

Business & Politics in the Muslim World
News Monitoring
March 19 to March 25, 2010
Weekly Report
Central Asia
Uzma Siraj

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- State Committee: Delimitation of border with Russia to be discussed in Azerbaijan

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- Armenia Issue Dogs Turkey-Azerbaijan Gas Talks

Social Front

- Pardoned Azerbaijani Journalist Says 'Deserved' Freedom
- U.S. Helsinki Group Slams Baku Court's Refusal Of Bloggers' Appeal
- Jailed Azerbaijani Opposition Journalist Pardoned
- Azerbaijan marks Novruz holiday

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- Politicians, Journalists Call For Kazakhstan To Quit Customs Union

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- Kazakhstan and Ukraine discuss space cooperation

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- Ukraine seeks to resume Kazakh oil flow
- Abu Dhabi's Al Hilal opens first Islamic bank in Kazakhstan
- Kazakhstan seeks to boost uranium exports to Japan

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- Thousands Evacuated In Flooded Eastern Kazakhstan
- Eastern Kazakhstan Flood Evacuations Continue
- Kazakh Oil Workers End Strike

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- Kyrgyz Politician 'Attacks Newspaper Office, Destroys Computers'
- Kyrgyz Independent Journalists To Create Union
- Kyrgyz President Pooh-Poohs Western-Style Democracy
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- Kyrgyz Assembly Dashes Bakiev's Hopes For Big Show Of Support

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Economic/Energy Front

- CIS Statistics Committee says Kyrgyzstan's GDP increase by 4 percent in 2010

Social Front

- Kyrgyz Find Little To Celebrate On 'Tulip' Anniversary
- Kyrgyzstan in top 20 dirtiest cities of the world

Tajikistan

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- Top Tajik Islamic Body 'Left In Legal Limbo'
- Tajik speaker informs Turkmen president of the past parliamentary elections results
- Elections to Tajik parliament's upper house being held today

Geo strategic Front

- Tajiks Summon Uzbek Envoy Over Blocked Rail Freight

Economic/Energy Front

- Tajik PM Disputes Uzbek Rationale For Rail Delays
- Europe and Central Asia facing energy crunch

Social Front

- Car Blast In Tajik Capital Injures Policeman

Turkmenistan

Political Front

- Prosecutor General of Turkmenistan severely reprimanded
- Minister of Internal Affairs of Turkmenistan severely reprimanded
- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov holds meeting in Tajik Parliament

Geo strategic Front

- Moscow to host meeting of CIS foreign ministers
- High-level delegation of Turkmenistan holds series of meetings in Kazan
- President receives new UN Resident Coordinator in Turkmenistan
- Turkmen delegation attends inauguration ceremony of new President of Tatarstan
- Ashgabat and Dushanbe speak in favor of peaceful resolution of Afghan problems

Economic/Energy Front

- Turkmenistan opts for highly efficient strategy of water use

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- People of Turkmenistan celebrate Nowruz - National Spring Holiday

Uzbekistan

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- Tajiks Summon Uzbek Envoy Over Blocked Rail Freight

Economic/Energy Front

- Tajik PM Disputes Uzbek Rationale For Rail Delays
- Uzbekistan-Oman business forum held

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Azerbaijan

Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- Armenian President Offers Baku Land For Security

YEREVAN -- Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian has said that Azerbaijani territory currently held by Armenian forces could be returned in exchange for security and self-determination for the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh

- State Committee: Delimitation of border with Russia to be discussed in Azerbaijan

A Russian commission is expected to visit Baku in mid-April to coordinate issues on delimitation of border between Azerbaijan and Russia, Garib Mammadov, chairman of the State Committee on Lands and Cartography of Azerbaijan said.

Economic/Energy Front

- Armenia Issue Dogs Turkey-Azerbaijan Gas Talks

Talks between Turkey and Azerbaijan over securing the Nabucco gas pipeline have stalled due to disagreements over Turkey's attempts to normalize relations with Armenia.

Social Front

- **Pardoned Azerbaijani Journalist Says 'Deserved' Freedom**
BAKU -- An Azerbaijani opposition journalist released from jail this week has told RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service that he "deserved" to be freed.

- **U.S. Helsinki Group Slams Baku Court's Refusal Of Bloggers' Appeal**
The U.S. Helsinki Commission has criticized a Baku court's rejection of appeals by two Azerbaijani bloggers against their prison sentences, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports. Emin Milli was sentenced in November to 2 1/2 years in prison and Adnan Hajizade to two years on charges of hooliganism arising from what the commission chairmen said "appeared to be a crude, government-arranged incident at a restaurant" in July 2009.

- **Jailed Azerbaijani Opposition Journalist Pardoned**
BAKU -- An Azerbaijani opposition journalist jailed on what supporters say were politically motivated charges has been pardoned, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

- **Azerbaijan marks Novruz holiday**
Novruz is widely celebrated in our country as the symbol of winter's end and spring's beginning. Novruz is celebrated on the first day of spring, which is determined by the annual circulation of the sun. According to scientists, the holiday dates back to the period of the prophet Zardush, some 3,500-5,000 years ago.

Kazakhstan

Political Front

- **Politicians, Journalists Call For Kazakhstan To Quit Customs Union**
ASTANA -- Kazakh opposition parties, nongovernmental organizations, and both pro-government and opposition journalists have urged the country's leaders to quit the CIS Customs Union that unites Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Geo strategic Front

- **Kazakhstan and Ukraine discuss space cooperation**
(SRI) - Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev and his Ukrainian counterpart Viktor Yanukovich discussed prospects for implementing joint space projects in a phone conversation last week, according to the Ukrainian presidential press service.

Economic/Energy Front

- **Ukraine seeks to resume Kazakh oil flow**
(SRI) - The new Ukrainian government plans to restore transit of Kazakh crude oil via the Druzhba pipeline, First Deputy Prime Minister Andriy Kliuyev said on Monday.

- **Abu Dhabi's Al Hilal opens first Islamic bank in Kazakhstan**
(SRI) - Abu Dhabi's Al Hilal Bank has been granted a license to open Kazakhstan's first Islamic bank last week, according to a statement. The bank expects to begin operation on March 25.

- **Kazakhstan seeks to boost uranium exports to Japan**
(SRI) - Kazakhstan plans to increase uranium exports to Japan and boost its share on the Japanese uranium market to 40 percent from current 4 percent, Kazakh Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev told Japan's Nikkei news agency on Wednesday.

Social Front

- **Thousands Evacuated In Flooded Eastern Kazakhstan**

OSKEMEN, Kazakhstan -- Kazakh officials continue to evacuate towns and villages in eastern Kazakhstan due to flooding caused by a massive thaw after a blizzard, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

- Eastern Kazakhstan Flood Evacuations Continue

OSKEMEN, Kazakhstan -- More people are being evacuated from villages in eastern Kazakhstan due to the danger of flooding, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

- Kazakh Oil Workers End Strike

ZHANAOKEN -- Oil workers in the southwestern Kazakh town of Zhanaozen have ended a strike they began two weeks ago, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Kyrgyzstan Political Front

- Kyrgyz Politician 'Attacks Newspaper Office, Destroys Computers'

BISHKEK -- An independent Kyrgyz newspaper today said the leader of a progovernment party came to its offices and damaged some equipment, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Kyrgyz Independent Journalists To Create Union

The chief editors of independent Kyrgyz media outlets gathered in Bishkek today to discuss the establishment of a union to protect their rights, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Kyrgyz President Pooh-Poohs Western-Style Democracy (RFE/RL) -- Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev used a major speech ahead of the fifth anniversary of the Tulip Revolution to suggest that Western-style democracy may no longer be suitable for Kyrgyzstan.

- Kyrgyz President Pooh-Poohs Western-Style Democracy (RFE/RL) -- Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev used a major speech ahead of the fifth anniversary of the Tulip Revolution to suggest that Western-style democracy may no longer be suitable for Kyrgyzstan.

- Kyrgyz Assembly Dashes Bakiev's Hopes For Big Show Of Support

Some of the closest allies of Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev have criticized his policies at a national assembly the president had gathered as a show of support for his government, amid its plunging popularity.

Geo strategic Front

Economic/Energy Front

- CIS Statistics Committee says Kyrgyzstan's GDP increase by 4 percent in 2010
Gross domestic product of Kyrgyzstan will increase by 4 percent in 2010. Such data was published on the official website of the Commonwealth of Independent States Interstate Statistics Committee.

Social Front

- Kyrgyz Find Little To Celebrate On 'Tulip' Anniversary

A chance to help make history prompted 33-year-old Duishonkul Chotonov to head north to Kyrgyzstan's capital to participate in antigovernment demonstrations. The March 2005 protests would indeed make their mark, evolving into what would become known variously as the "People's" or "Tulip" Revolution.

- Kyrgyzstan in top 20 dirtiest cities of the world

In the rating of the dirtiest cities in the world the capital of Kyrgyzstan – Bishkek city – took the 14th place. The information was revealed by Trend agency.

