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Azerbaijan's Consulate General in Los Angeles produces short film on Black January tragedy

The Consulate General of Azerbaijan in Los Angeles has produced a short film dedicated to Azerbaijan's Black January tragedy of 1990. The film mentions that in 1987 anti-Azerbaijani pogroms broke out in Armenia, and that Armenians, attacking Azerbaijani villages, killed hundreds of civilians. As a result, 250,000 Azerbaijanis were expelled from Armenia.

It notes that meanwhile Armenia raised territorial claims against Azerbaijan, and all this led to mass anti-Soviet protests in Azerbaijan, which soon turned into a national freedom movement. In order to brutally crush this freedom movement, by the order of USSR leader Mikhail Gorbachev, 26,000 Soviet troops invaded Baku on January 19-20, and shot indiscriminately into the peaceful demonstrators. As a result of this massacre, up to 150 Azerbaijani civilians, including women and children, were killed and over 700 were wounded.

The film states that despite the bloodshed the Gorbachev regime failed to break the will of the people of Azerbaijan and that a million Azerbaijanis, defying the curfew, filled the streets to mourn the victims of this brutal massacre.

It also stresses that Azerbaijan's national leader Heydar Aliyev fiercely denounced the bloodshed. The film includes a part from his speech made at Azerbaijan SSR's Permanent Mission in Moscow.

The film emphasizes that the Soviet brutality could not stop Azerbaijan from seeking its freedom, and that Azerbaijan finally restored its independence on October 18, 1991.

It notes that in the early 1990s, Armenia invaded 20% of Azerbaijan's territory and expelled 800,000 Azerbaijanis from their ancestral lands, and that in 2020, within 44 days Azerbaijani Army liberated the occupied lands.

The film concludes that 31 years after Black January, today, Azerbaijan is free, prosperous and strong and is striving to turn Caucasus into a region of peace and cooperation.

AZERTAC
2021, January 20

Black January - Azerbaijan's path to independence

By Abdul Kerimkhanov

Azerbaijanis mark the 30th anniversary of the Black January, meaning the killing of Azerbaijani civilians when Soviet troops took to the streets of Azerbaijan on the night leading to January 20, 1990 to crash the making of Azerbaijan's independence. Operation Strike (Udar) Union killed over hundred Azerbaijani civilians.

A few hours before the deployment of troops, the power unit of the Azerbaijani television was blown up, which cut off information communications both within the country and with the outside world. All major highways, airports, train stations and the seaport were blocked.

Soviet troops totaling 40,000 people began to fire at civilians without warning. During a large-scale military operation, 147 Azerbaijani civilians were killed, 800 people were injured and five people went missing.

The massacre marked the beginning of the end of the Soviet rule and served as a trumpeter for the national awakening movement in Azerbaijan. People were shocked that the Soviet Union could turn against them and kill them. Countless number of people started renouncing their Communist Party membership and some even burnt their party membership cards publicly. The crackdown on Baku residents was carried out after Heydar Aliyev was dismissed from his position in the political bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

In 1995 Gorbachev apologized to Azerbaijan by stating: "The declaration of a state emergency in Baku was the biggest mistake of my political career."

It's worth mentioning that Armenian armed forces, taking advantage of the critical situation in Baku, on the night of January 19 to 20, occupied the village of Karki of Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (NAR) and also attacked the village of Sadarak in Nakhchivan. Heavy Armenian artillery shelled other Azerbaijani villages in Nakhchivan causing civilian casualties.

The horrors of January 1990 failed to break the will of the Azerbaijani people and their desire for freedom. If anything, it made them stronger and more united.

Today, 30 years after the shocking massacre, thousands of people visit the Alley of Martyrs to pay their tributes by laying flowers and paying their tribute to the Azerbaijani heroes who gave their lives for their country's independence.

AzerNews. - 2020.- January 20. - № 3.

Black January. Symbol of unshakable will in national independence

By Abdul Kerimkhanov

The day of January 20, which will live forever in our memory, became not only a tragedy, but also a symbol of unshakable will in the name of national independence, freedom of our people.

January 20 was the first test and moral victory on the path leading the nation to independence, the restoration of national-spiritual and religious values. Azerbaijani people, subjected to punitive measures of an army armed to the teeth, did not break, did not lose their determination to independence, on the contrary, their righteous voice sounded even louder.

Despite 29 years have already passed since this tragic event, the day like the reel of film still scrolls in front of eyes of witnesses: anxious Baku, bullets glittering in the darkness, tanks and hum of armored vehicles, dead bodies scattered through the streets, hospital wards filled with hundreds of wounded.

Azerbaijan honors the memory of victims of the Black January events every year. The reasons leading to the January tragedy go deep into history, beginning from the territorial claims of Armenians against Azerbaijan

Due to the aggravation of the Karabakh conflict, a national movement grew in Azerbaijan, the situation in the country became tense, the Popular Front of Azerbaijan (PFA) was created

For this reason, USSR troops numbering more than 20,000 people, entered Baku on January 20, 1990 at 00:20, with the aim of preserving the power of the Communist Party in the country. The operation received the code name "Strike".

The Soviet army, without declaring a state of emergency, began military operations against Azerbaijan on the night of January 19-20, 1990. As a result of the military rally, 132 people were killed, including 117 Azerbaijanis. As many as 744 people were seriously injured, four were missing, 400 were arrested. After declaring a state of emergency, 21 more people were killed in Baku, 26 people were shot in Neftchala and Lankaran.

The operation was carried out under the command of the USSR Minister of Defense Yazov, by the forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the USSR State Security Committee, as well as regular units of the Soviet Army and Navy. As a result, in protest, several hundred cadets of various nationalities of the Baku All-Arms Higher Military School revolted, seizing part of the Salyan barracks with an ammunition depot in the central part of the city.

All the dead and missing in that Black January were named "Shahid of January 20" in accordance with the decree issued by Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev in 2000.

Crowded processions of Baku residents took place in memory of innocently executed residents of the city On January 22, 1991. The victims of the tragedy were buried as heroes of the struggle for independence in the park named after Kirov, which was later renamed the Alley of Martyrs.

In commemoration of the Black January events, the Baku Metro station called "The 11th Red Army" was renamed "January 20".

"Black January" is forever inscribed in the country history as a day of heroic struggle in the name of the freedom and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. The day that led to serious losses and the killing of innocent people demonstrated the readiness for struggle, the pride of people who could not bear the policy of the USSR leadership treacherous towards Azerbaijan, raised their voice to gain freedom and independence.

AzerNews. - 2019.- January 18-22. - № 5.

BLACK JANUARY IN AZERBAIJAN

“Proclaiming the state of emergency in Baku and sending army to the city was the biggest mistake of my political life...”

From M.Gorbachev’s speech in Istanbul in April 27,1995

“Azerbaijanis will never forgive the tragic death of his sons and daughters to anyone...”

From the declaration of the Chairperson of Supreme Council of Azerbaijan SSR E.Gafarova in January 21, 1990

Late at night on January 19, 1990, 26.000 Soviet troops stormed Baku. They acted pursuant to a state of emergency declared by the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium, signed by President Gorbachev and disclosed to the Azerbaijani public only after many citizens lay wounded or dead in the streets, hospitals and morgues of Baku.

More than 130 people died from wounds received that night and during subsequent violent confrontations and incidents that lasted in February; the majority of these were civilians killed by Soviet soldiers. More than 700 civilians were wounded. Hundreds of people were detained, only a handful of whom were put on trial for alleged criminal offenses. Civil liberties were severely curtailed.

The behavior of Soviet armed forces in Baku must be judged in the context of their actual mission. Mikhail Gorbachev's use of force in Baku was nothing but the desperate attempt to stop dissolution of Communist ruling in Azerbaijan. The Soviet army was trying to rescue the totalitarian regime, the rule of Communist Party and Soviet empire.

Then-USSR Defense Minister Dimitri Yazov stated that the use of force in Baku was intended to prevent the de facto takeover of the Azerbaijani government by the noncommunist opposition, to prevent their victory in upcoming free elections (scheduled for March, 1990), to destroy them as a political force, and to ensure that the Communist government remained in power.

Human Rights Watch report, entitled "Black January in Azerbaijan", states: "Indeed, the violence used by the Soviet Army on the night of January 19-20 was so out of proportion to the resistance offered by Azerbaijanis as to constitute an exercise in collective punishment. Since Soviet officials have stated publicly that the purpose of the intervention of Soviet troops was to prevent the ouster of the Communist-dominated government of the Republic of Azerbaijan by the nationalist-minded, noncommunist opposition, the punishment inflicted on Baku by Soviet soldiers may have been intended as a warning to nationalists, not only in Azerbaijan, but in the other Republics of the Soviet Union."

"The subsequent events in the Baltic Republics - where, in a remarkable parallel to the events in Baku, alleged civil disorder was cited as justification for violent intervention by Soviet troops -further confirms that the Soviet Government has demonstrated that it will deal harshly with nationalist movements," continues the Human Rights Watch report.

The Wall Street Journal editorial of January 4, 1995, stated:

"It was Mr. Gorbachev's recall, who in January 1990 chose to defend his use of violence against the independence-seeking Azerbaijan on the grounds that the people of this then-Soviet republic were heavily armed gangs of hooligans and drug-traffickers who were destabilizing the country and quite possibly receiving support from foreign governments."

Gross violation of human rights and mass manslaughter in Azerbaijan caused little reaction of Western powers. Mikhail Gorbachev's regime was adamantly supported against "heavily armed gangs of hooligans and drug-traffickers."

The brutal use of force in Azerbaijan created an anti-force. It buried chances of preserving the collapsing empire and resurrected national movement for independence.

In 1991 Azerbaijan became independent.

<http://www.january20.net/history>

BLACK JANUARY - BAKU 1990

Behind the Scenes - A Photojournalist's Perspective

by **Reza with Betty Blair**

Azerbaijanis call it "Black January", meaning the massacre of civilians that occurred on January 19 and 20, 1990, when Soviet tanks and troops took to the streets of Baku. Operation "Strike" (Udar) was intended to crush the makings of an independence movement in Azerbaijan. Officially, 137 people were killed; unofficially, the figures swell to at least 300 and possibly more. Even to this day, more than eight years later, the real truth is unknown, as apparently most of the documents — 200 boxes, according to some accounts — were confiscated and sent back to Moscow by the Soviet Army when it became clear that the Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse.

Black January turned out to be the beginning of the end of Soviet rule in Azerbaijan. Communist Party members, who had devoted their lives to serving the interests of the USSR, were appalled to find the system turning against them. Stories abound of Party members setting fire to their membership IDs. Azerbaijan's current President, Heydar Aliyev, a former member of the Politburo, waged a scathing attack on Gorbachev, accusing him of masterminding this heinous crime.

But throughout the confusion and turmoil, the Soviets managed to suppress nearly all efforts to disseminate the news to the international community. There were two notable exceptions: Mirza Khazar and his small team at Radio Liberty (US-sponsored), who broadcasted daily reports from Baku, and the efforts of a world-renowned photojournalist who, for the sake of simplicity, goes by the name Reza.

The following article describes Reza's efforts to smuggle himself into Baku during those turbulent days and get the story out to the world. His story reads like a novel or a Hollywood screenplay. But the scenario is real. Reza lived through all of the tense, historic moments described below.

Moscow-January 22, 1990. I'll never forget those days. More than 50 international journalists and photographers, including those representing some of the best-known names in the business — CNN, ABC, CBS, NBC, Reuters, AP — had checked into the Moscow Hotel. I was among them. Two other colleagues and I had just arrived from Paris. Something was happening in Baku. We didn't quite know what. We had heard that demonstrations were taking place in the streets and that Soviet troops had moved in. Beyond that, we could only speculate.

It seems the Soviets feared an independence movement was afoot in Azerbaijan. They sought to crush it before it gained momentum. Don't forget — those were the days of Gorbachev and Perestroika. Only a few months earlier, the world had watched the domino effect taking place, as Central Europe gained its freedom — the Berlin Wall, then Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Don't forget that the Soviets, with the world's largest military complex, had also been forced to withdraw in the face of the unrelenting Afghan guerrillas.

I had been catching snatches of news on the wire services in Paris. Being a photographer, part of my work is to anticipate clashes and upheavals before they occur. What good is it to arrive when the action is over? That's what photography is all about. A journalist can follow on the scene later on and draw upon many analytical sources, but a photographer has to capture the spontaneity of the moment. When I began detecting some disturbances in Baku over the news wires, I called up my friend Ahmad Sel, a Turkish cameraman working for a French company.

"Want to go to Baku?" I asked.

"Are you crazy?" he replied.

But Ahmad finally agreed to undertake shooting the video. I would handle the stills. We thought it would be invaluable to take an Azerbaijani along with us, so we invited Mrs. Shirin Malakova to join us. In

those days, you had to fly to Moscow to get to Baku — there was no another way. The authorities also required that you get advance permission for any city you wished to visit. We knew they would never give us approval for Baku so we didn't bother to ask.

Despite the run-around that we got from the Soviet Embassy in Paris, we managed to get our visas in hand by January 20th. That was the day all hell broke loose in Azerbaijan, though we didn't know it at the time. It seems the Soviet officials didn't make any connection either, since we had applied for the visas two days earlier. They knew I was a photo-journalist. I told them I was going to take photos of Moscow. It was the first of many lies I would have to tell in order to uncover the truth about the tragedy of Black January.

INSIDE CONNECTIONS

In 1988, I had visited Baku on the occasion of the 150th Jubilee of the great playwright, Mirza Fatali Akhundov. It was there that I met many prominent artists and writers, one of whom was Rustam Ibrahimbeyov. A prominent writer, Rustam would go on to write the screenplay for "Burnt by the Sun," winner of the 1995 Oscar for Best Foreign Film. [See Al 3.2, Summer 1995]. Rustam would turn out to be a pivotal person in our quest to smuggle ourselves into Baku.

I had called Rustam in Moscow several days earlier when I wasn't able to reach Baku. He had confirmed my suspicions that the situation was serious. "It could turn into a very bad situation," he had told me in very cautious, cryptic Azeri. I had to call him back twice. Another number, another time. Being a journalist, you pick up on things like this very quickly.

Now, with visas for Moscow in hand. I called Rustam again. "I'm coming with two friends. I'd love to see you and have dinner together."

"Yes," he replied, it's the right time to come because 'our friends' are already in!" (He meant that the Soviet troops had already moved into Baku.)

Our Paris team arrived in Moscow on January 21st. Rustam was perplexed. He saw no solution for getting to Baku. Now that the troops and tanks were in the city, all of the roads would be blocked, and it would be very dangerous to travel.

Back at the hotel that evening, word spread that Moscow's press officials had organized to fly all of the journalists to Baku the next day. We were told to meet in the hotel lobby at 9 o'clock the next morning (January 23).

"Are you sure they plan to take us to Baku?" I asked some of the other journalists. They were sure. And I was equally sure they wouldn't. If there was one thing I had learned after spending more than five years (1983-1988) on assignment with Time Magazine covering Afghan guerrilla fighters in the mountains of Pakistan and Afghanistan, it was this: "Never trust Soviet officials when they make irresistible offers."

LOCAL TRAIN TO BAKU

The next morning, Ahmad, Shirin and I were as far away from the hotel lobby as we could get. Instead of accompanying our foreign colleagues on the three-hour flight to Baku, we decided to take a local train. The trip would grind on for 48 hours, stopping at every little town and village; however, unlike the express train, there would be fewer security checks.

Back at the hotel, while we were gone, Rustam arranged for someone to mess up our rooms every day and make them look lived in." We had to keep up the pretense that we had not checked out in order not to arouse suspicion. Remember, our visas were only for Moscow.

Rustam's friend Kamal accompanied us on the train. Our first task was to learn a few Russian phrases: "Ya pa rusky niz naya" (I don't speak Russian) and "Ya Azerbaijani" (I'm Azerbaijani). I was

concerned that I didn't know Russian. Kamal assured me that many Azerbaijanis in the countryside didn't know Russian either, so I could get by. But if anyone ever stopped us for our papers, we knew that would be the end.

We did our best to dress like the locals — to blend in, to appear so ordinary that we would be overlooked and ignored. Shirin spoke fluent Russian and Azeri as well as French. Ahmad's Turkish accent was quite obvious, but Russians didn't know the difference.

It was a long ride. Fortunately, we had our own compartment. Whenever a controller came along, Kamal would warn us and we would quickly crawl up into the luggage compartment and hide. Sometimes, when we were sleeping, he would bribe the officer and request that we not be bothered.

One of our biggest problems involved the toilets, which were located in the main section of the train. We didn't want to get ourselves in a situation where we had to speak to anyone, so Kamal would wait outside our compartment and signal when it was clear to head down the corridor.

BAKU — AT LAST!

We arrived in Baku on January 24th, tired but full of anticipation. As we pulled into the station, I looked out the window anxiously. There, standing and waiting for everybody to get off the train, was a long row of soldiers! I'll never forget the scene. It was right out of a spy movie about the Cold War — the only difference being that this was real life and I happened to be right in the middle of it.

Tall, husky Russian soldiers stood there with their big, bulky overcoats and fur hats, cradling their machine guns, silhouetted against the darkness of the chilly night. They looked so huge — so foreboding, so threatening. I remember looking at Ahmad and Shirin with horror in my eyes, saying, "I think they're going to catch us. We'll have to pass through that wall!"

It wasn't that I was scared of being arrested. That comes with the territory when you're a photojournalist. You know it can happen — getting arrested, or beat up. What I feared most was not being able to get the story. Especially since I am Azerbaijani myself, I wanted to be part of telling the world this story.

The train came to a halt. We were hoping that Rustam had succeeded in arranging for someone to meet us. Suddenly, in the crowd I spotted Elinora Huseinova (now Ambassador to France) with a couple of her girlfriends. She jumped up on the train, her arms full of flowers — roses — not the red carnations that were being used for mourning those days. She gave me a big hug and whispered in my ear, "Put your cameras and luggage in the compartment. Come out with me. Don't carry anything."

And so we did. She slipped her arm through mine; the other women latched on to Ahmad and Shirin. With arms full of flowers, acting as if we were lovers reunited, we walked right past that long line of soldiers. Some gave us knowing nods, as if to say, "Hey, you guys — you lovers — have a great time! We won't bother you. Get along! Get on with it!"

No matter how nerve-wracking that experience was, even more unsettling was the realization that a number of plainclothesmen had been traveling on the train with us. When they got off, they flashed their IDs to the soldiers and immediately started motioning some of the passengers over to the side. It was so well organized and well orchestrated that it was frightening.

A car was waiting for us. We went to dinner at someone's home. It was a wonderful meal, especially after traveling for two or three days with little to eat. It was good to be in Baku. Friends of Ramiz Abutalibov and Elinora gathered round that night. Ahmad wanted to film them. "No way, man!" they replied. "Come on! We'll get caught. You can't film us. We're just here to talk about these things and take you to different places." They knew how important our mission was and were committed to getting the story out to the world. They showed us a map of the city, pointing out exactly where everything was happening and where the troops and tanks were located.

I remember the TV blasting away in the living room. The chief commander of curfew, a Russian, droned on, trying to convince everyone that everything was under control — that nothing was happening.

Everybody ignored his platitudes; we all knew better. We only got about two or three hours of sleep that night. All evening we talked and talked, making plans.

I'll never forget how sad everybody was. I've visited more than 85 countries in my lifetime, but I would have to admit that during those days, Baku was the saddest city I had ever seen in my life. The people were in a daze, totally shocked and disoriented. It was incomprehensible to them that the Russians had orchestrated an attack on them and killed innocent people. After all, they had been taught for 70 years about the great brotherhood of the Soviet Union.

JUST LIKE A DIVORCE

But in the midst of all that sadness, I detected another phenomenon. It seemed people realized that the Soviet Union was collapsing. An analogy could be made to living with a spouse and finally reaching the decision that it is time to divorce. This feeling of separation and desire for independence somehow seemed to give the nation dignity in the midst of its despair over the loss of so many friends and family members. It was like Azerbaijanis had made up their mind to move on. That they knew what to do. That the decision had been made.

During the first demonstrations, Azerbaijanis had sought better relations with the Soviets because they believed in the relationship. After Black January, they knew the relationship was over.

THE ASSIGNMENT

The next day, two cars came — one for me, the other for Ahmad. We split up in case one of us got caught. Besides, it was hard to operate in a small car and still conceal our cameras. Ahmad had a HI 8 Sony video camera, which was small enough to fit in his hand. I had two cameras; one smaller, the other larger. I always left one of them at home in case the other got confiscated, stolen or broken.

First we headed off to the hospitals. I'll never forget the horror that filled those halls. The rooms were so crowded that the wounded and dying were lying, unattended, in the corridors. We knew it would be hard to get inside the hospitals undetected, since police were guarding all of the entrances. I kept telling hospital personnel that I was looking for a friend who had had surgery a few days earlier. "He wasn't wounded," I explained. "It has nothing to do with these latest incidents." Of course, we didn't dare walk in carrying our camera equipment ourselves.

So one of "our scouts" would go in first, check the place out and persuade some little old ladies — peasants — to come out. We would stuff our bags down into their larger bags, and off they would go walking right through the hospital entrance for us.

We found it was safest to photograph inside the operating rooms. Our scout would check if a room was safe. If so, we would slip in and close the door. One of the surgeons told us that more than 300 people had been killed and more than 1,000 wounded. Unfortunately, many of those injured later died of their wounds.

After a few hours, we decided to head out in search of the tanks. We found them in an open area, but it was impossible to photograph without being detected. We hit upon the idea of taking photos from an apartment opposite the parking area. One of our "scouts" checked out the situation. Soon he was back and we were climbing up to the eighth floor. Again, no cameras. Someone followed later with our bags. But even though the view from the top was clear, we knew it was too risky. The soldiers would have spotted us too easily.

I decided to suggest that the lady of the house go out on her balcony and pretend to be washing the windows. From inside, we could then aim our telephoto lenses at the soldiers and tanks below as she raised her arms to wipe the glass. Her body would shield us from view. She agreed. It worked. We got the photos we wanted.

Actually, our "cleaning lady" quite enjoyed the attention. She kept saying, "I'm in a movie! I'm in a movie!" It was all very funny. But her husband feared that the soldiers would aim their guns at the apartment, or that someone would come up and arrest him. Innocent people were being shot on their balconies those days.

Down in the streets again, I knew I had to make every photo count. I was deliberately traveling very light and had only seven or eight rolls of film. Soldiers were patrolling the streets. Tanks rolled by. Looking up at the apartments, we could see black strips of cloth hanging down, symbolizing solidarity with those who had died. Black was all over the place. It seemed the Azerbaijanis were not afraid of making such symbolic protests. To me, it was another sign that the Soviet Union was disintegrating — nobody seemed afraid to offend the government anymore. Clearly, it marked the end of the Soviet era. Everyone sensed that the end was coming. In my opinion, the day those tanks entered Baku sealed the death sentence for the Soviet era. Of course, it would take about two more years before that great colossus would come tumbling down, but clearly its legs were beginning to collapse.

Next, we went to a morgue. Again, the entrance was blocked. This time they were checking IDs and writing down the names of everyone who came in to identify the bodies. But there was one room that we managed to enter. On a table in the center of the room there were photographs of the corpses. People came in, picked them up in their hands, with dread, desperately searching for their loved ones, but at the same time, hoping not to find them there.

We learned that on the next day there would be a huge gathering at Shahidlar Khiyabani (Martyr's Lane) as there would be a mass burial. It would give us the chance to be among the people, to witness their emotions. We knew we would be able to photograph freely. It didn't even matter if the guy standing right next to us was KGB or not. He wouldn't dare cause any trouble for fear of being attacked by the masses.

But we knew not to take chances. We knew we would have to disappear before the crowd dispersed so no one could follow us. We even organized a little escape scenario. After the cemetery scenes, we felt we had enough photos. We had already spent three days and two nights in Baku. It was time to leave.

I don't quite know how our friends managed it, but soon we had fake entrance visas along with tickets for the flight back to Moscow. Officially, remember, we had not really entered Azerbaijan. As with everything else that had happened in Baku, we had to put our total trust in others, even to be able to leave the country. As before, we didn't dare carry our cameras, videos or film with us on the plane. We were told someone on the plane would carry our equipment for us. We didn't know who. En route, however, two Russian girls came up and started talking to us. We were suspicious since we had heard so many stories about blonde Russian girls. "Oh no," we told ourselves. "It's the KGB! They've finally caught up with us." One girl spoke Azeri and made reference to film. We totally denied knowing anything that related to photography. "What film?" we asked. But it turned out these were the passengers doing us the favor of carrying our stuff in their suitcases for us. They had really given us a scare.

Back at the Moscow Hotel, we got the film from the girls and headed straight for the airport. We also found out what had happened to the journalists who had taken the flight to Baku.

