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30 die as farmers, cattle rearers clash

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Governor Aliyu Doma

AT LEAST 30 people died in an attack that lasted several hours at Udeni Gida village in Nasarawa local government of Nasarawa State at the weekend. Nasarawa State police commissioner Shehu Babalola confirmed to Daily Trust on telephone yesterday that there was fighting between cattle herders and peasant farmers in the community. He however said he would release more details today, Monday.

Babalola said the clash has been a "perennial problem" in the area. He said a fight broke out between the herders and the farmers in the same community on December 6, but that the police were able to

restore normalcy to the area. However, he said, the crisis broke out again at the weekend, although he withheld details, including the number of persons killed.

The commissioner said two units of anti-riot policemen from MOPOL 38 in Akwanga and some army personnel were brought in to quell the crisis. He said "normalcy is now restored".

The lawmaker representing Udege/Loko in the state House of Assembly (which includes Udeni-Gida), Mohammed Baba Ibaku, however told Daily Trust more than 30 persons died in weekend's flare up. He said, "Day before yesterday (Friday), we discovered 20 corpses. Yesterday, 12 corpses were recovered, making it over and above 30 corpses."

Ibaku added that dozens of houses and other properties including crops were razed down in the melee. He said two weeks ago, a group of herders drove their cattle into a rice farm, following which a farmer protested. He said this led to a clash in which the farmer lost his life. "But we held back our people and pleaded for calm, only for them to be woken up at about 6am of Friday by gunshots from some herders who laid ambush around the village."

"They opened fire and killed the people", he added, alleging that the gunmen who invaded the village were said to have been brought in from the neighbouring Kogi and Taraba states. The lawmaker commended the prompt response from both the police and Army, although he said "we need more security personnel in the area because we hear the people are still hiding in the bush and can attack again".

Mr. Patrick Boga, head of the Livestock Division of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources who visited traditional rulers in the state last month, said a grazing route that will run through four neighbouring states - Nasarawa, Plateau, Benue and Ebonyi is on the way for the herders as part of federal government's efforts to tackle the incessant conflicts between the herders and farmers. He said with the planned demarcation of the route, farmers should stay from lands designated as grazing routes. He also said 30 metres of land would be marked as range for the grazing route.

Contacted for his comments last night, Sarkin Fulani Nasarawa Senator Walid Jibrin said he was worried that both the rearers and farmers in the area decided to resort to violence instead of dialogue in settling a minor difference.

Jibrin said he has met with both the police commissioner and the state director of the State Security Service (SSS) at their respective headquarters in Lafia, after which he returned to Nasarawa local government to assist in restoration of the peace.

He said he was disappointed that both parties failed to take their differences to the appropriate authorities as has been outlined by the various committees working for peaceful co-existence between cattle rearers and farmers. He named the efforts of the Sultan of Sokoto and Governor Gabriel Suswam of Benue State, Governors Aliyu Akwe Doma of Nasarawa State and Murtala Nyako of Adamawa State and the various committees set up for peace, calling on all parties to shun violence and adopt dialogue in settling quarrels.

He called on those who have fled the trouble spots to return to the area and assist the police and Army personnel in fishing out the trouble makers. He blamed the escalation of the crisis to "rumours which some people are spreading."

Nasarawa local government chairman Alhaji Mohammed Sani Bawa, who also spoke to Daily Trust, said "the truth is that both Fulani and farmers must live together", saying however that the crisis was regrettable. He advocated for a special court that will adjudicate between herders and farmers over such crisis, saying only when trouble makers know that the law will trace and punish them that they can begin to restrain themselves from causing trouble.

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