

Official warns of new Mogadishu offensive

by UPI

MOGADISHU - War-weary residents of the Somali capital, Mogadishu, have been warned the government is planning a new offensive against Islamist rebels in the city. A U.N. aid agency says nearly 50,000 residents have abandoned the battered city of 2 million in the past 10 days to escape the fighting. On Monday, Deputy Defense Minister Salad Ali Jelle told civilians to get out while there was still time, a Washington Post correspondent reported. Ramshackle buses being pressed into service to evacuate residents are charging three times the normal fares and the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is concerned people fleeing the city on foot are going days without food or water and sleeping outside, the report said. There has been no official death toll given from the street fighting, as bodies are strewn in the streets, the Post said. Meanwhile, Ethiopian reinforcements continued to stream into the city to help Somali forces in the fight against the Islamists, who were routed from power in late December.

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