

# 600 Azerbaijanis Slain at Khojaly, Investigator Says

**■ Civil war: Ethnic battle with Armenians in February was the bloodiest since the Soviet breakup.**

By HUGH POPE  
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

**BAKU, Azerbaijan**—More than 600 Azerbaijanis, most of them civilians, were killed by Armenian forces during a bloody February engagement in the Nagorno-Karabakh town of Khojaly, the chief of the official Azerbaijani investigation said Thursday.

The figure is double any previous reliable report on the casualties in the worst ethnic battle to follow the breakup of the Soviet Union, but it is in line with unofficial estimates made by foreign diplomats and aid workers in the capital of this Caucasus republic.

"The figure of 600 dead is a minimum. But it will take several more months for us to reach a final list," state prosecutor Aydin Rasulov said. Rasulov heads a 15-man team investigating what is known in Azerbaijan as "the Khojaly Disaster."

The Azerbaijani defeat during what some say was a fighting retreat and others call a "massacre" brought down the government of Communist President Ayaz Mutalibov, led to the Azerbaijani loss of its last hold on the disputed enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh and drastically hardened Azerbaijani opinion against Armenia.

To win restitution for Khojaly by diplomacy, or if that fails, by war, is a driving principle of the 3-week-old, nationalist Popular Front government in Baku, which is bitterly convinced that the West believes that only Muslim Azerbaijanis kill Christian Armenians, not the other way around.

That aim has narrowed any room for Abulfaz Elchibey, recently elected Azerbaijan's president, to compromise on this republic's demand for continued sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh, a Caucasus mountain enclave where 150,000 Armenians and 30,000 Azerbaijanis lived before ethnic war began four years ago.

A confirmed death toll from Khojaly has been slow to emerge for many reasons, mainly the chaos of a new nation in the throes of a nationalist revolution.

The first official reports said that 184 people had died, but that was only the number that could be initially examined by Azerbaijan's forensic scientists.

According to the scientists' findings, fatalities included 51 women and 13 children. Gunshots killed 151 of the 184; axes and other instruments were used to kill 10, they said. Explosions killed three people hiding in a snowbound forest outside the town. The other 20 people were killed by shrapnel.

Thirty-three people showed signs of mutilation, including eyes gouged out or ears, noses or sexual organs cut off, according to the specialists' report.

Prof. Rafik Youssifov, Azerbaijan's chief forensic scientist, said: "We only saw a small percentage of the dead. We are Muslims, and these bodies must be buried within 24 hours."

Prosecutor Rasulov—who made his name with a two-year study of the people killed when Soviet troops moved into Baku in Janu-

ary, 1990, to stop pogrom-like killings of Armenians and stem unrest—is supported in his calculations by several other sources.

The official tally by Azerbaijani Defense Ministry spokeswoman Leila Yunusova is taken from casualty lists published in May in the Baku newspaper Ordu, which listed 479 victims by name and 200 unidentifiable bodies.

Khojaly Mayor Elman Memmedov is compiling his own list and said he has narrowed the range of the death toll to between 580 and 630 through interviews with people displaced from Khojaly to 40 dif-

ferent districts of Azerbaijan.

"Government officials talk nonsense, saying there were 1,000 or 2,000 dead. We want to get it right," said Memmedov, still mourning the loss of his mother and 30 close relatives at Khojaly.

Between 300 and 350 bodies have been recovered so far, and the rest are believed to be scattered in and around Khojaly, Memmedov said. About 700 people taken hostage during the fighting have been swapped with the Armenians for gasoline and for people captured by the Armenians.

"They took everything, includ-

ing everybody's gold teeth, even from the hostages [prisoners]," Memmedov asserted.

Francois Zen Ruffinen, head of the International Committee of the Red Cross delegation in Baku, said that the Muslim imam of the city of Agdam near Khojaly has reported a total of 580 bodies, mostly those of civilians, that were received at his mosque from Khojaly.

"We do not count the bodies. But the figure seems reasonable. It is no fantasy," Zen Ruffinen said. "We have some idea since we gave the body bags and products to wash the dead."

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# Iran Executes 4, Condemns 5 to Death for Rioting

From Times Wire Services

NICOSIA, Cyprus—Iran executed four people and condemned five more to death for rioting in the southern city of Shiraz in a merciless crackdown on opponents of the Islamic republic.

The Iranian news agency IRNA Thursday said the rioters were thieves and hooligans and quoted an official as saying that any further disturbances would also be dealt with "decisively."

The extent of the rioting this spring and the severity of the crackdown indicate that the government of President Hashemi Rafsanjani, which has leaned toward moderation in an effort to attract needed foreign investment, is deeply concerned.

At least 24 people have been executed as a result of the riots in April and May, said Ali Safavi, a spokesman for the Moujahadeen Khalq, the major group opposed to Iran's Islamic government.

IRNA quoted Mohammed Karami, prosecutor of the Islamic revolutionary court of Shiraz, as saying 45 people had also been jailed for between four months and 10 years for their role in the April 15 Shiraz riots. Twenty people are still being tried.

Karami said the Shiraz riots, triggered by the ill treatment of disabled war veterans by security forces, had not been organized by groups seeking to overthrow Iran's clerical leadership.