

Business & Politics in the Muslim World
News Monitoring
April 24 to 30, 2010
Weekly Report
Central Asia
Uzma Siraj

Azerbaijan	
Political Front.....	3
Geo strategic Front.....	3
Economic/Energy Front.....	3
Social Front.....	4
Kazakhstan	
Political Front.....	4
Geo strategic Front.....	4
Economic/Energy Front.....	4
Social Front.....	4
Kyrgyzstan	
Political Front.....	4
Geo strategic Front.....	5
Economic/Energy Front.....	5
Social Front.....	5
Tajikistan	
Political Front.....	5
Geo strategic Front.....	5
Economic/Energy Front.....	5
Social Front.....	5
Turkmenistan	
Political Front.....	6
Geo strategic Front.....	6
Economic/Energy Front.....	6
Social Front.....	6
Uzbekistan	
Political Front.....	7
Geo strategic Front.....	7
Economic/Energy Front.....	7
Social Front.....	7

Outline

Azerbaijan

Political Front

- Azerbaijani Prosecutor-General Gets Third Term
- Azerbaijani Protesters Detained Ahead Of Rally

Geo strategic Front

- Pakistan and Azerbaijan boost cooperation in defence industry
- Azerbaijan, China discuss military cooperation

Economic/Energy Front

- Russian PM Putin calls Nabucco "useless and dangerous"
- The European Union welcomes Azerbaijan-Turkey agreement on gas transportation"
- Turkish Minister Says Gas Deal Reached With Azerbaijan

Social Front

- Azerbaijani Journalist Pleads Not Guilty To Possession Of Drugs

Kazakhstan

Political Front

- Kazakh Officials Reject Opposition Requests For May Day Rallies

Geo strategic Front

- Kyrgyz Rally At Kazakh Embassy Demands Nazarbaev Apologize

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- Former Kyrgyz President's Chief Of Staff Arrested
- Kyrgyz Interim Government To Allow Exiled First President To Return
- Ousted Kyrgyz President Charged In Protest Deaths
- Draft Kyrgyz Constitution Would Empower Parliament At Expense Of President
- CDs, Leaflets Call For Kyrgyzstan's Split Into Two Countries
- Committee To Defend Ousted Kyrgyz President Set Up In Osh
- Future Kyrgyz Government Faces Traditional North-South Divide

Geo strategic Front

- Kyrgyz Rally At Kazakh Embassy Demands Nazarbaev Apologize

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

Tajikistan

Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- Tajikistan Asks Russia To Detain Suspected Islamic Militants
- CSTO Rapid-Reaction Forces End Exercises In Tajikistan

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

- Polio Outbreak Reported In Tajikistan
- Tajik Police Arrested In Death Of Detainee
- Religious Freedom Group Sees Rise In Persecution

Turkmenistan

Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- President of Turkmenistan leaves for China on visit

Economic/Energy Front

- May 20 set as Turkmenistan's National Day at EXPO 2010
- Ashgabat to host international conference on energy security of Eurasia
- First billion cubic meters of gas reaches China via Turkmenistan - China gas pipeline

Social Front

- Traditional festival of World Turkmens starts near Ashgabat

Uzbekistan

Political Front

- Prominent Uzbek Sports Journalist's Trial Opens

Geo strategic Front

- President meets Member of China's State Council

Economic/Energy Front

- Uzbek, Chinese ministries sign cooperation protocol
- Uzbekistan-ADB cooperation developing dynamically
- President of Uzbekistan receives World Bank VP

Social Front

- Uzbekistan participates in immunization week

Summery

Azerbaijan

Political Front

- Azerbaijani Prosecutor-General Gets Third Term

BAKU -- The Azerbaijani parliament today approved a third consecutive five-year term for Prosecutor-General Zakir Qaralov, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

- Azerbaijani Protesters Detained Ahead Of Rally

BAKU -- Police in the Azerbaijani capital today detained dozens of opposition activists on their way to a rally outside the mayor's office, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

Geo strategic Front

- Pakistan and Azerbaijan boost cooperation in defence industry

Azerbaijan's Defence Industry Minister Yavar Camalov met Pakistan's Defence Secretary Sayid Athar Ali. Mr. Camalov stressed the importance of closer cooperation between the two countries in the field of defence industry.

