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15 feared dead in Kaduna blast

From **Saxone Akhaine** (Kaduna), **Azimazi Momoh Jimoh**, **Lemmy Ughogbe**, **Joke Akanmu** (Abuja) and **Chris Irekamba** (Lagos)

It was tragedy in Kaduna yesterday as more than 15 people lost their lives and several others injured following a bomb blast that hit the heart of the city.

The incident occurred shortly after the elders in the North ended the Peace and Unity Conference intended to find solution to the insecurity posed by the militant

Islamic sect, *Boko Haram* in the country.

In a reaction, the National President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor urged the Police to get to the bottom of the blast. He said that security agencies should assure Nigerians that what happened was not orchestrated by religious bigots.

Meanwhile, the military has, before the Federal High Court, Abuja Division, denied complicity in the July 30, 2009 killing of the leader

Security agencies, CAN disagree on cause Military denies role in *Boko Haram* leader's killing Reps want NIGCOMSAT to focus on defence

of the Islamic sect - *Boko Haram*, Mohammed Yusuf in the ongoing trial of the five police officers over the act.

In a related development, the services of Nigeria Communications Satellite Limited (NIGCOMSAT) is to be deployed against the vari-

ous threats to security in the country as against the increasing patronage being given foreign-based firms.

It was gathered that the casualties from the Kaduna blast were mostly children and women in a residential building, and traders who

were attending to customers in several shops along the busy Ogbomoso Road (Ori Akpata) where the explosion occurred.

Besides, the unfortunate incident which occurred at about 9.17 a.m. yesterday, shook several buildings in

the vicinity. There was prompt response of security personnel, including soldiers, policemen and officials of Red Cross, National Emergency Agency (NEMA), State Emergency Agency (SEMA), State Security Service (SSS), Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) as well as the fire fighters who prevented spreading of the fire to other neighbourhood.

Evacuation of victims, which began at about 10.00 a.m., lasted several hours,

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FG faults U.S., others' comments on Nigeria's anti-gay marriage stand

From **Madu Onuraoh**, Abuja

THE Federal Government has said it is the legitimate right of Nigeria to make laws governing its activities without apologies to other countries.

Reacting to the misgivings of some Western countries led by United Kingdom and United States condemning the passing into law the bill against same-sex marriage by the Senate, Minister of Information, Mr. Labaran Maku said that the nation's Democracy will be guarded by Nigeria's interest and values and not by the comments of others.

Maku told journalists at the end of the Federal Executive Council (FEC) meeting that what everyone must note is that "between Europe, America and Africa, there is a huge culture gap. Some of the things that are considered fundamental rights abroad, also can be very offensive to African culture, tradition and to the way we live our lives here."

He added that Nigeria would "take comments by our foreign partners and friends as

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The scene of the bomb blast in Kaduna... yesterday. (Inset: A victim of the blast.)

PHOTO: SAXONE AKHAINE

N'Assembly extends 2011 budget lifespan, cuts Jonathan's request by N66.5b

From **John-Abba Ogbodo** and **Terhamba Daka**, Abuja

THE National Assembly is still tinkering with the 2011 and 2012 federal fiscal estimates with a drastic cut in President Goodluck Jonathan's virement request and three-month extension of this year's appropriation.

These two steps were taken yesterday by the House of Representatives while the Senate said that the Medium

Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) pending before it would determine the shape of the budget.

The House yesterday approved a virement of N31.9 billion for some Federal Government's Ministries, Departments and Agencies in the 2011 Appropriation Act, against the sum of N98.4 billion requested for approval by President Jonathan, showing a cut of N66.5 bil-

Ties 2012 estimates to expenditure framework

lion in the proposals. Specifically, the President had in a letter dated September 27, 2011 to the Speaker of the House of Representatives explained that, "it is my hope that the virement proposals will go a long way in addressing some of the difficulties being encountered in the implementation of the 2011 budget and give focus to

some of the key priorities of government."

In approving the virement, which means moving allocated funds from one less important project heads, or sub-heads to more critical ones, the House has also approved the extension of the 2011 budget lifespan to March 31, 2012 from December 31, 2011.

