

10 feared killed in Rivers cultists' attacks

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PORT HARCOURT—
SUSPECTED cultists
rained gunfire on several ma-

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10 feared killed in Rivers

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major streets of Port Harcourt for the 24th hour running yesterday, causing panic among residents.

The gunmen launched their attack on Sunday evening in such areas as Wokoma Street, Water Front and Borikiri. Three persons were feared dead in Sunday's shooting alone. By yesterday, the death toll had risen to 10.

Policemen immediately barricaded the roads leading to their stations as Mile One and Olu Obasanjo Road.

The shooting resumed yesterday on Ikwerre Road at about 9.30 a.m. The development disrupted commercial activities in the area, with people scampering for safety.

Vanguard gathered that the gunmen had "camped" for about 40 minutes at the Leventis Junction, in the early hours of the day, shooting sporadically and causing commotion, forcing people to run towards Abonema Wharf Road. The shooting preceded an early morning torrential rain, which kept residents at homes till about 7.30 a.m. when the downpour eased.

Witnesses said the men left the area when the police from the state police headquarters rolled out their armoured personnel carriers in readiness to do battle with them. The ear-shattering sound of the guns echoed around Mile 1 Market, overlooking the Police Divisional Headquarters, Diobu, as the gunmen drove freely along the street in two unmarked Kombi buses.

Within minutes, the crowd of marketers and passers-by along the road had disappeared. The gun-

men who drove from the Mile 2 axis, kept firing as they passed the police station and headed towards Education Bus Stop, the trigger-happy men turned into Nsukka Street, directly behind Ikwerre Road. Apparently not wanting to be caught unawares, policemen from the station poured into the busy road, cordoned off the entrance and exit roads to the station and diverted traffic to other areas.

The shooting continued along Nsukka Street, forcing residents to stay indoors while passers-by fled in different directions, seeking refuge from the rampaging gangsters.

However, the presence of police patrol vans restored calm in the area, even as some traders packed their wares and closed shop for the day. The abrupt closure of the road caused prolonged hold up, compounding motorists' woes on the usually congested Ikwerre Road.

Police PRO Ireju Barasua, a DSP, was not available for comment. A voice in her office said she was at "a meeting with the commissioner." The Mini Okoro Divisional Headquarters and Elelewon Police Stations, in Port Harcourt, were attacked on the eve of the governorship and House of Assembly elections in two weeks ago, leading to the death of seven policemen.

Meanwhile, alleged move to impeach the Speaker of the state House of Assembly, Mr Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi was cited as a contributory factor to the tension in the state capital. This allegation could not be confirmed from any member of the House. But sources said some members had started gathering signatures of their colleagues to effect the impeachment.