

# D-O-O-M-S-D-A-Y is here!

## Port Harcourt residents jittery ahead of elections as cult groups clash, leaving 20 dead, scores injured

By Jimitota Onoyume

**PORT HARCOURT:** SIGNS that the April elections in Rivers State might be characterized by violence have started emerging. Already, dreaded cult groups allegedly funded by politicians have begun engaging in battles of supremacy. Diobu area of the state capital alone between penultimate Friday and Sunday witnessed two violent cult clashes that claimed no fewer than twenty lives and left scores injured.

Nobody, including the Police in the state could place a finger on the cause of the clashes till date. When contacted on phone for comment on the likely cause, all the state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mrs. Ireju Baresua could say was that the sad incidents were cult-related, but had no knowledge of the motivating factor(s) behind the crises. She said the Police was, however, battling to get to the root.

Those familiar with the political terrain of the state however linked the situations to the electioneering period. They said it was like this in 2003 when the election was drawing close. According to them, ahead of the elections that year, politicians engaged jobless youths in the state to fight their political battles. They reportedly armed them. After the election, they dumped them. And did not, of course, retrieve the guns and other weapons handed to the youths.

"What do you expect jobless youths to do with guns, of course, indulge in crimes," Mr. Felix Brown said. The sources continued that these boys went into petty crimes like robberies, but as time went on, bunkerers in the creeks found most of them very useful. They redirected their energies to providing security for barges on the high sea used for bunkering.

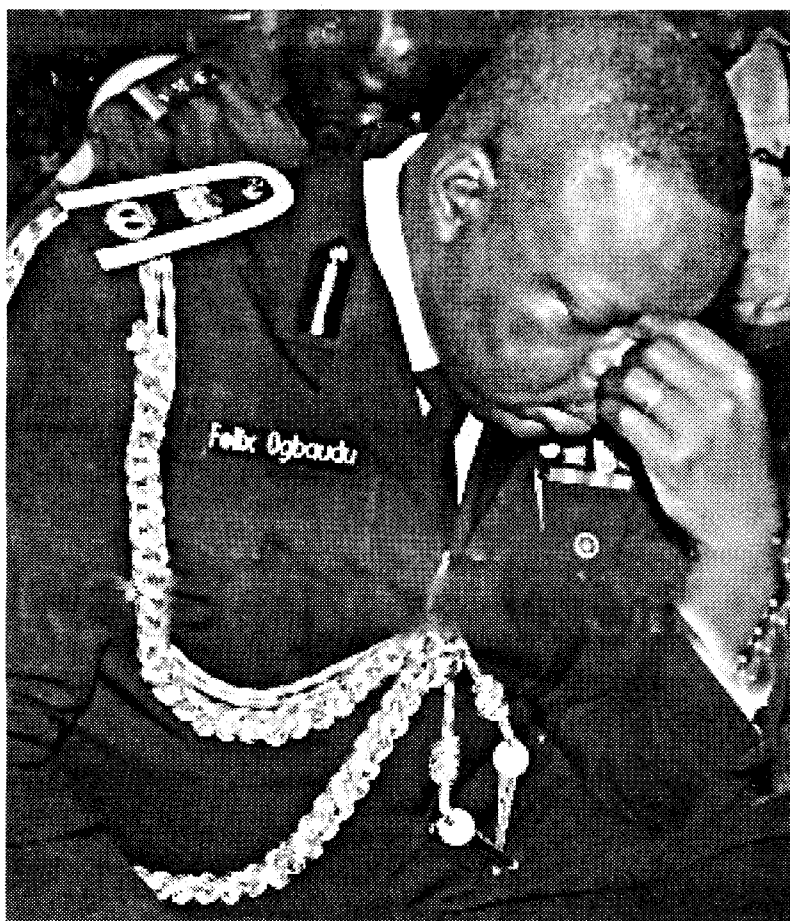
These boys, according to our sources, later had internal conflicts among themselves over who should protect which barge and the method of resource distribution. These culminated in cracks in their ranks, which later gave birth to several cult groups. Today in Port Harcourt alone, according to sources, no fewer than ten of these deadly groups exist under different names.

With the April elections around the corner, keen observers of situations in the state fear the boys had long started relocating from the creeks to serve as willing tools in the hands of politicians who already have so much to offer.

Recalling how they went about their act between the penultimate Friday to that Sunday one could safely conclude that sympathy and value for human life have long fled the hearts of these boys. Their actions were not only bizarre, but callous and chilling

### Friday attack

Kelvin Onodu who saw it all said three boys came in a motorbike to Emenike/Okija Street, fused themselves in the crowd around the area that day. They reportedly remained there waiting for their target. Unknown to others around, their motive was sinister, they were agents of death. And the bags they were carrying concealed lethal weapons. "I noticed them. You know as a trader we take good look at passers-by, they could be



●Mr. Felix Ogbaudu, Police Commissioner, Rivers State

(prospective) customers. They were just standing very close that day there, (pointing at where they stood), but none of us knew they were robbers", he said.

