

More Bloodshed In Benue, Plateau As Gunmen Kill 55

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The insecurity in Benue and Plateau states took a turn for the worse yesterday after gunmen killed no fewer than 55 people in the two troubled North Central states.

The gunmen defied the 24-hour curfew placed on Mangu local government area by Plateau State Governor Caleb Mutfwang to unleash mayhem on Kwahasalek village and the surrounding communities where they killed no fewer than 25 persons and razed property worth millions of naira.

Also, militiamen suspected to be herders also struck in Benue State communities, killing 30 people.

Meanwhile, a Plateau group, Mwachavul Development Association (MDA), has condemned the military for not doing much to ward off the marauders during the attack, accusing them of taking sides against the hapless residents.

A resident of the affected community in Plateau State who gave his name as Hosea Ibrahim said the skirmish which happened at the Mangu town that culminated in the imposition of 24-hour curfew was only a decoy to pave the way for the attack on the community.

Our correspondent reports that the Kwahasalek community is not far from the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) permanent orientation camp at Jakatai, Mangu LGA.

He said, "What happened at Sabon Gari and Mangu on Tuesday was just a distraction so that people's attention will be shifted away from the villages. For the second time, my village, Kwahasalek (Behind NYSC camp), was attacked at about 12:30am leaving over 25 people, mostly women and children, killed while many others sustained gunshot wounds.

"At about midnight there was sporadic gunfire and the women ran to one compound for safety. Unfortunately, the terrorists went there and killed them while the men were keeping vigil outside the community. The victims were killed at a community leader's house where they ran for refuge. The Mairana, Kinat and other communities in Mangu Halle District and those on the borders of Mangu and Barkin Ladi local government areas have been deserted now."

It was learnt that a family of five was burnt to death despite the curfew imposed by the Governor Mutfwang on.

LEADERSHIP gathered that a family of five, including a mother, father, and three children, fell victim to the conflict, as they were set ablaze during the turmoil in Mangu town yesterday.

The state commissioner of information and communication, Hon. Musa Ibrahim Ashoms, described the relentless killings of innocent persons in their ancestral homes as very unfortunate.

He called on security operatives to, as a matter of urgency, fish out and punish the perpetrators of this heinous act wherever they are to serve as a deterrent to others.

According to Ashoms, the killings in the state, particularly in Mangu, is one too many, adding that the government cannot provide leadership to people who are not certain of the security of their lives.

"We cannot be living in perpetual fear

because some people have decided to take up arms against their fellow human beings. Once a non-state actor is arrested with arms, the commiserate punishment should be meted out to him. You can see what is happening is not only in Plateau State; once criminals are not arrested and punished, they continue to perpetrate their nefarious acts."

He, however, said that the security agencies had woken up to their responsibility unlike before when in one day there will be a lot of casualties, adding that there was aerial surveillance by the police as they sent a helicopter to Mangu to prevent further breakdown of law and order in the area.

"As a government our major focus is to put the state on the right track, and would not want any distractions of this kind.

On the casualties figure, the commissioner said the state government was waiting for the police, the special assistant on security, the chief of staff who are ground for on-the-spot assessment, stressing that it will restrain from giving incorrect figures.

"Sometimes it is a sensational report and, as a government, we will not toy with that line. We want to have reports from the Red Cross, National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), State Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and other agencies that are on ground," he said.

He advised the people to devise a means of defending themselves.

"I am not saying they should carry arms, but there is a need for them to be vigilant and to sleep with one of their eyes closed and report any suspicious movement to the law enforcement agents. They should be law-abiding and peaceful as they have always been despite these unprovoked attacks," he said.

Meanwhile, a security personnel who preferred anonymity said, "Mangu town is calm but we were called in the early hours of today about a development around the communities close to the NYSC camp. Our people are there, but the deed has been done. The victims are mostly women and children; they ran to hide there because they thought the place was far and the attackers wouldn't go there, but the attackers were conveyed in a vehicle and dropped there before they attacked," he said.

Similarly in Benue State, residents of Ejima and Ogwumogbo communities in Agatu local government area of Benue State are fleeing their homes over the serial attacks by suspected armed herdsmen which have claimed over 30 lives.

A native of Agatu who identified himself as Abel, in a statement entitled 'Ejima and Ogwumogbo communities call for help' disclosed that "the two communities have witnessed serial attacks from the dangerous Fulani violent attackers, killing local farmers, injuring scores, destroying properties and finally displacing them just to take over their homes."

He said, "The little assessments carried out by some youths of these communities, who sneaked in to look for their missing loved ones after the attacks listed that over 30 persons lost their lives and property worth over N100 million were destroyed in separate attacks at Ejima gegah, Ejima Ge-Che and Ogwumogbo in Agatu LGA, Benue



Egbetokun

State.

Abel further stated that the suspected herders, who invaded these communities, have sacked the inhabitants and are currently occupying their homes.

He said that the affected members of the communities were taking refuge in different locations even as he called on the government, relevant security agencies, Defence Headquarters, Nigerian Police Force, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Governor Hyacinth Alia, and Agatu local government chairman, Hon. Yakubu Ochepo, to come to the aid of the affected communities.

