

Violence, Confusion Mar PDP Congresses

Ward Congresses of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) which commenced nationwide yesterday turned tragic in some states as the exercise was marred by violence while in some other areas, it was confusion galore.

At least two people were

• *Two killed in Oyo, one in Bayelsa*

By Our Correspondents

feared dead in troubled Oyo State as the Deputy Governor of the state, Alhaji Hazeem Gbolarumi, allegedly led

thugs round the venues of the PDP congresses in Ibadan while in Bayelsa State, a mobile policeman in the escort team of a member of the state House of Assembly

was shot allegedly by one of the thugs in the lawmaker's entourage.

In Kwara, Rivers and Bauchi States, complaints of all kinds of irregularities trailed the congresses.

However the exercise was said to have taken off on a peaceful note in Lagos, Ogun, Delta and Kogi States as well as the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

Ward congresses are the

first in the series of the intra-party elections to pick PDP candidates in the forthcoming 2007 general elections.

Gbolarumi was seen among the crowd walking on foot along Mokola-Sango Road in Ibadan around 12.23 pm with a black face cap and grey kaftan.

His official car, a black Jeep and a 406 peugeot car were driven slowly behind the entourage with some heavily

armed policemen and plain clothed security details.

At Mokola Round-about, he reportedly met some pro-Adedibu thugs heading towards Sango, brandishing cutlasses and other dangerous weapons chanting war songs against Senator Rashidi Ladoja.

The thugs were seen in a Mercedes Benz car marked OYO AR 499 BDJ and two buses with one marked XA 799 WWD.

According to THISDAY checks, the deputy gover-

Continued on Pg. 6

CEMENTING SINO-AFRICAN BOND...



THISWeek/News

PDP CONGRESSES *Cont'd from P1*

nor's convoy had stormed the political base of the recently returned governor, Rashidi Ladoja at ward 10, located at Oba Akinyele High School venue of the ward congress in search of his supporters.

It was learnt that Ladoja's group was given the go-ahead by the National Secretariat of the party to participate in yesterday's congress even though they were not registered. It was a surprise for Chief Lamidi Adedibu's loyalists that Ladoja's loyalists outnumbered them at some of the wards they visited.

Checks revealed that a passerby was gunned down, during a crossfire between supporters of the deputy governor and those of a leading gubernatorial aspirant in the state, Alhaji Yekini Adejo, at Adejo area of the city.

Another unidentified party supporter, sources claimed, was reported to have been mowed down at Yemetu area of the city.

At Odo Iye area of Ward 1, Ibadan North Local Government, one Dauda Owolabi, a known supporter of Ladoja, received a machete cut from enraged PDP loyalists.

The assault on Ladoja ward at Ward 10 led to one Kola Olayiwola receiving machete cut on the head while the house of Mr. Aiki Wahab of Ward three was vandalised by aggrieved party loyalists.

But in a swift reaction, Special Adviser on Media to the deputy governor, Mr. Ademola Solalu, denied the incidents, saying his boss was only on inspection tour of wards in the state. But when asked about the attacks on Ladoja's supporters, he queried whether Ladoja was still a member of PDP.

Reports from Oyo Township and Saki, in Oke Ogun areas of the state showed that there was orderliness in the conduct of the congress, although THISDAY learnt that two parallel congresses were held at Saki.

Bayelsa

In Bayelsa, THISDAY gathered that the escort team were with Mr. Waripamowe Dudafo, the member representing constituency II when the incident resulting in the death of the policeman happened at Opokuma town in Kolokuma Opokuma Local Government area of the state.

One account of the incident had it that the deceased, a sergeant with the tag of Ashidi Bainuigha with force number 163878, met his untimely death at about 12.45pm when he was accidentally shot by one of the thugs in the procession of the lawmaker he was escorting.

The other account had it that the deceased might have been felled by a flying bullet from his colleagues as they were shooting indiscriminately into the air on arrival at Opokuma while heading towards

Tamuabuwari, Ward 8 for the congress.

THISDAY gathered that the state commissioner of police, Alhaji Hafiz Ringim, had earlier ordered the arrest of the policemen escorting the lawmaker ostensibly because of their unruly behaviour before tragedy struck.

Although it could not be immediately ascertained where the bullet that killed the police officer came from, however, the alleged assailant, one Mr. Bowei, a private security detail attached to the Chairman of Kolokuma-Opokuma local government area has been arrested and whisked to Yenagoa.

The tragic incident notwithstanding the ward congress went smoothly in the local government area.

