

Violence a 'promise' near end of Russia's mourning

Hundreds mourn the September school siege for the traditional 40-day mourning period, while others seek revenge

BY MIKE ECKEL
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BESLAN, Russia — Wailing and pounding their hands on dirt graves, hundreds of people dressed in black on Tuesday marked the end of the traditional 40-day mourning period for the children and adults killed after terrorists seized a school on the first day of classes.

Fears are rising that grief may give way to violence by the mostly Ossetian residents against the Ingush, a rival ethnic group whose members were among the raiders who took control of School No. 1.

Top federal and regional officials have appealed for calm, but seething anger is replacing sorrow in North Ossetia, the republic in southern Russia where Beslan is located.

"I can promise you there will be violence," said a 47-year-old man outside the school who gave only his first name, Ruslan. "(The Ingush) are all bandits."

The school's shattered remains yet again became the epicenter for the anguish of those whose relatives and friends died in the Sept. 1-3 siege. The corridors of the school — rank with mildew and smoke, and rife with angry graffiti — rang with women's wails and sobs.

In the charred gymnasium, where more than 1,000 people were held without food or water in sweltering heat for three days, schoolchildren lit thin candles and people propped up small religious icons and photographs among the flowers and stuffed animals. One woman shook with

sobs as she read the graffiti scrawled on the walls: "Children, forgive us."

"Many of us are afraid to go to school now. Many of us can't even sleep at night," said 16-year-old Alona Pliyeva, who came with about two dozen classmates from a nearby village.

In the surrounding streets, families set up long tables and lit bonfires for mourning meals. Grief-stricken families could be identified by their men, wearing beards that they planned to shave at the end of the 40 days.

At the town cemetery, where hundreds of fresh graves were adorned with flowers, bricks and wooden marking posts, Ossetian women began exchanging their black head scarves for dark-colored ones to mark the end of the mourning period. Red-eyed men somberly poured drops of water or beer on the graves as offerings to the dead. The sounds of a chorus of Orthodox Christian priests singing prayers and blessings mixed with the wails of women pounding the dirt graves, and yelling in Ossetian or in Russian: "How can this be? How can this be?"

"I can barely even look at her grave. I have no words to express it," said Vitaly, as he stood near the grave of his 12-year-old niece, Zarina.

Across Russia, priests conducted services in Orthodox churches and cathedrals, while regional politicians urged calm amid rumors that the end of the mourning period would bring a wave of reprisal killings.

Some Ossetians have vowed to seek revenge on the Ingush for the

deaths of nearly 340 victims at School No. 1. The hostage-takers, apparently acting under orders from Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev, included some Ingush. The only hostage-taker to have been detained by Russian forces is a man identified as Nur-Pashi Kulayev. Authorities say the 31 others were either killed in the gun battle with Russian forces and Ossetian fighters, or killed by residents as they tried to slip away.

Officials fear a repeat of the 10-day war fought between Ossetians and Ingush in the fall of 1992 over land rights. Ingush tried to return to their homes half a century after being exiled together with the Chechens under Soviet dictator Josef Stalin. Hundreds were killed and thousands of Ingush were forced to flee the eastern regions of North Ossetia.

Thousands of Ingush live in squalid settlements and refugee camps along the border between North Ossetia and Ingushetia. Those in North Ossetia are subject to harassment, discrimination and, after Beslan, death threats. Many Ingush still claim title to land and homes now occupied by Ossetians.

Former Ingush President Ruslan Aushev has repeatedly warned that revenge attacks could destabilize the entire Caucasus. But Russian authorities have vowed to prevent acts of vengeance, dispatching hundreds of extra police and troops to the region.

"The seizure of the school in Beslan was the latest attempt to destabilize the situation in the North Caucasus," the southern Russian area that includes Chechnya, Ingushetia and North Ossetia, Ingush President Murat Zyazikov was quoted as saying by the Nezavisimaya Gazeta daily.

