

A police bullet for N20 at check-point

• Octogenarian's birthday party cancelled due to death of most promising son



• Isola

EVERY December 10, the family of octogenarian, Pa Babalola of Ilupeju-Ekiti, Ekiti State looks forward to a family get-together in celebration of the patriarch's birthday.

But since the last three months, the old man has been put in deep mourning and as such the 82nd birthday ceremony was cancelled.

Before the calamity that befell Pa Babalola, most of the children, especially those residing outside the sleepy, agrarian community had been assigned one role or the other for the ceremony, which they hoped would not only be a success, but also a grand re-union for the entire clan.

As a close family member put it, "a party cannot hold when the roof is on fire". The fire, literally, is the sudden demise of the arrowhead of the family on whose shoulders the organisation of the party would have rested.

Forty-eight-year-old Isola Babalola, one of the sons the old man dots on, was murdered cheaply on the highway by the police.

Before his death, Isola owned a successful Clearing and Forwarding Agency in Lagos and the father, as usual, was looking forward to a leading role from his son in the birthday celebration. But the police shot and killed him in cold blood.

Isola, a father of five, whose wife, Anike, incidentally works as a civilian employee in the Accounts Department of the Ondo State Police Command, was felled the second Friday in October by a single police bullet while on his way to Akure, where his family resides, from his Lagos base.

Isola was said to have been one of the leading stars in the family and a very lively personality with a huge sense of humour. His death has not only aborted the planned birthday celebration, the entire family is now praying that the old man, who has been devastated by the sad news, would survive the loss.

Also killed in the vehicle in which he was traveling to Akure at a police checkpoint at Ilara Mokin, a five-minute drive from the Ondo State capital, was an unidentified elderly woman who died instantly as a result of shots from police guns.

According to eyewitness accounts, the incident occurred around 7.30 p.m. when one of the policemen at the checkpoint fired at the vehicle conveying the victims, allegedly thinking that the driver wanted to avoid paying the illegal but mandatory N20 levy that commercial drivers pay at every checkpoint.

The Akure-bound vehicle, a Toyota car conveying the victims, was said to have left Ojota Motor Park in Lagos around 4.00 p.m. on the fateful day with five people on board including the driver.

One of the occupants of the car, Wale Ogungbemi, an employee of The Guardian Newspaper Limited, who was sitting at the back of the vehicle with the two victims said there was no communication whatsoever between the driver and the policemen.

He disclosed that the driver, very much wary of the havoc policemen at checkpoints are capable of causing if denied their "toll fees", had changed enough N20 notes at the Ojota departure point prior to take-off.

A shocked Ogungbemi, who is also related to Babalola, said: "We were not going more than 30 kilometres because that portion of the road was bad. There was no warning or anything. We just heard the sound of a single gunshot."

"Initially, we didn't know our car was hit until Isola Babalola, who was sitting in the middle told me that he had been shot."

"The other woman died instantly. We didn't stop but told the driver to try and get to the nearest hospital but unfortunately, he died before we got there."

Investigations by The Guardian revealed that the shot,



• The vehicle

From Niyi Bello, Akure

obviously fired by the policeman at the rear of the checkpoint, pierced the right back door of the car and entered the body of the woman before exiting to kill Isola, who was sitting at the middle.

Ogungbemi was sitting close to the left door.

The Police Command, who was notified a few minutes after the incident through its Public Relations Officer, Adeniran Aremu, responded swiftly by reporting the matter to the commissioner who ordered the immediate arrest of the policemen.

Three of the culprits, an Inspector and two Corporals were arrested at the scene of the crime, a few minutes after the incident on the orders of the state Commissioner of Police, Innocent Ilozuoke.

They have since then been undergoing interrogation by men of the Homicide Department of the Police Command at the State Investigation Bureau (SIB) where they are being detained.

The bodies of the victims were initially deposited at a private hospital morgue in Akure while the Police Commissioner, who has ordered full-scale investigation into the matter with a view to bringing the trigger-happy policemen to book, appealed to Isola's relations to keep

calm.

He pledged the commitment of the police to investigate the matter and bring the policemen to book to serve as deterrent to others who constitute themselves to "armed robbers" on the highways.

