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## CAR BOMB KILLS 30 IN MAIDUGURI

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The scene of a bomb blast at the Post Office Area in Maiduguri yesterday.

.Army blames Boko Haram

.Shettima seeks probe

At least 30 people were killed and over 50 others sustained injuries yesterday when a car bomb exploded and

rammed into other vehicles in Maiduguri, the Borno State capital.

It was the deadliest attack in Maiduguri metropolis since March last year and the Army said it was carried out by Boko Haram militants.

Residents and hospital sources said more than 30 people were killed and police have confirmed 17 deaths but said they were still counting the casualties.

Witnesses said more than 20 vehicles and five auto-rickshaws (popularly called Keke NAPEP) were burnt to ashes by the rampaging flame that emanated from the blast which occurred at the part of the metropolis known as GSM Village.

The fire has also consumed many roadside tents and shops, mostly belonging to youths who sell recharge cards and handset accessories.

Our correspondents gathered that many worshippers who congregated at a nearby mosque observing the Zuhr prayers and others sitting on slabs conducting ablution were killed.

A police traffic warden, women selling bean cake, many motorists and a popular suya meat seller known as Malam Amadu Faragai and four of his staff, who were all close to the GSM Village, have lost their lives.

Hospital sources said over 30 dead bodies were deposited at the state Specialists Hospital.

One of the rescue workers, who does not want to be named, said they recovered about 33 bodies. "Many people could not be recognised," he added.

At the scene of the blast, a big crater, enough to swallow a motorcycle, was created at the scene even as body parts, valuables and charred remains of vehicles were seen.

Many children and women were caught in the blast, witnesses said.

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The last bomb blast in the heart of Maiduguri city was witnessed in March 2013 at One Way, along Monday Market, though there were incidences in barracks and markets at the outskirts of the city.

'Thunderous bang'

A journalist, who was not far from the scene of the incident, said it was a car bomb that exploded very close to a military outpost and the GSM Village.

"I and my friend, Michael, would have died if not for the fact that we were still inside my car, trying to park near the U-Turn of the BRTV, not far from the GSM Village where I intended to go and collect my phone which I took for repairs," Abdulkareem Haruna, a reporter of one of the national dailies, said.

"I strongly feel it was a suicide mission because the explosion occurred in a moving car, loaded with explosives in a heavy traffic heading somewhere. It is sad and a calamity.

"As soon as the vehicle exploded, there was pandemonium but I managed to escape with my car. Few seconds after, there was conflagration and many vehicles went in flame and you can see dead bodies all over. The suicide bomber actually targeted peak hour," he added.

Abdul Mudallabi, a native of Jigawa State who sells sugarcane in Maiduguri, said he narrowly escaped death because he was at the scene.

"I was at the Jagwal (GSM Market) pushing my wheelbarrow, which was loaded with sugarcane, when I heard a thunderous bang that rattled me. Shrapnel hit my hand and lied flat on the ground. I saw many bodies on the ground, some lifeless and some wailing.

"When the dust that enveloped the place cleared, I fled the scene, even though blood was gushing out from the injury I sustained," Abdul Mudallabi said.

Rebecca John, who deals in GSM kits, said the market was filled to capacity when the bomb exploded.

"I escaped unhurt but my boss was hit on the head. We have taken him to hospital," she said, adding that many shops and tents have been destroyed by the blast.

Many residents said they heard the sound of the blast from about four kilometres away.

Salisu Bala Mai Memory, who sells recharge card at the market, described yesterday as the darkest day in his life. "My younger brother was consumed, I only recognised his shoes but his body has scattered," he said.

Alhaji Modu, a businessman, said his shop attendant was also killed. "My boy saw some people coming towards our shops and he went out to woe them to ours. That was when the bomb exploded and killed him," he said.

Another woman, who identified herself as Carole, said she and her two-year-old baby survived the incident but her husband was trapped and killed in their car.

As at the time of filing this report yesterday evening, thick smoke is still billowing around the scene of the incident while all roads leading to the Post Office have been closed.

Markets and roadside shops were hurriedly closed soon after the explosion. The popular Ramat Square, the Monday Market and the Post Office area became empty as people fled for safety.

'Boko Haram to blame'

The military authorities have blamed Boko Haram militants for the attack.

A statement signed by the spokesman of the 7 Division Colonel Mohammed Dole said "at about 1413 hours on Tuesday, 14th January, 2014, a Honda car laden with improvised explosive devices (IEDs) exploded near Post Office area in Maiduguri metropolis.

"Members of the frustrated Boko Haram terrorists are suspected to be behind the bomb explosion. Scores of death and injuries were recorded, 10 vehicles and five tricycles are confirmed damaged and one suspect is arrested. This incidence happened after a long period of relative peace in Maiduguri.

"However, in view of this emerging ugly development, the 7 Division of the Nigerian Army has stepped up measures to forestall further occurrence. While investigation is ongoing, the General Officer Commanding, 7 Division of the Nigerian Army, Major

General Junaid Bindawa, warns that any individual or groups found to be behind these heinous and dastardly acts will be decisively dealt with."

Shettima calls for investigation

In his reaction, Governor Kashim Shettima, who spoke through his spokesman Isa Umar Gusau, described the attack as cruel and inhuman.

"Governor Shettima condemns in strong term today's (yesterday's) bomb explosion in Maiduguri which came at a time when peace is returning and being celebrated by residents," he said.

"Governor Shettima has directed the security to carry out a full scale investigation on the bomb explosion which resulted in the unfortunate youth rampage that led to breakdown of law and order. The governor also condemns uprisings in the last three days in the state capital which he described as unfortunate, even though avoidable."

He added: "The Borno State Government will take firm measures to continually protect lives and property of citizens. As part of such measures, Governor Shettima today (yesterday) met with the National Security Adviser in Abuja during which issues of security of lives and property of Borno citizens (were put on ) the agenda.

"Governor Shettima is already on his way back to Maiduguri. He appeals on all residents to remain calm and law abiding. The governor reminds citizens that peace is a collective responsibility that requires the input of both the government and the governed through the exercise of constitutional and moral obligations, duties and responsibilities."

#### **Youths on rampage**

Shortly after the blast, hundreds of youths in Maiduguri went on rampage, describing yesterday's incidence as politically motivated.

Armed with sticks and cutlasses, the youths reportedly set ablaze the campaign office of former Governor Ali Sheriff around the UTC area.

They also denied fire fighters access to the office until substantial part of it was razed.

Another set of youths who were moving towards the house of the former governor along Barracks Road as well as the home of his father along Damboa Road were dispersed by soldiers and policemen, while roads leading to the houses were blocked for some hours.

During the rampage, buildings and vehicles that have the posters of Sheriff were set ablaze by thugs.

Daily Trust reports that there was disquiet in the Borno State capital since Sunday following Sheriff's visit to Maiduguri, the first in nearly a year.

He is believed to be angling to seek election to the Senate, and also planning to replace Governor Shettima with Mohammed Imam, a former chairman of the defunct All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP).