

Mu'azu Doka, from Kampanin Doka village, is now seeking refuge in Birnin Gwari town. He told Daily Trust Saturday that the armed thieves stormed his village last week on motorcycles in large number, shooting into the air to terrorise residents. He said: "Local vigilantes who were located at isolated areas in the town exchanged fire with the bandits and killed about eight of them. One man was unfortunately killed by the thieves."

Doka said the bandits later regrouped and sent messages to the village notifying them of plans to return and avenge their cohorts. The message led to widespread panic in the village. "I fled to Birnin Gwari in the afternoon today (last Tuesday) with my family to avoid being harmed by the bandits and a few hours after my departure, I got a call from my brother in the neighbouring Layin Mai-Gwari that many armed bandits stormed the village in large numbers and rustled away over 30 bulls after killing the owner, a local farmer. They were said to have raped some married women and carted away provisions, loading them onto a stolen camel."

However, the allegations of rape could not be immediately verified by Daily Trust Saturday.

The bandits, sources said, opened fire on workers installing electricity poles near Tsohuwar Gwari village, injuring about three. The reason for the attack remains unknown, even as the Kaduna Electricity Distribution Company confirmed the incident in a statement by the Head, Corporate Communications, AbdulAziz Abdullahi. "Three members of our staff, attached to Birnin Gwari Business Unit, Sa'idu Mohammed, Ibrahim Kasim and Ibrahim Ahmed were attacked by armed robbers along Birnin Gwari-Funtua road on Thursday, 18th June, 2015 while on line-tracing and network maintenance exercise," the statement read. It added that the three victims of the robbery attack were immediately taken to Birnin Gwari general hospital where first aid was administered on them. Two of them, Mohammed and Kasim who sustained gunshot wounds have been transferred to the Nigerian Air Force Base Hospital Kaduna for further treatment while Ahmed has been discharged.

In Kwasa-Kwasa village, the robbers rustled 6 bulls away after looting shops, according to a source who requested anonymity. The source said a day after the attack, the bandits stormed Gobirawa village and fired gunshots sporadically, sending residents into hiding. "They broke into shops and houses and stole valuables and foodstuff. No-one attempted to stop them from attacking," the source said.

There also were reports that the armed bandits had attacked people in Hayin Lasan village last week, injuring at least two people. They were said to have made away with an undisclosed but large number of cows to their forest hideout.

At Zugai village, the thieves harassed the residents with guns and also rustled a number of cows, according to a resident. "The same gang had recently killed three vigilantes in Gayan community," he said.

The story is similar in some parts of Kachia local government, where armed thieves have recently been having a field day terrorizing local communities recently. There also, they are said to go on rampages in the villages, shooting, looting shops and raping women.

Chikwale and Garin Oga villages, located few kilometers to Akilibu have faced continuous attacks, causing villagers to move away en masse. Malam Ismail (not real name), who fled to the village with his family, said Chikwale, which used to be a prosperous farming and hunting community was "completely deserted following relentless attacks by the thieves. They move from house to house stealing money and other valuables. They have raped women in a few incidents and killed some. No-one could bear such, and as I speak to you now, both villages are deserted. There are other villages in Niger State, too, which are uninhabited now due to the incessant attacks."

But police in nearby town Katari said they are unaware of the incidents.

The Police Public Relations Officer in Kaduna, Deputy Superintendent Zubairu Abubakar said the armed attacks in the Birnin Gwari area and the southern parts of the state are a thorn in the side of the government and security forces, but efforts are being made to deal with the situation. "The joint security team known as Operation Yaki were deployed to the area in addition to some detectives," he said, adding that the state will hold a security meeting with neighbouring states to form a common front in tackling the bandits in Birnin Gwari forest.

As the violent activities of the armed bandits continue to terrorise victims in Kaduna, one point of fear remained in most of the people spoken to: It appears to be worsening, spiralling into something truly worrisome.

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