

15 people killed as secret cult killings resume in Edo

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THERE is tension in Benin, the Edo State capital, as rival cult groups, Black Axe and Maphite Confraternities, have resumed their battle of supremacy which led to the killing of about 15 people.

The situation is coming barely three months after Governor Monday Okpehbolu, signed the Secret Cult Prohibition Bill into law, thereby approving 21-year-jail term for cultists and their sponsors.

The *Nigerian Tribune* learnt that the renewed cult activities said to be between the two rival groups, started on Friday, April 25, with the killing of a physiotherapist, simply identified as Alex and one another at the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH) back gate, Ugbowo in Benin.

According to eyewitness account, Alex, one of the victims was reportedly gun down by the hoodlums, while he went to take his lunch.

Apparently as a reprisal attack, two suspected cult members were said to have been shot at a popular restaurant in Sapele road area of Benin by yet to be identified gunmen same Friday, thereby opening the floodgate of cult killings in Benin.

At Upper Forestry road, one alleged cultist was killed, while *Nigerian Tribune* also scooped that two people were killed at Second East Circular and Upper Sokponba roads by the bypass on Saturday.

Another person said to be a member of one of the groups

was killed at his shop at Second Ugbor road in Benin.

At Ibiwe Street, close to the King Square, another suspected cultist was killed on Saturday evening, just as another said be a cement dealer was killed at the front of his shop that same day.

On Monday evening, one person was shot dead around the back of Iyayi Sawmill, Okhoro in Benin, while another identified as Iyobo was killed at Obenevebo community, Sapele road.

Other areas where casualties have been recorded in the ongoing cult killings are Urelu Shell and Peanut axis in Sapele road, where one person each were killed between Sunday and Monday.

As at the time of this report, the police authorities in the state are yet to issue statement over the situation in Benin.

It will be recalled that Okpehbolu, on January 30 signed the Secret Cult Prohibition Bill into law, thereby approving 21-year jail term for cultists and their sponsors.

Secretary to State Government (SSG), Umar Ikhilor, in a statement, said that the previous law had been repealed to impose stiff punishment on cultists and their sponsors.

He urged the public to take heed and avoid actions that were detrimental to the peace and development of the state.

"It is hereby announced for the information of the public that the Edo State Secret Cult (Prohibition Law) 2018 has been repealed by the Edo State House of Assembly," he said.