

One feared dead as Ebonyi officials, traders clash

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•Ebonyi State CP, Awosola Awotinde

Edward Nnachi, Abakaliki

There was confusion at the Abakpa Market, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, on Wednesday, following the alleged beating to death of an apprentice by state government officials, who invaded the market to enforce the payment of tax by the traders.

PUNCH Metro gathered that agents of the Ebonyi State Government task force had gone to the market to force the traders to pay their taxes, an action that was resisted by the traders.

In the ensuing pandemonium, policemen drafted to the scene were said to have fired teargas canisters at the traders, who reportedly hauled missiles at the government officials. This led to the abrupt closure of the market.

An eyewitness told *PUNCH Metro*, “I saw traders running helter-skelter when I was going to the market this morning and I was told that some thugs had issues with one of the traders, which resulted in their beating him to death.

“When the task force people got to the man’s shop, he was said to have asked them what the matter was. I learnt that one of the thugs slapped him and the man retaliated and the others started beating him. The man eventually died. Policemen took over the market and it was shut.”

The spokesperson for the state police command, Loveth Odah, told journalists that she would not comment on the matter because her colleagues had yet to return from the scene of the clash.

Reacting to the incident, the Special Assistant to the Governor on Internally Generated Revenue, Okwuegu Martin, denied the death of any trader.

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According to him, the state government had given the traders several demand notices to pay up the outstanding taxes, but they refused to comply.

The acting Chairman, Abakpa Market Traders Association, Oba Peter, said he only took the enforcement agents to shop owners, who had refused to pay up their taxes, when the protest by some persons erupted.

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