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# Kidnappers return with big bang

By Hassan Ibrahim (Kaduna), Habibu Umar Aminu &amp; Mahmud Idris (Katsina), Shehu Umar (Gusau), Ibraheem Hamza Muhammad (Lafia) &amp; Ahmed Tahir Ajobe, (Minna) | Published Date Jan 12, 2019 4:38 AM



*Guns and ammunition recovered by troops, from Zwere armed militia in Ugya of Toto LGA of Nasarawa State.*

With a series of dramatic incidents, 2019 started on a high note for kidnappers, in spite of increased efforts of security operatives. Why is there a spike in the disturbing trend? *Daily Trust Saturday* takes a look.

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With kidnapping having reached alarming heights in 2018, and all seeming calm at the end of the year, just a few days into 2019, abductors have raised the tempo across states, taking hostage many in the process. At least seven persons have been known to have been individually kidnapped, including Dr. Fashina and Pastor Onaade, David Jejelowo and a driver in Ekiti State and District Head of Zandam, Babangida Lawal and a businessman, Murtala Rabe, and an aide to Justice Mamman Nasir in Katsina State. Checks by *Daily Trust Saturday* showed that there are a number of cases which have not been reported to the police, at the orders of the kidnappers.

Unease returned to the busy Kaduna-Abuja highway over the upsurge of activities of gunmen, with recent reports of killings and kidnapping of commuters, passengers, drivers and other road users. Some drivers who ply the route regularly, informed of an incident a few days ago, when a passenger vehicle belonging to the Katsina State Transport Authority broke down along the Abuja-Kaduna highway, and just as another vehicle belonging to the same company stopped to assist, abductors emerged from the bush and picked most of the passengers.

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However, the Managing Director of Katsina State Transport Authority, Haruna Musa, said the management was unaware of any of its buses missing, or having been attacked along the route.



■ Driver Usman Nura, who was shot by gunmen recently



■ The Provost of Command Motor Park Kaduna, Mr. Austin Alfred



■ Mr. Jimoh Balogun, a driver



■ Yammama sign post, close to the spot where Justice Nasir escaped being kidnapped

*Daily Trust Saturday* gathered that since January 1, incidents have resurfaced on the busy expressway. In fact, worried about the situation, the Kaduna State Commissioner of Police, Muhammed Abdulrahman on Thursday undertook an inspection of parts the highway and a forest at Kasarami village to check, first hand, routes the kidnappers may be using.

Commercial vehicle drivers plying the route expressed worry over the situation. The Provost of Command Motor Park in Kaduna, Austin Alfred, confirmed to *Daily Trust Saturday* the return and spike of kidnappings, which have thrown commercial drivers into apprehension and uncertainty.

Alfred said a few days ago, gunmen stopped a bus and took with them 18 passengers on board apart from six other taxis they attacked, and abducted passengers for ransom. He said since the beginning of the year, about 60 people were kidnapped, explaining that on Tuesday at about 7pm two commercial vehicles and a private car were attacked. *Daily Trust Saturday*, however, could not confirm the number of victims.

A commercial driver, Usman Nura, said: “We’re worried about recent happenings, and I think drastic action should be taken before the situation gets worse. Even yesterday (Tuesday), my brother’s vehicle was attacked by gunmen on the highway, and in the process one of the passengers was shot, while two others were kidnapped.”

Also, another commercial driver, Jimoh Balogun, told *Daily Trust Saturday* that the recent upsurge of kidnapping along the highway has gotten out-of-hand.

But the Kaduna State Police Command Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), DSP Yakubu Sabo, denied reports of an upsurge in criminal activities along the Kaduna-Abuja highway, even though he confirmed the Tuesday attack on

commuters.

DSP Sabo said the command was strategising and reviewing deployments to checkmate such incidents.

### **How abductors ‘abandoned’ Justice Nasir**

What would have been a high-profile abduction was however averted when kidnappers were unable to pick a former President of the Court of Appeal and District Head of Malumfashi in Katsina State, retired Justice Mamman Nasir. Travelling from Malumfashi to Katsina, the abductors abandoned the 90-year-old, who is also the Galadiman Katsina, as he could not walk. The kidnappers then grabbed his aide, Aminu Sani, and are demanding a ransom of N50million.

