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WEEKEND *Life*



•Some IDPs at Pantisawa

When hell visited Taraba

- Communities in North East state smart from deadly communal clashes
- Scores dead, 3,000 displaced in attacks on 50 villages
- Outrage over fresh killing of six alleged cattle rustlers at market square

IT is a season of blood flow in Taraba State. People are killed on a daily basis in violent confrontations impelled by drive for grazing fields, farmlands and allegations of cow rustling. The Northeast state which prides itself as nature's gift is enveloped in fear.

No fewer than 73 persons were believed to have died from communal clashes between the Hausa-Fulani and Yandang communities in Lau Local Government Area of the state. About

■ Fanen IHYONGO, Jalingo ■

50 villages were also burnt. By the time the dust settled, more than 3,000 people had become homeless.

Only last Sunday, residents of the local government area were preparing their evening meals when they heard bone-chilling sounds of gunshots. The staccato sound of gunshots was not new to residents.

A killer militia masquerading as herdsmen had invaded the vast swathe of the council area. Without

being told, they ran helter-skelter for dear lives, but it was too late. Forty-two persons, mainly aged men, women and children, were reportedly felled by bullets from the guns of the gunmen.

A heart-rending story was told of how a septuagenarian woman ran to hide herself in a flowering shrub but had her throat sliced by another set of herdsmen who had laid ambush.

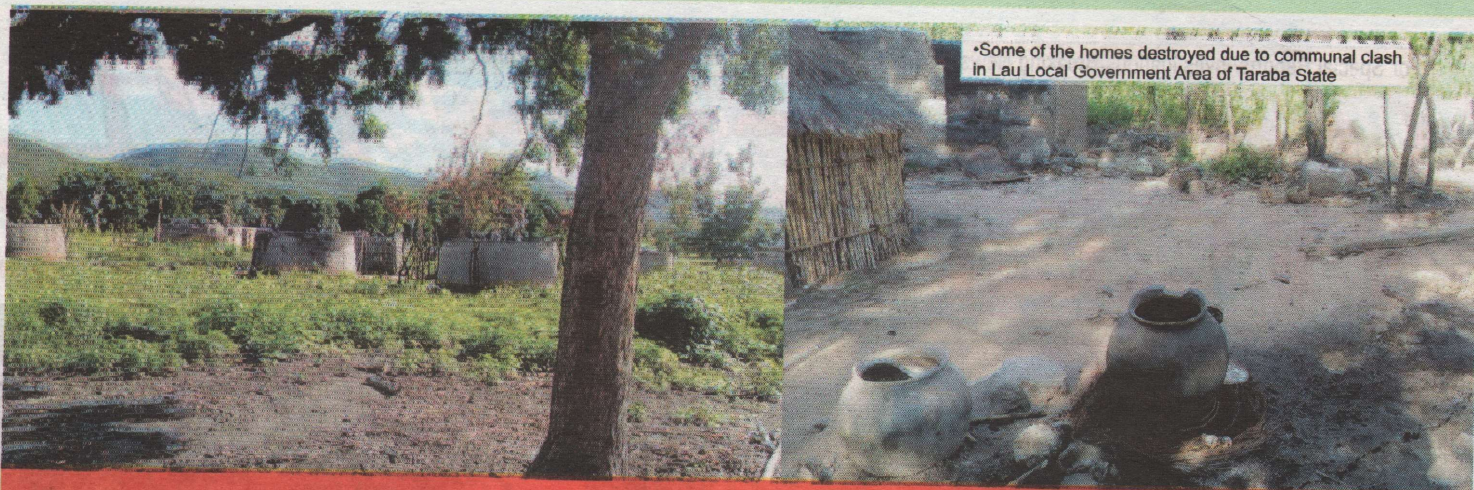
In all, more than 20 villages were

sacked, crop farms destroyed and homes torched.

When our correspondent visited the scenes of slaughter on Tuesday, the affected villages looked like 'ghost towns.' Lau was completely deserted. Not even security personnel were seen, even though police spokesman, David Misal, said SARS and MOPOL commanders had "temporarily" relocated to the affected areas to calm

•One of the homes destroyed due to communal clash in Lau Local Government Area of Taraba State

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14



When hell visited

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

the situation.

Among the affected villages are Bujum-Yashi, Bujum-Wagure, Bujum-Waya, Wagure, Bujum-Kasuwa, Bujum-Centre, Yoti, Galadimawa, Bamga-Dutse, San-Turaki and Mayo-Lope.

Others are Yilti, Bunzung, Sabon-Gida, Kwajafa, Sobon-Layi, Budon, Bawa-Garki and Kpanti Ladi.

"They came and began to attack and kill, without provocation. You can see how they have burnt down all the villages," lamented Bitru Dare, a resident of Bujum-Kasuwa.

The Chairman of Lau Local Government Council, Weni Yafi Weni, who conducted reporters round the rubbles, cried out that the state and federal government should jointly wade in and stop the crisis.

He said: "I see no end to this crisis, and I can see hunger looming because we are in rainy season and nobody is farming. The little farms made have been destroyed.

"I am calling on the government to provide enough security for displaced people to return to their homes."

In January, 68 persons were killed by herdsmen in the same Lau villages. When Benue State lowered its flag as it buried 73 victims of herdsmen attack in brown boxes, Taraba committed their dead to earth in mass graves, without caskets.

The latest attacks have displaced more than 3000 persons, some of them sustaining severe injuries. The bulk of the displaced persons are taking refuge in Negatavah Primary and Secondary school in Jalingo while others are camped in Pupule and Pantisawa, all in neighbouring Yorro Local Government Area.

Camps of despair

A visit to the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps revealed a people

“ The men, already displaced by crisis involving herdsmen in their area (Lau) on Tuesday came to Iware market with their cows to sell, do some other businesses and alleviate their suffering. But they were trailed by their assailants all the way from Mayo-Lope, who hacked them to death at the market square **”**



in anguish and without hope. As the children can no longer attend schools in their ancestral districts, so their parents have abandoned their jobs, predominantly farming and teaching. They sleep on bare floor while they are bitten by mosquitoes and other insects.

They look hungry, with symptoms of ill health. What about the rains that hit them when there is

cloudburst? They have no basic utilities such as clothing items and cooking utensils. Yet, they live in fear that even in the camps, they could be attacked.

The Nation gathered that the displaced persons are a distraction to pupils that

school in those camps. Some women, for instance, bathe in the open, it was learnt.

Police spokesman, David Misal, an Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP), said the Deputy Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner of Police in charge of Operations were shuttling the camps on a daily basis to monitor the situation.

He added: "We are also engaging critical stakeholders from the area in series of meetings with a view to restoring peace."

Taraba State Deputy Governor, Haruna Manu, at the prompting of Governor Darius Ishaku on Monday visited the IDP camps in Pantisawa and Pupule, all in Yorro Local Government Area. He was accompanied by the Deputy Speaker, Mohammed Gwampo, Secretary to the State Government (SSG),

Anthony Jellason, the Military Commander, MS Adamu and the Commissioner of Police, David Akinremi.

The deputy governor was received by the council chairman of Yorro, Joseph Sonweri; the chief of Pupule (Kpantin Kwaji), HRH Abubakar Buba Nyala and the chief of Mumuye, HRH Ado Adamu Mazan.

Manu brought the affected ethnic groups, Yandang, Mumuye and Fulani, together, to listen to details of the crisis. After listening to all the parties, the deputy governor told them the hard truth: "Nobody can bring peace to you; you must crave for it."

"Peace lies in your very hands. And the government is preaching peace but you prefer violence. You are the ones to suffer the consequences. We are tired of