

Some experts and public figures note that disorders in Masanchi village that took lives of 10 people are indicative of serious issues in interethnic relations.

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A state of emergency in the area was declared in Kordai district of Zhambyl region. A government commission was established by order of President Kassym Zhomart-Tokayev to investigate the details of the conflict.

Kazakhstan officials expressly emphasise that misunderstanding between some residents of Kazakh and Dungan ethnicities was caused by domestic affairs; then the situation was used by provokers.

According to official data, 10 persons died during the clashes. According to vice minister of health Liazzat Aktaeva, 165 persons sought medical help in the hospitals of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. 30 persons in serious but stable state and eight persons in extremely critical state were placed to medical institutions of Kazakhstan.

According to the interior ministry of Kazakhstan, about 400 people took place in the clashes. 47 persons were detained and two shotguns were seized from them. 25 private houses, 31 retail outlets and 41 vehicles were damaged during the incident.

By presidential order, the head of Zhambyl region was replaced. Prime minister Mamin when introducing ex vice prime minister Berdibek Saparbaev as the akim of the region emphasised that “special attention should be paid to the ideological work and strengthening of interethnic concord, improvement of social and economic situation and standard of living of the people.”

Afterwards, deputy akim of the region for social affairs and heads of police department of Zhambyl region and police precinct of Kordai district were removed from offices. Tokayev assessed the incident in border villages as disorderly conduct and blamed the provokers.

Кровопролитие произошло по вине провокаторов, при попустительстве

сотрудников госорганов, они будут наказаны. Пострадавшие получают государственную поддержку. Мир и согласие – наше достояние, никто не вправе его подрывать!

— Qasym-Jomart Toqayev (@TokayevKZ) [February 9, 2020](#)

*«Blood was shed because of provokers, connivance of public officers, and they will be punished. Those who were injured will be supported by the state. Peace and concord are our property and no one may undermine it!»*

The authorities of the country deny any interethnic grounds of the conflict. Vice prime minister of Kazakhstan Berdibek Saparbaev [noted](#) at the meeting with the residents of the district that it “was a domestic conflict used by provokers and that changed its way.”

The chair of the Kazakhstan-based society of Dungans, Abubakir Vointse, shares the same opinion.

“I have been a police investigator, so I analysed the situation. It couldn’t happen without external assistance. They wouldn’t gather so many people, prepare for such a short time and spread their messages on social media. It seems to have been prepared in advance,” Vointse said.



*Masanchy village after the clashes. Photo: T.Batyrrshin*

The conflict started on February 7 in the border village of Masanchi, which is deemed one of the centre of Dungan diaspora in Kazakhstan. According to the 2009 census, the residents of the village were 90 per cent of Dungans, 5 per cent of Kazakhs and 5 per cent of Russians.

Metal objects, rocks, and shotguns were used during the clashes. The police tried to curb the crowd, but the participants of the clash didn't follow the order to calm down and keep the peace. Two more villages of Kordai district, Zhambyl region, had the conflict at night.

### **Peace and quiet?**

Since 1995, the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan has been operating in Kazakhstan. Its objective is to implement the national policy and preserve peace in the multinational country. In 2007, it received the constitutional status and nine seats in the lower house of the parliament. In a year, the law "On the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan" was signed and it became the full-fledged member of the political system of the country.

Kazakhstan is a multinational society. Despite the declarations of the authorities regarding the support of ethnic diversity and creation of necessary conditions for peaceful and harmonious co-existence of ethnic communities, ethnicity-based conflicts occur in different places of the country from time to time.

According to experts, the recent conflict with fatalities is the sign of serious problems in ethnic relations.

Journalist **Azamat Yergali**, who was the witness of the conflict, does not think any provokers and third parties were involved in the incident. According to him, the clashes started with a domestic conflict, as locals told him.

“Children of the injure old man [Aqsaqal] told me about the attack. On February 5, Tolegen ata from Karakemer village was going with his two sons to an ophthalmologist. The central hospital is located in Sortobe village. A man stopped their car near the service station short of the hospital. The driver and the man had a cross talk. More people joined the man who stopped the car. The conflict was increasing and turned into a fight, and Tolegen tried to stop it. So, he was injured during the fight. This is how the events developed in Masanchi,” Yergali said.