Just as I had suspected, none of the journalists had succeeded in reaching Baku. It seems that when the plane was in mid-air, flying over Caucasus mountain peaks, the pilot announced that, unfortunately, Baku's airport had been shut down, and he would have to divert the plane to the nearest airport. How convenient that this airport just happened to be Yerevan (Armenia), where the Soviet press had already arranged for newly arriving Armenian refugees fleeing Azerbaijan to tell the international media their version of how savage Azerbaijanis were.

Once again, the Soviets had duped the international press. The only story that the press could take back home was exactly the one that the Soviets wanted them to tell, which further justified the need for troops to crush those unruly Azerbaijanis. The realization gradually dawned upon us that not a single journalist had succeeded in getting to Baku except us. Looking back on those days in Baku, I'd have to admit that despite all of my years of working in difficult places, I was terribly afraid that something would happen to us in Azerbaijan

— that somehow we would disappear. After all, we were witnessing events and gathering information that the whole Empire was denying, and that the whole world was waiting to hear. We were the only ones who were carrying the story out. When the plane took off from Moscow, we all looked at each other. I'll never forget the incredible relief and joy that was in our eyes. It had been a tough seven days. We were finally taking off for Paris. I couldn't believe we had made it.

BACK IN PARIS

We landed about 4 or 5 that afternoon. Ahmad and I both sped off to process our film and edit the videos. The news would air at 8 pm. I was still afraid that maybe our films had been X-rayed or the videos demagnetized. The Soviets were notorious for such things. You think everything is fine, but when you arrive home, everything is blank. I had heard the horror stories of a French team who had filmed in Kazakhstan for three weeks. Upon arriving home, they discovered that all of their tapes had been demagnetized. They had nothing.

The TV was on at the lab when I started processing the slides. Then I heard a voice announcing that at 8 o'clock there would be a very important news broadcast. Tears came to my eyes. It meant Ahmad's videos were safe. That night, the news opened with the tragic events that were unfolding in Baku. They gave five or six minutes of coverage, an incredibly long time by Western standards, when the usual item runs 30 seconds to a minute.

My slides came out fine, too. I selected about 40 of them to be duplicated for distribution. I gave them to an agency that would transmit them to 2,000 magazines and newspapers all over the world.

And so it was: 24 hours after we returned home, the tragic story of Azerbaijan's Black January was being distributed around the world. More than 18 TV channels and dozens of radio stations were calling us for footage. Mission completed. Black January was no longer a secret — the world was watching.

JANUARY 20, 1990 - DAY OF MOURNING AND PRIDE FOR AZERBAIJAN

When I entered my children's room, my attention was caught by my daughter's dolls. I was taken aback with surprise - all of the dolls were wearing black clothes and their heads were covered in the Muslim tradition. Despite myself, my eyes watered. "What is this, Sevinj?" I asked. "Tomorrow is January 20, the remembrance day. Aren't we going to the Alley of Martyrs?", she asked me in reply, while my son extended to me his drawing of a bunch of carnations tied with a black ribbon... 9 years ago, I myself laid thousands of carnations in the blood-stained streets of Baku.

In 1988-1990, people of Azerbaijan led the struggle against the Soviet empire and it was Azerbaijan that was selected by the Soviet empire as a republic to teach a lesson of obedience for other nations seeking independence to follow.

In early morning of January 20, special armed detachments entered Baku from the north. This so-called gate of Baku had already brought the nation tragedies in 1796, 1813, 1828, 1905, 1918, 1920, and at last in 1990. In January 1990, the developments in Azerbaijan reached their peak. People began demanding secession from the USSR in a constitutional way. The then leadership of the USSR, currently Russian premier Primakov, and Girenko, arrived in Baku to hold negotiations, which actually meant a clandestine preparation for the introduction of troops: modern military machinery was accumulated in Baku and an army of 66,500 soldiers sent to Azerbaijan. Azeri police were disarmed and starting from January 15 all hospitals were cleared from patients. In the evening of January 19, KGB blew up the energy block of the Azerbaijan TV. On the same day, communication systems were disrupted in Baku.

The Soviet state could not perpetrate its crimes directly, as it wanted the world community to have a different look on the events later on, and it easily managed to find a pretext for the operation. 225 Azeris, who perished in Armenia and 240,000 who were ousted from their homes, were destined to become the first victims (back in 1905, in order to instigate an uprising, a killed Armenian's body was thrown to a mosque and a killed Azeri's corpse was planted in a church). The brutal plan succeeded. On January 19, at 10.40 p.m., when the troops were entering Baku, there were thousands of people in the streets opposing their advance. Despite all the demands from international organizations, fire was opened at the unarmed people and tanks trampled them down. The thugs used internationally prohibited bullets of 5.45 mm calibre with shifted center. Even a firetruck with only a driver within was shot.

Red army shoots its own monument

Having thus surmounted the first live barrier, the army reached the Square named after the 11th Red Army, which, in 1920, helped the Red Army, at the expense of 48,000 Azeris' lives, to establish the Soviet Power in Azerbaijan. The square was subsequently named after the 11th Red Army and a monument to it was erected there. Early in January 20, most of the demonstrators gathered on the square. Tanks approached the pedestal trying the scare people away, but people did not retreat, and tanks went forward, shooting at the innocent people and at the monument to the Red Army. After this night, both the metro station nearby and the square were named after January 20.

Fire at were not only at people in the streets, but also at the republican hospital, nearby apartment buildings. Tanks trampled down cars, trees and even demolished a wall of an apartment building. An ambulance van with doctors inside was shot. One is tempted to ask a question, that if the Soviet Army had come to rescue Russians, Armenians, why were there Russians among the first victims, why were people killed in their apartments. A 16-year old Vera, 11-year old Larisa, an old blind man were among the first to perish.

On that night, people fought for their freedom and independence with whatever they could reach. They were killed chanting "Freedom" and "Independence". This was the longest night in the history of Azerbaijan, as people were bidding farewell to their Russian brother.

By dawn, the shooting stopped and the first order by the military commander of Baku was read. He was ordering to introduce curfew and forbidding people to gather in the streets. This did not frighten people either. Several hours later, there were millions of carnations in the streets.

Witnesses of the bloody night were demanding explanation from the state. The first secretary of the CC Vezirov fled to Moscow. At 1.40 p.m., the sound of sub-machine guns could be heard again at a protest rally and although the fire was into the air, several people were injured. It is curious whether this army could believe that after everything that has taken place in Azerbaijan ever since, Azeri Russians will be defending the country's territorial integrity, and some will even become national heroes of Azerbaijan.

The army was not satisfied with the what happened on the 21st, 22nd and 23rd. On the 24th, a tank destroyed a car with 3 doctors inside.

The longest mourning

This decision was made by the nation. Victims of the tragedy will be buried in Baku's most beautiful place, the Upland park. What is this park and where is it? In 1918, in a stand-off between Azerbaijanis and Armenians instigated by the Russian empire, 10,000 Azerbaijanis were buried in this cemetery. The Soviet empire, before destroying a nation, first deprived it of its language, then of its memory and history. As a result of this policy, a park was built in place of the cemetery. One of the first leaders of the Soviet Azerbaijan, a Russian by nationality Kirov's monument was erected in the park. Soviet Azerbaijanis, unbeknown to them, would dance and drink on the ashes of their forefathers. This was a triumph of the Soviet life-style. Three graves from that period were discovered and new victims of the Soviet regime joined them in eternity.

The entire republic came to see the victims off and the longest mourning in history of Azerbaijan commenced in Baku. Enterprises stopped and only strategic objects were functioning. 7 million in the North Azerbaijan and 27 million in Iran lamented the victims for 40 days. No music sounded in Azerbaijan for 40 days. The families who lost a member mourned him, while those who didn't mourned all the 170 (first officially reported figure). 131 of 170 were buried in Baku, including 6 Russians, 3 Tatars, 3 Jews, and 1 Lezghin. 706 people were wounded and 321 were unaccounted for. Later on, news of the unaccounted for would be arriving from various jails of the ex-USSR and bodies of some more would be discarded by the sea to the shore.

Years have elapsed. January 20 was embedded in the history of Azerbaijan as a day of national tragedy, while the Alley of Martyrs has become a pilgrimage site.

Who were the victims? Three lives broken by one bullet.

1500 years ago, according to a legend, a beautiful girl who lived on top of a high tower in the middle of the sea, learned that her beloved one had died and threw herself into the sea. Azerbaijanis never bring to question this legend, because there are many cases at present when Azeri girls sacrifice their lives for their beloved ones. There have been many cases during the military action in Upper Karabakh, when women killed themselves in order not to fall into Armenian captivity.

On January 20, a 28-year old Ilham was killed. He and Fariza had been married for 6 months. When he was being buried, he wife was not there, because at that moment she was committing suicide. She and her unborn baby were also buried together with Ilham. This is how another legend was born. Young people, before starting a family, still come to their grave and swear to each other.

January born and killed in January. The 33-year old January, born on January 1, would frequently joke that his birthday was celebrated worldwide. He did not know that his death would be deplored by the entire nation. At present, his wife Almara with whom he had lived only for 3 years, is fostering an 11-year old Hasan. The son does not remember his father, he remembers him only by his picture. There has been no one to decorate an X-tree for him and every year on January 1 he comes to his father's grave.

School children's graves - Among the victims were schoolchildren. 15-year old Vera Bessantina was killed in her apartment and an 11-year old Larisa was shot pointblank when leaving a bus together with her father. Ilgar was shot on his balcony.

Killed in prayer - On January 20, a 78-year old Suraya, having heard shots, started praying for those outside in danger. A bullet found her during her prayer at home.

Years have elapsed. Azeris, regardless of the nationality and age, revere the memories of the killed. Every year on the national mourning day, people re-live the developments and pilgrim to the Alley.

By Sevda Mehraliyeva
Azernews Contributor

<http://www.atmg.org/January20>

LARISSA

Black January-January 20, 1990

by Galina Mammadova

Each year on January 20, Azerbaijanis observe the anniversary of what they call "Black January", that tragic night in 1990 when Soviet tanks and troops bore down on Baku and opened fire on civilians in a savage crackdown on Azerbaijan's independence movement. Every year, thousands of mourners visit the graves of those victims buried in Martyr's Lane ("Shahidlar Khiyaban", pronounced sha-hid-LAR khi-yah-BAHN), a cemetery on the most prominent hillside overlooking the Caspian Sea.

This is the story of one of the youngest victims of the Black January tragedy — a 13-year-old girl named Larissa — as told by her mother, Galina Mammadova.

On the night of January 19, 1990, my husband, a bus driver, was shuttling people back and forth to the demonstrations in Baku. When Farman stopped in at home for supper, my daughter Larissa decided that she wanted to join him when he went back out — she was quite a curious child and took a great interest in the events that were unfolding in Azerbaijan's quest for independence. She liked to go to demonstrations with her father. Sometimes she would stay out with him in Lenin Square ¹until the wee hours of the morning. Those were the days of Perestroika or "openness" as Gorbachev referred to them.

Ever since Armenians had made claims on Nagorno-Karabakh, a mountainous region inside Azerbaijan, and forced Azeris to flee from Yerevan and other regions of Armenia, there had been a ground swell among Azerbaijanis to protest the injustice of the situation. More and more refugees were streaming in from Armenia, and a great resentment was growing as they saw Armenians living comfortably in Azerbaijan while they had just been savagely beaten, killed, and driven from their homes.

Beginning around January 13-14, the Armenians in Baku, fearing for their safety, started leaving Azerbaijan (mostly for Russia). In the meantime, Russian military families were also heading to Moscow and were spreading rumors that they were being mistreated.

I asked Larissa to stay home that night, but she stood her ground and insisted on going. "Mom," she said, "I want to see our national flag. I want to see what's happening in our country. You stay home and take care of Narmina (her sister)." So my husband and daughter left home like they had done so many times before.

Larissa was 13 years old at the time. She was tall for her age. I can't say that she was the brightest pupil in school, but she loved playing the piano and taking art lessons. She was a kind and friendly child, and very expressive in her love for her family and for Azerbaijan.

I remember once when we were visiting some Azerbaijani refugees who had just arrived from Yerevan, Larissa begged me: "Mom, let's take some of these children home and look after them."

"But Larissa," I cautioned, "what about your brother and sister?"

"That won't be a problem, Mom," she insisted. "I can take care of them and look after the refugee children, too," she had begged.

Soon after that, Larissa wrote a letter to my parents in the Ukraine, telling them about the refugee situation and about Azerbaijan's hard times. She was always very conscious of what was going on in Azerbaijan despite her young age.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Since Independence in 1991, Lenin Square, the most prominent exhibition area in Baku, has been named "Azadlig" which means "Freedom". It is located in front of the Ministry Building close to sea.

No one could ever have imagined that the Russian soldiers would shoot civilians. Earlier, when their tanks were parked in the street, the children used to walk up to the soldiers and offer food and flowers.

Galina Mammadova

A MISSING DAUGHTER

I waited up all night for Larissa and Farman, but they didn't come home. I waited and waited and waited until the night faded into morning. About 6 a.m., I went out into the streets. People were shouting that the soldiers were killing our people. They were begging for medical supplies. I brought some cotton, gauze bandages and candles to be taken to the hospitals.

Not long after that, I got a call from Semashko Hospital. They said that my husband was there, lying in a coma. I asked them: "What about my baby?" But no one there had seen my daughter.

I had to find out where she was, so I made my way to the demonstration that was being held in front of the President's Office.² I knew that my husband and daughter had planned to go there the night before. If I could only address the crowd, maybe someone could tell me what had happened.

So I went. As I tried to force my way through the crowds up to the organizers, I heard people saying, "Don't let her pass through — she's Russian." (I was actually born in the Ukraine, not Russia). I told them that my husband was Azerbaijani, that he had been wounded by Russian soldiers and that I had lost my daughter. With that, they let me pass. I approached the leaders and they gave me the microphone. I addressed the crowd, asking if anybody had seen my daughter. Someone told me that at about 11 p.m., my husband and daughter had left the demonstration to go home.

Then I went to the hospital where my husband was and asked the staff if they knew anything about my daughter. No one did. Farman was still unconscious. While I was in the hospital, I noticed that many of our neighbors had gathered. They seemed to be looking at me strangely, as if they knew something that I didn't. I thought that perhaps one of our neighbors had been killed, or maybe they had come to visit Farman. It never occurred to me that anything might have happened to Larissa.

I decided to go home and see if everything was all right with my younger two children. When I arrived, I saw that many neighbors had gathered around our house. When I went inside, I found Larissa's body laid out on the dining room table.

CORPSE NO. 316

At first, I couldn't believe it was Larissa. My poor daughter's body was full of tiny slivers of glass. She was still wearing her coat and her face was covered in blood.

While I had been in the hospital looking for my daughter, our neighbors had found her body at one of the morgues and had brought her home. A number hanging around her neck indicated that she was victim 316. It was strange that her corpse was marked as 316 when the official death count announced days later stopped at 134.³

² During the Soviet period this building, now known as President's Aparat, housed the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Soviet Azerbaijan.

³ The exact number of casualties from the Black January tragedy has never been investigated and published. There were two official accounts during the Soviet period, one emanating from Moscow and the other from Azerbaijan. Moscow stopped counting at 132 deaths. However, Soviet Azerbaijan's official count was higher. According to "Black January:

Our neighbors had run into trouble trying to get her out of there — the Russian soldiers had tried to lock the door to the morgue so that no one could remove the corpses. It was as if they wanted to hide the actual number of the dead.

We kept Larissa's body at home for three days. Then we were told to take it to the square because all of the victims would be honored as "martyrs" and buried together. We discovered that the dead would be buried in Kirov Park.⁴

On January 22, more than a million people gathered in the streets there to bid farewell. The coffins were blanketed with red carnations. Ever since those days, the red carnation has become closely identified with the tragic events of Black January.⁵

On our way to the burial ground, I remember being told that we should hurry or else the Russian soldiers might shoot at us, too. Can you imagine? People were rushing to bury the dead and fearing for their own safety as well. The streets leading to Kirov Park were full of Russian soldiers.

Larissa loved her country very much. Kids used to tease her that I was Russian and she tried to explain to them that, no, I was Ukrainian, not Russian. She used to tell me, "Mom, you know when I get my passport, I'm going to ask them to write my name as Leyla. Larissa is like a Russian name." But my poor baby didn't live to see our independence. She didn't live to get her own passport.⁶

THE FATAL BUS RIDE

Farman remained unconscious for 10 days. He didn't find out that Larissa had died until he came out of the coma. Even though he stayed in the hospital for another four months, his leg still hasn't completely recovered. It still hurts him a lot, and he has trouble sleeping at night. We don't have the money to have his leg properly fixed.

Gradually, I have been able to piece together the details of that night. Farman and Larissa had driven to the President's Office, where they had been told by the leaders of the demonstration that the workers at the Lieutenant Schmidt munitions plant needed help.⁷ The factory was 50 km away. Soviet troops had entered Baku at about 10 p.m. that night and started invading the city from three directions — the airport, the Caspian Sea and

Baku 1990, Documents and Materials" (AzerNeshr, Baku, 1990, p. 287), the Ministry of Health of Azerbaijan SSR announced, "By February 1, 1990, there were 706 people who had applied for medical assistance to medical facilities of Baku. The Court Medical Bureau had accepted 84 persons; 73 from gunshot wounds (16 in their backs), 8 injured from being smashed by armored personnel carriers, and 2 from bayonet wounds. By February 9, 1990, 170 people, including 6 Russians, 7 Jews, Tatars and Lezgins had died. Among the dead were 6 women and 9 children and teenagers. A total of 370 people were listed as wounded and 321 people were declared missing." As those who had "disappeared" were never found, it is reasonable to suggest that they, too, had been massacred [perhaps, their bodies buried at sea]. In this case, it is fair to conclude that at least 500 people died in the Black January Tragedy. [Footnote material contributed by Adil Baguirov].

⁴ Kirov was the strategist who facilitated the Red Army's takeover of Baku in April 1920. He died suspiciously, probably from Stalin's directives. Kirov's statue was erected on the most prominent vantage point in Baku, overlooking the sea. When Azerbaijan gained its independence, this statue was dismantled. No statue has yet replaced it. When the graves were being dug in Kirov Park to bury the victims of Black January, mass graves were found from the 1918 massacres in Baku when Armenians and Bolsheviks attacked and killed Azerbaijanis indiscriminately. Some estimates say 10,000 people died in the short span of less than two weeks.

⁵ Red carnations have come to be closely associated with death, especially after the massacre of Black January. Azerbaijanis traditionally place flowers on graves in pairs to signify solidarity and empathy. A gift of flowers to a living person should include an odd numbers of flowers — 1, 3, 5, etc. For example, traditionally a guy would never send a dozen roses to his girlfriend.

⁶ Azerbaijani passports representing the independent Republic of Azerbaijan are only now beginning to be distributed to the general public in the summer of 1999.

⁷ The ammunitions factory in Baku was named after Lieutenant Pyotr Petrovich Schmidt, a German who helped organize the October Revolution of 1917.

a place known as "Gourd Gapisi", better known in Russian is "Volchyi Vorota", which means "Wolf Gates". The Soviet troops were planning to seize the munitions factory, so my husband and Larissa were on their way to take one of the buses there. My daughter had been sitting in the back of the bus and my husband was standing next to the driver.

While driving through the Ganjlik section of town, Farman suddenly realized that the soldiers were starting to shoot at the bus. He jumped away from the front window and crouched down by the stairs. Five of the people who were on the bus died, including the driver; others were severely wounded. Farman would have died, too, if he hadn't hid himself in time. He was pulled out of the bus and taken to the hospital in a coma. The doctors worked under dreadful conditions that night to save him and the other victims. They had no electricity, no supplies, no pharmaceuticals.

ANNUAL COMMEMORATION

Every year when January 20 rolls around, I relive that dreadful day all over again — just as if it were yesterday. No one could ever have imagined that the Russian soldiers would shoot civilians. Earlier, when their tanks were parked in the street, the children used to walk up to the soldiers and offer food and flowers.

Just like those innocent kids, all our daughter had wanted was peace, but she didn't live to see her dream realized. It must have been her destiny to pass away just when she was on the verge of blossoming as an individual.

We were victims of a stupid policy — what else can I say. The attack on Baku was calculated and deliberate. Besides, the soldiers were completely drunk and acting totally on orders from their superiors.

Many innocent people died or were wounded that night, including so many innocent bystanders — women, children and the elderly. What was their guilt? Tell me that. It still gnaws away at me, "What was my daughter's guilt? She was only 13 at the time."

Farman and Galina have two other children: a son, Emin (born in 1985), and a daughter, Narmina (born in 1989). Larissa's parents were interviewed by Farida Sadikhova and Gulnara Akbarova.

https://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/73_folder/73_articles/73_larissa.html

TRAGEDY OF JANUARY 20 REMEMBERED

In the first hours of January 20, 1990, Soviet troops stormed Baku, Azerbaijan's capital, in what became known as the Black January, one of the most tragic events in the country's recent history. Indiscriminate massacre of civilians and the use of heavy military equipment was the Soviet authorities' response to popular demands for more sovereignty and end of Communist regime. There were no armed people among more than 130 civilians killed and 700 wounded by the troops. January 20, 1990, became a national tragedy, victims of which represented Azerbaijan's diverse and multi-cultural society. Among them were a 7-year old boy, a newly married couple, an 80-year old man, a 16-year old girl, a young doctor shot in an ambulance while helping another victim, and many others.

That day, nine years ago, the Alley of Martyrs was established in Baku's hilltop park, where the victims of the Black January were laid to rest. Since then The Alley has expanded to receive victims of the war with Armenia.

While the events of January 20 in Baku were unprecedented by their scale and brutality, they were preceded by earlier attacks on civilians in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and Tbilisi, Georgia, in 1986 and 1989 respectively, and were followed by use of force in Vilnius, Lithuania, and the unsuccessful Coup d'Etat in Moscow in 1991.

According to "'Black January in Azerbaijan," a report by Human Rights Watch, "Among the most heinous violations of human rights during the Baku incursion were the numerous attacks on medical personnel, ambulances and even hospitals." The report concluded that: "'Indeed the violence used by the Soviet Army on the night of January 19-20...constitutes an exercise in collective punishment... The punishment inflicted on Baku by Soviet soldiers may have been intended as a warning to nationalists, not only in Azerbaijan, but in other Republics of the Soviet Union."

Despite the curfew and repression which followed January 20, that day became a turning point for Azerbaijan and strengthened determination of the people to build their own independent country. In 1991, Azerbaijan became independent and in April of 1993 the first among the former Soviet republics with no Russian military bases on its soil.

Among many Azerbaijanis united in their effort to tell the truth about January 20 in Baku known, was Azerbaijan's current leader Heydar Aliyev, who lived in retirement in Moscow. His strong condemnation of Soviet leadership for this invasion at an improvised press- – conference in Moscow on January 21, 1990, was his first public appearance since resignation from the Soviet Politburo in 1987. Soon after the Black January 1990 Heydar Aliyev resigned from the Communist Party.

Every year on January 20 citizens of now independent Azerbaijan pay their tribute to those who gave their lives for the country's independence.

<http://www.azerbaijan.com/january>

BLACK JANUARY of 1990

12 years pass from January events of 1990s which entered to the history of Azerbaijan as Bloody Tragedy of January. Spiritual, ideological and political aggression against Azerbaijan during 70 years came up on the military desk with January 20 events. The purpose of this terror was the physical death of Azerbaijanian people.

Over the night from 19 to 20-th January, 1990 without preliminary declaration of the state of emergency military units of former Soviet Union were entered into Baku city and some regions of Azerbaijan. The invasion into Baku of a large contingent of Soviet Army units, interior troops and special destination detachments was accompanied by particular cruelty and unprecedented atrocities. Reprisals were inflicted toward peace population, hundreds of people were killed, wounded, missing.

In total as a result of illegal entering of troops into Baku city and regions of the republic 133 men were killed, 611 men - wounded, 841 men - illegally arrested and 5 - missing. The soldiers sacked and burnt 200 houses and apartments, 80 automobiles, including ambulance cars, the state and personal property with total worth 5637286 rubles was destroyed. Women, children and old men, as well as ambulance and militia employees also were among the killed persons.

Entering of troops and introduction of the state of emergency in Baku were rough violence of the USSR Constitution (article 119), Constitution of the Azerbaijani SSR (article 71), International Pact "On civil and political rights" of 1966 (article 1) and the sovereign rights of the Azerbaijan Republic.

The illegal declaration of the state of emergency in Baku, invasion of armed forces into the city and severe violence against the peace population with use of heavy equipment and killing weapons under conditions of full lack of any resistance from the population was the crime against the Azerbaijani people.

