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ThisDay question

150 Killed in Bauchi Religious Crisis

From Segun Awofadeji in Bauchi, 07.27.2009

Bauchi, the capital city of Bauchi State, was awash with bloodbath early morning yesterday as scores of religious fundamentalists were killed after a failed attack on a police station.

Official estimates put the death toll at 32, but the figure is not less than 150, according to correspondents who said they counted the bodies.

A group called Boko Haram (Education is sin), which has been campaigning for the imposition of Shariah (Islamic law) on the 36 states of the Nigerian federation, was said to have sparked off the crisis when its members launched an attack on the station.

Reuters news agency quoted a member of the group, who was wounded during the initial attack on the station, as saying the group wanted to clean the (Nigerian) system which is polluted by western education and uphold Shariah all over the country.

The police has (have) been arresting our leaders; that is why we decided to retaliate, said the man, who gave his name only as Abdullah, according to the news agency.

Meanwhile, the state Governor, Mallam Isa Yuguda, has described the fundamentalists as militants, urging Nigerians to see it as a national issue.

Their plan is to attack everybody, he said, while announcing a curfew from 9pm to 6am. Governors should brace up and clean their states of this rubbish.

THISDAY gathered that the sect struck around the Federal Low-cost Housing Estate and Dutsen Tanshi areas in the early hours of yesterday. They were said to be reacting to the refusal of the Bauchi State government to allow a free atmosphere to publicly practise their religion as well as win more souls to the sect.

The newspaper learnt that members of the sect had been planning a demonstration in Bauchi for a long time now but were not given the chance because of the fear by government that their doctrine, if allowed to be preached publicly, could cause a religious crisis. Their teachings are regarded as completely out of tune with the teachings of other Islamic sects, especially regarding peaceful co-existence.

The sect members, in their hundreds, trooped to the Dutsen Tanshi Police Station in the early hours of the day and attacked it, chasing away the few policemen on duty and forcing themselves into the station before destroying anything they could lay their hands on.

But they could not break into the armoury which was under lock and key. After a distress call by the policemen to the Command headquarters, a reinforcement of armed policemen, including men from the mobile unit, was drafted to the area to ward off the fundamentalists during which some of them were killed and several others injured.

The Bauchi State Police Command, through the PPRO, Mohammed Barau, confirmed the incident, saying more policemen had been drafted to the area to maintain order and security.

He said other security measures had been taken to ensure that the crisis did not spread beyond the area, adding that as soon as the state command got clearance from the Police Headquarters in Abuja, it would officially make a pronouncement.

As at the time of this report, the combined military and police patrol teams had gone round the villages in Bauchi to fish out some of the fundamentalists who had escaped from their Bauchi base.

In his reaction, Minister of Police Affairs, Ibrahim Yakubu Lame, declared that the Inspector General of Police (IG), Mr. Ogonnaya Onovo, had been ordered to ensure peace and security of lives and properties of citizens across the country.

He said inasmuch as the government was committed to freedom of religion, it would not condone any fundamentalist who would bring about breakdown of law and order in the country.

Though the Director of Press Affairs to the Governor, Mohammed Maigari Khanna, and other top government functionaries were seen at the Police Command Headquarters, they refused to make any comment on the development, but promised that as soon as the situation was properly studied, government would make its position known.

The Nigerian Taliban, according to an AFP report, made its debut in 2004 when it set up a base dubbed Afghanistan in Kanamma village in northern Yobe State, on the border with Niger, from where it attacked police outposts and killed police officers.

Its membership is mainly drawn from university dropouts.

Religious clashes between Muslims and Christians in Bauchi State led to the death of five people in February.

More than 700 people died last November in Jos, capital of Plateau State, when a political feud over a local election degenerated into bloody confrontation between Muslims and Christians.

Meanwhile, major streets in Jos, the capital city of Plateau State, was yesterday, deserted as armoured tanks were stationed at strategic points within the metropolis.

Education is Sin

Boko Haram, the sect fingered in the latest Bauchi religious crisis, means education is sin. The sect wants Islamic law imposed on the federation, while also campaigning against Western education. They have similar beliefs with the Taliban group in Afghanistan.

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