

By TAJUDEEN SULEIMAN

The reaction stirred by the recent sectarian violence in Jos and other parts of Plateau State confirmed the fears of Vice President Goodluck Jonathan that the crisis could threaten the unity of this country if allowed to linger.

Many state governments in the southern parts of the country sent rescue vehicles to evacuate their citizens from Jos as the violence reportedly spread to every part of the city and surrounding communities. Delta, Bayelsa, Osun, Ekiti and Lagos were among the states that reportedly evacuated their people from the troubled city.

In the northern parts of the country, fear of reprisal attacks led to tension in many state capitals, and many residents stayed indoors. Schools and shops were closed in

some parts of Bauchi, Yobe, Borno, Kano and Kaduna states as a result of growing tension.

Police authorities put the official figure of those killed at 326, although it is believed that nearly a thousand people lost their lives in the mayhem. According to the National Emergency Management Agency, NEMA, at least 40,000 people were displaced with many of them still living in refugee camps in some villages in Bauchi and parts of Jos. There are about 18 of such camps.

By Wednesday last week, Jos was yet to fully return to life. Markets and shops closed in the wake of the crisis were yet to reopen for business. Schools also remained closed, including the University of Jos, which was forced to break in the middle of a semester examination. The state secretariat and other government establishments were also deserted as civil

servants were yet to be called back to work. The only busy places were the motor parks where many residents struggled to hurriedly get out of the embattled city in spite of efforts being made towards finding a lasting solution to incessant outbreaks of ethnic and religious crises in the state.

In less than three years of his first term in office, Governor Jonah Jang has seen two major sectarian crises that shook the foundation of the once peaceful state. After the November 2008 crisis over local government election in Jos North in which over 700 people reportedly lost their lives, most people thought it would never be allowed to happen again.

But it has happened again. The recent fighting was even more reckless and ferocious. There were reported massacres of innocent people in some parts of the state, especially in Kuru Karama where about 150 corpses were recovered from wells. People

Jos: Echoes of a Crisis

Life is gradually returning to Jos and other parts of Plateau State after another devastating sectarian crisis. But many are worried whether the perpetrators would ever be brought to book, and whether the tragedy could be stopped from happening again

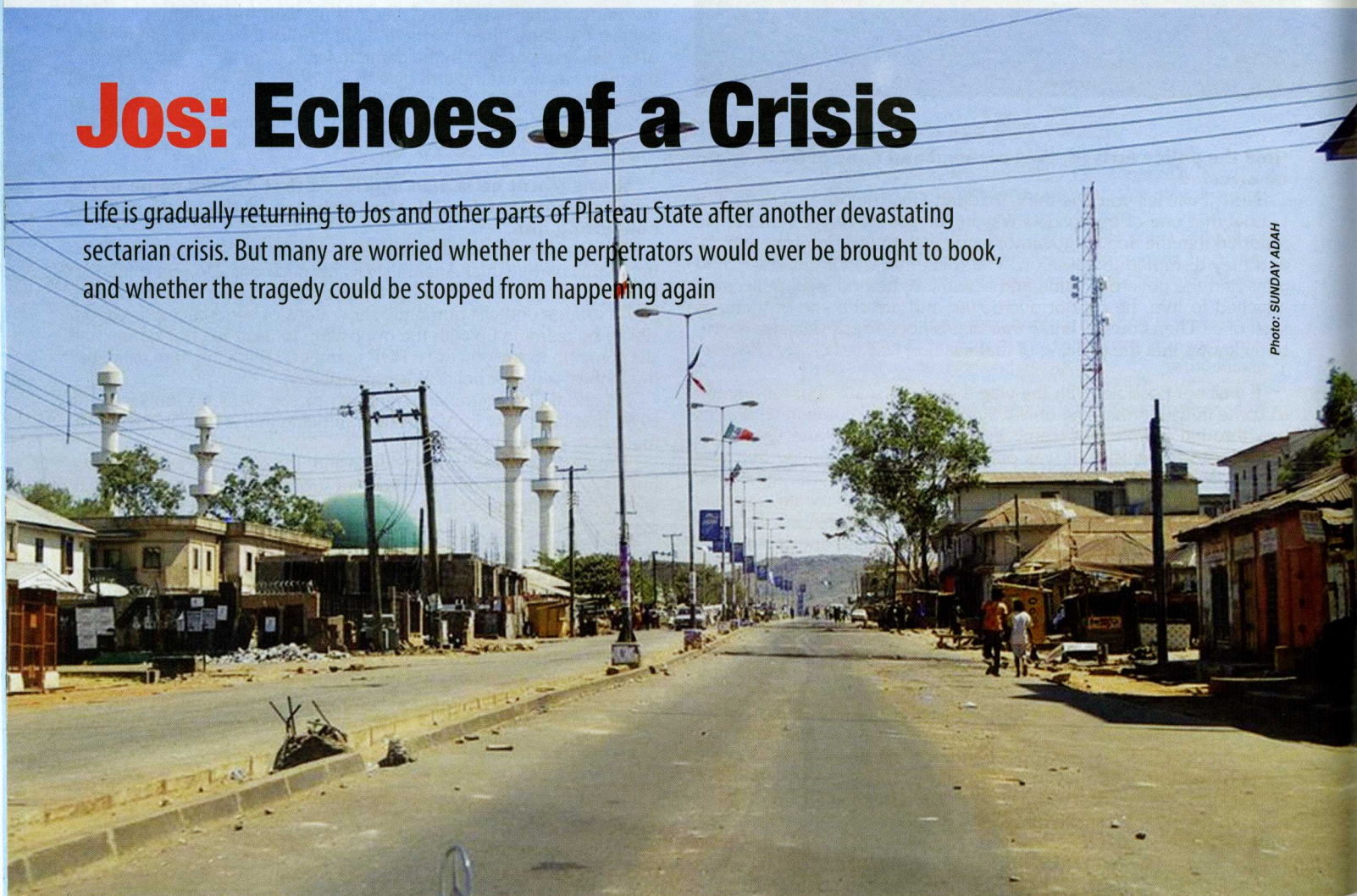
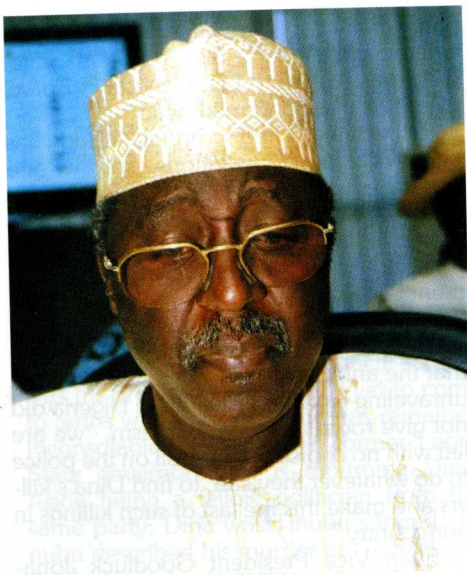


