

Bandits on rampage in Sokoto, Niger, kill 15, abduct many, set houses ablaze

● Kill 15 in two Sokoto LGs ● Appoint district heads ● Story baseless, unfounded – Police ● Attack LG in Niger, set houses ablaze, abduct, gun down villagers ● Kidnap 4 factory workers in another LG

By Wole Mosadomi & Ibrahim Hassan

BANDITS were again on rampage in the early hours of yesterday in two local government areas in Sokoto State, killing at least 15 persons and appointing district heads in affected communities.

They also struck in two local government areas in Niger State, abducting several persons and setting houses ablaze. Some were also killed in the attacks.

Sokoto State governor, Aminu Tambuwal, who confirmed the attack on the two local government areas in his state yesterday, listed the affected councils as Goronyo and Illela.

But the state police command said the attack never took place, describing the information around it as baseless and unfounded.

However, the governor confirmed to Channels Television in an interview monitored yesterday that the victims were killed during the attacks which occurred between Sunday night and yesterday morning.

Tambuwal confirms killings

Governor Tambuwal, who gave the confirmation shortly before he presented the state's 2022 draft budget to members of the state House of Assembly, said: "12 people were killed in Illela and three others lost their lives in Goronyo."

He consoled with the families of those who lost their loved ones to the attacks, as well as people of the affected communities.

Vanguard gathered that apart from imposing levies on those who did not flee from their villages due to incessant attacks, the bandits have now also usurped powers of district heads and have begun to appoint district heads in affected communities.

A native of one of the affected communities, Idris Gobir, told VOA Hausa Service in an interview that the bandits had appointed two district heads in the Sabon Birni zone of Sokoto State.

He said: "Yesterday (Sunday), the bandits leader celebrated the

Maulud in Makwaruwa, where he declared himself the district head. The event took place in the presence of the bona fide district head. But when they asked if he had any objection, the bona fide district head, Dan Sani, paid allegiance to the bandits' leader who usurped his powers.

"Similarly, in Gangara town, the bandits summoned a meeting which was attended by all the inhabitants and the bandits. They selected Dan Kwaro and he is now the district head of that town.

"He was in the town on Thursday and ordered mosques to reopen. He directed that the inhabitants should stop going outside the town for prayers, that they should be performing their prayers in the town.

"They control the local justice system and others. He ordered that markets be reopened on Tuesdays."

Another resident in the Eastern part of Sokoto, Bashir Altine Guyawa, told the VOA Hausa service that even before the bandits appointed district heads in the area, they had for a long time, been in control of that zone and called the shots.

"From Dama where there was an encounter between the bandits and security agents, up to Zango and Gatawa, the bandits are in total control of these areas and dictate daily affairs.

"So, whether they announce the appointment of district heads or not, they have already established their presence and they are in control. So, anybody who had traditional authority can no longer exercise that power," he said.

What attacks portend — security expert

Commenting on the consequences of this development, a security expert, Detective Auwal Bala Durumi Iya, said the situation was capable of making the people lose hope in government's ability to rescue them from the clutches of the bandits.

"Secondly, they (bandits) will be able to recruit from those who

are not part of them, whether they like it or not."

"Thirdly, this will show the world that the bandits are now strong enough to annex an area and impose their kind of authority," he said.

Story baseless, unfounded — Police

The police command, however, denied the development and described the story as baseless and unfounded.

The command in a statement signed by the PPRO, ASP Sanusi Abubakar, said investigation had revealed that the story was baseless, saying it had taken stringent measures to unravel the source of the story.

It added that there were plans by the special military operation, Hadarin Daji, and the police to launch an operation in places inhabited by bandits, with a view to restoring law and order.

The Niger attack

In Niger State, gunmen suspected to be bandits also invaded Munya Local Government Area in the early hours of yesterday, killing unspecified number of villagers after setting their houses ablaze, while some others were abducted.

A dependable source from the area said the gunmen, who were up to sixty, stormed some communities on motorcycles fully armed.

He said villages invaded include New Kachiwe, Zagzaga and old Kabila, adding that the gunmen also moved from one village to another without any resistance from security agencies.

He said the affected communities were just a few kilometres away from Sarkin Pawa, the headquarters of the local government.

"Many of the villagers were trapped in their farms while harvesting their produce and were gunned down. Others who were at home started fleeing to safer areas.

"There was confusion in the area, as some have been shot dead and many houses set ablaze," he declared.

The source, who preferred anonymity, described the area as

a "warzone" because of booming sounds of gunshots and the panic that had enveloped the area as villagers ran helter-skelter for safety.

"As I am speaking with you, there are no security personnel to repel the bandits, except the local vigilante members who attempted to confront them but did not succeed because the bandits overwhelmed them in number and with their fire power," he remarked.

Munya local government area had persistently been invaded by bandits and is one of the eighteen local government areas under the siege of the bandits.

When contacted, the Secretary to the State Government, SSG, Alhaji Ibrahim Ahmed Matane, confirmed the attack but said he had not been officially briefed and so didn't have details yet. "One thing I can assure you is that government will take action immediately by deploying security agencies to restore peace to the affected communities," the SSG assured.

In another attack on Tegna in Rafi Local Government Area also in Niger State, bandits kidnapped at least four persons in a sachet water factory.

The gunmen were said to have attacked the factory on Sunday night, abducting the four workers.

2nd reported attack on Tegna

A resident of the area, who confirmed that the incident happened around 8pm, said the bandits shot sporadically into the air while residents scampered for safety.

The source added that the factory was near Government Girls' Secondary School in Tegna where there had been previous kidnap earlier in the year.

This is the second reported attack by gunmen in Tegna community in 2021.

Recall that in May, 156 students were abducted from Salihu Tanko Islamic School in Tegna when gunmen invaded the school.