

Business & Politics in the Muslim World
News Monitoring
Weekly Report
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Central Asia
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- Foreign companies to develop major gas field Southern Yoloten

Social Front

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- Orthodox clergy hold annual meeting in Turkmenistan
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- Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan resume border demarcation

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Social Front

Outline

Azerbaijan

Political Front

- Azerbaijani parliament protests European Parliament's resolution

Members of Azerbaijani parliament deem it important to protest the European Parliament resolution. Azerbaijan's Milli Majlis (parliament) has adopted an appeal to the European Parliament.

- Azerbaijani parliament's observation mission says parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan were transparent and democratic

Azerbaijani observers say the parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan were transparent and democratic. Member of the Azerbaijani delegation, chairman of the parliament's agrarian policy committee Eldar Ibrahimov said the elections were held in the peaceful atmosphere in Uzbekistan on Dec. 27.

- Azerbaijan Central Election Commission may cancel outcome of municipal elections in one of district election commissions

The result of municipal elections in Azerbaijan's Naftalan region might be annulled. Member of the Central Election Commission Tofiq Hasanov said the investigation proved interference of local authorities in the voting process. "It would be expedient to annul result of elections in Naftalan municipalities.

Geo Strategic Front

- Hungarian FM: Azerbaijan is our strategic partner in South Caucasus region

Exclusive interview with Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Balázs.

How do you assess the current bilateral relations between Hungary and Azerbaijan?

Hungary considers the Republic of Azerbaijan as a strategic partner in the South Caucasus region.

Economic /Energy Front

- SOCAR president: Azerbaijan to increase gas supply to Russia twice

SOCAR (State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan) will increase gas supplies to Russia twice - up to 1 billion cubic meters per year in 2010, SOCAR President Rovnag Abdullayev said on Dec. 26."

Social Front

- Monuments of Heydar Aliyev and Suleyman Demirel erected in Gagauzia

Monuments of Heydar Aliyev and Suleyman Demirel, two outstanding personalities of the Turkish world, have been erected in Comrat, the capital city Gagauzia, an autonomous region of Moldova. Being of common origins, the peoples of Azerbaijan and Turkey have assisted the people of Gagauzia both materially and morally in their hardships, Mikhail Formuzal, head of the Territorial Unit, stated at the ceremony dedicated to the 15th anniversary of establishment of the Unit.

- Baku hosts seminar on assistance to human trafficking victims

A seminar on assistance to human trafficking victims was held in Baku on Dec. 25. The event co-organized by the International Labour Organization and Azerbaijan's Center for Assistance to Victims of Human Trafficking brought together officials, representatives of NGOS and international organizations.

Kazakastan

Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov invited to pay official visit to Kazakhstan

In his congratulatory New Year message to Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, Nursultan Nazarbayev invited his Turkmen counterpart to pay an official visit to Kazakhstan. The text of the message was published in the central media of Turkmenistan. The President of Kazakhstan thanked the Turkmen leader for the "warm and cordial reception" during his recent working visit to Turkmenistan to launch the Turkmenistan - Uzbekistan - Kazakhstan - China gas pipeline.

Economic /Energy Front

Social Front

- Kazakhstan citizens to have four days off on New Year

According to the Law on Holidays in Kazakhstan, New Year, celebrated on January 1 and 2, is the state holiday. The days of the national and state holidays are non-working days

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- Kyrgyzstan Convicts Four For Protesting Campaign Manager's Arrest

-- A court in the northeastern Kyrgyz town of Balykchi has sentenced four people to four years in jail each for holding an illegal protest during last July's presidential elections.

Geo Strategic Front

- NATO Office To Move From Astana To Bishkek

Kyrgyz Defense Minister Bakyt Kalyev has said a NATO office for Central Asia will be established in Bishkek, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Kalyev said today at a parliamentary meeting on international and interparliamentary affairs that the NATO representative office, which includes its Partnership for Peace program, will be relocated from Astana to Bishkek because of the opening of the alliance's Transit Center at Manas Airport,

- Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan resume border demarcation

Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan resumed work of the intergovernmental commission on delimitation and demarcation of the state border after a 5-year break on December 28. "The commission did not meet for some objective and subjective reasons that provoked nervousness and stress of people, especially residents of border regions," Daniyar Usenov the Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan told the press in Tashkent.

- Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan resume border demarcation

Ilias Davydov the Energy Minister of Kyrgyzstan has left for Uzbekistan to talk over gas supply of Kyrgyzstan in 2010, press service of Kyrgyzgas company told the news agency 24.kg.

Economic /Energy Front

- Energy Minister heads for gas talks in Uzbekistan

Ilias Davydov the Energy Minister of Kyrgyzstan has left for Uzbekistan to talk over gas supply of Kyrgyzstan in 2010, press service of Kyrgyzgas company told the news agency 24.kg.

- Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan to formulate single policy on PTL-500kW construction

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan stand for formulation of a single coordinated policy on construction of power transmission line-500kW Hodjent-Datka-Kemin-Almaty as a part of CASA-100 project, preliminary results of the 9th session of Kyrgyz-Tajik intergovernmental commission in Osh said.

- Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan sales turnover amounts to \$140M in 2009

Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan sales turnover amounted to \$140 million in 11 months of 2009, Rustam Azimov the first Assistant Prime Minister of Uzbekistan said, meeting with the head of the Kyrgyz government Daniyar Usenov Monday.

- Uzbekistan concerned about import of non-CIS goods to Kyrgyzstan

Uzbekistan is concerned about volume of goods, imported to Kyrgyzstan from non-CIS states, Rustam Azimov first Assistant Prime Minister of Uzbekistan said Monday meeting with the head of the Kyrgyz government Daniyar Usenov as a part of the 7th session of joint intergovernmental commission on bilateral cooperation.

- Kyrgyz GDP growth hits 2.4 percent in 2009

Kyrgyzstan's GDP growth reached 2.4 percent in 11 months of 2009 and took the second place among CIS countries, Orozmat Abdykalykov Chairman of the National Statistics Committee told the President.

- Kyrgyzstan signs gas deal with Uzbekistan

Kyrgyzstan has signed a long-awaited gas deal with Uzbekistan Monday in Tashkent, press service of the Kyrgyz government reported.

Social Front

- Plane Pilots Sentenced For Deadly Crash In Kyrgyzstan

A Kyrgyz court today sentenced the pilots of an aircraft that crashed near Bishkek last year to five years in prison, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Kyrgyz Children Freed From Slave Labor In Russia

Russian police have freed 15 Kyrgyz children who were forced to work in an underground factory in Moscow Oblast, RFE/RL's Russian Service reports. Police said they discovered an illegal textile shop in Noginsk, about 50 kilometers from Moscow, where migrants from Vietnam and Kyrgyzstan were working.

- OSCE to specify journalists' security as priority area in Kyrgyzstan in 2010

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe plans to specify providing of journalists' security as one of its priority areas in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, Burul Osmonalieva representative of OSCE said at a meeting of mass media and civil society in Bishkek on Saturday.

Tajikistan

Political Front

- Vice speaker receives visiting representatives of political parties of foreign countries

On Friday December 25, Safar Safarov, the first deputy speaker of the Majlisi Namoyandagon (Tajikistan's lower chamber of parliament), received a group of representatives of political parties of a number of foreign countries that arrived in Tajikistan to attend celebrations dedicated to the 15th anniversary of founding of Tajikistan's ruling People's Democratic Party

- Number of constituencies for elections to GBAO legislature increased from 54 to 61

The 21st session of the GBAO legislature (Majlis) has elected the regional electoral commission for the 2010 legislature elections.

The regional electoral commission consists of 13 members and all political parties functioning in the region, except the Socialist Party (SPT) and the Party of Economic Reforms, are represented in it.

- PDPT determines candidates for election to parliament through party list system

On Saturday December 26, the 10th congress of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDPT) determined candidates for election to the Majlisi Namoyandagon (Tajikistan's lower chamber of parliament) through a proportional, party list system from a single, countrywide constituency.

