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There was pandemonium at Abakaliki Federal Prisons in Ebonyi State yesterday when the inmates rioted over alleged poor meals served them by prison officials. The riot resulted in high casualties on the part of the inmates and prison officials as no fewer than 10 people died during the riot.

The leader of the inmates, who allegedly incited the inmates against the officials, was shot dead. Sources at the prisons said two officials were killed during the incident while seven casualties were recorded on the part of the inmates. "If not for the rapid response of the combined team of prison officials, police and army drafted to the scene, the inmates had started escaping from the prison, having overpowered the guards," the sources said. New Telegraph learnt that three of the officials sustained serious injuries and were taken to the Federal Teaching Hospital (FETHA), Abakaliki for medical attention.

Findings by our correspondent showed that death toll is expected to rise as those injured are in critical condition at the Accident and Emergency Unit of the Federal Teaching Hospital, Abakaliki (FETHA) where they



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are receiving treatment. Some of those injured in the attempted jailbreak had their bodies shattered with bullets. The inmates had allegedly snatched a rifle from one of the guards and shot some of the officers, which provoked them into retaliation.

They had created opening on the prison wall for escape before anti-riot policemen arrived and heavily tear-gassed them into submission. Gunshots were heard intermittently as officers of the Nigeria Police Force and Nigerian Army battled to recover the snatched rifle. A high ranking official told New Telegraph in confidence that the inmates were actually killed and their bodies evacuated secretly.

The Abakaliki prisons, which was built by the British Colonial Government to accommodate 300 inmates, presently houses no fewer than 1000 inmates. In a telephone interview, the state Comptroller of Prisons, Mrs. Oputa Emilia, stated that three persons were injured in the process. She, however, denied knowledge of any death or snatching of guns of prison guards by the inmates. Oputa explained that the incident, which occurred about 9:30 a.m. on Thursday, ensued as a result of some inmates refusing the early morning routine search in their cells. "Yes, I can confirm that there was an incident at the Abakaliki prison this morning.

This was as a result of some inmates refusing the routing search in their cells. "But I can assure you that everything has been brought under control without any inmate escaping from the prison," she said. She confirmed that some inmates actually tried to escape from the prison by trying to break one of the walls, but that the situation was brought under control by the combined efforts of the armed squad of the Prisons, the Police and Military personnel stationed at the prison.

The Controller said that she had to call for reinforcement from the state Police Command to arrest the situation. She said some inmates were injured in the process and were currently receiving treatment in the hospital. She, however, denied that the riot was triggered by inmates protesting poor quality of food and welfare. When contacted, the state Police Public Relations Officer, DSP George Okafor, said the command was still working hard to resolve the crisis. He, however, refused to confirm if anybody died.

"There was an attempted jailbreak and the prisons called in the police. We cordoned off the area and restored normalcy to the area," he said. As

at press time, soldiers and policemen had cordoned off all roads leading to the prisons. Tension is also mounting in the prisons as security agents vowed to deal with the inmates at night. Meanwhile, Governor Dave Umahi has decried the state of the Abakaliki Federal Prisons. Umahi spoke yesterday evening when he visited the prisons after the botched jailbreak by the inmates.

“Luckily, I am told that the prisoners are not complaining of any maltreatment and malnutrition. I was told that those who attempted the escape are those awaiting trial. I was told that there are so many of them awaiting trial. This is not good for us,” the governor said.

Umahi directed the state Comptroller of Prisons, Oputa, to compile such cases and send to him to enable him to put head together with the state’s Chief Judge, Justice Aloy Nwankwo, to fast-track justice. He decried infrastructural decay in the federal prisons, saying it was not good for the inmates.

The governor observed that the structures were built in the 1960s and promised to partner with the prisons authorities to modernise the facility.

“Ebonyi State Government could suspend one or two things and would want to, at least, de-roof some of the buildings and re-roof them,” he said. The governor also said his administration would provide sporting facilities in the prisons in order to keep inmates engaged. Umahi added: “Recreational and sporting facilities will be provided.

I believe such things will engage those in the prisons and keep them away of thinking of how to escape. When they are engaged, they will not have time to think about crimes. What we have here cannot reform anyone. It will rather harden them. We have to reform them and reintegrate the good ones into our society.”

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