




METRO AND CRIME

# Plateau: Again, herders kill 14 in fresh attack



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**Elders, elite behind violence, says COAS**

**STF arrests 72, parades 27**

Gunmen believed to be herdsmen of Fulani extraction have again killed at least 14 Berom natives during an attack in Jol village of Riyom Local Government Area of Plateau State.

Management Committee Chairman of Riyom Local Government, Hon. Emmanuel Danboyi Jugu, told our correspondent in Jos yesterday that 14 persons were killed on Tuesday night by



gunmen.

This is as the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Lt.-Gen. Tukur Yusuf Buratai, said the elders and elite were responsible for stoking the incessant and repeated violent clashes and their escalation in the state.

Jugu said bodies of 10 of the victims were given a mass burial yesterday afternoon.

He said: “Ten persons, including women and children, have been given mass burial. Four other bodies have just been discovered.”

The state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), DSP Mathias Terna, said he was yet to get details of the attack from the DPO in charge of the area and promised to get back to our correspondent.

Meanwhile, tension was still high in Jos, the state capital, following report of arrest of some persons by soldiers. The suspects were taken to the Maxwell Tohbe Cantonment, Rukuba Barracks, Jos.

Sources said dozens of military personnel stormed the remote community at daybreak and arrested anyone in sight, including women.

The soldiers forced their subjects to surrender and herded into a military truck.

Confirming the arrests, the Deputy Director, Army Public Relations, 3 Armoured Division, Col. Kayode Ogunsanya, said the Army was on a mission to find missing Major General Idris Alkali (rtd) whose vehicle was discovered in a pond near the community after days of search by soldiers.



“The general area of Dura-Du district in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State has been cordoned off.

“The aim is to search for the missing Major General Idris Alkali (rtd) dead or alive,” he said in a text message.

The arrest has created palpable fear in and around the community of a possible massacre as once witnessed in Zaki Biam, Benue State and other places.

The Army, however, said last week that it was not considering any such action.


Buratai, who was represented by the Commander, Special Task Force (STF) (code-named Operation Safe Haven (OPSH), Major-General Augustine Agundu, spoke at the burial of three soldiers who were killed in Barkin Ladi area on September 6.

The COAS said the body language of the elite and elders, their actions and inactions, had emboldened the youth to maim and kill innocent passers-by at their whims.

He said: “OPSH effectively came into force on January 21, 2010 but the crises on the Plateau have lingered prior to the establishment of the operation in 2000/2001 with vulnerable persons bearing the brunt of the crises. In recent times, the bane of the crises has revolved round total act of criminality by some unguided and irate youths mostly under the influence of hard substances.

“It is evident that these youths are supported by a section of the elite/elders bearing their inability to encourage them to eschew violence resulting in the absence of any tangible progress towards peace.

“The actions or inactions of the elders can be classified as one of the contributory sources that has rather emboldened the youth to maim and kill innocent passers-by at ‘their whims and



caprices'. Human dignity has lost its value on the Plateau. The troops of OPSH like all service personnel are officially detailed to Plateau State to perform the duties upon which they swore on oath to serve the nation."

Buratai said that in recent past, the mere presence of troops served as deterrent to the warring parties to toe the path of law and order, but unfortunately service personnel were increasingly becoming victims of internal strife and "most often their success stories go unnoticed."

He added: "It is evident that there exist armed ethnic militia groups sponsored or supported by some elite and elders who deploy the misguided youths into committing the worst of heinous crimes. There is certainly no constitutional provision that allows civilians to bear firearms, but their possession has become a well sort-out vocation here in the Plateau."

The COAS said the avoidable incident of September 6 led to the death of the gallant soldiers who battled the armed militias in order to save the communities that were under attack.


Also yesterday at the OPSH headquarters, Agundu paraded 27 persons, including two women allegedly arrested in connection with the recent violence in Jos.

He said though 72 persons were arrested, after investigations, about 30 of them confessed to the crime, of which the 27 were paraded.

Agundu warned that the OPSH would no longer tolerate any further attempt to attack the troops.

In his capacity as the commander of OPSH, Agundu also condemned what he described as the conspiracy of silence among the elders and elite going on in the state.

He said: "But they keep quiet. If they want to stop this act of violence and criminality, they can do so within a twinkle of an eye."



The commander also dismissed what he described as “media hype” about fake soldiers, saying there was no fake soldier going from door to door.

“The dexterity my men exhibited was what marvelled the criminals,” Agundu said.

He, however, admitted that there were some criminals in black attires perpetrating violence that had been arrested, but they were not soldiers.

Also, the Senator representing Plateau Southern Senatorial District and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) governorship candidate, Gen. Jeremiah Useni, called on government to take proactive action to stop reoccurrence of this evil menace.

In a statement issued and made available to journalists in Jos, Useni said the security forces should be seen as neutral in the fight for a peaceful Plateau and the nation as a whole.

He said: “The recent unrest in some parts of Jos North leaves one to wonder and ask questions if violence is the way to go. Does it bring development? If peace is the way to go, why won’t we all give it a chance for a better Plateau?”

“For the citizens to be protected and to be prosperous, the government should be seen as being proactive in matters of security and to be protective of her people.

“I am identifying with those who lost their loved ones. Let them accept my condolences. I also pray for speedy recovery for those that are injured.”

Useni, however, called on government to rise and do the needful by protecting the lives and property of her people as part of the oath it took.