

NEWS.

Robbers raid Kogi communities, kill three

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• Banks suspend operations

FINANCIAL institutions operating in many communities in Okunland, Kogi State have shut down due to incessant attacks by armed robbers in the area.

The Guardian learnt that most of the first generation banks that have branches may have decided to close, from Kabba to Egbe, as armed robbers have targeted the financial institutions in the last three years.

Indeed, a gang of armed men invaded one of the first generation banks in Egbe, attacked the police station in the town, which forced the policemen on duty to flee and they operated for more than two hours unchallenged, killing three people in the process. The robbers also attacked another bank in Odo Ere.

Indications that the banks may have collectively decided to close shop emerged at the weekend when their officials came into the vandalized buildings and removed their valuables and documents without any information on possible date of re-opening.

It is believed that this development would affect teachers and civil servants in Okunland as there is no other means for them to collect their salaries when they are paid.

Some of the workers especially teachers who have not been paid for about 14 months recently got three months out of the 14 months arrears only for those who still have money in the bank to be stranded.

Indeed, not only are the teachers and workers in dilemma over the closure of the financial institutions, businesses are also affected.

Ilorin, the Kwara State capital and Lokoja, the Kogi State capital are the nearest places that banking services are available.

Speaking on the development, a member, Yagba West in the House of Representatives, Sunday Karimi, told The Guardian on phone that discussion is on-going with the state government to deploy military and mobile policemen across major roads in the area to ensure safety of lives and property.

On the bad state of the road, Karimi explained it is divided into two section that include Kabba to Egbe and Egbe to Ilorin with work on-going on the first section.

He was quick to blame the slow work on the project on paucity of funds saying, "there are so many federal roads that are undergoing rehabilitation at the same time across the country. The little resources we have given to the ministry of works are not enough to cope with the challenges. For instance, only N400 million was allocated to the project that has total cost of about N8billion in this this year's budget. We do not even know how much will be allocated to the road in next year's budget considering the revenue drop from oil earning.

Karimi called for commencement of road reform that will guarantee steady inflow of funds for road construction.

His words: "There is need to have a Road Fund Agency that will garner resources for building and rehabilitation of roads nationwide. There is nowhere in the world where government totally shoulder the construction of roads. I believe that such Agency will be charged with the responsibility of collecting some percentages on duties on car importation and fraction from rates paid for vehicle numbering and renewal of motor licenses. Government should also bring back tollgates for this agency to manage. These are veritable avenues through which enough resources can be generated for the sustainable road maintenance."

The lawmaker also appealed to people from the areas not to be discouraged from traveling home because of the incidents saying, "I appeal to them to come home because everything is being done to ensure their safety."

End.

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