

NEWS.

Hope rises as military flushes out insurgents from 'captured' towns

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HENCEFORTH, terrorists may not find it easy to perpetrate their callous acts in the country as an apparently better equipped Nigerian military has revved up its battle against the extremist Boko Haram sect, displacing the insurgents from key Adamawa and Borno towns they overran and seized in the past months.

Meanwhile, the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) has urged President Goodluck Jonathan to address the nation on whether Nigeria is in a state of war in the midst of the escalating terrorist activities in the North which have

left hundreds of victims dead and many others seriously injured.

A report by an online newspaper, PREMIUM TIMES, quoted one of its journalists travelling in the Boko Haram controlled areas as observing that in what appears a renewed bid to overwhelm the terrorists, the military, assisted by local vigilantes, known as Civilian-JTF, has cleared most of the towns ravaged by insurgents' activities.

The Nigerian military has drawn stinging criticism over its handling of the war against Boko Haram, an extremist militia that started in 2009 by killing or abducting security agents and civilians, while also attacking schools, markets and places of worship.

The group began seizing territories in parts of Borno and Adamawa states in 2014, a year that has seen Boko Haram's most horrendous assaults. More than 3,000 people are believed to have been killed by the sect this year alone.



As town after town fell to Boko Haram, which busied itself shooting, bombing and raiding communities, and slitting the throats of defenceless residents, Nigerian troops came under severe local and international ridicule for failing to neutralise often predictable attacks by the militants.

In recent months, soldiers have openly abandoned their posts as Boko Haram fighters arrived, fleeing militants they admitted were better armed and motivated, and surrendering even additional weapons to them. An American official said in June that the situation became so terrible that Nigerian troops feared to engage the terrorists.

But things now appear to be looking up for the military. "Our correspondent says, as he travels around towns seized by Boko Haram, but which have now been liberated by the military, the military appears to be better equipped and motivated, and appears to have upped its war games."

The online journalist, Aliyu Tilde, noted to be usually critical of the military's response to Boko Haram, said in despatches to the Premium Times that the road to Hong still deserted after Boko Haram insurgents were dislodged by the military.

Tilde said: "Gaskiya (truth be said) Nigerian military is doing a very very fine job here. They have cleared Gombi, Hong, Mararraba, Mubi and the entire route of Boko Haram.

"They are now at Uba slugging it out. Vehicles aren't allowed beyond Gombi. People trek to Hong. The road is quiet. Clearing of hazardous materials like IEDs is going on along Mararraba-Mubi Road before the road is

open to users.

"Gombi-Garkida road is also cleared. It is safe. I saw many vehicles plying the road. Clearing of Garkida-Biu road may start soon."

According to Tilde, "the military is now better equipped and more confident. Its newly acquired T72 tank is devastating. Boko Haram bombed it using suicide bombers with a pickup packed with explosives but to no avail. Only scratches. And the beast moved on. "Communities are still riddled with bullets and IEDs. The military is doing a lot of cleaning up. If the military is able to keep the tempo, many more places will be liberated."

It was learnt that on Tuesday, the reporter continued his journey, talking to residents of liberated towns, soldiers, and vigilantes.

In a dispatch on Tuesday night, Tilde wrote: "Gombi is quiet, half-empty, on curfew today, in the full control of Nigerian armed, police, custom, immigration forces. A camp of vigilantes can also be seen just before the junction to Mubi.

"I trekked from Muchalla to Gombi, saw burnt cars, motorcycles and buses of Boko Haram when their advance was checked by the military 10 days ago.

"Their last advance was stopped at Muchalla. So many bullet shells, small and big, on the road plus signs of shelling of trees, houses and others. Night curfew started just now at 6pm.

"Many residents have returned, although the road from Girei to this point has been nearly empty.

"Lassa and Dile exhibited the best use of self-defence doctrine. Unlike other towns that fled on hearing the sound of Boko Haram gunfire, the youths stood their ground and slugged it out with the Boko Haram chaps. Within 30 minutes, they cleared them although a few were able to escape.

"Boko Haram is becoming demystified gradually, it seems. There seems to be some change in the composition of the soldiers here. Most of them are 30 and above, truly professionals. The incident of begging for tips from motorists has also reduced drastically. We just hope they have made adequate safety arrangements for keeping the liberated towns safe."

Some officials and members of the NLC, led by the Vice President, Comrade Issa Aremu who addressed journalists at a press conference in Kaduna yesterday, condemned the manner the Federal Government, former Presidents and Heads of State, particularly those from the north, were handling the crisis facing the nation, stressing, that this is the time Jonathan must demand for accountability from his service chiefs and other security heads on why the anti-Boko Haram insurgency war has not been won.

Aremu said: "We join other well meaning Nigerians and the international community to express our grief and solidarity with the people and government of Kano State on the unfortunate and cowardly bomb blast on Friday November 28, 2014 at Kano Central Mosque which reportedly left scores of worshippers dead and many others injured".

He also condemned the attack in Yobe and Borno States by the insurgents, saying that it was time to call President Jonathan to account as commander-in-chief for the security challenges facing Nigerians and as well threatening their lives on daily basis.

He argued: "When we add serial bombings in parts of Maiduguri and now, Yobe, these are attacks getting too many for a country that has not been officially said to be at war. More frightening is the fact that the casualties include Nigerian soldiers and police meant to protect us. Citizens must be assured in concrete and

practical terms that workplaces, schools, markets and worship places are safe.

"The current state of insecurity, if not curtailed, will further worsen existing low productivity, ground work places and underdeveloped the nation. Its time President Goodluck Jonathan addressed the citizens on the state of the nation".

Also yesterday, authorities of the Sani Abacha Specialists Hospital (SASH), military and police sources in Damaturu, Yobe State said that the death toll in Mondays' multiple attacks on the state capital by Boko Haram has hit over 200, comprising security personnel, civilians and terror suspects that attempted taking over the Government House.

It was learnt that more bodies of those killed were being evacuated from streets of Damaturu and nearby bushes by rescue team of the Yobe State Environmental Protection Agency (YOSEPA) for "identifications and burial."

"All retrieved and evacuated bodies that could not be identified as at Wednesday noon are to be buried by the environmental agency at an undisclosed location in the state," said one of the supervisors of agency.

A military source said that six soldiers were killed at the various battle fronts of last Monday's Boko Haram attacks. In a breakdown of death toll yesterday in Damaturu, a mortuary attendant disclosed that "the over 200 corpses we had in the last three days, include over 150 militants, six soldiers, and 33 policemen", adding that more bodies were being retrieved from streets and nearby bushes.

The Yobe State police spokesman, Nansel Chagwang, was also said to have been killed in the attack.

The police source said many civilians were killed in the attack, adding: "Collation of the casualty figure is still on. Some militants and civilians died in the bush while fleeing. Our spokesman, Nansel Chagwang, was among the officers and men killed."

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) also yesterday declared December 7, 2014 as day of special prayers for victims of insurgency and special offering for the victims.

The National General Secretary of CAN, Dr. Musa Asake, who disclosed this in a statement in Abuja said it is imperative in times like this for all brothers in faith, to reflect on the individual and collective lives of Nigerians vis-a -vis the challenges that we have all faced in the course of the year.

It will be recalled that at different fora and on different occasions, CAN has urged Nigerians of different faith to pray for peace and the end to the insecurity plaguing the nation.

Asake observed that CAN has undoubtedly remained the strong voice against the evil of Boko Haram and other vices in the society, condemning their acts and suggesting ways of countering them, to the appropriate authorities.

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