

Change in Kyrgyzstan

IT is easy to oust dictators through revolutions but difficult to establish democratic rule. Five years ago Kurmanbek Bakiyev rode a populist wave to become Kyrgyz president after 'revolutionaries' made Askar Akayev, one of Central Asia's most enlightened rulers, go. On Wednesday, five years after the Tulip Revolution, Bakiyev himself fled Bishkek after agitators seized government buildings and other vital installations. A 'people's government' is now in power, and it intends to serve as an interim government for a period of six months, draw up a new constitution and set things right. We in Pakistan have been through this charade many times. A country's problems cannot be solved through street agitations. Kyrgyzstan is mired in poverty. Even though it has plenty of resources for a population of 5.5 million with a 98 per cent literacy rate, the country never had a government that could address the people's socio-economic problems. The break-up

of the Soviet Union has made no difference to the people's fortunes.

Bakiyev promised reforms but failed. Instead, his government cracked down on the dissent and muzzled the media. Two newsmen were recently killed, a TV channel was closed down, and many websites and at least one radio station were not accessible. The extent of popular feeling against him was evident from the people's anger, for Wednesday's violence left at least 40 people dead, though the opposition claims a figure touching 100. One can only hope that the interim government will remain interim, and that the setup headed by former foreign minister Roza Otunbayeva will organise a fair election to usher in a democratic era. Bordering China, Kyrgyzstan is strategically located and hosts an American and a Russian base. If managed properly, and given democratic institutions and prosperity it can be a source of stability in an area rife with militancy.