

Kaduna Baptist school invaders demand rice, others to feed victims, hold 121 students

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Kaduna State Governor, Nasir El-Rufai

Bandits, who invaded Maraban Rido in the Chikun Local Government Area of Kaduna State on Monday and abducted some students of the Bethel Baptist High School, Damishi, have reached out to the management of the institution to demand foodstuffs.

The PUNCH learnt that the hoodlums asked for food items such as rice, beans, seasoning and oil to feed the students.

A member of the school management, who confided in one of our correspondents on Tuesday, stated that the bandits said 121 students of the school were in their custody.

According to the school official, the bandits first called on Monday and allowed one of the students to speak to a top member of the school management.

It was learnt that they called again on Tuesday and allowed two senior students, a boy and a girl, to speak to a top official of the school.

It was gathered that the senior students confirmed that there were 121 of them with the bandits.

The official, who confided in *The PUNCH*, said, "When the phone rang, the bandits first spoke to the member of the management. They said a senior student was directed to count the students in their custody and the boy confirmed that 121 students were being held. They also asked for food such as rice and beans as well oil to feed the students.

“Later, the senior student, who counted the abductees, said there were 121 of them with the bandits.”

Parents, school management meet

The management of the school and parents of the abducted students met on Tuesday on ways to rescue the abductees.

This was just as the school management confirmed that 121 students were being held by the bandits.

The proprietor of the school, who is also the President, Kaduna Baptist Conference, Rev Ishaya Jangado, made the confirmation.

The meeting lasted several hours amidst threat by the parents to embark on another round of protest and block the Kaduna-Kachia Highway, where the school is located.

The parents, mostly women, had indeed blocked the highway before operatives of the Kaduna State Vigilante Service prevailed on them to abandon the protest.

The parents also held a prayer session for God’s intervention in the rescue of their children from the kidnappers’ den.

Shortly after that, Jangado confirmed to newsmen that no fewer than 121 students were in the custody of the kidnappers.

He said 28 students were “recovered” on Monday after the bandits attacked the school.

He explained that the total number of students in the boarding house was 154 and that 28 were recovered, while 121 were in the bandits’ custody. He, however, did not provide any explanation on the remaining five students.

He said, “For now, we know that we have 154 students in the school hostel and yesterday (Monday) after the exchange of fire between the soldiers and the bandits, we came to the school and recovered 28 students; some of them were hit in many places. In the course of being taken away, some of them escaped and they came back to the school.

“So, the total number of students we recovered yesterday (Monday) was 28 and today (Tuesday), by the grace of God, we got a call from the bandits and they assured us that our children are well and doing okay.

“In fact, we had the privilege of speaking with a few of them. They counted themselves in the jungle and they gave us information that they were 121, and when we put the number together with what we have recovered, we discovered that the number is exactly the same as the number of students we have in the hostel.”

Bandits’ letter to school was ignored – Parent

‘No, we were caught unawares’

Facts emerged on Tuesday on how the bandits wrote the management on their intention to attack the school.

A parent, who confided in one of our correspondents, said the bandits actually notified the management that they were coming to attack the school.

The warning, the parent said, was ignored by both the guardian of the boys' hostel and matron of the girls' hostel when the students took the letter to them.

She said the teachers taunted the students for being eager to go home for holiday.

She stated, "The bandits actually wrote the school a letter on Sunday that they were going to attack it on Tuesday before striking on Monday.

"The students took the letter to their guardian and he said to them that they didn't want to be in school and that they were trying to look for an excuse to leave school.

"They took the same letter and gave it to the matron of the girls' hostel; she also acted the same way. The children in their innocence believed them and never said anything until the bandits struck on Monday. The bandits notified the school of their coming, but the students acted otherwise."

However, Jangado dismissed the claim, saying it was a pure lie.

He said the bandits took the school management unawares.

“That is a serious lie. That is wrong. These people (bandits) took us unawares, because we have our plans on security matters, how we can ensure that the students write their exams and go. So, there was no letter or any information about their coming,” he stated.

‘If need be, we’ll seek Gumi’s intervention’

He also said the management of the school would be willing to seek out any individual, including the controversial Islamic cleric, Sheikh Ahmad Gumi, for intervention to secure the release of the students.

When asked if he would seek Gumi’s intervention, Jangado said, “Well, if something is burning in your hand, whatever you can touch to make your hands cold, you will touch it.

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“Whosoever will come to our rescue, the person is welcome. All the parents are crying about is for their children to come back. So, whosoever can intervene to make the children come back, the person is welcome.”

On if the management would seek the support of the National Baptist Conference, the national body of the church in Nigeria, Jangado noted that the body would be informed of the attack but it would not be involved in negotiation or payment of ransom should the need arise.

