

Confusion over

FOR about two weeks running, controversy has continued to dog the death, November, 26, of the former gubernatorial candidate of the Citizens Popular Party, CPP, in Delta State, Chief Ogbe Onokpite, who was shot dead by the police in Warri, Delta State, allegedly in a crossfire.

While the Commissioner of Police, Delta State, Mr. Mamman Tsafe, told Saturday Vanguard that the deceased was armed and in fact, opened fire on undercover operatives, who were investigating a case of gun running against him, the families of the deceased through their lawyer, Festus Keyamo said the police boss was standing the truth on the head.

How Ogbe was killed - Police

According to Tsafe, "Undercover operatives at Beeland Hotel, Orhunwhoroh, Udu Local Government Area intercepted a vehicle with registration number, AM 528 JRT, driven by one Malik Okorokporo, 33 years, m, of 31 Abasiomo Druona Compound, Alegbo, Warri.

"The driver was flagged down by police patrol men at Udu/Orhunwhoroh Road. The vehicle was searched and two AK 47 rifles with no. 20613 and 13702, with over 60 rounds of live ammunition were recovered. These rifles were to be delivered to one Collins Egbara, male, Chairman of Agaga community now on the run, at the instance of Ogbe Onokpite through his conveyor, Malik Okorokporo.

"The suspect took the patrol team to Beeland Hotel to apprehend his principal who attempted to take to flight on sighting the police, but was maimed. The principal gave up the ghost on the way to the hospital".

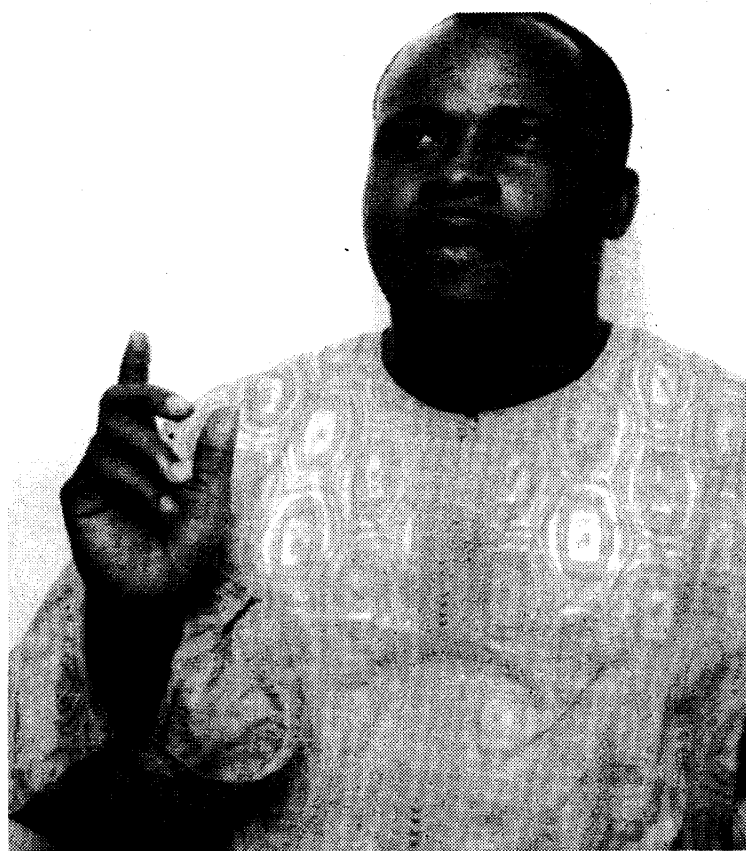
Keyamo disagrees

The lawyer for Onokpite family, Festus Keyamo Esq. however, disagreed with the account of the police. In a petition addressed to the Inspector General of Police, he said, "It is our brief that Chief Ogbe Onokpite (born 38 years ago), who was a gubernatorial candidate of the Citizens Popular Party in April 26th general elections in Delta was lodging at a hotel called Beeland Hotel, situated at Orhunwhoroh in Udu Local Government Area, Delta State when men of the Nigeria Police attached to the Police Area Command, Warri (in the company of other plain cloth unidentified persons) stormed

**He was armed- Police, Families say no*

**Dangerous twist to kidnapping, armed banditry in Delta*

**Delta Waterways eye-for-eye tactic for kidnappers*



Chief Onokpite

the hotel to arrest Chief Ogbe Onokpite.

"On arrival at the said hotel, the police ordered the receptionist on duty at the hotel to show them the room where Chief Ogbe Onokpite was lodging. Out of extreme fear, the receptionist obeyed and took the policemen to Ogbe's room and he was immediately arrested and brought out (to the open still within the hotel premises) and shot in the leg.

