

BOMB... Sympathisers at the Scene of the Bomb Blast at Thisday Newspaper office at Jabi in Abuja yesterday.

PHOTO: NAN

panel misrepresented facts and failed to meet the

regulations on the subsidy scam recommendations." Obviously piqued by media reports that the

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Charles Taylor found guilty

•To be sentenced May 30

In a historic ruling, an international court convicted former Liberian President Charles Taylor yesterday of aiding and abetting war crimes and crimes against humanity for supporting notoriously brutal rebels in neighboring Sierra Leone in return for blood diamonds.

Taylor is the first head of state convicted by an international court since the

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COUNTRYMAN

MANY OF NIGERIAN COACHES ARE QUACKS - EKEJI



INCLUDING THOSE THAT APPOINTED THEM

Explosions rock ThisDay, others in Abuja, Kaduna

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•40 feared dead •Jonathan, NPAN, others react

Catholic Priest kidnapped

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Explosions rock *ThisDay*, others in Abuja, Kaduna

MALACHY UZENDU, *Abuja Bureau Chief*, and CLEMENT NWOJI

TWO coordinated bomb explosions believed to have been masterminded by the Boko Haram sect, yesterday rocked *ThisDay* offices in Abuja and Kaduna, killing several people including a 12-year-old boy, while many people sustained serious injuries.

Boko Haram, the dreaded Islamic sect, had threatened that it would deal with unnamed media houses it claimed were "reporting nonsense", promoting claimed government attacks, arrests and detention of their members.

The Abuja explosion occurred at *ThisDay* Newspapers located at Utako District, while that of Kaduna was said to have almost simultaneously occurred in Kontagora Road by Ahmed Bello Way, at a building housing *ThisDay*, *The Sun* and *The Moment* Newspapers.

There were conflicting figures of the casualties of the explosions. While some sources said six people died in the attacks, others said the dead victims would not be less than 40.

It was gathered that at about 11am, a lone suicide bomber drove a yet-to-be-identified jeep into the premises of the *ThisDay* Newspaper Abuja, an attack that resulted in the death of two personnel of the newspaper company as well as the bomber.

Five other support staff of the newspaper company were

also said to have been injured and rushed to the hospital by members of National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and other security agencies.

The NEMA's account of the incidents through its spokesman, Yushau Shuaib, stated: "The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) received a call at about 11:08am of bomb blast at *ThisDay* Newspaper House located at Jabi, in Utako district, Abuja. The Agency mobilized response agencies to the scene for rescue operation and further cordoned off the whole entire area off.

"The attacker used a dark green SUV; he got entrance into the building through the back gate and detonated the explosive at exactly 11:00 am. The building and some nearby houses were severely damaged. Some cars were also damaged inside the *ThisDay* premises as a result of the explosion. "NEMA officials promptly reported at scene of incident and joined others stake holders, then later visited three hospitals where victims were evacuated to for treatment and were able to confirm the following: A number of people were confirmed dead including the attacker. One injured person was given immediate first Aid treatment.

"Seven victims were admitted at National Hospital, among them, one discharged himself; a 12-year-old boy was seriously burnt up to 70 percent degree. "Five injured victims were

also admitted at Wuse General Hospital, Abuja. One victim was also admitted at Garki Hospital. "In conclusion, a number of people were confirmed dead including the attacker and 14 people were injured and are currently receiving treatment at the hospitals mentioned above."

On the Kaduna explosion, Suaib said: "Information obtained from NEMA officials on rescue operation in Kaduna indicates that about 20 injured victims of today's (yesterday's) explosion have been admitted in four hospitals in the state. "While the dead victim has been collected for burial by the family, the attacker is reported to have been arrested." Editorial Board Chairman of *ThisDay* newspaper, Mr. Segun Adeniyi, who later also confirmed the incident, told reporters that the injured were receiving treatment at an undisclosed hospital.

Our reporters who visited the scene observed that the bodies were blown into pieces and their remains were packed into a black nylon bag by the NEMA officials before evacuation.

The blast completely destroyed *ThisDay* building and the adjoining buildings including a newly built multi-purpose plaza.

About 12 vehicles belonging to the newspaper company and staff were also shattered, while the building housing the press and the newsroom was completely destroyed.

Adjoining buildings were not spared either as their windows were shattered, vehicles parked in *ThisDay* premises were all damaged,

while the ones in the Utako Motor park which is directly opposite the office as well as others parked at shopping malls nearby were all damaged. Several people were injured.

