

Violence claims 14 more lives in Rivers

Stories: **Soni Daniel,
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NO fewer than 14 persons were feared killed in two violent clashes in Rivers State on Tuesday, creating tension and fears over the fast-approaching April poll.

Thirteen of the persons were reportedly slain in Kula in Akuku-Toru Local Government Area of the state while one student was shot and killed at close range by cultists at the state-owned University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt.

Although the cause of the renewed onslaught in Kula was not immediately clear, a source close to the community described it as a continuation of the fight which erupted in the area on January 8, 2007, when 12 prominent chiefs of the community were slain by unknown

youths.

The source, who is also a native of Kula residing in Port Harcourt, stated that the people were killed to prevent credible persons from the community from appearing and testifying before the judicial panel of enquiry inaugurated last week by the state government to probe the January killings.

He said that trouble started in the community when the panelists called for memoranda from the public on the remote and immediate causes of the crisis.

Our correspondent learnt that as soon as those who testified returned from Port Harcourt on Friday, they were attacked by unknown persons leading to the death of five persons on Monday night.

Tuesday's incident, according to informed source,

was a reprisal attack meant to send a strong signal to the first group that invaded the area at the weekend.

Although the Rivers State Police Command confirmed that there were some problems in Kula, it declined to give details of what happened.

The Police Public Relations Officer for the command, Mrs. Ireju Barasua, told our correspondent around 7.30pm on Tuesday that she heard of the crisis in the community but that she was yet to be briefed by the officers concerned.

She promised to give details as soon as she returned from where she was at the time.

The killing of the RUST student on Tuesday brought to two the number of students killed within 24 hours by suspected cultists on the campus.