

TERRORISTS SET TELECOM MASTS ABLAZE, KILL FOUR IN BORNO

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•One injured, as police foil attack in Bauchi

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Some people suspected to be terrorists on Wednesday set ablaze the regional office of the telecoms firm, MTN Nigeria, and nine masts belonging to different companies in Maiduguri, Borno State capital.

Four persons believed to be Igbo were also reportedly killed in Gwange ward of the metropolis.

This is coming just one week after men of the military Joint Task Force (JTF) raided the house of a suspected key commander of the Boko Haram Islamic sect where they recovered 54 assorted GSM SIM cards among other arms and ammunition in the Dala district of Maiduguri.

It would be recalled that early this year, the Boko Haram sect had issued a statement threatening that the telecommunication industry in Nigeria was one of their targets.

Our correspondent gathered that the MTN regional office in the West End area, on the Baga Road in Maiduguri, was set ablaze at about 2.00 a.m.

The office houses all the communication facilities of the frontline GSM operators in the country.

Also set ablaze were the telecommunication masts in Dala, Bulunkutu, Bayan Quarters, Gwange,

Sulimanti, Bolori, Adam Kolo and Bulabulin wards of the metropolis.

An eyewitness who does not want his name mentioned told our correspondent that the Bulumkutu mast was burnt down by some armed youths at about 8.00 p.m. on Tuesday.

In a related development, four people believed to be Igbo were killed by some suspected terrorists who invaded a house occupied by Yoruba and Igbo in the neighbourhood.

A neighbour of the four slain people told newsmen that residents heard a strange voice in the house where some of the deceased were crying for help, but to no avail.

The prevailing curfew in the town could not allow people to see what was happening where the distressed voices were coming from.

The eyewitness said it was not until Wednesday morning that the news filtered from the house that four people were killed in the house.

Speaking in a telephone interview, JTF spokesman, Sagir Musa, a Lieutenant Colonel, confirmed the burning of MTN office and some masts in Maiduguri, but denied that there was any other killing in the state.

“I can only confirm to you that some telecommunication masts and MTN regional office were set ablaze by suspected Boko Haram sect, but I am not aware of any killing in Gwange, please give me time, as soon as I get details I will communicate to you,” Musa said.

Also, one person was on Tuesday night injured when a suspected bomb exploded at a telecommunications mast, just as another one was detonated by police anti-bomb squad along Bauchi-Gombe Road.

Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) for the state, Hassan Mohammed, who confirmed the incident, said he was yet to get details.

A security source, who spoke to our correspondent on condition of anonymity, said “as far as we are concerned, the incident was a failed attempt because we have information about plan by hoodlums to attack some places.

“We have taken adequate security measures by deploying soldiers, policemen and other security personnel to guard every identified flash point to ensure that they did not succeed in their mission.

“The one targeted at the telecommunication mast exploded outside the gate because they dropped it outside and it exploded and a security man guarding the place was on red alert.

“Everything inside the mast was intact except the door, it was a metal door that slightly injured the security guard and he has been treated and discharged.

“We also foiled another attempt along Gombe road, they dropped the explosives and we are happy it did not explode, we have diffused it.”

The source enjoined journalists to do accurate and balanced reports since it was a failed attempt to attack the mast which failed due to adequate security measures put in place.

An eyewitness who spoke to our correspondent said the incident occurred on Tuesday night.

“We heard a loud sound, when we went there we found that a metal door was affected but the air condition and generating set inside the mast building were working,” he said.

Another report said there was pandemonium on Wednesday morning in Port Harcourt, Rivers State capital, as a six-man gang of robbers, including a lady, operating in a black Nissan Xterra Jeep, carted

away over N20 million from a man, killing a woman sweeping the road in the process.

Several others, including a policeman, were injured during the operation.

The robbery, which took place at about 8.00 a.m., saw traders around the Mile 1 fly over running helter-skelter. \

Eyewitnesses said a taxi driver carrying the money was shot in the leg.

“The police see them for here; as them see police, them come begin shoot, me I hide for this filling station. Police carry armoured car pursue them before them run. Them carry the man money but them no kill am,” the eyewitnesses said.

Another passer-by narrated that the gang had a lady member.

“One slim girl stand for the bank gate while others enter inside; as police dey shoot them, she dey halla say she no dey fear.”

When contacted on phone, the state Commissioner of Police, Mohammed Indabawa, confirmed that the robbers shot one person dead, injured a policeman and another civilian who is presently receiving attention in a hospital.

He did not, however, confirm the amount of money stolen but said investigation into the incident had begun.