

## NEWS

# 18 killed in dawn raid of Benue communities

•Suswam summons security meeting•Sets up relief committee

**I**T was like a scene from a horror movie.

Villages were invaded by armed men in the dead of the night. Shots were fired into the air to cause commotion. Harmless villagers who were asleep ran helter skelter and in the ensuing confusion, they were felled one after the other. By the time the invaders were through, 18 innocent villagers were dead.

It was bloody in Gbaange/Tongon, Hyonghtee/Ijaha and Senghev Districts in Gwer-West Local Government of Benue State last weekend.

Armed Fulani herdsmen, numbering over 200, allegedly invaded the districts in a dawn raid to wreak havoc on the people.

The raid is said to be similar to the invasion of Borno State by members of the Boko Haram sect.

The assailants were alleged to have gained entry into the local government across River Benue from Doma Local Government in Nassarawa State. They camped in Gwantashi island for some days before crossing over to Benue villages where they killed and destroyed property put at over N100 billion.

The Ter Nagi(traditional ruler), Chief Daniel Abomtse, who conducted reporters round the three districts, said the Fulani herdsmen were assisted by foreign mercenaries from Chad and were armed with sophisticated weapons.

Chief Abomtse said the attack on the Tiv populated villages started on February 8, at about 4:30 am. The armed Fulani herdsmen first invaded some villages in Mbaifu and Mbaba kindred in Ityoughtee district, he said.

Explaining how they operated, Chief Abomise said: "They first surrounded the village, shot into



•Fr Vitalis(left) and Chief Abomtse examining the bullets used by the mercenaries

PHOTO: UJA EMMANUEL

From Uja Emmanuel, Makurdi

the air, waited for the harmless villagers who were asleep to come out of their houses. In the ensuing commotion, they shot and killed the people one after the other and set their houses and crops ablaze."

The second class traditional ruler said over 300 houses were set ablaze, crops and food worth over N100 million were also burnt. Motorcycles, beddings and mattresses, and personal effects were all set ablaze; the villagers were left with nothing to eat or cover their body.

The bodies of those who died in the attack littered the three districts.

They were not buried. The villagers flee their homes and took refuge in Naka, headquarters of Gwer Local Government.

For three days, the victims were helpless.

Until last Sunday, almost five days after the attack, the youths who took refuge in Naka with the parish priest of St Francis Parish Agabge, Fr Vitalis Ber and the traditional ruler buried their loved ones whose bodies had already decomposed in shallow graves.

Over 20,000 refugees among them children, women and the old are taking refuge in primary schools in Naka, Kula, Jimba and Ahume in

the local government. Some sleep on the floor. Others find home in the open football field.

Benue State Government has set up a relief committee to support the displaced. Governor Gabriel Suswam, Senator George Akume and other prominent sons and daughters of the state have donated relief materials to the displaced. There is shortage of food supply in the camps.

Governor Suswam yesterday summoned a security meeting and had also reported the attack to the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Saad Abubakar.

## 'Rascals' remarks: I was grossly misunderstood, says Jonathan

**P**RESIDENT Goodluck Jonathan has said that his comment on the South West at his zonal presidential rally in Ibadan is grossly misunderstood.

Jonathan said it is unhelpful to public discourse if words are twisted beyond intended meaning. The president said what he meant was that the zone in question was too sophisticated for the abhorrence of mischievous notions and behaviours.

Jonathan posted this reaction as a note on his Facebook wall yesterday.

The President said it was saddening for people to place emphasis on the latter part of his remarks and downplaying the former part where he said the Southwest was too sophisticated and educated, adding that he takes full responsibility for any misunderstanding of the context in which the

From Tayo Owolabi, Abuja

statement was made.

The note reads: "At my zonal presidential campaign rally in Ibadan, Oyo State, last Tuesday, I spoke about the place of the Southwest in the Nigerian federation. Without mincing words, I spoke about the level of education and sophistication in the region."

"In my opinion - and in the opinion of many informed Nigerians - the Southwest is of critical significance to the economic and political advancement of the country. The progress of the zone is the progress of Nigeria. It makes perfect sense that such a critical segment of Nigeria is governed by those who have what it takes! These were my exact words as accurately captured by the *Nigerian Tribune* of Wednesday, February 9, 2011: "The entire Southwest is too important, too sophisticated and too

educated to be in the hands of rascals."

"I had referred here to the fact that unreliable or mischievous behaviours or notions ought not to be acceptable in any part of our body politic especially not in the South-West where the population has had the privilege of a head start in education compared to other parts of the country."

"It is unhelpful to public discourse if we constantly twist words beyond intended meaning. Surely, even the most zealous detractor of the interest of the South West would not desire that anyone would wish upon such a sophisticated part of our country, the activity of unreliable or mischievous intentions"

"In other words, I had indicated that abhorrence for such behaviour should be our proclivity, especially considering the disposition of the people of the Western States to governance standards."

## Ciroma, others meet on elections

From Yusuf Alli, Managing Editor, Northern Operation

AS part of regrouping for April poll, members of the Northern Political Leaders Forum(NPLF) yesterday met in Abuja to chart a position for the North.

But they kept the outcome to their chest until a communiqué is released today (Tuesday).

Investigation by our correspondent revealed that the NPLF members led by a former Minister of Finance, Mallam Adamu Ciroma met for several hours behind closed doors.

It was gathered that the April polls was a major issue on the agenda and the NPLF took a position.

It was also learnt that a former Presidential aspirant, ex-President Ibrahim Babangida met with some members of the NPLF on Saturday before traveling, abroad for an undisclosed mission.

A top member of the NPLF, who spoke in confidence, said: "You know what we stand for and we have not deviated from the cause that we are pursuing because we believe it is a just cause."

"But I will not tell you what we discussed. The appropriate persons will brief the press."

Virtually all members of the Forum kept silent on the outcome of the long session.

A member of the NPLF, Alhaji Tanko Yakasai told our correspondent last night: "It is true that we met but you should wait for the communiqué on Tuesday (today)."

According to findings, three options are said to be available to the NPLF members to realise its insistence on power shift to the North in April.

According to a reliable source, the options are continuous pursuit of all cases against President Goodluck Jonathan's emergence as PDP presidential candidate in court; adoption of a Northern candidate against Jonathan in April poll; and acceptance of offer of dialogue with Jonathan with the understanding that power may return to the North in 2015.

It was difficult last night to ascertain which of the options had been adopted by the Northern leaders.

Although the attendance at the meeting was kept under wraps, those believed to have participated were Ciroma, Tanko Yakasai; Bello Kirfi; MD Yusufu; Bashir Yusuf Ibrahim; Isa Salami; Prof. Abubakar; Ahmed Mohammed Gusau; and Sani Zango Daura.

## NBA to monitor