

Scores killed as JTF combs Borno for French hostages

M AIDUGURI, the Borno State capital, was on the boil for much of yesterday in the aftermath of a deadly clash between suspected terrorists and men of the Joint Task Force, Operation Restore Order.

Scores of lives are believed to have been lost in the clash which might also have been a fallout of the massive search for a family of seven French tourists kidnapped by suspected Islamist militants in Cameroon four days ago and been brought into Nigeria.

Many houses suspected to be harbouring terrorists in Ummarari and Jajeri were set ablaze by the security agents.

This came some eight hours after a suspected suicide bomber detonated an

■ **Joseph ABIODUN,** Maiduguri with Agency Report

Improvised Explosive Device (IED) on a JTF patrol vehicle on the Gamboru -Customs road of Maiduguri.

That incident provoked an exchange of gunfire between JTF men and terrorists.

The fire exchange claimed three lives.

All efforts to reach the spokesman for the JTF, Lieutenant Colonel Sagir Musa, proved abortive at press time.

There has been a surge in clashes lately between terrorists and the military in Maiduguri.

Security forces and western diplomats believe it could be an attempt by the terrorists to draw the mili-

tary troops into conflict within the city and limit their search and rescue capability.

"There is a massive man-hunt ongoing," national police spokesman, Frank Mba, told Reuters.

"Security operatives are working around the clock with search and surveillance to solve this."

The French hostages and kidnappers were near a small town called Dikwa at one point on Thursday, a Nigerian military source in Maiduguri said, asking not to be identified.

Dikwa is about 80 kilometres from Maiduguri and about the same distance to the border with Cameroon where the three adults and four children were taken hostage on Tuesday.

French President Francois

Hollande said on Thursday the hostages had probably been separated.

French gendarmes backed by special forces arrived in northern Cameroon on Wednesday to help locate the family, a local governor and French defence ministry official said.

The abduction was the first case of foreigners being seized in the mostly Muslim north of Cameroon, a former French colony, and highlighted the threat to French interests in West Africa since Paris deployed thousands of

troops to Mali to oust al Qaeda-linked Islamists who controlled the country's north.

On Sunday, seven foreigners were snatched from the compound of a Lebanese construction company, Setraco, in Bauchi State.

Many people were killed when suspected members of Boko Haram blew up a customs office, destroyed roadside stalls and engaged in gun-fights with the military on Thursday, three witnesses and a military source said.

"After the explosion, Boko Haram started sporadic shoot-

ing with rapid propelled guns leading to the death of many people," a commander in the military Joint Task Force told Reuters, asking not to be named.

Two corpses, believed to be those of militants, were outside a police station yesterday, witness Aminu Hakuri said.

Three people were killed on Wednesday when a bomb targeting the security forces exploded in central Maiduguri.

Three foreigners were killed in two failed rescue attempts last year after being kidnapped in northern Nigeria.

EFCC arraigns seven Internet fraudsters

THE Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has arraigned seven internet fraud suspects before Justice P.I

■ **Yusuf ALLI,** Managing Editor, Northern Operation

Ajoku of the Federal High Court 2, Benin.

All the suspects have been remanded in prison custody pending the beginning of their trial.

The suspects are Philip Agbodobri (alias Daniel Karlsson), Peter Sunday (alias Richmon), Nnamdi Obinna, Amegor Ovenseri, Eloghosa Ocikiabor (alias Kristopher Kole), Osagie Aghedo Bliss and Idehen Obabueki Bleek.

The Head of Media and Publicity of the commission, Mr. Wilson Uwujaren, said the accused persons pleaded not guilty to the charges.

Philip Agbodobri (alias Daniel Karlsson), Peter Sunday (alias Richmon), Nnamdi Obinna, Amegor Ovenseri, Eloghosa Ocikiabor (alias Kristopher Kole), Osagie Aghedo Bliss, Idehen Obabueki Bleek, according to the EFCC "on or about the month of October, 2012 (and 18th day of January, 2013), at Siluko Road, Benin City within the jurisdiction of this honourable court did conspire amongst yourselves to commit felony to wit: obtaining

money by false pretence contrary to Section 8(a) of the Advance Fee Fraud and other Related Offences Act 2006 and punishable under section 1(3) of the said Act."

Uwajaren said: "In view of their plea, prosecuting counsel sought the leave of the court for a short date for trial.

"Justice Ajoku reserved ruling on their bail applications for February 27, 28, 29 and March 4; and adjourned to April 22, 25 and 29 for trials.

"The court ordered that the suspects be remanded in prison custody."

The fraudsters are among the 20 suspected internet fraudsters arrested by men of the JTF, 4 Brigade, Nigerian Army, Benin and handed over to the EFCC, January 18th, 2013, for further investigation and possible prosecution.

Twelve of them had earlier been arraigned before Justice A. M. Liman on separate charges bordering on obtaining money by false pretence. They were subsequently granted bail.