Geo Strategic Front

- Tajik leader, Iranian envoy discuss cooperation issues

President Emomali Rahmon yesterday received Iranian Ambassador to Tajikistan, Ali Asgar Sherdoust. According to presidential press service, state and prospects of further expansion of bilateral cooperation between Tajikistan and Iran was the focus of the meeting.

- Tajik, Turkish presidents discuss cooperation issues

Yesterday evening, President Emomali Rahmon had telephone conversation with his Turkish counterpart, President Abdullah Gul, according to presidential press service.

- Chief of Russian Operational Border Group in Tajikistan replaced

By Russian president's decree Colonel Anatoly Mikheyev has been appointed to head the Operational Border Group (OBG) of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) in Tajikistan, replacing Major-General Vasily Vasilyev, Asia-Plus has learned at OBG's head office in Dushanbe

Economic /Energy Front

- Electricity prices expected to rise 25% in Tajikistan in January 2010

The government is currently considering the issue of raising electricity rates for all categories of consumers beginning on January 1, 2010, according to the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade (MEDT).

- Uzbekistan insists to keep the 2009 gas price for Tajikistan

Tojiktransgaz (Tajik state natural-gas distributor) is continuing negotiations with the Uzbek natural-gas supplier, Uztransgaz, on gas shipments to Tajikistan in 2010, the source at Tojiktransgaz said in an interview with Asia-Plus.

Social Front

- New building for education department officially opened in Shahritus

An official opening of a new building for local education department took place in the Shahritus district, Khatlon province on December 30.

Turkmenistan

Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov at informal talks with CIS colleagues

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports quoting the press service of the Turkmen leader, "during the meeting "without ties" the sides discussed a wide range of issues, starting with global ones, including global warming that was the main topic on the

agenda of the recent climate summit in Copenhagen, and finishing with specific issues related to promotion of bilateral cooperation."

- Russia supports Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline

Russia approves and supports the commissioning of the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan-China gas pipeline, RIA Novosti quotes Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov as saying.

- Turkey congratulates Turkmenistan on launching gas pipeline to China

Turkish President Abdullah Gul has sent a message of congratulations to his Turkmen counterpart Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov on the inauguration of the Turkmenistan - China gas pipeline

- President of Turkmenistan plans to visit Russia's regions

The presidents of Turkmenistan and Russia announced their decision to significantly increase the inter-regional cooperation at a meeting in Ashgabat on December 22. They described this aspect as the "most important component of modern bilateral relations

- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov invites Recep Tayyip Erdogan to visit Turkmenistan

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan held a telephone conversation today. The sides discussed the current state and prospects of further development of interstate relations, as well as a number of issues of international and regional policy of mutual interest and reaffirmed their willingness to intensify the productive dialogue.

- UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to visit Turkmenistan in April 2010

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon will visit Turkmenistan in April 2010. This was announced in the Secretary-General's New Year message of congratulations to President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov.

Economic /Energy Front

- New German-made municipal vehicles appear on Ashgabat streets

The municipal and industrial association for cleaning and improvement of the city of Ashgabat received the first batch of regular sweeping and watering machines of Schmidt brand on the chassis of Mercedes-Benz. According to "Neutral Turkmenistan" newspaper, 20 units of such vehicles will arrive before the end of this year, and another 20 in the first half of 2010.

- Russia to buy up to 30 billion cubic meters of Turkmen gas annually from 2010

Turkmenistan and Russia have agreed to resume Turkmen natural gas deliveries in the volume of up to 30 billion cubic meters annually. Relevant changes and amendments to the long-term contract on the purchase and sale of natural gas were made today following the talks between President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev, who arrived in Ashgabat on a visit, the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat.

- Turkmenistan and Russia sign agreement on expanding cooperation in energy and engineering

On December 22, Presidents of Turkmenistan and Russia signed an agreement to expand the strategic cooperation in energy and engineering. "Big Russian companies such as Gazprom, Stroytransgaz, Itera, Zarubezhneft, KAMAZ and others are successfully operating in Turkmenistan.

- China receives more than 23 million cubic meters of Turkmen gas

China has already received more than 23 million cubic meters of natural gas from Turkmenistan via a newly commissioned gas pipeline, and gas supplies will be increased steadily

- Foreign companies to develop major gas field Southern Yoloten
- , Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov signed a number of resolutions to develop the largest hydrocarbon field of Southern Yoloten.

Social Front

- Turkmen Leader Reopens Cinema To Mark Revival Of Film Industry

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov has presided over a ceremony in downtown Ashgabat to reopen the prominent Watan movie theater, RFE/RL's Turkmen Service reports. Schoolchildren, actors, and state officials also attended the event on December 28.

- President of Turkmenistan donates books about Japan to Institute of World Languages

The library of the Turkmen National Institute of World Languages named after Dovletmammed Azadi has got hundreds of books, published in Japan, about the culture and history, economics, arts, traditions and distinctive scientific and technological achievements of Japan.

- Orthodox clergy hold annual meeting in Turkmenistan

On December 21, Ashgabat's St. Nicholas Church hosted the annual meeting of clergy of the Turkmen districts headed by the bishop of Smolensk and Vyazemsk, Feofilakt, who was on a visit to Turkmenistan. According to the official website of Smolensk and Vyazemsk Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, the meeting summed up the results of the outgoing year.

- Russian Orthodox Church Deanery for Patriarchal Parishes in Turkmenistan launches official website

The Deanery of the Russian Orthodox Church patriarchal parishes in Turkmenistan launched its official website in the course of the visit to Ashgabat of the Bishop of Smolensk and Vyazemsk Feofilakt, manager of Orthodox parishes in the country.

Uzbekistan

Political Front

- Uzbekistan Holding Parliamentary Vote

Uzbekistan is holding a parliamentary election in which four parties -- all of whom support the rule of President Islam Karimov -- are competing. Some 17 million eligible voters will be able to cast ballots December 27 to elect the new 150-seat Oliy Majlis lower chamber of parliament.

Geo Strategic Front

- Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan resume border demarcation

Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan resumed work of the intergovernmental commission on delimitation and demarcation of the state border after a 5-year break on December 28

Economic /Energy Front

- Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan sales turnover amounts to \$140M in 2009

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- Uzbekistan considers lifting of Kyrgyz meat import ban

Uzbekistan could lift the ban on import of Kyrgyz meat, Daniyar Usenov the Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan said Monday summarizing the session of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission on Bilateral Cooperation in Tashkent.

- Kyrgyzstan signs gas deal with Uzbekistan

Kyrgyzstan has signed a long-awaited gas deal with Uzbekistan Monday in Tashkent, press service of the Kyrgyz government reported.

- Uzbekistan insists to keep the 2009 gas price for Tajikistan

Tojiktransgaz (Tajik state natural-gas distributor) is continuing negotiations with the Uzbek natural-gas supplier, Uztransgaz, on gas shipments to Tajikistan in 2010, the source at Tojiktransgaz said in an interview with Asia-Plus.

