

Inside Story Of Kogi Community Attack

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kogi attack

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On April 4, 2024, gunmen in their hundreds invaded Agojeju-Odo in Omala Local Government Area of Kogi State, killing and inflicting heavy injuries on residents and leaving their homes in ruin.

At the last count, 27 people were confirmed killed, but an unconfirmed report put the death toll at 34.

A community leader, Ojima Ataguba, said there was no household that was not affected by the attack.

“We have been picking dead bodies from ruined homes, streets and the nearby bush. Every household lost somebody; even the old were not spared.

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“They all fell to the trigger-happy invaders in their ancestral land. The sight is too gory to behold,” he said, adding that community leaders are still searching the bush to recover more dead bodies and find those missing and the injured.

He added that many people had left the town and many more are still leaving for the fear of more attacks.

An indigene of Agojeju-Odo and a regular guest on a Raypower FM programme, Mr Samuel Abu, was confirmed to be among the dead in the deadly attack.

Agojeju-Odo is an agrarian settlement where all the residents have lived peacefully for centuries.

The district head of Bagaji Odo, one of the affected communities, Chief David Akpa said, “There is no family that has not lost someone in this organised deadly attack.”

While the identity of the attackers is yet to be established, many are appointing accusing fingers to the lingering communal clashes that allegedly brought herders or bandits, as well as Agatu militia to Apa Local Government Area in Kogi State.

Bagana connection

Agojeju-Odo is said to be about 15km to Bagana, where two clans, Ihiankpe (Patanyi) and Otutubatu (Omagede) have been at daggers drawn since 1950 over fish ponds and land speculation.

According to an elder in the community, Chief Adejo Amatule, the invasion of Ogojeju-Odo emanated from the Bagana crisis.

“The crisis started gradually in 1950 and snowballed into a bloody battle in 1978, with heavy casualties on both sides.

“In the year 2000, both sides invited outside forces to enable them win the battle. It is an open secret in the community that Otutubatu (Omagede) aligned with Agatu in Benue State, who have been battling with herders, while Ihiankpe (Patanyi) pitched their tent with bandits/herders at Bagana.

“These outside forces ruined Bagana and both clans became losers at the end of the day,” Amatule said.

Another community leader, Ihiabe Atodo, said that following the war, Bagana residents, particularly the Igala ethnic nationality, relocated to join their relatives in the neighbouring villages. He said residents took refuge at Agojeju-Odo, Ajokpachi Odo, Bagani Odo and other communities in that region.

He added that in the process, herders took over Bagana as it was deserted due to the lingering crisis, a move one of the warring factions refused to accept as they felt threatened; and therefore, vowed to dislodge the herders.

A story making the round in the community notes that a suspected factional militia group would attack Fulani herders who settled in the place, kill their cattle and drop their bodies in any of the neighbouring villages to create the impression that residents of the community were behind the attack. In turn, the herders allegedly vented their anger on the community with devastating attacks.

Herders/farmers clashes

An elder in the community, Captain Adaji Atuluku (retd), said the incessant herders-farmers clashes in the communities over destruction of farm crops that occasionally led to crisis set a setting for an unending bloody clash at any time.

“At a point, it became obvious that an attack was imminent on any community in the area because of unending farmers-herders clashes.

“We did not know when and how it would happen, but we were sure it would happen,” Captain Atuluku said.

As a solution to this ugly situation, the chairman of Omala Local Government, Peter Ameh, was said to have held a meeting with leaders of herders, farmers and elders in the affected communities.

In the said meeting, the council chairman was reported to have reeled out a 16-point agenda, including giving a quit notice to the Fulani.

An agreement of peaceful coexistence was said to have been reached and signed last month by both parties.

Last straw

On a Tuesday last month, unknown persons allegedly rustled herders’ cattle in the area, and in the process, killed a herder and dropped his body at the Agojeju-Odo area in the communities.

Few days after the incident, in a seemingly reprisal attack, farmers in the community were said to have come under fire on their farms, leading to the death of four of them in the Agojeju-Odo community, with many sustaining injuries.

The dust of that encounter hardly settled down when, penultimate Thursday, the town received a more devastating blow from a yet to be established group, leading to the killing of many people, with many injured and missing in the process.

Security

The Kogi State police command said it had deployed its operatives to restore peace in the area, assuring that the perpetrators of the heinous crime would be arrested and prosecuted.

“Nineteen people were killed while some sustained injuries. The gunmen will be apprehended.

“CP Bethrand Onuoha has deployed more policemen to the Agojeju-Odo community, said CP Williams Aya, the command’s police public relations officer.

However, the report from the area on Wednesday noted that the military visited the area on Tuesday and left towards evening, stressing that there was no presence of security operatives despite the outcry that followed the attack.

Humanitarian crisis

Last Thursday’s attack has caused heavy humanitarian crisis in the various communities in that region.

Reports indicate that residents of adjoining communities – Ejima, Omagede, Iyade, Ogba, Patanyi, Bagaji Odo, Ugwumogo and host of others – have deserted their ancestral homes to stay with relatives, neighbours and friends in far villages and towns for their safety.

Most of the residents said they could not continue to live in the fear of the unknown, lamenting that they had lost many loved ones to incessant attacks on their land.

“Despite pleading to the government and security agents, no fruitful decision was taken to stop this assault on our land.

“We need a military formation in this region of the country to checkmate the excesses of factional group leaders and their collaborators that have unleashed terror on us and turned our communities to a killing field.

“In Lokoja, the capital of Kogi, Keffi in Nassarawa and Makurdi in Benue, there is no military formation close by to intervene and save us from any attack in this region,” said Amodu Abalaka, an elder in Lokoja from the community, who claimed to have lost five relatives in the attack.

Meanwhile, the Kogi State governor, Alhaji Ahmed Usman Ododo, said security agents had arrested those behind the attack at Agojeju-Odo.

“The crisis at the Bagana area did not start today; it has been in existence for over 45 years. We are doing our best to make sure that peace is restored within the area.

“As I speak to you, the suspected sponsors have been arrested and investigation is ongoing. They are giving us useful information that will lead to the arrest of other suspects. As soon as we are done with that investigation, the report will be made known to the public,” he said.

Daily Trust Saturday learnt that five people have been arrested, including two traditional rulers and three prominent indigenes of the community.

Daily Trust Saturday also reports that different socio-cultural groups have appealed to the federal and state governments, as well as individuals and organisations to come to their help.

The president of Ife Development Association (IDA), the Omala Local Government apex association, Dr Aaron Omaye, called for humanitarian support for displaced victims.

He said, “Relevant stakeholders like the governor, security agencies, heads of warring parties should take actionable steps that will quell the crises.”

Also, a community leader, Thomas Acheneje, has called on the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the Kogi State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) to assist displaced persons with relief materials.

“Most of the displaced persons are taking refuge in primary schools, mosques and churches with little or nothing to cater for themselves,” Acheneje said.