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Renewed Cult War In Benin: Residents Panic, Police Caution

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AFTER what looked like a respite, there was renewed cult war in Edo State, which as at last week, had reportedly claimed about 20 lives, although the Police dispute the casualty figures and have refused to disclose the number of persons killed.

The Guardian gathered that not less than 20 lives were lost as a result of reported clash between members of the Eiye Confraternity and the Black Axe.



Besides, at least 10 persons have been reportedly arrested by the Police over the clash, while it was learnt that some of the leaders of the gangs were on the run, following the determination of the security agencies in the state, in collaboration with the state government, to hunt the suspects down.

The cult war took a twist penultimate Saturday, as The Guardian reliably gathered that suspected cult members snatched a rifle from a Police Inspector attached to the Surveillance/Anti-Robbery Squad Team A of Ogida Police Station, who was on duty on that night.

It was further gathered that the affected officer was on duty with his colleagues less than 50 metres from the station when the incident happened and that his armed colleagues seemed helpless and may have been remanded by the Police authorities.

The incident was said to have happened at around 7.30 pm and barely 24 hour after, a youth leader in Ova community in Egor Council, Victor Odigie, was reported to have been trailed by three masked men along a bush path leading to his house, who shot him inside his Mercedes Benz car and fled.

The three men were said to have trailed their victim on a motorbike, which they abandoned after removing the plate numbers.

The deceased was said to have been rushed to a public hospital, where he was confirmed dead and his body deposited in a morgue.

Also, The Guardian learnt that members of the rival cult groups went to the home of one of the suspects, currently on the run, whose father was said to be a member of one of the warring groups, to resolve issues bothering on money.

It was while they were settling the issue that the suspect went upstairs and came back with a pump action gun and shot a member of the rival cult group in the leg.

The victim was rushed to the nearest hospital by his colleagues, while the suspect escaped. Consequently, his (victim) colleagues mobilised and went for a reprisal attack, visiting the homes of members of the rival cult group.

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This, according to sources, led to the various attacks, started from Ogbelaka area of Benin City, and spreading to Idu Owena, after Ugbowo, Isihor, Ugbiyoko, Textile Mill Road, New Benin and Igbesanwa areas.

Apparently worried by the incident, Governor Adams Oshiomhole was said to have convened an emergency security meeting last penultimate Friday and charged security operatives to fish out the killers; hence the arrest of ten persons, just as efforts are being made to find peaceful resolution of the crisis.

Though the state Commissioner of Police, Folusho Adebajo, did not confirm the number of persons killed, he described the killings as unacceptable and vowed that the Police would deal with the situation.

"We are not relaxing at all; we are in search of the leaders behind this. Some persons have been arrested, while some are in the run.

"The killings will stop, because the Police are on alert now. I can assure you that anybody arrested will be dealt with very seriously.

"All security agencies in the state are concerned. The governor is equally concerned and residents of the state are concerned, so we will not relent to stop this madness.

"It is very sad that people no longer value human lives," he said.

And as a confirmation of the threat to deal with the issue, 10 arrested suspected cultists, among other suspected criminals, including armed robbers, kidnappers and other criminals, were paraded on Thursday by Adebajo.

He said officer of the command recovered arms, including two AK47 rifle and magazines, 23 rounds of 7.62mm live ammunition, two-horse magnum pump action guns, one English-made cut-to-size double barrel gun and 107 live cartridges from the suspects in the last three weeks.

While parading the suspects, Adebajo reiterated his call to criminals and cultists to leave the state or face the consequences, just as he solicited the cooperation of the public to give useful information to the police.

While commending the ban on commercial motorcycles in the state, Adebajo said: "I remember when I assume duty here, I warned all the criminals to relocate or repent. Some of those who have not obeyed the order are the ones you are seeing here now.

"The Edo State Police command is working tirelessly to make sure that Edo people sleep with their two eyes closed. We are doing everything to make sure that the state is very peaceful and we will not relent.

"This is to warn all the criminals that they should desist from their acts or leave the state, as we are going to continue to pursue them."

He continued: "Some of them are armed robbers, kidnappers and those involved in the recent cultists killings.

"I want to thank the good people of Edo State for their collaboration with the Police and if we all work together, we can have a peaceful society.

"We need their assistance and cooperation, as we cannot do it alone. Everybody must join hands to make the state a peaceful place. We urge the people to continue to support us and give us useful information.

"By next week, they will charge to court. There are some that we cannot parade, because investigation is ongoing, but I assure you that they will be charged to court next week. This parade is our operation for three weeks.

"We have arrested some of the cultists, with some of them on the run, but we will not relent. We must get then, because cultism will not be allowed to thrive in Edo State.

"I wonder why students will be killing themselves. I don't understand, but they will be treated by criminals; we are not going to spare them in anyway."

He was optimistic that the ban on commercial motorcycles in the city would help check the excesses of criminals in the state.

"The ban on Okada is a very good thing is for security purposes, because a lot of crimes being committed in Benin City are bike-related crimes.



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