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Azerbaijan violence out of control; Moscow sends reserve troops

MOSCOW (AP) — The Defense Ministry called up reserve troops Thursday to help 29,000 soldiers quell ethnic violence in the Caucasus that has killed at least 66 people and wounded more than 220.

Defense Minister Dmitri T. Yazov said the additional troops were necessary to maintain order and possibly enforce a curfew — a measure authorities in the republic of Azerbaijan have refused to impose despite reports of vicious attacks by Azerbaijani extremists on Armenian residents.

At least 10,500 Armenians reportedly have been evacuated from the Azerbaijani capital of Baku, where rampaging Azerbaijani mobs began the violence Saturday.

Extremists have obtained heavy weaponry, including helicopters, tanks and ground-to-ground missiles in what Interior Minster Vadim Bakatin on Thursday called a "civil war."

In his first public comments since the Baku riots, President Mikhail S. Gorbachev defended the Kremlin's decision Monday to declare a state of emergency but said the ethnic problems date back centuries.

> "The problems, which have been accumulating for tens, no, for hundreds of years, have erupted and acquired the character we are now confronted with in the Baltics, Moldavia and now in this interethnic strife in Transcaucasia, in Azerbaijan and Armenia."
>
> — Mikhail S. Gorbachev, Soviet president

"The problems, which have been accumulating for tens, no, for hundreds of years, have erupted and acquired the character we are now confronted with in the Baltics, Moldavia and now in this interethnic strife in Transcaucasia, in Azerbaijan and Armenia," he told a meeting in Moscow.

"We are now busy trying to halt this process, to prevent it from going deeper and getting more acute," Gorbachev said in comments broadcast on state radio. "We have resorted to the use of force against criminals, against this vandalism."

It was not clear whether the Kremlin intended to impose the curfew in Baku and other parts of Azerbaijan, or if Yazov expected the Azerbaijani authorities to do it.

Members of the Azerbaijani People's Front said Thursday they had warned Moscow that if a curfew or martial law were imposed on Baku they would launch a general strike in the strategic oil center.

On Wednesday, the 29,000 troops already in Azerbaijan and the republic of Armenia were authorized to shoot if necessary to stop the bitter fighting in the hills around the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, according to Soviet media.

Foreign reporters were barred from travel to the republics.

"Hundreds of trucks with Armenian militants patrol the border with the Lachin and Kubaltin regions of Azerbaijan, Interfax said and troops have been reinforced.

The military commandant in Nagorno-Karabakh also ordered unregistered organizations dissolved, Tass said.

Yevgeny Primakov, a top-ranking Soviet legislator, confronted a mass anti-government demonstration outside the Azerbaijani Communist Party headquarters in Baku and said the riots had to stop.

Officials: States' low spending hinders prevention of nine diseases

ATLANTA (AP) — Federal health officials said Thursday that nine preventable chronic diseases are responsible for more than half the deaths in this country — but get only 2 percent of the public health dollars spent by the states.

Meanwhile, another preventable cause, injuries, remains the leading cause of "premature loss of life" with suicide, homicide and AIDS also ranking high.

The national Centers for Disease Control reported that nine chronic diseases — diseases with long periods of incubation or suffering — by themselves accounted for 1.1 million deaths in 1986, 52 percent of the deaths nationwide.

They are stroke, heart disease, diabetes, obstructive lung disease, lung cancer, breast cancer, cervical cancer, colo-rectal cancer and cirrhosis of the liver.

"They're all largely preventable — or preventable to some extent," Dr. Robert Hahn, a CDC epidemiologist, said.

The preventable risk factors for those nine chronic diseases include cigarette smoking, excess weight, high blood pressure, drinking and lack of exercise.

"We know what the risk factors are," Hahn said. "We know less about how you get people to act on them."

According to a report from 45 states and the District of Columbia, less than 2 percent of state public health expenditures are allocated to prevent and control chronic disease, the CDC said.

"That's low," Hahn said, noting that other chronic diseases not included in the CDC's dangerous nine also could be targets of increased public health efforts.

Each year, the average state expenditure on chronic disease control and prevention is 66 cents per person, Hahn said.

That amount includes money spent on efforts such as disease screening programs, but does not include education or direct doctors' care at public clinics.

Comparable figures on federal public health spending for chronic disease were not available, Hahn said. Many of the federal government's health programs concentrate on research, epidemiology and education, not the traditional screening and prevention efforts of state-funded health clinics.

