

World News

French teens strike for school reform

A half-million high school students strike, and the Education Minister promises improvements

By Jocelyn Noveck
The Associated Press

PARIS — Midmorning recess at Paris' Victor Hugo High School: usually a time for gossip, a few laughs, and a cigarette. But it wasn't that way Monday.

"What are you hanging around for, girls? There's a strike meeting in the courtyard!" 16-year-old Adrian Partouche shouted to his friends Vanessa and Mong-Houei.

They may be angry about their schools, but these French teenagers have clearly learned one lesson from their elders — when no one seems to be listen-

ing, strike.

Recent walkouts in this strike-happy nation have earned major concessions for truckers, transport workers and airline pilots, to mention a few.

Now, high school students have their moment in the spotlight, and they're determined to make the most of it. For too long, many say, they've suffered from overcrowded classrooms, a lack of teachers, outmoded equipment and badly planned schedules. And for once, they want the world to focus on them.

On Friday, a day after a half-million students marched throughout France, embattled Education Minister Claude Allègre promised to hire more teachers and modernize facilities. He repeated that pledge Sunday night.

But that wasn't enough for most students, who plan another nationwide protest on Tuesday.

"We all know that ministers often promise things and then never do them," said Anne-Julie Peschaud, 14. "Why a strike? Well, we know that's what works in this country."

As she spoke, her fellow students at Victor Hugo tried, with middling success, to organize themselves.

"Who's ready to start the strike right now?" shouted three self-designated leaders, who stood on chairs at one end of the courtyard. "We are!" everyone shouted back.

"And who's ready to occupy the school all night?" the leaders shouted. This time, there were only unenthusiastic groans.

An all-day sit-in was declared.

Students sank to the ground, en masse. But it lasted only an hour; the courtyard was too cold.

"Of course we're not very organized, like other strikes," said Mong-Houei Lui, 18. "But that's the beauty of our movement. It's spontaneous."

Students at Victor Hugo conceded they don't have it so bad. The school is in the posh Marais district, where stunning 17th-century mansions mix with ultrachic boutiques. School conditions are much better than in poorer neighborhoods or in some troubled suburbs.

"Yes, it's pretty good here," admitted Vanessa Guillon, 16. "But we're doing this in solidarity with others who are worse off. Have you seen schools in the suburbs? It's pure misery."

Troops halt soldier rebellion in Kutaisi

Mutinous soldiers charged with treason after a one-day revolt in western Georgia

By Misha Dzhindzhikhashvili
The Associated Press

KUTAI, Georgia — Mutinous soldiers surrendered Monday, ending a one-day revolt in which they clashed with government troops, blocked roads with tanks and advanced on Georgia's second-largest city. At least one soldier and four rebels were killed.

The mutineers released hostages, including two government negotiators, and agreed to return to their garrison in this mountainous former Soviet republic. They also apparently gave up control of a village they had seized, according to Teimuraz

Shashiashvili, governor of the region.

The leaders of the mutiny were charged with treason.

The revolt began when more than 200 soldiers fiercely opposed to President Eduard Shevardnadze took over their garrison in the western town of Senaki on Monday. They moved toward the heart of Georgia, sealing off roads with stolen tanks and trucks. Government troops poured into the area to defend it.

Troops were sent to intercept the rogue soldiers on the road to Georgia's second-most populous city, Kutaisi, but were forced to retreat. Rebels seized Gubi, a village 6 miles from Kutaisi, police said, and about 50 villagers joined them.

After talks with government negotiators, the troops agreed to re-

turn to their garrison at Senaki, Shashiashvili said.

"Georgia today has escaped civil war," he said.

One government soldier was killed in the fighting and two were wounded, said Health Minister Avtandil Dzhorbenadze.

At least four rogue troops were killed when government soldiers destroyed a tank they had been driving, military officials said. It was unclear whether the rebels suffered any other casualties.

The soldiers stole 10 tanks, two armored personnel carriers, and more than 50 machine guns from their garrison, presidential spokesman Vakhtang Abashidze said.

In a national television address, Shevardnadze threatened to call a state of emergency.

"It would be unjustified irre-

sponsibility on the part of Georgia's president and the defense minister if we allowed that heavy machinery and vehicles with armed adventurers into Georgia's second-largest city," Shevardnadze said.

During the day, security was tightened around key buildings in Tbilisi, the capital, including the government headquarters, parliament and broadcasting center, Russia's Interfax news agency said.

The leader of the mutiny, Akakiy Eliava, and several of his men were charged with treason, the prosecutor general's office said. It was not clear what sentence they face if convicted.

Eliava is a military commander who is also a supporter of the late president Zviad Gamsakhurdia.

Taiwan envoy visits with Chinese officials

Taiwan and Chinese officials argue over Taiwan's sovereignty during the five-day visit

By Annie Huang
The Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan — A Taiwanese envoy's ground-breaking visit to China ended a three-year freeze in relations between the estranged rivals, though wide divisions remained, observers said today.

The five-day visit by Taiwan envoy Koo Chen-fu that concluded Sunday was marked by sometimes pointed exchanges with Chinese officials. The two sides agreed to keep talking, but did not

make headway on the key question of Taiwan's future status.

"We support such frank exchanges of opinion," Sheu Kesheng, vice chairman of Taiwan's government Mainland Affairs Council, said today.

But he noted that China did not soften its claim that Taiwan is a part of China with no right to sovereignty.

Koo argued during meetings with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Daohan, that Taiwan is a sovereign state and will accept no other status. Koo said Sunday that reunification must not be considered unless China becomes a democracy.

China and Taiwan split into rival governments after Mao Tse-

tung's Communists sent Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists fleeing from the mainland in 1949.

In Beijing, China's official Xinhua News Agency urged Taiwan to take practical steps toward reunification.

"Stable and healthy cross-strait relations for the 21st century will be determined by whether both sides can hold political negotiations under the one-China principle as soon as possible," it said in a commentary.

Taiwan's China Times newspaper hailed Koo's visit as a first step to improving ties, but the paper remained wary about how to proceed.

"The impact of the mainland trip has yet to be assessed, but the

interactions during these five days will no doubt be an important chapter in history," it said in an editorial.

The newspaper, one of Taiwan's two largest dailies, called for both sides to continue negotiations.

Many Taiwanese are withholding judgment on the talks. But some were antagonized by the televised comments from Chinese officials restating China's claim over Taiwan.

"Those comments really made me angry," said Mary Chiu, an office worker. "You have no choice but to deal with your neighbor. But if he continues to be so domineering, do you still want to make friends with him?"

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