

# Lakurawa: FG plans more troops as sect spreads in North

26th November 2024



Nigerian Army troops

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As part of efforts to combat the Lakurawa sect, the Federal Government will deploy more military personnel and formations in the states where the terrorists operate, The PUNCH has learnt.

This is as The PUNCH reliably learnt that the sect, which operates in North West states Sokoto and Kebbi, has moved into Niger State in North Central Nigeria, as well as Kaduna State.

The Sokoto State Government asserted that it was concerned about the lives and property of its people, noting that security topped its nine-point agenda.

The Special Adviser on Security Matters to Governor Ahmad Aliyu, Col Ahmed Usman (retd.), said the Federal Government promised to deploy more security operatives in the state to tackle the sect that attacked Mera village, Kebbi State, leaving 17 residents dead November 8.

The terrorist group also rustled dozens of cattle in the community as the village vigilante fought back killing two members of the group during an exchange of fire.

Usman said, “If you can remember, the Minister of State for Defence during his working visit to Sokoto had disclosed the kind of pressure mounted on the Federal Government by the state government on the need to come to their aid.

“And the Federal Government has promised to establish more military formations and deploy more personnel and equipment to Sokoto State.

“On our part, the state government has provided the facility for the air component of operation ‘Fansan Yamma.’ Now, we don’t need to wait for fighter jets from Katsina in case of any emergency or air support.”

He added, “So, there has been investment in security infrastructure, including establishing more security outposts (Forward Operation Bases) and upgrading surveillance systems in key locations.

“The Sokoto State government has strengthened partnerships with federal security agencies to ensure a coordinated approach to tackling security challenges.

“Similarly, the government has launched public awareness campaigns with the support of the United Nations Development Programme and other local NGOs to educate citizens on security issues and encourage them to report suspicious activities.”

Speaking further, the governor’s aide explained that the current administration had been providing logistics support to the security agencies, assuring that Lakurawa “will soon be a thing of the past.”

Usman stated, “We provided tens of operational vehicles, including motorcycles, to security agencies and restored their allowances. In addition to other measures, we created the state-owned security outfit, which we called Sokoto State Community Guards, and they were equipped.

“Their role is to support the conventional security agencies in intelligence gathering, among others. The state government has inaugurated a security community under the leadership of the Deputy Governor of the state.

“The committee comprises security agencies, traditional and religious leaders, among other stakeholders in security. In fact, even the latest news about the Lakurawa was broken by the deputy governor while receiving members of the National Defence College in the state.”

The special adviser further explained that the state government also set up programmes to empower youths to discourage their involvement in crime and violence or being recruited by the Lakurawa.

He added, “The government has set up a conflict resolution mechanism to address disputes before they escalate into violence, promoting peace in communities just as it has been mediating between farmers and herdsmen to reduce conflicts over lands and resources, which can lead to insecurity.

“There has been massive investment in social welfare aimed at alleviating poverty, which is often the root cause of insecurity. And we hold regular security meetings with stakeholders to assess the security situation and develop strategies for improvement.”

The Minister of Defence, Muhammad Abubakar, assured citizens and residents of Sokoto and Kebbi states of the readiness of the armed forces to crush Lakurawa and other terrorist groups.

The minister gave the assurance in Sokoto as the Lakurawa sect reportedly extended its tentacles to Niger and Kaduna from its former hideouts in Kebbi and Sokoto States.

Following the November 8 attack on Mera, the Defence Headquarters deployed more troops in the area to dislodge the terror group which was said to have occupied the area for over six years.

A report said the group was dislodged from its hideout and several cattle recovered.

Speaking while inspecting the facilities of the air component of Operation ‘Fansan Yamma’ in Sokoto, the defence minister disclosed that the military had taken a decisive decision against Lakurawa.

He noted, “You heard it from the chairman of the Local Government Area attacked by the Lakurawa in Kebbi State, testifying to the heavy presence of troops in the area.

“The Lakurawa was sent away from the area. This is a result of the resilience and dedication of our security operatives. You are aware of the successes recorded by our air force, they bombarded some of the hideouts of the bandits and the bandits are now on the run.”

