

Kyrgyz Grand Mufti Resigns After Sex Tape Leak

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A scandal has erupted in Kyrgyzstan, as the country's highest-ranking Muslim official resigned Tuesday after a sex tape that appears to show him committing adultery with an unidentified young woman was leaked.

About 60 protesters rallied outside Grand Mufti Rakhmatullah-Hajji Egemberdiyev's office in Bishkek on Monday, to show their outrage over the sex romp video that surfaced on New Year's Eve, Radio Liberty reported. The demonstrators said that he should give up his position as he "has no moral right to hold it."

The mufti had originally explained the clip, which has been removed from YouTube, by saying that it shows him and his second wife. Polygamy is illegal in Kyrgyzstan, though many wealthy officials are thought to have multiple wives and there have been previous legislative attempts to legalize the practice. After protests ousted Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev from power in 2010, the former leader was charged with polygamy.

Maksat Toktomushev, Egemberdiev's deputy, will fulfill the role of grand mufti until a new election on Feb. 8.

Egemberdiyev told Radio Azattyk that the video's release may have been another political move and was orchestrated by the head of the country's commission for religious affairs, Abdulatif Zhumabayev. He claims Zhumabayev wants to replace him with a more loyal cleric and take control over the country's organization of the hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, for which the muftiate collects \$9 million every year.

The mufti is currently under investigation on suspicion of evading taxes on money taken as bribes while organizing Kyrgyzstan's hajj trip quota system.

Hoping that Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambayev would help him, Egemberdiyev said that elements in the government, like Zhumabayev and deputy head of the presidential administration Ikram Ilmiyanov, were involved in a plan to intimidate him into leaving his duties.

Egemberdiyev, who took his position in late 2012, is the sixth Kyrgyz mufti to be replaced in four years. Recent grand muftis, who are elected to five-year terms, have resigned early amid corruption scandals and been kidnapped and beaten.

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