

Bandits kill 3, abduct 64 in Zamfara

From Yusha'u A. Ibrahim & Abdullahi Abdulrahman Chakwa, Gusau

Bandits were said to have killed three persons and abducted at least 64 others on Saturday at Fegin Baza village in Tsafe Local Government Area of Zamfara State.

Daily Trust yesterday gathered that children and women were among the abductees taken to an unknown destination.

Four other people were said to have sustained gunshot wounds during the attack and were taken to Tsafe General Hospital.

Among those killed was a chieftain of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Umaru Moriki, along the Gusau-tsafe Road, near Fegin village.

Moriki, who was said to be gunned down while travelling to Kaduna, was the Sarkin Fadan Moriki.

The incident happened a day after the Minister of State for Defence and former government of the state, Bello Mohammed Matawalle, visited the state and announced that the Defence Headquarters had deployed fresh troops.

The minister had also told the people of the state that he would be meeting the troops to give the marching order to deal decisively with criminals. "Zamfara will no longer bow to fear. We are taking every necessary step to secure every community," he had told the crowd.

During his visit, Matawalle also questioned the utilization of federal allocations received so far within the last two years. "Zamfara has collected over one trillion naira. Show me what they have done with it," he had said.

Zamfara State is one of the epicentres of banditry in the North West with recurrent attacks on villages, highways and farming communities.

Despite multiple military operations, peace initiatives and security deployments, large numbers of armed groups continue to operate across forested areas of the state.

The latest abductions in Tsafe add to a long list of killings, mass kidnappings and cattle rustling incidents that have forced thousands of residents to flee their homes.

In recent months, many communities in Zurmi, Shinkafi, Maradun, Tsafe and Bungudu Local Government Areas of the state had come under attacks which had left many villagers displaced, compelled to pay levies and ransoms to bandits.

Witnesses told our correspondents that the bandits, who struck at Fegin Baza on Saturday, were over 30 in number and rode on motorbikes.

The attackers were said to have opened fire on Moriki's car and other vehicles.

Speaking to Daily Trust yesterday, a survivor, Abdulrahman Ahmad Dole, said the bandits began shooting immediately after overtaking motorists, including the convoy of the state Commissioner of Police.

He said the bandits blocked the Gusau-Funtua Road during the operation that lasted for 15 minutes.

Abdulrahman also confirmed that the bandits kidnapped an unspecified number of people.

"They kidnapped all the people conveyed by a commercial Golf Volkswagen and others," he said.

Narrating how the bandits carried out the attack, Abdulrahman said: "The bandits might have targeted the Zamfara State Police Commissioner because we were attacked minutes after the CP's convoy overtook our vehicle. Few minutes after the Commissioner of Police passed over the vehicle, we found ourselves in the middle of the bandits.

"We were in front of the Commissioner of Police's convoy, just about a short distance from the bandits. Our vehicle was overtaken by the convoy and the next thing we heard were gunshots from different directions.

"I quickly opened the car's door and ran into the bush. The bandits ran after me with



■ Ambassador Moriki

their motorcycles shooting, but I jumped into the primary school and hid inside before soldiers came to my rescue.

'We knew they were coming to attack us'

A residents of Fegin Baza, Malam Musa Yusuf, said the village had earlier received intelligence about a planned attack and mobilised vigilantes overnight.

He said the bandits eventually stormed the area around 10am, but failed to penetrate the village owing to the resistance by the vigilantes.

He said the bandits later turned to the highway where they carried out the mass abduction.

He said that two persons, who were earlier abducted were from the village, were later released after N500,000 was paid as ransom.

Yusuf said: "We were informed on Thursday about the bandits' plan to attack our village. So, we mobilised our

local vigilante members and spent Friday night patrolling the village. The bandits did not come until on Saturday around 10am, they came in large numbers and started shooting into the air. We were lucky, our people were all around.

"So, they did not gain access into the village. It was after they realised they could not overpower our people that they changed their plan and blocked the Gusau-Funtua Highway and operated for a few minutes. It was during that operation that they killed Hon. Moriki."

Also speaking, Ambassador Hussein Moriki said he was one of those that spent last moments with the late Moriki.

"We spoke on phone and about 45 minutes after I received a call that bandits blocked and attacked commuters along the Tsafe and I knew Sarkin Fada was on his way there, I tried his phone number, no response, I then quickly drove towards there. On reaching Kwatarkwashi, it

was confirmed to me that he was killed," he said.

The Minister of State for Defence, Matawalle attended the funeral prayer of the late Sarkin Fada, held at the Federal Low-cost, Tudun Wada Juma'at Mosque, Gusau. The prayer was led by Imam Alkali Abdullahi Yakubu.

Condoling the family, Matawalle said Moriki's death was a monumental loss to the state and the nation at large, considering his philanthropic activities that touched lives of many citizens, especially his neighbours and relatives.

Another attack near Gusau

Later on Saturday night, another bandit group were said to have invaded two locations on the outskirts of Gusau metropolis, abducting residents.

A resident of the area identified as Yusuf Zaza said the bandits entered from behind the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) station, kidnapped people and proceeded to the Bulunku area.

Another resident of the Bulunku area, Malan Hussein, said the bandits' shootings scared the people of the area.

"They kidnapped one woman and her son apart from those they kidnapped behind NTA station," Hussein said.

When contacted for a reaction to the recent attacks in Zamfara, the Commissioner of Police in the state, Ibrahim Maikaba, did answer several calls to his mobile telephone line.



■ Photos of a car involved in an explosion at Yar Tasha village, Maru Local Government of Zamfara State.