

Satellite phones banned in Nigeria

MAIDUGURI, NIGERIA: Nigeria's military commanders on Wednesday (19 June) banned the use of satellite phones in much of the north-east region after cutting mobile phone services as part of a plan to further isolate rebels in the area after a series of fresh attacks.



The military claimed in announcing the ban that Islamist extremist group Boko Haram had used satellite phones to plan attacks on schools. The insurgents have attacked two schools in the north-east this week, leaving at least 16 students and two teachers dead.

"Therefore, effective from 19 June, the (military) imposes a ban on the use and sale of Thuraya phones and accessories, including Thuraya recharge cards in Borno state," said a statement from Lieutenant Colonel Sagir Musa.

Thuraya is a popular brand of satellite phone used in Nigeria.

"Anyone seen with Thuraya phones, recharge cards and accessories will be arrested," the statement said.

Journalists use satellite phones

It was unclear whether the ban would also apply to journalists, who have used satellite phones to communicate when visiting the region, where the military launched a sweeping offensive on 15 May.

The announcement applied to Borno state, the hardest hit in the region and it was unclear if it would be extended to other regions in Nigeria.

The military has claimed it has pushed out the insurgents with its offensive, but a series of attacks in recent days have raised questions over whether the gains were only temporary.

On Sunday (16 June), suspected Boko Haram gunmen opened fire on a secondary school in Damaturu in Yobe state, killing seven students and two teachers.

The army said that two of the attackers were also killed.

On Monday (17 June) in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, suspected Islamists shot dead nine students as they sat an exam in a private school.

Boko Haram, whose name roughly translates as "Western education is sin," has carried out multiple attacks on schools in north-eastern Nigeria.

Boko Haram wants to create an Islamic state in the country's mainly Muslim north.

Violence linked to the insurgency has left at least 3,600 people dead since 2009. This figure includes the killings of rebels by the security forces, which have also been accused of major abuses.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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