



Features

FEATURES EDITOR: ROLAND OGBONNAYA

Traditionally, fighting and arguing are taboo to the Fulani man. But times have changed. Now, the Fulani is involved in socio-political endeavours, which naturally require arguments, and sometimes, fights. These endeavours are mainly in politics and religion. But the nomadic members of the Fulani tribe are becoming quite notorious for different kinds of fight and argument. Clashes between Fulani herdsmen and farmers have become common in many parts of Nigeria. The clashes are however more rampant in some North-western states of the country; and Jigawa State has one of the highest incidents over the last few years.

Yearly, the state has continued to contend with one communal clash or the other between Fulani herdsmen and local communities. Several attempts had been made by successive governments in the state to forestall recurrences. Unfortunately, like the proverbial bad penny, the problem always recurred. The root of the problem is grazing; but it also runs much deeper.

This year, when the clash occurred, grazing was not the immediate cause. It was nonetheless traceable to tensions, which had been rising over scarce grazing resources. Maigatari was the theatre of war in November. The unfortunate clash left one person dead, several others injured and two villages completely razed. According to eye-witness accounts, trouble started when a dog strayed into the midst of some Fulani men who were holding a private party in Rabo, Maigatari local government area.

"The problem started in Rabo, when a dog strayed into the midst of some Fulani men who threw out the dog. The owner of the dog from the neighbouring village complained vehemently to the Fulani men and he was beaten to a pulp. His kinsmen took offence and stormed the Fulani village to retaliate," the witness said.

The clash deepened as dangerous weapons were freely used and several houses were burnt down. It became a direct confrontation between Rabo and Arbo Gaja, both in Maigatari. At the end of the day, one of the villagers was killed and scores were injured in the ensuing confusion. The two villages were almost completely razed down.

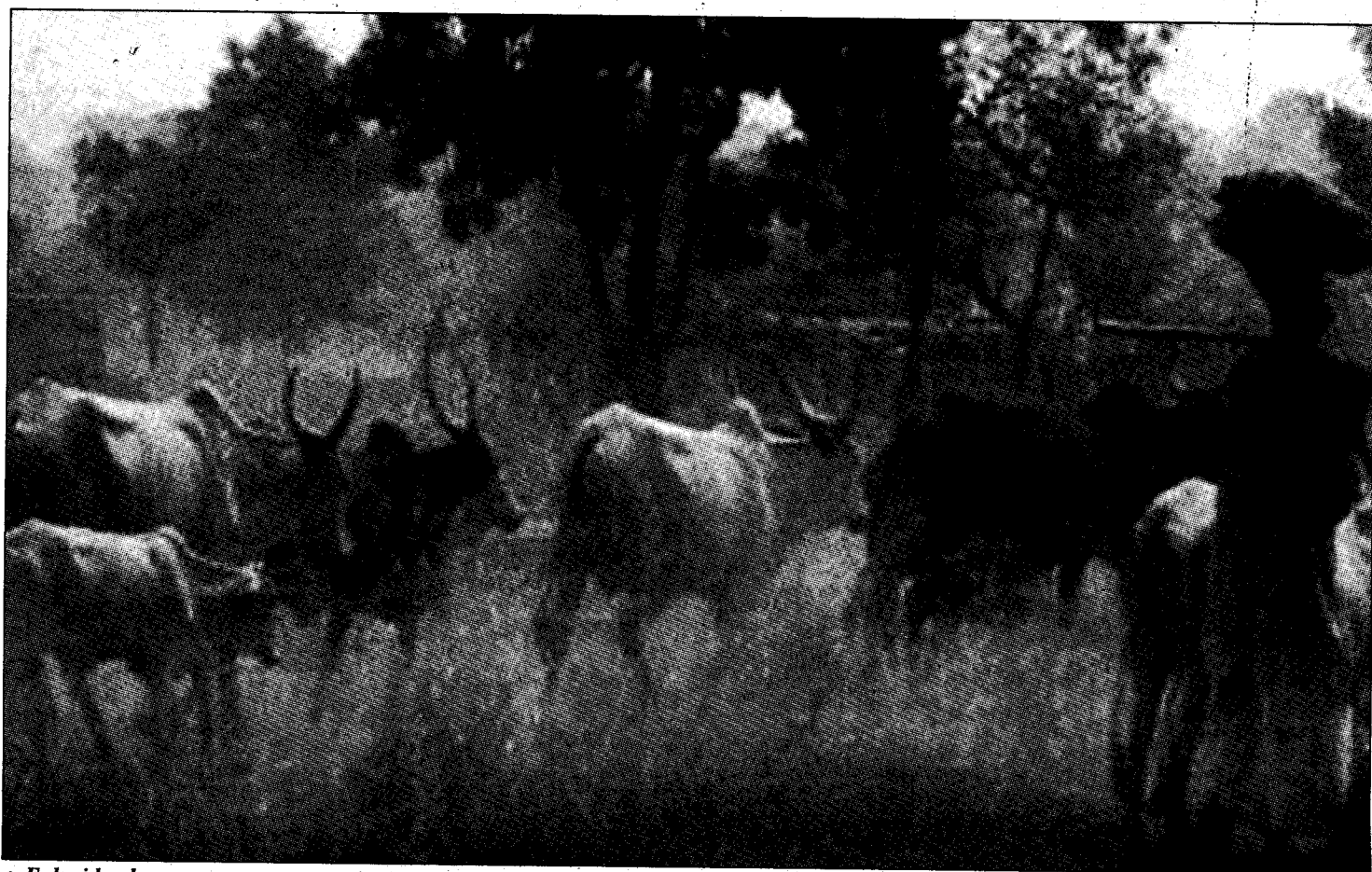
When contacted, the Commissioner of Police, Alhaji Saleh Abubakar Ningi confirmed the incident. He also confirmed that one person died as a result of injuries sustained. "We actually received the report and one person has been confirmed dead. We have however arrested 14 people and they are now helping us with our investigations," he said. He also pledged that the Police would get to the root of the matter and anybody found culpable would be made to face the full wrath of the law.

It is common knowledge that the most important object in any nomadic Fulani society is a cattle. The number of cows a person owns is a sign of his wealth. It is therefore a major reason for any conflict between the Fulani and the rest of the world. Conflicts often arise when the Fulani man's precious cattle stray into farm lands and devour farm produce which is as important to a farmer as the cattle is to the Fulani.

But the intensity of the clashes often show deep rooted tensions which overload the thin threads of tolerance and fan embers of hatred. Apart from grazing, the proud history of the Fulani is also an issue. The conquering forays of the ancient Fulani of yore into Hausa territories provide ready avenues for friction. Sometimes, the Fulani herdsman and the Hausa communities joke over this historical relationship. But, many other times, real conflicts emerge as a result of the 'victor-vanquished' attitudes between the communities.

There is also the international dimension to the clashes. Fulani herdsmen have remained mostly nomadic. Their migratory journeys take them through Nigeria to Niger Republic, Cameroon, Chad and back to Nigeria, mostly through Niger. There is this belief that the most troublesome clans are from these neighbouring countries. At a recent interactive session with journalists, the Chairman of the state's council of traditional rulers, Alhaji Adamu Abubakar Maje noted that the intensity of the clashes often suggest the involvement of 'foreign herdsmen'. "It is obvious that some of the perpetrators may not be locals. We believe Fulani men who are related to the farmers through blood cannot carry out the kinds of destructions which go with each clash," the Emir said.

The Royal father's position may not be far fetched when one considers the fact that dangerous weapons are often used in the clashes. Apart from knives and swords, poisoned arrows are often used freely. There is also, very often, a deliberate attempt to eliminate a whole village during every clash. This year's clash underscored this



• Fulani herdsmen

For Jigawa, Time to Avert Communal Clashes

Over the years, there have been incessant clashes between the migrant Fulani herdsmen and their Hausa neighbours in the northern part of the country. This has often claimed lives and properties or even annihilation of a whole community. Worried by this ugly trend, Jigawa State Government attempts to permanently address this problem. Taiwo Olawale writes

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With the drought, which set in across the state this year, many had expected several clashes to erupt as a result of scarce grazing resources. But, to the pleasant surprise of many, no clashes occurred. The situation remained so until November when the peace of the state was again shattered. The magnitude of the problem is however not lost on the government. The present administration is taking action on several fronts to stop the perennial clashes. The government started early October with a directive to the Agriculture Ministry to reactivate thousands of hectares of grazing reserves to make grazing easy for livestock farmers who are having difficulties feeding their cattle and other livestock due to the increasing spread of drought in the state.

Alhaji Nasidi Ali, the commissioner of agriculture disclosed this in Dutse, while responding to questions on strategies being employed by the state government to reduce the effect of drought on the citizenry. In addition to providing grazing alternatives to Fulani herdsmen who are affected by the drought, reactivation of the reserves was expected to eradicate Farmers/Fulani clashes over scarce resources, he added.

"The Governor has directed that the grazing reserves in the state be reactivated and fully developed. We are also working on improved seedlings with high nutrient values so that the cattle and other livestock which would graze in the reserves would get the best." He further disclosed that there are five major grazing reserves and over four hundred small ones spread across the state expressing optimism that the spread would take care of all the needs of the cattle farmers in the state. The five major reserves have a combined size of over twenty eight thousand hectares, while the smaller ones have an even bigger combined size.

In addition to this measure however, government has announced an inter-governmental committee to find lasting solutions to the clashes. The committee, which is headed by the Secretary to the State Government, Dr. Aminu Abdullahi Taura, has the five first class traditional rulers in the state as members. It also has as members, the Commissioner of Police, the Director of SSS, the Commanding Officer of the Janguza military formation in Kano and the Commissioner of Justice. The committee's main mandate is to find permanent solutions to the perennial clashes. And, it is to remain functional for as long as is deemed necessary.

The formation of the committee was

announced just before sallah break. It was the first time such a committee was formed to tackle the problem and it underscores the seriousness attached to putting a permanent stop to the clashes. Briefing newsmen on the formation of the committee, the Emir of Hadejia explained that the committee has started work already. He explained that four sub-committees were formed at its inaugural meeting. He listed the committees as the publicity committee, headed by the Emir of Gumel; the Internal Affairs sub-committee headed by the Emir of Kazaure; the Livestock sub-committee chaired by the Emir of Dutse and the sub-committee on Farmlands headed by the Emir of Hadejia.

He further disclosed that the inclusion of the Emirs in the committees was the first since efforts to put a stop to the clashes started. He said, "though traditional rulers have been involved in efforts in the past, their roles have been limited to advisory and informal roles. This is the first time traditional rulers are being given specific roles and we are confident that permanent solutions would be found. Peace is important, it is only when there is peace that any society can talk of development."

The Emir went on to explain that the traditional rulers would make contact with traditional rulers in areas where clashes occur or are likely to occur. "We would also make contact with governments in Niger Republic as well as traditional rulers in that country in order to find solutions to the international aspects of the problem."

"Apart from this, both the Hausa and Fulani communities are still very traditional. They often bear allegiance to their traditional leaders. So, the Emirs would be able to reach the warring communities more easily than government officials", he said.

Present efforts may not bring immediate end to the clashes, but the moves made in the last two months are quite encouraging. Just as the Emir of Hadejia rightly noted, there can be no development where there is no peace.

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