

crime



12 youths killed in IYC bloody election

• Many others maimed, injured, vehicles destroyed

From Mike Odiegwu and Rosemary Nwisi, Port Harcourt

NO fewer than 12 youths and many others injured died at the weekend during violence that occurred during the Eastern Zonal election of the Ijaw Youths Council (IYC).

The election, which took place at Abuloma, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, on Saturday ended in a supremacy cult war as two rival cult groups fought with guns, machetes and other weapons.

The youth held residents of Abuloma hostage, chanting war songs as they captured members of their enemy camp and butchered them in daylight.

It was gathered that sounds of gunshots boomed for hours during the fiasco that saw residents locked up in their houses and businesses halted throughout the day.

A Hilux van carrying many cutlasses drove into one of the areas and youths were seen arming themselves with the weapon and engaging in a free-for-all.

Some leaders of the IYC, including the President of the group, Jonathan Lokpobiri,

were reportedly held hostage for hours until a detachment of security operatives arrived at the scene.

Unconfirmed reports said the two groups lost 12 youths from both sides to the violence, adding that many vehicles were burnt and many people injured and maimed by the rampaging youths.

It was gathered that the election was organised to elect the executive committee members of the Eastern Zone.

Efforts to hold the election last weekend at Opobo ended in fiasco compelling the shift of the poll and its venue to Abuloma.

It was gathered that the chairmanship position of the zone was later politicised as youths were divided into two groups, who promoted different candidates based on their political divides.

Prior to the election, a freedom fighter and former President of IYC, Alhaji Majaheed Asari-Do-

kubo, was seen in a viral video dishing out concoction from a basin to fortify youths loyal to him.

The pro-Asari group was said to be working to ensure the emergence of a chairman that would be loyal to the governor while others were working to enthrone a pro-Wike chairman.

A former IYC President, Udengs Eradiri, condemned the violence confirming that it was fuelled by some persons, who were dropping the names of Wike and Fubara in a matter concerning the IYC.

Eradiri dismissed such antics, insisting that the political disagreement between Fubara and Wike should not be exploited by some leaders of the IYC.

He described such name-dropping as "all lies", saying some people only depended on it to collect money from politicians and enrich themselves.

Eradiri said Wike singlehandedly made Fubara, from the Ijaw extraction, a governor and that the Ijaw should be concerned

with settling the dispute between them and not deploying it to divide the Ijaw groups.

He said: "What is all this nonsense about Sim candidates or Wike candidates in IYC zonal election? These are lies and tools of blackmail to collect money from politicians, who lack self-confidence.

"No sitting IYC zonal chairman can work against Ijaw interest or governor, it won't happen because the Ijaw forces will stop him except the governor does not know his terrain and powers.

"I don't believe Sim Fubara or Wike had anything to do with IYC elections. Sycophant followers stop these lies that have led to the needless death of youths."

But the executive members of the IYC loyal to Lokpobiri convened an emergency meeting yesterday morning and blamed the violence on the Secretary-General of IYC, Nangi Maobuye Obu, in whose zone the election was held.