

Modu Sheriff Escapes Attack As Female Suicide Bomber Kills 16 In Biu Market

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A female suicide bomber blew herself up at a crowded market in Biu, Borno State, killing about 16 persons and injuring many more.

Former Borno State governor Ali Modu Sheriff was said to have escaped attack after youths began a violent protest in reaction to the bomb attack.

The former governor was said to have made a detour to avoid being caught up the violence which, some said, was targeted at him.

It is the latest in a spate of similar attacks by women and girls in the region besieged by Boko Haram.

Witnesses told the Hausa service of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) that many injured persons and corpses were being evacuated to hospital at the time of filing this report.

The agency also reported that two other female bombers were arrested with explosive vests at the market.

The explosion occurred less than a month after the Nigerian military killed at least 42 insurgents, including 15 Chadians, as it repelled an attack on the

town.

The insurgents had descended on the town on January 14 but were effectively repelled by the military, which recovered two anti-aircraft guns and captured a number of the terrorists.

Boko Haram militants had largely been kept out of Biu through the combined efforts of the military and youths of the town.

The terrorist group has seized towns in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States. The latest seizure was Monguno and Baga, where numerous people, including soldiers, were killed.

Many traders, shoppers killed

Witnesses said the bomb went off at about 3:20pm after a passenger bus drove into the market and parked at the spot where the explosion occurred.

"The driver did not leave the bus as he was pretending to be waiting for his passengers to finish trading. Those that saw him said they never noticed or suspected him to be Boko Haram until suddenly the bus, a model-F 12-seater, went up in thick flames," said one Aliyu Buba, a trader.

Biu town, which is about 185 kilometres south of Maiduguri, is the largest

town in that part of Borno State where displaced persons from surrounding villages run to for refuge.

A Civilian-JTF operative, who spoke to LEADERSHIP on phone from Biu but wished not to be named, said he could not give actual figure of the dead and the injured "because they are many."

"The explosion today in Biu market happened very close to Alhaji Haruna-110 shop. We have been evacuating casualties, both dead and injured. We are still on it and the figure may be high because some are shattered beyond recognition, while seven corpses can be identified," he said.

According to him, facilities at the Biu General Hospital were overstretched, and individuals were asked to donate blood to help save injured victims.

The source said the explosion later ignited a political conflict when angry youths with sympathy for the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) took to the streets of Biu and began to vandalise PDP flags and other structures. They blamed a proposed rally by PDP politicians in the state as the factor that instigated Boko Haram to carry out the bomb attack.

"There was pandemonium in the town

after the blast. Many of our young men went vandalising the party flag of the PDP because the bomb exploded at a time the former governor, Ali Modu Sheriff, and other top members of the PDP, who were campaigning in the southern parts of state, were being expected in Biu. So many youths are saying that the bomb explosion occurred because the opposition politicians were being expected," he stated.

But another resident of Biu disagreed with the justification given for the attack PDP flags.

"The youths simply leveraged on the bomb explosion by Boko Haram to vent their political malice. The PDP politicians were in Bayo and Kwayakusar local government; why was there no Boko Haram attack or bombing?" quizzed the 42-year-old local government worker who didn't want his name published.

"All I know is that the same youths who attacked the PDP flags had been bragging all day that they won't allow former Governor Sheriff and the PDP politicians to enter Biu for campaigns. And now that Boko Haram bomber came to do the worst, we should not use it for politics."