
Army yet to access \$1b equipment fund, says Buratai

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Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General Tukur Buratai / AFP PHOTO / PIUS UTOMI EKPEI

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The Nigerian Army is yet to access the \$1 billion approved by the Federal Government for procurement of arms to fight the raging Boko Haram insurgency in the North East, the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Lt.-Gen. Tukur Yusuf Buratai, disclosed yesterday.

He told newsmen in Maiduguri that “you know the process of funding is another major issue. The bureaucracy and so on is (are) another issue. Approvals are given but before you really get the money out is another challenge.

“So, the people are talking or the media have been talking of \$1 billion that has been approved but I tell you up till today, the fund that is supposed to come from that amount to the army in particular, is still in the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN).

The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) further quoted the COAS as saying: “The Ministry of Defence is yet to access the fund. When the ministry gets the fund, they will get the right equipment for us as proposed.”

The presidency was, however, silent of the issue when contacted.

Specifically, President Muhammadu Buhari approved the money in April this year.

Army spokesman, Brig.-Gen. Sani Usman, had also confirmed the non-release on a live programme.

But the presidency was not forthcoming when The Guardian sought to know what the authorities were doing to fast-track the release of the money in view of the prevailing insecurity in the country.

In a terse response via an email, the Special Adviser on Media and Publicity to the President, Femi Adesina, simply said: “Your question has already been answered by Army spokesman.”

Buratai raised the alarm that fake news not only poses threat to national security but also makes the ongoing counter-terrorism fight more difficult.

He urged Nigerians to be patriotic.

The COAS regretted that after the recent attack on troops of 157 Task Force Battalion at Metele, Borno State, numerous casualty figures were bandied about, adding: “The figure so far has been 23, even if it is one, it is unfortunate. But to go out of the reality, to continue to spread false information is really unfortunate.”

NAN reports that after the incident, various media reports at different times put the casualty figures at 44, 70, 100 and above until a few days ago when the army confirmed 23 dead and 31 others wounded.

He said the military was working to counter fake news being spread about it and its operations through its newly established Cyber Warfare Command.

However, two soldiers are feared to have been killed when suspected Boko Haram terrorists reportedly attacked the Buni/Gari community military base in Yobe State at the weekend.

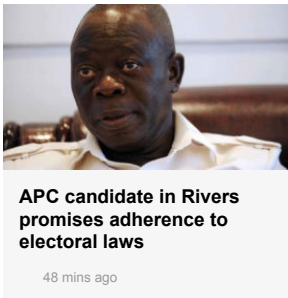
The settlement is located on the southern fringe of Sambisa Forest, and 60 kilometres south of Damaturu.

Confirming the incident yesterday in the state capital, a military officer, who craved anonymity, stated: “We were caught unawares when the insurgents burst into our base along Damaturu-Biu road amid sporadic gunshots.

“By the time we could respond, the terrorists set our Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) and base ablaze before being pursued with a fighter jet and a helicopter gunship.”

The officer said some of the homes in the locality were equally torched, as dozens fled into farmlands and the adjoining Buni/Yadi settlement.

The two communities have in the last six years witnessed their fair share of insurgency.





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Efforts to get official statement yesterday from the Operation Lafiya Dole, Theatre Command, Maiduguri were futile.