Chairman of the House Committee on Appropriation, John Enoh while briefing members on the committee's recommendations said the extension had become necessary to enable the affected MDAs implement the capital projects for which the funds were being moved.

Shedding light on what gave rise to the noted cut, Enoh said the committee's analysis revealed that recurrent expenditure items "were transferred between ministries and agencies, contrary to Clause Four of the 2011 Appropriation Act which reads: "In the event that a need arise to vire amounts within the heads of expenditure to which sums

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Police must get to the root of Kaduna blast, says CAN

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while the entire area was sealed off by security personnel. It took the armed soldiers and police extra effort to control the surging crowd of people that invaded the area to search for their loved ones.

The Commissioner of Police, Mr. Bala Nasarawa who was at the scene of the explosion, said: "It is a sad incident. As at now, we are not suspecting any foul play, you can see that the fire is still burning but if you observe well, it is where they sell batteries and gas, so we are suspecting that it was an explosion from within, not sabotage from outside". Nasarawa who refused to give official figure of casualties, remarked that "as at now, there are casualties but I cannot give you certain numbers until after investigations."

Several people who were

victims of the blast were seen weeping in groups, among the hundreds of sympathizers, gazing at the Red Cross, NEMA and SEMA officials and other security agents pulling out victims from the rubbles.

An eyewitness, Mr. Hycent Nwafor who spoke to journalists, said "my shop is adjacent the place that the explosion took place. I sell spare parts. We just heard a loud bang and all of a sudden, we started seeing fire and smoke everywhere.

"I cannot confirm the number of casualties now, but so many people died. Some of the victims have been evacuated to the hospital," he added.

Malam Abdulwaheed Oyewumi who also spoke on the incident said: "I am a mechanic around this place. From my shop I saw somebody running and burning and people started pouring

water on him. So, we ran to discover that some shops were on flames shortly after we heard a sound of an explosion."

Relating his own account of the incident, Mr. Fabian Ozochukwu, who was a victim of the blast said: "Two boys came on a motor cycle to my neighbour, may be to buy some goods and as I was coming out from my own shop, I heard a loud sound. It sounded a second time too and up to about five times and shops and houses started crashing.

"One of the boys on a motor bike had his body burnt and ran down there. I don't know whether he died or not; I can't tell. There were two people on top of a bike. I was outside and they were carrying something, and that something they were carrying exploded more than five times. There were about four or five generators around there, so immediately the thing exploded, the generators exploded too. They were passing and the thing exploded on the bike."

Also giving his account on the blast, Mr. Emeka Udoji, a trader said: "I came this morning and just about to settle down for business, I heard a loud blast. I sell motor parts. The blast happened at the back of my shop. There are people living at the back of my shop. No one sells batteries or gas cylinders around here. From my experience and what I saw, there was nothing like explosion of gas or battery, it was bomb explosion."

The Co-ordinator of the Security Task Force in Kaduna (Operation Yaki), Col. Dickson Mamman who was at the scene of the blast, said: "We need to be very careful ourselves; we must make sure that we comb our environment personally. Like what has happened now, was from somebody's shop.

"He came in the morning,

opened his shop and this thing happened. I cannot imagine that somebody threw something. The allegation that people came on a bike is still an allegation yet to be confirmed. This thing was inside the shop, the explosion came from the shop. It was an explosion I can confirm."

The Media aide to the Governor of Kaduna State, Mr. Reuben Buhari, in his reaction said: "What we heard is that the shop where the explosion started from contained combustible materials that include batteries, generators and gas cylinders, which further expanded the damage."

Buhari however stressed that "until further investigation reveals other things, the damage was caused by these materials that were contained in the shops."

While calling on the Police to rise above religious, ethnic and other primordial sentiments, Oritsejafor said they should demonstrate their avowed neutrality to the whole world that they are not part of a grand design by a clique who are bent on destabilising the nation on the altar of a particular religion to the disadvantage of the other.

"I have continued to urge the elite in the North to ensure that the regime of uncertainty is put behind us so that the country can forge ahead to harness its huge potentials for the benefit of the generations yet unborn," Oritsejafor said.

According to him, "the problem with this country is that people are often ready to mouth their commitment to peaceful resolution of the multi-faceted problems in the country while their actions outside the glare of klieg lights is at variance with what they say.

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