

## Boko Haram: Abductions, bomb kill ceasefire hopes



Whatever is left of the hopes of the “ceasefire” between the Federal Government and Boko Haram insurgents have been shattered.

More women are being abducted, men killed and homes burnt in Borno and Adamawa states.

Besides, a bomb went off Wednesday night in Azare, Bauchi State.

Five people were killed and 12 injured, according to the police.

This followed the abduction of about 45 women in Magadali in Adamawa State on Tuesday.

Some of those who were freed after the abduction told reporters in Yola, the Adamawa State capital, yesterday that many of the younger women among those abducted were forcibly taken straight into matrimony.

In spite of this, the government delegation and supposed representatives of the sect were in talks in N'Djamena, the Chadian capital. The talks are being moderated by Chadian President Idris Derby. Details are, however, unavailable.

Residents of the town of Wagga told AFP that 40 females were kidnapped by suspected Islamist gunmen who went door-to-door, specifically looking for young women and girls.

“They left N1500 and some kola nuts in each home where they seized a woman, apparently as a bride price,” said Lazarus Baushe, an elder of the Wagga community.

Witnesses in the nearby town of Gwarta separately reported a kidnapping last weekend involving another 20

female victims, but details were not immediately clear.

Bauchi police spokesman Mohammed Haruna said the dead in the Azare bus station blast were “burnt beyond recognition”.

No-one claimed responsibility, but Bauchi has been attacked repeatedly throughout Boko Haram’s brutal five-year uprising, which has left more than 10,000 people dead.

“Five persons burned beyond recognition were certified dead, while 12 others sustained various degrees of injuries,” Haruna said.

“The entire surrounding (area) has been cordoned off ... No arrest has yet been made, but an investigation has commenced.”

A Chadian diplomat told Reuters that a deal could still be reached if this faction has ultimate control over the girls — although analysts say that could be divided between several cooperating factions.

Reports of fresh kidnappings by the Islamists first emerged on Saturday near Chibok, where 219 schoolgirls were seized since April. Their release is part of the ongoing talks.

Confirmation that the Bauchi bombing or the latest abductions were tied to Boko Haram would further undermine the government’s claim that they have negotiated a ceasefire with the extremists.

After Chief of Defence Staff Air Chief Marshal Alex Badeh announced the ceasefire following talks in Saudi Arabia, a senior aide to President Goodluck Jonathan said Boko Haram had agreed to release the schoolgirls.

But evidence is mounting that both pacts were hollow.

There has been no comment so far from Boko Haram’s purported leader Abubakar Shekau and hopes voiced by the Presidency that the girls would be released by Tuesday came to nothing.

Nigerian negotiators were reportedly set to resume talks with Boko Haram envoys in neighbouring Chad next week, but further questions will likely be asked about the identities of the purported sect negotiators.

Some of the residents of Michika and Madagali local government areas, Adamawa State, who were abducted by Boko Haram have returned home, bearing tales of their harrowing experience.

Some of the 45 girls and women recently abducted in the area have been wedded to fighters of the Islamic sect, they said.

The insurgents, according to the returnees, have also turned some of the abducted girls to maidens who cook their food.

Many of the relatives of some of the abducted girls who were released because of ill health told reporters in Yola, the state capital, that their relatives claimed that some of the girls had been turned to cooks while others were married off to the fighters.

A relative to one of the women released by the insurgents who does not want his name in print said initially, the insurgents seized about 80 girls and women whom they loaded into vans and zoomed off.

He added that later in the night, the insurgents separated the elderly women from the girls and released them. Many, the source said, are languishing in the forest as they could not find their way back to the towns.

"We were told by trapped residents that the elderly women were released while the insurgents went away with the young ones," he said.

A relative of one of the abducted girls has enjoined the Federal and Adamawa State governments to intensify efforts at rescuing the abducted girls so that they will not be left in the hands of the insurgents for too long to save them from being abused.

"We are confused that hours after the so called ceasefire agreement has been entered between the Federal Government and Boko Haram insurgents, our girls were abducted by the insurgents.

"We are at a loss about the government's sincerity on the whole issue and we urge it to rescue our daughters without further delay as we are ready to die searching for our missing ones," he said.

More than 400 girls have so far been kidnapped by the fighters since April 2014 in many places across Adamawa, Yobe and Borno states since the insurgency began five years ago.