The police said the bandits had picked up one 35-year-old Hauwa Aminu of Dam Site in Malumfashi town, who was rescued subsequently. Sources say the kidnappers stormed their residence at about 1.30am, whisking her and her mother away. Our reporter gathered that a gunshot narrowly missed her father, Bello Maje, a former member of state house of assembly.

After abducting both mother and daughter, the kidnappers abandoned the mother and went away with Hauwa.

On January 7, the Ward Head of Zandam, in Jibia LGA in Katsina State, Babangida Lawal, was kidnapped. The traditional ruler was abducted alongside a businessman in the village, Murtala Rabe. The kidnappers stormed the village in the night, broke into their respective homes, and whisked them away. Some residents who tried to rescue the victims were severely injured in the process. No ransom has so far been placed on them by the abductors.



On January 9, armed bandits attacked Yar Santa village in Kankara LGA, killing four people and injuring many others. On the same day, the Councillor of Garin Maje Wayya in Charanchi LGA, Amina Bello Maje, was kidnapped.

The police spokesman in a statement on January 3 said it arrested a kidnapper who confessed a planned abduction of businessman in Yarmalai in the state.

Meanwhile, residents of border villages of Bakori and Kankara LGAs are living in fear, as kidnapping has resurfaced, early in 2019. In the middle of last year, people of Kakumi and Guga in Bakori LGA experienced the abduction of some of their sons before the police and vigilante group combed the area, arresting some of the kidnappers and their informants.

Muhammad Sani of Kakumi village said their close proximity to Pauwa forest in Kankara LGA is what makes them vulnerable. He told *Daily Trust Saturday* that they have not been attacked this year, but the news going round of abductions in Jibia, Batsari, Safana, Danmusa and Kankara, is sending shivers down their collective spines. He enjoined the people of the area and the state to be cautious as the kidnappers were working hand-in-hand with informants who are residing amidst the unsuspecting victims.

“There are always bad eggs amongst us, who divulge information to the bandits about their targets. The way out of this is to be more vigilant, cautious of revealing our confidential financial details, and timely reporting of suspected criminals in our midst to the police,” Sani said.

A farmer in Kandarawa, Garba Abdullahi, told *Daily Trust Saturday* that from 5:00pm people were deserting Sheme-Kakumi-Kankara road for the fear of the unknown. It was also observed that many motorists plying the Funtua-Dutsinma-Katsina highway are extra-cautious by avoiding the road from 6:00pm to 6:00am.

Three persons, Abdulsalam Lawal Wada, Hafiz Isa and Musbahu Yunusa were on Wednesday kidnapped around 5pm in Gurbi, on their way to Katsina. Already their abductors have demanded N50million. The trio were travelling in a private car when the kidnappers opened fire at the vehicle, causing the driver, Umar Shargalle, to screech to a halt, before they took the others.

“When they came to the car, Shargalle was in pool of blood, so they left him alone. They took the three others, and made away with them into the thick bush,” a witness said.

### **Kidnappings in Zamfara now daily affairs**

Kidnappers, despite heavy hits on them from security personnel, still plague many communities across Zamfara State, as it has become a daily affair, *Daily Trust Saturday* gathered. People in the state are being forced to restrict their movement, especially to rural areas where the cases have become rampant. The armed bandits and cattle rustlers inflicting havoc on the villages have resorted to kidnapping for ransom, and many have been taken, with millions of naira paid in ransom.

“Hardly a day passes without one hearing about someone being kidnapped either on the farm, on the way somewhere, or even at home. That’s why a lot of people have changed the way they interact with others,” said a resident called Hadi Ali. He added that a lot of people in the state were afraid of paying for hajj, for fear of being marked by the kidnappers. “You can’t pay N1.5million and think of going free. Informants are on the prowl and they will divulge your financial status to potential kidnappers,” he explained.

Many people in the state, our reporter learnt, have foregone night journeys for fear of being kidnapped. The unfolding drama has also made many farmers unable to harvest their crops.

The Zurmi-Shinkafi-Kaura Namoda and Dansadau-Magami-Bagega-Dankurmi axes are hotspots of kidnappers in the state.

The Emir of Anka, Alhaji Attahiru Muhammad Ahmad, had appealed residents to stop paying ransoms if their relative is kidnapped, saying if a victim dies, he or she has been martyred. The traditional ruler further explained that the people of the state are in a dilemma for the fact that despite the deployment of more security operatives to the state, atrocities being committed by the armed bandits have not reduced. "Farming and animal rearing that were hitherto the major occupation of the citizens of the state, especially dwellers of the rural communities, have now been abandoned," he added.

