

NEWS.

22 die in Abuja, Mubi blasts, suspect arrested

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- **B'Haram worse than civil war, says Jonathan**
- **Death toll in Kaduna attack hits 100**
- **Three killed in Lagos fuel depot explosion**

It was another black day in Abuja, the nation's capital, as one of the busiest shopping malls in the city, Emab Plaza, was hit Wednesday by a huge blast. It claimed 21 lives, injured many and destroyed about 11 cars.

In Mubi, the commercial centre of Adamawa State, a bomb also exploded yesterday, killing one person and injuring others.

Amid these tragic developments, President Goodluck Jonathan re-iterated his description of the insurgency of the Boko Haram in the Northeastern part of the country as worse than the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970.

Yesterday, three persons were feared killed in an explosion at a fuel depot (also called tank farm) on Creek Road, Apapa, Lagos. It is yet to be officially confirmed if the blast occurred from a bomb attack but a witness at the scene said emphatically: "It is a bomb. The police anti-bomb squad is on its way here. It is bomb blast."

Besides, fresh indications emerged yesterday that the casualty figure in Tuesday's attack of villages in Sanga council of Kaduna State by gunmen has risen from 38 to about 100, just as the state government has imposed a 24-hour curfew on the area.

Meanwhile, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has moved to boost expertise in the treatment of bomb victims by organising a seminar for surgeons.

The ICRC has also dismissed the fear that it may move out of the country owing to the prevailing bombings in the Northern part of the country.

An eyewitness said the Abuja explosion occurred as Muslim worshippers were about to say the Asr (quarter-to-four) prayer in the mosque. Some worshippers were said to be affected. The Guardian confirmed that about 11 cars and some shops close to the gate were affected but the cars parked inside the plaza were intact. A deep hole was created at the spot of the bombing.

Sources told The Guardian that the loud explosion which occurred close to the entrance of gate was apparently triggered in a car laden with explosives being driven into the mall. The bombing triggered fires. Many cars were set ablaze. Emergency workers were quick to mobilise to the scene, with personnel of the Federal Fire Service fighting fire on the burning cars. Emergency officials also evacuated the dead and the injured to the nearby Maitama District General Hospital in their ambulances.

At the Maitama Hospital, officials confirmed that about 30 casualties were received with three of the bodies "completely dismembered." Officials were referring new victims brought there to the National Hospital. Both the Maitama General Hospital and the National Hospital were flooded with victims and sympathisers who clustered in groups discussing and watching. Security personnel were heard asking them to disperse in order not to create a security problem.

Briefing journalists at the scene of the incident at No 14 Aminu Kano crescent in Wuse II area of Abuja, the Police Public Relations Officer (FPRO) Frank Mba, an Assistant Commissioner of Police, said the blast which occurred at 3.30 p.m. claimed the lives of people who were mostly shoppers, hawkers and passersby.

He said although two suspects were arrested in connection with the bombing, one of them died on the way to the hospital, while the other was in the police custody undergoing interrogation.

He said: "The building is currently cordoned off for an investigation to go on. The police bomb disposal squad in conjunction with other security agencies are working to secure the critical infrastructure, the shops, property, building and all the goods that are here and we are assuring the traders and members of

the public that we would put adequate security measures in place so that there is no pilfering or looting."

An eyewitness said the casualty figure far surpassed the one given by the police. She said that if the emergency services had come to the scene on time, some of the dead victims would have been rushed to the hospital and many cars would not have burnt.

A source told The Guardian that the Mubi blast occurred at noon along Ahmadu Bello Way near a market.

A trader in the market who identified himself as Mallam Abubakar Shehu said that police immediately cordoned off the site of the incident, preventing members of the public from gaining access to the area for the fear of another bomb blast.

"I saw only one dead body being carried by the police, but the place was full of security men. So I cannot exactly say how many people died", he stated.

However, the Police Public Relations Officer Usman Abubakar, a Deputy Superintendent, while confirming the blast, said there were no casualties.

"They missed their target. It was a local explosive", he said.

Receiving a delegation of bishops of the African Church, led by Prelate Emmanuel Udofia at the Presidential Villa, Jonathan said that while the civil war had the government pitted against a known rebel army demarcated by boundary, the Boko Haram was like an enemy within - right in our "sokoto pockets"

He urged the clerics to continue with their prayers for the country which had kept Nigeria from being decimated by the terrorists, assuring the delegation that despite the challenges, the nation would overcome the menace of Boko Haram because "light will surely subdue darkness."

He lamented that moral and religious education was being neglected in the nation's educational system. He promised that his administration would continue to improve the welfare of Nigerians as part of efforts towards tackling the spread of insurgency.

The Kaduna State Chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) has condemned the killings, calling on residents of the state to respect the sanctity of lives, while stressing that about 100 persons were killed in Sanga council.

The State's CAN chairman, Mr. Sunday Ibrahim, at a press conference in Kaduna yesterday said: "It is with heavy heart that I address you today. Reports reaching us from our Sanga branch reveals that terrible things have happened to our members there. We are told that over 100 people have been killed from Tuesday afternoon into the night.

"This is very sad. Residents of Kaduna State must learn to respect the sanctity of human lives. No religion preaches murder of any person. The villages that were attacked were Dogon Daji, kobin, Naidu, Kabamu-Karshi, Hayin Kwanta, Kabani and Gani.

"I call on the state government and security agencies to intensify security in our vulnerable communities, and I want to urge our people to stay calm and not take the law into their hands, for that will not be the way of Christians."

The Councillor representing Gwantu ward, Mr. Shehu Ajetu, spoke to reporters on the killings, saying: "At the moment, we cannot give a definite number of people that have been killed because in some of the villages that were attacked, it is difficult to bring out corpses from the villages to Gwantu. Some were killed as they were running into the bush."

However, the State Commissioner of Police, Shehu Umar said that "I can confirm the death of 18 persons and several others wounded, we have also arrested three persons in connection to the crisis, they were arrested with three AK47 and about 158 rounds of ammunition."

At the opening of the fourth seminar on surgical skills for casualties of armed violence in Abuja yesterday , the ICRC Head of Delegation in Nigeria, Zoran Jovanovic, said what was happening in Nigeria was also happening in many parts of the world and that ICRC would not leave Nigeria on account of insurgency.

He added: "Nigeria is not an exception because this kind of conflict is happening in many parts of the world. The ICRC continues to state categorically that even within the Nigerian situation, our mandate is to ensure that civilian population is protected and people who have stopped to participate as a result of injury must also be protected. Yes we have to take some precautions to ensure the safety of our teams but we cannot complain at all. People who have to complain are the people who are trapped in the North East and people who live in Borno and the surroundings who no longer have access to basic healthcare anymore as a result of the bombings. We need to realise that schools have been closed and farmers can no longer go to their farms."



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