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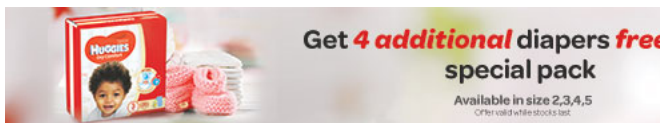
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## How cultism is sniffing out nightlife in Benin

By Usman A. Bello, Benin | Published Date Mar 10, 2019 0:51 AM



*A cross-section of suspects allegedly arrested for cultism paraded by Edo State police commissioner*

Nineteen-year-old Godspower Edobor was killed as a result of supremacy battle between rival cult groups in Edo State.

Edobor was killed at Omozeghiam Street, off Okhoro road in Benin metropolis by a rival cult group who chased him from his house into the street and shot him dead.

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As a result of cult war between rival groups over yet to be identified issues, many youths in the city have lost their lives. It was gathered that between February 5 and 20 this year, over 15 youths were killed in Benin metropolis.

Among those killed in the fight was a hotel manager, Okunkpolor Osatohamwen. He was shot dead in his place of work at Upper Sakpoba area of Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area on February 18 by unidentified gunmen.

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As the dust of the killings was settling down, there was a reprisal attack on February 19, where over four persons were killed. Among those killed on that day was a man simply identified as Africa. He was said to have been killed while he was in his beer parlour, located at Uyiosa junction, Upper Sakponba. It was gathered that his assailants dragged him out of his beer parlour and shot at him severally. When they discovered that bullets could not penetrate him, they allegedly used machete and axe on him.

Three persons were also killed on February 20.

It was further gathered that the fight between Eiye and Arrow-baga confraternities claimed over 10 lives within a space of one week.

The police were also not spared in the clash as a sergeant was reportedly killed in a crossfire between rival cult groups.

*Daily Trust on Sunday* gathered that following the development, most of the cult boys abandoned their homes while waiting for tension to abate.

Between January and early February, over 180 suspected criminals were paraded by the police. Out of this number, over 130, aged between 14 and 19 years, were arrested over cultism. This development has created palpable fear in Benin metropolis, especially Upper Sakpoba and Third area, where most of the killings took place.

*Daily Trust on Sunday* reports that before the upsurge in cult activities, fun seekers used to relax in some eateries or visit night clubs after a hectic day job and enjoyed themselves till midnight. But today, the streets of Benin, especially areas like Upper

Sakpoba and Third junction, you hardly find anybody in the streets beyond 7pm.

A resident of the area, James O, said the development was affecting business in the area as shops, drinking joints and other relaxation spots are hurriedly shut down by 6pm in order not to fall victim of cult attack by hoodlums who lurk around waiting to carry out attack on their targets.

He said the development had grounded economic activities in the areas as everyone now goes home early.

Also, a trader at a popular Ekiosa market, by Third junction, who only gave her name as Mary, said the killings had affected night trading in the area.

“Before this development, we made quick money between 7pm and 9pm when civil servants and artisans who closed late visited the market for last minute shopping.

“Low income earners and the unemployed usually waited for the evening time before coming to Ekiosa market to buy food items because they believed that at such hours they could get cheaper items. But now, nobody dares stay beyond 7pm. As from 6:30pm, this place is like a ghost town. The cult fight is really affecting us,” she said.

Another shop owner in the area, who did not want his name mentioned, also said, “The development is not healthy for our business. Even in the day time you see them pushing one another with guns. So we have to close early because they can use the opportunity to rob us of our sales,” she said.

Speaking to *Daily Trust on Sunday*, the police public relations officer, Edo State command, Chidi Nwaduzor, said the fight among secret cult groups had become a serious challenge for the command.

“The development has been a problem, especially around Third and Upper Sakpoba axis of Benin metropolis,” he said, adding that a good number of the suspects have been arrested.

“Following the preparation for the presidential and National Assembly elections, the command solicited the cooperation of other security agencies to carry out some raid actions. These raid operations were carried out by the Police, Army, Air Force, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Department of State Service (DSS), Customs and the National Drugs Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA). We were able to calm the situation with the raid operation.

“So far, so good, the city is calm after the elections, apart from the recent one that happened in New Benin area; where one Victor Osas was murdered by another rival cult group,” he said.

Nwabuzor noted that the fight between rival cult groups in the state was seasonal.

“Rivalry between cult groups becomes tense at the resumption of new academic session as they use it as an avenue to get close to members who they have problems with but were fortunate enough to have gone on holidays after examination,” he further said.

He also said that cult clashes were usually prevalent during examination periods when they know that students whom they have an axe to grind with would be available. So they target their victims during examinations and resumption time.

On what usually caused the fight, Nwabuzor said, “As we know, there are many people who engage the cult groups to fight for land, properties, traditional stool, relationship conflict (like girlfriends, crashing marriages), among others.”

He called on the youth to stay away from cultism as it does no one any good.

Also speaking on the development, the Edo State Government said it had put measures in place to address incessant cult clashes in the state.

Speaking with our correspondent, the media assistant to Governor Godwin Obaseki, Crusoe Osagie, said the recent upsurge in cult fight had political undertone.

“We have it on good authority that politicians were arming the youths for the elections. When it was postponed, they had already given them the arms, and with the one week extension, they decided to use the weapons against themselves. So the rivalry was what followed after arming the youths,” he noted.

He, however, noted that the problem of cultism in the state predated the election period as it kept happening from time to time. He said the state government was using the carrot-and-stick approach by strengthening the security architecture in the state.

“Edo State has launched the Security Trust Fund. We have also launched “Operation Wabazigan,” comprising various security agencies and the vigilante group, in order to nip crimes in the bud. The vigilantes will permeate the communities to gather useful information for the security agencies.

“Government is also working on a law, which is with the state House of Assembly. The law will pronounce specific and very severe penalty for people who are found to be involved in secret cult activities.

“These are some of the things that are being done to stop cultism and cult-related fight or violence in the state. Every crime committed in Edo State will be met with severe penalty when the law is passed,” he warned.

He urged the youth to engage in productive ventures because an idle man is the devil's workshop. He said there's the need for proper orientation because most people joined cult groups due to ignorance.

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