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Special Edition – Kyrgyz Republic (Kyrgyzstan) – Latest updates

April 6 & 7

Following two days of protests around the country, the government of President Bakiyev has declared a nationwide state of emergency. Meanwhile, the opposition leader Omurbek Tekebayev has stated that the opposition will take responsibility for restoring security in the country and that power has transferred to opposition members in almost all major towns.

Around midday on April 6, some 500-1,000 opposition supporters in Talas, northwestern Kyrgyzstan, reportedly forced the local police to release opposition leader Bolot Sherniyazov, who had been detained on arrival in Talas that day. Anti-government protesters threw stones and Molotov cocktails at the regional administration in Talas, then attempted to occupy the building and even appointed their own alternate governor. According to the Kyrgyz Interior Ministry, protesters also twice attempted to storm the local police headquarters. Police responded with teargas and rubber bullets, but failed to disperse the protesters, who were subsequently joined by up to 5,000 Talas residents. According to Sherniyazov, Special Forces were flown in from Bishkek.

On Wednesday April 7, a 1,000-strong crowd in Naryn, where protests had taken place throughout March, took over the local administrative building. The same events reportedly happened in the town of Kerben (on the border with Uzbekistan in the Ferghana Valley region). Meanwhile, in Bishkek, over 1,000 protesters attacked the president's and general prosecutor's offices and took over the state television station. When teargas and rubber bullets again failed to repel the attackers, security forces fired live ammunition, killing at least 21 people and injuring some 200. Unidentified 'blasts' have also reported.

April 8 (today)

President Kurmanbek Bakiyev late on April 7 fled the capital Bishkek following violent anti-government protests earlier the same day, during which activists attempted to seize government buildings. Bakiyev's whereabouts remain unknown, but conflicting reports suggest that he is either in the southern Osh oblast (province) or out of the country. Meanwhile, opposition leader and former foreign minister Roza Otunbayeva has announced the formation of an interim government following the prime minister's reported acquiescence to the protesters' demands to dissolve the government. The demonstrators reportedly remained on the streets of the capital overnight despite a declaration of a state of emergency by the authorities and the imposition of a curfew between 22.00 and 06.00 (local time) in Bishkek, as well as in the cities of Naryn (Naryn oblast) and Talas (Talas oblast). Several protesters were armed with small and large firearms and engaged in apparently indiscriminate firing. A pervasive security presence remains on the streets in central areas of Bishkek.

At least 47 people were killed in the unrest on April 7 and more than 400 others were injured. The security forces opened fire on the protesters outside the White House (the presidential administration building) on Chuy Avenue, near Ala-Too Square in Bishkek. Earlier in the day, the police used stun grenades, tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannon in failed attempts to disperse the protesters.

The unrest also prompted the temporary closure of Bishkek's Manas International Airport (FRU) between 20.00 on April 7 and 08.00 today. Additionally, the country's borders with Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have been closed in response to the unrest, though reports on the status of crossings with Uzbekistan and China have not yet emerged. Telecommunications were initially reported to have been disabled, though local sources indicate that telephone landline, mobile, text messaging (SMS) and internet services remain functional.

The security environment remains tense, particularly in the capital, with conflicting reports regarding the situation continuing to emerge. Although the opposition has set up an interim government and announced plans to create a new constitution within six months, there has been no official response from Bakiyev or representatives of his administration. The situation is expected to remain highly volatile for the next few days. If Bakiev resigns, redistribution of assets away from his inner circle is likely and the structure of state shareholding in key sectors will likely change again (for instance, Maxim Bakiev's Development Agency has been holding shares of the Kumtor gold mining operation in trust for private shareholders). Opposition supporters have also called for the renationalisation of the privatised Kyrgyztelecom and utilities company Severelektro.

A continuation of street protests in the capital and other major cities such as Osh, Naryn and Talas are likely. The position of the police, presidential guard and security forces with regard to the new government will determine whether the violence continues or a rapid decrease in unrest ensues; an announcement of their support for the opposition interim government would be expected to lead to an improvement in the situation. Personnel should anticipate a pervasive presence of security personnel and measures amid a tense environment in Bishkek, Osh, Naryn, Talas, Tokmok and other major urban centers in the coming days. Business travelers and expatriates are unlikely to be directly targeted during any further outbreaks of unrest, but face a significant incidental risk from anti-government disturbances and during any confrontations between protesters and security personnel. Meanwhile, the airport and border closures are expected to be temporary measures that will be lifted in the coming days. The curfew is expected to remain in place until order is restored.

Recommendations:

- We advise against all non-essential travel to Kyrgyzstan until the situation stabilizes. A curfew is in place from 22.00 to 06.00.
- Staff already in the Kyrgyz Republic should minimize movement and remain in secure locations.
- There is currently no need to evacuate staff from the Kyrgyz Republic, but corporations should ensure that they have effective and realistic evacuation plans in place and ready to implement should the situation deteriorate.
- Risk Managers should ensure that they are aware of the locations of all staff and their contacts details. Communications may be difficult at times and personnel should consider all alternative options (satellite phones, text messages (SMS), emails etc.).
- Staff in the Kyrgyz Republic should carry proper documentation to ease passage through checkpoints. Follow directions from the security forces promptly.
- Avoid the vicinity of Ala-Too Square and all other government buildings, as well as state television and radio stations.
- Monitor the local media and our website for updates.

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