- Azerbaijan, China discuss military cooperation

Today, Azerbaijani defense minister Safar Abiyev has met Chinese Ambassador to the country Chzhan Yannyan. They discussed military cooperation between the two countries. They also exchange views over the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Economic/Energy Front

- Russian PM Putin calls Nabucco "useless and dangerous"

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on Saturday dismissed as "useless and dangerous" Europe's Nabucco pipeline project, which aims to alleviate dependence on Russian gas.

- The European Union welcomes Azerbaijan-Turkey agreement on gas transportation"

The European Union welcomes Azerbaijan-Turkey agreement on gas transportation, said EU Energy Commissioner Guenther Oettinger.

- Turkish Minister Says Gas Deal Reached With Azerbaijan

The Nabucco project would bring Middle East gas through Turkey to Europe.

April 27, 2010

Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz says Turkey and Azerbaijan have reached an agreement in principle for the price of natural gas, an issue linked to delays on the European Union-backed Nabucco gas pipeline project.

Social Front

- Azerbaijani Journalist Pleads Not Guilty To Possession Of Drugs

The trial of imprisoned journalist Eynulla Fatullayev on drug charges resumed today in a Baku court, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

Fatullayev pleaded not guilty. He said the drugs were planted in his cell before they were discovered in December.

Kazakhstan

Political Front

- Kazakh Officials Reject Opposition Requests For May Day Rallies

ASTANA/ALMATY -- Authorities in Almaty and the Kazakh capital of Astana have refused to allow the People's Power political bloc to hold demonstrations on May 1, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Geo strategic Front

- Kyrgyz Rally At Kazakh Embassy Demands Nazarbaev Apologize

BISHKEK -- Dozens of Kyrgyz activists have picketed the Kazakh Embassy in Bishkek to demand an apology from Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev for derisive comments he made about the uprising in Kyrgyzstan, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

- Kazakh Rights Activist's Guilty Verdict Upheld

The Kazakh Supreme Court today upheld the guilty verdict against jailed prominent Kazakh rights activist Yevgeny Zhovtis, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- Former Kyrgyz President's Chief Of Staff Arrested

BISHKEK -- The former chief of staff of Kyrgyzstan's presidential office has been arrested, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Kyrgyz Interim Government To Allow Exiled First President To Return

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyzstan's interim government said today it will allow Askar Akaev, the country's first president, to return to the country from Russia, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Ousted Kyrgyz President Charged In Protest Deaths

A leader of the interim authorities in Kyrgyzstan says Kurmanbek Bakiev, the ousted president of the Central Asian country, has been charged with organizing mass killings.

Bakiev is in Belarus after he fled Kyrgyzstan in the wake of violence that left at least 85 people dead. The violence erupted on April 7 when security forces fired on anti-Bakiev protesters, who then stormed government buildings.

- **Draft Kyrgyz Constitution Would Empower Parliament At Expense Of President**
Kyrgyzstan's interim government has introduced a draft constitution that would alter the country's political system by giving more power to parliament while reducing the president's authority.

- **CDs, Leaflets Call For Kyrgyzstan's Split Into Two Countries**
OSH, Kyrgyzstan -- Leaflets and compact discs are being circulated in southern Kyrgyzstan calling on citizens to create a "South Kyrgyzstan Democratic Republic" with ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev as its leader, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- **Committee To Defend Ousted Kyrgyz President Set Up In Osh**
OSH, Kyrgyzstan -- A committee to defend ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev has been established in the southern Kyrgyz city of Osh, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- **Future Kyrgyz Government Faces Traditional North-South Divide**
On the map it's one country, but since the first days of independence in late 1991 observers have warned of a possible north-south split.

Geo strategic Front

- **Kyrgyz Rally At Kazakh Embassy Demands Nazarbaev Apologize**
BISHKEK -- Dozens of Kyrgyz activists have picketed the Kazakh Embassy in Bishkek to demand an apology from Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev for derisive comments he made about the uprising in Kyrgyzstan, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

Tajikistan Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- **Tajikistan Asks Russia To Detain Suspected Islamic Militants**
KHUJAND, Tajikistan -- Tajik officials have asked Russia to detain and deport 41 people suspected of belonging to the banned Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

- **CSTO Rapid-Response Forces End Exercises In Tajikistan**
KHUJAND, Tajikistan -- Rapid-reaction forces of a regional security grouping have concluded military exercises in northern Tajikistan intended to combat insurgents, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

- **Polio Outbreak Reported In Tajikistan**
The World Health Organization (WHO) has sent group of experts to investigate a polio outbreak in Tajikistan, where 10 children have reportedly died of the illness.