Tajikistan

Political Front

- Top Tajik Islamic Body 'Left In Legal Limbo'

DUSHANBE -- Tajikistan's highest Islamic body says it has been left with no clear legal status because of a new law on religion, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

- Tajik speaker informs Turkmen president of the past parliamentary elections results

DUSHANBE, March 19, 2010, Asia-Plus -- On Thursday March 18, visiting Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymuhammedov met here with Chairman of the Majlisi Namoyandagon (Tajikistan's lower chamber of parliament), Shukurjon Zuhurov.

- Elections to Tajik parliament's upper house being held today

DUSHANBE, March 25, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Elections to the Majlisi Milli (Tajikistan's upper chamber of parliament) are being held in Tajikistan today. According to the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CCER), registration for the parliament's upper house ended on March 18, with 27 candidates registered to run.

Geo strategic Front

- Tajiks Summon Uzbek Envoy Over Blocked Rail Freight

DUSHANBE -- The Tajik Foreign Ministry has summoned the Uzbek ambassador to hand over a protest note about blocked rail freight, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Economic/Energy Front

- Tajik PM Disputes Uzbek Rationale For Rail Delays

UNITED NATIONS -- Tajikistan's prime minister has described as an "excuse" Uzbekistan's claims that technical problems are blocking freight trains bound for his country. Uzbekistan began roughly two months ago to blockade the passage of Tajikistan-bound freight trains through its territory. Some 1,000 freight cars with construction material, aluminum ore, and fuel are thought to have been held up.

- Europe and Central Asia facing energy crunch

DUSHANBE, March 19, 2010, Asia-Plus -- The outlook for primary energy supplies, heat, and electricity is questionable for the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region, despite Russia and Central Asia's current role as a major energy supplier to both Eastern and Western Europe, press release issued by the World Bank said.

Social Front

- Car Blast In Tajik Capital Injures Policeman

DUSHANBE -- Tajik police say a car bomb has exploded in the capital, Dushanbe, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. The blast went off as policeman Hamdamov Safarali started his car today. Safarali survived, but was injured in the incident.

Turkmenistan

Political Front

- Prosecutor General of Turkmenistan severely reprimanded

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov severely reprimanded the Prosecutor General of the country, Chary Hodzhamyradov

- Minister of Internal Affairs of Turkmenistan severely reprimanded

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov severely reprimanded Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic Isgender Mulikov "for poor management of internal

affairs bodies, lack of proper management of recruitment, as well as the low level of fulfilling the instructions."

- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov holds meeting in Tajik Parliament

As part of his official visit to Tajikistan, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov met with Speaker of the lower chamber of the Tajik Parliament Shukurdzhon Zuhurov in Dushanbe on March 18.

Geo strategic Front

- Moscow to host meeting of CIS foreign ministers

Moscow will host a meeting of foreign ministers of the Commonwealth of Independent States on March 26. The meeting will discuss issues of migration control, military cooperation and prospects of the CIS development. Turkmenistan will be represented by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs

- High-level delegation of Turkmenistan holds series of meetings in Kazan

On March 25, a high-level delegation of Turkmenistan visited Kazan to attend celebrations associated with the accession to office of the new President of the Republic of Tatarstan, Rustam Minnikhanov. Speaker of the Mejlis of Turkmenistan Akja Nurberdiyeva, the head of Turkmenistan's Embassy in Russia Halnazar Agakhanov and Minister of Culture and Broadcasting of Turkmenistan Gulmyrat Myradov participated in the inauguration ceremony.

- President receives new UN Resident Coordinator in Turkmenistan

On March 24, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received the new UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Turkmenistan, Lenni Montiel. The guest handed a written message of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and a letter of the UNDP Administrator, Chairman of the United Nations Development Group, Helen Clark, to the Turkmen leader.

- Turkmen delegation attends inauguration ceremony of new President of Tatarstan

The delegation of Turkmenistan is taking part in the inauguration ceremony of the new President of the Republic of Tatarstan of the Russian Federation, Rustam Minnikhanov, in Kazan.

- Ashgabat and Dushanbe speak in favor of peaceful resolution of Afghan problems

Turkmenistan and Tajikistan support peaceful resolution of problems in Afghanistan through political and diplomatic means and methods with the active involvement of the United Nations and its specialized institutions, namely the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia.

Economic/Energy Front

- Turkmenistan opts for highly efficient strategy of water use

The President of Turkmenistan believes that solving the problem of pollution of the Amu Darya river, reduced water quality, increased groundwater salinity and loss of soil fertility, flooding of pastures in the middle and lower reaches of rivers is of paramount importance today.

Social Front

- People of Turkmenistan celebrate Nowruz - National Spring Holiday

March 21 and 22 are widely celebrated in Turkmenistan as the National Day of Spring. Picturesque foothills of the Kopet Dag were the center of the celebration with dances,

sport contests and traditional fare. A special place among the dishes was spared for "Semeni" which is made of germinated wheat grain that Turkmens cook for Nowruz.

Uzbekistan

Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- Tajiks Summon Uzbek Envoy Over Blocked Rail Freight

DUSHANBE -- The Tajik Foreign Ministry has summoned the Uzbek ambassador to hand over a protest note about blocked rail freight, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Foreign Ministry spokesman Davlat Nazriev said Tajikistan hopes for Tashkent's cooperation in expediting the forward passage of some 1,000 freight cars bound for Tajikistan.

Economic/Energy Front

- Tajik PM Disputes Uzbek Rationale For Rail Delays

UNITED NATIONS -- Tajikistan's prime minister has described as an "excuse" Uzbekistan's claims that technical problems are blocking freight trains bound for his country.

- Uzbekistan-Oman business forum held

The forum of business circles of Uzbekistan and Oman was held at Tashkent's International Business Center on 23 March. The event was organized by the Ministry for foreign economic relations, investments and trade of Uzbekistan and the Ministry of trade and industry of Oman.

Detailed Report

Azerbaijan

Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- Armenian President Offers Baku Land For Security

YEREVAN -- Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian has said that Azerbaijani territory currently held by Armenian forces could be returned in exchange for security and self-determination for the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Sarkisian, in comments on his official website and to the Syrian newspaper "Al-Watan," reiterated Yerevan's long-standing policy of Armenian forces withdrawing from seven Azerbaijani districts around Nagorno-Karabakh in the event of an agreement on its final status. "When the people of Karabakh get a true chance to realize their right to self-determination and mechanisms for security and development are created, then in compromise the Armenian side can consider the return of the regions around Karabakh, preserving the corridor linking [it] and Armenia," he said.

Sarkisian also warned that "unilateral concessions will deepen the existing dangers and threats." Sarkisian's comments come one day after the Armenian military confirmed there is currently a nationwide call-up of military reservists, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports. Colonel Seyran Shahsuvarian, a spokesman for the Armenian Defense Ministry, told RFE/RL on March 22 that men across Armenia under the age of 50 are being summoned by military commissions to participate in military exercises. He said reservists spend up to a week in military camps refreshing and improving combat skills.

Shahsuvarian downplayed the significance of such drills, saying that the armed forces have always called up reservists to verify their availability and ensure that "every duty-bound Armenian man knows his place and function in the military" in the event of a conflict. The latest call-up comes amid rumors, stoked by some media outlets, that the army has been put on high alert in anticipation of an Azerbaijani offensive.

The Defense Ministry has categorically denied those reports. A senior Nagorno-Karabakh security official, Colonel Levon Chalian, on March 22 dismissed as a "provocation" pro-opposition media claims that Nagorno-Karabakh authorities have banned local male residents from leaving the territory. "We are performing our duties as usual," he told RFE/RL. "There are no restrictive instructions." Shahsuvarian stressed at the same time that the Armenian military is taking serious Azerbaijani threats to solve the Karabakh conflict by force. "We have been reinforcing our frontline fortifications," he said. "We now have several lines of defense there. We are raising soldiers' spirits, combat-readiness, and so on." Azerbaijani Defense Minister Safar Abiyev warned last month that the threat of conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh is increasing. His Armenian counterpart, Seyran Ohanian, recently warned Azerbaijan against attempting to win back the Armenian-held region by force, saying that Yerevan's troops have significantly beefed up defensive fortifications around the disputed territory and are prepared for another war.

Armenian forces captured Karabakh from Azerbaijan in a six-year war that ended in 1994. Some 30,000 people were killed in the conflict and more than 1 million people were displaced by the conflict.

- State Committee: Delimitation of border with Russia to be discussed in Azerbaijan

A Russian commission is expected to visit Baku in mid-April to coordinate issues on delimitation of border between Azerbaijan and Russia, Garib Mammadov, chairman of the State Committee on Lands and Cartography of Azerbaijan said. Three sections of the overall 490km-long state border between Azerbaijan and Russia are still to be determined. According to Mammadov, at present the work continues on the level of experts and discussions at the commissions. With regard to delimitation of state border between Azerbaijan and Georgia Mammadov said an expert group of Azerbaijan together with their Georgian counterpart visited the disputable territory.

"We prepared materials both cartographic and nature," Mammadov said. A Georgian commission is expected to pay a visit soon. The length of the Georgian-Azerbaijani border is 480 kilometers. According to statements by the sides, major part of the border has been coordinated.

