

Five killed, police station burnt in Ekiti varsity crisis

• Oyo parents withdraw wards from schools over food poisoning

By Yaqoub Popoola (Ado Ekiti) and Oladele Ogunsola (Ibadan)

VIOLENCE broke out on Thursday in Ikole-Ekiti where five people were killed when the residents protested the relocation of the new Federal University from the city to Oyo.

Ekiti.

Ikole police station, located in Idi-Ose, was set ablaze. Five vehicles, including a police Hilux van, were also burnt.

Youths barricaded all roads leading to and out of Ikole and commuters were trapped for hours in the melee.

To quell the riot, Governor Kayode Fayemi announced

through his Spokesman, Mojeed Jamiu, that the university still remains in Ikole-Ekiti.

He said the position of the government on the matter is unchangeable, noting that consultations were held before arriving at Ikole-Ekiti as the most suitable site for the new university.

The statement appealed for calm and assured that the mat-

ter would be resolved.

The casualties, whose bodies have been deposited at the Ikole-Ekiti specialist hospital mortuary, were allegedly shot by Swift Response Squad (SRS) personnel who were dispatched to stop the riot.

The SRS officers narrowly escaped being killed by the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Five killed, police station burnt in Ekiti varsity crisis

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

youths. One of their Hilux vans was set ablaze in the Iloka area of the city.

Those who received serious gunshot wounds included Michael Okimi, a teacher, now receiving treatment in hospital along with others.

One Gbenga Osanpin was shot in the head, which caused serious damage to his brain.

Another victim, identified simply as Gbenga, was shot in the stomach.

Tension flared as soon as the protesters, who were said to be conducting themselves peaceful, heard that four of them had been killed by the police.

The Ifaki Ekiti-Omuo-Lokoja highway and the road between Iluomoba and Iloke-Ekiti were barricaded, which disrupted free flow of traffic. Commuters were trapped for several hours.

Iloke Council workers deserted their offices and ran for their lives as protesters engaged the policemen, who fired gunshots to disperse them.

The protesters threatened that the matter would snowball into a communal clash between Iloke and Oye-Ekiti if the Federal Executive Council (FEC) fails to rescind its resolution on where the university should be located.

They alleged that a member of the National Assembly (NASS) from the state used his connection in Aso Rock to thwart the efforts of the community over the university, saying the attempt would be resisted by the people.

Iloke Council Caretaker Chairman, Biodun Akin-Fasae, and a member of the state Assembly representing the community, Adebayo Morakinyo, displayed the pellets of bullets used by the police in an action they described as barbaric and a show of shame.

They said such flagrant dis-

play of "madness" cannot happen in a civilised society against the people who were peacefully protesting a matter that borders on their collective destiny.

Akin-Fasae added: "The university was wrongly relocated to Oye-Ekiti by the FEC. Ekiti people, and specifically the people of Iloke, did not request a federal university, but the Federal Government gave us one.

"A team of experts came from the National Universities Commission (NUC) in company of the Minister of State for Education, Kenneth Gbagi, and they okayed the site in Iloke-Ekiti, which (Fayemi) was favourably disposed to.

"Just last week, (Fayemi) paid over N15 million to the surveyors doing the layout of the proposed site and even our local government here has spent over N8 million on publicity, and all the academia of Iloke-Ekiti origin have been making efforts to ensure a smooth take off of the university.

"As we were doing these, the Federal Government did this to us and the police acted worse by killing our people for fighting a just course. We are very optimistic that President Goodluck Jonathan will do what is just by rescinding the FEC's decision and locate the university in Iloke to prevent further crisis."

Morakinyo condemned the killings and flayed the action of the Federal Government, saying it should have taken Fayemi into confidence before making the decision.

His words: "Look at what happened in Kogi State, Governor Ibrahim Idris located that of Kogi in Lokoja, which was an indication that he had an input on the location just like other Governors.

"But I begin to wonder when some people say that (Fayemi) does not have a say in the matter.

"I believe (Jonathan) is the President of the nation and not that of a political party. And if this is the thinking in Aso Rock, I believe that the matter will be addressed and the university will come back to our people."

Police Public Relations Officer, Jimoh Mohammed, confirmed the protest, but added that, "We are still expecting reports from Iloke divisional headquarters, so we cannot comment now on whether some people were killed or not."

There was also panic in Ibadan on Thursday, as parents withdrew their wards from government schools over alleged food poisoning by Oyo State Government officials to kill children for rituals to ensure a successful Governorship vote in April.

But the allegation was dismissed by Education Commissioner Nureni Adeniran, who moved round schools to allay fears.

He described the allegation as a wicked rumour by political opponents.

The state government said it has nothing to do with the meal, stressing that the present administration has not been serving meals in government schools since its inception about four years ago.

Regardless, parents stormed schools demanding the release of their wards following alleged poisoned food served pupils by government agents.

It was alleged that an unidentified government agent visited Wesley Primary School in Elekuro to serve rice and Macaroni to the pupils, two of whom fainted after taking the meal and were rushed to hospital.

Like Harmattan fire, the news spread across Ibadan, resulting in parents besieging the schools to withdraw their wards, an attempt the school authorities resisted.

Pupils at Adekile High School, Otita Aperiin, were reportedly

served a meal but nothing had happened to them when reporters visited the school, the gate was locked and no student was allowed in or out. Efforts to speak with the Principal of the school failed.

The rumour spread to other schools in the city, such as Salvation Army Primary School, Yemetu; Islamic Mission School, Beere; CAC Primary School, Olugbode; and others in Mokola and Sango.

Parents threatened to destroy the schools' gates to withdraw their wards.

After his tour of some schools, Adeniran, the Education Commissioner said: "The attention of the Oyo State Government has been drawn to a malicious rumour making the rounds that (it) is feeding students with poisonous food, a situation that is intended to insult the psychology of the citizenry.

"It is abundantly clear that the state government is not feeding any student, whether in primary or secondary schools, with any food whatsoever. The rumour is the handiwork of political opponents who know that they cannot win through legitimate electoral process."

Adeniran disclosed that the government has alerted the security agents to fish out the rumour mongers while investigation is going on.

"The state government has banned selling of food by accredited school vendors in our public schools and urged parents and guardians to provide food for their children and wards from home."

He stressed that the government is irrevocably committed to the growth and development of the state and its people, and will not be deterred by the "wicked and malicious activities" of rumour mongers among political opponents.