

Panic in FCT, Kwara, Ekiti over 240 fleeing inmates



•IG Usman Alkali

•Gunmen kill soldier, policeman in Kogi prison attack

THERE was anxiety yesterday in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and six states sharing boundaries with Kogi State.

The panic led to heightened security following Sunday night's gunmen attack on the correctional facility in Kabba, Kogi, resulting in the escape of 240 inmates.

The whereabouts of the inmates, some of them condemned hardened

From Gbenga Omokhunu, Abuja; Adekunle Jimoh, Kwara; Toba Adedeji, Osun; Ibrahim Rasaq, Ekiti and Justina Asishana, Niger

criminals, are unknown, causing fears that they might be headed to neighbouring states.

The Kogi government has also raised the security to red alert, seeking information on the movement of the escapees.

Police in Kwara, Edo, Osun, Ekiti and Niger have taken measures to secure the states and boundaries.

In the FCT, Force Police spokesman Frank Mba, a commissioner of Police, said the force had activated all its operational and intelligence platforms in pursuit of the escapees.

Mba told one of our reporters that all hands were on deck to re-arrest the

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THE MEASURES

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- Ekiti moves undercover agents to boundaries
- Niger puts squad on red alert
- Kwara closes boundaries
- FCT tightens security

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Panic in FCT, Kwara, Osun, others over 240 fleeing inmates

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fleeing inmates.

According to him, the force will collaborate with the NCS to forestall a further breakdown of law and order.

The police spokesman said: "We have experience in dealing with matters of this nature and we will dig deep into our operational experience and toolbox to make sure we get them rearrested."

Urging the inmates to voluntarily turn themselves in, Mba said: "We have activated all our operational and intelligence platforms in pursuit of the escapees or the suspects and also in assistance and support of the correctional services.

"We are making all our intelligence and operational services available to the Nigerian Correctional Services (NCS) and we will work with the NCS as well as other patriotic citizens of this country to make sure that those suspects are rearrested as quickly as possible.

"In that vein, we are advising the suspects to give up voluntarily or face the law."

The Kwara Police Command said it has closed its borders to forestall infiltration of any of the escapees to the state.

Command spokesperson Ajayi Okasanmi said policemen in Kwara are collaborating with their colleagues in Kogi to arrest the escapees and their accessories.

Ajayi said: "The command is combat-ready to ensure there is no spillover. That's why all our borders between Kogi and Kwara are now closed."

In Osun, Commissioner of Police, Mr Olawale Olokode met with the Controller of the

240 inmates flee Kogi custodial centre, soldiers, policeman killed

NO fewer than 240 inmates of the Kabba Medium Custodial Centre, Kogi State escaped when gunmen attacked the 13-year-old facility late Sunday night.

A soldier and a policeman died in a gun duel between securitymen guarding the facility and the attackers.

The whereabouts of two Nigeria Correctional Service (NCoS) personnel had yet to be ascertained as of 9 pm yesterday.

Interior Minister Rauf Aregbesola and Comptroller-General of the NCoS Haliru Nababa said a manhunt for the fleeing gunmen and inmates had been launched.

Aregbesola added that the International Criminal Police Organisation (INTERPOL) had been contacted to watch out for any of the inmates that might attempt to flee the country.

Kogi Information Commissioner Kings-

From Blessing Olaifa and
Gbenga Omokhunu, Abuja

ley Fanwo said some of the inmates had been re-arrested. He did not give the figure.

The 200-capacity centre located along the Kabba-Lokoja Highway had 294 inmates when the gunmen struck.

Seventy of the inmates were convicted and the remaining 224 were on the pre-trial list.

Aregbesola said in a statement by his Media Assistant, Sola Fasura, that 15 soldiers, 10 policemen and 10 NCoS armed guards were on duty during the attack.

The statement partly reads: "The Kabba Custodial facility had 294 inmates as of the time of the attack, many of whom escaped after the gunmen used explosives to destroy three sides of the perimeter fence.

"However, 28 inmates didn't escape.

from Kogi.

Ogbadu also tasked all policemen in the state and the various police formations in Edo to closely monitor and check suspicious movements across the three senatorial districts.

He admonished Edo residents to offer useful and timely information to the police about criminals in their midst, particularly the escapees from the Kogi jailbreak. The police chief promised to shield the informant's identities.

