

Six feared dead as Egba, Awori clash in Ota

Ademola Oni, Abokuta

AT least six persons were feared killed and scores of others injured or maimed as the Egba and the Awori engaged in a violent clash in Ota, Ogun State, over an issue that could not be immediately ascertained.

Reports initially said some people had laid a siege to the Ota farm of former President Olusegun Obasanjo, protesting alleged irregularities in the installation of a monarch.

Our correspondents visited the town on Tuesday, and gathered that the warring parties defied the heavy presence of riot policemen and the Gateway Response Squad to unleash mayhem on the commercial town.

Details of the clash, which forced the Commissioner, Ogun State Police Command, Mr. Joseph Apapa, to abort a meeting and rush to Ota, was still sketchy as at press time but sources said the casualty figure could be higher than six.

Residents of Ota said the magnitude of the intra-ethnic clash had never been witnessed in the community.

An eyewitness said the fracas, in which guns, cutlasses, charms and other dangerous weapons were freely used, started in the morning, forcing residents and workers to run

for protection in various directions.

It was learnt that up till late afternoon, guns were still booming at some discrete locations while the roads in the town were deserted.

A source told our correspondent that there had been mutual animosity between the Egba and the Awori for some time now.

The Awori, believed to be the 'owners' of Ota, are said to be angry over the installation of a prominent monarch from Abeokuta as a king in the town two years ago.

The source, a community leader, who craved anonymity, however, told our correspondent that he was not aware of the immediate reasons which precipitated the clash on Tuesday.

The state Police Public Relations Officer, Mr. Femi Awoyale, claimed that the state police command was "on top of the situation.

"We have enough men on the ground there. GRS and riot policemen are taking charge of the situation and we even have two armoured personnel carriers to tackle the situation. There is no cause for alarm; we are on top of the situation," said Awoyale, a Deputy Superintendent of Police.

He could not, however, confirm the casualty figure in

the violent clash.

The leader of the riot policemen to the Ota mayhem, Mr. Sony Ukata, was reportedly shot in the eye by a faction of the warring parties.

Ukata, an Assistant Superintendent of Police, who had restrained his men from shooting as the violent clash was shot while trying to maintain the peace.

The ASP, who leads the Mobile squadron 16 of the state police command, is also the head of the special unit that monitors security in the state Election Petitions Tribunals.

As at 7pm on Tuesday, doctors were still battling to save his life at the Sacred Heart Hospital, where he was rushed to after the incident.

Among those reportedly injured were Chief Bashiru Osunlabi, the fourth in rank to the Olota of Ota, Oba Mashood Oyede, Messrs Afolabi Adeosun, Tajudeen Adelowo, Fatai Lawa and scores of others who were later taken to various hospitals.

The clash on Tuesday had been interpreted as an open revolt against the Olowu of Owu, Oba Adegboyega Dosunmu, who, with the active support of former President Olusegun Obasanjo, installed alternate traditional rulers in some communities in the state.

The Olowu reportedly installed alternate kings in Obada Oko, Itori and Ifo but had insisted on having his way in Ota, even as residents claimed that the community belonged to the Aworis and not Owu.

Awoyale told our correspondent on the telephone that nobody died in the clash but justified the deployment of two APCs in the town, saying the police authority did not know the magnitude of the fracas.

"You know this thing is usually from Lagos and we have to be careful what we do. We did not know what our men would meet on the ground; that's why we decided to send two armoured personnel carriers to the place," he said.

The corpse of a man in a jeans and canvas, simply identified as Idowu Olaomo, (aka Coach) lay at the Ansar-Ud-Deen Teaching Training School junction along Ota road.

The genesis of the crisis, according to sources, was the refusal of some of the 12 "coronet Obas" in Sango-Ota, appointed in 2006 by

Dosunmu to stop parading themselves as traditional rulers.

The Ogun State Government had, three weeks

ago, issued a statement directing 'coronet kings' to stop parading themselves as traditional rulers in the state.

The clash on Tuesday which lasted for more than four hours, was said to have started on a peaceful note with the Awori Consultative Council visiting the Obasanjo at his farm even though they did not meet the former President at his Ota farm.

The leader of the ACC, Chief Nosiru Dehinde, who addressed the press after the crisis at the Olota Palace, said they had gone to the former President's house to register their displeasure on the disobedience of the Olowu to call his coronet Obas to order.

It was gathered that trouble started when the protesters, which included Egungun, hunters, market women, Orisa and Ogbori cult, were returning from the Obasanjo Farm to the Sango-Ota Junction when they were confronted by the Egba group, who massed towards Ijoko Road, and ostensibly assumed that the Awori were coming to attack them.

The ACC, which issued a communiqué after the crisis, said there would be no peace in the area unless the Dosunmu called his 'chiefs' to order.