Social Front

Detailed Report

Azerbaijan

Political Front

- Azerbaijani parliament protests European Parliament's resolution –

Members of Azerbaijani parliament deem it important to protest the European Parliament resolution. Azerbaijan's Milli Majlis (parliament) has adopted an appeal to the European Parliament. The paper says that Azerbaijan continues democratic state-building and respects human rights. In mid-December, the European Parliament adopted a statement, which contains criticism over human rights situation in Azerbaijan. The paper expresses concerns over the deterioration of freedom of speech. "Like many countries passing the way of democratic development, there are some problems in Azerbaijan. The regrettable fact is that the entire world community knows which country is the occupier and which is under occupation. Despite this, Azerbaijan, as a state choosing path of democratic development, has always given preference to the settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict peacefully. Given all this, we protest against the European Parliament statement criticizing the human rights situation in Azerbaijan, and we hope that taking into account Azerbaijan's interest in more strengthening relations with Europe, the European Union will not allow such kind of statements with regard to Azerbaijan in future," the document says. Today's sitting of the Azerbaijani parliament began with protest of the parliamentarians against resolution on Azerbaijan adopted by the European Parliament on Dec. 17. Vice-speaker Valeh Alasgarov said the resolution of the European Parliament on Azerbaijan was unfair. "Everybody's, nor only journalists' rights should be ensured. The European Parliament has never remembered the violated rights of one million refugees and IDPs. Nobody remembered their rights. The resolution demands immediate release of some persons, restoration of broadcasters. We should respond to this," he said. Parliament Speaker Ogtay Asadov regarded the resolution as a kind of pressure against Azerbaijan.

"This is one of the means to make Azerbaijan compromise in the settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict," he said. MP Rovshan Rzayev said the Azerbaijani parliament should

issue a protest statement about it. "We should start dialogue with members of the European Parliament," he said. "Some political groups exert pressure on Azerbaijan," said MP Fuad Muradov. According to MP Samad Seyidov, the forces that dislike Azerbaijan have become active. He considers that the resolution should be reacted in two manners. "Protest should be expressed against the resolution. First of all, this resolution is connected with Azerbaijan's leadership in the region. On the other hand, we should analyze our work. In what direction are we working with them? We should explain Azerbaijan's importance for Europe in the language they understand. The resolution is biased," he said.

Following the discussions, Azerbaijani parliament established a commission. Speaker Asadov said the commission will prepare a statement of protest to the European Parliament, the parliament will confirm the statement today. The European Parliament resolution adopted on Dec. 17 says freedom of expression and press is not satisfactory in Azerbaijan and calls on the Azerbaijani government to take positive steps.

URL: <http://www.today.az/news/politics/58593.html>

- Azerbaijani parliament's observation mission says parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan were transparent and democratic

Azerbaijani observers say the parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan were transparent and democratic. Member of the Azerbaijani delegation, chairman of the parliament's agrarian policy committee Eldar Ibrahimov said the elections were held in the peaceful atmosphere in Uzbekistan on Dec. 27. He said the elections were in line with the European standards. Ibrahimov said they observed the voting in the regions around Tashkent. The Azerbaijani delegation included MPs Eldar Ibrahimov, Hadi Rajabli, Aydin Abbasov, Chingiz Asadullayev and Akram Abdullayev.

URL: <http://www.today.az/news/politics/58668.html>

- Azerbaijan Central Election Commission may cancel outcome of municipal elections in one of district election commissions

The result of municipal elections in Azerbaijan's Naftalan region might be annulled. Member of the Central Election Commission Tofiq Hasanov said the investigation proved interference of local authorities in the voting process. "It would be expedient to annul result of elections in Naftalan municipalities. There was a number of appeals and complaints by the candidates and observers from Goranboy-Naftalan electoral district. We visited Goranboy and Naftalan to investigate these complaints and heard explanations of the candidates and observers. We collected photos, videotapes, documents and acts. The investigation showed that head of the Naftalan Executive Power and his assistants visited the number of polling stations taking interest in personality of some observers and ordering police to ask those people to leave the polling stations," he said. "The fact of his gross interference was confirmed. The observation process was violated in fact and the candidates promoted by the head of executive power were elected". Hasanov said they also collected materials about two other local officials who interfered in the voting process.

URL: <http://www.today.az/news/politics/58753.html>

Geo Strategic Front

- Hungarian FM: Azerbaijan is our strategic partner in South Caucasus region
Exclusive interview with Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Balázs.
How do you assess the current bilateral relations between Hungary and Azerbaijan?

Hungary considers the Republic of Azerbaijan as a strategic partner in the South Caucasus region. We recognized the independence of Azerbaijan on 26 December, 1991. Diplomatic relations were established on 27 April, 1992. The first embassy of Hungary in Baku was opened on January 12, 2009. The political relations between the two countries are meaningful and excellent, with no major problems or misunderstandings. Economic cooperation is also steadily on the rise. In the field of contracts we have already done the bulk of the job and created a whole net of so called basic agreements destined to boost this cooperation. Past years have witnessed a number of important high level visits between the two countries. Just to mention the most important ones, we had the privilege to welcome President Ilham Aliyev twice in Hungary, first in February 2008 and then in January 2009. The Prime Minister of Hungary also visited Azerbaijan twice, in July and November 2008. In September 2008 the Speaker of the National Assembly of Hungary held talks in Baku.

We are really impressed by the remarkable economic performance of Azerbaijan, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of which is increasing by more than 10% per year despite the severe conditions of the global financial crisis. The economic turnover between the two countries is also on the rise. The overall Hungarian-Azerbaijani turnover was USD 85.9 million in 2008, while in the period between January and September 2009 it was USD 62,7 million. These figures highlight that we have serious reserves in our bilateral economic relations to be exploited by common efforts.

Besides the political and economic fields, we have an increasingly developing cooperation in the field of culture, education, defense and energy supply. We are convinced that Azerbaijan can play a significant role in the diversification of Europe's energy supply. Therefore we would welcome the greatest possible involvement and participation of Azerbaijan in the Nabucco Project as well.

<http://www.today.az/news/politics/58666.html>

Economic /Energy Front

- SOCAR president: Azerbaijan to increase gas supply to Russia twice

SOCAR (State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan) will increase gas supplies to Russia twice - up to 1 billion cubic meters per year in 2010, SOCAR President Rovnag Abdullayev said on Dec. 26."The talks have already been held. Azerbaijan has capacity to increase gas supplies. We will supply Russia with 1 billion cubic meters of gas in 2010," Abdullayev said. He said gas supplies to Russia will be launched from January 1, 2010 as it was envisaged in the contract. It was initially planned that SOCAR will supply Russia with 500 million cubic meters of gas. But a decision was made to increase supplies twice.

URL: <http://www.today.az/news/business/58646.html>

Social Front

- Monuments of Heydar Aliyev and Suleyman Demirel erected in Gagauzia

Monuments of Heydar Aliyev and Suleyman Demirel, two outstanding personalities of the Turkish world, have been erected in Comrat, the capital city Gagauzia, an autonomous region of Moldova. Being of common origins, the peoples of Azerbaijan and Turkey have assisted the people of Gagauzia both materially and morally in their hardships, Mikhail Formuzal, head of the Territorial Unit, stated at the ceremony dedicated to the 15th anniversary of establishment of the Unit. On the threshold of the anniversary, opening of the monuments to these great personalities of Turkish world is evidence to their historical contribution, Formuzal noted. Joining the anniversary event,

Turkey's ninth president Suleyman Demirel wished kind neighboring to the people of Gagauzia and Moldova. Taking part at the ceremony, Azeri MP Asaf Hajiyev read out President Ilham Aliyev's congratulatory letter to the people of Gagauzia.

URL: <http://www.today.az/news/society/58645.html>

- Baku hosts seminar on assistance to human trafficking victims

A seminar on assistance to human trafficking victims was held in Baku on Dec. 25. The event co-organized by the International Labour Organization and Azerbaijan`s Center for Assistance to Victims of Human Trafficking brought together officials, representatives of NGOS and international organizations. Speakers at the event said Azerbaijan had joined several relevant international documents. They particularly stressed President Ilham Aliyev approved a National Action Plan on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings for 2009-2013.