Economic/Energy Front

- Armenia Issue Dogs Turkey-Azerbaijan Gas Talks

Talks between Turkey and Azerbaijan over securing the Nabucco gas pipeline have stalled due to disagreements over Turkey's attempts to normalize relations with Armenia. Turkey's Energy Minister Taner Yildiz today said that Turkish officials "have not talked with the Azerbaijanis for between a month and a month and a half, the fundamental issue here is politics." Turkey signed protocols late last year with Armenia which agreed to establish diplomatic relations. The talks over gas supplies from Azerbaijan are crucial to

help fill the European Union-backed Nabucco pipeline project, which aims to reduce Europe's dependence on Russian gas.

Social Front

- **Pardoned Azerbaijani Journalist Says 'Deserved' Freedom**

BAKU -- An Azerbaijani opposition journalist released from jail this week has told RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service that he "deserved" to be freed.

Qanimat Zahid, the editor in chief of "Azadliq" newspaper, was freed on March 17 three years into a four-year sentence for what supporters say were politically motivated charges of hooliganism. Zahid said he was asked on his release what he wanted to say about the presidential pardon that freed him.

"I replied, 'I deserve freedom,'" he said.

Zahid said his imprisonment had violated not only his rights, but the rights of Azerbaijani society. He said he had not wanted to ask for a pardon as he didn't want to seem angry or aggressive. But he added: "My arrest -- it was their [authorities'] mistake. You simply can't do such things to people."

Zahid was among some 70 people pardoned by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev.

- **U.S. Helsinki Group Slams Baku Court's Refusal Of Bloggers' Appeal**

The U.S. Helsinki Commission has criticized a Baku court's rejection of appeals by two Azerbaijani bloggers against their prison sentences, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports. Emin Milli was sentenced in November to 2 1/2 years in prison and Adnan Hajizade to two years on charges of hooliganism arising from what the commission chairmen said "appeared to be a crude, government-arranged incident at a restaurant" in July 2009. Both bloggers were well-known for their satirical comments on Azerbaijani government policy. The Baku court rejected their appeal on March 10. Both men, and a number of rights groups, have insisted the incident behind the jailing was a provocation and the motives connected to their very public criticism of the government.

Senator Benjamin Cardin (Democrat, Maryland), the U.S. Helsinki Commission chairman, said the bloggers' case "is the latest in a long series of setbacks for independent journalism and civil society in Azerbaijan." Commission Co-Chair Congressman Alcee Hastings (Democrat, Florida), said it "illustrates the lack of independence of Azerbaijan's judicial system."

Congressman Robert Aderholt (Republican, Alabama) said the bloggers' conviction "seems to indicate a determination to stifle dissent before the parliamentary election later this year." The U.S. Helsinki Commission wrote in December to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev expressing concern about the convictions and calling for a fair appeal process. Azerbaijani authorities did not reply to that letter.

- **Jailed Azerbaijani Opposition Journalist Pardoned**

BAKU -- An Azerbaijani opposition journalist jailed on what supporters say were politically motivated charges has been pardoned, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

Qanimat Zahid, the editor in chief of "Azadliq" newspaper, was jailed for four years in 2007 on hooliganism charges. He was among some 70 people pardoned today by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev.

- **Azerbaijan marks Novruz holiday**

Novruz is widely celebrated in our country as the symbol of winter's end and spring's beginning. Novruz is celebrated on the first day of spring, which is determined by the

annual circulation of the sun. According to scientists, the holiday dates back to the period of the prophet Zardush, some 3,500-5,000 years ago.

This holiday was celebrated in ancient Babylon for 12 days beginning in Nisan (March, April). Each of the 12 days had its ceremonies and enjoyment. According to the first inscription, the holiday of Novruz was established in 505 B.C.

Islam figures always try to explain this holiday from a religious point of view. The prominent enlighteners Firdovsi, Rudaki, Avicenna, Nizami, Sadi, Hafiz and others have proven that Novruz is older. Novruz was celebrated unofficially during Soviet times because it was prohibited. However, Azerbaijani families have followed the old tradition and have celebrated Novruz. On Tuesdays we celebrate Su Charshanbasi (water Tuesday), Odlu Charshanba (fire Tuesday), Torpag Charshanbasi (land Tuesday) and Akhir Charshanba (final or wind Tuesday).

Based on folk tales, water in the first Tuesday purifies and stirs, fire in the second Tuesday, land on the third Tuesday and wind in the fourth Tuesday revives nature and trees begin to blossom, which symbolize spring. The Noruz holiday is rich with ancient traditions and games. Khidir Ilyas is the symbol of productivity and Kos-Kosa shows that spring is coming. Novruz also has interesting traditions related to water and fire. Being the land of the fire, Azerbaijan has rich traditions. Fire is the symbol of purification and clarification. Both men and women jump seven times over a fire and say, "Give me your redness and take my yellowness." The fire is never put out with water but it is left to burn out. Young boys and girls take ashes from the fire and throw it far from their houses, which symbolizes throwing away of all of the family's mischance.

Traditions related to water symbolize the New Year in Azerbaijan. Jumping over flowing water one cleanses oneself from one's mistakes. Family members splash water on themselves before going to bed on New Year's Eve. They say all flowing waters cease in and everything bound to it, even trees bound down. Whoever drinks water from Akhir Charshanba New Year's Eve is considered to be protected from disease for the next year.

The peak of Novruz is the time when the past year gives its turn to new one. According to old traditions, pistols are fired in honor of Novruz. N. Dubrovin wrote in the 19th century: "Shootings in the cities and the villages informed people that spring is coming to Azerbaijan." Adam O'Leary, witness of the Novruz holiday in 1637, wrote: "The astrologer very often stood up his place and determined the height of the sun with astronomic equipment and a sun clock and at the moment of equinox said that the New Year has come and music was heard ringing out from the towers and walls of the city."

Azerbaijanis pay particular attention to the table laid for the holiday. There should be seven different types of food on the table, all starting with "S." For example, sumakh (a kind of spice), sirke (vinegar), sud (milk), samani (grown wheat), sebzi (fried meat with greens) etc. A mirror adorned with colored eggs and candles should also be on the table. Candle is the symbol of fire and light (keeping a person from damage) and mirror is the symbol of happiness. According to tradition, all family members should be at home on the first day of the holiday. People say: "If you are not at home on the day of the holiday, you will live without home for seven years." On the first day of the New Year lights in the house are kept on for the whole night because no light and fire is the symbol of misfortune.

With Novruz people in the villages determine the coming year; whether it will be a dry, rainy and fertile year. According to tradition, the first day of Novruz symbolizes spring, the second day summer, the third day autumn and the fourth winter. If the first day is dry and with no wind spring is going to be good for agricultural work and if it is rainy and windy so the spring is expected to be the same. The rest of the days determine the summer, autumn and winter.

Novruz is a joyful and lovely holiday.

Kazakhstan

Political Front

- Politicians, Journalists Call For Kazakhstan To Quit Customs Union

ASTANA -- Kazakh opposition parties, nongovernmental organizations, and both pro-government and opposition journalists have urged the country's leaders to quit the CIS Customs Union that unites Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Some 175 people signed an open letter to President Nursultan Nazarbaev, the prime minister, and the chairmen of both parliament chambers that was posted on many Kazakh websites today. Sixty political parties and groups have expressed support for the initiative. The authors expressed concern that membership of the Customs Union means "the beginning of the end of Kazakhstan's independence." They argue that plans for the further development of the Customs Union contradict Kazakhstan's national, economic, and strategic interests. They warned that if their demand is not met, they will stage mass actions of civil disobedience and demand the immediate resignation of Kazakhstan's leadership and early presidential and parliamentary elections. The leaders of the customs union, also known as the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), have agreed to establish a common economic space in 2010. Uzbekistan has already suspended its membership in the Customs Union.

Geo strategic Front

- Kazakhstan and Ukraine discuss space cooperation

(SRI) - Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev and his Ukrainian counterpart Viktor Yanukovich discussed prospects for implementing joint space projects in a phone conversation last week, according to the Ukrainian presidential press service. Ukraine and Kazakhstan, along with Russia, could participate in the implementation of the Global Navigation Satellite System (GLONASS) project. Nazarbayev and Yanukovich also discussed the launch of Ukraine-produced Dnipro rocket with European Prisma and Pecard satellites from Kazakhstan's Baikonur launching pad.

Economic/Energy Front

- Ukraine seeks to resume Kazakh oil flow

(SRI) - The new Ukrainian government plans to restore transit of Kazakh crude oil via the Druzhba pipeline, First Deputy Prime Minister Andriy Kliuyev said on Monday. Shipments have been suspended since late January, after the two countries reportedly failed to agree on transit tariffs. Kazakhstan has rerouted its crude oil shipments via Poland since February, completely bypassing Ukraine. Ukraine was scheduled to ship 11.06 million barrels of Kazakh crude to Slovakia and Hungary in the first quarter.

Ukraine and Kazakhstan plan to hold a governmental summit later this year to resolve the crude oil tariffs and improve the overall economic relations between the two countries, according to a statement by the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

- Abu Dhabi's Al Hilal opens first Islamic bank in Kazakhstan

(SRI) - Abu Dhabi's Al Hilal Bank has been granted a license to open Kazakhstan's first Islamic bank last week, according to a statement. The bank expects to begin operation on March 25.

The Kazakh branch, called Al-Hilal Islamic Bank, has capital of \$36 million. Its headquarters are in Almaty, with a second branch in Kazakhstan's capital, Astana. It plans to open two additional branches by the end of 2010.

Kazakhstan and Abu Dhabi signed an agreement to launch Al Hilal Islamic Bank in Kazakhstan last June, after Kazakhstan passed legislation allowing Islamic banking in February 2009.

The majority of Kazakhstan's population are Muslim. Kazakhstan's government has been promoting Islamic finance as it seeks to establish the country as a regional financial centre and diversify its funding sources.

- Kazakhstan seeks to boost uranium exports to Japan

(SRI) - Kazakhstan plans to increase uranium exports to Japan and boost its share on the Japanese uranium market to 40 percent from current 4 percent, Kazakh Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev told Japan's Nikkei news agency on Wednesday.

According to Saudabayev, basic principles and areas of bilateral cooperation in civilian nuclear power engineering were defined in a civil nuclear agreement signed between the two countries in Tokyo on March 2, 2010.

"The implementation of these accords will make it possible in coming years to increase the share of Kazakh uranium products on the Japanese market from 3-4% to 40%, of which about 30% will be highly processed products," he said.

Social Front

- Thousands Evacuated In Flooded Eastern Kazakhstan

OSKEMEN, Kazakhstan -- Kazakh officials continue to evacuate towns and villages in eastern Kazakhstan due to flooding caused by a massive thaw after a blizzard, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Officials reported four bridges were washed away and a total of more than 160 homes, 200 nonresidential buildings, and nine livestock farms have been completely destroyed by floods in the past week in East Kazakhstan Oblast.

Another 1,600 structures and 20 other livestock farms were damaged and an estimated 30,000 sheep, 4,000 cows, and more than 1,500 horses were reportedly killed by the flood waters. Local authorities started evacuating the population in the Tarbaghatai and Ulan districts of East Kazakhstan Oblast last week. More than 7,000 local citizens have been evacuated so far.

The East Kazakhstan Oblast's Emergency Situations Ministry reported no casualties from the recent floods. On March 13, at least 41 people died when flood waters burst two dams in southeastern Kazakhstan.

- Eastern Kazakhstan Flood Evacuations Continue

OSKEMEN, Kazakhstan -- More people are being evacuated from villages in eastern Kazakhstan due to the danger of flooding, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

A further 4,220 people have been evacuated from several villages in the Tarbaghatai district over the past 48 hours. Melting snow has raised the water level in the Ulan River in Ulan district, causing flooding in three villages.

Melting snow has also caused massive avalanches in the region. All the main highways in East Kazakhstan Oblast are temporarily closed.

- **Kazakh Oil Workers End Strike**

ZHANAOKEN -- Oil workers in the southwestern Kazakh town of Zhanaozen have ended a strike they began two weeks ago, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Several thousand employees of the OzenMunaiGaz Company had been on strike since March 4. They had demanded the annulling of a change in the workers' pay scale, which they say reduced their wages; cuts in the annual production target; and the resignation of OzenMunaiGaz's director. That last demand was met on March 16, when OzenMunaiGaz head Baqytqali Biseken was fired.

Kazakhstan's KazMunaiGaz energy giant, of which OzenMunaiGaz is a subsidiary, announced today that the conciliation commission that was set up earlier this week has reached an agreement acceptable to all parties. On March 18, one of the strikers died of high blood pressure and a second was hospitalized.

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- **Kyrgyz Politician 'Attacks Newspaper Office, Destroys Computers'**

BISHKEK -- An independent Kyrgyz newspaper today said the leader of a progovernment party came to its offices and damaged some equipment, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Aslanbek Sartbaev, the chief editor of the newspaper "Uchur," told RFE/RL that Nurlan Motuev -- the controversial leader of the Joomart (Generous) movement -- forced his way into the newspaper's offices in Bishkek and smashed four computers. Motuev confirmed to RFE/RL that he was in the newspaper's offices, but claimed he destroyed only two computers. He said he destroyed the computers because the newspaper has been insulting and libeling him for a long time.

"I do not believe in the local courts, they never make a right and fair decision, and so I decided to stop the lies about me in this way," Motuev said. He added that one newspaper libeled him in the past but the court needlessly prolonged the hearings and ultimately dropped the case. Bishkek police have launched an investigation into the incident.

- **Kyrgyz Independent Journalists To Create Union**

The chief editors of independent Kyrgyz media outlets gathered in Bishkek today to discuss the establishment of a union to protect their rights, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Participants at the meeting discussed the problems the independent mass media is facing in Kyrgyzstan. They include the blocking of several independent news websites, the suspension of the broadcasting of RFE/RL's Kyrgyz radio and TV programs, the closure of several independent newspapers, and physical attacks against journalists.

The media chiefs said the union is needed to protect their rights in the event that official pressure and harassment against them continues.

Meeting organizers told RFE/RL that government officials were invited to participate in the discussion but did not attend.

- **Kyrgyz President Pooh-Poohs Western-Style Democracy**

(RFE/RL) -- Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev used a major speech ahead of the fifth anniversary of the Tulip Revolution to suggest that Western-style democracy may no longer be suitable for Kyrgyzstan.

His appraisal comes as public criticism -- including by the exiled former president who was ousted in the 2005 unrest -- accuses Bakiev of nepotism and other tactics that compromise the legacy of the largely bloodless transition. Speaking at a "kurultai," or assembly of the people, Bakiev said on March 23 that ideas from the "last century" -- such as democracy based on elections and individual human rights -- may no longer be the correct path. "In today's world the drawbacks of the model of democracy that was accepted in the last century and that was based mainly on elections and human rights is being actively discussed," Bakiev said. "But, unfortunately today there is no certainty that such models are suitable for all countries and peoples." Bakiev suggested Kyrgyzstan now needs a "consultative democracy" that has "deep roots in the traditions of our people."

Kurultai Klatch

He pointed to the kurultai -- which he convened personally -- as an example of a more traditional form of democracy for Kyrgyzstan's people. But he also said that human rights would be defended in Kyrgyzstan and that the authorities would fulfill its international obligations as concerns human rights. The assembly was meant to heal the rifts that have developed in the country over controversial government policies. It came amid vocal opposition to Bakiev's rule and clashes between opposition activists and police, almost five years to the day since protests toppled his predecessor, Askar Akaev.

Bakiev became president shortly after Akaev fled in the face of protests around Kyrgyzstan against parliamentary elections that many in the country felt were rigged. Last week, several thousand opposition supporters rallied in Bishkek and the northeastern town of Naryn, airing wide-ranging grievances from high energy prices to a government clampdown on independent media.

Panned By Predecessor

In an exclusive interview with RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service, former leader Akaev suggested Bakiev and his government would do well to heed those criticisms. "I think today's [Bakiev-led] kurultai will not result in very much, because all the participants are preselected and, of course, they will support the authorities," Akaev said. "I think people expressed their demands during [last week's opposition rally]. If they [authorities] implement all the demands, Kyrgyzstan will have a future. If not, then there's no future for Kyrgyzstan -- Kyrgyzstan will not exit from the crisis. I'm really concerned about it."

Bakiev has pledged on numerous occasions to fight corruption and nepotism and make the country's media entirely independent. But several independent newspapers have been suspended, and two journalists were killed last year while others have been beaten. Bakiev has appointed one of his brothers as head of presidential security and his son to chair a newly created agency in charge of economic development. Bakiev also changed the structure of the government late last year and is expecting the parliament, packed with his supporters from the ruling Ak-Jol People's Party, to approve necessary amendments to the constitution.

- Kyrgyz President Pooh-Poohs Western-Style Democracy

(RFE/RL) -- Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev used a major speech ahead of the fifth anniversary of the Tulip Revolution to suggest that Western-style democracy may no longer be suitable for Kyrgyzstan.

In the capital, Bishkek, a group of protesters attempted to reach the building where Bakiev opened a Kurultai, or national assembly, meant to heal the rifts that have developed in the country over controversial government policies. The protesters wanted to hand over a letter with their demands to Bakiev and some 750 delegates attending the Kurultai. Police intervened, telling protesters they had to disperse since they had not obtained official permission to hold a demonstration or march.

There was a brief clash between police and the protesters, with some reports claiming police used clubs to beat back demonstrators. The police said 19 people were detained, though the opposition put the number at 30. Police said the head of the opposition party Ak-Shumkar (White Falcon), Temir Sariiev, voluntarily went to the police station where the detained protesters were taken.

Police Moved In

In southern Kyrgyzstan, supporters of jailed former Defense Minister Ismail Isakov held an unsanctioned meeting in the country's second-largest city, Osh. President Kurmanbek Bakiev during the opening of the Kurultai in Bishkek today. RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports that protesters had obtained permission for a meeting in a local movie theater. But people arrived from the southeastern Alai, Isakov's home region, and the theater, with a capacity of some 60 seats, could not accommodate everyone. Those who could not enter the theater tried to hold a demonstration outside the theater.

