

# DEADLY CLASHES IN MOGADISHU

## 3 killed, Ethiopia seeks African help

AFP, Mogadishu

At least three people were killed when Somali gunmen battled government and Ethiopian troops in the heaviest fighting in Mogadishu since the ouster of hardline Islamists last month, residents said yesterday.

At least two people died in a gunbattle between forces and rebels in southern Mogadishu, the Islamists' traditional stronghold, while a policeman was gunned down when a gang raided a cache of weapons he was guarding.

The deaths underscored the scale of the task facing Somali President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed's weak interim government, which was only able to supplant the Islamists with the aid of the Ethiopians.

As many Somalis seethe at the presence of Ethiopian troops on their streets, Addis Adaba tried to explain its intervention to other African states and urge them to help make a planned peacekeeping force a reality.

Witnesses said rockets and mortar shells as well as machine-gun and anti-aircraft fire were used in the overnight battle.

"After the fighting, I saw two bodies, both of them men killed near a pasta factory," said Munina Ismail.

"An explosive that was thrown at the vehicle left many casualties, but I do not know how many," said Mohamoud Aden, said another local resident in the area which has been the scene of a number of ambushes of troops in recent days.

The exchanges dragged on for up to an hour before a joint force of government troops and Ethiopian soldiers brought the situation under control.

In the second incident, gunmen raided a nearby police station in Huruwa neighbourhood, gunning down an officer and stealing three rifles.

Ethiopian troops and tanks then arrived, sealing off the area and searching houses for weapons.

Member of parliament approved the imposition of martial law at the weekend, giving the security forces wide-ranging powers.

But a government vow that "the days of terrorising people are over" has been derided in a country without effective central authority since the 1991 ouster of dictator Mohamed Siad Barre triggered incessant clashes between war-

lords.

Residents said the overnight fighting was the heaviest since the Islamists, which had managed to restore order during six months in control in Mogadishu, fled on December 28.

"This was the heaviest fighting since the government and Ethiopian forces defeated the Islamists," said one local, Mohamed Hassan.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi wants his troops to leave within weeks but only Uganda has so far volunteered troops for a prospective 8,000-strong African Union peacekeeping force.

Wary of becoming bogged down in a quagmire, Meles dispatched officials to 13 African countries to seek support for stabilization efforts and outlined his reasons for the intervention.

Leaders would be asked "to

extend necessary support to make use of the good opportunity that would ensure peace and security in Somalia," said a government statement.

The transitional government was formed in Kenya in 2004 and returned to Somalia the following year but, unable to go to Mogadishu, had to set up in the provincial town of Baidoa before the Ethiopians intervened.

While the government claims the Islamists are a spent force, their fighters are believed to be regrouping in Mogadishu for a guerrilla war.

Apart from the threat from the Islamists, the government also has to bring about a disarming of militias that has been agreed to by the warlords.

A government spokesman said a mayor whose appointment was rejected by the warlords 18 months ago would now take up his post.

## New Delhi lacks social graces

Study says

AFP, New Delhi

Residents of India's capital regularly spit, litter, break traffic rules, harass women and lack civic sense, which makes the city of 14 million a downright rude place to live, according to a new study.

"We have found most people do not give any thought about their conduct in public," said P.C. Joshi, an anthropology professor at the University of Delhi, which conducted the study over three years.

A team of researchers fanned out to 20 different locations each year in the city known for its grand Mughal-era Red Fort to find out how people behave in public spaces where they are anonymous.

People were judged on five criteria: traffic violations, spitting, encroachment of public places, littering and social etiquette.

The study -- the results of which would be shared with the state government, which oversees the city areas not under federal jurisdiction -- found people failed on most counts in each category, irrespec-

tive of their background and the profile of the location.

In a crowded marketplace, almost 90 people made indecent remarks, gestures and advances towards women within 30 minutes. At another market, 19 people spat within the same duration.

Joshi attributed the behaviour to high levels of tolerance among Indians.

"India is a very tolerant society, which is otherwise a good thing. But in such cases, there is no rebuke, so it becomes a trend."

There was, however, no finding in the study to suggest if such behaviour was more common in New Delhi than in other Indian cities.

The state government in recent years has tried to improve traffic in the burgeoning city by widening roads and launching a new underground train service.

But hundreds of thousands more migrants come to the city every year because of better career and education facilities, putting further pressure on space and infrastruc-



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

A run-down manhole on Syeedabad-Malibagh Road near Kamalapur footbridge in Dhaka has often been causing road accidents, but there is no initiative from the authorities concerned to repair it.

## Brown relaxes into PM-in-waiting role

REUTERS, London

After waiting awkwardly in the wings for years to succeed Tony Blair, Gordon Brown is relaxing into the role of Britain's next prime minister.

Brown increasingly looks like a certainty to take over and it shows in his demeanour, analysts say.

In a flurry of media appearances this month, Brown has set out his stall on issues from terrorism to public service reform, calling for "a new style of government" and appearing to distance himself from policies that have hit Blair's popularity.

Noted for his mighty intellect but not for his smile or charisma, Brown is even perfecting the art of self-deprecation, joking and interacting with audiences about his university days or political memoirs with a newfound ease reminiscent of

Blair.

"Now that Brown realises there isn't a serious challenger for the succession he's more relaxed," said Philip Stephens, Blair biographer and political commentator.

Blair is widely expected to resign by July. Brown may yet have to win an internal Labour ballot but no heavyweight challenger has so far come forward.

