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3 Security Officers and 4 Militants Killed in Dagestan Shootout

By The Moscow Times

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Three members of the Russian security forces and four militants were killed in a shootout in southern Russia less than a month before the Sochi Winter Olympics, Interfax reported Wednesday.

The gun battle followed two suicide bombings in southern Russia that have fueled security concerns before the Games, which Islamist militants have threatened to attack.

President Vladimir Putin has staked a lot of personal and political prestige on the success of the Games, which open on Feb. 7, and has put security forces on combat alert in Sochi.

Interfax quoted sources in the security forces as saying a group of militants had been trapped in a house in the village of Karlanyurt in the North Caucasus republic of Dagestan, where insurgents are fighting to create an Islamist state.

The news agency quoted the sources as saying five officers had also been wounded in the shooting.

Dagestan's capital, Makhachkala, is about 620 kilometers east of Sochi.

Russia's National Anti-Terrorism Committee, or NAC, declined to comment on the incident but confirmed that a special operation was under way against a group of militants in Dagestan.

Mostly Muslim Dagestan is plagued by bombings and shootings that mainly target police and state officials as part of the insurgency.

At least 34 people were killed last month in the suicide bombings in the southern city of Volgograd. Putin ordered safety measures to be beefed up nationwide after the attacks.

The Dagestan leg of the Olympic torch relay will take place at a football arena instead of the center of Makhachkala due to security concerns, a news report said Wednesday.

The relay will be held at Anzhi Arena in the coastal city of Kaspiisk, located about 15 kilometers south of the Dagestani regional capital, Kavkazsky Uzel reported, citing the republic's sports ministry.

The Olympic flame is set to arrive in Dagestan on Jan. 27 from Astrakhan, after which it will travel to neighboring Chechnya.

The number of participants in the Dagestan leg of the relay has also changed, being cut from 270 to 67.

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