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Rioters Attack Government Buildings in Kyrgyzstan

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Rioters scaling a fence surrounding government headquarters in Bishkek. **Abylay Saralayev**

BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan — Protesters clashed with police and tried to break into a building housing the parliament and government offices in Kyrgyzstan's capital Wednesday during a rally to demand the resignation of the prime minister and other top officials.

Police officers protecting the government building, known as the White House, used dogs and smoke bombs to disperse a group of young men who attempted to scale the gates.

The Health Ministry said 10 people were treated for injuries, three of them for gunshot wounds. Officials said no police were injured.

About a thousand people gathered in the center of the city for a rally organized by nationalist politicians Sapar Zhaparov and Kamchibek Tashiyev, ostensibly to demand the nationalization of a controversial gold mine in the east of the Central Asian nation.

Interior Minister Zarylbek Rysaliyev said those responsible for the violence would be sought

out and punished.

Kyrgyzstan has come to prominence in recent years because it hosts a U.S. air base used to support military operations in nearby Afghanistan.

Zhaparov and Tashiyev are members of a virulently nationalist opposition party, Ata-Zhurt, which draws the bulk of its support from the south of the country, which was the scene of deadly ethnic clashes in June 2010. Ata-Zhurt is the largest party in the turbulent country's parliament, although it is not in the governing coalition.

Wednesday's gathering was nominally intended to voice discontent over the Kumtor gold mine, which has been the source of a series of toxic spills in past years.

Critics have alleged that Toronto-based Centerra Gold, which is developing Kumtor, has used accounting tricks to reduce its tax liabilities. The company has denied the allegation.

Centerra says its project has generated $1.9 billion in benefits for Kyrgyzstan, including $620 million in taxes. Kumtor accounts for 12 percent of the economy.

Some observers believe opposition politicians may be using discontent over the mine to make a grab at power.

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