

Again, the Cultists

Bloody clashes between rival cult groups in Rivers State claim 12 lives

By KLEM OFUOKWU

Renewed cult violence, last week, claimed 12 lives in Rivers State in two separate incidents. On Thursday, July 20, an alleged tussle for political supremacy between two politicians in Bodo community, in Ogoniland, snowballed into a string of violent clashes, leading to the death of six persons. The renewed crisis was said to have broken out on the heels of the return of exiled members of Degbam, a cult group, who were said to have been banished from the community by its rival, Dewell, in a violent feud in 2005.

The magazine gathered that a series of peaceful moves made in the past by Degbam to return home had been stalled by Dewell. But, while some sources alleged that Kenneth Kobani, finance commissioner in Peter Odili's cabinet, and Gabriel Pidomson, member, Rivers State House of Assembly, might be remotely connected with the violence, Ledum Mitee, president, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People, MOSOP, completely ruled out the possibility of political coloration.

Just a day after the attack on Bodo, Rumuakunpe, a community in Emuoha Local Government, came under the same claws of Degbam and Dewell cult groups. However, nobody has been able to link the two incidents.

TELL gathered that on Friday, July 21, members of Dewell stormed Emuoha and shot dead six Degbam boys. But other sources put the clash on the possibility of a reprisal by Ogbakiri community, which had alleged that their kinsmen were killed in Emuoha community some time ago. Some others said it was chieftaincy or politically related. Chidi Lloyd, representative of Emuoha Constituency in the state House of Assembly, denied that the crisis was politically motivated. Chidi confirmed that the six people were killed in two separate attacks when hoodlums wreaked havoc on Rumuakunpe.

But, on Monday, July 24, Governor Odili fell short of labelling the clashes in parts of the state political when he addressed the 23 local government chairmen in the state at Government House, Port Harcourt. "If you cannot maintain peace or disengage yourself from the crisis in the local government; then you are not fit to lead the people. I will not think twice in dissolving any local government council where the leadership of the council or party or elected officials are involved in the crisis of the area," warned Odili. According to the governor, reports of involvement of some politicians in community crisis were already before him. Efforts by the magazine to get the reactions of Kobani and Pidomson, who were linked with the Bodo crisis, were unsuccessful.