



Metro

Five dead as protesters, security agencies clash in Bayelsa

By Julius Osahon, Yenagoa
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Five persons were feared killed and scores injured following a clash between security operatives and protesters from the university town of Ammasoma, Southern Ijaw, in Bayelsa State, which is the hometown of former governor, the late Diepreye Alamiseigba.

The clash, which started in the morning at the gate of the state-owned Niger Delta University (NDU), and which left many people injured, was a continuation of the seven days protest embarked by the sacked workers of the Niger Delta University.

It was gathered that the university community was thrown into tension as sporadic gunshots and fired teargas canisters caused pandemonium among the residents in the university town



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Tension has enveloped the town since protest by the students over increment in school fees had led to the closure of the university, but matters got worse when the state government sacked some of the workers, who hail from the community.

As a result of the sack, commercial activities were grounded in the town last week as old women took to the streets to protest against their removal.

The women had blocked the road leading the university, disrupting commercial and vehicular activities in the area, as they demanded that their names be returned to the payroll.

The women, who carried a mock coffin of the state governor, Seriake Dickson, fresh palm fronds and placards, also blocked the entrance to the university, which was temporarily closed following students' protest.

Dickson had commenced public sector reforms to free the civil service of illegal workforce and create spaces for fresh graduates to get employments.

However, yesterday's bloody incident was said to have started when a detachment of armed security operatives, who arrived the community early in the morning, forcefully opened the gate of the troubled school.

The women, who insisted that their names must be returned to the payroll against civil service rules, were said to have hired the services of a welder to permanently seal the university's gate.

To find an amicable resolution to the issues, the government recently dispatched a team of negotiators led by the Chief of Staff, Talford Ongolo and the Commissioner for Education to meet with the protesters and the host community.

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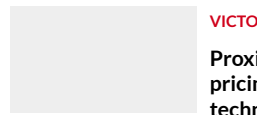
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the school's gate was forcefully opened and surrounded by scores of heavily armed security operatives. They were said to have regrouped in their numbers and marched towards the gate to confront the security men.

A source from the community who spoke in confidence said: "The security operatives including the police, soldiers and men of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) were overwhelmed by the crowd rushing towards them.

"They first retreated into the premises of the university and called for reinforcement. Later they started throwing teargas canisters at them and shooting at the protesters. Many were injured and three persons were shot."

But in a swift reaction, the Bayelsa State government while condemning the violence, said the attack on the school was perpetuated by hoodlums hired by the opposition political leaders in the state.

In a statement by the Special Adviser to the Governor on Media Relations, Mr. Fidelis Soriwei, he blamed opposition political leaders for the mobilization of the hoodlums who barricaded the gate and disrupted academic activities in the institution last week to protest the retirement of some averaged and redundant personnel.

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