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Bakassi council, cult clash claims two

From Anietie Akpan, Calabar

TWO persons have been reported dead and several houses destroyed as a cult group unleashed mayhem on the New Bakassi Local Council on Monday and yesterday.

At least 15 persons are already in police custody as two shrines with human skull were uncovered in Ikang Town, New Bakassi following the fracas and prompt response by the police and the state emergency response team.

Bakassi Council officials yesterday confirmed the incident but denied the death of any person though the locals involved in the clash said two people were killed by the cult group.

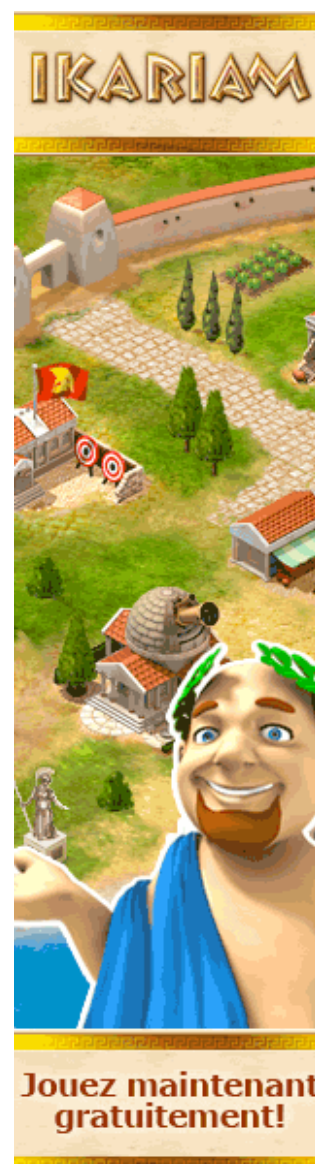
Some in the council attributed the incident to a clash between the neighbouring Akpabuyo Council and the newly established New Bakassi, carved out of Akpabuyo in the wake of Nigeria ceding Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroun in 2002.

Vice Chairman, New Bakassi Council, Mr Ene Cobham told The Guardian "the clash was between a notorious cult group and the Bakassi Council over revenue points and has nothing to do with Akpabuyo Council."

He equally denied claims that two persons died but confirmed that "not less than 15 persons were arrested by the police and security men of the Operation MESA put in place by the state government to handle emergency cases.

He said two dangerous fetish shrines in the heart of Ikang and Asin Ufot Ikang, belonging to the

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rampaging cult group, had been uncovered by the police and "a human skull, several wraps of Indian hemp, about 20 masquerade masks and other fetish things were found at the shrines."

Cobham said the leader of the cult group was on the run and a councillor in New Bakassi, Mr. Effanga Ekeng, was yesterday suspended for three months for alleged involvement with the cult group.

Meanwhile, Bakassi Council Chairman, Ignatius Edet, who is reportedly bitter over the crisis, has set up a five-man committee to investigate the matter.

Cobham explained that the conflict ensued between the cult group and the council because the cult members kicked against the new revenue committee put in place by the Bakassi Council recently to handle revenue matters for it.

He, however, confirmed that the situation had been brought under control by the police and that the state government had been informed.

The state Police Public Relations Officer, Tom Adama Opene, could not be reached for comments but police sources confirmed the arrest and discovery of the two shrines with human skull and other fetish materials.

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