"Chief Ogbe was then carried out of the hotel premises (still alive) in a vehicle, bearing the inscription of the Nigeria Police, Area Command, Warri to the Police Station at Warri where he was again shot in other more delicate parts of his body and left him there to bleed to death.

"The attached photographs speak volume as to the barbaric and dastard murder without trial of Chief Ogbe Onokpite in the hands of men of the Nigeria Police under the watchful eyes of the Area Commander in Charge of the Policemen serving the Delta Central District of Delta State", he said.

In his words, "Need we say that Chief Ogbe Onokpite has a right to life guaranteed by

It is in the light of the foregoing, we are calling on you to employ your good offices to unravel and bring to book the officers and men of the Nigeria Police Force involved in this illegal killing of Chief Ogbe Onokpite who, like any other citizen of Nigeria is presumed innocent until proved guilty

the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 and nothing in this Constitution justifies extra-judicial killing of any person no matter the offence he may have committed.

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*** His dead body**

the Nigeria Police Force involved in this illegal killing of Chief Ogbe Onokpite who, like any other citizen of Nigeria is presumed innocent until proved guilty.

"The Onokpite family is prepared and are urgently requesting for a Coroners' Inquest to be made in order to obtain the autopsy report and a full Criminal Investigation Report of the murder of an innocent citizen. The lifeless body of Ogbe Onokpite has been dumped at the morgue in the Central Hospital Warri, Delta State", he asserted.

The controversy over the death of Chief Onokpite is expected because he was a governorship aspirant and avowed critic of government in power in the state.

And at the moment, not even the police can boast that the oil city is safe given the almost daily strikes of kidnappers and armed robbers in Warri and environs.

Crime upsurge

Indeed, in the same period, Onokpite met his death, the Commissioner of Police had practically relocated to Warri for strategic planning sessions with his Area Commanders

and Divisional Police Officers, DPOs, throughout the state following what the police described as "high tide" of kidnappings and armed robbery in Warri.

On the same day Onokpite was killed, at about 20.45 hours, a joint patrol team also intercepted one Audi 80, black in colour with registration number, EDO, EP 493 BEN and recovered one locally made gun and eight live cartridges from one Obinna Arize, 27, who was arrested.

Obinna disclosed in an interview with newsmen that the guns were to be used by cultists during the initiation of new members into the Eiye Confraternity in Warri and that he was asked to deliver it by an unnamed person.

Alarm

It was not only the police that was alarmed by the upsurge, the State Security Service, Joint Task Force on the Niger-Delta and the Delta State Waterways Security Committee, DWSC, which has a special anti-Kidnapping Task Force to tackle kidnapping in the riverside areas of the state, were taken aback by the unprecedented

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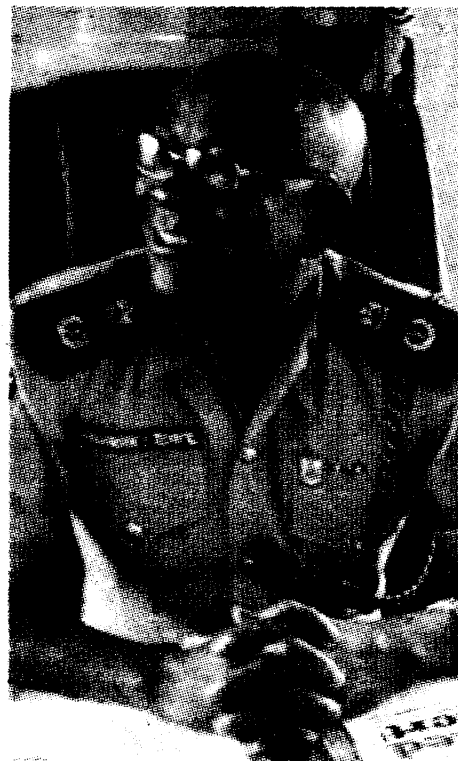
Onokpite's death



•Festus Keyamo Esq.



•Delta State Gov, Dr. Emmanuel Uduaghan



•CP, Delta State, Mamman Ibrahim Tsafe

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surge. Initially, kidnapping was a business for militants in the Niger-Delta, but with the sustained battle against kidnapers by DWSC, police and other security agents, as well as amnesty granted to militants by the Federal Government, some of the kidnapers fled the state.

Uduaghan's initial suspicion

The state governor, Dr. Emmanuel Uduaghan and police commissioner, Mr. Tsafe confirmed to Saturday Vanguard, some months ago, that most of the kidnapping activities in the state were being carried out by infiltrators from other states in conspiracy with few bad boys from the state.

