

8-yr-old girl shot dead, five others killed in Ajah renewed hostilities

By Albert Akpor

JUST when residents of Ajah, a suburb in Eti-Osa Local Government Area Lagos, thought of heaving a sigh of relief, with the intervention of the state government after an avalanche of crises which claimed lives and property late last year, the entire community again went up in flames recently.

This time, it was much more vicious than imagined. As usual, the clash left in its trail cries of woes and agony as an unidentified 8-year-old pupil rushing to school that ill fated morning was cut down by hot lead of bullet by one of the warring factions. The little girl was not left alone in the hostilities as five other persons equally paid the supreme price. They were allegedly macheted to death. Markets in and around Ajah that usually attract patronage from far and near were razed down. Even the awesomeness and reverence of a palace could not deter the warring youths as they attempted to set ablaze the magnificently built Palace of Olumegbon of Ajah. But for the stout presence of fierce looking armed anti-riot police men keeping vigil at the palace, the entirety of the Palace would have been razed completely. Nonetheless, expensive furniture including louver glasses were destroyed while the entire walls were riddled with bullet holes.

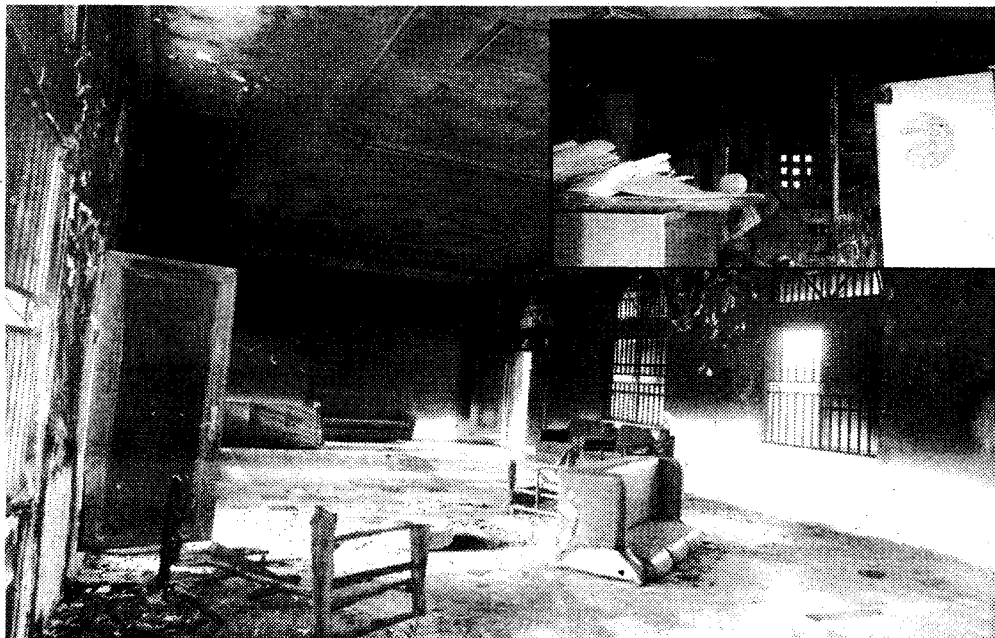
City scope investigations revealed that the crisis is deeply rooted in the determination of ownership of vast area of land in the community. And this is between the Olumegbon family on the one hand and the Ojupon family on the other. Whereas, the Olumegbon claimed the land in dispute is his ancestral land, the Ojupons are making counter claims. Curiously, the Ojupon family are allegedly pointing accusing fingers at the state government which they said was behind the unending crisis in the hitherto peaceful community.

To lay credence to their grievances, some perceived aggrieved youths threw caution to the wind while the state government and the gubernatorial candidate of Action Congress AC, Chief Babatunde Fashola, were on campaign tour of the area recently, disrupted the rally and attacked both the Governor, Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu and the entire entourage. Several people in the entourage went home with broken skulls and bruised knees.

The skirmishes continued unabated for almost four days running resulting in the disruption of social and business activities in the area. The high point of the almost one week carnage was the attack on the Palace by those perceived to be opposing the overlordship of Fatai Olumegbon of Ajah who of course, is at the centre of the crisis. However, the police came in immediately and arrested no fewer than 17 persons suspected to be brains



A recent scene of public disturbance.



Damaged buildings and (inset) shop after the Ajah carnage.

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behind the incessant clashes in the area.

When **City scope** spoke with Chief Fatai Olumegbon, the man at the centre of the crisis on the carnage in his house and the attempt to his life, the man who could not hide his discontentment over the unending wars in Ajah exploded; "it has been a recurrent decimal in Ajah, I mean the frequency of land crisis. What they fail to understand is that I am the overlord of Ajah and there is nothing anybody can do about it."

"The Supreme Court, the highest court of the land has confirmed this. The matter has been rested in 1948 by the highest court in the land. The Supreme Court has ordered us to go back to the status-quo. I am a peace-loving person and I have constantly called for a round table meeting, but they will not come. This is unfortunate. But one thing is certain, and that is, I will defend what belongs to me with the last blood because if I fail to do that, my children will curse me.

They are accusing the state government of siding me, now, have you ever seen any state Governor fanning the ember of unrest in his state? The government knows that the White Paper is in my favour; that is why they are doing what they are doing. I am a peace-loving person and I have respect for the law of the land. Why do you think that I will fight for what do not belong to me? If you are from Edo or Delta State and you have no ancestral linkage in Lagos, for instance, do you go and begin to contest ownership of land in Lagos? This is one of the questions people should ask themselves."

"In the recent attack, I woke up around 6.00am and had a call that hoodlums came through the water and Allege Junction with a view to razing down the Palace. So, I quickly called the DPO and Area Commander and they brought in their men there and then; thank God that the god and goddess of water has vindicated me because Olumegbon's name is always a recurring core decimal in Lagos State. Now see what they did to the Palace? If they burnt my Palace today, do that tomorrow and we cause

havoc along the axis and if it doesn't settle, don't you think innocent people will suffer it?

The Supreme Court judgement dated 9th December 2002 confirmed Olumegbon as the overlord of Ajah. The Justice Morinike Onalaja tribunal they are talking about is a year and three months ago.

We went to the tribunal when there was crisis, it was just like an ad-hoc committee. They called us and made recommendations and they promised to take them to the government and come out with their white paper and this is yet to be done. So, why are they killing themselves over nothing?"

Attempts by **City scope** to get the reaction of the other party in the feud was not successful. However as it is now, even residents of Ajah are still gripped with fear; wondering how a reprisal attack from the Olumegbon family whose Palace was touched in the recent crisis would come up; questions that have perpetually remained on the lips of observers and concerned citizens are, will there be an end to this upheaval?