Police then moved in and clashed with that group, detaining some 40 people, reportedly all from the Alai region. Reuters reported that some demonstrators shouted "Down with Bakiev" as they were loaded onto buses to be taken to the police station. They were later reportedly released. At the Kurultai in Bishkek, Bakiev said opposition representatives had been invited but criticized them for only complaining and "slandering."

"It is my fervent opinion that opposition is an indivisible part of any normal political process. A country without opposition will not develop," Bakiev said. "Unfortunately, our opposition, instead of offering alternative programs to society, is busy with just criticizing and slandering."

Bakiev also said it's time for a review of Western-style democracy in his country. He said democracy based on elections and individual human rights may no longer be suitable for Kyrgyzstan. He suggested that "consultative democracy" -- envisaging dialogues with influential social groups -- would be more in keeping with his country's traditions.

Wide-Ranging Grievances

Today's protests come amid growing opposition to Bakiev's rule, five years after protests toppled his predecessor, Askar Akaev. Bakiev became president shortly after those protests broke out around Kyrgyzstan in the wake of parliamentary elections that many in the country felt were rigged. Last week, several thousand opposition supporters rallied in Bishkek and the central town of Naryn, airing wide-ranging grievances -- from high energy prices to a government clampdown on independent media. Bakiev pledged on numerous occasions to fight corruption and nepotism and make the country's media entirely independent. Several independent newspapers recently have been suspended, two journalists were killed last year, and others have been beaten. Bakiev appointed one of his brothers to be head of presidential security and his son to head a newly created agency in

charge of developing the country's economy. Bakiev changed the structure of the government late last year and is expecting the parliament, packed with his supporters from the ruling Ak-Jol People's Party, to approve necessary amendments to the constitution.

- Kyrgyz Assembly Dashes Bakiev's Hopes For Big Show Of Support

Some of the closest allies of Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev have criticized his policies at a national assembly the president had gathered as a show of support for his government, amid its plunging popularity.

Delegates at the national assembly, or "kurultai," today condemned the imprisonment of opposition politicians and government pressure on independent media. Uson Sydykov, who was previously head of the presidential administration, urged his former boss to release former Defense Minister Ismail Isakov and others the opposition describes as political prisoners. A number of prominent politicians have been tried and jailed in recent years, mostly for abuse of power, after falling out with the president.

Sydykov also called on Bakiev to engage in "direct talks" with political opponents and antigovernment protesters "as they, too, have the country's interests at heart." "Recently, we -- you and I -- discussed the issue of Ismail Isakov. You have very good ideas regarding him. I suppose you will implement these ideas," Sydykov said. "You, as the head of state, should be generous toward the future of some others [jailed opposition members], as well."

'Liberty' To Radio Liberty

Sagynbek Mombekov, a prominent poet and composer, was one of those who called on Bakiev to let independent media operate "without obstacles."

The kurultai in progress Hinting at recent interruptions of programs by RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service, known as Radio Azattyk, in some parts of the country, Mombekov asked Bakiev to allow Azattyk back on the air. And he noted what he said was the crucial role that Azattyk's broadcasts played covering the 2005 Tulip Revolution protests that toppled Bakiev's predecessor, Askar Akaev.

"Even our president, dear Kurmanbek Salievich [Bakiev], came to power thanks to Radio Azattyk," Mombekov said. "Now he is shutting it down. I urge him to give liberty to Radio Liberty."

The Kyrgyz government has come under criticism after access to several independent news websites, including centrasia.ru and ferghana.ru, was blocked and Azattyk rebroadcasts interrupted in some parts of the country this month. Bakiev's critics accused him of trying to silence independent media ahead of widespread protests and an opposition kurultai in the run-up to the fifth anniversary of the Tulip Revolution today.

'Voice Of The People'

As for the official two-day kurultai that concluded in Bishkek today, Bakiev had been hoping to show his government enjoyed the people's support. Bakiev has repeatedly mentioned since late 2009 that official kurultais -- as the "voice of the people" -- should convene at least once every two years "to give advice to the government."

Bakiev has said that a kurultai, as an advisory body to the country's rulers, is part of Kyrgyz history and tradition.

Some 750 representatives from all Kyrgyz regions took part in the kurultai. The majority of them were government supporters, as delegates were selected with the help of the

presidential administration and local authorities. Bakiev's popularity has waned during the past five years, a period that has seen flawed elections, allegations of corruption, and a lack of democratic reforms. Bakiev further dashed any hopes for democratic reforms on March 23, when he said that Western-style democracy had run its course in Kyrgyzstan. Speaking to the national assembly, Bakiev said democratic values, such as human rights standards and elections, were not relevant to Kyrgyz traditions.

Former Defense Minister Ismail Isakov "In today's world, the drawbacks of the model of democracy that was accepted in the last century and that was based mainly on elections and human rights is being actively discussed," he said. "But, unfortunately today, there is no certainty that such models are suitable for all countries and peoples."

'Several Steps Backward'

Bakiev's remarks were condemned by some in Kyrgyzstan.

Omurbek Tekebaev, a prominent opposition politician, said today that Bakiev's idea of Kyrgyz-style democracy is "wrong" and that its implementation would mean "several steps backward" for Kyrgyzstan. And he said that if recent elections lacked authority, as Bakiev stated, then the legitimacy of Bakiev's presidency itself is in doubt. Today's kurultai concluded with a resolution that mainly focused on the economy, development, and culture among other issues. Calls to stop media harassment remained unanswered. As for the release of political prisoners, including Isakov, the president said, "Isakov will be set free if the law allows that." Despite the unexpected backfire at the assembly, Bakiev said at the end of the gathering, "The kurultai has achieved its goals."

Geo strategic Front

Economic/Energy Front

- CIS Statistics Committee says Kyrgyzstan's GDP increase by 4 percent in 2010

Gross domestic product of Kyrgyzstan will increase by 4 percent in 2010. Such data was published on the official website of the Commonwealth of Independent States Interstate Statistics Committee.

According to experts, it is one of the highest indicators among CIS countries. Similar indicator is prognosticated in Tajikistan as well. The fastest growth is expected in Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan - 7 percent.

Reportedly, in 2011 GDP growth rate in KR will slow down and make up 3 percent. Other CIS countries are expected the next year's growth at the level of 1-2 percent or retention of rates of 2010.

Social Front

- Kyrgyz Find Little To Celebrate On 'Tulip' Anniversary

A chance to help make history prompted 33-year-old Duishonkul Chotonov to head north to Kyrgyzstan's capital to participate in antigovernment demonstrations. The March 2005 protests would indeed make their mark, evolving into what would become known variously as the "People's" or "Tulip" Revolution. But as the five-year mark approached, Chotonov lamented that "there is nothing to celebrate." Duishonkul Chotonov Widespread discontent over parliamentary elections in February 2005 prompted the mostly haphazard demonstrations that erupted in Kyrgyzstan. Protesters accused President Askar Akaev and his family of heading a corrupt and nepotistic government that did not represent the people. The revolution that unfolded was supposed to change all that. Sweeping political changes took place, starting with the ouster of Akaev, and the new president, Kurmanbek

Bakiev, promised swift reforms. Nevertheless, as Chotonov says today, "It didn't bring the changes we had hoped for."

Lofty Hopes

"Protesters, opposition, people -- everyone was hoping for rapid changes, for reforms; we were hoping our living standards would improve," Chotonov says. "But those changes were not going to happen."

Kurmanbek Bakiev -- more of the same?The initial optimism expressed by Chotonov -- who helped organize antigovernment protests in the southern city of Osh and is now a member of the opposition Fatherland (Ata-Meken) party -- is representative of the general mind-set outside the capital. Loose-knit and unorganized, the revolution centered on the grassroots appeal of establishing a government that would be truly representative. Former Prime Minister Bakiev, who hails from the south, was able to capitalize on the events. Soon afterward, he was introduced as the country's acting leader of the country, and he won a presidential election held in July 2005 by a landslide. Chotonov says it was immediately clear that Bakiev and other politicians were more interested in "fighting for portfolios" than forming a government that would represent all. "For the leaders, the Tulip Revolution wasn't about democratic reforms. It was a fight for top government posts," Chotonov says. "We realized our revolution was stolen from us."

'Stolen Revolution'

Many Kyrgyz look back on the Tulip Revolution as an event that replaced one corrupt leader with another. The driving force behind the 2005 revolution -- public anger with a presidential family many believed had gained enormous wealth at their expense -- is today often affiliated with Bakiev's rule. Shortly after taking power, Bakiev began to promote family members to senior positions. His brother, Janysh Bakiev, was put in charge of the State Protection Service, a department that only recently expanded its size and budget, according to reports. The president's opponents accuse Janysh Bakiev of manipulating law enforcement agencies against the opposition.

Unbowed by criticism over the appointment of his brother, President Bakiev went a step further in November 2009 when he appointed his son, Maksim, to head the state development, innovation, and investment agency, a post that oversees foreign and domestic investments. Maksim's appointment prompted speculation that he was being groomed as Bakiev's successor. Thousands took to the streets earlier this month in the northern province of Naryn to demand that Maksim leave his job and the country.

