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MINNA

Niger: Bandits kill policeman, 14 others

...11 pupils, four others regain freedom

Bandits yesterday killed a mobile police officer and 14 villagers during an attack on Beri village in Bobi District of Mariga Local Government Area of Niger State.

The bandits also torched the Beri Police Station while several people were injured during a stampede accompanying the arson.

However, local vigilantes killed five of the bandits during the attack, which occurred in the morning.

Also yesterday, another set of bandits invaded the Garin-Gabas village but met stiff resistance from youths of the town.

It could not be immediately ascertained the number of casualties on both sides.

Also yesterday, bandits raided Ungwan Bako in the Kotonkoro District of Mariga Local Government and abducted many people, mostly women and children.

The Director-General (DG), Niger State Emergency Management Agency (NSEMA), Ibrahim Inga, told the *New Telegraph* that the casualty figures could not be ascertained for now.

But a police officer said more than 10 villagers were killed.

Meanwhile, gunmen have released 11 of the pupils kidnapped from Salihu Tanko Islamic School, Tegina community in Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State.

Four victims of the abduction at Batatti in Lavun Local Government Area of the state were also



Bandits

released.

This was as residents of the state yesterday lampooned Governor Abubakar Sani Bello for travelling out of the country despite the attacks by bandits on three local government areas - Rafi, Wushishi and Lavun.

The bandits invaded Tegina community, shot one person dead, injured another and abducted an unconfirmed number of students and teachers from Salihu Tanko Islamic School alongside some passengers travelling to Minna in a Sharon vehicle.

The *New Telegraph* learnt that 11 children, who are too young and couldn't walk, among the kidnapped Islamiyya students were released on Sunday evening.

Also, over 100 gunmen, on about 70 motorcycles, attacked 17 com-

munities in Wushishi Local Government Area where they shot several people while some women and children drowned as they tried to escape across the River Kaduna.

More than 10 people were said to be receiving treatment at the Wushishi General Hospital even as search was still ongoing for many missing people from Babako, Tashan Girgi, Kwakwagi, Fakara, Ndiga, Buzu, Akare, Kala Kala, Agwa, Anguwan Gizo, Tsamiya and other neighbouring villages attacked by the bandits.

Following the attacks in his domain, the Etsu Nupe, Alhaji Yahaya Abubakar, on Saturday called for an emergency meeting of district and village heads after four people at Batatti were kidnapped.

A witness said the bandits had on Friday invaded Batatti about

8pm, kidnapped four people and injured several others.

However, it was learnt yesterday that the four abductees had regained their freedom after their families paid N5.5 million. The bandits had earlier demanded N50 million to free the hostages.

It was learnt that the meeting between the Etsu Nupe, who is also the Chairman, Niger State Council of Traditional Rulers, and district/village heads helped in the release of the abductees.

One of the victims, Kolade Olushola, told the *New Telegraph* that they were released about 7.30pm on Sunday.

He identified the other three victims as Bose (his salesgirl), Mallam Aliyu, a shop owner, and a tractor engineer said to be on transit in a Toyota Hillux who was shot.

Olushola said they could not identify the kidnappers because they were blindfolded until when they were released.

He said: "The driver of the Hilux vehicle paid N2 million, Bose and I paid N3 million while Mallam Aliyu paid N500,000."

The bandits, who have adopted new tactics, arrived in Batatti in a white Hilux vehicle and performed congregational 'ishai' prayers on Friday alongside members of the community before they started shooting into the air.

The shooting, witnesses said, forced shop owners and petty traders within the vicinity to abandon their wares and shops.

"After several hours of wreaking havoc on Batatti, they left the

area through Gbangbagi community to the forest of Fazhi and Kutigi, the headquarters of Lavun Local Government Area," one of the witnesses said.

Meanwhile, the Chief Press Secretary (CPS) to the governor, Mary Noel Berje, said in a statement that Bello was on a security mission abroad, seeking foreign support to tackle insecurity in the state.

She said: "The governor, who had left the country to explore all possibilities of strengthening the state's security architecture before the incident happened, is expected back soon."

The governor, in a statement, expressed shock by the recent reports of abduction of innocent people by bandits in several communities across the state.

But the Niger State residents flooded the social media to condemn the governor's trip.

They alleged that Bello went on a private trip and not to woo other nations to help the state fight insecurity.

One of the social media users said, "just as we are shocked to see him (Governor Sani Bello) dancing and dining at a party a day after two local government areas were badly terrorised. And now he has travelled abroad on a private trip while his state is under attack and over 200 students abducted".

Another user said: "Niger State government, please, I am begging you people, don't let me start because I usually don't know how to stop when I start."

Ebonvi-Benue border attack death toll rises to 52