WHO spokeswoman Sona Bari told RFE/RL's Tajik Service that 128 cases of acute flaccid paralysis -- or weakness and loss of muscle control -- have been reported so far.

- **Tajik Police Arrested In Death Of Detainee**

Two police officers have been arrested in northern Tajikistan in connection with the recent death in police custody of Usman Boboev, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Boboev, 30, returned with his brother from Moscow to their hometown of Isfara in Tajikistan's northern Sughd Province in February.

- **Religious Freedom Group Sees Rise In Persecution**

A Shi'ite Muslim in Iraq holds chains used in self-flagellation outside the Imam Hussein shrine during the Ashura observation in Karbala in December 2009.

A new report from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom warns that religious freedom across the globe is increasingly being threatened and oppressed by governments in human rights "hot spots."

Turkmenistan Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- **President of Turkmenistan leaves for China on visit**

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov stated today his official visit to China. The Turkmen leader will hold talks with President Hu Jintao and meet a number of heads of major Chinese companies.

Economic/Energy Front

- **May 20 set as Turkmenistan's National Day at EXPO 2010**

May 20 will be the National Day of Turkmenistan in the framework of the Universal Exposition EXPO 2010 in Shanghai. More than 200 Turkmen artists will attend the event. On this day, visitors will be able to get acquainted with rich centuries-old traditions of the Turkmen people and their modern achievements as part of concerts, presentations and round tables.

- **Ashgabat to host international conference on energy security of Eurasia**

Ashgabat will host a conference titled "Strengthening regional cooperation in Central Asia to ensure sustainable and reliable energy supplies in Eurasia" on May 3-4, 2010.

- **First billion cubic meters of gas reaches China via Turkmenistan - China gas pipeline**

As of 5:00, April 27, a total of 1 billion cubic meters of natural gas reached China via the Turkmenistan - Uzbekistan - Kazakhstan - China gas pipeline. According to "Renmin Ribao" newspaper, the volume of daily gas supply exceeds 7.5 million cubic meters. Natural gas imported from Central Asia meets the quality requirements of the state standard of China.

Social Front

- **Traditional festival of World Turkmens starts near Ashgabat**

The third traditional festival of World Turkmens titled "Turkmenistan - land of transformations" started near Ashgabat today. Turkmen families from the Russian Federation, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Germany, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan arrived in their historical homeland to participate in this event.

Uzbekistan

Political Front

- Prominent Uzbek Sports Journalist's Trial Opens

TASHKENT -- The trial began today of prominent Uzbek sports journalist Khairulla Khamidov and 14 others charged with activities associated with a banned Islamic group, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports.

Geo strategic Front

- President meets Member of China's State Council

President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov met with Meng Jianzhu, Member of State Council, Minister of Public Security of the People's Republic of China, in Oqsaroy on 23 April.

Economic/Energy Front

- Uzbek, Chinese ministries sign cooperation protocol

Meng Jianzhu, Member of State Council, Minister of Public Security of China, held a meeting with Bakhodir Matlyubov, Minister of Internal Affairs of Uzbekistan, on 24 April in Tashkent.

- Uzbekistan-ADB cooperation developing dynamically

President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov received President of the Asian Development Bank Haruhiko Kuroda on 30 April, on the eve of the 43rd Annual meeting of the ADB Board of Governors, at Oqsaroy residence in Tashkent.

- President of Uzbekistan receives World Bank VP

President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov received World Bank Vice-President for Europe and Central Asia Philippe Le Houérou at Oqsaroy residence in Tashkent on 30 April.

Social Front

- Uzbekistan participates in immunization week

Events related to the European Immunization Week are being held in Uzbekistan for the second time. The week is being coordinated by the European regional bureau of the World Health Organization.

