

Turkmen Leader Fires Security Chief

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ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan — Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov has fired the head of the nation's security services, replacing him with the defense minister, a state newspaper reported Wednesday.

Ministerial reshuffles are frequent in Turkmenistan, and almost no senior official has managed to remain in place for more than a handful of years.

The Neutral Turkmenistan newspaper said Charymurat Amanov, who served as the minister of national security since 2007, lost his job for "shortcomings in his work." Amanov was replaced by Defense Minister Yaylym Berdiyev, who will be succeeded by his deputy, Begench Gundogdiyev.

The prosecutor general said in a televised meeting of senior security officials Tuesday that an audit into the National Security Ministry's activities revealed "a number of shortcomings," but he gave no specific details.

In contrast with the mercurial late President Saparmurat Niyazov, who died suddenly in late 2006, Berdymukhammedov normally issues at least two verbal warnings before dismissing

ministers.

Berdiyev, who trained at an agricultural college before joining the military, is a native of Berdymukhammedov's Akhal province. High-ranking appointees in the Turkmen government have in recent years been selected almost exclusively from Berdymukhammedov's home region in a sign that observers say indicates the president prizes loyalty over competence.

Observers don't expect the tightly controlled, energy-rich nation to face the prospect of public unrest similar to what has roiled the Middle East, but authorities have nonetheless reportedly enforced strict new rules on the movements of university students.

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