

Military Bombs Bandits, Police Kill Nine Kidnappers on Abuja- Kaduna Highway

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- ***NAF loses airman in parachuting accident***
- ***I did not intend to discredit traditional rulers, says Dan-Ali***
- ***Group raises the alarm over N1bn ransom paid kidnappers***

Kingsley Nwezeh in Abuja

As security agencies ramped up pressure on bandits, the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) fighter jet and helicopter gunship bombed their logistics base in Kagara Forest in Zamfara State, killing four bandits.

In the same vein, the Nigerian Police killed nine suspected kidnappers on the Abuja-Kaduna Highway and recovered a cache of arms.

However, NAF said it lost an airman, Corporal Meshak IIya Komo, during a parachuting accident.

A statement issued in Abuja said the incident occurred during a training exercise.

This is coming as the Minister of Defence, Brigadier General Mansur Dan-Ali (rtd), yesterday said his statement on Zamfara crisis was based on information available to the Ministry of Defence and not meant to discredit Zamfara State's traditional rulers.

Also, a group of private security companies, ASIS International, has raised the alarm over payment of over N1billion to kidnappers on the Kaduna-Abuja Highway, which is deployed to purchase more arms by the kidnappers in an unending vicious cycle.

An update provided by NAF said it sustained air strikes on the hideouts of the bandits at a location within Kagara forest.

"In continuation of its sustained intensive air operations against their hideouts in Zamfara State and its environs, the Air Task Force (ATF) for Operation DIRAN MIKIYA has destroyed some logistics stores belonging to the bandits at a location within Kagara forest.

"The operation was executed yesterday, following credible intelligence reports indicating that some of the bandits who had fled their camps as a result of NAF's earlier air strikes had relocated some logistics items, including fuel, motorcycles and local arms making equipment, to another location within Kagara forest.

"Accordingly, the ATF dispatched a Mi-35 helicopter gunship, supported by an Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) platform, to attack the target", it said.

NAF stated that the target area initially appeared uninhabited. However, as the helicopter approached, some of the bandits were seen emerging from under the shrubbery and running away from the area.

"The helicopter engaged the target recording successful hits on the logistics facility, which was engulfed in flames with thick black smoke seen. Some of the bandits, who fired at the aircraft, were taken out by the helicopter.

"Reports from independent sources, including local informants and village leaders around the general area, later confirmed that the logistics base was totally destroyed and four bandits killed as a result of the attack."

In another development, the Police in a statement issued in Abuja, said it took out nine kidnappers on the Kaduna-Abuja Highway.

"The unrelenting efforts to root-out criminal elements terrorising commuters along Abuja – **Kaduna** expressway recorded additional successes with the recovery of six Ak47 Rifles, one Pump Action Gun, 1,206 rounds of Ak47 ammunition, Seven Magazines, 28 Cartridges and 158 expended shells by Police operatives attached to Operation Puff adder deployed to the area", a statement signed by Force Spokesman, DCP Frank Mba, said.

The statement said the recovery, part of the ongoing "Operation Puff Adder" launched by the Police against kidnappers, followed a serious exchange of gun fire between the police operatives and a heavily armed notorious criminal gang at the Akilbu forest, off Abuja-**Kaduna** Expressway, which resulted in the death of nine members of the gang while two escaped with gunshot wounds.

"One of the police operatives, however, sustained gunshot wound and he is presently receiving treatment in a hospital. Effort is being intensified to arrest the fleeing members of the gang.

In another development, NAF said it lost an airman, Corporal Meshak Iiya Komo, during a parachuting accident.

A statement issued in Abuja said the incident occurred during a training exercise.

"The Nigerian Air Force (NAF) is sad to announce the passing of one of its airmen, Corporal Meshach Iliya Komo, who died in **Kaduna** in a parachuting accident during recurrency training.

"On behalf officers, airmen and airwomen of the NAF, the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal Sadique Abubakar, commiserates with the family of the late airman over this irreparable loss. We pray that the Almighty God grants his soul eternal rest", the statement said.

Meanwhile, the Minister of Defence, has said the statement he made on Zamfara monarchs was not meant to discredit the traditional rulers but based on security report available to the ministry.

"The attention of the Honourable Minister of Defence was drawn to publications in some media organisations alleging that he accused some traditional rulers in the states affected by banditry of conniving with bandits.

"For the avoidance of doubt the statement was not meant to discredit our highly revered traditional rulers in the states affected. However, the statement was meant to serve as a warning to some community leaders and their surrogates. This is based on security reports available to the Ministry of Defence and cannot be divulged to the public.

"The Ministry of Defence wants to once again assure all law abiding citizens of the commitment of the Armed Forces of Nigeria towards protecting lives and properties of Nigerians", a statement signed by the minister's media aide, Col. Tukur Gusau, said

In the same vein, a group of private security professionals at a press conference in Abuja, has raised the alarm that over N1billion was paid to kidnappers, who in turn deploy it to purchase more arms to engage further in the deadly trade and called on government to devise more creative means to tackle the menace.

It urged government "to make its position on ransom payment very clear which should be in line with best global practice and any government official that goes contrary to this should be sanctioned appropriately."
