

Kyrgyzstan asks Russia to help quell ethnic clashes

AFP, Markhamat

Kyrgyzstan's interim leader yesterday asked Russia to send troops to help quell ethnic violence in the south of her country, which she warned had spiralled "out of control".

Interim President Roza Otunbayeva appealed to Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to send military forces to help stem the violence after a second day of ethnic clashes that have killed 62 and wounded almost 800 people.

"I have signed a letter asking Dmitry Medvedev for third-party forces to be sent to the Kyrgyz Republic," Otunbayeva said in a nationally televised address.

"Since yesterday the situation has got out of control. We need outside military forces to halt the situation. For this reason we have appealed to Russia for help."

Otunbayeva discussed her country's situation with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin by phone late last night, the Russian government added.

The provisional government -- which seized control of the ex-Soviet state in April -- had also appealed to retired police and army officers to go to the city of Osh to halt a descent into civil war.

"The authorities will be grateful for any

volunteers who are ready to help prevent civil war in the south of Kyrgyzstan," said government spokesman Azimbek Beknazarov, the 24.kg news agency reported.

Thousands of Uzbek women and children have fled the violence to the nearby border with Uzbekistan, an AFP reporter witnessed, raising the spectre of a possible humanitarian crisis.

The border remains sealed from the Uzbek side.

"We just want peace in Kyrgyzstan, we don't want any wars with the Kyrgyz people.... But most of the Kyrgyz people don't understand and we are suffering from their actions," an elderly Uzbek woman, who declined to give her name, said at a border crossing near the Kyrgyz village of Markhamat.

"They are shooting us, killing us!"

People reached by telephone in Osh described an increasingly violent and chaotic situation, with gunfire echoing across the city amid what seems to be a near-total collapse of central authority.

Andrea Berg, a researcher for Human Rights Watch who has been trapped in a guest house in Osh since the fighting began, pleaded for intervention by the international community.

"The situation here looks terrible. The government doesn't have any more control over the city. It's war," she said.



PHOTO: AFP

Protesters march behind a banner, which reads "The crisis is called capitalism" during a demonstration against the government's cutback plans in Berlin yesterday. A large coalition of various groups staged the protest march under the motto "we won't pay for your crisis".

Tight security in Iran ahead of polls anniversary

BBC ONLINE

There is a huge security presence in Tehran and other Iranian cities, as the country marks the first anniversary of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's disputed re-election, witnesses say.

Opposition leaders have called off planned protests, saying they want to avoid the loss of innocent lives.

The government says Mr Ahmadinejad was re-elected by a landslide. It says the protests were just a Western plot.

So far there are no reports of any protests.

But opposition sources say their supporters did go out onto their roofs after dark on Friday night to chant Allahu Akbar (God is great), a gesture of defiance they began following Mr Ahmadinejad's re-election.

They came onto the streets in their millions a year ago. It was a spontaneous outburst of anger from huge numbers of Iranians who felt Mr Ahmadinejad had stolen the presidential election.

Since then the opposition have been steadily battered into submission, beaten up when they demonstrate on the streets, arrested and, they say, abused in prison.

16 dead in US flood

REUTERS, Arkansas

A wall of water, triggered by heavy rains that swelled the Little Missouri River to 20 feet, caught victims asleep in their tents at the Albert Pike campground in the Ouachita Mountains west of Little Rock, authorities said.

The death toll was lowered to 16 from the 20 that was previously reported, a spokeswoman for the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management said.

She added that officials did not know how many people were missing "as we don't know how many people were there."

Television images showed cabins reduced to rubble and mobile homes and vehicles overturned by the waters.

N Korea warns South over loudspeakers

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea repeated its threat yesterday to shoot down loudspeakers the South has set up at the border to broadcast anti-Pyongyang propaganda messages, keeping tensions on the peninsula bubbling at their highest in years.

The Korean peninsula has been on edge since the sinking of a South Korean warship off the western coast, killing 46 sailors, in late March.

Seoul has accused the North of torpedoing its navy corvette, the Cheonan.

In what it called a "crucial declaration," North Korea's army general staff said it would shoot down the loudspeakers and all other means of psychological warfare if South Korea resumes its propaganda broadcasts.

"From a military point of view that a psychological warfare is one of the basic operational forms for carrying out a war the installing of such means for the above-said warfare is a

direct declaration of a war against the DPRK," the North's official KCNA news agency said, referring to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The heightened tensions and exchanges of rhetoric have rattled Seoul's financial markets, pushing foreign investors already jittery over Europe's debt crisis out of South Korean assets.

South Korea announced punitive measures over the incident in May, including the installation of loudspeakers to resume broadcasts of propaganda messages against Pyongyang. It has yet to start such broadcasts.

"The revolutionary armed forces of the DPRK will launch an all-out military strike to blow up the group's means for the psychological warfare against the DPRK," Saturday's KCNA statement said, repeating similar threats made in recent weeks.

It warned South Korea that any military action on its part would risk turning Seoul "into a sea of flame."

Iraqi Shia groups merge to form new bloc

BBC ONLINE

Iraq's two main Shia groups, which performed strongly in recent elections, have merged to form the biggest alliance in the new parliament.

The bloc, to be called the National Alliance, brings together the prime minister's coalition with other Shia factions, including followers of radical cleric Moqtada Sadr.

