

Angry protesters marched to the palace of the paramount ruler of the Idoma, the Och'Idoma, carrying the corpses of victims following fresh attacks in Benue

concerns repeatedly raised by residents.

According to him, the man's elder brothers, who were among those killed, had often warned him against his alleged activities.

Residents also claimed the suspect fled before the attack and that his house, located within the same family compound, was left untouched by the assailants, raising further suspicion.

Sources said some community members were searching for him.

When contacted, the Police Public Relations Officer, Alfred Alabo, said he had yet to be briefed on the incident.

Protest as 18 killed in fresh Benue attack

A protest broke out in Otukpo on Sunday after gunmen killed at least 18 people, including a pregnant woman, in separate attacks on two communities in Otukpo Local Government Area of Benue State.

The attackers invaded Akpachi village in Ugboju community, where two people were killed on their farm on Saturday evening. They later attacked the Otukpo-Nobi community in the early hours of Sunday, killing 16 others, mostly women and children. Several others were injured.

Residents said the attackers operated between 3am and 5am while most people were asleep.

Witnesses told our correspondent that the death toll rose to 18 from the initial 10 as of Sunday evening as the search team recovered more bodies from the surrounding bushes in

the affected communities.

The killings triggered outrage in Otukpo town. Angry youths and other residents carried some of the victims' bodies to the palace of the Och'Idoma, Dr John Odogbo Eliagwu, in a peaceful protest, demanding urgent government intervention and improved security.

Also, angry youths blocked all entrances to Otukpo, a development that took a long time before the Commissioner of Police in the state was allowed to gain entry into the town and the affected communities.

One of the female protesters who spoke to journalists in Makurdi on the telephone said 16 people were killed in Otukpo Nobi, including her sister and two children.

Another protester narrated that a three-year-old infant's head was spattered while on the back of his fleeing mother, and a seven-year-old who was sweeping the front of the local church around 5am was gunned down just as the clan head of Ai-Ochaikpigu, Ebegidi Ukwanya, almost ninety years old, was shot on his arm and stomach.

Chairman of Otukpo LGA, Prince Maxwell Ogiri, has, however, linked Sunday's attack on Otukpo-Nobi community to the recent killing of the Chairman of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), Alhaji Ardo Risku Muhammad, warning that reprisals were anticipated.

"I am sure the news of the death of Ardo Risku Muhammad is no longer news to you, and if you know the mindset of the people we are dealing with, you should also know that reprisals

were likely to occur," he said.

Ogiri disclosed that the violence began on Friday evening when suspected bandits attacked farmers at Apachi village in Otukpo LGA.

He told journalists in Makurdi that: "Three persons went to the farm to work, and the bandits came and killed two of them. One escaped and alerted the community. The following day, we mobilised to the farm, recovered the two bodies and buried them on Saturday."

The chairman added that despite efforts to comb surrounding bushes and strengthen vigilance, the attackers struck again around 4am on Sunday, noting, "We woke up to the news that they had besieged Otukpo-Nobi, killing several people and injuring many others."

Ogiri said security had also been beefed up in the area.

Meanwhile, the Benue State Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), DSP Udeme Edet, appealed for time to comment on the incident, saying she had yet to receive details of the attack.

Reacting to the incident, Benue State Governor, Hyacinth Alia, described the killings as "barbaric and inhuman" and a direct assault on the peace and security of the state.

In a statement by his Chief Press Secretary, Sir Tersoo Kula, the governor directed security agencies to immediately intensify surveillance and patrols in the affected communities and border areas, collaborate with security operatives in neighbouring states, and ensure that those responsible for the attacks are tracked down,