

Parliament Elects Kyrgyz Government

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BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan — Kyrgyzstan's parliament elected a speaker and approved a new government on Friday, laying the foundation for Central Asia's first parliamentary democracy after months of upheaval and violence.

"We now embark on a new track, and whatever difficulties we may face, we should learn lessons of true democracy," Kyrgyz President Roza Otunbayeva told deputies after voting.

Alluding to the nomadic roots of the ethnic Kyrgyz, she likened the country's path to that of a "caravan" that becomes more orderly as it travels along.

The new Kyrgyz model of government, backed by the United States but criticized by Russia, makes parliament the main decision-making body and gives the prime minister more power than the president.

Future presidents will be limited to a single six-year term but will have the right to appoint the defense minister and national security service head. Otunbayeva will step down as acting president on Dec. 31, 2011.

Candidates for speaker and prime minister were proposed to parliament by Ata Zhurt (Motherland), the Social-Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan and Respublika, which formed a governing coalition last week.

A previous three-party grouping had lasted just two days, failing to elect a speaker.

Ata Zhurt faction leader Akhmatbek Keldibekov was elected speaker by a 101-14 vote in the 120-seat legislature.

Deputies later approved Social Democratic Party leader Almazbek Atambayev as prime minister and Respublika leader Omurbek Babanov as first deputy prime minister.

Three failed attempts to elect a speaker and prime minister would have forced Otunbayeva to hold a new parliamentary election.

"The new government should now get down to business," Otunbayeva told the parliament. "We must roll up the sleeves and work. There is no place for personal ambitions."

Longtime President Askar Akayev was forced to flee in 2005 after mass protests. Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who deposed him and took over, suffered a similar fate in April this year and fled to Belarus following violence in which at least 85 were killed.

Proponents of parliamentary democracy say Kyrgyzstan's experience has shown the inefficiency of authoritarian rule and a lack of public control that allowed the plundering of state coffers by family clans.

"The nation must not be run by one family," Atambayev, 54, who was once Bakiyev's prime minister, told deputies. "There will now be strict control."

Keldibekov, 44, ran the state tax committee under Bakiyev. Babanov, a 40-year-old entrepreneur, was first deputy prime minister in Bakiyev's day.

"We must regain investor confidence," said Atambayev.

He said gold deposits, ample hydro power resources and agriculture could be drivers of the country's future economic growth.

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