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Sudan crisis

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Ethnic cleansing's latest arena

ethnic
problem

As opposed to the world's silence on the genocide in Rwanda, it is heartening that it is acting on what seems at least a potentially genocidal situation in Sudan's western province of Darfur. There is a 17-month-old civil war here, with the Sudanese government and an Arab militia known as the Janjaweed pitted against two black rebel groups. In the battle over land and resources, the black uprising has led to an ethnic cleansing campaign in which the Janjaweed are driving out blacks from their villages and farms. In what is known to UN as "the world's worst current humanitarian crisis", 30,000 are reportedly killed, a million displaced from their homes and in refugee camps, and 2.2 million on the brink, in urgent need of food and medical aid. The US Congress has branded this as genocide, while EU has threatened sanctions against Sudan if it fails to check Janjaweed's rampaging militias. EU ministers have also identified a tactic that was used in Bosnia, systematic rape of women to fulfil political objectives.

The immediate task is to reach emergency aid to refugees who are in desperate need of food, shelter and medical help. According to Medecins sans Frontieres, trying to provide relief in the region, there is widespread suffering and some pockets of real disaster, with people at risk of dying in large numbers. Beyond that, however, there is a point of view that the outside world ought not to get involved in local disputes. But there is an unconscious racism here, as the EU does get involved when massacres take place in its own backyard, say, Bosnia. To say that Bosnian victims need to be rescued from their tormentors, but far larger numbers of Rwandan victims are left to their own devices, is widely seen as racist. Besides, in a globalised world, every place is someone's backyard. Disorder in Afghanistan can lead to the bringing down of the World Trade Centre in New York. The Sudanese government has an unpleasant record of Islamic fundamentalism, and once sheltered Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda. That is perhaps why the world's eyes are riveted on it.

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Nigeria ethnic clash toll soars

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Lagos, May 5 (Reuters): Nigeria's top Muslim leader said today that 300 people, mostly Muslims, were killed by Christian militia in Sunday's attack on the town of Yelwa.

Justice Abdulkadir Orire, secretary general of the Jama'atu Nasril Islam, described the killings with machine guns in the remote farming town as "genocide" and said they took the toll from three months of ethnic violence in central Nigeria to at least 700-800 people.

"The information we have is that 300 people died and they are mostly Muslims. We call it a genocide because they are killing women and children," Orire said in a telephone interview from his Kaduna headquarters.

The conflict between the Christian Tarok tribe and Muslim Fulani is rooted in competing claims over the fertile farmlands at the heart of Africa's most populous nation. It is fuelled by religious and ethnic differences.

Orire, who is a leader of Nigeria's 60 million Muslims, said Tarok militia used machine guns and arson in the attacks which left most of Yelwa's buildings including a mosque destroyed. He criticised the Plateau state governor Joshua Dariye, a Christian, for apparently inciting violence.

Police stationed in Yelwa had been withdrawn four days before the attack, he said, despite complaints by local Muslims that they were surrounded by Taroks and tension was rising.

"It seems the governor is supporting the move. We heard that the government said non-Indigenes should move out of the area," Orire said. "That is very bad. He should look after everyone in the state and not just his own tribe."

Nigeria is the world's seventh largest oil exporter. Ethnic fighting has hit the Opec country's oil production in the past, but Yelwa is hundreds of miles from any oilfields.

A Reuters correspondent in Yelwa yesterday saw thousands of Muslims lining the body-strewn streets chanting religious slogans and vowing revenge on the attackers.

These people, many of whom have already fled violence in other parts of the state, are now virtually besieged by Tarok villages surrounding the town.

31 die in Assam ethnic clashes

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, March 24

IN ONE of the worst ethnic clashes in recent times, 31 people belonging to the Karbi and Kuki tribes were killed in four separate incidents in Karbi-Anglong district of Assam on Wednesday.

This recent spate of killings has taken the death toll in the troubled hill district to over 80 since November last year when clashes between the Kuki and Kar-

bi militants broke out. The militant-backed ethnic clashes then were overshadowed by the anti-Bihari carnage that had shaken Assam almost simultaneously.

According to Karbi-Anglong district police officials, the latest violence was perpetrated by suspected Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA) militants when they raided Uden Tisso Gaon under Bokajan police station around 4 am. They hacked to death four Karbi men and set a

dozen huts on fire in a village situated about five km from Dilai police outpost.

An hour later, another group of suspected KRA militants attacked two adjoining villages - Sarpo Terang and Sarkhe Englang - located about 20 km from Dilai outpost. The women and children in the village were spared, but all the men were called out of their houses and 22 of them were killed - some shot dead, while the rest were hacked. Most of

the house were razed.

Things had taken an ethnic turn by afternoon, and irate Karbi groups retaliated by picking on some Kuki residents in Jari Terang village, about 12 km from Manja police outpost under Diphu police station.

Five Kuki men were shot dead during the attack, presumably orchestrated by the Karbi militant outfit, United Peoples' Democratic Solidarity.

"The situation is un-

derstandably tense in Karbi-Anglong, particularly in view of the Lok Sabha elections", state home secretary B.M. Mazumdar said. "Senior police officials have rushed to the spots and we're in touch with the armed forces for any contingency".

The Army's 11 Garhwal Regiment has been posted in the district since November last year, besides additional units of paramilitary forces, as well as Assam Police commandos.