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Rafiq Aliev, Farhad's brother and the president of the country's largest private oil company, Azpetrol; Health Minister Ali Insanov; and former finance minister Fikret Yusifov.</p> <p>Labor Minister Ali Nagiev and the presidential Chief-of-Staff Akif Muradverdiev were also dismissed on 20 October.</p> <p>Local media reports said Fikret Sadikhov, a member of parliament and head of the state-owned AzerChemical, was also arrested, but this information could not be independently confirmed.</p> <p>Rumors persist that Education Minister Misir Mardanov has been sacked, but on Friday he denied his dismissal in a Baku radio interview.</p> <p>In a joint statement by the State Prosecutor's Office and Ministries of Internal Affairs and National Security, the government charged that the Aliev brothers (no relation to the president) had conspired with Finance Minister Yusifov and Health Minister Insanov and to fund a "violent revolution" and "armed resistance" timed to coincide with the return to Azerbaijan of long-time exile and Democratic Party leader Rasul Guliev.</p> <p>Guliev, despite having been charged in 2000 with the embezzlement of US\$100 million in state funds, has been allowed to run in the parliamentary election, although he now faces additional charges of fomenting a revolution.</p> <p>The Prosecutor's Office said Yusifov was cooperating with the authorities after a search of his home last week, during which investigators said they found €100,000 that Farhad Aliev allegedly had personally handed to Yusifov.</p> <p>According to the authorities, Guliev and Yusifov met in Berlin earlier this month to discuss funding the revolution and staging mass protests.</p> <p>"Weapon[s], ammunition, and explosives" have also been found elsewhere in Baku, the authorities claimed.</p> <p>Guliev's expected arrival at Baku's Heydar Aliev airport on Monday led to the deployment of thousands of troops and police at checkpoints between downtown Baku and the airport.</p> <p>Detained in Simferopol, Ukraine on an Azerbaijani arrest warrant, Guliev has now been released by a Ukrainian judge due to "lack of evidence".</p> <p>His immediate plans are unknown, although a source in the Baku press speculated on Friday that he "could return in two days", which would coincide with a planned opposition demonstration on Sunday.</p> <p>But the media source downplayed the importance of Guliev in the wave of arrests and dismissals.</p> <p>"Guliev is an excuse," said the reporter, who requested anonymity.</p> <p>The real issue, he said, is a power struggle between various factions that have emerged in Azerbaijan since the death of late president Heydar Aliev, father of the current president, and to many, the founder of the first "post-Soviet dynasty".</p> <p>"These groups are like mafias," said the reporter, who underscored the strong clan-based rivalries that are based in western and southern Azerbaijan.</p> <p>Fuad Mustafaev, Deputy Chairman of the Azerbaijan Popular Front party (one of three opposition parties in the Azadlig Bloc), agreed.</p> <p>"There are several groups inside the government that are fighting for spheres of influence since the death of Heydar Aliev...they are oligarchs...Farhad Aliev is not sincere about reforms," Mustafaev cautioned, "but he is a pro-Western oligarch."</p> <p>The arrests represent a tactical gain but a strategic loss for the Heydar Aliev oligarchs, who draw their power from the Nakhichevan area and are headed by Heydar's son Ilham and his allies, said Mustafaev.</p> <p>"The government has now lost all of its literate, educated base", as well as the middle class entrepreneurs, he maintained. "We would have won the election even before these arrests. But the arrests and sackings show that the government was not united [...] and Ilham Aliev was afraid of an image of government on the threshold of disunity."</p> <p>Some say that with Guliev implicated in the plot to overthrow the government, the Popular Front could be next.</p> <p>"It's a possibility," said Mustafaev. "Torture is a possibility" for the men recently arrested as well, he told ISN Security Watch. "The government is like a junta."</p>	<p><b>Search</b></p> <p><input type="text"/></p> <p>ISN Website <input type="button" value="GO"/></p> <p>» <a href="#">Tell me more about ISN LASE</a></p> <p>» <a href="#">Comment on this story</a></p> <p>» <a href="#">Printer-friendly version</a></p> <p>» <a href="#">Forward this story to a friend</a></p> <p> <b>Perspectives</b> is a weekly column written by our Security Watch readers. 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But an official in the pro-government New Azerbaijan Party dismissed the seemingly dramatic nature of the arrests. The underlying issues behind the arrests were not simply political, but criminal, said Mubariz Gurban.

"What we have seen here is the fight of President Aliev against corruption as well as preventing the usurping of the government," he said.

As to mass support for the opposition, he waved his hands in the air and declared: "It is no more than 15 to 20 per cent."

He dismissed speculation that a Ukraine- or Georgia-style revolution could take place on election day on 6 November.

"A revolution cannot take place in Azerbaijan as happened in Ukraine or Georgia. Why? Azerbaijan has oil! Revolutions do not happen in oil states!"

Baku is now bracing itself for the Sunday demonstrations, and the speaker of Azerbaijan's parliament, Murtuz Alasgarov, has warned that the investigations are not over and more arrests should be expected in the coming days.

(By Karl Rahder in Baku)

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