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200 feared dead in Bauchi police, Islamic sect clash

- Two die in Borno bomb mishap
- Govt beefs up security
From Ali Garba (Bauchi), Njadvara Musa (Maiduguri) and Isa Abdulsalami (Jos)

A SHIMMERING standoff between men of the Nigeria Police in Bauchi State and members of an Islamic fundamentalist group, Boko Haram, turned a pall of tragic conflagration yesterday in an early morning raid on a police station allegedly launched by the sect members to seize the ammunition stored there.

No fewer than 200 people, including members of the sect and security operatives, were feared killed with several others badly injured in the crossfire in Bauchi metropolis.

To avoid a spill over to neighbouring Plateau State, security personnel were put on red alert.

The Boko Haram sect is allegedly opposed to western education and values, a stance that had pitted it against the police and the state government since its founding in 2004. The group has a purported link with Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda terrorist group and goes by the sobriquet, The Taliban.

In Maduguri, Borno State, two would-be bombers of some public buildings, including some mosques, were at the weekend killed as they allegedly prepared explosives for their bombing spree.

Hassan Sani Balami and Isa Viga Gwoza were killed in Balami's home when devices suspected to be bombs went off as the duo prepared explosives for their planned public attack. The dead men were alleged members of an Islamic fundamentalist group led by one Mohammed Yusuf in Borno.

The explosion ripped off Balami's house, injuring his wife, Zainab, who is the sole survivor of the blast. However, she has been arrested alongside her four-year-old son over the incident.

The blast occurred barely three hours after the state Police Command paraded nine suspected bomb makers allegedly arrested with explosives.

Meanwhile, Borno State Governor, Ali Sheriff, has charged residents of the state to be security conscious, saying that the safety of all from the criminal activities of a few is a collective responsibility.



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Sheriff spoke yesterday in Government House, Maiduguri, after a security meeting called against the backdrop of the Balamo bomb blast.

However, security has been beefed up in the Maiduguri metropolis and its environs with armed mobile policemen yesterday standing guard at the churches across the state to prevent attacks on them by the Yusuf-led sect, which reportedly enjoys followership in Yobe, Kano, Sokoto and Kebbi states as well as in the Republic of Chad.

In Jos, the Plateau State capital, there was palpable fear by residents that the riot in Bauchi could spill over to Plateau. After church service yesterday, the Police rolled out armed personnel carriers that patrolled the metropolis.

Force Public Relations Officer (FPRO), Emmanuel Ojukwu, confirmed the Bauchi clash.

He said: "A group of fundamentalists this morning (yesterday) attacked a police station in Bauchi State. They were armed with guns, bows and arrows and explosives. There were some casualties but I cannot say how many for now."

Ojukwu said the police arrested more than 100 fighters and that the situation "is now calm."

Bauchi State Police spokesman, Mohammed Barau, said most of the dead were Islamist fighters.

"We have received a total of 42 bodies," Awwal Isa, a nurse at Bauchi Specialist Hospital, Bauchi, told Augene France Presse (AFP) on telephone.

They were victims of "fighting between security personnel and members of the Taliban," he said.

The two sides exchanged gunfire after a failed dawn attack on a police station in Dutsen Tanshin.

"Our men succeeded in repelling the dawn attack by the Taliban," Barau said, adding that it appeared the assailants "wanted to steal weapons from the police station."

"We have launched a manhunt for other members of the group that have fled," Barau added.

Director of Press Affairs to the Bauchi Governor, Mohammed Maigari Khanna and other top government functionaries were seen at the Police Command Headquarters.

They, however, declined to comment on the development, saying the state was studying it and would soon issue an official statement on it.

A source told The Guardian that at about 4.00 a.m., over 100 Boko Haram members invaded an Izala Mosque at Dutsen Tanshin and later headed for the police station in the area, attacking it with sophisticated weapons.

The Boko Haram members reportedly chased away the few policemen on duty and forced themselves into the station destroying everything in sight as they made their way towards the armoury, which they, however, failed to break into.

After a distress call by the sacked policemen to the Command

headquarters, a reinforcement of armed policemen, regular and mobile, was drafted to repeal the attack.

The ensuing crossfire escalated, leading to the sacking of residents in the nearby Federal Low Cost Housing Estate, Yelwa, and Dan-danko suburbs of Bauchi.

The Islamic sect wants the freedom to preach its creeds and seek fresh converts, which the state government opposed on grounds that the Boko Haram opposition to modern lifestyle, especially western education, was unacceptable.

The state also feared that giving the sect free room to operate might engender a sectarian crisis as the group's teachings were allegedly contrary to the teachings of other Islamic movements in Bauchi.

The police are combing Bauchi for the fundamentalists who fled the clash scene and believed to be hiding in surrounding hills.

In a reaction, Police Affairs Minister, Ibrahim Yakubu Lame, said the newly-appointed Inspector-General of Police, Ogbonnaya Onovo, has been ordered to bring the situation under control, ensure peace and security of lives and property nationwide.

Governor Sheriff, however, allayed fears generated by the bomb blast.

He added: "Let me seize this opportunity to further warn all members of the Islamic sect, led by Mohammed Yusuf, to desist from their nefarious and criminal activities that pose threats to lives and property in Borno."

The governor urged Borno residents to go about their legitimate businesses, saying the police and other security agents had obtained information and materials from the arrested suspected bomb makers, which they were working on to make the state safer.

He reiterated his administration's support for the police and other security agencies, stressing that he would provide more logistics for them to curb crime in Borno.

Commander, Borno State Operation Flush II, Col. Ben Ahanotu, said: "The security of lives and property in the state in being threatened by members of Mohammed Yusuf Islamic sect by the massive manufacture and use of bombs against the state government and security agents, including the Izala mosques and government lodges.

"I know Yusuf very well. He is very fanatical about the Islamic sect, which has caused a lot of security threats to people's lives and property."

Ahanotu alleged that some politicians were behind Yusuf and had been supporting his "criminal activities against Borno State and its residents."

On whether Yusuf has been arrested by the police, Sheriff said: "As the chief security officer of the state, I have given the order to the police and other security agents in the state to carry out their constitutional responsibilities of roping in the sect leader with the wrath of law."

When The Guardian visited Balami's house, the roofs and rafters

of his bedroom were ripped off, while the wall of his wife's bedroom had caved in.

Ten armed soldiers kept guard at the scene, which reeked of rotten flesh.

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