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SOMALIA: Baidoa calm after spate of looting

NAIROBI, 7 Oct 2002 (IRIN) - Life in southwestern Somali town of Baidoa - headquarters of the Rahanweyn Resistance Army (RRA)- is returning to normal, four days after falling to rivals of the RRA chairman, Col Hasan Muhammad Nur Shatigadud, a local source told IRIN on Monday.

The source said there had been a spate of looting over the weekend "mostly at night and targeting businesses of those seen as Shatigadud supporters".

Forces loyal to Shatigadud's two deputies and rivals for power - Shaykh Adan Madobe, the RRA first vice-chairman and the second vice-chairman, Muhammad Ibrahim Habsade - seized control of the town on 3 October from Shatigadud loyalists, who had been in control of the town since 31 July.

Fighting first broke out in Baidoa on 1 July between forces loyal to Shatigadud and those of his two deputies in an apparent power struggle.

However, a close ally of the Madobe-Habsade camp, while admitting "to some problems early on", denied that there had been "targeted looting". "There is no looting and anyone caught looting will be shot," he said.

He said most of the militias had been removed from the town centre and "will remain outside". "Baidoa is now peaceful and open for business," he added.

Meanwhile, Madobe and Habsade seem to be consolidating their hold on the region with the capture of Buur Hakaba, the second most important town in the area, local sources in Baidoa told IRIN.

The whereabouts of Shatigadud are still unclear, with some local media reporting that he was regrouping and reorganising his forces at a clan stronghold in Eil Don village, some 25 km north of Baidoa.

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[\[Back\]](#) [\[Home Page\]](#)

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