Even a sachet water vendor said one of them bought water from her. "They were nice when I gave them the water", she said.

These assailants, sources said, swung into action as soon as they sighted a bus, which perhaps was their target. They reportedly shot at the four tyres first. Satisfied that they had deflated the tyres, they allegedly started pulling out the occupants of the vehicle and were killing them one after the other.

*I counted nine corpses that evening. The painful thing was that it was happening metres away from the Mile One Police Station*

"I counted nine corpses that evening. The painful thing was that it was happening metres away from the Mile One Police Station", a lady who also saw it all said.

Sources said the assailants took time to inspect the corpses to be sure they were all dead before hopping on the two bikes they came with. As they fled, they were reportedly firing. Several passers-by that evening sustained bullet wound injuries.

"They rolled each of the corpses to be sure they were all gone. After confirmation, two of them sat on one bike while one sat alone on another bike. As they were going they were shooting, and at the same time shouting "up Niger Delta."

"It was after they had gone that the police came out to start removing corpses into their vans. You need to see the stampede at the market that evening. You know the place is very close to the Mile One market".

The state Commissioner of Police, Mr. Felix Ogbaudu told *Saturday Vanguard* on phone that seven persons were killed that evening while ten persons sustained bullet wounds. But one of those who had bullet injury died at the hospital, another source later disclosed.

The panic and fear that greeted the incident had hardly died down when last Sunday evening again, cultists struck again at Azikiwe Street, some distance away from the location of the first clash. No less than five persons reportedly died in the attack. They detonated dynamite at will. It could not be ascertained if their targets were frolicking at any of the brothels on that street that evening but they went round all of them shooting. At one of the brothels, they allegedly killed one of the commercial sex workers and a young man. It could not be confirmed if they were killed by stray bullets.

From the way the boys carried on that night, it was obvious they were in charge. Residents either locked themselves up in their houses or fled. Motorists parked their cars and hurriedly disappeared. There was pandemonium everywhere. As if to avert a repeat of a recent experience where these boys stormed a police station in a section of the state capital to release a detainee, the police at Mile One quickly barricaded a portion of Ikwerre Road close to their station. Motorists were forced to take other routes.

*Saturday Vanguard* gathered that the police later mobilized to storm the "war-torn" area in two armored vehicles. No arrest was made at the end of the day, according to the state Police PRO, Mrs. Ireju Baresua. The next day, the Police reportedly went back again in two Mitsubishi buses to convey the corpses.

### Assasins trail Kenneth Kobani

Wailing had hardly died down when stories filtered in on how

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## Save my triplets from dying, jobless father cries for help

By Chioma Gabriel, Asst. Editor

**O**RDINARILY, having triplets would excite many parents to no end. Such divine favour would always advertise the parents of the babies in more ways than one. Oftentimes, they and their newborn babies become instant cynosures.

But for Obinna Dimkpa, a 31-year-old unemployed man from Ikwuano Local Government Area of Abia state and his wife Obianuju, having triplets has become both a thing of joy and a burden. Today, Obinna is happy that he has a set of triplets, just as he is losing sleep over the fate of his treasured kids.

On the February 14, 2007 when people all over the world were celebrating love, Obianuju put to bed a set of triplets, one boy and two girls. Today, Obinna is somewhat a man in distress.

Looking apparently disturbed, he walked into the premises of *Vanguard* Newspapers, Thursday, with one mission in mind: to solicit for assistance from the well-spirited Nigerians.

One, he is jobless and does not have the wherewithal to take care of his wife and the triplets who are still in the incubator and needs two more weeks to complete it. Mr. Dimkpa's predicament is worsened by the fact that the triplets who are still incubating at Lagos



●Mr and Mrs Obi Dimkpa with their triplets

University Teaching Hospital, LUTH, would be moved on Monday because doctors are going on strike and would dismiss them to seek help elsewhere.

"I have no regrets about my triplets," he says. "I am a happy father. My problem is because I'm jobless. As a result, I can't take care of my wife and the three kids. No man in my position will be

happy because I don't want anything to happen to my kids". The couple got married in June last year. And when his wife took

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# Doomsday is here

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assassins stormed the GRA residence of the state Commissioner of Finance, Hon Kenneth Kobani, last Monday, killing one of his MOPOL (Mobile Policemen) guards.

