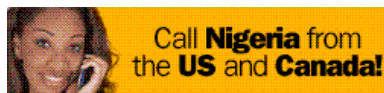


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Easter: Eight students die in boat mishap

EMAIL

 Written by Dayo Johnson, George Onah, Emma Amaize, Jimitota Onoyume & Isiaka Oyibo
 Tuesday, 25 March 2008

AT least eight students were feared drowned at Igbo-Egunnun in the Ilaje Local Government Area of Ondo State, Sunday, while returning from an Easter retreat even as four petrol thieves were killed yesterday in a gun duel with military men in Rivers State.

People believed to be assassins also shot dead, on Sunday, the PDP Chairman in Ankpa Local Government Area of Kogi State, Alhaji Ali Ayegha, ahead of this weekend's fresh governorship election in the state while a clash between two cult groups at Orokpe, Delta State claimed the life of the chairman of the community's vigilance group, Mr. Francis Atima.

His deputy, Mr. Francis Ejijona, and two others were critically injured, and no fewer than five buildings, four of which belonged to Senator Williams Erhadajaye, were razed.

8 students drown in Ondo

The drowned who were mainly students were said to be among 15 passengers in a boat navigating the Oloto/Igbo-Egunrun river at about 2.30 p.m. on Sunday.

The boat unexpectedly capsized, apparently on account of the massive water hyacinth that had taken over the surface of the river.

By yesterday, six bodies — four men and two women— had been recovered, while the search for the rest continued. The retreat was organised for students of tertiary institutions in the state.

A community leader, Mr. Egbayelo, expressed shock and described the incident as unfortunate. Egbayelo said the death of the victims was a great loss to the community, adding that government should do something about the spread of the water hyacinth.

4 fuel thieves shot dead in gun duel

The Rivers State shoot out took place at Isoko where thieves had hidden a petrol laden tugboat and a barge both of which they hijacked three days earlier.

The team from the Joint Task Force (JTF) had traced the tugboat and the barge there for the purpose of retrieving them.

The thieves dared the JTF to a fight, sparking commotion in the area as other seafarers deserted the "battle field."

"We had information about the hijack and troops were immediately deployed along the sea route to monitor the movement of the militants and it yielded fruit," a security source told Vanguard.

"This morning (yesterday), the troops confronted them just as they were trying to move through the Dawes Island with the seizure. There was a heavy shoot out which resulted in the sinking of the speedboats used by the militants. Four of the militants were killed while one was seriously injured. He has been arrested. The JTF is on top of the situation," sources said.

Spokesman for the JTF, Lt.-Col. Sagir Musa, confirmed the incident, saying: "JTF encountered the suspected militants while they were trying to relocate the stolen barge and tugboat at about 9.30 a.m.

"During a heavy shoot out, four of the 12 militants were killed while one was injured and arrested. Our gunboat which was patrolling Isaka area based on intelligence report ran into the militants this morning (yesterday).

"They opened fire on our men but we responded with heavy gunfire resulting in the death of four of their men. One of them was seriously injured and was arrested by our men. As I speak, we are trying to recover the bodies of the slain militants and their sunk boats from the sea."

PDP chairman killed in Kogi

The PDP chairman in Ankpa local government, Alhaji Ayegba, was killed just 72 hours after presiding over a rally of his party at the Township Stadium, Ankpa, ahead of this weekend's fresh governorship election in the state.

Four men were said to have gone to his residence of Olobojo area of the town at about 7:30 p.m and opened fire on him.

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Confirming the incident to Vanguard yesterday, spokesman for the state Police Command, ASP Innocent Inalegu described the killing as wicked and unfortunate. "The killers went to the house of the PDP chairman located at the Olobojo area at about 7.30 p.m and felled him after inflicting injuries on him," he said. He said a team of police detectives had commenced a manhunt for the killers.

The Chairman of Ankpa Local Government, Chief Vincent Baba, who could not also hold back tears when Vanguard contacted him yesterday described the murder as pathetic, gruesome and barbaric.

"This was somebody who only three days ago was on the podium campaigning vigorously for Alhaji Ibrahim Idris only for him to be brought down in this manner," he said. Chief Baba pleaded with the Inspector-General of Police, Mr. Mike Okiro, to ensure adequate security for this weekend's election.

Vigilance chairman shot dead, 5 houses razed in Delta

It was a bloody Easter at Orerokpe, headquarters of Okpe Kingdom in Delta State, Sunday, as two rival cult groups clashed, leaving the vigilance chairman of the community, Mr. Francis Atima, dead.

His deputy, Francis Ejijona and two others were critically injured, while no fewer than five buildings, four of which belonged to Senator Williams Erhadajaiye, razed.

There was tumult in the community all through Easter night and the mayhem continued till yesterday morning when the Joint Task Force (JTF) on the Niger Delta deployed some troops to the community to restore law and order.

The vigilance group's chairman who was shot at a close range by his killers died on the spot while his deputy was rushed to a hospital outside Orerokpe where doctors are battling to save his life. A house belonging to a woman, Mrs. Grace Ikolo, was equally razed in her presence by the cultists, said to be working for a politician in the area.

Special Adviser to the Delta State Governor on Land and Security, Chief Sheriff Oborevowori (JP), was said to have contacted the appropriate security agencies on Sunday evening to contain the situation. He told Vanguard yesterday that the situation was under control.

Vanguard learnt that there are at least five different cult groups in Orerokpe and that trouble started on

Sunday evening when some cultists from a particular group went to a drinking joint and refused to pay for the bottles of drink they had taken.

The surprised owner of the bar contacted the vigilance group in the community, led by the late Atima after efforts to make the cultists see reason failed. Vanguard was told that the vigilance team soon stormed the drinking house and arrested some of the cultists, who were handed over to the police. Some of them escaped.

It was learnt that the colleagues of the cultists made frantic efforts to secure bail for their comrades in police custody that night, but, the vigilance group rejected the move, advising that they should wait till yesterday morning, particularly as the debt for the drinks had not been paid.

The son of a prominent politician in the area, suspected to be a member of one of the rampaging cults, contacted his father to assist in securing bail for his comrades. His father went to the Orerokpe Police Station, spoke with the senior police officer on duty, who advised him to call the leader of the vigilance group, which he did and was told to leave the matter till yesterday morning.

He was about leaving when his son insisted that he would not be allowed to leave the place except his friends were released. The politician summoned the vigilance group's chairman and his team again, but they stood their ground that the matter be allowed to wait till daybreak.

At this stage, said our source, an exchange of words ensued between the members of the cult group and the vigilance team, resulting in a free-for-all and shooting of the chairman, Atima, by one of the cultists. He died on the spot.

The vigilance team retreated after the killing of its chairman and reinforced, but was overpowered by the cultists, who shot the vice chairman.

Another group of cultists in the town, believing that the killing of the vigilance chairman, known to be a staunch supporter of a chairmanship candidate that is financing their group was a calculated plot to take control of the town, embarked on a revenge mission.

They descended on the house, hotel and all the properties of the Senator Erhadajaiye and burnt them that night. The following day, Monday, they went to his estate and continued with the mayhem.

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