Detailed Report

Azerbaijan

Political Front

- Azerbaijani Prosecutor-General Gets Third Term

BAKU -- The Azerbaijani parliament today approved a third consecutive five-year term for Prosecutor-General Zakir Qaralov, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

The vote was 103 in favor and six against. Qaralov, 54, is an ethnic Azerbaijani who was born in Georgia. He is a close relative of Zahid Qaralov, a longtime parliament member and one of the founders of the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party. He worked as chief prosecutor in the city of Ganja before becoming prosecutor-general.

The law on the Prosecutor-General's Office was amended last year to permit one person to serve more than two consecutive terms in that post.

It followed a referendum on March 18, 2009, that amended the constitution to allow one person to be elected president more than twice under certain conditions.

Incumbent President Ilham Aliyev was reelected in 2008 for a second term that ends in late 2013.

- Azerbaijani Protesters Detained Ahead Of Rally

BAKU -- Police in the Azerbaijani capital today detained dozens of opposition activists on their way to a rally outside the mayor's office, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

The rally was organized by the opposition Azadliq (Liberty) political grouping, which includes the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party, the Liberal Party, and the Civil and Development Party. They were picketing the Mayor's Office to demand that the authorities respect freedom of assembly.

But police and plainclothes officers did not allow the activists to gather at City Hall, and detained the demonstrators in small groups near the Iceri Seher subway station. Police said protesters were arrested because the gathering was not sanctioned by city authorities. Azadliq representatives said about 80 party members were detained. They said about 50 of them were taken to the police department and the rest driven to various parts of the city. The bloc had asked authorities to sanction a protest on April 25 in front of the Baku City Hall, but it received no answer. Nevertheless, the bloc decided to hold an unsanctioned picket on April 26 demanding official observance of the right to free assembly. Police also broke up a similar protest two weeks ago at the same location organized by the opposition Musavat party.

The Azerbaijani Constitution guarantees freedom of assembly, but the Baku authorities have refused to allow public protests in the city center for three years, only permitting demonstrations on the outskirts. Parliamentary elections will take place in the fall. The main opposition parties, including Musavat and the Popular Front Party, vowed to take part in the elections and to challenge the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party.

Geo strategic Front

- Pakistan and Azerbaijan boost cooperation in defence industry

Azerbaijan's Defence Industry Minister Yavar Camalov met Pakistan's Defence Secretary Sayid Athar Ali. Mr. Camalov stressed the importance of closer cooperation between the two countries in the field of defence industry.

Mr. Athar Ali said his country is keen to boost cooperation with Azerbaijan in all areas, including defence industry. Azerbaijan's Ambassador to Pakistan Eynulla Madatli and Pakistani Ambassador to Azerbaijan Abdul Hamid were also present at the meeting.

- Azerbaijan, China discuss military cooperation

Today, Azerbaijani defense minister Safar Abiyev has met Chinese Ambassador to the country Chzhan Yannyan. They discussed military cooperation between the two countries. They also exchange views over the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The Chinese ambassador stressed the importance of solving the problem based on the principles of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Yannyan introduced China's new military attache to Abiyev.

Economic/Energy Front

- Russian PM Putin calls Nabucco "useless and dangerous"

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on Saturday dismissed as "useless and dangerous" Europe's Nabucco pipeline project, which aims to alleviate dependence on Russian gas. Putin made his comment in Vienna, shortly before Austrian Economics Minister Reinhold Mitterlehner signed on to Russia's rival South Stream project. Austria is also part of the Nabucco consortium, dpa reported. Nabucco is to supply Central Asian gas to Europe, while South Stream is to send Russian gas from the the Black Sea to south-eastern and Central Europe.

"We don't see any conflict of interests," Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann said about his country's double strategy. His Russian counterpart said he did not understand why countries want to become independent from Russian gas, as Russia is able to satisfy the needs of its customers for years. Taking a jab at Nabucco, Putin said: "It is useless and dangerous to build a pipeline without having supply contracts." The 6 countries involved have yet to conclude such agreements with Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan or Iraq.

The Nabucco consortium also includes energy companies in Germany, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. South Stream is a joint project between Russian gas giant Gazprom and Italian energy group ENI.

- The European Union welcomes Azerbaijan-Turkey agreement on gas transportation"

The European Union welcomes Azerbaijan-Turkey agreement on gas transportation, said EU Energy Commissioner Guenther Oettinger.

