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15 die in Benue chemical attack

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- NEC tackles Fulani/farmers' crisis
- Group threatens self-help

BLOODY raids by Fulani mercenaries on Benue communities took another dimension Thursday when the marauders invaded Shengev community in Gwer West Local Council leaving 15 people dead without gunshot wounds.

The worry is that the victims did not die of gunshot or machete wounds as in the past but were foaming in the mouth, leading to fears that they may have been attacked with chemical weapons.

Another dimension may also have emerged in the Boko Haram insurgency problem as the militant sect has threatened to attack some institutions in Plateau State with explosive devices.

A circular to that effect, a copy of which The Guardian picked up, said the leader of the sect, Sheikh Abubakar Mohammed Shekau, has instructed some members in the state to send the list of institutions that, if attacked, will cause serious injuries to the state.

The list of institutions allegedly sent to the Boko Haram leader include the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru, University of Jos, Plateau State University Bokokos, Federal College of Education, Pankshin, College of Education, Gindiri, Major Seminary, Katako, Jos, Federal Government College, Jos and Science School, Kuru.

Other institutions slated for attack any moment from now include Command Secondary School, Jos, St. John's Vianey Barkin Ladi, St. John's College, Jos, St. Murumba College, Jos, St. Louis College, Jos, GSS Laranto, Jos, two secondary schools in Bokokos Local Council and Church of Christ in Nation (COCIN), Dadin Kowa, Jos South Local Council.

“Additionally, it was disclosed that the three members of the group who have been assigned to trail the state Governor, Dr. Jonah David Jang and the State House of Assembly member, Daniel

Dem, have been given enough time to carry out that operation.

Meanwhile, the President of the Student Union Government (SUG) of the University of Jos, Ajik Magaji Izang, told The Guardian that he had a hint that members of the Boko Haram sect are in Jos.

He said they are educating the fresh students to be security conscious and report any strange object to the security personnel for immediate action.

But the Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) of the State Police Command, Superintendent Felicia Anslem, said she did not want to believe that there is Boko Haram in Jos, adding however that all should be conscious and vigilant.

Spokesman of the Special Task Force (STF), Captain Salisu Ibrahim Mustapha, was said to be in a meeting yesterday when The Guardian took a photocopy of the circular to their headquarters in Jos.

But the Special Adviser to the Governor on Political Matters, Nde Alexander Molwus, said that he was not aware of the circular.

Meanwhile, alarmed at the escalating conflict between suspected pastoralists and farmers across the country, the National Economic Council (NEC) rose from its first meeting in the year with a call on President Goodluck Jonathan to, as a matter of national urgency, convene an expanded meeting of the National Security Council (NSC) to address the issue before it gets to a more frightening dimension.

The proposed meeting, according to the resolution read by Akwa Ibom State Governor Godswill Akpabio, should include the governors of the states affected by the crises, who would meet with the heads of the various security agencies with a view to making relevant input into how the matter could be resolved.

According to the Council's resolutions, "statistics released from the meeting, which was presided over by Vice President Mohammed Namadi Sambo, at least 17 states spread across the country are considered as flash-points as a result of the increasing activities of the attackers.

Besides, the Council also expressed fears about possible food shortage if the activities of the attackers are not contained within a short period.

"Council also discussed the issues pertaining to the current conflicts between the farmers and the pastoralists across the entire country. We received presentations from the NSA on the incessant conflicts being experienced across Nigeria, especially the one of sacking so many villages by

criminals in Benue State and other adjoining states in the North.

“According to the NSA presentation, 17 states have been identified as flash-points. Of course, such states include Benue, Plateau, Adamawa, Bauchi, Niger, Nasarawa, Kwara, Kaduna and Oyo. We also reported issues bordering on the conflicts in her southern parts of the country such as Edo, Akwa Ibom, and Cross River, particularly in the Ogoja area.

“The Council also resolved to fast-track the recommendations of the committee on grazing reserves headed by Governor Murtala Nyako and which now includes Governor Gabriel Suswam as co-chair in order to ensure that at least during the next Council meeting, a report on it is presented to the Council.

“Council further resolved that a technical committee be set up to come up with recommendations that can resolve the conflict between the farmers and the pastoralists. Such committee should within two weeks meet with all stakeholders.”

One of the inhabitants of Shengev community told The Guardian that one of the victims, his elder brother, was found dead outside his house but after critically observing his body, no cut or wound was seen on him.

The chairman of the local council, Mrs. Eunice Abajwa who confirmed the invasion of part of her domain, said yesterday that they had recovered 10 bodies without wounds and had taken them to the Benue State University Teaching Hospital, Makurdi for autopsy to ascertain how they died.

Another worrisome development is that the alleged inability of the Federal Government to put a stop to the killings may force victim-communities to resort to self-help.

As the uncertainty surrounding the persistent attacks on some communities in Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba states by Fulani marauders continues, Tiv sons and daughters in America have restated their resolve to fund their communities to defend themselves if the Federal Government failed to intervene.

The Vice President of Mutual Union of the Tiv in America (MUTA), Prof. Joseph Zume, yesterday in Abuja said the government at the centre has continued to look the other way while attacks targeted at Tiv communities are being perpetrated unabated.

Zume said: “It seems there is a conspiracy to emasculate our people, make them not to perform their well-known vocation of farming very well, kill them, drastically reduce their number and possibly make them politically irrelevant.

“But the Federal Government has remained silent about it.

We are therefore constrained to begin to fashion out a way for our people to be able to defend themselves if they are attacked.”

Meanwhile, in a release jointly signed by the President, Joseph Unongo and Secretary, David Agum, the group said the situation is deteriorating by the day as hundreds of their people are being murdered and others rendered homeless in their homeland and “strongly condemned the orchestrated attacks and killings of people in parts of Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba states by Fulani herdsmen and mercenaries.

They, therefore, “warned that if the Federal Government of Nigeria cannot defend the Tiv people from the marauding herdsmen, we will be forced to mobilise the people to defend themselves.”

The group said their decision was hinged on the fact that the attacks are all unprovoked, motiveless and rather gratuitous, as “it is disturbing that what started as a local dispute along the Benue-Nasarawa axis a few years ago, has now manifested as a well-orchestrated agenda to over-run Tivland.

“This is evident both from the expanded scope of the attacks and the sophistication with which they are executed. The most recent well-co-ordinated attacks and devastation of Tiv communities in Makurdi, Guma, Gwer, Gwer-West, Kwande, Logo and Katsina-Ala local councils of Benue State are suggestive of a deeper plan than meets the eye, and we warn the perpetrators and their sponsors to think twice - it won't be that easy.”

Unongo said as Tiv sons and daughters in The Diaspora, they cannot fold their arms and remain mute as “communities at home are being ravaged and our people being killed, maimed, and rendered homeless by the Fulani and their cohorts.”

Yesterday, fear of impending attack by suspected Fulani marauders heightened among communities on Lafia-Makurdi Expressway, leading to the residents fleeing for their lives.

From communities and settlements along the ever-busy Lafia/Makurdi Road after Mopol 28 Barracks in Lafia, the long stretch to Kadarko, a usually busy town renowned for pounded yam and bush meat delicacy, has been deserted.

Motorists and others plying the road have expressed fear due to the absence of security operatives.

One of the commuters who spoke with The Guardian regretted the attacks on innocent people, which he said, has brought untold hardship to the people.

“Travelling on this road is no longer safe. Can you imagine driving for over 15 kilometres without seeing any resident? Boko Haram has threatened to destabilise Plateau State through explosive attacks on some institutions in the state as part of their efforts to wreak havoc on the relative peace being enjoyed in the state”, he said.



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