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Moscow Sees 'No Reason' for Armenians to Flee Karabakh

By AFP

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Refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh arrive in the town of Kornidzor. **Alexander Patrin / TASS**

Moscow on Thursday said Armenians fleeing Nagorno-Karabakh after Azerbaijani's takeover of the region had nothing to fear, an apparent rejection of Armenia's claims of ethnic cleansing in the disputed territory.

"It's difficult to say who is to blame [for the exodus], there is no direct reason for such actions," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

"People are nevertheless expressing a desire to leave... those who made such a decision should be provided with normal living conditions," Peskov added.

Yerevan said more than half of Nagorno-Karabakh's population of 120,000 had left by Thursday afternoon.

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Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan warned of "ethnic cleansing" in the region and called on the international community to take action.

Pashinyan has also criticized Russia's peacekeeping force for failing to intervene when Azerbaijan last week launched its lightning offensive to regain control of Nagorno-Karabakh, accusations which Moscow denies.

Peskov reacted tepidly to the announcement that the ethnic Armenian statelet would "cease to exist" by the end of the year.

"We have taken notice of this and are closely monitoring the situation. Our peacekeepers continue to assist people," Peskov said.

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