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Scores killed as troops, vigilantes ambush Kebbi students' kidnappers

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- ***Female student dies as military rescue two teachers, five students***
- ***Police: Van belonging to High Court judge used to move abductees***

Bandits terrorising the Kebbi/Zamfara/Niger axis may have burnt their fingers on account of the Thursday abduction of a yet to be determined number of students of Federal Government College (FGC), Yauri, Kebbi State.

As many as 80 of the bandits are feared killed during a raid on their enclaves in the forests of Sakaba Local Government area of Kebbi State by soldiers who went after them late Thursday.

One of the abducted students was found dead yesterday during the military raid although five other students and two of their teachers were rescued.

Governor Atiku Bagudu last night confirmed the rescue of some of the students and their teachers.

He said the others would return safely soon.

The police, in an update on Friday, said the gunmen hijacked the official vehicle of a high court judge in the state for use during the abduction.

The police said the actual number of students seized during the attack was yet to be ascertained.

Online news outlet *PR Nigeria* reported on Friday that soon after the Thursday attack on the school, security personnel supported by *Yansakai vigilance group members* went in pursuit of the bandits, raiding their hideouts in forests and villages located in the state and neighbouring Niger State.

The enclaves raided include Uddu, Rijau, Sabon Gari Ushe, and Warari.

The Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) of the Nigerian Air Force (NAF), which detected the bandits' enclaves, facilitated the smooth coordination of the troops' operations, according to the news outlet.

Some suspected gang leaders were also arrested.

The bandits reportedly tried to resist the military attack but could not withstand the superior firepower.

Apart from those killed, some others were injured while the rest fled.

How troops rescued Kebbi students, teachers from fleeing bandits

In its own account of the raid of the bandits' enclaves, the army confirmed that troops of Operation Hadin Kai rescued two teachers and five of the abducted students.

It also said one of the female students was found dead.

The Director Army Public Relations, Brig-Gen Onyema Nwachukwu, said in a statement in Abuja that the rescue of the captives followed an encounter with the abductors.

His words: "Nigerian Army troops operating under the auspices of Operation Hadarin Daji, who have been on a hot pursuit of kidnappers and bandits following an unfortunate abduction incident in Federal Government College, Birnin Yawuri yesterday 17 June 2021, have so far rescued two teachers and five students after a fierce exchange of fire with the criminals.

"The rescue followed an initial encounter with the abductors in the early hours of today 18 June 2021 after trailing the kidnappers from Yawuri through Riyao to Sombo community, where the kidnappers who had split into two groups fled, with one group conveying the abducted children while the second group conveyed rustled cattle.

"The land troops in conjunction with elements of the Nigerian Air Force, who provided close air support during the rescue mission, intercepted the two groups at about 2.30 am and engaged them in a fire fight, leading to the successful rescue of the teachers and students.

"The troops also recovered 800 cattle rustled by the bandits.

"The gallant troops are still on the heels of the kidnappers in order to rescue the remaining abductees still in captivity.

'Sadly, a casualty was recorded during the exchange. A female student was found to have given up the ghost as a result of exhaustion.

"The rescued teachers and students will be handed over to the Kebbi State Government.

"The Nigerian Army appreciates the cooperation so far from good spirited citizens and wishes to solicit for more.

“The Chief of Army Staff, Maj-Gen Faruk Yahaya, has directed the Commander to spare no effort until all the abducted persons are safely rescued and reunited with their loved ones.”

Also speaking on the encounter, the Deputy Force Commander, Joint Taskforce of Operation Hadari Daji, Air Commodore Abubakar Abdulkadir, said the bandits were forced to abandon seven of the abductees by the heat of the gun battle.

Abdulkadir said: “In the early hours of this morning, we came across the kidnappers. They came to our blocking point and we engaged them.

“At that point, they abandoned five of the students and one of the teachers. Unfortunately, I think we lost one of the students.”

