

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

'Boko Haram killing men, tribes linked to Chad'

Boko Haram militants are rampaging through northeast Nigerian villages and selectively killing men, boys and members of the same tribe as Chadian forces that have dealt major blows to the Nigerian Islamic extremists, witnesses said yesterday.

The fighters separated and killed people of the Shuwa-Arab community, which spreads across the border between Chad and Nigeria, while sparing people from the Kanuri tribe to which most Boko Haram militants belong, according to Mohammed Seit, a resident of Kala Balge village.

"They gathered the people in the market, and then separated the Kanuris from the Shuwa-Arabs; then they informed the Shuwa-Arabs that it was your tribesmen of Chad that are tormenting (Boko Haram)," he told AFP. The militants said they were on a "revenge mission and to send message to your brothers the Chadians."

Scores have been killed and homes in dozens of villages burned down in the past five days, Seit told The Associated Press by telephone. Nigeria's

neighbor, Chad, has spearheaded a regional offensive and seized back major towns bordering Cameroon from Boko Haram in recent weeks.

In a separate attack Tuesday, at least 68 men and boys were killed in an attack on the rural community of Njaba, about 100 kilometers (80 miles) southeast of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, witnesses said. "We, the women, were spared but every male in-

cluding children of 12, 13 and 14 years old were killed", said Aminatu Mommodu.

She said she and other women were allowed to escape into the bush but crept back and counted the dead because she was looking for her husband and elderly parents too old to run. Corpses, including many men with their throats slit, were in the mosque, since the attack came during dawn prayers. Others

outside the mosque were shot, she said.

International concern has grown alongside casualties from the conflict. Some 10,000 people died in the Islamic uprising last year compared to about 2,000 in the previous four years, according to the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations. Some 1.6 million people have been forced from the homes, including tens of thousands across borders.

Burkina orders exhumation of Sankara

The government of Burkina Faso has ordered former president Thomas Sankara's corpse to be exhumed, potentially rekindling controversy over the 1987 assassination of one of Africa's most idolised leaders.

A government decree issued late Wednesday said the move was aimed at formally identifying the remains of Sankara, slain in a putsch that saw his former friend and protege Blaise Compaore take power.

Sankara, a popular Marxist army captain who came to power in a 1983 coup, was buried in a cemetery in the east of the capital Ouagadou-

gou but many of his family members doubt if the corpse is indeed his.

Compaore held power for 27 years, but stepped down on October 31, 2014, after angry mass rallies opposing a bid to amend the constitution to allow him to stay in power. The new Burkina government headed by Michel Kafando said Sankara's family would be provided with the necessary means to help identify the corpse.

But Sankara's widow Mariam on Wednesday denied that she had been approached by the government on the issue. Sankara's family has been asking in vain since 1997 for

an investigation amid claims that the corpse buried in his grave was not that of the former leader.

Compaore's regime obstructed their efforts and even ignored an order from the African Court on Human and People's Rights for DNA testing of the body in Sankara's grave.

A pan-Africanist revolutionary, Sankara transformed what was then the former French colony of Upper Volta into Burkina Faso, which means "Land of the Upright Men". His spirit loomed large during the recent anti-Compaore protests.

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