How bandits trick abducted students

One of our correspondents, who visited the school premises on Tuesday, was told how the bandits tricked the students to follow them into the bush.

According to a source, when the bandits succeeded in breaking into the school through “the broken perimeter fence,” they headed straight for the boys’ hostel and deceived the students that they were military personnel on a mission to rescue them from bandits.

He said, “When they entered the various hostels, one of the bandits spoke in English to the students that they were on a mission to rescue them from bandits. He said bandits were on the way to the school to attack them. The bandits asked the students to come out and follow them. It was after they came out that they sensed that something was wrong and those who could escape did so and others were taken away.”

Nigeria has become a wasteland, says CAN

Nigeria under the watch of the President, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (retd.), has become a wasteland devouring its inhabitants, the Christian Association of Nigeria has said.

The body also called on the international community to assist Nigeria, as it did for Syria, to fight nationwide banditry and insecurity.

The President of CAN and immediate-past President of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, Dr Samson Ayokunle, said this in a statement, while reacting to the kidnapping of 121 students of the Bethel Baptist College, Kaduna.

Ayokunle said the situation in Kaduna State “has become quite terrible because of the uncouth, unbridled and acidic statements credited to Governor Nasir El-Rufai, who appears to be talking too much than acting!”

According to him, Buhari should caution El-Rufai against making reckless statements.

The statement read in part, “It is a sin and a crime against humanity to have zero regards for the lives of others or be unable to provide security for citizens.

“Kidnapping and abduction are now a thriving business in Nigeria and it is almost becoming synonymous with the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari. It is very evident by each passing hour that this present administration is just paying lip service to the issues of security.

“Whereas, provision of adequate security for all Nigerian citizens was one of the campaign promises of President Muhammadu Buhari in the 2015/2019 general elections and the major reason people voted for him was being an ex-military man, the administration has failed woefully to keep campaign promises.”

NUT asks FG to implement safe school initiative

The Secretary-General of the Nigeria Union of Teachers, Dr Mike Ene, on Tuesday, urged the Federal Government to implement the Safe Schools Initiative programme to end the spate of abductions in schools, especially in Kaduna State.

Ene made the appeal in an interview with The PUNCH in Abuja.

He lamented the rising spate of abduction of school children across Nigeria.

Ene noted that the implementation of the Safe School Initiative, which was the brainchild of the President Goodluck Jonathan administration in 2014, would go a long way in reducing if not eliminating the crime, especially in Kaduna State, which he noted had become an epicentre of the schoolchildren abductions.

Similarly, a UNESCO education specialist, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution, said the organisation was working with the Federal Ministry of Education and the North East Development Council to deal with the situation.

The source said, “We are making sure that we transfer students from the BAY (Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states) to schools in other areas.

“Most of the students, who were transferred when the initiative was launched, have graduated and the process still continues. We are working with the Education Ministry and the North East Development Council.”

El-Rufai condoles with families of troops

The remains of one of the military personnel killed by bandits while on a mission to rescue the abducted students have been laid to rest.

The names of the slain personnel were given as Private Salisu Rabi'u of the Nigerian Army and Ordinary Seaman Bilal Mohammed, a naval rating.

The state Commissioner for Internal Security and Home Affairs, Samuel Aruwan who stated this in a statement, said while the remains of Mohammed were interred at the Ungwan Kanawa Cemetery, Kaduna North LGA, Rabi'u's corpse was taken to Daura, Katsina State, for interment.

El-Rufai condoled with the families of the slain security operatives.

The commissioner said, "The governor of Kaduna State, Malam Nasir El-Rufai, has condoled with the families of two personnel of the Nigerian Army and the Nigerian Navy, who paid the supreme price on Monday, while defending students of the Bethel Baptist High School, Kaduna.

"The two personnel, Private Salisu Rabi'u and Ordinary Seaman Bilal Mohammed, lost their lives while engaging the bandits, who attacked the school and kidnapped an unspecified number of students in the early hours of Monday, July 5, 2021."

Reps decry incessant killings, kidnapping

Meanwhile, the House of Representatives has condemned the growing insecurity in Nigeria, especially the endless killings and kidnapping across the country.

At the plenary on Tuesday, the House resolved to “condemn the senseless incessant killings and abductions of Nigerians” and to “pray for the repose of the soul of all military personnel and other victims who lost their lives in the hands of these blood thirsty gunmen, and condole with the bereaved families.”

The House also urged all security agencies to “take necessary measures to ensure early and safe return of the abductees,” while urging the Federal Government to “as a matter of urgency, increase its recruitment and training capacity for military men and police to close the gap between available and required man power.”