

Delta police arrest 10 cultists

CAJETAN MMUTA, Asaba

DELTA State Police Command has declared its readiness to flush out secret cult members, whose activities have led to the death of four persons within one week in Asaba, the state capital.

This is as the command announced arrest of 10 suspected cultists in Asaba and 18 members of an outlawed vigilante group, "Bakassi Boys" in Ugheli town.

Also apprehended by the police were two persons involved in oil bunkering in other community in Ugheli. Arrested with the bunkerers was a tanker vehicle, carrying 13,800 litres of black oil.

Parading the suspects Thursday at the Command headquarters, Commissioner of Police, Mr Udon Ekpoudom lamented that activities of cultists and 'Bakassi Boys' were threat to peace in the state.

Also paraded was a dead member of one of the cult groups killed by a rival group on Wednesday in Asaba.

Mr. Ekpoudom alleged that prominent politicians, lawyers and some elders in Asaba were behind the cultists, noting that organised crime has left untold mayhem on residents of the state capital.

He said Asaba in recent times has been besieged by cultists who are out to kill and maim themselves due to endless reprisal attacks.

He maintained however that the Command is poised to stem the tide as adequate security has been put in place in parts of the town.

The Police boss attributed the upsurge in the violent and bloody skirmishes, of the cultists on attempts by their sponsors to have total control over the controversial and illegal land speculation which has continued to pitch individuals and groups within quarters in Asaba.

He explained further that the situation had been worsened by the high tempo of political activities as politicians recruit thugs to pave way for actualisation of their individual ambitions

Ekpoudom said that the Bakassi Boys were nabbed in Ughelli town after their members had shot dead an unnamed operator of a petrol filling station who refused to part with an undisclosed amount of money to the militia group for vigilante activities in the town.

He specifically condemned the activities of the militia group

for what he described as a plot by the body to form a parallel police in the state.

He therefore urged residents of the state to go about their normal businesses as the situation has been under control.

However, investigations by *Saturday Champion* revealed that over 40 houses and several vehicles were destroyed during the mayhem which started Thursday, previous week.

The tension in the town has forced residents in Ogeilo, Umuaji, Ogeosewe, Ogeogo and Umuagu quarters in Asaba where the activities of the secret cult rival groups are most severe, to flee to neighbouring villages and towns.

Worse as the bloody violence has left the city, social activities especially in the night have drastically reduced as the hoodlums cash-in on the hours to attack their perceived enemies while others rob people of their valuables.

There was heavy gun battle on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday in the affected quarters including Ibusa Road junction, Ogeogonogo and Stadium areas of Asaba.