

## Damaturu: 40 killed in JTF, gunmen clash

Written by Hamza Idris, Maiduguri and Hamisu Kabiru Matazu, Damaturu  
Wednesday, 20 June 2012 05:04

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OVER 40 dead bodies of victims of Monday's violence in Damaturu, the Yobe State capital, have been deposited at the Sani Abacha Specialist Hospital and there are reports of yet-to-be recovered bodies in many areas of the town where gun battles and explosions were reported.

A source at the hospital said at about 4.50pm yesterday, about 40 corpses of civilians and uniformed men, mostly with gunshot wounds had been deposited at the morgue.

"We also have many people with critical wounds at the accident and emergency ward. Some are in need of blood which is very scarce," the source said. Another source at the hospital told Daily Trust yesterday evening that the number of casualties was increasing.

Yobe State police commissioner, Mr. Patrick Egbuniwe, also confirmed that three policemen were killed while four others sustained injuries during the confrontation with the gunmen.

The Yobe State government has already imposed a 24-hour curfew to help contain the situation, and reports said by evening yesterday, there was some calm in the city.

"Operatives of the JTF and few other humanitarian agencies are the only people that are evacuating and bringing victims here. The state of emergency is affecting the activities of agencies like NEMA," our hospital source said.

Mukhtar Abubakar, a resident who spoke to Daily Trust on phone said: "This is a depressing and pathetic moment for us. We are all traumatized ...our wives and children are crying and all of us are hopeless. We pray to Almighty Allah to relieve our pains."

"We heard sounds of five more blasts around 12.noon but someone told me that it was the

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police anti bomb squad that detonated them after finding them in some sensible locations,” Abubakar said, adding that he could still see some smoke billowing in some parts of the town.

Witnesses also reported seeing the corpse of a soldier and that of a Mobile Policeman being taken to the hospital yesterday, in addition to three wounded policemen conveyed to the hospital for treatment.

A hospital source said the soldier might have fallen from a speeding patrol vehicle and died as a result of injuries he sustained.

Another soldier who called our correspondent said he was also receiving treatment at the hospital as a result of gunshot wound. “I am not alone in this condition,” he said.

Commander of the Joint Task Force (JTF) in Yobe State, Colonel Dahiru Abdulsalam could not be reached for comment.

Competent sources who confided in Daily Trust said that a delegation from the Amnesty International had landed at the Maiduguri International Airport yesterday, but it is not yet clear whether they have proceeded to Damaturu or not.

Though there is no official closure of the Nigerian borders, Daily Trust reports that hundreds of businessmen and travellers coming into Nigeria from Chad, Cameroon and Niger had been forced to take alternative routes because of the 24 hours curfew on Damaturu and fears of being trapped in the fighting.

A release signed by the Special Adviser to Governor Ibrahim Gaidam on Information and Press Affairs, Abdullahi Bego, said movement in other parts of the state has also been restricted as an added security measure. “The 10pm to 6am curfew in Potiskum also remains in place,” Bego said.

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In another statement the governor's spokesman called on the people of Yobe to disregard some 'mischievous text messages' in circulation, saying that Christians have been attacked. He said they were meant to cause disaffection and stir up tension between Christians and Muslims. "The entire content of the text being circulated is false, misleading, mischievous and unfounded," he said.

Many travellers were reported to have gone back to Maiduguri and taken the longer route to other parts of the country via Biu in Borno State and other obscure routes in Gombe State.

"I am going back straight to my village in Cameroun," Modou Babakar, who claimed to be a textile dealer told our reporter at Jimtilo, an entry point to Maiduguri from Damaturu. He claimed that he was on his way to Kano to buy textile materials.

The curfew has also forced residents, some in need of food and other necessities to remain indoors while students who were billed to sit for the NECO examinations missed yesterday's papers.

Witnesses said about five formal schools including the ones at Ajari, Pompomari and another primary school along Gujba road were seen in flames. There are also yet to be confirmed reports that Bindigari and Central Primary schools had been set on fire.

It was also gathered that the private residence of Governor Ibrahim Gaidam at Sabon Fegi was not razed by the assailants as earlier feared. "Several gunshots targeted the highly fortified resident but it was not razed," a source said.

"We heard the sounds of all kinds of guns, including rocket launchers throughout Monday and in the early hours of yesterday (Tuesday)," he said. "Northern Nigeria is in trouble," he added.

Our correspondents could not ascertain the total number of buildings affected by the battle which took residents of Sabon Fegi, Gwange, Ali Marami, Pompomari and many parts of Damaturu unawares.

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Over 30 roadblocks mounted by operatives of the JTF comprising soldiers, police, air force, navy, customs, immigrations and SSS were penetrated by the assailants.

Up till the time of filing this report, no group has claimed responsibility but residents said they heard the assailants, numbering over 100 chanting Allahu Akbar and moving without any sign of fear.