It was proved that individual military men acting under conditions of the state of emergency implemented inhuman actions that may qualify them according to the Decree of International Military Tribunal, Geneva Conventions on protection of victims of war of 1949, Additional protocols I and II of 1977 to them, and Criminal Code of Azerbaijan as military criminals. In fact all acting international conventions on human rights including Common Declaration on human rights of 1948, International Pact on civil and political rights of 1966, international pact on economic, social and cultural rights of 1966, Final act of Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe of 1975, Final document of Viennese meeting of CSCE of 1989, Declaration on protection of women and children in emergency and armed conflicts of 1974, Convention on child's rights of 1989, acting conventions regulating waging of war, in particular, 4th Hague Convention about the rule and customs of land war of 1967 were violated. The military men shot the people point-blank with particular cruelty, tanks and armored troop-carrier specially rode into cars to kill the people sat in them, fired on the hospitals, prevented medical staff to help to the wounded persons. Personnel of troops finished the wounded persons off, killed by bayonets, use bullets with 5.45 caliber in Kalashnikov submachine gun, which not only wound the man, but increase his suffering and do his death inevitable.

The bloody tragedy took place in Baku in January, 1990 showed anti-national character of totalitarian regime when USSR armed forces were again used not for protection from foreign aggression, but against its own people.

The events took place before the tragedy

The analysis of the measures implemented by party and state bodies, and contradictory process took place in Baku, on the eve of the 20th of January, shows that the January tragedy was the corollary of prepared military operation.

The policy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union contradicting to interests of the people and directed against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan in the period before January, 20, biased and preconceived line of the Center, inefficient activity of the leaders of Azerbaijan became the main reasons of introduction of the state of emergency in Baku.

This aggression against Azerbaijani people implemented stage by stage: provocations which led to the massacre carried out in the city, weapons were withdrawn even from militia employees under the pretext of population disarmament, etc.

From the end of 1989 right up to the January events additional contingents of internal troops and forces of Soviet Army were sent in Baku. In connection with it various preparatory measures for quartering of military units were taken. In spite of presence in Baku of 110.000 armed security and law-enforcement personnel additional 66.000 soldiers and officers were transferred to Baku among them also were reservists, conscripted for short period in the middle of January, 1990.

The Investigation Commission ascertained that reservists and personnel of units 11.500 strong entered into the city were brought intensive psychological pressure: information about necessity of this action for Russian population protection in Baku which is allegedly annihilated cruelly by the local population was spread, false information about fair amount of snipers and submachine gunner from National Front stationed around the barracks and on the roofs of the houses who will meet the troops with burst of sub-machine gun fire and etc. is reported. Thus, the troops are expected fierce fire and were ready for cruelty. According to the materials of the Investigation Commission there are many persons of Armenian nationality among reservists.

Some days before the events beds in the hospitals in Baku were freed quickly, preparation for receiving quantity of wounded is implemented, members of families of soviet servicemen were evacuated from Baku. Thus, all conditions for implementation of military aggression and troops entering into Baku were created.

The next stage of military operation has become explosion of the power block of the Azerbaijani television and full stopping of broadcasting in the republic on January, 19. Since the day of tragedy the activity of other mass media was suspended and the people was deprived its rights to get information.

For realization of this planned criminal action USSR defense and interior ministers, other high rank military officials and party figures arrived to Baku. In all their speeches they assured that they arrived to Baku to understand the situation and not allow the troops to be entered into the city.

Due to the inefficient activity of local leadership tried to satisfy the central authorities and blindly implement its instructions the situation in the city was beyond the control.

Just in this period during a few months in Baku, other cities and districts mass meetings in connection with unequal attitude of the central authorities of USSR to separative claims of Karabakh Armenians about annexation to the Armenian Republic of the autonomous republic which is the part of Azerbaijan were held. Unclear position of the leadership of USSR in the decision of this issue, undisguised play with Armenians in this issue became the reason of the conflict spreading and led to the mass proscription of the Azerbaijanis from

Armenia. About 300.000 Azerbaijanis were subjected to torture and killed with aim to oust them from their own houses, and forced to be refugees and took refuge in the Azerbaijani Republic.

All these inflamed anger of the people, and the demands about the resignation of the leadership of Azerbaijan were made at the mass-meetings . The proposal about introduction of the state of emergency put forward at the meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan on January, 1990 was a result of fear to loose the power. On the basis of this decision on January, 15 1990 Presidium of USSR Supreme Council adopted the Decree “On declaration of the state of emergency in Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast and some other districts”. On January, 15 1990 during the visit of chairman of Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Azerbaijani SSR to Moscow under conditions of lack of quorum illegal meeting of Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Azerbaijani SSR was held where the decision about consent on introduction of the state of emergency in Azerbaijan were taken under the pressure of the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan. It again confirms that the tragedy of the 20th January was beforehand planned criminal action.

Decision by Presidium of the USSR Supreme Council “On introduction of the state of emergency in Baku city” violating item 14, article 119 of the USSR Constitution and article 71 of the Constitution of the Azerbaijani SSR, its publication after introduction of the state of emergency and blood shed of hundreds innocent inhabitants of Baku city confirm that this military and political action was open aggression and the crime against the Azerbaijani people committed by the leaders of CPSU, Soviet state and personally Mikhail Gorbachev.

January, 21 1990

The tragedy of January, 20 has evoked anger and indignation of the progressive forces all over the world. The radio stations of many countries broadcasted full information about the January tragedy and damned imperial forces.

The city awoke by the night tragedy only in the morning, 6-7 hours after declaration of the state of emergency in Baku, listened the Decree of Gorbachev and the order of the city commandant by the radio. Disorders by troops entered into the city have continued, the people have perished, and these events continued for several days.

January, 22 1990

The extreme session of the Supreme Council of the Azerbaijani SSR held on January, 22 1990 at request of the people and initiative of the group of deputies tried to evaluate the January events and adopted some documents.

The session adopted the Decree of the Supreme Council of the Azerbaijani SSR “On cancellation of the state of emergency in Baku city”.

The appeals to the USSR Supreme Council, Supreme Councils of union republics, parliaments of all countries of the world, UN as well as to all nationals and peoples living in the Azerbaijani SSR also were adopted at this session. Questions about legal evaluation of the events were risen at this session and the deputy investigation commission was created.

This day Baku bid farewell to the sons and daughters of Azerbaijan perished as a result of the January tragedy. Millions people have gathered at the Lenin square. The funeral procession reached Upland park in Baku - the highest place in the city which was chosen as the place of burial of the victims of this terrible tragedy. They became the heroes for the next generations and the shehids (martyrs) perished for independence of Azerbaijan.

In 1994 according to the decree of the President of the Azerbaijan Republic Heydar Aliyev “On conducting of the fourth anniversary of the tragedy of January, 20” Milli Mejlis (parliament) after holding special meeting adopted resolution “On tragic events took place in Baku on January, 20 1990” where the events of tragic January, 1990 were given political and legal evaluation for the first time.

The Decrees of the President of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev of December, 16 1999 “On the 10th anniversary of the tragedy of January, 1990” and of January, 17 2000 “On awarding of honorary title “Shehid (Martyr) of January, 20” (where all the victims of the tragedy are listed) once more showed the deepest respect to the tragic history of our people.

Azerbaijani people remember and revere memory of all fallen heroes who sacrificed their lives for independence and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.

May they rest in peace!

<http://www.january20.net/hist1>

JANUARY 20, 1990 IS A SPECIAL DAY IN AZERBAIJAN'S HISTORY

January 20 is a very important day for Americans because that is the day every four years when the President is inaugurated. But it is also one of the most important, if not the most important, date in the history of Azerbaijan.

It was on Saturday, January 20, 1990, that 26,000 Soviet troops under orders from Mikhail Gorbachev invaded Baku, killed one hundred and forty innocent civilians, and set in motion the events which led to Azerbaijan's independence a year and a half later. The significance of the events in Baku on January 20, 1990, cannot be overestimated. Peaceful demonstrations had been taking place for several weeks in downtown Baku, protesting Soviet control of Azerbaijan and the arbitrary decisions (dictated by Moscow) of local communist officials.

In fact, Azerbaijan was the first of the former Soviet republics to mount a serious move toward independence, and it was the prospect of a breakup of the Soviet empire that prompted Gorbachev to send both armored troops and KGB officials to Baku. He succeeded temporarily in preventing independence, but he was unable to stop the quest for freedom, and, in fact, accelerated the process by enhancing nationalistic feelings among all Azerbaijani people.

It is interesting now, seven years later, to look back at those events and the world's reaction at the time. Gorbachev, of course, was something of a hero in the West because of his policies of glasnost and perestroikavv. But, in fact, Gorbachev had no intention of breaking up the Soviet Union he merely wanted to "reform" communism to extend its life.

The Washington Post reported on January 21, 1990, that the situation in Azerbaijan had "presented Gorbachev with his 'gravest crisis' since taking power in March, 1985." On January 23, The Washington Times reported that some Soviet experts warned, "that Azerbaijan could become Moscow's next Afghanistan, but some U.S. experts believe that it might become the Kremlin's Northern Ireland."

Throughout the 70 years of Soviet reign, Moscow used ethnic differences and tensions to maintain internal control. Stalin was master of the divide and conquers game. He transplanted thousands of people of various ethnic backgrounds to either dilute their strength or to counter other ethnic groups. In Azerbaijan's case, he expelled several hundred thousands of Azerbaijanis from Armenia and gave a strip of land to Armenia that separated Azerbaijan from its region of Nakhichevan, both to internally divide Azerbaijanis and to prevent a direct link between Azerbaijan proper and Turkey.

In 1988, the ethnic conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan began when ethnic Armenians in the Azerbaijani region of Nagorny Karabakh unilaterally declared their independence. While neither the Soviet Union nor any other nation gave recognition to this unilateral declaration of independence, reactionary forces used the conflict to keep Armenians and Azerbaijanis divided and, therefore, under tight Soviet control.

Soviet army and Spetsnaz troops fired indiscriminately at civilians, some of whom were merely watching events from their windows or the sidewalks. Ambulances carrying the wounded were fired upon. The Washington Post reported on January 22 that a Russian photographer told the Western reporters in Moscow, who were banned from travelling to Baku, that "Soviet soldiers fired at almost anything that moved in the early hours of their occupation." Again in classic Soviet fashion, Soviet military authorities announced on January 23 that no one had been killed in Baku since the Saturday invasion, while at the same time more than one million Azerbaijanis gathered to mourn the dead who were buried in a park overlooking Baku, now known as the Martyr's Cemetery.

The West, fearful of undermining Gorbachev, was very circumspect in its reaction. The press reported on January 26 that President Bush said Gorbachev had done a "remarkable job" in handling the situation in Azerbaijan and that British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher told the House of Commons she had "great sympathy" for Gorbachev as "he tries to keep his nation from unravelling." The Washington Post reported on January 21 that the White House "expressed regret at the 'already heavy loss of life' in Azerbaijan, and called

'upon all involved to act with restraint in the use of force and to show respect for the rule of law and the rights of individuals concerned.'

A more candid assessment of the West's reaction came in a January 21 Washington Post dispatch: "As ethnic strife and secessionist pressures buffet the Soviet Union, U.S. officials have been forced to acknowledge that the United States has a stake in President Mikhail Gorbachev's survival that now outweighs the old Cold War hope that the U.S. S. R. might fragment or fall apart." What the West failed to comprehend was that the events in Baku that January seven years ago were for Azerbaijan no different from what happened in Budapest, Hungary, in 1956 and Prague, Czechoslovakia, in 1968.

While some in the West may have been fooled by Gorbachev's justifications, the Azerbaijani people were not fooled. They instinctively knew - as did the people of Hungary and Czechoslovakia - that what was happening was the destruction of their freedom. That's why thousands of Azerbaijanis surrounded Communist Party headquarters demanding the resignation of the republic's leadership. That's why thousands of Azerbaijanis in Turkey rallied near Turkey's border with Azerbaijan. That's why the Baku City Council demanded that Soviet troops be withdrawn. That's why even the Soviet legislature in Azerbaijan condemned the occupation as "unconstitutional" and threatened to call a referendum on secession unless Soviet troops were withdrawn within 48 hours. That's why there were reports of mutiny by Soviet Azerbaijani military cadets, and why Azerbaijani oil tankers blocked Soviet naval vessels from reaching the Baku harbor.

Despite a news blackout, hundreds of Azerbaijanis in Moscow used short-wave radios to listen to Voice of America and BBC to learn what was happening in Baku. Many of these Azerbaijanis gathered in Moscow seeking information and demanding explanations. At that point, on the day after the invasion, Azerbaijan's current President Heydar Aliyev - who was living in retirement in Moscow - made his first public appearance since his resignation from the Soviet Politburo and Government in 1987. He broke the information blockade in Moscow concerning the Soviet attack, and strongly urged international condemnation of the invasion.

Soviet troops were eventually withdrawn from Baku, but political control was maintained for almost another two years until Azerbaijan's parliament declared independence in October, 1991. Azerbaijan has maintained its independence for five years, despite lingering economic and social problems from the Soviet era, and despite the military occupation of 20 percent of Azerbaijan by Armenia. The Republic of Azerbaijan has a freely elected president and parliament, the beginnings of free market reforms led by the energy sector, and, most importantly, no foreign troops on its soil. Yes, January 20 is an important date in American political history. It symbolizes American democracy and freedom. By the same token, January 20 is perhaps the most important date in the history of the new Republic of Azerbaijan. For it was on that date that the citizens of Azerbaijan stood up to Soviet bullets and tanks; martyrs gave their lives to begin the struggle for freedom from communism and dictatorship. Indeed, January 20, 1990, in Baku, Azerbaijan, the fate of the Soviet empire was sealed, because it quickly became apparent that even the might of the Soviet military could not extinguish the hopes and dreams of a people seeking freedom and independence.

Hafiz M. Pashayev,
Ambassador of the Azerbaijan Republic to the U.S.A.

<http://www.january20.net/hist2>

WORLD AZERIS TO HONOR JANUARY 20 VICTIMS

The 18th anniversary of the January 20 tragedy will be commemorated across the world. Hundreds of civilians were crushed or injured by the Soviet troops in Baku on that day on an order from the USSR leadership that was trying to maintain the Communist regime in Azerbaijan and strangle the national liberation movement.

Azerbaijanis living in countries around the globe will honor the victims and convey the truth about the bloody page in the country's history to the international community. Events will be organized on this occasion in a slew of countries, including Turkey, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Japan, Thailand, Pakistan, Australia, New Zealand, Northern Cyprus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Russia and Ukraine, the State Committee on Work with Azerbaijanis Living Abroad said.

Comprehensive information on the tragic date will be provided to the participants, a film on the history of Azerbaijan and the Armenia-Azerbaijan Upper (Nagorno) Garabagh conflict screened and photos exhibited. A "talkback" debate will be held as well to allow the attendees to share their views concerning the atrocities committed against the Azerbaijani people in 1990. The discussion will be attended by representatives of the Azerbaijani Diaspora and those of other Turkic nations, as well as diplomats, local officials and public figures.

In Brussels and the Hague, the January 20 tragedy will be commemorated by distributing leaflets. A demonstration will also be held on a central square in Strasbourg with the support of the Strasbourg-Azerbaijan House and the Association of Azerbaijani Students in France.

By Lala Alizada
AzerNEWS Staff Writer

"AzerNEWS". - 2008. – 17-22 january. - №2. - P. 2.

BLACK JANUARY OF 1990

18 years passes from January events of 1990s which entered to the history of Azerbaijan as Bloody Tragedy of January. Spiritual, ideological and political aggression against Azerbaijan during 70 years came up on the military desk with January 20 events. The purpose of this terror was the physical death of Azerbaijani people.

Over the night from 19 to 20-th January, 1990 without preliminary declaration of the state of emergency military units of former Soviet Union were entered into Baku city and some regions of Azerbaijan. The invasion into Baku of a large contingent of Soviet Army units, interior troops and special destination detachments was accompanied by particular cruelty and unprecedented atrocities. Reprisals were inflicted toward peace population, hundreds of people were killed, wounded, missing.

Victim numbers

In total as a result of illegal entering of troops into Baku city and regions of the republic 133 men were killed, 611 men - wounded, 841 men - illegally arrested and 5 - missing. According to the Black January: Baku 1990, Documents and Materials, AzerNeshr, Baku, 1990, p. 287, with a reference to the Ministry of Health of Azerbaijan SSR, "By February 1, 1990, 706 people had applied for medical assistance to medical facilities of Baku. The court medical bureau [sudebno-meditsinskoye byuro] had accepted 84 persons, 73 of them with gunshot wounds (16 in their backs), smashed by APCs 8, bayoneted wounds 2. By February 9, 1990 170 people, including 6 Russians, 7 Jews, Tatars and Lezgis, had died. Among the dead are six women and 9 children and teenagers. 370 people were wounded. 321 people disappeared." The soldiers sacked and burnt 200 houses and apartments, 80 automobiles, including ambulance cars, the state and personal property with total worth 5637286 rubles was destroyed. Women, children and old men, as well as ambulance and militia employees also were among the killed persons.

The bloody tragedy took place in Baku in January, 1-990 showed anti-national character of totalitarian regime when USSR armed forces were again used not for protection from foreign aggression, but against its own people.

The policy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union contradicting to interests of the people and directed against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan in the period before January, 20, biased and preconceived line of the Center, inefficient activity of the leaders of Azerbaijan became the main reasons of introduction of the state of emergency in Baku.

This aggression against Azerbaijani people implemented stage by stage: provocations which led to the massacre carried out in the city, weapons were withdrawn even from militia employees under the pretext of population disarmament, etc.

From the end of 1989 right up to the January events additional contingents of internal troops and forces of Soviet Army were sent in Baku. In connection with it various preparatory measures for quartering of military units were taken. In spite of presence in Baku of 110.000 armed security and law-enforcement personnel additional 66.000 soldiers and officers were transferred to Baku among them also were reservists, conscripted for short period in the middle of January, 1990.

The Investigation Commission ascertained that reservists and personnel of units 11.500 strong entered into the city were brought intensive psychological pressure: information about necessity of this action for Russian population protection in Baku which is allegedly annihilated cruelly by the local population was spread, false information about fair amount of snipers and submachine gunner from National Front stationed around the barracks and on the roofs of the houses who will meet the troops with burst of sub-machine gun fire and etc. is reported. Thus, the troops are expected fierce fire and were ready for cruelty. According to the materials of the Investigation Commission there are many persons of Armenian nationality among reservists.

Some days before the events beds in the hospitals in Baku were freed quickly, preparation for receiving quantity of wounded is implemented, members of families of soviet servicemen were evacuated from Baku. Thus, all conditions for implementation of military aggression and troops entering into Baku were created.

The next stage of military operation has become explosion of the power block of the Azerbaijani television and full stopping of broadcasting in the republic on January, 19. Since the day of tragedy the activity of other mass media was suspended and the people was deprived its rights to get information.

Azerbaijani people remember and revere memory of all fallen heroes who sacrificed their lives for independence and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.

May they rest in peace!

By Sun Stuff

“Baku Sun”. – 2008. – 18 january. - №2. - P. 1, 2.

BLOODY BUT HONORABLE PAGE OF AZERBAIJANI HISTORY

Eighteen years ago, at night of 19th of January to the 20th, 1990 and within the next several days the management of the former USSR had committed monstrous by its format and tragic by the outcome barbaric act against Azerbaijan and its people.

That night military units of former Soviet Union moved into Baku and other regions of the country without the preliminary announcement of emergency situation and co-ordination with the legislative authorities of the country - the Supreme Council of Azerbaijani SSR. Despite of the presence of 110 thousands of troops in Baku, another contingent of 66 thousand along with heavy military equipment was dislocated around the city. This was realized in accordance with the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union and signed by the president, **Mikhail Gorbachev**.

The investigation group on the reasons and results of bloody events of January had established that the military forces that entered Baku and other regions were brainwashed. They were told that the operation is necessary for the protection of Russians, Armenians and other minorities that had been suffering of brutal attacks of local population. They were wrongly instructed as if there were snipers and machine gun shooters hiding on the roofs of houses and buildings prepared to shoot the coming military forces.

Thus the military contingent was ready to an aggressive armed resistance and was psychologically tuned to act brutally. The greater part of armies was made of reserve forces, basically, by the newly recruited soldiers of Armenian nationality. And this «peaceful Soviet army» has made bloody massacre and tragic results if which will be discussed later.

What has served as the reason for this horrible event of the XX century?

All has begun that, feeling disorder of the Soviet Empire; Armenians have started realization of one of the first items of the old mythical plan of creation of «Great Armenia», by joining Nagorno-Karabakh — historical part of Azerbaijan — to Armenia with perspective views of occupation of other territories of the neighboring country. It has caused a natural storm of protest of Azerbaijani people, overgrown into a powerful national-liberation movement, which, in turn, has strongly frightened the ruling elite of the dying power.

And it had decided to suppress the movement of people that had risen to struggle for freedom and independence, motivating the suppression as attempt to prevent the establishment of an "Islamic state", "set an order in the republic" and "guarantee the safety of citizens". In fact the statements made by M. Gorbachev to media are not casual: **Any attempt of establishment of an Islamic State in Azerbaijan will be prevented with force. We shall act strictly!**

This butcher wearing a greatcoat of a "man of structural adjustments" and "democrat" really acted very decidedly. Having signed an order on introduction of troops into Azerbaijan in January, 19 he made tacit command **to crush everyone and everything!** Report of USSR Defense Minister **Dmitry Yazov** headed this bloody operation code-named "Blow" was not fortuitous. An official of Azerbaijan committee for State Security witnessed the operation: "**Comrade the First, they were trampled as cockroach!**"

According to the finding of Court of enquiry, **introduction of military units and bodies of troops entailed bombardment of crowds of innocent people in the streets and squares, apartment houses and medical centers.**

Tanks crushed ambulance and roadside cars, injured were finished off, medical personnel rendering emergency aid was fired. Some people were killed at their flats, doorways, buses and working places.

Here are bloody results of unprecedented action of state authorities against their peaceful citizens: **death roll of 170 men** (131 men died in massacre, the rest died of wounds — **G.Z.**), **744 injured, 841 were arrested, dozens of citizens disappeared.** All of them were peaceful people like children, the youth, old men, and women. Innocent people in Nefchala and Lenkoran where state of emergency was not declared were also

killed. Many of persons aggrieved without information of introduction of troops into the city were going for their own business. Power-generating unit of TV Center was detonated to block information for 8 p.m. in January, 19. **Seven** people were killed at home, **19** were killed close to their houses. **70** of murdered had families, 159 orphans remained without families, **seven** of killed were underage. There were 6 Russians, 3 Jews, 3 Tatars, 5 employees of internal affairs, 2 ambulance men among those killed. **13-year-old Ilgar Ibrahimov and Larisa Mamedova were the youngest and 75-year-old Suraya Babayeva and 76 year-old Yunus Rahimov were the oldest victims.**

Military men smashed and burnt 200 houses and flats, 80 motor vehicles including ambulance cars, public assets and paraphernalia to the amount of **5 637 286 rubles** for that time.

Introduction of troops and announcement of state of emergency in Baku severely violated USSR Constitution (119 article) and Constitution of Azerbaijan SSR (71 article), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 (article 1). Sovereign rights of republic were trampled. Military men were proven to commit inhuman operations estimated as criminal crimes by the decree of international military tribunal and Geneva conventions on protection on war victims of 1949, additional protocol and III of 1977 and Azerbaijan Criminal code. All present international conventions, as well as Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, final act of Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe of 1975, resulting document of CSCE Viennese meeting of 1989, Declaration of Protection of Women and Children in Emergency Situations and under Armed Conflicts of 1974, Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 and acting conventions regulating warfare were in fact violated.

20th of January, 1990 is a bloody, mournful, tragic and at the same time heroic and glorious chapter in the history of sovereign Azerbaijan.

G. Zeynalolu
« *Voice of Karabakh* »

«*Voice of Karabakh*». - 2008. – *january*. - №1. - P. 3.

HANDS FOULED IN BLOOD OF INNOCENT AZERBAIJANI PEOPLE

There are lots of documents proving ill-mentioned participation of authorities and officers of the first order of former USSR fighting for Baku in the 19th-20th January, 1990. Below you can find information from the passage of Chapay Sultanov's book "Invasion" directly reflecting this participation.

A record of negotiations between Chairman of the soviet of Nationalities **E. Primakov**, Secretary of **A. Girenko** and the head of department of CC international relations **V. Mikhailov** was obtained. All of them were in Baku on the eve of January tragedy "to normalize situation" in Azerbaijan capital. Here is the part of conversation taken place in January, 19, 1990 at 18.30 p.m.:

"A. Girenko: *"People in Azerbaijan regions and cities should not be aware of situation in Baku. Troops were already ordered to enter the city."*

E. Primakov: *"People get all information via TV".*

V. Mikhailov: *"Communication should be cut shot".*

Power unit of Azerbaijan Television was detonated.

A letter of the first deputy of public prosecutor of that time **Murad Babayev** to USSR Judge Advocate General, lieutenant General **V. F. Katusev** proves participation of KGB special group in detonation of power unit: **"Detonation of power unit was organized and realized as a special measure on bar of unauthorized broadcast of materials on behalf of Popular Front according to inspection record of KGB letter 125 of January, 17, 1990. It evidences that KGB "is working over special measures" on prevention of capture and usage of broadcasting center by APF officials. Version on KGB collaborators participation in detonation is to be checked by Office of Military Prosecutor"...**

USSR Defense Minister **D. Yazov** said in his interview: **"Troops entered Baku to break the structures of Popular Front"**.