Republicans claim proposed tax cut in Social Security a political charade

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Bush, trying to prevent a political stampede, said Thursday that a proposed cut in Social Security taxes was a charade that would force either an increase in other taxes or a reduction in retirement benefits.

"And I am not going to do it to the older people in this country," Bush said in his first public comment on a proposal, initiated by Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, D-N.Y, that will roll back the Social Security payroll tax increase that began Jan. 1.

Vice President Dan Quayle took a similar stance.

"I think it's a political trap and once people understand it, they won't fall for it," Quayle said.

On the heels of Moynihan's measure, Sen. Ernest F. Hollings, D-S.C., has proposed a 5 percent value-added tax — a national sales levy — to replace revenues lost both by the Social Security tax cut and Bush's own proposal to lower the tax on capital gains.

Hollings' plan would raise $53 billion in 1991.

Rep. Donald Pease, D-Ohio, a member of the House Ways and Means Committee, called the value-added tax, or VAT, "pretty much a pie-in-the-sky proposal."

"We certainly could not get a VAT without the active support of the president," Pease said. "And on theoretical grounds, the VAT could be as regressive as the Social Security tax."

Quayle called Moynihan's plan "a subterfuge for a general tax increase" and pounced on Hollings' proposal as evidence of that.

"The cat's a little bit out of the bag right now," the vice president said in an interview with the Associated Press.

The White House has been put on the spot by Moynihan's plan because it has won support across the political spectrum, even from traditional allies of the president such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and conservative groups.

Moreover, it has exposed Bush to criticism that he is espousing a tax cut for the rich with a cut in capital gains taxes, while spurning a break for middle- and low-income Americans with a reduction in Social Security taxes.

Florida gets boost from president

Everglades face extinction

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — The battle to keep Florida's environment off the terminal list gets a boost this week, as President Bush plans a visit to the Everglades and leading conservationists meet to set their agenda.

Heavily populated south Florida is under mandatory water restrictions because of its worst drought in three decades, and state environmentalists say time is running out for ambitious, expensive efforts to reverse damage caused by runaway growth.

"The Everglades is on the critical list," Brien Culhane, a Wilderness Society official and chairman of the Everglades Coalition, said. "It is the most threatened ecosystem in the United States. The 1990s will be the decade of decision. The decisions we make — and our success in carrying them out — will determine whether the Everglades will be saved."

The Everglades Coalition begins its fifth annual meeting Thursday. After sessions with Florida's top politicians, seminars and field trips, the conservationists will announce their agenda for the year.

Meanwhile, Bush plans a tour and briefing Friday at Everglades National Park. The main purpose of Bush's six-hour Florida visit is to keynote a fund-raising dinner in Miami for Republican Gov. Bob Martinez's November re-election effort.

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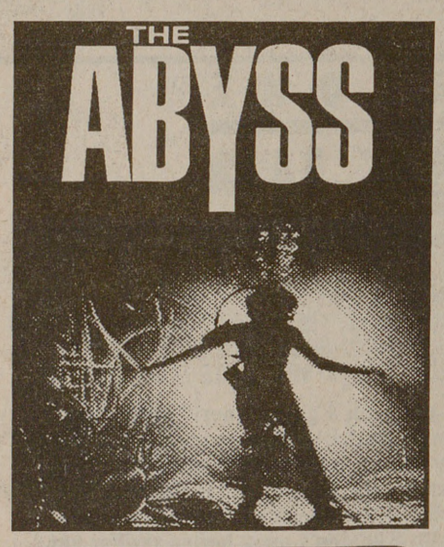

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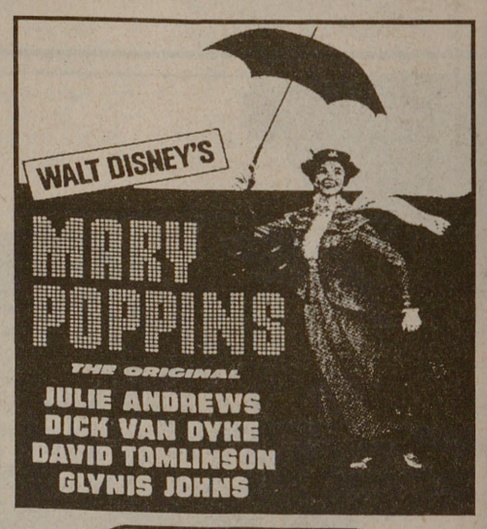

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