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Kyrgyzstan Cancels Election Result After Night of Chaos

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The election results sparked a tumultuous night of protests and clashes in the capital Bishkek.
Vyacheslav Oseledko / AFP

Kyrgyzstan's electoral body said Tuesday it was canceling the results of a disputed parliamentary vote that plunged the Central Asian nation into violence and political chaos.

The ex-Soviet nation's Central Electoral Commission said in a statement that it had "invalidated the election results" which saw parties close to pro-Russian President Sooronbay Jeenbekov score big wins amid accusations of mass vote-buying campaigns.

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The results sparked a tumultuous night of protests and clashes in the capital Bishkek, with

protesters seizing government buildings and freeing high-profile politicians including ex-president Almazbek Atambayev.

The clashes left dozens injured, with more than 100 people seeking care in hospitals.

A health ministry spokeswoman said Tuesday that one of the injured had died — a man wearing civilian clothes. The ministry had not yet identified the victim, she told AFP by telephone.

The crisis — reminiscent of revolutions that saw presidents toppled in 2005 and 2010 — will be closely watched by Russia, which maintains a military base in the landlocked republic of 6.5 million, and neighboring China.

Moscow's embassy in Bishkek on Tuesday called for "a legal solution" to the crisis. "Ensuring the safety of citizens, internal stability should be a priority," it added.

Opposition politicians including a former prime minister and several party leaders said they had formed a "coordination council" to restore stability and "return to the rule of law."

The council issued a statement criticizing Jeenbekov for failing to honor a promise to provide equal conditions for the parties competing in the vote.

Jeenbekov's office has insisted the situation in the country is under his control, while the president accused "several political forces" of attempting to seize power.

"I ordered law enforcement agencies not to open fire or shed blood, so as not to endanger the life of a single citizen," Jeenbekov said.

He said he had "suggested that the Central Election Commission carefully investigate the violations and, if necessary, annul the election results" that sparked the unrest.

Along with Atambayev — a bitter rival of Jeenbekov — two former prime ministers and two former lawmakers were released from jail, media reported.

Broken windows, strewn debris

On Tuesday morning, supporters of nationalist politician Sadyr Japarov — who was also freed by protesters — called for him to be made prime minister or president at a gathering outside the building that houses Jeenbekov's office and parliament.

An AFP correspondent saw broken windows and debris strewn around the rooms of the building. Its exits were being guarded by protesters, with no official security presence in sight. Volunteers were handing out tea and helping municipal services cleaning up.

Media reported that Omurbek Suvanaliyev, whose party Butun Kyrgyzstan scraped into parliament according to preliminary results, was appointed national security chief.

It was not clear who had appointed Suvanaliyev or what legal force the appointment had.

A preliminary count of the election results showed two pro-presidency parties, Birimdik and

Mekenim Kyrgyzstan, dominating the new parliament and three parties represented in the outgoing parliament left out in the cold.

Opposition supporters poured onto Bishkek's streets the previous evening to demand Jeenbekov's resignation and a re-run of Sunday's poll.

Poll sows divisions

The peaceful demonstrations in Bishkek turned violent after a column of protesters marched on the White House, home to parliament and the presidential administration.

Police used water cannon, stun grenades and tear gas to disperse protesters attempting to force their way through the gates of the building.

Demonstrators later returned and surrounded the building, eventually breaking in and later marching to the State National Security Committee building where former president Atambayev was jailed.

Footage posted on social media showed the 64-year-old greeting supporters after he left jail, where he was serving an 11-year-sentence for his role in the illegal release from jail of a mob boss.

Atambayev was once close with his successor Jeenbekov, but the pair fell out shortly after the 61-year-old won 2017 presidential elections.

Both men are viewed as loyal allies of Russia, a destination for hundreds of thousands of Kyrgyz migrants, whose strategic position in the country is likely to remain unaffected despite the unrest.

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