

Mayhem in Ibadan •As NURTW men, policemen clash •4 killed

Tribune

Published 25/02/2011 02:29:06

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Written by Adebayo Waheed, Saheed Salawu and Dare Adekanmbi Friday, 25 February 2011

IT was like a scene in a war movie in Ibadan, the Oyo State capital, on Thursday, as members of the proscribed National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) loyal to Abdul-Lateef Akinsola, also known as Tokyo, vehemently resisted the demolition of their secretariat building by the Oyo State government.

A policeman, an unidentified driver of one of the bulldozers drafted for the demolition and two others were reportedly killed in a cross-fire between the policemen and members of the outlawed union. However, the state commissioner of police said no policeman was killed.

The state government, it will be recalled, proscribed the union late last year following violent clashes between members of the rival factions of the transport workers and announced its intention to demolish the secretariat building located at Olomi area in Ibadan.

According to an eyewitness, trouble started around 7.45 a.m. when armed policemen arrived in more than 40 patrol vehicles and four Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) to give effect to the order.

The policemen were said to have shot into the air to drive away an army of ferocious members of Tokyo's faction, who had got wind of government's plan and allegedly formed a brickwall of gun-wielding men around the secretariat building to forestall its destruction.

The driver of one of the bulldozers deployed by government was reportedly killed and the vehicle set ablaze.

The other bulldozer and the articulated lorry that brought them were badly damaged in the clash.

The atmosphere was very charged as the NURTW members, in large numbers and people, mostly youths in their 20s, made bonfires on the roads leading to the secretariat building, including the Academy portion of the Lagos-Ibadan expressway.

For close to two and a half hours, the expressway was a no-go area because of the clash. The highway was opened at 11.00 a.m. by some of the remaining mobile policemen who put out the fire.

Thick black smoke was seen billowing into the sky from about five kilometres to the scene. Shop owners hurriedly closed their shops while their economic activities in and around the area were paralysed.

The factional NURTW members were said to have overpowered the police detachment with the security operatives taking to their heels to avoid further casualties in the ensuing gun duel.

The early morning pandemonium created huge traffic gridlocks on the adjoining roads as motorists detoured to safe areas from the trouble spots.

When contacted, the state Commissioner of Police, Baba Adisa Bolanta, said that he was aware of the incident at the union's secretariat complex but said it was not the policemen that led the attempt to demolish the

NURTW building.

He said it was the state government that was behind the exercise, adding that the policemen had to provide security when there were reports of shooting.

He said that no policeman was killed, because the policemen were under instruction not to fire any shot.

When told that three people were killed, he said it was the members of the union that might have shot one another and not the police.

According to him, he halted the exercise when the shooting was becoming too much.

Meanwhile, the chairman, caretaker committee of Oluyole Local Government Area of Oyo State, Alhaji Kehinde Olaosebikan, has assured the people of Olomi and the entire local government area of the safety of their life and property at all times, just as he charged landlords and residents to stop harbouring criminals in their houses and shops.

Alhaji Olosebikan gave the assurance in a statement in Ibadan, on Thursday, on the public disturbance perpetrated by some individuals at Olomi/ Academy area, on Thursday.

Olaosebikan said that the government was disturbed by the activities of some elements who had continued to terrorise the people of the area and making the area unsafe in spite of all the efforts of the landlords and community leaders in the area to rid the community of them.

The chairman explained that the security checks at the area, on Thursday morning, were in response to the petitions and appeals made by landlords and other members of the public on the menace of the thugs and miscreants in the area.

The chairman, who commended the action of the security agencies, called on the people of the area to continue with their normal daily activities, stating that the security agencies were on top of the situation.

Olaosebikan, however, charged the residents, landlords and community leaders in the area not to harbour criminals in their houses and shops and give their total support to all the efforts being made by the security agents in their bid to restore sanity for peace and progress to reign in the area.

Olaosebikan stated further that the continued stay of the hoodlums in any disguise would not do the people, the community, the local government area and the state any good.

“As a responsible and responsive government, the government of the day would continue to do its best in protecting the life and property of the citizenry and do everything possible to protect them at all times,” he added.

Alhaji Olaosebikan said that the issue at stake was the safety of life and property of the people of Olomi area and it should be seen as such without any introduction of any extraneous sentiment into it.

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