

Gunmen free 30 detainees in Abuja police office attack

- Police re-arrest 25
- Presidency orders security alert
- UK issues travel advice to citizens

THE Presidency yesterday ordered a 24-hour security alert nationwide, following an early morning attack on the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in the Federal Capital Territory by unknown

From Yusuf Alli and Gbade Ogunwale, Abuja

gunmen. The gunmen killed two policemen and set free more than 30 high-profile suspects. But the police said they arrest-

The police... appeal to Nigerians for calm while reassuring them of the Force's readiness to perform its constitutional and statutory responsibilities of providing adequate security for the citizenry.



ed two of the attackers and 25 of the fleeing suspects.

Inspector-General of Police M.D. Abubakar has set up a panel to probe the incident.

Also yesterday, some embassies, especially the United Kingdom, warned their citizens

against travelling to Kaduna State, following the Jaji bomb explosions and the attack on SARS.

The UK also asked Britons to restrict their movement to some parts of Abuja. But the Presidency has direct-

ed all security agencies, including the police, to place the nation on a 24-hour alert.

A source, who spoke in confidence, said: "The government is deeply worried about the resurgence of bombings and attacks by gunmen since it decided to rule out dialogue with any militant group and placed ransom on some leaders of the Boko Haram sect.

"The Presidency has directed all military formations, security/intelligence agencies and the police to beef up security nationwide. This directive became necessary because the recent gains recorded by security agencies have overwhelmed some of them.

"I can tell you that there will be tight security nationwide with priority placed on volatile states in the Northeast, North-

west and Northcentral."

No group has claimed responsibility for the SARS invasion, which bears the imprint of the Boko Haram (western education is sin) sect.

A source said it was difficult to ascertain who the gunmen were because the suspects in the SARS included armed robbers and other dangerous criminals.

"Gang members of each group of suspects could have mobilised to invade SARS," said the sources, adding: "The luck we had was that SARS is heavily fortified and our officers and men were able to launch a counter-attack against the gunmen.

"Unless a group comes out to claim responsibility, we

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Jaji death toll hits 30

• Military: it's 15

From Tony Akowe, Kaduna

AHOSPITAL official yesterday said the death toll in the twin suicide bombings at the St Andrews Protestant Church inside the Command and Staff College, Jaji, Kaduna State has hit 30.

An official, who spoke on condition of anonymity at the base's medical centre, was quoted by the AP as saying that at least 45 others were injured.

But the military authority, which said on Sunday that 11 people died, yesterday upgraded the death toll to 15.

The Commandant of the Command and Staff College, Air Vice Marshal Abdullahi



•Chairman, FBN Holdings Plc, Dr. Oba Otudeko delivering his speech at the listing of the company's shares on the Nigerian Stock Exchange in Lagos...yesterday. With him are (from left) Managing Director/CEO, FBN Holdings Plc, Mr. Bello Maccido, Chief of Staff/Head, Corporate Division, Nigerian Stock Exchange, Mr. Bola Adeeko, Director General/CEO, Nigerian Stock Exchange, Mr. Oscar Onyema, and Group Managing Director, First Bank of Nigeria Limited, Mr. Bisi Onasanya

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Jaji attack death toll now 30

PHOTO: NAN

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Kureh, told visiting Kaduna State Governor Patrick Yakowa of the increase.

He condemned a situation where "people who went to pray to God to give us peace were attacked by another group", adding that security had been tightened to forestall another attack.

AVM Kureh decried the spate of attacks witnessed in various parts of the country, adding that no meaningful development could be achieved without peace.

He condemned the attack at the command, saying people expect that the military institution should have solution to the insurgency.

Yakowa said the bombing of churches on Sundays and other days is a major challenge to the nation, adding that attacking a premier military institution like the Command and Staff College was a wake-up call for all security agencies to fashion out a solution to terrorism.

Yakowa described the incident as "devastating" and called on the perpetrators of the acts to embrace peace, come out with their grievanc-

es for dialogue with the government.

According to the governor, targeting a military formation is devastating and disturbing.

He urged security agents to harness their tactical and professional prowess to tackle the challenges in the land.

Yakowa said insurgency, in whatever name or for whatever reason, cannot help anyone, but rather destroy. There cannot be development without peace and the need for peace should be the greatest project for all, he said.

He urged stakeholders to find a solution to frequent bombings and killings of innocent people.

"Let us use our differences as a source of strength to move the country forward. Religious bigotry or terrorism will only destroy Nigeria instead of building it. The state will work with all security agencies to continue to provide security," Yakowa said.

