

News

Bloodbath in Benue: 50 killed as militia gangs go to war

●Crisis broke after kidnap, murder of deadly gang leader by rival ●Family of 7 wiped out ●12 of the dead, farmers caught in crossfire ●20 corpses recovered — **LAWMAKER** ●Police deploy more personnel to area ●NASS leadership to meet Tinubu, reiterates call for review of security architecture ●Stop bandits' attacks in 17 Katsina LGAs, Reps tell Tinubu

By Henry Umoru, Peter Duru & Gift Chapi-Odekina

MAKURDI — No fewer than 50 persons, including a family of seven, were feared dead on Tuesday following the invasion of Gbagir community in Ukum Local Government Area of Benue State, by suspected armed Fulani militia, supported by local Tiv bandits in a battle to oust another Tiv militia gang in the area.

It was gathered that most of the dead were members of the rival militia gangs, while about 12 innocent farmers were caught in the cross-fire which also left over 30 persons injured and many others declared missing.

A traditional ruler in the area, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the bloody fight started on Tuesday morning after a Tiv militia leader in Ukum LGA, kidnapped another Fulani militia leader, one Alhaji Gana and his family members, who were allegedly known for banditry and kidnappings, from neighbouring Chinkai community in Wukari LGA of Taraba State.

His words: "After kidnapping them, he asked for N100 million ransom but was given N5million. After collecting the money he killed the hostages.

"The murder of the hostages sparked outrage

among his gang members in Taraba State. This happened over the weekend.

"What followed was that another militia gang leader in Ukum now went and joined forces with the Fulani militia gang in Taraba to help them eliminate the rival gang in Ukum that killed their leader, Alhaji Gana.

"The essence was to enable him become the head of militias in Ukum. The combined forces of Fulani and Tiv militia gangs started moving into the bushes of Gbagir in their hundreds from Sunday to sack the gang that killed Alhaji Gana. On Tuesday morning, the bloody fight ensued.

"From what we gathered, over 45 persons, mainly bandits have been killed, though we have records of over 12 farmers who were caught in the crossfire. Over 30 others were injured, while some are also missing. We learned that the gangs are also evacuating some of their dead members.

"Sadly caught in the cross-fire was a family of seven in Tse Adzandeh Mbasaa, Mbajiga, Ityuluv, Torov. They were all members of the Adzandeh family.

"The armed men have also spread to the bushes

of Gbeji, Chito and Afia in their numbers but cannot move into the residential areas because of the timely intervention of troops of Operation Whirl Stroke, OPWS.

"In fact, when people noticed the movement of armed Fulani militia into Benue communities, the chiefs informed political leaders, who immediately briefed Governor Hyacinth Alia, who equally alerted the military for swift action.

"It was this timely response of the governor to the intel and the intervention of the OPWS that saved the people of Ukum LGA because we gathered that they planned to kill hundreds of people in Ukum as revenge for the murdered Fulani militia leader but it is their gang war, innocent residents have nothing to do with that.

"Over 1,000 of them have laid siege to Ukum LGA as we speak. That is why we are appealing to the military to save us before they wipe out our innocent families.

"We need more security posts in and around the area and we also appeal to the governors of Benue and Taraba states to team up and put an end to the activities of these cross-border criminals. They should support the military with logistics also.

"As we speak, these people

are still in the bushes in Ukum, they have not moved back to Taraba. The Fulani militia are being supported by a Tiv militia group to eliminate another Tiv militia gang and as they fight, the innocent locals will be killed.

"There is urgent need to protect the other three villages because we are hearing that the first phase of the attack is in Gbagir, while Chito, Gbeji and Afia might be next. We are also appealing for fortified military presence in all the Benue and Taraba border communities."

20 corpses recovered — Lawmaker

Confirming the killings, the lawmaker representing Ukum state constituency, Ezra Nyiyongo, said 20 corpses had been recovered.

Efforts to reach the Force Commander of OPWS, Major General Sunday Igbinomwanhia, was unsuccessful but a military source confirmed the development.

The source said: "These are militia men killing each other. Yes, we acknowledge that some people may have been caught in the cross-fire but the majority of the people that were killed were members of the militia gangs in the area.

"But be that as it may, our troops are in Ukum to

POCKET CARTOON

Power Minister Adelabu threatens to revoke DisCos licenses over worsening electricity supply in Nigeria!



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ensure that the attack does not affect innocent people."

Police deploy more personnel to area

Contacted, Benue State Police Commissioner, Mr. Emmanuel Adesina, who also confirmed the development, said more officers were deployed to the area, adding that five corpses had also been recovered from the scene.

