

Hours before Buhari's visit, explosions rock Maiduguri

3 killed, military battles ISWAP

Remain steadfast in final push against insurgents, president tells troops

From Atiku Galadima and Leon Usigbe

SOME hours before the visit of President Muhammadu Buhari to Maiduguri, Borno State, on Thursday, military forces battled Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) fighters after multiple explosions rocked the state capital.

The troops were massively deployed to foil attack by the terrorists on the state capital. Local sources told PRNigeria that mortar bombs were launched at some parts of the state capital by the ISWAP fighters which landed on many houses around Ngomari, Bulumkutu and Ayafe close to the airport.

Later, surveillance military aircraft were deployed to assist the ground troops to forestall any impending attack by ISWAP elements.

There was no immediate

word on who fired the projectiles, but the rocket hit Bulumkutu Kasuwa, Ajiri cross and Ngomari Ayafe in which three persons were said to have lost their lives according to sources.

The blasts which came a few hours before President Buhari's arrival to the state left about eight persons injured.

Witnesses told Nigerian Tribune that some of the rockets had hit Ngomari Ayafe neighborhood, less than two miles from the Air Force base where the president was expected to land.

It was the second such strike against Maiduguri, the state capital, since the December 4 attack.

On hand to receive the president was the state governor, Professor Babagana Zulum; alongside his cabinet members; Kaduna State governor, Malam Nasir el-Rufai among other security chiefs.

Among the projects he commissioned was the first 10km flyover in the state capital and an international conference centre.

On arrival, President Buhari told troops of Operation Hadin Kai to remain steadfast as they go into the final phase of the campaign against insurgency and other forms of criminalities.

The president, who addressed the troops at the Air Force Base in Maiduguri, said the nation remains grateful for the gallantry displayed in ensuring gradual return of peace to the North-East, while condoling with families that had lost loved ones and the wounded.

Buhari was quoted to have said, "I urge you also to stay focused to achieve our strategic end-state which is the defeat of all adversaries and restoration of an economically viable North-East geopolitical zone and other parts of

the country where Nigerians are free to go about their activities without fear or harassment."

Buhari assured families of soldiers who paid the supreme price for the nation and the injured that the Federal Government will cater for their needs, recognising their sacrifices for all Nigerians.

"I am, therefore, here on behalf of a grateful nation to thank and commend you for your service and sacrifices. Let me start by commiserating with you all on the unfortunate loss of Brigadier-General Dzarma Zirkushu and other personnel of 25 and 28 Task Force Brigades, who died on November 13, 2021.

"I do this mindful of the fact that we have lost others in this theatre of operation as well as other operational areas across the country. We pray for the repose of their souls and for the Almighty God to comfort the families

that they left behind.

"The people of Borno State and indeed the entire country owe a debt of gratitude to our serving men in uniform for the huge sacrifices in the pursuit of peace," he said.

He also noted that the response exhibited across the theatre had shown extraordinary resilience and steadfastness in the face of adversity, saying "that is the spirit, tenacity and resolve that the Nigerian Armed Forces is known for. Well done."

"Our country, just like all the others in the Sahel region, is faced with several security challenges that are largely characterised by the violent activities of non-state actors. This has necessitated several interventions aimed at ensuring the security of persons and property across the numerous hot spots.

"Further improvements in the security situation in Operation Hadin Kai have led

to a corresponding rise in the confidence of our people who are now returning in significant numbers to their homes.

"Further to the reorganisations in the military leadership, concerted efforts are being made to improve your equipment holding. I am aware that you have started receiving some of the platforms procured by our administration while others would be received in the weeks ahead."

The president noted that substantial resources had also been directed at procuring equipment for explosive ordinance disposal.

He then appreciated the government of Borno State for its continuous cooperation with the Federal Government in multiple spheres, adding that "this has been critical to the furtherance of our mutual efforts at restoring peace to the state."