

In the grip of violent crimes

The country is under siege. Armed robbers have taken over. From Lagos to Kano, from Enugu to Benin, all over the country, its tales of woe all over as the ubiquitous robbers are having a field day, unleashing terror, killing and maiming and turning the country topsy-turvy. The citizens are helpless. Not even the

policemen who are supposed to protect the people are spared. One after the other, and in quick succession, they fall victims of the monster that the armed robbers have become. In Ibadan, Oyo State, three policemen were killed when armed robbers stormed the city. This report tells the story of how unsafe Nigerians have become in the different states of the federation.

Lagos State

In recent times, the security situation in Lagos has assumed a frightening dimension following the relentless escapades of armed robbers, hoodlums and Motor Park touts.

In the last six months, there have been no less than 50 bank robberies in Lagos State alone. And where the Police dared them, the hoodlums engaged the cops in gun duels, with the men of the underworld coming up tops. Even Victoria Island and Ikoyi, which were generally safer than other parts of Lagos, have, in recent times, experienced bank and an increase in smash-and-grab car robberies.

By Mohammed AKOMOLAFE, Iniobong EKPONTA, Odunayo OGUNMOLA, Emma MGBEAHURIKE Abu-Sadeeq AMOKPA, Osu STEPHEN and Clarice AZUATALAM

Apart from the huge sums of money usually stolen, the marauders waste human lives. Starting in December last year, heavily armed robbers after killing the driver and robbing the passengers of their valuable items, set ablaze a luxury bus that had just arrived Lagos and was driving to its terminus.

No road in the Lagos metropolis is safe for motorists and commuters alike, particularly, the Third Mainland Bridge. The Oworonshoki end and Adekunle parts

of the bridge, have been described as most dangerous when there is traffic build-up and in the evenings.

Other dangerous roads include the Abule-Egba bus stop along Lagos-Abeokuta expressway, the Mile 2 Oke and Toyota bus stops on Oshodi-Mile 2 expressway, Maryland bus stop, beginning from Idiroko bus stop and Bariga-Gbagada Bridge. Motorists are usually at the mercy of the hoodlums whenever they are caught up in a traffic jam in these areas.

Recently, barely 24 hours after it was declared opened to the public, a gang of armed robbers who killed two persons attacked a newly established eatery along

Iju Road, in Lagos.

An eyewitness' account said the robbers came to the place in a Lagos State commercial colour bus all dressed in black T-shirts and black trousers. The witness added that at first, the hoodlums were mistaken for a group of entertainers who were there to add colour to the opening ceremony of the new spot. But as soon as everybody settled down for the day's business, the hoodlums struck by first firing at private security personnel who was manning the door of the main entrance to the hall of the eatery. One other person, who was shot, according to the eyewitness, was later discovered to be a policeman invited as one of the guests to witness the opening ceremony of the new spot

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The criminals were said to have operated unchallenged for more than 30 minutes. A victim said the robbers collected GSM handsets and other valuables.

Not even the house of God is spared in the attacks these days. Just in March this year, over 10 armed bandits raided private homes and places of worship in Alakuko area of the state, including a branch of Overcomers Christian Mission, carting away unknown amounts of money and other valuables.

Policemen were said to have arrived the scene from Alakuko Police Station after the robbers had escaped with their loot.

Just last weekend, armed robbers killed two police officers at Oke-Afa, Isolo and carted away about N700, 000. The dead police officers had accompanied a bullion van belonging to a fast food outlet, Mr. Biggs at Jakande Estate, Isolo, Lagos. They were said to be on their way to Allen Avenue, Ikeja branch of a new generation bank when they were cut down in a hail of armed robbers' bullets. The robbers, who operated in a Mercedes Benz Jeep, trailed the bullion van and escort vehicle from Jakande Estate, Isolo branch of the eatery. The bandits eventually overtook the convoy after it descended the Oke-Afa Bridge, a boundary between Isolo and Ejigbo, blocked them with the Jeep, and shot dead the driver of the van and the two policemen before carting away the money.

An eyewitness said the owner of the Jeep had earlier on been shot dead before the robbers snatched his vehicle.

