

Police in Georgia Beat Opposition Protesters

TBILISI (Reuters)—Masked police beat dozens of opposition protesters in the Georgian capital on Monday in the latest flare-up during a weeks-long street campaign against President Mikheil Saakashvili, witnesses said.

Dozens of black-clad police officers armed with truncheons confronted a protest of about 50 people at Tbilisi's main police station demanding the release of six opposition activists detained since Friday, a Reuters photographer said.

He said several protesters and a photographer for the European Pressphoto Agency were severely beaten. Senior opposition official Zurab Abashidze was admitted to hospital.

Police seized cameras from photographers and cameramen, including a Reuters photographer. The cameras were later returned but the Reuters photographer's images had been erased. Other photographers said their memory cards had been taken.

Tensions are running high in the former Soviet republic, after more than two months of opposition protests and road-blocks demanding Saakashvili quit over his record on democracy and last year's disastrous war with Russia.

The volatile country of 4.5 million people sits on Russia's southern border, at the heart of a transit region for oil and gas to the West.

"This is absolutely unacceptable," protest leader and former Saakashvili ally Nino Burjanadze said of the violence. "We demand a response from our Western partners, to give their assessment of the situation."

Saakashvili said he was tolerating a state of "lawlessness" and accused his opponents of trying to provoke him.

"They think Saakashvili is hot-headed, they insult (parliament speaker David) Bakradze and (Prime Minister Nika) Gilauri, and they try to make us crush them," he told a televised meeting of the parliamentary majority.

Police firing tear gas and rubber bullets dispersed the last mass demonstrations against Saakashvili in 2007.

Watched closely by the West, authorities are wary of taking a hard line again, but analysts question how long the stalemate can continue.

'Criminals and Bandits'

Both sides have traded blame for a spate of violent incidents, vying for the sympathy of Georgia's Western allies.

The opposition said that statements by several Western embassies on Friday, in which they criticized opposition protesters for throwing rocks and bottles at Bakradze's official car, had encouraged the government to take a hard line.

"The statements made by the U.S., French and Czech ambassadors clearly gave impetus to the authorities to act as criminals and bandits today," opposition leader David Gamkrelidze said.

The Interior Ministry said in a statement that protesters were hampering traffic and resisted police efforts "to unblock the entrance to the police station and restore traffic movement." It said 39 protesters were detained.

Deputy Interior Minister Eka Zguladze said police had acted inappropriately toward journalists. "It is our mistake. We admit it and apologize," she told a news conference.

Pro-opposition television stations Maestro and Kavkasia said they would temporarily halt broadcasting in protest.

Turnout at the demonstrations has waned, but dozens of mock prison cells erected around parliament continue to block traffic through central Tbilisi.

Earlier on Monday, men in civilian clothes armed with knives broke up mock prison cells behind parliament.

The opposition accuse 41-year-old Saakashvili of monopolizing power since the 2003 "Rose Revolution" that propelled him to the presidency.

He has faced renewed pressure since last August, when Russia crushed a Georgian assault on the breakaway pro-Russian region of South Ossetia. But analysts question whether the opposition has the unity or the numbers to unseat him.



CLASH: Georgian police violently clash with opposition protesters in Tbilisi on June 15. STR/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Canada Faces Third Election in 4 years

BY MATTHEW LITTLE
Epoch Times Staff

Canada's turbulent minority Conservative government was again put on election notice after the leader of the main opposition party said he would decide by Friday whether or not to force an election.

If Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative government does fall, it will be the third election in four years and the second in seven months.

In Canada's four-party parliamentary democracy, during a minority government, the opposition parties can force an election by voting against significant pieces of legislation because their total number of seats is greater than the governing party. Although the governing party holds more seats than any one other single party, during the current minority government it cannot pass any legislation without the supporting of at least one other party.

After a political crisis shut parliament down soon after the last election just seven months ago, the Liberal party, which has the second highest number of seats in parliament making it the Official Opposition, came to an agreement with the Conservatives that allowed the government to stand.

That agreement included a new budget and the provision that the government would submit reports on stimulus spending efforts three times in the coming year. On Thursday the government filed the second such report



PARTY TROUBLE: Canada's Prime minister Stephen Harper during a press conference on April 19. Harper's Conservative government may fall if opposition parties force an election, which would be the third election in four years for Canada. THOMAS COEX/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

and in a press conference in Ottawa Monday Morning Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff said he would decide by this Friday whether or not to try to topple the government and trigger an election.

Ignatieff laid down four areas he needed explanation or action from the government: employment insurance reform, figures detailing stimulus spending, a plan to pay down the deficit, and how the government plans to deal with the medical isotope crisis.

All three opposition parties have been pushing to ease eligibility requirements for employment insurance saying the five extra weeks of coverage the Conservatives added to the plan in their last budget was not enough. Besides asking to see specific figures detailing how the government has delivered stimulus funding to infrastructure projects across the country, Ignatieff is also demanding to know how the government will deal with a global shortage of medical isotopes set off by Canada's Chalk River nuclear reactor being taken offline recently. Medical isotopes are used for medical imaging and cancer treatments.

Although Ignatieff said he will decide by Friday whether to trigger an election, he said that deadline could be extended if Harper makes an effort to explain why he needs more time and what he is doing.

"My party doesn't control the timing of elections in any case. It's the prime minister and his government's responsibility to maintain the confidence of the House," Ignatieff told reporters.

Second Open Letter Demands Justice for Rape Case

By FANG XIAO
Epoch Times Staff

Thirty-two Chinese scholars, professionals and human rights activists have published a second open letter to the Chinese Supreme Court to protest the Enshi police's decision to sue Deng Yujiao for excessive defense.

This open letter, following a previous letter published on May 16, reiterates that Deng Yujiao was legally protecting herself from sexual harassment when she stabbed the government official. The letter points out that "excessive defense" cannot be used as a legal charge as it is only a cause to mitigate punishment after the crime is confirmed.

The letter also criticizes the local authorities and police department for intentionally twisting and hiding key facts from the public, and listed a series of illegal or unreasonable operations in the handling of the case.

At the end of the letter, the authors urged the Supreme Court to remain just and independent when dealing with this case. They warned that since the case has attracted the attention of the entire nation, an unjust sentence would intensify the conflicts between the people and the authorities.

Lu Jun, spokesperson of a Beijing-based rights group and one of the cosigners of the letter, said in a recent interview that the local authorities' earlier charge of mayhem had been a huge disappointment to the public. The recent efforts to ban internet discussions and media reports on this case further showed that the authorities are suffocating independent voices, said Lu.

Another co-signer, Beijing scholar Chen Yongmiao, said that the purpose of the open letters was to promote social and legal justice and protect the rights of the underprivileged groups from corrupt political powers.

Iran's Mousavi Calls for Annulment of Election Results

MOUSAVI CONTINUED FROM A1

"...there are occasional news of unpleasant events in some areas including the Tehran University and some people are providing advertising feed for foreign media, and also there have been reports sent to the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Legislature) about violent confrontation with people," he said in a statement obtained through the semi-official ISNA news agency.

Iran's supreme Leader Ali Khamenei met with Mousavi late on June 14 informing him that he has ordered a probe into how the election was handled. An an-

nouncement through the state media the following day confirmed the Guardian Council's probe into the allegations of election irregularities. The Guardian Council is an influential 12-member council that also oversees elections.

The reversal, on the part of Khamenei and the Guardian Council, is seen by experts as a move made in reaction to the protests and the growing fear that the unrest amongst Mousavi supporters will grow and shake the stability of the current Iranian regime.

Many Mousavi supporters have been shouting "God is great" on

their rooftops to show their objection to the alleged election fraud. This act was one of the non-violent means of protest against Iran's monarchy regime used during the 1979 revolution.

A note on Mousavi's website advises people to keep saying "God is great" until "the election issue is resolved" three times each night at 22, 23, and 24.

According to White House Press Secretary Robert, Obama administration is continuing to monitor the situation Iran, with as focus upon resolving pending issues with Iran's nuclear weapons program.

"Obviously we continue to have concern about what we've seen. Obviously the Iranians are looking into this, as well. We continue to be heartened by the enthusiasm of young people in Iran," Gibbs told reporters.

U.N.'s Ban Ki-moon has urged Iran's government to respect the will of Iranian people and said that he will closely watch the probe into the election.

France, Germany, and Britain have also expressed concern about the allegations of election fraud and the violent confrontations after the election.



NEWBORN: Chiang Mai zoo officials hold a new born panda at Chiang Mai zoo on May 27, 2009. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Name Up for Vote for Thailand's First Panda Cub

By MADISON LEE
Epoch Times Staff

A contest to select a name for a female baby panda born in Thailand's Chiang Mai Zoo on May 27 is nearing the end with a 1 million baht (\$29,300) prize to the winner.

From the thousands of entries received, the Zoological Park Organization of Thailand has narrowed the selection down to four names: Ying Ying, Lin Ping, Thai-Jean and Khwan Thai.

Each of the four contestants who submitted these names will receive

400,000 baht (\$11,700) and an airfare ticket to China to tour panda sites.

People can vote for their favorite name by sending in a postcard that will be available for purchase starting June 19. The winner will be announced on August 12, which is Mother's Day in Thailand.

The zoo is also currently constructing a 60 million baht (\$1.76 million) snow house for the pandas that is expected to be completed by the end of the month.

The panda cub was bred by artificial insemination and is the first to be born in Thailand.

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