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Five feared dead as Bin Ladin's supporters, Shiites clash

10/1/2009

Tony AKOWE, Kaduna

A clash between two fundamentalist sects in Zaria, Kaduna State, yesterday may have claimed five lives. A police source confirmed one dead, however. One of the sects, the Salafiyya, is alleged to have links to Saudi-born billionaire Osama bin Ladin, who is the most wanted man on the United States, (US) list. The other group, the Islamic Movement of Nigeria, better known as the Shiites, is led by Sheikh Ibraheem el-Zakzaky, a firebrand scholar. Details of how the deaths came about were sketchy, but security has been beefed up in the university town as well as in Kaduna, the state capital, where Shiite members staged a peaceful demonstration. The demonstration was to protest what they described as aggression by the Salafiyyas and also Israel's bombing of Hamas strongholds in the Gaza Strip. Sources in Zaria said that following the burning of the house of one of their leaders last Tuesday, members of the Shiite group gathered around the house to mourn the fate that befell their leader. But residents of the area were not comfortable, suspecting that they were planning something else.

The state government has said that security operatives were on top of the situation. It added that those who perpetrated the breakdown of law and order in Zaria have been arrested and asked residents of the state to go about their normal duties.

Our source said that the Emir of Zaria, Dr Shehu Idris, was not happy with the attack on the residence of the Shiite leader.

According to the source, the Emir had to call off of a planned trip after the attack to appeal for calm from his people.

However, a Muslim group reportedly chastised the emir for his alleged lukewarm stance on the incident and insisted that members of the Shiite movement be dealt with. The group reportedly launched a fresh assault on the Shiites during which the Emir's convoy was allegedly stoned and one person was said to have been killed.

While reacting to the claim that they stoned the convoy, the Shiite group denied it. During a procession on Tuesday to mark its Ashura day, sources said, some fundamentalists set fire to the house of the publisher of *Almizan*, a Hausa language newspaper, who is also Zakzaky's deputy, Alhaji Danlami.

Armed policemen have beefed up security around Alhaji Danlami's burnt house in the Kakaki area of the city. Most residents in the area observed a self-imposed curfew.

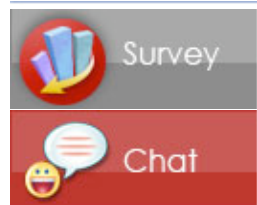
The Shiite group, in a statement, said the Ashura day was held in commemoration of the 10th day of Muharram in the Islamic calendar when the grandson of the Prophet Mohammed was martyred.

They said: "This year's programme was not supposed to be different from the previous ones but alas the devilish hands of some mischievous fifth columnists were bent on changing the orderly and peaceful tradition that all our processions are known for.

"As the last segment of the procession was about passing Babban Dodo area, some hired thugs who camouflaged as part of the mourning procession uncovered their evil plan by attacking scores of vehicles in the convoy of Emir of Zaria, which at that same time happened to be passing.

"The intruding thugs attacked the convoy by smashing their windscreen, side and rear glasses of the cars thereby damaging them.

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"Our stance over the unfortunate incident is that we condemn all those who committed such evil acts and they must be made to account for their crimes."

The Shiite group in Kaduna staged a peaceful demonstration against the continued bombing of Hamas strongholds by Israeli soldiers.

While lamenting the wanton killing of Palestinian during the attacks, they denounced the US and some Arab nations for alleged complicity in the attacks.

The peaceful demonstration which had the blessing of the Kaduna state government was carried out along some selected streets within the metropolis under heavy police escort.

The Special Adviser to the governor on Media and Public Affairs, Alhaji Umar Sani said in a statement that residents of the state capital had no cause to panic and should go about their normal duties.

Sani said that the demonstration "is in exercise of their constitutional rights to lawful assembly", adding that the protest had nothing to do with the recent incident in Zaria where the Emir's convoy was attacked.

"The attempt to cause civil unrest in Zaria by some overzealous elements has been nipped in the bud by the combined efforts of our *Operation Yaki* operatives," the statement said.

The Shiite group during the demonstration, chanted anti-Israel slogans and carried placards some of which read "Death to Israel" "Shame on the Arab nations," "It's the worst atrocity against humanity."

Spokesman of the demonstrators, Mallam Muktar Sahabi lamented that Arab nations had failed to take positive action against the attack on the Palestinians describing it as "highly unfortunate".

"This is the worst ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian innocent souls, while the United Nations, from its inception to date, is designed to protect and promote Zionism against the world population.

"We ask Muslims and all the defenders of human rights to realize the dangers of the on-going killings of Palestinians as it is a direct threat to all mankind.

"Our hearts and prayers go to the Palestinians who are made the sacrificial lamb of the World Zionist Movement and we implore all mankind irrespective of faith, sentiment or geographical location, to equally condemn the acts, and offer assistance to them, no matter how little," he said.

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