

# Story behind Zamfara's Oct. 1st massacre



THE robbers set a local fuel depot ablaze, said the villagers

Lawan Danjuma Adamu, Gusau

**T**WO hens and about half a dozen chicks were pecking on a corner of the bungalow, the only signs of life in the building that was until last Saturday, a home to three happy families. The occupants have been killed and the rest driven by fear. Alhaji Aliyu headed the extended families that were quartered in the building. Adjacent to the apartment he shared with his wife and younger children are two other apartments, each occupied by two of his sons, Lawwali and Nura, as well as their own families. The unusual emptiness, broken doors and bloodstained rooms speak volumes of the gory incident that had taken place a week ago on the 1st of October, 2011,

on Nigeria's Independence Day.

The house is just one of dozens that came under attack when gunmen invaded Lingyado village – located over 100 kilometres from Zamfara State capital, Gusau, and accessible on motorcycles, through untarred, bumpy and dusty road – on an alleged revenge mission. Alhaji Aliyu and other members of the household were asleep when the assailants, numbering almost 100 and armed with sophisticated weapons and cutlasses, descended on the village, some minutes past 5am. They broke into the compound, and one after the other, the three heads of the extended families were pinned to the ground, in their rooms – mostly, in the presence of their wives and children – and slaughtered.

It was in the wake of that decimating assault that the surviving occupants fled,

without even waiting to mourn their dead. A number of other families have also suffered similar fate as the attackers, spreading like a plague, went house-to-house, shooting and butchering. In another, the gunmen singled out a room and ferociously attacked its occupants using automatic weapons without even opening the door, riddling the tin-sheet door with bullet-holes, killing the owner, Malama Aisha Muhammad. As if on a mission to exterminate the entire household, they turned to her children, killing her eldest son, Husain and shooting his brother, Saad, who is now receiving treatment at Federal Medical Centre (FMC) Gusau.

While in another house, they killed a popular baker in the village, Idi Maibredi. His wife luckily survived with gunshot wounds. One of the villagers jumped into a deep well

to escape the attack. Luckily for him, they robbers could not trace his whereabouts after a thorough search of his house, but he almost drowned. At another section of the village, a labourer was met reciting the Qur'an, but was not spared. "Some pages of the Qur'an were splashed with his blood after they shot him," the Village Head of Lingyado, Alhaji Dalha Mohammed, said.

When Sani Gwamna realized that his village was under attack from a stronger enemy, he ran out of his house only to be met by the attackers on their way in, dashing back, he scaled over the fence and ran to the residence of his parents. His aim was to alert them of the danger in another part of the town, which already headed their way. "When I found my way into the house, I went to my father, telling him that we are under attack. I told him that the attackers have superior firepower. 'Leave before they come, father', I told him," Gwamna related shakily. But before any member of the house could escape, the bandits arrived. "I climbed out over the fence, while they went in shot my father, Malam Nazuwaira and killed my brother," Gwamna said.

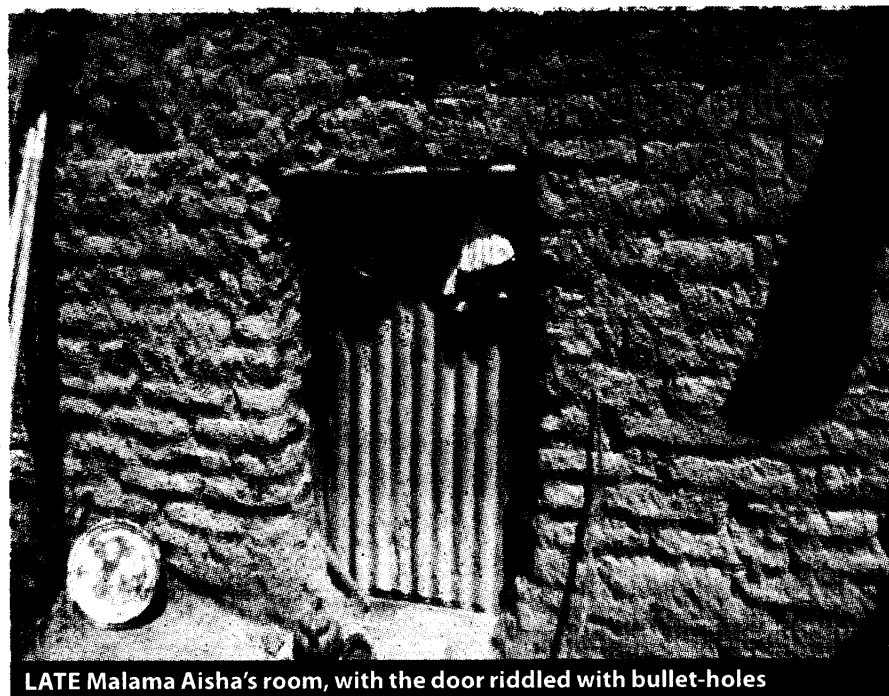
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Gwamna said the robbers then brought the corpses before his mother. "They told her that if there is anything she can do, to go ahead and do it."

