

Bandits invade varsity hostels, abduct 24 students

•Protocol officer, nine construction workers also kidnapped •Soldiers say they've rescued six, killed 5 abductors

Attahiru Ahmed | Gusau

GUNMEN in their tens kidnapped 24 students of the Federal University, Gusau, Zamfara State, on Friday.

They also abducted some construction workers and a protocol officer of the university.

Armed gangs have plagued the North West in recent years, kidnapping for ransom, looting and destroying communities and murdering civilians. Security forces' attempts to halt their rampage have met with little success.

Mugira Yusuf, spokesperson for the Zamfara State governor, said 24 students, 10 workers and a security guard were seized by armed men in the early hours of

Friday from the university.

Soldiers rescued six female students and killed five abductors during a shootout, a security source said.

The source said a joint security operation between the army and police was underway to free those still in captivity.

Kidnappings of students, once a notorious tactic by militants to intimidate the population, have become a money-spinning industry for armed gangs demanding ransom payments.

President Bola Tinubu promised to end widespread insecurity during his election campaign earlier this year but he is yet to spell out how he will tackle the problem.

A separate report put the number of the construction workers, who were abducted

alongside the protocol officer of the institution, at nine.

One of the construction workers who escaped being kidnapped, Ibrahim Mohammed, told *Saturday Tribune* that the bandits arrived in the university on motorcycles in the early hours of Friday.

Mohammed said that the kidnappers went away with the construction workers, including a representative of the contractor.

According to him, immediately the bandits arrived, they broke into the building where the construction workers were sleeping and whisked them away.

Mohammad explained that he was able to jump through the window and run away.

"When they broke into the building, they told us to come out and follow them.

"I was looking at a way to escape and then suddenly, I jumped through the window. One of the bandits fired a shot in my direction but he missed," he said.

A local watchman, popularly known as Buge Garba, said he tried to stop the bandits from gaining entry into the university premises but they were too many. He said one of them fired a shot at him which he survived.

"I was shot by the bandits but their bullet could not penetrate my body. I then ran and hid somewhere.

"I saw as they went to the house of the protocol officer of the institution, Mr Ezekiel. They whisked him away.

Buge Garba said further that he saw no fewer than 50 students, mostly females, being marched away by the bandits.

"I heard some of the vic-

tims lamenting and wondering who would rescue them as they were going with the bandits," he said.

Meanwhile, operatives of the Joint Task Force, Operation Hadarin-Daji, said on Friday afternoon that they had rescued six female students out of those abducted.

Force Information Officer, Operation Hadarin-Daji, Captain Ibrahim Yahaya, confirmed this to the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) via telephone.

Yahaya said the troops pursued the abductors who took the students, mostly females, to the forest.

He said the troops engaged the abductors in a gun duel, supported by the air component of the Nigerian Air Force (NAF), and rescued six of the students.

Yahaya further stated that several bandits were killed during the rescue effort which, he said, was still ongoing.

"The troops also recovered one AK-47, a magazine, four motorcycles and one communication gadget from the terrorists," the officer said.

Students of the institution had, in June, protested the spate of abductions of their schoolmates residing in Sabon-Gida and Damba communities.

The two communities are opposite the main campus of the university, which is about 20 kilometers from Gusau, the state capital.

Efforts to speak with the school authorities on the incident proved abortive, as the institution's spokesperson, Umar Usman, did not answer several calls put through to him.