

Sara-suka, cultism taking Jos by storm

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With ethno-religious crisis almost a thing of the past in Jos, the Plateau State capital, emerging security challenges are sending shivers to communities despite a high presence of security personnel within the city centre. The rising cases of criminal gangs, popularly referred to as Yan Sara-suka, and cult groups within densely populated communities, are threatening to return the state capital back to the volatile days of fear, division and anguish. Right now, the activities of Sara-suka, a criminal gang more commonly among Muslim Hausa communities in Jos north, and cultism among Christian communities around Gada-biyu and environs are seen as the two major security threats bedevilling the city.



Rising cases of cultism

In 2017, the Permanent Secretary, Security in Plateau State, Cornelius Sholbial attributed the low level of nightlife activities in Jos to rising cases of cultism. Sholbial stated this while

answering questions during a media parley between Governor Simon Bako Lalong and journalists as part of activities marking that year's Democracy Day. He had noted that tricycle riders, popularly referred to as Keke-napep were mostly targeted by the cultists and it was partly why the state government had banned their movement after 9pm.

At the time he made the statement, not many had insight as to the severity of cult activities around the metropolis until early May when members of two deadly cult groups clashed around Gada-biyu, leading to the death of about 11 people. The clash had been a climax of what members of the community described as weeks of tit-for-tat killings between the Black Axe and the Red Axe. Prior to the clash, members of the affected communities had suspected that certain sinister activities among some residents could be linked to cult groups, but only few had known for sure that cultists were living comfortably among the people.

"Cult activities used to be known as one of the major vices confronting Nigeria's tertiary education, but today, the menace has spilled to the streets of Jos, with members living discreetly among closely knit communities," Joseph Idu, a resident of Gada-biyu said.

Idu, who asked Daily Trust on Sunday to protect his true identity, said the activities of the cult groups had almost led to chaos in Government Secondary School (GSS), Kabong a few weeks ago. He said, "A secondary school female student who was dating a cult member reported to him that a teacher had flogged her. If not for the quick intervention of some community leaders and youths, GSS Kabong would have

been burnt down because the cult member was threatening to avenge for his girlfriend.”

Another community leader who pledged anonymity because he had been threatened by the group said, “One of the groups used to converge in a hotel called Cool Penny, but it was recently demolished by members of the other gang during the clash. After security operation in May, a lot of cultists were arrested while others went underground, but we suspect that they are now regrouping because they have commenced reconstructing that building.”

He said the cultists lived in the crannies and most often look miserable because they are stern alcoholics and drug addicts. Joseph Idu said though their mode of operation still remained mysterious, the main target was to get elevated in ranks as they kill major targets of rival cult groups.

“The issue of cultism is dicey around the Kabong axis, which include Gada-biyu. Nobody wants to talk about it because you may be targeted. The security agents are doing their best, but they are not spirits and some parents are shielding their children because of fear that they may also attack them,” he said.