Kwara

PDP ward congresses in Kwara State was marred by complaints of irregularities even as some of the gubernatorial aspirants of the party led their supporters to boycott the exercise.

Though, at the end of the exercise, delegates emerged in all the 193 wards in the state with the use of open ballot system.

Speaking with newsmen in Ilorin, the Chairman of the 5-man electoral panel sent to the state by the PDP national headquarters in Abuja, Dr. Ibrahim Lame, said that the party opted for open balloting to ensure transparency in the conduct of the primaries.

He said the primaries were opened to all members of the party with or without PDP card; so long as such members have registered at their various wards.

According to him, the party's leadership took this decision in order to forestall complaint of marginalisation by any member of the party.

But two governorship aspirants of the party in the state, Mr. Gbenga Olawepo and Col. Theophilus Bamigboye (rtd), faulted Lame's claim saying the state executives of the party led by Alhaji Abubakar Zubair was biased and partisan in the conduct of the congress.

have been favoured by the Party hierarchy to fly the Party's flag at the 2007 governorship polls in Lagos was murdered in his Ikoyi, Lagos home in July this year. The manner he was killed fuelled suspicions that it was another high profile political assassination as he was found dead in his bedroom with his legs and hands tied. Until his death, Williams, 58, a former commissioner for works in Lagos State and PDP flag-bearer in 2003 general elections, had the most formidable political machinery within the PDP in Lagos State.

THISDAY investigations reveal that at the meeting between Obasanjo, George and Williams family led by

The two PDP leaders told newsmen in Ilorin that, they had told the national secretariat of PDP on the need to dissolve the state executive council of the party led by Alhaji Zubair to no avail and that this led them to call on their supporters to stay away from the congress.

Bamigboye and Olawepo said they had petitioned the Presidency over the matter because the congress in Kwara State was purely an affair by the Sarakites, a reference to the group loyal to former senate leader, Dr. Olusola Saraki.

Their words: "We are boycotting the congress; our chairman and secretary have issued a statement warning that we would not participate if the Alhaji Abubakar Zubair executive is not dissolved. He openly supported the governor during his declaration; he raised his hand just like the wife of the national chairman, Mrs Ali was also there to openly support the governor."

"If they don't create a level playing ground we can't work together. Dr. Ibrahim Lame, the chairman of the electoral panel for the state is Secretary of the Northern Union founded by Dr. Saraki so you can see that everything is already predetermined and that is why we can't participate with them," they said.

Rivers

There were reports of non availability of materials for the congress in Rivers State.

When THISDAY went round the wards, there was no sign of any congress going on while all the Local Government Chairmen who had converged on PDP headquarters at Aba Road in the morning were later seen at Government House.

At 5.40 pm when THISDAY called some people in various parts of the state to know if the congress held, none confirmed that it did but rather gave same explanations that materials were yet to arrive.

Elder Law Jumbo, one of the gubernatorial aspirants told us that he was still in Bonny and that he was

the wife, Hilda, the latter was said to have reviewed the political situation in Lagos and told the President that it was the decision of the Williams family that she should join the race.

One, according to her, the family does not want all that her late husband laboured for politically to be in vain and since her children are still too young to take on such a tough task, it became imperative that she mounts the saddle herself. She told the president that this was one of the reasons why the family asked her to join the race.

Hilda was also said to have explained to Obasanjo that WILCO, the single most formidable campaign body within PDP in Lagos state

informed that the expected materials for use in the ward congresses had not arrived.

The same story was told by Hon. Andrew Uchendu who also said that he first went to his ward at midday by there was no sign of the arrival of the material and would go back later to see what was happening.

At the PDP headquarters, some party members were seen as at 4pm milling around still waiting for the arrival of materials while some muttered in low tones of an attempt to rig the congress to enable the hierarchy foist a gubernatorial candidate on the party.

Bauchi

In Bauchi, the ward congresses, started on a shaky note.

No congress had taken place as at 2.30 p.m. in the four wards in the state capital and only a few party supporters were seen around venues of the exercise.

Among the four wards which include Maji-dadi A-B, Ardo Danly, Makama and Dawaki, it was only in Maji-Dadi A and B that some youths were seen singing different slogans.

Security was however beefed up as armed mobile policemen were patrolling the whole town.

The chairman of a youth organ of the party, "Grass root Alliance", Malam Abdullahi Adamu, claimed that there was no election in all the wards.

Adamu also claimed that the party did not issue any membership card to members.

But the exercise took off peacefully in Lagos and Ogun States, the congresses also went on peacefully in areas visited by our correspondent.

The early downpour, however, disrupted the exercise in some parts of Lagos even though the people came out en masses to witness the exercise.

