

# Death of five infants proves bandits' resilience

**THE tragic death in captivity of five infants recently underscores the resilience of the terrorists, bandits and assorted criminals tormenting Nigerians and the flailing campaign to neutralise them. News of the death of the five children, who were among 17 villagers abducted by bandits in some villages in the Birnin Gwari Local Government Area of Kaduna State sparked outrage, and anger against perceived tepid official response. President Bola Tinubu must adopt more effective measures to protect Nigerians.**

The case of the five children and the 12 others depicts the agony of Nigerians as the government grapples with widespread insecurity.

The 17 villagers, including the infants and their mothers, were kidnapped by bandits on October 7 and taken into the bush. According to media reports, the bandits initially demanded a ransom of N19 million. However, after the payment was made, they released only four people and demanded an additional payment.

Residents said the bandits later called to inform the community that the five infants had died because their mothers fell ill and consequently could not breastfeed them.

This is heartbreaking, a reminder of the sorrow, tears and bloodletting inflicted by criminals across the country. Tinubu rubbed salt in the public injury by failing to visit the communities. Instead, he jetted out to Saudi Arabia for another summit. Like its predecessors, the administration lacks the quality of demonstrable public empathy with bereaved Nigerian

communities.

Two things stand out in the episode. One is the tenacity of the terrorists, bandits, Fulani herdsmen/militants in their criminal enterprise. The other is the apparent failure of the government's law enforcement and military operations to eliminate criminality altogether or degrade them to insignificance.

Yet, the government keeps allocating trillions of naira to fund the security efforts, including a fresh N552 billion in the recent 2023 Supplementary Budget signed this month.

Obviously, defeating banditry and terrorism, and their associated crimes of kidnapping-for-ransom, armed robbery and Fulani herdsmen rapine requires fresh thinking, new strategies, and focus. Tinubu should depart from the uncaring attitude of his predecessors to the afflictions of Nigerians.

When Nigerians suffer tragedies, the responsibility of leaders is to show up

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in the afflicted communities, both for on-the-spot assessment, and to stand with the people. If he deemed his Saudi trip so important, Tinubu should have sent a high ranking official to Kaduna to reassure all Nigerians that he has their back.

Determinedly, the government should crush banditry and kidnapping. The International Review of the Red Cross says, "In terms of its disruptive impact and intensity of violence, banditry is the gravest security threat that Nigeria currently faces and is driving a grave humanitarian crisis." Its handmaiden, kidnapping, is described by SBM Intelligence as "Nigeria's fastest-growing industry."

Its estimate of N653.7 million paid as ransom between July 2021 and June 2022 is believed to be understated. Some 3,420 persons were abducted in that period in over 500 incidents during which 564 persons were murdered. Between June 2022 and July 2023, 3,620 persons were kidnapped in 582 incidents, 430 civilians killed, while over N5 billion was demanded.

Among other measures, the government must ensure effective border controls, overhaul the security agencies, and adopt extensive use of ICT tools. The security chiefs must perform or be replaced. Policing should be devolved, with state agencies and personnel well-armed, trained and equipped. Funds allocated for security must be accounted for, and criminal suspects prosecuted.

Tinubu must urgently adopt a hands-on leadership style and devise new strategies to defeat banditry and kidnapping.