

Kyrgyzstan Tries TV in Transparency Effort

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BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan — Authorities in Kyrgyzstan began testing members of the new anti-corruption agency on live television Monday in a bid to display an unusual level of transparency.

The unorthodox hiring process is the culmination of a restructuring of the country's chief anti-graft body, which began with the recent disbanding of the widely criticized Finance Police.

Officials say the new body is needed to improve the country's anemic economy, which has been hamstrung by bribery and nepotism.

Former employees of the Finance Police have criticized the process and say their dismissals were illegal.

Images broadcast live from the testing center showed hopeful applicants sitting at computers while an offscreen presenter commented on the proceedings.

The prime minister's office released a statement upon completion of the first session of 100-minute-long quizzes Monday, naming and shaming the lowest scorer and praising the best performer for answering 95 out of a total of 100 questions.

The tests, to be held over four days, will initially whittle the 1,400 applicants aspiring to join the State Service for Combating Economic Crimes to 400.

After medical examinations, fitness tests and interviews, a group of 177 successful candidates will be admitted to the agency.

Such exercises in transparency are virtually unheard of in a country where many obtain government posts through personal recommendations or by paying bribes.

Prime Minister Omurbek Babanov's government is eager to dispel comparisons with the rule of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who was overthrown in 2010 in a public revolt inspired by anger over corruption and a stagnant economy.

A group of dismissed personnel from the Finance Police, which was disbanded last month, submitted a letter to parliamentary deputies over the weekend in which they accused high-ranking government officials of seeking to hinder the fight against economic criminality.

The government insists, however, that former members of the Finance Police have been allowed to take the exam and re-enter service.

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