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Outcry as fresh Benue attack claims 38 lives

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Rampaging gunmen have thrown Benue State into fresh mourning after killing 38 people in their latest attack in the state.

The Friday night attack on Mgbam community in Nkwel Ward of Guma Local Government Area took the death toll in 48 hours of bloodshed in the state to 89.

President Muhammadu Buhari ordered an immediate review of the security arrangement in the state.

But Governor Samuel Ortom said the current situation in the state required more than the words and actions so far offered by the president.

The Defence Headquarters said yesterday that it was doing its best to deal with the situation.

The authorities of the Benue State University Teaching Hospital (BSUTH), Makurdi,

From Uja Emmanuel, Makurdi/Bolaji Ogundele, Musa Bologi, Juliana Agbo, Abuja/Franca Ochigbo, Abuja

confirmed that 38 people, of whom 30 are women, were killed on Friday night when the yet to be identified gunmen invaded the Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) primary school in Mgbam and opened fire on hundreds of internally Displaced Persons (IDP) taking refuge there.

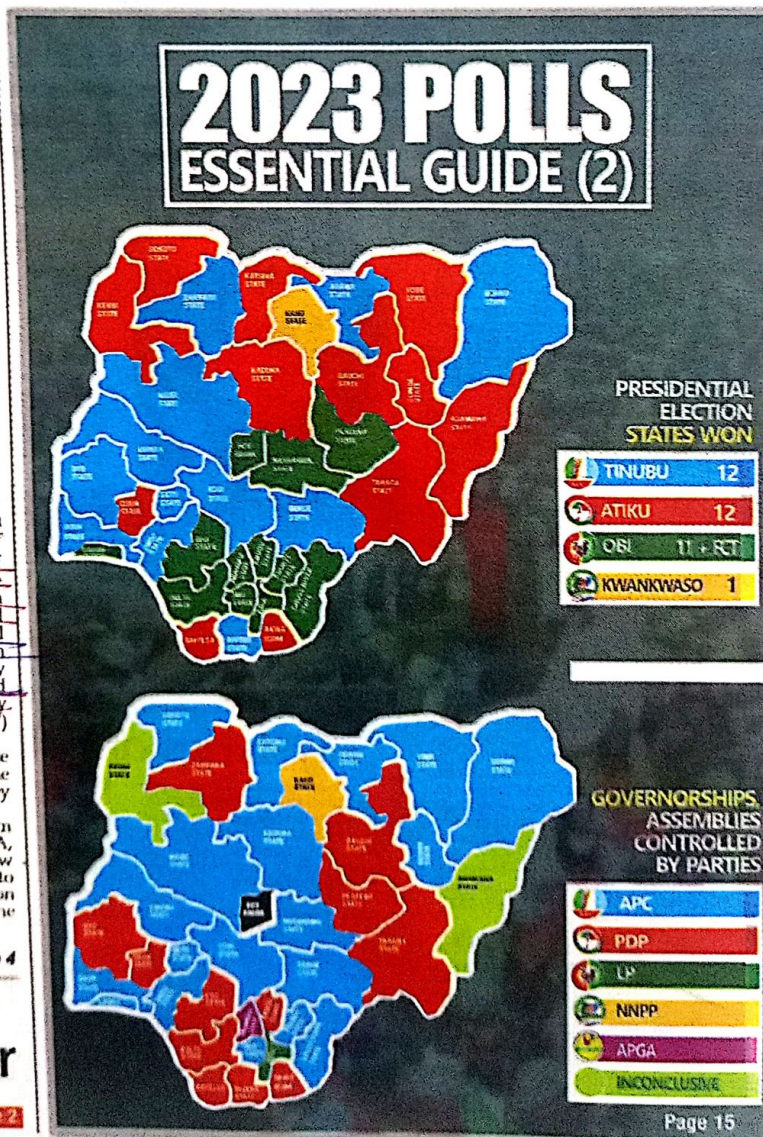
Thirty-nine other IDPs are receiving treatment in the hospital for the wounds they suffered.

Ortom, who hails from Nzorov in the same LGA, rushed to the scene a few hours after the attack to personally assess the situation and sympathise with the people.

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Man sets ex-lover's apartment ablaze over failed reconciliation

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WHO says life expectancy increased from 46 to 73 years

Global life expectancy for both sexes has increased from 46 to 73 years, with the biggest gains in the poorest countries, the World Health Organisation (WHO) says.

