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Ex-Azeri Leader Allowed to Return for Funeral

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Azerbaijan's first post-Soviet leader returned to Baku following almost two decades in exile after Azeri authorities granted him permission to attend the funeral of his son, his party said Tuesday.

Ayaz Mutalibov, 73, still faces a criminal investigation stemming from a violent crackdown on an Azeri nationalist uprising by Soviet troops in Baku in January 1990, when Mutalibov was a senior member of the Communist Party.

He was elected president after Azerbaijan's 1991 declaration of independence from the Soviet Union but was overthrown in 1992 as war engulfed the rebel region of Nagorno-Karabakh. He fled to Moscow and had not been back since.

Mutalibov arrived late Monday at the Baku airport and was whisked through the VIP exit without talking to reporters.

An official in his Social Democratic Party of Azerbaijan, who declined to be identified, said

Mutalibov had returned after receiving permission from the Azeri leadership under President Ilham Aliyev.

His 49-year-old son, Azad, died Monday after what Azeri media reports described as a long struggle with cancer and was to be buried Tuesday. It was unclear whether Mutalibov planned to remain in Baku or whether Azeri authorities would prevent him from leaving in order to pursue the criminal inquiry.

(Reuters, MT)

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