

Crime

Ogun: Tears, sorrow as Akoogun festival turns bloody

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Akooogun festival in Ifo, Ogun State, is an annual celebration. During the festival, every son and daughter of the Akoogun faithful are expected to return home. It is a time for prayers for the progress of the town and Nigeria in general.

It has always been a period characterised with joy, singing and dancing. It is a celebration that had always been peaceful. But this year, everything turned from celebration of joy to one of horror and sorrow, as gunshots peppered the gathering, leading to the death of an artisan and later a motor park chairman.

The incident plunged everyone into mourning and before one could say Jack Robison, angry youths mobilised, took to the streets and started chanting songs of solidarity. They wreaked havoc on the community.

Trouble on that fateful Sunday started about 5p.m., while everyone was at the shrine at Sogo Ifetedo, Cele area, waiting for the chief priest to come and pray for them. Suddenly, the waiting crowd heard gunshots.

A witness said: "Before we knew what was happening, the policemen entered the shrine and arrested Regal. While they were taking him away, they started destroying everything in the shrine and threatened to kill anyone, who came close to them. They entered their van and zoomed off."

The killing of 25-year-old Akeem Akinsanya, a battery charger, came barely two weeks after the Acting Inspector-General of Police (IG), Muhammadu Adamu, warned policemen to desist from indiscriminate shootings and killing of civilians.

The second victim killed on the same day and in the same community is Monsuru Alabi, chairman of the motorcycle riders in the community.

The policemen, who reportedly killed Akeem, were said to have come from Zonal Intervention Squad (ZIS). The five policemen shot and killed Akeem while



Some of the burnt buses

trying to escape from Akoogun shrine, after arresting Regal.

Residents said that the policemen defied tradition and went into the shrine to arrest the suspect in the presence of adherents.

The shooting generated outrage by residents who took to the streets. The incident snowballed into a violent attack on the Ifo constituency office of the Deputy Speaker of the state House of Assembly, Hon. Olakunle Oluomo.

In the attack, the constituency office and five vehicles belonging to Oluomo were razed down by suspected hoodlums.

A police source disclosed that a team of operatives from ZIS, Obada Oko area, Abeokuta, Ogun State investigating an alleged case of unlawful possession of arms, ammunition and cultism went to arrest Abu aka Regal, a notorious cultist.

The source said: "Regal had been implicated by Afeez Popoola aka Level, who had been previously arrested and undergoing investigation by the team. He is said to be the curator of arms and ammunition of the Eyiye Fraternity in Ifo axis of Ogun State. Regal was arrested by the team about 3p.m. while in possession of a locally-made pistol with cartridges kept in a handbag. The items were recovered by the police team. While the policemen were taking the suspects to the station

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along with the recovered items, a renowned tout popularly known as Obasanjo in company of a host of other suspected cult members, ambushed them."

The police team leader, Inspector Sunday Ogundapo, who happened to be in possession of the recovered exhibits, according to the source, was inflicted with machete injuries on his head.

The source said: "He was about to be dispossessed of his AK47 rifle; in the process of struggling with the mob, a bullet accidentally discharged and killed Akeem."

Akeem's uncle, Chief Mukaila Muraina, said it was an unfortunate incident. Muraina said that every adherent was in the shrine performing ritual when the policemen dashed into the shrine and started dragging Regal away.

He said: "It was in the process of trying to whisk Regal away that the policemen started shooting sporadically. Among those who were also running from being hit by the flying bullets was Akeem. He was, however, hit on the thigh, buttock and penis. He fell into a stream. Before we knew what was happening, the festival ended abruptly as everyone scampered for safety. We have not witnessed such incident in our community before."

The distraught mother of the deceased, Mrs. Sherifat Akinsanya, said: "I was with my friends

when Akeem told me he was going to his sister's house. I was still with my friends when I received a phone call that Akeem had been shot. I tried to rush down to the scene. When I was rushing there, I saw policemen on motorcycles leaving, but I didn't know they were those who killed my son. When I got back home I saw a crowd gathered in our house, weeping. I fainted. I was later revived at the hospital.

"I also heard that some of his elder brothers and friends in the community chased the policemen to a petrol station where they hid from being mobbed. His corpse was taken to hospital, where he was confirmed dead. He was the last of my three sons. I don't know where to start from; all I want is justice for my son."

Akeem's cousin, Mr. Yahaya Muraina, said that he was with the deceased when the police shot him.

He said: "Immediately the bullet hit Akeem, he called me and said, 'brother, I have been shot by the police.' Before I knew what was happening, my cousin fell into a stream. I screamed for help, but nobody could get close to him. I ran, but later returned to the scene and tried to rescue him. I took him to the health centre, where we were later referred to Ifo General

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