Evidences of D. Yazov to the Office of Public Prosecutor of Azerbaijan: **"...I was invited to President Mikhail Gorbachov in January, 19, 1990. Minister of Foreign Affairs Bakatin was also invited. There were Chairman of USSR Council of Ministers N. Rijkov and Chairman of Supreme Soviet A. Lukyanov in Gorbachov's cabinet. Gorbachov said, situation in Baku was dangerous and Bakatin and I had to go there to restore order. The same day at 17 p.m. we arrived to Baku. We met officials of USSR president E. Primakov and O. Shenin, first secretary of Azerbaijan SSR A. Vezirov in the cabinet of Commander of Western sector General N. Popov. There we discussed situation and made decision to declare state of emergency"**.

Yazov is known to observe from the helicopter how peaceful citizens were killed in Baku.

By the way, it was informed in internet in 12 years after January tragedy that Yazov sells component part of his military honor, head gear of marshal for 500 dollars and certificate for 200.

It is painful that such nonentity killed the best sons and daughters of Azerbaijan!

Top authorities of USSR participated in making decision regarding entering of troops into Baku as in Afghanistan case. Yazov, Gorbachov, Primakov, Rijkov and others lie about "fierce resistance". (*No fact of resistance is authentic- ed.*)

Independent experts of public military organization "Shield": **"to Chief Military Prosecutor, lieutenant-general Katusev A. V. Military crime guided by Defense Minister Yazov was committed in Baku in January, 19-25, 1990. We ask you to institute proceedings against guilty persons"...**

A. Karaulov: "Military invasion was organized by Defense Minister, USSR Minister of Internal Affairs and KGB. Code name of operation is "Blow". Special service "Alfa" and diversion group "A" of KGB played key role. "Gorbachov ordered three men Dmitry Yazov, Vadim Bakatin and Philip Bobkov, first deputy of Kruchkov in KGB to save Soviet Power in Baku. They arrived to Baku a week before that fateful night..."

KGB officials were actively involved into January developments in Baku...

The troops landed in airport in January, 12. Bakatin and Bobkov were in charge of the operation.

One of the "heroes" of the tragedy recollects: **"I remember how I met commanders of militants from special groups Alexander Miroshnichenko ("Alfa"), Sergey Lisuk ("Vityaz"), Alexander Gorodilov ("Vimpel") at the aerodrome. I saw Viktor Blinov and Oleg Lutsenko with great pleasure. We together participated in detention of some criminals... Boris Jirov, Mikhail Platonov, later become Generals, Yuri Fedoskin, Anatoly Smirnov, Nikolay Stebnev, Viktor Luginin, Vladimir Voskoboynikov, Vacheslav Pelenkov, Vladimir Ribakov, Igor Kuznetsov, Eugene Bataman, Viktor Rastrusin, Vladimir Kashin, Vladimir Vasin and other officers of second and fifth KGB offices and some its departments arrived to Baku."** Scales increased!

It is necessary to note that there were officers in KGB and Minister of Internal Affairs of Azerbaijan who did not fear to account by Military Prosecution and were fiercely fighting against occupation.

In January, 21, 1990 one of the officers said to USSR Minister of Internal Affairs, lieutenant-general Vadim Bakatin at the protest meeting: **"I will arrest you as a senior investigator because you are guilty of the blood shed by my nation"**.

Trio of Primakov, Volskiy and Bakatin was not fortuitous in Azerbaijan. They were connected by so-called "red mafia" washing CPSU funds...

Another hero of January developments in Baku was **Alexander Lebed** headed airborne division proud of his command.

(Pay attention to the fact in A. Lebed's biography demonstrating anti-Azerbaijan and pro-Armenian scenario of operation in Baku in January, 1990. It was prepared by Grigory Belonuchkin based on the text of Vladimir Pribilovsky for directory "Security Council", October, 1997: "In January, 1990 Lebed's division was again sent to suppress anti-Armenian and anti-Soviet unrests in Azerbaijan. In February, 1990 Lebed was conferred military rank of "Major Generated" - ed).

"Voice of Karabakh". - 2008. – january. - №1. - P. 3,7.

WORLD AZERIS HONOR JANUARY 20 VICTIMS

The 19th anniversary of the January 20 tragedy - a massacre unleashed by the Soviet troops - is being commemorated in Azerbaijan and beyond.

134 civilians, including women and children, were killed and more than 700 people wounded in Baku on that day on orders from the USSR leadership that was trying to maintain the Communist regime in the republic and strangle the national liberation movement.

Since the morning hours, rank-and-file citizens as well as representatives of cabinet ministries, committees, companies and organizations will pay tribute to the Alley of Martyrs, a cemetery in the center of the capital where those who fell for their homeland were laid to rest. The nationwide ceremony will last till late at night.

On this day, a minute of silence honoring the victims of the atrocities committed against the Azerbaijani people in 1990 regularly takes place.

The Azerbaijani community has conducted commemoration events in the UAE's Dubai Emirate. A photo exhibition reflecting the memories of the tragic day was arranged and video footage screened, the State Committee on Work with the Diaspora said.

In Sweden, Azerbaijani Diaspora organizations submitted a broad fact-book and photos about the January 20 developments to the country's parliament, foreign ministry and local representations of international groups. Further, the Azerbaijani representatives met with lawmakers from the Swedish ruling party and several other political parties of the country, and presented to them facts regarding the massacre. The Swedish politicians voiced support for Azerbaijan's fair cause.

By Rustam Abdul-Aliyev
AzerNEWS Staff Writer

"AzerNEWS". - 2009. – 20-27 january. - №3. - P. 2.

CLERICAL LEADER URGES TO TRY JAN 20 CULPRITS AT THE HAGUE

The number of people killed by the Soviet army in Baku on Jan. 20, 1990 exceeds official estimates, which necessitates specifying facts about the tragic developments, deputy chairman of the ruling Yeni (New) Azerbaijan Party (YAP) Ali Ahmadov told a commemoration ceremony on Tuesday.

In the backdrop of Armenia's territorial claims and aggression, the USSR leadership, which was trying to maintain the Communist regime in Azerbaijan and strangle the unfolding national freedom movement, pulled troops into Baku early on January 20, 1990, without announcing a state of emergency. 132 people were killed, including women, children and the elderly, and 612 others were injured. 117 of those killed were Azerbaijanis and the rest were people of other nationalities, according to official sources.

Ahmadov noted that the statistics on the Jan. 20 death toll was announced shortly after the gruesome developments, saying a part of the severely injured people passed away afterwards. "But they are not included in the list of those who lost their lives in the aftermath of the Jan. 20 tragedy. We have restricted the scale of this tragedy from the viewpoint of statistics on the slain people. We have neither fully grasped the magnitude of this tragedy nor managed to convey it to the international community."

The YAP deputy chairman said marking the Jan. 20 anniversary should not be confined to commemorating its victims, and Azerbaijan should make an effort to inform the world community of the truth about this tragic page in Azerbaijan's history. According to him, the paramount task is to achieve international recognition of the massacre as a crime against humanity.

Ahmadov also hailed the appeal to the Milli Majlis (parliament) made Monday by the leader of the Caucasus Muslims, saying those responsible for the carnage should be brought before the international court at the Hague.

Sheikhulislam Haji Allahshukur Pashazada's appeal said the massacre is a heinous crime against the Azerbaijani people, calling for taking action to prosecute the culprits, led by then USSR leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

Ahmadov said that a legal assessment should be given to the 1990 developments, along with a political assessment. "YAP is ready to put forth its due stance on the issue."*

"AzerNEWS".- 2010.- 20-26 January.- N.3.- P.2.

SOVIET ARMY IN “BLACK JANUARY”: TO SAVE OR KILL?

Twenty years. Is it a long time or short? For those whose agenda is to forge recent history, the passed time is apparently long enough to begin doing their job, i.e. turn history upside down. On the twentieth anniversary of the bloody crackdown of the independence movement in Azerbaijan, Armenian media introduced yet another ridiculous interpretation of those tragic events. Armenian online resources in one voice justified the brutal killing of more than 130 civilians by the Soviet army, which, they insist, ‘rushed into the city to finally stop the extermination of Christian Armenians in mostly Muslim capital’. This mission sounds indeed noble, and one can hardly overcome the temptation to say a big ‘thank you’ to the ‘people’s army’. However, a question arises: how come this ‘humanitarian’ military operation saved no single life and, on the contrary, brought the death of more than 130 innocent people? What was the real aim – to save or kill? Or was it just the ‘unprofessional’ military who failed to find anyone to save but meanwhile ‘accidentally’ killed hundreds of their own citizens during this ‘desperate’ search for those who needed help? What kind of a ‘rescue operation’ is that with this number of ‘collateral’ loss?

By the end of 1989, the political power almost in entire Azerbaijan was taken over by the Popular Front. Communist authorities controlled only their administrative building, nothing else. Popular Front was indeed very popular those days, and that was the result of the complete failure of Abdulrahman Vezirov and his team to gain people’s trust and respect. It was clear to the central communist government in Moscow that during the next parliamentary elections, which was supposed to be launched in mid-February, 1990, the Popular Front would win almost all the seats. The latter did not make any secret that its first decree in the new parliament would be full independence of Azerbaijan. And that would have become the first republic to officially declare its independence, even before the Baltic republics.

While the Soviet authorities could tolerate the loss of some other republics, it was unthinkable for the Kremlin to lose strategically important and energy rich Azerbaijan, whose natural wealth could help to slow down further disintegration of the Soviet Union and postpone the economic collapse even despite the low oil prices in the world market those years. Besides (not the least), the hard-liners in Politburo wanted to teach the others (especially the Baltic nations and Georgians) a “good lesson” of the “right behavior” and warn them against having any second (pro-independence) thought. Thus, Azerbaijan was the natural target to pick for this show.

The hard-liners charged the Kryuchkov-led KGB to begin planning the crackdown of the Popular Front to prevent its coming to power during the approaching elections. The elections were supposed to be postponed, if not cancelled altogether. To intervene, Moscow needed a good pretext. KGB had been assigned with this task well before the January events, some time in the end of 1989. The remaining Armenian residents who had not yet fled the Azerbaijani capital represented a wonderful chance for the central government in Moscow to boil the situation in the city. The pogroms were organized by KGB, which sent its undercover agents to provoke refugees for taking revenge. The violence took place between 13 and 15 January (mostly on the 13th and 14th with minor incidents on the 15th). By 16 January, all the Armenian survivors had been saved and evacuated to safer places mostly by the Popular Front activists, for whom it was not an issue that the pogroms were the KGB’s provocation to be used against the independence movement. 13.000 Soviet troops that were stationed in the city those days silently watched the disturbances and did not act. Being an eyewitness of those events, I asked one of the soldiers, why they simply watched and did nothing to stop the public disorder? The answer was shocking: “we have the order not to intervene and let it happen”. A good question then arises: what was the point of intervention after the violence if there was the order not to intervene during the violence?

Moscow needed the pogroms! It organized and used them. By January 16, Armenians were not an issue any more, as there were no more pogroms in the city, and the survivors had been evacuated. Does anyone wonder how come the Soviet troops, which patiently watched the violence all those three days long, suddenly

realized five days after the end of the pogroms, i.e. on 20 January that it was finally the right time to come and save Armenians? The Soviet troops were sent to Baku to save not the Armenians, but the totalitarian empire.

Interesting fact: after the troops had entered Baku, they did not even bother to head toward the areas where ethnic Armenians used to live. Their main concern was taking over governmental buildings and the headquarters of the Popular Front, blow up the TV station, close down newspapers, seal the central election committee, kill the street passers and curious people looking from their windows. What did all this have to do with Armenian residents? Nothing! What threat did the central election committee or the newspapers pose to them? None! The army did NOT care about the Armenians. It used them. On and after 20 January, did the army save at least one Armenian? Not a single soul! It came to kill its own citizens, not to save them.

Of course, the Armenian online resources may argue today (for the purely propaganda purpose) that the army came to save “Christian Armenians” from the “barbarians”. Well, they are free to think whatever they wish to think and continue to praise the army that betrayed and used them in the most cynical way – it’s their business. If they are sure that this argument will support their Nagorno Karabakh cause, no one minds – they can argue whatever they want. However, the truth is that Politburo sent the army not to save Armenians, but to crush the independence movement! In this sense, the tragic events in Baku were profoundly different from those in Sumgait. The latter were spontaneous, Moscow was indeed caught in surprise and sent the army to stop the violence. In Baku, however, KGB itself organized the pogroms because it badly needed them as a handy pretext. Hence, no wonder it acted the way it did.

Vugar Seyidov
Special correspondent of AzerTAc
Berlin
AzerTAc.- 2010.- 22 January

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM: REMEMBERING JANUARY 20, 1990

This month, the Republic of Azerbaijan commemorates the 20th anniversary of a turning point in its history and the histories of all the now former Soviet Republics. On January 20, 1990 - nearly two years before the official collapse of USSR - Soviet leadership ordered a full-scale military attack on civilians in Azerbaijan's capital, Baku. In trying to preserve the once-mighty empire by massacring civilians, the Kremlin actually doomed any remaining hopes at salvaging the USSR's rapidly sinking ship and cemented the West's victory in the Cold War.

The details of this crime against humanity, perpetrated by the Soviet Army, are well-documented and included a surprise attack on a major metropolitan city and the mass murder of about 150 unarmed civilians, including women, children, and elderly. Soviet leaders unleashed heavily armed troops and tanks, shooting indiscriminately, killing hundreds, injuring thousands, and destroying a peaceful city known for its tolerance and secularism. The massacre in Baku became the bloodiest case of the USSR's acquired pattern of attacking its own citizens. In 1986, indiscriminate force was used against civilians in Almaty, Kazakstan; in 1989 in Tbilisi, Georgia; in 1991 in Vilnius, Lithuania; and later, in 1991 in Moscow during a self-defeating and ill-fated coup d'état attempt. An important footnote to remember is how Human Rights Watch described the Soviet army's actions as "an exercise in collective punishment" and "a warning to nationalists, not only in Azerbaijan, but in the other Republics of the Soviet Union." Yet, contrary to the crumbling regime's hopes, these attacks convinced even those who had doubts that the time was ripe for independence from the agonizing and increasingly violent USSR.

The tragedy of January 20, 1990 in Baku was an important event on many levels, from the geopolitical to the regional to the deeply personal for the many affected by it. For instance, former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, a one-time favorite of the West, was widely unpopular throughout the USSR and routinely ordered massacres of civilians such as the one in Baku. This dichotomy between the outward upbeat appearance and the actual weakness of a failed politician whose inability to govern exasperated the challenges of USSR's collapse has never been grasped by the West. As a result, taken by the fanfare of the fall of the Berlin Wall, a dramatic and historic event in its own right, the then Bush 41 Administration was quick to overlook the blood of civilians spilled by Gorbachev's soldiers throughout the former Soviet Republics. Many outside the former USSR failed to comprehend the significance of millions of Soviet citizens turning into ardent supporters of Azerbaijan's independence overnight following the January 20, 1990 atrocities.

January 20th bears rich symbolism for many in Azerbaijan and throughout Eurasia. On that day, the majority of the people of Azerbaijan lived through the personal transformation of abandoning Soviet identity and becoming citizens of the independent Republic of Azerbaijan at the time when such independence still seemed unreachable. If on January 19th many among the peaceful protesters against authorities believed that the Soviet Union could be reformed, by the next morning those hopes were killed by none other than the Soviet troops themselves.

I was a student in Russia in January 1990 and witnessed how Soviet special police attacked students and professionals who had gathered at Azerbaijan's mission in Moscow. I also saw how former Politburo member and the highest-ranking Azerbaijani in the Soviet Union, Heydar Aliyev, joined the protesters gathered in Moscow. By courageously speaking out against the brutality of the Soviet regime and denouncing the Communist Party, Heydar Aliyev, once a veteran Soviet politician, had established himself as the authority and leader of the emerging independent Azerbaijan.

January 20th stands out in its symbolism for many reasons. The faces of tragedy, from a newlywed couple and children shot by soldiers, to bullet-ridden ambulances and doctors dying as they protected their patients represent my people and their dedication to freedom and one another. And victims of that night also speak of Azerbaijan's diversity, as they include a young Azerbaijani boy, a teenage Jewish girl, an elderly Russian man and many others from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. The tragedy united the people of Azerbaijan

into a community of citizens of an independent nation and strengthened their resolve to achieve that independence. Perhaps, naturally, one of the most characteristic photos from Azerbaijan was taken on the funeral service for the victims of the massacre and features Christian, Jewish and Muslim religious leaders leading a joint prayer at the cemetery.

For Azerbaijani identity, the date of January 20, 1990 is a fundamental building block, which, as mentioned earlier, precedes the nation's formal independence. The hilltop cemetery overlooking the Caspian Sea, the Martyr's Alley, established ad-hoc 20 years ago in spite of a curfew and military attempts to disperse the people, is a symbol of Baku today. Unfortunately, it has grown significantly since then because many victims of the war with neighboring Armenia are buried there as well. And the red carnations, once a flower of choice in Azerbaijan, are now almost exclusively a symbol of bloodshed for the nation's independence.

Similar to monuments in America, Baku's Martyr's Alley is not aimed at anyone or any nation. It symbolizes the sacrifices made by our people for their independence. After all, so much that we take for granted, be it our nationhood and even the ability to own one's national flag, have been earned by paying a very steep price. Over the last 20 years much has changed and Azerbaijan today stands firmly on its feet a regional leader. Speaking of symbolism, in 2001 Vladimir Putin became first Russian president to visit independent Azerbaijan and to lay a wreath at the January 20th memorial.

Two decades later, a vibrant and independent Republic of Azerbaijan is still the best tribute to the memory of those whose lives were cut short by the collapsing empire's crime. And so, as we mourn the victims, we also celebrate our Azerbaijan and the independence, freedom and sacrifice that come with the steep price of freedom.

Elin Suleymanov
Azerbaijan Consul General to Los Angeles

AzerTAc.- 2010.- 23 January

IN THE NAME OF INDEPENDENCE - 20 JANUARY 1990

by Ibrahim Zeynalov

Causes

Although 21 years have elapsed since the events of 20 January and various views have been expressed on the reasons for the tragedy, all opinions have one common feature: the people of Azerbaijan demonstrated to the world at the turn of the 20th century that they would not deviate from their pursuit of freedom and independence.

The trail leading to 20 January opened in the 1980s. The Azerbaijani people's struggle to preserve the territorial integrity of their country began in 1988 and eventually developed into a national liberation movement.

The failure of the USSR government to forestall renewed Armenian claims on Azerbaijan's territory, and separatist activities in Nagorno-Karabakh, further bolstered the people's national liberation spirit.

The leaders of the Soviet empire perpetrated the 20 January massacre in Azerbaijan, a republic with strengthening tendencies towards independence, in order "to teach a lesson" to other Turkic-speaking nations of the USSR.

Various state-of-the-art items of Soviet military hardware and personnel were deployed around Baku in mid-January 1990. The Presidium of the USSR Supreme Council resolved on 19 January 1990 to introduce a state of emergency in Baku as of 20:00 on 20 January 1990, but the decision was kept secret in order to trap those who had taken to the streets to defend their constitutional rights and massacre them. A prior announcement of the state of emergency and curfew could have disrupted the USSR leadership's plans.

The Baku operation and its consequences

The Baku operation was overseen personally by the USSR's Minister of Defence. It was carried out by specifically trained units of the Soviet army against their own people. The most sophisticated military hardware and equipment, tear gas and various types of arms and ammunition were used in the operation.

Unarmed people who tried to find shelter to hide from the sporadic gunfire were picked out by spotlight and fired at. This is how many innocent civilians, including the elderly, women, children - anyone who happened to be on the street - were killed. Armed detachments of the Soviet army even resorted to firing on people from tanks and armoured personnel carriers. Soldiers fired on ambulance teams coming from hospitals to provide first aid to those wounded or to recover the bodies of the dead.

As a result of the special operation conducted by the Soviet army in Baku and other parts of the republic, a total of 137 people were killed on 20 January 1990, including more than 120 Azerbaijanis, six Russians, three Jews, three Tatars. A total of 744 people were wounded, 400 people were arrested and four were reported missing. Those killed ranged in age from 12 and 73.

On 21 January, Heydar Aliyev, who was living in Moscow at the time, went to Azerbaijan's permanent representative office in the Soviet capital, flatly condemned the crime perpetrated by the USSR leaders against Azerbaijan and its citizens, and expressed support for his people. In a statement made at the meeting, Heydar Aliyev gave a political assessment of the tragedy:

As far as the developments in Azerbaijan are concerned, I am convinced that they run counter to the rule of law, democracy, humanity and the principles of state building in our country.

International attitude

Shortly after these events, heads of state and government of Western countries issued biased and lopsided statements without bothering to examine their historical and political background.

It is also worth mentioning that from the latter half of the 1980s, the West and other parts of the world were receiving only distorted information about Azerbaijan. This anti-Azerbaijan campaign was spearheaded by the central Soviet media. Another major contributor was the powerful Armenian lobby operating in many countries.

Even in the aftermath of the massacre, leaders of the western superpowers did nothing to establish what had actually happened in Baku and expose those who had masterminded developments. Instead, they fully supported the destructive policies of the USSR leadership, headed by Mikhail Gorbachev, which would inevitably lead to a break-up of the Soviet Union. They even provided indirect support for one of Gorbachev's key policies, that of ethnic conflict. Western leaders knew only too well that support for chauvinist policies against the Turkic-speaking nations of the USSR would speed up the collapse of the Soviet empire.

Analyses show that the key reason behind Western support for Gorbachev's policies was that the conflicts were playing into the hands of the USSR's 'cold war' enemies and served their strategic interests. The Caucasus, including Azerbaijan, did not register in Western geopolitical interests at the time.

According to Zbigniew Brzezinski, a former US presidential security adviser, the US administration made a serious mistake in underestimating the strategic importance of the Caucasus and leaving it beyond its sphere of interest in the late 1980s and early 1990s. For this reason, the US State Department's assessment of events was totally misconceived. A spokesman for the State Department said in a statement that Washington did not support Azerbaijan on the 20 January developments and did not want to provide a comment on the situation.

The foreign ministries of the UK and Italy issued statements indicating that the developments in Baku were "an internal affair of the USSR". The statements said further that the Soviet government had carried out the Baku operation in order to restore stability and prevent ethnic confrontation.

At the same time, leaders of Turkey, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Arab world countries, Iran and a number of international organizations, including the Istanbul-based Eurasia Foundation, said that the massacre unleashed by the Soviet Union against civilians in Baku could not reverse the Azerbaijani people's struggle for freedom and independence, adding that those killed on that horrific night had entered the history of the Turkic world.

While describing the 20 January developments in Baku as a tragedy, the statements of support indicated that they would also be remembered as days of great hope, belief and victory. Although the Soviet Union crushed protesters ruthlessly and did everything in its power to silence their voices, it failed to achieve its goal.

The Soviet leadership, with significant assistance from its media, attempted to conceal the actual causes and aims of the 20 January operation in Baku and even succeed in convincing some Western circles of the 'reasonable' nature of its policies. As a result, no international condemnation or sanctions followed from that anti-constitutional campaign in Azerbaijan.

Lessons learned

The USSR government chose to slaughter those who had risen to defend their territorial integrity and protest against the policies of the centre. The deployment of a large contingent of special-purpose units and USSR Interior Troops in the Baku operation led to unprecedented cruelty and the killing of innocent civilians.

The Baku operation, which was intended to break the will of the Azerbaijani people and display the full strength of the Soviet military machine, was an act of pure aggression.

One of the bloodiest crimes committed by the Communist regime in the 20th century, this was an act of aggression not only against Azerbaijan, but also against all mankind. Unfortunately, those who are culpable got away with it.

It is beyond doubt that, along with the Soviet leadership, the then Azerbaijani administration has to share the blame for what happened. Analysis of the events shows that the Azerbaijani leadership of the day ignored people's demands and followed orders from Moscow without reckoning that the situation might get out of hand.

The Baku tragedy exposed the deep gap between the people and government in Azerbaijan. It demonstrated that Azerbaijan needed a strong, wise and subtle leadership with great respect for national values, a leadership experienced and capable of leading the nation forward without shedding blood and offering up sacrifice.

After 20 January 1990, Azerbaijan entered upon a new phase in its struggle for freedom, independence and territorial integrity. It was on this date that many patriots decided that the honour and dignity of their nation and their people's freedom are above all else and they made the ultimate sacrifice.

The Soviet leaders failed to break the will of the Azerbaijani people. On the contrary, the nation became even more united around the idea of independence.

The tragedy showed again that the empire was destined to fall apart. Azerbaijan's path to independence and sovereignty lay through secession from the empire and restoration of the independence the republic had lost in 1920. From this standpoint, 20 January must be seen as a watershed in the history of Azerbaijan. It also turned the national liberation movement in Azerbaijan into a political reality.

