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Bauchi: Death toll from clashes climbs to 70

WRITTEN BY -

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Governor Isa Yuguda

ozens more bodies were recovered after violent clashes between security forces and Kala Kato followers in Zango area of Bauchi State, bringing the death toll to around 70, a count at a hospital morgue showed yesterday.

An AFP reporter listed 42 bodies on the floor of the morgue in the city of Bauchi, all with bullet or machete wounds. Another 25 bodies, mostly young people including minors, had been placed in cold storage rooms.

A morgue employee said "the bodies were brought in on Monday" after clashes erupted in Bauchi between suspected members of Kala Kato and security forces.

Police late Monday said 38 people died in the fighting, including three members of the security forces. The Police in Nigeria have been placed on high alert in the aftermath of the clashes as part of a bid to forestall further violence.

The Kala-Kato sect, also known as Maitatsine, has been present in several Muslim-dominated states in northern Nigeria for decades.

It led religious uprisings in 1980 and 1984 which claimed thousands of lives in the northern cities of Kano and Yola. The number of its followers is not known but estimated run into several thousands.

Sect leader Badamasi Saleh Alkaleri was among those killed by security forces, said the police who were deployed along with soldiers across Bauchi. The soldiers were withdrawn yesterday as life began returning to normal.

"Peace has been restored to the Zango area which was rocked by violence on Monday. However our men are on high alert in the event of any breakdown of law and order," Bauchi state police commissioner Atiku Kafur told AFP.

The Red Cross was organising burials for the victims. "So far we have 40 dead bodies and we have secured a warrant from the justice commissioner for the burial," Adamu Abubakar, the head of the Red Cross office in Bauchi told AFP.

"With the heat, these bodies need to be buried quickly as they will decompose rapidly," said the worker at the morgue, where the room was being cooled by a single fan.

Houses, cars and motorcycles were burnt during the clashes.

The Kala-Kato sect rejects modernity, including Western-style education and medicine. It bans television and radio in its members' homes and rejects any literature except the Koran.

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