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Sverdlovsk Brawl 'Not Ethnic Conflict'

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Investigators denied on Saturday that ethnic tensions were behind a mass brawl in a Sverdlovsk region village where locals fended off an attack by visitors from Yekaterinburg, most of them purportedly Caucasus natives.

Residents of the Sagra village said they had to fight thugs, who arrived July 1 in a column of 10 to 15 cars, armed with knives, chains and guns, to punish them for forcing a Gypsy drug dealer to move to the village outskirts, RIA-Novosti reported.

Local prosecutors said about 30 people participated in a brawl, in which one attacker, identified by news reports as Faig Musayev, a Yekaterinburg-based ethnic Azeri, was shot dead. The nongovernmental anti-drug group City Without Drugs, whose help was sought by the locals, said there were at least 60 participants, Interfax said.

Local residents told RIA-Novosti that nine of their own managed to scare away the attackers, who did not expect resistance.

Interfax reported Sunday that several attackers later returned unhindered to the scene to pick up their discarded weapons.

A senior official with the Sverdlovsk branch of the Investigative Committee, Valery Zadorin, said the clash was not an ethnic conflict because the attackers were "a ragtag bunch of both Caucasus natives and our Slavic people."

The regional branch of the Federal Drug Control Agency denied reports about a drug dealer in the village.

No officials have so far said what exactly prompted the conflict.

Three locals, including the suspect in Musayev's shooting, have been detained, but Zadorin said no arrests have been made among the attackers because "none are trying to hide."

The Sagra incident caused much discussion across the country's blogs and media, drawing comparisons to a 2010 incident in the Krasnodar region's Kushchyovskaya village where the brutal murder of 12 exposed a gang that had terrorized locals for years, and ethnic violence in Karelia's town of Kondopoga in 2006.

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