

How varsity cultists invaded birthday party, murdered colleague

Penultimate Saturday was fatal in the Federal University of Technology, Minna. As FRANCIS FALOLA reports, the day started with festivities, but ended in disaster with the murder of Ahmed Daba, a 400-Level student

WHAT could have led a gang of students to invade the venue of a birthday bash and go straight for their target, a fellow student, and stab him to death? This is the mystery that the Niger State Police Command is trying to unravel after the gruesome murder of a 400 Level Geology student of the Federal University of Technology Minna, Mr. Ahmed Suleiman Daba.

It is not uncommon in university campuses for students, especially at the end of their examinations, to throw a parties, either to commemorate the end of a semester/session or to mark their birthday ceremonies.

Daba was attending one of such parties organised by a female classmate on Saturday August 4, when the emissaries of death raided the venue. They forcefully yanked off the gate to the private residence in the Bosso area of the state capital, gaining entrance and going straight for their target.

The gang, it is widely believed, was said to have been led by one Pele, a leader of a cult group known as the Buccaneers and a 500-Level Microbiology student in the School of Biological Sciences. The knife that did the havoc was used to pierce the 24-year-old Daba from the back and it penetrated so deep to the heart of the 400-Level Geology student that it snuffed the life out of him.

In unravelling the circumstances and motive behind the killing of the deceased, the police have already invited the organisers of the party and some of the friends of the victim to get to the root of the matter.

The prime suspect in the criminal act, it was learnt, is not new to committing criminal acts on campus. He was said to have been one of the few that participated in the public renunciation of cult activities before the university authorities as a condition for pardon and was also said to have been handed over to the police over allegations of threat to the life of fellow students. But as it is with the nation's legal system, Pele took advantage of its laxity and a few weeks after his arrest, secured his freedom and returned to the campus.

The party started around 8pm penultimate Saturday and after all the invited guest had arrived for the wining, dining and the dancing game, the organisers shut the gate to the venue around 11pm for proper security, only for the emissaries of death to come calling less than an hour later. The gate of the residence was damaged and the group moved in and went straight after Daba.

Mission accomplished, the group disappeared in the midst of the pandemonium that prevailed after the attack on Daba, while his colleagues at the party were left to hurriedly rush him to the General Hospital Minna, in an attempt to save his life. Alas, the young man gave up the ghost around 2am on Sunday August 5.

The Police Public Relations Officer of the

Niger State Command, Mr. Funsho Adeshina, disclosed that the case was only reported at the Bosso Police Station around 8am on Sunday, several hours after the death and the occurrence of the incident that led to the sudden demise of Daba.

Adeshina stated that the fact that the deceased was the only one attacked at the party had created the suspicion that it was a case of a premeditated murder, adding that the police had commended its investigation in determining whether it was a case of cultism or not.

He blamed the inability of the police to arrest the prime suspect, Pele, on the failure to bring the notice of the incident to the police in time, insisting that the police would have immediately carried out the arrest of Pele, if the men of the command had been promptly notified of the attack.

He advised that the police should be notified promptly for necessary action once there was an attack resulting in serious wound to the victim and wondered why the hospital attended to the victim without requesting for a police report and notifying the police of the incident.

The Niger State Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, Alhaji Adamu Usman, who corroborated the position of the police on the matter, said that it was not a matter of law for medical personnel to make such a report to the police, but a matter of practice and convenience.

He said it was a practice in the administration of justice that in any case involving injury to a victim, the police must be informed so as to monitor and ensure that the evidence in the case was not destroyed. He described the making of such a report as a procedural practice in law, adding that the moment there is a disconnection it becomes difficult for the police to carry out their investigations and therefore making it difficult for the cause of death to be attributable to the accused and impossible for the crime to be traced to a particular person.