"Turkey and Azerbaijan are our indispensable partners for the realization of the Southern Corridor. This agreement between such two important partners opens the way for a strategic allocation of gas that will underpin the Southern Corridor and provide energy security to Turkey and the EU.

Just as importantly, a strategic allocation will mean, that Azerbaijan cements itself as a leading partner to the EU in the Caucasus and Caspian regions." Turkish minister of energy and natural resources Taner Yildiz said last week that they reached agreement with Azerbaijan on gas transportation.

- Turkish Minister Says Gas Deal Reached With Azerbaijan

The Nabucco project would bring Middle East gas through Turkey to Europe.

April 27, 2010

Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz says Turkey and Azerbaijan have reached an agreement in principle for the price of natural gas, an issue linked to delays on the European Union-backed Nabucco gas pipeline project.

Yildiz said he and other Turkish officials met with Azerbaijani officials in Ankara on April 26 to agree on a price and volumes of Azerbaijani gas to be shipped to Turkey.

But Yildiz said the issue of transit of Azerbaijani gas through Turkey was still unresolved.

The Nabucco pipeline is intended to bring 31 billion cubic meters of gas annually from the Middle East and Caspian Basin to Europe.

But no contracts with gas suppliers have been signed so far. Many believe that is because Turkey and Azerbaijan, one of the potential suppliers for Nabucco, have so far failed to agree on transit prices for gas headed for Europe.

Social Front

- Azerbaijani Journalist Pleads Not Guilty To Possession Of Drugs

The trial of imprisoned journalist Eynulla Fatullayev on drug charges resumed today in a Baku court, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

Fatullayev pleaded not guilty. He said the drugs were planted in his cell before they were discovered in December.

Fatullayev described the prison where he is currently serving an 8 1/2 year term for defamation, instigation of terror, and tax evasion as "a concentration camp."

He said prison officials have also accused him of homosexual relations with prisoners, of participating in a mutiny, and added that some people have tried to kill him in jail. Fatullayev said an official offered to secure his release on condition that he promises not to publish any further articles about Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and his family, but that he refused the offer. Fatullayev's lawyer, Isakhan Ashurov, said at today's hearing that he successfully petitioned the judge to have Fatullayev's handcuffs removed in accordance with international conventions and for him not to be kept in a steel cage in the courtroom. International rights organizations have said the charges against Fatullayev are politically motivated. Amnesty International considers Fatullayev a prisoner of conscience. Fatullayev is the founder and editor in chief of the popular newspapers "Realny Azerbaijan" and "Gundelik Azerbaijan." He was first jailed in 2007 for insulting Azerbaijanis killed by Armenian forces in the February 1992 Khojali massacre.

Kazakhstan

Political Front

- **Kazakh Officials Reject Opposition Requests For May Day Rallies**

ASTANA/ALMATY -- Authorities in Almaty and the Kazakh capital of Astana have refused to allow the People's Power political bloc to hold demonstrations on May 1, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

The People's Power bloc consists of the Kazakh Communist Party and the unregistered opposition Algha (Forward) party.

An Algha spokesperson told journalists today that although the gatherings were not sanctioned, People's Power will hold a protest rally in Algha's Almaty office on May 1, which is celebrated as the day of the worker in Kazakhstan.

On April 20, People's Power leaders announced their intention "to revive the tradition of May Day demonstrations on May 1."

Geo strategic Front

- **Kyrgyz Rally At Kazakh Embassy Demands Nazarbaev Apologize**

BISHKEK -- Dozens of Kyrgyz activists have picketed the Kazakh Embassy in Bishkek to demand an apology from Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev for derisive comments he made about the uprising in Kyrgyzstan, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Ondurush Toktonasyrov, head of the "April 7" movement, told RFE/RL that the protesters want Nazarbaev to apologize for stating that the April 7 ouster of Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev was "not a revolution, but an act of banditry."

Speaking at the Eurasian Media Forum in Almaty on April 27, Nazarbaev also said that "this is a change of one elite by some other [elite] and a struggle for power."

Toktonasyrov added that protesters are also demanding that Kazakh authorities extradite some former officials from Bakiev's government who fled to Kyrgyzstan after the bloodshed that left more than 80 people dead.

