

Kyrgyz Lawmakers Get First Job

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BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan — Kyrgyz President Roza Otunbayeva on Wednesday urged the country's new parliament to elect a prime minister within three weeks to avert a possible rerun of elections.

Kyrgyzstan held elections last month aimed at creating the first parliamentary democracy in Central Asia, a region otherwise ruled with an iron fist by powerful presidents.

Five political parties won representation in the parliament, but none will receive a majority of the 120 seats, prompting fierce wrangling to form a coalition.

"In the current situation, party interests and ambitions should not take precedence over the interests of the state," Otunbayeva said in an address to the first session of the new parliament.

The Oct. 10 elections were billed by international observers as an important step toward democracy, in a year that has seen a popular uprising and the worst ethnic bloodshed in Kyrgyzstan's post-Soviet history.

But they failed to produce a clear winner in a country split by political and clan rivalries. A coalition of three of the five parties in the legislature is required to form a majority.

"We face a major examination for Central Asia. We are the first to switch to a parliamentary form of government," said Otunbayeva, who gave a deadline of Nov. 27 to elect a prime minister who would assume greater power than the president.

Kyrgyzstan's constitution, adopted after a June referendum following clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks that killed more than 400 people, demands that a prime minister be elected within 15 days of the first session of parliament.

The first session did not end Wednesday and was adjourned until an unspecified date.

The parliament will be given three attempts to form a coalition and approve a prime minister. If they fail to do so, Otunbayeva must dissolve the parliament and call new elections to be held within two months.

The parliament's press service said all but five of the 120 deputies participated in the opening session, which was suspended late Wednesday.

The most immediate tasks for the new parliament were to form a coalition and elect a speaker, Otunbayeva said. She also urged deputies to select cabinet members based on "professionalism and good knowledge of the economy."

Ata Zhurt has 28 seats in the new legislature and three other parties — the Social-Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan, Ar-Namys and Respublika — each have more than 20. The fifth party, Ata Meken, has 18 seats.

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