However, the Senate a few weeks ago raised the alarm that the militants had moved into Niger, Kaduna and other North-Central states, sparking fear among the people.

Worried by the activities of the terrorist group, the northern states have decided to unite against the Lakurawa in a clear move to contain its spread and operations.

The Niger State Commissioner for Homeland Security, Mohammed Bello, said the affected states were working together with the Federal Government to eliminate the terrorist cell.

“You know how we do in Nigeria. Sometimes, we neglect things until they become real problems, they can become complicated. For the first time, more than two or three states are putting resources together to see that things are being done to eradicate the problem.

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“I assure you that the problems will become a thing of the past in a few days. In a few days, the people in Kaduna, Zamfara are putting heads together; by the grace of God, things will become clearer very soon,” Bello said.

“The issue with the bandits is that when they are under pressure in one state, they run to another state because there is no clear-cut demarcation of these states we are talking about.”

Also speaking on what the Kebbi State Government was doing to complement the Federal Government’s efforts, the Special Adviser on Communication and Strategy, Abdullahi Zuru, said the state government was supporting troops drafted to the area with logistics.

“We are procuring vehicles that will help them with mobility. You know the troops drafted here were brought to help us deal with the Lakurawa, but the state government is discussing with the Chief of Defence Staff on how to make them stay permanently in the areas to avoid any reoccurrence.

“We are also assisting the local vigilante with operational vehicles and other logistics to help them gather timely and accurate information for the troops.

“The role they played last time during Lakurawa’s attack on the Mera community cannot be overemphasised. They tried their best hence they need to be encouraged to do better than before.”

### **District heads**

The District Head of the Gagi community in Sokoto State, Sani Jabi, advised the Federal and Sokoto State governments to adopt dialogue in dealing with the Lakurawa group in the state.

The monarch noted that the sect had inhabited some areas of the state for the past eight years.

He said the people of the affected communities had lived with the Lakurawa members for years without any issues until the November attack.

Should the security forces mount an attack on the sect, Jabi warned the government should be ready for the consequences.

“As for me, I prefer using dialogue with the group. This could be done in collaboration with our neighbouring countries affected by the Lakurawa.

“With such a move, their exit will be peaceful, without any rancour and exchange of fire between them and the security agents.

“But if it’s about kinetic approach, it’s also a welcome development but the Federal Government should be ready for the consequences.

“I said the consequences because the government should be ready to ensure permanent relocation of security agents to the affected areas, which will give the people hope of survival. Anything short of that, those people will come back and attack the people,” Jabi stated.

While calling on security agents to improve their intelligence-gathering system, the district head claimed the security agencies were aware of the existence of the group.

“I think the problem is they were not attacking their hosts before now, they initially find a way to live in peace with the people without any rancour.

“They will interact, do business and preach to them until recently when they introduced a tax on them and their cattle,” Jabi added.

He also called for the deployment of more security operatives, citing the increased population in the area.

“Go to the local areas, the number of divisional police officers in the last 10 years has not increased while the population is growing daily. How can you address that with the level of insecurity at hand?”

A district head from one of the affected Local Government Areas, who spoke on condition of anonymity, applauded the government for the posting of troops to the area to contain the group.

He suggested a permanent base in the area for the security agents since most of the affected communities shared borders with neighbouring countries.

He stated, “We appreciate them (government) for their efforts so far but in all honesty, we need permanent security personnel in this area to tackle this menace.

“We cannot continue this way; our border needs to be monitored. The border is too porous such that anyone can come in or go out at will. We want more intelligence gathering with the community stakeholders and the local vigilante, which we believe will help us better.

“This will ensure every nook and cranny will be secured. We also want the security agents to hold meetings with housing agents and local government councils, among others.

“The rural-urban migration is on the high side and we should be able to identify those migrating to our community to know where they are coming from and their source of livelihood.”

Umaru Bauji, who spoke on behalf of the District Head of the Mera community, said the community now enjoys a measure of peace and security following the deployment of troops in the area.

“We can categorically tell you that the situation has improved, our farmers can now access their farms unlike when the incident happened then.