

Radiation Panic Sparks School Closings

One is forced to suspect that such a rumor was spread maliciously by the antis.

Yahoo News (Reuters)
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Bulgaria moved to quell panic on Friday after rumors of a nuclear power plant accident in "a nearby country" sparked school closings and a dash to pharmacies by people seeking anti-radiation remedies.

It was not clear from where the rumors originated, but media reported earlier this week of a scare concerning the Chernavoda plant in neighboring Romania and, later, at a reactor in the Russian town of Balakovo.

Both countries denied any radiation leaks, but Bulgarians have started buying iodine and other anti-radiation remedies in scenes reminiscent of 1986, when news of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster spread across then-communist eastern Europe by word of mouth amid an initial hush-up by the region's Soviet regimes.

Bulgaria's civil defense office said it had received scores of worried inquiries.

"This whole thing has been blown way out of proportion," said Civil Defense spokeswoman Lilia Kostadinova. "We have been measuring for seven days and there has been no increase in radiation levels."

Romanian authorities have said there have been no incidents of any type at Cherna Voda, which lies near the country's Danube-river border with Bulgaria. Russian authorities have also denied any radiation leaks.

Kostadinova said her office had sent a team with Geiger counters to at least one school to calm worried administrators, and two elementary schools closed in Sofia Thursday. Media said the closures had possibly fueled fear. In the Black Sea port of Varna, people were buying large quantities of iodine, a reputed antidote to radiation exposure.