

URBAN WARFARE: suicide attacks kill 54 in borno

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A total of 54 persons were killed yesterday in Maiduguri when suspected Boko Haram members carried out multiple suicide attacks at crowded places in different parts of the city, police said. Over 140 people were also injured in the attacks that started before noon.

Five explosions, mostly suicide bombings, targeted markets and a bus station in the state capital, witnesses and security agents.

Other sources put the number of dead from the incidents at 60, saying some families had taken home the corpses of their loved ones. Property worth millions of naira was also destroyed during the attack that lasted about two hours.

Vigilantes said apart from the suicide bombers who died in the explosions, most of the victims were unsuspecting traders, bystanders and travellers.

The first blast went off around 11.15am at the popular Baga Market, the biggest fish market in North-East, when a woman detonated explosive device she was carrying on her body.

"A woman who strapped herself with bombs alighted from a Keke NAPEP (tricycle) and busiest entrance of the market," said Habibu Usman, a grocery seller near the scene.

"Soon after the Keke NAPEP zoomed off, the woman went close to the unsuspecting people and the bomb went off. May be she detonated it herself or it was remotely controlled from somewhere," he said.

Mohammed Maikifi, a fish monger at the market, said he counted at least 18 dead bodies at the scene of the blast. "Over 30 others were injured. I saw all of them before I fled," he said.

Two other female suicide bombers detonated explosives around 12.05pm and 12.20pm at Monday Market, some four kilometers from the scene of the first incident, according to witnesses.

"The suicide bombers killed many people and destroyed property," said Tahir Mamman, who sells egg at the precinct of the market.

"One went off near Kofa Biyu and the other few meters away. The suicide bombers concealed the explosives beneath their flowing ropes and took many people unawares. You know Monday Market is always busy, especially at weekends.

"I think they deliberately refused to enter the market because the vigilantes are using metal detectors to screen everybody. They, therefore, killed women and dates (Dabino) sellers who carry out their businesses outside the walls of the market," he said.

A fourth suicide attack occurred around 1pm at the terminus of the Borno Express along Damaturu Road in Maiduguri, killing unsuspecting travellers, ticket sellers and hawkers.

The explosion happened while the pandemonium from the earlier bomb attacks was yet to settle down and even as rescue operations were still going on.

Four ambulances, belonging to Borno State government evacuated corpses and injured persons from the scene of the attack.

Few hours after, another suicide bomber struck a military checkpoint in Benisheikh, headquarters of Kaga Local Government Area of Borno State, killing himself and injuring one soldier and two youth vigilantes.

A security source who confirmed the attack said the suicide bomber left Damaturu in Yobe State earlier in the day and that the way he was driving raised suspicion among security officials at various checkpoints along the way.

"He had already passed some checkpoints from Damaturu when it became obvious that he was not a normal person. Our men, therefore, sent a signal to Beneshiekh and when he got there, he was stopped for thorough check and sadly, the

bomb-laden car exploded, killing the man inside, while a soldier and two youths sustained injuries,” the source said. Benesheikh is 75 kilometers west of Maiduguri

Our correspondents report that the explosions rattled residents across Maiduguri, forcing people to cancel various activities, including businesses in markets and marriage ceremonies.

Most streets turned empty, while security operatives were seen moving from one place to another.

Confirming the attacks, the Borno State Commissioner of Police, Mr Clement Adoda, said 54 people had been killed and several others injured.

“We had unfortunate incidences today, but we were able to bring the many challenges under control. So far, 54 people have been killed and several others injured, but normalcy has been restored. We are working closely with other security agencies to ensure the safety of the people,” the commissioner said.

Shettima, PDP condemn attacks

Meanwhile, Governor Kashim Shettima yesterday cut short his campaign rally to Southern Borno mid-way, following reports of the bomb explosions in parts of Maiduguri, the state capital.

The governor condemned the attacks and their perpetrators in strong terms. He also condoled with the families and friends of those that lost their lives and commiserated with those who sustained injuries.

Shettima, who was in Hawul Local Government area, stopped APC chieftains from making campaign speeches and led prayers for repose of the soul of the victims of the bomb blasts, before launching a free feeding programme to ease hardships faced by residents there arising from insurgents attacks.

A statement by his Special Adviser on Communications, Isa Umar Gusau, reads: “Governor Shettima was visibly troubled by the unfortunate bomb blast which came at a time citizens of Borno were already adjusting to normal lives, following successes being recorded by the combined efforts of the military, other security agencies and youth volunteers, called the civilian JTF, involved in ongoing counter insurgency operations in different parts of the state.

“Shettima expressed agony over the latest attacks and others in recent and previous times, describing them as acts of evil that have no justification in Islam. The governor, however, expressed optimism that the security challenges will be brought to an end as his administration remains committed to providing all necessary support to the military, youths volunteers and others security agencies involved in the fight against insurgency. He noted that Allah is already giving victory over insurgents and he was without the iota of doubt that the situation will be brought to sustainable end.”

Shettima promised to be holding an emergency meeting with different stakeholders in markets, motor parks and other public places to take new measures aimed at enhancing security in public places, while he called on residents to patiently support whatever measures that will be taken in collective interest.

On his part, the gubernatorial candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Alhaji Mohammed Imam, who issued a statement through Mr. Inuwa Bwala, the Coordinator and Media Campaign Director of his campaign organization, said they were saddened by the explosion in several parts of Maiduguri.

“We once again condemn the act and empathize with fellow citizens for the losses and pains being inflicted on them. Coming at a time hopes are beginning to rise that the mindless carnage is coming to an end, it is really sad that some sadists are still bent on keeping the fire burning.

“It is rather curious that such explosions occur only when the PDP is planning a visit, as was the case in Biu recently, and Maiduguri. While we have our reservations, to the effect that there may be a deliberate sabotage of Federal Government efforts in ending insurgency in the state, we must condemn all efforts at further prolonging the sufferings of the people.