Lagos

In Abesan, a suburb of the state, the congress went on peacefully with little or minor disagreements among delegates which were resolved eventually.

WILLIAMS WIFE *Cont'd from P1*

has been in disarray following the death of her husband and it was as a result of the need to unite the various political tendencies within the group so as to present a united front that also informed the family's decision to ask her to declare for the governorship race.

THISDAY checks indicate that the family also told the president that given the present crisis in Lagos PDP on the one hand, and within WILCO on the other hand, if a consensus material is not presented, chances are that it could jeopardise PDP's chances in the 2007 governorship race in Lagos. A presidency source told THISDAY that Hilda then informed the president that "as father of the party, there

Ogun

In Ogun, the congresses began on a peaceful note as members filed out to elect delegates without problems.

The Special Adviser to Governor Gbenga Daniel on Special Duties, Mr. Raheem Ajayi, said the congresses went on peacefully without rancour or bitterness among members.

According to him, "the ward congresses went on smoothly and members turned out en masse. This shows Governor Gbenga Daniel's resolve to ensure that next year's election is free and fair."

There was a heavy presence of policemen at each of the wards in the state capital while PDP members queued up to participate in the exercise.

Delta

In Delta State, the congress was also peaceful as members filed out to elect 25 delegates each from the 265 wards in the state.

The exercise went on smoothly in all the 12 wards in Oshimili South (Local Government) Area which hosts Asaba, the state capital and nearby towns in the state.

When THISDAY visited the wards, there was a heavy presence of policemen while party members queued up to participate in the exercise in an open secret ballot system.

The party in the state had in a statement Friday directed that ward electoral panel of three credible persons from each ward be constituted by the state executive committee and posted to various wards for the purpose of the ward congress.

At the Wards five (Umuaji), seven (Umuagu) and eight (Ugbomanta) as well as West End areas of the state capital, the election started early in the day with the arrival of returning officers even as canopies were provided for the people due to the scorching sun.

At the ward six (Ogbeke square) at about 11.25 am, the exercise was yet to take place as eligible voters waited for the officials to conduct the congress.

Members of the National Working Committee (NWC) of the party were in the state to educate stakeholders in the state on the party's preparation for the forthcoming general elections.

Kogi

In Lokoja, Kogi State, thousands of PDP members yesterday in Lokoja participated in the party's congresses in an orderly and peaceful manner.

Of Lokoja's five local government areas, there were reports that four of them adopted consensus candidates.

However, at the fifth ward, youths and elders could not reach a consensus and decided to hold two separate elections. Majority of the youths supported one Ahmed Usman, but the elders supported Bawa Yakubu.

A handful of policemen were seen under the supervision of the Kogi State Commissioner of Police, Mr. Samuel Adekunle, at the Paparanda Square maintaining law and order.

FCT

In FCT, Abuja, the congresses were also peaceful.

At the Kuje Area Council, the election of delegates, which took place at the township stadium was concluded as early as noon.

Malam Mohammed Dogara, who was the leader of the panel that conducted the congress at the centre, said he was delighted with the orderly conduct of the exercise.

"The PDP members in Kuje are very cooperative, and I am happy that the congress was conducted in a very peaceful manner," Dogara said.

In Kuje Central and Durumi wards in Abuja Municipal, as well as the Byazin and Kubwa wards in Bwari Area Council and other centres visited, five spaces were reserved for women.

According to Alhaji Dangiwa Karu, the head of the election panel for Durumi ward, "PDP leadership directed us to reserve five seats for women to encourage more women participation in politics."

is no way we would go ahead with such a plan without consulting you."

The family also explained the need for PDP to ensure that the primaries does not lead to acrimony so as to enable the party benefit from the building rancour within the Action Congress led by Governor Bola Tinubu.

It was gathered that Obasanjo in his reply prayed for her and gave her the go-ahead just as he has always done for all those who sought his blessings and consultation.

When contacted Chief George who was at the meeting, told THISDAY last night that what the meeting was not an endorsement of her candidature as it was normal for the President to

give his go-ahead to all those aspirants who consulted with him.

According to him, there are 6,125 delegates in Lagos that would vote to decide who would be the PDP governorship candidate and it is not possible for one individual to control these 6,125 delegates. The success of any aspirant, he said, depends on individual hardwork, dedicated and mobilisation capacity, amongst other factors.

The list of governorship aspirants for Lagos state as at the last count are well over a dozen within PDP alone.

Though, Mrs. Williams is not of Lagos origin, her supporters are already saying it loud that by virtue of her marriage, she is a Lagosian.