URL: <http://www.today.az/news/society/58626.html>

Kazakastan

Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov invited to pay official visit to Kazakhstan

In his congratulatory New Year message to Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, Nursultan Nazarbayev invited his Turkmen counterpart to pay an official visit to Kazakhstan. The text of the message was published in the central media of Turkmenistan. The President of Kazakhstan thanked the Turkmen leader for the "warm and cordial reception" during his recent working visit to Turkmenistan to launch the Turkmenistan - Uzbekistan - Kazakhstan - China gas pipeline. "During our bilateral meeting, we discussed a wide range of issues related to Kazakh-Turkmen cooperation," Nursultan Nazarbayev said. He proposed to discuss the agreements reached earlier in the course of the forthcoming visit of the Turkmen president. He stressed that implementation of these agreements will "take Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to a qualitatively new level of interstate cooperation." The date and time of the visit will be specified through diplomatic channels, the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports quoting the press service of the Turkmen leader.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16088&type=event&sort=date_desc

Economic /Energy Front

Social Front

- Kazakhstan citizens to have four days off on New Year

ArcelorMittal may dismiss 10 thousand employees in 2010

Kazakhstan citizens will have for days off on the New Year holiday: January 1, 2, 3 and 4, Kazakhstan Today agency reports.

According to the Law on Holidays in Kazakhstan, New Year, celebrated on January 1 and 2, is the state holiday. The days of the national and state holidays are non-working days. When holidays are coincided with the weekends, a day off is the day that comes after a holiday. As January 2 will be on Saturday, the day off will be shifted to Monday. Hence, Kazakhstan citizens will have four days off on the New Year: January 1, 2, 3 and 4. Kazakhstan citizens will have days off on January 7, 8 and 9. As informed earlier, the amendments to the Law on Labor were approved in December, 2005, according to which

the first day of Kurban ayt, the celebration of the Muslim calendar and January 7, orthodox Christmas, will be days off.

<http://eng.gazeta.kz/art.asp?aid=141576>

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- **Kyrgyzstan Convicts Four For Protesting Campaign Manager's Arrest**

Opposition leader Amambek Atambaev said he would do all he could to free his four convicted supporters.

BALYKCHI, Kyrgyzstan -- A court in the northeastern Kyrgyz town of Balykchi has sentenced four people to four years in jail each for holding an illegal protest during last July's presidential elections. Some 1,000 people gathered in Balykchi on July 23 to protest the detention of the local campaign manager of opposition candidate Almaz Atambaev. Police used percussion grenades and fired tear gas to disperse the crowd. Atambaev was in Balykchi today attending the trial. He said the court decision was politically motivated and that he would do whatever possible to free the four convicted people.

http://www.rferl.org/content/Kyrgyzstan_Convicts_Four_For_Protesting_Campaign_Managers_Arrest/1913885.html

Geo Strategic Front

- **NATO Office To Move From Astana To Bishkek**

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyz Defense Minister Bakyt Kalyev has said a NATO office for Central Asia will be established in Bishkek, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Kalyev said today at a parliamentary meeting on international and interparliamentary affairs that the NATO representative office, which includes its Partnership for Peace program, will be relocated from Astana to Bishkek because of the opening of the alliance's Transit Center at Manas Airport, which is just outside Bishkek. Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev told the Russian television station Vesti on December 28 that the Transit Center is designed to transport nonmilitary goods to NATO troops in Afghanistan and represents Kyrgyzstan's contribution to combating terrorism. He said the center has no military component. It was formerly known as Manas Air Base and had housed a U.S. military base since 2003.

http://www.rferl.org/content/NATO_Office_To_Move_From_Astana_To_Bishkek/1916885.html

- **Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan resume border demarcation**

Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan resumed work of the intergovernmental commission on delimitation and demarcation of the state border after a 5-year break on December 28. "The commission did not meet for some objective and subjective reasons that provoked nervousness and stress of people, especially residents of border regions," Daniyar Usenov the Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan told the press in Tashkent. The countries have already demarked about 900 km of borders while other 600 km have to be delimited. Moreover, there are about 13 debatable border parts between the countries. The Kyrgyz prime minister believes delimitation and demarcation of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border would settle the issue on ownership of certain border objects.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/cis/2009/12/29/10052.html>

Economic /Energy Front

- **Energy Minister heads for gas talks in Uzbekistan**

Ilias Davydov the Energy Minister of Kyrgyzstan has left for Uzbekistan to talk over gas supply of Kyrgyzstan in 2010, press service of Kyrgyzgas company told the news agency 24.kg. Salamat Aitikeev, head of Kyrgyzgas, reportedly accompanies the minister to the neighbor country. The Kyrgyz delegation plans to return in Bishkek on December 28.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/cis/2009/12/26/10037.html>

- Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan to formulate single policy on PTL-500kW construction
Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan stand for formulation of a single coordinated policy on construction of power transmission line-500kW Hodjent-Datka-Kemin-Almaty as a part of CASA-100 project, preliminary results of the 9th session of Kyrgyz-Tajik intergovernmental commission in Osh said. Official delegations of both states headed by Nurlan Sulaimanov the Kyrgyz Transport and Communication Minister and his Tajik counterpart Olimjon Boboev have considered the state and prospects of trade and economic cooperation. Representatives of the countries outlined their “interest in implementation of PTL construction projects for further electricity supply to third countries through Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and formulation of a single policy on construction of Hodjent-Datka-Kemin-Almaty PTL-500kW as a part of CASA-1000 project,” the Kyrgyz Transport Ministry reported. The sides have also agreed on consideration of regular Bishkek-Dushanbe-Delhi and Delhi-Dushanbe-Bishkek flights by Kyrgyzstan Air Line Company. The intergovernmental commission has also charged the local authorities of both countries with banning all kinds of construction on Kyrgyz-Tajik border till its demarcation and delimitation is completed.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/cis/2009/12/26/10034.html>

- Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan sales turnover amounts to \$140M in 2009
Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan sales turnover amounted to \$140 million in 11 months of 2009, Rustam Azimov the first Assistant Prime Minister of Uzbekistan said, meeting with the head of the Kyrgyz government Daniyar Usenov Monday. The rate reportedly made up \$265 million in 2008, having increased by 44 percent comparing with 2007 index. Azimov believes the current sales turnover could not satisfy both countries. Execution of agreements in the line with 2007-2011 program, approved by leadership of the republics in 2006, could, in his opinion, add to development of economic relations. Uzbekistan thinks promotion of Uzbek engineering, glass and textile industry products will contribute to development of economic cooperation between the countries.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/cis/2009/12/28/10046.html>

Uzbekistan concerned about import of non-CIS goods to Kyrgyzstan

Uzbekistan is concerned about volume of goods, imported to Kyrgyzstan from non-CIS states, Rustam Azimov first Assistant Prime Minister of Uzbekistan said Monday meeting with the head of the Kyrgyz government Daniyar Usenov as a part of the 7th session of joint intergovernmental commission on bilateral cooperation. Main part of the goods is re-exported through Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan. Azimov outlined the sides should secure “efficient cooperation of customs services.” The first assistant minister pointed necessity of solving the issue on unhindered access of Uzbek power and gas specialists to objects situated on the Kyrgyz territory and used by Uzbekistan.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/cis/2009/12/28/10045.html>

- Kyrgyz GDP growth hits 2.4 percent in 2009
Kyrgyzstan’s GDP growth reached 2.4 percent in 11 months of 2009 and took the second place among CIS countries, Orozmat Abdykalykov Chairman of the National Statistics

Committee told the President. The head of the committee presented the President Kurmanbek Bakiev the first copy of a book, issued on results of 2009 population census, presidential press service reported. The census demonstrated obvious population growth almost in all regions of the country (4824.9 million people in 1999 and 5362.8 million – in 2009). The head of the state charged the National Statistical Committee with updating methods on estimation of population's living standards and wide application of internationally approved advanced methods, presidential press service reported.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/business/2009/12/29/10057.html>

- Kyrgyzstan signs gas deal with Uzbekistan

Kyrgyzstan has signed a long-awaited gas deal with Uzbekistan Monday in Tashkent, press service of the Kyrgyz government reported.