State congressman admits to forcing sex on ex-girlfriend

David Wu tries to do damage control as reports surface regarding his 'inexcusable behavior' 28 years ago

BY BRAD CAIN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALEM — Democratic Congressman David Wu has been in a fierce battle with GOP contender Goli Ameri to keep his seat in the Nov. 2 election, and now questions about his re-election chances are being raised after his admission of "inexcusable behavior" toward an ex-girlfriend 28 years ago.

Wu has been leading in opinion polls, but the disclosure "could potentially be devastating to David Wu," Portland pollster Tim Hibbits said Tuesday.

The Oregonian newspaper reported that when Wu was a student at Stanford University, a former girlfriend claimed Wu tried to force her into having sex. Wu released a statement saying he had a "two-year romantic relationship that ended with inexcusable behavior on my part."

The disclosure couldn't come at a worse time for Wu, who for the first time in years is facing an aggressive, well-funded GOP challenger.

With Oregon's vote-by-mail election set to begin Friday, Wu quickly went into damage control mode Tuesday. He gave interviews with news media outlets in which he apologized over and over for his actions.

Wu refused to confirm or deny any of the details in The Oregonian's story in which a former girlfriend from Stanford University claimed Wu tried to force her into having sex.

"The other person and I both felt it was a private matter that was disposed of a long time ago," Wu said in an interview with The Associated Press.

To discuss details of the incident now, he said, would only "compound things by violating the privacy of the other person."

As for the potential impact on 1st District race, Wu said: "I'm not the

right person to ask about that; Oregon voters will make their own evaluation of this and other issues in the race."

Ameri's campaign withheld making any public statement about their Democratic opponent's woes.

The Republican and Democratic congressional campaign committees in Washington, D.C., which have been closely tracking the 1st district race, also avoided making comment.

Oregon Republican Chairman Kevin Mannix called it a "serious and sad situation."

"Congressman Wu has come forward with an appropriate expression of sorrow. It will be up to the voters to decide whether his explanation is sufficient," Mannix said.

Neutral observers said the revelations about the 1976 incident could be a windfall for Ameri's campaign to knock off the three-term incumbent.

"All of a sudden this goes from a race that was leaning to Wu to a race that is wide open and where anything could happen," said Jim Moore, who teaches political science at Pacific University in Forest Grove.

Moore said Wu may have defused the situation somewhat by quickly taking full responsibility for his actions and apologizing.

"There's not been the denials and the fudging that we saw with Neil Goldschmidt earlier this year," Moore said, referring to revelations that the former governor had sex with a 14-year-old girl while he was mayor of Portland in the 1970s.

Hibbits said all of the publicity surrounding the Goldschmidt scandal could make the Wu story stick in people's minds more.

"In the wake of the Goldschmidt situation, people might be more sensitive to allegations of sexual misbehavior," the Portland pollster said.

Pledges fall billions short for aid in Iraq; leader calls for help

Deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh says the country is now safe enough for the money to be effective

BY ERIC TALMADGE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TOKYO — With only \$1 billion in hand out of \$13.6 billion pledged, Iraq's deputy prime minister on Wednesday called on nations to fulfill their promises of aid at the start of a 55-nation conference aimed at increasing donations for the reconstruction of Iraq.

Five members of Iraq's interim Cabinet, including Deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh, were at the two-day conference to try to persuade participants that their country is both in need of donations and is safe enough for the money to be effective.

The conference is the first since the new government assumed power in July. Organizers hope donor nations will be more willing to deal with the new Iraqi government than the previous U.S.-controlled administration.

The meeting follows a conference in Madrid last year in which 37

countries and international lending institutions pledged \$13.6 billion in grants and loans.

But the continuing instability in Iraq has stalled reconstruction and diverted funds to security. Only about \$1 billion of the pledged amount has been deposited with the World Bank and U.N.

"Please do not delay — the time to make firm commitments is now. Honor your pledges now," Saleh told delegates at the start of the conference.

He said Iraq's wealth had been "utterly squandered by tyranny."

Japan pledged additional aid of \$40 million to help with Iraq's elections in January. The announcement brings to \$1.3 billion the amount Japan has put into specific projects. It has pledged another \$200 million in the near term and a total of up to \$5 billion over the next several years.

The United States is the leading donor nation, with a pledge of \$18.4 billion.

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