The WHO Director-General, Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus, disclosed this during an online media conference.

Ghebreyesus said after years of war, the organisation realised that it was better to work with one other than fight with one another.

He said that the organisation also realised that a healthier world was a safer world.

"Their vision was clear, but bold: the highest possible standard of health, for all people. To achieve that vision, they agreed to set up a new organisation."

"They debated and agreed what this organisation would be and do in a document called the Constitution of the World Health Organisation," Ghebreyesus said.

According to him, the organisation marked the 75th anniversary of the day that constitution came into force.

He said that the organisation's constitution was the first document in history to formally recognise health as a human right.

The WHO boss said that since then, the world has made significant progress towards realising that vision.

He said that smallpox had been eradicated and polio was on the brink.

"These are actually two of the important highlights during the 75 years of existence of the Organisation."

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Outcry as fresh Benue attack claims 38 lives

The District Head of Nyiev, Chief Bernard Shawa, told the governor that the invaders came in a large number, armed to the teeth.

Shawa said: "They were armed with sophisticated weapons. They set a house ablaze and started shooting into the air."

"In the melee that ensued, the attackers moved straight to where the villagers were sleeping in a classroom and shot many people dead."

He said the victims, mainly women and children, were forced into sleeping in the school because of the fear of the unknown caused by the long-standing security challenge in the area.

Shawa confirmed that two of his own children were killed during the attack.

He added: "We took 39, who sustained various degrees of injuries, to the hospital, but two later died, bringing the total number of casualties to 38."

He appealed to the Federal Government to protect the people, who are peasant farmers, to enable them return to their farms, especially now that the rains are here.

Ortom expressed his condolences to the community and asked the federal government to fish out and punish the killers.

He said: "As I was coming here, I read somewhere that President Muhammadu Buhari has condemned the killings and sympathised with the government and people of the state, and ordered security men to go after the killers."

"I hope the Commissioner of Police, who is here with some soldiers, will go after the killers as ordered by Mr. President."

He appealed to the people not to take law into their hands but to continue to be law abiding.

He directed the Chairman of Guma Local Government Area to make arrangement for immediate burial of the dead.

Ortom also visited the BSUTH to see the wounded.

The Local Government Chairman, Dr. Mike Uba, told The Nation on the phone that the gunmen shot "men, women and children at close range."

"They also macheted pregnant women and children. We recov-

ered about 36 bodies, took about six victims to the hospital but just got informed that three more have died," Uba, who doubles as the state chairman of the Association of Local Government of Nigeria (ALGON), said.

The Nation gathered that the policemen on guard at the school fled as the gunmen swooped.

One of the policemen was said to have lost his rifle during the attack.

A large number of Guma LGA people are currently displaced from their homes on account of incessant attacks by gunmen.

Guma is a boundary local government area with Nasarawa State.

They killed my wife, relatives - Civil servant

Among those bereaved in the Mgbam massacre is a civil servant with the Benue State Government, Mr. Philip Amasham.

Amasham, 37, lost his former wife, Comfort (35) and some other relations.

Narrating his ordeal to The Nation yesterday, Amasham said Comfort left Makurdi for Mgbam on Thursday to tend her farm only to be killed.

He said she was gunned down while she was fleeing her home for the IDP camp and the gunmen began shooting.

Amasham said his elder brother's wife and younger brother's son were also killed during the attack.

He said the deceased had reached out to him on the phone as soon as the attack began, to inform him about what they were going through back home.

He said: "We usually rely on the security there. That's why we normally leave our houses to sleep there (school) because of the safety, then return home to do our farm work during the day."

"After hearing about this, we

immediately reached out to the Chairman of Guma Local Government Area and he promised Governor Samuel Ortom was going to address us on the issue."

"We have been suffering for a very long time and this has to stop. My wife left me with five children. She has been the one supporting the family."

"As I speak, I don't know where to start from. I'm still in shock and the government and relevant security agencies must act fast before we all get killed."

The traditional ruler of Ikobi in Apa LGA, Prof. Mohammed Adah, pleaded with the government and other relevant stakeholders to stop invaders from harassing innocent people.

"We barely sleep because of the constant attacks. Our place has become empty. Farmers can no longer go to farm," he said on the phone.

"Immediate action should be

taken to protect our land. The consequence of this may result in famine because our people only rely on farming activities to survive," he said.

