

COVER

Terkula Igidi, who was in Ibi

The old fishing town of Ibi used to be a serene, peaceful place but the religious riot that engulfed the town Sunday morning has rewritten its history. Snuggling on the south-eastern bank of River Benue, Ibi town with its sprawling red roofs and dusty streets is home to fishermen, who fish in the Benue waters and farmers who farm the rich alluvial plains of the Benue valley.

Now tension hangs over the old town as smell of blood and burnt buildings fill the air.

The town also had a booming fish market, especially at this time of the year but now the place is deserted.

Thousands of people, mostly women and children were seen fleeing the violence on foot and on bikes to neighbouring villages. And for them, the sectarian crisis has come at a very terrible time. With the scars of the destruction wrecked on them by the floods that ravaged their farmlands and washed away their homes, it is like adding salt to injury.

Faith Nungwa, a young lady who was seen trekking along Ibi Wukari road with a heavy load on her head, said she and her family members have been sleeping in the bush and they have to find a way of leaving the town before another round of violence.

"We were in church on Sunday for morning service when suddenly we heard sounds of gunshots. Everybody was tensed up and the Pastor had to end the service and as we came out, we saw smoke billowing into the sky and people were running helter skelter and we knew that all is not well in the town. We had to run for our dear lives and hid in the bush," she said.

Already some refugees have camped at Ibua and Dooshima villages, a safe distance from the boiling Ibi but with little or nothing to eat, as they have left their foodstuff and cooking utensils behind.

"We are just settling down after the floods washed away our farmland and displaced us from our homes and I never imagined that this disaster will befall us. Thank God for sparing our lives but crisis is the last thing that we want in Ibi now," Titus Iorja, a fleeing resident, said.

At least 10 people lost their lives in the crisis which started on Sunday morning and continued up to Monday.

Uneasy calm has returned to the town with the imposition of a 24-hour curfew on Monday, but life will no longer be the same for adherents of the two religions who, before now, have co-existed peacefully as there will



Shops along the main street in Ibi burnt down during the sectarian crisis

Ibi crisis ignites 'sorrow, tears and blood'

The religious crisis that hit Ibi local government area of Taraba State led to the death of ten people and arrest of 200 suspects. Weekly Trust reports that the crisis, which started, as a quarrel, left "sorrow, tears and blood" in its wake.

be mutual suspicion between them.

It all started like a mere quarrel between members of the Boys Brigade of Nigeria, who mounted a roadblock near their church, the Christian Reformed Church of Nigeria (CRCN) at the heart of the town. A Muslim passerby insisted on passing through the roadblock, which escalated to riots resulting to the loss of lives.

Witnesses said the man forced his way through and he was beaten mercilessly by the Boys Brigade. He was said to have survived the beating and went and mobilised his people who came "on retaliatory mission" and allegedly attacked members of the church. Two people were hacked down immediately as Christians and Muslims rose up in defence of their religions. Houses, shops and places of worship were torched

in the few hours of fierce fighting before security forces intervened.

Chairman of the Ibi local government Ishaka Adamu however said the violence was not sparked off by religious sentiments as people were made to believe. He said the crisis was political and sponsored.

He said politicians are behind the violence but decline to mention names of those that fuelled the crisis. He said the local government will do all within its powers to ensure that the violence does not escalate and it does not reoccur in the future.

The Chief of Ibi His Royal Highness Alhaji Abubakar Danbawuro lamented that Ibi that used to be a peaceful town has lost its peace. He called both Christians and Muslims to tolerate one another, saying "what tolerating one another and living in

peace will give you violence will not give you. So I call on all my subjects both Muslims and Christians to live in peace with one another as brothers and sisters. It is only then that we can achieve our goals in life," the third class chief said.

The Taraba House of Assembly has set up an ad hoc committee chaired by the deputy speaker Abel Peter Diah to investigate the immediate and remote causes of the crisis.

While addressing newsmen in Jalingo on Thursday, the deputy speaker said the committee has invited the chairman of the local government who is the chief security officer of Ibi and the traditional ruler to assist the committee in its investigations. He said all heads of security agencies stationed in Ibi and the chairmen of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Muslim Council in the local government will be invited to give evidence to the committee.

"We want to do a thorough work and see if there was negligence by the authorities," adding that "Taraba has enjoyed peace and we cannot afford to lose the peace that we have been enjoying so we are doing a thorough job to see that the report of our findings come out on Tuesday.

Already the chairman has mentioned some names to us and after our findings we shall invite whoever is implicated in the crisis to appear before us and clear himself," he said.

Meanwhile, security forces drafted to keep the peace have arrested over 200 militia men and handed them over to the police.