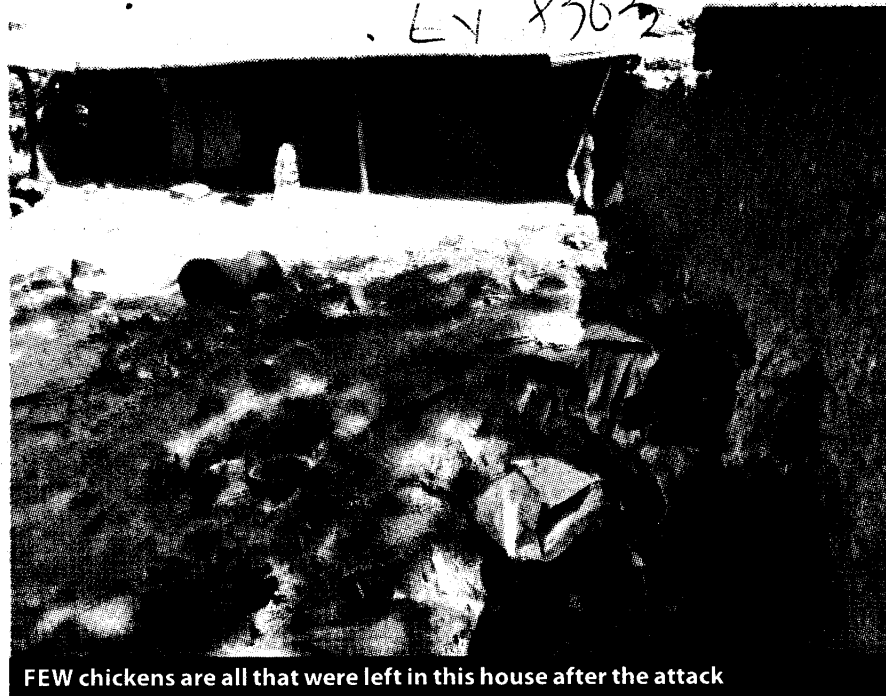
#### Bloody Independence Day

In all, the armed men killed 18 people in the pre-dawn attack, according to Alhaji Mohammed, while about seven others

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LATE Malama Aisha's room, with the door riddled with bullet-holes



FEW chickens are all that were left in this house after the attack



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sustained injuries, most of them from gunshots. Narrating to *Weekly Trust* how the attack started, the Village Head said the attackers came through a farm route on the northern border of the village and divided themselves into three groups before going in. "It is by Allah's mercy that I'm still alive today. When they came to my house, I escaped and ran to a neighboring village," he recalled. Each of the groups was to advance into the village through an assigned route, and was not to let go any adult male on its path.

Junaid Salisu is among the surviving victims that are currently receiving treatment at the Federal Medical Centre (FMC) Gusau. His wife first heard the curses of the assailants and alerted him that all was not well. Without wasting time, he rushed to leave through the door, but was confronted by them. Before he lifted his foot back inside, they sprayed him with bullets. Other members of the family helped drag him inside and covered his mouth so that his groans did not lead the attackers inside. His father, meanwhile, went to peep through the door, but did not come back to relate what he saw: only his lifeless body, riddled with bullets, was retrieved.

