

# THE WORLD NEWS II

## Boko Haram Again! Sacks Bama, Gwoza Towns

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Some of those interviewed said they thronged together with their families and basic needs to the state capital because it is now the "safe haven." They also confirmed earlier reports that the Boko Haram insurgents, who were dislodged from their enclaves in northern and central Borno, had regrouped on top on Gwoza Hills and Mandara Mountains in Southern Borno.

Bama, one of the hitherto thriving business hubs of Borno State, is 78 kilometers away from the state capital while Gwoza, an equally prosperous business and farming community is 135 kilometers away from Maiduguri.

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The last attack in Bama in May, this year left over 40 policemen, 13 prison warders, 3 soldiers, 10 Boko Haram suspects and several civilians dead.

Police barracks and Mobile Police formations, including the offices of the Area Commander and the Police Divisional Officer were all razed down during the attack which was launched few weeks after similar one Baga, a fishing town in northern Borno where over 200 people were killed and over 2000 houses burnt, according to locals and some politicians from the area.

Locals from Bama said yesterday that the outlawed mercenaries of the Boko Haram sect had issued and pasted threat letters of impending attacks.

Some of the fleeing people interviewed in Maiduguri said they had seen hell in the last seven weeks when the state of emergency was declared, pointing out that the situation got worse four days ago when some Boko Haram fighters issued threat letters directing civil servants to quit government jobs, burn their records of employment and credentials and thereafter repent.

They said the letters which were written in Kanuri and Hausa languages, threatened that violators of the instruction would be dealt with decisively.

Zakari Saina, a local farmer, said residents of Bama had to pay between N6,000 and N7,000 per person instead of N300 before he or she would be transported to Maiduguri through bush and desert path.

"The trucks, pick-up vans and buses had to pass through Dikwa which is 60km away from Bama and in all, you will cover 150km to get to Maiduguri which will consume at least nine hours because of countless checkpoints," he said.

Modu Fannami, a father of five, said he chartered a Hilux van at the cost of N50,000 to be ferried to Maiduguri together with his wife and children, describing the experience as hellish.

Some people who arrived Maiduguri from Gwoza also alleged that the town had been infested by Boko Haram insurgents who had taken full control of the area and brandished their AK-47 rifles in the open, with impunity.

A retired civil servant, James John, said villagers in the hilly areas of Gwoza had crossed over to the Republic of Cameroon in search of safety, pointing out that the Boko Haram who were fought by the Nigerian security forces at the Sambisa forest have found sanctuary on top of mountains and caves.

It was reported last week that hundreds of Boko Haram fighters had regroup on mountains in southern Borno and thereafter used Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and attacked villages, including Kunde, Hwa'a, Gathahure and Gjigga; killed a pastor, the village heads of Kurana Bassa and Damboa and also burnt houses and worship centres in one fell swoop.

"Gwoza has now fallen to the Boko Haram fighters... unless there is immediate increase in the number of military troops in the area, I am afraid the insurgents would have their way," James said.

Madam Jummai Musa, another fleeing resident, said the Boko Haram insurgents had taken over most settlements in the outskirts of Gwoza, including Pulka and Kirawa.

"Our people who do not have relatives in Maiduguri have fled into Mura and Marwa villages in neighbouring Cameroon," she said.

It would be recalled that in 2001, the Boko Haram fighters, who were then known as Nigerian Taliban had launched attacks in Gwoza after an altercation with security operatives in Kanamma, Yobe State. Locals said, lately the Boko Haram insurgents were trying to gain momentum in Gwoza, which also serves as a training base for mobile police because of its rocky terrain.

Sunday Trust reports that immediately after the declaration of state of emergency on May 14, 2013, the road leading to the two border towns of Bama and Gwoza from Maiduguri to Adamawa and Taraba States, were cut off as military operatives mounted roadblocks and signposts.

The road blockage is in addition to the complete grounding of telephone services in the three affected states which makes communication and getting information from crisis prone areas nearly impossible. Few days ago, the Joint Task Force (JTF) criminalizes the use of satellite phones, including Thuraya, on the grounds that it is being used by "terrorists" to organize themselves and perpetrate crimes.

"But the Boko Haram insurgents are effectively communicating with one another with cell phones. The cutoff of GSM services did not affect them in anyway...I think they are using the services of Cameroon," said Bushara Marcus, a fleeing trader from Gwoza. Speaking on the twist of event despite claims by the federal government and military authorities that Nigeria is winning the war against the Boko Haram, Major Inusa Aliyu (rtd) said he has doubts.

"The fact is there is no effective roadmap to curtail the situation. The soldiers are only being mobilized to areas that have been attacked or subdued by the insurgents. The worst part is that the military is using crude method to track the insurgents instead of using latest technology...the Nigerian army is not taking preventive measures, rather they only believe in counter offensive which I believe is a wrong approach," he said.

However, a government source in Maiduguri simply said there is "disquiet" in Bama and Gwoza. The source acknowledge that many people are fleeing their homes but did not agree that the Boko Haram fighters have taken over the two towns. "They have not hoisted their flags like what they did in Kirenowa," he said.

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