Finally, he said the protesters "also urged the government of Kazakhstan to open the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border," which has been largely closed since April 7. Kazakh Embassy official Talgat Zholdasov met with the protesters and accepted their petition. He promised them that the ambassador will be told of their demands. Kazakhstan currently holds the chairmanship of the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE), of which Kyrgyzstan is also a member. Kazakh Foreign Minister Kanat

Saudabaev and other Foreign Ministry officials were active in their capacity as OSCE chair in mediating for Bakiev's resignation and for him to leave Kyrgyzstan.

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

- **Kazakh Rights Activist's Guilty Verdict Upheld**

The Kazakh Supreme Court today upheld the guilty verdict against jailed prominent Kazakh rights activist Yevgeny Zhovtis, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Zhovtis, the director of the Almaty-based Kazakh Bureau for Human Rights, was sentenced on September 3 to four years in a labor camp for manslaughter after his car struck a pedestrian who later died.

Zhovtis and his lawyers have protested the verdict, saying it is retaliation by Kazakh authorities for his professional activities.

Domestic and international human rights organizations consider the case against Zhovtis to be politically motivated.

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- **Former Kyrgyz President's Chief Of Staff Arrested**

BISHKEK -- The former chief of staff of Kyrgyzstan's presidential office has been arrested, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Sources at the Bishkek prosecutor's office told RFE/RL that Kanybek Joroev was transferred to the National Security Service detention center in Bishkek.

He is being charged with abuse of power. Joroev, who is from the southern Batken region, was a close associate of ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev. Gulnara Derbisheva, a member of the disbanded parliament, told RFE/RL that some people in the Batken and the southern Lyailyak area are collecting signatures demanding Joroev's release.

- **Kyrgyz Interim Government To Allow Exiled First President To Return**

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyzstan's interim government said today it will allow Askar Akaev, the country's first president, to return to the country from Russia, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Interim government Deputy Chairman Omurbek Tekebaev told journalists today that Akaev and his family will be allowed to return to Kyrgyzstan, but only after the parliamentary elections scheduled for October 10. Tekebaev said Kyrgyzstan's current authorities decided to allow Akaev to return with the status of former president.

Akaev, 65, served as president from 1990 until he was ousted by mass demonstrations during the Tulip Revolution in 2005. He and his family have been living since then in Moscow, where Akaev works as a physics professor at Moscow State University.

He told RFE/RL after the April 7 ouster of his successor, Kurmanbek Bakiev, that he had no plans to become involved in Kyrgyz politics. Akaev's daughter, Bermet Akaeva, announced on April 27 that the former president's family plans to return to Kyrgyzstan.

Akaev was accused of turning a blind eye to widespread government corruption and nepotism involving his daughter, Bermet, and son Aidar, who controlled several large businesses in Kyrgyzstan.

- **Ousted Kyrgyz President Charged In Protest Deaths**

A leader of the interim authorities in Kyrgyzstan says Kurmanbek Bakiev, the ousted president of the Central Asian country, has been charged with organizing mass killings. Bakiev is in Belarus after he fled Kyrgyzstan in the wake of violence that left at least 85 people dead. The violence erupted on April 7 when security forces fired on anti-Bakiev protesters, who then stormed government buildings.

Azimbek Beknazarov, a deputy prime minister of the opposition forces that have claimed provisional control of the country, told a news conference today that Bakiev has also been charged with abuse of power and that his presidential immunity will be stripped. Beknazarov said an extradition request will be sent to Belarus "within days." He said Minsk is obliged to extradite Bakiev under an agreement among former Soviet countries.

- Draft Kyrgyz Constitution Would Empower Parliament At Expense Of President
Kyrgyzstan's interim government has introduced a draft constitution that would alter the country's political system by giving more power to parliament while reducing the president's authority.

The interim leaders say the proposed constitution, which was introduced April 26 and would have to be approved in a national referendum set for June 27, would prevent future presidents from concentrating too much political power or using pro-presidential parties to control parliament.

Widespread discontent over the powers wielded by former President Kurmanbek Bakiev helped lead to his ouster after at least 85 people were killed during bloody antigovernment street protests earlier this month. In the parliament elected in December 2007, 71 of 90 seats were held by the ruling Ak-Jol party.

RFE/RL Kyrgyz Service Director Tyntchtykbek Tchoroev explains that the draft constitution would hand two powers previously held by the president over to the parliament.

