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FRESH ATTACK CLAIMS 52 IN BENUE

Category: **News** Published on Monday, 24 March 2014 05:00 Written by Hope Abah, Makurdi Hits: 810



At least 52 people were feared killed yesterday in renewed heavy fighting between Tiv farmers and suspected herdsmen at Gbajimba, the headquarters of Guma LGA of Benue State.

Residents told Daily Trust yesterday that the death toll could rise as more bodies were being recovered.

According to the residents, the invaders stormed the area during the Christian worship hours but were repelled by youths and had to retreat.

"But they returned in large numbers at lunch time in a more organised form and started shooting, burning down houses and killing people on sight. The situation is very bad as we speak because dead bodies litter everywhere in the town," a resident said. Efforts to reach the council chairman, Frank Adi, did not yield result but it was gathered that the available security personnel in the town could not contain the renewed attack.

Our correspondent also observed a mass exodus of people to Makurdi as a result of the fighting. Women and their children filed in a single line trekking through the road behind the University of Agriculture, Makurdi to get to the North Bank area of the state capital.

Gbajimba is the home of the Minister of State for Trade and Investment, Samuel Ortom and until yesterday remained the last standing locality with only a handful of inhabitants in the entire LGA. The sacking of Guma LGA headquarters has heightened fears of a possible attack on Makurdi, the state capital itself. Police spokesman, SP Daniel Ezeala confirmed the development but said the command was yet to get details.

"We gathered that there is serious fighting in Gbajimba right now but I'm yet to get a formal briefing on the matter. I'll let you have a clearer picture of the situation when I get it," Ezeala said.

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