**DAUD OLATUNJI** writes about the dust raised by the killing of two villagers in Ogun village by police who subsequently labelled them terrorists

escaped by a whisker when the police ambushed my father and his nephew. They rained bullets on them, but the bullets did not penetrate their bodies. One of the policemen later moved closer to them and forcibly took the Dane gun belonging to Bara (Kolawole) and shot him to death.

death.

"The same policeman approached my father, took his machete and hacked him to death. I saw how he killed them from where I hid, "said 25-year-old survivor, Alani Ojugbele. The duo were allegedly killed by the police a few hours after an Inspector, Omolayo Olajide, was murdered, by yet-to-be identified persons during a clash between some. heroebs and Yoruba farmers in Saala Orile, Yewa-North Leoal Government Area OD unn State.

Local Government Area of Opin State.

The two victims were identified as Kolawole Bara and Sole Ojugbele. While Ojugbele was said to be a nephew to the village head, Bara, popularly called Alape, was identified as a younger brother to the village head of Adekan village near Sala Ohle, Ohio Adies Deep New Sole Office Adies Deep New Sole Office Adies Deep New Sole Ohle, Ohio Adies Deep New Sole Ohle, O Saala-Orile, Chief Adisa Bara.

Seasua-orne, cutter Aoisa Bara.
Speaking with our correspondent, Ojugbele said the duo
and himself were on a motorcycle moving around the villages
a few minutes after the violent incident.
He said they were stopped abruptly by a team of
policemen around Saala-Orile who shot at them.

He said "I am a farmer. I was with my father when he was killed. Some people came to our house to tell him that the baale wanted to see him and he left. When he returned home, he said the baale asked him to check the village and give him a report of what was happening there. That was how I went with my father to visit the area. When we were returning, my

"We decided to assess the areas from Saala Orile.
"We decided to assess the areas from Saala Orile to Ijaka-Oko. We saw some policemen at Vulcaniser bus stop at Saala Orile junction and we passed them by towards Ijaka-Oke. We later turned towards Ijaka-Oko after looking around the area. On our way back, the police were still at the junction with their van

"The bike we sat on was driven by Alape (Bara). We went through the area and we turned back towards Saala-Orile to pass through the area to our house. As we passed Ijaka-Oke to Saala-Orile Junction. we met some relicement to Saala-Orile Junction, we met some policemen and one of them alighted from the van and started shooting at us.

"As he shot at my father and Alape, the bullets didn't penetrate their bodies. But after he exhausted the bullets in his gun, he moved towards them and towards them and snatched the gun held by Alape and shot at him at a close range. The gun penetrated his body and killed him. Another cop at the same time dragged my dad from the back and used a machete

"I fled when the cop started shooting and hid somewhere around. If not for the fact that I was also fortified from bullets, I might have been killed too. It was the police that hacked my father to death and shot Alape dead. After killing them, they put their bodies in their van and drove away. It happened on the Saala-Onie Road near a mechanic shop in the area. My father was not a bandit. He was a farmer. Alape was also not a bandit, he was a hunter." Announcing the inspector's death, the state police command said he was shot dead by terrorists during a gun duel in the area. The police labelled Bara and Ojugbele killed

The spokesperson for the police in the state, DSP Abimbola Oyeyemi, in a statement said the incident occurred on Tuesday, January 24, 2022 in Saala-Orile forest in the Yewa-North LGA.

Oyeyemi noted that the operatives of the state police command gunned down two terrorists during a gun battle in the forest following the alleged attack

Oyeyemi claimed that the duo were killed following Oyeyem claimed that the duo were falled following a distress call received by policemen attached to Ayetoro division that a group of terrorists were attacking some Fulani herdsmen at Isaala Orile forest. According to him, the DPO Ayetoro, CSP Bernard Edicabram guidable led his way and constitue of the

Ediogboyan, quickly led his men and operatives of the joint security intervention squad to the scene.

He said, "On sighting the policemen, the bandits opened fire on them and the policemen replied fire for

"At the end of the encounter which lasted for about At the end of the encounter which lasted for about 20 minutes, two amongst the bandits were shot dead while others escaped with varying degrees of gunshot injuries. Regrettably, an inspector of police, by name Omolayo Olajide, lost his life during the gun duel." But the villagers disagreed with the police, saying that those killed were not terrorists but hunters and farmers.

The villagers identified them as village high chiefs who worked with the village head, Chief Adisa Bara of

Adekan village.

In its reaction to the development, Yewa North

Patriotic Forum faulted the police on the killings.
The forum in a statement by its spokesperson, Fatolu
Ganiyu, condemned the killing of the villagers by the police

during a clash between farmers and herders in the area.

The statement read in part, "The forum finds it mischievous, despicable, and inciteful a press release issued on the recent Fulani herders-farmers clash in Saala Orile by the Nigeria Police Force, Ogun State Command, signed by DSP Abimbola Oyeyemi (PPRO Ogun State Police

"It is saddening and unacceptable that the police could descend that low to support those suspected Fulani herdsmen which they have known from time immemorial to have been terrorising the farmers, kidnapping and killing

"It is a deliberate fabrication by the police to tag innocent villagers living within Ayetoro, Saala Orile, Erinpa and neighbourhood as bandits. This obviously was done in a rush to cover up the unprofessional way its men handled the conflict at Saala Orile.

The forum stated that despite the state anti-open grazing law, the same thing happened when herdsmen with their animals invaded farms

of innocent farmers at Saala Orile, Erinpa, Agada and Ogodo,

destroying the farms.

