

Kidnappers blocked Kaduna-Abuja road 4 times on Sunday - Villagers

From Lami Sadio, Mohammed I. Yabo
(Kaduna) & Idore Isamaka (Abuja)

People living in villages and towns along the Kaduna-Abuja highway told the Daily Trust yesterday that an unspecified number of people have been killed by kidnappers who blocked the road four times at different points on Sunday.

Scores of people including eight students of Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria are still missing after they were kidnapped on the highway. It was learnt.

This confirmed our exclusive story of Monday in which we reported that at least 15 people were killed by the kidnappers and an unknown number abducted.

The revelation by people in different communities and witnesses contradicted yesterday's statements by the army and Kaduna State government.

They claimed that only two people were killed and nine others who were abducted had been rescued.

The two authorities were, however, still silent on the fact that the kidnappers blocked the road four times and held motorists hostage during the day without any resistance from any of the different security operatives purportedly manning the highway.

That notwithstanding, the Kaduna government yesterday confirmed fresh attacks by bandits in Igabi and Kajuru local government areas of the state which led to the death of "some people".

The Commissioner, Ministry of Internal Security and Home Affairs, Samuel Aruwan, also said that the Vice Chancellor of ABU, Professor Kabir Bala had informed the government that eight students of the institution were among those kidnapped on Sunday.

'We don't know the number of people killed'

Our correspondents who spoke with residents of Aklubu village along the highway said that the gunmen carried out "swift operations", saying they could not ascertain the number of victims killed.

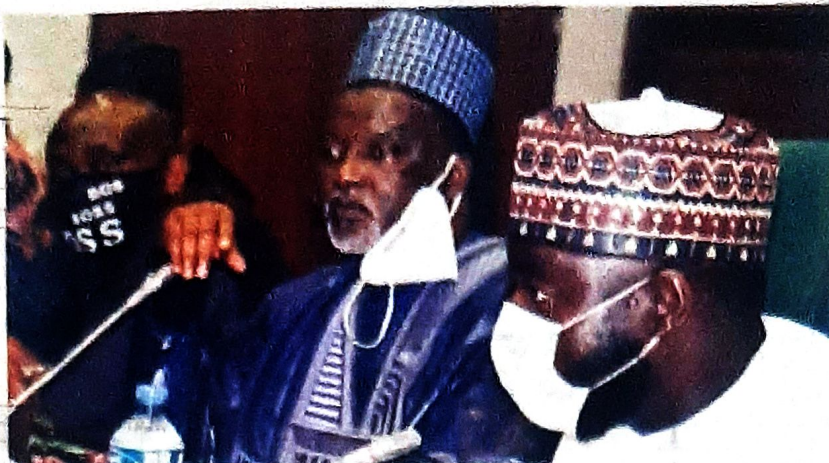
A housewife at the village whose home is by the roadside told Daily Trust that the bandits mounted four different roadblocks along the highway within hours.

She said the first roadblock was mounted around 4 pm at New Aklubu, thereby blocking the lane from Abuja to Kaduna and later Kaduna to Abuja.

She said another roadblock was mounted at a place called Gadan Malam Mamman, while the third roadblock was mounted at a forest closed to Rijana town.

"All these were on Sunday evening and many people were abducted while some were killed. The gunmen made their way into the forest with their victims," she said.

Another resident of Aklubu



■ From left: Minority Leader, House of Representatives, Rep. Ndudi Elumelu; Deputy Speaker, House of Representatives, Rep. Ahmed Wase; and Rep. Yusuf Gaggi, during the Deputy Speaker's meeting with Service Chiefs at the National Assembly in Abuja yesterday. Photo: NAN

told Daily Trust that the bandits returned to the area around midnight, shooting sporadically and left around 1 am on Monday.

"We couldn't sleep on Sunday because the incidents took place a few metres from our village and the bandits returned around midnight shooting in the air," he said. Ibrahim Jamilu from Rijana community corroborated that the highway was blocked four times. According to him, "Although I cannot say how many people were killed, I know the highway was blocked four times on Sunday evening."

"A few months back, the road was safe but the truth is the bandits have resurfaced and the authority needs to act fast," he said.

Girls raped, one abandoned in bush

The Aklubu residents lamented some girls from the village who went to the farm two days ago were trailed and raped by the bandits.

"They raped the girls badly and abandoned one of them in the bush. Those that escaped rushed home to inform the men who later went to the bush to bring her home," one of them said.

Another resident said this was the most trying moments for them because they could no longer live a normal life.

"While we can't travel with ease, it is only by the grace of God that you can go to your farm and come back safely."

"If you are not lucky you will be kidnapped and would only be released after a ransom is paid. We need help in this village," he said.

We saw six bodies- Commercial drivers

Our correspondent gathered from members of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) that ply the Kaduna-Abuja Highway that they saw six corpses.

