

Thousands flee homes as B/Haram holds Geidam

From Ibrahim Baba Saleh (Damaturu) & Olatunji Omirin (Maiduguri)

Fighters of the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), who besieged Geidam town in Yobe State on Friday, have remained in the town, consolidating control while thousands of residents flee to nearby Yunusari Local Government and Damaturu, the state capital.

Over 2,000 residents including children and aged trekked long distances to safety.

The insurgents, who have taken position within residential parts of the town, have been engaging the military in the town in a heavy gun battle for more than 48 hours.

Residents told our reporter that the insurgents were boasting to the locals that they will dislodge a military base located in the town. Troops have, however, put a strong residence even as they were being restrained by fear of recording too many collateral damages.

On Saturday, 11 members of a family were killed when an explosive device targeted at the insurgents landed on their homes. The victims were buried yesterday in Damaturu after fleeing parties evacuated their corpses.

The insurgents struck through the eastern part of the town on Friday evening in more than 20 Hilux gun trucks.

Our correspondent gathered that after initial airstrikes by the military, the insurgents beat retreat but they returned hours later and have been wreaking havoc on the town.

The insurgents cut off two major communication networks in the area, belonging to Airtel and MTN as they forced shops opened and carted away food items.

Chairman of the local government, Ali Kolo Geidam, who spoke to our correspondent over the phone confirmed that thousands of his people have fled the town and its environs.

"I don't know who is presently in control because I couldn't access the town for the past two days, but based on the information I received the insurgents overran the military."

"I visited some of the injured victims here in Damaturu Specialist Hospital and I sympathised with their condition," he said.

He said the insurgents have slaughtered two people on Sunday morning including a teacher in Kawuri Primary School, Mallam Baba Tazira in addition to those that were injured with many others displaced.

The chairman refuted military claim that they inflicted heavy casualties on the terrorists adding that they should have liaised with locals to get adequate information.

Hours after the incident, report issued by the Nigerian Army, indicating that it has inflicted heavy casualties on the

terrorists, another group of the attackers were sighted ganging up in Fulatari the eastern part of the town on Sunday, a source told Daily Trust.

A survivor who escaped to a neighbouring village yesterday, Rawana Usman, told our reporter via telephone interview that he had no intention of leaving his house but later changed his mind when he learnt that the assailant slaughtered two Christians working with an NGO from his neighbourhood.

"They were going round houses targeting Christians, NGO workers and those that are educated in the western schools. When I heard of the selective killings, I couldn't resist, I left abruptly."

"I can say that there were soldiers engaging them. They have been doing their best to push out the terrorists, but I can tell you that these boys were moving normal in the town up to the time I left," he said.

Another source, Abba Nura revealed that about 11 people of the same family were killed as a result of an explosive device that struck their homes at Saminaka Area, close to the military camp in Geidam during the encounter.

Nura said nobody can authoritatively tell if it was the military or the insurgents who released the explosive.

"I heard the sound, but I can't tell where it came from, whether it is from the military airstrike or the side of the insurgents because they engaged in a serious gun battle."

"Upon entering their house after the shooting had stopped, we found 11 of them dead as a result of the injuries they sustained with no first aid support."

He said the funeral procession could not be performed in Geidam due to the situation.

"We had to convey their corpses to neighbouring communities of Mozagun and Damaturu the state capital for the burial. We are just confused. The attack is so tragic; only God can save us."

According to him, both aged people and children were trekking long distances to find safety, saying some of the fleeing residents collapsed along the way.

"This is fasting period, but we had no option than to break our fast to this hardship, we can't withstand this hot weather with long distance trek without food and water."

A local who doesn't want to be named in print revealed that the attackers started with sporadic shooting as they burnt down some buildings and vehicles.

"They camped in Fulatari area asking residents to vacate homes."

He disclosed that what makes the attack peculiar this time around was that the insurgents dropped some leaflets all over the town, reassuring residents that they were safe with them and advocating for the



Yobe state Governor Mai Mala Buni (right) with Chief of Defence Staff Gen Leo Iraboh (left) when the governor visited the army chief to discuss the Geidam Boko Haram attacks

establishment of an Islamic state.

