

Taiwo Jimoh

Ownership

There is palpable tension in a Lagos community as two persons fight over who becomes the monarch of Egan Oriomi town, Ojo Awori Local Council Development Area, in the Ojo area of the state.

It was learnt that gunmen numbering over 100 invaded the riverine community at about 9pm on Friday April 12, attacking several residents of the community and setting several houses on fire.

The gunmen are alleged to be working for the person installed as the monarch of the community, who some of the indigenes claim is not part of the royal family, but was forced on them.

During the attack, a 15-month-old baby, who was sleeping in her mother's room, was burnt beyond recognition. This is just as about 20 houses were also burnt, with property worth several millions of naira destroyed in the crisis that ravaged the community.

Our correspondent also gathered that ten persons were shot, and among the victim is a 90-year-old man, who sustained deep machete cuts in parts of his bodies and is currently battling to survive at the hospital.

Genesis

The distraught father whose son was burnt to ashes by the arsonists said his baby's name was Emmanuel. He added that he went to work, leaving his wife with his two children at home and that by 9.30pm, he received a phone call that some suspected cultists were shooting everyone on sight in the town.

He said his wife went inside with the children to avoid being hit by stray bullet. At about 1am, his wife called again to inform him that cultists had set their building on fire and that she ran out without carrying their baby who was sleeping in their bedroom, but rescued the elder brother from the inferno.

He said: "Immediately the information reached my father-in-law he went straight to our house and rushed inside the fire to rescue the baby, unfortunately he was attacked with cutlass by the cultist. He is presently at the hospital battling to survive."

"When I returned to the community on Saturday, I met my baby already burnt to death. He was my second child. Since then my wife have been crying and refused to eat."

Man shot

A 22-year-old man, Joel Babatunde, was shot on the neck by the assailants, he is battling to survive at the hospital where he was rushed to for treatment.

He said: "I was sleeping in my house and I heard gunshots. I ran out in confusion, unaware of where the gunshots were coming from. Immediately I stepped outside, I was shot by one of the gunmen on the neck and other parts of my body."

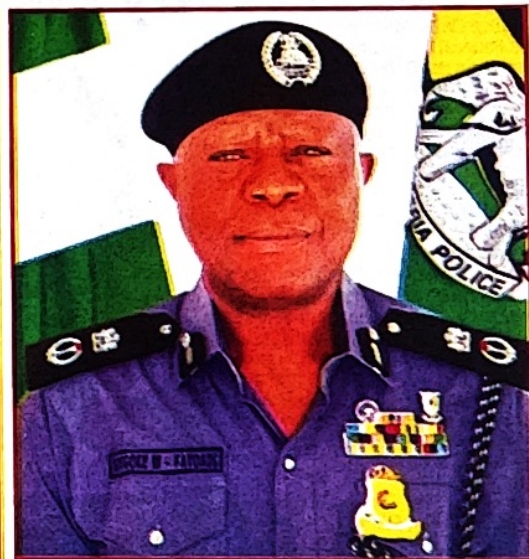
Another victim who gave his name simply as Mohedeen said his house was among the buildings burnt, in all, over 20 houses were burnt, most of the affected houses belong to members of the Oba Mos-

Lagos community under siege as cultists battle over kingship stool

...infant killed, 20 houses burnt



One of the victims



Lagos CP, Fayoadé

hood Olarewaju's family.

"One of the houses burnt belong to the oldest woman in our community. She was lucky to have been taken out immediately the house was set on fire. She too would have died inside. Oba Olarewaju ought to be the rightful Oba of this community and we still regard him as our leader," one of the respondents said.

Politician accused of bias

The residents blame the arson and killing on the position taken by the council chairman and some politicians in the area, who they accuse of bias over the installation of a traditional ruler who is not a member of the royal family and not from the town.

The indigenes allege that the stranger was installed as the traditional ruler, instead of an indigene of the town. It will be noted that before now, there had been a lingering tussle between two families in the community over who rules.

Speaking with *New Telegraph*, one of the indigenes, Lawal Adesegun, who claimed to be a Crown Prince of the town said the cause of the fight was over ownership dispute.

The alleged invaders "are not indigenes of our town, or our family members. We have gone to the tribunal set up by the Lagos State Government to fight for our right and we won. We have the documents from the tribunal to back our claim, including judgments and clearance from the Ministry of Chieftaincy and the Attorney General of the state, confirming us as the rightful Oba of Egan, Ori Omi Atto Awori of Ojo Local Government."

"Some politicians brought the man that was installed as the monarch of the community, on Thursday April 11, 2024, he was forced on us, but the police restrained them because they

knew fight would broke out. This was not the first time they would be attacking us. A similar incident occurred on June 15, 2018, when some of our people were also killed."

"The local government intervened then and the case was dropped in court, frustrating our efforts to seek justice. The House of Assembly deliberated on the matter for two years. They set up a committee which recommended justice and emphasised on the need to install the right person to the position. But the recommendation was not implemented because these same politician scuttled the process at the assembly."

"The original king is Olarewaju Moshod Lawal, yet they replaced him with a non-indigene. He left the community in 2018 due to insecurity. We are therefore calling on Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu, to intervene before they wipe everyone of us out of our town, we have all our documents from the government, yet, these politicians are blocking all our efforts to meet the governor, to hear our side of the story, we are not violent people."

CP calls for truce

The Commissioner of Police, Lagos State Command, CP Adegoke Fayoadé, has called for truce between the two factions and also stop their planned protest slated for Monday.

The planned protest that was supposed to take place on Monday and to be led by the father of the baby burnt to ashes to the Governor's office and the state Police Command was suspended to douse tension.

According to Adesegun, "when there lawyer wrote a letter to the Divisional Police Officer, Ajangbadi, informing him about their plan to stage a peaceful protest, the DPO told them to seek the permission of the Commissioner of Police before they

would proceed with the protest to avoid harassment from security agencies in the state.

"It was through this process that the Commissioner of Police invited us to the state command. And informed us that he had invited the other party. That was why we stopped our planned protest. The CP asked Dauda the cause of the clash and he said that we stopped him from entering the community as the newly installed King."

"The CP then asked why he would attack the people he intended to rule over. But he denied it, saying he wasn't the one who sent the cultists to invade the community."

Police deployed to community

The community has been deserted as several residents have moved out of the community for fear of being attacked by the gunmen. But policemen were deployed to the community to provide security and forestall further crisis by the invaders and protect life and property.

While the meeting was ongoing with the CP, some of the community leaders told the CP that some of the cultists were in two buses outside the police command headquarters, immediately some plain clothes policemen were sent out, fortunately, twelve of the suspected cultists were arrested, while others escaped.

Meanwhile, when the present king was contacted on phone to get his reaction, he didn't pick his phone and also didn't respond to text messages sent to him over the invasion of the town.

However, the Lagos State Police Public Relation Officer (PPRO), SP Benjamin Hundeyin, said some of the suspects have been arrested and some anti-riot policemen have also been deployed to the area to prevent further breakdown of law and order in the community and other parts of the town.

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