

Many killed as ISWAP, soldiers battle in Borno

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FIGHTERS suspected to be members of the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) on Saturday engaged in a fierce battle with troops of the Nigerian Army at a military base in Askira/Uba Local Government Area of Borno State.

Sunday Tribune learnt that the attack came hours after top commanders of ISWAP were killed by military air strikes; fighters of the sect launched attacks in Askira Uba, Mulai, Ngamdu and Buniyadi in the North-East.

Investigation by *Sunday Tribune* revealed that residents were said to have reported the movement of the terrorists to security forces but no action was taken before the deadly group stormed Askira town

hours later.

Findings by *Sunday Tribune* revealed that the ISWAP fighters in a long convoy were seen along Ngude axis moving towards Askira town in early morning of Saturday.

Some of the latest casualties, it was gathered, included a military commander who was leading reinforcement troops.

Confirming the attacks, Deputy Speaker of Borno State House Assembly, Abdullahi Musa Askira, disclosed that the insurgents and troops engaged in a fierce battle.

"Yes, ISWAP attacked Askira town. I was informed that our troops fought them, but residents ran into the bush for safety.

"My people told me that the insurgents came with about 16 gun-trucks and

there was confusion in the town," Askira said.

A member of civilian JTF, Yakubu Luka, said immediately the attackers stormed the town, they went to the military base.

"We are expecting reinforcement from the nearby community, as I am speaking with you heavy gunfire is ongoing.

"We are appealing to the authorities to send fighter jets to support the ground soldiers. We are outnumbered; we only have five gun trucks with us," Yakubu said.

It was gathered that many people were killed during the battle.

Meanwhile, President Muhammadu Buhari has expressed sadness over the demise of Brig.-Gen. Dzarma Zirkusu and three soldiers who paid "the su-

preme sacrifice while fighting terrorists in the North-east zone of the country".

The president, who expressed his feelings in a statement issued by his media aide, Malam Garba Shehu, on Saturday, in Abuja, noted that the soldiers lost their lives in a very rare display of gallantry as they tried to help their compatriots against terrorists.

He said: "Nigeria has lost brave soldiers. I salute their courage. May their souls Rest In Peace. Gen. Zirkusu leaves us sad and devastated.

"The soldier in him will remain immortal."

The president urged the Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen. Faruk Yahaya, to accept his heartfelt condolences and that of the nation, and conveyed same to the families of those martyred.