

Xinjiang riot claims 140 lives: Beijing

Written by Taipei Times

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Chinese riot police patrol a street following riots in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous

PHOTO: AFP

Violent street battles killed at least 140 people and injured 828 others in the deadliest ethnic unrest to hit China's western Xinjiang region in decades and officials said yesterday that the death toll was expected to rise.

Police sealed off streets in parts of the provincial capital, Urumqi, after discord between ethnic Muslim Uighurs and China's Han majority erupted into riots. Witnesses reported a new protest yesterday in a second city, Kashgar.

Columns of paramilitary police in green camouflage uniforms and flak vests marched around Urumqi's main bazaar — a largely Uighur neighborhood — carrying batons, long bamboo poles and slingshots yesterday. The mobile phone service was blocked and Internet links were also cut or slowed down.

Rioters on Sunday overturned barricades, attacked vehicles and houses, and clashed violently with police in Urumqi, media and witness accounts said. State TV aired footage showing protesters attacking and kicking people on the ground. Others, who appeared to be Han Chinese, sat dazed with blood pouring down their faces.

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A boy runs in front of the burnt wreck of a car in a street in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uighur Auto

PHOTO: AFP

There was little immediate explanation for how so many people died. Exile groups said the violence started only after police began violently cracking down on a peaceful protest complaining about a fight between Uighur and Han factory workers in another part of China.

About 1,000 to 3,000 Uighur demonstrators had gathered on Sunday in the regional capital for a protest that apparently spun out of control. Accounts differed over what happened, but the violence seemed to have started when the crowd of protesters refused to disperse.



A video grab from state-run CCTV shows an overturned police car in Urumqi, Xinjiang U

PHOTO: REUTERS

The state-run Xinhua news agency reported hundreds of people were arrested and checkpoints ringed the city to prevent rioters from escaping. Mobile phone services provided by at least one company were cut yesterday to stop people from organizing further action in Xinjiang.

Internet access was blocked or unusually slow in Urumqi yesterday.

An official at the Xinjiang government said more than 260 vehicles were attacked or set on fire in Sunday's unrest and 203 shops were damaged. She said 140 people were killed and 828

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injured in the violence.

Xinhua said several hundred people had been arrested in connection with the riot and police were searching for about 90 other “key suspects.” It also quoted a local police chief as saying the death toll was expected to rise.

Uighur exiles condemned the crackdown.

“We are extremely saddened by the heavy-handed use of force by the Chinese security forces against the peaceful demonstrators,” said Alim Seytoff, vice president of the Washington-based Uyghur American Association. “We ask the international community to condemn China’s killing of innocent Uighurs. This is a very dark day in the history of the Uighur people.”

Mamet, a 36-year-old restaurant worker, said he saw People’s Armed Police attack students outside Xinjiang University.

“First they fired tear gas at the students. Then they started beating them and shooting them with bullets. Big trucks arrived and students were rounded up and arrested,” Mamet said.

Meanwhile, a group of 31 Taiwanese tourists traveling with Joan Tour were in Urumqi as of yesterday.

The company said that their group entered Urumqi yesterday and did not see the riot. They are scheduled to return tomorrow.

Tourism Bureau Division Chief Chen Mei-hsiu confirmed that a total of 91 Taiwanese are in Xinjiang, including those from Joan Tour. The other 60 tourists left Urumqi before the riot, she said.

The Mainland Council Affairs (MAC) has not issued any travel alerts for Xinjiang.

The Taipei Times tried to contact the MAC for its view on the situation in Urumqi, but a spokesperson was unavailable for comment.

ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY SHELLEY SHAN AND STAFF WRITER

Also See: [Democracy activist condemns attack on Uighur protesters](#)

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