

Boko Haram gunmen kill scores in attack on market



Sect takes another town in Borno

Jonathan meets Chadian President

Another Borno State town has been taken by the Boko Haram sect, it was learnt yesterday.

An unknown number of people were killed when sect members invaded Damasak at dawn yesterday.

Damasak is an isolated town on the border with Niger Republic. It is 116 kilometres from Maiduguri, the state capital.

According to Senator Maina Lawan, eyewitnesses said the attackers arrived with improvised explosive devices and petrol bombs in a convoy of Toyota Hilux vehicles and motorcycles.

No fewer than 300 soldiers guarding the town were said to have retreated.

A military source said the insurgents attacked the town on Friday but failed, losing some men. They, however, returned on Monday.

The source said: "When they attacked on Friday, we were able to fight them back forcing them to retreat. We were also able to capture one of their buffalo vehicles as they did not know what hit them."

The situation is ongoing and the picture confusing, the source added.

Other witnesses told French News Agency (AFP) that the militants entered the town, disguised as soldiers before attacking traders in the market. Government official Mohammed Damasak said the group concealed their

weapons in containers before opening fire.

“They pretended to be traders but sadly inflicted horror,” said Damasak. “Many traders escaped with bullet wounds while many are lying dead at the market.”

According to Reuters, the militants continued to prowl the town hours after the initial attack, despite the fact government soldiers have now reached the scene.

A witness, Bukar Aji, told Reuters from the village: “The insurgents came at about 9.00 am and fired shots into houses to force people out. They are still there up till now and still firing shots. Many people may have died. I am talking to you now from the bush.”

The attack on Damasak is the third in under a week in Borno. Last Thursday, the sect’s members ambushed 48 fishermen and killed them by tying them up and throwing them into Lake Chad.

The European Union (EU) and Spain have condemned the attacks.

A statement issued by EU regional group spokesperson Michael Mann said the EU hope to further reinforce the Nigerian efforts in the fight against the sect.

Mr. Mann said: “Deadly attacks on innocent villagers have become daily routine in north eastern Nigeria. It is appalling to see that Azaya Kura in Borno State has been targeted already for the second time this year. In the latest attack, at least 45 people were killed and more than 50 injured. We express our condolences to the families of those killed and our sincere wishes for a speedy recovery to the injured.

“The European Union stands with the Nigerian government and its people in their fight against terrorism. The Ministerial dialogue between Nigeria and the EU, to be held next week in Abuja, will give us the opportunity to discuss how further to reinforce the Nigerian efforts to bring peace, security and development to the areas affected by the Boko Haram insurgency”.

Spain condemned the massacre, stating that it is with Nigeria’s authority in its fight against terrorism.

For the second time in two months, President Goodluck Jonathan met yesterday with President Idris Deby of Chad on how to tackle the Boko Haram menace.

The talks came barely few days after a political associate of Chadian President was arrested along Chadian-Sudan border, allegedly with 19 SAM2 missiles meant for Boko Haram.

The Presidency described Jonathan’s meeting with Deby as “bilateral”, but *The Nation* gathered that the session might have to do with the botched ceasefire deal with the sect for the release of the abducted 219 Chibok girls.

According to sources, the President’s trip was connected with the ongoing regional collaboration to end the Boko Haram insurgency.

A source, who pleaded not to be named, said: “The trip was rated as bilateral but it was not unconnected with Boko Haram and the negotiation with the sect for freedom for the abducted Chibok girls.

“The truth is that everyone has come to realise that Chad is vital to any solution to the insurgency in the Northeast because Boko Haram is said to have a solid base in that country.

“Nigerian President went to Chad to review the insurgency, compare notes and weigh the status of the ongoing ceasefire negotiation with the sect.”

A security source said Nigeria was working on a tentative timeline to end the insurgency by December and it might require a total declaration of war against the insurgents.

The source said: "With the December target, the Federal Government may have no choice than to move decisively against the insurgents. This involves putting all Nigerian neighbours, such as Cameroon, Chad and Niger on the alert.

"There is no way Nigerian military will not chase these insurgents to some of these neighbouring countries.

"The government has been pushed to the wall. Imagine the dastardly killing of 48 fish traders and blockade of a route linking Nigeria with Chad near Doron Baga in Borno State.

"The government is now desperate to deal with the situation in the Northeast before it spreads to other states."

The President told reporters that Boko Haram had a lot of external influence from outside Africa and it had become even more imperative for all countries in the region to work together to overcome terrorism and other criminal activities across their borders.

"If you look at the economies of Nigeria and Chad both are linked. The Boko haram people don't take permission to move from Chad, Niger, Cameroon and Nigeria.

"If the countries do not cooperate, we will not find it easy to win the war, because when the heat is strong in one country, the criminals and terrorists will go to another one and hide.

"So we must work together and we are discussing along that line," President Jonathan told reporters.

He said that discussions between both countries on cooperation in the ICT sector were ongoing and expressed optimism that more proficient use of modern technology will help greatly to address economic and security challenges in the region.

President Jonathan who was accompanied on the one-day official visit by Minister of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Aminu Wali and the Director-General the National Intelligence Agency, Ambassador Ayodele Oke.

The Borno-Yobe Peoples Forum yesterday said it was opposed to the extension of emergency rule in the two states.

Instead, the Forum said it would prefer homespun self-defence mechanisms to tackle Boko Haram.

The Forum made its position known in a communiqué at the end of its session in Abuja.

Though the session was held on Sunday, the communiqué was released yesterday.

It reads in part: "On the issue of the extension of emergency rule, the Forum resolves to support the efforts of some of its Senators and House of Representatives members to resist the extension, saying that more towns and cities have fallen into the hands of the insurgents, more lives have been lost, more territories have been annexed and many more people have been internally displaced under the emergency rule than ever before.

"Against the above backdrop, the Forum resolves to partner with all levels of government in Borno and Yobe states, traditional rulers, religious leaders, community heads and youth drops with a view to putting up appropriate homespun self-defence mechanisms to protect and secure lives and property in the affected areas.