

# 36 killed in tribal clashes at Sudan's north-south border

Abyei region likely to be most volatile during and after voting

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Khartoum: At least 36 people have died in clashes between tribespeople and Arab nomads near Sudan's north-south border, leaders in the contested Abyei region said on Monday, on the second day of a vote on southern independence.

Analysts say the central region of Abyei is the most likely place for north-south tensions to erupt into violence during and after the vote, the climax of a troubled peace deal that ended decades of civil war.

Southerners are expected to vote to split from the mostly Muslim north, depriving Khartoum of most of its oil reserves.

Senior southern official Luka Biong official condemned the fighting and told Reuters both sides were still trying to settle their bitter dispute over the ownership of Abyei as part of a package of negotiations, including how the regions will share oil revenues and debt after a split.

## Link denied

Leading members of Abyei's Dinka Ngok tribe accused Khartoum of arming the area's Arab Misseriya militias in clashes on Friday, Saturday and Sunday and said they were expecting more attacks in days to come.

US President Barack Obama this week warned both northern and southern leaders not to use proxy forces over the voting period, highlighting international concerns that both sides might be resorting to tactics used in past campaigns.

In another sign of tension, southern army spokesman Philip Aguer said two men — a Ugandan and a northern army soldier — were arrested with four boxes holding 700 rounds of AK-47 ammunition in the southern capital Juba on Sunday night.

The northern army's spokesman, Al Sawarmi Khalid, yesterday denied any link to the ammunition or the clashes.

Observers said thousands of voters queued up for a second day of voting that continued peacefully across other areas of the south. The final results are expected by February 15, with preliminary results a week earlier.

"Yesterday I tried my best but it was too much for me. Queues were too long. People were too emotional. Everyone wants to be first to decide his destiny," said Salah Mohammad, waiting outside a booth on the outskirts of southern capital Juba. "Today I could vote but still as you can see the crowds are still there ... I think the commission might need to extend the voting days."

The referendum's organising commission said 20 per cent of registered southerners had already cast their vote. The turnout needs to be 60 per cent for the result to be valid.

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