

Bandits defy curfew, kill 18 villagers in fresh Benue attack

JOHN CHARLES and DANIEL AYANTOYE

GUNMEN suspected to be bandits Friday night invaded the Mbacher community in Mbacher council ward, Katsina-Ala Local Government Area of Benue State and killed 18 people.

Sources from the local government told our correspondent that the bandits who defied the curfew imposed by the state government raided the community at about 11 pm on Friday and killed the villagers.

Benue State Governor, Rev Fr Hyacinth Alia, had imposed a curfew from 6 pm to 6 am in Sankera axis following a violent protest that rocked Ukum LGA two weeks ago.

The Sankera axis comprises of Katsina-Ala, Ukum and Logo which has remained a flashpoint of criminality in the state.

The source further told our correspondent that the bandits assembled the people pretending to be addressing them when they opened fire on some of them.

Sunday PUNCH learnt that 18 bodies were recovered Saturday morning by the military.

Confirming the incident, the Chairman of Katsina-Ala LGA, Justine Shaku said the bandits had concluded their operations before the military got to the village.

Shaku said, "At about 11 pm yesterday (Friday) we received a distress call from the villagers that some group of terrorists mobilise themselves and were moving from house to house forcing people to follow them.

"I quickly mobilised the military officers that were in Tor Doonga and being a remote area, before they could reach there the people had been killed.

He added that some people were wounded during the attack.

"Yesterday night, I was told it was 17 but today 18 people have been confirmed dead. All of them were assembled in one place and killed.

"This morning, I, the assembly member and adviser on legislative matters held a meeting and we communicated the development to the Commissioner of Police."

The council chairman described the activities of bandits in the area as a "guerilla type of war" describing the gunmen as "local terrorists."

"I no longer call them bandits because I'm seeing hands/elements of terrorism in their activities. So to me, I classify them as terrorists now.

"But they are terrorists within though they have external forces, those who are sponsoring and helping them to perpetrate the acts. The locals are the major people doing it," he added.

The state Police Public Relations Officer, Catherine Anene, said, "The attack in Katsina-Ala is confirmed. Investigations have begun."

Meanwhile, the Special Adviser on Security and Internal Affairs to Governor Hyacinth Alia, Joseph Har, confirmed the incident.