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## Baale Sent To Prison Over Murder

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The Baale of Abijo in Ibeju-Lekki area of Lagos State, southwest Nigeria, Chief Johnson Avah has been remanded in Ikoyi Prison over murder.

Avah is facing trial before an Ebute Meta Magistrates' court over the death of Samuel Benapumo in his palace.

The 58-year old community leader ran into trouble after he allegedly locked up the late Benapumo in a room at his palace and on the fifth day of his detention, he was found dead and hanging from a ceiling fan.

The 36-year old Benapumo was allegedly detained over N100,000 he borrowed from the Baale with an interest of N20,000 and could not pay back.

The Lagos State Police Command arrested Avah who claimed that he knew nothing about his death even though he died in his palace where he was locked up.

### Photo Gallery



In Pictures: Chief Edwin Clark, Ex-minister, Ijaw Leader, Marks 86th Birthday

The police alleged that Avah tortured Benapumo who was a boat operator to death because he was not able to pay back the loan.

According to police authorities, Avah is a loan shark and had demanded 20 per cent interest on the N100,000 loan. So, the deceased was supposed to pay back N120,000.

However, after the time given to the deceased had lapsed and he could not pay back, the Baale continued to put pressure on him.

It was learnt that the Baale reported the matter to the Elemoro Police Division and the deceased was arrested and detained for a few days.

The police source said: "The Baale is highly respected in the area so he reported the matter at the station and policemen immediately arrested him (Benapumo). After a few days in detention, we called both parties to reach an agreement because none was willing to go to court.

"Both of them made a verbal agreement and the deceased said he would pay back in instalmentally. We released him and that was the last time we saw him."

*P.M.NEWS* learnt that after some weeks, the deceased was able to clear some of his debt but when he could not pay further, the Baale's thugs allegedly went and arrested him.

The Baale subsequently detained Benapumo in a room in his palace. On 16 April, 2013, after five days in detention, the lifeless body of Benapumo was discovered hanging from a ceiling fan in the room.

Avah reported the matter at Elemoro Police Division and said in his statement that the deceased committed suicide because he could not pay back the money.

He added that Benapumo did not leave any suicide note.

The police arrested Avah for murder and transferred him to the State Criminal Investigation Department, SCID, Panti, Yaba for further investigation.

*P.M.NEWS* learnt that police investigations revealed that prior to his death, Benapumo was tortured and had made frantic calls to friends telling them to bail him out.

A police source said: "While in detention at the Baale's palace, he was using his phone to call friends to help him raise money. He was able to raise N50,000 which was paid into the bank account of the Baale's daughter.

"He had complained to friends that he was being maltreated and that he could die in detention if he did not pay back."



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Avah, however, said only N30,000 was repaid and not N50,000.

He said in his statement that the deceased had also agreed to be detained in the event that he could not pay back. He said there was no written agreement to that effect.

P.M.NEWS learnt that the death has raised many unanswered questions and police sources said murder would not be ruled out.

There was outrage in the community as residents expressed shock over the incident.

They wondered who gave the Baale the right to detain someone illegally.

"We are waiting for the autopsy result but from our investigation, there is more to the hanging than meets the eye," a resident noted.

The police spokesperson for the State Police Command, Ngozi Braide, had earlier said three suspects, including the Baale, had been arrested in connection with the case, but only the Baale had been charged to court. Braide said that the Baale claimed that he discovered the corpse hanging from a ceiling fan but the police was not satisfied with that explanation.

"So we are waiting for an autopsy report," she said.

The police, after investigation, charged the man to court with murder under the Criminal Code.

His plea was not taken. Rather the presiding magistrate ordered his remand in prison custody.

The court ordered the prosecutor to duplicate his file for the DPP's advice.

—Cyriacus Izuekwe

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