

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 seethed at the presence of Ethiopian troops on their streets, Addis Ababa 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-guns 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 Huriwa 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.

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.

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.

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