

Host communities lament herdsmen's alleged atrocities

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Barely a month after Fulani herdsmen killed Brig. Gen. Sylvester K. Iruh (ret'd) on the long bridge along the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway in July 2012, they struck again on Monday night and stabbed a commercial motorcycle rider, also known as okada rider, with a dagger.

Doctors battled to save the life of the victim, Owolabi Habib, whose intestines spilled from his stomach after the attack. He offered two Fulani herdsmen a ride from Berger to the cattle market adjacent the long bridge but was stabbed instead.

The hoodlums said they headed to New Kara, Ogun State, located around the long bridge but, according to a source in Habib's family, "As soon as they got near their destination and Owolabi (Habib) slowed down, one of the men pulled out a long knife and stabbed him in the stomach. 'Habib abandoned his okada and fled to save himself,' it was said. He was rushed to the Lagos State Accident and Trauma Centre at old Tollgate before a referral to the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH) for intensive care.

Also in July, 2012, Brigadier-General Iruh was killed on the bridge by suspected Fulani herdsmen as he attempted to fix a flat car tyre while returning from Ilorin, Kwara State. He had been admonished by a concerned motorist who plied the road regularly to "quickly hop into his car and leave the area as it is a 'black spot', a notorious den of Hausa/Fulani criminal gangs who rob, stab and kill their victims in cold blood."

But the hoodlums reacted faster. They jumped out of the bush with daggers, bows, arrows and other dangerous weapons and demanded for money, which the General offered them. They shot him with an arrow and stabbed him several times, nonetheless.

He died before he got to the hospital. And tellingly, "the men who attacked him were said to be carrying sticks like Fulani nomads with bows and arrows in their bags," noted Brig.-Gen. Iruh's wife after talking with the witnesses.

Iruh was the Commander, Army Records, Lokoja, Kogi State, and was at a time appointed Chief Security Officer in the state during Alhaji Idris Ibrahim's administration. He retired in 2009 and had his pull-out ceremony on January 23, 2009.

Underscoring the notoriety of the Lagos/Ibadan expressway long bridge, with notable flash points as Sapade, Ogere and the 7-km bridge,

near Lagos, herdsmen also stabbed and chopped off the ear of an okada rider after he was robbed. Motorists often reported the sighting of corpses around the area.

As part of measures to arrest the development, the governments of Ogun and Lagos States, under the incumbent Governor Ibikunle Amosun and immediate past Governor Babatunde Fashola, formed a joint police team provided with working tools and a conducive atmosphere to enhance operations.

The Kaduna experience

Plagued by the same cause, the Kaduna State government has recorded progress similar to Lagos' and Ogun's. Until late 2015, gunmen suspected to be Fulani herdsmen carried out bloody attacks on villages in the southern part of the state as well as Kaduna Central villages of Birnin Gwari Local Government Area.

Like the recent Benue State experience, several villages of Southern Kaduna were attacked at night by gunmen suspected to be Fulani herdsmen. Southern Kaduna People's Union (SOKAPU) said in early 2015 that the gunmen said to be responsible for the attacks launched a total of 40 bloodletting attacks in the area since 2011 with perhaps undetermined casualty figures and several property destroyed.

But the March 14, 2014 attack on four communities of Manchok in Kaura Local Government may well be regarded as the most devastating. After unsuspecting residents of Maisankwai, Tyekum, Maikakpang and Angwan Kura in Bondong district of Manchok had gone to bed that evening, according to survivors, unknown gunmen invaded the communities just before midnight in apparently coordinated attacks and murdered 119 villagers in their sleep, as confirmed by relevant authorities.

Women and children and the aged were not spared as the attackers either shot or inflicted machete cuts on the victims. They mutilated the corpses and set some on fire, along with their houses. When a group of children and women sought refuge in one of the buildings, the attackers swooped in on them and set the building ablaze, snuffing life out of 18 of them. In January 2014, not less than 10 persons were killed in a separate incident at Bungel, Moro'a Chiefdom of Kaura Local Government Area when persons also alleged to be herdsmen clashed with residents.

