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17 feared dead in Maiduguri blasts

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Category: National

Hits: 84

- Vehicles, others destroyed
- Army kills two B' Haram leaders, 11 others in Adamawa

ABOUT 17 people were feared dead and property destroyed during twin blasts in Maiduguri, Borno State yesterday.

One of the explosions occurred in a tricycle, carrying four other passengers to the Maiduguri Monday Market.

An eyewitness at a shop said: "We were sitting in this shop when we heard an explosion from a tricycle at 1:30 p.m. today, and people started scampering for safety. Even though I cannot tell you the exact number of people killed or injured, I saw some people lying on the ground, before the soldiers rushed to the scene."

The Guardian learnt that an hour after the blast, five bodies were carried to the hospital in a police patrol vehicle, while four other bodies were deposited at a different hospital for identification by the families of the slain people who were mainly traders at the Jogul electronics market.

Confirming the blasts in Maiduguri yesterday, the spokesman of 7 Division of Nigerian Army, Col. Mohammed Dole, said in a telephone interview that the blasts went off in the afternoon, injuring several innocent people going to the market.

“The blast went off in tricycle, carrying some passengers to the market, sending plumes of smoke into the air for two hours, including the one that went off at the open theatre, 500 metres from the scene of the initial blast. But we are yet to get the total number of casualties, besides some of the destroyed vehicles in the blast,” Dole said.

The Borno State Police Command said that the death toll in the bomb blasts had increased to 17.

The bodies were being counted at the Maiduguri Specialist Hospital and University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital (UMTH) by policemen.

The Police Commissioner, Lawal Tanko, said yesterday that the death toll had increased from nine to 17, two hours after the blasts that destroyed 19 vehicles, including the tricycle from which the bomb was detonated near the Jogul electronic market and High Court.

Tanko said some of the roads and streets, including Maiduguri Monday Market (MMM), had been closed by security agents to prevent further attacks and killing in the metropolis.

Meanwhile, the Army has killed the two Boko Haram commanders heading the bloody operations in Adamawa State and 11 other members of the deadly gang called Mubi during a seven-hour gun battle with the group.

The Commanding Officer, Special Operation Battalion in Mubi, Lt.-Col. Beyidi Marcus Martins, told journalists yesterday in Mubi that the two Boko Haram commanders, Abdul Baki and Abdulrazaq Mubi, operating in the Mubi area were on the wanted list of the military since 2011.

He said that the insurgents numbering over 20 on December 18, 2013 invaded the Mubi International Market and shot at the traders, pointing out that they invaded the bureaux de change in the market and carted away millions of naira and foreign currencies. He said that these were recovered after the army over-powered the attackers in a seven-hour gun battle.

Martins who led the gun battle against the insurgents 20 kilometres away from Mubi Market disclosed that when the soldiers arrived at the scene of the operation, the attackers ran into the bush to escape, but that he and his men continued to pursue and exchange fire until 13 of the insurgents including the two wanted

commanders were killed.

“I was in office on that day when the chairman of bureaux de change called me that gunmen invaded the market but before I could talk to him his phone went off because they were already in his shop.

“My men were already there, but when one wounded soldier was brought to the office I quickly moved with another group of soldiers to lead the assault myself.

“To avoid civilian casualties we pushed them out of the town before we engaged them in a full gun battle, which lasted from 12: 30 p.m. to 7:00 pm.

“We killed 13 of them. When we took their bodies back to Mubi we discovered that the parents of the two wanted commanders are also

residents of Mubi town, so they were using their understanding of the area to carry out their operations”, he maintained.

The army officer disclosed further that eight AK47 rifles, one rocket-propelled grenade, three Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), live ammunition, and other arms were recovered from the insurgents after the battle.

He also pointed out that the insurgents killed four civilians in the market during the operation and several others were wounded.

The army officer who commended the members of the area for their support for always assisting them with useful information concerning the insurgents, insisted that the group must be wiped out of the country for peace and unity.

He also further disclosed that several other members of the group were arrested and handed over to the army headquarters for further investigations.

Thousands of people have been killed in the insurgency affecting parts of Nigeria’s predominantly Muslim northern half. President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency in May to quell it and thousands of security forces were deployed in the area. They swiftly drove militants out of Maiduguri and most other cities but the insurgents have begun striking back in the urban centres.

On December 2, hundreds of Boko Haram fighters in trucks and a stolen armoured personnel carrier attacked an air force base and international airport on the outskirts of Maiduguri in one of the insurgent group’s most daring attacks. Two helicopters and three decommissioned military aircraft were heavily damaged in the attack.

A United States (U.S.) travel advisory issued earlier in January noted: “Late 2013 saw an increase in Boko Haram attacks and clashes with Nigerian government security forces in northern Nigeria. ... Boko Haram is known to descend on whole towns, robbing banks and businesses, attacking police and military installations, and setting fire to private homes.”

The Islamic extremist uprising began in 2009 and threatens the security and cohesion of Africa’s biggest oil producer and its most populous nation, with more than 160 million people. The extremists say they want to impose Islamic Shariah law across all of Nigeria.

In one of the group’s deadliest attacks, a Boko Haram member detonated a car bomb at the United Nations main offices in Nigeria’s capital, Abuja, on August 26, 2011, killing 25 people and wounding more than 100 others. The United States last year designated Boko Haram a terrorist organisation.

A member of the House of Representatives, Alhaji Kaka Kawu Gujbawu, has enjoined members of the Joint Task Force (JTF) to tread with caution as they keep the peace in the Maiduguri Metropolitan Council (MMC).

In a statement, the lawmaker who represents MMC federal constituency expressed dismay that the latest incident that led to the loss of lives and property of his constituents occurred at a period when efforts were being made to ensure the return of lasting peace to the state.



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