

Ifo Mayhem: Cultism And Partisan Politics

By **Sulaiman Fasasi** - May 11, 2019

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ABEOKUTA – “The whole thing has political undertone and as it is, we are going to separate that from the police action.” That was the statement of the Ogun State Commissioner of Police, Bashir Makama during an on-the-spot assessment of the mayhem unleashed on Ifo area of Ogun State where two persons lost their lives and properties, including constituency offices of politicians were razed.

It was another annual Akoogun festival in Ifo town and suspicions were everywhere as there has been no love lost amongst members of the community following the frosty relationship that characterised the electioneering period in an area which is one of the red spots in Ogun State.

The grand finale of Akoogun festival coincided with the 41st day of a cult clash between Aiye and Eiye confraternity which left a top shot of Aiye, simply identified as Thompson, dead. Thompson was said to be a member of the Allied People’s Movement (APM) and there were apprehensions that the festival might be used as a revenge ground.

The opposing camps alerted the police as to the impending danger if the 'boys' are allowed a field day at the event. Eventually, one of the boys who was believed to be an harrow head was picked up in the middle of the night.

According to the Police, the suspect cooperated with them and mentioned names of other leaders of the cult groups who must be arrested in order to have an eventful and clash free event.

Plain clothed men of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad from the Zonal Intervention Squad, Zone II, were in town to make more arrest especially as some gang members have stormed the venue of the event with weapons.

The arrest was made but what followed was what the Police never envisaged, probably the officers could have devised new tactics in line with global best practices to make their arrest and not in a crowded ceremony.

Youths loyal to the gang leader, his sympathisers and political loyalists charged at the police officers, mobbed them in an attempt to prevent the suspect from being taken away. Shooting rented the air.

In the process, a 25-year-old Akeem Akinsanya, popularly known as Obasanjo in the area was hit by bullet, though in his thigh, but later gave up the ghost as he couldn't quickly get any help from the tensed environment.

Akinsaya's family head, Mr Oridota, who witnessed the shooting of his brother, in an exclusive interview, said his brother could not get immediate attention as many had taken to their heels.

Oridota said when Obasanjo was finally taken to a hospital, the management demanded police report before they could attend to him and before he got back to the police station, Akeem bled to death.

He said, "We were all in the venue of the festival when the police came, they said they wanted to arrest a guy, we said okay, they can arrest but they wouldn't do that with decorum, they started shooting into the air and bullet hit the boy.

"Nobody can immediately assist him because of the tensed situation, many had run away and there was pandemonium everywhere. I later summoned courage and took him to the hospital."

The news of Obasanjo's death spread like a wildfire and youths in the area took to the street with bonfire in protest of the killing thereby disrupting vehicular movement in the ever busy expressway for a very long time.

A police officer, Sunday Ogundapo got missing in the process and did not return until after 72 hours with matchet cuts on his body.

Our Correspondent further gathered that the monarch of the town, Oba Samuel Oladipupo had to intervene before the crises subdued, but this had to be short-lived as the whole scenario, again escalated after another member of Akeem's group identified as Adekoya Monsuru, was also found dead with a gunshot injury later in the evening.

Adekoya was the treasurer of the Amalgamated Commercial Tricycle and Motorcycle Owners, Repairs and Riders Association of Nigeria (ACOMORAN) and was reportedly with about N900, 000 which belongs to the association when he was killed.

ACOMORAN's election was fast approaching and all the stakeholders are members of the different groups within the Association, the way to equally belong to different political parties especially APM and All Progressives Congress, APC.

Both Akeem and Adekoya were said to be supporters of the APM.

It was further gathered that members of the gang started attacking any member of the APC on sight before unleashing terrors on the community.

All hell was let loose on the constituency offices of the Deputy Speaker of Ogun State House of Assembly, Olakunle Oluomo and that of a member of House of Representatives, Ibrahim Isiaka, who represents Ifo/Ewekoro federal constituency, burning not only the offices but all their contents.

At Oluomo's office, three 42-seater Mercedes buses, one Isuzu luxurious bus and a 36-seater coasted bus used by Oluomo for free ride to students of primary and secondary schools in the constituency were burnt to ashes.

No fewer than 19 computer sets including their furniture, also meant for secondary school students as part of Isiaka's constituency project, were also completely razed.

Both Oluomo and Isiaka were political godsons of Senator Ibikunle Amosun, the governor of Ogun State, until the build up to the 2019 general election when Amosun denied the two politicians return ticket to their different offices but were given the ticket by the National Working Committee of the Party.

Amosun's loyalists later decamped to the APC while Isiaka and Oluomo stayed in the APC.

It is not the first time the supporters of APC and APM will attack themselves in Ifo local government since the frosty relationship of both the godfather and godson. Oluomo, was attacked by hoodlums allegedly led by a member of transport union identified as Alhaji Jimoh Ogunrombi, also known as Erin and Dauda Soremekun, who was the Chairman of Tricycles Riders Association in Ifo in October 2, 2018. Party members were wounded while the same office was destroyed.

On March 7, two campaign vehicles of the APM were destroyed in front of Oluomo's office, a party member was reportedly killed on the same day.

The Deputy Speaker, while giving account of what happened said, "This is to invite the attention of security agencies to Ogun State Ifo to forestall total breakdown of law and order.

"Yesterday was the final Akoogun festival in Ifo and one of the boys opposed to APC during the last election invited many of the political thugs and unionists that were involved in attacks against me and APC supporters during the elections, I learnt SARS trailed one of the boys to the venue for gun possession and got him arrested with the gun.

"Others surrounded the police to prevent the boy from being taken away, took the gun back from the policemen and even attempted to seize AK47 from one of the policemen, in the melee, one of the boys was killed and the policemen escaped from the scene.

"The boys later regrouped and started attacking any APC members or supporters in sight, accusing them of inviting police. They later mobilised themselves in large numbers, moved to my constituency office and set ablaze five vehicles that I use for free school shuttle. The entire office was razed down and they later moved to the constituency of Ifo / Ewekoro Federal Rep, Hon. Ibrahim Isiaka and burnt it down as well."

When contacted, the House of Representatives member said he couldn't see any correlation between the festival and the attack on the offices and the properties.

To the Police, there's no nexus between the unprofessional police conduct which is becoming rampant in recent times, and the spontaneous community action which he described as pure criminality.

The police Commissioner said, "Findings so far is that something started it and it ended somewhere. "The Police were on their lawful duty and they had encounter with the boys and something transpired and from what we gathered, the man that was fell tried to resist arrest where some weapons have been recovered in their enclave. In the situation, he was shot and died.

"That didn't bother the community, just like Kabiyesi said, because we are going to unravel the course of death. What bothers the community is the youth going out of their way burning people's offices and destroying people's properties. The Honourable here renders this service for the sake of school children and now, you've rendered him incapacitated.

"The Policemen that were involved have been apprehended, one of those suspects is already in custody and subsequently, others would be identified because we must separate criminality from spontaneous community action, we just have to do that because this is a pure act of criminality and there's no nexus in these.

"The whole thing has political undertone and as it is, we are going to separate that from the police action."

It is obvious, from afar, that the problem in Ifo is multifaceted and the whole citizen of the town and Ogun State at large would be looking up at the police in the State to summon courage, do a thorough job, and come up with detailed and acceptable result that will ensure justice to all involved.
