

[Home](#) » [News](#) » School, market closed in Lokoja as cult clash claims 4

NEWS

School, market closed in Lokoja as cult clash claims 4

**Police arrest 15 suspects*

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By Boluwaji Obahopo

Lokoja—Four persons have been reportedly killed while about five houses burnt as rival cult groups clashed in Kabawa, one of the traditional areas of Lokoja, Kogi State capital.

It was gathered that the clash started on Monday night as two rival groups engaged themselves in a free-for-all, which led to the killing and burning of the houses and a tricycle (Keke NAPEP) in Kabawa.

As the clash continued yesterday morning, schools and markets were shut.

Most of the cultists are said to be teenagers within 14 and 17 years of age, who are either in secondary schools or learning trades in the area.

The crisis saw residents moving their families to secured places to avoid being caught in the clash.

The Monday crisis was said to be a reprisal by one of the groups following the killing of one of their members in January.

The sources said the cultists, armed with guns and other dangerous weapons, invaded the street, attacked people and burnt houses they believed to belong to their rival families.

However, when the police stormed the area, yesterday, to calm down the situation, some of the cultists also engaged the security agents in a gun battle that lasted several hours before they were overpowered.

- **Igbo communities wage war against cultism, say it is destroying the society**

A source in the area said: “Some members of the cultists jumped into River Niger to avoid arrest and then swam to the other side of the river bank.”

15 suspects arrested

The Kogi State Police Command Public Relations Officer, SP William Aya, while confirming the incident, said 15 suspects have been arrested by the command.

Aya said the command can only confirm that one person was killed, adding that they are still investigating what led to the incident.

The Kogi State government, however, read riot act to cultists in the state, warning that proactive actions against whoever is involved in the crisis will soon be taken.

The State Security Adviser, Jerry Omodara, warned that “cultists and other miscreants fomenting trouble in traditional areas of Lokoja should be ready for the government onslaught as the state government will not allow anybody rubbish its successes in the area of security.

He said: “Henceforth, anybody who feels he’s powerful should try the government. Irrespective of how highly placed, the person will be dealt with decisively.

“Be rest assured that Governor Bello will deal decisively with cultism in Kabawa. We will arrest the situation and I assure you that we’ve moved into the area and made tremendous progress after enough intelligence gathering.

“We’ve identified the culprits having extensively discussed it at the security council meeting. We’ve gone deep into the matter. Be rest assured that Governor Bello will not shy away from his responsibilities in fighting crime, be it armed robbery, kidnapping or cultism.”

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