The past five years under Bakiev have been marred by economic hardship, pressure on independent media, and repression of political opposition. Two presidential elections -- Bakiev's initial victory in 2005 and his reelection in 2009 -- were marred by allegations of voter fraud. After early parliamentary elections were called in 2007 following the passage of a new electoral system and constitutional reforms, Bakiev's newly formed Ak-Jol party received 71 of the 90 seats in the expanded legislature.

Playing Favorites

Over the course of five years, Bakiev has lost many supporters who were instrumental to his ascension to the presidency. Some, like former Foreign Minister Roza Otunbaeva, left Bakiev's camp to join the opposition. Others, including former Defense Minister Ismail Isakov, were imprisoned after fallouts with Bakiev. Some have been jailed in Kyrgyzstan just for gathering to protest against the government. Just a week before planned nationwide protests by opposition supporters in the run-up to the revolution's five-year

anniversary, Bishkek faced international condemnation after access was blocked to independent news websites, including centrasia.ru and ferghana.ru. Meanwhile, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service and BBC news programs were interrupted in some areas.

Bakiev, a native of the southern province of Jalal-Abad, is often accused of promoting southerners to top jobs. While there is no official tally of how many natives of southern provinces such as Batken, Osh, and Jalal-Abad have been promoted to high posts under Bakiev, local experts estimate that since 2005 more than 50 percent of top posts have been filled by southerners. They say most of the appointments are in the areas of the economy, defense, and law enforcement.

Nur Omarov, a Bishkek-based political analyst, says the unbalanced appointments are deepening a historic divide between the country's south and north. "Regionalism is one of the main problems in Kyrgyzstan today. It existed before the 2005 revolution, but it wasn't prevalent in politics," he says. "Now regionalism has become an obvious problem that can result in the disintegration of our society."

No Regrets

Despite the many flaws associated with Bakiev's rule, however, one of the key leaders of the Tulip Revolution that swept him to power, Otunbaeva, says she has no regrets. "I don't think we've lost," she says. "It was a step forward. We are getting more and more experienced." Otunbaeva says that since 2005, "many political parties have appeared. The opposition has entered the parliament. People are disappointed, of course, but we should not forget that the revolution was an important lesson for us." Today, while only a handful of political parties are represented in parliament, Kyrgyzstan boasts some 25 officially registered parties, more than any other country in Central Asia. Despite all the odds, Kyrgyzstan is a place where the opposition is strong enough to take to the streets to voice its discontent with the president and the government. Staging similar protests in autocratic neighbors Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan would be unthinkable.

Unfinished Business

Taking to the streets is exactly what Erkingul Imankojoeva, a former Tulip Revolution protester, wants to do next. For Imankojoeva, a resident of the northern province of Issyk-Kul, the Tulip Revolution is unfinished business. "We need another revolution to save Kyrgyzstan," the 44-year-old engineer says. "I am ready to fight. People are ready to rise up again. They only need a leader to go in front." Erkingul Imankojoeva Southerner Chotonov feels the same way. "My friends and I always say we couldn't really change the system in 2005," says the teacher-turned-politician. "Our aim has always been to bring good governance to Kyrgyzstan, to get rid of the corrupt government, and to change entire undemocratic system. It wasn't about one person."

Chotonov says he will have "peace of mind" only when Bakiev is gone, and the country is firmly on a democratic path.

- Kyrgyzstan in top 20 dirtiest cities of the world

In the rating of the dirtiest cities in the world the capital of Kyrgyzstan – Bishkek city – took the 14th place. The information was revealed by Trend agency.

As was noted, the dirtiest city among former Soviet manufacturing centers, according to the experts, is Almaty, which ranks # 6 in the rating. The following cities has the top places in the rating - Bogota (Columbia), Teheran (Iran), Nairobi (Kenya), Cairo (Egypt) and Havana (Cuba).

Experts ranked cities worldwide based on levels of air pollution, waste management, water potability, hospital services, medical supplies and the presence of infectious disease. Shortly before this, Business Week magazine, which looks at the same indicators, ranks Almaty the fourth place in the list of the most unfavorable place in the world for residence, having ranked the city to the high risk area.

Bishkek, Baku and Moscow are also among African megalopolises in the leading ranks of NYC Partnership Consulting rating. Both for residents of the above-listed cities and for Almaty residents these marks of international experts are not a surprise.

Kiev, surprisingly (considering the vicinity of Chernobyl APS), did not appear among the above-listed cities. But, based on how fast woodlands disappeared in the capital of Ukraine, we can say that very soon Kiev may appear in the list of the most environmentally unsafe cities of the world.

Tajikistan

Political Front

- Top Tajik Islamic Body 'Left In Legal Limbo'

DUSHANBE -- Tajikistan's highest Islamic body says it has been left with no clear legal status because of a new law on religion, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Under the law passed last year, all religious organizations that were not reregistered with the Ministry of Culture by the end of last year are illegal. Tajikistan's Council of Islamic Scholars has no such reregistration papers. In comments to RFE/RL, Sheikh Amonulloh Nematzoda, the head of the council, blamed the problem on the directorate of religious affairs at the Ministry of Culture for not completing the reregistration of mosques across Tajikistan's districts and provinces. The ministry's Saidbek Mahmadulloev said the council could be reregistered once more than 50 percent of mosques are reregistered and their representatives hold a congress. The council has come under criticism by some experts who say it usually toes the government line and that a lot of well-known Islamic scholars are not included among its 20 members. Tajikistan's Council of Islamic Scholars was created in 1997 to replace the four-year-old Muftiyat, or board for Islamic affairs.

From Soviet times until 1993, Islamic affairs were administered by the Tashkent-based Muftiyat of the Central Asian region. Last week President Emomali Rahmon signed a decree reinstating the State Committee for Religious Affairs, but it remains unclear who will lead the reregistration process and if there are any new regulations.

- Tajik speaker informs Turkmen president of the past parliamentary elections results

DUSHANBE, March 19, 2010, Asia-Plus -- On Thursday March 18, visiting Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymuhammedov met here with Chairman of the Majlisi Namoyandagon (Tajikistan's lower chamber of parliament), Shukurjon Zuhurov.

According to the Majlisi Namoyandagon press service, Zuhurov informed Turkmen leader of the results of the parliamentary elections that were held in Tajikistan on February 28, 2010. Tajik speaker also briefed Turkmen president on work of the Tajik parliament's lower house. Berdymuhammedov, for his part, congratulated Zuhurov on election of him as speaker of the Majlisi Namoyandagon and expressed hope that the parliaments of the two countries would play an important role in expanding bilateral mutually beneficial cooperation between Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, the press service said.

- Elections to Tajik parliament's upper house being held today

DUSHANBE, March 25, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Elections to the Majlisi Milli (Tajikistan's upper chamber of parliament) are being held in Tajikistan today. According to the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CCER), registration for the parliament's upper house ended on March 18, with 27 candidates registered to run.

Muhibullo Dadajonov, an official with the CCER, says councils in the Sughd and Khatlon provinces as well as Dushanbe nominated five candidates each, while councils in Gorno Badakhshan and districts subordinate to the center (RRPs) nominated 6 candidates each. Five constituencies have been set up for elections to parliament's upper house that will take place on March 25, Dadajonov said.

We will recall that three-fourths of the total number of members of the Majlisi Milli are elected at joint meetings of people's deputies of the Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Region and its towns and districts, regions and their towns and districts, Dushanbe city and its districts, towns and districts subordinate to the centre, on the basis of indirect elections by means of secret ballot. The Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Region, regions, Dushanbe City, towns and districts subordinate to the center have an equal number of representatives in the Majlisi Milli (five each). One-fourths of the members of the Majlisi Milli are appointed by the President. Besides, each former President of the Republic of Tajikistan shall be the life member of the Majlisi Milli, if he doesn't refuse to use this right.

Two members of the new Majlisi Milli are already known – they are ex-President Qahhor Mahkamov and ex-speaker of the Majlisi Namoyandagon Saydullo Khairulloyev. Qahhor Mahkamov is the life member of the Majlisi Milli as ex-president of the country and Saydullo Khairulloyev was appointed by the president. We will recall that during an address at the opening session of the Majlisi Namoyandagon, President Rahmon noted on March 16 that he will appoint Mr. Khairulloyev member of the Majlisi Milli.

Geo strategic Front

- Tajiks Summon Uzbek Envoy Over Blocked Rail Freight

DUSHANBE -- The Tajik Foreign Ministry has summoned the Uzbek ambassador to hand over a protest note about blocked rail freight, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Davlat Nazriev said Tajikistan hopes for Tashkent's cooperation in expediting the forward passage of some 1,000 freight cars bound for Tajikistan. He said the freight cars are being held up at the Khavos, Qarshi, Jayron, and Kudukli stations in Uzbekistan.

Usmon Qalandarov, the deputy head of Tajik State Railways, said Uzbekistan claims the delay is technical. He said the freight cars contain construction materials for the Roghun hydroelectric power plant, raw alumina for the Tajik aluminum plant, fuel, and some nonmilitary cargos bound for international forces in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan opposes the Roghun project.