Buhari orders security review, vows perpetrators will face justice

President Buhari, in his reaction to the development yesterday, deplored the series of attacks and killings in some communities in the state and directed security agencies to go after the perpetrators and bring them to justice.

In a statement issued by his Senior Special Assistant on Media and Publicity, Mallam Garba Shehu, the President urged that all efforts be made to end the "extreme violence."

He condemned the use of terrorism as a tool in inter-communal conflicts, urging that the attackers be found and dealt with swiftly under the law.

He conveyed his grief and

sympathy to the families of those who lost their lives due to the attack and directed the secret services, police and military commanders to enhance surveillance on every front and to immediately review the security management in the affected areas.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of those murdered. The entire nation stands united in the fight against the forces of terror and evil," said the President.

Gunmen had on Wednesday killed 51 people at Umogidi community in Otukpo LGA.

'Gunmen destroying our farms with impunity'

A chieftain of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in the state, Mr. Omageri Ocheche, said yesterday that the federal government should halt the impunity with which gunmen are trampling on the rights of the people of the state.

Ocheche alleged that the rampant killings appeared to be sponsored by well positioned people.

He said: "The gunmen started with Agatu, extended to Tiv land and now the whole state is being overrun."

"They are now bringing in mercenaries from Nasarawa and Kogi states. We are appealing to President Muhammadu Buhari and the federal government to come to our rescue in Benue."

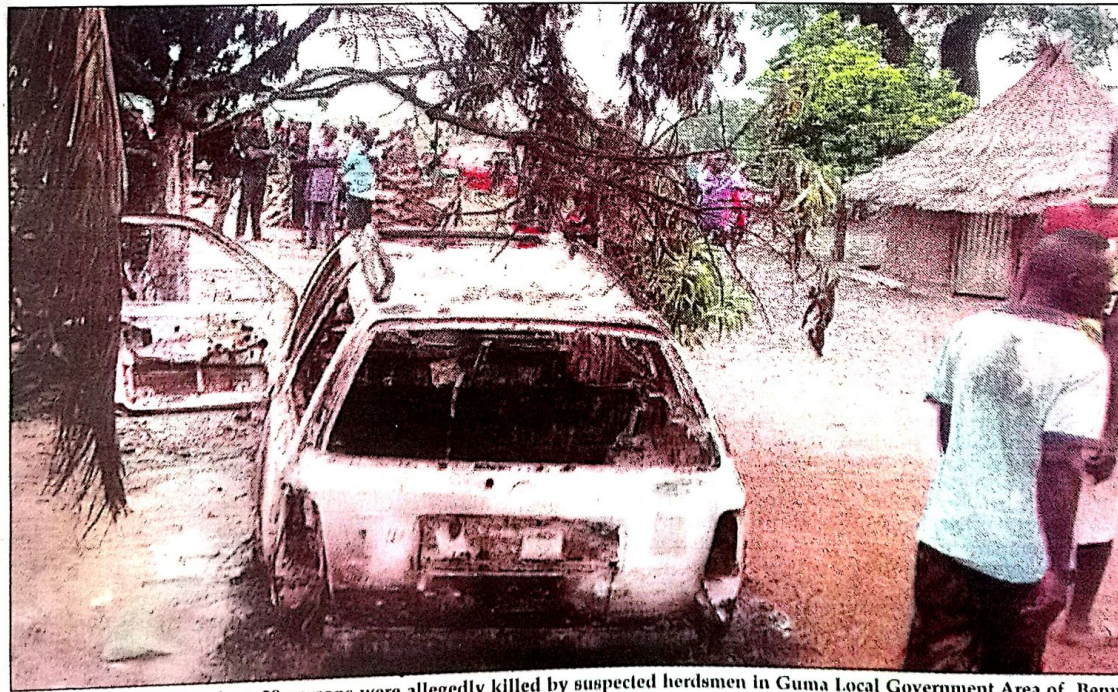
DHQ: We're doing our work, we're not sleeping

Contacted yesterday over the resurgence of banditry in some northern states, the Director Defence Media Operations, Maj Gen Musa Danmadamai said the military was doing its best to handle the situation.

"What I can only tell you is that we are doing our work. We are not sleeping," he said.

"I've always told you people this all the time. I don't know why you people are always agitated."

"We are doing our work and will continue to do our work as is as simple as that."



•Scene of the attack where 38 persons were allegedly killed by suspected herdsmen in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State at the weekend.

Kogi governorship: Bello holds crucial meeting to douse tension among aspirants