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Black Saturday on Abuja-Kaduna expressway

By Christiana T. Alabi & Maryam Ahmadu-Suka, Kaduna | Publish Date: May 19 2018 3:00AM

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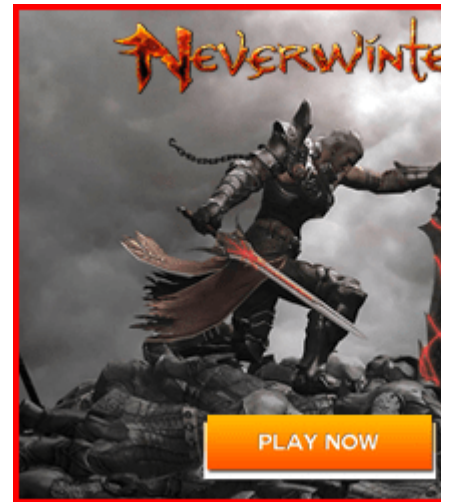
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It was indeed a black Saturday when travellers ran into the hands of armed robbers along the Abuja-Kaduna highway. Some people in the process lost their lives, some got injured, while some were allegedly abducted, and taken into the bush.

Though the activities of the notorious attackers, particularly on the highway, seem to have been reducing gradually until it assumed

hurricane proportions last week Saturday. While the people of Kaduna State were busy carrying out their civic duty at the LG polls, the men of the underworld were having a field day on the highway.



It was earlier reported that men of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad on patrol were said to have gotten wind of the operation and tried to stop the bandits when they were said to have opened fire and in the exchange, one of the police sergeants in the team was hit.

A driver of one of the vehicles stopped by the armed men also caught a stray bullet during the exchange of fire. It was also reported that as the exchange was going on, an accident occurred near the scene and four persons lost their lives, while 10 others were injured. The bodies of the accident victims and the two dead from the robbery attacks were rushed to a nearby hospital.

A driver, who gave his name as Babangida, and who ran into the scene of the attack, said that the incident took place at about 6:30am, near a village called Katari. "I ply Kaduna-Abuja highway. I was driving to Abuja with passengers in my Golf car on that fateful morning, and another driver was driving ahead with a passenger who chartered him," he said.

"Just after Katari, I saw from far on the lane coming to Kaduna from Abuja a gang of armed men who stopped more than 10 vehicles. In the process, an accident occurred. When we drove close, the kidnappers asked us to come down as they threatened us. They did not cover their faces with masks, rather, they used turbans to wrap their heads and part of their faces. Out of fear, a passenger in my car opened the car door and bolted out into the bush, and the bandits ran after him, shooting. When I saw that their attention was no longer on us, I started reversing with speed."

"I was lucky, the road was clear because movement was restricted due to the elections that held on that day. Immediately the car in front of me saw me reversing, it also started reversing. I did not stop until I got to a u-turn where I saw soldiers. The soldiers tried to



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go to the scene of the attack but their van would not start. So they requested me to take them in my car to the scene, which I did and quickly went back with reverse. I also saw some mobile police officers shooting at the attackers. On getting back again, I met an Army captain with an escort on the highway and he asked me what was happening. I explained to him and he made some calls,” Babangida narrated.

Explaining further, Babangida said that before he was able to escape, he saw that many people had been shot. “I saw more than 10 people shot, because the bandits were shepherding people into the bush. Those who fell, got shot, as they selected the ones they believed are wealthy, probably for ransom.”

“While the attack was going on, a Mitsubishi van carrying about 30 people was stopped. Another trailer carrying goods was stopped and in the process of stopping, it hit the Mitsubishi while the Mitsubishi further hit a Prado SUV. The man in the Prado was shot when the driver was trying to escape. All the vehicles were taken to Katari Police Station. My car was also damaged when the car in front of me stopped abruptly,” Babangida added.

While he condemned the attack, Babangida said: “We had breathed a sigh of relief for a while, before these bandits attacked again on Saturday, in a deadly manner. I have been meeting armed robbers on the highway but I have never experienced such a deadly attack like that of this past Saturday.” He called on both state and federal governments to deploy more security personnel to the highway, just as it was during the Abuja airport diversion. According to him, the highway is not safe at all. “It is a big road that people ply on a daily basis and as such, it should be protected. Many people do not travel by road to and fro Abuja any longer because of insecurity,”

The driver also urged government to provide all that is necessary to security personnel to fight crime and criminality including more sophisticated arms, and functional vehicles to move around as fast as possible. “The soldiers tried their best on that day, so also the police, but the attackers were many,” he noted.

Kaduna State Police Public Relations Officer, ASP Mukhtar Hussaini Aliyu confirmed the incident, but said that there was no

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information about abductions. "Men of SARS were around the area when the robbery was going on, and they moved to the scene. One policeman was shot, and a driver of one of the vehicles was also shot," he said.

Aliyu said shortly after, there was an accident close to the scene of the robbery, which led to the death of four people, while 10 were injured. "But there was nothing like abduction, to the best of our knowledge," he said.



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