A highly placed security source said the militia men who were armed with guns and machetes engaged the security forces in a shoot-out for several minutes before they were overpowered and arrested and taken to Jalingo, the Taraba State capital.

Our source said some were killed in the exchange of gunfire but could not give figures. A mobile policeman was shot by one of the militia who was in a military camouflage and he was receiving treatment at General Hospital Wukari.

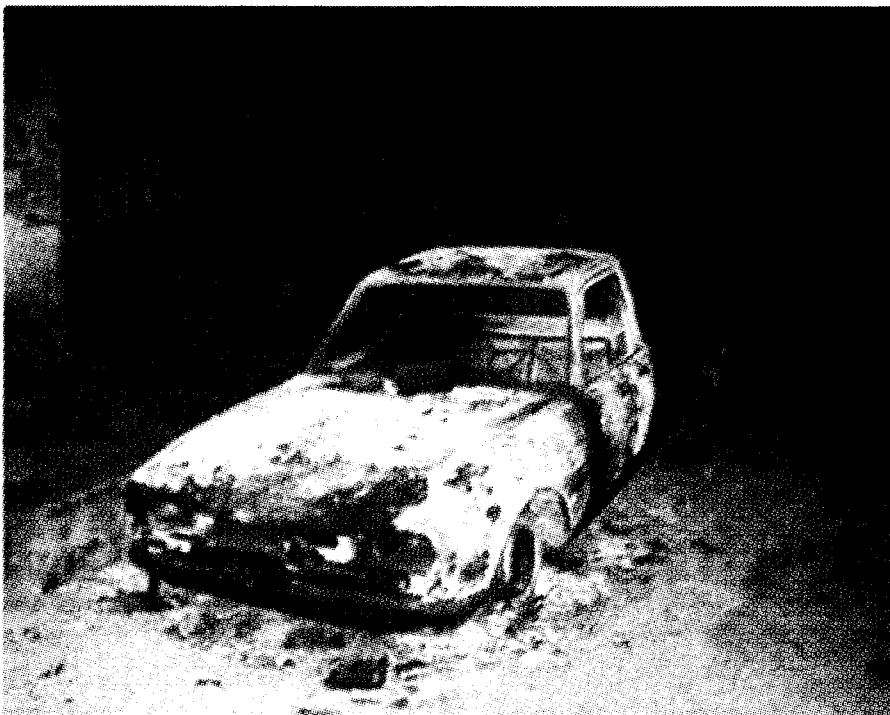
The Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) of the Taraba State Police Command Amos Olaoye confirmed the arrest. "We arrested some suspects in connection with the Ibi crisis and we are investigating them to know where they came from and how involved they were in the crisis," he said.

He said the 24-hour curfew imposed on the town by the state government on Monday has brought normalcy to the town.

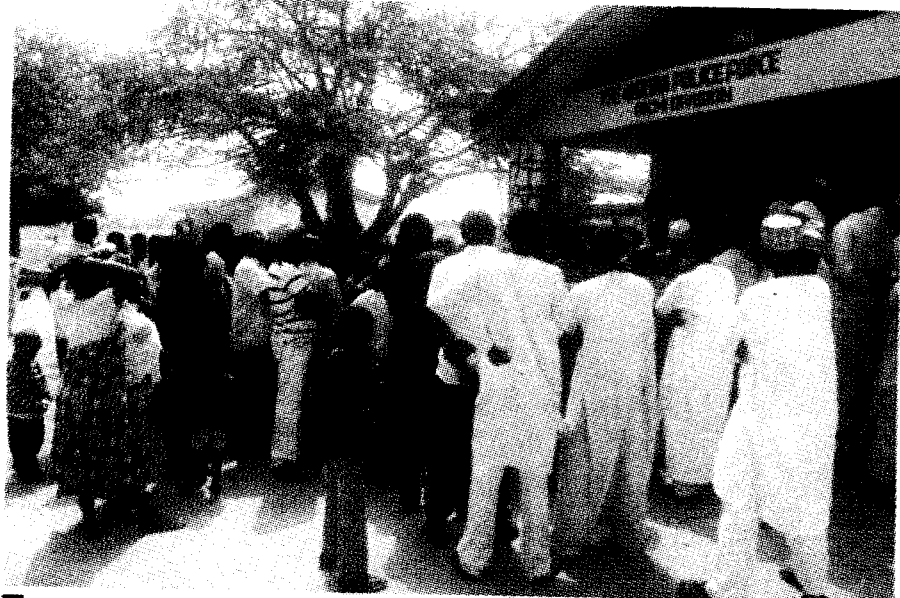
There are reports of violence still going on in the villages around Ibi especially at night but the police said that it is just speculation.



