

Three killed in Maiduguri

From Hamza Idris & Yahaya Ibrahim

SOME gunmen have killed three people in Maiduguri, Borno State Capital, within 12 hours.

The Joint Task Force (JTF) consequently shut the popular Maiduguri international fish market and the adjoining timber market along the Baga road.

A patent medicine store owner, simply identified as Okonkwo, was killed around 7.30pm on Sunday at Jajeri area, close to the Baga market, while two tea vendors, including one Mallam Tumba, 39 and his brother, were yesterday shot dead while attending to customers at Wanzamari Chaco around 9.00am.

Witnesses said the gunmen carted away an undisclosed amount of money at the medicine store and took nothing away from the tea joint.

Spokesman of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), North-east,

Ibrahim Farinloye confirmed the killing, saying officials of the agency had visited the Baga market and took away vulnerable people, including beggars and children, while military operations were ongoing.

The Baga market is biggest fish market in the state where international traders from Niger Republic, Chad and Cameroun as well as Southern Nigeria transact businesses.

The market and its surroundings have become a target of attacks in the past one week. During the recent independence anniversary, gunmen laid siege there, killed a butcher and scared many away. Earlier, an explosion suspected to have targeted a JTF vehicle killed two civilians at the Ngarnam area of the metropolis.

Shortly after yesterday's attacks, traders who had been ready for business at the Baga market were chased away by JTF operatives, while the major Baga road was blocked for almost

four hours as security operatives combed the market in search of the attackers.

The whole Wanzamari area was also cordoned off as military personnel conducted house-to-house search.

Baban Gusau, a security guard and resident of the area, said, "It was a difficult day for all of us in the area. It was my identity card that saved me... some of my neighbours are still there. The security operatives said the gunmen live among us and we have to produce them or else we are taken as accomplices."

Military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Mohammed Hassan, who spoke to Daily Trust on phone, said, "I have nothing to tell you now. When my superiors give me the go-ahead to address you, I will surely do that".

The state's Commissioner of Police, Simeon Midenda confirmed the attack, saying investigations were ongoing.

As at the time of filing this

report, it could not be confirmed if the JTF had succeeded in arresting anyone over the attack.

Meanwhile, there are feelings that following the ban on motorcycle operation in Maiduguri and its environs, gunmen use sport utility vehicles (SUVs) to carry out their attacks.

"Today's attack at Wanzamari was carried out by two young men who trekked to the scene and brandished Ak47 rifles. When the military men came, the gunmen had already sneaked away through a nearby primary school," Musa Saleh, one of the witnesses, said.

In a related development, an articulated vehicle fully loaded with watermelon yesterday hit a pick-up van of the JTF operatives around the Mala Kachalla roundabout at Bulunkutu area of Maiduguri.

Witnesses said three soldiers were critically injured and had been taken to the University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital.