
President Kocharian Lifts State Of Emergency

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YEREVAN, MARCH 20, ARMENPRESS: President Robert Kocharian, who ends his second term in office on April 9, said today he will not extend the state of emergency which he imposed earlier this month after opposition protests led to violent clashes with police.

The 20-day state of emergency was declared on March 1 following mass protests against the February 19 presidential election, which the opposition claimed was rigged. Eight people died and more than 100 were injured during the disturbances in downtown Yerevan.

"I see no reason to extend the state of emergency in Yerevan. From tomorrow our capital city will be back to normal state of affairs," the outgoing president told a news conference today.

Kocharian said Armenia was always reputed as one of the safest countries in the world. Now, he said, we all must work to restore the country's good name and image.

Kocharian said the post-election developments showed that Armenian democracy should be safeguarded against demagogy. "We have carried out economic and public reforms but the experience shows we need to have clear-cut legislation to protect the foundations of our statehood," he said.

He said in Germany people who call for disobedience to law-enforcement bodies will be sentenced to five years in jail. Kocharian said he will initiate a legislative bill that would enforce tougher norms for protection of the statehood's foundations.

"I must hand over a stable country and government to the next president. We were not able to prevent the events of March 1 but we were able to prevent more serious consequences," he said.

Kocharian also warned the opposition against staging new unsanctioned rallies in Yerevan saying mass assemblies in the capital within next weeks may pose serious threats to public security.

He said if the warnings are defied then law-enforcement bodies would respond appropriately and in line with law.
