

Robbers unleash mayhem on Makurdi as residents cry for help

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Arms recovered recently in Benue

Attah, Ede, Makurdi

Benue State has turned into a hotspot for criminals. In fact, it is now a magnet for armed robbers, kidnappers, car snatchers and cattle rustlers.

The situation has got so bad that many youths in Makurdi, the state capital, now move around armed with cutlasses and knives to defend themselves against hoodlums.

Our correspondent learnt that there are cases of shop burgling, kidnapping, rape, robbery and cult-related killings almost on a daily basis

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√, some of the hoodlums connive with commercial bus drivers to attack their victims in broad daylight in
æ of the presence of security agents.

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Benue State Commissioner of Police, Mr. Bashir Makama, publicly acknowledged that the rate of criminal activities in the state is high.

While parading about 63 crime suspects at the police headquarters, recently, Makama said, "It was like my baptism in the state, but I also quickly showed the criminals that I am not here for a tea party. My mission in Benue State is to ensure the safety of lives and property.

Since the CP made this statement, the hoodlums have intensified their efforts in unleashing more terror on the state.

Eyewitnesses said the criminals, who move around in groups usually rob shops owners at various locations within the town and threaten them with guns or axes.

A grocery store owner around Bem Hotel in Makurdi, Mrs. Ene John, said in the month of August, her shop was burgled four times and all items in the shop were taken away each time.

She said, "Just last week, the hoodlums came to my shop in broad daylight, pointed a gun at me and collected N150,000 I wanted to give my son to purchase goods. The money was a loan.

"The same criminals went into the estate opposite my shop and robbed residents there. They have almost crippled me financially. I am afraid that if they come next time and do not see anything to steal, they may want to harm me.

"I am now indebted to so many people. I plan to permanently close down the shop. But if I do that now, the people I owe will think that I want to run away with their money."

Another resident, Andy Teryilia, told *Saturday PUNCH*, "No day passes without a robbery around our street. Because of the frequent robbery attacks, major streets in this area have installed iron gates and protectors."

A senior nurse with the General Hospital, Makurdi, Mrs. Aoadona, told our correspondent that she was trailed to the gate of her house along George Akume Road, New GRA, at about 10pm on Wednesday.

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she said, "Immediately I got to the gate and honked for the gate to be opened, three men suddenly jumped out of my vehicle with guns and ordered me out of my car. I screamed and that woke up my neighbour, who ran to help me with a cutlass.

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They were both bundled into the boot of my car and whisked away. These hoodlums took us round houses in the area and robbed many occupants. After they finished their operations, they brought us back to our house and still took all our money, phones and other belongings.”

A roundnut seller, 14-year-old Talatu Adams, also fell victim of the robbers.

She said some men pursued and caught up with her at the Makurdi old bridge while going home one evening.

They robbed me of all the money I had made from hawking that day and took my mobile phone too. They took me to a bush and wanted to rape me when someone passing by saw them. The passer-by began to scream, then they left me alone and ran away.”

The Benue State correspondent of the New Telegraph newspaper, Mr. Cephas Lorchemen also lost his vehicle to the car thieves recently.

Lorchemen told our correspondent that he did not know how the hoodlums gained access into his car where it was parked.

He said he parked the car on the premises of a bank located on New Oturkpo Road, Wurukum, Makurdi, and went into the bank to conduct a transaction. By the time he came out, the car was gone.

“I asked the bank’s guards and the policemen attached to the branch but they said they knew nothing. I reported the matter to the police, but up till now, it has not been found. We are now living at the mercy of criminals in the state,” Lorchemen said.

The wife of an assistant commissioner of police in the state who operates a beer parlour in the city also told our correspondent that she lost over N350,000 to a criminal who entered her shop and pretended to buy a recharge card as he robbed her salesgirl of recharge cards and money at gunpoint.

Our correspondent learnt that on Wednesday night, robbers armed with pistols attacked one dispensary and robbed the owner and his wife of N138,000 and four mobile phones.

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On the following day, robbers also shot and killed 13 residents of the state.

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The victims include one Terseer Akaya, a driver from Katsina-Ala, a woman and her two children aged 10 months old and eight years old.

Others injured in the attacks were receiving treatment at an undisclosed hospital in Makurdi as of the time of filing this report.

Police Public Relations Officer, Mr. Moses Yamu, who confirmed the incident, disclosed that the gang was led by one Terwase Akwaza alias, "Ghana", who had already been declared wanted with a N5M bounty placed on him.

Yesterday PUNCH gathered that the gang went to rob at Senga village in Katsina-Ala, where a mob caught and lynched two of them. One of their members identified as "Chemical" and a lady harbouring him were also killed, while the others escaped to Gbise village.

They were said to have mobilised for a reprisal and came back to the community.

It was learnt that the youth of the village had also mobilised to protect other residents.

But the robbers reportedly went to Kenvenger village, which is next to Senga and killed 10 residents.

Yamu said, "Police operatives have been deployed to patrol the area to prevent further breach of the peace. We have also launched a manhunt for other members of the gang."

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