

The Saturday COVER

NOTORIOUS TERRORIST BELLO TURJI TO MILITARY:

Why have you not killed me? You're just provoking me, not ready to end banditry

- Air raid may compel us to break peace pact with Zamfara residents
- Real enemy of the people is govt
- People begin to return to farms after paying N20m levy

By Nasir Muhammad Gusau

Bello Turji Kachalla, popularly known as Turji, a notorious terrorist and bandit leader operating in northern Nigeria, particularly Zamfara, Sokoto and Niger states has said the Nigerian government was not interested in ending banditry because some of its officials benefit from it.

Turji who was reacting to recent aerial bombardment of his residence by military jets also accused the government of provoking them (terrorists) to break their peace pact with the residents.

Turji, early this year, led his gang to carry out a massacre in Zamfara where almost 200 people including women and children were killed.

On August 21 this year however, Deputy Governor of Zamfara state, Senator Muhammad Hassan Nasibi announced that Turji had embraced peace. But on September 18, he narrowly escaped being killed when the Nigerian Air force bombed his house in Fakai village in Shinkafi local government area of Zamfara state which led to the killing of 12 of his fighters and relatives.

The Defence Headquarters thereafter on November 14 declared him and 18 other terrorists wanted with a price tag of N5m each on their heads.

Reacting to the attack on his house, the bandits warlord, accused the government of breaking the peace accord they had with him to stop banditry and protect the people of Shinkafi axis from any attack.

Speaking on phone with an online Hausa television monitored by Saturday Vanguard, Turji expressed bitterness over the air raid on his abode and the killing of innocent people when he had agreed with government officials and community leaders to abandon banditry.

His words: "I wonder if truly the government wanted to kill me. I think they only wanted to provoke me by making me renege on my promise not to kill anyone. If they could spot my house why couldn't they sight and kill me because I only left the house a couple of minutes when the bombardment

occurred.

"The people should know their enemy from the onset. The government is provoking us so that we will take revenge on the poor masses.

"The government is only fooling the gullible and naive people that they want to end banditry whereas in actual sense, they are the ones fueling the activities of the bandits and also benefiting from them.

"Peace is priceless and I'm ready to be a peace advocate unless the government wants me to be a war monger. I'm ready for either peace or war. Whatever, the government wants, we can give them a multitude."

According to him, "there have not been any attacks in the last five months since we reached a truce with the government but now that the military has attacked our home, we feel betrayed especially after the death of vulnerable people in the air strikes. The government only succeeded in destroying some part of my house and other buildings belonging to the innocent people."

"For the past five months, we didn't attack or kill anyone around Shinkafi. As a result, farming and other businesses were flourishing without any hitches. I feel embarrassed when my name was mentioned after the attacks by other terrorists".

Turji imposes N20m protection levy on residents

As the Defence Headquarters said they were looking for Turji, a n d announced a N5m price tag on him, the notorious bandit leader was exercising

his authority in his area of control by imposing a N20 million "Protection Levy" on Moriki community which is located 33km along Kaura Namoda-Shinkafi road.

Turji had imposed the N20m levy on the residents of the village and asked them to pay the money on or before Sunday, November 27, or face his wrath.

He threatened to attack the Zamfara village if the money was not paid on or before the deadline.

He said if the community could raise and deliver the money within two weeks, they should have no fear of attacks and every farmer from the town could tend to his farmland without any intimidation.

Residents said that Turji had escalated attacks on Moriki and other neighbouring communities since the NAF raid on his residence near Fakai village in the neighbouring Shinkafi local government area in September.

Holds five residents hostage over default in payment

A resident, Sani Moriki, said, "after he imposed the levy we met at the community level to see what we could do to raise the said amount of money bearing in our minds the consequences of ignoring his demand."

"We came up with an idea that every household in the community must pay N6,500 and if we add it up we would get the N20 million for onward delivery before the deadline ends."

"We were able to raise N10.6 million as some community members defaulted. We used N100,000 to buy them packs of cigarette, loaves of bread, soft drinks and recharge cards as they instructed."

"Seven members

of the community were mobilized and dispatched to deliver the money at an agreed spot near Kasayawa, a community located 10km east of Moriki town. After the delivery team arrived at the location, seventeen Turji boys rode to the spot and asked for the money and other items we bought for them.

"However, when Turji's attention was drawn to the fact that the money brought was N10.5 million, not N20 million as agreed he became angry and ordered his boys to hold five out of seven members of the delivery team. He asked them to take the residents to one of his camps in Jirani forest straddling Zurmi and Shinkafi local government areas. Two of them escaped and arrived home this morning."

"We are now put on edge and we have started making effort to reach out to him that we will deliver the balance of N10 million to him. We are in a serious trouble as a people."

Some days ago, the people however heaved a sigh of relief when they eventually completed the levy and handed it to him.

Community completes payment

An indigene of the area who requested anonymity for security reasons, said that the money was eventually paid last Sunday adding that some people who fled to other places, had started returning to the village.

"Many people including myself have returned to the village because of the payment of the levy. Few farmers are also going to the farm although confidence is not totally back."

"We paid additional sum of N6 million for the release of five people abducted by the terrorists who belonged to Bello Turji's camp," he said.

Meanwhile, a University don, Dr. Murtala A. Rufa'i from Usman Danfodiyo University, in his book titled "I'm a bandit", had revealed the names of some terrorist leaders, location of their enclave and even the membership strength of each terrorist group.

According to the book, in Maradun, Maru, Shinkafi, Zurmi, Birnin magaji and Safe local government areas of Zamfara state alone there are about 62 groups of bandits.

In Maradun Local government, the bandit leader, Samaila of Bryan Dutse has 150 members; Jimmo Fadama of Bayan Ruwa controls 80 members; Simoli Jaya of Bayan Ruwa leads 65 members; Sahabi of Bayan Ruwa has 250 members; Naakka of Bayan Ruwa has 180 members; Sani Baruwaka of Dagwarwa village controls 250 members; Maibokolo of Dajin yartunniya, 300 members; Haruna Zango of Damakawa village, 280 members while Muntari of Duddubi village has 310 members.

In Shinkafi local government there are Bello Turji of Fakai village with 2,500 members; Atarwase of Dajin Mashema with 200 members; Danmakwado of Kamarawa and Barawa villages has 550 membership strength, while Nagona of Surduku has 200 members.

Isafe local government has the likes of Idi of Guga village who has 100 members in his camp; Baba Yayi also of Guga has 100 members; Juli of Kwankwanba village has 100 members while Tukur of munhaye has 90 members.

According to the researcher, Zurmi local government has four notorious bandit groups and they include Dankarami of Isanu village with 750 members. Kachalla of North Mayasa, 1,200 members and Maidaji of North Labunde, 1,500 members.

In Birnin Magaji local government, all the groups live in Rugu village and they comprise of Alhaji Zaki with 85 members; Yalo (Yellow) 60 members and Hassan, 28 members.



• Bello Turji Kachalla