The Kyrgyz Premier Daniyar Usenov, said the deal was crucial and the price is being negotiated, but as it was already declared Kyrgyzstan will buy gas cheaper than all other states in the region. Therewith, some unofficial sources informed 24.kg that 1,000 cubic meter of gas would cost Kyrgyzstan about \$220 in 2010.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/business/2009/12/29/10049.html>

Social Front

- Plane Pilots Sentenced For Deadly Crash In Kyrgyzstan

Sixty-five people died in the crash of this Itek-Air flight in August 2008.

BISHKEK -- A Kyrgyz court today sentenced the pilots of an aircraft that crashed near Bishkek last year to five years in prison, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. The court found crew commander Yury Goncharov and copilot Tim Vodolagin guilty for the deadly August 2008 crash of an airliner because they violated technical security requirements.

The Itek-Air Boeing 737 flying from Bishkek to Tehran crashed several minutes after takeoff into a field some nine kilometers from the Bishkek airport. The plane's crew survived but 65 of its 90 passengers died.

http://www.rferl.org/content/Plane_Pilots_Sentenced_For_Deadly_Crash_In_Kyrgyzstan/1915884.html

- Kyrgyz Children Freed From Slave Labor In Russia

Russian police have freed 15 Kyrgyz children who were forced to work in an underground factory in Moscow Oblast, RFE/RL's Russian Service reports. Police said they discovered an illegal textile shop in Noginsk, about 50 kilometers from Moscow, where migrants from Vietnam and Kyrgyzstan were working. Margarita Maslova, a spokeswoman for the criminal investigation department in Moscow Oblast, told RFE/RL that the children were reportedly forced to work at night. She said that if they did not fulfill their work quotas they were punished. She added that numerous bruises and signs of a beating were found on the body of an 11-year-old boy employed at the shop. A Kyrgyz native who is registered in Moscow Oblast was reportedly selecting children from poor Kyrgyz families to work in the factory. Criminal charges are expected for the use of slave labor of children and operation of a clandestine factory.

http://www.rferl.org/content/Kyrgyz_Children_Freed_From_Slave_Labor_In_Russia/1915816.html

- OSCE to specify journalists' security as priority area in Kyrgyzstan in 2010

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe plans to specify providing of journalists' security as one of its priority areas in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, Burul Osmonalieva representative of OSCE said at a meeting of mass media and civil society in Bishkek on

Saturday. The organization is reportedly ready to support media community in case of consolidation. She called journalists and human rights activists for practical actions while appeals to authorities, in her view, lose their effect.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/politic/2009/12/26/10036.html>

Tajikistan

Political Front

- Vice speaker receives visiting representatives of political parties of foreign countries

DUSHANBE, December 26, 2009, Asia-Plus -- On Friday December 25, Safar Safarov, the first deputy speaker of the Majlisi Namoyandagon (Tajikistan's lower chamber of parliament), received a group of representatives of political parties of a number of foreign countries that arrived in Tajikistan to attend celebrations dedicated to the 15th anniversary of founding of Tajikistan's ruling People's Democratic Party (PDPT), Muhammadato Sultonov, a spokesman for the Majlisi Namoyandagon said in an interview with Asia-Plus. Among them were Chen Fengxiang, vice-chairman of the International Department of the Central Committee of China's Communist Party, Mubariz Gahraman Ogli, member of the Political Council of Azerbaijan's Yeni Azerbaijan (New Azerbaijan), and Shaabek Niyazov, member of the Political Council of Kyrgyzstan's Ak Jol, (Genial Path). Safarov briefed the guests on activity of the Majlisi Namoyandagon. On the parliamentary elections set for February 28, 2010, Tajik vice speaker noted that all political parties of the country would participate in the elections.

Jumaboy Sanginov, the head of the PDPT group within the Majlisi Namoyandagon also attended the meeting.

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/16/60862.html>

- Number of constituencies for elections to GBAO legislature increased from 54 to 61

KHOROG, December 25, 2009, Asia-Plus -- The 21st session of the GBAO legislature (Majlis) has elected the regional electoral commission for the 2010 legislature elections. The regional electoral commission consists of 13 members and all political parties functioning in the region, except the Socialist Party (SPT) and the Party of Economic Reforms, are represented in it. The Peoples' Democratic Party (PDPT) has three representatives in the commission, and the Communist (CPT), Islamic Revival (IRPT), Social-Democratic (SDPT), Democratic (DPT) and Agrarian (APT) parties have one representative each. Besides, the commission members also include five nonpartisan persons. Tavakkal Ramazonov, who is the deputy head of GBAO governor's office (member of PDPT), was elected to head the commission, and Parpisho Shonazarov, the head of the GBAO land reclamation station for remote pastures (member of APT), was elected as deputy chairman of the commission. Qamchibek Nasillobekov, the head of the state unitary enterprise Badakhshonkhorijakor (external labor migration enterprise) representing CPT, was elected as secretary of the commission. The commission nonpartisan members include Muhamamdrustam Abdurazzoqov (teacher at school # 6 in Murgab district), Sanavbar Bakhshov (deputy head of school # 8 in Roshtqala district), Qanoat Mavloqulov (head physician of the central district hospital in Ishkashim), Zohir Shamsiddinov (head of the architecture and town-planning department, Vanj district administration) and Balajon Dodajonov (head of the social care department, Darvoz district administration).

The session also confirmed the number of constituencies for elections to the GBAO Majlis. The number of constitutions was increased from 54 to 61: three new constituencies were established in the Shugnan district; two in Khorog; one in Rushan district; and one in Vanj district.

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/311/60851.html>

- PDPT determines candidates for election to parliament through party list system
DUSHANBE, December 26, 2009, Asia-Plus -- On Saturday December 26, the 10th congress of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDPT) determined candidates for election to the Majlisi Namoyandagon (Tajikistan's lower chamber of parliament) through a proportional, party list system from a single, countrywide constituency. The PDPT has a party list of 22 candidates for the 2010 parliamentary elections and Amirsho Miraliyev, the head of President's Executive Office, is at the top of the list. Among those put on the party list are also Akbarsho Felaliyev, the member of the Majlisi Namoyandagon, Khairinisso Yusufi, the chairperson of the Committee for Women and Family Affairs, Said Yoqubzod, Minister of Land Reclamation and Water Resources, Jumaboy Sanginov, the member of the Majlisi Namoyandagon, and other candidates. People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan was founded in 1993. PDPT is the biggest political party in the country, boasting some 125,000 registered members. Its chairman is President Emomali Rahmon. The party controls more than 80 percent of the seats in parliament. The Majlisi Namoyandagon has 63 members, who are directly elected for a period of 5 years. 22 are elected through a proportional, party list system from a single, countrywide constituency. To win seats, parties must pass a five percent threshold. The remaining 41 members are elected from single-mandate constituencies under a majoritarian system. In the single mandate constituencies, candidates must win an absolute majority of votes to be elected. If none of the contestants manages to win an absolute majority during the first round, a second round of voting is held between the two leading candidates two weeks later. For any of the elections to be valid, there must be at least a 50% voter turnout. We will recall that elections to the Majlisi Namoyandagon and local legislatures will take place on February 28, 2010

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/17/60875.html>

Geo Strategic Front

- Tajik leader, Iranian envoy discuss cooperation issues
DUSHANBE, December 29, 2009, Asia-Plus -- President Emomali Rahmon yesterday received Iranian Ambassador to Tajikistan, Ali Asgar Sherdoust. According to presidential press service, state and prospects of further expansion of bilateral cooperation between Tajikistan and Iran was the focus of the meeting. The two, in particular, considered issues related to implementation of a number of joint economic projects in Tajikistan and acceleration of construction of the Sungtuda-2 hydroelectric power plant (HPP) on the Vakhsh River. In the meantime, Iran's Fars News Agency (FNA) reported on December 28 that President Emomali Rahmon described Iran as the closest friend of his country. "We assume all-out cooperation with Iran as a priority for ourselves and actually view Iran as the closest country to us," Rahmon said, commenting on the upcoming visit by the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Dushanbe early January, according to FNA. Rahmon welcomed Ahmadinejad's trip to Dushanbe, and expressed the hope that it would be the beginning of serious developments in the all-out ties between the two countries. Also pointing to Iran's progresses in different fields, he

described Iranians as a civilized and progressive nation and owner of advanced technologies.

