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WEDNESDAY 11 MAY

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8 killed as blood flows in Rivers, Bayelsa again

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By Jimitota Onoyume, Samuel Oyadongha & Davies Iheamnachor
PORT HARCOURT— The bloodbath in Rivers State continued, yesterday, as five persons were killed in attacks by suspected cultists in different parts of the state. The state high court premises in Port Harcourt also came under attack.

The attack on the court led to a shutdown of the judicial system in the state.

This came a day after five policemen attached to the 30 Police Mobile Force in Bayelsa State, were killed during a gun battle with suspected cultists at Okobe in Ahoada West Local Government Area of Rivers State.

The policemen were attacked en route their base in Bayelsa from Yobe State, where they went on official assignment.



SUSPECTED CULTISTS—Suspected cult members paraded by the Second Brigade of Nigerian Army in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, yesterday. Photo: NAN.

In the creeks of nearby Bayelsa State, gunmen suspected to be sea pirates and renegade militants in the early hours of yesterday, invaded the coastal town of Foropa in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of the state, killing three soldiers.

The attack on the soldiers, it was gathered, occurred at 1a.m., at a military check point in the coastal settlement.

In the Rivers State incident, among those killed were two private security men guarding the state judiciary complex. It was gathered that the gunmen invaded the state judiciary complex in Port Harcourt, and killed two guards in the court premises.

The killers also attacked three civilian security men who were on night duty with machetes and axes in the court premises.

Two of the victims died instantly, while the third person has been hospitalized.

When **Vanguard** visited the complex, Police patrol vehicles and armed policemen were seen at the two main entrances to the complex.

A female guard, who resumed duty, yesterday morning at the state high court premises, told *Vanguard* that the victims were killed with machetes and axes.

The lady, who pleaded anonymity, said the killers entered the court compound through the gate and met their victims sleeping.

She said the victims were on night duty when they were attacked, adding that the guards were overpowered.

Also, the Chief Security Officer of the court complex, Mr Tabotubo Douglas, who confirmed the killings, said one of the guards was injured and is receiving treatment at an undisclosed hospital.

He said the assailants used hard substances to club the guards, noting that no gunshot was fired.

“Two were killed, one injured. I came to work after 6p.m., and met Policemen all over the place. Unknown men killed the security men on duty.

“The press should verify their news. No gunshot was fired anywhere. No policeman was killed. Rather, it was our security men that were killed. I don’t know when it happened. We don’t know what happened,” Douglas

said.

Asked if the attack on the guards had anything to do with the case involving those arrested in connection with death of late ex militant leader, Soboma George, that was to come up at the court, yesterday , Mr Douglas said he was not sure.

He called on the Police to investigate the incident, expressing hope that work would resume at the judiciary today.

PDP, APC trade blames

Reacting to the killings, Chairman of Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, in the state, Mr Felix Obuah, described the attack on the state judiciary as painful.

Obuah, who spoke in Port Harcourt after his party's congress in the state, in which he was returned elected as chairman of the party for the second term, said the act was perpetrated by enemies of the state.

The All Progressive Congress, APC, in in the state blamed the state government for the ugly incidents.

The state Police Commissioner, Mr Musa Kimo, visited the scene of the incident with some of his officers.

State Police Public Relations Officer, Ahmad Muhammad, who spoke on the incident, said the Police would unearth those behind the killings at the court premises, adding that the killers did not fire any gunshot.

“The civilian security men at the court were attacked by unknown

assailants. We are investigating the matter. And in no distant time, we will come out with something,” he said.

Another attack near prisons

In another attack, **Vanguard** gathered that gunmen shot for several hours on Creek Road, close to Port Harcourt prisons, in the early hours of yesterday.

An officer of the prisons who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the prisons did not come under any threat. The officer said as the gunmen were firing close to the prisons, warders at the prisons had to fire warning shots.

“You know at night when you hear gunshots, they sound very close. So our men had to fire warning shots. It was later we heard that the shots were coming from Creek Road, close to the market,” the source said.

The source confirmed that some inmates linked with the murder of the late Soboma George were to have been conveyed to court, yesterday, adding that they had to stop when they heard of the sad incident at the court.

“We were supposed to have taken inmates detained in connection with the murder of Soboma George to court yesterday. But we stopped when we heard of the death in the court,” the source added.

Gunmen kill three in Bori

Three persons were shot dead on Monday night on Polytechnic Road in Bori, Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Police spokesman, Ahmad confirmed the incident, saying they were shot by suspected hoodlums on a motor bike, adding that the three men were at a relaxation spot when they were killed.

One of those killed was a member of the All Progressives Congress, APC, and the other, a member of the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, while the third one was described as a student of the Polytechnic.

The Police could not confirm if the killing was politically motivated.

“On the issue of Bori, they were relaxing when gunmen opened fire and killed them,” Ahmad said.

Three soldiers killed in Bayelsa creeks

In nearby Bayelsa State, a community source told *Vanguard* that the development had heightened tension in the coastal enclave, with the natives fleeing their homes for fear of possible reprisal attack by the military.

The soldiers, attached to the Joint Task Force, code-named *Operation Pulo Shield*, OPS, were reportedly attacked by armed men, who stormed the checkpoint in two speedboats.

It was gathered that the attackers carted away two AK47 rifles, a General Purpose Machine Gun (GPMG) and some ammunition at the checkpoint.

According to a community source, the soldiers were caught unawares by the suspected sea pirates.

“These militants attack security agents ostensibly to steal their arms and ammunition. Criminally-minded youths are stockpiling arms again. This calls for vigilance among security operatives,” he said.

Coordinator of the Joint Media Centre of the OPS, Col. Isa Ado, confirmed the attack, describing the gunmen as “suspected pirates and renegade militants.”

He said: “At 1p.m., of the day, sea pirates and renegade militants engaged our men at their location in Foropah community in gun battle which was very intense. Some of our men sustained injuries, while three were killed. There were also casualties on the attackers side, which I can confirm. We have condoned off the area and the security operation is ongoing.”

Meanwhile, the community led by the Chairman of Foropa Council of Chiefs, Chief Walson Eribini, and the Chairman of Community Development Committee, Pastor Timi Ode, yesterday, condemned the killing of the soldiers and called on the Federal Government to ensure the killers were brought to justice.

Pastor Timi Ode, who spoke with **Vanguard** after an emergency meeting by indigenes of the community in Yenagoa, said the unfortunate incident had triggered fear in the community.

“The report we heard over the killing of the soldier was sad. We condemned it in the strongest of terms. And we have sent a Save-Our-Soul letter to the state governor, Mr Seriake Dickson and the Commander of the OPS to ensure that our community and the people are safe,” he said.

17 suspected cultists, kidnappers paraded

Meanwhile, the Nigerian army, yesterday, paraded 17 suspected cultists and kidnappers at the 2 Brigade headquarters in Port Harcourt. Spokesman of the Brigade, Captain Eli Lazarus, said five General Purpose Machine Guns, GPMG, 16 AK 47 riffles, two fabrique national rifles, six Pump action rifles, three G- 3 rifles were among items recovered from them during the operations.

He said: “Three G-3 magazines, 11 fabrique national magazines, 15 AK 47 rifle magazines, 11 short dane guns, 508 rounds of 7.62mm (NATO) ammunition, 313 rounds of 7.62 mm (special) ammunition were recovered.”

Captain Lazarus, said nine pieces of dynamites were also recovered from the hoodlums.

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