

NEWS

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THE Joint Task Force in Rivers state says it has arrested six persons in connection with killings last Wednesday of five persons among whom were three prominent chiefs in Ogbogoro community.

Spokesman of the body and Army PRO in the state, Major Sagir Musa told Saturday Vanguard that they raided three communities in the area yesterday. Among those arrested, he said, was the second in command to Soboma George, leader of the dreaded Outlaws cult group in the state. The areas raided, he said, were Ozuoba, Rumuekini and Ogbogoro.

Sagir said they also raided a shrine where they found photographs of some of the cultists in which they appeared naked, among other items. He said things recovered have since been passed on to the intelligence department of the Army. He said the JTF relied on a tip off that some of cultists were hiding in a hotel along the East-West road, and they immediately stormed the place.

His words: "The houses earmarked for cordon and search is based on intelligence reports. We are to ensure that all the houses are diligently and carefully searched without molesting the house owners, their neighbours and even the villagers."

He continued that the operation was led by the General Staff Officer in charge of Training and Operations 2nd Amphibious Brigade, Lt. Col. A. U Mohammed. Major Musa said the community had pleaded with the JTF not to withdraw its troop immediately from the area as there were fears that the cultists could storm the place on a reprisal mission.

It would be recalled that three chiefs and two women were reportedly killed by suspected cultists in Ogbogoro Wednesday.

Still on the incident, the Rivers state Police Commissioner, Mr. Felix Ogbaudu, while confirming the death of five persons in the cult crisis that engulfed Ogbogoro community in the state on Thursday three chiefs and two women said that crisis broke out in the area after the community carried out some traditional rites to rid the town of militant and criminal activities. Those unsatisfied with the action, he said carried out the attack.

It would be recalled that Vanguard had reported that three chiefs were feared dead when the crisis broke out on Wednesday.

Ogbaudu added that security operatives in the state had uncovered the arrow head of the plot but said he was on the run. He however refused to disclose his name. Meanwhile, a community source who gave details of the incident said the community took youths they considered trouble makers in the town for rituals at a river in the area. He said the essence of the act was to make them vow to drop their evil ways. After the rituals, one of the youths he simply described as Master was still indulging in cult and other criminal actions.

So when the community gathered for a meeting on what line of action to take next he reportedly stormed the place with some his boys, killing three of the chiefs on the spot. They said his men shot sporadically. He said before JTF team could arrive the town the brigands had fled. But when they finally arrived, he said they calmed the situation.

Meanwhile, for fear that the soldiers could begin to harass innocent civilians in the town, the community according to the source quickly mobilized to see how they could help fish out the cultists in the area for the JTF. Youths reportedly marched through Ozuoba, calling on any one harboring the miscreants to release them to the JTF. He said about five persons were later arrested by the security team.

When contacted, the army PRO in the state and JTF spokesman, Major Sagir Musa confirmed the arrest of some youths. So far according to him, they left an Armored Personnel Carrier in the community. He said they also extended provision of security to Ozuoba area.