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“Visions of Azerbaijan”.-2011.-January-February.-P.22-27.

IN THE FOREIGN PRESS

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JANUARY 20, 2000

An Anniversary of Unintended Consequences

By Paul Goble

Moscow's military intervention in Baku ten years ago this week exacerbated the three things it was supposed to quell: ethnic unrest between Azerbaijanis and Armenians, the influence of Islam in the Soviet Union, and support for independence movements across the non-Russian portions of the USSR.

As such, the events in Baku a decade ago call attention to the unintended consequences which characterized so many aspects of Mikhail Gorbachev's reign as the last Soviet leader. And they serve as an object lesson of the ways in which the incautious use of military force by any government to address political problems can backfire.

But even more, especially when viewed from the perspective of today, the gap between what Moscow said it wanted to do in Azerbaijan at that time and what it actually achieved suggests some almost eerie parallels between what the current Russian government says it is doing in Chechnya and what its actions there may ultimately lead to.

For that reason, if for no other, the events of January 1990 in the southern Caucasus are currently attracting more attention in the Caucasus, in Russia, and in the West than might otherwise be the case.

The actual history is both complex and in some places still very much actively disputed. On 15 January 1991, President Gorbachev approved the airlift of some 11,000 military and security troops to Azerbaijan. The Soviet leader said he was taking this step to stop escalating violence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

Violence between these two nations had been percolating since 1988, but it flared up at the end of 1989 and the beginning of 1990, following Baku's decision to blockade the railroad leading into Armenia and Yerevan's declaration that Nagorno-Karabakh should be integrated into the Armenian economy and that Armenian laws took precedence over Soviet ones.

These actions in turn sparked demonstrations in Azerbaijan, and they led to the formation of volunteer militias and self-defense forces on both sides. In the face of this escalating violence, Gorbachev on 17 January ordered its troops to open fire in self-defense and to protect civilians.

But this measure, designed to be intimidating and to limit the violence, had just the opposite effect. Over the next week, hundreds of people were killed — the exact numbers remain a matter of dispute — and Moscow upped the ante by introducing still more of its forces into Azerbaijan.

At home, this process was far quicker. Gorbachev soon faced mounting opposition from Russians who questioned the value of what he was doing. During the Soviet leader's visit to his native Stavropol Krai on 19 January, for example, one Russian woman told him that "I won't give you my son" for such campaigns in the Caucasus.

Non-Russians were even more outraged by this action. Most saw it as a reversal of the cautious approach Gorbachev had adopted following the massacre of demonstrators in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi in April 1989. But an increasing number decided that such a use of force meant that autonomy within the Soviet Union was no longer an attractive option for them and that outright independence, might be a better choice.

The Azerbaijan SSR Supreme Soviet indicated on 22 January, nearly a week after Soviet forces arrived, that the republic might seek to secede from the USSR. That move was followed within months by equally assertive actions from the Caucasus to the Baltics.

Faced with this challenge and hoping to send a message far beyond the borders of Azerbaijan, Soviet forces sealed the borders of that republic, imposed a state of emergency, and sought to hide what they were doing by denying entry to foreign journalists.

That show of force initially appeared very successful. For a few weeks, force appeared to have gained the upper hand. But in less than two years, Azerbaijan was independent, and the Soviet Union was no more.

At least part of the reason for that dramatic acceleration of the pace of history in Azerbaijan and elsewhere was the misplaced effort of those in Moscow who sought to slow it down.

WITNESS SAYS TROOPS "SHOT AT EVERYTHING"

Special to The New York Times

MOSCOW, Jan. 20 — Arif Yunusov, an Azerbaijani political centrist - who spent the predawn hours walking through the streets of Baku, said today that army and Interior Ministry troops converged on the city from the north, south and west, with the most intensive battles in the north.

"They shot at everything that was moving, even people on their balconies," he said in a telephone interview.

General Valentin Varennikov, the Deputy Defense Minister, said in an interview published tonight in Izvestia that troops - showed restraint, firing only upon those who threatened them.

Aleksandr A. Bessmerthykh, the Deputy Foreign Minister, said at a briefing in Moscow that the "soldiers met with resistance from civilians armed with machine guns, rifles and other weapons", although local residents said the militants primarily used Molotov cocktails and pistols.

Thousands Hold Vigil

At about 6 A.M., Mr. Yunusov said, Soviet tanks and armored personnel carriers finally reached Lenin Square in central Baku, where thousands of Azerbaijanis held a protest vigil in front of the Communist Party headquarters.

When the soldiers fired into the air, he said, the crowd stood its ground and chanted "Freedom! Freedom!". The military ended the tense standoff by pulling back most of its forces and putting the soldiers to work securing Government buildings, he said.

Later in the morning, Mr. Yunusov said, the crowd swelled to 70,000, but it dispersed after the Government declared a period of mourning until Monday.

Mr. Yunusov said he had spoken with employees at three hospitals and the Baku city health service and that they estimated the death toll at 200 to 300.

Black Flags and Flowers

Black flags appeared throughout the city, he added, and flowers were piled on bloodstained patches of sidewalk. "People will never forgive this," he said.

Helicopters swooped over the city today, dropping leaflets announcing a curfew from 11 P.M. to 6 A.M., residents said. The residents confirmed that the Soviet Army appeared to have firm control, with only an occasional shot now fired in the city.

Two residents said that shooting was heard throughout the day inside the Salyan military barracks in central Baku, however.

The New York Times. January 21, 1990

SOVIET TROOPS ATTACK MILITANTS

Azerbaijanis Say Death Toll High

By David Remnick
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, Jan. 20 (Saturday) — Soviet troops battled Azerbaijani militants early today in Baku, the republic's capital, killing and injuring many people, according to news agency reports quoting spokesmen for the nationalist movement there.

The nationalist spokesmen said troops opened fire as they moved into the city, smashing roadblocks set up by Azerbaijanis. The official Soviet news agency, Tass, said "guerrillas of the Popular Front have opened fire on [Soviet] servicemen. The military units have been forced to reply. Lives have been lost."

Tass gave no casualty figures. Nationalists reached by telephone in Baku said that hundreds had been reported dead in the fighting, but that they personally had confirmed only small numbers of deaths.

Earlier, President Mikhail Gorbachev said that tensions surrounding the ethnic fighting in the Transcaucasus had not eased despite the presence of 24,000 Soviet troops, and Soviet authorities announced Friday night that additional forces were being sent there.

News services quoted Azerbaijani nationalist leaders speaking by telephone from Baku, on the Caspian Sea in the southern Soviet Union, as saying Soviet troops moved into the city by land and sea shortly after midnight and smashed barricades erected by Azerbaijanis to sleep the armed forces out.

"There is shooting through .the center of the city, particularly on the outskirts where all the blockades are." Mahmud Kesamanly an official in the nationalist Azerbaijan Popular Front, told Reuter. "They pushed right through the blockades with tanks. There are many dead and injured people," he said, but he added that he had details only of three killed when soldiers fired at a bus. He said residents were resisted by the Soviet army's assault.

Natik Alekserov, of the Front's national Defense Council, told agency France-Presse that hundreds people had been killed. The Associated Press quoted Leila Yunusova, the Azerbaijan Social Democratic group, as saying that wounded were being taken to three city hospitals and that a doctor had confirmed to her the deaths of at least seven young men in street battles.

Reports from Baku on Friday said the rebels had been given a two hour deadline by the republic's Communist Party leaders to remove the barricades and allow the army to enter the city.

Communist Party headquarters Baku had been surrounded for a third day by thousands demanding the resignation of the public's leadership and the withdrawal of Soviet troops, Baku radio said, according to Reuter. Most of the troops had been hemmed in by militant Azerbaijanis or trapped in their barracks or at the airport by barricades and parked vehicles.

To deal with the recently intensified fighting between Azerbaijanis and Armenian over control of joint occupied territories, the Kremlin began calling up reservists from elsewhere in the country this week, it that prompted angry demonstrations in several cities in the Russian republic.

In an apparent response to those protests, military officials said Friday that they had stopped calling up reservists and would replace them with regular troops.

Soviet television Friday night showed pictures of a rally in the southern Russian city of Stavropol, where Gorbachev spent most of his early political life, at which parents draft-age boys said they did not permit their sons sent to fight in the Transcaucasus. "I won't give you my son," said one woman.

Another said. "We don't want to be seen by the nationalities down there as a foreign occupying power. We don't want a second Afghanistan."

Moslems living near the Soviet Iranian border have staged huge demonstrations in recent weeks, demanding free travel across the border and, in some cases, unification of southern Azerbaijan and northern Iran into a separate state.

Gorbachev, speaking at a congress of workers and intellectuals here, said, "These tensions benefit a small group of extremists, adventurists and representatives of the shadow economy who are robbing both (Azerbaijani and Armenian) peoples."

"*Perestroika* reforms are like a thorn in their flesh," he said, referring to his program of restructuring. "They cannot attack them directly, so they link themselves with tensions on national grounds."

Gorbachev said his government plans to do "everything possible" to end the fighting. The Communist Party Central Committee and the Supreme Soviet, the country's legislature, issued an appeal to both sides.

"At this difficult moment we appeal to your responsibility for the fate of your peoples and our entire multinational motherland", the statement read. "The wave of enmity, arbitrariness and violence must be stopped at all costs and sorrow and misfortune cannot be allowed on our land."

The violence began last weekend when Azerbaijanis left a huge rally in downtown Baku and went on a rampage.

The focus of the enmity between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis is control of the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh. The enclave has been under Azerbaijani control since 1925 although its population is more than 70 percent Armenian. The two republics have been battling over the region, physically and politically, for more than two years.

Boris Yeltsin, a leading radical and populist in the Soviet legislature, said at The Hague today that the Soviet leadership's perestroika reforms had failed so far and that radical measures were necessary in order to avoid further violence and even revolution.

"We are fed up with Gorbachev already," said Yeltsin, who, since being fired from the Politburo two years ago, has been one of the Soviet leader's biggest critics. "Last month I asked Mr. Gorbachev at the legislature if he was sure that the changes in the Soviet Union could proceed without violence," Yeltsin said, "I am not so certain. ... It is the most serious test we are facing."

Since its formation in 1917, the Bolshevik state has been dominated by ethnic Russians, but demographic trends show that the population of the country is now only about half Russian.

Until the rise of Gorbachev in 1985, the Kremlin kept close control of all national groups and sought to repress the expression of nearly all ethnic and religious aspirations.

The Washington Post. January 21, 1990

AZERBAIJANI CAPITAL DEMANDS WITHDRAWAL OF SOVIET TROOPS

Scores Killed in Army Crackdown in Baku

By Don Oberdorfer
Washington Post Staff Writer

MOSCOW, Jan. 21 — The city council of the embattled capital of Soviet Azerbaijan demanded today that army troops be withdrawn, while thousands of people gathered outside Communist Party headquarters there in defiance of a state of emergency to mourn those killed in this weekend's sudden military occupation.

As Soviet troops with heavy weapons patrolled the streets of Baku in force, an "enlarged meeting" of the city council demanded that the state of emergency be lifted and army units removed, according to the official news agency Tass. The council's action was a brusque rejection of appeals by the Soviet military commander for residents to join in "the rebirth of the city" under Moscow's control.

At a higher political level, the Supreme Soviet, or provincial legislature of Azerbaijan was summoned to an urgent meeting amid predictions from nationalist sources that it, too, would demand that the troops go home. Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev had ordered them into Baku before dawn Saturday to put down ethnic fighting between Azerbaijanis and Armenians who have been battling over territorial issues in the two neighboring republics.

Sniping and sporadic fighting, including an account of mutinous Azerbaijani military cadets firing on Soviet army troops, were reported by Western news agencies based on telephone interviews from Baku today.

But all reports indicated that the locale of military activity had diminished sharply from the early hours of Saturday when the estimated 29,000 Soviet troops smashed through barricades placed by rebellious local forces to keep them out of the city.

The death toll from fighting in the capital was put at 83 by Soviet authorities tonight and at several times that number by Azerbaijani nationalists. An Azerbaijani government official assigned in Moscow cited unofficial estimates from Baku that 500 people had been killed.

On Saturday, Elmira Kafarova, the president of the provincial legislature, condemned the military action and charged that Gorbachev and others leaders in Moscow were entirely to blame for the resulting deaths.

The international consequences of the Kremlin's military action also began to mount. Iranian news media criticized the crackdown and Iran's cabinet expressed regret and called on Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati "to take serious measures" to seek an end to the bloodshed. About 30 million Azerbaijanis live in Iran, across the border from about 6.8 million Soviet Azerbaijanis.

News media in Islamic nations on the Persian Gulf also sharply criticized the Soviet military action against a stronghold of their fellow Moslems.

In announcing on television Saturday that he had sent troops into Baku, Gorbachev had expressed hope that the move would induce unity and quiet the ethnic violence between Azerbaijanis and Armenians.

But one immediate effect has been to galvanize the Azerbaijanis against Moscow and to present Soviet citizens outside the troubled area with gruesome accounts of the Soviet Army and its opponents in action domestically, shown tonight on Soviet television anchorman with special effects that simulated streams of blood running down the television screen.

"Not even catastrophes like Chernobyl can be compared with what is happening right now between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the Transcaucasus," the Soviet television anchorman told national viewers on the evening news.

"We are really passing through extremely trying times, of a kind that we have probably not experienced since World War II," he said.

Political resistance to Gorbachev's first large-scale use of military force was unabated, and several major challenges to Moscow were announced by local militants.

Two Russian photographers who were in Baku Saturday estimated that hundreds had died in the fighting. One of the photographers told Western reporters here that Soviet soldiers fired at almost anything that moved in the early hours of their occupation.

Foreign journalists continue to be barred from traveling to Azerbaijan by orders from Moscow.

Tass reported that the provincial government declared a three day mourning period for those killed and that black flags of mourning had been hoisted on many private houses in Baku in a show of popular feeling.

The Associated Press, quoting an Azerbaijani social democratic activist, said local military cadets fired on Soviet army troops at Baku's garrison and military academy and continued to exchange fire for 20 minutes.

Moscow newspapers reported that leaflets signed by Lt. Gen. Valentin Dubinyak, who was identified as the Soviet military commander in Baku, were dropped into the city by army helicopters, announcing an 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew.

The leaflets also declared that troops have authority to detain anyone for up to 30 days for violating emergency regulations and that soldiers have been authorized to fire on anyone suspected of threatening the troops with weapons.

Tass said Dubinyak addressed city residents, declaring that the principal purpose of the military occupation "to curb crime and extremism." He added, "Our task is to ensure the integrity and independence of Azerbaijan."

The military occupation of Baku posed a difficult problem for neighboring Iran, which has been inclined to take the side of the Azerbaijanis but which also values its recently improved relationship with the government in Moscow.

The Tehran Times newspaper, reputed to be close to Iran's leadership, criticized the military action and said that "something sounds fishy" about the outbreak of ethnic clashes that led to the state of emergency. The newspaper urged that a top-level meeting be held between Iranian and Soviet officials to discuss the crisis.

The Washington Post. January 22, 1990

MOSCOW ARRESTS AZERBAIJAN REBELS

Warships and Tanks Smash
Blockade of Baku Harbor

By **BILL KELLER**

Special to The New York Times

MOSCOW, Jan. 24 — Soviet troops arrested dozens of insurgents and outlawed "illegally functioning organizations" in defiant Azerbaijan today in a selective crackdown aimed at consolidating the Kremlin's hold on the republic, the authorities and residents said.

The authorities also broke a blockade of Baku harbor with what one witness described as a 40 – minute bombardment by warships, tanks and artillery.

Residents, of Baku, the Azerbaijani capital, said a general strike had brought the city's industries including its offshore drilling rigs and critical oil equipment factories, to a standstill, despite a military order to return to work.

12,000 Evacuated From Baku

The official press agency, Tass, said the military reported that it had evacuated about 12,000 members of the families of army; K.G.B. and interior troops in the face of attack and threats that, officials claimed, were assuming an increasingly anti-Russian character

"Events are taking on the shape of a guerrilla war," the Government newspaper Izvestia said tonight. People drive around the city on motorcycles at night, attacking military foot patrols and then vanishing. Cans, of gasoline are thrown onto armored personnel carriers that are transporting the army."

Threats to Russians

Azerbaijani Popular Front leaders said the threat to Russians was being exaggerated to justify the troops presence.

The chief Foreign Ministry spokesman, Gennadi L Gerasimov, today rejected suggestions that the upheaval in Azerbaijan posed a threat to President Mikhail Gorbachev.

"There is no alternative" to the current leadership, he said in English to reporters who surrounded him after a news briefing. "There are no alternative leaders. There are no alternative policies".

The occupation of Azerbaijan by an undisclosed number of army, K.G.B. and Interior Ministry troops has preoccupied the Soviet leadership at a time when Mr. Gorbachev was supposed to be preparing the Communist Party for a congress this autumn that many expect will decisively test his control of the visibly disintegrating party.

Session Is Postponed

A meeting of the party's governing Central Committee, called to hear Mr. Gorbachev's latest program, was postponed for a week, until Feb. 5 and 6. The delay prompted speculation that the Azerbaijan disorders had emboldened hard liners who attribute the unrest to the Soviet leader relaxation of central authority.

Mr. Gorbachev said the military intervention was necessary to stop anti Armenian violence in Baku and to prevent the Popular Front from seizing power by force.

The Official death toll in Baku since Saturday stood today at 99, not counting those killed in Armenian-Azerbaijani skirmishes elsewhere in the republic and along the frontier with neighboring Armenia. Azerbaijanis contend the figure is much higher.

The Azerbaijani Parliament has demanded prompt withdrawal of the troops and dangled a threat of secession. The Soviet troops have also met with defiance from a sullen populace that has embraced the Popular Front with the devotion usually accorded to a religious cult.

43 Arrested in Raids

General Vladimir Dubinyak, the Baku military commandant, said 43 people were arrested in overnight raids on the headquarters of unidentified "Illegally functioning organizations."

Popular Front leaders and other Baku residents reached by telephone today said arrests had come in a sweep of district offices of the front and its paramilitary offshoot, the National Defense Council. Front members charged that troops smashed the group's offices, took files and cut telephone lines.

Top leaders of the front, however, were reportedly allowed to remain at large, and General Dubinyak even went on Baku radio to deny rumors of a crackdown on the Popular Front.

Some Go Into Hiding

On Saturday, when he sent in the troops, Mr. Gorbachev denounced the front leaders as "extremists", but since then Moscow has taken pains to avoid blanket criticism of the group, apparently in appreciation of its popularity in Azerbaijan.

Some front leaders changed apartments. In anticipation of arrest, but others were still answering their telephones today.

Baku was city without newspapers or television and the radio broadcasts consisted of music, military proclamations, and appeals for calm from Muslim mullahs and Russian Orthodox churchmen, according to residents.

The Government continued to provide only sketchy information about the situation in Baku, and Western correspondents have been barred from the republic.

Azerbaijanis reported on Tuesday that a fleet of some 50 oil and gas company vessels and tankers was idled in Baku harbor, the captains threatening to blow up their vessels unless the troops withdrew from the city.

Reopening of Harbor

If true, the threats were not carried out, and today the authorities said they had reopened the harbor.

Yusif Samedoglu, a poet and leader of the Popular Front, said he watched the action from the 10th floor of the seaside Hotel "Azerbaijan".

Mr. Samedoglu said that some of the civilian vessels appeared to have been hit by the military barrage, but that he could not tell for certain through the smoke whether any were sun.

Makhmud Ismailov, an Azerbaijani historian and Popular Front member said that the bay is visible from his apartment window and that he saw no signs of a large scale clash.

The only official information on the exchange came in a Tass report today that said the "blockade of Baku Bay has been lifted".

Mr. Gerasimov said that the Soviet Army had reestablished full control over the Soviet-Iranian border.

In mostly Christian Armenia, the capital city, Yerevan, was reported quiet except for continued efforts by Armenians to arm themselves.

Tass said a tank, two 76-millimeter guns, and an anti-aircraft gun were stolen from the World War II memorial museum in Yerevan, along with two mortars and two machine guns.

The New York Times. January 25, 1990

SOVIETS SHELL BLOCKADING BAKU SHIPS

*Army Shuts Offices
Of Azerbaijani Front,
Arrests 50 Activists*

By Michael Dobbs
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, Jan. 24 — Soviet troops tonight bombarded merchant ships that have been blockading Baku's harbor for the past four days to protest the imposition of military rule on the Azerbaijani capital, residents reported.

The attack on the ships anchored at the harbor's entrance was the most dramatic, confrontation in Baku since Soviet tanks and armored vehicles shot their way into the center of the city Saturday morning. The official Soviet news agency Tass later reported tersely that the blockade, "had been lifted."

A correspondent for state television reported an "exchange of fire" in the harbor after nationalist activists aboard the tankers shot at a passenger terminal. About 50 vessels, including oil tankers had been blockading the harbor's entrance to prevent Soviet navy ships from heading out to the Caspian Sea.

Rumors circulated in Baku that the navy ships contained bodies of people killed during the army take over of the city, but this has angrily been denied by military authorities. Tass said tonight that independent public figures had been allowed to board the ships to disprove the allegations.

Earlier today, the army closed down the Baku headquarters of the Azerbaijani Popular Front, which has been leading resistance to military rule, and arrested more than 50 nationalist activists. About 15,000 members of servicemen's families have now been evacuated from the Azerbaijani capital in air force planes and a convoy of armored vehicles. Tass reported.

According to official figures, about 100 people have been killed since the imposition of the state of emergency in Baku last weekend. Popular front activists claim that the real figure is several times higher and that many are still missing.

A Popular Front leader, Yusif Samedoglu, told the Renter news agency that he thought several vessels had sunk in Baku harbor as a result of the 40-minute bombardment by tank guns, artillery and heavy machine guns. He said he saw flashes from some of the ships, indicating that they had been hit, while others retreated into the open sea.

The Communist youth paper Komsomolskaya Pravda reported this morning that the tanker captains had visited Chairman of the Azerbaijani Parliament's Elmira Kafarova. Tuesday evening renewing threat to blow up their ships unless Soviet troops were withdrawn immediately. Kafarova, who earlier had condemned the military takeover of Baku pleaded with them not to make hasty decisions.

The continuing protests in Baku four days after Soviet troops entered the city to enforce a state of emergency have confronted President Mikhail Gorbachev with the most serious crisis of his political career. But Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov rejected suggestions that Gorbachev is in danger of being ousted by hard-liners opposed to his *perestroika* reform program.

"There is no alternative to it. There are no alternative leaders. There are no alternative policies," Gerasimov told reporters in English after a regular daily news briefing.

No senior Soviet leader has made any public comment on the crisis since Saturday evening, when Gorbachev made a nationally televised appeal for unity and national reconciliation. A meeting of the Communist Party's policy making Central Committee that had been scheduled for Monday has been postponed for a week to allow passions to cool.

According to Tass, a total of 53 people were arrested overnight in Baku under emergency regulations that allow the army to hold suspected troublemakers for 30 days without trial. Tass said 57 others were detained for violating the 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew.

Tass said that the military arm of the Azerbaijani Popular Front which calls itself the National Defense Council, had been banned by the military commander of Baku, Lt. Gen. Vladimir Dubinyak. It said that the headquarters of illegally functioning informal organizations had been "neutralized" and "copying machines and propaganda facilities.....confiscated."

Most of those arrested appear to be relatively low level activists. In a telephone interview from Baku, the editor of the Popular Front's newspaper. Najaf Najafov, said that none of the movement's 14-man governing board had been arrested.

For the second time in three days, Soviet television described the Popular Front as enjoying widespread popular support, depicting it as an essential partner in any negotiated settlement. So far, how ever, there are no signs of talks beginning between the front's leaders and officials in Moscow.

Azerbaijan's Communist Party leaders began an emergency session tonight to choose a successor to the former party chief, Abdul-Rahman Vezirov, who was dismissed shortly after the state of emergency was imposed. Vezirov, who is reportedly in a Moscow hospital reserved for Kremlin officials, has been expelled by his local party.

According to some accounts, the leading conservative in the Soviet party Politburo, Yegor Ligachev, attending the Azerbaijani Central Committee session as the Kremlin's representative. The meeting began after the start of the nighttime curfew to forestall demonstrations, local residents said.

The Azerbaijani Communist Party is in disarray, with tens of thousands of members quitting in disgust since the army short its way into Baku early Saturday morning. Many have burned their party cards during demonstrations in Baku and other Azerbaijani cities.

A general strike declared by the Popular Front continued for the third day today, despite a military ban on all strikes and protests. Residents said that city transport and factories closed down almost completely. Newspapers refused to publish in protest against censorship.

In report from Baku, a correspondent for the government newspaper Izvestia said, that guerrilla fighters are using motorcycles to harass soldiers at night. He also reported that some nationalists were throwing molotov cocktails from windows at armored personnel carriers and military patrols.

"It's a lie," said Najafov, the Popular Front official. "Armed soldiers occupy every street corner and anybody who drove through the city at night on a motorcycle would be shot. These stories are being invented in order to justify the presence of troops in Baku."

