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## Cultists on rampage in Akwa Ibom, kill 8

INIOMBONG EKPONTA - UNYO

**F**EAR has enveloped some hinterland in Akwa Ibom State as the menace of cultism and drugs, accompanied by petty crimes holds sway in some local government areas.

At the last count, no fewer than eight persons suspected to be members of rival cult groups have been killed in circumstances linked to crimes and chieftaincy tussle.

**Metro** investigation revealed that three persons were killed in Okoyo village in Ukanafun Local Government Area in an incident linked to robbery and chieftaincy feud.

Among those killed was one Udodia, a popular native doctor said to be blessed with the discerning power to reveal the next village head of Okoyo community.

He was reported to have revealed the next village head of the community, leading to the arrest of the village head-elect, Chief Monday Ndarake, along with the Chairman and Secretary, who were quizzed and released by the police.

Others hacked to death by suspected cultists included the youth chairman of Okoyo, Comrade Sembenge Ubookodom Unwa Okponenye, popularly called **Epelemepe**, and his deputy.

According to a family source, the victims were murdered in gruesome circumstances by some axe-wielding hoodlums on motorbikes "to avenge their colleagues, who were arrested by the youths and handed over to the police for robbery".

It was learnt that the assailants had trailed the deceased youth chairman to his compound.

"When they could not find him there, they traced him to his in-law's place and shot him several times.

"When the bullets could not penetrate his body, they resorted to attacking him with axes and machetes before overpowering him," the source explained.

"After the first assignment, the killers left immediately to also kill the native doctor and the youths' Vice Chairman of the village," he disclosed further.

According to him, youths in the village had apprehended some suspected cultists accused of involvement in armed robbery in the community and handed them over to the police.

The village council, **Metro** gathered, had written a petition to the police,

seeking that due process be followed in the investigation and prosecution of the suspects.

But the leaders of the cult group were said to have warned the deceased youth leaders to release their members or prepare for some drastic action.

"When they succeeded in removing their detained members from the police cell without community involvement, the next thing they did was to make good their threat to eliminate the youth leaders," Etimbuk Akpan, one of the locals who fled to the neighbour-

ing Udianga Enem village when the police raided the community, told **Metro**.

In the neighbouring Ikpe community in Etim Ekpo Local Government, the Vice Chairman, popularly called 'Salvation', was killed by suspected cultists.

According to reports, the

deceased youth leader met his death when he allegedly failed to share equitably the N2 million oil compensation given to the youths by an oil company operating in the area during the Yuletide. In Otoro village, a few kilometres from Ikpe community, the youth chairman, Oto Stephen and the town crier, Sunday Akpan, were killed by suspected cultist (name withheld).

Also, two suspected cultists allegedly shot and killed one Boniface Benson, along with the Urua Udo Okure axis of Uruk Atta 11 community in the early hours of Tuesday.

Effiong Mark, a community leader in the area, said the deceased was drinking at a joint around the Urua Udo Okure when his assailants arrived on a motorcycle.

"After discussing briefly, the suspects picked him on their bike to his house and somewhere along the road, they stopped at an isolated area and shot him many times," he recalled.

A resident of Edem Akai village, Ukeme Ifum, told **Metro** that "cultists came on a revenge mission and killed one person. They missed their target and transferred the anger on the brother who they killed instantly."

Checks revealed that the affected villages including Okoyo, Otoro, Ikpe and part of Uruk Atta, had been deserted due to incessant raids and indiscriminate arrests of the people by the police, since the outbreak of violence in those communities.

The Commissioner of Police, Murtala Usman Mani, who spoke via phone with **Metro** on Tuesday, said "I am on leave in Abuja," promising that any outbreak of violence in the state would be tackled with full force of the law.

The Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Cordelia Nwae, did not also pick her calls, but police sources at the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), confirmed the arrest of several suspects.

"Investigations are ongoing; the police are on top of the situation and as soon as we are through, the suspects will be made to face the full wrath of the law," he said.



An accident scene on Abuja-Zuba-Kaduna Expressway in Abuja on Tuesday. PHOTO: NAN

## 4 suspects arrested for tricycle riders' death in Delta

ALPHONSUS AGBORH - ASABA

**FOUR** persons including a spray painter have been arrested by the police in Asaba, Delta State, over the death of two commercial tricycle riders.

**Metro** gathered that decomposing bodies of Abubakar Suleman and Hamza Abdulahi were discovered in the bush along the Asaba/Benin highway near the old governor's office by a police officer.

The policeman was said to have gone to a mechanic workshop to repair his car when he perceived an offensive odour from the bush and when probed further, he discovered the corpses which attracted the attention of residents of the neighbourhood.

Following the discovery, the northern community members protested at the weekend, alleging that a number of their members who were tricycle riders had been killed and their tricycles stolen.

The police were said to have arrested four suspects, including a spray painter, when a tricycle belonging to one of the deceased was found in his workshop in Asaba.

Confirming the report on Tuesday, the Police Public Relations Officer, DSP Andy Aniamaka, said tricycle riders should be conscious of

their safety, especially at night.

According to him, the police would not relent in bringing the perpetrators to book.

## Tailor accused of armed robbery gets bail

AYOMIDE OWONIBI ODEKANYIN - LAGOS

A 30-year-old tailor, Muhammad Hassan, who was arraigned in court for armed robbery, was on Tuesday granted bail by an Ebute Metta Magistrate Court.

Hassan was granted N250,000, bail with two responsible sureties, after his lawyer, Alli Aba, had argued that the police failed in linking him with the offences.

The lawyer also added that the police only cooked up the charges in order to keep his client in prison without any justifiable or probable reasons.

The police had filed a remand application before the

court against the tailor on alleged two-count charge of armed robbery and robbery.

According to the police, the tailor, who practices his business at Idi-Araba, Lagos, and others at large, had on December 24, 2016, at about 1.30a.m., at Gbaja Street, Surulere, robbed a driver of a wine coloured Toyota RAV4 with registration number EKY 603 BJ valued at N2.5 million, a Samsung J7 phone valued at N105,000, Samsung phone valued at N110,000, and a silver necklace valued at N100,000.

The offences, according to the police, are punishable under Section 259(a). But Alli Aba in his argu-

ment stated that there was no nexus between the remand application and his client.

He further stated that there was discrepancy between the date of the offence as stated in the charge sheet and the remand application.

He pointed out that while the date of the offence read December 24, 2016 on the charge sheet, it read January 10, 2017, on the remand application.

He also stated that on the remand application, the police stated that no weapons were found in the custody of the defendant, while they had completed their investigation.