

Death toll hits 32 in Taraba herdsmen attack

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The death toll in Wednesday's dusk attack by Fulani herdsmen in Taraba State has risen to 32, the locals said yesterday.

The marauding herdsmen have resumed their violence in full swing on innocent citizens despite the presence of the Inspector General of Police, Ibrahim Idris, and a military panel probing allegations by former defence minister, Gen Theophilus Danjuma, that "the armed forces collude with armed bandits that kill Nigerians."

Herdsmen had attacked Jandeikyula village in Wukari Local Government Area on Wednesday, at 6pm.

No fewer than 25 bodies were counted the following morning, in spite of the intervention by soldiers who were said to have battled with the killers for several hours.

A former Special Adviser to the late Governor Danbaba Suntai, Orbee Uchiv, an indigene of Jandeikyula, told *The Nation* that seven new bodies were recovered yesterday.

Some of the victims were buried in shallow graves, it was learnt.

Uchiv said some residents had crawled into the bush during the attack.

“But they died of injuries resulting from gunshots. Their bodies were recovered in the bush today,” he said.

Uchiv said a photographer had snapped and filmed the bodies for the purpose of documentation.

He said residents have deserted the affected village, despite the deployment of security personnel.

Women in Takum town yesterday protested the killings and alleged “brutality and collusion by the military.”

The women, in their hundreds, wearing all black, said their husbands and sons were illegally detained in the Takum barracks.

They called the peaceful protest: “Operation Mother’s Breast.”

Their placards read: “We are tired of intimidation; Stop harassing our people; We want to sleep with our eyes closed; We are not at war in Takum, etc.”

The protesters marched through major arteries of the town and blocked the gate of the 93 Battalion, Ada Barracks Takum.

They demanded the release of their arrested people as they demanded to see the Commanding Officer Lt. Col Ibrahim Gambari, who has since been accused by Governor

Darius Ishaku of taking sides.

The leader of the protesters, Esther Yakubu, told *The Nation* “Houses are being searched by soldiers. Kitchen knives and cutlasses are being taken away. Children are being harassed.

“Youths looking strong enough to defend the community are whisked away. The youth whose names have appeared on a ‘gossip list’ as youth defence vanguard have been arrested.

“Our people are now left at the mercy of Fulani herdsmen whose business of killing and destroying lives and property continues.

“The army should go into the bush and disarm those killing us, so that we shall return to our farms.”

An Assistant Director of Publicity of the Army Exercise Cat Race, Major Adegoke, said he was gathering facts about the protest, which he would share with journalists.

Shiban Tikari, the council chairman of Takum, Gen. Danjuma’s home, yesterday called on the people of Takum to defend themselves.

Sharing a similar view with Danjuma that the military were not neutral, Tikari said the people can use “sticks and stones in the face of unprovoked attacks by the herdsmen.”

The council boss alleged that he saw soldiers escorting some herdsmen to Kashimbilla area of Takum on Tuesday when the IGP, Ibrahim Idris, was commissioning a mobile police base in Takum.

Tikari’s grouse is that the presence of the Army Exercise Ayem AKpatuma (Cat Race) in the southern part of the state has given rise to increased attacks and killings.

He said: “These killings have continued, and instead of stopping the attacks, the army are busy harassing innocent people in spite of the influx of herdsmen in Takum.

“Two people were arrested in Takum around 3 am this morning by the army without any reason, when Fulani militia were killing people in the villages of southern Taraba.

“As the chief security officer of the local government, the army did not inform me when they escorted herdsmen to Kashimbilla on Tuesday when the IGP was commissioning a mobile police base in Takum.

“It is unfortunate because these Fulani herdsmen are the ones killing people. Therefore, any Fulani herdsman in Takum is on his own.

“We don’t have AK-47 rifles, but we can use traditional sticks and stones. I have told my people to stand their ground and defend themselves with sticks and stones.

“In the story of David and Goliath in the Bible, it was a stone that David threw to kill the almighty Goliath.”

The Ussa Council Chairman, Rimansikwe Karma, also lamented the influx of herdsmen in his domain at the commencement of Exercise Cat Race, adding that the coming of the herdsmen heightened security threat in his local government.

He added that despite his complaints that the army were complicit in the attacks on his local government, nothing had been done to convince them that they were neutral.

Karma said they were armed with evidence to confront the committee set up by the Chief of Army Staff, Tukur Burutai, to probe allegations by Danjuma that the Army were colluding with bandits to kill people.

Governor Darius Ishaku has backed Danjuma on the latter’s allegation that the armed forces “are not neutral” in the attacks on innocent Nigerians by “armed bandits.”

He told the military panel investigating the allegation, headed by

Retired Maj-Gen. John Nimyel, that the people of Taraba State were “fully in support of the statements by the former defence minister calling on Nigerians to defend themselves.”

Ishaku said the remarks by Danjuma, who once headed the Nigerian army, should be carefully looked into rather than criticised.

He said: “I didn’t sleep last night. At 1 am, I was woken up by a distress call on another herdsmen militia attack.

“Yesterday, fortunately, the military from Takum came in to help. They battled till this morning.

“In the morning, they counted 15 bodies. Some are in the hospital in Sondi.

“But as you are aware, now you can go to Sondi. This is not fake news. I spoke with the commanding officer of the army there this morning.

“Also this morning at 3 am, the military in Takum went about beating up youths, arresting them from their homes and taking them to the military barracks.

“The people are being killed and yet you are arresting them. Where is the fairness in this matter?” he asked the military panel.