

Three feared dead as anti-monarch protest rages in Ondo community

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UNCONFIRMED reports indicated Tuesday that no fewer than three persons may have been felled by police bullets when violence engulfed the sleepy cocoa-producing town of Ile-Oluji, headquarters of Ile-Oluji/Oke-Igbo Local Council of Ondo State as protests against the town's monarch, Oba Suulade Adedugbe, entered the second day.

Four other persons, including the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) in charge of the only police station in the town, were confirmed injured in the clash between the protesters and a detachment of police drafted to maintain peace in the community.

The development has led to the paralysis of socio-economic activities in the town as shops were closed and the few banks suspended operations to avoid mob attack.

Hundreds of youths drawn from various quarters of the town on Monday night staged a demonstration against the monarch, alleging that he was blocking the progress of the community before invading the palace located at the centre of the town to demand that the traditional ruler vacate the throne he ascended 21 years ago.

One of the allegations against the monarch is that he refused to allow the siting of a federal polytechnic in the community on the ground that the government may not be able to pay compensation for the thousands of economic trees that would be destroyed at the proposed location of the institution.

He was also alleged to have received monetary inducements from the people of Idanre, another cocoa-producing town for moving the location to the town, an action the protesting youths considered unpatriotic.

Although the monarch had to flee the town to avoid harm, a high chief who addressed the protesters said there was no truth in the allegation against the traditional ruler and that the youths were only acting on rumour which was being spread by enemies of the palace.

Trouble, however, started when the police on patrol fired tear gas to disperse the protesting youths, and the youths retaliated. This infuriated the police and they shot sporadically into the air to disperse the mob.

A source said, "some youths were hit in the process and some of the youths went inside their houses to respond to the police attack, at least three of the

youths were feared dead while some of them who were wounded were taken to hospital in Ondo town for treatment.”

Another source who said the police officer may have been wounded while the protesters staged a reprisal attack on the law-enforcers added that some of the protesters were arrested on Monday night and that trouble started when the mobilised youths assembled at the police station demanding for their release.

The protesters were said to have attacked some of the officers who tried to explain reasons for the arrest. This infuriated the police who were said to have fired some shots at the protesting youths.

However, the State Police Public Relations Officer, Wole Ogodo, who confirmed the development said no fatality was recorded during the incident. He said the police officer who was attacked by the mob has been hospitalised and that armed mobile policemen have been drafted to the town to restore normalcy. “We are on top of the situation to restore normalcy in the area,” Ogodo said.

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