

Kyrgyz Leader Says Coup Attempt Foiled

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BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan — Kyrgyz forces arrested an opposition party leader on suspicion of plotting to overthrow the interim government on Thursday after troops fired blank rounds into a crowd trying to join mass demonstrations near the parliament.

Acting President Roza Otunbayeva said security forces seized firearms and grenades from Urmat Baryktabasov and 26 supporters after a day of protests in the capital, Bishkek.

"All who attempt to destroy the peace of the citizens will be punished," Otunbayeva said.

Her interim government has struggled to impose its authority since an uprising in April toppled President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Savage ethnic fighting followed in June, killing more than 350 people over several days and forcing thousands from their homes.

Baryktabasov, who staged a failed coup attempt in 2005, recently returned from exile. Early Thursday, Kyrgyz troops stopped busloads of his supporters as they approached the capital from his hometown on the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul.

After a standoff lasting several hours on a main road into Bishkek, troops fired tear gas and

blank rounds to disperse the crowd. Local news agencies said two women were injured by rubber bullets.

Keneshbek Dushebayev, head of the Kyrgyz national security service, said the army was acting on information that some of those arriving by bus were armed and might attempt to overthrow the interim government.

"If their demands are not met, they are intent on seizing power," he said during the standoff in the village of Kirshyolk, as helicopters roared overhead.

Baryktabasov appeared among the crowd of his supporters at the roadblock.

Dushebayev, speaking later at a news conference with Otunbayeva, said relatives of Bakiyev had helped plan the coup attempt.

His claims could not immediately be verified. From exile in Belarus, Bakiyev has repeatedly denied any involvement in the June violence.

While troops blocked the crowd outside Bishkek, up to 3,000 other demonstrators amassed near the parliament to demand a role in the government for Baryktabasov.

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

The crowd outside parliament later dispersed peacefully.

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