

15 die as more houses are burnt in Edo kingship crisis

FRESH violence erupted in South Ibie community in Estako West Local Government Area of Edo State on Sunday night, lasting till the early hours of yesterday.

One of the villagers in a telephone chat with *The Nation* yesterday morning confirmed that the two warring factions led different attacks at Sabo and Power line areas of South Ibie.

He said more houses were set ablaze by the groups, and more people were fleeing the community in droves for fear of being caught by stray bullets.

As at Sunday, 25 houses had been confirmed razed down while 15 persons were feared dead and several others missing in South Ibie Kingdom.

Many persons were also displaced following the violence among the warring factions.

The villagers told *The Nation* that some persons were yet to be accounted for as their cell phones were ringing without being answered.

As at yesterday, Red Cross official, Jepaih Erhagbai, told *The Nation* that rescue workers had recovered six bodies so far from different locations. He said more than 30 persons were severely injured.

Jepaih said they were still combing the villages to search for more dead bodies, adding that the General Hospital was filled with injured persons.

The Red Cross official said severe

From Osagie Otabor, Benin

injuries were taken to the General Hospital in Auchi while some were taken to the Primary Health Care Centre.

Commercial activities were completely paralysed in South Ibie as there was an exodus of people from the community.

Many houses were deserted except for a few motorcyclist and vehicles seen around. They were thoroughly search by a combined team of riot policemen drafted to the community to maintain peace and order.

Heavy police presence was seen in South Ibie at the main roads, but police sources said they could not comb the interior villages where the fighting occurred.

The renewed violence that erupted in the South Ibie kingdom is between two warring factions struggling for the stool of the Aidonogie of South Ibie.

South Ibie Kingdom, a suburb of Auchi community, has been enmeshed in a conflict on who is the rightful Aidonijie of the Kingdom.

Two cousins, Momodu Inusa Umoru and Kevin Danesi, from the two ruling houses in the kingdom are laying claim to the throne of Aidonijie.

The Saturday crisis, as gathered, started because of plans by Danesi to celebrate his 10th year anniversary as the Aidonogie of South Ibie.

This planned celebration, accord-

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ing to sources, angered the Umoru group who the source said saw the celebration as making the world believe he was the rightful Aidonogie of South Ibie.

But a spokesman for Umoru, Musa Ibrahim, said the Danesi group started the shooting and burning of houses because of the court judgment that was delivered against its candidate.

He named Dauda Habib as the one who allegedly started the shooting with sophisticated weapons, leading to the burning of houses by the Danesi group.

Ibrahim blamed the crisis on the Otaru of Auchi and Governor Adams Oshiomhole.

He said the much-needed peace in the community was in the hands of the Otaru and Oshiomhole.

"Oshiomhole had at a reception at Uzairue openly supported the candidacy of Danesi. He should look at the

papers on his table and allow the rule of law to prevail because he is a product of the judiciary," he said.

Ibrahim claimed that the Danesi group started the crisis because of a motion granted at the Benin High Court restraining the governor from installing him (Danesi) as the Aidonijie of South Ibie.

Recalling the genesis of the crisis, Musa said when the former ruler of South Ibie who was Umoru's father died, the next person to be the king from the other ruling house was said to be insane by the Danesi family.

"Danesi's father was not an Aidonogie. His father was only a chief. He is not our Oba. He has lost many cases at the court. Nobody can force him on us. We cannot go to the mosque and worship there because there is some kind of power there for the Aidonogie. We don't know him as our Obi. Umoru is the rightful Aidonogie of South Ibie. When Umoru's father died, the person that was supposed to be the Aidonogie from their ruling house was an old man and they said he was insane and incapable of ruling as a king. They now brought Kelvin Danesi. Danesi was never an Aidonogie."

He confirmed that there were still many people missing, but he could not give the exact figure of the number of deaths recorded so far.

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ings."

Oshiomhole had at a news conference declared Danesi as the constitutionally recognised king in South Ibie.

However, Justice M. O Ighodaro of a Benin High Court restrained the state government from installing Danesi as the Aidonogie of South Ibie on May 23, pending the determination of a *Motion on Notice* brought before it by counsel to the plaintiffs, Mr. Roland Otaru (SAN).

The plaintiffs in the suit are: Chief (Alhaji) Shaibu Imogere, Prince Abu Umoru, and Prince Yusuf Umoru; for themselves and on behalf of the Ogiator branch of Okhokho Ruling House.

The other defendants in the case are the Governor, the State Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice; House of Assembly; Permanent Secretary, Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs; Estako West Local Government Council and Danesi.

Shortly after moving his *Motion on Notice*, lead counsel to the plaintiffs, Otaru, informed the court that the 1st defendant in the case, Oshiomhole, had concluded arrangements to install the 6th defendant (Alhaji Kelvin Danesi as the Aidonogie of South Ibie on the 23rd of May, 2009 in spite of the fact that there was a subsisting interim injunction earlier granted by the court against the installation.

But Danesi in a chat with reporters said he was the rightful Aidonijie of South Ibie and that he had been installed since 1999.