

Six feared dead as cults clash in Enugu, Ekpoma

From Lawrence Njoku, (Enugu)
Alemma-Ozoruvu Aliu (Benin City)

NO fewer than six people were feared dead yesterday as rival cult groups clashed at the Institute of Management and Technology (IMT), Enugu and the university town of Ekpoma, Edo State.

IMT was deserted as students scampered for safety following clashes by rival cult groups that allegedly left three persons dead with several others sustaining injuries. The development had disrupted academic activities in the school as the rampaging cult groups engaged in several shoot-outs that sent lecturers and students away from the school.

In Ekpoma, seven persons were feared dead as a result of clashes between rival cults, Maphites and Black Axe, with the latest casualty being a graduate who had gone to Ambrose Ali University (AAU), which is located in the town, to collect his call up letter for the National Youths Service

Corps (NYSC). Eyewitnesses said six of the victims were shot at different locations in the town while one of them was shot dead in front of the school gate on Wednesday.

But the Edo State police spokesman, Peter Ogboi, put the figure of the dead at three while and said some arrests have been made. "The situation is worrisome but it is under control. We have sent operatives to the area and they are already making huge success to get all those involved. Two suspected cultists are already with us now; they were arrested with arms. They are being questioned over what happened in Ekpoma by a special squad and they are going through intensive interrogation."

In Enugu, *The Guardian* gathered that the clash between members of Black Axe and Vikings had erupted at about 10:00 a.m. when a bus loaded with persons dressed in black shirts stormed the IMT premises and started shooting.

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persons were killed on the spot, the third person died while being rushed to the hospital from various wounds he sustained in the gun duel.

Security was later beefed up when the rampaging cult members left as the entrances to the school were barricaded by the police.

But Rector of the institute, Prof. Edwin Onyeneje, who confirmed the development how-

ever, said that only one person was killed in the clash in the school, stressing that information reaching him further indicated that another person was killed around the Maryland area of the state by the groups.

He attributed the development to the forthcoming elections, saying that secret cult groups would want to do all in their power to protect people financing them.

Meanwhile, police said yesterday that they have taken extra measures to ensure the safety of students, lecturers and members of the public entering the institution. Police Public Relations Officer, Ebere Amaraizu, said the gallantry of police prevented further casualties, assuring the public that calm had been restored to the school.

On his part, the Public Relations Officer of Ambrose Ali University, Dr. Chris Adamaigbo, said that the persons killed were not known students of the university and that the institution has nothing to do with the ugly incident.