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Armenia, Azerbaijan declare ceasefire

BEIJING, April 5 (Xinhua) -- Armenia and Azerbaijan have agreed on a ceasefire after deadly clashes between forces of both sides in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region erupted overnight Saturday, and military operations on their contact line reportedly have been suspended.



A wounded villager is treated at hospital in Azerbaijan's Garagoyunlu village bordering Nagorno-Karabakh region, on April 4, 2016. [Photo:Xinhua/Tofik Babayev]

Military operations have been suspended on the contact line between Azerbaijani and Armenian armed forces since Tuesday noon local time (0800 GMT) with the consent of both parties, the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Armenian television reported that "the ceasefire is observed for several hours."

No sound of fighting was heard early Tuesday afternoon.

The defense ministries of both sides confirmed Tuesday that a ceasefire agreement is currently being prepared.

Recent hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan on the contact line of the mountainous Nagorno-Karabakh region flared up overnight Saturday with the two countries blaming each other for triggering the escalation.

The Azerbaijani Defense Ministry said on Tuesday that its forces have killed 70 Armenian soldiers and destroyed 20 armored vehicles in the past two days, while at least 16 Azerbaijani troops were killed during heavy fighting in the region.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Armenian Defense Ministry said that clashes on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border continued, Azerbaijani armed forces started shelling Armenian targets in certain villages on the border, and Armenian troops returned fire.

"Clashes on the border of Armenia and Azerbaijan recorded last night and early in the morning," Armenian Defense Ministry spokesman Artsrun Hovhannisyan wrote on Facebook.

Hovhannisyan also said on Monday that the situation on the contact line of the Nagorno-Karabakh region remained tense.

"Being unable to break the resistance of the Armenian side, the Azerbaijani troops attempted to use heavy military vehicles, combat aircraft, including heavy flamethrower systems and unmanned aerial vehicles," said the spokesman.

Also on Monday, the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry said that the country's armed forces have destroyed an Armenian command and staff point in the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

It said that its army may carry out strikes on Khankendi, capital city of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, noting that "Azerbaijan's Defense Ministry has tasked all types of the armed forces, including the rocket and artillery troops, to be ready to carry out crushing strikes from all heavy combat weapons on Khankendi city and other occupied settlements, if Armenians do not stop shelling Azerbaijani settlements in a short time."

Azerbaijan said it has neutralized 170 Armenian troops and destroyed 12 Armenian armored vehicles in Monday's counter-attack while three Azerbaijani troops were killed in the fight.

Armenia and Azerbaijan have been locked in a bitter dispute over the mountainous region of Nagorno-Karabakh. The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh first broke out in 1988, when the enclave dominated by ethnic Armenians claimed independence from Azerbaijan and declared to join Armenia.

Peace talks have been held since 1994 when a ceasefire was reached, but there have been occasional minor clashes.

Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Hikmat Hajiyeve earlier told local media that Azerbaijan is ready for a ceasefire, but on the condition that the Armenian armed forces withdraw from all the occupied territories of Azerbaijan in accordance with the United Nations Security Council resolutions.

The remarks came after Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan said that Armenia was ready for compromises in the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