The governor promised to settle the medical bills of those affected by the explosion.

The Commandant, who conducted the governor round the scene of the explosion, said his deputy, who is a senior Naval officer, was among those in the church at the time of the attack.

Reports said Air Commodore Alechenu Ekagbo, the Director of the Air wing of the college, may have been affected by the explosion.

The officer, whose official residence is about 15 metres from the scene of the explosion, is said to be in a critical condition at the 44 Army Reference Hospital, Kaduna.

Family sources said Commodore Ekagbo was resting when the bomb exploded, hitting his house, adding that he went into coma and was rushed to the hospital.

The source said: "We thought he was dead until we got the news this morning that he's still alive but in critical condition."

Another source said the officer may be flown abroad for better medical attention, "any time from now".

The Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) said the distasteful acts should be condemned by all people of

goodwill, precisely because they go against the core value of humanity enjoined by God.

In a statement by its National Publicity Secretary, Anthony Sani, in Kaduna, the ACF said: "All those who take delight in taking the lives of innocent people, as their own way of addressing their concerns, should know they are chasing shadow."

"That is why they should lay down their arms and embrace dialogue as the only viable option to addressing their concerns towards peaceful coexistence."

"One way they can achieve this is to lay down their arms, approach their chosen Saudi authority to play some roles in any constructive engagement between them and the Nigerian government."

"If Saudi Arabia accepts to play any role, they would naturally link up with the Nigerian authority. Our heart goes to those who lost loved ones and those who got wounded by the attack. May God grant them the fortitude to bear the irreparable losses and the means to replace losses many fold."

The situation is giving leaders of the zone a serious con-

ernor, Achike Udenwa, among others.

Gunmen attack police station, banks, PHCN office in Auchi

From Shola O'Neill, Warri and Osagie Otabor, Benin

AUCHI, the major town in the northern part of Edo State, was under attack last night.

Unknown gunmen, armed with sophisticated weapons and dynamites, stormed the polytechnic town between 5:30 and 6:30pm. They bombed a police station, the Etsako West Local Government secretariat, three banks and the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) office.

An unspecified number of people were reportedly killed.

The bombed banks were behind the Federal Polytechnic campus.

The PHCN office on Alhaji Musa Street was bombed. The police station was set on fire along with some vehicles.

A resident of the area where the PHCN office is located said the sheer force of the explosion brought down at least one gate and a fence in the neighbourhood. Several buildings lost louvres, windows and doors frames.

A resident living directly behind the PHCN office said: "We are under siege; they just bombed PHCN office; we heard the police station has been razed and we are afraid

because there's a filling station nearby and if they bomb it, we will be in a bigger danger."

As at 8:35pm, our sources said the police engaged the invaders in a gun duel to prevent them from pushing ahead.

A resident, Mr. Williams Oriaghe, posted on twitter at about 6:27 pm: "Gunshot all over Auchi town." He followed up with another tweet at 6:55pm: "Gunshot still raining here in Auchi."

At 7pm, he said silence as of a grave yard had descended upon his part of the town.

Residents were holed up inside their homes following the heavy bombardment.

Another resident said on the telephone: "I am sitting somewhere now. We are hearing heavy bombardment."

Another said they were advised to stay indoors to avoid being hit by stray bullets.

It was gathered that the gunmen first attacked a police station with dynamites and explosives.

Some policemen were said to have died in the attack.

Another source added that a

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have to wait for the outcome of the Special Investigative Panel raised by the IGP.

A statement by the Deputy Force Public Relations Officer, CSP Frank Mba, gave an insight into the attack.

The statement said: "In the early hours of Monday (at about 2am), unknown gunmen in large number attacked the premises of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Federal Capital Territory Police Command. Policemen on duty responded swiftly and engaged the gunmen in a gun battle that lasted for some minutes, at the end of which the gunmen were successfully repelled."

"However, in the confusion that ensued, about 30 suspects in the detention facilities of SARS broke out of the cells and attempted to escape. Tactical and coordinated efforts to rearrest the fleeing suspects yielded instant result."

"So far, twenty five (25) of the

suspects have been re-arrested while five (5) suspects originally being held in relation to robbery related offences are currently at large. Two (2) Policemen died during the operation while two (2) of the attackers have been arrested."

"It needs to be emphasised here that no suspect held for terror related charges escaped from SARS detention facilities. No explosive or IED-related materials were used in the botched attack."

"Meanwhile, the Inspector-General of Police, IGP MD Abubakar, CFR, NPM, mni has personally visited the scene of the incident to assess the situation."

