

Hundreds flee Dushanbe to escape ethnic clashes

Influx of Armenians spreads violence to Tadzhikistan

MOSCOW - Armenians by the hundreds have fled the Tadzhikistan capital of Dushanbe to escape ethnic rioting that has killed at least seven people and injured more than 100, news reports said Tuesday.

Soldiers in tanks and armored personnel carriers were reportedly in control of the central Asian city 1,600 miles from Moscow, but violence was spreading to the suburbs, said Anatoly Larenok, a correspondent for the national newspaper Vozdushny Transport.

"There are tanks guarding key buildings in the center of the city, and the riots have moved to the suburbs," he said.

Violence broke out in Dushanbe on Monday after rumors spread that thousands of Armenian refugees -- already fleeing ethnic clashes with

Azerbaijanis in the Caucasus -- were being given preference for scarce new housing.

There is a chronic housing shortage in Dushanbe for Tadzhik families, which traditionally are large.

Television news Tuesday evening said the ethnic attacks were continuing, and showed film footage of bloody clashes between rioters and rows of police, smashed vehicles and shattered storefronts.

Larenok said at least 300 Armenians had fled the city aboard special flights to Yerevan, the Armenian capital, and many others had left on regular flights.

About 30 people were arrested for taking part in the violence, the report said.

Zaniddin Nasreddinov, an editor at the Tajiktass news agency, reported

another rally in the center of Dushanbe Tuesday morning, but said there was no violence. Communist Party leaders spoke to the crowd and assured them that all Armenian refugees had left the city, he said.

The demonstrators elected a committee of 12 to represent the public in negotiations with authorities on issues such as the current ethnic strife, housing and unemployment, Nasreddinov said.

Interfax, a publication of official Radio Moscow, said the crowd demanded the deportation of all Armenians from Tadzhikistan, the closure of an ecologically dangerous aluminum plant, the return to the republic of all proceeds from cotton production, and the resignations of the Communist Party and government leadership.

The official Tass news agency, contradicting the TV report of continuing attacks, said Dushanbe was calm Tuesday but "still very tense."

A state of emergency was declared Monday and a 10 p.m.-6 a.m. curfew was imposed, Tass said. The curfew remained in effect Tuesday night.

Tass said precise casualty figures were unavailable, but preliminary reports showed that at least seven people had died in the rioting and 108 were injured when young Tadzhiks stormed the Communist Party headquarters and went on a rampage.

The news agency said a small crowd that had gathered in front of the building Monday morning swelled to a rally of at least 4,000 later in the day.

Communist Party First Secretary Kakhkar Makhkamov and other members of the government told the crowd

that only about 40 refugees were in Dushanbe, and they were living with relatives, Tass said.

"No one believed them, and several members from the rally attempted to enter the building," Tass said. "Interior Ministry troops blocked entrances to the building and soldiers fired into the air, but this did not stop the extremists."

Shots were fired at the troops from the crowd and stones were thrown at them, Tass said. Rampaging youths broke the ground floor windows and set fire to the building, it said.

Larenok reported that the rioters then attacked apartments belonging to Armenians across the city. "A jewelry store, shops, a railway station and several kiosks were broken into and smashed," he said in a telephone interview.

Germanys agree to begin formal talks

BONN, West Germany - The Germanys agreed Tuesday to begin formal talks on making the West German mark the official currency of East Germany, a move that could lay the economic foundation for reunification.

In Ottawa, meanwhile, British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd said Tuesday that the Western allies and the Soviet Union are close to agreeing on a way to unite the Germanys.

The announcement referred to a U.S. plan to have East and West Germany work out procedures for a merger immediately after East Ger-

many holds national elections on March 18.

The allies of World War II -- the United States, Britain, France and the Soviet Union -- then will discuss security questions, including whether a reunified Germany would be a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

The Soviets want a neutral Germany, while the United States is pressing for NATO membership.

Hurd made the announcement during an East-West summit on aerial surveillance.

Deep problems exist between the

government of West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the rickety Communist coalition of East German Premier Hans Modrow.

Their brief summit produced an agreement to set up a joint commission next week to devise a way to make the West German mark the official currency of both nations.

The opposition groups want all important decisions on economic recovery put off until after March 18 elections.

But some West German officials who are championing reunification warn that East Germany's economic state is so dire that it could be bankrupt even before the elections.

Modrow pressed for immediate steps after March 18 to join the German economies, but made clear that no action could be taken before then.

The premier instead appealed for \$9 billion in "solidarity aid" to tide over East Germany. West German Finance Minister Theo Waigel said massive loans could not be made when so little detail of East Germany's financial profile has been made public.

Modrow claimed his nation has much to contribute to a unified Germany, declaring that national wealth totals \$850 billion, more than half the gross national product of the wealthy West German state that is three times larger.

Daily Nebraskan

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The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE, Monday through Friday during the academic year; weekly during summer sessions.

Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by phoning 472-1763 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The public also has access to the Publications Board. For information, contact Pam Hein, 472-2588.

Subscription price is \$45 for one year. Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448. Second-class postage paid at Lincoln, NE.


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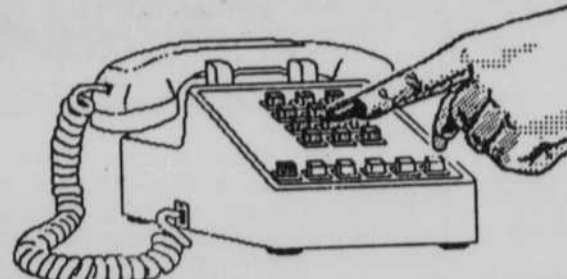
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