

NEWS.

Scores feared killed by insurgents in Yobe, Borno

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VIOLENCE is yet to abate in Yobe State as suspected of Boko Haram terrorists on Wednesday in convoy of Toyota Hilux vehicles and motorcycles attacked Katarko village in Gujba Local Council, killing 25 people. The insurgents also abducted women and children.

News about the development came Thursday as the Federal Government said it was intensifying efforts to recapture Baga from the control of Boko Haram insurgents.

According to a resident that fled to Damaturu yesterday, the terrorists torched several houses and shops before fleeing into the Gujba Forest, north of the attacked village. Katarko is a farming community on the Damaturu-Biu road, and 21 kilometres south of Damaturu, the state capital.

"The insurgents, in a convoy of armed vehicles, burst into our village on a reprisal attacks, after a team of local hunters killed dozens of terrorists and recovered two Toyota Hilux vehicles, arms and ammunition used in attacking neighbouring villages and towns in Gujba and Gulani council areas of Yobe," the fleeing resident said in atelephone interview yesterday.

Goni Isa, a prominent politician from the village, also said that over 25 people were killed, adding that some women and children were also abducted by the armed militants at Wednesday night.

"My wife and six children are among several women and female adults abducted by the insurgents. They mercilessly butchered our people and killed many with guns. The military men around tried to repel them but they were over-powered by the militants," Isa said.

He said that hunters attacked Boko Haram stronghold in Gujba town where they ambushed their leader



(Amir) and killed some of the militants, which led to Wednesday's reprisal attack on Katarko village.

Ya Fati Umar, a female resident who also escaped to Damaturu, said that the insurgents tied the hands of victims to their backs, before they were killed by slitting their throats. "Two of my nephews were slaughtered in my presence. I cannot tell you how I escaped their onslaught," said Fati.

It was also gathered that the Boko Haram terrorists have killed more residents of Baga town as they were fleeing the border fishing and farming settlement, after the insurgents torched several houses and shops and took over a military base of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF) last Saturday.

Speaking yesterday in a telephone interview in Maiduguri over the killings, the District Head of Baga, Alhaji Baba Abba Hassan, however, denied media reports that over 2,000 Baga residents were killed while fleeing to Chad and Maiduguri, the Borno State capital.

His words: "There was no fresh attack on Baga, as reported in the media yesterday. What happened was that as the people continue to flee for safety, the insurgents pursue them, until some of them were shot dead, while others got drowned into the Lake waters last night. There was no new attack on Baga on Wednesday, this is what I know."

On the capture and control of Baga, he said: "The terrorists did not move an inch since the first day of the attack on Saturday. But I cannot tell you the actual number of people killed because many were pursued to the bushes and killed.

"The terrorists have also destroyed hundreds of houses in Baga because they were well prepared, they came with dozens of vehicles and first attacked the Multi National Joint Task Force location. There was resistance initially, but later, the insurgents had an upper hand. They remained in Baga since the first day of the attack. "Hundreds of our people are now taking refuge in Maiduguri. The Borno State government has sent many buses to the bushes to rescue the fleeing displaced persons."

The Coordinator, National Information Centre, Mr. Mike Omeri, who disclosed the Federal Government's move to recapture Baga at a routine briefing on the security situation of the country, stated that situation has improved since the last attack on the town.

His words: "While confirming the presence of Boko Haram in some location in Yobe, Adamawa and Borno states, the centre wishes to inform that situation in Baga has improved since the last attack on the town. Security forces are working to ensure the full liberation of the strategic town and other places close to it.

"Government is constantly reviewing the situation with regard to the fight against insurgency in order to improve logistic requirement and support for the security forces to enable the defeat of insurgents. Officers are being trained and re-trained to upgrade their skills and capacity, while increased surveillance, intelligent sharing and synergy are being enhanced.

"We therefore, want to assure citizens in all the troubled areas in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa that government is working steadfastly to stabilise these areas. Top in our concern is that this be achieved with minimal, if any, loss of precious lives of our citizens."

Omeri maintained that consultations with the security chiefs (serving and retired), traditional rulers and other critical stakeholders with a view to bringing their varied experiences to bear on the fight against the insurgency are on-ongoing.

"We want to encourage well meaning leaders to emulate friendly countries who have thrown their weight behind Nigeria in this fight. The path of patriotism and honour is not to wait until we get into government before we can contribute to save the precious lives of our citizens."

Speaking further, the NIC Coordinator also urged influential Nigerians to apply patriotic wisdom and courage to speak the truth when addressing national issues in order to reduce perceived tension and generate goodwill and hope among Nigerian citizens.

"We believe that the unity of purpose so far exhibited by Nigerians in the fight against insurgency must be sustained by all, irrespective of political persuasions, religious beliefs and ideological position."

Meanwhile, the Primate of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), The Most Revd. Nicholas Okoh has urged Nigerians to come together and relentlessly engage in efforts that would put an end to Boko Haram insurgency in the Northern part of the country.

Okoh gave the advice yesterday while addressing bishops and archbishops in Anglican Church during their annual retreat with the theme: "The 21st God's Ambassadors in the Anglican Church" going on at the Ibru Centre, Agbarha-Otor, Delta State.

The cleric who lamented the Boko Haram insurgency that has turned the affected areas into war zone, with killing and maiming and scattering of families, warned that if there is no co-operation to end the menace of the sect, the danger of the terrorists overrunning the country should not be undermined.

Okoh also said it has become necessary for other Nigerians to assist the victims of insurgency with cash and kind, urging Nigerians to note that if they fail to act swiftly, similar situation may be closed to their door steps.

In the same vein, the Archbishop of the Ecclesiastical Province of Bendel, the Dean, Church of Nigeria and Bishop of Esan Diocese, Most Rev. Friday Imaekhai, remarked that the situation in the country today had long been determined. He likened it to a seed that was long planted, the fruits of which we are now reaping.

"Things are not just happening and it is most unfortunate that they are happening during the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan. Although people tend to claim that what is going on in the North is not a religious war, everything happening points to that direction, where churches are burnt, people are forced to renounce their faith, Christians are recklessly killed with their families scattered and Islam is being forced on the people as the mode of worship.

"When we look at the history of the nation, we would see all the efforts of some of the past leaders from the military to civilian trying to Islamise the country and the fact that Nigeria has been sold to the Muslim world."

Imaekhai continued: "Boko Haram says it hates everything 'Western' and at a time, the sect called on President Jonathan to be a Muslim.

We were dragged into Organization of Islamic countries (OIC) and by implication, Nigeria is a Muslim country which means that whatever is happening on other Muslim countries should be repeated here, and if we would not deceive ourselves, we can see the handwriting on the wall.

"We pray that the nation comes out of the coming election successfully and as a Church, it is our prayer that God would lead us through this difficult time and give us credible leaders that will make for stability of the country and also make the rule of law to operate where people have freedom of worship and serve their God in their own way."

The Bishop of Gombe Diocese, Rt. Rev. Henry Ndukuba, described what has been going on in the North as economic, physical, social and spiritual battle that may not end soon and after it has ended, things may not be the same in the affected areas in the next ten years as it is easy to destroy, but difficult to build.

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