





METRO AND CRIME

Herdsmen on the rampage

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...more bodies still being recovered

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It was indeed a black weekend as the blood of innocent women, children and men, flown like a river when the herdsmen launched coordinated attacks on Plateau State.

At press time, over 110 bodies of the victims had been recovered, 120 suffered varying degrees of injuries while 50 people are still missing at the end of a 48-hour siege the herders believed to be of Fulani extraction laid to over eight villages of Gashish and Ropp districts in Barkin Ladi and Riyom Local Governments.

The villages are Xland, Gindin Akwati, Ruku, Ngar, Kura Falls and Kakuruk all in Gashish District as well as Rakok, Kok and Razat villages all in Ropp District. The police, however, said only 11 people were killed.

The President, Berom Youth Moulders Association, Rwas Choji Chuwang Dalyop, who confirmed the number in a statement issued to journalists in Jos, said 110 natives of villages in Barkin Ladi and Riyom were confirmed killed by suspected Fulani herdsmen, who were bent on conquering the land. He said: “Our villages in Barkin Ladi and Riyom local government areas have in recent times witnessed sustained killings by those the government has always referred to as ‘unknown gunmen’.

“Between Monday, June 18 and Friday, June 22, prior to the Saturday, June 23 major massacre, the Berom nation has consistently buried an average of five people daily.

“Notably, there have been early warning signals of these ceaseless attacks, usually brought to the notice of the Special Task Force (STF) stationed in the affected communities.

Unfortunately, they receive these messages with levity, thus seen as accomplices to these despicable acts. “Without mincing words, the STF has neither been proactive nor precautionary in safeguarding precious lives and properties of these villagers, thereby letting them to their aggressors to deal with mercilessly.

“It is also noteworthy that as at the time of this statement, killings are ongoing in the aforementioned villages without concerted efforts by the STF to halt and we feel there is more to it than just meet the eyes.

“Currently, 110 corpses of men, women and children have been discovered against a detestable and fallacious claim by security agencies that the death toll is just 11, over 120 people nursing severe wounds are also currently at Vom Christian Hospital, Plateau Specialist Hospital, Jos University Teaching Hospital and other health care centres, while over 50 people are yet to be seen.

“We are also calling on the international community to swiftly intervene in this degenerating security situation on the Plateau, which has received less attention of the state and Federal Governments, leading to taking over of over 50 Berom native villages.”

Governor Simon Lalong had to cut short his stay at the All Progressives Congress (APC) National Convention in Abuja to enable him to personally take charge of the security situation in the state, particularly communities in Barakin Ladi Local Government Area.

The governor also directed the security chiefs to checkmate the assailants. He appealed for calm as government fashions out a lasting solution to the present challenge.

Lalong, in a statement issued yesterday morning in Jos by the Commissioner for Information and Communication, Hon. Yakubu Dati, said he was deeply pained that despite concerted efforts which had led to the restoration of relative peace across the state, some unpatriotic elements were bent on disrupting the gains so far made.

He said: “As a government, we are committed to ensuring a safe and secured environment that will guarantee peaceful coexistence among the various groups in the state as we remain resolute to the well-being of our people.

“We, however, appeal to citizens not to take laws into their hands and cooperate with security agencies to prevent further breakdown of law and order as they track perpetrators of the evil act.”

The government later imposed curfew in Riyom, Barkin Ladi and Jos South local government areas to avert further breakdown of law and order as a result of the killings in the state. In a statement, the Secretary to the State Government (SSG), Hon. Rufus Bature, said movement had been restricted from 6p.m. to 6a.m., except those on essential duties.

The Pastor in charge of Regional Church Council (RCC), Church of Christ In Nations (COCIN), in Barkin Ladi Local Government Area, Rev. Pam Chollom, said mourners were killed by suspected armed herdsmen while returning from a burial of an 80-year-old man in the village. Chollom said the attack on Saturday lasted for several hours.

He said: “Fulani people attacked our members who attended the burial of the father to one of our clerics, Baba Jakawa, at Gindin Akwati, Gashish District of Barkin Local Government Area.

“The armed Fulani ambushed the sympathisers on their way back from the burial, attacked and killed 34 persons from Nekan village, 39 others from Kufang, and 47 people from Ruku village. “As we speak with you, many others are still missing in the bush.

“The sad incident started at about 1p.m. in the afternoon, and lasted still about 8p.m. on Saturday.” Yesterday afternoon, youths gathered to protest the killings, which they claimed were as a result of the failure of the authorities particularly the security operatives to protect them.

The protesters gathered at Anguldi Junction, Kuru Junction where they blocked the main entrance into the state thereby disrupting the movement of motorists and commuters travelling from Jos to other parts of the country, especially Abuja, Bauchi, Kaduna and Pankshin. Member representing Barkin Ladi Constituency in the state House of Assembly, Hon. Peter Ibrahim Gyendeng, told journalists in Jos that over 200 of his constituents were killed by the suspected herdsmen.

He said: “Over 200 innocent citizens of my constituency were killed by the suspected Fulani herdsmen and still counting the dead. This is barbaric and evil. This is happening even when we have security all over the state.

This is genocide and ethnic cleansing.” Yesterday morning, several bodies were still being discovered in nearby bushes and rocks located in the locality. But the state Police Command said that only 11 bodies had so far been recovered and deposited at the Barkin Ladi General Hospital. The state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), ASP Tyopev Mathias, confirmed the attack to our correspondent in Jos.

He said: “There was an attack at Barkin Ladi yesterday (Saturday) and so far the police have recovered 11 corpses and deposited them at the Barkin Ladi General Hospital for now. If there is any update, I will let you know.”

The PPRO said the police and other security agencies had taken steps to curtail the situation. According to him, the security agencies are doing everything possible to restore peace in the area. President, Gashish District Development Association, Francis Chong, frowned at the number of people the police claimed were killed.

He said: “We will gather over 200 corpses and take them to the police headquarters to confirm better. How can the security play politics with human lives?” Chong said the Regional Headquarters of COCIN and the house of the pastor, including a car, were also burnt to ashes by the suspected Fulani herdsmen.

The Berom Youth Movement President, Dalyop Choji, said the bodies from many of the villages were yet to be retrieved because the herdsmen were still laying ambush in most of the community roads. According to him, any individual who attempts to go from village to village will be killed. He said: “Because we are yet to retrieve the corpses, there is a chance that the death toll could be significantly higher than the 130 which has now been confirmed.” Also, member representing Barkin Ladi/Riyom Federal Constituency in the House of Representatives, Istifanus Gyang, has described the latest reign of terror in the area as senseless bloodbath.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Plateau State chapter, in a statement signed by the Chairman, Rev. Soja Bewarang, said the continued genocide going on now in Barkin Ladi Local Government and other communities in Riyom and Bokkos was disheartening.

“The killings are becoming no longer herders and farmers again, but deliberate attempt to conquer and occupy the land of the people’s ancestral heritage. CAN also notes with great pains the dastardly attacks ongoing in many other local government areas in the state by the herdsmen militias. “Barkin Ladi is under siege with more than 200 innocent precious human lives killed and countless driven out in the rains and left without shelter.

“CAN is also saddened by the news of attack on CAPRO School of Missions (SOM) in Gana-Ropp by the militias,” the body said. The state Publicity Secretary of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Mr. John Akans, condemned the attacks.

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