

## 5,500 flee Borno as Boko Haram kills 18

• Dozens of houses set ablaze • Displaced residents of 21 communities receive relief materials

**A**BOUT 5,500 Nigerians have fled across the borders with Cameroon and Niger amid renewed clashes between the soldiers and Boko Haram insurgents, the UN's refugee agency said yesterday.

The figure emerged as the insurgents attacked two Borno villages yesterday, killing no fewer than 18 people.

Adrian Edwards, spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, said that 4,000 people had fled to Cameroon since mid-January, and 1,500 to Niger.

In northern Cameroon, UN aid workers met with refugees from around the town of Banki, which lies just over the border in Nigeria.

"The refugees said their villages were bombed, that several people had been killed and that at least two villages were burnt to the ground," Edwards told reporters.

The Federal Government imposed a state of emergency in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe State last May in a bid to crush the sect's insurgency.

Thousands of people have fled across the borders or to other parts of Nigeria to avoid being caught up in the fighting, to escape attacks by militants or to flee what human rights groups say is a heavy handed government crackdown that has also affected civilians.

The new influx raises the number of Nigerian refugees in Cameroon to more than 12,400 — just over 2,000 of whom have been moved to camps deeper inside the country.

In Niger, meanwhile, those who have fled include 8,000 Nigerians and 30,000 Niger nationals who had been living in Nigeria.

The latest refugees there told UN aid workers that they had fled a village after

I'm still in

■ Bodunrin KAYODE, ■  
with agency report

its mosque was attacked, seven people were killed and 60 shops torched.

Most of the refugees were women and children, and were being hosted by the local community, Edwards said.

The UN has appealed to countries in the region to keep their borders open for Nigerians who need a haven, and not to send back any refugees.

Emergency rule has largely succeeded in pushing the militants out of towns and cities in the wider north but attacks are still frequent in some remote areas, particularly in the border regions.

Agency reports claimed that no fewer than 18 people were killed in the latest attack on Njaba and Kaya villages in Borno State by the Islamist sect.

Dozens of houses were burnt in the two villages, witnesses said yesterday.

The attacks came despite a

military offensive aimed at stemming violence in vulnerable rural areas.

"Suddenly we heard gunshots in all directions and cries for help from women and children," said Wovi Pogu, nursing a gunshot wound from the attack on Njaba in which 10 people were killed on Tuesday.

Five others were wounded in the village.

"As I entered my house, I was hit on leg and I fell down, but I dragged myself to a nearby shack where I hid until the shooting subsided," he said, from his bed at a Maiduguri hospital.

Another resident, Wadai Mutah, said that Mude and Kwaljiri villages were similarly destroyed, but resi-

dents escaped unharmed.

Fighters from Boko Haram also shot dead eight people in Kaya village before razing it to the ground on Wednesday, witnesses said.

Col. Muhammadu Dole, spokesman for the military in the state, said he had no further details on the incidents.

The military offensive against the four-and-a-half-year-old insurgency that President Goodluck Jonathan ordered last May has pushed the rebels into remoter areas, but it has failed to stem the violence. It has also triggered reprisals on civilians.

Jonathan replaced his entire military command last

week, after some embarrassing security lapses in rebel-affected areas, including an attack on the airport and military barracks in Maiduguri last month.

He also nominated Gen. Aliyu Mohammed, a former National Security Adviser (NSA), as a minister.

He is tipped to take the defence portfolio.

Meanwhile, 21 communities of about five hundred men women and children of Jere Local Government Area of the state who abandoned their villages due to threats from Boko Haram have been given food items worth millions of naira by the state government.

