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Kyrgyzstan Sets New Polls as New PM Reassures Russia

By AFP

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Sadyr Japarov gave assurances that the Russian language would keep its constitutional status. **Abylai Saralayev/TASS**

Kyrgyzstan's electoral authorities said Wednesday parliamentary polls annulled over unrest would be repeated in December as acting leader Sadyr Japarov moved to assure Russia of the two countries' strategic partnership.

The Central Asian country's elections commission said the fresh elections would be held on Dec. 20, after a previous vote was annulled over political chaos that unseated a president and rattled Russia.

Members of the Central Electoral Commission agreed to the new date unanimously, the body said in a statement.

Allegations of vote-buying in the Oct. 4 elections raised by international monitors and losing

parties sparked a protest that escalated into clashes between police and demonstrators.

Central government all but disappeared in the week that followed as rival groups contested executive positions.

Sooronbay Jeenbekov resigned as president last Thursday, allowing populist Japarov — who had been approved as prime minister the day before — to also take over as acting head of state.

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Jeenbekov was the third Kyrgyz president to resign on the back of political unrest since independence in 1991.

This turbulence has concerned Russia, which maintains a military base in the country and is a destination for hundreds of thousands of Kyrgyz migrants.

Japarov received Moscow's ambassador Nikolai Udovichenko on Wednesday, a government press release said, in his first publicly acknowledged talks with a Russian official since becoming prime minister.

Japarov thanked Udovichenko for Moscow's "important role" in stabilizing the country, after Dmitriy Kozak, deputy head of Vladimir Putin's presidential administration, held talks with Japarov and Jeenbekov last week.

Japarov said Russia "was and remains a trusted strategic partner of our country" and gave assurances that the Russian language would keep its constitutional status.

Udovichenko congratulated Japarov on becoming prime minister and said that Moscow was ready to assist Kyrgyzstan in the modernization of the tax system and customs procedures, according to the release.

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Foreign Minister Ruslan Kazakbayev is scheduled to meet with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov in Moscow on Thursday, a Russian foreign ministry statement said last week.

After agreeing a date for new parliamentary elections, lawmakers must now schedule a presidential election.

According to the constitution, 51-year-old Japarov will not be able to run for office unless he leaves his posts before the electoral period begins.

The new leader has suggested he will seek to change the constitution and restructure parliament but the legislature has yet to discuss any concrete plans.

Kyrgyzstan is the most democratic — but also the most politically volatile — of the five former Soviet Central Asian states.

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