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11 killed, 22 injured in Ibadan jailbreak

Akin Oyedele, Ibadan

No fewer than 11 inmates of the Agodi Prisons, Ibadan, Oyo State, were feared killed on Tuesday during an attempted jailbreak.

The incident, which occurred around 6am, also left about 18 inmates and four warders injured.

The victims, said to be awaiting trial, were shot by warders and policemen while trying to escape.

The bodies of the victims were deposited at the University College Hospital, Ibadan. The injured were also moved to the hospital for treatment.

When contacted on the telephone, the Public Relations Officer of the UCH, Mr. Kunle Atinwore, said, "We have records of 11 deaths. Twenty-two people are also undergoing treatment in various wards."

But the state Comptroller of Prisons, Mrs. Maureen Omeili, and the Commissioner of Police in charge of the Oyo State Command, Mr. Udom Ekpoudom, put the casualty figure at eight.

Omeili, who initially resisted the coverage of the incident, added that 18 inmates were wounded.

The inmates were said to have revolted against the purported death of one of them who was receiving treatment at the prison's clinic.

It was learnt that a notorious jailbird, identified simply as Soponna, led the revolt.

He was said to have instigated others to escape, following the alleged death of the sick

inmate.

The inmates allegedly claimed that their dead colleague was given poor medical attention when he fell sick.

According to the source, the inmates attacked the warders and the officials, who were taking over duty from those on night shift.

He said the inmates first broke the cell of a convicted criminal, who joined in the assault before moving to the female yard. At the female yard, they allegedly attempted to seize handsets and money before they were halted by a combined team of warders and policemen.

The prison authorities were said to have sent a distress call to the police command, from where men and one Armoured Personnel Carrier were mobilised to the scene.

When newsmen arrived the scene, the comptroller directed officials of the prison not to allow them to cover the incident.

Some overzealous officials of the prison had battered an Assistant Editor with the Nigerian Tribune, Mr. Tope Abiola, who attempted to explain to them why the incident deserved coverage.

But Omeili, who later conducted newsmen round the prison, said the action of the inmates was 'annoying and shocking.'

She confirmed that four of the prison officials were wounded by stray bullets.

She said, "We have a lot of drugs in the clinic. We have a doctor, a physiotherapist, physiologists and nurses taking care of them. It's annoying for them to say they receive poor medical attention.

"The inmate they claimed was dead, which brought about the attempt, is still alive. It's also not as a result of any poor feeding because we have sacks of food in the store and they are well fed.

"It annoyed me that they used the same sacks to create a ladder to scale the fence. They threw stones and broke window panes."

The Deputy Comptroller, Mr. Olanrele Joseph, said the cables of the Close Circuit Television recently installed to monitor the cells from the Administrative Office were also damaged by the aggrieved inmates.

Joseph added, "They brought out about 30 knives from the kitchen and stabbed the officials. They broke into carpentry and tailoring workshops from where they brought out sharp objects to injure the staff.

"They brought out kegs of palm oil, plates and sacks of food and other movable materials to climb the fence, but they could not succeed."

Also speaking with newsmen, Ekpoudom said the intervention of the Police prevented the inmates from escaping.

Ekpoudom said, "Thank God that they called us on time. Please note that this is an attempted jailbreak and not a jailbreak.

"This is not the best. They destroyed so many things and injured some people. Thank God that none of them escaped. It would have created a big problem for the police and the prison authorities.

"Eight people were killed, while 18 were injured in the incident. But none of the inmates escaped. We are investigating the cause of the incident."

Blood stains were noticed in different parts of the expansive prison yard. Personal effects, drugs and kitchen utensils littered the premises.

One big hole was seen on a part of the high walls of the prison.

There were also visible signs on other parts of the walls where attempts were made by the inmates to drill more holes.

Built with a capacity for 500 inmates, the prison had 680 inmates as at Tuesday.

Sixty-one of the inmates, including a female, had been convicted.

The Comptroller-General of the Nigeria Prisons Service, Mr. Sola Ogundipe, later paid an emergency visit to the Agodi Prisons.

He said out of the 680 inmates, 612 were awaiting trial. Ogundipe added that 75 per cent of those awaiting were armed robbery suspects.

He identified congestion as a major problem confronting the nation's prisons.

There were four major jailbreaks in the country between 2005 and 2006.

The biggest occurred on February 22, 2006 in Anambra State.

About 585 inmates were freed by rioters who accused the staff of the Onitsha Prisons of harbouring 'people that had been killing' their brothers and sisters.

No fewer than 100 people died in the incident.

On June 17, 2005, 176 inmates of the Port Harcourt Prisons were also freed by armed men. Also, in September 2005, 120 inmates escaped from the Auchi Prisons.

Another incident was in Ogwashi-Uku, Delta State, where an unspecified number of prisoners also bolted away.

Shortly after the Auchi crisis, the then Acting Comptroller-General of the Nigeria Prisons Service, Mr. Uche Kalu, announced the setting up of a Rapid Response Squad to curtail the trend.

Kalu said the RRS would receive and analyse intelligent reports to bring any riot under control.

He also said that the squad would be empowered to mobilise men and resources to ensure that riots were curtailed with minimal damage.

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