NASS leadership to meet Tinubu, reiterates call for review of security architecture

Disturbed by the Benue killings and security issues across the country, the leadership of the National Assembly yesterday resolved to urgently meet President Bola Tinubu to find lasting solutions to the problems.

The National Assembly, particularly the Senate, also declared as very disturbing, unfortunate and sad, the killing of over 50 people in fresh attacks on some communities in Benue State.

It also urged the service chiefs and heads of other security agencies to, as a

matter of urgency, deploy security personnel to address the continuing and ongoing attacks by armed terrorists parading as herdsmen on communities in Kwande, Ukum, Logo and Katsina-Ala LGAs of Benue State to flush them out and restore normalcy to the affected communities.

The Senate called for a review of the security architecture in affected areas and investment in surveillance technology and equipment to detect and prevent future attacks.

It also urged the National Emergency Management Agency, NEMA, to immediately mobilize relief materials to people displaced by these attacks in Kwande, Ukum, Logo and Katsina-Ala LGAs.

Resolutions of the Senate yesterday were sequel to a motion brought under matters of urgent public importance pursuant to Orders 41 and 51 of the Senate Standing Orders 2023 (as amended) by Senator Emmanuel Udende (APC, Benue North-East), following the fresh attacks.

Moves to have an urgent meeting with President Tinubu by the leadership of National Assembly

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on the unending security problems bedeviling the country came after exhaustive debate on fresh killings in Benue State.

According to the National Assembly, the planned meeting is to find lasting solutions to the mindless carnage in the land.

The proposed meeting with the President, and other resolutions which are coming after an earlier one by the Red Chamber, is to intimate him with reports of security summits in the 8th and 9th Assemblies as well as the far-reaching resolutions of its recent engagements with security chiefs.

Earlier in his presentation of the motion, Senator Udende lamented that no fewer than 50 persons had been killed in fresh attacks in the affected communities, adding that as at Tuesday, March 5, areas attacked include Tyuluv, Borikyo, Kundav, Ugbaam, Uyam, Udedeku, Yaaiwa, Nyihemba, Tomatar, Menakwagh, Yase and Agura, all in the Benue North-East Senatorial district.

He said: "The residents of the villages and communities now find themselves targeted on a daily basis by heavily armed terrorist herdsman, and the toll continues to be staggering as they bear the brunt, with reports of marauders butchering several villagers, leaving many homes completely burnt down and numerous residents still missing, while the perpetrators, however, remain elusive and have not been apprehended."

Senator Udende, who further lamented that the situation, in addition to the loss of lives and property, has already impacted negatively on the economic lives of the people and led to the shortage of farm produce, said despite public outcry and previous resolutions of the National Assembly as regards the criminal activities of these terrorists parading as herdsman, there seemed to be no visible action on the part of government to curtail, abate or totally stop their criminal activities.

Udende said: "The purpose of government is the security and safety of lives and properties in line with Section 14 (2) b of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) and there is need to act urgently."

In his contribution, Senator Osita Ngwu, Enugu West, advised the Federal Government to seek what he referred to as political or cultural solutions

to solve the security problem, just as Senator Adamu Aliero (PDP, Kebbi Central) expressed disappointment that despite huge budgetary allocations to security, there seemed to be little or nothing to show for it, blaming it squarely on poor oversight by relevant Senate committees.

He lamentably declared that he was already tired of coming to mourn the loss of innocent lives due to attacks by criminals.

In his contribution, Senator Sadiq Umar (APC, Kwara North), shared the thoughts of Aliero and said what Nigeria needs is a return to the basics, strengthen local communities and trust them enough to address the issues.

Former President of the Senate and Chairman, Senate Committee on Defence, Senator Ahmad Lawan (APC, Yobe North), advised the Senate leadership to meet with President Tinubu, pointing out that huge budgetary allocations had always been made to the security agencies and they should ensure efficient service delivery.

Stop bandits' attacks in 17 Katsina LGAs, Reps tell Tinubu

Meanwhile, the House of Representatives has called on President Bola Tinubu to direct security agencies to sustain pressure on criminals



From left, Friday Ebojoh, Chief Kenneth Uzolgwé and Alaba Samson, all graduates, during the International Academy of Forensic Professional Career Development in Forensic Investigation and Criminal Intelligence, graduation ceremony in conjunction with UNILAG Consult, held in Lagos, last week. Photo: Kehinde Shonola.

perpetrating violence and criminal activities in Katsina State and the country in general.

The call was sequel to a motion of urgent national importance moved by Sada Soli at plenary in Abuja yesterday.