Having succeeded unchallenged after the robbery, the robbers were said to have shot their way through Okota Road to safety. They were also said to have thrown canisters of tear gas at passersby who scampered for safety on hearing the gunshots from the rampaging robbers.

On reaching Isolo Divisional Police Headquarters, the robbers were said to have shot into the station apparently to dare the Police.

Also, the Alagbado area of Lagos was raided in the wee hours of last Saturday by men of the underworld, who moved unchallenged for several hours from one apartment to the other; one person was reportedly killed by the robbers.

In yet another incident on Monday, a 60-man gang invaded the Bureau-de-Change complex on the Murtala Muhammed International Airport Road, Ikeja, Lagos killing a mad man within the vicinity.

The gang shot sporadically into adjoining buildings and overpowered a policeman on duty at the complex.

According to sources, the robbers collected a gun from the policeman who was injured. He is said to have been admitted in a hospital.

The robbers, who arrived at the scene at about 3 am, in eight buses invaded over 30 shops in the sprawling complex, forcing the doors open with bullets. After opening the doors, the robbers who were armed with welding cylinders forced the "safe" (the metal compartment where money is kept) open but met it empty.

Enraged over their discovery, they started shooting into the air to scare people.

During the operations, the policemen at the new domestic terminal, fired in their direction, a development which provoked the robbers who returned fire, leaving the walls with bullet marks.

The Commissioner of Police, Airport Command, Mr Ibrahim Baba Ahmed said over 700 expended pellets and a carton of bullets were recovered from the scene, while three life bullets were abandoned by the robbers.

Early this year, a gang of robbers raided a Bureau-de-Change near Hajj Camp Police Station carting away huge sums in foreign currencies.

However, in a rare case of police efficiency and bravery last Sunday, Police in Lagos frustrated an armed robbery attack on a popular hotel in Ikeja, the state capital, and arrested eight people in connection with the incident. The Police team that effected the arrest was led by the State Police Commissioner himself, Mohammed Abubakar.

The policemen attached to the command had earlier on received a telephone call from a member of the public who said he heard an unusual noise in and around the



Suspects, Gbenga Adediji and Lope Akindele arrested in Ibadan, Oyo State on Thursday.

Armed robbers go on rampage

hotel and that he suspected something was amiss. Before the officers could arrive at the scene, the CP was already within the environment in his private car monitoring the situation. When his men came, the CP personally gave them directives on how to attack the robbers who were wielding sophisticated weapons, including AK47.

"The CP ordered us to bombard the hotel from all fronts," a police source said, adding, "we thus forced our way into the hotel, overpowered the criminals and got all of them, eight, arrested."

Police public relations officer (PPRO) in the State, Mr. Bode Ojajuni confirmed that the recent development is giving law enforcement agents sleepless nights. He also stated that the highway robbery operation was the most difficult to police. "Look at this scenario, how many roads and streets are in Lagos and how many policemen do we have in the Lagos command, and how do we police every one of these streets and roads?" he said.

Apart from the menace of armed robbers, another great threat to the peace and security of Lagos has been Motor Park touts whose umbrella body is the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW). Whenever they strike, they leave death and destruction of unimaginable dimension in their trail. Most often, the casualties are innocent, law-abiding members of the public. It is amazing to see the brazen manner in which the NURTW members deploy guns, machetes, axes, charms and all kinds of missiles while taking on rival factions in their quest to control some motor parks.

Recently, for instance, a clash between factions of the NURTW in Pen Cinema area of Agege left a university student dead while a stray bullet hit another victim and lodged in his head.

It is against this backdrop that the Lagos State Governor, Mr. Babatunde Fashola (SAN) recently inaugurated a 31-member security committee headed by former Inspector General of Police, Mr. Musiliu Smith with an assertion that the need has arisen for the State Government to address

the rising crime wave in the State.

Again, last week's decision by the Lagos State Government to approve N2.3 billion to boost security in the state is a welcome development. The money is to be used primarily for the expansion, reorganisation, re-kitting and re-motivation of the state's Rapid Response Squad (RRS). The state government has also begun talks with the Federal Government, aimed at redeploying more officers and men to the RRS.

