

SINCE the beginning of the month of June, residents of Enugu State have been reminded of how precarious life has become in the state following the spike in kidnapping, routine killings and armed robbery.

While some of these criminal activities have left most residents on the edge and in trepidation of what fate lies ahead, some others have taken it as a routine to the effect that they no longer feel surprised to hear about such criminal activities around them.

However, one particular incident that has left a sour taste in the mouth of residents was the killing of a graduate of the Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Augustine Sommadina, Ali, on June 23. Sommadina was said to have been kidnapped while going home to his village in Udi, Enugu State.

It was gathered that three days before he was kidnapped, Sommadina had procured a United Kingdom visa for his master's degree programme. He was said to be heading to his village, Umachio Uguwu in Oti Amokwe LGA, Local Government Area of Enugu State when he was kidnapped.

It was further gathered that his body was found where it was dumped along on the roadside hours later even as his abduction never failed to raise concern for his life. He was said to be the hope of his family, the reason they ensured that he moved to the UK for his master's degree.

Similarly, a final-year student of the Institute of Management Technology (IMT) who boarded a mini-bus on his way to school was kidnapped. A huge ransom was reportedly paid for his release.

Penultimate Friday, masked gunmen kidnapped more than 30 students and killed a security operative identified as Onyebu Idoko, working with the Central Neighbourhood Watch in Igboeze North Local Government Area. He was on his way to work when the incident occurred.

According to a source, the hoodlums operated freely despite the presence of military and police formations in the area.

The source said: "It was a terrible situation. The shock is too much for me. We saw them marching with guns and ordering people to clear the road until the neighbourhood watch member ran into them."

"They ordered the man who was riding on his motorcycle to alight and leave the rider. Then they shot him several times. His blood was flowing like water on the road."

Apart from the routine killings, criminal gangs are holding the state hostage with their indulgence in armed robbery, which has become a daily occurrence in the state, particularly the state capital.

While the activities of criminals who use tricycles and mini-buses to rob and dispossess unsuspecting residents of their valuables persist, there have been rising cases of attacks on Point-of-Sale (POS) operators in recent weeks.

This is more pronounced around Gariki, One-day and Meru axis in Enugu South Local Government Area of the state as well as Abakpa and Iganem areas in Enugu East LGA.

A witness said that the robbers attacked the unsuspecting operators and succeeded in dispossessing them of huge cash.

A POS operator was also attacked at Tecoco Junction, Abakpa, Enugu East, by some hoodlums who released gunshot into the air as they escaped.

On some occasions, the robbers even became emboldened to attack certain areas that were hitherto considered safe areas for criminals. For instance, on June 17, armed robbers operating in a brand new black bus stormed the popular Robbers' Store Enugu along the popular Basilla Road, an area which is around the Government House Enugu.

It was gathered that the masked robbers, could not gain entry into the store as they were said to have been prevented, courtesy of internal security which automatically shut the doors against them.

However, the robbers reportedly escaped with two customer's vehicles as well as its occupants. Another customer was also said to have been kidnapped by the invading robbers made good their escape.

While residents are getting more and more apprehensive over the activities of armed robbers, the incidence of kidnapping for ransom has assumed a disturbing dimension, particularly along the Enugu-Ugwo Nkwa-Nike Road, where bandits conduct regular abduction and kidnapping, most times unchallenged.

It will be recalled that last year, some kidnappers suspected to be herdsmen resident in the Ugwo Nkwa-Nike Road, took over the road and abducted travellers on a daily basis. The claim was the abduction of a former secretary to the Enugu State Government, Dr Dan Shere, as well as some returning students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN).

Then governor, Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi, deployed heavy security to the road and even had to lead

Unease in Enugu as killings, kidnappings set communities on edge

Police, anxious residents in verbal war

• By Damian Duriheoma, Enugu •

the police, army and other security chiefs to the forests in Ugwo Nkwa. His visit led to the clearing of the forest for visibility and ended the kidnapping menace.

However, the bandits have now returned with more vicious attacks on motorists, while taking travellers hostage on a regular basis. It was gathered that no fewer than 23 persons had been kidnapped for ransom on the said road between Tuesday June 20 and Friday June 23 despite the presence of more than 10 police and military checkpoints on the road. While some of the victims had regained freedom after payment of huge ransoms, others whose relatives were yet to raise the required ransom were still in captivity at the time of filing this report.

