

Ex-President Brought Back to Kyrgyzstan in Graft Probe – Gov't

By [AFP](#)

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Former Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev **Sergei Bobylev / TASS**

Kyrgyzstan's first post-independence leader has been brought back to the country from exile to face questioning over his role in corruption, authorities said Monday.

Kyrgyzstan's national security committee said in a statement that Askar Akayev had been "delivered" to the capital Bishkek but did not state how he had been brought there after 16 years living in exile in Russia.

A celebrated academic, Akayev led Kyrgyzstan from 1990 to 2005, building a system based on nepotism and corruption before being toppled by street protests.

He has been "charged with corruption" in connection with deals struck for the Kumtor gold mine, the security committee said, without clarifying whether or not the 76-year-old faced the threat of arrest.

Earlier this year Kyrgyzstan seized control of the gold mine which was previously operated by Canada-headquartered Centerra Gold.

The Toronto Stock Exchange-listed company admitted in May that it was "no longer in control of the Kumtor Mine and can no longer ensure the safety of the mine's employees or operations."

The mine, whose output accounted for 12.5% of Kyrgyzstan's GDP in 2020, is the country's largest foreign investment and a regular flashpoint for struggles between the government and opposition.

It began producing gold in the 1990s when Akayev served as president and was embroiled in a scandal when a company lorry carrying sodium cyanide crashed and shed its load into a river in 1998.

After Akayev was overthrown during street protests in 2005, successive Kyrgyz governments sought revisions to the agreement over the mine.

Akayev blamed his overthrow on interference from the United States, which at the time maintained a military base in Kyrgyzstan that was used for the Afghan war.

President Sadyr Japarov is a native of the Issyk-Kul region where the gold mine is situated and was a proponent for its nationalization when he was an opposition lawmaker.

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