

Bandits on rampage, kidnap 27 at wedding, 56 others

- Kill 5 in Niger, Kaduna, Taraba
- El-Rufa'i expresses distress, prays for the dead
- New service chiefs cannot do better than their predecessors —Shekau
- Nigeria dealing with protracted security problem —Buhari
- Warns against ethnic, religious prejudices
- Says govt'll protect religious freedom

By Wole Mosadomi,
Johnbosco
Agbakwuru, Femi
Bolaji & Ibrahim
Hassan Wuyo

MINNA—BARELY forty-eight hours after President Muhammadu Buhari appointed new service chiefs, bandits have gone on rampage in Niger, Kaduna and Taraba states, killing five persons and kidnapping 83, including 27 wedding guests.

While one of the casualties was killed in Lapai and Shiroro LGAs of Niger State, and 56 kidnapped, four were killed in Kalgo community in Kaduna. The 27 wedding guests were abducted along Wukari-Takum road in Taraba State.

In Niger State, Vanguard gathered that the gunmen attacked Avu community in Gupa-Abugi ward of Lapai Local Government in the early hours of yesterday and opened fire, killing one person and abducting six persons.

A member of the community, Idris Musa Avu, told Vanguard that the gunmen invaded Gupa-Abugi village around 1:00 am yesterday, shooting to scare the villagers. According to him, "the gunmen arrived the village around 1:00 am in large number and upon seeing them, people scamped for safety as they were shooting sporadically and one person was killed and six others were kidnapped."

He added that the vigilantes tried their best but could not get police back as the attack progressed.

Another set of armed bandits, it was learned, stormed Bassa community in Shiroro Local Government Area in large numbers on motorcycles and kidnapped 50 people.

It was reliably gathered that the villagers were getting set for the day's activities when the bandits struck.

Consequently, many villagers fled into the bush to avoid being kidnapped by the bandits.

Co-convener, Concerned Shiroro Youths, Sani Abubakar Kokki, who confirmed the attack, described the bandits as terrorists, adding that it was time for government to redouble its efforts and flush out the bandits who now attack the area on a daily basis.

"The invasion of these bandits in the state, especially Shiroro, is becoming a daily affair and

government should now re-strategise and get the new service chiefs to stem the trend.

"Shiroro Local Government Area is now in dire need of help as the people have continued to live at the mercy of the bandits," he said. When contacted, the Police Public Relations Officer, PPRO, ASP Abiodun Wasu, promised to get back to our Correspondent for more details but did not do so at press time last night.

In Kaduna, the bandits attacked Nasarawa Kalgo community on the outskirts of Jaji, Rigachikun district in Igabi Local Government Area, killing four persons.

Samuel Aruwan, Commissioner, Ministry of Internal Security and Home Affairs, Kaduna State, said yesterday that the bandits stormed the village in dozens, and killed one resident, Harisu Ibrahim.

Similarly, armed bandits attacked the Kujama area of Chikun Local Government Area but were repelled by local vigilantes.

He said as the bandits retreated to their hideouts, they attacked Janwuriya village in Kajuru Local Government Area and killed two brothers, Nuhr Ishaya and Yakubu Ishaya. In a separate incident, Aruwan said the bandits invaded Maraban Kajuru, also in Kajuru Local Government Area and killed one resident, Samiru Na Ya'u.

According to him, Governor Nasir El-Rufa'i has expressed his distress at these reports, and prayed for the repose of the souls of the slain, while sending his condolences to their families. He also quoted the governor as tasking security agencies to conduct diligent investigations into the incidents and sustain patrols in the locations.

Patrols are set to be sustained in these locations.

In Taraba State, at least 27 wedding guests were kidnapped along Wukari-Takum road.

Chairman of Takum Local Government Area, Shiban Tikari, who disclosed this yesterday, said the victims were returning to Takum when they were abducted.

He said no contact had been made with the families of those abducted but disclosed that security operatives as well as the youths of the area have been combing bushes along the axis in search of the 27 victims.

Contacted, spokesman of the state police command, DSP David Misal, confirmed the

incident.

Misal said: "We confirmed that they are missing, investigation has commenced."

In a similar development, Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram's factional leader, has called on the newly appointed service chiefs to repent and convert to Muslim, noting that they cannot perform better than their predecessors.

President Muhammadu Buhari had on Tuesday appointed, Major-General Leo Irabor, Chief of Defence Staff; Major-General J. Attahiru, Chief of Army Staff; Rear Admiral A. Z. Gambo, Chief of Naval Staff; and Air-Vice Marshal I. O. Amao, Chief of Air Staff, as his new service chiefs following criticisms from Nigerians that the former ones had exhausted their plans.

In a new audio obtained by the Humangle.ng, Shekau mentioned the names and roles of the new service chiefs and called them to repent since they can't do anything to destroy his terror gang.

"Leo Irabor, the head of the military, you should have sympathy for yourself, repent and convert to Islam."

"There is nothing you can do. Maj-Gen. Ibrahim Attahiru should not deceive himself because he has a Muslim background."

"Even if you are a Muslim but you conduct polytheistic practices, you are no longer a Muslim," Shekau said.

Meanwhile, President Muhammadu Buhari yesterday met with the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, NSCIA, led by the Sultan of Sokoto, Sa'ad Abubakar at the Presidential Villa, Abuja, saying Nigeria was dealing with protracted security problem. The President, who assured that his administration was doing everything necessary to halt the menace, said government had continued to provide the military with the needed equipment and called on citizens to provide timely intelligence to the nation's security agencies.

While noting that government could not do it alone, Buhari urged the people to lend their support to the fight against insurgency.

The President said: "Security is a protracted challenge. But we are not relenting in our efforts. We are equipping the military. We encourage localities to enhance their intelligence gathering and timely remitting to the security agencies."

He said his administration was diversifying the economy as it bids to reduce poverty in the country, noting that the war against corruption was relentless.

The President assured that he would continue to promote religious freedom and be fair to all.

"We are diversifying the economy to reduce poverty, we are combating corruption. We will continue to promote religious freedom as a constitutional responsibility. If the country must work, we must continue to work together, in spite of ethnic and religious differences. It is my solemn decision to be fair to all in the society," he said.

The president urged traditional leaders to give full backing to the Alternate School Programme (ASP) recently launched, even as he admonished them to lend their voices to the COVID-19 global public health crisis to curtail the spread of the disease.

He reiterated that government was working hard to procure COVID-19 vaccines, pleading with the NCSIA to join in the drive to educate people on the importance.

Earlier in his address, Sultan Abubakar commended the President for the successes achieved so far in the Northeast, calling on the government to deal decisively with the banditry that is ravaging the Northwestern states of Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto and some parts of the North Central.

While expressing confidence that security forces, with better synergy among them, will overcome present challenges, the Sultan solicited the cooperation of all the governors with the federal government, irrespective of their political leanings, calling on Nigerians to support the new leadership of the armed forces.

The NSCIA leader also appealed to Nigerians, particularly religious leaders, to refrain from making inflammatory comments that tend towards sowing discord in the polity and exacerbate the current level of insecurity in the land. He asked that religious leaders making subversive comments be called to order.

The meeting, which took place in the council chamber of the presidential villa, was attended by the Etsu Nupe, Yahaya Abubakar; the Ministers of the Federal Capital Territory, Interior, Information and Culture, Mohammed Bello, Rauf Aregbesola and Lai Mohammed respectively, as well as the National Security Adviser (NSA), Maj. Gen. Babagana Mongunu and the Chief of Staff to the President, Prof. Ibrahim Gambari.