

Three feared killed in Benue youths, police clash

PANDEMONIUM broke out at Oturkpo town in Benue State yesterday afternoon, when youths protesting three weeks of outage in the area clashed with anti-riot policemen, leading to the death of three persons.

The *Guardian* learnt that about 300 youths marched on Oturkpo streets, taking on members of staff of Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), who were on routine disconnection of electricity customers.

The protest, which turned violent, saw the youths manhandling PHCN staff, destroying their vehicles and carting away valuable items.

Also, the youths broke into the PHCN Zonal Office at Federal Road, Oturkpo and carted away valuable materials.

An eyewitness said the protest turned bloody when policemen arrived at the PHCN zonal office and the youths pelted them with stones.

The eyewitness told *The Guardian* that a policeman in the contingent opened fire on the protesters as they approached their vehicle. One of the protesters, later identified as Edache, died on the spot. Two others died later at a private hospital.

As the youths further approached the police van, the policemen retreated to their zonal headquarters on Federal Road. The irate youths then barricaded the federal highway, making bonfires on the road.

The state Police Commissioner, Mr. Ibe Aghanya, confirmed that the police in Oturkpo have been directed to use maximum force to quell the youth uprising in the town.

He said that it was unfortunate that some hoodlums, in the name of youthful exuberance, would attack PHCN staff

and installations because of incessant power outage.

He said that police are in total control of the situation.

One of the protesters, Joshua Idoko, said that Oturkpo residents were tired of the antics of PHCN.

Idoko added: "We have

From Simeon Nwakaudu, Makurdi

been cheated repeatedly by this organisation. We don't usually get electricity, until two days to the release of our monthly bills. This protest was peaceful, until they invited the police. PHCN and

police will not know peace in Oturkpo".

Also commenting on the crisis, Oturkpo Local Council Chairman, Chief Godwin Obla, blamed the youth for taking laws into their hands.

He said that the youths failed to see reason in a letter from PHCN, which

explained why the area was in darkness for months. According to him, he had supplied the transformer, which went bad.

Obla said: "I am unhappy that the youths took laws into their hands. For the first time, PHCN acted wisely by informing the community what they

have been doing to solve their problem. I am saddened that an innocent person was killed and a policeman seriously injured."

He appealed to Oturkpo residents to remain calm, noting that efforts were being made to restore peace.

Lagos builders get deadline to register with materials testing agency

By Farotimi Oluwole

STAKEHOLDERS in the building and construction industry have been given 90 days to register with a new Material Testing Laboratory recently established by the state government.

The action is pursuant to the enactment of the Building and Civil Engineering Construction Material (Quality Control) Law 2006, which establishes the laboratory to ensure adequate control and assurance for all civil engineering and construction materials in the state.

State Commissioner for Works and Infrastructure, Mr. Rauf Aregbesola, disclosed yesterday that the measure is to ensure that materials used for buildings are subjected to the mandatory tests as required by the law.

Aregbesola urged all stakeholders to obtain registration forms from the Materials Testing Laboratory office at the Public Works Corporation complex upon the payment of N100,000 to the Lagos State Government Miscellaneous Account code 01-047-000-11009-0000-33101 at any of the branches

of either Union Bank or Intercontinental Bank.

He said that upon the expiration of the ultimatum, non-compliant individuals and corporate organisations would be sanctioned in line with the provisions of the law.

According to the him, "by the said law, the Lagos State government plans to eradicate the recurrent collapse of buildings and other civil engineering structures and eliminate quackery in the industry."

Aregbesola listed stakeholders in the building and construction sector as including state ministries, local governments, agencies, parastatals, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), manufacturers of clay bricks/ sand crete blocks, developers, importers and manufacturers of civil/building, mechanical/electrical materials, steel and iron rods, galvanised/aluminum products.

There are also contractors and producers of asbestos/celtex, ceramics wood/planks, marbles, granites/aggregates/laterite, nails lighting/ thunder arrester and other related.

The Lagos State House of Assembly recently passed the Building and Civil Engineering (Construction Materials Quality Control Laboratory law to provide uniform control tests of buildings and civil engineering materials in line with the Standard Organisation of Nigeria (SON) quality



• President Olysegun Obasanjo (left) and his Benin Republic counterpart, Boni Yayi, during the 46th independence anniversary of Republic of Benin in Cotonou... yesterday.

