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Uzbek Government Says Karimov 'Critical,' Reuters – 'Dead'

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A poster shows Uzbek President Islam Karimov posing with a group of children and the words reading "Our children ought to be stronger and smarter than us and they ought to be happy!" is seen in front of an old building of a library in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, Aug. 29, 2016. **Umida Akhmedova / AP**

While the Uzbek government said Friday that President Islam Karimov is in a "critical" condition, the Reuters news agency reported that the president had died.

"It is with great sadness in our hearts we inform you that in recent days our president's condition has dramatically worsened, and according to doctors, it is considered critical," the Uzbek government statement said, the RIA Novosti news agency reported.

On Friday, the Reuters news agency confirmed Karimov's death, citing three diplomatic sources.

There has been much speculation surrounding the long-serving strongman's condition

since the country's Fergana news website reported his death on Monday, citing unnamed sources. This announcement followed media reports about Karimov's hospitalization having suffered a brain hemorrhage.

In the cemetery in Karimov's hometown of Samarkand — where his brothers and mother are buried — preparations for the president's funeral are underway and Karimov's body had already been flown to Samarkand from the Uzbek capital of Tashkent, Fergana reported Thursday.

Cleaning work has been "urgently" taking place in central Samarkand, Reuters reported Thursday, citing a source close to the matter who said similar mobilizations of public workers usually take place before visits by foreign dignitaries.

Karimov's death will be officially announced Sept. 2, with his funeral taking place the next day, according to Fergana. Uzbek Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyayev, tipped by many to be Karimov's successor, has already arrived in Samarkand ahead of the funeral, Fergana reported.

Senior Uzbek officials did not attend celebrations marking Uzbekistan's 25th Independence Day on Thursday. A concert and fireworks display were cancelled, Reuters reported.

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