



•Scene of the bomb blast in Sapele

•Inset: Onokpite's corpse



•Tsafe

Tension in Delta over upsurge in crime rate

Emmanuel Addeh, Warri

The last few weeks have been challenging and agonising for Delta State residents, even though it has never been ranked among the most peaceful states in the country. As always, criminal activities, ranging from kidnapping, armed robbery, and assassinations were rife, especially in Warri, the ever volatile commercial capital of the state. **CRIME DIGEST** investigations show that there is tension in some parts of the state as a result of an unprecedented surge in assassinations and bomb blasts.

The recent killing of a prominent Ijaw leader, Chief Emmanuel Timiyan, for example, ignited demonstrations in Warri. The protests followed the alleged assassination of the Gbaramatu high chief, who was also an elder brother to King Joseph Timiyan of Ogulagha Kingdom.

Timiyan was said to have been shot dead in full view of onlookers by a gang of criminals who trailed him from the premises of a commercial bank located on Okumagba Avenue to the scene of the murder.

Then, like a bolt from the blues, a bomb explosion rocked the Main Mosque situated in the Hausa Quarters in Sapele.

Although nobody was killed, to the incident, which was suspected to have been masterminded by suspected members of the violent Islamic sect, *Boko Haram*, a victim of the blast, known as Tanko Musa, sustained injuries on his face and hands.

Two weeks later, another blast occurred in a Koranic school around the same Hausa quarters in Sapele, leaving seven people injured.

The killings, and a 21-day ultimatum issued by the Niger Delta Indigenous Movement for Radical Change, and a resulting mass exodus of the Hausa/Fulani from the state have further heightened the tension in Warri and its environs.

The ultimatum followed a similar quit order reportedly given to and the killing of Christians resident in the north by the *Boko Haram*.

The exodus became pronounced, following last Friday's alleged looting of households and properties belonging to members of the Muslim community in Sapele, which led to the arrest of

two persons by the police.

The Chairman of the Asaba Cattle Rearers Association, Alhaji Makuidi Ningi, told **CRIME DIGEST** that over 10,000 Northerners had so far travelled out of the state capital to avoid reprisals for the killing of Southerners in the North.

The Niger Delta group, led by Nelly Emma, had declared that the security of Northerners in the region would no longer be guaranteed after the expiration of the 21-day deadline.

The group had been calling for the immediate transfer of the state Police Commissioner, Mr. Ibrahim Tsafe, over a perceived surge in the incidence of crime in the state.

It claimed that last December alone, 25 policemen and five soldiers were killed in Delta State by armed robbers who also seized their service rifles.

Just before the new year, suspected armed robbers shot and killed a pregnant woman and her husband, who was a mobile policeman, in Warri.

The deceased were said to have met their end when the robbers raided their jewellery shop on the Warri/Sapele Road.

The police seem to be at the receiving end of flak from residents of the oil city, who have lamented the rise in armed robbery and kidnapping, in spite of the existence of security checkpoints in most parts of the state.

Two weeks ago, a robbery operation, which lasted several hours, caused pandemonium on the busy Warri/Sapele Road and brought economic activity to a standstill, as security operatives attached to nearby banks abandoned their duty posts and fled.

The robbers, who were decked out in Army fatigues, killed four people and injured many others during the operation.

However, one of the most controversial crimes committed in the state in 2011 was the killing of a governorship candidate in the April 26 election in Delta State, Chief Ogbe Onokpite.

Onokpite, of the Citizens Popular Party, had

contested the last two elections in the state before he was shot by the police in his hotel on a Saturday.

While the CP, Mr. Tsafe, maintained that the politician was killed when he resisted arrest, his lawyers and associates insisted that he was assassinated.

The police in Delta State claimed Onokpite, whom it accused of gun-running, had sustained serious injuries and died on the way to the hospital. But Festus Keyamo, counsel to the deceased, maintained that Onokpite, who had worked for the Peoples Democratic Party before defecting to the opposition Democratic Peoples Party, was set up for assassination.