Akwa Ibom

In Akwa Ibom, the current state of insecurity has become a source of serious concern to the state. Bank, super market and filling station raids as well as car-snatching have become regular occurrence in the state. A first generation bank in Eket has continued to fall prey to robbery attacks, which necessitated the deployment of a new Divisional Crime Officer (DCO) to the area. Similarly, in Uyo, the state capital, a robbery kingpin nicknamed 'Aeroplane' who had been terrorizing the metropolis with his killer gang was shot dead two weeks ago along Barracks Road by the Police Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mr. Gab Ngban told The Nation that a policewoman attached to the state command was arrested as accomplice. According to Ngban, the suspect who was paraded along with others had confessed to being a member of the gang. He said interrogation revealed that she served as information courier and cash depositor for the gang.

Perhaps, the major crime incident in the state occurred at Oruk Anam Local Government Area along Akwa Ibom State end of the East-West road. Investigation by The Nation revealed that some daredevil armed robbers ambushed a group of navy personnel, attacked them and seized their ammunition. Worried by the development, the State Police Commissioner (CP), Moses Omo Aneghode despatched all his Senior Staff Officers (SSOs) and Divisional Police Officers (DPOs) to some local government areas in

the state. According to the new DPO in charge of Oruk Anam, Mr. Eze Nwafor the robbery incidents along the East-West road end of the local government has made life unbearable to the road users and residents of Oruk Anam.

The State House of Assembly equally passed a resolution declaring the situation a matter of "urgent importance" to the executive and asking it to urgently wage into the insecurity problem in the state. The issue became necessary following the recent arson attack by armed robbers on the house of a retired army officer, Mr. Effiong Akpan at Obio Offot town, Uyo. His baby boy about six months old was burnt in what an official of the University of Uyo Teaching Hospital (UUTH) where he is currently receiving treatment, described as second degree burns. According to Effiong, his house was set ablaze when he refused to open his doors to robbers who raided his home at night. "They removed fuel from my car parked outside and set my house on fire in an attempt to smoke me out. My little kid got burnt in the process, and is currently receiving treatment at the UUTH," Effiong lamented.

In order to combat the menace of armed robbery in the state, Aneghode told The Nation that a holistic action plan was being adopted. He explained that the plan called a "Nipping Point" strategy where policemen are stationed at some strategic locations in some robbery prone areas leading to some major outlets to other cities was on. About 666 men, he said, have been committed into the project. Patrol vehicles and other facilities, he said are needed to enhance the fight. The executive governor of the state, Mr. Godswill Obot Akpabio said a combined team of regular police, mobile and army would be formed to combat the situation in line with the directive by President, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua.

Rivers

After the 2003 general elections, crime rate in the state assumed a high tempo.

Since 2003 until now, violent crimes in the state have been mostly cult-related as the various cult groups who fought for the politicians usually disagreed on sharing formulae for the booty from their paymasters. With time, these inter-cult rivalries graduated to serious bank robberies. Seeing that most banks in the state have beefed up security in and around their premises, the arm-totting youths also devised another means of survival.

This time around, they have found that kidnapping or taking hostage is a very lucrative means of making money. Though government has never said that ransom was paid to secure the release of any hostage, but the people around the corridors of power do whisper that millions of naira is usually dropped into the palms of these abductors to make them free their captives.

This explains why a week hardly passes without an incident of kidnap. From January this year to this time, it was reported that about 150 persons, especially foreign nationals had been taken hostage in the state. The situation has become very scary that many foreigners have abandoned their jobs and said goodbye to the state.

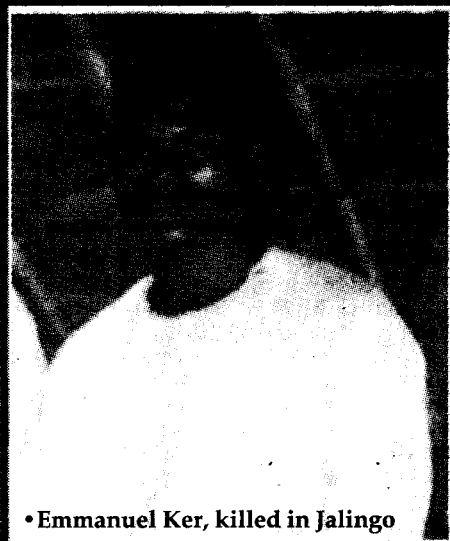
Apart from white men working in the state, some Nigerians now fall victim to hostage taking. For instance, Mrs Cecilia Omehia, the mother of the new governor of the state, Sir Celestine Omehia was kidnapped from her Ubima home one evening in May this year just before her son was sworn into office.