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/16/60924.html>

- Tajik, Turkish presidents discuss cooperation issues

DUSHANBE, December 31, 2009, Asia-Plus -- Yesterday evening, President Emomali Rahmon had telephone conversation with his Turkish counterpart, President Abdullah Gul, according to presidential press service. The two discussed issues related to state and prospects of further expansion of bilateral mutually beneficial cooperation between Tajikistan and Turkey. Rahmon and Gul also discussed a number of international and regional issues being of mutual interest, the press service said.

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/16/61025.html>

- Chief of Russian Operational Border Group in Tajikistan replaced

DUSHANBE, December 30, 2009, Asia-Plus -- By Russian president's decree Colonel Anatoly Mikheyev has been appointed to head the Operational Border Group (OBG) of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) in Tajikistan, replacing Major-General Vasily Vasilyev, Asia-Plus has learned at OBG's head office in Dushanbe. Anatoly Mikheyev, 50, graduated from Higher Border Officers' Training School named after Dzerzhinsky in 1982 and Military Academy named after Frunze in 1993. In 2003, Mikheyev graduated from the Military Academy of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. In 1993-1997, Mikheyev served with Russian Border's Service in Tajikistan. We will recall that the procedure of transferring control of Tajikistan's common border with China and Afghanistan from Russian border guards to their Tajik colleagues completed in 2005. Under the bilateral agreement that was signed on October 16, 2004, FSB's Operational Border Group has been stayed in Tajikistan to perform advisory functions, provide assistance to Tajik border guards in the effective border patrolling and training of the young generation of border guards.

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/36/61005.html>

Economic /Energy Front

- Electricity prices expected to rise 25% in Tajikistan in January 2010

DUSHANBE, December 26, 2009, Asia-Plus -- The government is currently considering the issue of raising electricity rates for all categories of consumers beginning on January 1, 2010, according to the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade (MEDT). The source at a MEDT noted that the draft government resolution on raising electricity prices had been worked out by the MEDT and had already been endorsed by the interested ministries and organizations of the country. Electricity prices are expected to rise 25 percent for all categories of consumers. Electricity rates in Tajikistan usually rise twice a year – on January 1 and May 1. This year, electricity prices for all electricity consumers, except Tajik Aluminum Company (Talco), were raised by 25 percent on January 1 and the second 25% rise was introduced on August 1. Current electricity price for residential customers is 7.5 dirams per one kWh.

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/49/60856.html>

- Uzbekistan insists to keep the 2009 gas price for Tajikistan

DUSHANBE, December 25, 2009, Asia-Plus -- Tojiktransgaz (Tajik state natural-gas distributor) is continuing negotiations with the Uzbek natural-gas supplier, Uztransgaz, on gas shipments to Tajikistan in 2010, the source at Tojiktransgaz said in an interview with Asia-Plus. According to him, the next round of negotiations on this subject is

beginning in Tashkent, Uzbekistan today. "On Wednesday December 23, the Uzbek side noted that it will keep the 2009 gas price – 240 U.S. dollars per 1,000 cubic meters of gas, and they demand prepayment for gas deliveries" the source said, noting that Tojiktransgaz is currently studying Uzbek gas supplier's proposal. In the meantime, Tajikistan wants Uzbekistan to decrease its gas price. We will recall that Radio Liberty's Tajik Service reported on December 14 that speaking in an interview with RF/RL, the Tojiktransgaz head Saidmamad Shoriddinov said world gas prices have fallen and therefore Tashkent should decrease its price as well. He added that Tajikistan expects Uzbekistan to decrease its price for gas by 30 percent.

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/31/60797.html>

Social Front

- New building for education department officially opened in Shahritus DUSHANBE, December 31, 2009, Asia-Plus -- An official opening of a new building for local education department took place in the Shahritus district, Khatlon province on December 30. According to the Ministry of Education (MoD), the building has been constructed in a new settlement, which is currently under construction under the national program for socioeconomic development of the Shahritus district.

The building has been constructed due to funds allocated from the ministry's budget and a total cost of the project is 765,000 somoni, the source said, noting that construction company, Nilufari Rouz, constructed the two-story building in five months.

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/26/61015.html>

Turkmenistan

Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov at informal talks with CIS colleagues President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov attended an informal meeting of heads of the CIS countries in Kazakhstan.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports quoting the press service of the Turkmen leader, "during the meeting "without ties" the sides discussed a wide range of issues, starting with global ones, including global warming that was the main topic on the agenda of the recent climate summit in Copenhagen, and finishing with specific issues related to promotion of bilateral cooperation." The sides paid particular attention to the need to consolidate efforts to jointly withstand consequences of the global financial and economic crisis, as well as modern challenges and threats.

The informal meeting of heads of state, which was held in the sports and recreation complex "Akbulak" near Almaty, was also attended by the Presidents of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16045&type=event&sort=date_desc

- Russia supports Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline Russia approves and supports the commissioning of the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan-China gas pipeline, RIA Novosti quotes Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov as saying. "The more diverse and the better the infrastructure in the Customs Union and CIS countries, the bigger our contribution to global energy security," Shuvalov noted. "We support such projects," he said. The First Deputy Prime Minister

added that "Russia on its own and in cooperation with other partners is working to expand the infrastructure for energy supplies." It should be recalled that the new Trans-Asian gas pipeline with total length of more than 7000 km was formally launched on December 14 with the participation of leaders of Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and China. Up to 40 billion cubic meters of natural gas will be supplied to China for the next 30 years annually via the new route.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16046&type=event&sort=date_desc

- Turkey congratulates Turkmenistan on launching gas pipeline to China

Turkish President Abdullah Gul has sent a message of congratulations to his Turkmen counterpart Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov on the inauguration of the Turkmenistan - China gas pipeline. The message was published today in the Turkmen press, the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat. "Turkey supports the policy of friendly and brotherly Turkmenistan on diversification of energy transportation routes. I am confident that by pursuing this policy Turkmenistan with its abundant resources will make a significant contribution to gas transit to Turkey and through Turkey to the West," the message said. "There is no doubt that the Turkmenistan - China gas pipeline that took energy cooperation between Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and China to a new level will also have a positive impact on regional development and stability," Abdullah Gul said

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16048&type=event&sort=date_desc

- President of Turkmenistan plans to visit Russia's regions

The presidents of Turkmenistan and Russia announced their decision to significantly increase the inter-regional cooperation at a meeting in Ashgabat on December 22. They described this aspect as the "most important component of modern bilateral relations." In the course of high level talks, the sides noted that "the palette of these contacts is being expanded and filled with new specific content, the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat.

According to Dmitry Medvedev, delegations of various regions of Russia, including Saint Petersburg and Astrakhan region, visited Turkmenistan in recent years. The high guest also stressed the importance of the Ashgabat forum of agricultural producers of CIS countries, which took place this year. Speaking of that, the President of Russia expressed support for the Turkmen leader's proposal to hold a similar bilateral activity the next year focusing on regional cooperation.