He could face a struggle, however, to defeat a Conservative Party resurgent under new leader David Cameron in the next general election expected in 2009, or sooner if Brown opts for a snap poll.

Blair and Brown have been twin architects of the Labour Party's three straight election wins but their rivalry has at times threatened to destabilise Labour's upper echelons.

The underlying hostility between the Blair and Brown camps burst into the open mid-last

year, forcing the premier to say he would leave office within 12 months to quell a Labour revolt.

Stephens said their relationship had reached a period of relative calm but resentment remained: "I think they have found a modus vivendi," he said.

**BROWN SETS HIS OWN COURSE**

More outspokenly than before, Brown has set out his vision for Britain, increasingly straying beyond his financial brief. His interventions show a desire to distance himself from Blair, analysts say.

Blair proved Labour's best electoral asset but his support for the US-led Iraq war eroded support for the party and he has been damaged by government mismanagement and sleaze rows.

Brown on Saturday said the importance of winning hearts and

minds had been "undervalued" in the fight against terrorism. He spoke a day after Blair strongly defended military intervention to defeat Islamic intervention.

Brown also condemned the manner of Saddam Hussein's execution several days before Blair and stressed the need for personal responsibility on global warming, just as the premier refused to curtail his exotic holidays to save carbon emissions.

"It would be very hard to take over as leader and say things are going to carry on as now," said Patrick Dunleavy, a politics professor at the London School of Economics, noting Blair had been questioned by police in a cash-for-state honours inquiry and violence was spiralling in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Steady as she goes wouldn't be a very common sense position to take," he added.

## Projonma Debate Festival held in Comilla

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Projonma Uranus Dal became the champion in the final round of the two-day 'Aktei Joy Projonma Debate Festival' held in Comilla recently.

Projonma Bitarka Sangathan, a debating club of Comilla, organised the festival at Comilla Town Hall auditorium, says a press release.

The members of the champion team are Nusrat Jahan Tania, Naznin Ferdous and Syeda Saima Akhter. Tania was adjudged the best speaker.

Hasan Ahmed Chowdhury Kiron, founder-chairman of National Debate Federation, Sarkar Firoz, senior vice-president of ATN Bangla, and Tashik Ahmed, executive director of Amra Korbo Joy, were present at the prize giving ceremony.



Sarkar Firoz, senior vice-president of ATN Bangla, and Hasan Ahmed Chowdhury Kiron, founder-chairman of National Debate Federation, hand over the prize to the champion team at the closing ceremony of 'Aktei Joy Projonma Debate Festival' in Comilla recently.

## US military apologises over S Korean rape

AFP, Seoul

US military authorities in South Korea have apologised over the alleged rape of a 67-year-old local woman by a US soldier, saying the case was "an affront" to all servicemen, officials said yesterday.

The apology came hours after South Korean police arrested a 23-year-old US soldier for allegedly raping and beating the woman in an alley in Seoul.

Major General John Morgan, the acting US 8th Army commander, said in a statement posted on the US military website late

Sunday that the case tainted the reputation of US soldiers.

"I deeply regret and personally apologize for this terrible incident that has resulted in grave injury to a Korean civilian," Morgan said.

"This vicious act is an affront to all soldiers."

The arrested soldier initially refused to cooperate with police pending the arrival of US legal officers, according to South Korea's Yonhap news agency.

Morgan said the US military was "cooperating fully with Korean authorities" over the case and a joint investigation was underway.

Police want to obtain court permission to detain the soldier in South Korean rather than US military custody. The victim is receiving treatment at a nearby hospital.

Some 29,000 US troops are stationed here to support the South Korean armed forces against any attack from North Korea.

Crimes involving US troops here have been a key irritant in the military alliance between Seoul and Washington, stoking anti-American sentiment here.

A US soldier's brutal murder of a South Korean bar girl in 1992 once triggered a volley of anti-American protests nationwide by Korean activists who then demanded to pull American troops of the the country.

The death of two South Korean middle-school girls in a traffic accident involving US armored vehicles in 2002 also triggered a series of massive candlelight protests across the country.

## No guarantee of Iraq success

### Says US general

AFP, Baghdad

The latest US plan to beef up its forces and secure Baghdad has "no guarantees of success and it's not going to happen overnight," US General George Casey acknowledged yesterday.

Casey, the outgoing US military commander in Iraq, told a press conference in the Iraqi capital that "initial elements are already here, but I would not like to comment on troop movements."

## Nato soldier killed in Afghanistan

AFP, Kandahar

Nato troops attacking an insurgent base in southern Afghanistan were engaged from several positions yesterday, leaving one soldier dead and several others wounded, the Nato-led force said.

The International Security Assistance Force did not name the province where the attack occurred or the nationalities of the servicemen involved.

The fatality was the second this year among the nearly 40,000 foreign troops in volatile Afghanistan, after a British soldier was killed in a Taliban attack in the southern province of Helmand on Saturday.

"ISAF soldiers were involved in a pre-planned operation against an insurgent base when they were engaged from several insurgent positions. Close air support was requested and targeted the insurgents," an ISAF statement said.

Two other ISAF soldiers, said by Afghan police to be Canadians, were wounded yesterday when a patrol vehicle struck a roadside bomb in a separate incident in the southern province of Kandahar.

About 170 were killed in Afghanistan in 2006, the deadliest year in an insurgency launched after the extremist Taliban was driven from government in late 2001 after a US-led operation.

There are about 11,500 ISAF troops in four provinces in southern Afghanistan -- which last year saw some of the most intense Taliban-linked fighting -- with the main deployments from Britain, Canada, The Netherlands and the United States.