

○ Irate villagers burn village head's body, houses, vehicles

Disagreement over a request for Christian rites of passage between the eldest son of a pagan chief and his kinsmen in Ukala-Okpunor, Oshimili North Local Government Area of Delta State degenerated into rage. **DOMINIC ADEWOLE** reports

IT was meant to be a simple, sober and serene ceremony - a funeral. But everything went wrong at the weekend in Ukala-Okpunor, Oshimili North Local Government Area of Delta State, where a quarrel over a funeral evoked violence.

Two family houses, eight cars, the body of an octogenarian village-head (*Diokpa*) and a casket were set ablaze.

The incident, which occurred Thursday night during a wake kept, led to the alleged killing of a popular businessman and millionaire Chief Frank Nezieanya, an indigene of the area.

The day of rage began with a disagreement between the children of a chief, John Maduka, the *Diokpa* of Ogbe Iyase of Ukala Okpunor, over the type of funeral rites he should be given. He died early January at 96.

The late Nezieanya was said to be a pagan, right from birth, and believed in the custom and tradition of the people.

One of his three sons and the eldest, Mr. Magnus Apani Maduka, managing director of

the defunct Hallmark Bank Plc, now pastor of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Lagos, insisted that the late Nezieanya be buried in accordance with the Christian rites. But the idea was rebuffed by his kinsmen who believed in custom and tradition such that it would pave the way for a new *Diokpa* to emerge.

The disagreement that followed between the late *Diokpa*'s children and his kinsmen was said to have taken them to Lagos where initial dialogue on the funeral arrangement collapsed.

The late *Diokpa*'s wife, Mrs. Cecilia Unojei Maduka, was alleged to have been separated from him long ago.

Therefore, according to the tradition and norms of the people, she needed to confess openly and be admitted back into her family house to mourn her late heart-throb.

The public confession was reported to be the kernel of disagreement by his eldest son that his father be given a Christian funeral in so far his mother does

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not face the consequential effects.

The Nation gathered that on the eve of the wake-keep (Thursday), while the body of the octogenarian was lying in state, some youths from the village started drumming, an action which eyewitnesses said angered the eldest son.

The pastor quickly called in nine policemen from the Akwukwu-igbo police station.

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gument erupted and one of the policemen, opened fire on Frank Nezieanya suspected to be leading his kinsmen against giving the late *Diokpa* a Christian funeral.

There was pandemonium. The policemen disappeared into the night even as it was gathered that one of the boys drumming was arrested by police on the orders of Magnus.

The policeman, who is believed to have fired the killer-shot, was said to have abandoned his rifle and uniform at the scene of the incident.

Irked by the shooting, youths and elders took to the streets and set the houses, the body, the casket and the vehicles ablaze.

Police spokeswoman Olabisi Okuwobi said the command was investigating the case and searching for the policeman, Simon Matthew, a corporal.

“The policeman knows the consequence of his action, that the command does not tolerate extra-judicial killing. He pulled off his uniform and dropped his rifle and ran away,” she said. She declined comments on the other eight officers.

Obasanjo opens Tinapa today

AFRICA'S multi-billion dollar premier business and leisure resort, Tinapa, sited at Adiabo in Cross River State will be commissioned today by President Olusegun Obasanjo.

At least five African leaders are expected to grace the occasion, according to the Managing Director of Tinapa, Mr. Sam Anani.

Anani said what will be commissioned is the first phase while phases two to four would come on stream soon.

Top politician killed

A top politician in Delta State, Livy Ajufo was killed at the weekend on Ibusa/Asaba road while going for a burial ceremony in Ibusa, Oshimili North Local Government area of the state.

The brutal killing was suspected to have been executed by armed robbers.

US deports 75 Nigerians

By Kelvin Osa Okunbor

ABOUT 75 Nigerians were at the weekend deported from the United States (USA) for immigration and narcotics-related offences.

The deportees were flown in a special flight that disembarked its human content at the cargo terminal of the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Ikeja, Lagos.

Also, three security officials of the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) were arrested for scooping aviation fuel at the international wing of