

Lower Dir fighting displaces 30,000 people

by UPI

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan -- About 30,000 people in Pakistan's Lower Dir region have been displaced because of a military offensive against Taliban militants, a local official said Tuesday.

Iftikhar Hussain, Northwest Frontier province information director, said the displaced people fled from the Maidan area after the military offensive -- Operation Black Thunder -- began Sunday, the Pakistani newspaper Dawn reported.

"We are making arrangements for them in Peshawar, Nowshera and Timargarah districts," Hussain said.

One local non-profit organization told Dawn it had registered 2,241 displaced families.

The information minister said the operation was justified because the Taliban challenged the government's authority.

"The government will defend its writ but won't make the first move," Hussain said, adding the NWFP government was committed to the peace deal, which allowed for the following of strict religious law in nearby Swat valley in exchange for the Taliban to end their fighting in the area.

About 50 insurgents and eight paramilitary soldiers had been killed since Operation Black Thunder began, officials said.

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