The leaflets carrying ISWAP logo in Arabic with Hausa inscription, advertised their doctrines calling on residents to cooperate with them noting that their doors remains open for whoever wants to join them.

Part of the messages contained in the letter were; "The blood of every Muslim, integrity and wealth is forbidden on us, we are not allowed to harm on them until the situation warrant"

"We are fighting unbelievers; Christians and any other person or group going against the teaching of Islam even if they are Muslims."

He said they assembled some youths and preached to them on justice and equality.

Meanwhile the development has continued to spark fears among residents as they urged concerned authorities to come to their aid.

A source who pleaded for anonymity said another group of the attackers were seen thronging from Digeltura/Subbu area of Geidam Local Government.

He added that security forces also fled for their lives amidst insinuation that the insurgents were members of the Chadian rebel group.

While the siege was on, Yobe Governor, Mai Mala Buni was in Abuja from where he issued a statement assuring that efforts were being intensified to curb the incessant attacks.

Buni in a statement signed by his Director-General, Press and Media, Mamman Mohammed assured to work closely and to support the security agencies to find a new approach to safeguarding the lives and property of the citizenry.

The Executive Secretary, Yobe State Emergency Management Agency; Dr Mohammed Goje, said some injured victims of the attack were evacuated to government facilities for treatment

Goje further said relief materials of food and medicals have been delivered to the fleeing residents in their place of hostage as directed by Governor Buni.

SEMA as at yesterday

evacuated three injured victims of gunshot and they are currently receiving and positively responding to treatment at a government health facility.

"Preliminary findings from few host communities visited confirmed an imminent emergency needs for the victims."

"SEMA is working on bringing together humanitarian actors both within government and INGOs partners for an urgent, coherent and principled response to fill gaps in responding to the victim's emergency needs"

Buni meets Chief of Defence Staff

Governor Buni on Sunday met with the Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Leo Irabo and discussed the Boko Haram attack on Geidam, according to an official statement.

The statement said the governor had since Friday been liaising with the security authorities to find a lasting solution to the incessant attacks on Geidam and the border communities.

Governor Buni said there is an urgent need to find a permanent solution to the intrusion of the insurgents into the state.

"The problem we have is the movement of the insurgents from the fringes of Lake Chad into the state."

"We need to check this holistically to proffer a permanent solution to the menace" he said.

He lamented that the people of Geidam had been subjected to several attacks and untold hardships that must be checked.

"As a leader, I have to explore all avenues including meeting the Chief of Defence Staff and the service chiefs to ensure the safety and security of the people of Geidam and the state at large" Governor Buni said.

Military base razed in Mainok

While the control of Geidam remained contentious, Boko Haram members staged another daring attack on a military camp located in Mainok town along Maiduguri/

Damaturu Highway.

Sources said the insurgents ransacked the military base and cart away weapons and other supplies.

It was learnt that the outlawed group stormed Mainok village with no fewer than 15 gun trucks at about 1 pm block the highway while others headed towards Mainok Super Camp in gun duels.

A local vigilante who with knowledge of the attack said they sighted some vehicles, which were burnt at the roadside with empty shells of bullets all over on the scene near Mainok town in Kaga Local Government Area of Borno State.

The source added that they had wanted to intercept some logistic taken to the theatre of war to enhance the military operations but it met swift resistance from combined troops.

"As we speak now, the insurgents have destroyed the Super camp in Mainok, I can't say if there are any soldiers there but I can tell you that we are not safe, the situation is getting worse everyday."

"They came and started shooting sporadically, penetrate the Super Camp and looted arms and ammunition after it was set ablaze. Some soldiers wounded in the attacks but there was no death recorded," he said.

"We are concerned about the troops fighting insurgency, let continue to be praying for them because we don't know where the next target is," the vigilante source said.

The security source told our correspondent that the military base was partially burnt down before Air Components of Theatre Dole arrived and fend off the attack.

"They aimed to hijacked some logistics from the high command being transported to Maiduguri but it was successfully repelled unfortunately they attacked our base in Mainok and it was partially burnt down."

"This won't deter us from what we are doing in the theatre of war, our troops will sustain the current tempo. I can assure you no hiding place for them."