According to him, it was a long-felt conflict, so a small fight led to such tragic results.



*Masanchi village after the clashes. Photo: T.Batyrsin*

Public figure **Mukhtar Taizhan** also noted that the conflict in the border villages of Kordai district was the result of omission by the authorities that don't pay enough attention to interethnic issues.

"The authorities deem it's peace and quiet in interethnic relations because there is the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan! Why then we have interethnic conflicts every year? Why do we have bloodshed every year and why the heads of diasporas make public appearance and apologise? [...] The authorities are afraid of identifying them as conflicts and attribute them to domestic conflicts. Is it normal to have domestic conflicts that desolate villages and thousands of people take to the streets?" Taizhan said.

Public figure and lawyer **Askhat Asylbekov** doesn't deny it was a provocation, but notes that the ordinary people and the marginalised crowd can be easily agitated by a few topics – land sale to the Chinese, Kazakh language and battering of Kazakhs by other ethnicities.

"I absolutely share the idea that this interethnic conflict was based on fundamental grounds



amid the social policy of the state that created disorder and chaos in the country for thirty years. The following reasons have led to the current situation in the country: destruction of culture, education, agriculture, loss of social standards, [...] total absence of justice in the judicial system, corporate raiding and liquidation of the middle class, deterioration of business environment for ordinary people and many other reasons,” Asylbekov said.

### **Silenced not to be solved**

After the clashes, rural residents of Kordai district tried to cross the border of Kyrgyzstan on vehicles and on foot to save their lives. Some left their vehicles to get to the neighbouring country as fast as possible. Later on, the border post reported that four thousand citizens of Kazakhstan crossed the border of Kyrgyzstan via the Aukhatty-Ken Bulun border post since morning of February 8. Some people crossed the border via Sarytobe-Tokmok border post. They were mainly women and children.

“That night men started gathering foodstuff and bringing them to the customs so that people could have a bite. Those who were crossing the border received something to eat. At first, we did like this. And then other people saw they were crossing the border without anything and started to hand clothes over to them. Then this information was posted on social media and they started to gather clothes,” **Abdulla Liurov**, head of the diaspora of Dungans in Tokmak, said.

The drop-off station was organised in a local café. Residents brought their winter clothes, blankets, foodstuff there.

The mayor’s office of Tokmak provided two schools for the Kazakhstanis. Some of them went to their relatives, others went to volunteer’s homes.

On February 9, some people started to return to Kazakhstan for the funerals of their relatives. According to the Border Service of the Kyrgyz Republic, more than a thousand of Kazakhstanis left the country by 10 am.

The clashes in border villages of Kazakhstan also provoked discussions in Kyrgyzstan. Hate messages against the refugees appeared on social media. It wasn’t by coincidence, said **Tolekan Ismailova**, the leader of the human rights movement ‘Bir Duino-Kyrgyzstan’. According to her, the interethnic conflict in the south in 2010 and all the incidents before and after it were just silenced, but not analysed to be prevented in the future.

“Back then, the politicians created various informal groups, as a counter to independent

civil society organisations, such as OBON, ‘kyrk choro’, ‘aprelevtsy’, heroes of revolution, and others that continue to use various forms of discrimination and violence against ethnic minorities and activists,” Ismailova said.

She emphasised that after gaining independence, Central Asia was left without special attention of international analysts and experts. Every country has ethnic minorities who usually don’t have equal access to information, equal participation in decision-making, and who live apart.

“The recent tragedy in Kazakhstan has shown old wounds and the inability of the authorities to prevent such conflicts. Peaceful citizens, especially, ethnic minorities, become the target of attacks, discrimination, and violence. The tools of transition justice have been replaced by some commissions and the conflicts are not solved, but silenced for some time. And this is fraught with consequences,” Ismailova said.

According to her, Central Asian states do not have tools to manage risks and their agencies do not cooperate with each other to provide effective assistance to people in case of such conflicts.

“In this strategy, local governments and local communities should play the key role. The automated authorities and security agencies’ supervision don’t allow for such dialogues and peer platforms. However, this system has become outdated. It is not designed for people,” the human rights activist said.

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*This publication was produced under IWPR project «Forging links and raising voices to combat radicalization in Central Asia»*



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