Hundreds of Somalis flee into Kenya following fresh militia fighting

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Hundreds of Somali nationals yesterday fled from their war-ravaged country into Wajir District after rival militia factions resumed fighting.

However, the death toll from the renewed fighting at the border town of Dhobley, 25 kilometres from the Kenya-Somali border could not be ascertained.

North Eastern Provincial Commissioner, Mr Abdul Mwasera said more than 30 casualties were brought to Kenya for treatment. He said at least 200 families had crossed in from Dhobley, where there have been bomb attacks. "We expect more casualties because we learnt that rocket-propelled bombs and land mines were widely used during the fighting," he said.

The heavy artillery fighting purportedly pitted troops loyal to warlord Muhammad Hirsi alias Gen Morgan and the Juba Valley alliance militia faction led by Barre Hirale over control of Dhobley.

Mwasera said preliminary reports indicated that Morgan's troops split into two after they were defeated - with one faction escaping towards Kismaayu and another heading north to Bulo Hawa near the Ethiopian border.

Mwasera confirmed that 12 vehicles ferrying refugees from Somalia were intercepted and held at the Dejabula although none of the passengers was armed. He said they were stopped from proceeding directly to Dadaab refugee camp for security reasons as some could be among the escaping militia troops.

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The fighting comes barely a week after delegates at the Somali peace talks in Nairobi ratified an interim parliament in an effort to formulate a legitimate government in the war-ravaged nation.

The fighting has sparked anxiety over a possible attack on the Kenyan soil although the government has denied claims that Gen Morgan was holed up in Kenya.

The exhausted families, which have been streaming into the country since Thursday [16 September], are camped at Dadajabula Location in Diis Division.

They said at least 15 gunmen had been killed and several others injured in Dhobley. At least 15 casualties with bullet wounds were taken to Garissa Provincial Hospital and Dadaab refugee camps for medical attention.

Wajir DC Wilson Wanyanga said four vehicles which had ferried the families were escorted under heavy security to Liboi in Garissa for fear they could trigger attacks.


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