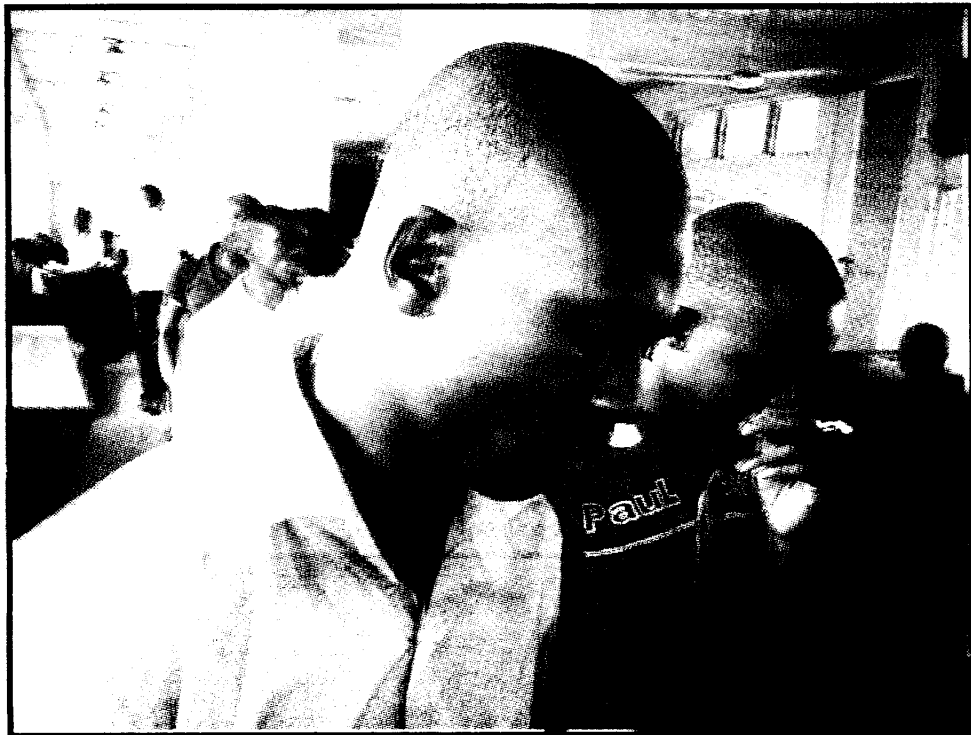


CRIME WATCH



• Mike (left) and Ikechukwu



• Ismaila (right) and onlookers

Kidnappers blamed for alleged killings

Stories by Titilayo Banjoko

SOME residents of Itire-Ikate, a suburb of Lagos, have blamed a gang of kidnappers, said to use their victims for ritual purposes, for the spate of killings in the area. The searchlight on the mysterious deaths was beamed on the area after Rafiu Ismail, a resident of the community, became the latest victim of an alleged 'bloodthirsty' kidnap ring.

On Thursday, November 3, a landlord was electrocuted on Smith Street along Lawanson Road in the Itire-Ikate area of Lagos as he made to connect electric power from a high tension electric wire in the company of one of his tenants.

While the tenant was fortunate to have survived the ordeal with a couple of severe injuries to boot, the landlord, a 35-year-old man who, until the time of his death was popularly called IK, had to pay with his life. IK, according to sources who pleaded anonymity because of security reasons, made a living from selling rugs and carpets around Lagos.

He also owned the property on No. 33, Smith Street where he met his untimely death. His woes had begun, sources said, when he invited one of his tenants who work for the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) to help him reconnect his house to the main grid after faults were discovered from an electric pole which hitherto supplied power to the building and a few others in the vicinity.

According to eyewitnesses, while the

PHCN employee made his way through the rungs of the ladder, Mr IK clasped to the ladder below in a firm grip to prevent his tenant from falling.

The steel ladder had made contact with the high tension wire above, unknown to the two of them, sending landlord and tenant into a vicious spin, eyewitnesses recounted.

While the landlord was said to have died on the spot, his tenant was reported to have been in a state of coma as he was badly bruised and torn.

The late landlord's family, however, would not take his death lying low. Accusing fingers were immediately pointed the way of a Muslim cleric called Alfa Lukman, who was alleged to have predicted that the deceased would certainly join his ancestors within three days.

Another source who spoke to *Newsextra* said the deceased had discovered a fetish substance on the front terraces of his compound one morning and had contacted a more seasoned Muslim cleric who informed him that the fetish substance was certainly

not a good omen and sacrifices must be offered to the gods to turn the omen on its head.

Piecing the stories together, the deceased's family reportedly went into a rage. Unable to lay their hands on Alfa Lukman, the aggrieved family of Mr IK seized a close ally of Lukman's; 28-year-old Rafiu Ismail to carry out their reprisal attacks.

"I was coming back from work on November 4 when six able-bodied men who I immediately recognised as the late landlord's boys descended on me. They dragged me forcefully and pulled me into the compound from where I was taken into the backyard.....they tied my hands and feet and beat me with canes and charms....." Ismail recounted.

Ismail continues; "They brought out two native white eggs, muttered some incantations and requested from me the names of my parents. I refused to mention my parents' names. So, they proceeded to break the eggs on my head. They told me they would kill me if I didn't speak. I was shouting at this point. A young boy who heard my screams alerted people who rushed to my

rescue."

Ismail further told *Newsextra* that he overheard the gang say they needed seven human heads to perform the rituals for the late landlord's burial.

Two of the suspects who harassed Ismail, Ikechukwu Eze, 28 and Nwakore Mike 33, have since been picked up by the police and have confessed in separate statements to be part of the group who brutally assaulted Ismail, with order from the deceased's family.

Ikechukwu, who was supposed to have tied the knots with his would-be bride last Saturday, has blamed the devil for his role in the onslaughts in the area and the twosome have confessed that ritual kidnapping and killings are what they engage in to earn a living.

Some residents of the Itire community in separate interviews confided in *Newsextra* that rituals for the purposes of making money have been going on in the community for a while now. They pointed to the deluge of decaying corpses exhumed around the area recently when work for the dredging of the nearby canal commenced, as proof that kidnappings and killings abound in this Lagos suburb.

Investigations into the reprisal attacks carried out on Ismail by the gang of six is ongoing and the case has been charged to court.

All attempts to get the views of the Lagos State Police Public Relations Officer, Mr Samuel Jinadu, proved futile at the time of filing this report, as his mobile phone was switched off.