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11 policemen, 79 others killed in Yobe bombing

- Government agencies, banks, churches burnt
- Jonathan cancels wedding trip, orders security beef-up
- Boko Haram spokesman vows more attacks

Yusuf Alli, Managing Editor, Northern Operations,
Joel Duku, Damaturu, Abiodun Joseph, Maiduguri,
with agency reports

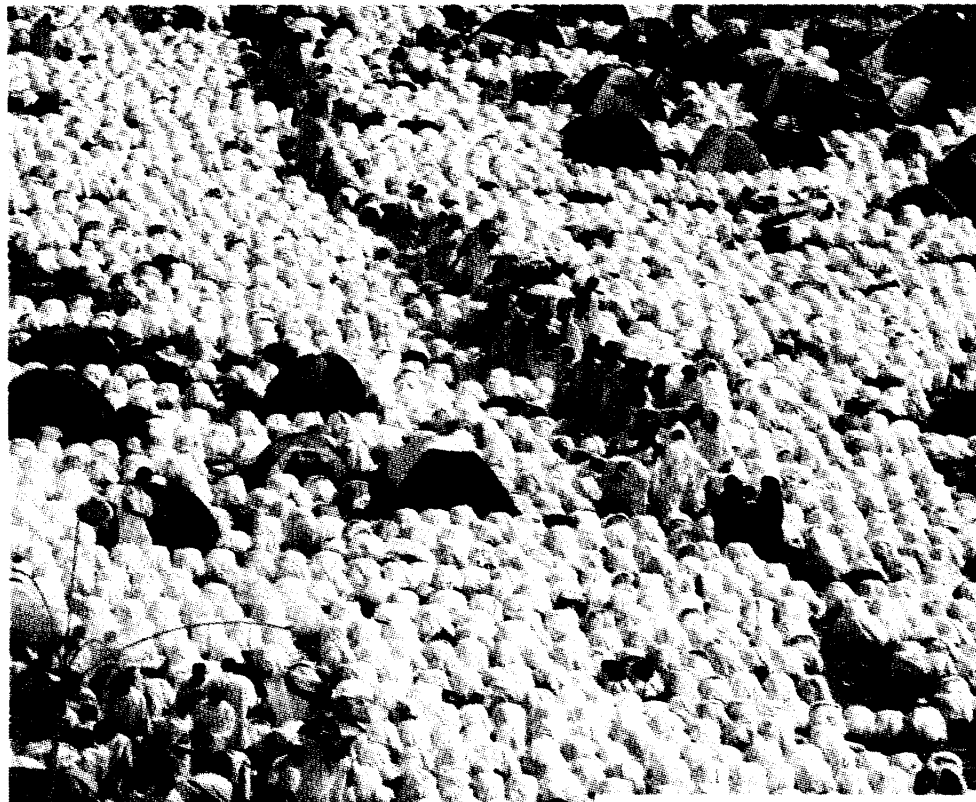
APALL of grief enveloped Damaturu, the Yobe State capital yesterday, as residents began to bury their beloved ones killed in Friday's bomb and gun attack on the town by suspected members of the *Boko Haram* sect.

The police gave the casualty figure as 53 including 11 policemen, two soldiers, two Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) officers, and one each from Immigration and Customs.

However, the Nigerian Red Cross put the figure at 65 and the Jamatu Nasir Islamiyya (JNI) at 93. Even at the figure of 53 given by the police, this is the highest number of people killed in a single attack by the sect.

The State Police Command headquarters, State Anti-Terrorism Squad, the offices of Immigration and Customs Departments, and the FRSC were attacked by the rampaging gunmen. They did not spare the First Bank and United Bank for Africa (UBA) branches in the town. The Federal Government Secretariat in the town was also burnt.

Continued on Page 4



CONSTITUTION

Presidency scales down amendment from 50 to 20

FROM: Yusuf Alli, Managing Editor,
Northern Operation

THE Presidency may soon present its list of fresh amendments to the 1999 Constitution to the National Assembly.

But the government has scaled down its proposed amendments from 50 to between 15 and 20.

Investigation by our correspondent confirmed that President Goodluck Jonathan opted for what was described by sources in the Presidency as "water-tight amendments."

A source, who spoke in confidence, said: "We are likely to send the bill on the amendments to the National Assembly before the end of this year. The proposal is going through its final checks before presentation to the National Assembly."

Continued on Page 4

Eid-el-Kabir

11 policemen, 79 others killed in Yobe bombing

• *Continued from Page 1*

President Goodluck Jonathan who was billed to travel to his home state of Bayelsa yesterday for the wedding of one of his brothers called off the trip and directed security agencies to fish out the brains behind the spate of attacks.

He also ordered security beef up in Borno and Yobe States. His Special Adviser on Media and Publicity, Dr. Reuben Abati said: "The President does not feel that he should be seen attending a wedding when such incidents are happening and he has renewed his charge to security agencies to renew the search for those behind the dastardly acts."

"He believes that for anyone to carry out such acts of destruction of lives at this season of peace deviates from the message of peace and love that ordinarily radiates around *Eid-El-Kabir*."

The attack started with a car bomb exploding outside a three story building used as a military office and barracks. Many uniformed security guards died in the blast.

The state government has declared a 7pm to 7am curfew in the state.

This came just hours after a series of explosions by the sect in Maiduguri, capital of the neighbouring Borno State on Friday. The town of Potiskum, also in Yobe, was attacked simultaneously as Damaturu. The distance between the two towns is 100 kilometres.

As the day broke yesterday, scores of Damaturu residents began to flee following whispers that the sect might return. The situation was not helped by a statement by a spokesman for the group that more attacks were coming.

"We are responsible for the attack in Borno State and Damaturu. We will continue attacking federal govern-

ment formations until security forces stop persecuting our members and vulnerable civilians," sect spokesman, Abul Qaqa said in a state to new agencies.

Witnesses said the Damaturu bombs hit several targets, including churches and the headquarters of the Yobe State police.

Red Cross official Ibrahim Bulama, in Damaturu, told the BBC at least 63 people had been killed there.

He said people visiting morgues have reported seeing 92 bodies.

An unnamed local government official in Damaturu was quoted as saying that hundreds of wounded people were being treated in hospital.

The attacks began on Friday at about 6.30pm and lasted about 90 minutes.

Gunmen then engaged in running battles with security forces after invading police stations and shooting indiscriminately. Business activities were abruptly called off as people ran for their lives.

A Roman Catholic parish priest said his church had been burnt down and eight other churches also attacked. He described gangs of young men roaming the streets throwing improvised bombs into the churches.

A Damaturu resident, Mamman Mohammed said: "We are all indoors while the fighting is going on. Damaturu and Potiskum my home town are under siege. The *Boko Haram* sect have taken over the towns and the security men are battling them. No one is safe."

A lawyer who visited the Damaturu General Hospital yesterday looking for a missing friend said he counted 60 bodies in the morgue.

"I have seen 60 dead bodies in the hospital, all brought in yesterday from the attacks," the lawyer who

asked not to be named said. "I am here to look for my friend who didn't return home yesterday." He said anxious relatives were flocking to the hospital in search of loved ones.

Security forces this week started door-to-door searches for weapons in the

northeast, after an arms amnesty for Islamist militants expired on October 31. It was unclear whether or not this spate of attacks was a response to that operation.

Yobe State Police Commissioner, Suleiman Lawan, said the attacks caught the town by surprise. He dis-

closed that seven *Boko Haram* members were shot dead.

"A police station and a mechanical workshop of the police were attacked. Six churches in the area were also bombed," said resident Edwin Silas, adding: "The whole city is traumatised."

Soldiers and police have

mounted checkpoints in parts of the city, searching vehicles and carrying out body search of drivers and passengers.

In Potiskum, a grenade narrowly missed a police station and an ensuing gun battle left one policeman dead.



• L-R : President, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Mr Ledus Mitee , Mr George Feyii – Secretary, Rivers State Government, Dr. Wale Ahmed – Commissioner, Special Duties Lagos State. Dr. Joe Okei-Odumakin – chairman of the occasion and Prof. Itse Sagay – guest Speaker

Constitution: Presidency scales down amendment from 50 to 20

• *Continued from Page 1*

"But the government will not propose 50 amendments as being speculated. To have 50 amendments would amount to re-writing the entire constitution. That is not the intent of the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan. I think you can

• **More devolution of powers likely**

safely say that we will present water-tight or compact amendments to the National Assembly.

"We do not want amendments just for the sake of playing to the gallery. These new amendments will enhance our democracy and

assist it to work for the benefits of all Nigerians. They are amendments that will add value to our democracy and economic development."

Responding to a question, the source added: "There is every likelihood of

tenure for the 774 local government areas.

Others are abolition of Joint State- Local Government Account widely adopted in most states; and constructive federalism; abolition of indigene ship; right to vote and be voted for after being resident in any part of Nigeria for six months; and removal of