During the meeting, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov expressed his intention to pay a working visit to Astrakhan and Sverdlovsk regions and the Republic of Tatarstan. "We also plan to visit the twin city of St. Petersburg and Altai region with which we plan to cooperate in the agricultural sector," he said.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16058&type=event&sort=date_desc

- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov invites Recep Tayyip Erdogan to visit Turkmenistan

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan held a telephone conversation today. The sides discussed the current state and prospects of further development of interstate relations, as well as a

number of issues of international and regional policy of mutual interest and reaffirmed their willingness to intensify the productive dialogue. President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov invited the Turkish Prime Minister to visit Turkmenistan at any convenient time. The invitation was accepted with gratitude. The sides agreed that the dates of the visit will be specified later through diplomatic channels, the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) said. During the meeting, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Recep Tayyip Erdogan exchanged congratulations on the coming New Year and extended their wishes of happiness, peace and prosperity to the friendly peoples of the two countries.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16082&type=event&sort=date_desc

- UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to visit Turkmenistan in April 2010

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon will visit Turkmenistan in April 2010. This was announced in the Secretary-General's New Year message of congratulations to President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. The text of the message was published in today's central press, the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat. It should be recalled that an agreement on the visit was reached during the meeting between Ban Ki-moon and President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in the framework of the 64th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2009.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16084&type=event&sort=date_desc

Economic /Energy Front

- New German-made municipal vehicles appear on Ashgabat streets

The municipal and industrial association for cleaning and improvement of the city of Ashgabat received the first batch of regular sweeping and watering machines of Schmidt brand on the chassis of Mercedes-Benz. According to "Neutral Turkmenistan" newspaper, 20 units of such vehicles will arrive before the end of this year, and another 20 in the first half of 2010.

It is reported that the new vehicles were previously tested on Ashgabat streets. The new machines have reflected a number of recommendations of the Turkmen side. In particular, the sweepers have more capacious water tanks, their design allow them to clean 3-m wide strips of road from dust and dirt, the power of pumps was increased to allow the machines to pump water under high pressure and effectively wash away dirt from the roadsides and curbs.

To date, the Ashgabat public utilities have more than fifty machines of Schmidt brand, the most part of which arrived in 2008. These are watering and water spraying machines, garbage trucks, dump trucks, snow removal equipment, "Neutral Turkmenistan" said.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16047&type=event&sort=date_desc

- Russia to buy up to 30 billion cubic meters of Turkmen gas annually from 2010

Turkmenistan and Russia have agreed to resume Turkmen natural gas deliveries in the volume of up to 30 billion cubic meters annually. Relevant changes and amendments to the long-term contract on the purchase and sale of natural gas were made today following the talks between President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and President

of Russia Dmitry Medvedev, who arrived in Ashgabat on a visit, the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat.

The documents were signed by Gazprom Deputy Board Chairman Alexander Medvedev and Chairman of Turkmengaz state concern Nury Muhammedov.

As Alexander Medvedev explained to journalists, "the documents define all the conditions for the resumption of deliveries of natural gas, as well as their volumes, prices and modes." According to him, the resumption of gas deliveries is expected to start on January 1, or no later than January 10, 2010, in the volume of up to 30 billion cubic meters a year. "It is for the first time in the history of Russian-Turkmen relations in gas sphere that gas will be delivered on the basis a price formula that fully complies with conditions of the European gas market," the deputy board chairman of Gazprom said.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16054&type=event&sort=date_desc

- Turkmenistan and Russia sign agreement on expanding cooperation in energy and engineering

On December 22, Presidents of Turkmenistan and Russia signed an agreement to expand the strategic cooperation in energy and engineering. "Big Russian companies such as Gazprom, Stroytransgaz, Itera, Zarubezhneft, KAMAZ and others are successfully operating in Turkmenistan. It is in our interest to continue to encourage investments in industrial cooperation," Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said after the meeting. He called the agreement "a step forward" that will make it possible to "specify the areas of joint work in several directions." "I believe that those decisions taken today will serve as a good basis for our energy cooperation in the near future," Dmitry Medvedev said.

In turn, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov noted the positive dynamics of trade turnover between the two countries. "It is significant that trade turnover, even without the gas component, has recently increased so much that today Russia holds the first place among foreign trade partners of Turkmenistan," the head of state said.

On the result of ten months of the year, trade turnover between the two countries, excluding gas supplies, amounted to US \$ 900 million, approximately a 20 percent increase on the last year.

It should be recalled that as part of the Russian President's visit to Ashgabat there was also signed a document between Turkmengaz state concern and Russia's Gazprom Export on amending the contract on the sale of Turkmen natural gas.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16059&type=event&sort=date_desc

- China receives more than 23 million cubic meters of Turkmen gas

China has already received more than 23 million cubic meters of natural gas from Turkmenistan via a newly commissioned gas pipeline, and gas supplies will be increased steadily. This was reported by Vice Premier Baymyrat Hojamammedov to President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov at a regular meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan.

According to his report, the Trans-Asian gas pipeline is successfully reaching its projected capacity in accordance with the technical schedule, the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) said.

It is expected that the pipeline, which is meant to supply up to 40 billion cubic meters of Turkmen natural gas to China annually for 30 years, will reach its full capacity by 2012.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16087&type=event&sort=date_desc

- Foreign companies to develop major gas field Southern Yoloten

On December 29, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov signed a number of resolutions to develop the largest hydrocarbon field of Southern Yoloten.

According to the resolutions, Turkmenstate signed contracts with CNPC (China) in the amount of US \$ 3, 128 billion, with Petrofac International (UAE) in the amount of US \$ 3,979 billion, with Gulf Oil & Gas (UAE) in the amount of US \$ 1,150 billion and with a consortium of South Korean companies LG International Corp. and Hyundai Engineering in the amount of US \$ 1,485 billion. The total amount of contracts is about US \$ 9,7 billion.

As the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) reported, Gulf Oil & Gas has been commissioned to carry out the design and construction of underground facilities, including production wells, at a portion of Southern Yoloten field that will ensure production of 20 billion cubic meters of gas per year. A similar set of works will be carried out by Chinese company CNPC, namely to design and drill wells and develop the field to ensure annual production of 10 billion cubic meters of gas.

Two other partners of Turkmenstate will construct gas processing facilities at Southern Yoloten field. In particular, Petrofac International will carry out the design and construction of a gas processing plant with the capacity of 10 billion cubic meters of marketable gas annually, as well as the creation of the entire ground infrastructure with the annual capacity of 20 billion cubic meters of gas. The contract signed with a consortium of South Korean companies provides for engineering and construction of a gas desulfurization plant with the annual capacity of 10 billion cubic meters of gas.

It should be recalled that Southern Yoloten - Osman field, located in the Amu Darya basin, contains enormous reserves of natural gas confirmed by an independent audit conducted by the renowned international consultant, Gaffney, Cline & Associates (United Kingdom) company. According to preliminary estimates, the field contains 6-14 trillion cubic meters of natural gas that puts Turkmenistan in the 4th place in the world.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16099&type=event&sort=date_desc

Social Front

- Turkmen Leader Reopens Cinema To Mark Revival Of Film Industry

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov has presided over a ceremony in downtown Ashgabat to reopen the prominent Watan movie theater, RFE/RL's Turkmen Service reports. Schoolchildren, actors, and state officials also attended the event on December 28.

Watan is one of several cinemas in the Turkmen capital that is being renovated and reopened. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Turkmen film industry suffered as President Saparmurat Niyazov ordered the Turkmenfilm studios closed, leaving film professionals jobless.

The government's isolationist policy left Turkmen movies out of foreign film festivals as theaters were closed and used for other purposes. Watan will again show films -- mostly from India and the United States -- until the Turkmen film industry returns to its Soviet-

era level. Berdymukhammedov declared early in his leadership that reforms were part of his "New Revival" program, which included lifting Niyazov's bans on the opera, circus, and movie theaters. Berdymukhammedov came to power in 2006 after the death of Niyazov.

http://www.rferl.org/content/Turkmen_Leader_Reopens_Cinema_To_Mark_Revival_Of_Film_Industry/1917312.html

- President of Turkmenistan donates books about Japan to Institute of World Languages

The library of the Turkmen National Institute of World Languages named after Dovletmammed Azadi has got hundreds of books, published in Japan, about the culture and history, economics, arts, traditions and distinctive scientific and technological achievements of Japan.

