

NEWS

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Troops Kill Scores of Insurgents in Yobe

● **Buhari plans trip to Cameroun as US donates \$5bn to MNJTF**

● **Another 11 die in twin bomb attacks in Potiskum**

Senator Iroegbu in Abuja and Michael Olugbode in Maiduguri with agency report

The Nigerian military on Sunday repelled a renewed onslaught against Babbangida town in Yobe State by heavily armed men suspected to be members of the Boko Haram sect.

The Defence Headquarters (DHQ) confirmed this attack through its twitter handle, disclosing that the terrorists used women and children as human shields.

According to the Twitter post, "Scores of heavily armed terrorists using women and children as shields died on Sunday when they attacked Babbangida in Yobe State."

"While their action was being foiled by troops on Sunday, over 10 rifles and weapon accessories, as well as hundreds of rounds of ammunition and some hand grenades were also recovered from the terrorists as some of them fled with gunshot wounds."

DHQ also confirmed that one soldier and a vigilante member died, while five others were wounded during the encounter.

Boko Haram insurgents have recently stepped up their attacks, mostly through suicide bombing in the North-east.

To counter the attacks, President Muhammadu Buhari has moved the command centre of the Nigerian military from Abuja to Maiduguri, Borno State.

He also held talks with the leaders of Chad and Niger and immediately followed it up with an expanded meeting that included Cameroun and Benin Republic, held last week under the auspices of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) in a bid to mobilise the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) that will stop cross-border insurgent attacks.

Over the weekend, he ordered the release of \$21 million (out of the \$100 million pledged by Nigeria) to the MNJTF.

In furtherance of his objective to wipe out the insurgency, Buhari will also visit Cameroun to cement the regional fighting force against Boko Haram, he told AFP yesterday.

When Buhari met his counterparts from Niger, Chad and Benin at the LCBC summit in Abuja last week, Cameroun's leader Paul Biya was noticeably absent but was represented by his defence minister.

The two countries have long had strained ties, in part over a bitter territorial dispute but also after Boko Haram mounted cross-border raids into Northeast Nigeria from Cameroun's far north.

Buhari visited Niger and Chad in his first week in office and said he would have gone to Cameroun's capital Yaounde for talks with Biya had he not been invited to attend the G7 summit in Germany.

"But on my return to Nigeria now, I will try to go to Cameroun," he said on the sidelines of the African Union (AU) summit in Johannesburg.

Last week's Abuja summit rubber-stamped an 8,700-strong regional force involving the five countries to replace an ad hoc coalition of Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroun.

The current force came into being after Chad's President Idriss Deby sent troops to assist their Camerounian counterparts against a wave of attacks by the Islamist militants.

Troops from Niger and Chad have crossed into Nigerian territory but those from Cameroun have not, in an indication of the strained relations between the neighbours.

But Buhari indicated last Thursday that soldiers from the new MNJTF would not be restricted in terms of movement.

The MNJTF will be headed by a Nigerian officer for the duration of the mission, with his deputy from Cameroun for an initial 12 months once troops are deployed from July 30.

Buhari has made crushing Boko Haram his immediate priority since coming to power on May 29 and he told AFP that foreign support was vital.

"The most important support is intelligence. What we are looking for from the G7... is intelligence. We want help in terms of logistics," he said.

"Boko Haram declared that they are in alliance with ISIS, so terrorism has gone international. They are in Mali, they are in Nigeria, they are in Syria, they are in Iraq, they are in Yemen... It's an international problem now," he added.

Buhari's efforts to build a powerful coalition through the MNJTF got a major boost yesterday with the announcement by the United States that it would be contributing \$5 billion to the regional force in order to boost military operations against the Boko Haram insurgency.

Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the US Assistant Secretary, Bureau of African Affairs, announced this at a news briefing via telephone from the AU summit yesterday.

"We have been working with Nigeria as well as the African countries' innovation to address their concerns about Boko Haram because we don't see this as just a Nigerian problem," the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) quoted her as saying.

"We are having discussions with President Buhari on how we might bolster our support. We have already been working with them and providing information."

"We are providing some training and support and we'll love to work with the new administration to see how we might increase the level of support to Nigeria."

