

Dozens killed in Nasarawa-Benue, Niger border airstrike, bomb blast

From Bala Yahaya (Minna) and
Abel Abogonye (Lafia)

ABOUT 50 persons have been feared killed in a blast in Doma community, at the border between Benue and Nasarawa States.

Details were sketchy at the time of filing this report; it was unclear whether the explosion resulted from a military airstrike.

Mr. Frank Kya, who spoke with *The Guardian* on phone, said a heavy sound, like a bomb blast, was heard in a nearby village, yesterday.

"The sound was scary. Shortly after, news starts filtering in that it was a blast from an aircraft. Many people died as a result. I can't tell exactly, but more than 50 persons, including women

and children, were involved," he said.

Police Public Relations Officer, Nasarawa State Command, Nansel Ramham, confirmed that there was an airstrike in the area but could not ascertain whether the explosion was as a result of military action.

The incident came about 24 hours after the Tor Tiv in Benue State and the Emir of Lafia in Nasarawa State held a close-door meeting to discuss incessant killings in border towns between the two states.

Doma local council has witnessed repeated attacks by bandits.

ALSO, 18 members of a special hunters squad attached to the Department of State Services (DSS) were

killed during a military airstrike at Galadima Kogo community in Shiroro Local Council of Niger State on Tuesday.

Investigation by *The Guardian* revealed that the incident happened while the hunters were conducting routine patrol in the area.

Some of the survivors, who spoke to *The Guardian* on condition of anonymity, said the hunters had been on their way to confront bandits that stormed nearby villages.

"After we had mobilised, we saw an air force fighter jet flying above. Our commander on the ground received a call from the flight crew, asking him to relay our distance from the bandits' location. He replied that we were 10 kilometres away from the bandits. Immediately after, a bomb dropped in our midst," a source said.

Another source at the IBB Specialist Hospital in Minna, the state capital, who also didn't want his name on print, explained that 18 corpses of the deceased hunters were deposited at the mortuary on Tuesday.

Efforts to speak to government officials were unsuccessful. Also, messages sent to the spokesman of the Training and Doctrine Command, Nigerian Army, Minna, were not replied.

The spokesman of the Niger State Police Command declined to comment.

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