

Russia begins military exercises in volatile North Caucasus region

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VLADIKAVKAZ, July 5 (RIA Novosti) – Russia began Saturday large-scale military exercises in several regions of the Southern Federal District, which includes highly volatile North Caucasus republics, a senior military official said.

The exercise, dubbed Caucasus Frontier 2008, will involve units of the North Caucasus Military District, mainly the 58th Army, the 4th Air Force Army, Interior Ministry troops, and border guards.

“The active phase of the multi-stage exercise will be held through the second week of July,” said Maj. Gen. Vladimir Maystrenko, deputy chief of staff of the North Caucasus Military District.

He said the main goal of the exercise is to practice interoperability between federal troops, interior ministry’s troops, border guards, and the Air Force in special operations against militants and the defense of Russia’s state borders.

The exercise will mostly take place on the territory of Chechnya, North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachayev-Circassia.

According to statistics, 80% of terrorism-related crimes in Russia occur in the Southern Federal District, which includes North Caucasus republics of Chechnya, Daghestan and Ingushetia.

During the first five months of 2008, Ingushetia alone saw a sharp increase in assaults on law enforcement and military personnel. In 53 attacks a total of 12 police officers and four servicemen were killed and 46 law enforcement officers and 11 soldiers were injured.

On Wednesday, two policemen were killed, and five others wounded in the town of Malgobek in Ingushetia after their vehicles came under fire by unidentified gunmen.

The region has also been recently shaken by an intensified conflict between Georgia and its breakaway republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

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