

NEWS.

Military kills 115 B' Haram suspects in Borno State

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- **Recovers arms, vehicles**
- **Insurgents targeting the elderly**

THE tide in the fight against insurgency in the north-eastern part of the country seems to have turned in favour of security agencies as the military at the weekend, claimed successes in its operations against Boko Haram militants.

The successes came just as the Director General, State Services (DGSS), Mr. Ita Ekpenyong said security agents remain firm in their resolve to protect the unity and stability of Nigeria as a country and that divisive elements in the polity will not be given a chance to perpetrate their scheme.

A source, whose claim could not be immediately confirmed, said over 115 of the militants were killed by troops of the 7th Division of Nigerian Army in Borno when the Islamists attempted to attack Damboa Central Mosque disguised as herdsmen.

Damboa is a council headquarters, and 87 kilometres south of Maiduguri, the state capital.

A Damboa resident, Yusuf Ibrahim told The Guardian in a telephone interview on Saturday in Maiduguri: "The attack was foiled when soldiers were alerted of an advancing herd of cattle with over a hundreds of herdsmen towards the mosque around 1:30 p.m.

"When we sighted the advancing cattle and so many herdsmen, we became very suspicious because these insurgents change their tactics to attack soldiers and innocent people living on Maiduguri-Damboa road. We alerted the soldiers immediately and ambushed the militants, killing 115 of them."

He said the Friday prayers had to be suspended, because of the attempted attack on Damboa.

Confirming Friday's attempted attack, a military source in Maiduguri yesterday told The Guardian that that was not the first time the insurgents had masqueraded as herdsmen to attack and kill.



The source said that the insurgents had last July employed herds of cattle to kill one of the soldiers patrolling Maiduguri-Biu road.

In the same vein, Director of Defence Information, Maj-Gen. Chris Olukolade in the Defence Headquarters blog on Sunday said 75 insurgents were killed when they were intercepted by soldiers who foiled their planned attack on Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) engineers who were working in Komala village to repair the 132 KVA power line destroyed last Wednesday."

The statement reads in part: "A large number of the terrorists died in the process while their IED laden Hilux vehicle was destroyed. The troops also captured a Hilux vehicle earlier stolen by the terrorists from the Borno State Ministry of Education which they have repainted and mounted with an Ant-Aircraft Gun. Other weapons recovered by troops include Rocket Propelled Grenades and rifles. Two soldiers died in the encounter.

"In a similar development, military engineer troops who have been clearing terrorists' Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and effecting repairs on bridges, repelled an attack while working on a bridge around Husara.

Several terrorists also died in the encounter.

A total of four General Purpose Machine guns, three rifles and two Rocket Propelled Grenade launchers were captured from the terrorists during the encounter.

The downside was one soldier, however, died while three others were wounded in the encounter.

"In Adamawa State, troops are conducting land patrol of towns including Mubi, Uba, Garkida, Muva and others as the advance by coordinated air and land operations continues in areas where the counter terrorists campaign is ongoing to clear the terrorists operating anywhere in the state."

In the same blog, Olukolade said: "An ongoing mopping operation will determine the number of terrorists who died in the encounter with troops on patrol between Maiduguri and Damboa on Friday."

Ekpenyong who spoke at the graduation of the Executive Intelligence Management Course (EIMC) 7 at the Institute of Security Studies Abuja at the weekend observed that the services' "intelligence collection efforts have made threat indicators more explicit and are also geared towards ensuring the success of government policies and programmes."

He said the response of the security service to threats on national unity have being "comprehensive" such that has placed Nigeria on the path of sustainable growth and development which no machination by uninformed terror elements, or unscrupulous politicians with divisive tendencies, and other criminals elements, shall succeed against the collective will of the people to remain united.

"Accordingly, we owe it a duty to protect, and ensure the indivisibility of the nation. This, we must uphold in the face of enormous security challenges which obviously are surmountable."

Stating that the battle against terrorism has become a global phenomenon that Nigeria must tackle her own share of the trend, and the Officers were adequately equipped in the course of the training to brace up "to manage and contain these challenges."

Ekpenyong said with the 2015 general election already by the corner, the 48 participants, drawn from 18 agencies of government have being imparted "with requisite knowledge, exposure and expertise to ensure a safe and stable environment in which the political processes can find a full expression."

He said the Institute of Security Studies was founded on the premise that it would enhance synergy between security and first responder agencies of government and develop "broad outlook and capacity of participants to handle the ever complex nature of known and emerging security challenges, and boost their abilities to manage human and materials resource efficiently and effectively."

But while troops were recording successes in Damboa , Borno State, the insurgents yesterday evening attacked Geidam, in neighbouring Yobe State barely 48 hours after they had struck at Damagun also in Yobe.

Eyewitnesses told The Guardian that the insurgents, in a convoy of Toyota Hillux vehicles laden with explosives attacked Geidam, a border town , killing an unspecified number of civilians and security personnel at military posts about 5:00 p.m. yesterday. An eyewitness, a resident of the town, Grema Modu said, the gunmen burst into the town, chanting 'God is great!' in Arabic before opening fire at military posts and passers-by.

"I was standing along Market Road when the Boko Haram insurgents started shooting.

"They were shouting that people should run into their houses as they were after soldiers."

He said as people ran, the militants proceeded to set fire to the local police station, and military posts near the market and polytechnic.

On casualties, Modu said he could not be specific but said: "As I speak to you a fighter jet is hovering over the town and the routes leading to the military outposts."

There have also been on-line reports lately that Boko Haram militants are turning their guns on elderly people, in a new tactic that has instilled more fear in areas under their control.

Residents in some five villages say people too elderly to flee Gwoza are being rounded up and taken to two schools where the militants open fire on them.

The villages are about 130 kilometers southeast of Maiduguri, the Borno State capital.

"What they are doing now is to assemble the aged people — both men and women ... and then they just open fire on some of them," said Muhammed Gava, a spokesman for civil defence groups in the area. More than 50 people had been killed at Government Day Secondary School in Gwoza, he said.

A villager who had fled said more elderly people are being gathered and shot at Uvaghe Central Primary School. The villager spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of endangering his trapped parents.

Government officials did not immediately comment on the reports.

Nigeria's military said soldiers are patrolling "in search of terrorists" and "to verify abductions" on Friday around the village of Gumburi, where witnesses say extremists kidnapped at least 185 people a week ago.

According to the reports, a new video from Boko Haram shows gunmen mowing down civilians lying face down in a dorm, and a leader saying they are being killed because they are "infidels" or non-believers.

There are so many corpses the gunmen have difficulty stepping to reach bodies still twitching with life. Most appear to be adult men.

"We have made sure the floor of this hall is turned red with blood, and this is how it is going to be in all future attacks and arrests of infidels," the group leader says in a message.

"From now, killing, slaughtering, destructions and bombing will be our religious duty anywhere we invade."

The video released to journalists late Saturday comes two days after fleeing villagers reported that the extremists are rounding up elderly people and killing them in two schools in Gwoza, in northeast Nigeria.

The setting of the latest video appears to be a school, a long dormitory furnished with bunk beds which the leader says is in Bama, a town 60 kilometers (40 miles) north of Gwoza.

Previously, the militants had told residents of villages and towns that they would kill only enemies and wanted people to live peacefully in the area they have dubbed an Islamic caliphate, a large swath along Nigeria's northeastern border with Cameroun that they have controlled for more than three months.