


Birnin Gwari: How soldiers died after seizing thief

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Twelve soldiers from a special detachment of troops were killed by scores of bandits late Tuesday in Birnin Gwari Local Government Area of Kaduna State which has been under serious security challenges for over 10 years.

In the past one year, more than 30 communities in BirninGwari have come under various forms of attacks from hoodlums who seized residents' cattle, took away their valuables, collected their money and most times killed and burned their houses.

The Emir of Birnin Gwari, Malam Zubairu Jibril Mai Gwari II, said between January and now, 64 persons had been killed in one form of attack or the other and the villagers live in fear, which had affected every facet of life in his emirate.

Our correspondents gathered that communities in the local government including the headquarters had been sacked by armed bandits at one time or the other and many lives and

property had been lost in the process.

The casualties had been mainly traders, travelers, drivers of commercial vehicles and villagers while some security agents had equally been killed.

One attack too many

But Tuesday's attack which left a dozen soldiers dead has introduced a new dimension into the crisis as the bandits targeted a military camp and in one fell swoop shot and killed 12 soldiers while another three believed to have fled into the bush are still missing.

Some of the villagers said more corpses had been recovered from the bush after the first day when bodies of the 12 were taken to Kaduna.

Some of the villagers told our correspondents that they believed that the attack on the soldiers was deliberate in order to stem the presence of security personnel in the villages so that the bandits could have easy passage.

Nasiru, a driver who plies the BirninGwari- Kaduna road, said the hoodlums who most times come from the bush between Birnin-Gwari town and Buruku, usually do so at random, striking when most convenient for them.

"We don't know the motive but we believe they just came out and attacked the soldiers," he said.

Our correspondent gathered that since about two months ago when the detachment of troops was camped near Doka, the rate of crime especially night attacks and highway robbery subsided as heavily armed soldiers made their presence felt.

The soldiers were said to have been specially drafted to the village to ensure the security of workers of a construction company which included a number of foreigners working on a new road project linking Kaduna with Zamfara State through Doka-Dansadau.

Our correspondents learnt that the need for heavy security presence became necessary due to the constant raids on the workers and their equipment, the height of which was the kidnap of one of the foreign engineers last year.

One of the villagers who works in a federal government agency in BirninGwari town told our correspondents that since the soldiers set up their camp at the village, the raids on villages dropped drastically.

"Everybody knew the soldiers were around so the bad people retreated and we were enjoying relative peace," he said.

How Tuesday incident changed narrative

The spark which resulted in the killings was said to have happened in the morning when bandits who were about 20 tried to raid Maganda, a rural settlement about 40 kilometers from BirninGwari and were stopped by the local vigilantes group known as 'Yan Sakai. This was said to have happened at about 9:00 am on Tuesday.

In the process of trying to stop the raid on the community however, the two sides exchanged fire and three of the bandits were killed while nine members of the vigilante group were shot.

The bandits were said to have quickly picked their dead and ran and were pursued by the vigilante members who captured one of the commanders of the hoodlums and handed him over to the military men at the Doka camp.

One of the villagers, who gave his name as Hassan Shehu said the police in BirninGwari later went to the military camp to demand for the suspect but the military refused to hand him over.

Our correspondent learnt that the bandits may have got the hint that the member who was later discovered to be one of their commanders was with the soldiers and launched the attack on the camp of the soldiers to free him.

"The soldiers were sleeping in the camp when they were taken unawares by the bandits who pounced on them and killed many of them. It is obvious the soldiers were not expecting it and the bandits succeeded in freeing their member and left with him," he said.

Dead soldiers moved to Kaduna

Our correspondent learnt that the corpses of the soldiers were initially deposited at the morgue of the BirninGwari General Hospital but were later taken to Kaduna.

One of the ward heads in BirninGwari who asked not to be named corroborated the account of Shehu.

He said, "We gathered that the soldiers had caught a thief in a village called Maganda in the area and were taking him back to their camp when some personnel of the police asked that they hand the thief over to them which the soldiers refused.

"The same police followed the soldiers to their camp in KampaninDoka and again asked them to hand over the thief to them, but the soldiers still refused. Around 8pm on Tuesday, bandits attacked the soldier's camp and killed three soldiers in a hole and nine others in a tent in the camp."

No exact cause of insecurity yet known-Emir

The emir said nobody could yet place his finger on the exact cause of the insecurity in the area.

He said, "First, we have a terrible road which has helped the insurgents to do what they like. Going back to your question, only God can give that answer, we have been standing up against these people, fighting them in the hope that it will end all to no avail.

"I must say that the Kaduna State government particularly this present government, the governor, has done his best and I believe is still doing his best, but I think, when you say somebody is doing his best, maybe their best is not enough, that is why, when they do something, it would look like they are succeeding, but then, eventually, the bandits find a way to unleash terror on us.

Living in hell

"I had once said here that we were leaving in hell, what is more than hell when all development projects and everything good intended to come to BirninGwari is blocked by these same insurgents."

The emir added that the people were suffering and it appeared the government did not want to assist the community.

"What is happening here is worse than what has happened in Benue, Taraba, Zamfara and other places but the president visited those places but nobody has visited us. We are also humans," he

said.

Bubbling days but uncertain nights

When our correspondents visited BirninGwari, the whole town was a bit bubbling with life, but residents said life usually appeared normal in the day time but after dusk, nobody is ever sure what would happen.

Many unanswered calls to govt

Many groups and individuals have tried to call the attention of the government to what is happening in the local government.

Last year, a group under the auspices of BirninGwari Emirate Progressives Union appealed to Governor Nasir el-Rufai to assist in taking a decisive action concerning what it described as an alarming security situation in the area.

The letter jointly signed by the chairman of the security sub-committee of the group, Muazuldris and its president, MurtalaAbdullahi, lamented that reports had it that in Doka village and Kungigari (15km away) bandits attend markets brandishing AK-47 rifles in the open without any challenge from security agents.

It was within the same axis that a member of Kaduna State House of Assembly representing BirninGwari was abducted, two female students of the Kaduna State College of Midwifery and staff were abducted, another batch of three were kidnapped and a car conveying NYSC members was intercepted and all the female corps members were allegedly raped by the bandits last year.

Return dedicated troops-Emir

The emir said the solution rested in keeping dedicated troops in the town.

He said, "What we want is for them to bring back the young people they brought earlier. When they were here, they arrested some people and dealt with them, things started to become normal and all of a sudden, they were withdrawn. I am advising government to bring security agents who will come and work until they finish the bad people, we know the areas and we have been telling

them where their locations are, but they rather pick wrong people to show them their hideouts, they do not come to me, they would find some people they like in the villages and towns and say they are their scouts, they are the people who will give them intelligence reports.”

How to end it all

He also advised that the government should deploy troops along the borders of Niger, Katsina, Kaduna and Zamfara states. “I bet you, within one month, they will finish the insurgents,” he stressed.