Residents of Ibi fleeing to neighbouring villages



A pick-up van burnt in the crisis that engulfed Ibi recently



■ Residents at the police station in Bichi

PHOTOS: Sani Maikatanga

How alleged blasphemy sparked riot in Bichi

Lawan Danjuma Adamu

About a hundred non-Muslims were taking refuge at the premises of the police division in Bichi Local Government Area of Kano State yesterday following a deadly religious violence that broke out Thursday in the town located about 30 kilometres from Kano city.

Among the people seeking shelter at the police division were women and children. Some of them said they have lost all they had to the riot that started on Thursday morning after an Igbo tailor has inadvertently made a pronouncement that 'miscreants' misinterpreted to mean a deliberate blasphemy against Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

The tailor, whose name was simply given as Chibuke - now rumoured to have been killed - was said to have wrongly pronounced the name for a popular outfit (Na Annabi ya zo kasuwa), while chatting with a business associate.

Weekly Trust gathered that some youths who were present at the place, went into town alerting people that the tailor has blasphemed the Prophet of Islam, which instantly resulted in a violent protest.

Demonstrators, who were armed with cutlasses, knives and other dangerous weapons, went round the town in groups, attacking non-Hausas and destroying their property.

Witnesses claimed that about four persons were killed, including the Chibuke, who was said to be the first to have been macheted to death.

Hospital sources disclosed that two burnt bodies were deposited at the General Hospital, Bichi, while residents said another person was also killed on the road leading to the Federal College Education (FCE) Bichi.

Also affected by the riots were several shops, churches and valuables belonging to non-Muslims.

The crisis was brought under control with the deployment of dozens of police and military personnel, Weekly Trust learnt.

One of the victims taking refuge at the police station, said he has spent 35 years in Bichi, adding that he has neither heard nor

experienced attack on non-Hausas, until the one of Thursday morning.

Samuel, who was addressing the district head of Bichi and other members of the local government security committee who paid them a visit, said even when religious riots broke out in other parts of the state or the country, the people of Bichi had never targeted non-Muslims in their midst.

Describing the situation as an act of God, Samuel assured that the violence would not send them packing from the town, as they have understood that it was the undoing of few elements in the society.

He, therefore, called on government at all levels to provide adequate security for the non-indigenes.

Another victim disclosed that all his belongings were set ablaze by the rioters. "I have only this clothe I'm wearing left,"

he stated. "I only managed to bring myself to the station unhurt, but I later found out that all my property, at home and in my shop have been razed," he complained.

Other victims also explained that the protestors went about bringing their property out of their houses before setting them on fire. Others, it was gathered, hid themselves in roofs to avoid being killed.

Addressing the victims, district head of Bichi Alhaji Idris Bayero, urged them to regard the attack as an

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act by some hoodlums for their own selfish interest and not representing the position of the people of the town or the ones in Kano.

While condemning the act, the traditional ruler pointed that the perpetrators did not act in the name of Islam or Muslims, stressing that what they did was unIslamic, barbaric and reprehensible.

According to him, the generality of the people in the town were happy with their presence and that nobody was happy with the crisis which targeted them.

Also, the district head described as erroneous some news reports which he said were carried by international media purporting that the tailor was wearing an outfit with blasphemous inscription on it. "That was not what happened," he said, explaining that the problem started with misrepresentation of his name of the outfit.

Similarly, both the Interim Management



■ Remnants of tyres that were set on fire



■ Alhaji Idris Bayero, district Head of Bichi, addressing residents to calm the situation



■ Normalcy gradually returning to Bichi

Officer of the council, Alhaji Abdulhadi Aliyu Kachako and the state assembly member representing Bichi constituency, Alhaji Hamza Sule Maifata, promised to ensure that no such attack happens again in the town.

They also advised them to return to their homes, as adequate security has been put in place to safeguard their lives and property.

Our correspondent, who went round parts of the town, reported that riot policemen were stationed at various places in the area.

However, burnt items dotted facades of many shops in the area, while the main road traversing the town also had tyre burns at various points.

Meanwhile, the Kano State Police Command yesterday in a statement said two persons were killed, while 22 suspects were arrested.

The statement, which was issued by its spokesperson, ASP Musa Magaji Majiya, said the crisis was ignited by "disgruntled elements who do not wish the state well."

Majiya said seven Churches, eight shops and one house were set on fire in the crisis, noting, however, that two people were injured.

"Normalcy has already been restored at Bichi, people are going about their normal business without any hindrance as Patrol has been intensified," he said.

"Furthermore, the Command will not relent in its effort to investigate the root of the inferno and whoever is involved would be arrested to face the wrath of the law accordingly. People should continue to live in peace and pay due respect to each other's way of life without any form of provocation, please."