

# Enugu: 12 killed in police, youths clash

CHUKWUDI ACHIFE, Enugu

**N**O fewer than 12 people were feared dead, while over 15 houses were razed in a communal violence that has engulfed Mgbowo community in Awgu local government area of Enugu State for the past three days.

Also 10 others were said to have been critically injured and are receiving treatment in various hospitals in the state.

Witnesses told *Daily Champion* that the violence, which started last Saturday, was triggered off by the shooting by a detachment of policemen of six youths from the community who were protesting the security agents' interference in activities marking the community's annual 'Iri ji' (New yam) cultural festival.

The villagers alleged that the policemen had been invited by

some prominent members of the community who had feared that the festival might be turned into a political platform by some of their opponents in the community.

The uniformed men, who reportedly arrived the town with an armoured vehicle, were said to have clashed with the youths when they (policemen) allegedly started smashing canopies and seats already set up for the festival at Mgbowo Boys Secondary School.

Following the incident during which six of the youths were said to have died instantly, while many others were severely injured, the youths regrouped in the evening and resolved to vent their vengeance on the prominent indigenes who were suspected to have invited the police to disrupt the ceremony.

They reportedly went on a

rampage burning more than 15 houses belonging to the alleged instigators of the police action.

The violence continued until Monday and threatened to claim more lives and damage properties but later subsided following an emergency visit by the Enugu State Commissioner for Police Mr Charles Dawodu, leading a team of senior police officers.

The commissioner reportedly appealed to the villagers to let peace reign, promising to launch a full investigation into the matter.

When the *Daily Champion* visited Mgbowo Tuesday, it wore a sad and sober look as villagers continued to lament over the crisis. The decomposing corpse of a middle-aged person who apparently was trampled to death during the rampage was seen lying along a major road in the town.

Some of them who spoke with our correspondent traced the trouble to the appointment of two allegedly unpopular indigenes to the traditional leadership of the two autonomous communities, which were recently created in the town by the state government.

They explained that, the two leaders whose houses were also burnt in the rampage, and their supporters may have feared that the people would use the 'Iri ji' festival as a platform to show their displeasure and had invited the police to forestall trouble.

Both the police and members of the families of the alleged instigators, however, vehemently denied this claim.

"There is nothing like that at all, the police was not involved at all, we only received reports of violence in the town and we intervened to restore order", said Mike Abattam, the state police public relations officer.

He, however, stated that the police had restored calm in the town following the visit of the police commissioner, adding that investigations into the incident would continue.

Meanwhile, the remains of dead youths were reportedly deposited at a mortuary in the town located along the Enugu Port Harcourt expressway but officials there refused to divulge any information, saying that they had been warned not to speak to the press.

## 160 killed

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equity and money markets, the central bank, companies such as Reliance Industries Ltd. and the country's busiest airport.

The blasts in Mumbai "are shocking and cowardly attempts to spread a feeling of fear and terror among our citizens," Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said in New Delhi. "I condemn these shameful acts aimed at our peace-loving people. I reiterate our commitment to fighting terror in all its forms."

The blasts have taken place in Khar, Mahim, Mira Road, Jogeshwari, Borivali, Matunga and Bandra, Roy said. No one has so far claimed responsibility for the blasts.

Some parts of the city's suburban railway network, used by about 6.1 million people daily, were shut after the blasts. The injured have been taken to the city's hospitals.

"Our priority now is to ensure that every injured person gets prompt treatment," said Johnny Joseph, Mumbai's municipal commissioner, in a phone interview.

The airport at Mumbai, India's busiest, has been put on "high alert," Praful Patel, India's

civil aviation minister, said in a phone interview. "We have to remain alert. Security is being tightened all over," Patel said.

Passengers jumped out of carriages packed with commuters during the evening rush hour, the *Aaj Tak* television channel said, citing eye witnesses.

The Mumbai explosions came after grenade attacks earlier yesterday by suspected Islamic terrorists that killed eight people in Srinagar, the summer capital of India's northern state of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Indian capital New Delhi was rocked by three explosions on October 29 last year that killed at least 59 people. The blasts took place in crowded market areas with people shopping for the festivals of Diwali and Id.

Mumbai generates about 5 per cent of India's gross domestic product and contributes more than one-third of the country's tax revenues, according to the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority.

More than 10 million daily passenger trips are provided by the suburban railway and the state-run bus service, according to the authority.