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Boko Haram Suspect: We Were Sent to Bomb Lagos Airport

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Boko Haram suspect

- Others deployed to Apapa, Lagos Island
- Insurgents kill 10 in Borno villages

Chiemelie Ezeobi, Chinedu Eze and Michael Olugbode with agency report

The Boko Haram suspect who was arrested at National Airport Management Authority (NAMA) annex in Lagos yesterday, confessed last night that he was sent along with other Boko Haram members to Lagos to bomb various parts of the city.

The physically challenged 22-year-old suspect who was caught with canisters around his neck, in his confession, told security operatives that his two other colleagues were assigned the task of bombing Murtala Mohammed International Airport (MMIA), as well as the densely populated Lagos Island and Apapa areas of the megacity.

Security source, who spoke exclusively to THISDAY, said the suspect (name withheld) had confessed that he alongside several others were recruited from Niger Republic and were trained extensively before their deployment.

He also said the plot to bomb Lagos would not be simultaneously done, a clear deviation from the planned simultaneous attacks last year March, when the sect tried to bomb various designated places across the state at the same time.

According to him, the attempt by the physically-challenged suspect was the first attempt to bomb Lagos after the twin bomb blasts in Apapa two months ago that claimed no fewer than five persons including the suicide bomber.

A security official, who spoke to THISDAY on the strict condition of anonymity, said the attempt would have been successful but for the inability of the explosives to detonate when they were supposed to.

He said: "He was caught because when he tried to set off the explosives, there was a hitch. He ran back to an obscure place to check it out and fix it.

His suspicious movement and the frustration evident on his face aroused the suspicion of security operatives attached to NAMA."

Also speaking, another source from the state security department said already, investigations had kicked off in full gear to round up other suspects who were said to have been deployed to wreak havoc in the state.

The suspect was arrested at the NAMA annex facility, known as CENTREX, about 300 meters from the international terminal of the airport, opposite the airport cathedral.

THISDAY learnt that the suspect was making frantic phone calls, and looked frustrated and restless.

His mannerism and slovenly conduct aroused the suspicion of security personnel who were watching him and subsequently arrested him.

He was taken to the MMIA police station at Beesam junction.

Shortly after his arrest, the police had initially pleaded for more time to undertake the investigation to confirm the identity and mission of the suspect.

The police also said that the suspected explosive device found on the suspect would be examined and confirmed later, adding that it would be hasty to describe it as an explosive.

A police officer, however, described the device found on the suspect as locally made explosives.

Reacting to the incident, the General Manager, Public Affairs of NAMA, Supo Atobatele, said the suspect was within the vicinity of the airport making phone calls along the Airport Road when the agency's security personnel accosted him.

He said his incoherent explanation aroused further suspicion, especially with the suspicious looking canisters on his person.

"The attention of NAMA has been drawn to insinuations that a suspected suicide bomber was arrested at one of the agency's facilities at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos, on Monday.

"The basic truth however is that the said suspect was on the ground making phone calls along the Airport Road close to CENTREX, an annex office of NAMA when the agency's security personnel accosted him.

"His incoherent explanation exposed him to the security personnel who later found on him some devices suspected to be explosives. He was subsequently handed over to the Airport Police Command for further investigation.

"The Managing Director, Ibrahim Abdulsalam, in reaction, commended the security personnel for their vigilance and prompt arrest of the suspect," Atobatele said in a statement.

The suspect who wore brown shorts and a white T-shirt was prevented from speaking to reporters about his mission to the airport.

But another policeman told THISDAY that the suspect was not willing to talk initially, having concealed his age but later said that his father was from Kano while his mother was from Cameroun and that he lived in Nasarawa quarters in Kano.

Yet, another senior security official with one of the aviation agencies told THISDAY that enquiries had revealed that the suspect was from Niger Republic, arrived Lagos on Sunday and was asking people for the location of the airport before he was arrested.

The official alleged that the suspect was on a mission and was sent by somebody, dismissing the initial statement from the police that he was a lunatic.

"I don't think that the suspect is a lunatic. If the police say that he is a lunatic let them prove that he is one.

"From my own assessment, the suspect was on a mission; he was sent by somebody, but the police have not given us more information. I went to see him and the young man spoke both in English and in Hausa. The police said they should be given time to investigate the suspected devices, so let me give them time," the official said.

Meanwhile, suspected Boko Haram gunmen have killed 10 people who had fled their homes to avoid the incessant attacks by the insurgents, reported AFP yesterday.

The villagers who were running from death inadvertently ran into death when they encountered the insurgents in a nearby village in Borno State.

Like drunken murderers, the insurgents opened fire on them killing all 10, witnesses said yesterday.

Residents of Krenuwa village had fled to nearby communities after Boko Haram members raided their community last month killing seven people.

The people were further terrified when they saw the extremists raze a military camp, police station and several homes.

About a dozen militants stormed the villages of Durwa and Maforo in the Marte district on Sunday, where some of the villagers were seeking refuge.

"They came on motorcycles and gathered people before singling out their victims who moved in from Krenuwa after it was attacked", said Usman Ari, a Durwa resident.

"They shot six of them dead and slaughtered four," said Ari, who fled to the Borno State capital, Maiduguri, some 100 kilometres away after the attack on the community.

After the attack in Durwa, the suspected Boko Haram gunmen stormed nearby Maforo and killed four, said Hassan Goni, another Durwa resident, who also fled to Maiduguri.

"We are afraid they are going to come back for more attacks which is why we left," he added.

After the attack on Krenuwa village, a counter-offensive by soldiers killed five insurgents and captured another five.

Krenuwa resident, Abba Kolomi, said Boko Haram had also killed six people from the village who sought refuge across the border in Chad.

The Marte district was one of the areas where Boko Haram chased out the government last year, forcing President Goodluck Jonathan to declare a state of emergency in the region and a military offensive to crush the uprising.

Although a scorched-earth military response reclaimed the territory, deadly Boko Haram raids on towns and villages in the area have continued unabated.

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