

Political clashes claim 10 lives, 30 houses in Benue

• Police arrest Gombe guber candidate

ABOUT 10 persons were feared killed across 10 villages of Benue State on Sunday when violence erupted between supporters of the Action Congress (AC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). About 30 houses were also razed.

And in Gombe State, the governorship candidate of the Democratic Peoples Party (DPP), and former governor of the state, Alhaji Abubakar Habu Hashidu, has been arrested by the police over violence that allegedly broke out after he flagged off his political campaign.

The Police Public Relations Officer, Samuel

*From Simeon Nwakaudu
(Makurdi) and
Auwal Ahmed (Gombe)*

Jinadu said that seven persons have been arrested in connection with the crisis. He said that investigations have begun into the mayhem.

Trouble had reportedly started in the evening of Sunday, when an argument ensued between supporters of PDP and AC at a popular bar in Sati Village of Kusuv Council over the senatorial contest involving Governor George Akume of the PDP and Dr. Azeze Lim of AC for the Benue North West Senatorial

District.

The argument degenerated into a fight, leading to the death of a popular PDP youth known as Aon-dowase. An eyewitness told *The Guardian* in Buruku town yesterday that the PDP supporters in Kusuv Council later took the body of the slain party faithful to the council headquarters in Buruku.

Upon sighting the body, armed youths suspected to be PDP supporters went on the rampage, burning down houses of persons suspected to be members of AC and in the process killed five persons. The crisis soon spread across

Continued on Page 2

Obasanjo.

10 feared killed in Benue clashes

Continued from Page 1

10 villages with supporters of both parties launching reprisal attacks indiscriminately.

As at 10.00 p.m. on Sunday, about 10 persons have died from the attacks by the supporters of the two parties. When *The Guardian* visited Buruku town, the headquarters of Buruku Council yesterday afternoon, hundreds of residents were fleeing the area with their property. The displaced persons were mostly the aged, while more youths from the two feuding parties were being drafted to the area in buses.

Buruku town was deserted though a handful of mobile policemen were seen around the Local Council Secretariat to protect the area. Local Council workers stayed away from work yesterday.

It was gathered from

sources that fighting continued in the hinterland of Kusuv Council where the Police could not access, due to the difficult terrain and the sophisticated weapons used by the fighters.

Contacted, the Benue Police Command spokesman, Samuel Jinadu, confirmed the violent clash between the two parties at Buruku Council, but declined comments on the number of casualties, saying that he was yet to receive detailed information from the Gboko Area Commander. He said that a unit of Mobile Policemen had been drafted to the area to bring the crisis under control.

In a statement on the crisis, the AC, through the media assistant to its gubernatorial candidate, Garshagu Atoivigba, described the crisis as an offshoot of the plans of the

PDP to rig the 2007 elections by employing violence. The statement said that AC members have been under constant harassment by the PDP militia in Buruku.

The statement said: "The whole crisis is meant to cripple our campaign, which is waxing stronger because of the realisation in the state that the PDP no longer stands for the interest of the people."

In a telephone interview, the deputy chairman of PDP in Benue State, Dr. Samuel Ortom, confirmed the crisis, but said that the members of the PDP were not involved in the mayhem.

The Gombe DPP governorship candidate was arrested along with 14 others over the destruction on Sunday of some private and government structures by persons alleged to be his political supporters.

Trouble reportedly started around 4.00 p.m. soon after Hashidu flagged off his electioneering campaign at Gombe High School playground near his residence.

Suspected political thugs also called "kalare" who were armed with dangerous weapons such as daggers, dane guns, knives, bows, arrows and cutlasses, went wild unleashing terror and inflicting injuries on passers-by and motorists.

Among structures destroyed were the private house of Lamido Umar Chikaire, junior brother to the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) National Secretary located along Government House; the State Ministry of Lands and Survey, including some of their vehicles; Voice of Nigeria Zonal office; some party offices belonging to the PDP;

many campaign billboards of the state governor, Danjuma Goje, including houses belonging to private individuals.

At the time of filing in this report, the state government was yet to make any public comment on the issue, though the governor had gone round to inspect the extent of damage.

Contacted on the issue, the state Police Commissioner, Joseph Ahmed Ibi, confirmed the arrest of 15 people, including Hashidu, saying they will be charged to court as soon as investigation was concluded.

Last week, Alhaji Hashidu and gubernatorial candidate of the ANPP in the state, Alhaji Jamilu Ishiaku Gwamana and his AC counterpart, Col. Musa Mohammed, signed a memorandum of understanding to work against political thuggery and *kalare* in the state.