

The Prelate of Methodist Church in Nigeria, His Eminence, Rt. Rev. Uche who negotiated their release from the clutches of the kidnappers described the abductors as "mean, wicked and heartless." Uche decried the activities of the herdsmen who, he said, had taken to reckless criminality, saying if the Federal Government does not check them, they posed the danger of Islamising Nigeria.

Two brothers of one of the former Special Advisers to ex-governor Idris Wada, who would not want his name in print, were abducted in the same area where Bishop Ibikunle was kidnapped. The two young men were on their way back from a trip to Lagos where they had gone to purchase a Tokunbo car for their brother last November when kidnappers swooped on them at the Irepeni end of the Lokoja-Okene highway. For the two brothers, they thought they had fled to safety when they abandoned the newly purchased vehicle after a robbery incident. Unknown to them, three Fulani herdsmen appeared with AK-47 rifle, abducted them and marched them into the forest. Three days later, the kidnappers demanded for N100 million ransom each. Upon negotiation, the kidnappers urged the brother to bring the ransom to a certain place in Obajana.

On 12th January this year, the kidnappers struck at the Redeemed Church of Christ at a village in Kabba junction. Acting like members of a military force specially trained to make dangerous raids, the Kidnappers stormed the Church in broad daylight and forcefully took away the Pastor of the Church while in the pulpit preaching and in the full glare of his congregation. He was dragged to the nearby bush before he was taken away. They later demanded for a ransom of N10 million. This time, the abductors met a brick wall as authorities of the Church called the abductors' bluff, warning them to release the man of God or face the wrath of God. The threat paid off as the Pastor was released six days later

The traditional ruler of Apaa village, an obscure community about 10 kilometres to Obajana was also seized early this year by eight gunmen suspected to be Fulani herdsmen while travelling to the next village. A ransom of N2million was demanded. *Saturday Sun* gathered that the community was only able to raise N150, 000 with which they succeeded in securing his release after four days.

Perhaps, incidents of abduction on the highways in Kogi State that generated so much outcry was that of a female Permanent Secretary of the Osun State Ministry of Finance, Mrs. Adebimpe Ogunlusi, her driver and one director in the state's civil service. They were abducted on April 22nd this year on their way to Abuja. However, they were released eight days later after paying an unspecified amount to the kidnappers. Nevertheless, few days after the release of the Osun State officials, two sports stars who were simply identified as the 'DNA Twins' were also kidnapped at the same spot. They were said to be returning to Lagos from Abuja where they won a laurel when they were kidnapped. They were released two days later, although it was not clear if ransom was paid.

#### **The evil ones also operate as gangs**

Scenes described above are commonplace in most highways in Kogi State. For residents of the state, particularly commuters on the highways, travelling along the Kogi State highways is like a stroll through areas ladden with landmines. It is akin to walking through the biblical valley of the shadow of death. The Lokoja-Obajana, Lokoja-Okene and Obajana-Kabba highways are full of dangers, evil and death. On these highways that connect the North to the South, anything can happen. And the worst often happen. Apart from the condition of the roads which are condemnable, activities of members of the gangs kill and maim the road users have conspired to make the highways in Kogi State prone to incessant attacks on travellers.

One of the victims who pleaded not to have his name in print told *Saturday Sun* that the Kidnappers operate as gangsters and that the kidnap and robbery syndicates consist of a large membership "with high connections." He said that most of the members are Fulani herdsmen whose accents and physical build are different from the typical Fulani man on the street. "We were held captive for about 14 days in a forest in Oshokosoko with well-organized syndicate members who are running eight hours shift with some coming in the morning, evening and at night. Oftentimes, they communicate in Hausa which I understand very well.

"I can tell you that there are some bad elements in the Police who give them useful information on targeted victims, giving them protection. They even have herbalists and marabouts whom they consult to know when it is safe for them to operate. For example, anytime there is a ransom to be paid, they seek for spiritual guidance to know whether the money is laced with juju or whether those bringing the ransom will pose a threat to them," he added.

#### **Police fingered as accomplice**

Example of police alleged connivance with kidnappers was the experience of one of the negotiators of a kidnap victim. According to *Saturday Sun* source, the negotiator was at the police station to inform the police about the agreed fee and actually wanted to pull a fast one on the kidnappers. One of the kidnappers later described who him, the clothe he was wearing and the car he drove to the Police Station.

But the state police command denied that they had anything to do with kidnappers in the state. The Police Public Relations Officer, ASP Willy Aya, dismissed the allegation as baseless, misleading and far from the truth. While acknowledging that the command had some challenges over the incessant crime rate in the state, the PPRO said the Federal Government had gracefully provided a helicopter, which is currently in the state combing the bush as surveillance against the Kidnappers.

He said the Kwara State APC Chieftains and the two judges who were kidnapped recently have been released, even though he declined to reveal if ransom was paid or not. The PPRO could not give statistics of the kidnap and robbery incidents in the state as he was said to be with the CP combing the bush for the kidnappers.

As it is, the highways in Kogi State have achieved the notoriety of roads under the gun. Guns rule the highways and motorists, commuters and residents live in mortal fear of the cold metal.

Recently, Kabba community relocated the Sango market in Odolu, based on reports that some herdsmen often hid inside the market to perpetrate crime. One of the Hausa community leaders said he ran into trouble after reporting certain people to the police who were accused of kidnapping. He said, but for God, the whole case was turned against him as the suspects, allegedly released by the police came haunting for him.

If this community leader is lucky, the traditional head of the Fulani in Oworoland based in Obajana and a member of the vigilante group were not as he was murdered recently in broad day light "for leaking the kidnappers' secret to the police." The Fulani head, popularly known as Ardo, Alhaji Ibrahim Isa Kurumi and one Idris Banshe, a Vigilante member, both reputed to be spiritually strong were murdered a fortnight ago. The Chairman of Miyetti Allah Cattle Rearers in Kogi State, Alhaji Abubakar Ibrahim Jalido said the killing of the duo has caused serious apprehension in the area and called on President Muhammadu Buhari to intervene.