At the point of arrest, the suspected fraudsters, who had in their possession forty five (45) laptops of different make, twenty eight (28) telephone sets, eight (8) internet mobile modems and one Nissan car with registration number USL 375 AG at the point of arrest includes: Idehen Obabueki, Adesa Lucky, Usuagu Uche, Eloghosa Olikiabor, Larry Edomwonyi, Amowie Maiké, Francis Ezeigbede, Itua Samuel and Endurance John Egbeifo. Others are Amegor Ovenseri, Iyen Ighodaro, Philip Agbodor, Lucky Robinson, Nnadi Obinna, Osabuoehien Osahon, Chinenu Eze, Peter Sunday, Solomon Ogu, Niyi Femi and Osagie Aghedo.

Meanwhile, Justice Dije Abdu Aboki of the High Court of Kano State has convicted and sentenced two bankers, Funsho Olaleye and Ayoade Peter Abiola, to two years imprisonment with option of N410,000 fine each.

The first accused was ordered to pay a compensation of N700,000, while the second accused has already restituted the victim in the course of investigation.

The convicts, both former staff of Intercontinental Bank Plc (now Access Bank Plc) were arraigned by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission on a six-count charge of conspiracy and misappropriation of funds.

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•From left: Chief of Staff, Office of the Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Africa, Mr. Adeyemi Dipeolu; Special Guest of Honour and Ekiti State Governor, Dr. Kayode Fayemi; and former Attorney General and Commissioner (AiMP) in Lagos... on Thursday night.

Gunmen wipe out family of 12 at funeral

•Two-month-old among victims

■ **Yusufu IDEGU,** Jos

A wake for a grand mother in Plateau State ended in tragedy on Thursday with the death of 12 members of her family.

Gunmen suspected to be Fulani herdsmen stormed the venue at Kogom village in Vwang District of the Jos South Local Government Area and opened fire on relations and sympathisers who had gathered for the ceremony.

Two persons were injured. The gunmen seemed to have hidden nearby and waited for the wake to get underway before striking, sources said.

They attacked with guns and machetes.

A relation of the deceased, Habila Musa, put the number of the gunmen at 20.

Musa himself narrowly escaped death.

He said the invaders wore military uniforms and their guns looked sophisticated.

He said they struck at exactly 9pm and operated for an hour without challenge from any security agency.

His words: "I escaped as soon as I heard sporadic gunshots. We began running in different directions. They did not pursue me, but they went after my younger ones and killed them mercilessly. They were pursuing them with torches and shooting at the same time".

Special Adviser to Governor

Jonah Jang on Media and Publicity, Mr. Ayuba Pam, on a visit to the scene, described the incident as barbaric.

Government, he said, would not rest in the search for lasting peace in the state.

He spoke of government's determination to remain undaunted in ensuring that the

state regains its rightful place as "Home of Peace and Tourism".

He said: "I received a call from a member of the Operation Rainbow, informing me that there was an attack in Kogom village. I was told that four people were killed. Later, another figure came in that 10 people were killed, including children.

"We are very surprised that when we thought we had achieved peace at last, we are still experiencing killings. Recently the Gbong Gwom Jos and the Emir of Wase embarked on a peace tour of the four local government areas (most affected by the crisis) to strengthen peace, yet the killings continue."

The District Head of Vwang, Da Choji Balack, condemned

the attack and called for the immediate withdrawal of men of the Special Task Force (STF) in the state for allegedly shirking their responsibility and aiding the Fulani herdsmen.

Da Balack said the withdrawal of the soldiers would ensure the return of peace to the state.

Spokesman for the STF, Captain Salisu Mustapha, was unavailable to speak on the incident.

He was said to be out of the state on official assignment.

...five killed, seven injured in Gombe

G UNMEN yesterday killed five persons and injured seven others at the Bagadaza area of the Gombe metropolis in Gombe State.

A source told the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) that the gunmen came to the place and met the victims playing cards at about 4 p.m., adding that they started shooting, and in the process killed five instantly.

The source said that the injured, including a policeman attached to Government House, Gombe, had been taken to the Federal Medical Centre (FMC), Gombe for treatment.

When the NAN visited the hospital about 6.30 p.m., the injured were seen responding

to treatment at the Accident and Emergency Unit of the hospital.

The incident drew the attention of scores of relations of the victims who trooped to the hospital to know the fate of their relations.

A wife to one of the injured persons, Mrs. Kate Philibus, told the NAN that she was called and informed that her husband had been shot and was at the FMC.

"I was not there. They called and informed me that he had been shot on the arm, and I am just arriving," she said.

A father to one of the survivors, Mr. Bulus Chiroma, told newsmen that her daughter who worked at a provision store in Gombe was lucky to

have entered a house when the gunmen arrived.

He said although his daughter was also among the victims conveyed to the centre, she was, however, safe.

A policeman told the NAN on condition of anonymity that residents of the area stopped security personnel from conveying the corpses to their respective homes.

According to him, the people insisted that they must see either the Commissioner of Police or the governor of the state, Alhaji Ibrahim Dankwambo, before releasing the bodies.

Contacted, the Commissioner of Police in the state, Mr. Mohammed Sule, confirmed the incident.

He said that he was wait-