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View Point

Kyrgyzstan in Turmoil

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In the aftermath of the deadly uprising in April 2010 that overthrew President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, the Republic of Kyrgyzstan continues to be politically volatile. The interim government has accused the ousted leader for instigating the recent violence, a charge that has been denied by Bakiyev who is currently living in exile in Belarus. The unrest has deepened divisions between the country's ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities.

In 2005, the *Tulip Revolution* in Kyrgyzstan toppled Askar Akaev's regime and Akaev was replaced by Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Many hoped he would bring positive changes in the country with a democratic government that is capable of handling social problems and improve economic situation of the country. But five years later, Kyrgyzstan is far from being democratic and economically it is even weaker. Events in the recent past have clearly demonstrated the ineffectiveness of government institutions and policies that failed to ensure peace, stability and democratic functioning of the State. Significantly, amidst internal pressures, Kyrgyzstan's integrity has been threatened.

The protest which started in the northern city of Talas on April 6 flared up in Naryn and then rapidly spread to the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek on April 7. Violent clashes killed nearly 300 and injured over 1000. The protest forced President Bakiev to flee the capital and seek refuge in the Southern region of Jalalabad, which is Bakiev's home region and the original support base during the *Tulip Revolution*. The conflict between the North (controlled by opposition) and parts of the south have increased gradually. The interim government, headed by Roza

Otunbayeva, dissolved the parliament, undertook revision of the constitution. Interestingly, the interim government has been seeking the assistance of international community to provide it the much needed support. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, the neighbouring states, closed their borders with Kyrgyzstan in early April and the current situation on the border is having adverse impact on inter-state trade.

The recent protests have spurred authoritarian practices, persecution of opposition leaders, high utility prices and widespread poverty causing social unrest resulting in immense pressure on the government to bring about internal stability. Besides, rivalry within the interim government has complicated the situation and affected the internal situation of the country. This has also impacted negatively on the regional dynamics leading to the civil war and clashes which are rooted to regionalism, tribalism and increased ethnic tensions. The Sokh enclave, which has always been a zone of conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, witnessed disturbances causing severe problems between Kyrgyz-Uzbek population. The violent events in the enclave are a reflection of the ongoing broader conflict in the Fergana Valley between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek authorities. Although many attempts have been made to delineate the borders since the two states gained their independence, none were successful. Other countries like Russia, U.S. and the U.N. have also condemned the recent violence in Kyrgyzstan.

There are no exact figures on the scale of ethnic unrest in Kyrgyzstan, and the official casualty figures are contradictory and considerably lower than the unofficial estimates. All that is known is that many people are dead and as many as 100,000 people have been forced to abandon their homes in Osh and Jalalabad and other towns in Southern Kyrgyzstan.

There are two versions of what caused the tragic events of June 10 and 11 in the city of Osh and Jalalabad. According to a version, spontaneous fighting between young Kyrgyz and Uzbeks quickly spread into a larger conflict in which shops and cars were set on fire and there were a large number of injuries and deaths. The other version is that the riot were pre-planned and timed to coincide with the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Tashkent. However, both versions have blamed the local criminal organizations for the clashes. It is believed that criminal masterminds timed the violence to coincide with the SCO Summit.

The SCO Summit went off peacefully in Tashkent (capital of Uzbekistan) and during the news conference, the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev ruled out using CSTO forces to

stabilize Kyrgyzstan, which was an appeal by the leader of Belarus, where the Bakiev and his family are presently living. Though a resolution that calls on SCO countries to send observers to the referendum on constitutional reform held on June 27, was drafted and approved before the Summit, it was agreed that referendum was a way to legitimize the new Kyrgyz government. A referendum for a new constitution was held on June 27 and an overwhelming 90 percent of Kyrgyz voters adopted the new constitution that envisages a parliamentary democracy in Kyrgyzstan.

Today Kyrgyzstan is facing severe abuse of power, human rights violation and poor socio-economic conditions. It is sinking into chaos and the chances of a positive outcome are rapidly diminishing. The new regime and the leadership need to build effective government institutions improve socio-economic conditions and tackle corruption and nepotism to manage the internal challenges as well as external geopolitical dynamics. It should also focus on improving the socio-political environment making it more democratic rather than authoritarian and formulate strong domestic as well as foreign policy. The Kyrgyz people are peace loving and wish to restore peace in the country, which the new leadership needs to take note of.

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