

... THE REAL BANDITRY!

OPINION

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Zuru Emirate and the conspiracy of silence in Kebbi State

BY SUNNY IKHIOYA

The late General Sani Abaca was once quoted to have said: "Any insurgency that lasts more than 24 hours, a government official has a hand in it." So, what do we say of a top ranking official of government, in the person of the Attorney General of the Federation, Abubakar Malami (SAN), coming out to compare spare parts traders with rampaging herdsmen? Why is it that the war on bandits, kidnappers, Boko Haram terrorists, killer herdsmen and the rest is not making progress? I have in my hands, a piece written by a retired Colonel Danlami Maina Ribah which is a perfect description of how government officials deliberately contribute to the insurgency situation in the country. I have reproduced it hereunder; you be the judge:

The movement of armed bandits from Zamfara State to Kebbi State (specifically Zuru Emirate) in 2019, ransacking towns and villages like Shengel, Vadako, Unashi, Bena in Danko/Wasagu Local Government compelled the people to write official complaint and petitions to the state government and the Inspector General of Police, IGP. The people appealed for help to curb the menace and further requested for a fact-finding committee to verify the mass murder and other atrocities committed by the bandits and the number of people displaced, but there was no positive response from the state or the police. When there was no response, those internally displaced persons became aggrieved, helpless and formed an association called "Yan Sa Kai" as a child of necessity which is non-tribal, non-religious and non-political to protect their farms and villages from armed banditry.

Barely two months later, the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, MACBAN, precisely on the 16th August 2020 issued a statement that Fulani pastoralists are being targeted and killed by "Yan Sa Kai", the same vigilante group formed

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by the locals for self-defense, specifically putting the blame on the Dakarkari (Aborigines) people as if the group was a tribal group. The Police and the State Government responded immediately within a week by calling for a meeting in Zuru. In attendance for the meeting were the following: The Inspector General of Police, IGP; Director, State of Security Services, DSS; Defence Intelligence Agency, DIA; Kebbi State Governor and his Deputy; Kebbi State SA on Security; the Emir of Zuru; Interim National President, Zuru Emirate Development Society, ZEDS; Sarki Fulani (Kirwa); Leader of Yan Sa Kai and other well meaning persons of the emirate.

The meeting concluded that a follow-up be held in Abuja at the instance of the IGP with the following in attendance to harmonise issues and map out the way forward for peaceful co-existence: The Governor's representative, the Emir, ZEDS President, Sarki Mala

mai, CAN Chairman, Ibakkana Chairman, Alhaji Muhammadu Kirwa (Chairman Miyetti Allah) and the leader of Yan Sa Kai. Saturday September 5th 2020 was fixed for another town hall meeting in Zuru to present the Abuja Accord. All the members of the Yan Sa Kai were in attendance and were briefed and educated and their excesses strongly condemned. The Deputy Governor, the Senator representing Kebbi South, member representing Zuru emirate, the Emir, the SA on Security to the Kebbi State Governor and other elders, like retired General M Magoro (a former senator) and former Chief of Army Staff, COAS, Gen I.R. Bamaiyi (rtd), advised all the members to make peace and let the Emirate be a peaceful place where no one is oppressed.

Unfortunately, after this peaceful meeting, the Kebbi State Government declared the Yan Sa Kai a terrorist group, arrested AVM Bala Ribah (rtd) and the leader of Yan Sa Kai at Abuja and detained them for five days at SARS Office in Abuja without any cogent reason. This further demoralised and infuriated the Zuru people and subsequently the Emirate which enjoyed relative peace during this dialogue, witnessed increased wave of kidnapping, cow rustling, armed banditry and the destruction of villages within the Emirate. For example, on the 25th September 2020, armed bandits attacked Akawo village, Yar Kasuwa, Ushe, Senchi killing scores of people and destroying their properties in Zuru local Government. On the 27th September 2020, they attacked Wasagu town and kidnapped nine persons; they also attacked Dankande and Unashi towns.

The bloodletting bandits continue to enjoy freedom of operation at the moment because the vigilante group (Yan Sa Kai) had been disarmed by the state. They invaded villages like Munhaye on 23/01/2021, killing 24 people, 20 houses burnt, 19 persons kidnapped. On 22/02/2021, they invaded Ayu and many other villages in Danko/Wasagu Local Government Area. Just last week they invaded Kurmin Hodo, Dokar Kambari, etc, where

many people lost their lives, including the DPO and eight other police men in Sakaba Local Government Area.

As at today, not fewer than 400 people have lost their lives in this carnage. It is pertinent to note that after the meetings held in Zuru and Abuja, the common people in the Emirate saw hope coming their way but the reverse is now the case. The situation is now worse than it was before; farmers cannot go to their farms which is a major occupation of the people and no help is forthcoming from anywhere. Furthermore, all those displaced persons are now managing with their relatives in Danko/Wasagu, and Sakaba Local Govt Headquarters. No arrangements whatsoever is being made to take care of the displaced persons by the State Government.

What baffles me the most is the conspiracy of silence not just from the state government whose responsibility is to safeguard the lives and properties of its citizens, but equally guilty of this conspiracy are all the media organisations (electronic and print media) and NGOs in the state about the happenings in the Emirate. Even Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, which is the main opposition party in the state, is guilty of this conspiracy. Our elders, leaders and representatives in the national and state assemblies are all playing dumb about the precarious situation. If I may ask the people mentioned above: what is the purpose of your existence to your community? I wish to remind our people that the Minister of Defense during an NTA network news did not mince words when he stated that Nigerians must defend themselves.

The above statement is enough to tell us to get our acts together and face the bandits or killers squarely and not shy away from our responsibilities. We must not fail our people because we are not known as cowards.

To be concluded

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