A three-year old son of a female legislator, Master St Michael Somiari-Stewart was on June 26, 2007 kidnapped while being taken to school by his Nanny. Barely three days after Somiari-Stewart was rescued after payment of about N13 million ransom, a half-cast British girl, Margaret Hill was kidnapped while being driven to school. After her release, another two-year old boy, Samuel Amadi, son of Paramount ruler of Iriebe was abducted. A few weeks back, two Nigerian engineers working for Shell were taken hostage at Soku in Asari Toru Local Government Area of the state. The list is as endless as it is disturbing.

At subsequent fora, Omehia had stated his resolve to stamp out the heinous crime. To prove this, he set up Peace and Rehabilitation Committee to pay one million naira to any criminal that drops his gun, so that the person could use it as take-off grant to start a new life.

The Police have said that they are "on top of the situation." Spokesperson of the Police in the state, Mrs Ireju Barasua said that Police could withstand the strength of these criminals. She cited instances of successes recorded by the Police in foiling crimes in the state and even at rescuing those taken

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• Emmanuel Ker, killed in Jalingo



• Some of his children



Robbers lay siege to society

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hostages.

Despite these efforts at curbing crime in the state, however, there is hardly a day shooting does not occur in the state. On Friday, July 20, 2007 movement in Mile 1 area of Port Harcourt was disrupted in the evening following shootings by some unknown gunmen. It was learnt that Police later went to confront them. The same Friday, a Lebanese business man was killed in his house at Ogbunabali area of Port Harcourt. Last Monday, a party thrown by the Billy Braide, the newly sworn-in Commissioner for Works in the state turned to disaster as some unknown gunmen invaded the venue of the party at 4, Lumumba Street, Diobu, Port Harcourt, killing Braide's brother and another person.

Going by the rate at which crime is rising in the state, Observers said that the solution to it requires serious and urgent approach. They suggested amongst others that money for arms dropping should not be the ultimate bait to disarm these boys. They suggested a proper re-orientation programme for the youths. This should be followed with sustainable development programmes aimed at making them acquire skills. It was further suggested that those who armed the youths should be fished out and brought to book, to serve as a deterrent to others who might want to tow that line in future.

Ekiti

There have been fears over the security situation of Ekiti State following the upsurge of crime in some parts of the state most especially Ado-Ekiti, the state capital.

The rising level of insecurity in the state usually forces residents indoors early as the streets of the state capital become empty as early as 8.00 pm.

The epileptic supply of power (as the state is not directly connected to the national grid) contributes in no small measure to the activities of the men of the underworld who are becoming more daring with little or no challenge from security agencies.

Unorthodox security measure like making bonfires in the dead of the night, blowing whistles and lacing the streets with charms are being adopted to check the wave of robbery in some parts of Ado-Ekiti.

Criminal activities reduced drastically before the conduct of the April general elections but picked up shortly after the Ekiti people went to the polls with some people linking the latest upsurge in crime to the proliferation of arms that found their ways into the hands of some individuals, which are being used in committing crimes after the elections.

Some of the criminal activities the people of the state have witnessed in the state of late included armed robbery which led to some killings, burglary, homicide, disappearance of some people most especially children believed to have been kidnapped for ritual purposes among others.

The latest crimes that have gained currency in the state are vandalism and threats to the lives of prominent individuals in the state by yet-to-be-identified persons.

Penultimate Monday, robbers invaded Karounwi Hostel on Ilawe Road in Ado where the occupants who are mostly students, corps members and construction workers were robbed of valuables including cash and mobile phones at gunpoint.

The incident, which occurred in the wee hours of the day, saw the robbers killing a

guard attached to a construction company, Anthony Akpan who was ruthlessly macheted to death after his hands were tied backwards.

