
KYRGYZSTAN SEEKS RELEASE OF DETAINED CITIZENS AS BORDER TENSIONS RISE WITH UZBEKISTAN

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Kyrgyz authorities say negotiations are under way with officials in neighboring Uzbekistan to secure the release of four Kyrgyz nationals detained by Uzbek police in a disputed border area abutting the two Central Asian states.

Kyrgyzstan's state border-guard service said on August 24 that the four men are being held at the Yangi-Kurgan district police station in Uzbekistan.

Negotiators from the Uzbek border-guard service said there was no reason to worry about the safety or condition of the detained Kyrgyz.

The tensions have prompted Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambaev to ask his government to review international border agreements signed by previous administrations.

Kyrgyz officials said the four men were detained by the Uzbek police officers deployed by helicopters to a small mountain known as Ungar-Too on August 22.

Ungar-Too is located in disputed territory along the border between the two countries and is the site of a Kyrgyz radio and television transmitter at Kerben where the men work.

Kerben has been a flash point for unrest in the past, including when Kyrgyz police fired on protesters angry over reports suggesting a border demarcation agreement with China had surrendered land in a nearby mountain range.

This month's deployment of the Uzbek police officers -- whose number Bishkek put at around seven -- prompted some residents of nearby Kyrgyz villages in the Aksy district center in southern Jalal-Abad Province to stage a protest.

'On Top Of Our Heads'

The Kyrgyz locals gathered near the district government headquarters on August 23, demanding that authorities resolve the dispute.

Mayram Akkulueva, a resident of the village of Ustukan who attended the demonstration, said participants also demanded that Uzbek police leave the area.

"We saw how two Uzbek helicopters brought the soldiers to the mountain," she said. "The mountain is located above our village. It feels like they have sat on the top of our heads."

She added, "We are afraid, we dont know what happens next."

Kyrgyz authorities said they sent reinforcements to the border area after the Uzbek police deployment.

The Kyrgyz border-guard service said on August 24 that the situation in the area remains unchanged.

Atambaev said some border agreements with neighboring countries were signed without transparency or the endorsement of the public or parliament.

He said past border agreements play "a negative role in current efforts to defend Kyrgyzstan's national interests."

Meanwhile, local authorities in Jalal-Abad said that work is under way to build a new radio and television transmitter in the area.

Kaynak/Source: