

NEWS

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Inter-communal clashes kill 48 in Niger – Report



Intercommunal violence in western central Nigeria killed at least 48 people on Wednesday, a security report seen by AFP said on Thursday.

The report, prepared for the United Nations, said “herder militia” armed with machetes raided farmers from the Kamuku ethnic group in the town of Tegna in Niger state, “killing at least 42 people”, prompting a reprisal that killed six herders working in a plantation.

Niger state is already reeling from deadly violence by jihadists as well as kidnapping-for-ransom and cattle rustling gangs called bandits.

A local community leader Abdullahi Alhassan told AFP that herders from the Fulani ethnic group invaded the area, attacking residents with machetes and burning others alive in their homes.

“The raid was reprisals for the killing last month of the herders’ patriarch they blamed on vigilantes from Kamuku farmers,” Alhassan said.

Kamuku farmers launched retaliatory attacks on three herding settlements around Tegna, also burning homes and killing at least two herders, Alhassan said.

Last month Kamuku farmers killed Muhammad Shehu, a respected community leader among the herders, over the sharing of money donated to the community by a politician, the security report said.

The killing of the herders’ leader led to “a cycle of communal rifts between the two communities”, it said.

Niger, known for its huge gold deposits and considered to be a food basket, has been terrorised by bandits and jihadists who carry out deadly raids and displacing agrarian communities.

A month into the annual rainy season which runs between June and September, a huge number of farmers have failed to access their lands due to attacks by bandits and jihadists who impose hefty levies on farmers in exchange for permission to work their farms.

International aid agencies have warned that displacement of communities across the north and centre poses risk to Nigeria’s food security.

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In its latest advisory on Thursday, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) warned that Nigeria’s food security is “worsening faster than previously

anticipated.”

WFP said more than 17 million people are experiencing “crisis, emergency, or catastrophic levels” of hunger in northern Nigeria.

Illegal mining, from which jihadists and bandits benefit, partly drives the violence in some regions of Nigeria, according to officials.

Nigeria’s northwestern and central regions regularly see deadly violence over land and water exploitation between farming and herding communities, which has worsened in recent years because of population pressure and climate change.