It added, "The farmers then called on the hunters to on the hunters to help chase away the animals from their farms. It was at this point that the well armed herders brought out weapons and attacked both the hunters and formers." farmers

The forum alleged nat the herders that the herders called the police who promptly responded whereas they never answered previous calls by the farmers to come for their

Saturday
PUNCH gathered
that the killings were triggered by the inspector's death. It

was gathered that the crisis erupted after some herders living in neighbouring villages grazed their cattle on farms located in some villages such as Erinpa, Agada, Ogodo, Ijaka-Oke, Adekan and Saala-Orile .



by the loss, some farmers reportedly sought help from Agbekoya and hunters in the area who confronted the herdsmen over their action. The clash between the Agbekoya and the herders didn't record any casualty.

and the herders didn't record any casualty.

The herders reportedly alerted the police who allegedly stormed the place to protect the herdsmen said to be under attack. Some villagers who spoke to Saturday PUNCH on condition of anonymity said the police opened fire on the hunters but the bullets didn't penetrate.

It alleged that the hunters in self-defence killed one of the policemen while other cops fled for reinforcement.

Upon return to the scene, our correspondent gathered

Upon return to the scene, our correspondent gathered that the hunters had left while two farmers reportedly on motorcycle were seen in the area and allegedly attacked and killed by the police.

The victims were reportedly sent on an errand by the village

head to the affected villages to find out what was going on.

Saturday PUNCH learnt that the villagers had deserted their homes and farms over the possible attacks and arrest by

Initial attempts to speak with the village head, Adisa Bara, were futile as he was said to have also left the village shortly after the incident.

after the incident.

The village head who later spoke with our correspondent on the telephone from hiding, lamented the killing of two of

He confirmed that he was the one who sent the two

villagers identified as his younger brother and a nephew to check happenings in the villages.

He said "I am a brother to Kolawole Bara, who is one of

the victims of Tuesday, January 25, 2022, killings at Saala Orile by police. The police later labelled them as bandits. I got a call on Tuesday from a head teacher of Community Primary School, Adekan, one Mr Oyero. He told me to meet with the school teachers to ensure the pupils arrive in their homes safely. He said there was a clash between farmers and herders from Saala who came to Ijaka-Oke and that the roads had been blocked.

"On getting to the school, I met a teacher identified as Mr Aina to whom I relayed the message and he said they would protect the pupils so I returned home. But I got another call some minutes before 11am. I was told to return to the school and some minutes before tiam. I was told to return to the school and inform the teachers to release the pupils to go to their various homes. I did and the teachers said they would be released immediately when they finished eating. I returned home. I then instructed my brother, Akanji Bara and my cousin Sole Ojugbele to go round the village to know what was happening. They rode a motorcycle.

"But few hours later, I got a call that they were both killed; now was killed with a my and the other with a machete. I acked."

one was killed with a gun and the other with a machete. I asked who killed them and I was told the police did along Saala-Orile road close to a mosque and mechanic junction. My investigation showed that the victims were not questioned by the police but

only stopped as they were on a bike and shot at."

He also called for the release of the corpses by the police, stating that there should be an explanation for the act because

was sure of the victim's innocence. The village head said, 'They were both hunters and

had identification cards. They were chiefs in the village and I always sent them on errands to check the wellbeing of the villagers."

Previous attacks recorded

Last year, Yewa-North witnessed herders' attack: which forced several villagers to relocate to neighbouring countries for many weeks

Many lives and property were lost to the clashes between farmers and herdsme

farmers and nerusmen.

The incident also prompted some northern governor including the Kano State governor, Abdullah Ganduje to hold closed-door and town hall meetings with the state governor

Dapo Abiodun and stakeholders in the state.

Also, the state government set up a fact-finding committee with the mandate to uncover both immediate and remote want me manual to underer both immediate and remote causes of clashes between farmers and herders in the area. The committee which had submitted its report was also asked to recommend a lasting solution to the clashes.

A few months after the submission of the report which was not made public, the clashes continue unabated. An elder bother to mere of the sight of Carbel Obashes and M.

A few months after the submission of the report which was not made public, the clashes continue unabated. An eldeibrother to one of the victims, Gabriel Ojugbele, said the villegawinessed a similar attack by herders last year. He said the attacks had been regular with loss of lives and property. Ojugbele further said that their village was one of the village that recorded frequent attacks from herdsmen.

He said, "They not only destroy our farms but also maim and left our people."

kill our people.'

kill our people."

Police fault villagers' claim

In its reaction, the state police spokesperson, Overdescribed the claim by the villagers as insulting and annoyu: 5'
Oyeyemi said the villagers didn't know the gravity of what they did by killing an inspector.

According to him, policemen killed terrorists who engaged their men in a gun duel.

He said "Does it weren we are the several to be the state of the state of the said "Does it weren we are the several to be sufficient or sufficient

He said, "Does it mean we are the ones that killed our He said. Does it mean we are the ones that knied our inspector? Terrorists killed our officer and we engaged them killing two of them. The villagers are now saying the

Families demand release of corpses
The families of the victims demanded the release of the corpses of their late loved ones, seeking justice for the farmer

Ojugbele, who lost his father, said, "What I want from the government is to allow us to take our father's corpse fo burial. The police refused to release the bodies of the victim for burial. We need the government to help us retrieve the remains of our slain family members. We also want the

government to ensure justice on the matter.

On his part, the village head said "I want the statt government to help us. I have sought help from my family and others because I am confused and helpless.

We ran away from our homes because we are not sure o

what may happen if we continue staying in the village.

"We beg the government to wade into this matter. The death of my people who I sent to check the situation of thingmust be probed."

Also the forum urged the police to withdraw the terro tag on the victims, advising them to "conduct a thorough investigation into the crisis to unveil the criminal element terrorising the neighbourhood."

It called on the Inspector-General of Police to investigate the murders by the police and ensure the prosecution of the