

Tajik Rebels Surrender After Assault Threat

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DUSHANBE, Tajikistan — Rebels facing off against government troops in Tajikistan's volatile east began laying down their weapons Sunday after the authorities threatened to start a new offensive to capture a former warlord accused of killing a local security chief.

President Emomali Rakhmon had called a cease-fire Tuesday after heavy fighting, promising to pardon anyone who disarmed while demanding that the rebels handed over Tolib Ayombekov, the former warlord, along with three fighters.

A senior Tajik security official said Sunday on condition of anonymity that the rebels had started to surrender about 7 a.m., handing over "dozens of guns."

"We now hope that everything will end peacefully," he said.

Tajikistan's Interior Ministry confirmed the news in a statement, saying: "Members of illegal armed units in the Gorno-Badakhshan region have started turning in their arms. ... Those laying down their weapons are immediately amnestied."

Rakhmon had sent troops into the area in pursuit of Ayombekov, accusing him of killing Major-General Abdullo Nazarov, the head of the Gorno-Badakhshan branch of the GKNB, successor to the Soviet-era KGB, on July 21.

Officials said the heavy fighting that followed killed 17 troops, 30 rebels and one civilian and raised concerns about the stability of the majority Muslim nation.

On Saturday, after several days of talks, the authorities issued a final warning, telling the rebels they would launch a new large-scale offensive against them unless they surrendered.

But not all of the authorities' demands were met.

"At this stage, there is no talk about the surrender of Ayombekov and other rebels accused of killing Nazarov," the same security source said Sunday. "Militants say they are in Afghanistan, and we also do not exclude this."

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