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Azerbaijanis Blocked in Russia After Virus Clash With Police

By AFP

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Russia and Azerbaijan have both closed their borders to fight the coronavirus epidemic. **Aziz Karimov / Pacific Press / ZUMA / TASS**

Hundreds of Azerbaijanis who have been unable to cross the Russian border to go home because of the coronavirus have blocked a highway and clashed with police, investigators said Tuesday.

Russia's Investigative Committee said about 400 people "used violence" against police and border guards as they were "displeased with the organization of their crossing" into Azerbaijan from the southern Dagestan region.

Related article: Coronavirus Border Closures Leave Migrant Workers Stranded in Moscow's Airports

They tried to block a major highway and threw stones at law enforcement officers who tried to stop them.

Seven Russian policemen were lightly injured and several cars damaged, investigators said.

The perpetrators have been detained, investigators added in a statement.

Around 700 Azerbaijanis have been stranded outside the village of Kullar on the Caspian Sea near the border between Russia and Azerbaijan.

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> На границе России и Азербайджана беспорядки. Бунтуют жители временного лагеря, которые не могут покинуть Россию уже больше 2 месяцев. Полиции пришлось стрелять в воздух. pic.twitter.com/wdlqqBkw4W
>
> — baza (@bazabazon) June 15, 2020

They have been living in a makeshift tent camp — some for almost two months — since both countries closed their borders to fight the coronavirus epidemic.

They have complained about the conditions and what they see as indifference from the Azeri government.

One of the men living in the tent camp said on condition of anonymity that the clashes were triggered after a group of people were designated to cross the border.

"Only half of the people who have been at the border for a long time got on that list," the man told AFP, adding that had made many "angry."

He said some started walking toward the border and were stopped by police, with clashes ensuing and police using tear gas.

"About 50 Azerbaijanis were injured and about 100-120 were detained," the man said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Azerbaijani leader Ilham Aliyev discussed the situation last month but in vain as more people arrived.

Only around 100 people are allowed to cross each week, some of the stranded men told AFP.

After the clashes an Aliev aide called on his compatriots not to break the law and "be understanding."

The elderly, women, children and families are given preferential treatment, Hikmet Gadzhiyev told local media.

Rich in hydrocarbons, former Soviet republic Azerbaijan has been led by the Aliev family since

1991. Many in the country travel to Russia for work.

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