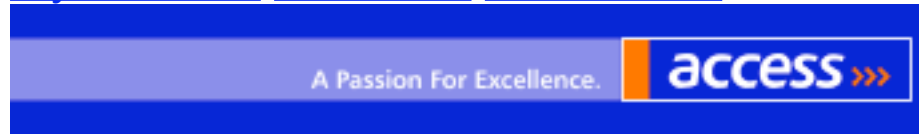


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Boko Haram: 30 Gunned Down in Military Operation

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Lt. General Azubuike Ihejirika , Chief of Army Staff

By Mike Olugbode and Aisha Wakaso with agency reports

And the bloodbath continues. Saturday night, 30 persons, including a 13-year-old boy, were killed during a joint military and police operation against Boko Haram in Maiduguri, Borno

State capital.

In Suleja, Niger State, a blast targeted at a church led to the death of four persons, with many injured.

"At about 19:30 a patrol team of the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) was attacked with improvised explosive devices and several gunshots from a building in a bus park," Colonel Victor Ebhaleme, speaking for the task force, told the media Sunday.

Commander of the JTF, Maj. Gen. Nwachukwu Nwaogbo, said security forces launched a search operation after two suspected members threw two homemade bombs at patrol cars from a moving bus, injuring five soldiers.

Nwaogbo told journalists in Maiduguri that a 13-year-old boy, five men and 11 suspected members of Boko Haram were killed during the operation on Saturday.

Other sources however put the casualty figure above the 17 admitted by the military.

The residents claimed that over 30 persons were killed by the soldiers who they alleged went into their homes, brought out their men and shot them.

Usman Abdullahi, the 36-year-old brother of a victim, said soldiers chased people in the streets for hours and shot at them. He said the soldiers accused them of being Boko Haram members.

THISDAY gathered that as a result of the battle which went on throughout the night, residents of Kalari area are packing out en mass.

Some of the fleeing residents said there had been massive killing of innocent civilians during the rampage.

According to them, some angry soldiers, after the attack on them by suspected members of Boko Haram, attacked many households.

Many people, including a member of the academic staff of the University of Maiduguri, were killed by gun shots, while several houses and cars belonging to the residents were burnt.

But in a press release from the headquarters of the JTF code-named "Operation Restore Order (ORO)", they said the buildings that got burnt were destroyed by the bombs detonated by the Boko Haram members.

The statement read: "The JTF ORO in Borno State wishes to once again draw the attention of the general public to the danger of allowing residential and business premises to be used by members of outlawed Boko Haram sect as was experienced in London-Chiki Sunday.

"At about 7:30pm, a patrol team of the JTF was attacked at Kalarin in London Chiki area of Maiduguri metropolis with Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and several gunshots from a bus parked at a building.

“The attack was successfully repelled by members of the JTF and 11 members of the sect killed while two members of the JTF were injured. Some buildings and vehicles were however destroyed by the IED.

“The JTF is aware that some members of the general public have prior information on attacks on security agencies and willingly allow their premises to be used for such act without reporting to the security agencies. The public is again reminded of the implication of such collaboration as it will be dealt with appropriately.

“In a related development, an IED targeted at patrol vehicles of JTF this morning exploded around Ramat square area. Some of the items used have been recovered by the JTF and investigation is on-going. However, no casualty was recorded.

“The JTF wishes to assure the general public of its commitment to restoring order in the state and urges law abiding citizens to go about their normal businesses.”

A resident of Kalari, Mallam Yau, told reporters that “we could not sleep last night because of the bomb blast and gunshots; many people have been killed that I cannot give the number now... Many houses and cars have been set ablaze during the battle by some people we saw wearing military uniforms.

“We have seen death, we have seen blood-letting and many of us have left since early this morning. We are in pains; we are between the devil and the deep blue sea, because

neither the Boko Haram nor the JTF are making our lives safe here.”

