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# Chechen rebels, volunteer hostages leave aboard buses



**BUDYONNOVSK, Russia (AP)** — Chechen rebels and more than 100 people acting as their human shields rode a slow convoy of buses down winding steppe backroads Monday, the delicate endgame of a siege in which the rebels grabbed 1,500 hostages and the Russian government caved in to their demands.

The buses, most of their curtains drawn, were joined by police cars, an ambulance and a refrigerator truck carrying the bodies of Chechens killed in Russian raids on the hospital.

The Chechens had been holed up in the hospital since they invaded Budyonovsk in southern Russia on Wednesday to demand an end to Russia's war against their separatist republic.

The rebels released most of the hostages after Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin agreed Sunday to declare a cease-fire in Chechnya, resume peace talks and give the gunmen safe passage to their homeland. But there were reports of continued fighting in Chechnya.

After nine hours on the road, the seven red-and-white buses were nearing Russia's republic of Dagestan after being sent on a circuitous route through remote backcountry. They remained far closer to Budyon-

novsk than to Chechnya, 90 miles to the south.

The buses had been stopped by troops a few hours into the journey at the border of North Ossetia, which borders Chechnya, and told to take a different, longer route through Dagestan, the ITAR-Tass news agency said. The road then wound in the opposite direction from Chechnya.

One bus developed engine trouble, and authorities prepared a tank of motor oil which the gunmen picked up along the way, ITAR-Tass said.

After the buses pulled away from the hospital early Monday, hundreds of hostages emerged to waiting crowds of relatives and friends. Loud arguments soon broke out between many former hostages who were sympathetic to the Chechens and angry residents who recalled the Chechens' storming of the city in which more than 100 people were killed.

"The Chechens treated us well," said one former hostage, 33-year-old pediatrician Natalya Serebryakova, who wore a torn and dirty white doctor's smock.

"If the Chechens promised something, they did it. When (the Russians) started to fire shells ... into a maternity ward, the Chechens jumped on the bed and covered infants with their own bodies," she said.

The government launched

two attacks Saturday on the hospital but failed to free the hostages, and those inside said dozens were killed or wounded. The rebels freed more than 400 hostages, mostly women and children, over the weekend as talks continued with the government.

About 50 bodies of civilians killed during the six-day drama were left behind in the hospital, local officials said.

Authorities said troops found and defused three mines in the hospital, ITAR-Tass said.

During the negotiations, Chechen commander Shamil Basayev had demanded "volunteers" to assure safe passage from the hospital.

"All hostages must be left in the hospital," Chernomyrdin told Basayev by telephone at one point. "The volunteers — that is another story."

According to Alexander Korobeinikov of the regional government, there were at least 73 Chechen rebels on the buses and 114 volunteers, including local officials, parliament members, journalists and other civilians. News reports put the number of volunteers at about 150.

"The term 'hostage' ceases to exist the moment you board the bus," said Vladimir Vorozhtsov, an Interior Ministry spokesman. "From then on, you are voluntarily accompanying the terrorists."

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# Swiss oppose chocolate changes

**GENEVA (AP)** — One of Switzerland's most famous national symbols — chocolate — is about to be Eurocratized, and many Swiss don't have much appetite for it.

New food regulations taking effect Saturday allow Swiss chocolate makers to add vegetable oils to the traditional cocoa butter, putting them in line with other European countries.

That incenses consumer groups, which fear the quality of Swiss chocolate will decline. They are circulating petitions demanding the government rethink its policy.

Manufacturers, nervous about a public backlash, have rushed to reassure chocoholics that they won't tamper with the recipe of the beloved "Schoggi" — the Swiss German word for chocolate. At least in Switzerland, the companies say, although exports may be another story.

The 150-year-old Lindt company, Switzerland's largest independent producer, takes an even firmer line. "We aren't going to change anything. We're staying with the old recipes," said Irene Meienberg, a Lindt executive.

It earns big money for Swiss companies from tourists visiting the country and from rising sales

around the world. More than 53,000 tons of Swiss chocolate were exported last year, fetching the equivalent of \$308 million.

The Swiss themselves class as the world's biggest chocolate munchers. Per capita consumption was about 24 pounds last year, ahead of the Austrians and Norwegians, according to figures from the industry organization, Chocosuisse.

The chocolate shock stems from government attempts to overhaul its antiquated 1905 food laws and bring them into line with standards in Europe.

The original idea was to revise the rules in preparation for joining the European Economic Area, a 19-nation free trade zone. But even after the Swiss voted against membership in December 1992, the government decided to press ahead on the assumption it would be better in the long run to have standards that conform to the rest of Europe.

Hidden among dozens of pages dealing with everything from genetic engineering to cheese standards is one provision saying chocolate may contain up to 5 percent vegetable fat — such as palm or soya oil. Until now, only cocoa butter was allowed.

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