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10 killed as shi'ites, soldiers' clash in Zaria

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BY OUR REPORTER ON DECEMBER 13, 2015

COVER

- Army alleges assassination attempt on Buratai
- Sect denies allegation

FROM ABDUL HASSAN, ZARIA

Ten persons were yesterday killed in a bloody clash between the Shi'ites and soldiers in Zaria, Kaduna State.

But the army authorities said it was an attempt to assassinate the Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant-General Tukur Buratai.

"Shi'ites attempted to assassinate the Chief of Army Staff in Zaria," Army spokesman, Colonel Sani Kukasheka Usman stated in Zaria, yesterday.

An eyewitness told Sunday Sun that the clash occurred following a hot argument between Shi'ite sect members and the soldiers over alleged removal of roadblock mounted by the group on the main road from Sabon Gari to Samaru, to allow Gen. Burutai to pass, to enable him to attend the passing out parade of 72 Regular Recruits intakes at the Army Depot, Zaria.

The eyewitness, Yusuf Abubakar said, "I saw two soldiers pleading with the Shi'ite members to remove the roadblock but they refused and later the soldiers opened fire."

The leader of the sect, Sheik Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, was said to have left his home immediately after the incident to an undisclosed area

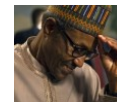
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Zazzau and attend the passing out parade of the Army recruits.

Col Usman stated further, "The sect numbering hundreds carrying dangerous weapons, barricaded the roads with bonfires, heavy stones and tyres. They refused all entreaties to disperse and then started firing and pelting the convoy with dangerous objects. The barricade was obviously a deliberate attempt to assassinate the Chief of Army Staff and members of his entourage while on a legitimate official assignment as special guest of honour at the passing out parade which has earlier been widely publicized.

"The troops responsible for the safety and security of the Chief of Army Staff on hearing explosion and firing were left with no choice than to defend him and the convoy at all cost as well as open up the barricaded road for law abiding citizens. This is in line with the Nigerian Army Rules of Engagement and Code of Conduct. This kind of behaviour will not be tolerated from any individual or groups and should not be allowed to repeat itself.

"We wish to implore all Nigerians to continue to be law abiding and remain conscious of other people's right to life, freedom of movement and passage. The Chief of Army escaped unhurt and continued with his duties."

But members of the Shiites contradicted the Army's position and that of the eyewitness.

Although the leader of the group, El-Zakzaky, could not be reached, one of his aides, Mallam Ibrahim Usman emphasized that their brotherhood was seriously opposed to the use of violence.

He said that some eyewitnesses among their members said about 10 innocent persons were shot, adding that there was no way one could know the exact number because the corpses of slain members were taken away to an unknown place by soldiers.

"It is a complete lie that our unarmed members wanted to assassinate the Chief of Army staff. In fact, I was surprised when Sani Kukasheka (Army spokesman) stated this.

"I am at the place where the alleged incident occurred. We have a programme and we were raising a flag because of Eid-el-Maulud, the birthday of the Holy Prophet is coming and we want to usher in the month.

"So, our people started gathering and we were aware that yesterday, some influential persons in Zaria Emirate had contracted hoodlums to cause disruptions and we became aware, so we gave warnings.

"This is the type of thing that the military men did to us in 2014 and we don't trust anybody here in Zaria.

"So, they just bulldozed their way, started shooting, killed some of our people and packed all the corpses away and now, they have surrounded the area where we were to do our programme.

"We can't say exactly how many people were shot because we do not even know how many or where they took those packed in military vehicles to. An eyewitness I spoke with said he saw not less than 10 bodies being taken away.

"People were just shot and their bodies taken away but Sheikh El-Zakzaky will soon tell you our position on this. If you can recall, they once killed his three sons but whatever he says is okay for all of us.

"We are now trying to recover our dead and the injured," Mallam Ibrahim Usman stated on telephone. "If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man's life, sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility," he added.

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