Tass said that talks between Azerbaijan and neighboring Armenia on ending border clashes broke down today after representatives of the Azerbaijani autonomous province of Nakhichevan, which declared its independence Saturday, walked out.

The Washington Post. January 25, 1990

BLACK JANUARY: THE BLOODY BIRTH OF THE AZERBAIJANI NATION

Salakhadin Ragimov, 41, came to Martyr's Lane Wednesday as he has every year to pay his respects to victims of "Black January," Azerbaijan's anniversary of a bloody Soviet crackdown in 1990.

Clutching some red carnations in one hand and his young son in the other, he filed past the black granite gravestones of the victims buried here, the most hallowed spot on Azerbaijani soil.

"I come here to see those who died for our freedom," Ragimov says as he deposited the flowers at one of the headstones before heading for the exit with some of the thousands of others who came to honour the dead.

"And I bring him here to show him who our enemies are - the Soviet army," he says, nodding to his 10-year-old son. "This is a day of mourning for the entire Azerbaijani people."

Nine years after Soviet forces rolled into the capital under orders to put down anti-Armenian riots ignited by the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh, the anniversary has not lost any of its emotion for the nation.

Close to 200 were reportedly killed and hundreds more injured as troops opened fire on civilians and crushed others under their tank treads. Some officials claim the number of victims was actually much higher.

Some Azerbaijanis contend that the anti-Armenian pogroms were in fact Moscow-organized, in order to give the Soviet army a pretext to enter the capital and suppress the local Popular Front independence movement.

However, the crackdown actually helped the independence movement gain in strength and contributed to the breakup of the Soviet Union. Hundreds of thousands of Armenians also fled the country after the January 1990 events.

Although the true facts surrounding January 20 may never be known, the day has acquired a meaning beyond merely remembering the dead, representing now the country's common sacrifice in its struggle for independence.

Black January is now the solemnest date on the country's national calendar. All businesses and restaurants are closed, street vendors are barred for the day and music cannot be played in public.

All foreign television channels are blocked, leaving only the two government stations, which show continual scenes from the Martyrs Lane cemetery along with commentary on the seriousness of the occasion.

"The January 20 events played a decisive role in awakening the national consciousness," one television commentator intoned, while the thousand-fold crowd marched past in the background.

"It was the final attack from imperial Russia to try to preserve its position," he continued. "It was the fight between communism and anti-communism, democracy and totalitarianism."

Other observers see Black January as the event, which helped unify the country and create a national identity, where previously none had existed.

"If you walk through Martyr's Lane, you see gravestones from all ethnic groups and religions - Azeris, Jews, Christians, Russians, etc.," said Thomas Goltz, an expert on the region and author of "Azerbaijan Diary."

"Like so many states created in the 20th century, Azerbaijan was born from the emotional trauma of blood and violence," he continued. "January 20 unified the country in its grief and helped create a nation."

Indeed, Black January can be seen as a day of national reconciliation, where the country's bitter political divisions are forgotten for the moment and all unite in a common past and against a common enemy.

Leading figures from the government and opposition took their turn in paying their respects to the dead and laying wreaths at an eternal flame overlooking the panorama of Baku's bay.

"This is a great day, and the positive in it is much greater than the negative," said Tofik Gasymov, foreign minister under the former Popular Front government and an arch opponent to President Heydar Aliyev.

"This is an event for the entire country, when there are no differences between the opposition and the government," he continued. "Today we are all the sons of one nation."

By: David Stern, Baku, Jan 20, 1999

Agence France Presse. January 20, 1999

TRAGEDY OF JANUARY 20 REMEMBER

Azerbaijan commemorates 1990 tragedy.

Islamabad - The People of the Azerbaijan Republic on January 20, Wednesday, commemorated victims of "Black January" - the most tragic event in the modern history of Azerbaijan, when the Soviet army occupied Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, at midnight of January, 20, 1990. Hundreds of innocent unarmed people were shot that day on streets of Baku, and other cities of Azerbaijan and more than 700 were wounded, says a press release issued by the Azerbaijan embassy here.

The cruel use of force by the Soviet army units in Azerbaijan on the order of Mikhail Gorbachyev was another manifestation of the policy of intimidation pursued earlier in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Georgia and Lithuania. Under the protest of restoring constitutional order unprecedented bloody attack was aimed at crushing opposition movement in Azerbaijan's bid for independence and preventing the dissolution of the communist regime.

In the autumn of 1989, the national independent movement had reached an incredible moment when hundreds of thousands of people demonstrating for the ideals of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Black January became a turning point in the history of Azerbaijan.

Commemoration ceremonies were all over the country and flags were flying half-mass in cities and rural areas. A ceremony of mourning for the victims of 1990 was held in Shahidlar Hiyabani (Martyrs Cemetery) in Baku.

"The Pakistan Observer". January 22, 1999

AZERIS REMEMBER BAKU KILLINGS

Azerbaijan has been commemorating the tenth anniversary of the violence which broke out in the capital, Baku, when Soviet troops were sent in to suppress independence demonstrations and quell ethnic unrest during the final years of the Soviet Union.

More than one hundred and thirty people were killed and about seven hundred injured.

The victims included a number of women and teenagers.

Correspondents say the intervention gave a huge impetus to the independence movement in Azerbaijan and caused a deep mistrust of Russia which is still felt today. President Aliyev led a special memorial service at the cemetery where the victims are buried and commemorative events are being held in Baku throughout the day.

BBC. January 20, 2000

INVASION OF BAKU BY SOVIET TROOPS AND KILLING OF INNOCENT CIVILIANS JAN. 20 1990

<http://www.alwatandaily.com/default.aspx>

At midnight on the eve of Jan. 20, 1990, Soviet troops attacked Baku from all directions, including the sea in an ultimately failed attempt to save Communist rule and put down Azerbaijan's national independence struggle. It was an unprecedented attack by Soviet troops on unarmed citizens in Soviet Azerbaijan and it sent shockwaves throughout the republic

There had been earlier attacks in other Soviet Republics but never on the scale that took place in Azerbaijan. In Baku, under the pretext of "restoring order to the city," the Soviet army entered the city brutally attempting to squelch the independence movement that was gaining momentum. They mowed down everything in sight with their tanks and submachine guns.

The military operation called "Udar" (Strike) against anti-Soviet, pro-democracy and pro-independence movement in Azerbaijan was carried out pursuant to a state of emergency declared by the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium, signed by President Gorbachev and disclosed to the Azerbaijani public only after more than 130 citizens lay dead in the streets or 700 more wounded.

Mikhail Gorbachev's order on use of force in Baku against the innocent civilians was nothing but a desperate attempt to stop dissolution of Communist ruling in Azerbaijan.

It is quite ironical and paradoxical that Mikhail Gorbachev, President of the USSR admired in the West as a "democrat" and "peace lover" and nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize "for his leading role in the peace process" in October 1990 was personally responsible for this tragedy and killing of the innocent people.

The Nobel Peace laureate Mikhail Gorbachev defended the invasion by citing the supposedly imminent danger of Islamic fundamentalism in Azerbaijan. Other officials used tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan as a pretext for the occupation.

But Soviet Defense Minister Dmitry Yazov was more honest. "We came to prevent the de facto takeover of the Azerbaijani government by the non-communist opposition, to prevent their victory in upcoming free elections (scheduled for March, 1990), to destroy them as a political force, and to ensure that the Communist government remained in power" he said.

Human Rights Watch report, entitled "Black January in Azerbaijan", states: "Indeed, the violence used by the Soviet Army on the night of Jan. 19-20 was so out of proportion to the resistance offered by Azerbaijanis as to constitute an exercise in collective punishment. Since Soviet officials have stated publicly that the purpose of the intervention of Soviet troops was to prevent the ouster of the Communist-dominated government of the Republic of Azerbaijan by the nationalist-minded, noncommunist opposition, the punishment inflicted on Baku by Soviet soldiers may have been intended as a warning to nationalists, not only in Azerbaijan, but in the other Republics of the Soviet Union."

The invasion did not turn out as the Soviet leadership intended. Black January was a turning point in the history of Azerbaijan. The Red Army killed the last shreds of hope among Azerbaijanis that the Soviet Union could somehow be reformed and preserved.

Every bullet that was fired splattered blood across the face of the Soviet Empire, undermining the ideals of communism. Those tanks, armored vehicles, automatic rifles and bullets were supposed to have scared the nation into giving up its dream for independence. But instead, the Azerbaijani people became more determined than ever to pursue its independence.

On Oct. 18, 1991 at its historic session, Supreme Council of the Republic of Azerbaijan unanimously adopted the Constitutional Act "On the State Independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan". This decision was followed by the nationwide voting in the Republic of Azerbaijan on Dec. 29, 1991. The ballots of this referendum have reflected the only question: "Are you for the Constitutional Act on the State Independence of

the Republic of Azerbaijan"? The people of Azerbaijan have unanimously voted for the renewal of State Independence.

Following the "Black January" atrocities, aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan and occupation of its 20 percent territories, and political-economic hardships inherent to the early days of independence, could not fade the determination of the Azerbaijani people to build a democratic, independent and prosperous country.

Today Azerbaijan is a dynamically developing country with an unprecedented economic growth. Consistent democratic and economic reforms, good governance and effective management have made Azerbaijan a regional leader and reliable partner in international relations.

Every year on Jan. 20, the Azerbaijani people visit "The Alley of Martyrs" to pay their tribute to all those who sacrificed their lives for the independence, freedom and prosperous development of the country.

By: Ambassador Shahin Abdullayev

"Kuwait Times". 18 January, 2010

BLACK JANUARY - CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY

By Sara Rajabova

23 years have passed since the January events of 1990 which went down in the history of Azerbaijan as Black January. Azerbaijani people still remember the tragic day of January 20 as if it happened yesterday.

Hundreds of civilians were crushed or injured by the Soviet troops in Baku on January 20, 1990, on an order from the USSR leadership that was trying to maintain the Communist regime in Azerbaijan and strangle the national liberation movement.

Every year Black January victims are commemorated with great sorrow not only by the people in Azerbaijan, but also Azerbaijanis throughout the world.

This year, the 23rd anniversary of the nationwide tragedy will be marked in many countries of the world. According to the State Committee on Work with Diaspora, a number of events will take place on this occasion in the United States, Canada, Australia, Turkey, Russia, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and other countries.

Conferences, roundtables and seminars will be organized in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg and other cities of Russia with participation of the regional department of Azerbaijani Youth Organization of Russia, the All-Russian Azerbaijani Congress and other diaspora organizations. At the same time, the newspaper Azerbaijani Congress and other media will publish articles dedicated to the January 20 tragedy.

Azerbaijanis living in countries throughout Europe will also hold a variety of events dedicated to the January 20 anniversary. The Co-ordination Center of Azerbaijanis in Germany, Azerbaijan House, Caspian Hanover Society and Alm.az Society will conduct a number of events.

The Day of National Condolence will take place in Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Kocaeli, Adana, Antalya, Edirne and other cities of Turkey with the support of diaspora organizations.

The nationwide tragedy will also be commemorated in the United States with assistance of the U.S.-Azerbaijan Chamber of Commerce, Azerbaijan Association of New York and other diaspora organizations.

Besides, earlier in January, U.S. Azeris Network (USAN) launched an annual campaign on informing the American public about the events which took place in Baku on January 20, 1990.

Through USAN's letter campaign, members of Azerbaijani- American community inform the American people on the issue and call on their legislators to pass decisions for official commemoration of the victims of January 20 by the government of the United States.

In the last two years, USAN has achieved two official resolutions on Black January from the legislatures of Texas and New York.

The 70-year Soviet oppression against Azerbaijan culminated with the bloody tragedy on January 20, 1990. Late at night 26.000 Soviet special forces called "Alfa", without declaring a state of emergency, entered Baku and committed atrocities against the innocent Azerbaijani people. The invasion was launched at midnight and was committed with brutality; even children, women and the elderly were not spared.

In total, as a result of the intrusion of troops into Baku and regions of the republic 133 people were killed, 611 wounded, 841 illegally arrested and five went missing.

Though the Azerbaijani people suffered military, moral and political aggression, they displayed their ability to maintain the traditions of historical heroism and resist the cruelest attacks for the sake of the freedom and independence of their motherland, even at the cost of losing their lives. The sons of the motherland perished on January 20, 1990 while defending the freedom and independence of Azerbaijan and with their bravery made history in the chronicles of heroism of our country.

Subsequently, Azerbaijan declared independence on October 18, 1991. And today the Azerbaijanis are proud of those who are ready to perish for the sake of their people's national identity.

Under the decrees of the President of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev dated December 16, 1999, all the victims of the crackdown were awarded the title "Martyrs of January 20."

"Azernews".-2013.-18-22 January.-№4.-P.1.

Crisis-hit Russia and three South Caucasus musketeers

By Mushvig Mehdiyev

Relations between Russia and three South Caucasus countries – Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia – have always had their ups and downs, as politics tends to do, resulting in uneasiness in the region.

Russia is going through a tough period as a result of Western-applied sanctions, that along with the falling price of oil and the depreciating ruble, risks seeing Russia's woes travel south into the Caucasus.

If that were to occur one might well ask what impact will Russia's failing economy have on Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia? How will it further take its toll on the South Caucasus countries to the point where they would start reconsidering their relations with the northern giant?

Let's first take a brief tour to the root of the challenge facing the world's largest country. The Ukrainian crisis made Russia discern the first glimpses of the trouble waiting ahead when the Western forces – Europe and U.S. – blamed it for escalating tensions in Ukraine during the Maidan unrest. Russian authorities then rebuffed all accusations, saying it was just trying to help Russians living in Ukraine.

Further actions by Russia revealed its active involvement in the events in Ukraine as it annexed the Crimea peninsula in March, 2014, prompting accusations from the West and the introduction of sanctions.

Given that a large number of Ukrainians aspire to integrate Europe politically, Russia's intervention was labeled as an act of aggression and Western forces vowed to back Ukraine. This does not seem to have influenced Russia who is still reportedly involved in military hostilities in eastern Ukraine, where it is backing the separatist forces, according to the West's allegations. More than 1.7 million children in conflict-torn areas of eastern Ukraine face an extremely serious situation amid conflict and winter cold, according to UNICEF.

Although Russian President Vladimir Putin called the ongoing hardship in his country an "unfavorable scenario" rather than accepting it as a crisis, Moscow is trying to prevent the ruble turmoil from turning into an economic catastrophe, and finds itself more isolated than at any period over last 25 years.

The most recent exchange rate of the ruble against the US dollar is 57 rubles for one dollar. In addition to Western sanctions, the ruble's overwhelming depreciation is reportedly linked to the global depreciation in oil prices, which is a serious blow on Russia's oil-oriented economy.

What should Azerbaijan expect from the Russian crisis? Azerbaijan's relations with Russia has always cordial and at a relatively constant and at a high-level.

Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan refused to join the Russia-lead Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), explaining it with its preference to an independent course in political and economic policies in the region, rather than bearing certain compulsory responsibilities within a union. Positive feedback of that decision by the Azerbaijani authorities was reflected in the International Monetary Fund report about the impact of the Russian crisis on its neighboring countries. The IMF claimed that Azerbaijan's economy will be among those to have less and even intangible consequences of the crisis in Russia.

"Both Europe and Russia are our good partners and neighbors, and we cooperate with either side based on our national interests," said Ali Hasanov, Head of Public and Political Department of the Presidential Administration.

Hasanov noted that Azerbaijan sees Russia as a great player in the region. He said Azerbaijan was not making a choice between Russia and Europe.

Last August Russia announced it was closing its markets to European products in retaliation to the "punishing" sanctions from the West. Preventing Western food products from entering its markets, Russia started to trust on more active involvement of its eastern partners by increasing their export to Russian markets.

Azerbaijan is seen as one of the main exporters who can fill part of the void in the Russian market after Moscow in a retaliatory move banned European products. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has even said the fruits imported from Azerbaijan were much more tasty and high-quality than the fruits brought from Europe.

Meanwhile, Azerbaijani officials are confident that the Russian slowdown will not affect their economy given the stability of the national currency, the manat. Indeed, President Aliyev has recently said the fall in oil prices would not affect the country's economy, due to stable rate of the national currency the manat based on strong economic basis and well-thought economic policy.

In a nutshell, Azerbaijan's political and economic skills were not seriously affected by the deepening crisis in Russia, so far. Moreover, the "evil days" in the northern giant could not threaten Azerbaijan to turn away from its neighbor and leave it alone in the region.

Georgia

But if relations between Baku and Moscow are cordial the same cannot be said about Moscow and Tbilisi, who fought a brief, but bloody war in August 2008, when Russia recognized the independence of Georgia's breakaway South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions, causing a serious uproar among Georgian authorities to cut diplomatic ties with Moscow.

Economic relations between the countries worsened in 2006, when Russia banned the importation of Georgian wines, mineral water and agricultural products, claiming low quality of such goods. The measure, which Georgia described as politically motivated, came as ties between the two former Soviet nations soured with the rise to power of pro-Western Georgian leader Mikheil Saakashvili.

Russian-Georgian relations improved after the Georgian Dream Team took power in 2012. This was characterized by Moscow's conciliatory gestures towards Georgia, including the opening of the Russian market to Georgian goods in 2013, resumption of direct flights, Tbilisi's great willingness to contacts with Russia and its consideration of Russia's some interests. This did not affect Russia's overall priority for Georgia. Russia signed a versatile treaty with the breakaway Abkhazia region in November to provide a multi-sided assistance to the separatist regime, once more deteriorating the releted relations of the two countries. Grigory Karasin, Russia's Special Envoy for Georgian Issues, said the agreement with Abkhazia was Russia's respond to Georgia's strong aspiration for European integration.

Political negotiations between Russia and Georgia are being held by special representatives Grigory Karasin and Zurab Abashidze under the Geneva Format of Talks, a coordinated negotiation framework to soften the Russia-Georgia relations escalated after August 2008 war.

Georgia as a neighbor of Russia also has some predictions in regard to the economic slowdown in Russia. First of all, as a small country, it expects a smaller impact caused by Russia's troubling economy compared to Germany, France and Italy, whose trade balance with Russia amounts to tens of billions of dollars. Russia is the fourth major trade partner of Georgia and the third main export market, particularly for wine and mineral water.

If the Russian economy suffers from a sharp decline, the solvency of Russian population will simultaneously drop to affect Georgia's export potential, Georgian economic analysts worry. Moreover, there are hundreds of Georgian citizens who work in Russia and send money to their families. Soso Archvadze, an economic analyst, claims that the deepening economic crisis in Russia threatens Georgian migrants with a possible loss of jobs. Reduction in their income will seriously affect money transfers to Georgia, which make up almost 60 percent of overall remittances to the post Soviet country.

"Money transfers share one third of the Georgian residents' revenues and roughly 14-15 percent of GDP. Nearly 60 percent of the total money inflow comes from Russia. Therefore, Georgia should make a very serious analysis and shift its focus to Asian markets. China, for example, is a very attractive wine market due to its huge population," Archvadze said.

Georgia's national currency the lari faced a decline in its value in recent days, which is reportedly linked to the Russian ruble's devaluation. Nevertheless, Georgia is not threatened by financial hassle given the sustainable support from the Western forces. Now, the government is developing fundamental plans to build firm relations with the European Union and NATO, accepting the west as a best roof over its head amid aggressive Russian policy in the region. The European Union ratified the Association Agreement with Georgia on December 18, 2014, to push the post Soviet nation a step closer inside Europe.

Armenia

Armenia is most likely the main country to feel the fallout of the Russian crisis.

It is a member of the Russia-lead Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union, having irreversible obligations under the common rules of the alliances. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Armenia should resist the Western sanctions along with Russia in any necessary circumstance.

Russian-Armenian political relations date back to very old times, as Russia has always been accepted as the main strategic ally and "big brother" of Armenia, reviewing South Caucasus nation's each step in regional and even international policy.

In return to Armenia's long-lasting loyalty, Russia, as a chief protector, pledges to ensure the South Caucasus country's security (under the CSTO membership terms) and welfare (under the EEU membership terms) in the region.

Russia is also an important regional player for Armenia in regard to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Amid its regular decentralization on the peaceful resolution to the protracted conflict, Russia is a key power to urge the South Caucasus country to stay committed to the peaceful negotiations, since any turmoil in the region is a threat to the northern giant's interests. Also, Russia is playing a dual role in the region to keep the balance in military skills of Armenia and Azerbaijan by selling weapons to the belligerents. But, anyway, a peaceful end to the conflict is one of the key issues in regional policy of Russia, a co-chair country of the OSCE Minsk Group, and Armenia obeys Russia's instructions in regard to the Karabakh knot.

Any tremor in Russia's economy means an earthquake in the economy of Armenia – this may be the best saying to express the mutual economic ties of the two former Soviet nations. Russia is the top destination for Armenian-made products, since nearly 85 percent of the overall exportations are directed to Russia. Dependence on Russian markets paralyzes Armenia's economy on the background of the modern crisis hitting the northern giant. Weakening purchasing power in Russia, which is a clear result of the crisis, inflicts painful blows on the Armenian export.

"An unpleasant causal chain started in the Russian markets simultaneously with the ruble's fall. Drop in purchasing power in Russia decreased orders from Armenia," said Vaahn Mkrtychyan, Co-owner of the Armenian Wine Company, while Avag Harutunyan, Head of Armenian Winemakers Union, revealed a \$86,000 daily loss of the Armenian winemakers in Russia given the financial tussle.

Over 2.2 million Armenians live in Russia today, according to the Armenian Diaspora's data. Many of them are labor migrants, who left Armenia to earn their life and provide for their family living in the native land. The money transfers from migrant workers in Russia take a considerable share in the South Caucasus country's income, making up nearly 84 percent of the overall private remittances and 15.4 percent or \$1.6 billion of Armenia's Gross Domestic Product, the Central Bank revealed.

The bank announced that the total transfers made by Armenian migrant workers in Russia was nearly \$146 million this year, which testifies to a sharp fall by \$11 million compared to the last year. Just in October, the remittances from Russia has dropped by 20 percent.

Current dethronement of the Armenian dram started all while the Russian ruble began to slide to an all-time low following the isolating sanctions by the Western forces. Experts claim that Armenia's tightening relations with Russia, amid the partnership within the Eurasian Economic Union, show green light for future challenges in its economy if Russia fails to tackle the deepening economic hassle facing it. Economic experts believe that the prices in the Armenian markets have taken a sharp rise this year ahead of the New Year holiday season compared to the previous years, linking it to the dram and ruble devaluation, as well as the dollar's significant appreciation in the global market.

President Vladimir Putin promised to overcome the "unfavorable scenario" in two years, maybe less. Amid the ongoing developments the three South Caucasus nations will have to take the best stand not to sink their ships in a battle of big powers.

The article was first published at Eurasiareview.com.

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Black January, day of mourning, national pride

By Amina Nazarli

Twenty five years have passed since the January events of 1990 which has been written with black blood in the history of Azerbaijan.

The collective punishment of people aspiring to gain independence from the Soviet empire after 70 years of subordination was brutal and unprecedented.

Thousands of people were marching on the central square (now Azadliq or Freedom Square) and on the streets of Baku to struggle for the ideals of freedom, independence and sovereignty to preserve the nation's territorial integrity.

During an operation which began from January 19th night and continued into January 20th, 26,000 hostile and aggressive-minded Soviet special forces called "Alfa" entered Baku and committed atrocities against the Azerbaijani people. They stormed and murdered hundreds of civilians without declaring a state of emergency.

They also began to open fire on protesters crushing many of them with tanks, and arrested hundreds more for imprisonment and torture. The invasion was launched at midnight. It was committed with brutality. Even children, women and the elderly were targeted.

Though the final death toll is still disputed to this day, at least 130 people died from wounds received during the subsequent violent confrontations. A vast majority of the casualties were civilians, with over 700 of them wounded.

Baku residents with indomitable and unwavering will to freedom marched through the main streets of the city under the muzzles of guns to bury the dead. The country stood still for 40 days, mourning the victims, and protesting the bloody suppression.

The tragic event marked a turning point in the history of Azerbaijan's independence from the Soviet Union and revealed the strong determination of the people to build their own independent country.

The day went into the history as the Day of Remembrance of the totalitarian regime victims. The people of Azerbaijan commemorate the victims every year, laying fresh flowers at a memorial at the Alley of Martyrs on January 20.

Mourning for the martyrs, Azerbaijanis at the same time are proud of those who sacrificed themselves for the independence of their homeland. With their blood, they entered the heroic, glorious page of the history of Azerbaijan.

Use of force in Baku reflected a desperate attempt of the former Soviet leaders to stop the dissolution of Communist rule in Azerbaijan. The Soviet Army had been sent to do everything in their power to keep Azerbaijan under the thumb of the government in Moscow. Their efforts proved useless, because just 20 months later, on October 18, 1991, the Azerbaijan parliament declared their independence.

A report by Human Rights Watch titled "'Black January in Azerbaijan" states: "Among the most heinous violations of human rights during the Baku incursion were the numerous attacks on medical personnel, ambulances and even hospitals."