"He has equally ordered a high-powered investigative panel headed by a Senior Police Officer to investigate the circumstances surrounding the incident."

"Similarly, the IGP has ordered water-tight security around all government and Police related facilities nation-

wide.

"The Police High Command uses this medium to appeal to Nigerians for calm while reassuring them of the Force's readiness to perform its constitutional and statutory responsibilities of providing adequate security for the state and the entire citizenry."

"The Force, therefore, enjoins the public to continue to go about their lawful duty without fear or intimidation as adequate strategies have been put in place to guarantee the general security and safety of all Nigerians."

It was also learnt that some cells being used by some militant groups and criminals have been identified and demolished in the FCT and its environs."

The source added: "We are on the trail of some groups and sect commanders who had been operating in the FCT-Niger State axis. We will rout them out of their operational bases."

"We will ensure that we pro-

tect lives and property in the FCT and its environs."

But, despite the assurance, some embassies were yesterday gripped with anxiety.

A diplomatic source said: "Some embassies made consultations on the need to liaise with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the actual security situation in Abuja."

"They became anxious because SARS is not far away from Asokoro District, which is hosting some embassies. And the embassies in Asokoro District felt the impact of the crossfire between the gunmen and SARS police."

While the enquiry is in progress, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the UK, through its High Commission in Nigeria, at about 5pm yesterday updated its travel advice to its citizens following the Jaji and SARS incidents."

The travel advice reads in part: "This advice has been reviewed and reissued with amendments to the Travel

Summary (bomb attack on 25 November on church in Jaji, Kaduna State; security incident at police station in the Guzape area of Abuja). The overall level of the advice has not changed. We advise against all travel to some areas of Nigeria and against all but essential travel to other areas, including Kaduna, and Zaria cities."

"We advise against ALL travel to: Borno State; Yobe State; the riverine areas of Delta; Bayelsa; Rivers; Akwa Ibom; Cross River State; Warri city; and Kano city."

"We advise against ALL BUT ESSENTIAL travel to: Bauchi State; Jos city; Riyom and Barkin Ladi Local Government Areas in Plateau State; Gombe State; Mubi Town in Adamawa State and the area north of Mubi town that borders Borno State. Non-riverine areas of Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers and Akwa Ibom States; Abia State; Kaduna City; Zaria City."

"There was a bomb attack on

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• Abubakar

ADVERT HOTLINES:
08023006969,
08052592524
NEWSROOM:
LAGOS - 01-8962807,
ABUJA - 07028105302
COMPLAINTS:
01-8930678

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On 25 November on a church in Kaduna State. Initial reports state that this resulted in a number of deaths. You should exercise vigilance and caution, and monitor the local media for further information. "In the early morning of 26 November there was a security incident involving a police station in the Guzape area of Abuja. The nature of the incident is still unclear, but we advise British Citizens to avoid the area for the time being.

"There was a bomb attack on a church in Kaduna City on 28 October, resulting in deaths and injuries. You should exercise vigilance and caution, and monitor the local media for further information.

"There have been violent clashes between ethnic groups in Agyaragu, Nassarawa State on 22 November which has led to a number of deaths. British nationals in the area should exercise vigilance and caution, and monitor the local media for further information."

Gunmen attack Auchi

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A combined team of policemen and soldiers had cordoned off roads leading out of the community.

The source said the gunmen drove through villages, shooting sporadically.

The Acting State Commis-

sioner of Police, Mohammed Hurd, said he was on his way to Auchi and would issue a report later.

"I don't want to lie about the incident. Call me later and I will brief you on the accurate information," Hurd said. But he could no longer be reached last night.

Chinese firm, others win N130b contracts

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at N90.3 billion. The companies are expected to deliver the job between 18 and 24 months.

The Attorney-General/Commissioner for Justice, Mr. Wemimo Ogunde, described the contract as "symbolic" and another demonstration of the Governor Ibikunle Amosun's commitment to the people's welfare.

Ogunde said the contracts would be closely monitored to ensure best practices and adherence to the "Ogun standard" by the contractors. Also yesterday, the govern-

ment urged relations of dead persons, whose graves would be affected by the ongoing expansion of roads in Abeokuta, to relocate the remains of their loved ones.

Director-General of the Bureau of Lands Mrs. Ronke Sokefun said: "A number of graves fall within the right of way of the Ojere-Onikolobo-Panseke-Ibara-Isale Igbein-Sapon-Ake-Adatan road.

"The government, therefore, calls on the relations of the departed to make immediate arrangements for the relocation of such graves in accordance with their religious beliefs."