

Medvedev Calls Egyptian President as Russians Flee

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President Dmitry Medvedev urged his Egyptian colleague Hosni Mubarak by telephone on Thursday to resolve the political crisis in Egypt in a peaceful and lawful way, the Kremlin said.

Medvedev "expressed the desire and hope that the current difficult period in the life of friendly Egypt will be overcome soon through the peaceful resolution of existing problems within a lawful framework," the Kremlin said in a statement.

A bloody confrontation gripped Cairo on Thursday as armed government loyalists fought pro-democracy protesters demanding the overthrow of Mubarak in overnight clashes that killed six.

More than 380 people have been killed since the riots began Jan. 25. About 3,000 were injured and 1,000 arrested, with the clashes between Mubarak's supporters and opponents intensifying since Tuesday.

Moscow has enjoyed good relations with Mubarak. It has sought to increase its role in the

region, where it has close ties with other Arab nations and is a member of the "quartet" of Middle East peace mediators.

Egypt is a very popular destination for Russian tourists, up to 75,000 of whom may be remaining in the country despite the unrest, according to official estimates.

But 132 Russian students, most of them studying at the Cairo Al Ahram University, were evacuated from Cairo on Thursday, Interfax reported.

The evacuation plane successfully landed in Ufa, the capital of the predominately Muslim Bashkortostan republic, the report said.

Residents of many Russian locations, including Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod and Penza, were on the plane, said Artyom Valiyev, spokesman for the republic's head, Rustem Khamitov.

Nevertheless, Russia was not planning a large-scale evacuation from Egypt, Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich told reporters Thursday.

But the wife of a Russian diplomat working in Cairo said Russian embassy staff were advised to evacuate their families from Egypt earlier this week.

"Everyone is fleeing. It looks like a civil war has begun," the woman, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, told The Moscow Times by telephone Thursday.

(Reuters, MT)

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