

## IN-DEPTH

# Abducted 150 Maru villagers: 3 dead as bandits remain silent on ransom

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**A**lmost a month since the abduction of 150 villagers in Mutunji District of Maru LGA of Zamfara State, three of the victims have been reported died in captivity even as the bandits have remained silent on the issue of ransom for the remaining 147 in their den.

Daily Trust reports that armed bandits had on Friday, November 24, 2023 attacked six villages in Mutunji District and abducted 150 people for their inability to settle a N200 million levy placed on them by a notorious bandits' leader known as Damina.

In simultaneous operations, the bandits kidnapped 18 people in Mutunji village, 32 in Kwanar Dutse, 30 in Unguwar-Kawo, 22 in Sabon-Garin Mahuta, 20 others in Gama-Giwa all in Maru LGA.

They also kidnapped seven people in Bulakke village in Maradun LGA on the same day.

According to a resident, the three people reported dead might have died of hunger, saying "the gang that kidnapped them is being led by a notorious bandits' leader, Damina, who is known for maltreating his captives."

"Damina is a wicked and heartless bandit. He is known for torturing and maltreating his victims. He spares no one when it comes to torture. He does not feed his captives well and that is why sometimes people die under his custody."

**Why banditry persists in Mutunji District**

Mutunji is one of the biggest

**The district head of Mutunji has been residing in Dansadau for the past six months because of the harassment and threats by the bandits. There was a time when they ransacked his residence and warned the people that are gathering in front of his house to stop doing so or else be dealt with**



districts in Maru LGA with 43 villages under it. However, despite its size and the natural resources the district is endowed with, there are no adequate security personnel in the area.

"For the past five years, over 10 out of the 43 villages under the district are being controlled by bandits. Nobody is staying there and no security personnel can dare go to those villages."

"Even the villages that are not controlled by the bandits, majority of the occupants have relocated to other places for safety. Very few people are residing in their villages in Mutunji District at present. Many of the residents have relocated to either Maru or Gusau," a resident, who does not want his name in print told Daily Trust.

"Previously, there was military a base in the district, but since the soldiers were withdrawn, the bandits continued with their heinous activities. If there is presence of security personnel, the bandits will not have the chance to carry out their devilish activities."

"I believe lack of security personnel in the area is responsible for the rising cases of banditry in

the district. If adequate personnel can be deployed to the area, the banditry will be minimised if not completely stopped."

"Personnel of the recently launched Community Protection Guards (CPG) who are familiar with the terrain can go to such villages and fight the bandits. So, if these personnel can be deployed to the district to complement the efforts of the military in the fight against banditry, the insecurity challenge in the area can be curtailed."

"Although, the CPG personnel are still undergoing their training, but whenever there is intelligence report on any possible banditry attack, they are deployed to their respective villages to protect the people. To be sincere, we are in terrible situation in Zamfara State. Banditry is crippling our state."

"The district head of Mutunji has been residing in Dansadau for the past six months because of the harassment and threats by the bandits. There was a time when they ransacked his residence and warned the people that are gathering in front of his house to stop doing so or else be dealt with," he said.

**Mutunji residents pray for divine intervention**

However, the resident said the people have resorted to prayers for divine intervention to end banditry in the area. "People engage in the daily recitation of the Holy Qur'an and supplications to end banditry in the state."

"Residents are tired of attacks and kidnapping by the bandits. It appears that the only option that the residents have is prayers. Since government has failed to end the menace, the residents have resorted to prayers for divine intervention."

Meanwhile, the bandits are said to have begun negotiations with families of the abducted 17 people in Ruwan-Dorawa village of Maru LGA of the state.

Daily Trust reports that armed bandits had on Sunday, November 19, stormed Ruwan-Dorawa village and kidnapped 17 people including a bride and the wife of the village head, Marafa Kabiru Makau.

The attack was described by many residents as disturbing as throughout the operation, which lasted for about four hours, the bandits fired only a single shot that

claimed the life of a policeman on duty at an outpost located in the middle of the village.

The bandits numbering about 150 in number, suspected to be led by a notorious leader, Dan Nagala, arrived at the village on motor bikes with each bike carrying three people.

A relation of one of the abducted persons, who craved anonymity, confided in Daily Trust that the bandits have contacted the families of the 17 abducted persons through the village head, Marafa Kabiru Makau, and were demanding N100 million for their release. The families were said to have agreed to pay only N5 million as the negotiation continued.

According to the man, whose brother was among the abducted people, "The bandits first called our village head on phone and demanded for N20,000 worth of credit cards from him. But what is still not clear is whether the credit cards are for the release of his wife who was kidnapped alongside the 17 other victims."

"When they called for the second time, they demanded N100 million ransom for the release of 17 people. However, after a long bargain, the families agreed to pay N5 million, but when the message was conveyed to the bandit, he switched off the phone and since then he has not called back again."

"So, this is how the first move for negotiation ended unsuccessfully."

The source added that they recently called and directed for the payment of N5 million ransom per person, saying "but negotiation is still on and we are hoping to reach a final agreement very soon. I am sure, when the bandits and the affected families agree on a certain amount as ransom, the abducted persons will regain their freedom."

"The village head is still in shock because his wife was ill when she was kidnapped. She was kidnapped a week after she was discharged from the hospital. And since then the bandits did not allow the village head to speak with her. So, at present he doesn't know her health condition. In fact, we are not certain if woman is still alive."

He, however, explained that relations of the abducted persons have been trying other ways to secure the release of their loved ones, noting that the affected families are worried about their brothers and sisters held by the bandits, and are therefore ready to use any available means for their immediate release.

Efforts to reach Commissioner for Internal Security, Captain Bala Muhammad Mairiga (rtd) for comment proved abortive, as he did not pick several calls by this reporter.