

Bandits abduct Zamfara monarch after deadly NAF airstrike

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Kwara, Niger towns celebrate reported capture of notorious terrorist

Bandits have abducted the traditional ruler of Yankuzo, Babangida Kogo, in Tsafe Local Council of Zamfara State, just hours after a devastating Nigerian Air Force (NAF) airstrike killed scores of terrorists in the area.

The monarch was reportedly seized on Tuesday evening along the Mararaba axis, while fleeing his community over fears of reprisals, following the military operation.

According to security sources, the abduction was carried out by a group of heavily armed men riding on more than 10 motorcycles. They intercepted the district head and his entourage near the abandoned farm of the late Alhaji Malami Yandoto, taking him away while sparing others.

The incident came in the wake of a precision airstrike by the Air Component of Operation Hadarin Daji, which targeted a large assembly of bandits between Yankuzo and Munhayе. The gathering was believed to be a wedding or celebratory event attended by fighters loyal to notorious bandit kingpins active in the Tsafe–Zurmi axis, including some who had crossed over from Katsina and Sokoto states.

Intelligence reports and aerial surveillance had tracked over 100 bandits converging on the location before the strike. The operation left dozens dead, several wounded, and destroyed numerous motorcycles.

“The impact was massive. Charred bodies and wreckage of motorcycles littered the area after the strike,” a security source told counter-insurgency expert, Zagazola Makama.

“The airstrike triggered widespread panic across surrounding villages, prompting residents — including the abducted monarch — to flee in fear of retaliation.

“We knew they would strike back. That’s why our district head was leaving. Unfortunately, he ran into them before reaching safety,” a Yankuzo resident said, speaking anonymously for security reasons.

Local vigilantes have, however, launched a manhunt to locate the abducted monarch, while military ground troops have been deployed to prevent further attacks.

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In the meantime, residents of communities in Kwara and Niger states, bordering Benin Republic, are discreetly celebrating the rumoured disappearance of Abubakar Abba Mahmuda, leader of Mahmuda, currently the most feared terror group in the country.

According to some villagers in the Baruten council area of Kwara State, whose communities have suffered the most attacks at the hands of Mahmuda terrorists, the notorious terrorist was believed to have disappeared over the weekend.

The villagers confirmed that none of Mahmuda's commanders has been able to explain the disappearance.

However, speculation is rife among the villagers that the Department of State Services (DSS) may have covertly trailed and captured Mahmuda during a visit to one of his numerous witchdoctors.

After capturing Mahmuda, the villagers claimed, the DSS officers moved him to a secret location. This, they say, explains Mahmuda's puzzling disappearance, which has thrown his camp into disarray.

Typically, the new DSS leadership, which has consistently pledged to return the Service to covertness, has kept sealed lips on Mahmuda's whereabouts.

A local chief in one Baruten village, speaking in Hausa, said the villagers strongly believe that only the DSS could capture Mahmuda in such a manner.

On his part, the leader of a famous cattle market in the area, also speaking in Hausa, expressed the hope that Mahmuda's speculated capture by the DSS would restore peace to the traumatised villagers.

Mahmuda, a breakaway faction of Boko Haram, is believed to have links with terror groups in Mali and the Republic of Niger. It migrated to Niger State over five years ago after dislodging guards at the Kainji Lake National Park (KLNP), an area with a land mass of over 5,300 square kilometres, more than the size of Anambra State.