

Five killed, 443 inmates at large as gunmen attack Kuje prison

•64 Boko Haram members escaped —Defence Minister

•Abba Kyari, Dariye, Nyame safe in custody —NCoS

•Buhari questions intelligence failure over attack

•ISWAP claims responsibility

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THE Kuje Medium Security Custodial Centre came under attack with explosive devices on Tuesday night by suspected terrorists who succeeded in freeing about 879 inmates, including Boko Haram members held in the centre.

It was gathered that the attack, which began at exactly 10:26 p.m., threw the entire area council into confusion as residents ran into different directions for safety.

An eyewitness said: "The first explosion, a high-capacity bomb, went off at about 10:27 p.m. and was followed by second and third blasts and sporadic gunshots that left residents scrambling for safety."

It was gathered that 443 of the escapees had been recaptured, bringing the total number of inmates in the facility to 578, while three of the attackers were killed during the encounter with security operatives, with several others escaping with bullet wounds.

Nigerian Tribune gathered that the facility houses over 900 inmates as of the time of attack.

The attackers were said to have overpowered about 38 military personnel and other security officers on ground, leading to the death of an official of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) attached to the custodial centre, while three personnel of the Nigeria Correctional Service were seriously injured.

NCoS authorities have, however, confirmed that the suspended Deputy Commissioner of Police, Abba Kyari; former Plateau State governor, Joshua Dariye; his Taraba State counterpart, Jolly Nyame, and other Very Important Personalities (VIPs) held in the facility did not escape, stressing that they are currently in custody hale and hearty.

Dariye and Nyame, who had been granted pardon by the National Council of States, were also in the facility during the attack.

The Kuje prison is famous for holding high-profile inmates and suspects, including former governors and ministers.

The Controller-General of

Corrections, Haliru Nababa, cleared the air on the whereabouts of Kyari, Dariye and Nyame after initial reports of the attack suggested that they had gone missing.

Nigerian Tribune observed that the custodial facility had been cordoned off by combined security operatives, including military personnel, personnel of the Nigeria Police Force, NSCDC, Department of State Services (DSS) and NCoS Armed Squad, just as police helicopter hovered around the area.

Nababa, in a statement by the Public Relations Officer of NCoS, Umar Abubakar, confirmed that the attack occurred at 11:00 p.m. on Tuesday.

He also disclosed that a total of 879 inmates escaped from the facility during the attack.

Nababa immediately ordered the deployment of the e-Corrections Information Management System (e-CIMS) to track all fleeing inmates and return them to custody.

While appealing for prompt supply of credible information to re-arrest the fleeing inmates, the Controller-General assured the public that the biometrics of all the inmates are intact and would be used to track them wherever they hide.

"As of the time of this report, 443 have been recaptured, 578 inmates are currently in custody, 443 inmates are still at large, four inmates died and 16 inmates sustained various degrees of injury and are being treated at the moment."

"However, efforts are ongoing to recapture all fleeing inmates," he said.

The statement reads in part: "In furtherance to my earlier press release on the unfortunate attack by gunmen suspected to be terrorists, I wish to state that the attackers broke into the Medium Security Custodial Centre, Kuje using explosive devices through the main entrance and the fence of the facility respectively, killing an officer of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) attached to the Custodial Centre and left three personnel of the Nigeria Correctional Service seriously injured."

"The Service will deploy its Corrections Information Management System (CIMS) in synergy with National Identity Management

Commission (NIMC) to track all fleeing inmates and return them to custody."

"This is also to confirm to the general public that DCP Abba Kyari and other VIPs held in the facility did not escape. They are presently in custody, hale and hearty."

"Recall that after the attack at the Medium Custodial Centre in Abolongo, Oyo State, the Minister of Interior, Mr Raul Aregbesola, met with heads of security agencies under his supervision where the idea of Joint Security Taskforce comprising the Nigeria Correctional Service, Nigeria Immigration Service, and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps was formed to forestall further breaches on custodial facilities."

"As of the time of the attack on the Kuje facility, we have 38 military personnel on ground, in addition to personnel of the Nigeria Police Force, Civil Defence, DSS and our Armed Squad."

