

Police: 19 Sect Members Killed in Nigeria Clashes

Associated Press writers Ibrahim Abdul contributed from Jalingo and Ibrahim Garba contributed from Kano.

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Multiple clashes between security forces and suspected members of a radical Islamist sect in Nigeria's north have left four policemen, four civilians and 19 militants dead, authorities said Wednesday, as the feared sect continues to widen the scope of its attacks.

Assailants torched two blocks of empty classrooms at the Federal Polytechnic Damaturu in the northeastern city of Damaturu Tuesday evening, said Yobe state police chief Patrick Egbuniwe.

Salisu Ado, who lives near the polytechnic, said he heard a blast at around 6 p.m. Tuesday. He said it destroyed a nearby police outpost in a city still reeling from multiple sect attacks last week which, authorities say, left 40 people dead.

Suspected Boko Haram members and Nigerian security forces had clashed early last week in the besieged city. The police and army had fought back after Boko Haram sect members struck six churches, five primary schools, a police station and a police outpost across the city, authorities said.

Egbuniwe said security forces engaged the sect in another hours-long gun battle Tuesday night that left two suspected sect members dead in Damaturu. He said at least two civilians were also killed and two more injured in the attacks.

In a major northern city about 430 kilometers (270 miles) west of Damaturu, police say gunmen targeted police in two residential neighborhoods.

About 30 suspected sect members stormed one part of the city, attacking a police station and a police outpost, said Kano state police chief Ibrahim Idris.

He said gunmen also attacked a police college and barracks in another part of Kano, Nigeria's second-largest city.

Idris said 17 suspected sect members were killed in an ensuing gun battle and three others arrested. He said a policeman was also killed and another wounded.

In January, a coordinated assault on government buildings and other sites in Kano by Boko Haram killed at least 185 people. In the time since, the sect has been blamed for attacking police stations and carrying out smaller assaults in the city. Idris said that at least 45 civilians have died in drive-by killings that occurred after the January attacks.

Later Tuesday night, about 730 kilometers (450 miles) from Kano, gunmen attacked a police station and administrative police offices in the town of Wukari in the northcentral state of Taraba, said Taraba police spokesman Amos Olaoye. They also robbed three banks, he said.

Three policemen and two civilians were killed in the attacks, Olaoye said. He could not say if Boko Haram was responsible, but the sect has carried out attacks in the area in the past.

Boko Haram began its terror campaign with gun attacks from the backs of motorcycles. Last year, it started escalating its assaults with a string of suicide bombings targeting churches, government buildings, and even the United Nations headquarters in the capital, Abuja.

The group is held responsible for at least 620 deaths this year alone, according to an Associated Press count.

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