"The report concluded that: "'Indeed the violence used by the Soviet Army on the night of January 19-20...constitutes an exercise in collective punishment... The punishment inflicted on Baku by Soviet soldiers may have been intended as a warning to nationalists, not only in Azerbaijan, but in other Republics of the Soviet Union."

Azernews.-2016.- January 20.-№5.-P. 2.

US Medium online media platform publishes article on Black January tragedy

The US-based Medium online media platform has published an article by Azerbaijan's Consul General in Los Angeles Nasimi Aghayev on Black January tragedy.

In the article, the Consul General states that 31 years ago, on January 20, 1990, 26,000 Soviet troops invaded Azerbaijan's capital city of Baku and brutally massacred Azerbaijani civilians, including women, children and the elderly.

Highlighting the preceding events, he notes: "In 1987, anti-Azerbaijani pogroms broke out in Armenia. Armenian mobs, supported by officials in Yerevan, attacked Azerbaijani-populated villages, killing hundreds of innocent civilians". Aghayev mentions that following these pogroms, over 250,000 Azerbaijanis were forced to flee their ancestral homes in Armenia, becoming refugees in Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, Armenia raised groundless territorial claims against Azerbaijan, "launching a wave of violence that would result in a painful war between the two nations."

Consul General Aghayev underlines that all these injustices, backed by pro-Armenian Soviet leadership in Moscow, caused public outrage and led to mass protests in Baku, which soon turned into a national freedom movement. Aghayev notes that "this powerful movement for freedom was recognized by Newsweek, which used a photo of one of the demonstrations in Baku as a cover for its December 1989 issue titled "Standing Up for Freedom. PEOPLE OF THE YEAR".

"The movement made the Soviet leadership tremendously nervous. By invading Baku and killing peaceful demonstrators they wanted to instill terror in any nation that dared to challenge the hopeless grip of Soviet tyranny." He mentions that despite the curfew, "over 1 million Azerbaijanis took to the streets of Baku, literally flooding them, to demonstrate as a bold collective against the insanity of terror and tyranny and to honor and mourn the victims of the bloodshed. Muslim, Jewish and Christian faith leaders held public prayers together, as a message of our shared faith, hope, and the indomitability of our values," the Consul General notes.

Nasimi Aghayev mentions that Azerbaijan's national leader Heydar Aliyev visited the Azerbaijan SSR's office in Moscow and fiercely denounced the massacre. He writes that Heydar Aliyev's "defiance helped to inspire the Azerbaijani people and Aliyev became a leader of the struggle for liberty."

The Consul General states that Soviet brutality backfired and in October 1991 Azerbaijan fully restored its independence.

"Under the visionary leadership of President Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan is now economically dynamic, politically stable, and an important geopolitical power," Aghayev says.

He also underlines that "Our values have seen us through hard times, even in very recent months. Just this past autumn, Azerbaijan liberated its territories from Armenia's nearly 30-year-long, illegal, U.N.-condemned occupation... We now begin the process of rebuilding and returning, and with peace finally achieved, the strength and vitality of our independence, and the values that led us there, are strong and invigorated, ready to take on the challenges of 2021, in all their complexity."

The article can be read here: <https://medium.com/@nasimiaghayev/remembering-black-january-finding-hope-in-the-wake-of-unspeakable-tragedy-acdd5d003ef0>

AZERTAC
2021, January 20

Azerbaijani Ombudsperson issues statement on 31st anniversary of January 20 tragedy

Azerbaijani Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) Sabina Aliyeva has issued a statement on the 31st anniversary of the January 20 tragedy.

The statement reads: “The tragedy of January 20, committed 31 years ago as a result of the inhumane and treacherous policy of the USSR leadership against the Azerbaijani people, is engraved in the memory of our people as the night of Black January. It is also a date that demonstrates the struggle, inflexibility and pride of our people, who strive for their freedom and independence.

At that time the people were protesting against the biased policy of the USSR leadership, demanding the investigation of crimes committed against Azerbaijanis in Armenia, also by separatists in Nagorno-Karabakh and the punishment of criminals. The massacre of 20 January was committed by the former USSR leadership in order to suppress the people’s fair voice, as well as to prevent the possibility of independence of Azerbaijan. The day before the incident, the energy bloc of the Azerbaijan State Television was exploded as a result of a provocation organized by the USSR Committee of State Security in order to hide information about the planned event from the population and the world community in general.

On the night from 19 to 20 January 1990, the Soviet army were deployed in Baku, Sumgait, and other cities and districts of the country without declaring a state of emergency and fired on civilians using various weapons. Armed forces killed 150 unarmed civilians mercilessly regardless of their nationality, age or sex, including children, women and elderly, 744 peaceful, innocent people were wounded in the capital city of Baku and surrounding areas, hundreds went missing and 841 persons were unlawfully imprisoned. Even the ambulances and physicians carrying the injured persons were fired on, therefore medical staff became martyrs or were injured. 21 people were killed after declaration of a state of emergency on January 20.

Thus, the international law norms and fundamental human rights were grossly violated, a violent crime against humanity was committed against our multinational people which stood in defense of freedom of the homeland and its own rights.

On January 21, 1990 a harsh statement related to these bloody events was made by national leader Heydar Aliyev in the city of Moscow on behalf of the Azerbaijani people and he demanded legal assessment of the massacre committed against our people on January 20 and punishment of the perpetrators.

This horrible crime against humanity is a gross violation of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and other international legal instruments. According to international law, the tragedy of 20 January must be interpreted as a crime against humanity. Under Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the following acts interpreted as a crime against humanity: murder; enforced disappearance; persecution on the political, national, ethnic, cultural or gender grounds; torture and other inhumane acts intentionally causing great suffering or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health.

The tragedy of January 20 committed by the Soviet army against our people did not break the will of our people, and the struggle for freedom resulted in the restoration of Azerbaijan's independence in 1991.

At the initiative of President Heydar Aliyev, who came to power for the second time in 1993 at the request of the people, a special session of the Milli Majlis was held and this bloodshed was given its political-legal assessment. The date of January 20 has been declared as the National Day of Mourning in our Republic. Every year on this day the martyrs are remembered by hundreds of thousands of people with deep respect.

According to the Presidential Decree, citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan killed during the tragedy were awarded the honorary title “Martyr of the January 20”, as well as state care continues for persons disabled during the events of January 20, 1990.

It should be noted that at that time, as a result of the support of the Soviet Government to Armenia, ethnic cleansing, genocide were committed against Azerbaijan, twenty percent of our lands were occupied, innocent Azerbaijani population was withdrawn by force from Armenia, also from Nagorno-Karabakh, which is an integral part of Azerbaijan, and seven adjacent districts of the country, which resulted in gross violation of fundamental rights of one million civilians. Refusing to resolve the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict peacefully and seeking to occupy new territories, Armenia committed provocations directed at the positions of our army in July and August 2020, violated the ceasefire in late September 2020 and fired on positions of Azerbaijani Army and civilian settlements. As a result of this, many military servicemen and civilians were killed and wounded, and civilian facilities, including residential buildings, were severely damaged. In response, the Azerbaijani Army under the leadership of Commander-in-Chief Ilham Aliyev launched a counter-offensive operation on September 27, 2020, and liberated most of our territories from occupation in a short period of time. On November 10, a historic document was signed formalizing the complete

defeat of Armenia. With the liberation of our occupied lands and the opportunity for hundreds of thousands of civilians to return to their ancestral lands, their fundamental rights have been restored.

We would like to note with regret that, despite the gross violation of international legal instruments, as a result of the terrible act committed against humanity, one of the most horrible crimes of the 20th century for its nature and scale, January 20 events have not been given international legal assessment so far, those ordering and perpetrators of the bloodshed have not been punished.

There are quite sufficient grounds that events occurred on the 20th January can be interpreted as a crime against humanity, which is one of the gravest types of international crimes according to the principles of international law, as well as to hold criminally responsible the military personnel who committed these atrocities and perpetrators who ordered this massacre, then USSR administration, in particular.

We strongly believe that the perpetrators of this bloody crime will soon be brought to justice by giving an international legal assessment of the tragedy of January 20, 1990.

We urge international institutions and the international community, as a whole, to give legal assessment to this criminal act that is associated with severe violations of human rights and is a breach of international legal norms.”

This Statement is addressed to the UN Secretary-General, UN Security Council, UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Office of High Commissioner for Refugees, UN Human Rights Council, the United Nations Children’s Fund, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, European Union, Council of Europe, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, International and European Ombudsman Institutions, Asian Ombudsman Association, Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Ombudsman Association of its member states, Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, European Network of Ombudspersons for Children, International Peace Bureau, foreign ombudsmen and national human rights institutions, embassies of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the foreign embassies in Azerbaijan, also the Azerbaijani Diasporas.

AZERTAC
2021, January 19

Black January – The start of Azerbaijan's independence

Guivami Rahimli, BP Azerbaijan Senior Government Affairs Advisor, has shared with AZERTAC some highlights of the tragic events in January 1990 captured by world famous photographer Reza who arrived in Baku on 24 January.

Reza Deghati has gone on to become a renowned photojournalist who, for the last three decades, has worked all over the world, notably for National Geographic. His assignments have taken him to more than one hundred countries as a witness to humanity's conflicts and catastrophes. His work is featured in the international media (National Geographic, Time Magazine, Stern, Newsweek, El País, Paris Match, Geo, etc.), as well as in a series of books, exhibitions and documentaries. Sometimes Reza as the only foreign photojournalist witnessed and recorded brutal repression through his camera.

20 January 2020 marked the 30th anniversary of a horrible crime against the Azerbaijani people known as Black January. Just before midnight on 19 January 1990, Soviet tanks broke into Baku and massacred the peaceful population, including women, the elderly and children. More than 130 people were killed and about 800 wounded. Among them was also my uncle Nariman's 14-year-old grandson who was also named Nariman.

The Soviet Army invaded Baku clearly to stop the dissolution of the Communist regime and crush any opposition in Azerbaijan's bid for independence. The people were infuriated by the territorial claims and aggressive acts of Armenia against Azerbaijan, which were backed by the then Soviet leaders. Azerbaijanis were being expelled from the lands they had lived on for centuries and were protesting against the policy of the USSR and, as a result, demonstrating for the ideals of the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.

Amid confusion and turmoil, the Soviets managed to suppress all efforts to communicate the news about the events in Baku to the international community. Foreigners were not allowed to enter so there would be no information leakage.

My good old friend Reza's efforts to smuggle himself into Baku during those turbulent days 30 years ago and get the story out to the world look like a Hollywood screenplay. He told me his story many times on various occasions during our meetings: the way he lived through those tense and historic moments of Black January.

On those cold winter days of January 1990, Reza was trying to catch up with news in Paris. When Reza began detecting disturbances in Baku, he called his friend Ahmad Sel, a Turkish cameraman working for a French TV company, and invited him to join him in a trip to Baku where he would undertake videos, while Reza himself would handle the stills. Reza also invited Ms. Shirin Melikoff, the daughter of Irene Melikoff, a renowned scholar and Turkologist of Azerbaijani origin at the University of Strasbourg, to join them. Shirin has excellent command of Russian and Azerbaijani along with her French and that would help to avoid the suspicions of the Russians.

Despite the run-around that Reza's crew got from the Soviet Embassy in Paris, Ramiz Abutalibov, who represented Azerbaijan at UNESCO during the Soviet time, helped them to get the visas from the Soviet embassy by 20 January. That was the day the inferno happened in Azerbaijan. Soviet officials couldn't link their trip to the tragedy in Baku because Reza had applied for visas two days earlier. They knew he was a photojournalist and was going to take photos of Moscow.

Later, Reza called Rustam Ibrahimbeyov (a renowned Oscar-winning screenwriter) in Moscow, whom he had known since 1988. Rustam had confirmed Reza's suspicions that the situation in Baku was serious. "It could turn into a very bad situation." Reza told Rustam that he was coming with two friends and would love to see him to get more information about the situation in Baku. Rustam said that it was the right time to come because 'our friends' are already in - meaning that Soviet troops had already moved into Baku.

Reza and his two colleagues arrived in Moscow on 21 January. On 22 January 1990, more than 50 international journalists and photographers, including those representing some of the best-known names - CNN, Reuters, AP, BBC, ABC, NBC, CBS - had checked into the Moscow Hotel. Reza and two other colleagues were among them. They had heard that demonstrations were taking place in the streets of Baku and that Soviet troops had moved into the city.

Rustam, along with Ramiz Abutalibov, would turn out to be a pivotal member in the quest to smuggle themselves into Baku. Meanwhile, Rustam was perplexed. Now that the troops and tanks were in Baku, all the roads would be blocked, and it would be very dangerous to travel.

On the same evening back at the hotel, word spread that Moscow's press officials had arranged to fly all journalists to Baku on 23 January. They were told to meet in the hotel lobby at 9 o'clock the next morning. Having spent more than five years on an assignment with Afghan guerrilla fighters in the mountains of Afghanistan and Pakistan for the Time Magazine, Reza learned one thing from them: "Never trust Soviet officials when they make irresistible offers."

The next morning, instead of accompanying foreign journalists on a three-hour flight to Baku, Reza decided to take a local train to Baku that would grind on for 48 hours. Unlike the express train, this one would stop at every little town, however, there would be fewer security checks.

Reza's Paris team did their best to blend in, dressing like the locals, to appear so ordinary that they would be overlooked and ignored. Reza and his team were fortunate to have their own compartment. Whenever a controller came along, Rustam's friend Kamal who accompanied them on the train, would warn Reza and they would quickly crawl up into the luggage compartment and hide.

Reza's film crew arrived in Baku on 24 January. As they pulled into the station, they became very anxious seeing a long row of soldiers waiting for everybody to get off the train. It was right out of a spy movie - the only difference being that this was real life and Reza happened to be right in the middle of it.

The tall and tough Russian soldiers standing there with their big bulky overcoats and fur hats, cradling their machine guns - silhouetted against the darkness of that chilly night. They looked so huge - so foreboding, so threatening. Reza wasn't scared of being arrested. What he feared most was not being able to get the story, especially since he is Azerbaijani himself and wanted to be part of telling the world this story.

The train came to a stop. Reza and his friends were wondering who would meet them as they didn't have a clear picture of the trip arrangements made by Rustam Ibrahimbeyov and Ramiz Abutalibov. Suddenly Reza spotted Eleonora Huseynova in the crowd (she was Azerbaijan's first Ambassador (1994 – 2004) to France after its independence) with a couple of friends. She jumped up on the train, her arms full of roses. She gave Reza a big hug and whispered in his ear, "Put your cameras and luggage in the compartment. Come out with me. Don't carry anything."

Eleonora slipped her arm through Reza's; the other ladies latched on to Ahmad and Shirin. With arms full of flowers, acting as lovers reunited, they walked right past that long line of soldiers, some of whom gave them knowing nods, as if saying, "We won't bother you. Get along!"

A car that was waiting outside, took the film crew to the home of one of Reza's Baku friends. It was a fantastic feeling that they managed to get to Baku.

Reza's film crew and friends of Eleonora got together that night to talk about the things happening and plans to take them to different places. They knew how important the mission was and were committed to getting the story out to the world. The local folks showed a map of the city, pointing out exactly what, where and why all this had happened, where the troops and tanks were located.

The next day, two cars, one for Reza and the other for Ahmad, took them to different locations in Baku. They split up in case one of them got caught. Ahmad had a small Sony video camera which was small enough to fit in his hand. Reza had two cameras; one small, the other one larger. He always left one at home in case one got confiscated, stolen or broken.

Reza and Ahmad first headed off to the hospitals. The rooms were so crowded, the wounded and dying were lying, unattended, in the corridors. They knew it would be hard to get inside the hospitals undetected because the entrances were guarded by the police. Reza kept telling hospital personnel that he was looking for a friend who had had surgery a few days earlier, explaining that he wasn't wounded and had nothing to do with these latest incidents.

Reza and Ahmad didn't dare walk in carrying their camera equipment themselves, so one of their escorts would go in first, check the place out and persuade some old woman to come out and they would stuff their bags down into large bags of those women, and off they would go walking right through the hospital entrance for us.

They found it was safest to photograph inside the operating rooms. Their escorts would check if a room was safe. If so, they would slip in and close the door to make shots.

Then, Reza and Ahmad decided to head out in search of the tanks, but it was impossible to photograph without being detected. They hit upon the idea of taking photos from an apartment opposite the parking area. One of their escorts checked out the situation. Soon he was back, and the crew were climbing up to the eighth floor. Again, no cameras. Someone followed later with their bags. But despite how clear the view was from the top, they knew it was too risky. The soldiers could have spotted them easily.

The crew decided to suggest that the lady of the house go out on the balcony and pretend to be washing the windows. From inside, they could then aim their cameras at the soldiers and tanks below when she raised her arms to wipe the glass. Her body would shield them from view. It was very risky, innocent people were being shot on their balconies those days. But she agreed despite this risk. It worked out and they got the photos they wanted.

Next, Reza's crew went to a morgue. Again, the entrance was blocked. This time they were checking IDs and writing down the names of everyone who came to identify the bodies. But there was one room that they managed to enter. In the center of the room on a table there were photographs of the corpses. People came in, picked them up desperately searching for their loved ones, though hoping not to find them there.

The next day there was a huge gathering at Martyrs' Cemetery. It gave Reza the chance to be among the people, to witness their emotions. Reza knew they would be able to photograph freely. It didn't even matter if the guy standing right next to them was KGB because, he wouldn't dare cause any trouble for fear of being attacked by the crowd. They even organized a little escape scenario, to disappear before the crowd dispersed so no-one could follow them.

After the Martyrs' Cemetery scenes, the team felt they had enough photos. They had already spent three days in Baku, and it was time to leave. Reza didn't quite know how his friends managed it, but soon they had fake entrance visas along with tickets for the flight back to Moscow.

As with everything else that happened in Baku, Reza's Paris team had to put their total trust in the people accompanying them including the arrangements to be able to leave the country. As before, the crew didn't dare carry their cameras, videos or films with them on the plane. They were told someone on the plane would carry their equipment for them, but they didn't know who. Enroute, however, two Russian girls came up and started talking to them. They were suspicious because there were so many stories about blonde Russian KGB girls. "They've finally caught up with us", Reza thought. One girl spoke Azerbaijani and made reference to films and gave us a real scare. Reza totally denied knowing anything that related to photography. But it turned out these were the passengers doing them the favor of carrying their stuff in their suitcases for them.

Back at the Moscow Hotel, the film crew got the films from the girls and headed straight for the airport.

Reza also found out what happened to the journalists who had taken the flight to Baku. Just as Reza had suspected, none of the journalists succeeded in getting to Baku. It seems that when the plane was in mid-air, flying over the Caucasus, the pilot announced that unfortunately, Baku's airport was shut down and that he would have to divert the plane to the nearest airport. How convenient that it happened to be the capital city of Armenia, Yerevan, where the Soviet press had already arranged for newly arriving Armenian refugees fleeing Azerbaijan to tell the international media their version of how savage Azerbaijanis were.

Once again, the Soviets had duped the international press. The only story that the press could take back home was exactly the one that the Soviets had wanted them to tell, which further justified the need for troops to crush those unruly Azerbaijanis. The realization gradually dawned upon them that not a single journalist had succeeded in getting to Baku except for themselves.

Reza admits that despite all the years working in difficult places, he was terribly afraid something would happen to him in Azerbaijan - that somehow he would disappear. After all, Reza's film crew was witnessing events and gathering information that the whole Soviet Union was denying, and that the whole world was waiting to hear. Reza's team was the only one who were carrying the story out.

Reza says that he'll never forget the incredible relief and joy that was in their eyes when the plane took off from Moscow. Those were very tough seven days in the former Soviet Union, and he couldn't believe they had made it.

They landed in Paris in the afternoon. Both Reza and Ahmad sped off to process the film and edit the videos. The news would go on air at 8 pm. Reza was still afraid that maybe their films had been X-rayed or the videos demagnetized. Soviets were notorious for such things. You think everything is fine, you arrive home and everything is blank. Reza knew the horror stories of a French team who had filmed similar events, but much smaller in scale in Kazakhstan for three weeks and upon arriving home, they discovered all their tapes had been demagnetized. The French crew had nothing.

Reza started processing the slides in the lab when he heard a voice on TV announcing that at 8 o'clock there would be a very important news broadcast. Tears came to his eyes. It meant Ahmad's videos were safe. That night, the news opened with the tragic events that were unfolding in Baku. They gave about six minutes coverage, incredibly long by Western standards as an ordinary item runs between 30 seconds and a minute.

Reza's slides also came out fine. He selected about 40 of them to be duplicated for distribution. Reza gave them to an agency who could transmit them to 2,000 magazines and newspapers all over the world.

So they did it: within 24 hours of Reza's return home, the tragic story of Azerbaijan's Black January was circulated all over the world. More than 18 TV channels and dozens of radio stations were calling Reza and Ahmad for footage. Mission completed. Black January was no longer a secret - the world was watching the real story about the tragic events that took place in Baku.

Black January – the Path to Independence

Yusif Babanli,

Special Correspondent for AZERTAC

The night of January 19 into the following day, often referred to as Black January, is the bitter experience of every Azerbaijani citizen. That frostbitten night, as many awoke from the sounds of the tank caterpillars and continuous gunfire, the entire nation would awake from the calls to break free.

The Black January massacre, considered the gateway event to the independence of Azerbaijan, traces its roots to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. If we look back at how Azerbaijan was brutally integrated into the Soviet empire, we find that history, often forgotten by Azerbaijanis, does repeat itself. After the dissolution of the Transcaucasian Sejm and subsequent birth of the first Azerbaijani Democratic Republic (ADR) on May 28, 1918, the country became entangled in territorial disputes with Armenian Dashnaks and saw an influx of external pressure from the Russian Bolsheviks, who eventually made their way into Azerbaijan.

The bitter truth about the 11th Red Army marching through the northern regions of the ADR and perpetuating atrocities in its capital Baku upon the occupation of Absheron peninsula in April 1920 was soon forgotten. Or was it? During the next two decades, outspoken Azerbaijani critics of the Soviet system were systematically silenced, and most were completely removed from Azerbaijan during the Great Purge of 1937. Once the immediate threat to Soviet rule was tamed, mistreatment of Azerbaijani Turks was re-executed on a more massive scale. Although the mountainous part of Karabakh had already been carved out to form the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast within the Azerbaijan SSR in 1921, and Zangezur Uyezd was previously awarded to the Armenian SSR in 1920 at the behest of Armenian nationalists, the territorial claims on Azerbaijani lands did not stop. Shortly after World War II, Stalin signed two executive decrees of Soviet Union's Council of Ministers No. 4083 and No. 754 on December 23, 1947 and March 10, 1948, respectively, initiating the forced relocation of up to one hundred thousand Azerbaijanis from Armenia to southeastern Azerbaijan, with the objective of creating living space for Armenians who were subsequently moved there from Lebanon, Iran, and Syria. In the late 1960s, several villages of Nakhchivan and Gazakh were transferred to the Armenian SSR. Silent enough, the Azerbaijani leadership succumbed to unjust Moscow's territorial policies. Although Armenians did instigate protests in Armenia demanding the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh itself to the Armenian SSR, their efforts did not fall through.

A more organized agenda was put forth after a row of Armenian terrorist attacks on Turkish diplomatic missions and civilian targets in Europe and the United States from 1975-1982, which provided for an assertive ultra-nationalist awakening among Armenians. Many of those terrorists would later be glorified by the Republic of Armenia after it gained its independence in 1991.

Fast forward to February 1988, when an ongoing three months of brutal expulsion of thousands of Azerbaijanis from Armenia that originated in its Masis and Gugark districts in November 1987 back to back with significant incidents in the central parts of Yerevan and Khankendi, prompted the Sumgait events - ironically led by three ethnic Armenians. Within the next twenty months, Azerbaijan was forced to restrain the ill-advised ideology of the "friendship of peoples," all the while the country was being terrorized by a mass exodus of Azerbaijanis from their homes, attacks on buses, trains, and other civilian targets. Repeated calls to prevent atrocities and the burning of Azerbaijani villages in Karabakh went in vain.

The national awakening movement, literary referring to the awakening of Azerbaijani people from the seventy-year-old nightmare of unjust territorial transfers, forced population migrations, and the mishandling of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue by the Soviet regime, was in acceleration mode.

The meticulous plan of invasion of Baku foresaw instilling terror into the republic, intending to break the momentum of a popular movement. By the time the information blockade was enforced on Azerbaijan by blowing up the central television transmission block and main telephone network of Baku at 19:00 hours from January 19 into the early morning of January 20, as many as 147 civilians laid dead, many from sporadic fire on crowds, others by gunfire into buildings as tanks rolled through the streets of the city, and some by individual beatings and point blank executions in various locations of the town. Selective shootouts resulting in more deaths would continue through January 22. The autopsies identified the main utilized arsenal of the special forces as the infamous 5.45 mm caliber bullet with a shifted center of gravity, which upon entering a body - unlike conventional bullets - travels in sporadic movements spiraling through the organs causing excessive pain and internal bleeding, thus increasing the chances of death.