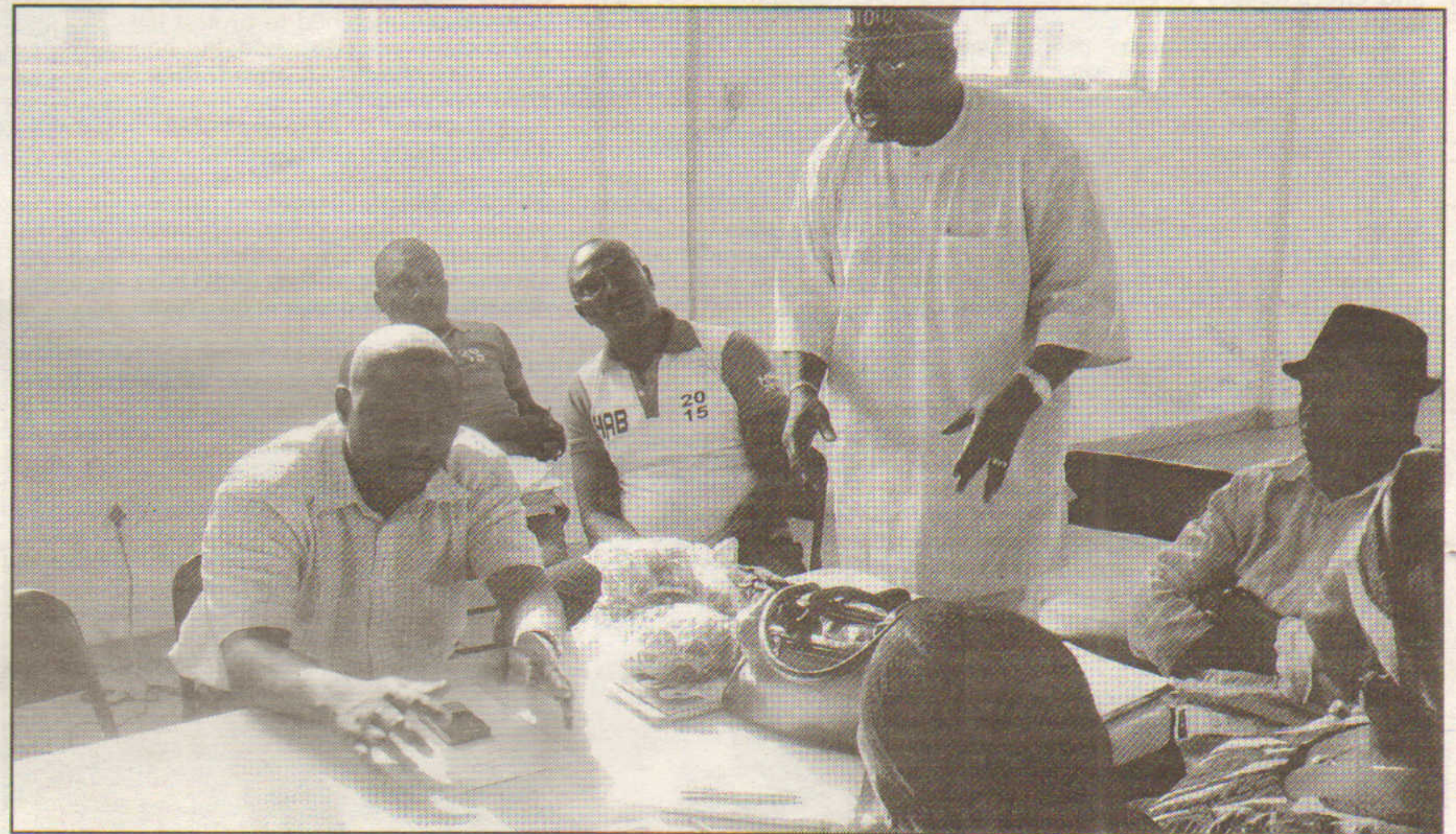
Delivering the items to representatives of the com-

munity, the Commissioner of Justice, Shehu Lawan, said that the communities were not really attacked by Boko Haram but they ran due to fear of the sect.

According to him, the government had consulted with security agents and had perfected plans to protect these villagers who had been asked to go back to their villages with escorts and protection from soldiers.

Some of the items donated include 2,000 sleeping mats and blankets respectively, 100 mattresses, 200 bags of rice and 100 jerry cans of groundnut oil.

The villages affected by the latest assault include Allay, Ngao, Fante, Gambari and Talbari.



• Governorship aspirant and Chairman of DHB Group, Hakeem Aloba-Bakare (standing), addressing campaign coordinators after their inauguration in Lagos yesterday

## APC Reps vow to abide by party's directive to block Presidency's bills

**T**HE APC Reps in the House of Representatives yesterday said they will abide by the directive of their party that members of the party in the National Assembly should block all proposals from the Presidency till the rule of law

Kereke alleges plot to kill detained Okah