

One student killed, two injured in Benue gun battle

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| By John Charles

Three students were hit by stray bullets during a gun duel between the military and criminals at Ikpengezwa, a settlement in Jato Aka, Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State.

One of the students was reported to have died of stray bullets, and two others were receiving treatment at an undisclosed hospital, *PUNCH Metro* gathered on Wednesday.

Some residents of the community who spoke to our correspondent alleged that some military men attached to a Chinese mining company stationed at Tarkom, a settlement along the same route, disrupted the burial procession of a chief in the area.

One of the residents, who simply gave his name as Takir, said, “The incident happened on Monday when some youths who had earlier escorted and buried the remains of the late Ortar u Nzaav, Zaki Hanave Laha, were reportedly attacked.

“The incident happened at the time students were returning home from school. Unfortunately, a student of Government Science Secondary School, Jato Aka, identified as Iorfa, was hit by a bullet after it penetrated another victim, Mr. Iorsuur, who was reportedly shot at close range.

“The injured students are currently receiving treatment at the NKST General Hospital, Jato Aka, while Mr. Iorsuur’s body was allegedly whisked away by soldiers to an undisclosed location.

Efforts to confirm the incident from the chairman of the Local Government Area, Mr Vitalis Neji, were not successful as he did not respond to calls and messages sent to his cellphone as of press time.

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However, a top military officer who spoke to our correspondent on Wednesday morning but did not want to be mentioned because he was authorised to speak with the media on the matter described the incident as ‘unfortunate’, adding that nobody died during the incident, but said that three students hit by bullets from criminals were receiving treatment at the hospital.

He said, “It is true that such an incident happened, our men (soldiers) were on patrol in the area when they encountered criminals, and immediately they (criminals) sighted the soldiers, they shot at them.

“Unfortunately, it happened at the time students were returning from school, and three of the students were hit by bullets from the criminals. The victims are at the hospital receiving treatment.

Also confirming the incident on Wednesday, the spokesperson for Benue State Command, DSP Udemé Edet, however, admitted that a student lost his life during the incident and two others were still receiving treatment at an undisclosed hospital.

The PPRO said, “It is not killing of students, the military team was coming back from their patrol, and on their way, they sighted some hoodlums with firearms on a bike.

“While chasing them, the hoodlums opened fire at the military, and the military replied to them. It was in that process that, unknowingly, stray bullets hit three students.

“On arrival at the hospital, sadly, one of the students was confirmed dead by the doctor, while the two others are responding to treatment. Meanwhile, an investigation is ongoing.”