

Russians, tourists jittery after Moscow bus hijacking

■ **RED SQUARE:** Gunman seizes busload of South Korean tourists near President Yeltsin's office

MOSCOW (AP) — Tourist buses packed Red Square and cobblestones were washed clean of blood Sunday, but psychological scars remained after 25 South Koreans were hijacked in broad daylight next to the Kremlin.

Russians and foreigners alike were jittery after Saturday's attack, which drew attention to the nation's soaring crime rate and dealt a painful blow to its image abroad.

A busload of South Korean tourists was seized by a gunman and held for nearly 10

hours until Russian commandos stormed the bus early Sunday and killed the assailant. The gunman was identified as a Russian, but authorities did not know his name or anything about him.

The hijacking took place on a bridge behind the onion domes of St. Basil's Cathedral, one of the world's most recognizable buildings. The area is near the Kremlin, the seat of Russia's government.

The 25 tourists, uninjured but badly shaken, cut short their tour of Russia and flew on to their next scheduled stop in Frankfurt, Germany.

The gunman, said to be in his early- to mid-30's, brandished an AK-47 assault rifle when he boarded the bus late Saturday afternoon. He told the tourists they were

hostages and ordered them to draw the curtains, freed hostage Yun Dong-hyuk told the South Korean news agency Yonhap.

Scores of police ringed the bus, snipers crouched on a Kremlin tower and ambulances and fire trucks surrounded the scene for hours.

The gunman initially demanded \$10 million but later lowered the demand to \$1 million. Authorities paid him \$500,000 after several hours, and he released the hostages in groups until just four tourists and the Russian bus driver were left.

Then, after a bank truck pulled up and authorities apparently prepared to hand over another payment, about 20 commandos swarmed over the bus. They fired in the air and smashed windows as stun

grenades exploded with searing flashes.

"All of a sudden, we heard gunshots and everybody ducked," Im Chil-sung, one of the five men still on the bus, told Yonhap.

The gunman was shot to death within seconds. Police found a homemade bomb hidden on his body and a Makarov pistol with four bullets in the bus.

The remaining hostages were hustled from the bus shaken and dazed.

In the midst of the crisis, the newly crowned Miss Russia emerged following the pageant at a nearby hotel and told reporters she would offer her golden crown in exchange for the release of a hostage.

Authorities apparently did not take 19-year-old Yelena Matsina's offer seriously, and she left still in possession of her crown.

Pro-Saddam propaganda swamps voters

■ **ELECTION:** Iraqi voters urged to vote for the sole candidate in the nation's first presidential election

BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP) — From the moment they entered polling stations Sunday, Iraqi voters were swamped with pro-Saddam Hussein propaganda in an effort to guarantee the Iraqi leader a landslide victory in the nation's first presidential referendum.

The massive effort should work. Saddam was the sole candidate in Sunday's election, which Washington has dismissed as a sham.

Iraq's state-run newspapers, along with its television and radio stations, have inundated voters for weeks, urging them to vote for Saddam.

On Sunday, the campaign moved to the polling stations. Outside a school in downtown Baghdad, seven large posters told people to vote "yes" for the man who has ruled since 1979 without ever facing a general election.

Voters walking toward open ballot booths saw more large pictures of the president inside the school, some with the slogan "Long Live Saddam Hussein."

Saddam's supporters worked hard to make polling places even as far away as Karbala, a holy Shi-

ite Muslim city in southern Iraq with a tradition of dissent, look like campaign rally sites.

The paper ballots said: "Do you agree that Saddam Hussein should be the president of the Republic of Iraq for another seven years?" Voters used pens to mark "yes" or "no."

The government was expected to announce the results of the referendum late Sunday or early Monday, but Saddam's victory was a foregone conclusion.

Washington has ridiculed the ballot, especially Iraq's claim it marks the beginning of a process that will bring democracy to a country ruled by Saddam alone for 16 years.

Saddam appears to be holding the vote to show the world that he remains popular, despite the massive problems that he and his government face.

U.N. trade sanctions imposed after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 have devastated Iraq's economy, leaving many of its 20 million people beggared and hungry.

Rolf Ekeus, the U.N. arms expert in charge of scrapping Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, told the world body last week that Saddam's government has repeatedly misled U.N. monitors.

Krzysztof Plominski, the ambassador at the Polish Embassy in Baghdad, which represents U.S. interests in Iraq, believes the embargo has left many Iraqis nationalistic.

That was evident Sunday.

"This referendum has shut all the mouths in the West that are antagonizing Iraq and Saddam, our beloved president," said antique salesman Ali Shadhan, 45, after casting his ballot in downtown Baghdad.

In an effort to make the election appear legitimate, Saddam invited public figures who support him in other countries, including Russian ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who called the vote "a discouraging reply to Western lies."

Plominski said in an interview the ballot is not significant by itself and no one doubted that Saddam would win by a landslide.

But, he said, countries that have long encouraged Saddam to begin introducing democracy should withhold judgment for now.

"My personal opinion is that even if someone is a criminal and he wants to do his best, wants to improve his image, we have to encourage him and at least wait to see what happens," he said.

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