According to security sources, the unknown gunmen invaded the place in the early hours of Monday, demanding to see the commissioner. Suspecting that their motive was evil, his security aides opened fire. In the ensuing gun battle between them, the head of the MOPOL was reportedly gunned down, while the assailants also lost two of their men. The Police source said the assassins later retreated in their Mazda car with their corpses, but abandoned the vehicle at Eligbam by East West road with the corpses inside. The Police recovered the vehicle and said investigations on the car would begin, to trace the owner and the circumstances under which the assailants got the car.

Could it be that it was snatched? Or the owner released it for the operation? These and many more would-be questions the Police said it would strive to find answers for.

When this reporter called the Finance Commissioner on phone for comments, he merely thanked God for sparing his life, and said he was not in the mood to talk to the press, at least for now.

## UST killings

## ries for help

Churches should come to my aid and God will reward everyone who helps to save my triplets."

But did the couple know what was on the way? "No," Dimkpa said. "We were not expecting triplets because the scan showed twins. We were pleasantly surprised when it turned out to be triplets but our joy is being affected by the financial challenge we are facing."

For all kind-hearted Nigerians and firms, Obinna Dimkpa said he could be reached on telephone number 08056688620 and/or an Oceanic Bank account number, 0860001009536.

"My prayer is that God will bless everyone who comes to my aid. If the doctors embark on strike on Monday, I don't know what will become of my babies and how they will survive. That is why I am crying out for help from the general public. Please, come to my aid".

Meanwhile, at the Rivers state-owned University of Science and Technology (UST), about two students were reportedly killed last Monday. The university in recent time has been enmeshed in cult crises.

Between January and February this year alone, the university has lost about three students to cult-related skirmishes. The first incident involved a part three student of Business Administration/Accounting. He was reportedly excused from the class by some persons. It could not be confirmed if he knew them.

But as they argued back and forth, they reportedly brought out guns and pumped volleys of bullets into him. This case was followed by two other similar incidents. The climax of the ugly situation was when suspected cultists detonated explosives at the car park of the university's law faculty last month. Those around the area that day ran for dear lives. Many interpreted the action to be a sign that their next target might be somebody in the faculty.

As if confirming the speculation, last Monday, a final year law student was murdered at the back gate of the school by suspected cultists. He was said to be a member of the Man O'War, a student security organization on the campus. The killing triggered restiveness on the campus as members of the Man O'War literally went on rampage, moving from room to room in search of suspected student cultists. One of those caught was reportedly nearly lynched but for the timely intervention of the Police.

Seeing that it had lost control of the situation on the campus, the school authorities reportedly ordered the students to vacate the campus before the situation degenerated into an orgy of violence.

Some of the students who spoke to *Saturday Vanguard* blamed the university authorities for the clashes in the school. They alleged that the authorities knew how best to handle the situation but were not willing to take the necessary steps. But it is necessary to note that cult problem has become very prevalent in the university. Last year alone, the school lost four of its students to cult-related clashes. At press time, many wondered why nothing had been done to redeem the situation and steer the university away from the culture of violence.

## Kula killings

JUST when many thought that the state had had enough of killings for the week, another incident came up again on Tuesday in Kula, where about a total of fifteen persons were reportedly killed. It was reliably gathered that the community had been factionalized with each group recruiting boys for a battle of supremacy. Sources said trouble started recently in the area when a group made efforts to tamper with an oil facility in the area. The other groups mobilized to counter the move, and this left several people dead.

But another source said the problem had to do with a panel of inquiry set up by the state government to investigate the cause of a crisis in the area which claimed the lives of about fifteen of their chiefs and several other persons in the community in January. It would be recalled that fifteen of the community chiefs were ambushed on the sea allegedly by those loyal to one of the groups. The chiefs were said to be going to Kula from Abonnema. The ambushing party reportedly killed them. This act sparked off trouble in the community for days.

In reaction, the state government set up a panel to unearth the cause of the crisis. According to community sources, this week's killing in the area was triggered off by the panel. Those who did not want to be testified against, reportedly mobilized against those who had evidence on their involvement in the crisis and other killings in the area.

If in one week, the state lost about thirty energetic youths, many are beginning to wonder what could be done to save the situation. Miss Vivian Uchechi Nwachukwu who lives in the epicentre of the cult crisis in Diobu said there was urgent need to deploy the Army to assist the Police in the business of security in the state.

"It is clear now that the situation is going beyond the Police. See the kind of rifles the boys are carrying, they are superior ones compared to what the Police have. So, there is need to call in the Army to assist them", she pleaded.

Mr. Ibiene on his part said it is only when politicians choose to develop some level of morals that there can be peace. "They provide the boys with arms. The politicians should just develop some value for life. It is only this that can save the situation."

One thing residents of Port Harcourt are united on is that they want peace.