

Fresh attacks claim 34 lives as new terror group emerges

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FILE: Terrorists group

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No fewer than 34 people have been killed in separate attacks on residents in Kwara, Benue and Borno states.

While 15 vigilantes were killed in Kwara, 17 farmers were murdered in Benue, while at least two soldiers and many civilians were shot dead in Borno.

This is just as a new terror group identified as Mahmuda, aka the Mallam Group, emerged in the North Central.

The National Counter-Terrorism Centre in the Office of the National Security Adviser confirmed the emergence of the group to *Saturday PUNCH* on Friday.

The group, believed to be a breakaway faction of Boko Haram with suspected links to extremist cells in Niger and Mali, has been blamed for a string of kidnappings in rural communities across the North Central.

Saturday PUNCH gathered that Mahmuda killed 15 vigilantes and villagers on Wednesday in an attack on Kemaanji, a community in Kaiama Local Government Area of Kwara State.

According to sources, the group has been carrying out series of attacks, including killings and kidnappings, in rural communities around the Kainji Lake National Park, which spans parts of Kwara and Niger states.

Some communities in Kaiama LGA—including Kemaanji, Tenebo, Baabete, Nuku, and Nanu—and those in Yashikira District of Baruten LG in Kwara State were recently attacked by the terror group.

Reports also indicated that Mahmuda had taken control of areas within Babana and Wawa districts of Borgu LG in Niger State.

Confirming the presence of the group in an exclusive interview with *Saturday PUNCH*, the National Coordinator of the NCTC, Maj. Gen. Adamu Laka, said, “Yes, we are aware of that group.”

When asked about efforts taken to contain the group, he said security forces had commenced operations against them, adding, “Some attacks were conducted at their camps some weeks ago.”

Reacting to the development, a security expert, Chidi Omeje, expressed concern over the growing number of terror cells across the country.

He said, “It is like our country has become a fertile ground for all manner of terrorist groups, militias, marauders, bandits, and extremists.”

Omeje attributed the group’s rise to the apparent weakness in the state’s response.

17 farmers killed in Benue

In Benue, no fewer than 17 people were killed in an attack on Gbajir, Chito, Saror, and Mbawar villages in Ukum LGA of the state.

The attack was allegedly carried out by suspected herders who invaded the communities in the Sankera axis of the state with their cattle on Thursday.

The axis, which comprises Ukum, Logo, and Katsina-Ala LGs, has been a flashpoint for criminality in recent times.

Some locals, who spoke to *Saturday PUNCH* on Friday, claimed that many villagers were also killed and injured on Thursday in Tuluv council ward of the local government.

A resident, who identified himself as Tulumn, said, “Some communities in Ukum LGA have been taken over by armed herders with a lot of cows and sheep grazing freely.

“They attacked some villages in Tuluv council ward where they killed many people on Thursday, and many are still missing as of this morning (Friday).”

Confirming the invasion and killings in the communities, the state Commissioner for Information, Mathew Abo, said five bodies were recovered and three were receiving treatment at an undisclosed hospital in Zaki Biam.

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He confirmed the influx of armed herders into Ukum, stating that there was apprehension in Katsina-Ala and Logo LGs due to the invasion.

Abo said, “It’s true that there is an influx of armed herders, and they came with a lot of cows and sheep grazing freely in Ukum. They killed five people and injured three others, who are receiving treatment in the hospital now.

“The attack, which started on Thursday, lasted till Friday and has spread to Logo LGA, but Katsina-Ala LGA is relatively calm for now.”

The Katsina-Ala Local Government Chairman, Justine Shaku, told journalists on Friday that though the council was calm, the border communities were being threatened by the attack on Ukum.

However, the Benue State Police Command confirmed the death of 17 people in the attacks.

The Public Relations Officer of the command, Catherine Anene, in a statement on Friday, said a large number of armed herders invaded the Sankera axis and carried out the attacks.

Anene said five people were killed in Ukum, while 12 were killed in Katsina-Ala.

She said security agents were still engaging the bandits as they retreated to the forest around the Taraba axis.