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Kyrgyzstan Tears Down Government Gates in Symbolic Move After Crisis

By AFP

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The Bishkek White House is being restored following the takeover by protesters. **Bala Biott / Wikicommons**

Kyrgyzstan tore down the gates of its main government building on Friday in a move authorities said symbolized the removal of barriers between citizens and authorities following political turmoil.

Sooronbay Jeenbekov last month became the third president in Kyrgyzstan to resign amid unrest since the country gained independence 29 years ago amid the collapse of the Soviet Union.

His departure came after allegations of vote-rigging in parliamentary elections sparked mass protests that persisted even after the results of the vote were canceled.

The initiative to tear down the black-painted metal gates surrounding the building that

houses both the parliament and the presidential administration came from the new prime minister and acting president Sadyr Japarov, parliamentary speaker Talant Mamytov told journalists.

The demolition of the gates "is a symbol of the openness of the new government to the people," Mamytov said.

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An AFP correspondent saw state workers use cutting and welding tools to break off sections of the gate before hauling them away using a crane, leaving one section untouched.

The new mayor of the capital Bishkek, Balbak Tulobayev, said the section, which includes a plaque bearing the name of the dead from a previous uprising, would be left standing and compared it to remnants of the Berlin wall.

"It will remain as a memory," Tulobayev said.

'Mass vote-buying'

Protesters captured the government building, known as the White House, in the early hours of Oct. 6, a day after the results of the election were announced.

They broke through the gates, mirroring the actions of protesters during political upheavals that unseated the country's first and second presidents in 2005 and 2010.

The latest crisis was triggered by legislative elections that saw parties close to former president Jeenbekov accused of mass vote-buying.

Parliament is currently holding sessions at the state residence on the outskirts of Bishkek until the White House is restored following the takeover by protesters.

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Jeenbekov resigned on Oct. 15, paving the way for Japarov to inherit his presidential powers less than two weeks after the populist politician was freed from jail by supporters and a day after he was confirmed as prime minister.

Both moves were demanded by Japarov's supporters, who converged on Bishkek from the provinces at the peak of the political crisis.

Key ally Russia has been slow to recognize Japarov as acting head of state as the impoverished, mountainous country that was part of the Soviet Union before gaining independence from Moscow in 1991.

Japarov has said he plans to step down from both his positions in order to run in presidential elections scheduled for Jan. 10.

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