The gang went on, breaking shops and stealing cash and valuables. "They emptied two provision stores, broke into gold-weighting offices and carted away computers and then stole various sums of money," he said. "Some of their guns were too big to be carried by hand, instead going on the heads of some of the attackers. When we gave some of the empty shells they left behind to the police, they told us that they had never seen such ammunition."

Arresting the attackers is difficult for law enforcement officers, not because of their heavy firearms, but for the forest which provides cover for them and makes it possible for them to move across boundaries. A vigilante leader, Sarkin Baka Idi, told *Weekly Trust* last Tuesday that when a detachment of soldiers, accompanied by vigilante groups, went after the armed robbers in the wake of the attack, the only clue they were able to find was the packet of stolen biscuits.

Before the attackers left the village that day, they threatened to return, warning the residents to keep money for them before the time. That threat, coupled with the massacre they unleashed, sent shockwaves into the villagers' hearts, sparking mass exodus. Women, children and even men were seen frantically relocating to other villages. Similarly, it was gathered that members of other neighbouring villages were also leaving their homes to other parts of the state for fear of a similar attack.

*Weekly Trust* also learnt that while some few men chose to remain behind, others have joined their wives and fled, while some sleep in other villages and return to Lingyado at daybreak. Those that remained behind have their only source of food come from handouts from neighbouring villages.

## A history of violence

Months ago, in August, when Muslim faithful were observing the Ramadan fast, a similar attack was launched on two communities of Guru and Tungar Baushe, both located a distance from Lingyado, but under Dansadau Emirate. Ten people were killed in the onslaught and more than fifteen were injured. Majority of the victims, either killed or injured, were members of the communities' vigilante groups and traditional leaders. Some housewives were reportedly raped during the operation. At that time, some of the survivors and their relations told *Weekly Trust* why they thought they were targeted.

According to them, majority of the communities under Dansadau have been suffering frequent armed robbery attacks, either in their homes or on the road, with little

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THESE children are part of about 200 people taking refuge in Bindin village, about 5 kilometres from the place of the attack

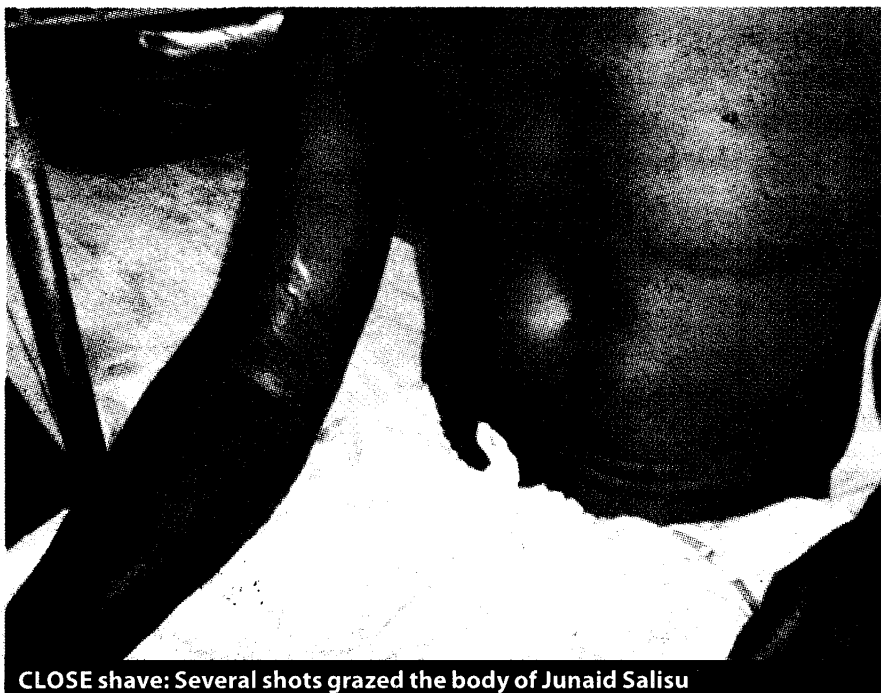
hope of getting respite despite complaining consistently to relevant authorities. The notorious armed robbers were said to be living the lives of outlaws. The stronghold enjoyed by the bandits on the community was said to have fuelled suspicion among the villagers, of possible collaboration between them and some traditional rulers, who allegedly accept kickbacks in return for providing safe haven.

