

Four feared dead in week-long Area Boys crisis

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NO fewer than four persons have been killed so far in a week-long crisis which erupted between factional groups of street urchins, popularly called *Area Boys* at Gaskiya Street in Ijora Badiya area of Lagos State while unconfirmed sources said over 20 persons have been arrested by the police.

The crisis which broke out last Tuesday spread quickly and paralysed commercial and social activities in the densely populated area while a team of mobile and regular policemen were posted in strategic areas to forestall further escalation of the crisis.

Sources said trouble started in the area after some politicians mobilised two factions of the street urchins to the tune of N100,000:00 before the commencement of last week's People Democratic Party (PDP) congress but other factional groups demanded that they get their share of the money as well.

It was learnt that when the two factions refused to share the money with them, the other groups resorted to open confrontation and during the crisis that ensued, dangerous weapons including broken bot-

tles, cutlasses and locally made pistols were freely used by both factions.

Vanguard gathered that following the open confrontation, business and commercial activities were grinded to a halt. Some residents of the area were said to have relocated to safer places for fear of their lives as the crisis intensified for several days.

It took a re-enforcement of mobile policemen from both Units 20 and 22 for peace to be restored in the area.

When *Vanguard* visited the area yesterday, heavily armed mobile policemen were seen patrolling the streets while skeletal business activity was noticed in some areas. The streets were littered with broken bottles while uneasy calm

pervaded the area.

Residents of the area who were interviewed told *Vanguard* that they are still living in fear as the area boys normally attack each other at odd hours of the night in spite of heavy police presence.

When contacted, Lagos State police spokesman, Mr. Bode Ojajuni told *Vanguard*, "I am yet to receive the details but I assure you that we are on the ground and peace has been restored in the area."

Nigeria targets top 20 world's largest economies

OTA, OGUN — PRESIDENT Olusegun Obasanjo said yesterday that the current vision is for Nigeria to emerge as one of the 20 largest economies in the world by 2020.

In a message to the 2006 Customs Comptroller-General's conference in Ota, Ogun State, Obasanjo, represented by Governor Gbenga Daniel of Ogun State, said that Nigeria would need an efficient and modern Customs Service comparable to that of Brazil, South Africa and Korea to achieve the vision.

He challenged the Customs Service to work towards becoming one of the top 20

Customs Services in the World by 2020.

Obasanjo said that the Customs Service must be the facilitator of the nation's international trade in exports and imports, adding that countries must make use of international trade or they would be isolated from the global economy.

He urged the service to rise to the challenges of destination inspection introduced this year, saying: "If we handle destination inspection well, we could reap some advantages."

He said: "In addition, under a destination inspection scheme, Nigerians are in a

better position to receive all goods paid for, unlike in previous years when goods inspected and destined for the country were diverted to other locations."

Also speaking, the Comptroller-General of Customs, Mr Jacob Buba, said that the service collected N153.86 billion into the federation account between January and October, 2006.

In his address of welcome, the Comptroller-General said "this is N35.51 billion or 18.75 per cent lower than N189.37 billion collected during the corresponding period in 2005."

He explained that the short-