The Enugu-Ugwo-Nike Road is a stretch of road that is less than 10km long.

Some of the recent victims of kidnapping hail from Eha-Alumona community in Nsukka LGA. It was gathered that at least four of the victims from the community were made to pay a total sum of N11 million as ransom for their relatives to regain freedom five days after they were kidnapped on the same road.

On Thursday, June 22, the kidnappers were said to have struck three times on the said road between the hours of 12 noon and 5pm, marching their victims into their hideouts.

A stakeholder from Eha-Alumona community, Dr Sampson Ugwu, told reporters before the release of the ransoms that the natives were still being held hostage, stressing that efforts made to reach them had yielded no result. He said the four natives had left Enugu and were coming to the community for burial penultimate Thursday but were kidnapped between Ekwekwe and Opi-Agu boundaries.

A relation of one of the kidnapped persons stated that his relative was kidnapped on Friday

June 23 on their way to a burial in Nsukka, stressing that "by Sunday morning, his abductors called and demanded to know how much he could raise in cash. They said they needed cash and that they would call again in an hour's time. But as I speak to you (5.30pm), they are yet to call back."

Some residents and observers within the ancient city believe that the state of violence and insecurity has taken an alarming dimension in the state because the security agencies had been lax in clamping down on identified and notorious hoodlums within the state, particularly that of Enugu-Ugwo-Nike-Opi-Nsukka Road.

The Command, therefore, wishes to state categorically that the video, with the accompanying message and the news publications, are not only untrue but highly unfounded and misleading. This is because there was no such serial or repeated incident of kidnapping on the same day as reported, or shooting and chaotic incident as relayed in the video, at the mentioned location or any other part of the state.

"As a matter of fact, forensic analysis of the video indicates that it did not happen anywhere in the country, let alone Enugu State."

In the same vein, the Command sees the unverified and unfounded report of repeated kidnapping incidents on the same day as a misleading and mischievous act of misinformation aimed at creating panic in the state.

Nonetheless, the Command, while acknowledging the recent recurrence of acts of abduction/kidnapping at some locations on the said road, wishes to clearly state that sensationalising and blowing the situation out of proportion, as intended by peddlers of the video clip and the publication, will never be in the best interest of the security and safety of the state and her people.

He said that the Commissioner of Police, Ahmed Ammani, had ordered a massive deployment of the Command's policing

Ndukwe, said. "The Enugu State Police Command is in receipt of a viral video clip depicting gunshot and people running in a forest, with the accompanying message that 'Enugu-Ugwo-Nike is not safe now... Yesterday, hoodlums kidnapped three times yesterday. The first was by 12pm, 2pm and 6pm.'"

This was similarly published in some news blogs and webpages with the title 'Kidnappers conduct marathon operations at Nsukka-Ugwo-Nike-Enugu Road'.

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He said that the Commissioner of Police, Ahmed Ammani, had ordered a massive deployment of the Command's policing

resources to the said location and other such locations to sustain the onslaught against criminal elements.

"He reiterates the unwavering commitment of the Command to containing such acts of crime and criminality in the state and bringing their perpetrators to book."

He also encouraged residents to disregard the claims by "misinformation makers" on assignment to scare commuters that kidnappers were on the road.

The road is safe as a joint team of the military, police and forest guards patrol the road and the buses. Let no one be scared. Opi-Ugwo-Nike Road is safe as the Enugu State Government has adequately contained any form of insecurity on the road," he said.

Interestingly, moments after the protest on the road, the state police command paraded 15 criminal suspects, including two of the kidnappers involved in the daily abduction of travellers along Ugwo Nkwa-Nike-Opi-Nsukka Road.

They were paraded at the State Police Command headquarters alongside 13 other suspects arrested for various crimes.

The Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) of the command, DSP Daniel Ndukwe, who addressed journalists on Tuesday on behalf of the Commissioner of Police, Ahmed Ammani, said a female victim (names withheld) escaped from the kidnappers.

He gave the names of the suspects as Sani Usman, 25, and Landi Usman, 30, both from Sokoto State.