Moving the motion, Soli expressed concern about the devastating impact of banditry on the lives and livelihoods of people of Katsina State,

adding that escalating banditry attacks in the state had led to loss of lives, destruction of properties and kidnapping of innocent men, women, and children on a daily basis.

He said security agencies are yet to take immediate and decisive action to address the security challenges in Katsina.

The lawmaker called for increase in deployment of security personnel to the affected communities to combat banditry and restore peace

and order.

He further explained that some gangs of armed bandits from neighboring Kaduna and Zamfara states are making efforts to gain control over some communities in Katsina State.

Soli warned that Katsina State is on the verge of being overrun by criminal elements and urged urgent and decisive action to curb the activities of the bandits and restore peace to about 18 LGAs.

The House commended

troops for the ferocious operations they conducted on March 4, 2024, in Kurfi and Safana LGAs of Katsina State, which resulted in the killing of two notorious bandits, while others fled with gunshot wounds.

The House urged NEMA and the Ministry of Humanitarian and Poverty Alleviation to urgently provide humanitarian assistance to the affected communities and support displaced persons in the state.

Adelabu threatens to revoke DisCos' licences over poor power supply

ABUJA—THE Minister of Power, Mr Bayo Adelabu, yesterday threatened to revoke licences of Distribution Companies over poor power supply.

Adelabu, in a post on his X

page (formerly Twitter) said he invited chief executives of Abuja Electricity Distribution Company, AEDC, and Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company, IBEDC, as well as the Managing Director of the

Transmission Company of Nigeria, TCN.

He said the meeting is over the worsening power supply in their regions and to collectively find lasting solutions.

He said: "As the Minister of

Power, I am deeply concerned about the deteriorating electricity supply across the country.

"The Ministry has been exerting pressure on the Generating Companies (GENCOs) to enhance their performance, resulting in a recent increase in generation to over 4000MW.

"Despite this progress, certain distribution companies are failing to adequately distribute the power supplied by TCN, while vandalism of power infrastructure exacerbates the problem in regions such as Abuja, Benin, Port Harcourt, and Ibadan.

"Moving forward, I am committed to holding all distribution companies accountable for their performance.

Willful non-performance will not be tolerated, and severe consequences, including license revocation, may be imposed."

Also, the minister said TCN has been instructed to prioritise repair works on damaged transmission towers and power lines to improve supply in affected areas.

Adelabu said: "During recent supervisory visits to power generating plants, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges faced by the sector."

"Plans are underway to settle outstanding debts owed to power generation and gas supply companies, which will alleviate the financial strain and contribute to improved generation levels nationwide."

Granting interviews after court sittings unethical, Justice Odili cautions lawyers

THE Chairman of the Body of Benchers, Justice Mary Peter Odili, retd, yesterday cautioned lawyers against addressing the media after court proceedings, describing the action as unethical.

She stated this on the second day of the Call to Bar Ceremony of 4,412 new lawyers in Abuja.

The retired justice of the Supreme Court also disclosed that a committee has been set up to address the worrisome issue of conflicting judgments of courts in the country.

She tasked the newly sworn in lawyers to demonstrate the highest level of professional ethics and behave with honour at all times.

Justice Odili also urged the

new lawyers to be honest, not to mislead the court, and abide by the judicial dress code.

She said it is unethical for lawyers to discuss and arrive at conclusions on matters pending before the court.

The Chairman of the Body of Benchers said, "One of the issues plaguing our dear country in recent times is the contentious and polarizing spectacle of media trial. The negative resultant effect of media trial is pre-judgement which can erode the foundational pillar of an individual's right to a fair and unbiased trial."

"Lawyers who engage in media trial sway public opinion and potentially skew the trajectory of justice, sometimes turning the people against the court."

"It is unethical for lawyers to be addressing the media

and to interfere with, or be reasonably capable of prejudicing or interfering with the fair trial of the matter or the judgement or sentence thereon."

"It is, therefore, also unethical for lawyers to be discussing and arriving at conclusions on matters pending before the court."

CLO kicks against early closure of Lagos estate gate to motorists, pedestrians

CIVIL Liberties Organization (CLO), a human rights group in Lagos, has expressed concerns over early closure of the entrance gate into Abel Orebiyi Street, off Salvation Road, in Opebi, Ikeja, Lagos State, against motorists, at 8:00pm daily.

CLO argued that such

at any hour of the day. Guests, who attended events in the estate were not excluded from the restrictions.

They are all directed by the security guards to go through Ajanaku Street, which is about 120 meters away.

There has been latent

However, at the gate, there is a public notice that the "estate is strictly residential and commercial activities are not allowed."

Meanwhile, the Head of Legal Unit at CLO in Lagos, Princewill Akpakpan, acknowledging that security