HARCOURT — NO fewer than 10 gunmen, suspected to be cultists, have been shot dead in Buguma, Rivers State, in a renewed crackdown on runaway cultists said to have escaped from Port Harcourt to take refuge in the creeks and swamps of the state.

In Rivers, renounce cultism, get N1m

Already, the state government is offering N1 million to every cultist who is prepared to repent and embrace peace. The state has been allocated N18.207 billion as its own share of allocation from the Federation Account for last month.

Vanguard gathered that as the soldiers closed in on the criminals, sporadic gunshots rang out from their hideout, prompting the soldiers to surround the area and respond with superior firepower in a gun battle, which lasted ten minutes, last weekend.

Eyewitnesses said scores of the gunmen fled and ran into the water, following which some drowned. Ten corpses were recovered lying beside their AK-47 rifles, pistols and dane guns as well as machetes.

Among the dead was a former councillor in the area. His corpse was immediately buried by his father and relations after it was retrieved out from the river when the guns went silent. His father was quoted as saying “my son’s death was politically motivated.”

Fishermen sighted some other unidentified bodies floating on the river, yesterday, far from the battleground, as some of them said they heard the sound of the shootout at their fishing ports, causing them to paddle away to safety.

The Joint Task Force men also swept across Bakana, Harris Town and environs, combing the thick forest, creeks, even as air force helicopters hovered, offering air cover as the ground troops sailed the waters deep into the suspected havens of the terrorists.

Ironically, while some far-flung and surrounding local government councils of the city came under fire, many police stations in Port Harcourt

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have recorded near-zero crime in the last two weeks when the state government invited the military for a total operation to rid the state of terrorists.

A police officer at the command said the “combined efforts of policemen and soldiers have paid off greatly. We now have some respite from those hardened criminals. But that is not saying that petty crime is not being committed here and there”.

Also at the NTA Road Police Command, a female police officer told Vanguard: “One full page of our crime register has not been exhausted since last week. I don’t know whether people are afraid to come to the police station to report crime or whether there are no more criminals around.”

Efforts to contact the Army PRO, Major Sagir Musa, and the state police commissioner failed as their phones rang without response. But an army officer at 2 Amphibious Brigade Headquarters, Bori Camp, told Vanguard: “What you are seeing in Ogoni, Buguma and everywhere in the state is the mandate that we have been given to deal with the situation as it concerns cultism or menace of gunmen.” He did not comment further and pleaded anonymity.

Meanwhile, the Rivers State government has again assured repentant cultists in the state of one million naira each. Governor Celestine Omehia told a delegation of Coalition of National Youth Leaders led by Marvin Yobana in Port Harcourt that the future belongs to the youths, hence they should be encouraged to be good leaders.

He spoke of the readiness of his government to partner with the body to lay a concrete foundation for youths to assume their rightful place in the scheme of things.

“The future belongs to the youths, it is our belief as government that tomorrow starts today, but if you fail to plan for tomorrow today, there will be no tomorrow, and we must start planning for the youths,” the governor said.

Rivers gets N12.2bn lion's share allocation

Meanwhile, the state government received the highest allocation from the Federal Accounts and proceeds of the Value Added Tax for the month of August, having collected N18.207 billion.

Akwa Ibom State government came second with N12.23 billion, followed by Delta and Bayelsa state governments with N8.024 billion and N7.191 billion respectively.

According to details of the allocation which the various tiers of government received on the 26th of last month and posted on the Economic Confidential website, Lagos and Kano led the group of non-oil producing states with N5.957 and N4.164 billion, respectively. The figures did not include the allocations to the various local governments.

Transfer to Excess Crude Account for the month stood at 119,822,299,640.30, while Nigeria Customs Service was given N1,556,723,595.18 as cost of collection. The Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) equally received N1,463,598,147.10 as cost of collection.