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Krasnodar Camp Brawl Fuels Ethnic Tensions

By Alexandra Odynova

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A brawl at a youth camp near the site of the 2014 Winter Olympics has turned into an ethnically charged battle pitting Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov against Krasnodar Governor Alexander Tkachyov.

What exactly happened on Sunday night at the Don camp in the Krasnodar region's Tuapse district remains a matter of dispute, but the incident serves as an embarrassment for Tkachyov, who is overseeing preparations for the Sochi games.

Prosecutors said the fight broke out after a deputy camp director saw three Chechen campers arguing with a 14-year-old girl from the Rostov region and asked them to back off.

Fists started flying, and the deputy director, Boris Usoltsev, suffered a broken nose and an injured leg, the Prosecutor General's Office said in a statement.

A Chechen adult supervising the Chechen teens at the camp joined in the melee, the statement said.

Then, a few hours later, a throng of unidentified people arrived at the camp and initiated a clash with the Chechen campers, it said.

Three people were hospitalized — Usoltsev, a Chechen teen and a local resident who was stabbed — and nine others suffered minor injuries, including the coach of the Chechen youth wrestling team, Ruslan Ginazov, prosecutors said.

Cell phone footage of the interior of a camp building aired on Channel One television showing broken windows and furniture with shards of glass scattered across the floor.

Kadyrov has denounced the fight as "extremism," saying in a statement that a drunken Usoltsev had initiated the fight with ethnic slurs and later invited local residents to the camp to attack the Chechen campers.

Chechen ombudsman Nurdi Nukhazhiyev said 300 local residents had entered the camp and attacked the Chechen campers.

He also said about 400 Chechen children and teachers, who arrived at the Don camp on July 13, have been bussed home together with two Omsk teachers who were fired from the camp for refusing to blame the Chechens for the fight. The Omsk teachers will now have to return home from Chechnya, he said.

The camp hosts up to 600 campers from across the country for three-week stints every summer.

"We have complaints about the governor, and if they don't conclude [that human rights violations occurred], the Olympic Games in the Krasnodar region might be in jeopardy," he said, Gazeta.ru reported.

"Billions are being invested into the region. One should check who is running it," Nukhazhiyev said.

Tkachyov denied that ethnic hatred had played any role in the brawl and insisted that locals were tolerant of children from Chechnya.

"We consider this as a clear incident of domestic hooliganism," Tkachyov said in the statement.

Local investigators have opened a criminal case and detained at least seven local residents on suspicion of hooliganism. If charged, they face up to five years in prison.

A senior Chechen official involved in youth affairs, Said-Magomed Ustarkhanov, said Chechnya would not send children to the Don camp anymore.

Separately, the Kremlin's deputy envoy to the North Caucasus, Vladimir Shvetsov, said the Caucasus republics should compile behavior codes for youth who visit other parts of Russia.

He said national dances, for instance, can be irritating for people outside the North Caucasus, RIA-Novosti reported Wednesday.

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