Mr. Nduka Nwosu, Managing Editor, Abuja Bureau Chief of *ThisDay*, was confused when he got to the place. This reporter heard him ask (to nobody in particular): "where is Ike; where is Nduka; Atoi; Sunday; where is everybody? Oh God, what is happening? Oh, my God, they have killed my colleagues."

It was learnt that the people who died were either security personnel or printers who had worked on the day's edition of the paper. They were even cleaning off the debris when death came calling and they died!

They immediately cordoned off the place even before the arrival of operatives of the State Security Service (SSS); the Military; the Federal and FCT Fire Service as well as the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC); Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and NEMA.

The Assistant Inspector-General of Police (AIG) David Fatai, who represented the Inspector-General of Police (IGP) came to the scene of the incident left at about 1pm.

He told journalists that Nigerians must be proactive over security consciousness and that they should not leave security to security agencies alone.

Fatai, who regretted the incident, also said there is the need for Nigerians to always inform the police of any movement considered suspicious, adding that the police are on top of the situation and that the days of the Boko Haram will soon be over.

When asked if he can confirm that the bombing was a suicide bombing, the Police boss said considering that the bomber blew himself up with the vehicle, it would be safe to conclude that the incident was a suicide bomb.

He also said the incident in Kaduna State where another office of *ThisDay*, *The Moment* and the *Sun* newspapers were bombed, were being investigated and the Force will

address the press in due course.

Another rush to the place to rescue people led to another hoax, but this time, the management of *Leadership* led by its Chairman, Nda Isiah, and the Executive Director, Abraham Nda-Isiah, had already barricaded the entrance to their premises with make-shift tyres and other materials.

Nda Isiah did not want to speak. He merely thanked all the people who had showed "this kindness to us".

As journalists wanted to disperse, another rumour had it that *Nigeria Pilot* head office, owned by a Bayelsa man and Extraordinary Adviser to President Goodluck Jonathan, Denis Sami, was the target.

A visit to the place, which is also near the *Champion* newspapers' office showed that it was another hoax although Policemen had taken over security and were monitoring events as they unfolded in the place.

National President of the Nigerian Union of Journalists, Mohammed Garba who later came to *ThisDay* with the National Secretary Shuaibu Usman Leman, regretted the bomb blast that rocked various media houses both in Abuja and Kaduna State.

Garba said the threat by Boko Haram to journalists was a dangerous dimension to the upsurge of terrorism in Nigeria.

He, however, said the union is still studying the incidents in Abuja and Kaduna and will soon address a press conference on the development.

The NUJ sympathized with the bereaved families, the *ThisDay* management and entire media family over the ugly incident.

Meanwhile, President Goodluck Jonathan yesterday condemned the coordinated bomb blasts which engulfed newspaper houses in Abuja and Kaduna at the early morning hours.

At least the offices of four media houses one of which located at a busy area of Utako district, Abuja while others located in Kaduna were yesterday attacked which had devastating effects on the targets.

The media houses involved

include the Corporate Headquarters of *ThisDay* Newspapers located at Utako District, Abuja while also another explosion said to have almost simultaneously occurred in Kontagora Road by Ahmed Bello Way, Kaduna, Kaduna State at a building housing some media houses Bureau offices which included *ThisDay*, *The Sun* and *The Moment* Newspapers.

The President, who received the sad news in Abidjan, Cote D'Ivoire where he is attending an Extra-Ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on the situation in Mali and Guinea-Bissau, described the attack as "ignoble, misguided, horrendous and wicked."

Also, President Jonathan, in a statement endorsed by his Special Adviser on Media and Publicity, Reuben Abati, reaffirmed "the commitment of the Federal Government to continue to uphold the constitutional right to freedom of expression in general and of press freedom in particular, pledging that criminal elements bent on instilling fear in the minds of Nigerians and foreigners will not succeed."

In its reaction, the Newspapers Proprietor Association of Nigeria (NPAN), said it received the news of the attacks on newspaper offices with "a great shock and sadness", saying: "The attacks are coming against the background of earlier warning by the Boko Haram sect of its intent to launch onslaught on the Nigerian media."

In a statement by its Executive Secretary, Mr. Feyi Smith, the NPAN stated: "Those incidents constitute a major and unwarranted attack on free Press in the country, and we condemn it in very strong terms. The attacks are insensitive, barbaric and very retrogressive."

"The NPAN finds it difficult to understand why the sect would make the media a target, when the media is only performing its social and constitutional duty of reporting events as they unfold."

"It is this call to duty that explains why member of the sect always have a space in media when its spokesperson(s) call-in to grant interviews, or issue press statements. Their views are usually well reported."

