

Kyrgyz Probe Into Ethnic Violence Blames Uzbeks

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BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan — A government commission in Kyrgyzstan investigating last summer's outbreak of mass ethnic violence pinned the blame Tuesday on leaders of the Uzbek minority for fomenting the unrest.

Commission chairman Abdygany Erkebayev also said the provisional government failed to take heed of warnings from the security services about the possible outbreak of violence.

More than 420 people, mainly minority Uzbeks, were killed in rampages by ethnic Kyrgyz in the southern cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad in June. Hundreds of thousands of Uzbeks were forced to flee their homes.

The violence erupted weeks after the overthrow of a widely disliked government amid bloody street protests, which Erkebayev said triggered claims by the Uzbek community for greater political representation.

Erkebayev singled out prominent Uzbek businessman Kadyrzhan Batyrov as being the main

instigator of the unrest.

"He traveled to areas of southern Kyrgyzstan densely populated by Uzbeks, agitating and organizing rallies," he said.

Those meetings appear to have caused deep anger among the Kyrgyz and precipitated the first clashes on June 10 that then spread across the Osh region, Erkebayev said.

Condemnation of Uzbek community leaders is likely to create fresh resentment among the ethnic group, although it fits into a familiar official narrative of the violence.

Erkebayev sought to defuse potential anger over the investigation's findings by noting that only extremists were to blame for the violence and that neither the Kyrgyz nor Uzbek communities should be held responsible.

In a rare official confirmation of the exact casualty figures, Erkebayev said that of the 426 people killed in the violence that could be identified, 276 were Uzbeks and another 105 were ethnic Kyrgyz.

Erkebayev said close relatives of the interim government that took over power from ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiyev were also involved in the ethnic violence. He named the son of former acting Prosecutor General Azimbek Beknazarov as having played a role.

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