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**27 Die in Rioting in Western China**

**By CHRIS BUCKLEY**

HONG KONG — At least 27 people died in rioting in far western China on Wednesday, when protesters attacked a police station and government offices and the police fired on the crowd, state media said. It was the worst spasm of violence for years in Xinjiang, a region troubled by tensions between Uighurs, an overwhelmingly Muslim ethnic minority, and China’s Han majority.

The confrontation broke out in the morning in Lukqun, a township in Turpan Prefecture, the state-run news agency, Xinhua, reported, citing unnamed officials.

“Knife-wielding mobs attacked the township’s police stations, the local government building and a construction site, stabbing at people and setting fire to police cars,” the English-language report said. In the initial outburst of bloodshed, 17 people were killed, including nine police officers and security guards, and the police then fatally shot 10 rioters, it said.

The Xinhua report gave no explanation of what set off the confrontation. Nor did it give the ethnic background or other details of the rioters. Uighurs predominate in Turpan.

In the past, Uighur residents have often given accounts of unrest sharply at odds with those given by Chinese government officials.

Repeated efforts to contact residents, and a spokeswoman for the Xinjiang regional government, were unsuccessful.

A spokesman for the World Uyghur Congress, an exiled group that advocates independence for the region, said the bloodshed had been stoked by a burst of detentions of Uighurs in the area over recent months.

“This clash did not happen by chance,” said the spokesman, Dilxat Raxit, who lives in Sweden. “There have been sweeps and crackdowns in the area, leading to many Uighur men disappearing, and the authorities have refused to give information about their whereabouts,” he said, citing recent phone conversations with residents.

Images circulated on Chinese Internet sites, which could not be verified, showed a body, apparently dead, splayed on the road, next to an abandoned and smashed police car. Other pictures showed burned out vehicles near a fire-gutted police station and a puddle apparently red with blood.

“It’s inconvenient to talk,” said an official in the propaganda office of Shanshan County, which includes Lukqun in its jurisdiction. “Leaders are all out, it’s inconvenient to take interviews.”

Many members of the Uighur minority, a Turkic-speaking group, resent the growing presence in Xinjiang of Han Chinese people, whom they say get the better jobs and land. Government restrictions on religion have become a growing source of tensions with Uighurs, who have embraced more conservative currents of Sunni Islam.

The bloodshed struck a part of Xinjiang where relations between Uighur and Han people have traditionally been relatively untroubled, said Nicholas Bequelin, a senior researcher in Hong Kong for Human Rights Watch.

“But the tension has been escalating in recent years,” said Mr. Bequelin, who takes a particular interest in Xinjiang. “The tensions are linked to the introduction of policies that call for much finer control and monitoring of local Uighur affairs by officials. You have a lot of rehousing and relocation there, too.”

The government has placed blame for past violence in Xinjiang on groups it accuses of using terror to seek independence for the region, including the East Turkestan Islamic Movement. But advocates of Uighur self-determination and some foreign scholars say the discontent has local causes and is not orchestrated from abroad.

In July 2009, Urumqi, the regional capital of Xinjiang, was troubled by the worst ethnic violence in China in many years, when Uighurs attacked Han Chinese after the police broke up a protest by Uighurs. At least 197 people were killed, most of them Han Chinese, according to the Chinese government. Crowds of Han Chinese residents then marched through Uighur neighborhoods, demanding vengeance and attacking residents with rocks and cleavers.

Chinese news Web sites initially featured the Xinhua report on the latest violence. But later in the day, those reports disappeared, in what appeared to be a government effort to stifle alarm or anger about the deaths.

In April, at least [21 people died](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/25/world/asia/violence-in-western-china.html) in fighting in Xinjiang between security forces and a group of what a government spokesman called “gangsters.” In March, [two courts convicted](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/28/world/asia/china-sentences-20-for-separatists-acts-in-restive-region.html) and sentenced 20 people accused of militant separatism in the region.

Uighurs once formed the vast majority of residents in Xinjiang, which neighbors Central Asia and came under the control of Chinese Communist forces in 1949. In recent decades, the number of Han Chinese residents has grown, aided by migration. Uighurs now make up 46 percent of Xinjiang’s civilian population of 22 million, and Han Chinese account for 40 percent, according to government estimates.

Lukqun, where the rioting erupted, has about 30,000 residents, 90 percent of them Uighur, according to a report in the Xinjiang Daily last year.

Jiang Zhaoyong, a Chinese former journalist who has written extensively about Xinjiang, said police stations had been a target of ethnic violence there before. “This appears to be the act of a local group,” he said of the latest attack.

Last year, Mr. Jiang visited the area where the rioting broke out on Wednesday. “In the past, that area wasn’t one where tensions were especially acute.”

*Patrick Zuo and Mia Li contributed research from Beijing.*