

Kano bomb blasts death toll hits 162

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People watch as smoke rises from the police headquarters after it was hit by a blast in Kano January 20, 2012. Over 162 people were killed in a string of bomb blasts in the city . Photo: AFP

MORGUES in Kano are running short of space for corpses following the mounting death toll from Friday's multiple bomb blasts unleashed on the city by members of the extremist Islamic sect, Boko Haram.

At the last count, 162 bodies had been deposited in the various morgues in the city, unarguably the single largest number of making this casualties in a Boko Haram operation.

As residents and government officials took stock of the situation yesterday, it emerged that the militants forcibly set free between 50 and 100 suspects held in police and Immigration cells.

A distraught Governor Rabi'u Kwankwaso yesterday visited the areas attacked to assess first hand the havoc wreaked by Boko Haram

members.

He was conducted round by the State Police Commissioner, Mr. Ibrahim Idris who said three suicide bombers were gunned down by the police during the raid.

Two of them, the Police chief said, had attempted to force their way through the barricade erected by the police at their headquarters. The police guards on duty opened fire on them only to find in their Toyota Camry car with number plate BR 487 BBR, three drums of locally assembled explosives.

Another suspected suicide bomber, according to him was shot dead at the police zonal office while trying to force his way in.

A few hours after the Jumat prayers on Friday, members of the sect launched co-ordinated bomb and gun attacks on the State Security Service (SSS) office, the Zone 1 headquarters of the police and the police stations at Fegge, Farm Centre, Naibawa and Jedijedi as well as the Immigration Office in the metropolis.

A journalist, Enenche Akogwu of Channels Television was shot dead by the militants while recording the mayhem.

Tension was high in Kano yesterday with residents seething with anger at the effrontery of the invaders.

Most of the injured are being treated at the Murtala Muhammed Hospital in Kofar Nasarawa and Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital on Zaria-Kaduna road.

Soldiers and police officers swarmed over streets yesterday in the city of more than 9 million people. But their effectiveness remains in

question, as the uniformed bodies of many of their colleagues lay in the overflowing mortuary of Murtala Muhammed Specialist Hospital, Kano's largest hospital.

"We have been receiving dead bodies since last night (Friday) from relief agencies involved in the evacuation of bodies," a morgue official said on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to give out figures.

"At this moment we have 162 bodies in the morgue, and this figure may change because bodies are still being brought," he added, speaking of the tally, with some of the remains having been collected by family members.

Other bodies likely lay at other clinics and hospitals in the city.

A senior local government security source said:"Definitely more than 100 have been killed.

Nwakpa O. Nwakpa, a spokesman for the Nigerian Red Cross, said volunteers offered first aid to the wounded, and evacuated those seriously injured to hospitals. He said officials continued to collect corpses scattered around sites of the attacks. A survey of two hospitals by the Red Cross showed at least 50 people were injured in Friday's attack, he said.

State authorities declared a 24-hour curfew late Friday as residents hid inside their homes amid the fighting.

A security source involved in the mopping up said the death toll was on the high side.

"Officially, we have exhausted about 125 bags where we put the

remains of the victims of the blasts. Among the dead were two Immigration Officers. We have all the bodies in the two hospitals” the source said, adding :”We could not mop up last night (friday) because of the grave security situation. But as early as 5am on Saturday, we started the exercise. The mopping involved all aid agencies like the JNI, Red Cross, and Kano State Emergency Management Agency.”

“Although the official death toll figure has been communicated to the security agencies and the Kano State government, the state is being cautious in releasing it because it could ignite more violence in Kano City .

“The people of Kano are currently aggrieved over the motive of Boko Haram because 70 to 80 per cent of those killed were Muslims.

“There is tension in the city as I am talking to you. The figure is too high and it has left the city in mourning.”

The Head of Public Relations of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), Alhaji Yushau Shuaib, was not forthcoming on the death toll.

He simply said: “We are more concerned about attending to the victims of the explosions and mopping up the scenes.

“There is a high level of coordination between Kano State Emergency Agency and other aid organizations to clear the sites of the multiple blasts. That is all I can tell you.”

Contacted, the Director of Press Affairs to the state governor, Alhaji Baba Dantiye, a former President of the Nigeria Guild of Editors, said: “I have not got the toll figure yet but as soon as I get it from the

Desk Officer, I will make it available to you.

“But Governor Rabiul Kwankwanso has just made a broadcast to the people of the state on why the 24-hour curfew will still be in place. He said the curfew will be relaxed once the security situation improves.

“The governor also thanked the people of the state for their understanding.”

It was gathered that the Boko Haram sect struck in Kano in order to liberate its members being detained in the last two months by the police in various cells

It was also learnt that they attacked the Nigerian Immigration Office because some of their members, mostly Nigerians and Chadians, were due for deportation from Kano State.

Investigation revealed that following Boko Haram strikes in Borno and Yobe, the government and the people of Kano had taken pre-emptive measures to check the spread of the sect's serial attacks to the state.

It was gathered that the precautionary steps led to the arrest of some Boko Haram members by the police, including those handed over to security agencies by vigilant indigenes/ residents of Kano .

But the Boko Haram leaders were said to have reached out to top traditional leaders and the state government to release their members or face the wrath of the sect.

A top source said: “Those who perpetrated these dastardly attacks were mostly Nigerians and Chadians. They were just out to liberate

their members in detention.

“If you look at the pattern of the multiple explosions, they were restricted to the traditional parts of Kano , police stations, SSS office and Immigration Office. The areas are Zaharada, Bayero University Road , Bompai, among others.

“In the last few months, security agencies in collaboration with the people of Kano have tried their best to engage in mass arrest of Boko Haram members who have fled to the city . They are mostly Nigeriens and Chadians. Each time the Boko Haram members were arrested, their leaders would go to local leaders in Kano to prevail on security agencies to release them.

“But security agencies and the people of Kano were tired of the security breaches by the sect. So in the last two months, no one was interceding again for Boko Haram members who were arrested by the police and other security agencies.

“The arrest of a Boko Haram preacher and his son at Kuruna Asabe a few weeks ago has however put Kano on the edge. The Boko Haram leaders did not only demand the release of the preacher and other members of the sect in detention, they were threatening deadly strike in Kano if nothing was done.

“They struck because their detained members were not released. At a point, Governor Rabiul Kwankwanso said he could not order security agencies to release the detained Boko Haram members as he may be tagged a Boko Haram Governor.

“The Kano State Government said the Boko Haram leaders should take advantage of the rule of law to secure the release of their

members. Instead, the sect decided to take the law into its hands.”

Investigation confirmed that a major premise of the multiple attacks was jailbreak in some police stations to free detained Boko Haram members.

It was learnt that over 50 to 100 members of the sect were set free during the jailbreak.

A security source added: “The sect attacked Zone 1 headquarters of the Nigeria Police; the State Police Command in Bompai; the SSS headquarters at Sardauna Crescent ; a police station at Yakwa on Zaria Road ; and the Immigration Office at Farm Centre.

“These were the places where some Boko Haram members were detained. In fact, according to the report at hand, the Nigerian Immigration Service was about to deport some members of the sect to Niger and Chad .”

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