Photo: SUNDAY ADAH



Jang; Convened eminent citizens meeting

fleeing for safety were also ambushed and slaughtered like rams.

Governor Jang convened a meeting of eminent citizens of the state at the Government House last Monday to brainstorm on the latest crisis and its implications for the state. Those in attendance included Yakubu Gowon, former head of state and Solomon Lar, also a former governor of the state. It is, however, doubtful if the meeting made any significant impact on the actions of the state government.

For instance, Lar suggested to the gathering that the state government must prosecute traditional rulers and local government chairmen of any community where there is an outbreak of violence. He said it was a viable way of ensuring that peace reigns in all parts of the state. But up till press time, the state government was yet to take practical steps to resolve the crisis and ensure there is a permanent solution to it. Instead, the state has engaged in another media "war" with the federal government. Edward Pwajork, attorney general of the state, who addressed journalists on January 23, less than seven days into the crisis, questioned the transfer of some suspects to the Force Headquarters in Abuja.

He said it was a breach of an understanding the state had with the Federal Ministry of Justice that suspects would be prosecuted in states where the crimes were committed. He added that the action "smacked of a cover up." But Mohammed Lerama, the police public relations officer,

Plateau State Command, said last Monday that some suspects were moved to Abuja because the facilities in Jos could no longer accommodate more suspects. There are reportedly over 400 suspects arrested during the recent mayhem.

Governor Jang has also failed to stop groups believed to be close to him from making statements that many considered inflammatory. The people of Berom communities, where the governor comes from, have issued several media statements condemning certain actions of either the federal government or the Army.

For instance, they condemned the transfer of Greg Ayanting, former commissioner of police in the state, to the Force Headquarters in Abuja. Toma Jang, spokesman of one of the groups, said Ayanting's transfer was not unconnected with statements he made that the crisis was caused by some Muslims who attacked a church. Jang said it was "a factual statement," and there was no reason to have transferred Ayanting.

Another group also accused the Army command of genocide against the indigenes of the state, claiming that the army shot at people in their homes. But the Army command, fearing such unguarded statements could lead to more trouble, quickly dismissed the insinuation. Abdurrahman Danbazau, the chief of army staff, dismissed the allegation against the army, saying the army was trained to be above "primordial sentiments" like the one that led to the crisis in Jos.

However, the police have vowed to arrest and prosecute perpetrators of the recent crisis. Lerama disclosed last week that the police have uncovered the identities of the perpetrators, some of whom he said were now on the run. Although he did not name them, he promised the perpetrators would be prosecuted in Jos.

But if history is of any guide, such promises are no cheering news for the crisis-weary residents of Jos. They have heard such official boast in the past, but nothing happened at the end of the day.

Reports of panels of enquiries set up after each crisis in the past have not been implemented by the state government.

The Justice Niki Tobi commission of enquiry into the crisis of 2001 recommended over 100 persons and organisations for prosecution, but none was prosecuted. The Bola Ajibola panel set up by Governor Jang to probe the 2008 crisis submitted its report late last year, but government was yet to consider the report before the latest round of violence. The federal government panel on the 2008 crisis was still sitting in Jos when this latest violence started. The question many residents of Jos and concerned Nigerians are asking is whether the state or the federal government can find the courage to do what is right and stop the nation from a further slide into self-inflicted destruction. ■



Gowon; Attended the meeting



Lar; Asks government to prosecute community leaders