"This is the minister's efforts to rejig the security architecture of our facilities."

"The public is also informed that some of the attackers were killed, while some escaped with gunshot wounds."

"We, therefore, appeal to hospitals and other medical institutions and practitioners to report anyone who comes to them for treatment for gunshot injuries to the nearest law enforcement agency."

"The Controller-General of Corrections, Haliru Nababa, appreciates the efforts of other security agencies for coming to the rescue of the service in a timely manner."

"The CG has reassured the public that the unfortunate incident is being handled with every sense of dedication and professionalism," he stated.

Meanwhile, the National Security Adviser (NSA), Major-General Mohammed Monguno, led a team of security officials on an inspection of the attacked facility.

The Federal Government, however, disclosed that all the 64 members of the Boko Haram terrorists fled the facility.

Minister of Defence, Bashir Magashi, who made this known while addressing newsmen on Wednesday, said there are strong indications that the terrorists invaded the facility to free their members being held in detention.

He explained that the Federal Government was already working hard to ensure that other fleeing inmates were recaptured and put back in the facility.

"Most likely, they are Boko Haram because we have a sizeable number of Boko Haram members who were in detention," the minister said.

"Presently, we could not locate any of them. I think there are about 64 Boko Haram members in the prison; they have all escaped," he said.

Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Interior, Mr Shuaibu Belgore, when he visited the facility earlier after the attack, explained that over 300 of the inmates had been rearrested.

Meanwhile, President Muhammadu Buhari on Wednesday visited the Medium Security Custodial Centre, Kuje, spending about 30 minutes there, just as he raised a number of questions with the authorities, including the failure of intelligence.

He was briefed about the attack by the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Interior, Dr Shuaib Mohammad Lamido Belgore, and the Controller-General of Nigeria Correctional Service, Haliru Nababa, who showed him the bombed-out section used to access first, and the records office which was set on fire.

He was told that the invaders thereafter launched an attack on all cells in which Boko Haram terrorists were held.

According to a statement issued by Senior Special Assistant to the President (Media and Publicity), Garba Shehu, the president was apprised that at the end of it, none of the 63 terrorists are accounted for, but it was emphasized that records are not lost because they have been backed up.

Shehu said President Buhari, who, like most Nigerians, was shocked by both the scale and audacity of the attack queried: "How did the defences at the prison fail to prevent the attack? How many inmates were in the facility? How many of them can you account for? How many personnel did you have on duty? How many of them were armed? Were there guards on the watchtower? What did they do? Does the CCTV work?"

The President was also informed that the security forces have recaptured 350 of the escapees, while about 450 others are still unaccounted for, and that rapid work is under way to recapture the rest.

After inspecting some of the points impacted by the attack, President Buhari spoke to newsmen, expressing disappointment with the intelligence system (and utilization).

"I am disappointed with the intelligence system. How can terrorists organise, have weapons, attack a security installation and get away with it?"

The President, accompanied by the Secretary to the Government of the Feder-

ation, Boss Mustapha; the Chief of Staff, Professor Ibrahim Gambari, said at the end of the visit that he is expecting "a comprehensive report" on the incident.

The Presidency wishes to use this opportunity to react to mounting criticism of the trip to Dakar, Senegal by the President, and to stress that governments don't stop working because nations face terrorist threats.

To cancel the trip to Senegal would mean that the terrorists are successful in calling the shots, something that no responsible government in the world will allow.

Meanwhile, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) has claimed responsibility for the attack on Kuje prison.

In a footage on Wednesday night, the terrorist group showed some of its men shooting their way into the facility.

Members of the group were seen in the video footage marching in groups, while vehicles and buildings were on fire in the 38-second video.

Also seen in the video was a man in native attire who joined members of the group and were shouting on top of their voices.

Islamic State's Amaq Agency released the video with the caption: "Fighters of Islamic State attacked Kuje prison in Abuja yesterday and succeeded in freeing dozens of prisoners."

The words were written in Arabic.



President Muhammadu Buhari during his visit to the Kuje Correctional Centre in Abuja on Wednesday, after it was attacked by terrorists on Tuesday night.