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One Feared Killed, 27 Arrested as Normalcy Returns to Varsity

From Christopher Isiguzo in Enugu, 11.18.2009

Enugu

The crisis in Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), which led to a three-day protest by students assumed a new dimension yesterday as a first year Microbiology student, Mr. Victor Mgbefiofor from Achi in Oji River Local Government Area of the State was reportedly killed while several others sustained varying degrees of injuries allegedly from police gun-shots.

The students' protest grounded business activities in the capital city for several days.

Although police authorities denied that any student was killed during the clash between the security operatives and the students, they however confirmed that 27 students of the university, including a female were arrested for allegedly engaging in criminal activities during the demonstration, said to have turned violent.

Normalcy has however returned to the capital city yesterday as the protest abated.

Assistant Commissioner of Police in-charge of Criminal Investigations Department (CID) of the State Command, Mr. Isaac Akimoyede, said while parading the arrested students at the police headquarters in Enugu yesterday that the protest by ESUT students later resulted to wanton destruction of property including street lights, bus stop stands and modern dustbin stands provided by the state government.

Also destroyed in the incident, according to Akimoyede, were Zenith Bank billboards located at Bissalla Road junction, adding that the students attempted to snatch a car belonging to one Mr. Ike Ifeanyichukwu Samuel, having stolen his Nokia handset valued at N70, 000 and a cash of N7, 000 contained in an envelope inside his car.

The Assistant Commissioner said efforts by a team of policemen drafted to Okpara Square where the students had earlier assembled to persuade them not to disrupt public peace fell on deaf ears as the students violently mobilized into the major streets and roads in Enugu.

"At Otigba junction Enugu, the students set tyres on fire having barricaded the roads. Private and commercial vehicles were not left out in the attack by the rampaging students. Windscreens of vehicles were smashed by the students, stones were rained on policemen who were on hand to maintain the peace," he said. He alleged that the students had on Thursday and Friday last week unleashed mayhem at the popular Ozalla junction on Enugu-Port Harcourt Expressway, adding that the students held the road users to ransom for many hours by blocking the popular dual carriage way forcing some travelers to cancel their journey for those two days.

The police had tough time trying to dismantle the road blocks put in place by the rampaging students at the said Ozalla junction.

Akimoyede said, noting that a situation whereby students would troop onto major roads in the state to cause damage to life and property would not be tolerated by the police.

According to him, the arrested students would be investigated and if found culpable they would be prosecuted, adding that the police had taken necessary measures to ensure that calm was restored to the institution.

One of the arrested students, Emmanuel Agbo, who identified himself as a final year student said the students were only on a peaceful protest to express their anger over the renewed industrial action embarked upon by lecturers of the university barely one month after their five months strike was called off.

Agbo, who is the Secretary General, Faculty of Environmental Science, denied the involvement of the students in any criminal activity saying some hoodlums who were present when the policemen fired canisters of teargas to disperse them may have been responsible for the destructions experienced during the protest.

He called on Governor Sullivan Chime to quickly intervene in the crisis in ESUT saying the students can not afford to remain at home because of incessant strikes by lecturers over non-payment of their entitlements by the government. Reacting to the development, Commissioner for Information, Chuks

Ugwoke said that government was worried by the dimension the students' demonstration assumed, accusing opposition politicians as being the masterminds of the crisis that ensued. Ugwoke alleged plot by some evil-minded politicians and their agents to bring its efforts to ridicule and contempt, through an orchestrated campaign of violence and calumny against the people of the state and top officials of government including Governor Sullivan Chime.

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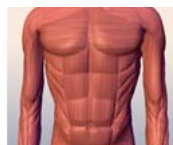
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