Tajik officials estimate that if the blockade continues, it could inflict millions of dollars' worth of damage on the Tajik economy. There has been no official reaction from Uzbekistan to the protest note handed today to Uzbek Ambassador Shokasim Shoislamov.

Economic/Energy Front

- Tajik PM Disputes Uzbek Rationale For Rail Delays

UNITED NATIONS -- Tajikistan's prime minister has described as an "excuse" Uzbekistan's claims that technical problems are blocking freight trains bound for his country. Uzbekistan began roughly two months ago to blockade the passage of Tajikistan-bound freight trains through its territory. Some 1,000 freight cars with construction material, aluminum ore, and fuel are thought to have been held up.

On March 23, Tajikistan's Foreign Ministry summoned the Uzbek ambassador to hand over a note of protest about the hold-up. Responding to an RFE/RL question at United Nations headquarters in New York, Tajik Prime Minister Oqil Oqilov said that a thorough inspection of the rail lines that Uzbekistan claimed have been damaged by floods and mudslides had revealed no such damage. He said the railroads in Uzbekistan were in satisfactory condition to allow for the transportation of freight trains without hindrance. "After inspection, there was no significant damage discovered and the passage of the freight trains could have been resumed without obstruction," Oqilov said. "That's why this is only an excuse that because of some technical problems the freight trains couldn't continue to Tajikistan." Oqilov said the blockade is depriving many Tajik farmers of fuel just as the seed-planting season approaches.

Some of the freight cars contain construction materials for the Roghun hydroelectric power plant, a project that Uzbekistan opposes. Uzbekistan is unhappy with water-resources distribution in Central Asia, where 60 percent of all water in the region originates in Tajikistan. Tashkent is concerned that if the Roghun project is completed, it will deprive Uzbekistan of an important water resource for irrigation.

But Oqilov said that the water reservoir at Roghun would take decades to fill and its effect on the environment would be negligible.

"This water reservoir is not going to fill to full capacity in one or two years, it will take decades," Oqilov said. "I think that all these issues of energy consumption may be solved in a civilized manner for the benefit of all Central Asian people."

If Tajikistan completes the construction of Roghun, he said, it would satisfy not only Tajikistan's power needs but even the needs of some of its neighbors, specifically Afghanistan.

- Europe and Central Asia facing energy crunch

DUSHANBE, March 19, 2010, Asia-Plus -- The outlook for primary energy supplies, heat, and electricity is questionable for the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region, despite Russia and Central Asia's current role as a major energy supplier to both Eastern and Western Europe, press release issued by the World Bank said.

In spite of the underlying resource base, the region as a whole will face an energy crunch unless investments of more than \$3 trillion are made over the next 20 years, according to the new World Bank report, Lights Out? The Energy Outlook in Eastern Europe and the Central Asia, launched on March 18.

"The demand for primary energy in the Europe and Central Asia region is expected to increase by 50 percent by 2030," said Peter Thomson, Director for Sustainable Development in the World Bank's Europe and Central Asia region, "while the demand for electricity is expected to increase by 90 percent."

Following the break-up of the Soviet Union, the countries of Europe and Central Asia experienced six years of dramatic economic decline, followed by vigorous economic recovery, enabling the region to become one of the most economically dynamic in the

world. This economic performance was reflected in the region's energy sector – the initial economic decline was accompanied by a sharp reduction in the production and consumption of energy. But as the region's economy recovered, both production and consumption increased. Investment, however, lagged, particularly in energy asset maintenance and upgrading, creating the prospect of an energy crunch.

The region was the hardest hit by the global financial crisis that began in 2008, dampening energy demand significantly. This created some breathing room, but this is only a temporary respite before energy availability again becomes a serious concern. Once growth picks back up, so, too, will energy consumption.

According to the report, if energy production is to be maintained or increased to meet Europe's energy requirements, significant investment will be required. The projected needs for primary energy development from 2010 to 2030 are estimated to be on the order of almost \$1.3 trillion in order to ensure the availability of oil, gas, and coal. In addition, the region's power sector infrastructure is in desperate need of upgrading. Electricity capacity has hardly increased since the early 1990s and plants are getting old. Investment needed in power sector infrastructure over the next 20 to 25 years is on the order of \$1.5 trillion, with a further \$500 billion required for district heating.

Investing in energy efficiency achieves three goals, simultaneously and at least cost: lower greenhouse gas emissions, better energy security, and more sustainable economic growth.

Governments have a major role to play in energy efficiency, not only in allowing energy tariffs to reflect costs, but by being proactive in setting and updating energy efficiency standards for homes, equipment, and vehicles, and in enforcing them. The report recommends that to set an example, governments should undertake energy efficiency programs in the public sector, inform the public on energy efficient technology options, and design cities with alternative means of transport.

The report emphasizes that given the enormous need for investment, and the long lead times required to implement projects in the energy sector, countries need to position themselves to secure funding support for such progress as quickly as they can. Failure to introduce an enabling environment to support investment in the sector will translate into a shortfall in investment that, in turn, could constrain economic activity. A 10 percent shortfall in energy availability could lead to a 1 percent reduction in economic growth, and a larger shortfall could have even more detrimental impacts.

Social Front

- Car Blast In Tajik Capital Injures Policeman

DUSHANBE -- Tajik police say a car bomb has exploded in the capital, Dushanbe, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. The blast went off as policeman Hamdamov Safarali started his car today. Safarali survived, but was injured in the incident.

An Interior Ministry official said the explosion was caused by TNT. An investigation is under way. A person who lives nearby told RFE/RL he heard the explosion and went to help Safarali. Safarali lives next door to General Rajabali Rahmonov, the head of the Presidential Guard. One analyst says that Rahmonov (no relation to President Emomali Rahmon) could have been the target of the bomb.

Rahmonov survived a reported assassination attempt when a bomb blew up his car in 2007.

Turkmenistan

Political Front

- Prosecutor General of Turkmenistan severely reprimanded

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov severely reprimanded the Prosecutor General of the country, Chary Hodzhamyradov. As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat, the reprimand was administered "for the breakdown of good order and discipline among staff of subordinate agencies of Prosecutor General's Office, as well as shortcomings in selection of staff."

"Hodzhamyradov was also warned that in case of failure to correct the shortcomings in the soonest manner he would be relieved of his post," the text of the Presidential decree reads. It was published in today's print media.

- Minister of Internal Affairs of Turkmenistan severely reprimanded

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov severely reprimanded Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic Isgender Mulikov "for poor management of internal affairs bodies, lack of proper management of recruitment, as well as the low level of fulfilling the instructions." "Mulikov was also warned that in case of failure to correct the shortcomings in the soonest manner he would be relieved of his duties," the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports quoting the press service of the Turkmen leader.

- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov holds meeting in Tajik Parliament

As part of his official visit to Tajikistan, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov met with Speaker of the lower chamber of the Tajik Parliament Shukurdzhon Zuhurov in Dushanbe on March 18.

According to the press service of the Tajik Parliament, during the meeting they discussed issues of strengthening the inter-parliamentary cooperation between the two countries. The sides discussed recent parliamentary elections in Tajikistan, praising their conduct and noting the process of democratization in Tajikistan.

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov congratulated Shukurdzhon Zuhurov on his appointment as chairman of the national parliament and expressed hope that in the near future the inter-parliamentary cooperation between Tajikistan and Turkmenistan will reach a new level.

Geo strategic Front

- Moscow to host meeting of CIS foreign ministers

Moscow will host a meeting of foreign ministers of the Commonwealth of Independent States on March 26. The meeting will discuss issues of migration control, military cooperation and prospects of the CIS development. Turkmenistan will be represented by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

According to the official website of the Russian Foreign Ministry, the meeting will consider a number of draft agreements and protocols, and will discuss the work of the CIS in the field of election monitoring, including ways to improve the work of the monitoring missions of the CIS and the CIS Inter-parliamentary Assembly.

"The ministers will also review the interim results of the plan of major events for the implementation of the concept of further development of the CIS which was approved by the Heads of State in October 2007. In this connection, the sides will exchange views on the introduction of possible adjustments to the plan aimed at its actualization in the light

of the task to improve the work of the CIS and its mechanisms," the Russian Foreign Ministry says.

- High-level delegation of Turkmenistan holds series of meetings in Kazan

On March 25, a high-level delegation of Turkmenistan visited Kazan to attend celebrations associated with the accession to office of the new President of the Republic of Tatarstan, Rustam Minnikhanov. Speaker of the Mejlis of Turkmenistan Akja Nurberdiyeva, the head of Turkmenistan's Embassy in Russia Halnazar Agakhanov and Minister of Culture and Broadcasting of Turkmenistan Gulmyrat Myradov participated in the inauguration ceremony. They also have had a series of meetings at the state bodies and institutions of Kazan.

The Turkmen delegation was warmly welcomed by President of the State Council of Tatarstan Farid Mukhametshin. At the Kazan State University members of the delegation met in a friendly atmosphere with Turkmen students studying in universities of Kazan.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from the Tatar capital, at a meeting with incumbent president of the Republic of Tatarstan Rustam Minnikhanov the interlocutors exchanged views on the prospects for economic and humanitarian cooperation between Kazan and Ashgabat. Rustam Minnikhanov stressed that the participation of representative of the Turkmen delegation in the inaugural celebrations underscores the special status of relations established between Tatarstan and independent Turkmenistan. He conveyed the best wishes to President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and expressed hope for the immutability of the path chosen by the parties to increase the level of partnership.