Our correspondent also learnt that herders invaded Ikpele community, which has also been deserted, and two dead bodies were recovered, adding that the surviving community members are taking refuge in neighbouring towns and villages.

In a telephone interview with the former director of publicity, John Ikwulono, who said he is also an internally displaced person because he doesn't have a home in Okokolo, his community, said the armed herders first attacked Okokolo village, killing four persons including some army personnel.

"As I speak with you, women, children, pregnant women and the aged are trekking to nearby villages for safety. My village in Okokolo has also been ransacked, everybody in my house, including my aged mother, has been displaced. I don't even have a place to stay in my community."

Ikwulono, who is the current media assistant to the Senate minority leader, Sen. Abba Moro, frowned at the ransacking and occupation of their ancestral homes by armed herders and called President Tinubu, to deploy more troops in Agatu to push out all the armed herders occupying the ancestral homes of Agatu people to enable them engage in farming this cropping season.

Plateau Group Blames Military

In a reaction to the latest attack, a Plateau group, Mwachavul Development Association (MDA), said it was saddened by the current breakdown of law and order in Mangu

town which began on Monday and continued till yesterday without any intervention by the security agencies.

MDA also said the people are losing confidence in the military authorities with each passing moment because their actions clearly showed that they had taken sides.

"Consequently, we wish to demand for complete withdrawal of the military to be replaced with MOPOLs and NSCDC as its roles in this conflict are highly suspicious," the group said.

In a statement issued in Jos last night by the association's director of public affairs, Lawrence Kyarshik, he described as unfortunate events going on under the watchful eyes of the military which have failed to give protection to law-abiding residents of Mangu.

He said, "The executive governor of Plateau State Caleb Mutfwang, in a swift reaction on Tuesday to curtail the situation, imposed a 24-hr curfew in Mangu local government area only for the jihadists to unleash mayhem on Kwahasalek, leaving over 30 people dead, houses razed and property, including food items, destroyed with fire."

Police Explain Explosion In Abuja

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) has said the explosion that occurred yesterday at about 11:45am near a refuse dump outside the Bureau of Public Enterprises premises in Maitama, Abuja, was not a bomb explosion as has been alleged on social media.

The FCT police spokesperson, SP Josephine Adeh, in a statement, said an overheated metal refuse container activated under intense heat to cause the explosion.

The police said the rapid response team and members of the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Unit were deployed to assess the situation and preliminary findings indicate that an overheated metal refuse container activated under intense heat, exploded, thereby causing injury to two of the refuse evacuator who are currently receiving medical attention at Maitama General Hospital, Abuja.

The FCT police command urged members of the public to exercise

caution and refrain from using metal refuse bins.

"Instead, we recommend the use of plastic or rubber containers for waste disposal, as they pose a reduced risk of incidents related to overheated metal refuse containers," it said.

Northern Leaders Proffer Solutions

As part of measures to restore peace and order across the country, the Coalition of Northern Groups (CNG) yesterday advocate for a multi-dimensional approach to end the insecurity that has bedeviled the country.

Former military head of state, Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar, while speaking at a two-day roundtable on Insecurity in Northern Nigeria, with the theme: "Multidimensional approach to tackling insecurity in Northern Nigeria," organised by the CNG, said that it's more urgent than ever before for all Nigerians to unite to tackle insecurity in the country, particularly in the Northeast.

He said, "Additionally, investing in education and economic development can address the root causes, ultimately fostering long-term stability. Also, synergy among the security agencies, state and federal authorities is key to effectively combating terrorism, kidnapping, and banditry."

He commended the military for their efforts in tackling insecurity across the country and encouraged them to redouble their efforts towards achieving a safer Nigeria.

In his remarks, Vice President Kashim Shetima, who was represented by his chief of staff, Ibrahim Yusuf Adejia, said that the initiative aligns with the resolve of the present administration to bring about lasting peace across the country.

He said providing security is one critical agenda of the government; hence the increase in budgetary allocation to security.

He maintained that no region will be left unattended to, as evident in all the critical projects being carried out in all the geo-political zones of the country.

Speaking earlier, the coordinator of CNG, Comrade Jamilu Aliyu Charanchi, said: "There is a need for decisive action to be emphasized, as speeches alone cannot secure the region. Accountability is crucial to the collective effort, and leaders are urged to act in order to protect innocent citizens."

Also, the director publicity and advocacy/spokesperson, Northern Elders Forum (NEF), Abdul-Azeez Suleiman, commended the CNG for organising a discussion aimed at finding practical solutions to the persistent insecurity in Northern Nigeria.

On his part, the former chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Prof Attahiru Jega, said that the insecurity had been allowed to fester too much, hence the expansion of the activities of the insurgents.

Prof Jega said it is now important to start adopting a multi-dimensional approach to tackling insecurity and urged Nigeria to adopt an inclusive process for tackling the menace, with the government taking a very responsive role devoid of politics.