A week earlier, not less than seven hotels and eateries were attacked with a few of the attempts not successful following prompt distress calls to the Police.

In Omuo-Ekiti in Ekiti East Local Government Area, a police constable was reported to have killed a middle-aged woman leading to his dismissal from the Force. He is awaiting arraignment after investigation might have been concluded.

Another homicide incident took place in Iroba Quarters of Ado-Ekiti where a spare parts dealer was said to have mobilised thugs who beat a woman who was a dealer in liquor to death a few weeks ago.

Vandals are also on the prowl in the state as the campaign billboards of the Action Congress (AC) governorship candidate, Dr. Kayode Fayemi were destroyed twice within a month with no suspect arrested yet.

The latest crime in the state borders on threats to the lives of some individuals in the state including a judge of the State High Court, Justice Emmanuel Kowe and counsel to the AC lawmakers, Mr Ayodeji Odu.

Some unidentified individuals waylaid Justice Kowe's son, Olusegun, telling him to warn his dad over a ruling he delivered in the suit filed by the AC lawmakers against their Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) counterparts.

Governor Oni also alleged that that some unidentified individuals sent threat messages to his mobile phone while his Senior Special Assistant (Public Communications), Mr Moses Jolayemi claimed that he received not less than three death threats within the week.

The Deputy Commissioner of Police in the state command, Mr Lateef Junaid, said the Police in the state are on top of the situation as investigations are still going on over some crimes allegedly perpetrated in the state especially armed robbery and homicide.

He attributed the success of some robbery operations in the state to lateness of distress calls to the command which made policemen arrived some robbery scenes after the hoodlums had left adding that those arrested for homicide would soon be charged to court on conclusion of investigations.

Niger

Owing to increased surveillance by the Niger State Police Command, relative peace and safety of lives and property have returned to the state.

Before recently, the crime waves within and outside Minna were virtually saturated with multiple cases of armed robbery, car and machine snatchings, burglary and gang rape Sarkin Pawa-Kaduna, Minna-Kontagora as well as Minna Suleja were so frequently terrorized that the state police command was compelled to permanently station anti-robbery squads at the various sharp points.

The Sarkin Pawa - Kaduna highway had witnessed the highest rate of robbery attacks in which several lives were lost. Dozens of innocent travellers have lost their lives in recent months. The hoodlums had found the highway the most convenient to operate owing largely to its sleepy nature.

The frequency and ease with which the robbers operated on the highway had remained a big riddle to even the members

of the police force who had to mark out the quiet federal highway as a special case.

The biggest crime incidents in the state in recent times include attack on the son of the Kebbi State Governor along Rijau - Kontagora highway as well as repeated molestation of women in a number of communities in the outskirts of Minna.

Popular crime analysts, Mr. Usman Mijinyawa described the crime rate across the state as having attained a record low.

He however cautioned the police against complacency as, according to him, the men of the underworld were busy devising fresh scientific methods to outwit them in the future.

Controversial lawyer and member of the legal aid council, Barrister Gero likened the relative silence in the crime world across the state to the peace of the grave yard, describing the armed bandits as a relentless group who would do everything to beat the police in their own game.

Imo

Imo has been bedevilled with various crimes before now.

However, since the resumption of the new police commissioner, Mr. Donald Iroham, peace has gradually returned to the Eastern heartland. But before his arrival, the security situation of the state was nothing to write home about as there was unprecedented level of lawlessness resulting in almost state of anarchy.

Precisely on July 22, 2007, some robbers went to Immaculate Heart of St Mary's Parish in Obowo and robbed the victims of a Mercedes Benz 190, N580,000 cash, cameras, VCDset, handsets, travelling bags and wrist watches. On information, the Imo State Police Command traced the robbers to Aba in Abia State where they arrested some of them as well as recovered all the items including the cash.

Another major exploit of the state police command is the arrest of a suspect who works in a bureau-de-Change at the popular Ama Awusa in Owerri, who duped his unsuspected victims the sum of N40 million in pretence that he was going to change foreign currency for them.

Others include the arrest and arraignment in court of some members of a popular secret cult in the state known as "Degbaam" as well as many other similar cases within the past two months.