The military reportedly shot and killed three protesters and injured over 100 others in Uzere community in Isoko South Local

Government Area of the state towards the end of 2011. The incident had led to the burning of the palace of the king of the town, HRM Isaac Udogri 1.

Also, the Ovie guest house, his wife's shop, and a house belonging to the Odiologbo of Uzere, Chief Ben Obegba, as well as some police vans, were burnt during the mayhem.

Even newsmen were not spared in the cycle of violence in Delta State, as unidentified gunmen invaded the Warri office of the Nigeria Union of Journalists, situated at Gbiaye Street, off Third

Marine Gate.

The gunmen, who were five in number, forced their way into the cafeteria and stole a large sum of money belonging to a caterer, popularly known as Madam NUJ.

Two journalists, Mr. Ogbe Oriogbe and Mr. Victor Okpomor, escaped death by a whisker during the attack. Apart from losing personal items worth over N500,000, including cell phones, jewellery, and laptop computers, Okpomor was severely wounded. He spent over two weeks in the hospital.

Oriogbe lost some of his fingers to gunshots that narrowly missed him when he was attacked by the criminals.

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The chairman of the Warri Chapter, Mr. Mike Ikeogwu, lamented the breaches in security in the oil-rich state. He said, "The increasing wave of crime in Warri and its environs is giving many residents cause for serious concern. It's unfortunate that people now sleep with their eyes open. In the last one month, robbers have attacked two of our members."

"It shows how much the security situation in this city has deteriorated. This act is condemnable and I would like the Commissioner of Police, Tsafe, to take a very decisive step in checking this growing criminal trend in Warri and Delta in general."

Meanwhile, another gang of robbers attacked commercial concerns on the popular Effurun/Sapele Road, leading from Airport Junction to Water Resources.

The robbery took place just one week after an armed gang unleashed terror on commercial banks and traders in the area, killing about five persons. Security personnel posted to keep watch after the initial killings were said to have run for cover, abandoning their vehicles.

The last three months were replete with abductions. For example, gunmen abducted 70-year-old Akpobome Ogrih, father of Mr. Sam Ogrih, a member of the staff of the Delta State House of Assembly Service Commission in Isoko South LGA.

The abduction of the septuagenarian by a gang of four heavily armed gunmen, who had arrived the scene of the crime in an Audi car, had sparked off fear and anxiety in the town.

The victim was said to be on his way to attend Sunday church service at the local branch of the Redeemed Christian Church of God when he was kidnapped and taken to an unknown destination.

Chief Wilson Eboh, a senior official at the state-owned *Delta Broadcasting Service*, was also seized from his house. His abductors reportedly demanded N30m before his release.

Other victims included the General Manager of Delta Line, the state-owned transport company, Mr. Isaiah Eyione, a structural engineer, Mr. Peter Okathe, and the aged mother of Delta State Commissioner for Oil and Gas, Mr. Mofe Pirah, who was recently kidnapped on her way to church at Eyara village.

An Inspector of Police was killed in Eku while in pursuit of a gang of suspected kidnappers, who were fleeing with a victim tucked in the booth of a Honda car, on Tuesday.

But it has not been all tales of woe. For example, the police last Monday arrested 10 kidnap suspects at Amai in Ukwani LGA, as they negotiated a ransom of N5m from their victim's relatives.

However, reacting to critics who argued that the police ought to put in more effort to fight crime in the state, Governor Emmanuel Uduaghan noted that he was not unaware of the security challenges facing residents of the state in recent time.

He said, "We're taking the security situation very seriously. I have charged the security agencies to tighten all loose ends. I understand that our people have been exposed to suffering and pain in the process. But I assure them that this is only temporary."

"Let me appeal to the criminals to have a change of heart. But they should know that I will not close my eyes and watch our people being killed. I have been through this before and we will surmount this challenge once again."