

Many killed as rival bandits clash in Katsina

From Tijjani Ibrahim, Katsina

Two bandits' groups clashed at Illela village of Safana Local Government Area of Katsina State, leaving many of them dead and many others injured.

The clash, between the Mani Sarki camp and Dankarami supported by Abu Rada camp, occurred last Thursday.

Sources told our correspondent that Sarki, now a repentant bandit, had accepted the government's amnesty and was seen as an outcast by many other camps in the forests.

It was gathered that his acceptance of the amnesty forced Sarki to relocate to Illela village to begin a new life, but some of his boys refused to move with him.

A source said: "Some bandits led by one Dan Da from Alhaji Dankarami gang had carried out an attack in Illela area, but that the other gang repelled them, causing them to abandon their weapons, including anti-aircraft gun which were all taken away by the attackers as booty. That infuriated them and they've not forgotten it.

"Secondly, a younger brother to Sarki Mani had, at one time, kidnapped the wife of one of the men from the Dangwate side and he was paid N500,000 ransom before he released her.

Other sources said Sarki's younger brother, identified as Chirwa, and his wife were killed while three others - Kabiru, Tanimu, Suleiman - were injured and presently receiving treatment in

Katsina town.

The two factions were said to have contributed to the buildup of hostilities and fueled enmity between both factions. It was also learnt that the Sarki-led faction had prevented some bandits from entering the area to carry out attacks or even take their livestock for feeding despite the abundance of fodder in the area.

According to reports, Dankarami, Dangwate and Mai Komi launched a reprisal attack to retrieve their anti-aircraft gun, said to be worth N5m.

They were said to have entered Illela area around 5 pm on Thursday in their numbers. According to some residents, there were more than 300 armed men.

Sources said on their arrival, they began shooting indiscriminately in the village unknown to them that the Sarki-led gang was already aware of their mission.

Another source, however, said it was a clash of interests between those in support of a peace deal with the government and those against it.

"One of the Sarki-led members, Mani, who is in favour of a peace deal has left the forest and settled in Illela but did not surrender his weapons to the government. So, he is one of the targets of those who are not in favour of the peace deal.

"So, what brought the Dangwate faction to Illela was to get that man. When they came they began a house-to-house search in

the bid to get him.

When they got to the house of Sarkin Pawa Mu'azu, who is the leader of butchers, they found a Dane gun and suspected that he was amongst the vigilantes, who are also their enemies.

He told them he was not a vigilante but they shot and killed him.

"They also injured four other persons - Kabiru, Tanimu, Nuhu and Sulaiman - in the village, and they are now receiving treatment in a hospital".

The source said the attackers spent about eight hours operating in the village, where they set vehicles and shops ablaze, and carted away many valuables, "but without accomplishing their mission of getting Mani who is in favour of peace with the government."

It was said that they went back to the forest and engaged the Dankarami-led gang and killed scores of them. Some said more than 100 were killed, including children.

"Dankarami himself only narrowly escaped death because he was shot on the hand," a source said.

On whether there was security presence during the incident, the source said "they did not come because they knew it was a fight between bandits and not with the community members."

The source said many were killed, but that he could not specify the number.

When contacted, the police spokesman in Katsina, SP Gambo Isah, said investigation was ongoing.