

Seven feared dead in intra-communal clash

Adelani Adepegba

ENUGU

PEOPLE of Mgbowo community in Agwu Local Government Area of Enugu State are currently counting their losses as a communal violence which gripped the village over the past three days is feared to have left seven persons dead.

An undisclosed number of people were also injured in the dash involving some youths of the community.

Our correspondent gathered that trouble started on Saturday when the past leader of the Mgbowo Improvement Union, one Mr. Bernard Epeta, refused to vacate office for the newly-elected President, Dr. Michael

Udeh.

This was said to have led to clashes by loyalists to the two sides.

A villager who did not give his name however said that the violence was triggered off by a policeman who shot at youths protesting the security agent's interference in activities marking the community's annual "Iri

Ji" cultural festival.

He said that the policemen had been invited by some prominent members of the community who had feared that the festival might be turned into a political platform by some of their opponents in the community.

The uniformed men who reportedly arrived the town with an armoured vehicle were said

to have clashed with the youths when they (policemen) allegedly started smashing canopies and seats already set up for the festival at the premises of the Mgbowo Boys Secondary School.

The violence continued until Monday, threatening to claim more lives, but later subsided following an emergency visit by the Commissioner of Police, Enugu State Command, Idris Charles Dawodu, with a team of senior police officers.

Another villager however traced the crisis to the appointment of two indigenes to the traditional leadership of two autonomous communities recently created in the town by the state government.

But the Public Relations Officer of the Enugu State Police Command, Mr. Mike Abattam, stated that the youths were actually fighting over the traditional stool of the two autonomous communities.

According to him, the youths do not want to have two autonomous communities, which would mean having two traditional rulers in the area.

He said that the youths were also having problem over who should lead the Mgbowo Improvement Union.

Boat accident: Assembly probes diversion of relief materials

John Ameh

ANAMBRA

THE tragic memories of the August 2005 boat accident in Ogbaru Local Government Area of Anambra State came alive on Tuesday as the state House of Assembly began a probe of how relief materials sent to victims were diverted.

No fewer than 70 people lost their lives in a village called Umunanlwo when a boat conveying farmers and women capsized in the River Niger at about 4.15 am.

Among the dead were a day-old baby and a man with his three wives.

Relief items worth over N2.5million sent to the survivors and the families of the dead by the National Emergency

the Vice-Chairman of the State Emergency Management Agency, Mrs. Callister Nwachukwu; and the Chairman of the Ad hoc Committee on the Onitsha Religious Crisis, Mr. J.C. Okeke.

Nweke, in his submissions before the committee, disclosed how in liaison with the principal secretary to Ngige, Mr. Emma Mwosu, SEMA officials were directed to release the Ogbaru relief to victims of the February 2006 Onitsha reprisal riots.

According to him, though the Ogbaru incident occurred in August 2005, it was not until February this year that the relief from NEMA arrived the state.

He, however, added that the arrival of the relief coincided with the outbreak of the

Onitsha riots, forcing Ngige to order the diversion of the relief to the Onitsha victims "because of the urgency of the situation on hand."

Both Nwachukwu and Okeke agreed with the presentation of Nweke, adding that, under the SEMA edict, the governor had the executive powers to direct the agency on how relief should be distributed.

"There was an emergency on our hand. In short, after the relief were sent to Onitsha, I immediately sent a memo to the governor reminding him of the need to replace the materials so that they could be sent to the original victims.

"Incidentally, maybe because of the change of government, the memo was not acted upon on time.

"I sent a similar reminder to the present Governor, Mr. Peter Obi, and since government is a continuum, we expect that he will act accordingly," Nwachukwu told the panel.

But, the Store Officer in charge of the state central store, Mr. Chibuzor Okafor, revealed how some government officials were issued personal items allegedly on the instruction of the PS.

Some officials, according to Okafor, who showed a list to the panel, collected between two and 10 bags of rice.

"The Ministry of Women Affairs collected 20 bags of rice and it was the Permanent Secretary (names withheld) who signed the memo," he revealed.