

Nigeria tightens curfew on 'Middle Belt' area

Government order follows violent clashes that have killed over 60 people, including two politicians gunned down in Jos.

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Nigeria has called for a curfew in its troubled Plateau state after gunmen killed a federal senator and a state politician at the mass burial for the victims of an earlier attack, an official has said.

"The senator representing Plateau North, Gyang Dantong, and the majority leader of the state assembly, Gyang Fulani, were gunned down today by Fulani herdsmen," Pam Ayuba, spokesman for the state's governor, said on Sunday.

He confirmed that the two were killed while attending the mass burial for the victims of a raid on Saturday, also blamed on the Fulani, a tribe made up of Muslim, pastoralist herdsmen.

Plateau state falls in Nigeria's so-called "Middle Belt" region, dividing the country's mainly Muslim north from its mostly Christian south.

The burial ground was located in the state's Gashis district, about 90km from the state capital Jos.

Another federal politician "escaped death by a whisker", Ayuba added.

Asked about the motivation behind the attacks, Ayuba said the gunmen were likely inspired by their resentment for the state's Christian political leadership.

Security concerns

Al Jazeera's Yvonne Nege, reporting from Abuja, said recent events will raise questions over whether the Nigerian security apparatus has a grip on things in the troubled region.

"Jos has seen on-and-off religious-based violence for years... the fact that these were public servants might just push the whole Jos issue, and the months of violence that we have seen, to

the top of the political agenda," she said.

A resident of the area told the AFP news agency that Christian youths had set up roadblocks after news of the attacks spread.

"Youth in the area... have taken over the two major highways, setting up barricades and looking for Muslim motorists to vent their anger on," Samuel Gambo, a resident, said.

The long-running Fulani conflict in the state has been fuelled by both religious and land tensions.

The nomadic Fulani complain that they have been marginalised by the Birom, the Christian agriculturalist ethnic group that dominates the state.

The two victims of Sunday's attack were Birom, as were the 23 people killed in the Saturday raid.

Last month in neighbouring Kaduna state, co-ordinated church bombings by the armed Islamist group Boko Haram sparked reprisal violence by Christian youths who raided mosques and killed dozens of their Muslim neighbours, burning some of their bodies.

Source:

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