One of the drivers at Television Garage in Kaduna said though none of their members was caught up in Sunday's attack, commercial drivers had reported that six people were killed.

The officials said: "The moment you try to proffer solution to these issues or you speak up, security and government officials will start looking for you, so nobody wants to talk about Nigeria's problems."

Another commercial driver said the dilapidated state of the road was aiding the activities of bandits.

"The bandits have no specific time of operation. Our members are not safe in the mornings, afternoons and evenings. We don't understand what is happening because women are the major victims. After all, most times when the bandits abduct them, they rape them mercilessly," he said.

How 8 ABU were abducted

Daily Trust learnt that the abducted eight students from ABU are from the faculty of arts of the institution.

They were reportedly on their way to the French Village in Lagos for a language immersion programme when they were ambushed by gunmen during one of the raids on the highway.

It was gathered that one of the students was shot on the leg when he attempted to flee while a female student was left behind because she had a toddler in her care. Some of the students took to Twitter yesterday and raised the alarm that their colleagues had been abducted.

They said between 12 and 15 students were forcefully taken away by the bandits.

However, sources from the ABU said 10 students were in a bus heading to Lagos when they fell into the trap of the bandits.

"One person was killed and a woman was spared by the bandits because she had a baby. That means eight of our students are with the kidnappers."

"We are devastated that such a thing has happened," said a lecturer with the Faculty of Arts, who asked not to be quoted.

Another lecturer told our correspondent that the students were not on an official trip as the school was not aware of their excursion.

"The school is not in session, the university is closed so we

don't know how it is that they organised themselves to make the trip," he said.

Only two 2 killed, 5 more with kidnappers'

The Kaduna State Government on Monday said it received operational feedback from the Defence Headquarters' Operation Thunder Strike that only two people were killed in Sunday's attack while nine victims were rescued after troops engaged the bandits in a firefight.

The government, however, later stated that it received feedback from a citizen who listed five relations as being kidnapped.

The earlier statement issued by Aruwan stated that troops were on a routine patrol along Aklubu-Gidan Busa axis on the Kaduna-Abuja road when they received a distress call at around 4 pm that bandits had blocked the main highway.

He stated that: "The armed bandits opened fire on a bus, forcing the driver to halt. On getting to the location, the armed bandits had already kidnapped nine persons from an 18-seater bus with registration number MKA-151."

"The troops immediately mobilised and engaged the bandits in a firefight and in the process rescued nine persons kidnapped who later rejoined their colleagues after the rescue and headcount."

"The State Government is open for inquiries and feedback from all and sundry, including the media for sound documentation and resolution," he said.

The commissioner debunked reports in circulation that the military and other security operatives have abandoned the route.

"There is indeed the presence of troops at strategic locations on the route comprising Operation Thunder Strike (OPTS), a response of the Defence Headquarters with both ground and air components, having operational headquarters (with a functional helipad) at Kateri town."

"There is also a team from the Inspector General of Police

(Operation Puff Adder) with two outfits (Special Tactical Squad and Intelligence Response Team) complementing operations with technical support," he said.

NLC condemns attack

The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) yesterday condemned the reported killing of some commuters on Sunday.

NLC President, Ayuba Wabba described the attack as one too many and the most horrific, stressing that it represented the height of impunity and lawlessness.

"We are afraid to state that our security agents have not done enough to contain the surge of violence on that road. In the past couple of weeks alone, we have recorded multiple attacks in and around the same spot qualifying it to be designated a dark spot. We also need more intelligence as reaction almost always comes after damage has been done."

"We do need mobile force on a sustainable basis instead of the present ad-hoc arrangement," he said. On his part, the former Senator representing Kaduna Central, Shehu Sani proffered solution to the numerous kidnapping activities along Kaduna-Abuja Highway.

Sen. Sani via his Twitter handle called on the government to recruit youths from the villages on the highway into the Nigeria Police and Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) who would be redeployed to protect their villages.

He stated that: "There are about 37 villages along the road. The youths of those villages should be recruited into the police and civil defence and redeployed to their villages to protect the road and combat the kidnappers. They know the terrain better," he said.

Bandits attack more villages

In a statement yesterday titled 'Update on armed banditry attacks in Igabi and Kajuru LGAs', Commissioner Aruwan said security operatives were presently pursuing bandits in some locations in Igabi and Kajuru local government areas of the state.

Though Aruwan did not give the actual figure of people killed or abducted, he said, "the development follows today's (yesterday) bandit attack at Albasu village of Igabi and Sunday night attack at Maraban Kajuru in the two councils."

"On Monday, armed bandits attacked Albasu village located south wards of Malam forest in Sabon Birni general area and subsequently killed some locals, while on Sunday night at Maraban Kajuru, armed bandits kidnapped two persons and killed one person while escaping into a nearby forest," he said.

He said Governor Nasir El-Rufai had sent condolences to the families and prayed for the repose of their souls.