

No light for 3 years... **4 killed in Sabon riots**

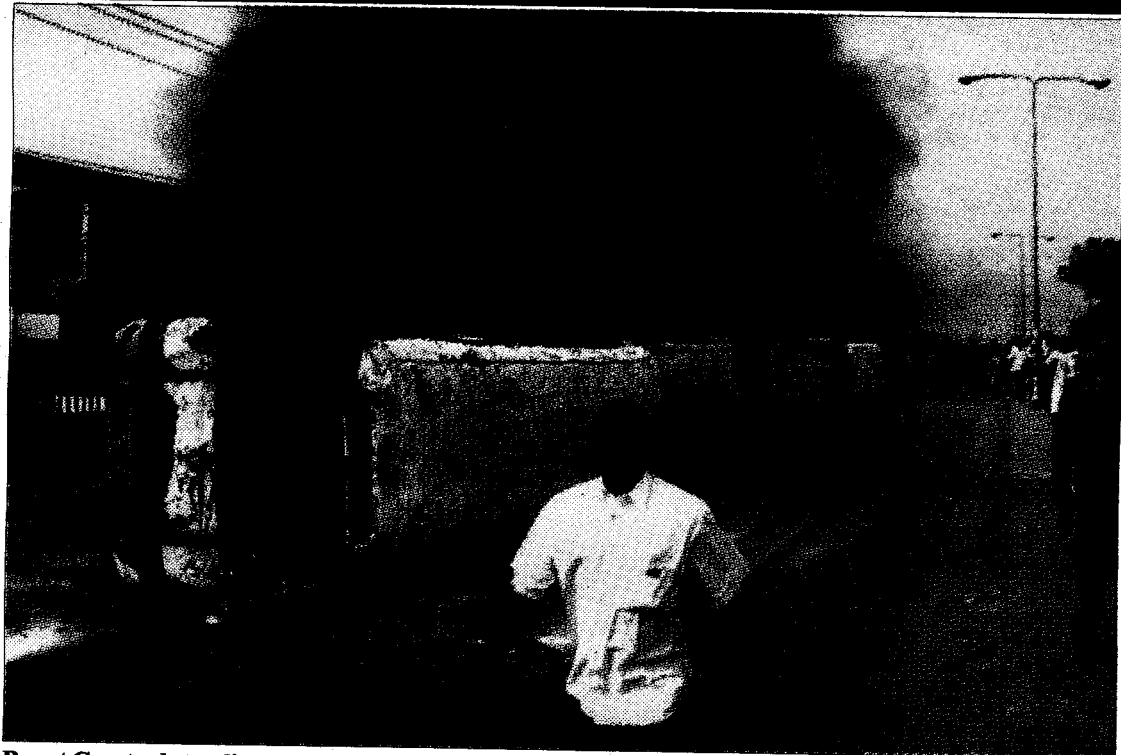
From AbdulRaheem Aodu & Isa Sa'idu Kaduna

A pregnant woman and one Auwalu Auta, a 25-year-old man, were among four people who were confirmed dead yesterday when thousands of youths took to the streets of the sprawling Sabon Tasha ward, on the outskirts of Kaduna metropolis, to protest lack of electricity in the area for the last three years. The rioters accused the Power Holding Company of Nigeria [PHCN] of failing to supply them with a transformer since the old one packed up.

Several other persons, including eight policemen, also sustained serious injuries in the clash that left four Toyota Coaster buses, two pick-up vans and a motorcycle burnt to ashes. Several public buildings, including an Upper Magistrate's Court, were vandalised as the irate youths in their thousands blocked the main road leading to the Kaduna Refinery and out of the metropolis to the southern parts of the state.

Thousands of the youths had poured out of Unguwar Matare and Unguwar Bulus villages to protest the marathon power failure.

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Burnt Coaster buses litter the highway after the riots at Sabon Tasha, Kaduna yesterday. *Pic: Isa Sa'idu*

4 killed in Sabo riots

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Efforts by the police to dialogue with the youths failed and they soon became violent. Kaduna State Commissioner of Police Haz Iwendi said his men had to use "minimal force" to quell the riots.

The injured policemen were said to have been man-handled by the youths and had their uniforms, identity cards and boots confiscated.

The demonstration that started as early as 7.30 in the morning followed the intervention of the police and the state government in a similar case involving nearby Ungwar Boro Village in Sabon Tasha. The Ungwar Baro youth had on Monday held a peaceful protest to protest two years' blackout that was a consequence of a faulty transformer and the failure by PHCN to replace it. Police intervened and the state government swiftly ordered PHCN to immediately install a 500 KVA transformer there.