"However, if the current attack is to intimidate the Press, we hasten to say that we shall neither be cowed, nor intimidated as we shall continue to be discharged our professional responsibilities without fear or favour."

"We hasten to task the government again, on the need to guarantee the security of lives and property. It does seem that nowhere is safe."

"We condemn the unwarranted and underserved destruction of lives and properties occasioned by the attacks, and commiserate with those who sustained injuries or lost their relations in the senseless attack."

"We also commiserate with the Nigeria Guild of Editors (NGE) and the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) over these attacks, and enjoin them not to be intimidated. They should remain resolute in the defence of the ethos of their profession."

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House, in considering the report, recommended that his tenure and that of other board member should be investigated and prosecuted if found wanting. Ali, in a statement issued in Abuja yesterday morning, said the panel ought to know the limits of his powers as a non-executive chairman of PPPRA and the operating processes in such an establishment.

The full text of the statement read: "The attention of Dr. Ahmadu Ali's friends, well wishers and political associate has been drawn to media reports that attracted major headlines in many national dailies linking him to the absurd findings in the just concluded subsidy probe of the federal House of Representatives. Dr Ali was the former chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, and the immediate past board chairman of the PPPRA.

"Ordinarily, we would have dismissed these allegations as the handwork of our political detractors or at best maintain dignified silence in the face of dramatic struggle by some people to smear the hard earned reputation built over decades of dedicated service and pursuit of excellence towards the good of mankind.

"But, it is for these glaring flaws in the report that it became expedient to join issues, if any, to correct the erroneous impressions and

Ahmadu

obvious misrepresentation of facts that were the lot of the House of Representatives recommendations.

"In democratic governance, such as this, the challenge before Nigerians is to develop a wider margin of moderation through constructive engagement based on facts, as the report of the House of Representative committee falls short of the minimum standard of best practices in any clime.

"Based on this premise, one could attempt to analyze some hard and fundamental facts which the report in its wisdom or lack of it has fallen below poverty line in educating or informing Nigerians on the subsidy scam recommendations.

"It is important to note of course for the purpose of records that Dr. Ahmadu Ali was appointed by the late president Umaru Musa Yar Adua as a non-executive chairman of the board of PPPRA.

"It is a noted fact that the PPPRA as an organization has its own laid down procedures for recommending companies to DPR to issue them licenses to import petroleum products and the Federal Ministry of finance pays subsidy through petroleum support fund (PSF) which is then set aside to pay subsidy on petroleum

products. It is suffice to say that Dr. Ahmadu Ali as a non-executive chairman of the board does not have the mandate to award licenses or authorized payments to PSF beneficiaries.

"It is equally important to note that the former national chairman of the PD" whose board meets quarterly for policy guidelines each year is neither the chief accounting officer nor is he the chief Executive officer of the PPPRA and as such during the board meetings, issues of recommendation for licences or payment of (PSF) claims do not form part of its agenda.

"Based on these submission, it is worthy to re-assure the public especially Dr. Ali's political associates that his hands are clean of any corruption or corrupt practices in the subsidy probe scam bearing in mind that the sole responsibility of issuing licences and payment of claims rests on the management.

"The recommendation of Farouk Lawal's report did not suggest that Dr. Ahmadu Ali is found wanting in the saga and for the whole House to use its democratic influence in trying to suggest otherwise is the greatest injustice to Dr. Ali and by extension, the greatest disservice to humanity.

"The grotesque display by the deputy speaker during the discussion of the report falls far short of minimum democratic principle and practice.

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post-World War II Nuremberg military tribunal.

Presiding Judge Richard Lussick said the 64-year-old warlord-turned-president provided arms, ammunition, communications equipment and planning to rebels responsible for countless atrocities in the 1991-2002 Sierra Leone civil war.

Lussick called the support "sustained and significant."

"Mr. Taylor, the trial chamber unanimously finds you guilty" of 11 charges including terror, murder, rape and conscripting child soldiers", Lussick told Taylor.

Taylor stood and showed no emotion as Lussick delivered the guilty verdicts at the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

Lussick scheduled a sentencing hearing for May

Taylor

16 and said sentence would be passed two weeks later. Taylor will serve his sentence in Britain.

Human rights activists hailed the convictions as a watershed moment in the fight against impunity for national leaders responsible for atrocities.

"Taylor's conviction sends a powerful message that even those in the highest level positions can be held to account for grave crimes," said Elise Keppler of Human Rights Watch. "Not since Nuremberg has an international or hybrid war crimes court issued a judgment against a current or former head of state. This is a victory for Sierra Leonean victims, and all those seeking justice when the worst abuses are committed."