Within the period under review, the Imo State Police Command has recovered over eight vehicles from armed robbers, 17 locally-made single and double barrel guns and some live cartridges in addition to the arrest of 17 suspects.

In his maiden briefing to journalists on Monday June 30, 2007, Iroham gave the Imo people the assurance that the best of him would be seen if they cooperated with him by feeding him with the necessary information; said that his arrival coincided with the elections in the country and that now that it is over, that he has settled down to do the real police work.

In totality Mr. Iroham stressed on the need for crime prevention which he noted should attract the attention of the general public more especially in the area of information to the police.

It is urged that the Federal Government should follow the example of the Lagos State Government by ensuring that officers and men of the Nigeria Police Force are properly

equipped and adequately remunerated. The security of the nation is too important to be left to the vagaries of unenlightened self-interest and partisan politics.

Taraba

With the return democracy in the country in 1999, the major problem confronting Taraba state has always been how to tackle the high incidents of armed robbery attacks on the major roads, major cities, market places and in private residents, these attacks are carried out 24 hours a day and seven days a week. The capital city, Jalingo is not an exception. The few major hotels in Jalingo became targets of these marauders while in some parts of Jalingo like Magami, Mayogwei, Sabongari and Jakadeferi these attacks were carried out on a daily

But with the arrival of the new Commissioner of Police, Mr. Richard Chime in the state, the story is changing. With the heightened security situation in the state capital, the robbers' attention now shifted to the southern part of the state.

The road between Wukari and Takum, Rafinkada danga, Takum to Katsina ala, Wukari Jalingo and Wukari Zakibiam, became no go areas for people who value their lives and property.

Former governor Jolly Nyame was a victim at a time. While returning from one of his assignments from Takum, his convoy was attacked on Wukari- Jalingo federal highway. When the governor managed to escape, the vehicles in his convoy were pockmarked by bullets.

Governor Suntai's wife Hauwa Danbaba Danfulani Suntai's convoy was equally attacked a few meters from Wukari town. Her pilot car was shot at while others in her convoy were destroyed, one of the security men in the convoy was also killed including her personal nurse.

The Controller, Federal Ministry of Works, Jalingo office, Engr. Ogochukwu was robbed at kilometer eleven Rafinkada- Donga road at about 9.15 am while on inspection of construction on Rafinkada - Donga federal government road and the construction of a bridge at river Donga.

Reacting to the incident, the controller described it as worse than terrorism and said the workers there live under fear as the attacks are already an everyday exercise and that is affecting the pace of work on the site.

Also the project manager, PW Nigeria Ltd, Mr. Douglas told *The Nation* at the project site in Donga that the company may abandon the site if the security situation does not improve. "You can not carry any money on you because these people can strike any time, on Rafinkada, Donga you are not safe, Takum, Wukari you are not

safe and even Takum, Katsina-ala, you are not safe again, so you see you can not work and your client is on your neck and mind you all these losses were not included in the contractual sum."

On the robbery attack on the governor's wife, the police paraded four suspects, two already dead. They were said to have been arrested at gunpoint at the scene of the robbery although residents disagree sharply with fundamental questions that are longing for answers.

The four suspects, Emmanuel Ker, Teryem Mbanengen and Abraham Terver Karshima were arrested at the scene of the incident at Iyolyina in Wukari local government area of the state. Emmanuel Ker and Teryem Mbanengen were shot dead.

But when *The Nation* visited Iyolyina village, the relatives denied, saying their sons were only victims of circumstance as according to them, the robbers had finished their operation for about an hour and half after the first lady had been taken to the general hospital Wukari when a combine team of soldiers and combat police arrive the scene and shoot at every body they saw around the place and tagged them robbers.

The wife of one of the victims, Mrs. Nguvese Emmanuel told *The Nation* in the family house that her husband was not a robber adding that police should show the world the fire arms they recovered from him. "My brother help me ask them to show you where they kept the gun they recovered from him?"

When contacted the Police Public Relation Officer, Solomon Isa told *The Nation* that as to whether the police recovered arms from their victims is immaterial as according to him the scene of the incident was already a dangerous place and he saw no reason why innocent people should be seen at the place, he also blamed the community as he said the robbers do come from there community, operate and go without fishing them out.