

BACK STORY OF THE DAY

State Assembly Election: How Violence Is Increasing Voter Apathy In Nembe Council Of Bayelsa State

Unlike any elections in Bayelsa State, the conduct of elections in Nembe Local Government area of the state, is specially handled by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in conjunction with participating political parties to avoid violence and bloodshed.

Nembe, with an estimated population of 197,682, is politically enlightened, but the past incidence of violence and killings before general elections has reduced participation and largely voting by the electorates.

On November 13, 2019, about three days to the governorship election in the state, a group of armed men launched a deadly attack in

Ogbolomabiri community in Nembe during a governorship rally. Six persons were killed including a staff and driver of the outside broadcasting van of the state-owned radio broadcasting corporation, Radio Bayelsa.

Also, in February 15, 2023, another deadly attack was recorded in Bassambiri community also in Nembe, about ten days to the presidential and national assembly elections, three persons were reported dead while unspecified number of elderly men, women and children were seriously injured in another attack.

Despite the fact that Nembe is the country home to a former governor and serving Minister of State for Pe-



troleum Resources, Chief Timipre Sylva and the senator representing Bayelsa West Senatorial district, Senator Biobarakuma Wangagha Degi Eremienyo, the series of armed attacks have left a large number of the indigenes discouraged from returning home to cast their votes during elections.

Commenting on the development at the Opu-Nem-

be town hall in Nembe LGA, the chairman, Opu-Nembe Council of Chiefs, Chief (Barr) Ezekiel S. T. Ikoli, accused some indigenous members of the community of masterminding the deadly armed attack, while calling on the federal government to come to their rescue.

He said, "The people of Opu-Nembe Kingdom now live in fear. Many have since deserted the community and forced to live as internally displaced persons across the state. With the ongoing 2023 general elections given repeated attacks on Opu-Nembe Kingdom, particularly the recent one which happened on the 15th of February, 2023, every eligible voter in the communi-

ty having become internally displaced, are afraid to return home even to exercise their franchise."

But a former youth president of Opu-Nembe, Comrade Iruo Theo, dismissed the claims leveled against him, and vowed to seek legitimate means to clear his name and others accused of the attack.

Political observers in the state however, predicted that with the series of security personnel and logistics deployed to the area by the state governor, Senator Douye Diri, it may largely influence the number of electorates willing to participate in the forthcoming rescheduled State House of Assembly election in the Area.