Police: Bandits hijacked judge’s car to abduct students

The Police Command in Kebbi State said the bandits who attacked Federal Government College, Birnin-Yauri, hijacked the official vehicle of a high court judge in the state and deployed same for the operation.

Police spokesman, Nafi’U Abubakar, said the gunmen used the stolen vehicle to convey the abducted students.

He spoke against the background of an allegation that the bandits used a police vehicle to kidnap about 50 students from the school.

He said: “A White Hilux Van with registration No. KBSJ 29 belonging to a High Court judge with inscription of Kebbi State Judiciary, hijacked by bandits on Birnin Yauri Road, was the one used in the kidnapping and not a police vehicle as stated by some media stations.”

He also said the number of students missing after the incident was still unknown.

Bandits served notice of attack – Lawmaker

The lawmaker from Ngaski/ Shanga/ Yauri in the the House of Representatives, Tanko Sununu, is disturbed that the security agencies could not stop the attack on the school.

He alleged yesterday that the bandits served notice of their intention to strike, yet those who were supposed to deal with the situation took no proactive measure to make the attack impossible.

Speaking on Channels Television on Friday, Sununu said: “What really happened is that about two weeks ago, we had an episode when bandits residing within parts of the areas bordering Zamfara, Niger, and Kebbi came up through one of the villages in my constituency.

“They killed a policeman and found their way until they reached Ibeto area where we have a quarry, killed some security men and kidnapped some of the foreign workers in the quarry and left.

“Ten days later, they came back to the same area and entered into my constituency bordering some villages, and they had more than a seven-hour field operation, going from house to house, room to room, collecting money, phones, cows, and any machine they deemed useful for their operations, and they left a message behind that they would soon be back.

“To fulfill their promise yesterday, we had intelligence that they were on their way coming. “Around 10.30 in the morning, they reached their final destination – the Federal Government College, Birnin-Yauri.”

Sununu said although the bandits were initially resisted by the Mobile Police and Police Counter-Terrorism Unit stationed at the school, the kidnappers overpowered the security operatives due to their large number.

They eventually killed one of the policemen and gained access into the school, abducting an unspecified number of students and five teachers.

He explained that it was difficult to ascertain the exact number of students abducted as parents from nearby villages and towns raced to the school to take their children away immediately after the incident.

He added: “Last night, I had a discussion with the Field Commander of Operation Hadarin Daji who said that they have succeeded in entering into the den of the kidnappers, and I think this is a major success because the security agencies are now taking the fight to the base of the kidnappers.

“I was also told that over 800 cattle that were rustled some days back have been recovered, and as of now, the military has combed the area where we are expecting that the students are with the bandits. They have also succeeded in creating many casualties on the part of the bandits.”

USOSA condemns attack on FGC BirninYauri

The Unity Schools Old Students Association (USOSA) condemned the attack on Federal Government College, Birnin Yauri in Kebbi State, calling for security agencies to speedily rescue the teachers and pupils abducted.

The group, which is the umbrella alumni body of all unity schools' alumni association, expressed disappointment yesterday that the bandits met with weak resistance when they attacked the school on Thursday, and described the incident as an attack on the education of innocent children.

The group urged the government to declare a state of emergency on security.

President-General of the association, Lawrence Aniretuoritse Wilbert, described the attack as utterly insane, wicked and a “reprehensible attempt to truncate the educational pursuits of Nigerian children and the country’s peace and security.”

He called for a “declaration of a nationwide state of emergency on security, “albeit with retention of all democratic structures and offices,” adding: “while we are mindful that the Federal Government has over the years taken other steps to tackle security challenges and even expended colossal sums of money (including billions of naira and dollars) on the procurement of arms and ammunition to counter and criminality in the country, we believe that the progressive deterioration of the security situation nationwide has indicated that more cogent action needs to be taken if the unholy marauders must be crushed once and for all.”

The group also flayed political office holders for alleged slow response to tackling insecurity in Nigeria and called for more sincere response from them.

The abduction is the latest in a series of kidnapping of students, especially in Katsina, Niger, Zamfara, Kaduna and Kebbi states.

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