"Parliament will be the key to preparing the government structure and in defining what party will form the government," Tchoroev says. "At the same time, parliament will have more tools to deal with the president's power. The main feature of the proposed parliament structure is that it will consist of a multiparty system and it includes not only the possible ruling party but also several other parties."

Check On Executive Branch

Ishenbay Kadyrbekov, a member of the Constitutional Council that authored the draft, explains that the basic law would provide a key check to the executive branch's powers.

"What had existed [in Kyrgyzstan] before? The main principle was the presidential republic, in which the president defined the executive branch of power," Kadyrbekov says. "The new [draft] constitution's main principle is that people's representatives -- lawmakers -- will define the executive branch. Thus, the main power in forming [the government] will be given to the parliament."

Another author of the draft constitution, interim government deputy head Omurbek Tekebaev, said no single political party will be allowed to have more than 50 percent of the parliamentary seats, even if it were to win the absolute majority of the vote.

This proposed change has raised questions among some critics who argue that the distribution of parliamentary seats should be determined solely by the outcome of elections.

The Constitutional Council that prepared the draft has said the document takes into consideration Kyrgyzstan's realities and past experiences. The country has had a history

of flawed elections since gaining independence in 1991, highlighted by the Ak-Jol-dominated parliamentary poll of 2007.

The leaders of the interim government, which will be in place until parliamentary and presidential elections take place in October, say they want to give more opportunities for political parties to enter parliament.

Key Roles Retained

According to the draft constitution, the president of the country will still be elected on the basis of a nationwide vote for no more than two five-year terms in office, as was the case under the previous law.

Although the proposed constitution sets limits on presidential powers, many key roles are retained in the executive branch.

The president would appoint the country's prime minister and members of the cabinet and would have the right to dismiss the prime minister and individual members of the cabinet. With parliament's agreement, the president would also appoint the prosecutor-general and the deputies within that office.

In a significant difference from the previous constitution, the draft document limits the president's say in the makeup of the Central Electoral Commission. While the body previously operated under the control of the presidential office, the president would now be able to appoint or dismiss three out of 13 members of the commission. The rest of the body would be appointed by nongovernmental groups and political parties.

Interim officials say the new structure would help pave the way for fair and transparent elections, while preventing future presidents from exploiting their power to rig votes.

- CDs, Leaflets Call For Kyrgyzstan's Split Into Two Countries

OSH, Kyrgyzstan -- Leaflets and compact discs are being circulated in southern Kyrgyzstan calling on citizens to create a "South Kyrgyzstan Democratic Republic" with ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev as its leader, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

The materials, distributed in and around the city of Osh, praise Bakiev -- who is currently in exile in Belarus -- and demand his immediate return to Kyrgyzstan. Bakiev is from the southern city of Jalal-Abad.

The leaflets and CDs claim that the 86 people killed in violent clashes between opposition supporters and Kyrgyz security forces earlier this month died because of provocative protest actions organized by opposition politicians, not because of an order from Bakiev or someone in his government to open fire on antigovernment protesters.

Witnesses said they have seen hundreds of the CDs being distributed in Osh and the towns of Kara-Suu and Alay, RFE/RL reports. Osh resident Tologon Keldibekov told RFE/RL that the leaflets and CDs are being left at the doorsteps of private homes and apartments and in local marketplaces.

Keneshbek Duishebaev, the acting chairman of Kyrgyzstan's National Security Service, told RFE/RL that the leaflets and CDs are being distributed by pro-Bakiev groups. He added that an investigation has been launched.

Bakiev, who resigned as president before fleeing the country two weeks ago, claims that he does not recognize his resignation and is still the legitimate president of Kyrgyzstan.

The interim government officially charged him with "mass murder" and has started the process of seeking his extradition.

- Committee To Defend Ousted Kyrgyz President Set Up In Osh

OSH, Kyrgyzstan -- A committee to defend ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev has been established in the southern Kyrgyz city of Osh, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Osh human rights activist Tolon Dyikanbaev told RFE/RL that the newly established committee's main focus will be to explain to people that it believes Bakiev was overthrown illegally and that Kyrgyzstan's interim government is illegitimate.

