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Kosovo rioters burn Serb churches

Mobs of angry Albanians in Kosovo have burned Serbian Orthodox churches and homes on a second day of violence which is showing no sign of a let-up.

The attacks came as Nato announced it was sending another 1,000 troops to reinforce the 18,500 already there.

At least 31 people have died in the worst violence since the 1999 Kosovo war and about 500 have been injured.

The UN Security Council meeting in a special session is expected to condemn the violence and urge calm.

Trouble erupted in the divided city of Mitrovica after the deaths of two Albanian children, blamed on members of the province's small ethnic Serbian community.

As attacks multiplied, angry demonstrators over the border in Serbia itself responded by burning several mosques.

Calls not heeded

A Serb Orthodox church in the heart of Pristina was the target of the latest attack on Thursday evening.

Earlier, Albanians managed to get past Nato peacekeepers to set fire to churches in Mitrovica and the town of Obilic, west Pristina, where about 100 local Serbs had to be evacuated.

Crowds of Albanians were also reported to be trying to storm a church being protected by Finnish peacekeepers in the central town of Lipljan.

Nato troops had to use teargas against Albanian protesters seeking to march on the village of Caglavica, south of Pristina, for the second day on Thursday.

Flights in and out of Kosovo have been suspended and internal boundaries with Serbia have been closed.

Nato officials insist that the alliance and the United Nations, which administers the province, are committed to quelling tensions.

But the top commander of the Nato-led force in Kosovo, known as K-For, has authorised the troops to use force if necessary.

The European Union has called on local leaders to rein in the violence - and the main Kosovo Albanian political parties have issued a statement urging their supporters to call off the protests.

Serbia has condemned both Nato and the UN for failing to protect the Serb minority in the province.

Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica said the attacks were "planned in advance and coordinated... this was an attempted pogrom and ethnic cleansing" against Kosovo's

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Serbs.

He has called for a state of emergency to be imposed in Kosovo.

Protesters in Serbia have taken to the streets again to demonstrate their support for the Kosovo Serbs - after having stoned and burned mosques and other Islamic buildings on Wednesday.

KOSOVO: KEY DATES

- 24 Sept 1998: Nato issues ultimatum to Milosevic to stop crackdown on Kosovo Albanians
- 24 Mar 1999: Nato begins air strikes against Yugoslavia over Kosovo
- 10 June 1999: Air strikes suspended after Milosevic agrees to withdraw troops. UN approves peace plan for Kosovo, establishes K-for peace force
- 11 June 1999: Nato troops enter Kosovo
- 10 Dec 2003: UN unveils road map on conditions Kosovo must meet by mid-2005 for talks on final status
- 17 Mar 2004: Serbs and Albanians clash in the worst violence seen since 1999

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