

24 killed as bandits, cultists go on rampage

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deployed to Niger State in the sustained operation to reclaim public space and tackle incidents of banditry, kidnapping and other violent crimes in the area.

He said: "Contrary to unconfirmed reports in some sections of the media which stated that eighteen officers were kidnapped, only 16 officers were attacked in the ambush."

"The officers successfully repelled the attack accordingly and neutralized the bandits in their tents, while many of the bandits scammed into the bush with gun shot injuries. Regrettably, four of the officers paid the supreme price during the exchange of gun fire between the Police and the bandits while an officer is still missing."

"However, the remaining 11 officers, led by their unit commander successfully recovered the bodies and firearms of their fallen colleagues while concerted efforts are being intensified to rescue the officer still missing."

"The IGP, while commiserating with the families of the officers who have yet again paid the supreme price in the service of our nation, assures that their death shall not be in vain."

"The IGP assures the citizens that the Force is not deterred and will not relent in its commitment to delivering on its mandate and ensuring that all activities of bandits and other unscrupulous elements in the area and other parts of the country are brought to check."

Soldier, 5 civilians killed in Borno

In Jajeri area of Maiduguri, the Borno State capital, a soldier and five civilians were killed while three others sustained gunshot wounds after a misunderstanding over a prostitute at a local bar situated near the demolished controversial hotel 'Barka Da Zuwa' along Baga road.

Eyewitnesses said the incident occurred late Saturday night.

Recall that 'Barka Da Zuwa' and other surrounding hotels, bars and accommodation in the area were demolished last year on the order of Governor Babagana Zulum, following series of clashes and killings between security operatives and civilians, mostly over women of easy virtues.

It was gathered that trouble started when one soldier (now deceased) was trying to fix an

appointment with a prostitute at the joint, as a young civilian (names withheld), now deceased, also called the same lady prostitute, attempting to snatch her from the soldier.

A source told *Vanguard* that a misunderstanding ensued between the duo, as the soldier opened fire on the young man, killing him instantly.

His killing did not go down well with other civilians who descended on the soldier, disarmed him of his rifle and lynched.

It was also learned that immediately other soldiers discovered that one of their colleagues had been killed in a mob action, they opened fire on the mob, killing four instantly, while three others sustained gunshot wounds.

Efforts to get the Police Public Relations Officer, DSP Edet Okon, proved abortive at press time but a reliable security report confirmed the incident.

"Reportedly, at about 2100hrs along Baga road Maiduguri, a soldier had misunderstanding with some civilians and shot 7 of them; 4 died instantly, while others hospitalized, the soldier was said to have been slaughtered and beheaded by other civilians at the scene."

"While this is a sad phenomenon, staff are hereby advised to avoid the area as soldiers might storm the location in retaliation to the event," the security report stated.

Gana's men kill 3 in Katsina-Ala, burn houses

Similarly, three persons were killed weekend at Dyom village, near Senga community, in Katsina-Ala Local Government Area, LG of Benue State by armed men dressed in military camouflage.

The gunmen were said to be loyalists of the late militia leader, Terwase Agwaza, also known as Gana.

However two of the armed men who also razed several houses in the community met their Waterloo when men of the joint security operation in the state, codenamed Operation Whirl Stroke, OPWS, in a counter-operation, apprehended them and recovered their weapons.

Special Adviser to the Governor on Security, Col. Paul Hembé, retd., who made this known to newsmen in Makurdi yesterday, said the timely intervention of the OPWS personnel saved what would have been a major bloodbath in the

community.

He said the armed men had sneaked into the village and started shooting sporadically and burning down people's houses.

"These were armed men in military camouflage said to be loyalists of the late Gana. They stormed the area, shot and killed three persons and also burnt down houses in the community."

"Luckily, while this was going on, information reached personnel of Operation Whirl Stroke who stormed the area and apprehended two of the armed men and also recovered their weapons which included live ammunition and an AK47 rifle including a locally made gun," he said.

When contacted, the Police Public Relations Officer, Deputy Superintendent, DSP, Catherine Anene, said she had not received details of the incident.

It would be recalled that the State Security Council had last week imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew on Katsina-Ala and Ukum LGAs to check the increasing cases of banditry, kidnapping and armed robbery as well as general insecurity in the two LGAs.

4 dead as cults clash in Bakassi

In a related development, a clash between two cult groups weekend left four persons dead at Bakassi in Cross River State.

Eye witnesses said the clash started on Thursday with the killing of one person at Ekpri Ikang, as the clash raged on till Saturday night.

A resident of Bakassi who gave her name as Etido, said one person was killed on Thursday, one on Friday and two persons on Saturday.

"I do not know the specific groups involved in the war but I can tell you that we have been experiencing regular gunshots and people running helter-skelter as one group chased members of another group," said the resident.

She said the killings on Friday and Saturday seemed to be retaliations by members of one of the groups for the killing of their members by warring groups.

She said many people in Bakassi had remained indoors to avoid being caught in the crossfire.

"We are at a loss and most of us do not even know what caused the fight and to avoid being



SPECIAL PUBLIC WORKS PROJECT FOR 774,000 YOUTHS— Gov. Yahaya Bello of Kogi (3rd, L); Minister of State for FCT, Dr Ramatu Aliyu (M); Deputy Governor, Chief Edward Onoja and other officials during the inauguration of the Special Public Works Project for 774,000 Nigerian youths in Kogi, weekend.

caught in the midst of violence, we decided to stay indoors," she added.

Ms Irene Ugbo, spokesperson of the Cross River Police Command, said she was yet to be briefed, while the council chairman did not pick calls.

Catholic priest killed, brother kidnapped in Niger

In Minna, Niger State, a Catholic priest of the Diocese of Minna, Rev. Father John Gbakaani Yaji, was killed by bandits weekend.

The killing was said to have occurred on Friday night at Tufa village, along Lambata-Lapai road.

The late cleric was said to be returning from Lambata where he had attended a religious meeting with his colleagues but was kidnapped and killed on his way back to his station.

Our correspondent reliably gathered that late John Yaji was kidnapped along with his younger brother whose whereabouts at press time yesterday was still unknown.

Efforts to get spokesman of the state police command, ASP Wasu Abiodun, last night for confirmation proved abortive but a priest of the Catholic Diocese who preferred anonymity, confirmed the killing to *Vanguard*.

Reacting to the priest's killing, Niger State chapter of Christian Association of Nigeria, CAN, described it as unfortunate and painful.

Speaking to our correspondent on phone, the state chairman of CAN, Revd. Mathias Echioda, said: "These attacks are unfortunate and we should not base them as religious but we

should all come together to put an end to banditry. And I know God who answers prayers will deliver us from the hands of the wicked."

Also reacting last night, the Christian Association of Nigeria, CAN, at the national level, has asked the Federal Government to put an end to the abduction and killing of religious leaders by bandits in the country.

CAN's Vice Chairman (Northern region), Rev. John Hayab, who made the call in a chat with *Vanguard* while reacting to the killing of a priest of the Minna Catholic diocese, Fr. John Gbakaani Yaji during the weekend, described the killing of the Catholic priest as 'shocking and painful', stating that insecurity in the North had assumed a more alarming dimension.

Hayab said: "We received the news of the kidnapped and killing of our dear Rev Father John with great shock and pains. Insecurity in our country has taken a more serious alarming situation."

"Sadly, those in power are wanting us to be singing their praises while our loved ones are being killed. No responsible citizen will enjoy criticising his leaders for fun or because he hates them. Citizens criticise leaders so that they will sit up and do what is right."

"Today in Northern Nigeria many people are living in fear and many young people are afraid to become pastors because pastors lives are in great danger."

"When bandits or kidnappers realised that their victim is a priest or a pastor it seems a violent spirit do take over their heart to demand more ransom and in some cases go to the extent of killing

the victim.

"We are simply pleading with the Federal Government and all security agencies to do whatever it will take to bring this evil to a stop."

"A person living in fear can never be productive and effective in the things he is doing. All we are asking from the government is protection from evil men that are destroying our lives and properties."

17 kidnapped in Shiroro

Also at the weekend, no fewer than 17 persons were kidnapped by bandits in three communities in Niger State, including Bassa/Kukoki wards, both in Shiroro Local Government Area.

Our correspondent reliably gathered that the people were kidnapped on Saturday night in Madagwa, Wongo and Marenje Communities.

The bandits were said to have stormed the communities, shooting sporadically, after which they abducted the helpless residents.

Five of those kidnapped, it was gathered, were abducted in Wongo and Marenje communities, while seven others were kidnapped at Madagwa.

Confirming the development to journalists, co-convenor, Concerned Shiroro Youths, Sani Abubakar Yusuf Kokki, described it as very sad, adding that the bandits are yet to make contact with relatives of those abducted.

Last Thursday, 20 people were also kidnapped at Duguru in Madaka Ward of Rafi Local Government Area of the state. They were said to be on their way to Madaka market when they were kidnapped.