

News

Shot dead at a funeral

• Family cries for justice over death of a school proprietor

A few weeks after his 40th birthday and nine months after his wife gave birth to their first child, Mr. Edebiri Obruche, a private school owner in Eku, Delta State, was mowed down, allegedly by police bullets. Family members are crying foul over the pussyfooting of the police to investigate his death. **SHOLA O'NEIL** reports.

FOR want of a better phrase to describe the death of Mr. Obruche Edebiri, Gideon, his younger brother and representative of the family, said he was "cut down at the prime of his life and at a time when his life was sweetest to him."

The statement easily evokes the line used by Chinua Achebe in his masterpiece, *No Longer At Ease*, of the evil forest, which kills a man the day his life is sweetest to him.

Edebiri, a private school proprietor and doctoral student of Agricultural Science at the University of Ibadan, was having the time of his life when he was shot dead at a funeral.

Our correspondent gathered that Edebiri, who was the Proprietor of Kings and Queens Academy, located within the premises of the First Baptist Church, Eku, Ethiope East Local Government Area of Delta State was killed on April 4.

Sources said he was invited by a bereaved woman for her father's funeral at Ebor-Orogun in neighbouring Ughelli North Local Government Area.

"As a friend of everybody, my brother could not turn down the invitation of the woman (identified as Mrs Regina Okoro (Nee Ighomuaiye). So, he joined them at Ebor-Orogun for the burial on the fateful day. Little did his wife and nine-month old baby knew that it would be the last time they would be seeing their darling husband and father," a source said.

It was gathered that the late Obruche left his No. 48, Ikidioka Street, Eku Town with other members of the school's staff in a Toyota Coaster Bus.

"But during the funeral, there was a heated argument between two ladies. The quarrel later re-

sulted in a minor fight. But Mr. Obruche and others were not involved because they were at a different part of the canopy," an eyewitness told our correspondent.

One of the sons of the man whose funeral they were attending is a senior police officer attached to Zone 5, Police headquarters, Benin City, the Edo State capital.

Apparently to safeguard law and order, the police officer reportedly drafted some policemen to keep the peace.

"So during the fighting, one of the policemen drew out his gun and fired a shot, possibly to scare away the fighters and restore peace. But as soon as he fired the shot, Mr. Edebiri slumped and blood was rushing out from his body," a source said.

Edebiri was rushed to the Obiaruku General Hospital, where he was reportedly confirmed dead on arrival (DOA).

Reports that the victim was rushed to the hospital by policemen attached to the Agbarho-Otor Police Division could not be independently confirmed.

But Gideon alleged that four days later when he visited the hospital's morgue, he found two marks, suspected to be bullet holes, on the face of his late brother.

Speaking through the family's counsel, Mr. Oghenebor Ikimi, he said: "Family members of the deceased paid a visit to the General Hospital, Obiaruku, where the remains of the deceased were deposited by policemen from the Agbarha-Otor Police Station and upon a closer observation; we discovered that the deceased sustained two bullet wounds on his face."

He said when the family met with the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) at Agbarha-Otor Police Station,



• Edebiri

Adamu Dangijah, over the injuries on the face of the deceased, the DPO assured them that the case file had been transferred to the State Command Headquarters.

Danjibah, Superintendent of Police, denied knowledge of the incident, saying: "I am not aware of any incident like that. The matter was not reported here in my station."

Another effort to investigate the reported at the State Headquarters proved abortive as the Acting Commissioner of Police, Mr. Jacob Oshiomobho, could not be reached for comments.

Ikimi, in an interview with our correspondent, said the late Edebiri's family believed that there was more to his death than the mourners and the police were willing to divulge.

He wondered why the mourners, including the children of the man whose funeral Edebiri was attending, had not been interrogated.

"To make matters worse, the invitees that were present with the deceased at the venue of the ceremony are presently evasive and the entire investigation process is being handled with levity," he alleged.

Gideon has petitioned the Inspector General of Police, Mr. Mike Okoro, alleging "unlawful murder".

The petition states in part: "That in the light of the foregoing, we call on you (IGP) sir, to order a comprehensive investigation of the above averments in a bid to ascertaining the culprits in the interest of justice and fair play as justice delayed is justice denied."

Thunderstorm kills four in Delta

NO fewer than four persons, including a 14-year-old boy were feared dead in Delta State following a downpour and thunderstorm.

The 14-year old was killed by rainstorm at a palm oil processing mill in Owa-Ekei village in Ika North-East Local Government Area.

He was reportedly working at the oil mill when the storm ripped off the roof and one of the wooden poles supporting the

roof broke off and hit his head. He reportedly died on the spot.

Three persons returning from a funeral at a riverside community in Sapele Local Government Area were also feared dead when their boat was struck by thunderstorm at Oguanja area of River Ethiope.

At Boyo Street, a traveller narrowly escaped death when a building roof and two electric

poles fell on his V-boot Mercedes Benz. He had barely left the car when the incident occurred.

Investigation by our correspondent revealed that property worth several millions of naira, including facilities of the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), was destroyed during the several hours of downpour.

Sources at Owa-Ekei said the storm destroyed goods and

property running, including another palm oil mill in the village that is renowned for its expansive palm oil farms.

The Anglican Children Ministry and a shrine were among houses whose roofs were blown off.

The Vicar of St. Paul's Anglican Church, Rev. Samuel Adugbe appealed to public spirited bodies and individuals to assist the victims.