Ndukwe said: "A total of fifteen (15) male

Motorists protesting over the continuous kidnapping activities on Enugu-Ugwo-Nike-Opi Nsukka Expressway last Tuesday



Some of the kidnab and armed robbery suspects paraded at the Enugu State Police command headquarters recently.

suspects were arrested for the offences of conspiracy, murder, kidnapping, armed robbery, rape, unlawful possession of firearms and fraudulent acts.

"These arrests led to the rescue of seven (7) kidnab victims and the recovery of seven (7) firearms, two (2) motor vehicles, one (1) motorcycle, one (1) dagger, cash sum of N701,000.00 and other incriminating exhibits. The separate operations carried out by Police Operatives of the Command, with support from other security forces and law-abiding citizens."

"Accordingly, Operatives of Anti-Cultism Squad of the Command, on 26/06/2023 at about 2 am, acting on a tip-off, carried out a raid operation in a hotel (name withheld) along Enugu/Port-Harcourt Expressway and arrested one Ali Jubril aged 25, a native of Kogi State."

"The suspect is reasonably suspected to be a member of a kidnapping gang, while the total sum of N701,000.00, which he could not give satisfactory account of, and one (1) dagger, were recovered from him. Further discreet investigation is ongoing at the Anti-Kidnapping Squad of the Command."

"Similarly, Police Operatives of the Command, serving in Igbo-Eze North Division, with active assistance from Forest Guard and Neighbourhood Watch Group, on 25/06/2023 at about 1pm, rescued four (4) kidnapped victims (two males and two females, names withheld), after an intense gun fight with kidnappers in a forest at Abakpa-Eke in Igbo-Eze North Local Government Area."

"The kidnappers, most of whom escaped with varying degrees of gunshot wounds, abandoned the victims due to the superior firepower of the Operatives."

"However, one of the victims sustained a gunshot wound in his left thigh during the duel, but was moved to the hospital, in response to treatment and in stable condition; while others and all the Operatives returned unscathed."

"The victims were reported to have been kidnapped at Umuopu village along Ette/Ogugu Road, on 20/06/2023 at about 9:30 pm, on their way to Obo-Afor, Enugu State from Ankpa, Kogi State, with the hoodlums said to have demanded a ransom of N10,000,000.00 for each of them."

"Also, acting on a tip-off, Police Operatives of the Command serving in Adani Police Division, in a joint operation with troops of the Nigerian Army, Forest Guards and the Neighbourhood Watch Group, on 26/06/2023 at about 6 pm, rescued a woman and her child, alleged to have been kidnapped by hoodlums along Adani-Opanda Road. The joint team is still on the trail of the suspected kidnappers."

"In a different case, acting on credible information on alleged attempted armed robbery, Police Operatives serving in the Anti-Robbery Section of the State CID, in synergy with the Neighbourhood Watch Group, on 22/06/2023 at about 1:30pm, arrested one male suspect, Danjuma Mohammed aged 21, at New Gariki Cattle Market, and recovered one (1) locally fabricated pistol from him. Further discreet investigation to apprehend his cohorts at large and recover more exhibits is ongoing."

"In another development, following the receipt of distress information on alleged kidnapping at Api-Opi, along Enugu/Opi/Nsukka Road, on 19/06/2023, Police Operatives serving in Umuofor Division of the Command, immediately mobilized to the scene and while recovering the kidnapped female victim (names withheld), who had escaped from the kidnappers."

"However, while still at the scene, the Operatives sighted and arrested two (2) male suspects, Usman aged 25 and Landi Usman aged 30, both from Sokoto State, who the rescued victim identified as members of the kidnapping gang. The recovered female victim, who was still at the scene while the case is undergoing further discreet investigation and tactical operational actions at the Anti-Kidnapping Squad of the Command."

"Also, on 18/06/2023, Police Operatives serving in Abakpa/LGA Division, acting on credible information, busted a 'one chance' armed robbery, abduction, rape and fraud syndicate and arrested the following suspects: Uche Nnamdi Ede aged 21, of Ugwaka, Nkuru East LGA, Paschal Chukwu aged 25, of Nwomeh in Nkuru East LGA, Moses Uchechukwu Nnam aged 20, of Agbani in Nkuru West LGA, and Joshua Okonkwo aged 22, of Ugwaka, Nkuru East LGA."

