

THE WORLD NEWS II

Boko Haram kills 124 in one week*As 34 traders, female suicide bombers lose their lives in Borno attacks

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Even with the renewed offensive launched against them by the military leading to the recapture of some territories hitherto under their control, the Boko Haram insurgents have carried out pockets of attacks that have led to the killing of 124 victims in the past one week, Sunday Trust checks have shown.

The latest of such attacks was carried out yesterday by two female suicide bombers who blew themselves up with explosives that also killed two bystanders at Ngamdu village in Kaga local government area of Borno State, according to witnesses and security sources. Yesterday's attacks followed the killing of 34 traders in an earlier attack on a market in Mainok village also in Kaga local government of Borno State. Witnesses said at least 34 people were killed at the market while more than 20 sustained injuries.

"We counted 34 bodies strewn in the market square after the pandemonium subsided. The terrorists were heartless because they did not spare anyone on sight, they shot sporadically into the crowded market," Nahuta Ibrahim, a trader from nearby Jakana village, said, adding: "I escaped by the grace of God but honestly I never thought I would make it. I left all my merchandise in the market."

As at Friday, as many as 86 persons had been killed in various attacks by the insurgents after the military onslaughts that dislodged them from territories they previously occupied. Some analysts had predicted that bomb attacks in Nigerian towns and cities were likely to increase in the run-up to forthcoming elections, despite the military claiming increasing successes against Boko Haram in captured territory.

All of the victims in the attacks were caught up at crowded bus stations in the northeast, wider north and also in the country's central region. The style of attack was mainly the use of either explosives left in bags or suicide bombers, a development that had prompted the government to issue a warning for increased vigilance at "soft targets".

With Boko Haram vowing to disrupt the elections rescheduled for March 28, security experts said there would be renewed fears about the safety of voters, particularly at polling stations.

"I think it's safe to say that as multi-national counter-insurgency operations continue in the northeast, Boko Haram will intensify its urban terror campaign," Ryan Cummings, chief Africa analyst at Red24 risk consultants, was quoted by the AFP as saying.

According to him, Boko Haram will know that it lacks the resources or capacity to engage the Nigerian Army and its allies in conventional warfare, so its retributive attacks will increasingly focus on asymmetric warfare, which is resource-light but nevertheless damaging.

Since the attack on Baga on January 3, where hundreds of civilians, if not more, are believed to have been killed, there has been a concerted fight-back even as Nigerian troops, aided by soldiers from Cameroon, Chad and Niger, have bombarded rebel strongholds in the northeast and claimed to have recaptured territory, including Baga.

Describing the renewed attacks as "desperation" on the part of the insurgents, Abdullahi Bawa Wase, a Nigerian security analyst who tracks the Boko Haram conflict, noted that such attacks had not stopped during the change in tactics to seize territory but were now taking place in tandem with hit-and-run strikes, "to show they still have the capability".

Panic at Ngamdu village

Yesterday's incident, which occurred before noon was said to have caused panic at Ngamdu village along the Maiduguri-Damaturu road where residents reportedly fled and locked themselves up in their houses, leaving the bodies of the suicide bombers and their victims by the highway.

It was gathered that the female suicide bombers, whose identity could not be authenticated stood by the roadside in Ngamdu and flagged down a commercial driver. A resident, Sharu Hassan said the women, who should be in their early twenties looked strange.

Hassan further narrated: "The women wore Hijab (long rope worn by women) and told the driver that they wanted to go to Damaturu. He actually wanted to take them but suddenly changed his mind, probably because they were jittery and inconsistent while talking to him. We were keenly watching the unfolding drama and the driver told them that his last bus stop was the next village (Kukareta) and will go back to Maiduguri.

"Ironically, the women told the driver that if that was the case, they would want to follow him to Maiduguri but he resisted and zoomed off. A few minutes after, the explosive strapped to the waist of one of the ladies exploded, killing her, her accomplice and two bystanders."

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Also a security source in Maiduguri who confirmed the incident said the bombs strapped to the body of the second woman did not explode.

"I strongly feel that even the first bomb went off prematurely and killed its courier, her accomplice and two other people. Our men went to the scene with bomb disposal experts who demobilized the explosives that the other woman was conveying. They actually wanted to go and wreak havoc in Damaturu or kill themselves and any other person (s) in the vehicle they wanted to board," he said.

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