Three weeks before the Ramadan attack, ward heads in collaboration with their subjects took a decision to flush out the robbers. They reportedly empowered local vigilante officials to execute the task, guaranteeing financial sponsorship. As they got the green light, various vigilante teams from different village would converge on a community having suspected armed robbers and pounce

on them, it was gathered. Neither repentant nor new armed robbers were spared during the campaign in which dozens of suspected criminals were extra-judicially killed.

Three weeks after, the suspected robbers came on a revenge mission, selecting Guru and Tungar Baushe for the first round. Following the initial attack on the bandits, the Zamfara State Police Command said it arrested three vigilante members, while it maintained that no arrest was made after the first retaliatory attack. It took the assailants nearly two months to carry out last Saturday's killing rampage on Lingyado. Curiously, residents interviewed would prefer to state that "It is from God." Similarly, Alhaji Mohammed, the village head, while noting that his domain could have been

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CLOSE shave: Several shots grazed the body of Junaid Salisu



MALAMA Hauwa, wife of the village head of Lingyado, also on the run with 11 other members of her family

# Suspected ritual killings causing stir in Zamfara

ABOUT a month ago, youths in Kaura Namoda town, in Zamfara State, protested what was seen as incessant cases of ritual killings in their community. The protesters, in their hundreds, set ablaze a shop belonging to a former polytechnic lecturer and also marched to his residence with the intention of destroying it. The building was protected with the timely arrival of policemen, who took the ex-lecturer and members of his family to safety.

For long, people in the community had been suspecting the teacher of having a hand in the spate of ritual killings that are gradually becoming commonplace in the area, it was gathered. But until then, their charges had remained at the level of mere whispers. Until last month, when a shocking death through alleged rituals, angered them to violence.

A day before his death, Yusuf Shehu received call from a particular individual, asking him to come over for an undisclosed business, residents said. He reportedly went to the meeting point as demanded by his caller. But he was never to be seen alive again. The next day, his allegedly mutilated remains were discovered at the venue of the said planned meeting – under a mango tree.

What was not there, of course, was the killer. But he had left his phone back at home for charging and when people probed the phone's records, they discovered the last call on it to have emanated from the lecturer.

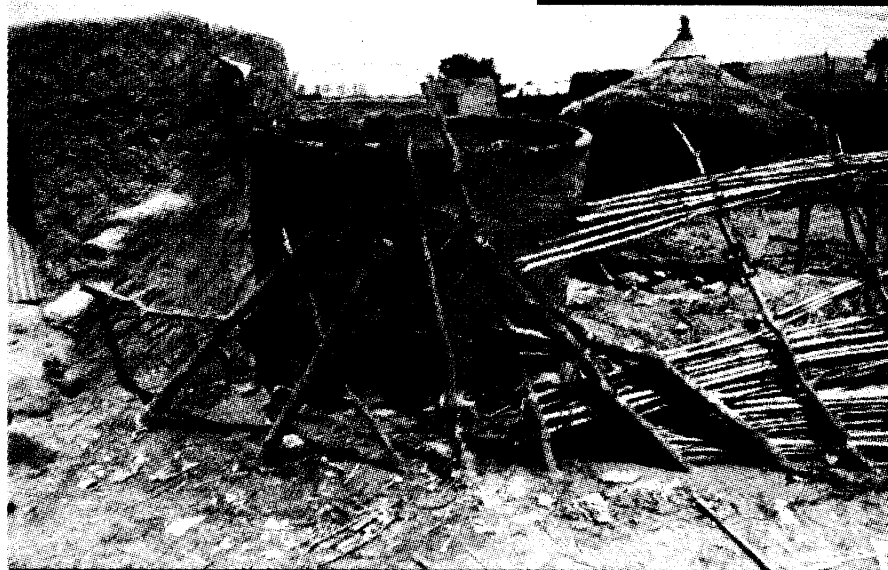
Before Shehu's death under the suspicious circumstances, other cases of ritual killings were recorded. Prominent among them was the murder of a youth called Balarabe. It was claimed that his body was discovered in drainage, with some missing organs. Similarly, the community was shocked again recently when another resident was found drenched in his own blood from a head injury, also inflicted by suspected ritualists who hammered four long nails into his skull.

Not long after, the body of another victim was found on a road leading to a neighbouring local government area. While attempts to speak to the Zamfara State Police Public Relations Officer, ASP Sanusi Amiru on the matter failed, the youths in the area are getting rather testy, as there is yet to be any report of arrests of the alleged perpetrators. This development, youths told *Weekly Trust*, is pushing them closer to taking laws into their own hands.



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PICS: Lawan Danjuma Adamu



**EVEN food stores were not spared**

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targeted for reprisal attacks, denied that his people participated in the alleged operation to flush the robbers.

## A twist in the tale

However, *Weekly Trust* reliably gathered that vigilante groups from Lingyado and another village called Kango, actively took part in the alleged killing of suspected armed robbers in July. "More than 17 were killed in Kango and about the same number was also killed in Lingyado," the source disclosed. According to another source, the territory of Dansadau, especially around the axis of Lingyado is very rich in gold deposits. For this,

the area became a hotbed of armed robbery gangs who mount road blocks to dispossess gold miners and dealers of huge amount of money.

In separate accounts of the genesis of the crisis, both Zamfara State governor, Alhaji AbdulAziz Yari Abubakar and the state Commissioner of Police, Tambari Yabo Muhammad, painted a different picture from the one provided by the villagers and which they (the villagers) swiftly refuted. Governor Yari, while addressing newsmen on the issue last Monday, held that it was precipitated by a declaration by some Fulani groups that only they can own cattle in the territories of Dansadau. Following the declaration,

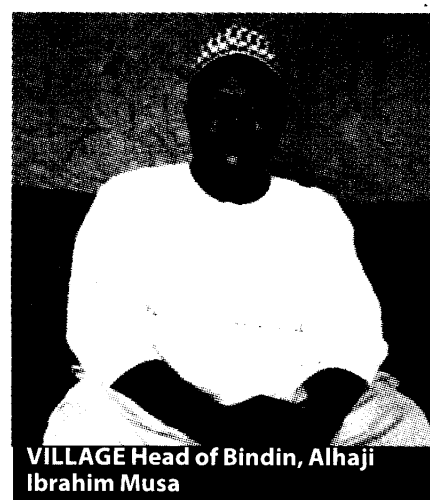
according to Yari, villagers, in collaboration with vigilante groups, went about killing suspected robbers of Fulani descent, a development he attributed for the eruption of series of retaliatory attacks after the Fulanis had mobilized their relations from within and outside the country.

CP Yabo was reported in the media saying the deadly attacks were not armed robbery-related, but reprisals. "All of the 19 people that were killed yesterday were Hausa. I learnt that some months ago, the Hausa people were alleged to have killed a number of Fulani men. So this one is a reprisal attack," the commissioner stated. "They did not steal any of the property of the people that were killed. So they are not armed robbers, they were just on revenge mission."

The attacked villages have however contradicted the two accounts, stressing that none of them fully capture the actual picture on the ground. "We heard over the radio that the attack on us was caused by quarrels between farmers and Fulanis. That narration was faulty. Because we never had any disagreement with Fulani men," argued the village head of Lingyado.

Meanwhile, the governor has also confirmed there is difficulty in tackling the menace, maintaining that his government may request the police headquarters in Abuja to send a patrol helicopter to be used in combing the bush for at least three weeks. Pointing that in its effort to stop the incessant attacks, government in the state provided vehicles and allowances running into millions to various security agencies, saying that the result was still not impressive. If the security agencies were under his command, he stated, the problem of the attackers would have been dealt with very easily.

Almost a hundred well-armed individuals had reportedly taken part in the attack, with the affected communities complaining lack of security. Then there's the issue of a dearth of appropriate information about the nature of the crisis on the part of authorities and admission of difficulty faced in taking the



**VILLAGE Head of Bindin, Alhaji Ibrahim Musa**



**VILLAGE Head of Lingyado, Alhaji Dalha Mohammed: He lost an uncle in the attack**

fight to the criminals. Plus an existing threat – of return – which the robbers had allegedly passed on after their recent onslaught. It will be difficult to predict how soon the problem can be brought under control, or if the survivors of the Lingyado killings will return to their homes.

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