### **Operation Whirl Stroke rounds up criminals in Nasarawa**

Many people are becoming victims of kidnappings, and high-profile variants are raising concerns in Nasarawa State. A House of Assembly candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC) for Obi II, Mr David Ayele, was kidnapped in December last year. A brother of the victim said the gunmen broke into his residence at Tudun Kauri in Lafia, and whisked him away to an unknown destination.

The National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), and National Association of Road Transport Workers (NARTO), among others, say they have been losing members due to the activities of armed men along the Keffi-Bade road for years. According to them, motorists, passengers, petty traders, farmers and locals along the Keffi-Bade route were not spared by the armed robbers and



kidnappers. However, the killing of the former Chief of Defence Staff, Air Chief Marshal Alex Badeh (rtd) in December has exposed abductors and robbers operating along the route.



■ Some kidnappers recently arrested in Katsina.

It was gathered that most incidents occur around the sharp bend near Unguwan Mangwaro village, Tudu Uku, before Zango Gitata. A senior official of the NURTW who preferred anonymity said they recently lost about four

drivers to kidnappers and bandits along the route. An official of NARTO, who also preferred anonymity, said they also lost many drivers, and passengers.

Recently, the United States issued a travelling alert to its citizens to avoid Adamawa, Bauchi, Bayelsa, Borno, Delta, Edo, Gombe, Imo, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Kogi, Niger, Plateau, Rivers, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara states. It recommended only essential travel to the states, warning about the rise in kidnapping and other related crimes.

Meanwhile, the Commander, Operation Whirl Stroke in charge of Nasarawa, Benue and Taraba states, Major General Adeyemi Yekini, said it has recovered 45 assorted weapons and ammunitions from a militia camp in Zwere, Toto LGA of Nasarawa State.

General Ayeni said the combined force of army, navy, air force, police, DSS, and civil defence, ran into an ambush by suspected Bassa militia in Ugya Town in Toto. The security operatives inflicted injuries, survived the ambush, and cleared the militia camp.

### Kidnappers spilling into Niger

The onslaught on bandits in Zamfara State and Birnin Gwari area of Kaduna State by security agencies is affecting Niger State negatively. Bandits fleeing the offensive in the two states are taking advantage of the thick forest stretching through Kaduna, Kebbi, Zamfara and Sokoto states by finding abode around the Niger axis and terrorising communities across local government areas which share borders with some of the affected states.

The most-affected local government areas include Munya Rafi, Shiroro and Gurara. The bandits, according to locals, attack communities late in the night and during the wee hours of the morning and lay siege on families considered to be well-to-do, and later call to demand ransom from relations.

Among the notable incidents within last year was also the kidnap of a Sharia Court Judge, Abubakar Mohammed, who was abducted near Jerimiya village in Rafi LGA. The Judge was returning to Pandogari from his duty post in Alawa, Shiroro LGA, also notorious for kidnapping activities, when he was abducted by gunmen who demanded N20million ransom. The situation triggered the deployment of security operatives.

“The police in collaboration with sister security agencies took the battle to the dens of armed bandits in Allawa, Kukoki, Pandogari, Isau, Kaffinkoro, Sarkin-Pawa, Shiroro, Mangoro, Lapai, and Gurara. The aerial surveillance and ground raids

culminated into the harvest of arrests and recovery of assorted weapons,” Niger State PPRO, ASP Muhammad Abubakar Dan-Ina had said then.

However, the kidnappers seem to have returned, even as some persons are devising fake abductions. Just recently, a 20-year-old married woman, Habiba Usman, allegedly faked her own kidnap with the intent of obtaining more money from her husband, Malam Usman Alfa. Before then, one Emmanuel Idi, 20, along with his conspirator, Mohammed Kwairi were arrested in June last year at the point of collecting N2.5 million ransom demanded for the release of his cousin, Haruna Danladi, whose kidnap he arranged in Sabon Mariga, Rafin LGA of the state.

Barely two weeks into the new year, and kidnappers are already holding Nigerians in some areas as a captive audience, literally. Whether the time has come for them to be halted once and for all, remains to be seen.

***Additional data: Haruna Ibrahim***

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