

# Concerns over abducted students as airstrike kills bandits' leader Kawaje

By Hamza Idris

The condition of dozens of abducted students of Federal University, Gusau, Zamfara State and those of Dutsinma, Katsina State, is not known following the killing of bandits' leader Ali Kachalla in an airstrike on Monday, *Daily Trust* reports.

Kachalla, whose real name is Ali Kawaje, was reportedly killed during reconnaissance by Nigeria Air Force (NAF) at a location in Niger State.

There was no official statement on his killing from the military, but credible sources said he has been taken out.

A source involved in talks for the release of the abducted students and others told the *Daily Trust* last night that Ali Kachalla has been killed.

He said, "Kachalla Ali's killing by the military has been confirmed by his younger brother. We don't know the implications on the Zamfara and Dutsinma students, the ongoing dialogue by the ONSA (office of the national security adviser), who will inherit his position, among other issues. We are meeting to discuss the issue," the source said.

A relative also confirmed that the kingpin's brother, Danlami with others were also killed.

In the past, there had been many stories alluding that Ali Kachalla was either killed or arrested, but all the stories turned out to be untrue as he continued to wreak havoc on hapless citizens.

This is the first time that credible sources within the security architecture, community leaders in Zamfara, and those with ample knowledge of happenings around the bandits all agreed that he has been killed.

It was learnt that the bandits' kingpin was killed alongside other commanders and foot soldiers, in what security operatives described as "an unprecedented breakthrough".

He was a vicious bandit who had committed countless atrocities around Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina, Niger, Kaduna and other states.

He had raided many communities, abducted men, women and children, and also killed those who could not afford to pay ransom.

Sources said among his victims that are still in captivity are



■ Bandits' leader Kawaje alias Ali Kachalla

students of Federal University, Gusau, where he abducted over 50 students, mostly women on September 21, 2023.

They also include female students of Federal University, Dutsinma (FUDMA), Katsina State, where on October 3, 2023, his boys invaded their rented apartment located behind Mariamoh Ajiri Memorial School, and shepherded them to the bushes without a trace.

On the day the abduction in Gusau varsity happened, Kachalla and his gang members reportedly stormed Sabon-Gida village near the university where students were being accommodated in private hostels and abducted scores of them at gunpoint.

It was learnt that besides the Zamfara and Dutsinma varsity students, there are dozens of hostages picked from many communities in his custody and many others under the firm grip of his lieutenants in various locations.

Even though some of our sources said it was very unlikely that the Zamfara or Dutsinma varsity students were among those bombed by the air force, the news of his death had raised fears among families and acquaintances of those abducted, especially in relation to their safety.

They said when the news of his death broke, many communities expressed gratitude to God for ending the life of the terror leader, who they said had inflicted havoc on their lives, impoverished them, forced many to leave their homes and farms and took refuge elsewhere.

However, it was learnt that the jubilation was short-lived,

especially for those whose relatives were under his custody.

"Of course, we are happy Kawaje has been killed, just the way he mercilessly killed hundreds of our people over the years," said Ma'aru Mamman, who now lives in Gusau, the Zamfara State capital.

"It was pleasurable news that a lot of his protégés have been killed also... This means the claim that the bandits were elusive is not correct," he said.

But Abubakar Tsafe, a trader in Gusau said many people have mixed feelings.

"After the initial jubilation, people started asking questions about the safety and whereabouts of dozens of people in his custody.

"Many people had prayed that he should be captured alive so that he would be compelled to produce all the people he stole.

"I have personally been receiving many calls since Monday, especially from outside Zamfara because some of the abducted students came from other states and their parents have never known peace since the time they were taken away," he said.

"Our prayer is that the federal government will deploy every means available to ensure their safe return," he said.

A community leader in Zamfara, who does not want to be named, commended the NAF's exploit that led to the killing of Ali Kachalla.

"We thank them for a good job but they should sustain the tempo," he said.

"The bandit leader controls hundreds of foot soldiers and he has his cells in many places. Both the air force and ground

troops should sustain the tempo, especially now that the rainy season is over.

"They should not wait for the bandits to attack them first and then repel, they should take the offensive to their hideouts, rescue our children and recover our communities," he said.

## End of the road

It was learnt that Ali Kachalla was bombed near Mangoro, in Munya Local Government Area of Niger State.

PRNigeria had on Monday, quoting a defence intelligence source, said that Ali Kachalla had attacked a detachment of security operatives deployed at Mangoro Community.

It said this was when the attention of NAF aircraft under Operation Whirl Punch was sought for.

Other sources who described Kachalla's movement as an "inglorious expedition," said they were tracked by the NAF aircraft at Kopa Hills and finally neutralised.

## How Kachalla abducted Zamfara varsity students

In September, the Kachalla-led bandits, who came on foot for the operation that lasted for hours, ransacked four female hostels, the residence of the protocol officer of the university and another residential house attached to one of the affected hostels.

At the first hostel, they kidnapped all the students except three who hid in the ceiling. All the students in the second and third hostels were also kidnapped, while at the fourth hostel, five students were abducted.

Approximately, the bandits were said to have gone with more than 50 people, mostly female students, the protocol officer, his sister, eight local iron-benders working inside the university and one other person.

In a report by this newspaper last week, Alhaji Muhammad Malami, one of the affected parents, said they were in a dilemma, as according to him, they are left to search for the whereabouts of their children.

Malami lamented that the government and the management of the Federal University, Gusau had failed woefully in handling the situation.

"It appears nothing is being done by both the government and management of the university to

rescue our children," he alleged.

"In fact, since the abduction of my daughter, I and her mother, fell sick and we have been battling with our health up till today.

"You can imagine scores of female students abducted and held in a bush for months and the government is making no effort to rescue them. What type of leaders do we have in this country? Our leaders are joking with the lives of innocent citizens. This is terrible and unfortunate," he lamented.

Asked whether the bandits have contacted him, Malami said he was contacted twice.

"One of the bandits called me and said we (the parents) should tell the government to release their people who were arrested in Zamfara State after they returned from Hajj about two years ago. He even mentioned one Ibrahim Alheri whom he said was among the arrested persons they wanted the government to release before they would release our daughters."

*Daily Trust* had confirmed that indeed, Ali Kachalla was aiming for "prisoner swap" before he was killed.

At the height of the negotiations, it was gathered that he wanted some of his high profile commanders, including his brother to be released but for some obvious reasons, the Nigerian authorities could not release the people he wanted.

## Kachalla's previous atrocities

*Daily Trust* had in August 2021, unravelled the mystery behind Ali Kachalla, who masterminded an attack on an air force aircraft.

The NAF Alpha Jet was brought down on June 18, 2021, near Kabaru village, located some 15 km west of Dansadau town.

Speaking on the issue at the time, NAF spokesman Edward Gabkwet said in a statement that the aircraft was attacked while on its way back from an air interdiction mission between the boundaries of Zamfara and Kaduna states.

It was told that Ali Kachalla spent most of his time at Kuyambana Forest, which straddles Zamfara, Kebbi, Kaduna and Niger states.

Those who know him said he was born in Madada, a hamlet near Dansadau to a family of herders. They said he was in his early 30s.