

Defense Minister Dispatched to Dagestan After Weekend Blasts

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Soldiers standing guard Sunday at a military checkpoint outside the town of Buinaksk, about 50 kilometers west of Makhachkala. A tandem of bombings in Buinaksk killed at least three and injured more than **Abdula Magomedov**

President Dmitry Medvedev dispatched Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov to Dagestan on Sunday after the North Caucasus republic was rocked by a series of attacks that killed at least three people and injured dozens, including a local government minister.

Serdyukov arrived in the local capital, Makhachkala, on Sunday afternoon to personally oversee efforts to aid the victims, Interfax reported. He has orders to regularly brief Medvedev on the situation, the report said, citing the Kremlin's press service.

The biggest attack happened early Sunday when a Lada packed with explosives blew up inside a military firing range near the city of Buinaksk, about 50 kilometers west of Makhachkala. Shortly after, a roadside bomb targeted investigators driving to the scene of the blast.

The first bomb killed three to five soldiers and injured more than 30, while the second caused no injuries, RIA-Novosti reported.

The car, driven by a suicide bomber, smashed through the compound's gates at about 1 a.m. and headed toward a tent camp where soldiers were sleeping, officials said. But he was stopped by the driver of a GAZ-66 truck who managed to turn around and block the Lada's path.

The ensuing explosion killed three soldiers, the Defense Ministry said. Thirty-two soldiers were injured, five in serious condition, ministry spokesman Alexei Kuznetsov told Interfax.

A local police source later told the official Riadagestan.ru news site that the numbers [had risen](#) to five dead and 39 injured. It was unclear whether the figures included the suicide bomber.

The soldier driving the truck was being treated in the hospital for injuries, Interfax reported.

The soldier probably saved many lives by stopping the attacker before he reached the tents.

The VAZ-21014 car carried explosives with a force of 40 to 50 kilograms of dynamite, investigators said.

Television footage from the scene showed the burned out wreck of the truck, while almost nothing of the car remained.

On Saturday, Dagestan's nationalities minister Bekmurza Bekmurzayev was injured when a bomb under his car exploded in Makhachkala.

The blast, which went off just as the car was leaving his house, [also killed his driver](#) and injured at least one bodyguard accompanying him, news reports said.

Bekmurzayev was rushed to the hospital with multiple injuries and a concussion, but his life was not in danger, Interfax reported.

The Investigative Committee said earlier that two passengers other than Bekmurzayev were injured, but Riadagestan.ru reported Sunday that the only other person who was injured was the bodyguard.

The job of nationalities minister, which includes responsibilities for religion and external relations, has proven dangerous, with two of [Bekmurzayev's predecessors](#) assassinated over the past 10 years.

But analysts voiced doubt that the attack had personally targeted Bekmurzayev, who was appointed in March after previously holding the post between 2005 and 2006.

Enver Kisriyev, an analyst with the Regional Research Center in the Academy of Sciences, said the local ministry had little influence in local politics because all important decisions were made at the presidential level.

"Bekmurzayev was probably targeted because he traveled with relatively little security," Kisriyev told The Moscow Times.

Dagestan has for years been beset with violent Islamist insurgents, and the predominantly Muslim region, whose population is divided into 28 linguistic groups, has recently seen a surge in coordinated attacks.

In June 2009, the republic's interior minister, Adilgeri Magomedtagirov, was gunned down in Makhachkala. And in February, the city's police chief Alhmed Magomedov was shot dead in his car.

The twin suicide bombings in the Moscow metro on March 29 were blamed on Dagestani militants, and authorities last month claimed the death of

Magomedali Vagabov, a local rebel leader blamed for the bombings.

Dagestani President Magomedsalam Magomedov, who was appointed by the Kremlin earlier this year, promised Sunday that stability would return despite the continued attacks.

"The bandits and terrorists have no future. The Dagestanis do not support them but condemn them," Magomedov told reporters at the scene of the Buinaksk bombing, Riadagestan.ru reported.

Last month, Magomedov called for the creation of anti-terrorist and anti-extremist units staffed by locals.

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