- President receives new UN Resident Coordinator in Turkmenistan

On March 24, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received the new UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Turkmenistan, Lenni Montiel. The guest handed a written message of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and a letter of the UNDP Administrator, Chairman of the United Nations Development Group, Helen Clark, to the Turkmen leader. According to the official report, the sides discussed the programme of joint work for the foreseeable future. Lenni Montiel expressed gratitude to head of state for providing assistance worth half a million US dollars to the Republic of Haiti that suffered from the devastating earthquake. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, in turn, conveyed word of thanks to the UN leadership for the adoption of a special resolution that recognized Nowruz as the international day.

- Turkmen delegation attends inauguration ceremony of new President of Tatarstan

The delegation of Turkmenistan is taking part in the inauguration ceremony of the new President of the Republic of Tatarstan of the Russian Federation, Rustam Minnikhanov, in Kazan. The delegation will also hold a number of meetings in the Tatar capital. The delegation is headed by Chairman of the Mejlis of Turkmenistan Akja Nurberdiyeva, Ambassador of Turkmenistan to Russia Halnazar Agakhanov, Minister of Culture and Broadcasting of Turkmenistan Gulmyrat Myradov.

The event was also attended by representatives of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, the heads of Russian regions, representatives of international organizations, in all about 780 guests. The ceremony is taking place in the Grand Concert Hall named after Salih Sajdashev.

Rustam Minnikhanov, Doctor of Economic Sciences, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Tatneft had held the post of Prime Minister of Tatarstan since 1998. He will succeed President Mintimer Shaimiev, who had headed the region since 1991. His candidature

was proposed by President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev and approved by the State Council of the Republic of Tatarstan.

- Ashgabat and Dushanbe speak in favor of peaceful resolution of Afghan problems Turkmenistan and Tajikistan support peaceful resolution of problems in Afghanistan through political and diplomatic means and methods with the active involvement of the United Nations and its specialized institutions, namely the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia. This was stated by President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov following the talks with his Tajik counterpart Emomali Rakhmon in Dushanbe on 18 March.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports, the Turkmen leader noted the need to create new long term political and diplomatic mechanisms based on today's realities.

In turn, Emomali Rakhmon said that the two heads of state instructed the relevant structures of their countries to consider in coordination with Afghan counterparts the joint construction of roads, gas pipeline and electricity transmission line Tajikistan - Afghanistan - Turkmenistan.

Tajikistan's President also expressed his support to other international initiatives of the Turkmen side, including those relating to energy security and conducting an international conference on disarmament in the region of Central Asia and Caspian Basin in Ashgabat this year. "The Tajik side will take active part in the conference," Rahmon said.

Economic/Energy Front

- Turkmenistan opts for highly efficient strategy of water use

The President of Turkmenistan believes that solving the problem of pollution of the Amu Darya river, reduced water quality, increased groundwater salinity and loss of soil fertility, flooding of pastures in the middle and lower reaches of rivers is of paramount importance today.

"In addressing these extremely important region-wide environmental and economic issues Turkmenistan has opted for a highly constructive strategy which is beneficial to neighboring states," Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said in his welcome address to the participants of the international conference on water issues in Central Asia that began today in Balkan province of Turkmenistan.

"As you know, irrigation is the basis of farming in the arid zones of the planet. In our region, including Turkmenistan, people have used the method of surface irrigation in crops growing since ancient times. It is considered natural when certain amount of groundwater comes up to the surface in the process of applying this technology," the president said. According to him, the issue of collection and processing of drainage water in one place with the aim of reducing its negative environmental impact on the development of irrigated agriculture is "the most important challenge of our time and remains valid for all states in the region."

"In order to collect drainage water from the entire territory of Turkmenistan in an environmentally safe location and process it for further use it was decided to construct an artificial lake in the heart of the Karakum desert. We called it the Turkmen Lake "Altyn Asyr," Berdimuhamedov stressed. He also noted that despite the short period of time since the launch of the first part of the lake "the processes occurring in nature are clear evidence of the favorable impact of the man-made lake on environment." "The desert has come alive before our eyes," the head of state said.

Social Front

- People of Turkmenistan celebrate Nowruz - National Spring Holiday

March 21 and 22 are widely celebrated in Turkmenistan as the National Day of Spring. Picturesque foothills of the Kopet Dag were the center of the celebration with dances, sport contests and traditional fare. A special place among the dishes was spared for "Semeni" which is made of germinated wheat grain that Turkmens cook for Nowruz.

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov sent a congratulatory message to the people. He emphasized that "since the ancient times Nowruz was considered a symbol of rebirth and renewal. It was welcomed and honored as the arrival of happiness and abundance." "With the first rays of the blessed sun the nature returns to life, inspiring the souls of our hardworking farmers with bright hopes and aspirations, invariably associated with a future generous harvest," the head of state said. He wished village workers success in their noble work.

Uzbekistan Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- Tajiks Summon Uzbek Envoy Over Blocked Rail Freight

DUSHANBE -- The Tajik Foreign Ministry has summoned the Uzbek ambassador to hand over a protest note about blocked rail freight, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Davlat Nazriev said Tajikistan hopes for Tashkent's cooperation in expediting the forward passage of some 1,000 freight cars bound for Tajikistan. He said the freight cars are being held up at the Khavos, Qarshi, Jayron, and Kudukli stations in Uzbekistan. Usmon Qalandarov, the deputy head of Tajik State Railways, said Uzbekistan claims the delay is technical. He said the freight cars contain construction materials for the Roghun hydroelectric power plant, raw alumina for the Tajik aluminum plant, fuel, and some nonmilitary cargos bound for international forces in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan opposes the Roghun project. Tajik officials estimate that if the blockade continues, it could inflict millions of dollars' worth of damage on the Tajik economy. There has been no official reaction from Uzbekistan to the protest note handed today to Uzbek Ambassador Shokasim Shoislamov.

Economic/Energy Front

- Tajik PM Disputes Uzbek Rationale For Rail Delays

UNITED NATIONS -- Tajikistan's prime minister has described as an "excuse" Uzbekistan's claims that technical problems are blocking freight trains bound for his country. Uzbekistan began roughly two months ago to blockade the passage of Tajikistan-bound freight trains through its territory. Some 1,000 freight cars with construction material, aluminum ore, and fuel are thought to have been held up. On March 23, Tajikistan's Foreign Ministry summoned the Uzbek ambassador to hand over a note of protest about the hold-up. Responding to an RFE/RL question at United Nations headquarters in New York, Tajik Prime Minister Oqil Oqilov said that a thorough inspection of the rail lines that Uzbekistan claimed have been damaged by floods and mudslides had revealed no such damage. He said the railroads in Uzbekistan were in satisfactory condition to allow for the transportation of freight trains without hindrance.

"After inspection, there was no significant damage discovered and the passage of the freight trains could have been resumed without obstruction," Oqilov said. "That's why this is only an excuse that because of some technical problems the freight trains couldn't

continue to Tajikistan." Oqilov said the blockade is depriving many Tajik farmers of fuel just as the seed-planting season approaches. Some of the freight cars contain construction materials for the Roghun hydroelectric power plant, a project that Uzbekistan opposes.

Uzbekistan is unhappy with water-resources distribution in Central Asia, where 60 percent of all water in the region originates in Tajikistan. Tashkent is concerned that if the Roghun project is completed, it will deprive Uzbekistan of an important water resource for irrigation.

But Oqilov said that the water reservoir at Roghun would take decades to fill and its effect on the environment would be negligible. "This water reservoir is not going to fill to full capacity in one or two years, it will take decades," Oqilov said. "I think that all these issues of energy consumption may be solved in a civilized manner for the benefit of all Central Asian people." If Tajikistan completes the construction of Roghun, he said, it would satisfy not only Tajikistan's power needs but even the needs of some of its neighbors, specifically Afghanistan.

- Uzbekistan-Oman business forum held

The forum of business circles of Uzbekistan and Oman was held at Tashkent's International Business Center on 23 March. The event was organized by the Ministry for foreign economic relations, investments and trade of Uzbekistan and the Ministry of trade and industry of Oman. The participants considered issues of expansion of trade, economic and investment cooperation between the two countries, including development of new joint projects. It was noted that the state visit of the President of Uzbekistan to Oman in October 2009 had raised the bilateral relations to the higher level and created wide opportunities for expansion of cooperation. The businessmen of Oman received information on the priority areas of investments in Uzbekistan, including fuel and energy complex, transport communications, car building, construction materials, IT, tourism, agriculture and others. They showed great interest to the opportunities created in the free industrial and economic zone in Navoi region. On the same day, the cooperation exchange was held between the Uzbek and Oman companies. The sides signed a number of cooperation documents in the oil and gas, as well as chemical industries.

During the visit to Tashkent, the delegation of Oman held talks at the ministries and departments of Uzbekistan on expansion of cooperation.

Social Front

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