The presentation of books in Japanese language was held at the Institute on December 23. It is reported that the books were donated to the institute by Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. The ceremony was attended by government officials, representatives of several ministries and departments, public organizations, media, students and teachers. It should be recalled that the President of Turkmenistan paid an official visit to Japan last week. The department of the Japanese language was established at the Turkmen National Institute of World Languages in 2007.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16066&type=event&sort=date_desc

- Orthodox clergy hold annual meeting in Turkmenistan

On December 21, Ashgabat's St. Nicholas Church hosted the annual meeting of clergy of the Turkmen districts headed by the bishop of Smolensk and Vyazemsk, Feofilakt, who was on a visit to Turkmenistan. According to the official website of Smolensk and Vyazemsk Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, the meeting summed up the results of the outgoing year. It was noted that in 2009 Bishop Feofilakt paid 5 days-long visit to Turkmenistan, during which he consecrated three churches and the altars in two churches. Also, this year was marked by a series of repair and restoration works in most churches of the district, including the church of St. Alexis of Moscow in Bayramali city.

The meeting paid particular attention to the issue related to activities of Sunday schools that exist almost in each parish. There were outlined plans for development of social service for the next year. To date, there are 12 parishes with 4 priests of the Russian Orthodox Church in Turkmenistan. It should be recalled that in 2008 Bishop Feofilakt (Kuryanov Denis Anatoliyevich) was instructed to supervise the Orthodox parishes in Turkmenistan in accordance with the decision of the Holy Synod on the formation of the Patriarch deanery in Turkmenistan.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16074&type=event&sort=date_desc

- Russian Orthodox Church Deanery for Patriarchal Parishes in Turkmenistan launches official website

The Deanery of the Russian Orthodox Church patriarchal parishes in Turkmenistan launched its official website in the course of the visit to Ashgabat of the Bishop of Smolensk and Vyazemsk Feofilakt, manager of Orthodox parishes in the country. The website turkmenistan.smoleparh.ru presents news of the Patriarch's district, information about the parishes in Turkmenistan, historical information about churches in the country.

In addition, the site features translations of books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch) and the New Testament in the Turkmen language.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16076&type=event&sort=date_desc

Uzbekistan

Political Front

- Uzbekistan Holding Parliamentary Vote

President Islam Karimov has ruled Uzbekistan for the past 20 years.

TASHKENT, December 27, 2009 -- Uzbekistan is holding a parliamentary election in which four parties -- all of whom support the rule of President Islam Karimov -- are competing. Some 17 million eligible voters will be able to cast ballots December 27 to elect the new 150-seat Oliy Majlis lower chamber of parliament. The contenders include the Liberal Democratic Party, the People's Democratic Party Of Uzbekistan, the National Revival Party "Milly Tiklanish," and the Social Democratic Party "Adolat." All the parties hold seats in the current legislature and have never publicly criticized the government of Karimov, who has ruled the Central Asian country with one of the world's most repressive regimes since Uzbekistan gained independence from the Soviet Union nearly 20 years ago. Fifteen seats are reserved for the Ecological Movement of Uzbekistan. There are no officially registered opposition parties in Uzbekistan, and the country has never held an election considered to have been free and fair by Western monitors.

The election monitoring arm of the OSCE, the Organization For Security And Cooperation In Europe, has declined to send an observer mission to monitor this election, saying that none of its recommendations offered after previous votes have been implemented. The OSCE said in a pre-election report that Uzbekistan's "current political spectrum does not offer the electorate a genuine choice between competing political alternatives."

http://www.rferl.org/content/Uzbekistan_Holding_Parliamentary_Vote/1914542.html

Geo Strategic Front

- Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan resume border demarcation

Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan resumed work of the intergovernmental commission on delimitation and demarcation of the state border after a 5-year break on December 28.

"The commission did not meet for some objective and subjective reasons that provoked nervousness and stress of people, especially residents of border regions," Daniyar Usenov the Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan told the press in Tashkent. The countries have already demarked about 900 km of borders while other 600 km have to be delimited. Moreover, there are about 13 debatable border parts between the countries. The Kyrgyz prime minister believes delimitation and demarcation of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border would settle the issue on ownership of certain border objects.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/cis/2009/12/29/10052.html>

Economic /Energy Front

- Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan sales turnover amounts to \$140M in 2009

Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan sales turnover amounted to \$140 million in 11 months of 2009, Rustam Azimov the first Assistant Prime Minister of Uzbekistan said, meeting with the head of the Kyrgyz government Daniyar Usenov Monday. The rate reportedly made up \$265 million in 2008, having increased by 44 percent comparing with 2007 index.

Azimov believes the current sales turnover could not satisfy both countries. Execution of agreements in the line with 2007-2011 program, approved by leadership of the republics in 2006, could, in his opinion, add to development of economic relations. Uzbekistan thinks promotion of Uzbek engineering, glass and textile industry products will contribute to development of economic cooperation between the countries.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/cis/2009/12/28/10046.html>

- Uzbekistan concerned about import of non-CIS goods to Kyrgyzstan

Uzbekistan is concerned about volume of goods, imported to Kyrgyzstan from non-CIS states, Rustam Azimov first Assistant Prime Minister of Uzbekistan said Monday meeting with the head of the Kyrgyz government Daniyar Usenov as a part of the 7th session of joint intergovernmental commission on bilateral cooperation.

Main part of the goods is re-exported through Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan. Azimov outlined the sides should secure “efficient cooperation of customs services.” The first assistant minister pointed necessity of solving the issue on unhindered access of Uzbek power and gas specialists to objects situated on the Kyrgyz territory and used by Uzbekistan.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/cis/2009/12/28/10045.html>

- Uzbekistan considers lifting of Kyrgyz meat import ban

Uzbekistan could lift the ban on import of Kyrgyz meat, Daniyar Usenov the Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan said Monday summarizing the session of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission on Bilateral Cooperation in Tashkent.

The meat import ban is still in force in Uzbekistan after a foot-and-mouth disease outbreak registered in Kyrgyzstan two years ago.

Kyrgyzstan reached an agreement with the neighboring country about possible lifting of the ban in case the Uzbek working commission would register favorable epizootic situation in the republic.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/cis/2009/12/29/10051.html>

- Kyrgyzstan signs gas deal with Uzbekistan

Kyrgyzstan has signed a long-awaited gas deal with Uzbekistan Monday in Tashkent, press service of the Kyrgyz government reported. The Kyrgyz Premier Daniyar Usenov, said the deal was crucial and the price is being negotiated, but as it was already declared Kyrgyzstan will buy gas cheaper than all other states in the region. Therewith, some unofficial sources informed 24.kg that 1,000 cubic meter of gas would cost Kyrgyzstan about \$220 in 2010.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/business/2009/12/29/10049.html>

- Uzbekistan insists to keep the 2009 gas price for Tajikistan

DUSHANBE, December 25, 2009, Asia-Plus -- Tojiktransgaz (Tajik state natural-gas distributor) is continuing negotiations with the Uzbek natural-gas supplier, Uztransgaz, on gas shipments to Tajikistan in 2010, the source at Tojiktransgaz said in an interview with Asia-Plus. According to him, the next round of negotiations on this subject is beginning in Tashkent, Uzbekistan today. “On Wednesday December 23, the Uzbek side noted that it will keep the 2009 gas price – 240 U.S. dollars per 1,000 cubic meters of gas, and they demand prepayment for gas deliveries” the source said, noting that Tojiktransgaz is currently studying Uzbek gas supplier’s proposal.

In the meantime, Tajikistan wants Uzbekistan to decrease its gas price. We will recall that Radio Liberty’s Tajik Service reported on December 14 that speaking in an interview

with RF/RL, the Tojiktransgaz head Saidmamad Shoriddinov said world gas prices have fallen and therefore Tashkent should decrease its price as well. He added that Tajikistan expects Uzbekistan to decrease its price for gas by 30 percent.

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/31/60797.html>

Social Front