

4 killed as military confronts armed youths in Benue community



...Monarch abducted, palace of another razed

...We recorded death of a student — Police

By Peter Duru

Makurdi —Four persons were feared dead yesterday, including two students of Government Science Secondary School, Jato-Aka, when soldiers allegedly opened fire on some armed youths at Ikpengezwa settlement along Jato-Aka-Kashimbila Road in Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State.

The incident reportedly left some of the students and locals with bullet wounds while a traditional ruler was taken hostage in the crisis that ensued.

According to a source in the area, the incident occurred Tuesday afternoon while residents were returning from the burial of the Kindred Head in Nzaav, Yaav Council Ward, Turan District of the council, Chief Hanave Laha.

He said: “It happened in my village. And my village is 10 kilometres away from Jato Aka. My village has been taken over by armed herdsmen and you cannot go there without proper security.

“The late chief has to be buried in the community, all the burial rites were done Tuesday outside the community. So, we needed to go and bury him in the village. The burial committee requested that the military men that were providing security for a mining company should help to escort them to bury him.”

He said the military personnel allegedly requested for money to enable them mobilise and move with them to the burial site.

He said: “But we did not have that kind of money. So, the burial committee mobilised the youths who rallied and got ten guns and went to bury the man.

“On their way back, the soldiers, who are protecting miners heard that the youths provided security for the burial they went and accosted them. During the quarrel, they opened fire on the youths. So, it was during the engagement that they killed a student and two youths instantly.

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“As a result of that, the people started protesting. And in the course of the protest, they killed another student and injured many persons.”

He said the people, during the protest marched to the palace of the Mue-Ter Ichongo, Simon Baver and razed his house and palace.

He said: “The people did that because, as they said, the man is complacent in the handling of the activities of the military and armed herdsmen in the area.

“As we speak, there is so much tension in the area and government needs to act fast to calm the people down because one of our chiefs has been taken away and the people are demanding for his release.”

Meanwhile, the Chairman of Kwande council, Vitalis Neji and the Ter Kwande, HRH, Timothy Ahile as well as the President-General of Kwande United People’s Organisation, Simon Aloko, who addressed the people appealed for calm, assuring that the government would step into the matter.

Reacting, the state Police Command in a statement by its spokesperson, Udemé Edet, said a student was killed by stray bullet during the incident.

According to her, “The military team was coming back from patrol and on the way sighted some hoodlums with firearms on a motorbike, while chasing them, the hoodlums opened fire at the military and the military repelled them.

“It was in that process that stray bullets hit three students of Government Science Secondary School, Jato-Aka. On arrival at the hospital, sadly one of the students was confirmed dead while two others are responding to treatment. Investigation is ongoing.”