
UZBEKS PAY ENTENTE-BUILDING VISIT TO KYRGYZSTAN

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A delegation of senior officials from Uzbekistan has paid a visit to neighboring Kyrgyzstan, reciprocating a trip earlier this month that presaged a possible thaw in relations between the two nations.

The 47-person delegation that traveled to Kyrgyzstans Osh region on October 26 was led by Uzbek deputy Prime Minister Adham Ikramov and also comprised the heads of the Andijan, Namangan and Ferghana regions, representatives of several government agencies, including the National Security Service, and members of the Kyrgyz diaspora.

As happened during the visit to Uzbekistan in early October, the officials passed through the Dustlik (Friendship) border crossing, which sits adjacent to Osh and has lain unused for many years.

So far, these encounters have focused primarily on pleasantries. The Kyrgyz hosts laid on a series of cultural events under the gaze of the giant statue of Vladimir Lenin in the center of Osh.

"During the visit, the delegation visited Osh State University, where they learned about the activities of the medicine faculty. Addressing the students, Adham Ikramov spoke of the inviolability of friendship and good neighborliness between the two countries. He stressed that good neighborly relations between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan should become a cornerstone for the further development of joint cooperation, Uzbek news website gazeta.uz reported.

On the same day, Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambayev held a telephone conversation with Uzbekistans acting president Shavkat Mirziyoyev. The pair reportedly discussed their shared interest in finally resolving the demarcation issues that have blighted relations since independence.

The border between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan is almost 1,400 kilometers long, but 324 kilometers of it in 58 separate locations remained unresolved. There have been some tentative signs of progress, however. Working groups from the two nations conducted joint field surveys on October 5-14 at 55 sites, after which they signed a document committing each side to work further on the issue.

This sudden apparent breakthrough comes only weeks after the death of Uzbek President Islam Karimov, whose preference in dealing with regional neighbors had been for intransigence over cooperation. It remains early to say with certainty if the change in mood will become a permanent feature of Mirziyoyevs rule, which is set to be formally extended by elections on December 4, but the early signs are encouraging.

The most pressing matter for communities on either side of the border would be for the multiple idle crossings to be reopened for travel and trade. As it is, regular free passage between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan is allowed only through one border post.

Kaynak/Source: