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Soldiers arrest 15 over fresh Jos killings

By Jude Ovwamian with agency report

Monday, 24 May 2010

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Soldiers have arrested 15 suspects after three Fulani herdmen were killed in a fresh outbreak of sectarian violence near Jos, Plateau State, the Nigerian Army said on Sunday.

The Fulani herdsmen died on Saturday in attacks believed to have been launched by ethnic Berom in the village of Tusung, just days after the state government lifted a curfew in the area.

"Fifteen suspects have been arrested," Colonel Kayode Ogundele, the operations director of a special military unit in central Plateau State, of which Jos is the capital, told the Agence France Presse by telephone.

The three were reportedly searching for lost cattle about 40 kilometres south of Jos when dozens of youths allegedly murdered them before setting the bodies on fire.

An AFP reporter saw the bodies at the Nigerian Air Force hospital in Jos.

"We will arrest more people. Those arrested are helping us with our investigation. For sure, those found to have had a hand in the incident will face the law," Ogundele said.

Meanwhile, two persons reportedly died on Sunday in a protest by Muslim youths at Zololo junction along Bauchi Road.

Our correspondent learnt that the protest was ignited by the sight of corpses of the three herdmen at the Jos Central Mosque (Moshalashi Juma'a).

The protesters seized areas around Bauchi Road, Nasarawa Gwong and Angwan Rukuba.

The killing of the herdmen occurred less than 48 hours after the traditional ruler of Heipang, Da Phelix Pam-Tok, petitioned the police over alleged influx of Fulani herdsmen into the area.

It was gathered that the Fulani herdsmen had sought the assistance of some soldiers, who were not among the troop guarding the area.

But it was gathered that on getting to the area, the youths, who thought that the soldiers had come to attack them, laid ambush and disarmed the military men. Before the soldiers could call for a reinforcement, the three Fulani herdsmen had been allegedly slaughtered and buried in a shallow grave.

When the reinforcement arrived, the youths were said to have insisted that the arms they seized from the soldiers must be handed over to a superior officer; which they did.

The soldiers were said to have exhumed the bodies of those killed. The corpses were then taken to the mosque on Sunday, on the request of the Muslim community in Jos.

But the Special Task Force in a statement signed by Lt. Col. Kingsley Umoh said, "On Saturday 22nd May 2010 at about 1pm, three herdsmen complained at a special task force location that their cows, earlier declared missing, had been seen somewhere in Fan district of Barkin Ladi Local Government of Plateau State."

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