It will be just short of an absolute majority in parliament but well ahead of the rival secular-Sunni bloc.

The new parliament opens on Monday.

After weeks of negotiations, the two Shia coalitions announced they were forming one bloc, and said they had notified the acting speaker of parliament.

The new alliance is made up of outgoing Prime Minister Nouri Maliki's State of Law coalition - which came runner-up in the March election - and the third-placed Iraqi National Alliance, along with other Shia factions.

Together, they will command just four seats short of an absolute majority, well ahead of the 91 seats held by Iyad Allawi's secular-Sunni bloc, although it came out first in the elections, with a narrow two-seat lead.



A military helicopter with the Louisiana Army National Guard 205th Engineer Battalion picks up bags of sand in Buras, Louisiana on Friday, to be dropped at Pelican Island in Barataria Bay, an area affected by the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

PHOTO: AFP

Cameron, Obama to discuss BP oil spill

BBC ONLINE

David Cameron will discuss the Gulf of Mexico oil disaster with President Barack Obama later.

The prime minister has said he is "frustrated and concerned" about the environmental damage caused by the leaking well - owned by BP.

But Downing Street says the telephone conversation with the US president will be "statesmanlike and workmanlike".

BBC business editor Robert Peston said BP was now likely to bow to US pressure and suspend dividends to shareholders.

The oil giant confirmed its directors will meet on Monday to discuss the possibility.

Our correspondent said: "It has taken a while for BP's board to reach the decision that if President Obama wants them to stop paying dividends, perhaps it would be sensible to do so."

"It is looking more likely BP will cease paying the £1.8bn of dividends per quarter it's been delivering to shareholders - until, that is, it can quantify the final bill for the oil debacle and prove it can afford those enormous costs."

Iran to unveil nuke fuel advance

REUTERS, Tehran

Iran will unveil a new advance in its nuclear program in the coming months, the head of its Atomic Energy Organization was quoted as saying yesterday, in comments that showed defiance in the face of new UN sanctions.

"In the next few months Iran will announce a new nuclear achievement in connection to the production of fuel for its Tehran research reactor," Ali Akbar Salehi was quoted as saying in the Resalat daily. He gave no details.

The last major advance Iran announced was in February, when it said it had started refining uranium to 20 percent purity -- saying it wanted to produce fuel for the Tehran reactor, which makes isotopes for treating cancer.

That increased Western concerns as it meant Iran was now refining uranium closer to the level needed for nuclear weapons, adding to the momentum behind a fourth round of sanctions passed by the UN Security Council on Wednesday.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) says there are reasons to suspect Iran is actively pursuing nuclear weapons capability. Once 20 percent purity is reached, the next step to the 90 percent needed for a warhead is much less onerous.

Iran is not known to have the technology to convert 20 percent enriched uranium into the special plates needed for the research reactor.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad dismissed the sanctions as no worse than "pesky flies" and said the resolution was "like a used handkerchief that should be thrown in the bin."

His vice-president, Mehرداد Bazrpash, told the official IRNA news agency: "America and its allies should wait for Iran's next move on the Islamic Republic's nuclear issues and they will soon realize that they have made a mistake."

Iran has refused to suspend its sensitive nuclear work, as demanded by the Security Council, and that the program only represents its legitimate right to power generation.

US teenage sailor rescued

BBC ONLINE

A 16-year-old US girl who ran into problems trying to become the youngest person to sail solo around the world has been rescued in the Indian Ocean.

Abby Sunderland was picked up by a French fishing vessel some 2,000 nautical miles off the Australian coast, maritime authorities said.

Her yacht, which has a broken mast, was spotted by an aerial search team in the southern Indian Ocean, midway between Australia and Africa, on Friday.

Rescuers say she is in good health.

The teenager had been stranded in mountainous seas since Thursday.

Laurence Sunderland, her father, said the family was "ecstatic that Abigail is in safe hands".

"She was in good spirits... She talked to her mother," he told reporters outside his home in California, the Associated Press reports.

A spokeswoman for the Australian Maritime Safety Authority's Rescue Co-ordination Centre, Rhianne Robson, said Ms Sunderland would be taken to the nearest land as soon as possible.

1.3m flee as China flooding kills 155

AP, Beijing

Unusually heavy seasonal flooding in China has killed at least 155 people and forced more than 1 million to flee as water levels in some areas reached at their highest in more than a decade, the government reported yesterday.

Direct economic losses total 24 billion yuan (\$6.5 billion), with large swaths of the country's southeast hit especially hard, according to the Office of State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters.

Virtually all of the country's major rivers were swollen, while water levels in lakes along the mighty Yangtze River were higher than in 1998, when catastrophic flooding killed about 4,000 people.

The office said 140,000 houses had collapsed and more than 1.3 million people had been moved to temporary shelter. Overall losses were about four times what they were last year, it said. Heavy rain has been falling since April, with 13 torrential storms on record already this season.

Flooding strikes along the Yangtze almost every summer, although authorities had claimed that construction of the massive Three Gorges Dam along the river's upper reaches would help modulate water levels and prevent major losses.

The office did not say what if any role the dam had played in controlling flood waters, although it said officials responsible for anti-flooding measures had been ordered to monitor and adjust levels wherever possible.

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