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How death of masquerade ignited violence in Kogi

By Itodo Daniel Sule, Lokoja | Publish Date: Apr 28 2018 2:00AM

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A building razed during the attack on Kpanche community in Bassa LGA of Kogi State

On Sunday, April 22, residents of Kpanche, the peaceful Bassa Kwomus agrarian community in Bassa Local Government Area of Kogi State, woke up to sounds of sporadic gunshots and burning of houses by hoodlums alleged to have come from the Igburra Mozum ethnic group.

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Daily Trust learnt that the over 20 gunmen invaded the community, killed residents and burned houses and other valuables.

According to residents, seven people were killed while security agencies responded promptly and killed six of the attackers.

The violence was said to have spread to neighbouring villages of Biroko and Ozugbe. Many residents of Kpanche and adjoining villages fled their homes.

The Chief of Kpanche, Jonathan Shabani, who narrowly escaped death during the attack, said he could identify some of the attackers.

“I know them, they live in my community here,” he said.

A resident, Sunny Joe, said, “Before I could come out of my house, they had started burning houses, my father was burnt in his house because he couldn’t escape.”

Another resident, Rumuji Paul, said he escaped narrowly, adding that some elderly people and youths who could not escape were killed.

The Kogi State Police Command in a statement issued by its spokesman, ASP William Aya, said five persons were killed in the attack while 15 houses were burnt.

“Consequent upon the news, the Mobile Police Force as well as the Nigerian Army promptly moved to the scene to restore peace and order. On sighting the security personnel, they opened fire at them, but it was vehemently resisted by the fire power of the security personnel. Six of the attackers were killed while two AK 47 rifles, one LA and 1 single barrel gun were recovered from them,” Aya said in the statement.

He said the commissioner of police had ordered a thorough investigation into the incident and vowed to prosecute anyone linked to the attacks no matter how highly placed to serve as deterrent.

The violence is believed to be a reprisal over a clash between the Bassa Kwomus and Igburra Mozums sometime in 2016. The



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alleged killing of a Bassa Kwomu masquerade called 'Genge' by the Igburra Mozums caused the 2016 violence.

The administrator of Bassa Local Government Area, Samuel Zakari Alumka, while explaining the remote cause of the crisis, said, "There was a clash between the masquerade and some people in which a masquerade was attacked and killed.

"That incident generated a lot of fight then and through the efforts of Governor Yahaya Bello, calm was restored. Prior to this incident, there were no complaints from anywhere only for some a few individuals to pounce on a community call Kpanche and started burning houses and killing people.

"Most of the people whose houses were burnt are Bassa Kwomus. So what warranted the attacks? The attack in Bassa was not about Fulani herdsman. The crisis was between Bassa Kwomus and Igburra Mozums."

Following the incident, the Kogi State Police Commissioner, Ali Janga, alongside the administrator of Bassa LGA visited the community to ascertain the level of destruction.

Meanwhile, Governor Yahaya Bello has ensured the signing of a bond on sustainable peace in Bassa by the Aguma of Bassa, William Jimba Keke and the Ohiagba of Mozum, Alhaji Khalid Bukar.

The signing of the bond which took place at the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs in Lokoja, was supervised on behalf of the governor by the Special Adviser in the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Engr Abubakar Sadiku Ohere.

A closed-door meeting to proffer lasting solution to the crisis was held in the ministry.

The meeting had in attendance Engr. Ohere, the Commissioner of Police, the Special Adviser on Security, Retired Navy Commander Jerry Omodara, traditional rulers and other stakeholders.

Ohere warned that any traditional ruler in Bassa who allows his subjects to take fresh arms to disrupt the peace of the land would

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be made to face the full weight of the law.

He noted that government would set up a panel of inquiry into the crisis.

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