

NIGERIA

Religious and sectarian clashes

Boko Haram is a murky organisation that has attacked Christians and the United Nations in recent months. It has evolved into a serious security threat far more quickly than many had anticipated but its main focus remains "the establishment" and the police in particular which it blames for the 2009 killing of its former leader while in custody. The Nigerian authorities have reportedly allocated 25% of this year's national budget to defense. There's concern that a strategy of confrontation, rather than dialogue, will condemn the region to long-term instability.

Boko Haram, which wants an Islamic state, said it launched the attack because the authorities refused to free a group of its members from jail. In the January attacks, hospital officials say 160 people have been confirmed dead but more bodies are still arriving at mortuaries. Mr Jonathan's government has struggled to contain the violence and has imposed emergency law in several parts of the north such as Kano which now has a night-time curfew.

Early morning on 24 January, fresh explosions and gunfire rocked an area near a police station in Kano. About 15 blasts and gunshots were heard coming from the vicinity of a mobile police headquarters.

Boko Haram: Timeline of attacks

2002: Founded

2009: Hundreds killed when Maiduguri police stations stormed; leader Mohammed Yusuf captured and killed

Dec 2010: Bombed Jos, killing 80 people; blamed for New Year's Eve attack on Abuja barracks

Jun-Aug 2011: Bomb attacks on Abuja police HQ and UN building

Dec 2011: Multiple bomb attacks on Christmas Day kill dozens

Jan 2012: Wave of violence across north-east Nigeria

Oil subsidy strikes

Due to the Nigerian government's decision to stop subsidising fuel, as of the 1st January 2012 the pump price of petrol increased from 65 naira per litre to 140 naira. Initially the government said the price increase was irreversible but it was forced to announce a price reduction to 97 naira in the past week. Nigeria's labour unions have not yet agreed to the reduced price but have decided to call off the strikes. Nigeria is Africa's biggest oil producer but it imports almost all of its refined fuel. Oil accounts for 80% of Nigeria's state revenue but after years of corruption and mismanagement, it has hardly any capacity to refine crude oil into fuel, which has to be imported. The \$8bn annual subsidy will be diverted towards improving refining capacity and infrastructure across the country in general.

The impact of the petrol price hikes could affect more than just the transport costs. It is also expected to affect the cost of producing goods and services, in particular; the prices of food, clothing, furnishings, housing and utility costs. In addition to higher petrol prices, the cost of producing electricity from petrol-powered generators is also expected to rise.

The situation is extremely fluid and as such the situation changes daily. Some nations have issued security alerts, advising their nationals not to travel to the country at present.

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