

Irate Kyrgyz Hit Russian Mine Camp

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan — Villagers in southern Kyrgyzstan have attacked a camp of geologists working for a Russian gold-mining company, accusing them of damaging the environment.

Residents of a village in Batken region raided the camp, owned by small private miner Almazintex, on two separate occasions this month after calls to halt exploration at the site were ignored, a police spokesman and the camp operator said.

"Property was set ablaze. A criminal investigation is under way," local police spokesman Talaibek Susumbayev said in an interview Thursday.

Mining is crucial to the economy of the Central Asian state, which has contracted this year largely to declining output at the Kumtor mine, owned by Canada's Centerra Gold. The mine alone contributed 12 percent of the gross domestic product last year.

The road to the high-altitude mine has been sporadically blocked by protestors, while a spate of attacks on other mining camps in the last 18 months — often with the support

of nationalist politicians — has dented investor confidence.

"They are demanding an end to geological work and that the deposit be recultivated," said Atambek Botoyev, deputy governor of Batken region. He said villagers had accused the company of contaminating a local river with chemicals.

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