

Four INEC officials feared killed in Ondo

From Niyi Bello and Julius Alabi, Akure

JUST about the time the weekend's elections were to be concluded in Ondo State, violence erupted and in the ensuing melee, four officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) were feared killed.

The irate mob, which killed them, accused the INEC officials of falsifying the polls results at the Ile-Oluji/Oke-Igbo Local Council Area of the state.

The mob also accused them of perpetrating the act to favour the state's ruling party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

The Guardian however learnt that one of the killings occurred at the Local Council Headquarters in Ile-Oluji.

But on the streets of major towns in the state, including its capital, Akure, residents marched out reacting differently to the rumoured victory of the incumbent governor, and PDP governorship candidate, Dr. Olusegun Agagu and his Labour Party (LP) counterpart, Dr. Olusegun Mimiko.

This followed an earlier announcement by the INEC state Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC), Mr. Josiah

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ment was near zero with few taxis and commercial motorcyclists plying the streets.

Drivers of government vehicles removed their number plates as there were unconfirmed reports of attacks on some government cars at different locations in the town.

Attempts by the traditional leaders of Akure, led by Oba Adesina, to appeal to the people to shun violence were rebuffed by the protesters.

As at press time yesterday, the REC was not available at the office, a reason given by his officers for the delay in the announcements of the results.

But there was massive jubilation on the streets of Akure, the state capital and

major towns in the state by supporters of Mimiko, following rumours of the announcement that he finally won the governorship election.

The whole of Oyemekun Road and Oba Adesida Road, the major transport artery into the state capital, were taken over by hundreds of youths chanting Iroko, the name by which Mimiko is fondly called.

Taxi drivers and commercial motorcyclists sped along the streets hooting their horns while daring youths hung precariously on open car doors in a frenzy of jubilation.

Various groups moved round with posters of the LP candidate while others engaged in the destruction of campaign billboards and posters of Agagu.

The demonstration, which

brought live to the tensed atmosphere of Akure, following the early morning siege on the Alagbaka office of the INEC began spontaneously at various sections of the town.

Some drinking joints along the major streets, which had earlier remained closed were hurriedly opened by their patrons to entertain the people.

Although there was large contingent of security personnel patrolling the streets, most of the law enforcers did not harass the jubilating crowd. In fact, in some instances, they joined the crowd in their wild jubilation.

Reports from across the state indicated the same trend of jubilation except in Ondo town where palpable tension enveloped

the community following reports that Mimiko, who hails from the town, had been denied victory.

As at the time of filing this report, the results of the polls were yet to be announced by INEC.

There were reports of shooting around the INEC office by soldiers deployed in the place to disperse the crowd of protesters that had converged on the place since morning.

In Mahin, a riverine settlement of Ilaje Local Council, the palace of the monarch, the Amapetu of Mahim was reportedly vandalised by protesters who accused the traditional ruler of bringing political hoodlums from Lagos to prevent the people from voting.

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Uwanzuruonye, that the result of the governorship and House of Assembly election had

been suspended indefinitely.

The suspension, according to Uwanzuruonye,

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was taken to allow the investigation of alleged electoral malpractices in the state.

The REC, while addressing journalists in the presence of the Deji of Akure, Oba Oluwadare Adepoju Adesina, said he would not declare a wrong person as winner of the election.

According to him, the commission is still expecting two local councils' result and all the cases of manipulation will be looked into before the election result is announced.

He noted that he would not like a repeat of the 1983 mayhem in the state as he was a witness of what happened then.

"I must say that the 1983 mayhem is still fresh in our memory and I don't want that in my town again and for you to have peace, you must announce the correct result which is the wish of the people," the Akure monarch advised.

But thousands of Akure residents yesterday besieged the INEC office, situated at Alagbaka quarters of the state capital, to protest as news filtered into town that the results of last Saturday's polls favoured Agagu.

Waving green leaves as a sign of solidarity, the residents made up of mainly youths and old women, barricaded the two roads leading to the building despite a large contingent of armed soldiers and anti-riot policemen.

Elsewhere in Akure, the tension was so thick that all the streets were deserted. Almost all the shops were closed and most residents stayed indoors. Vehicular move-

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directive came from the national office of the commission in Abuja in view of large scale violence that marred the polls in many councils.

Okogie alleged that in some wards, there were acts of lawlessness on the part of some of the outgoing local council chairmen, while one person was killed. He also alleged that some candidates hijacked ballot boxes and kidnapped some electoral officers and ad-hoc staff, carting away result sheets only to bring back completely different ones.

His words: "After due consultations with the national headquarters of my commission, the gubernatorial election has been cancelled and the gubernatorial elections in Imo State is hereby cancelled. The House of Assembly elections are not affected as they met the minimum required standard of fairly

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looking soldiers armed to the teeth, who barricaded the entrances to the commission's office. A bullet fired into Onoh's vehicle missed its mark and shattered the glasses.

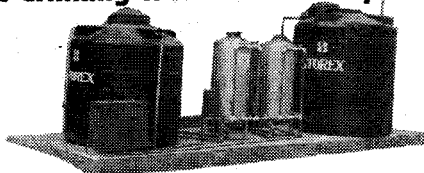
But the whereabouts of the governorship candidate of the Action Congress in the state, Dubem Onyia, who collapsed after inhaling balls of teargas and was revived minutes later by his supporters, remained unknown. Onyia, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs, whose black sports utility van (SUV) parked along the INEC road almost caught fire when it was caught by teargas fired by the securitymen, could not be traced after his supporters and party stalwarts had congregated at a nearby area.

The SUV, which he rode with to the place, was still parked at the Agric Bank junction at the time of filing in this report.

His running mate, Chief Mathew Agu, told The Guardian on phone yester-

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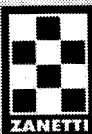
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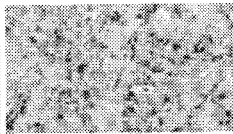
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