Uduaghan in particular suspected that there was a political dimension to some of the kidnapping cases, which was occurring more frequently in Urhobo areas of the state, but because he could not put his finger on it, he opted to keep silent.

But, events in the past two months in the state, especially the undercurrents after the killing of the gubernatorial candidate of the Citizens Popular Party, CPP, Chief Ogbe Onokpite by the police over gun running has thrown up the matter again.

Security officials confirm political undertone

The Area Commander of

Police, ACP, Warri, Mr. Abutu Yaro, told Saturday Vanguard, Tuesday, in Warri, that he had observed that there was political undertone to recent robbery and kidnapping operations in Warri and its environs.

A security official, who preferred anonymity, also informed Saturday Vanguard, "As a matter of fact, the battle is between the Democratic Peoples Party, DPP, and Peoples Democratic Party, PDP. Members of these two political parties are fighting themselves tooth and nail in Warri, Uvwie, Ekpan, Sapele, Abraka and Udu areas and they are using dangerous weapons.

"Nothing is being spared to dent the image of the governor, who is the chief security officer of the state and who has peace and security as one of his cardinal agenda. Since his party won at the polls, despite the plans to stop him, the opposition had decided to paint him as a failure with organized kidnapping and robbery activities in Warri and environs", he added.

He asserted that security agents were privy to some information on the calculations of some politicians and were working to round up the kingpins of the various cult groups being used to execute the plan.

Tooth for tooth

A member of the Delta Waterways Security Committee disclosed that one of the kidnap gangs working for the opposition kidnapped

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Mrs. Gbubemi, mother of the Commissioner for Oil and Gas in the state, Mr. Mofe Pirah and asked for a whopping N40 million just to create the impression that the state was insecure.

He said the Anti-Kidnapping Task Force of DWSC, through its information gathering network, found out who the kidnapers were and used unconventional method to equally seize the mother of the leader of the kidnapper gang.

"Let me tell you that because of the love for money and blind hate of the government in power, the kidnapper, who was got on phone by the DWSC Task Force to speak to

his mother that was also held "hostage", refused to buckle, saying he would kill the mother of the commissioner if ransom was not paid.

"The task force put two and two together and changed tactics by taking his mother-in-law into custody. His wife mounted suffocating pressure on him over the arrest of her mother before he reluctantly released the commissioner's mother in exchange for his mother and his mother-in-law. We even found out that his mother is part of his kidnap gang.

"What some members of the public do not know is that this kidnapping that is going on in the state is very deep. Some people are doing it to make money, while they are those doing it for political reasons, to spite the government, to spite Governor Uduaghan, and to spite PDP, the party in power", he stated.

Angst with media

"That is why I am angry", ACP Yaro told Saturday Vanguard. "Even the media don't seem to understand what is going on in the state and they report the matter as if the police and other security agents are not doing anything to combat kidnapers".

His words, "The Commissioner of Police addressed newsmen here in Warri on the death of Chief Ogbe Onokpite and other arrests made by the police, but no journalists reported what the man that confessed said. They interviewed him, but nothing was reported

about what he said. I have been waiting to read the report since then but what we read was that Onokpite was killed by the police without stating the circumstances of what happened the way they were briefed".

Onokpite driver's confession

The driver who was caught with two AK 47 rifles told newsmen that the late Onokpite sent him to deliver the guns to one Collins. He said he knew the deceased before the April elections when he came to seek his support for one of the House of Assembly aspirants on the platform of the DPP, adding, "Since then, we have been very close".

Cultists regroup

What is, however, strange is the manner cultists were regrouping in parts of the state over the Onokpite murder. A privileged source who corroborated Yaro's claim asserted, "As I speak to you now, cult groups in Warri, Sapele, Ughelli, Agbarho and Udu are regrouping under the canopy of opposition in the state to revenge the alleged murder of Onokpite.

"It is a known fact that Onokpite died in the hands of the police while being rushed to the hospital for medical attention after he sustained a gunshot in a cross fire with the policemen that went to arrest him in connection with the recovering of two AK 47 rifles from his driver. But because of the political dimension to the criminality in the state, the names of a prominent PDP youth leader and security official, Mr Ayiri Emami is being bandied about as one of the killers of Onokpite", he asserted.

Making of a scapegoat

According to the source, "Ayiri is the chairman of DWSC and he was abroad when this incident took place, why is he being dragged into the death of Onokpite by political troublemakers, if not for the purpose of stirring trouble. And this is coming even after the Commissioner of Police himself had taken time to explain how Onokpite died while attempting to escape from the police.

