

# Ritualists on the prowl in zamfara community

MUHAMMAD SABIU - GUSAU

TALATAN Mafara town is the headquarters of Talatan Mafara Local Government Area of Zamfara State. Today, the local government is reputed to have been the only one in the state that has produced two governors. The first indigene of the council to have been made governor was Malam Yahaya Abdulkareem, who was the governor of the old Sokoto State (then comprising Sokoto and Zamfara states). Again, the incumbent governor of Zamfara State, Alha Abdulaziz Yari, also hails from Talatan Mafara town.

However, in recent times, the town is gradually turning into an enclave of ritualists. Most of the residents told *Saturday Tribune* that night life in the small community is now at its lowest ebb because of the fear of ritualists.

A student of Abdu Gusau Polytechnic (the only higher institution of learning in the town) who would not like his name in print, noted that because of the activities of the ritualists, life in the school is boring.

"Before this time, we used to stay outside the campus in the evening, sometimes even late at night, to socialise with the people of the area; but today, all this has changed," he said.

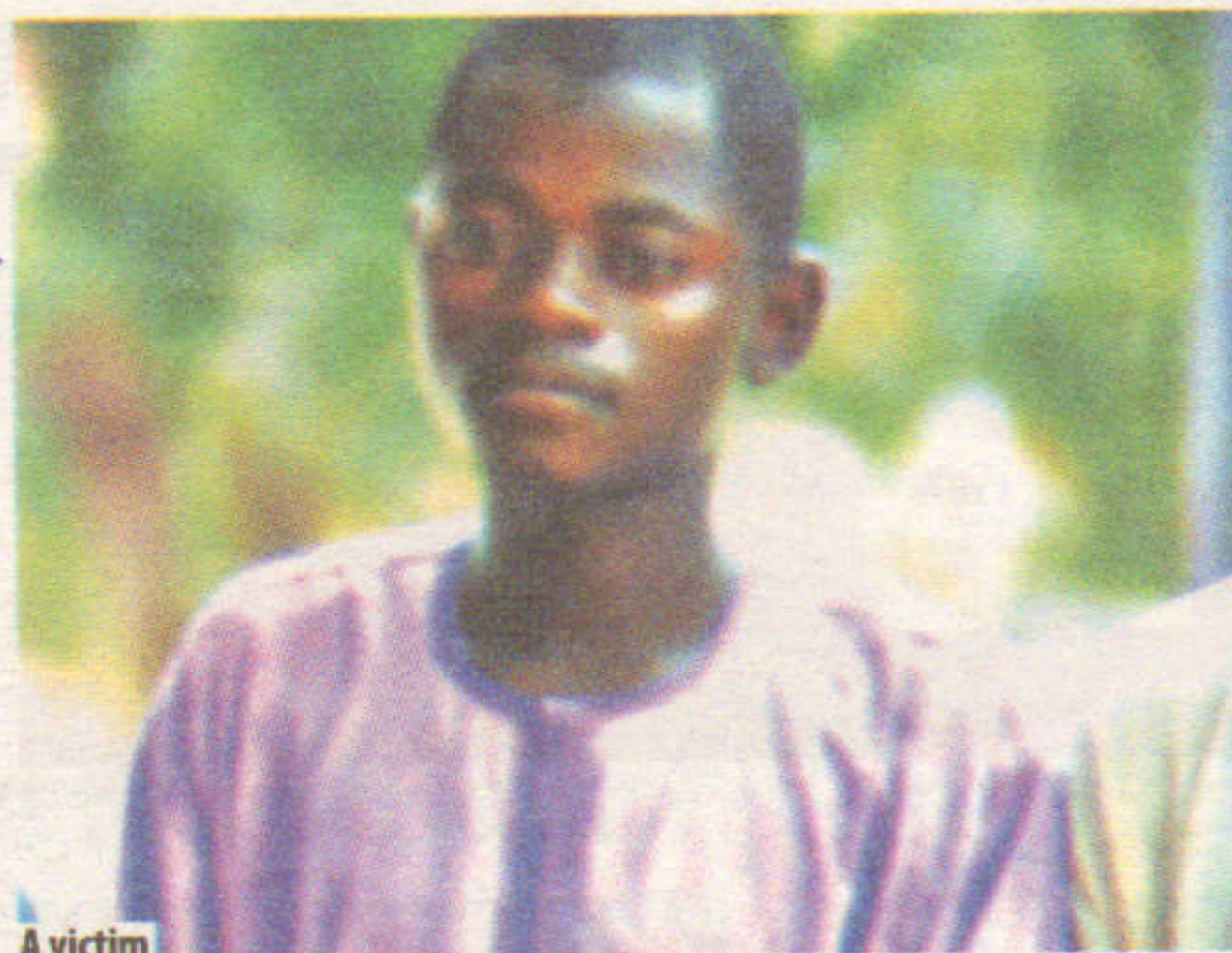
Investigation by *Saturday Tribune* revealed that the activities of ritualists came to the fore when in August last year, an unidentified young man was killed and his head severed from his body in circumstances that suggested that the act was carried out by ritualists. Around October of the same year, another teenager was brutally murdered and his nose and eyeballs were removed.

The two incidents drew a lot of condemnations from the people of the Talatan Mafara and sparked off reactions from a wide spectrum of the society.

Mallam Lawal Abubakar, a staff member of the local government, said the two incidents painted the name of the town and its people in bad light. According to him, nobody was happy over the development.

Another respondent, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, pointed fingers at politicians who want to win elections at all cost.

"We are really sad about this, especially as it is coming when the governor of the state is from this town," he noted.



A victim

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Unfortunately, the situation has not changed. From the beginning of this year, the rate of ritual killings in the town has increased.

A source who pleaded for anonymity told *Saturday Tribune* that there were four reported cases of ritual attacks in the town between January and March this year.

The first incident was said to have occurred around the central market, where two people were killed and some parts from their bodies were removed. The second attack, he said, occurred

around the Talatan Mafara-Sokoto road, where the body of a 25-year-old HND student of Abdu Gusau Polytechnic, Talatan Mafara, was found inside his room with his left eye, one of his teeth and his private part removed.

The third attack occurred along the cattle market. One person also died. The fourth attack, according to source, was the killing of a four-month-old baby, whose hands were removed and his private part mutilated.

Commenting on the killings, a brother of one of the deceased persons, Mallam Jamilu Ahmed, said "The killing of our brother, Ibrahim, in the home town of the governor of the state speaks volume on the genuineness of the government to protect citizens."

Ahmed said his brother, (the polytechnic student) would not have been killed if the state government had built hostels for the students. He alleged that hundreds of the polytechnic students sleep outside the school.

He also condemned security agents for not doing enough to apprehend the ritualists.

"It is almost a month now when we lost him, but the police have not made any significant progress in terms of arresting the culprits," he said.

When the *Saturday Tribune* contacted the chairman of Talatan Mafara Local Government, Alhaji Dahiru Maiyara, on the spate of ritual killings in his domain, he maintained that an average resident of the town would not indulge in such acts; that the practice must have been imported into the community by visitors.

The people of Mafara town, he insisted, were known for their obedience of the tenets of the Koran, which frown on taking lives in any form.

Nonetheless, Maiyara said his council would brace up for the challenge and collaborate with the security operatives in the local government to bring the situation under control.

He disclosed that normalcy had returned to the town, and that people had started going about their day to day activities unhindered.

The Public Relations Officer of the state police command, DSP Lawal Abdullahi, said the ritual killings in Mafara were still being investigated and that anyone found culpable would not be spared, no matter the status in the society.