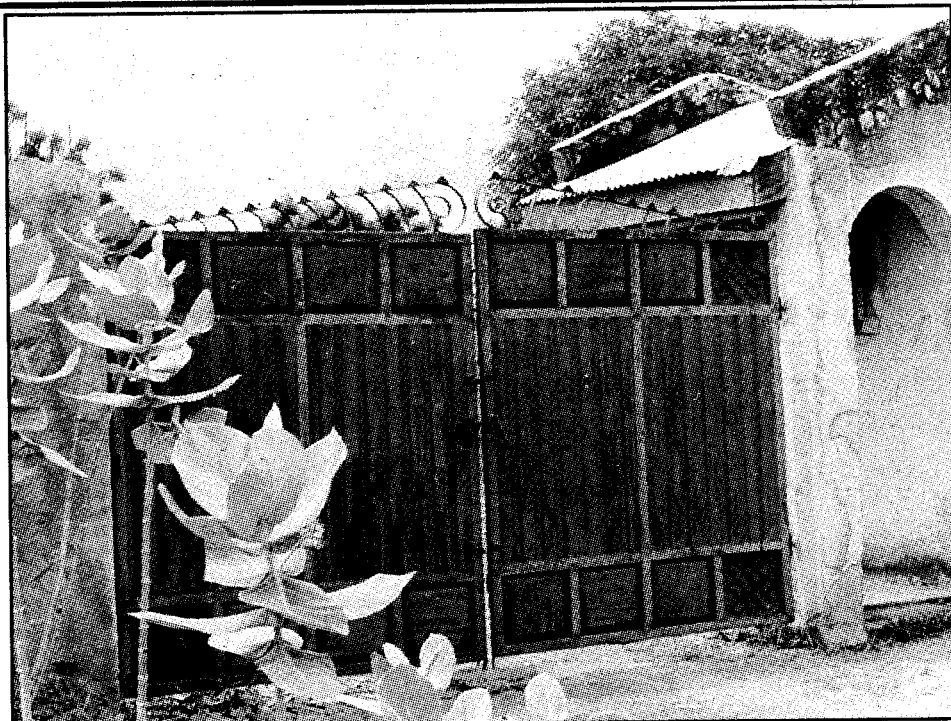
Usman urged medical personnel to, as soon as such a case of injury was brought to the hospital, alert the police as such injury may be as a result of criminal attacks or robbery suspects sustaining such injuries in an encounter with the police.

The President of the Student Union Government FUT Minna, AbdulWaheed Musa, said that the university's internal security was still conducting its investigations in unravelling the motive behind the murder.

He described the gang that slew Daba as cult members, but expressed the belief that the victim, based on the union's investigation, was not a member of any cult.

According to him, the deceased, as described by his roommates and close associates "was peace loving, very sociable and not a member of any cult." He, however, expressed the resolve of the student union to unravel the motives behind the killing.

The student union leader denied



•The house where the fatal party held



•Daba, the victim

knowledge of what could be the motive behind the attack on Daba, but said it was not uncommon for cult members to attack non-cult members on campus over the struggle or contest for female students.

Musa stated that the party, which coincided with the celebration of the birthday of one of the organisers, was also intended to mark the end of the prolonged semester, no thanks to the industrial action embarked upon by the Academic Staff Union of Universities for over three months earlier this year.

He disclosed that the prime suspect, who was simply identified as Pele, had appeared before the university authorities in the past over a series of allegations.

He disclosed that Pele had once participated in the public renunciation exercise conducted by the university, a condition the authorities stipulated before pardoning repentant cult members and that he had also been handed over to the police by the university authorities when the issue of allegations of threats to the life of another student levelled against him by a fellow student, was beyond what the university could handle.

He said he believed that it was the Pele gang that attacked the deceased, adding that while the prime suspect had been at large,

some of the members of the gang had been arrested. A large number of them were also in their hideouts.

He described murder charge as offence that would not attract a bail and expressed surprise over the release of the suspect by the police after being interrogated for attempted murder, describing the release as necessitating the eventual murder of another victim.

The union, he stated, had already asked its committee on Anti Social Activities to investigate the remote and immediate causes of the killing, adding that the seven-man committee had been given up till Monday, August 13 to submit its report.

Musa admitted that it may be difficult for cultism to be completely stamped out of the university, but stated the need for the university authorities, the students' body and the state security agents to redirect their energies towards curbing the menace of cultism on the campus.

According to him, "Most of these students claimed to have renounced cultism, but from the information reaching us, some of them are still actively involved. They only succeeded in diverting the attention of the university authorities from them to gain an opportunity to launch their clandestine activities."

Musa, a 500-Level Electrical and Computer Engineering student, however, commended the university authorities and the students' union in addressing the menace of cultism on the university campus.

Adeshina, in his reaction to the release of the prime suspect, exonerated the police from the blame.

According to him, "We are being governed by laws. We can only charge an accused to court and that is where our own role ends. Once the court orders the release of an accused or grants him bail, there is nothing we can do."

He regretted that some criminals took advantage of the laxity in the nation's laws to get themselves freed from a crime, only to later get involved in worse crimes.

The officer in charge of information at the university, Mrs. Lydia Legbo, described the murder of Daba as saddening and very unfortunate. The incident, which happened outside the university campus, she stated, had been reported to the police for investigations.

She urged the police to act quickly in unravelling the cause of the death and bring the perpetrators of the act to book. She denied the possibility of the cult members selling a dummy to the university authorities, adding that the university authorities had put up a mechanism in place to monitor students that renounce cult membership in ensuring that they do not return to it.