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TUESDAY 20 JUNE

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Calabar turns to cultists' theatre of war

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By Ike Uchechukwu

CALABAR—SOCIAL LIFE for which Calabar, the capital of Cross River State is well-known is slowly fading away, as residents of the Paradise City no longer stay out later than 8.00 p.m due to the fear of attack by rampaging cultists, who battle and spill blood openly on the streets. Cult activities, mostly in the Calabar South Local Government, which covers a huge part of the metropolis escalated, penultimate Monday, with the death toll rising to 10 with two more persons shot at Ebitto by Mayne avenue and White House street, last Friday evening.

Residents now go to their houses as early as 7.00 pm while owners of shops, sit out joints, restaurants and supermarkets, which normally stay open till 11.00 pm

now lock up before 8.30 pm.

War zone

Some shop owners, who spoke with NDV, lamented how the cult clashes have crippled their businesses. One of them, Mrs. Rosemary Ibok, said that Calabar which was noted for her rich delicacies, relaxation centres, restaurants and sit-outs where people make merriment has turned into a war zone.

"I closed by 8.00 pm because of the shooting along Mayne Avenue and later I learnt they killed one boy during the shooting, I do not think I can wait till 8: 00 pm anymore, I have lost a lot of customers because most people come here from evening. How can they come when they hear there is violence," she further lamented.

Another businessperson, Mrs. Chioma Nwosu, who runs a beer joint, along Chamley, said with the current cult clashes, people who do businesses in restaurants now close as early as 7.00 pm.

"Economic and social activities are been affected as we lose so much money because of the cult activities in Calabar, people are scared to sit at my place for fear of stray bullets or being attacked by these hoodlums, it is high time the government took the bull by its horn and stop treating this matter with kid gloves," she said.

Genesis of crisis

Initially, it was reported that the conflict between Ku Klux Klan and Vikings was a reprisal over the killing of a member of one of the groups, three months ago, but NDV investigations revealed that the renewed warfare actually emanated from the alleged seizure of a tricycle by an enforcement team from Cross River Transport Regulatory Agency, CITRA, popularly known as 100 Marian.

The leader of the enforcement team, Bassey, was identified by a cult group to be a member of another rival cult and when the tricycle rider informed the owner, he contacted Bassey, who sent some boys to brutalize and machete him (Bassey). A source, who spoke under anonymity, told NDV that Bassey's group got infuriated and for more than two weeks now, has been on the rampage with casualties mounting.

Tricycle riders desert Calabar

Speaking with NDV, chairman, Cross River State Tricycle Riders/Operators, Dr. Joseph Ewa, said the enforcement team from the Cross River Transport Regulatory Agency (CITRA) and had nothing to do with the tricycle union in the state.

His words: "The union's enforcement had nothing to do with the cult crisis in Calabar, we do not harass people, we allow constituted authority do their job and because of the activities of CITRA, a lot of operators have left Calabar to other neighbouring states, we do not have up to 2000 tricycles in Calabar anymore because operators are moving to places like Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa and Delta, some have gone to Umuahia in Abia and Owerri in Imo state.

"We are appealing to Governor Ben Ayade to intervene and save that sector from dying. There are a lot of families which depend on the income of many of these operators who are now leaving to other states for greener pastures due to constant harassment by some agencies and members of their enforcement team. Many of the operators who are still here no longer take up to N1,000 home because of the various offenses slammed on them, now cult war is another huge challenge to deal with."

CITRA causing problem

Ewa asserted: 'The activities of this agency is causing insecurity problems in the metropolis and this is the height of it ,we need peace and tranquillity, which Cross River state is known for, enough is enough.'

Killings and counter killings

However, sources claimed that the Vikings have allegedly killed more than eight members of their rival Mafians, which replied with the killing of three Vikings. As at the time of filing this report, the Vikings were reported to have killed six members of their opposing Mafians.

Though unconfirmed sources claimed that nine cultists have been killed, police in Calabar said that only four persons have died in the clashes.

Normalcy in the area – Police

Contacted, Police Public Relations Officer, Cross River State Police Command, Irene Ugbo, said police have restored calm, law and order in Calabar South.

Ugho disclosed that some persons have been arrested in connection with the killings, adding that police have commenced investigations into the killings, while patrols have also been intensified in the affected areas. She charged residents of Calabar to go about their lawful businesses as the Police were on top of the situation.



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