

Five killed in Benue fresh attack as 17 victims get mass burial

10th April 2024



File: Bandits

By John Charles

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Bandits launched attack on some communities in three local government areas of Benue State and killed five people.

The separate attacks, according to locals happened in Agatu, Apa and Gwer West Local Government Areas of the state.

This was as the state government, on Tuesday, conducted a mass burial for 17 victims of the armed herders' attack earlier killed on Mbakyor at Mbaikyor, Mbalom in the Gwer-East LG of Benue State were, on Tuesday, given mass burial.

Locals who spoke to our correspondent on Tuesday claimed that five people were killed in Agatu and Gwer West LGAs while many were reportedly injured and kidnapped in Apa LGA.

It was gathered that the attacks, which happened between Sunday and Monday, also led to the abduction of a woman.

The locals, in a telephone chat, told our correspondent in Makurdi that the bandits on Sunday attacked Ikpele village in the Agatu LGA at 6 pm and killed four persons with one of them beheaded while three others were amputated.

“One person was killed in another attack on rural farmers in Gwer West LGA, bringing the total of casualties on same Sunday invasion of the two LGAs to five during which several others were injured

by the gunmen,” a resident said.

In Apa LGA, though, no death was recorded, the bandits were said to have kidnapped a woman when they laid siege to the highway on Sunday and Monday to attack travelers along the Otukpo-Adoka-Oweto highway.

“They shot somebody in the leg and shot another vehicle’s tyres in Asaba-Ojantele of the Apa LGA. They also laid a siege between Iga and river Okpene of Apa LGA and kidnap a woman.

“As of Monday evening, they repeated the same attack on the highway on the same Asaba-Ojantele. People from the places have been totally sacked from their home in Asaba-Ojantele of Apa LGA,” one of the locals who did not want to be mentioned said.

A humanitarian worker in the area, Joseph Adakole, said that the continuous attacks by armed invaders on Idoma land were getting out of hand as people were being killed every day with houses burnt down and the destruction of farm produce becoming unbearable.

At the Tuesday mass burial for the earlier victims, the Benue State Governor, Rev. Fr. Hyacinth Alia, was represented by the deputy governor, Sam Ode.

Speaking on behalf of the governor, Ode said the best solution to end the incessant attacks by armed herders on Benue communities was the formation of vigilante groups.

The PUNCH had reported the killing of 17 people by bandits suspected to be armed herders on March 7, 2024.

Among those killed were a retired army officer and a boy.

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It was gathered that two out of the 17 peasant farmers were earlier buried, as their corpses were fast decomposing due to the manner of their death.

The state had for sometime been under attacks by armed herders as the immediate past governor, Samuel Ortom, also organised mass burials of victims of such attacks in most Benue communities.

At the mass burial on Tuesday, Alia said, “Today is a sad day in the history of Benue State, to line up caskets like this is unacceptable. I am so sad and my heart is heavy to see this kind of spectacle that shouldn’t have happened.

“Security is not for government alone, because there is no one that can protect you like yourself; you need to have a joint security task force or vigilance groups that would be properly profiled and handed over to the government to handle them. That is the solution to the insecurity we are facing in the state.”

The governor also pledged to construct the road that passed through the axis to ease the movement of security agencies to the area in times of emergencies, adding that the community was also ripe for a police station.

He, however, promised to meet with the families of the bereaved after the burial and prayed against a recurrence.

A member of the Benue House of Assembly, representing Gwer East, Elias Audu, wondered why, despite the availability of fighter planes to tackle such attacks, the security did not live up to their billings.

He lamented that while the people were under siege for over three hours, security agents could not intervene, even with the use of fighter helicopters.

Audu appreciated Governor Alia for all he had done since the incident, including the distribution of items he made available to the victims’ families during the Easter celebration.

President of the Masev Development Association, Prof. Vitalis Tarhule, noted that the primary responsibility of the government was the protection of lives and property, even as he appealed to the government to protect the people.

He added that similar attacks had occurred in 2014, 2018 and 2024, bringing to a total of 40 lives lost to the incidents.

He said there was a need to establish a security post in Mbaikyor, to check the activities of armed herders.

The Chairman of the Association of Mbaikyor Sons in Diaspora, Simon Kofi, told the governor that his people had apprehended two herders and handed them over to the police due to their nefarious activities.

He explained that their crime was that they told the herders not to come to the community again, a situation which prompted the attack on them.

Earlier, an interdenominational service was conducted for the victims of the attack by clerics present before their final interment.