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Jos: Two policemen killed, monarch's palace torched

By Jude Owuamanam, Jos with agency report

Tuesday, 8 Jun 2010

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Inspector General of Police, Ogbonna Onovo

Jos metropolis in Plateau State was on Monday engulfed in another orgy of violence as motorcyclists popularly called 'Okada' tried to resist a government ban on their activities.

By the time the violence was over, two policemen had been killed, many others wounded and a part of the palace of the Gbong Gwom Jos, Da Buba Gyang, was burnt by hoodlums who hijacked a protest by the motorcyclists.

The policemen were said to have been killed along Bauchi Road while trying to enforce the law during the incident that occurred hours after one person died in a clash between

herdsmen and farmers in Lapai Local Government Area of Niger State on Sunday.

Many motorcycles were also burnt in the process while more than 50 others were impounded by security agents in Jos.

It was gathered that policemen, officials of the National Security and Civil Defence Corps and Federal Road Safety Corps, were assembled early on Monday at the headquarters of the Plateau State Police command and instructed to enforce the law prohibiting the operations of the motorcyclists in Jos and Bukuru.

Governor Jonah Jang had earlier signed into law, a bill to prohibit and regulate commercial motorcycle activities in Jos and Bukuru. The law had earlier been passed by the state House of Assembly.

Acting on the directive, the policemen, FRSC and NSCDC officials moved into town around 10 am but were resisted by the motorcyclists.

First sign of trouble was noticed around Old Bukuru Park where policemen tried to arrest some of the motorcycle operators. Shop owners, who sensed that violence could erupt, hurriedly closed their businesses while parents rushed to schools to take their children home.

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The crisis in the area worsened with some hoodlums setting up bonfires and hurling stones and missiles at the security agents. While trying to disperse them, policemen and soldiers on patrol fired canisters of tear gas and bullets into the air.

Hundreds of the hoodlums were said have tried to gain entrance into the premises of the Police C Division and the palace of the Gbong Gwom Jos but were resisted by a combined team of soldiers and mobile policemen.

Our correspondent gathered that the urchins later regrouped and set a section of the palace of the paramount ruler of the serene city ablaze.

They were said to have climbed into a building in the palace through an adjoining structure and hurled a patrol bomb, which landed where Gyang's predecessors were buried.

However, officials of the state fire service were quickly mobilised to put out the fire. They saved the palace from being totally destroyed.

The hoodlums later moved to old Bukuru Park, where traders had strategically positioned themselves to prevent the breaking and looting of their shops.

The whole of Bauchi Road, Nasarawa Gwom, Dilimi and Terminus became no-go areas as the miscreants took total control while soldiers looked on.

Billows of smoke went up into the air around the areas.

The government was said to have convened an emergency meeting of the state executive council to review the situation. Earlier attempts to force the ban were abandoned after the motocyclists resisted it.

The National President of the Amalgamated Commercial Motorcycle Owners and Riders Association of Nigeria, Alhaji Babangida Maihula, who faulted the action of the state government, said that it should have provided an alternative source of income for the operators before implementing the ban.

He added that the government should have taken the association into confidence on how to enforce the law to avoid a breakdown of law and order.

"If the government meant well for the people, it should take us into confidence by discussing with us for a way out. We don't support the action because the government should have provided an alternative source of livelihood for our members. We are calling on the government to provide income sources for the state's jobless people."

Reacting, the state Commissioner for Information, Mr. Gregory Yenlong, said that he stood by his action since it was backed by law.

Yenlong said that the government was working out modalities to cushion the effects of the ban and called on the residents to remain calm. He added that security agencies had been directed to deal with all kinds of lawlessness.

Spokesman of the Military Special Task Force, Lt.-Col. Kingsley Umoh, told our correspondent that soldiers were not involved in the enforcement of the ban.

He added, however, that soldiers were on hand to prevent the escalation of the crisis.

Meanwhile, a clash between some herdsman and farmers on Sunday resulted in the killing of one person and burning of 20 houses and eight cars in Yelwa and Sheko LGAs of Niger State.



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