

11 feared dead in Benue over cancelled primaries

ALIADE, the headquarters of the Gwer Local Council of Benue State was, literally, a war zone at the weekend.

Six persons were feared killed on Saturday and another five yesterday as rampaging youths protested the upturning of

Fresh probe coming as

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a state assembly aspirant's victory at a primary election by an appeal panel of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

Fighting started in Aliade town on Saturday morn-

ing when the Benue PDP Appeal Panel upturned the victory of Dr. Tsetim Ayagwer who defeated Mr. Asema Achado at the primaries for the PDP ticket for Gwer state constituency in the 2007 general elections. Ayagwer, the initial win-

ner, is an Aliade-based medical doctor while Achado is a Makurdi-based government contractor.

Also, worried by the increased restiveness in Idomaland, former administrator of Plateau

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PDP contestants at a glance

11 die in Benue PDP violence

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State and senatorial aspirant for the district, Gen. Lawrence Onoja, has appealed to his supporters to remain calm and await the decision of the National Secretariat of the party.

Mobile policemen drafted to Aliade on Saturday night dislodged the rampaging youths on the Makurdi-Enugu highway to clear the way for motorists to access the Northern and South-Eastern zones. The clash between the two groups led to the death of four young men and a police inspector who died of gunshot wounds in a shootout.

The rampaging youths retreated into the suburbs of rustic Aliade town where they continued their attacks on suspected beneficiaries of the decision of the PDP

appeal panel. They torched Unity Hotel, the biggest hospitality outfit in the town owned by a supporter of Achado, whose petition was upheld.

It was learnt that fighters from other towns in the local council have moved over to Aliade to press the PDP to restore the winner of the primaries conducted at the Aper Aku Stadium, Makurdi.

Gwer Local Council, a volatile area in Benue State, only two months ago, emerged from an arms struggle over land with their Konshisha Council neighbours. That land crisis which has been on for 15 years, claimed over 30 lives between April and May. A former general manager of Radio Benue, Makurdi was killed in the process.

The Police Public Relations officer of Benue State Command, Mr. Samuel Jinadu, said that the crisis was now under control.

He said that a police inspector was killed by the youths, but declined comments on civilian casualties.

In an interview, former Lagos State Police Commissioner, Alhaji Abubakar Tsav regretted the uprising and the killings, but blamed the Benue State government for annoying the Benue people by imposing unpopular candidates on them.

But Onoja, who was supposed to be pitched in a run-off against Senator David Mark last Thursday, warned his supporters against toeing a similar line with their Gwer neighbours despite their grievances.

Onoja, in the wake of the Gwer crisis, told newsmen that he had petitioned the National Secretariat of the PDP to wade into the matter of cancelled primaries for the peaceful transition to continue.

The PDP senatorial aspirant pointed out that at the end of the primaries held in Otukpo, neither himself nor Gen. Mark polled up to 50 per cent of delegates' votes cast, necessitating a run-off.

He alleged that the Benue PDP caretaker committee, in an unconstitutional manner, before the primaries shared the ward executive councils in a ratio of eight-to-seven, between Mark and Governor George Akume, which put him at a disadvantage.

Govt reopens probe of Sosoliso plane