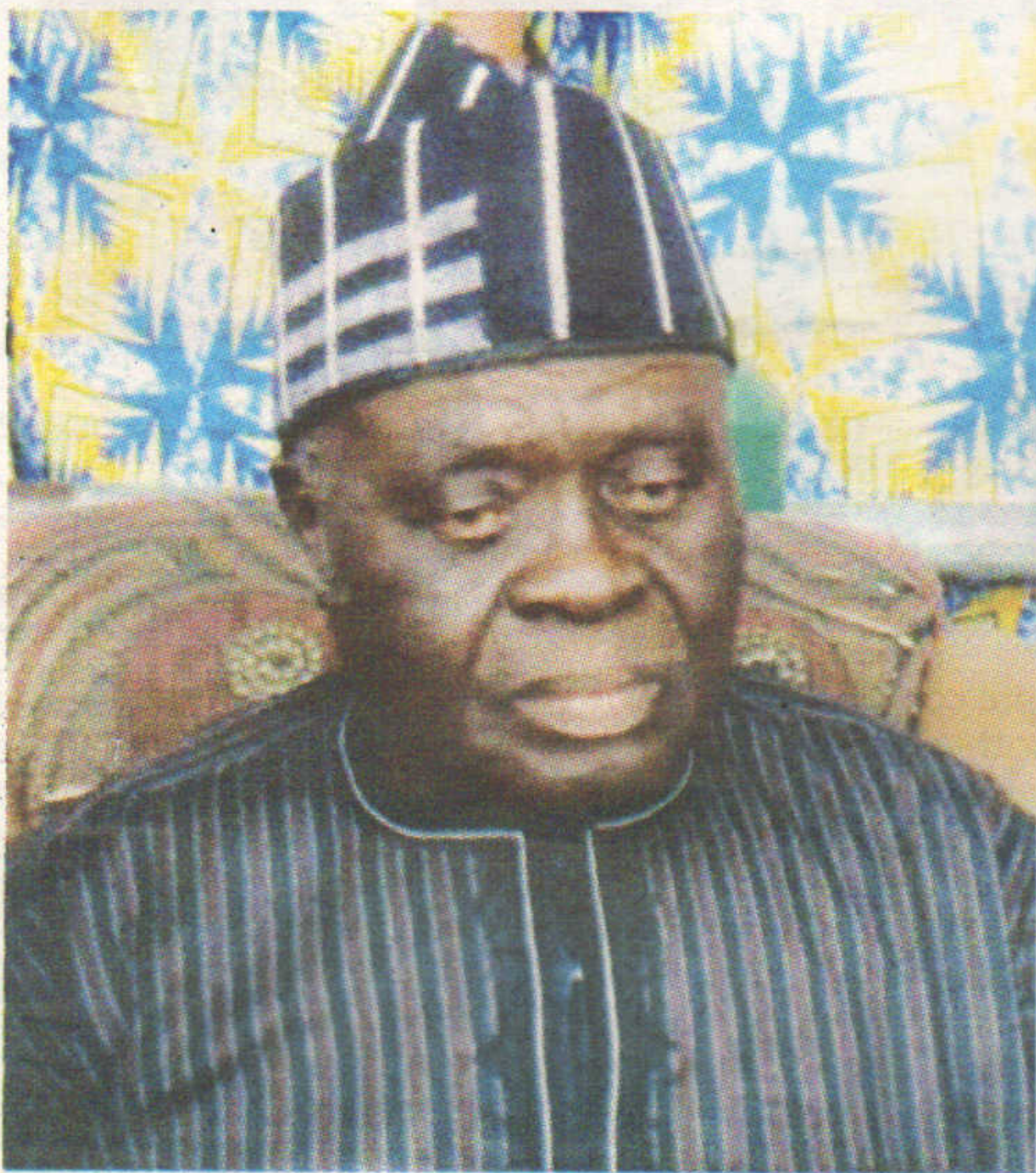


COVER



■ Late Chief Atoza Ihindan

Intrigues, anxiety as assassins rampage in Benue

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Peter Ukaa, a former deputy chairman of Katsina-Ala local government area of is one a few prominent people who survived the recent spate of killings in Benue North-east senatorial district.

Although he may not have been the major target of last Friday attacks by unknown gunmen which led to the death of a prominent political figure in the state, Ukaa however escaped by the whiskers but with a bullet wound.

The senatorial district, which comprises seven local government areas, recently witnessed an upsurge in the activities of assailants leading to the killing of notable politicians, with the worst violence occurring in Kastina-Ala, Ukum, Kwande and Ushongo local government areas.

While Logo local government, where the former governor Gabriel Suswam hails from had its share of violence during the March/April general elections, the area had also

suffered the loss of hundreds of lives lost to herders' invasion in the past six months.

But there had been insignificant cause to fret in the two local government areas of Vandeikya and Konshisha which form part of the district and home to senator Barnabas Gemade and representative Herman Hembe.

Only last week, residents in Katsina-Ala alleged that over 20 people were killed, among who was a People's Democratic Party (PDP) chieftain, Chief Atoza Ihinda. But the police had disputed the figure saying only three deaths were recorded.

Prior to Ihindan's assassination, PDP's former chairman in Katsina-Ala Zege Igyuve, was shot and killed by unknown gunmen, the party's youth leader in Ushongo, Ternenge Gbuuga, was also dealt a similar fate, just as two stalwarts of PDP in Kwande, Dege Ayahemba and Tarkighir Agbatse, were shot and killed, while another PDP faithful in Kwande, Felix Ajiva, was



■ Survivor, Ukaa with bullet wound on his rib



■ The suspect, Nough paraded alongside the chair in which he murdered Atoza

assassinated in like manner.

As a result of these incidents in Kastina-Ala in the last two weeks, tension had heightened in the ancient town with many innocent people sent to their early graves while others, such as Ukaa are thankful to God that they have another chance to tell their story.

He narrated that it happened on a fateful Friday while he sat on a plastic chair beside the late Ihindan. "Two men who rode on a motorcycle advanced towards us and began to shoot," he said, adding that he was so frightened that he

took to his heels but was still hit by a bullet.

The former deputy chairman said he could not determine whether the killings in the area were political or criminal, especially as the motives are still shrouded in mystery because most of the victims were members of his party, the PDP.

Similarly, the family of another victim, Jacob Terese Awarga Ajon, who was hacked to death a day before his 44th birthday, along the busy road linking the food basket junction in Katsina Ala town, is still searching for the rationale behind

his elimination.

His elder sister, Mrs. Shidoo Awaza told Daily Trust on Saturday in Tse-Ajon that her brother was brutally clubbed to death like an animal and his body shredded into pieces along the road.

She said the late Ajon, who was the only surviving son of his parents, was a civil servant who had worked with Katsina Ala local government with very little to show for it.

Mrs. Awaza said his assailant had earlier traced him to the house

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