"At the same time, we've just announced at the venue



SERVICE TO FATHERLAND

Senator representing Ondo South senatorial district, Yele Omogunwa; Ondo State Governor, Dr. Olusegun Mimiko; former Special Adviser to the President on Niger Delta Affairs, Hon Kingsley Kuku, and Speaker, state House of Assembly, Hon. Jumoke Akindele, at a special thanksgiving service for Kuku at the First Baptist Church, Arogbu, in Ese-Odo LGA, Ondo State...weekend.

of the AU, a five billion dollar contribution to the Multinational Task Force. We are also providing some equipment and support and we have a number of meetings with the countries who are members of the Multinational Joint Task Force to look at other areas we might support," she said.

Thomas-Greenfield said that Africa had faced "some really horrendous terrorist attacks" over the past two years, citing the West Gate and Garissa University attacks in Kenya and Boko Haram attacks, particularly the kidnapping of the Chibok girls in Borno State.

"While I would not say Africa is under siege, Africa has some major security challenges that require a very strong and very concerted strategic effort by African countries and partners to address the security concerns of Africa," she continued.

"The United States is providing strong support to

the AU on security, as it has a strong partnership with Africa on security. We are working closely with the Lake Chad Basin countries: Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroun to address the issue of Boko Haram," she added.

She said America had so far trained some 250,000 African peacekeepers, and expressed its highest commitment to security on the continent.

The US envoy also used the opportunity to express support for the warrant of arrest issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) against Sudan's President Omar Al-Bashir.

"The United States frowns on plans by some African leaders to subvert the constitution to extend their terms in office. US only supports two-term limit in office," she said.

But as Nigeria and its regional partners formalise the coalition against the insurgents, the attacks in the North-east continued unabated when two suicide

bombers hit the commercial town of Potiskum, Yobe State yesterday killing 11 persons and causing injuries to eight others.

An eyewitness, Abubakar Isa, told THISDAY on the phone from the town that the first attack was launched at the vigilante group office located at Dorowa area.

According to him, a suicide bomber tried to gain entry to the office, in the process detonated an improvised explosive device, which killed seven people on the spot. He (the bomber) also died in the process.

Isa said: "A young man came to our office, but we insisted that he would only be allowed into the premises after a search. And when he pretended to be opening the bag on him, he detonated an explosive device."

He said the explosion killed one of the commanders of the vigilante group in the town, adding that the suicide bomber came to the office located near the Nigeria Prison Service with

a computer device.

Isa, who said that the attack at the vigilante office happened at 12.30 pm, said: "Just as everyone was still shell shocked following the explosion, another explosion happened five minutes later at a drinking joint in the same vicinity."

According to him, three persons including the bomber were killed in the second explosion.

He said the bomber walked into the local pub, pretending to want a drink and detonated the explosive device strapped on him.

A source at the General Hospital, Potiskum, said 11 corpses were deposited in the morgue of the hospital.

She also revealed that eight persons were brought to the Accident and Emergency Unit of the hospital.

Yesterday's attack came just one day after Boko Haram militants attacked Babbangida, the headquarters of Tarmuwa Local Government Area in the state.

OPC Pulls out of NNPC Pipeline Surveillance

The Oodua People's Congress (OPC) has said it will pull out its men from guarding all Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) pipelines nationwide from yesterday evening.

The spokesman for Gani Adams faction of the congress, Mr. Yinka Oguntimehin, said this in an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) in Lagos yesterday.

Oguntimehin said this became necessary because the corporation was yet to start paying for the work its men were doing.

He said the corporation was, as part of the contractual agreement entered into, three months ago, expected to start payment.

The spokesman said the OPC

personnel had continued to guard the pipelines with the belief that the corporation would pay as promised.

"When we were given the contract on March 15, it was agreed that they will release money for the OPC personnel for effective protection of the NNPC pipelines nationwide."

"We lost one man last month because of the activities of the vandals here in Lagos, while some of our men were arrested in the course of protecting the pipeline."

"We had told them to release some of our money before the new administration took over, but they kept promising us."

"Enough is enough, three

months have passed since our members started monitoring the pipeline, and we have fulfilled our part of the agreement."

"By 10p.m today, our personnel will move out of the NNPC pipelines nationwide and

this applies to other groups in the country," he said.

The federal government had in March awarded a multi-billion naira contract to the OPC to secure NNPC pipelines in the South-west Zone of the country.

PDP Governors' Forum Meeting Holds Today

The Peoples Democratic Party Governors' Forum (PDPGF) will today hold its first post-general election meeting.

The meeting is scheduled for 7p.m. in Maitama, Abuja. In a statement released

by the Coordinator of the Forum, Osaro Onaiwu, top on the agenda are issues like post-election assessment of the party, the way-forward as well as the election of the chairman from among the thirteen members.