
KYRGYZSTAN, KAZAKHSTAN LEADERS MEET, RAISING HOPES OF RAPPROCHEMENT

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The leaders of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan met during a regional security summit in Minsk on November 30 for talks that have raised hopes that a bitter squabble between their nations could be settled.

Newly elected Kyrgyz leader Sooronbai Jeenbekov and President Nursultan Nazarbayev used the encounter to discuss the stalemate on their countries shared border. Intensified border controls imposed by Kazakhstan have for several weeks led to long lines and financially crippling delays for Kyrgyz exporters. The Kyrgyz government has valued the damage to its economy at around 1 billion som (\$14.3 million).

The tete-a-tete took place on the fringes of the Comprehensive Security Treaty Organization summit at the suggestion of the Kyrgyz government and is the highest-profile meeting of its kind since the diplomatic row broke out amid vitriolic accusations from Jeenbekovs predecessor that Astana was meddling in Kyrgyzstans political scene. Nazarbayev sounded a conciliatory note.

It is indispensable that we restore the family and brotherly ties between our two counties. This is in the interests of our people, Nazarbayev said.

Nazarbayev said that Kazakhstan would temporarily relax control at the Ak-Zhol border crossing. Another agreement that appears to have emerged from this meeting is that teams of officials from the Eurasian Economic Union, or EEU, the Moscow-led trade of which both countries are members, will inspect imports coming in from China.

What began last month as a strictly political row between top officials has developed into a low-level trade war that Kazakhstan has attributed to its frustration at what it says is the vast amount of contraband flowing into Kyrgyzstan from China. Goods smuggled into Kyrgyzstan avoid the EEU import levies that are supposed to be pooled and then redistributed among bloc members at pre-agreed rates.

The presidents in Minsk have also committed to completing a road map to settle all outstanding border issues. During an EEU intergovernmental council on October 26, Kazakhstans delegation refused to sign onto the road map initiative.

We have a road map. The government of the two countries will keep working at it and by the end of December we will finish the work on this matter. We will introduce joint control at the border. All issues of bilateral cooperation will be resolved, Jeenbekov said.

Kaynak/Source: