

N171m burrow pit money tears Edo community apart

•Blood, tears, deaths as irate youths tackle royal family •Monarch accuses son of plotting to kill him •I've been tortured for 44 years, Crown Prince alleges

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•The ruins of one of the buildings burnt down during the attack

Since Saturday, November 2, the Enogie of Ogan community in Orhionmwon Local Government Area, Edo State, HRH George Igbinovia, has been living like a fugitive in Benin City, the state capital. He fled his domain following protests by his subjects over the killing of one Aghahowa Pulley by some soldiers allegedly invited by him and some of his children. His palace was also razed by the irate youths.

Besides the palace, other buildings and vehicles belonging to the traditional ruler's children were also burnt. Some residents, who fled the community for fear of arrest by security agents, are yet to return home.

The crisis in Ogan community was said to have been caused by the proceeds from the burrow pit owned by the community but operated by some of the sons of the embattled traditional ruler under the name of Patuyi Global Service Limited.

Checks showed that Patuyi Global Services was given the right to prospect and excavate sand at the pit, while a sharing formula was worked out in November, 2010. The sharing formula was for the managers to collect 66 per cent, while the Enogie would get 20 per cent, his children five per cent and sons and daughters of Ogan community 13 per cent. The money was to be received from the fee each lorry paid to the community for a load of sand.

In 2018, crisis had ensued in the community when some youths, backed by some of the Enogie's children, demanded explanation regarding the operation of the pit and the sharing formula of the proceeds. It was gathered that the youths were peeved when the 13 per cent that was supposed to be paid to the community's coffers was not found. The money was calculated to have amounted to over N141 million. What further fuelled the youths' anger was that the operators of the pit, who are children of the Enogie, allegedly told them that the pit was still being test run and their operation had suffered a setback over the kidnapping of the director.

At another meeting held on December 23, 2018, the community's elders requested the burrow pit operators to pay the community the sum of N70 million, while they (Patuyi) continued with the sand excavation.

He said I should die for him to take over the rulership of the community. He brought all the youths and I told him to wait for his time. He never allowed me to rest. My house has now been burnt... I have spent 34 years on the throne. Daniel said I am now using his time. I told him I cannot kill myself until God says so. Daniel and Matthew would not allow me to rest.

Trouble reared its head again when in October 2019, the Ogan elders and youths resolved to sack Patuyi Global Services for reneging on the agreement on the backlog of money accruing to the community. They picked two youths each from all the quarters in the community to operate the pit to ascertain whether the place was yielding money or not.

Speaking with newsmen in Benin City, HRH Igbिनovia, who said he is over 90 years old, blamed his heir apparent, Daniel, as the person responsible for the revolt against him in his domain.

He claimed that his eldest son has been asking why he is still alive.

He said: "He said I should die for him to take over the rulership of the community. He brought all the youths and I told him to wait for his time. He never allowed me to rest. My house has now been burnt.

“Since my wife died four years ago, it was my children that were taking care of me and their houses have been destroyed. My two cars and my son’s car were burnt.

“On Saturday, a few minutes to six, I saw soldiers in the community. They drove to my compound. They said they heard there was trouble in the community and that was what they came to confirm. I sent my son, Wilson, to go with them. Later, I heard gunshots by the Ogan youths.

“I have spent 34 years on the throne. Daniel said I am now using his time. I told him I cannot kill myself until God says so. Daniel and Matthew would not allow me to rest.”

“It was not Wilson that brought the soldiers. They came on their own to confirm whether there was trouble in the community. They came to check if there was riot in the community. They have destroyed many things in the riot. It was my son who instigated the youths to trouble me.

“Government is aware of this problem. I don’t have any house again. Daniel cannot say I relegated him for his younger brothers. He attends community meetings. Since 30th of September, he has stopped some meetings. He has not become Enogie and he has been lying.