

TENSION IN RIVERS:

AS CULT GROUPS START RECRUITING SCHOOL CHILDREN

From Tony John, Port Harcourt

LONG before the #EndSARS protests happened in the country, and the aftermath of the hijack of the protests by hoodlums in several parts of the country, Rivers State had been in the grip cult groups whose activities claimed several lives and destruction of unquantifiable property in the state as they engaged in reprisal attacks.

The cult groups were notorious for kidnapping, killing, armed robbery and oil bunkering, and these illegal activities caused a massive inflow of cash for them and the leaders of the groups. The more troubling aspect of the upsurge in cult-related criminality is the discovery by police that even primary school pupils are getting into cultism through indoctrination by older cultists in their neighbourhood, whose live well without any visible means of livelihood.

Though there are several cult groups with different names in Rivers State, the most popular ones are Deygham, Deywell, Greenlanders and Icelanders. Members of Deygham graduate into Greenlanders while Deywell members turn into Icelanders. Each group has unique mode of operation, which enables members of the public to easily know which group carried out any particular criminal act.

Until he was arrested on September 12, 2020, Honest Diighara was a thorn in the flesh of people in Ogoni, Rivers State. The notorious cultist was alleged to be responsible for numerous incidents of kidnapping, oil bunkering, killing and robbery.

His horrendous criminality got to a point that the Rivers State government declared him wanted and placed a N30 million bounty on him.

The government appealed for credible information that could lead to his arrest.

He met his Waterloo when members his gang engaged security forces in a duel.

Diighara, a leader of the Greenlanders and also known by the nickname Bobosky, was arrested when police in a combined operation with a local vigilante team stormed this group's hideout in Korokoro community in Tai Local Government Area of the state.

Elated at the breakthrough recorded in the arrest of the dreaded Bobosky, Commissioner of Police, Joseph Mukan, chronicled the criminal activities of the cult group leader, when he addressed journalists at the headquarters of Rivers Police command, Moscow Road, Port Harcourt.

Mukan said the notorious cultist was responsible for the abduction of a legal practitioner, Emelogu, who was killed after the gang collected ransom from the family. Also, Bobosky was accused of killing the Divisional Crime Officer (DCO) of Afam Police Division, SP Moses Egbade. He was fingered by the



•An SUV's glass smashed in Diobu by cultists.

police in the gruesome murder of a soldier and personnel of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) at Gio pipeline in Ogoni in 2019 as well as the killing of two policemen on duty at a Federal Highway in Botem, among others.

Before he was arrested, the gang had engaged the police in a gun duel. In the course of the firefight Bobosky sustained fatal gunshot injuries and later died on the way as he was being taken to the hospital for treatment. Satisfied with the gallant effort of the police, Governor Nyesom Wike promptly redeemed the N30-million bounty he placed on Bobosky, who was a native of Nwidera in Gokana Local Government Area of the state.

On January 31, 2019, leader of the legislative arm of Ahoada West Local Government Area, Rivers State, Ekele Chikobi (aka EFCC Chiko), was shot dead by gunmen, suspected to be kidnappers along Elele-Rumuji axis of the East West road in Emohua local Government area of the state.

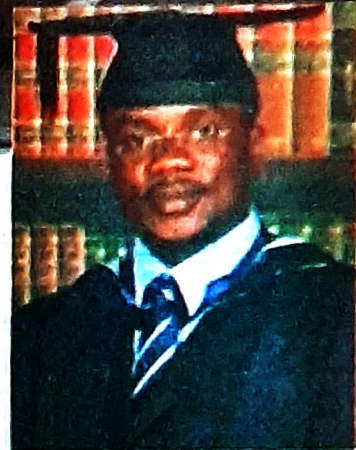
The deceased was riding in a convoy of vehicles when he and his team ran into a roadblock set up by a gang of suspected, who immediately opened fire on the convoy. Some occupants of one or two vehicles in the convoy were able to escape with life-threatening gunshot injuries. Unfortunately, six other people were abducted and taken into the

nearby forest.

Through diligent investigation, the police established that dastardly act was committed the leader of the Deygham cult group in Emohua LGA, Ekwueme Brown, who hails from Ndele in Emohua, who had been associated with a series of kidnap incidents along Emohua of East West road.

Again, people in Be-Dere community in Gokana LGA of Ogoniland, jubilated when two notorious cultists and kidnap kingpins, Barididum Danaa,

dreaded for his nickname, Kill and Bury, and his henchman, Prophet Nkpe, both of who were members of Deygham cult were arrested by



•Late Ekele Chikobi (aka EFCC)



•Suspects ("Kill and bury and Prophet Nkpe) leading security men, journalists and others to where 3 victims were buried.

police.

Following their arrest, and in the course of investigation, the duo led the operatives of the Anti-Cultism Unit of the Rivers Police Command to a shallow grave, in a forest in Bera community, close to B-Dere, where they buried three young men from the community who had earlier been declared missing.

At the scene of the exhumation of the bodies, a Superintendent of Police and Rivers Police Public Relations Officer, Nnamdi Omoni, who addressed journalists explained that the three deceased victims – Baridomale Sunday Tor, Baridon Gbarabera Asah and Barison Nawee – were declared missing on March 14, 2020.

Omoni disclosed that reports were made to the Police on the missing persons and following discreet investigation, the main suspects, Barididum Daanaa, aka "kill and bury" and Prophet Nkpe were arrested.

The suspects, acknowledged their membership of Deygham cult group, and revealed that they bound the victims' hands and legs before burying them alive in the shallow well. Daanaa said that victims were abducted after the gang discovered that they were informants to security agencies on the illegal oil bunkering activities going on in their area.

On the day of the exhumation of the three young men, grief enveloped the community as the people watched as the remains of the victims were brought out. Despite their grief, the people felt somewhat comforted that riddle over the missing young men had been solved by the police after three months.

As would be expected, supremacy battles between cults oftentimes breakout in Rivers State. In Diobu area of Port Harcourt City, a suspected Deygham cult member, simply identified as Leo, was shot dead by suspected members of Icelanders at Bishop Okoye Street, Mile 3 Diobu, Port Harcourt.

The incident was the result of a disagreement over which cult group should collect the "marching ground" fee in Diobu, Mile 3 area of the city. In the ensuing fight, several lives were lost over the incident and several private properties were destroyed and shops looted.

The mayhem of cults also claimed the life of Nduka Wiro, who was killed in Ohiou in Iba community in Emohua LGA, Rivers State.

His Nduka's brother and human rights activist told Sunday Sun that the young man was killed in his compound by suspected members of Icelanders cult on allegation that he was feeding soldiers with information about their activities.

Wiro tasked security agencies to intensify their operations in fighting cultists in the state. He noted that most of the persons involved in criminality belong to one cult group or the other. He added that youths should be reoriented from primary school level on the dangers of being a cultist.