When THISDAY visited the scene of the destruction, there were several burnt vehicles and houses at different locations of the area. The residents told journalists that they were certainly set ablaze because they were far away from the spot where the soldiers battled with the fundamentalists.

Another resident, an aged woman, said one Adamu Abdullahi, a lecturer at the University of Maiduguri – whose burnt house was still smoking as at the time of the visit – was killed when he was “trying to turn back upon sighting his house on fire”.

Pointing at the deceased’s car, she said: “His car which is over there hit the wall of the house of his neighbour, then he was shot and his car set ablaze. His corpse was not picked by the soldiers. This morning, his relatives came and took it away.”

Over 2,000 residents of Kalari and some in other parts of London-Chiki have deserted the area, leaving their houses under lock and key.

Maryam Habu, from Gwoza Local Government Area of Borno State, who was sighted dragging two of her kids out of the embattled area, said: “We are on our way to our village now; this madness is enough.”

Sunday, many churches could not hold services. Armed soldiers ordered worshippers to return to their homes as some major streets were condoned off as gunshots were heard

throughout the town in the morning.

In Suleja, an explosive thrown at a church killed four persons and seriously injured four others.

For the third time in five months, the commercial city experienced a blast.

According to THISDAY sources, the bomb was thrown in front of the All Christian Fellowship Mission, along Church Road, at about 2.30pm.

The building of the neighbouring church, Faith Mission Church, was also affected in the blast.

The attackers had thrown the bomb from a moving motorbike popularly known as Okada.

The newspaper gathered that the effect of the explosion would have been worse if it had happened during worship hours.

Those affected in the blast were said to have waited behind after the service in the All Christian Fellowship Mission for a meeting when the explosion killed four of them, leaving seven injured.

The bodies of the victims have been deposited at the Suleja General Hospital mortuary, while those injured have been transferred to the Gwagwalada Specialist Hospital.

Two of the victims, who lost their lives in the blast, are said to be women, one of whom was the secretary to the pastor. The other two are men.

In its reaction, the Niger State Government condemned the act describing it as inhuman and a terrorist act, adding that the perpetrators would be brought to book.

The first explosion on March 3rd during the zonal campaign of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) killed 10, while the second occurred on the eve of the elections to the National Assembly at the Suleja Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) office, killing eight ad hoc staff of the commission.

Boko Haram attacks have killed more than 150 people this year alone.

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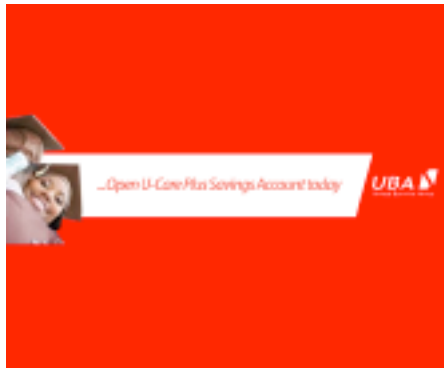
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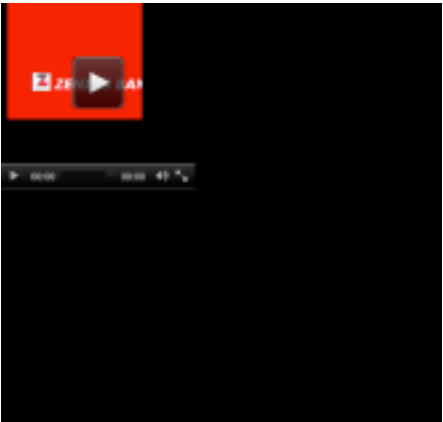
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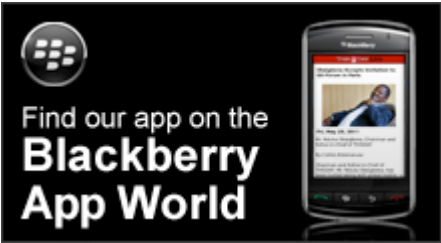




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