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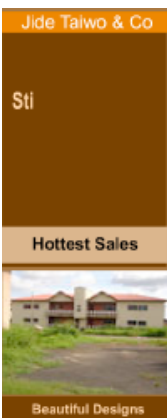
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Mayhem in Oyo over council polls

- 10 feared killed
- Thugs abduct 50 students, others
- Detain hostages at Adedibu's home
- Torch houses, vehicles
From Iyabo Lawal and Temitope Ariyo, Ibadan

FOR several hours yesterday, Ibadan and its neighbouring towns in Oyo State literally stood still as thugs went on rampage, shooting sporadically into the air, killing and maiming people. They burnt houses and cars, hijacked electoral materials and kidnapped several persons linked to the state governor, Alhaji Rashidi Adewolu Ladoja.

At the end of the mayhem, 10 persons were feared dead, and several houses and vehicles were burnt.

Some indigenes including the factional chairman of the National Union of Road Transport Workers

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(NURTW) loyal to Governor Ladoja, Alhaji Gboyega Abubakre and some students of the Polytechnic, Ibadan, were detained at the Molete home of controversial politician, Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu. Five of the deceased persons were killed in Saki during a factional crisis between members of the NURTW, three died in Oyo while two others were killed at Iyana Church and Oke Bola areas of Ibadan.

The Odo-Oba Elere residence of the NURTW factional chairman as well as the country home of Mr. Bayo Lawal, the state Commissioner for Information were among the five houses burnt across the state by the rampaging thugs.

But despite the activities of the hoodlums, the controversial local council election took place without police presence in some local councils in the state capital as well as Oyo, Ogbomoso, Saki and Oke Ogun among others.

Adedibu has declared the election as a nullity and a wasteful exercise.

Signs that the council election might turn bloody were visible on Wednesday evening when about 100 hoodlums shutdown the state-

owned radio and television stations after switching off the transmitters and destroying vehicles in the premises.

A band of thugs who wielded yesterday morning, dangerous weapons including cutlasses, charms, axe, arms and ammunition were said to have taken off from Molete in commuter vehicles in batches to designated wards and local councils.

Although roads were deserted while shops were locked, there was booming of gunshots as the hoodlums went round the metropolis to ensure that the elections did not hold.

At Oke Padre area of Ibadan, the rampaging thugs intercepted a lorry conveying electoral materials and about 50 students of the Polytechnic recruited as ad- hoc staff by the state Independent Electoral Commission (OYSIEC) for the election. The thugs fired shots into the air apparently to ward off any opposition before taking them to Molete.

It was the same situation at Challenge, Orita, Oke Bola and Ring Road in the state capital as the hoodlums went from one area to the

other, driving recklessly on the streets, shooting into the air while some kept vigil at the local councils to prevent the conduct of the election.

Journalists were not spared as, the crew of a Lagos-based television station, Channels, were waylaid by the thugs at the toll gate end of the city. The hoodlums seized the crew's camera and detained them for several hours before releasing them without their camera.

At the Ibadan North West Local Council, the rampaging thugs fired shots to disperse the voters who had formed a queue.

The hoodlums then proceeded to the OYSIEC office within the council secretariat to destroy materials meant for the election.

The ballot papers alongside other materials were angrily flung out by the thugs who also destroyed the window panes, vehicles as well as offices within the council secretariat.

But for the intervention of security men, the hoodlums could have attacked the Government House.

They paraded the streets in a

manner that suggested that they wanted to gain entry into the governor's abode. They shot indiscriminately into the air but the mobile policemen on guard mounted a tight security.

The thugs then drove to the nearby Ibadan North Local Council, seized the ballot bags and dispersed the voters.

For about 15 minutes, the thugs shot non stop at the frontage of the Government House and when their bid to gain entry failed, they proceeded to the state secretariat where they also fired guns into the air before driving off.

It was a similar story at Iwo Road, Gate, University of Ibadan (UI) - Ojoo, Orogun, Akobo and Bashorun.

Alhaji Abubakre, factional chairman of the NURTW and long standing opponent of a controversial Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) chieftain in the state, was abducted by the thugs and taken to Molete while his vehicle and house were set ablaze.

Some of his boys were also rounded up across the various motor parks and detained at the residence of the

Molete warlord.

But the situation was relatively calm at Apata, Bodija, Mokola, Old Ife Road, Egbeda, Ido, Ibarapa and some other areas in the state capital where the residents went out to cast their votes without any intimidation.

The governor in an interview with reporters expressed satisfaction with the turn out of people, saying the violence and skirmishes witnessed in some parts of the state were still tolerable when compared to that of the April 14

and 21 governorship and presidential polls in the state.

Ladoja pointed out that despite the initial hiccups placed on their way by the judiciary, which he said allowed itself to be turned into a political entity, the government was able to actualize its aim.

On the absence of police on the streets, Ladoja said while it was not the duty of the police or law enforcement agencies to be involved in the electoral process, he however pointed out that their duty in the maintenance of law and order was sacrosanct.

"Our position is that electoral

process is not the responsibility of the police. Their duty is to maintain law and order, as long as there is rancour in the society they are supposed to maintain peace. The violence of today was not as bad as that of the just concluded general elections. If it is now the culture of Nigerians that electoral issues must be accompanied by violence, then Nigerians will decide that," he said.

Ladoja disclosed that the attack on the state-owned radio and television station by thugs, was sponsored by a PDP chieftain in the state, adding that all the equipment carted away at the broadcasting station were taken to the home of the controversial politician by the thugs.

"If Alhaji Adedibu who claims to be a supporter of the governor-elect, Adebayo Alao-Akala is behaving this way, you can expect the kind of government we will have on May 29," Ladoja said.

The governor, who said that the matter had been reported to the police for necessary action, however expressed doubt over the ability of the state Police Commissioner, Mr. Jonathan Johnson to bring the culprits to book saying the police boss had

outlived his usefulness.

"The state government, local branch of the Nigeria Bar Association as well as civil society groups have complained to the Inspector-General of Police, Mr. Sunday Ehindero, that the state police boss has outlived his usefulness in Oyo State but we don't know what he is still doing here. Let us hope that one day, the IG will wake up to his responsibility or when a new police chief comes, he will look into it."

On the rising cases of lawlessness in the country, Ladoja expressed hope that the new administration of Umaru Musa Yar'Adua would bring about the change Nigerians desired.

He recalled that the outgoing President Olusegun Obasanjo recently described Yar'Adua as a patient and reflective unlike those who are not patient and reflective in their approach to issues", Ladoja added.

"By this time next week, we are going to have a responsible government."

But Adedibu dismissed the council election, saying as far as he was concerned, it was a nullity and would be reversed as soon as Alao-

Akala comes on board on May 29.

He said: "There is no election and there will never be. The mandate of the people has been given to Alao-Akala. How can somebody leaving on Tuesday say he wants to conduct local government council election today? If Alao-Akala comes on board next week, he will reverse all the actions of Ladoja, including contracts awarded."

Adedibu also disclosed that apart from the state broadcasting station, other media houses in the state had been warned against being used in the political crisis of Oyo State so as not to incur the wrath of the incoming administration.

The state Police Commissioner said that his men did not take part in the council election but confirmed that some people were killed in Saki in a fracas he said was caused by members of the two factions of the NURTW. He, however, could not ascertain the number of deaths recorded.

Johnson, who expressed surprise over the alleged detention of some persons at the Molete home of Adedibu, said his men would be deployed to the place for investigation.

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