Guns being

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HumanExtra

Confusion over Onokpite's death

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supplied to
communities!**

"Do you know that arms are being supplied to youths in some communities in a particular senatorial district in the state under the guise of opposition and ethnic battle and that a political leader of one of the parties is a godfather to these cultists? That is why they have regrouped and vowed to increase the rate of kidnappings and robbery operations in the state.

"Why do the people of the state not ask questions? Why is a political leader a godfather to cultists and kidnappers in the state? Who are these kidnappers and whose interest are they protecting with their activities in the state? Why are these kidnapping activities prevalent in Urhobo areas of the state because right now? There is no kidnapping in the waterways of the state, that is the Ijaw and Itsekiri areas", he said.

Major security challenge

Saturday Vanguard gathered that the matter of kidnappers centering their operations in Urhobo areas of the state had equally attracted the attention of the State Security Council,

with a mandate to chosen government officials from the Delta Central senatorial district to find out what had gone wrong with their people.

One of the major challenges in the state, according to a security report obtained by Saturday Vanguard, is that those engaged in recent kidnap operations in Udu, Uvwie, Ughelli and other Urhobo areas of the state are indigenes and people from the areas are not volunteering information to security agents to pick them up.

"But the funny thing is that most of those they have kidnapped in recent times are mostly wealthy Urhobo persons and they keep them in their hideouts within Urhobo villages and outskirts from where they ask for ransom. It is not possible for them to take them to Ijaw and Itsekiri settlements, and so the business is now concentrated in their areas", the source hinted.

Kidnap kingpin arrested

Commissioner Tsafe confirmed to Saturday Vanguard that one of the kidnap kingpins, identified as Kevwe Emet, whose den is at Eketa Waterside, Aladja in Udu local government area, was recently arrested and is

being detained by men of the Criminal Investigation Department, CID, Ondo State Police Command, Akure for kidnapping and armed robbery offences he committed in Delta state.

ACP Yaro told Saturday Vanguard that despite the attempt to blackmail the police over the death of Onokpite, "we will continue to do our work". He said the police were still on the manhunt of the chairman of Agaga community, who the guns were being conveyed to. Why is nobody asking questions about the confessions of the driver and the man he was taking the guns to, who is now on the run", he asked.

Dossier on new wave of kidnapping

Investigations by Saturday Vanguard, however, showed that security agents have obtained fresh dossier on the new style of politically motivated kidnapping and armed robbery in the state and were working on how to curtail it.

A source said there was a standing arrangement for guns to be supplied to some communities in the state for political reasons and the contract was being executed by some politicians, adding,

"We got information that some of the cult gangs met in a school in Warri, few days ago, to plan how to cause mayhem in the state. We are monitoring them".

Police take battle to criminals' hideouts

ACP Yaro said the police required information from all and sundry in the society, adding, "Based on information from some member of the public, the police on Monday night outwitted an armed robbery gang when it stormed Owase Primary School, Owase in Udu Local Government Area of the state and recovered a number of arms and ammunition hidden in a classroom by the gangsters. Nobody knows what they had planned to do with these weapons, whether it is kidnapping or armed robbery, but we got information and foiled it".

The bandits, according to reports, were said to have sent one of their members to the primary school to collect the guns and ammunition for their planned operation, only to discover that the police had swooped on the place. Also on the same day, men of the Area Police Command, Warri, in conjunction with operatives of the Delta Waterways Anti-

Kidnapping Task Force stormed the hideout of notorious gun supplier, said to be providing guns for robbers in Warri axis. He managed to escape but security agents are on his trail.

Yaro revealed that based on intelligence information received by the police, a patrol team was sent to comb the primary school and recovered one locally made cut-to-size single barrel gun, SBG a pistol and two cartridges, concealed in a bag among other things.

He said the police have launched an intensive manhunt for all categories of criminals in Warri area that one Brown Iboyi was arrested with a Beretta pistol, number, 54000403 with nine rounds of .9mm live ammunition, Tuesday, at Aladja area. According to him, a police patrol team at about 10.30 am, intercepted an unregistered red symba motor cycle conveying two persons, who jumped down and fled on sighting the police. "One of them later known as Brown Iboyi was arrested. Efforts are on to arrest the other on the run", he added.

Pointing out that the police was carrying the battle to the dens of criminals in Warri, he said that acting on a tip off, the police, raided a beer parlour, suspected to be a haven for bandits, Monday night and recovered some quantities of cartridges, while the owner of the beer parlour was arrested. He said the beer parlour owner