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Gunmen invade Rivers market, kill 8

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By Jimitota Onoyume

PORT HARCOURT—Eight persons were shot dead, weekend, by unknown gunmen at Agbonchia market area, Eleme Local Government of Rivers State.

Meanwhile, Rivers State Police Command said it had uncovered plans by two rival political groups to protest, today, the Federal High Court ruling in Port Harcourt that nullified the May 23 elections of 22 local government executives.

Deputy Commissioner of Police, Austin Agbonlahor in a statement in Port Harcourt, warned that the police will not allow any act that would cripple peace in the state, urging those aggrieved over the high court judgement to explore legal means to express their feelings.

On the market shooting, state Police Public Relations Officer, DSP Ahmad Muhammad, however, said five people died, adding that a suspect had been arrested.

He said the killers stormed a place around a market where people wash motorcycles and opened fire on those around, noting that five persons died at the end of the shooting.

He said: “The assailants came on motorcycles, opened fire at a motorcycles wash point at Agbonchia Eleme and fled. Five persons lost their lives.

“Preliminary investigation revealed that the attack was related to cult activities. One suspect is right now undergoing interrogation, while moves to arrest other fleeing miscreants has begun.”

Eyewitnesses said eight persons lost their lives in the incident, corroborating the account of the police image maker that the assailants were three in number and came on a motor bike.

They said the assailants pretended as if they came to wash their bikes.

“Suddenly, they started shooting at those around and when they were done, they hopped on their bike and fled,” the eyewitnesses said.

The incident caused tension in the area as nobody could say if it had anything to do with politics or cultism.

Some feared it would be connected with the sack of 22 council chairmen in the state.

A member of the community said: “Politicians can go to any length. Maybe factions of the two political parties are engaged in a war already, following political developments in the state last week.”

Another member of the community said it was likely a cult-related attack.

We killed 3 suspects—SARS

Confirming the development, the state Police boss, Chris Ezike, said that on the same day, detectives attached to the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, SARS, who were on stop-and-search duties at Obiri-Ikwere junction, encountered a group of hoodlums operating in a Toyota Camry car.

According to him, in the ensuing gun duel, the three suspects were killed by the police.

He added that bullets and one AK-47 rifle, with 20 rounds of ammunition, one pump action gun, with breach no. T5870, three locally-made revolver pistols and one double-barrelled gun, with 45 rounds of live cartridges, were recovered from them.

Police caution

Deputy Commissioner of Police, Austin Agbonlahor in a statement in Port Harcourt, appealed to the political class to allow peace reign, stressing that the state had seen enough of politically-motivated protests.

He said: “Information at the disposal of Rivers State Police Command indicates plans by unknown individuals to hold a protest today in Port Harcourt metropolis and other locations in the state against the recent Federal High Court judgment nullifying the election of the chairmen of 22 councils and the swearing-in of caretaker committees in their stead.

“Similarly, the command has credible intelligence that the protesters will be countered by another group. This could lead to confrontation with unpleasant consequences.

“We are in a democracy, where the Rule of Law and the right to protest are legitimate rights and aspirations. However, these rights stop where those of the other person begins.

“We acknowledge that anyone can hold a legitimate and peaceful protest; it is also fair to admit that the protest planners would not be able to control the process as pro- and anti-forces, and hoodlums, could hijack it and turn the state into a theatre of violence.

“So we are advising that all aggrieved persons should sheathe their swords and toe the path of honour by resorting to legal means of seeking redress and justice.”