

9 killed, 2 policemen missing in Benue attacks

Another 4 killed in midnight raid in Plateau

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NINE persons were reportedly killed in the early hours of Wednesday in separate attacks on two communities in Ukum Local Government Area of Benue State by people suspected to be Jukun and local militiamen.

Four persons were also killed during a midnight raid in Plateau State.

In the Benue attack, a native who did not want to be named said that three people were killed at Jootar, a border community between Benue and Taraba states, while six other people, among them a nursing mother, were killed at Mbamena settlement by suspected local militia.

The source said that Jukun militia suspected to be from Taraba State invaded Jootar around 4:00 a.m. on Wednesday,

killed three people and destroyed about 200 houses.

He said that the militia allegedly operated unchallenged for almost three hours despite the presence of Special Forces in Wukari, which is about two kilometres from the attacked community.

The source said the attack on Mbamena was said to have been carried out by militiamen from Tongov area who were out on reprisal mission.

The native explained that the militia group belonging to a kingpin in Ujoondo had three days ago invaded the Tongov community in Katsina-Ala Local Government Area of Benue State, killing one person, which then triggered the reprisal attack.

The caretaker chairman of Ukum Local Government Area, Mr Tortyokaa Ibellogo, confirmed that six persons were killed in the two attacks and accused the Jukuns of

masterminding the attacks.

Ibellogo said: "To the best of my knowledge, this is supposed to be a crisis between the Tiv and Jukun in Taraba State and it has nothing to do with Benue. In Benue, we have Jukun in Abintse and Wurukum in Guma and Makurdi living peacefully with the Tiv people.

"I want to call on the Inspector-General of Police (IGP), Chief of Army Staff and the President to, as a matter of urgency, intervene in this crisis."

The Benue State Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), DSP Catherine Anne, confirmed that three unidentified corpses were recovered in Jootar but declined comment on the attack in Mbamena.

She said: "The incident at Jootar is confirmed. Three unidentified corpses have been recovered. Two officers on duty in the area are yet to

be found and investigation is still in progress."

The Force Commander of *Operation Whirl Stroke*, Major-General Adeyemi Yekini, said the situation is now under control as troops had been drafted to the affected areas.

Also, residents of Tyo-Mu settlement, a suburb of Makurdi, the state capital city, on Wednesday, began fleeing the community after the police recovered a dead body in the area.

The community had, over the years, been embroiled in communal clash over land between the indigenous Ihyarev, consisting of Tiv people found in Makurdi, Gwer-West, as well as in Guma Local Government Areas and the Kparev, who are the settlers.

The settlers are believed to have migrated from Vandikya, Kwande, Konshisha and Ushongo local government areas of the state.

Some people who were found fleeing the area could not say specifically the reason they were leaving the community when the Nigerian Tribune approached them.

However, police spokesperson told journalists in Makurdi, that operatives of the command on Wednesday found an unidentified body in the area.

The PPRO said the command was yet to ascertain what led to the death of the victim and that had prompted people to desert the settlement.

Anene said two suspects had been arrested while more police personnel have been drafted to the area.

In Plateau State, gunmen on the rampage in Bassa Local Government Area of the state struck again on Wednesday and killed four people, injured six others and burnt several houses.

Irigwe Chieftdom in the local government area has been under a siege as a result of constant attacks by gunmen suspected to be herdsmen.

Last week alone, no fewer than 12 people were killed and properties destroyed by the gunmen.

Speaking with the *Nigerian Tribune*, the chairman of Maingo Youth Development Association, Mr Nuhu Nkali, said the mode of the attack was not different from the previous ones in Irigwe Chieftdom.

When contacted, the state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), ASP Ubah Gabriel, confirmed that four persons were killed in the attack.

Gabriel said the Commissioner of Police in the state, Isaac Akinmoyede, had deployed more policemen under the command of the Assistant Commissioner of Police (Operations) to the affected community.