Residents of nearby Ungwan Gwari, Kadara, Gimbiya and Matare, having realized that their neighbours had been given a transformer because of their previous day's protest, decided to launch a demonstration of their own. They blocked the Kachia road that leads to the Kaduna Refinery and made bonfires on the road from old tyres. Workers who were going to work in town were stranded as no commercial vehicle was ready to pass through the area.

The first batch of mobile policemen that came to the area shot sporadically in the air. The demonstrators responded by sacking the PHCN office in the area. They brought all files and furniture out of the office and set them ablaze. Two PHCN pick-up trucks parked in the premises were also dragged across the road and burnt.

In addition, the rioters set ablaze four luxurious 32-seater buses belonging to NNPC, as well as other cars and motorcycles commandeered from passers-by. The upper customary court was also not spared, as everything in it was brought out and set ablaze.

Daily Trust gathered from some of the youth in the area that the demonstration would not have turned violent if the policemen had not shot into the air. They also charged that the state government responds to its citizens' requests only when they take to the streets.

A youth leader told Daily Trust, "We have been in Ungwan Kadara for two years without electricity. The PHCN people took the transformer away when it developed fault, promising to fix it and return

it, but they refused to either return the old one or give us another one, even after repeated visits to their office. So when we heard that Ungwan Boro people had been given a new transformer within a single day of their staging a demonstration, we also decided to demonstrate since we also need a transformer. It was a peaceful demonstration that turned violent when those mobile policemen shot and killed all those people."

When our reporter visited the Sabon Tasha Police Station, where it was alleged that the dead bodies were taken to, the Divisional Crime Officer (DCO), Mark Wain, claimed that only one person was killed. He however added, "If it is true that there are others, we have not heard about them, but I can only tell you that only one person was shot."

Iwendi, who also confirmed the incident, however said only one person was killed in addition to the eight policemen who were seriously injured. He denied the allegation that the police shot at the protesters, saying the youth protested violently. He added that the police also monitored the previous day's demonstration that was peaceful and nobody was harmed.

Iwendi said, "It is not true. Yesterday (Monday) we

had the same demonstration by Ungwan Boro youth which was peaceful and there was no cause for us to use firearm. I spoke to the Governor and he ordered that they be given a transformer. They had a 200 KVA, which was not enough for them, and so a 500 KVA was given to them. Today's (Tuesday) demonstrators came out more violently. They blocked the road and started smashing cars' windcreens, and there was no cause for them to have gone violent and once they go violent, it is a must that we the police must react to maintain peace. We pleaded with them but all dialogue failed, so we have to use minimum force to dislodge them from the road and ensure free flow of traffic," he added, "One person was confirmed dead with eight policemen injured while three to four vehicles have been burnt and many buildings vandalized."

At the family house of the slain Awwalu Auta, his sister Ajia explained, "He went out to the football field to train in the morning. He was not even among the protesters, only for his corpse to be returned home later, saying he was shot by the police while trying to cross the road." She was sobbing as she spoke. One of the injured persons was also found at the Amangala Hospital, in the area.

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country without a comprehensive electoral reform that includes an inquiry into the flaws of the 2007 general elections as well as imposition of sanctions on all those that enabled them. It is instructive that the chairman of INEC, Prof. Maurice Iwu, whose agency coordinated the massive rigging of the elections and who Nigerians have roundly called upon to resign or be relieved of his position, is one of those invited by the presidency to this meeting. Yet APGA, the political party in government in Anambra state and some other registered political parties were excluded from a meeting purportedly called to proffer solutions to electoral problems at the grass root level in the country."

Alhaji Musa also argued that the PDP and President Yar'adua are only striving to ensure one party state in the country, which according to him was the reason why PDP led governments have purportedly held their local government elections that claimed over 300 Nigerian lives, something he said today's meet-

ing will never resuscitate.

"Nigerians know that the PDP is intent on foisting a one party state on the country, inclusive of a large measure of their aggravated intolerance of opposition and the perfection of electoral terrorism; but we are determined to lead Nigerians to seek multi party democracy and true federalism, both essential ingredients for the survival of our heterogeneous society," he said.

The CNPP also alleged that President Yar'adua joined hands with the PDP state governors to rig the local government elections in favour of his party, adding that Nigerians already expressed serious misgivings on the appropriateness of holding the local government elections by majority of the state governors whose legitimacy is itself in question.

"In late September 2007, President Yar'adua participated at a meeting of his party, which directed all its governors to hold local government elections on or before 31 December 2007. Most of the PDP governors have now complied with this dastardly in-