Earlier in October 2013, gunmen overran a number of communities in Attakhar on the Kagoro Mountains,

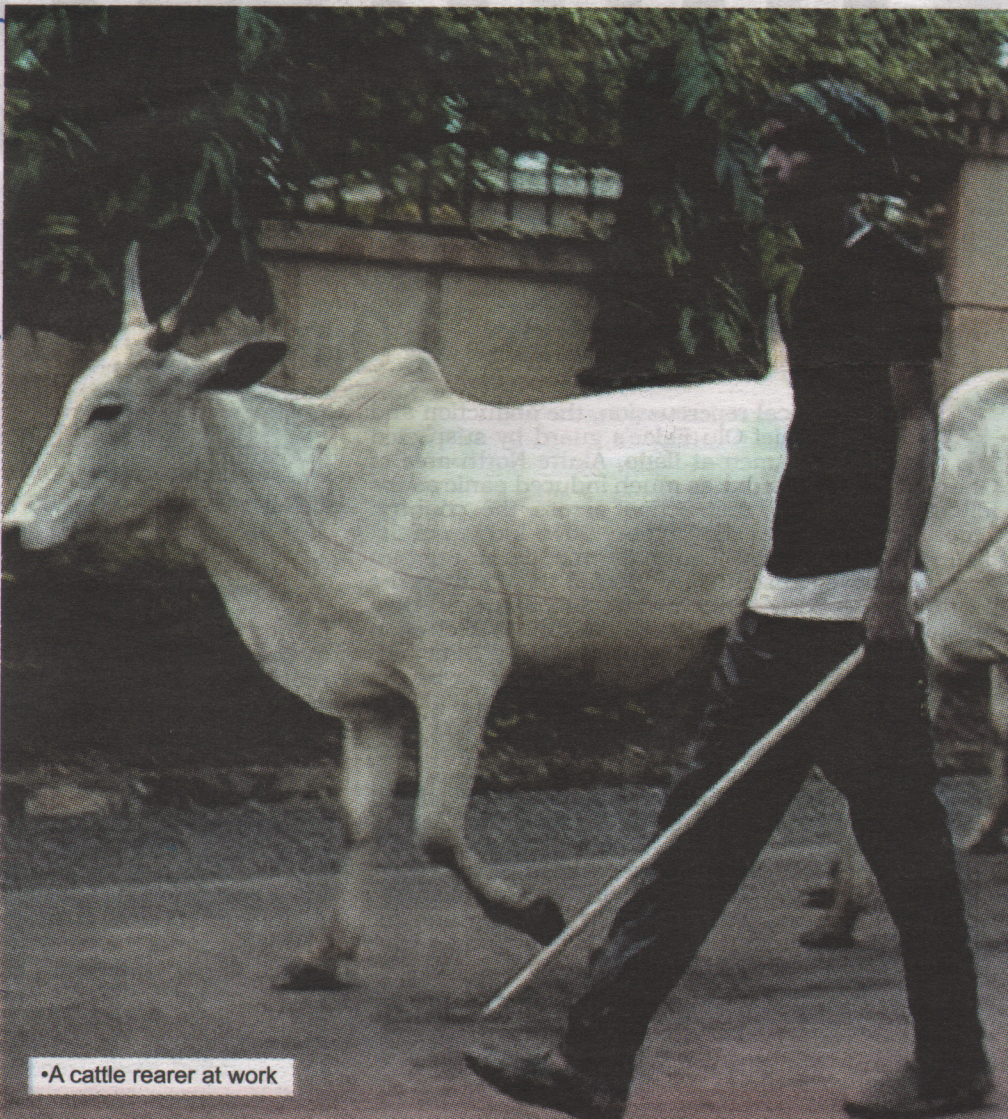
equally in Kaura local government and massacred some 50 residents of Mafan, Telak, Kirim, Danti, Mayit, Zadian, Dajak, Tinga Mogwai and Dugurang.

While the people counted their losses days after, the gunmen launched similar attacks on the Muyit and Sadn Zilan communities in the same area. The incidents preceded a May 13 attack on the Zangan district in which about 15 people were killed and houses razed. From reports, about 3,000 residents fled the area. Similar violence was also unleashed on Bajju communities in Zangan-Kataf, in Gbagyi land and parts of Kagoro chiefdom.

The Birnin Gwari case is somewhat different, but the villagers also blamed it on Fulani herdsmen. The suspected gunmen attacked Kwasakwa village, about 40

kilometres away from the Local Government Council headquarters, killing several persons, including members of the vigilante group and other security personnel. The attack, noted intelligence reports, was a reprisal by suspected Fulani herdsmen whose members were arrested by members of the vigilante group in the area.

In all the attacks, both in Southern part of Kaduna and Birnin Gwari, surviving residents always fingered Fulani herdsmen. But Malam Ibrahim Bayero, a former Special Adviser to the late Governor Patrick Ibrahim Yakowa, who is also a Fulani community leader at the Kachia Grazing Reserve, absolved the Fulani of any blame. Bayero, in an interview granted a national daily, thought the Fulani and the Southern Kaduna should reach a mutual consensus



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