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Kyrgyz Troops Block Demonstrators Bound for Capital

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BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan — Several thousand demonstrators gathered outside Kyrgyzstan's parliament on Thursday in support of a local leader back from exile after a failed attempt to seize power five years ago.

Kyrgyz troops blocked a road leading to the capital, Bishkek, to prevent a crowd from Urmat Baryktabasov's hometown from joining the rally in central Bishkek — a sign of growing tension before landmark October elections.

Baryktabasov tried to seize power before a presidential election in 2005 that swept Kurmanbek Bakiyev to power. Bakiyev himself was deposed in a popular revolt in April.

After his failed attempt to seize power, Baryktabasov fled the country. He returned after Bakiyev's ouster.

Keneshbek Dushebayev, head of the Kyrgyz national security service, said the army was acting on information that some in the crowd at the roadblock were armed and could try to

overthrow the interim government.

"If their demands are not met, they are intent on seizing power," he said in the village of Kirshyolk, where helicopters roared overhead and up to 500 heavily armed troops faced off with a crowd of about 1,000 Baryktabasov supporters.

Dushebayev said the crowd had arrived from Balykchy, a town on the western edge of Lake Issyk-Kul, and that some had demanded a place for Baryktabasov in the government. There appeared to be no interethnic element to the standoff.

"We received information that some of these people are armed with firearms and grenades," he said.

People in the crowd whistled, waved red flags and shouted their demands to be admitted into Bishkek to attend the rally. They made no explicit demands beyond being allowed through the military cordon. Baryktabasov appeared among his supporters in the crowd.

In central Bishkek, a crowd of 2,000 to 3,000 demonstrators held banners saying, "Hands Off Baryktabasov!" Some demanded that he be allowed to speak on the makeshift stage erected outside the parliament building.

"Our first demand is that Baryktabasov arrives here and gives a speech from his program," said Avazbek Abakirov, a man in his mid-40s in the crowd outside the parliament building.

"We live in poverty. In the south, there are also many who are against those in power. The population wants to unite around Baryktabasov," he said.

In a statement, the Interior Ministry said the situation in Bishkek was under control and that criminal groups were responsible for the latest unrest.

Farid Niyazov, spokesman for the interim government, said Baryktabasov was ineligible to participate in the October parliamentary elections because he was a citizen of Kazakhstan.

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