The Ekiti State Police Command said it has beefed up boundary security in a bid to arrest the fleeing inmates from Kogi.

Police spokesman, Sunday Abutu, told our reporter on the phone that policemen had been placed on the alert to apprehend the fleeing inmates.

According to Abutu, operatives and undercover intelligence personnel had been deployed in all boundary communities.

Some have also voluntarily returned to the facility.

"The NCoS Comptroller-General is currently monitoring the situation. A tour of the facility is also ongoing.

"A Crisis Response Centre has been activated and a Special Taskforce mobilised to recapture escaped inmates whilst an Inter-Agency Security Task Force is already on the trail of the gunmen.

"We are also putting INTERPOL on notice with their details, in case any of them attempts fleeing outside our shores.

"The minister assures the citizenry that Nigeria's security forces will find the attackers and bring them to justice."

Also, Nababa said in a statement that the gunmen arrived at the custodial centre "heavily armed and immediately engaged the armed guards in a fierce gun battle".

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He said: "We are working in collaboration with our counterparts in Kogi to ensure the arrest of the fleeing inmate. Our men are already in the towns that share a boundary with Kogi, Ondo, and Kwara states.

"Security at the border towns has been beefed up and surveillance intensified to prevent the inmates from seeking refuge in Ekiti."

Officers and men at the Niger State Police Command have been put on red alert.

The Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) in the state, Abiodun Wasilu, a DSP, told *The Nation* that officers and men in Lapai axis were on the lookout and on patrol to ensure that no prison escapee find their way into Niger state.

He said: "The Command is aware of the effect this might have in the state because we share a common boundary with Kogi.

"The Command has therefore taken some proactive measures and has placed its

officers and patrol teams across the state on red alert and being watchful of strange faces who might be wandering around as visibility policing is reinvigorated.

"Members of the public were equally admonished to be more vigilant and be security conscious in our various communities, by informing security agencies whenever something strange is observed in their localities."

Some residents in Lapai Local Government Area, the route to Kogi from Niger, said they were confident that the escapees cannot find their way into the state.

Baba Musa, one of the residents in Gulu, said for the escapees to be able to make it to Niger State, they would have to board a boat that will open them up to suspicion.

He said: "Everyone is aware of what happened in Kogi and we are all on alert and we are ready to question or report any strange face we see com-

ing into the state through the river. We do not doubt that if anyone tries to come in, we will know."

He said that those who ride the boats have also been put on the alert.

"I have noticed more security presence today which means that the Police are also on the alert. So, we have nothing to fear," he said.

Security personnel deployed in the Ondo North Senatorial District have been put on the red alert over the possible influx of fleeing inmates from Kogi.

It was learnt that Amotekun Corps have also been deployed to strengthen security.

The Amotekun Commander, Chief Adetunji Adeleye, said his operatives, including the intelligence units, had been alerted to the Kogi jailbreak.

Adeleye assured that any fleeing inmate from Kogi would be arrested and sent back.

He stated that Governor Oluwarotimi Akeredolu had previously tasked the corps to watch out for fleeing bandits and insurgents from other parts of the country.

Ondo Police spokesman, Fumilayo Odunlami, a Deputy Superintendent of Police, said policemen at the Ondo boundary towns with Kogi State had been on the alert.

Odunlami urged the locals to report any suspicious movement of persons or any strange persons in their community.

ADVERT HOTLINES

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He added in the statement by the NCoS Public Relations Officer, Francis Enobore, that investigation had commenced.

The Kogi State Commissioner for Information also confirmed the death of two security operatives.

"Security agencies have zeroed in to ensure those who escaped are rearrested as well as trail the masterminds of the attack.

"We have confidence in our security agencies to unmask the masterminds of the attack and get them apprehended.

"Our security network led to the re-arrest of many of the inmates that escaped as some have also come back to the centre on their own.

"Security agencies, traditional rulers and local hunters are working in synergy to ensure normalcy," he said

Fanwo asked residents of Kogi and neighbouring states to volunteer information that could lead to the arrest of the gunmen.

Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (HURIWA) which described the attack as "a grave threat to Nigeria's national security," called on President Muhammadu Buhari to sack the (NCoS) Comptroller-General.

The group said Nababa's sack would send a firm message to Buhari's appointees that "indiscipline, dereliction of duty and all forms of shows-of-shame would no longer be tolerated."