

NEWS.

Gunmen kill 57 in Borno, Plateau

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- **Security operatives arrest Jos bomb blast suspect**
- **Chibok council chief says 57 pupils escaped, 164 still in Sambisa forest**

A FRESH wave of violence has defied security measures in Borno and Plateau states, claiming 57 lives.

In Borno, gunmen suspected to be Boko Haram's members used dozens of four-wheel drives, pickup vans, motorcycles and an Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) to attack Gurmushi border village in Marte Local Council.

Forty-two people were killed and several houses destroyed in the attack which occurred around 6 a.m. on Wednesday.

Gurmushi is a farming border community with Cameroun, and 125 kilometres north of Maiduguri, the state capital.

In yesterday's early morning attacks, according to an eyewitness, Fantami Ngubdo, 12 villagers who were attempting to protect their houses and huts from being torched by insurgents with petrol bomb and

Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) were also injured.

"We were shocked and terrified this morning when a gang of armed insurgents, burst into our border village and destroyed our houses, after killing many of our people that had been living in peace for many decades. Some of us had to flee, as the gunmen continued to shoot at any person that challenged them. What baffled us this morning was that the gunmen chanted 'God is great' in Arabic, before forcing many of us to come out from our houses, and set them ablaze. Bodies of villagers scattered in front of torched houses."

Another resident that escaped to Maiduguri told The Guardian on phone that the gunmen came through Dikwa-Marte road before taking the desert tracks that lead to the village to attack Gurmushi.

"The gunmen operated for over three hours, without being confronted by soldiers or any other security operatives. They had a field day, while the villagers were killed like fowls. Others were slain by slitting their throats, after tying their hands to their backs. Twelve of the injured ones had been taken to a clinic near Cameroun for treatment," he said.

The Borno State Police Commissioner, Tanko Lawal, confirmed the incident in Maiduguri yesterday.

Gunmen also used Toyota Hilux vehicles, motorcycles and an APC to attack Amuda and Arbokko border villages. They killed nine people, before torching dozens of houses and shops in the early hours of yesterday. The two border villages are about 128 kilometres southeast of Maiduguri, the state capital.

Eyewitnesses say the gunmen came through the 16-kilometre Kughum-Pulka border road by 2 a.m., stormed the two neighbouring villages, and engaged in sporadic firing of guns at fleeing residents into farmlands and the Mandara Mountains.

Pirda Takweshe, a resident of Amuda, who escaped yesterday to Pulka said: "I cannot imagine how I escaped last night's attacks of

insurgents. It was God that saved my life; otherwise I would have been shot dead in my burnt house. The gunmen are after males that try to challenge their supposed work for God. Two of my neighbours were shot in their backs and legs, while fleeing their houses that

night, while others fell to the ground with sustained injuries.

"I was terrified, shocked and traumatised! I have never experienced such attacks and mayhem done to our village and the one in Arbokko, 10 kilometers away from the attacked border village with Cameroun."

Another eyewitness, from Arbokko told The Guardian that most of the villagers fled to the hilltops for safety, but some of the trapped residents were shot dead, as the villagers attempted to prevent attackers from razing down their houses with petrol bombs and explosives.

On whether there was security before the attack, he said: "No, there were no soldiers or policemen to protect us. Our protection is in the

hands of God. It was early this year, some soldiers came in here with their patrol vehicles; and drove way down to Kughum, a border village with Cameroun that has already been destroyed by insurgents. The people, who are mainly farmers, have relocated to Cameroun, because all their houses and property were destroyed last March with the killing of 12 residents, including children and women."

The Borno State Police Commissioner, Tanko Lawal, also confirmed the two incidents yesterday in Maiduguri, stating that nine people were feared dead in two separate border attacks by suspected armed hoodlums in Gwoza council area of the state.

In a pre-dawn attack yesterday, six people were killed at K-Vom in Jos South local council of Plateau State.

According to an eyewitness, Chuwang Davou, the attack occurred by 1 a.m. when people were deeply asleep. Davou said the gunmen sneaked into one compound with sophisticated weapons, killed people and left.

He added that men of the Special Task Force (STF) were contacted but the attackers had retreated before the soldiers could come.

The Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) of the Plateau State Command, SP Felicia Anslem, who confirmed the incident, said only four people were killed, adding that the area had been cordoned off by the security agencies while investigation into the matter was ongoing.

Yesterday too, it was disclosed that a suspect in the twin bomb blast which claimed lives of about 118 persons in Jos had been arrested by security operatives.

The Director of Defence Information, Major General Chris Olukolade disclosed the arrest in Abuja at the National Information Centre while addressing the media on the latest developments in the anti-terror campaign.

Besides, the leader of the Northern Civil Society Coalition, Mallam Shehu Sani, has said that the meeting between former President Olusegun Obasanjo and some family members of Boko Haram insurgents in Abeokuta was aimed at opening a new channel of dialogue with the leaders of the militant Islamic group, and securing the release of the abducted Chibok girls.

Sani pointed out that he was part of the meeting which was meant to fashion out a fresh understanding to stop the insurgency.

According to the civil rights activist in a statement yesterday, "this is to confirm that the meeting actually took place and I was part of it. The meeting was solely aimed at exploring the possibility of opening a new channel for dialogue or negotiation with the sect members towards securing the release of the abducted Chibok girls held in captivity for over a month".

Meanwhile, Chibok Local Government Chairman, Bana Lawal, has revealed that 57 of the 221 abducted girls have so far escaped from Boko Haram's captivity, leaving a total of 164 girls still missing.

The chairman, who spoke through a representative, Mr. Musa Okolo, at a stakeholders validation meeting of draft Humanitarian Response Plan for Chibok, Borno State, yesterday in Abuja disclosed that the location of the girls was no news as vigilantes had earlier told the public that they saw the girls but could not free them owing to the sophistication of their abductors' weapons.

His words: "There is no secret about the location of the girls. Everybody knows that the girls are in Sambisa

forest and a lot of people have spotted them. It is not news but the security fear is how to rescue them alive without any collateral damage and who is going to take responsible for bringing my daughter in case of anything.”

He maintained that the military was right by saying that the girls could not be rescued by force because of collateral damage.

“What I know in my personal capacity is that there are lots of mines all over, so it is not advisable for Nigerian troops to just move in like that.

“The vigilantes of Chibok saw the abducted girls at the Sambisa forest but they couldn’t move close to them. These are people that are ready to die for the cause they believe they are fighting for.

“We believe the girls are still alive and the community is very hopeful that they would be brought back alive and well.”

According to the council boss, Sambisa forest is not as large as the public has been made to believe.