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Closed Airport: Shettima's Brother Involved in Road Accident

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Maiduguri Airport

- Sheriff lands on Maiduguri

Michael Olugbode

The closure of Maiduguri International Airport has recorded its first casualty as an elder brother of the Borno State Governor, Alhaji Kashim Shettima, Shettima Mohammed Shettima, was involved in a ghastly motor accident during a trip to Kano to join a flight to Saudi Arabia for the lesser hajj.

While the governor's elder brother was fortunate to be alive after having multiple fractures, the police orderly attached to him after series of threat from Boko Haram insurgents, was not so lucky as he died from injuries sustained during the accident.

The Maiduguri International Airport was closed to commercial flights in February this year following the bombing of the Air Force Base in the town by insurgents.

This attack made the federal government to close the airport to all manner of the flights on June 27 for a period of three months due to security concerns.

This had compelled the intending pilgrims for this year's lesser hajj to travel by road to Kano amidst fear over their safety.

THISDAY gathered that the accident occurred at about 2p.m., about 20 kilometres from Damban in Bauchi State, while the governor's brother was travelling to board a Max Airline, departing from Kano to Saudi Arabia.

Recall that a chartered Max Airline flight which had arrived the Maiduguri airport on June 27 to airlift the 276 already screened intending pilgrims from Borno and Yobe States was turned back by security operatives at the airport.

It was later announced that the airport would remain closed to all manner of aircraft until September 29, by the time hajj airlift would have been concluded.

The closure, it was gathered, had caused hiccups in the handling of the activities of the state government especially those that involved support from the federal government institutions in Abuja as officials of the state government have had to travel a daylong journey to the federal capital territory.

The governor of the state was even compelled to travel by road to visit his brother in a Kano hospital where he is receiving treatment.

Shettima, who was not allowed the luxury of a chartered flight based on the decision of the federal government, had to embark on the five-hour road trip to Kano to see his brother from where he would travel to Saudi Arabia for the lesser hajj.

However, THISDAY gathered that despite the closure of the airport, a former governor of the state, Senator Ali Modu Sheriff, was at the weekend allowed by the federal government to fly into Maiduguri aboard a private jet.

Sheriff arrived the airport at about 1:40p.m. on board his private jet with registration number 5NBMH to the waiting hands of dozens of soldiers led by the Garrison Commander of 7 Division of the Nigerian Army in Maiduguri, Colonel D.R. Hassan who led troops to give cover to the ex-governor.

The plane subsequently departed the airport at 2:22p.m. and is expected to return today to airlift the former governor back to Abuja.

Sheriff is expected to defect to the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and lead the re-election bid of President Goodluck Jonathan in Borno State.

The former state governor was welcome by politicians mostly carrying PDP flags and chanting the slogan of the party, "power, power."

The former governor was in the company of some of his political associates, including Mohammed Imam, said to be interested in running for the governorship position of the state in 2015; Hon. AbdulRahman Terab, Hon. Lawan Isa and Hon. Peter Biye, all members of House of Representatives from the state.

Others who arrived with Sheriff in the flight were Alhaji Mala Othman and Alhaji Yusuf Adamu both former chairman and secretary of the defunct All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) respectively.

Meanwhile, the already tensed state was thrown into pandemonium as sporadic gunshots were heard in parts of Maiduguri yesterday.

Some investigations revealed that the shot were fired by security officers to scare off some political thugs who had laid siege at the residence of Sheriff who made an appearance in the town after a long absence.

The gunshots was without a casualty as a council official who worked as a treasurer in Kala-Balge Local Government Area, was said to have been killed by stray bullets by policemen who tried to disperse the thugs whose mission to the residence of the politician could not be immediately known.

Some people in town said they were at the residence to harass the political former governor who is said to be finalising plans to added to PDP.

Others said they were part of the huge crowd that took to the streets to welcome the former governor back to town.

An eyewitness said the police and soldiers were harassing everybody and blocked major roads "as if it was the president of the country that was making an appearance.

"They beat many people up and block the major roads with armoured tanks that they should have been deplored to fight insurgents as if any one of note is interested in Sheriff sudden reappearance."

The witness said: "It was during the harassment and the shooting that the man who was not part of the crowd was hit by the stray bullet."

Attempt to get police confirmation was not successful as the calls to the line of the state Police Public Relations Officer, Gideon Jibrin, did not go through.

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