The Moscow Times
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Kyrgyzstan Prime Minister Resigns During Post-Vote Chaos

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October 07, 2020



Protester near the parliament building in Bishkek. **Abylai Saralayev / TASS**

Kyrgyzstan's prime minister Kubatbek Boronov resigned Tuesday after widespread unrest pushed the country's electoral body to cancel the results of Sunday's parliament elections.

Boronov, an ally of pro-Russian President Sooronbay Jeenbekov, was replaced by a nationalist politician that protesters released from jail the day before.

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Unrest over the vote left almost 700 hurt and one dead and appeared to be spreading Tuesday to other parts of the country, raising concerns from Russia which has a powerful influence in the ex-Soviet country wedged between China and Kazakhstan.

Kyrgyzstan's Central Electoral Commission said that it had "invalidated the election results" which saw parties close to Jeenbekov dominate results amid accusations of mass vote-buying.

The results sparked a tumultuous Monday night in the capital Bishkek, with protesters seizing government buildings and freeing high-profile politicians from prison, including former president Almazbek Atambayev.

The new prime minister, Sadyr Japarov, was elected during an extraordinary meeting in a hotel after protesters seized the parliament building, the parliamentary press service said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that the Kremlin was "certainly concerned" over the unrest.

Russian military authorities said they had beefed up security at their base outside the capital.

The United States meanwhile called on all sides to "refrain from violence and resolve the election dispute through peaceful means."

Attempt to seize power

Bishkek was calmer on Tuesday, although the president's office remained under the control of protesters and there were some reports of crowds roaming the streets targeting businesses and other organizations.

Jeenbekov's office said the president had remained in the capital, despite not making any public appearances.

But reports indicated that unrest was spreading beyond the capital with several gold and coal mines — critical to the threadbare state budget — seized or damaged by marauders.

More than a dozen political parties said they had formed a "coordination council" to restore stability and "return to the rule of law," criticizing the presidency for failing to ensure a fair election.

However, the new prime minister's party has refused to recognize the council.

President Jeenbekov has insisted the situation in the country is under his control, and accused "several political forces" of attempting to seize power Tuesday.

"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.

A court in Bishkek on Tuesday reversed incoming premier Japarov's 11.5-year conviction for hostage-taking and other crimes that he began serving in 2018.

Banks and many shops and restaurants were closed in central Bishkek, with storeowners removing their goods over looting fears.

Mines targeted

Weakened security after uprisings in 2005 and 2010 saw criminal gangs target mining enterprises that are typically in remote locations.

A spokeswoman for Alliance Altyn, which operates Kyrgyzstan's second-largest gold mine, based in the western Talas region, told AFP that work at the mine had ceased work after a group of men broke into the premises and set fire to a processing unit.

"Our employees were not hurt, thank goodness. We cannot say yet when we will work again," said spokeswoman Kasiyet Karacholkova.

On the same day, an enterprise that controls a vast coal mine in Naryn region said that their mine had been seized and their offices robbed by a criminal gang.

Business associations called on political parties to ensure stability in order to help businesses facing "huge losses" over the coronavirus pandemic in a joint letter.

Opposition supporters had poured onto Bishkek's streets Monday to demand the president's resignation and a re-run of Sunday's poll that left three parties from the outgoing parliament out in the cold.

The peaceful demonstrations in Bishkek turned violent later after clashes with police.

Some protesters then marched 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's presidential election.

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