
TAJIKISTAN'S FIRST PRESIDENT DIES, AGED 84

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Qahhor Mahkamov, the first president of Tajikistan, who led the country until the eve of independence and at a time of profound political convulsions, has died at the age of 84.

Asia-Plus website reported on June 8 that Mahkamov had long been suffering from illness.

Mahkamov was born to a peasant family on April 16, 1932, in the northern city of Khujand, which produced much of Tajikistan Soviet elite. His career followed a classic Soviet trajectory.

In 1953, he graduated from the Leningrad mountain mining institute and that same year began working as an engineer at a coal mine in Shurab, a village straddling the border with Kyrgyzstan. While progressing steadily up the ranks of the mining sector, in 1957, he joined the Communist Party.

In 1961, he was appointed chairman of the city executive committee of Leninabad, as Khujand was known at the time. Two years later, he was promoted to chairman of the Tajik SSRs State Planning Committee, or Gosplan, a position he occupied for 19 years. From 1965, he simultaneously acted as deputy chairman of ministers in the Tajik SSR. And then from 1982 to 1986, he served as chairman of ministers in the Tajik SSR.

In December 1984, Mahkamov was appointed first secretary of the central committee of the Communist Party of Tajikistan, de facto making him the republics leader. From 1986, he became a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Despite being a true-believer in the communist system, Mahkamov embraced the reforms that came with perestroika and thought they would enable to flourishing of national self-awareness.

In the end though, he was never fully embraced by the population and seen as insufficiently

supportive of the national cause. His marriage to an ethnic Tatar was one of many aspects that drew suspicion in a republic where ethno-nationalist moods were on the increase.

In February 1990, mass disturbances broke out in Dushanbe amid a swirl of rumors that plush apartments were being handed out to Armenian refugees from Baku. This was a sensitive issue as the city was at the time in the grip of a mounting housing shortage crisis and, like now, plagued by unemployment. Several thousand people gathered at the headquarters of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Tajikistan. The next day, cries of "Down With the Armenians" mixed slogans like "Down With Mahkamov. The demonstrations were firmly quelled in a crackdown that ended with the death of dozens.

As criticism mounted, Mahkamov tendered a token resignation that was rejected by a plenary sitting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Tajikistan.

In November, the republics Supreme Soviet approved a decision to name Mahkamov Tajikistans first president — a post he filled while still serving as chairman of the Cabinet of ministers.

Mahkamov badly blotted his copybook during the August 1991 putsch, but siding with the organizers of the coup. Opposition forces at the time demanded his ouster as well as the abolition of a law banning the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan. On August 31, 1991, the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR voted in favor of a motion of no-confidence in Mahkamov, who accordingly resigned his post.

After his resignation he became a life-time member of parliament. He largely disappeared from public view in the years after independence.

Kaynak/Source: