

# Suicide Bomber Kills 26 In Maiduguri Mosque

BY KAREEM HARUNA, MAIDUGURI  
AND GEORGE AGBA, Abuja

The police yesterday confirmed 26 people dead in Maiduguri, the Borno State capital, after a suicide bomber detonated himself in a Mosque near the town's main market.

Borno state governor, Kashim Shettima, who was at the scene few hours after it occurred, was informed that 16 persons had died at the scene of the blast, while several others who sustained severe injuries had been rushed to the hospital.

But the state police commissioner, Aderemi Opadokun, in a statement, said 26 people died in the incident, while 28 others sustained injuries.

Market officials and traders were unanimous in their testimonies that the suicide bomber came to the scene pretending to be a trader hawking wares on a wheelbarrow.

"He was pushing a wheelbarrow and when he came near the Mosque, he pretended like he wanted to join us in observing the late afternoon prayers; as he parked the wheelbarrow, and went to the entrance of the already filled Mosque, the bomb went off," said Ali Bakomi, a trader who was lucky to escape the blast.

Another trader who declined mentioning his name, said, "the boy that came looked somehow suspicious; but when he parked his wheelbarrow to perform ab-lution in order to join the prayer in the mosque, we became more relaxed, thinking he could be one of the numerous hawkers around. But as he stepped into the mosque, we heard a thunderous explosion and sadly, it was the same boy we saw that was the bomber."

The Borno state governor condemned the blast even as he called on the people of the state to be extra-vigilant and also stressed that the insurgents, who were now at their wits end, could be more dangerous.

He said government would as usual, cater for the treatment of those affected by the blast and also prayed for the repose of the souls of those that had lost their lives.

The police was yet to issue any official statement about the blast, despite the presence of their personnel at the scene of the incident.

The Mosque bombing came barely 12 hours after Boko Haram terrorists had attacked Maiduguri town at night, shooting rocket propelled grenades into the city which resulted in the destruction of several houses and death of at least seven civilian residents.

A top security officer at the Department of Security Service (DSS) informed journalists, though on the condition of anonymity, that "7 persons were killed, 17 injured and about two houses completely destroyed as a result of the RPGs pumped into the town by Boko Haram insurgents."

Residents of Maiduguri were forced to wake up at midnight as thunderous blasts and deafening sounds of shooting from heavy assault rifles believed to be rocket launchers rent the air. Boko Haram terrorists attempted another entry into the town, but could not advance further beyond the barricade trenches and sand fortresses dug and built around the troubled city, a low ranking military personnel, who preferred not to be named in this report for official rea-

sons, informed our reporter.

A member of the Vigilante Group of Nigeria, Abbas Gava, confirmed that an RPG fired into the town had hit a house in Dala-Lawanti area of Maiduguri, killing seven occupants instantly and injuring many others.

"My younger sister lives in Dala-Lawanti. She and her family came running to my house at Moduganari ward in the night because a heavy explosion had hit the house close to theirs. And when we went back this morning to find out what transpired, we met people mourning the death of seven people killed by bullets from a rocket launcher. The building that was hit is a rented apartment; it was badly destroyed," Gava stated.

Another resident of Maiduguri, Mari Madu, whose house is not far away from Dala-Lawanti said, "I counted more than 40 heavy explosions coming from rocket launchers before I lost count. Each time they fired into the town, we see bright sparkling light, which moved with great speed, passing over our houses. One of the blasts shook the roof of my house so badly that I thought it might have landed on my house. Many houses were destroyed in our neighbourhood, but I have not heard if any person died."

The attack had forced thousands of residents, mostly members of the Civilian-JTF to the streets all armed as they kept vigil, should the Boko Haram attackers eventually make their way into the town.

The shooting, which started at about 12:50 am, continued as soldiers battled to keep the attackers at bay until about 3am when the situation calmed.

Maiduguri has since last year become a city surrounded by



Chief of Army Staff Lt.-General Kenneth Minimah

sand fortresses and deep trenches that provide tight security for the residents. With the trenches and sand fortress, no vehicle can enter the city through any route except the highways. This barrier has since made invasion of Maiduguri a major headache for the Boko Haram terrorists who would only end their fight with soldiers from outside the walls of the sand and deep trenches.

It was not ascertained if soldiers were able to kill the attackers, or only succeeded in repelling them, at the time of this report.

## Our Resolve To Crush Boko Haram Unshakeable - President Buhari

Reacting to the attacks yesterday, President Muhammadu Buhari, while condemning them, reiterated that his administration's resolve to crush the insurgents cannot be shaken.

He warned that his new administration would not "tolerate wanton and wilful destruction of life by criminal elements

that are bent on anarchy."

In a statement by the head of his media team, Mallam Garba Shehu, the president reassured that his administration "meant business in its determination to tackle terrorist violence with all the resources available to his government."

Describing terrorists as cowardly murderers that target innocent people, Buhari explained that as the Commander-in-Chief, he had sworn to protect the security of Nigerians everywhere.

He called for increased vigilance by local communities, even as he assured that his administration would give security close attention.

He added that his government was committed to boosting the morale of our armed forces by effectively funding them and attending to their welfare.

Condoling the families of the victims of the attack, President Buhari assured them that "the worst days of these criminal elements will be over soon".