

Arewa

FEATURES

Herdsman attacks in Benue: The increasing loss of life, property

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INSECURITY is becoming a major issue in Nigeria, especially in the northern part of the country. It is either that the members of the Boko Haram sect are attacking and killing people, including military personnel, or Fulani herdsmen attack and maim villagers across the country.

Recently, the Deputy Governor of Benue State, Steven Lawani, scheduled a visit to Adaka and Adeke, which communities were recently attacked by suspected Fulani herdsmen but put off the visit to Adeke at the 11th hour.

Daily Independent gathered that the visit to Adeke was aborted because security reports that stated that the area was "unsafe" for Lawani to visit.

It was further gathered that since the attack on Adeke and Adaka a fortnight ago, the attackers, who are suspected to be mercenaries from Bukina-Faso, Cameroon and Niger Republics, have pitched tent at Adeke.

Daily Independent also learnt that the assailants have taken over the town even as they have displaced thousands of peasant farmers from the area.

Chairman, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Benue State chapter, Yimam Orkwar, told our correspondent that the attackers were not the everyday Fulani and that they were seen around Tiv settlements.

The CAN Chairman, who is also the archbishop the All Nations Evangelism Ministries, Makurdi, argued that if it were not so they would not take over the land of those they attacked.

While he described them as mercenaries that were out to propagate Islam, he further pointed out that the Tiv people have been having skirmishes with the Fulani but at no time had they attempted to occupy their land, adding that those that were carrying out the attacks were executing the long term plan of the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) to make Nigeria an Islamic state.

The cleric, however, warned of the impending danger the attacks portend to the state and the nation at large.

Speaking to Daily Independent, the state governor, Gabriel Suswam, said Benue State has channelled a lot of resources to address the issue of insecurity in the state.

While noting that the issue is defying solutions, the governor noted that he has held meetings with the Fulani people in order to arrive at ways of ending the clashes between Tiv and Idoma farmers on the one hand and Fulani herdsmen on the other.

But, Suswam has visited scenes of the clashes in Agatu, Logo, Guma as well as Makurdi Local Government Areas (LGAs).

In Agatu LGA, he visited Anyibe town; Tse Iordye and Akaahena towns in Logo LGA; Gbajimba and Udei towns Guma LGA as well as Adeke and Adaka in Gwer-West LGA.

The governor had earlier paid visits to states that border Benue, among them Nasarawa, Taraba, Ebonyi and Enugu and the outcome of one of those meetings have been the setting up of a Joint Tiv and Fulani Peace and Reconciliation Committee in July 2013.

According to the governor, the state government has done everything possible to end the attacks, adding that the state was still experiencing challenges in that regard. He, however, stated that government has taken some measures to help solve the issues of security challenges posed by the crisis.

Among some of the ways at reaching an amicable solution, last year Suswam met with his Nasarawa State counterpart, Umaru Al-Makura, as it was suspected that the assailants usually come through Nasarawa to commit their nefarious activities.

He also stressed the need to patrol the waterways, as part of measures to curb the attacks of the Fulani herdsmen coming to attack Benue people using Nasarawa.

Suswam also assured the people of the state, "As difficult as this issue is, we are finding a solution to it as we want to protect lives."

"What I have seen pains me to my bones where children are being massacred. So we are doing everything that is humanly possible to protect life and property. Even if it needs taking additional measures, we would take them in order to protect lives."

Meanwhile, the attacks on Adeke and Adaka towns have made the road leading to Naka, the headquarters of Gwer-West, almost impassable for fear of being attacked.

It was shortly after the composition of the committee that the Fulani herdsmen struck at both Adeke and Adaka.

The dare-devil herdsmen suspected to be mercenaries, attacked Adeke, a community, which is just about seven kilometres away from the heart of Makurdi, the Benue state capital, in the wee hours of the morning.

The incident, which sent the people of Adeke fleeing their abode for dear life as they fled the troubled spot leaving thousands of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the process.

Also, no fewer than 10 persons might have lost their lives as at the time of compiling this report, while several others have been declared missing by their families and relations.

Shops, primary and secondary schools in the area have remained shut in the area as well as other areas in the last two years in towns where the Fulani have not given the people rest.



•Suswam

A teacher at Apostolic College, Adeke, which was deserted, Monday Kulugh, said the attack led to the closure of the school.

Also headmaster, Foundation Nursery and Primary School, Victor Iver, said they had to shut the school so as not to put the lives of the pupils at risk.

He said the school, which has a population of 180 pupils, is yet to see the presence of the police since the crisis.

The ever-busy mammy market near the Mobile Police (Mopol) barracks at Adeke also remained closed when Daily Independent visited the troubled area.

In the first few days after the attack; there was tension in Makurdi main town with several communities organising vigilance groups to keep watch should the assailants decide to attack them.

The difference with the recent attack was that the Fulani herdsmen, who might have come through the borders of Nasarawa State to commit their atrocities and go back without being detected, however, entered further inland into the heart of the state.

The attacks they carried out on the two towns were unprovoked.

It has also been observed that the state government ignored the issue of Boko Haram, which has become a problem for the nation, in its embryo stage, it might have to contend with the same challenge if it ignored calls to tackle the activities of the Fulani herdsmen that have continued unchecked.

Reacting to the incident, member representing, Makurdi South at the Benue State House of Assembly, Benjamin Adanyi, noted that if no drastic steps are taken to check the activities of the marauders, he would not be surprised if the next attack brought them into the centre of Makurdi, the state capital.

Chairman, Makurdi LGA, Godwin Donko, said the attacks have sent most of the IDPs into Makurdi town for fear of being attacked by the Fulani raiders. Most of them are sheltered in houses of friends and relations.

He was also worried that the assailants, who operate through some towns bordering Benue and Nasarawa states, have sacked some villages in the North Bank area.

Even though the villages are situated close to the Nigerian Army School of Military Engineering (NASME), it has not deterred the intruders from operating in the villages unhindered.

These incessant attacks have left many families destitute and without means of livelihood. Their children have also been out of school for as long we cannot tell.

Equally worrisome is that the recent attack was carried out at Adeke even though there is Mobile Police (Mopol) barracks just a few kilometres from the troubled spot.

When Daily Independent visited the troubled spot on Tuesday, peasant farmers in the area, including 82-year-old Yar Jov, warned that it was not safe

TO BE CONTINUED TOMORROW