"Their arrest is as a result of the Operatives tactical response to series of complaints,

alleging that the suspects used commercial mini buses to abduct their unsuspecting victims within Enugu metropolis, particularly young females, to secluded locations, where they robbed, raped and transferred sums of money out of their bank accounts at gunpoint. One (1) Pump Action gun was recovered from them."

"Also, Police Operatives serving in Emene Police Division of the Command, on 20/06/2023 at about 7:20am, while on routine stop and search duty along Ugwuoma-Nike Road, Enugu, intercepted a motorcycle and upon search conducted on the rider and his male passenger, two (2) locally made guns and workshop tools were recovered from the passenger, one Edeh Longinus aged 47, who is physically handicapped and of Otuoma-Owo in Nkuru East LGA."

"Preliminary investigation shows that he is a gun fabricator and runner, with workshop at Amavuni in Nkuru community of Emene State. Further discreet investigation is ongoing at Crack Squad Unit of the Command."

"Similarly, Police Operatives serving in Udenu Area Command of the Command, arrested one Chima Emmanuel Nwag aged 29, of Obo-Afor, on 16/06/2023, for threatening violence and unlawful possession of firearms, recovering one (1) locally made Double-barrelled gun from him."

"His arrest and the recovery is sequel to a report received at the Area Command, alleging that he, on 31/05/2023 at about 5:30pm, violently threatened to shoot the complainant (names withheld), who had gone to his house in April 2023, to demand for the payment of the sum of N70,000.00 she lent to him. Further discreet investigation into the case is ongoing at the Anti-Robbery Section of the State CID Enugu."

"In a related development, Police Operatives serving in Nnamdi Eke Division, working with members of the Neighbourhood Watch Group, on 21/03/2023, arrested one Chiemene Edeh aged 22, at Ibe-Ikpo, Nnamdi Eke, in Nnamdi Eke, and recovered one (1) locally made pistol from him."

"His arrest was due to a complaint alleging that he violently threatened the complainant on the said day. The suspect and the pistol were transferred to the Anti-Robbery Section of the State CID Enugu, from where further discreet investigation led to the recovery of two (2) more locally made guns from him."

"In another development, Police Operatives serving in Trane-Ekulu Division of the Command, on 28/04/2023 at about 4:30pm, arrested one Chibuke Ede aged 27 and Paulinus Oke aged 26 at Ibe-Ikpo, Abakpa-Nike Junction, following the receipt of a report that a black-coloured Peugeot 307, alleged to have been snatched at gunpoint from its owner sometimes in April 2023, was sighted displayed for sale at the said location."

"Preliminary investigation shows that after snatching the vehicle, Chibuke Ede took it to the workshop of Paulinus Oke, an Auto-mechanic where it was put up for sale before they were arrested and the vehicle recovered."

"And following the confessional statement of Chibuke Ede, Police Detectives serving in the Anti-Robbery Section of the State CID of the Command, further recovered in Abakpa, a white-coloured Lexus LX250 car, the suspects and cohorts had snatched from its owner in Awka, Anambra State in April 2023 at gunpoint."

"Also, the same Police Detectives, acting on intelligence, on 14/05/2023, arrested one Oyeasawa Ekene aged 25, of Egbema Street, Topical Enugu, following the receipt of a report that he, on 03/03/2023 at about 2pm, bought different electronic items at the total cost of N1,000,000.00, from an Electronic Shop (name withheld) at 20, Obo-Afor, Enugu, and made items after making a fake transfer payment of the said sum to the seller."

"In a similar fashion, the same Detectives, acting on intelligence, arrested one Mmesoma Linus (name withheld) aged 26, on 23/05/2023, at Independence Layout Enugu, for issuing a fake credit alert of N3,500,000.00 to an unsuspecting timber dealer (names withheld) in Nsukka Timber Market."

"The suspect, who had been on the watch-list of the Police for the criminal act perpetrated on the victim and others, had on the said day, after receiving a credit alert of N3,500,000.00, issued a fake credit sum and deceived the seller to give him a cash equivalent, which he immediately made away with."

"The suspect confessed to the crime, while a video clip filmed in the course of the discreet investigation, shows him spraying cash, which is reasonably suspected to be proceeds of his criminal activities, in a nightclub."

"The suspects will be arraigned in court and prosecuted accordingly, once investigation into the cases are concluded."

He reiterated the commitment of the Command to continue to protect the lives and property of citizens, as well as maintain maximum public security and safety in the state.