As reports of the massacre leaked to international press and the world wondered how and why the bullets with a shifted center of gravity were used, Azerbaijanis had questions of their own: What caused the center of the Soviet leadership's gravity to shift, to commit the massacre of innocent civilians? Fables about the glorious

Soviet army fighting for the greater good of the Soviet man were suddenly gone, and the true nature of the Red Army was revealed. The Bolshevik regime was established in Azerbaijan with the brutal invasion of Baku by the 11th Red Army on April 28, 1920. Ironically from January 19-20, 1990, as the monument to the Bolshevik invaders depicting three Red Army soldiers overlooked the 11th Red Army Square, the Soviet army opened fire on Azerbaijani civilians at the same Baku entrance and with the same brutality as seventy years ago. The Soviet regime had forced Azerbaijan to celebrate the former event for 70 years while the latter event ensured the regime's eventual departure.

As a sign of protest on the dawn of January 20, the plants and factories of Sumgait and the ships and vessels in Baku Bay simultaneously blew their horns for hours - so loud that the sounds could be heard beyond the Absheron peninsula where Baku is located. But their noise couldn't have been louder than the cries of mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers whose mourning could be heard farther away. Black January would become a tacit realization that the republic did not belong to the Soviet Union and that it would serve as a springboard for the independence of all fifteen republics. It was the occurrence which wobbled the Soviet regime, and the event that would eventually cause its collapse.

AZERTAC
2014, January 20.

Jewish Journal: "A Letter to my Jewish Sister on the Anniversary of Azerbaijan's Black January"

Yusif Babanli,

Special Correspondent

The US-based Jewish Journal has published an article by survivor of Khojaly genocide Durdana Aghayeva headlined "A Letter to my Jewish Sister on the Anniversary of Azerbaijan's Black January".

Durdana Aghayeva in her article addresses Vera Bessantina - one of the victims of the tragic event committed in Baku in January 1990.

The article says: "Dearest Vera,

27 years ago, we both stood at the precipice of adulthood. We were teenagers; you lived in the capital city of Baku of our homeland Azerbaijan, a Jewish student studying the violin, and I lived hours away, a Muslim student preparing to work as a telephone operator in the town of Khojaly. All those years ago tragedy struck us, in the same country divided only by distance, but our hearts and souls and hopes and dreams were as close as sisters. On that cold day in January in Baku, there were and slain bodies of innocent victims, shot mercilessly by the Soviet army. While I sat in my home only able to hear about these tragic events, it was on that day, when you hid in your apartment to avoid the violence, that a sniper caught you glimpsing out the window, and took your life. You were just 16 years old...

It was a last attempt at instilling fear and terror over Azerbaijan in the waning days of the Soviet Union. On that day of January 20, 1990, what would later be named as Azerbaijan's 'Black January', hundreds of innocent civilians were murdered, and over 1000 injured, as tanks, helicopters and 26,000 Soviet soldiers rolled through the beautiful city streets and unleashed sprays of bullets. It was then Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's last attempt at punishing a city and a nation for insisting on freedom from the Soviet tyranny, no matter the odds or the costs. It was an attack on unsuspecting men, women and children. It was also an assault on the impending and unstoppable notion of our freedom, as a soon-to be sovereign nation.

I lived far from Baku at the time. I grew up in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, in the town of Khojaly. And back then in 1990, I could never possibly imagine that only two years later, a different force of savagery would unleash a painfully similar warfare against my home, family, and everyone and everything I had known up until then. In February of 1992, I became a surviving victim of the Khojaly Massacre, when Armenia's troops slaughtered 613 Azerbaijanis, including over 300 defenseless children, women and elderly in what the Human Rights Watch would later call "the largest massacre in the conflict". I have shared before much of what happened to me in the torture camp as a young girl, and believe it holds true today and is important to remind us that evil does exist.

In the context of the tragedy of 'Black January', I often think of you, Vera, and I imagine we would have become close friends, had we both survived these tragedies. I see myself, just as I see our nation, from Khojaly to Baku and every town in between and beyond, as passionate witnesses to this time, and as those that have triumphed over the most reckless and cruel forms of human engagement possible. But there is hope and there is a spirit of willingness to build from what we have learned. And the same people that suffered these attacks have risen above those tragedies, as have the people of Azerbaijan, with enduring values of faith, courage, and the strength of our human spirit.

I remember hearing about what happened in Baku, and about the military curfew the Soviet leadership imposed after the 'Black January' over the entirety of Baku and the rest of Azerbaijan. Despite the curfew, millions of Azerbaijani people - Muslims, Christians and Jews - came together to mourn the tragic losses and flooded the city to honor the dead and to remember what had taken place. And despite the level of atrocity and the madness of indiscriminate bloodshed, everyone was more than a little inspired. Our nation wanted freedom, and we were able to push past the tragedy in 1990, just as we did the tragedies in 1992, to keep our dream alive. So much so, that in October of 1991, we regained our freedom and independence, for the second time in the 20th century, after 71 years under Soviet tyranny. I wish this was something you could have survived to witness, Vera: the independent, modern and multicultural Azerbaijan today, which tens of thousands of Jews are proud to call their homeland and share it with their Muslim and Christian sisters and brothers in dignity and peace!

So for you my Jewish sister, I want to remind the world that the crimes of war on such a level as 'Black January' cannot occur without leaving a lasting impact. Yet the perseverance and will to move on and move forward with a better life, a life of freedom, fairness, tolerance and peace, is something that has also left an even stronger and even greater impression. All those years ago, life was forever changed for so many people, as it was changed forever for you and your family.

Today, you are memorialized at Martyrs' Lane in Baku, where people from all across the world visit your grave and remember your life. On this day, I will always remember your life, and how it was taken. And on this day, our triumph over the past and our unbreakable commitment to freedom as a nation will not be forgotten."

AZERTAC
2017, January 18

Azerbaijani Ombudsperson issues statement on 29th anniversary of January 20 tragedy

Azerbaijani Commissioner for Human Rights (ombudsman) Elmira Suleymanova has issued a statement on the 29th anniversary of the January 20 tragedy.

The statement reads: Twenty-nine years pass from the bloody 20 January tragedy. This unforgettable crime against humanity is commemorated each time with a heavy heart. This bloody event, engraved on the memories as Black January, is both the day of commemoration of our martyrs and the day of solidarity, pride and honor of our people fighting for the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. These events once again demonstrated that our people are determined to fight for the independence and restoration of their violated rights.

Thus, as a result of the support by former USSR leadership to the raising Armenian separatism in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast, which is an integral part of Azerbaijan and biased position towards our country, gradual removal of the departments and organizations of the mentioned oblast from the subordination of our republic, deportation of the Azerbaijanis from their historical-ethnic lands in Armenia, exposure of compatriots to severe torture and violence exhausted our people's patience. 20 January massacre was committed upon the instruction of the Soviet government of the period in order to suppress the rightly protest of our people, to prevent the expanding liberation movement in Azerbaijan.

According to the official facts, we report that in the night from the 19th to the 20th January 1990, troops of the Soviet army were deployed to Baku and Sumgait, other cities and regions of the country as well, fired the people using descent groups brought by military vessels, tanks and other heavy military equipment, thus international law norms, provisions of the former USSR and Azerbaijan SSR Constitutions were grossly violated, a violent crime against humanity was committed against our multinational people which stood in defense of freedom of their homeland and their own rights.

Armed forces entered Baku, killed 168 unarmed civilians mercilessly regardless of their nationality, age or sex, including children, women and elderly, 744 peaceful, innocent persons in the capital, suburban settlements and surrounding areas were injured, hundreds of people went missing, 841 persons were illegally arrested. Even the ambulances and physicians carrying the injured persons were subjected to fire, therefore medical staff members became martyrs or were injured. Use of prohibited weapons and supplies resulted in immeasurable destructions. The energy bloc of the state television was exploded as a result of the sabotage organized by the USSR Committee of State Security with the purpose of concealing the event from the population.

At that period, a harsh statement was made by the National leader Heydar Aliyev in the city of Moscow on behalf of the Azerbaijani people and he demanded legal assessment of the massacre committed against the Azerbaijani people on January 20 and punishment of the perpetrators.

It should be noted that those events couldn't break the will of our people and the fight for freedom resulted in restoring the independence of Azerbaijan in 1991.

At the initiative of the president Heydar Aliyev special session of the Milli Majlis was held and this bloodshed was given its political-legal assessment. Every year the date of January 20 is commemorated as the National Day of Mourning in our Republic and on this day the martyrs are remembered by hundreds of thousands people with deep respect.

According to the Presidential Decree, citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan being of different nationalities killed during the tragedy were awarded with honorary title "Martyr of the January 20", and different measures are taken in accordance with the Decree on "Increasing the State care to the persons who became disabled during January 20 events", and these persons are entitled to relevant allowances by the state, and the martyrs' families are provided with Presidential pensions.

As in previous years, the Action Plan on "Commemorating the 29th Anniversary of the January 20 tragedy" has been approved this year and is being implemented by the relevant Decree aiming to draw the international community's attention to those bloody events.

This horrible tragedy caused the massacre of the civilian population. Consequently, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other international legal documents were grossly violated. Nevertheless, despite being one of the most horrible crimes of the 20th century for its nature and scale, January 20 events has not been given international legal assessment so far, those ordering and perpetrators of the bloodshed have not been punished.

Under the international law, the tragedy of January 20 should be classified as a crime against humanity. Thus, according to the article 7 of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, extermination, enforced disappearance of persons, other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great sufferings, serious injury to body, to mental or physical health are classified as crimes against humanity.

At that time the leaders of the Soviet state supported Armenia with that crime grossly violating the international legal norms, which resulted in the long-lasting Armenian aggression against Azerbaijan, ethnic cleansing, genocides were committed, twenty percent of our country territories was occupied, local Azerbaijani population was forcibly expelled from the territory of Armenia, as well as from the Nagorno-Karabakh and seven adjacent districts, which are integral part of our republic. These actions resulted in massive violation of the fundamental rights of the civilian population and still more than one million compatriots live as refugees and IDPs.

The Azerbaijani side constantly strives for the peaceful settlement of the conflict, proposes initiatives. President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has stated the crucial importance of the peaceful settlement of the conflict only within the territorial integrity of our republic, withdrawal of the occupant forces from the Azerbaijani lands repeatedly and resolutely in the platforms of the influential international organizations, including UN General Assembly. It is reflected in the corresponding decisions of the influential international organizations, including European Parliament resolution adopted on December 12, 2018, in which the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan was emphasized once more.

It should be mentioned that there are enough legal documents to classify the January 20 events committed twenty-nine years ago as a crime against humanity, being one of the most grave kind of the international crimes, at the same time sufficient evidences for bringing to justice the persons who ordered and committed this massacre and first of all, the leaders of the Soviet state of that period.

Impunity of persons committed such kind of deeds is contrary to the targeted universal priorities, UN Principles and Sustainable Development Goals.

We call the world community and international organizations to support justified demands of the Azerbaijani people and, in order to bring the perpetrators of this crime against humanity to deserved punishment, to assist in giving this bloody action an international legal assessment.

The Statement is addressed to the UN Secretary-General, UN Security Council, UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Office of High Commissioner for Refugees, UN Human Rights Council, UNICEF, UNESCO, European Union, European Council, OSCE, International and European Ombudsman Institutions, Asian Ombudsman Association, European Network of Ombudsmen for Children, Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Network of Ombudsmen Offices in its member states, International Peace Bureau, foreign ombudsmen, embassies of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the foreign embassies to Azerbaijan, also the Azerbaijani Diasporas.

AZERTAC
2019, January 20

Memory of Black January victims to be honored

By Laman Ismayilova

Azerbaijan State Philharmonic Hall will pay tribute to the memory of the victims of Black January.

The memorial concert will be held on January 19. Co-organized by the Culture Ministry and the Philharmonic Hall, the event is timed to the 32nd anniversary of the January 20 tragedy.

The State Symphony Orchestra will perform at the concert under the baton of the People's Artist Rauf Abdullayev. The concert will feature music pieces by Gara Garayev, Azer Rzayev and Agshin Alizadeh.

On January 20, 1990, hundreds of civilians were crushed or injured by the Soviet troops in Baku, upon an order from the USSR leadership that was trying to maintain the Communist regime in Azerbaijan and strangle the national liberation movement.

The invasion was launched at midnight and was committed with brutality. Some 137 people were killed, 611 were wounded, 841 were illegally arrested, and five went missing as a result of the intrusion of troops into Baku and other regions of the country.

AzerNews
2022, 19 January

January 20: Heroic page of Azerbaijan's history

By Ayya Lmahamad

The first thing people see while coming to Baku's Highland Park is the lines of graves, identical rows of light marble with portraits of men, women, and children. The tombstones bear the same date of death - January 20, 1990.

The day of January 20, 1990, became a tragic and heroic page in the history of the struggle for independence and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.

The events of Black January became a turning point in the process of the collapse of the USSR and in the life of the Azerbaijani people.

With the aggravation of the Karabakh conflict, a national movement grew in Azerbaijan, the situation in the country became tense and the Popular Front of Azerbaijan (PFA) was created.

On the night of January 19-20, under direct instructions from Mikhail Gorbachev, the then secretary-general of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, military units from the USSR Defence Ministry, the State Security Committee, and the Interior Ministry entered Baku and nearby regions to suppress large-scale popular uprisings protesting against the aggressive actions of Armenia.

Soviet troops totaling 40,000 people began to fire at civilians without warning and declaring a state of emergency. The operation received the code name "Strike".

As a result of the January tragedy, 147 civilians were killed and 744 more were wounded in Baku and nearby regions. Among those killed were women, children and the elderly, medical employees, and policemen.

At the same time, a total of 841 civilians were arrested in Baku and other cities and regions of the republic, 112 of whom were sent to prisons in different cities of the USSR.

The massacre marked the beginning of the end of Soviet rule and served as a trumpeter for the national awakening movement in Azerbaijan. People were shocked that the Soviet Union could turn against them and kill them. A countless number of people started renouncing their Communist Party membership and some even burnt their party membership cards publicly.

The horrors of January 1990 failed to break the will of the Azerbaijani people and their desire for freedom.

The first political-legal recognition of the January 20 tragedy came on March 29, 1994, when Azerbaijan's legislative body Milli Majlis adopted a relevant resolution on national leader Heydar Aliyev's initiative.

Thirty-two years have passed since the bloody events of January 20, 1990, and the Azerbaijani people continue to hold the memories of the martyrs dear to their hearts.

Every year on this date, the residents of Azerbaijan visit Alley of Martyrs, where the sons and daughters of Azerbaijan who gave their lives for the independence and integrity of the homeland are buried. A nationwide moment of silence is observed to commemorate the January 20 martyrs.

As mentioned, this day will forever be inscribed in the country's history as a day of heroic struggle in the name of the freedom and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.

AzerNews
2022, 20 January

January 20: Nation marking courage of sons & daughters that ushered in long-awaited independence

By Yusif Abbaszada

The formation of a nation and a nation-state is a lengthy and, at times, complex process that requires each individual to be determined, and courageous with a clear view of accomplishing holy missions. Azerbaijan has been through thick and thin in its sacred journey of becoming a nation-state by undergoing huge and often unbearable tasks by bringing the day for which many bright figures of the nation struggled for years and centuries.

On the night of January 19-20, 1990, the military units of the former Soviet army entered the city of Baku, brutally massacring unarmed civilians who took to the streets to protest at the injustice of the central Soviet government vis-a-vis Azerbaijan as one of the 15 satellites of the then second empire.

As a result of the January 20 tragedy, 147 civilians were killed and 744 more were wounded and 841 people were arbitrarily arrested and taken away to unknown directions.

The tragedy left hundreds of residential buildings destroyed, causing material damage to the city residents and the national economy. The barbaric aggression of the Soviet army was met with anger and hatred across the republic by residents, who were calling for justice to be restored and for the Soviet troops pulled out of Baku and other regions of the country.

Mikhail Gorbachev, the then Secretary-General of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, who came to the leadership of the USSR in 1985, took an unfriendly policy towards Azerbaijan. Primarily, this was expressed in the fact that in the fall of 1987, Gorbachev achieved the removal of the then deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Heydar Aliyev, from the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee. Gorbachev was intimidated by Heydar Aliyev's steadfast core and political influence. Aliyev's dismissal let Gorbachev secure his position and have a free hand.

At the same time, the Armenian Dashnaks were plotting against Heydar Aliyev. With his removal, the Soviet government began to pursue a pro-Armenian policy, encouraging criminal formations in Armenia and Karabakh. Gorbachev's policy strengthened the separatism among Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, who advocated the annexation of this territory to the then Armenian SSR.

All these ignited hatred of the Soviet government by the Azerbaijani people, who, in turn, kicked off the process of protests across the country. At that instant, the masks were off and the world saw all the crime and "democracy" of the Soviet government, built on blood and death. That day paved the way for the independence drive in Azerbaijan with no more fear of the central government. The nation's struggle went on day by day and succeed in the demise of the Soviet empire.

Back then, what the people truly needed was a hero, whose mission they would follow and trust, and it was Heydar Aliyev who became that person. At this truly fateful hour for the republic, Heydar Aliyev's voice of protest sounded in Moscow.

Taking an incredible risk, and demonstrating unmatched courage, he became the people's long-awaited light at the end of the tunnel. On January 21, a day after the tragedy that happened in Azerbaijan, Aliyev, together with his family members, came to the representation of Azerbaijan in Moscow, where by that time thousands of Azerbaijanis living and studying in Moscow had gathered. Here he made his famous brief speech, in which he called the decision of the top Soviet leadership to send troops to Baku "inhumane, anti-democratic and anti-constitutional" and demanded that "all those involved in the tragedy must be punished".

The fateful speech inspired every Azerbaijani man and woman, instilling in the nation the most important - confidence in freedom and sovereignty. In his appeal to the people, he did not pick up any epithets and words, the leader called a spade a spade, making it clear to the criminal Soviet leader that this would not go unpunished. Having challenged the crumpling system, national leader Heydar Aliyev became one with his people, regardless of the future consequences.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev annually commemorates the day with government officials by paying homage to those who sacrificed their lives for the freedom and future independence of the country. Holding the date in deep respect, Ilham Aliyev is doing everything to ensure that Azerbaijan continues to be a strong and sovereign state. The history of our country shows that our strength lies in the unity, sovereignty, and democracy of Azerbaijan

January 20, 2023, marks the 33rd anniversary of the bloody event, and the cruelty and scale of the crime committed still haunt the minds of those who were not yet born at that time. Our nation has had too many trials and tribulations through which we have passed with valor and courage without yielding holy principles. Looking at those who gave their lives for well-being, unity, and independence, we are obliged to prepare generations able to protect and secure the Land of Fire from any future threats and occupations, and judging by unfolding developments to this end, we can safely say that the mission is in secure and reliable hands.

Dear martyrs, rest in peace! Your services are cherished and will always be remembered with love and respect!

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January 20: History of national liberation written in blood

Hasanova Nigar

Even though 34 years have passed, when you listen to those who witnessed that history, you start to remember an event as if it happened yesterday. The night of 19th to 20th, 1990 was such a Saturday night that it is impossible to forget that date.

Perhaps, the night of January 19, 1990 was one of the ordinary nights in the collapsing Soviet Union, but in Azerbaijan, people sacrificed their lives in front of tanks and shells for the sake of freedom and sovereignty...

You were expecting to return home from work when you noticed tanks outside your window and heard gunfire coming from the streets. Your family is the first thing that comes to mind when you're worried; you should see them. Using the megaphones of passing cars on the city's streets, they summoned the people who love their country to the 11th Golden Army Square after nine o'clock at night. When you step outside the work, the scene is even more horrifying: there is a blood fountain in the street, and people are erecting barriers in front of women and children to keep them safe, says one of the witnesses of the event.

You may argue, that they are unarmed and defending the populace from armed individuals and tanks. Is there anything that they could do to those people? But neither of you could have predicted that the jarring Soviet soldier tank, the military hardware provided by Baku oil, would turn on its weapons, shoot, and then drive over the people.

When you finally return home in the morning and discover that your mother and sister are still alive, hug them goodbye with a sense of relief before returning to the streets to keep others safe. Nevertheless, they shoot you from behind while wearing your favorite police outfit, the entire thing is covered in blood. Sensing the warmth of blood you flee from the place so that your own people can hide and provide for you. Things go wrong, you bleed heavily, and ironically, the USSR weapon's bullet struck your communist party ticket. Finally, someone had been able to take you to the hospital. You eventually begin to feel cold you understand, it's too late, but you don't want to die; you have too much life still to live. You haven't even had a chance to see your unborn daughter; your mother is sick and unable to handle your death. There are a lot of things that you want to tell your mother, but all you manage to utter is, "Just tell my mum..."

This is the story of Telman Baghirov, one of the martyrs of January 20th, who was brutally murdered by Russian soldiers. Similar to Telman Baghirov's death, the incident that resulted in the deaths of 150 people—some of whom were just starting their careers, others were just beginning their lives—had one thing in common: none of them had any kind of weapon to defend themselves against Soviet tanks and other weapons. The year 1987 saw the beginning of the events that would culminate in the tragedy of 1990, as efforts were made to incorporate Garabagh into Armenia and to drive out Azerbaijanis from their ancestral villages in Armenia. Nevertheless, rather than averting these escalating tensions, the Soviet leadership perpetrated a heinous crime against the people of Azerbaijan.

On the night of January 19–20, military units from the USSR Ministry of Defense, State Security Committee, and Ministry of Internal Affairs entered Baku and the surrounding regions on orders from Mikhail Gorbachev, who is subsequently known for winning the Nobel Peace Prize. Gorbachev decided to resolve the issue "peacefully," massacring the civilian population with heavy military equipment and other various forms of weaponry. Large numbers of special and internal forces from the Soviet army were stationed in Baku, where they treated the civilian populace inhumanely. Before a curfew was declared, the army had brutally killed 82 citizens and seriously injured 20 more. A few days following the declaration of the curfew, 21 further civilians were killed in Baku. Eight other civilians were killed on January 25 in Neftchala and January 26 in Lankaran in regions where a curfew had not been implemented.

Thus, as a result of the illegal deployment of troops, 150 in Baku and the regions of the republic people were killed, 744 people were injured, 841 people were illegally arrested, and 112 of them were taken to different cities of the USSR and kept in prisons. 200 houses by military personnel and apartments, 80 cars, including ambulances, were destroyed by incendiary bullets a large amount of state property and private property was destroyed as a result of fires.

The office of Azerbaijan's permanent representation in Moscow was visited by national leader Heydar Aliyev and his family on January 21, 1990, shortly after the massacre. In addition to expressing support for his

people, he harshly condemned the Soviet leadership for carrying out the horrific tragedy and named those in charge of it:

"I view the events that transpired in Azerbaijan as a breach of the rule of law, democracy, and humanity as well as the fundamentals of constitutional state building. If the top party leadership had taken the appropriate action at the outset of the Nagorno-Karabakh events, we would not have seen the escalation of tensions that resulted in the military attack that killed civilians on January 19–20, 1990. Everyone convicted of this act ought to get the proper punishment."

In actuality, Soviet troops reoccupied Baku 70 years after Bolshevik troops had done so in April 1920. This planned act of aggression threatens Azerbaijan's democracy and its people. Its goals include undermining the country's independence movement, demeaning the populace, and striking a moral blow to them. On the contrary, this momentous occasion was crucial in shaping the national character of Azerbaijan and signaled the beginning of the country's return to freedom. The January catastrophe provided a powerful push to the Azerbaijani people's independence movement and transformed a national liberation movement into a political reality.

Azerbaijani people were unfazed by the automatic bayonets and tank guns aimed at them gathered on Azadlig Square for their martyrs' burial ceremony on January 22, in defiance of the emergency declaration. For forty days, the people of Azerbaijan grieved. The people went on a 40-day strike in protest despite having to face starvation.

On March 29, 1994, Azerbaijan's legislative body, Milli Majlis, issued a related resolution on national leader Heydar Aliyev's request, marking the first political and legal recognition of the January 20 tragedy. The resolution stated:

"The Soviet Union's deployment of troops to Baku and other regions, along with the ruthless killing of civilians, must be regarded as a military aggression and crime of the totalitarian communist regime against the people of Azerbaijan. The intent was to suppress, break the confidence and will of a people who peacefully demanded a new democratic and sovereign state and to humiliate their national identity as a show of Soviet army power."

The people of Azerbaijan honor and never forget the remembrance of the martyrs. Thousands of people gather in the Alley of Martyrs on January 20 of each year to pay their condolences by laying flowers, saying prayers for the victims, and condemning the culprits who caused the tragedy. At noon, the flag is lowered on all buildings across the country, and vehicles, trains, and ships come to a halt for the national moment of silence, reminiscent of when the lives and sentences of those individuals had halted abruptly in 1990.

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