Unfortunately, the woman victim is yet to be identified and the police seem not to be doing anything to unravel her identity so as to notify her family of the development. Her body was still lying at the State Hospital Akure morgue where it was taken on the orders of the police boss.

The Guardian also learnt that the Police Command has picked the bill for the preservation and embalming of the victims pending an autopsy.

However, Isola's family has appealed to the government through a petition that they claimed has been sent to the Presidency, to see that justice is done in this matter as "the whole family has been thrown into eternal sorrow through the act of some undesirable elements in the police".

A distraught Anike could not even utter a word when The Guardian visited her at Isola's Akure residence.

But family members said she would find it extremely difficult to resume at her duty post at the Police Command on Igbatoro Road, Akure as "she would be seeing her husband's killer in any black uniform-clad officer".

At 19th Ekimogun Day, Ondo indigenes chart way forward

By Isaac Taiwo

THE ancient town of Ondo on Saturday, December 2 came alive as the 19th Ekimogun Day was celebrated at the expansive Oba Adesanoye Civic Centre, Cannon Adeyemi Road, Ondo.

The event, a yearly cultural fiesta, which is also used as a platform for the re-union of Ondo indigenes at home and in Diaspora, attracted the cream of the society from all walks of life.

In his welcome address, the Chairman of the Ondo Development Committee (ODC), Prof. Ifedayo Oladapo, Yegengha of Ondo, stated that the community association was set up to promote socio-economic, cultural and political development of Ondo kingdom as well as to provide selfless services to the less privileged members of the society.

Oladapo further disclosed the plan of the ODC to create employment opportunities for youths in Ondo kingdom through the setting up of a rubber plantation project, which is expected to come on stream in 2007.

He traced the history of the ODC and enumerated some of the achievements

to include the organisation of the yearly Ekimogun festival, the political summit to sensitise the people of Ondo kingdom about political participation, the successful handling of Osemawe chieftaincy matters on the legal imbroglio between Oba Adesanoye and Prince Gbadebo Adewole, initiation of blueprint aimed at boosting the economic and industrial development of Ondo kingdom among others.

The chief launcher, Pastor (Mrs.) Oluwadamilola Kuteyi lauded the ODC for the success recorded since it was founded.

She stated that her resolve to be a chief launcher of the 19th Ekimogun Day ceremony was borne out of her deep concern for the plight of the less privileged in the society especially widows, women abandoned by their husbands, indigent students from poor homes who have no access to education among others for, which she said a committee has been set up to manage the

money she would donate to meet their needs.

The philanthropist appealed for support from wealthy Ondo sons and daughters in putting smiles on the faces of the poor in the society. She also urged the people of the community to embrace peace, love and mutual understanding while calling on the politicians to exercise restraints in the way they play politics by refraining from politics of bitterness, rancour and blood-letting.

In his own remark, the chairman of the Ekimogun Day 2006, High Chief Sasere D. R. Akinola commended the ODC for the giant stride recorded so far by the association in the area of improving the economic life of the people of Ondo kingdom.

The ceremony, which was used for fund-raising also involved the distribution of gift items to some important dignitaries and students who did well in the essay competition organised by the ODC as part of the celebration as well as special recogni-

tion for some firms including Nigerian Breweries Plc that has faithfully supported the ODC.

Cultural displays were also showcased to add glamour to the event, which attracted important dignitaries from the academia, government, traditional institution, religious organisations among whom were His Royal Majesty, Oba (Dr.) Victor Adesimbo Kiladejo, Jilo III, the Osemawe of Ondo; Mr. Alaba Isijola, Ondo State Head of Service who represented Governor Olusegun Kokumo Agagu; Dr. Olusegun Rahman Mimiko, former Minister for Housing and Urban Development and many others.

In a chat with reporters after the ceremony, Oba Kiladejo, who was attending the event in his official capacity as the Osemawe of Ondo for the first time lauded the formation of the ODC.

He expressed delight on the event and urged all Ondo children to continue to associate with the dreams of the founding fathers of the socio-cultural organisation aimed at moving Ondo kingdom to greater heights.