

Cult Members Kill 10 In Benin

• Militants Kidnap
Syrian In Port Harcourt

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Secret cults and militancy have been cloned into a truly dangerous breed in Benin City and Port Harcourt where they kill, main.

They terrorise residents and police alike, with no one – poor, rich, powerful – feeling safe.

Members of cults in Benin have killed at least 10 people in the past two weeks to progress their activities and keep the police on their toes.

About 14 people have been arrested, paraded along with armed robbery suspects at the weekend by Edo Police Commissioner, Bala Hassan.

Continues on A2

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Continued from A1

Those killed by cult members on June 15 and 16 included Osaretin Ajayi, Samson Adereme, Efosa Osemwengie, and Ilibade Adetona. Their corpses were dumped around the central police station in the city.

Hassan confirmed that three suspects have been arrested over the death of the four people and that the investigation is going well.

The prevalence of cults in Edo, especially in Benin, has defied solution for years; and remains worrisome, like armed robbery.

Clashes between different gangs are common spectacles for residents.

The police arrested six persons on June 28 at Kings Square in the city when members of a cult hired by a leader of one faction of the Drivers Welfare Scheme (DWS) unleashed mayhem on another.

Two persons were murdered on Second Cemetery Road. One of them, Eghosa Owie, was sent by his boss to collect a debt owed on the sale of a vehicle.

In the past few weeks, there have been several cases of missing persons believed kidnapped by cults; to which security sources also link the high rate of robberies in the state.

In Port Harcourt, militants abducted a Syrian at the weekend, thereby reneging on their pledge to stop hostage taking and give President Umaru Yar'Adua time to resolve the Niger Delta conflict.

Eyewitnesses narrated that the gunmen dressed in

police and military uniforms. They captured the man on Eyo Road in the Government Reservation Area (GRA) about 10 p.m.

Rivers Police Public Relations Officer, Ireju Barasua, confirmed the incident, as well as efforts being made to ascertain the employers of the Syrian and those who got him.

Militants also stepped up their attacks on Rumuolumeni in the state, killing three persons, among them the traditional ruler of Nkpor, who was slain in a dawn raid.

Intermittent explosions from dynamite and gunshots forced Governor Celestine Omehia to stay away from the inauguration of the golf course built by NNS Pathfinder and the opening of a maiden golf tournament.

Omehia, billed as the special guest of honour, had to cancel his appearance when the Navy informed him that security had deteriorated and he should keep away.

Instead of going to Rumuolumeni he headed for Enugu to attend a reception for Deputy Senate President, Ike Ekweremadu.

The kidnap of the Syrian came a few days after an armed gang abducted a three-year-old son of a lawmaker from Okrika. He was released on Friday on the payment of a ransom.

Militants had only two weeks ago promised to stop hostage taking and the disruption of oil facilities as a sign of their willingness to give Yar'Adua time to get going.

No group had claimed responsibility for the abduction

of the Syrian at press time.

The traditional ruler of Nkpor and scores of other persons were confirmed dead in a cult related clash. Four communities in Khana Council were destroyed.

A conflict between Deewell and Deegbam cults in the community has spilled over to neighbouring communities in Kong, Kaani II and Kaani II, where residents have fled.

Khana Council Caretaker Committee Chairman, B. Tonwi, confirmed the death of the monarch and the flattening of homes.

He said he has arranged a meeting of stakeholders drawn from the Community Development Committees and the impacted areas.

Tonwi urged the residents to return to their homes and gave an assurance that the government would ensure that cult activities are eliminated.

However, the violence got worse at the weekend when cult members killed three persons, then bombed the home of a former Commissioner.

The gunmen first struck in Rumuolumeni, local headquarters of the Navy. They killed two in a night raid, and ransacked the town. The residents fled.

The attackers ferried off the corpses through the creeks before the arrival of the police and other security agencies.

The police deployed some 50 officers in the area and solicited the assistance of the Navy in restoring order.

Eyewitnesses said the attack could be connected with last Sunday's murder of the youth leader in the community, Golden Isi, by cult members loyal to a militant who was slain in May.

They avenged the killing of Isi, who belonged to the camp of a popular Ijaw militant being looked upon to end the Niger Delta conflict.

As a battery of gunmen was bombing Rumuolumeni, another in Ogoni hit the home of the traditional ruler of Nkpor, headquarters of Gokana Council, and murdered him on the allegation that he was a patron and sponsor of cult activities.

About the time of the two attacks, yet another gang threw an explosive into the Abuloma home of former Local Government Affairs Commissioner, Mela Ofobirika.

He survived. But the duplex was badly damaged and several vehicles parked in the compound were destroyed.

Ofobirika could not be reached for comment, but Police Commissioner, Felix Ogbaudu, confirmed the attacks.

He said his men have taken over the troubled spot and that the situation has been brought under control.

"We are working round the clock to ensure that security in the affected areas does not degenerate. Our men are on the ground in all those places. Let people go about their normal duties and report any untoward movement or activity to us", Ogbaudu added.