Dyikanbaev added that the committee will work to secure Bakiev's return from Belarus -- where he is being hosted by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka -- and to enable him to serve out the remainder of the five-year term he was elected to last year.

Bakiev fled from Bishkek after deadly clashes between antigovernment protesters and security forces in the capital on April 7. He later flew to Kazakhstan before moving on to Minsk.

- Future Kyrgyz Government Faces Traditional North-South Divide

On the map it's one country, but since the first days of independence in late 1991 observers have warned of a possible north-south split.

The prospect came to the fore most recently when, in the midst of a violent uprising that began in the northwestern city of Talas on April 6 and continued the next day in Bishkek, President Kurmanbek Bakiev sheltered in his native south. There, in the safety of his support base, he sought help to counter the "northerners" who had chased him from the capital.

Today, Bakiev is no longer president, having resigned and fled to Minsk for safe haven. But the north-south split he tried to use to his advantage remains a considerable political reality.

Previous Kyrgyz governments have been careful to include representatives from both the northern and southern parts of the country. One example was the "tandem" of President Bakiev, from the south, and Prime Minister Feliks Kulov, from the north.

Within the temporary government running the country until elections can be held in October, interim leader Roza Otunbaeva was born in Osh, the south's biggest city and the country's second-largest, but has spent enough time in the north that many no longer regard her as a southerner. Another leader in the interim government, Omurbek Tekebaev, has spent much of his political career in Bishkek, but his southern origins could give him more weight among voters there.

Striking A Balance

As the country works to form a new government, the need to strike a balance between southerners and northerners in its makeup will be one key to its success. Failure to do so risks provoking the north-south rivalry.

"I think that the main differences [between the north and south] are that the southern Kyrgyz have lived for a long time with the local population, which are the Uzbeks and Tajiks of the Ferghana Valley who have lived here a long time and lived a sedentary lifestyle," explains Nurbek Kasymov, legal consul for the Jalal-Abad branch of the Center for the Support of Civil Society. "And a significant proportion of southern Kyrgyz mixed with them in villages and adopted to some degree their style of life, culture. And also of importance is that before the Russians arrived, [Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and Uzbeks] lived in one Kokand Khanate."

Kasymov contrasts that to what was a mainly nomadic culture in northern Kyrgyzstan. "There really was not much of an influence of the Kokand Khanate on northern

Kyrgyzstan. You could say they didn't bow to the Kokand Khanate," he says. "They lived as they wished. I think this mentality and tradition is to some extent preserved. And also southern Kyrgyzstan has to a degree a local dialect and it is a little different from the Kyrgyz spoken in the north."

'A Bit More Patient'

Kamil Satkanbaev, a television journalist and political expert in the southern city of Osh, also sees north-south differences. "It is to some extent true that people in the south are more hospitable and a little more, I would say -- and not just to defend southerners, and I am a southerner -- but a little more observant of how things are developing," he says. "And maybe people of the south are just a bit more patient than people in the north."

But Kasymov and Satkanbaev emphasize there are no huge differences between peoples from the two regions, with Kasymov pointing out one important similarity. In each region, he says, tens of thousands of residents have become migrant workers in Russia, Kazakhstan, and other countries.

Among those who remain at home to make a living, Satkanbaev points out a key difference: "Generally here, people are farmers and herders," he says. "The industrial areas are all in the north."

Faithful In Abundance

Contrasting levels of religious zeal are often mentioned in the debate over what divides the Muslims of Kyrgyzstan's north and south. "Many analysts and researchers remark that in southern Kyrgyzstan people are more religious than the people in the north," Kasymov says.

A U.S. military plane at the Manas air baseBut while Satkanbaev acknowledges the faithful are in greater abundance in the south, he is careful to point out that that doesn't necessarily mean they are stricter adherents.

"There are more followers of Islam here than in the north, but I need to say that there are excellent Muslims in the north and I mean that in the best sense of the word," Satkanbaev says. "And they differ from a few of the Muslims of the south who consider themselves the most religious but are using various narcotics, and I've seen this with my own eyes. Some even drink alcohol, for example, but they consider themselves Muslims."The contrasts also manifest themselves in the ethnic and cultural makeup of the two regions, with the north considered more Russified and the south better reflecting the native traditions of Central Asia.

As noted by Kasymov, southern Kyrgyzstan -- essentially Kyrgyzstan's sector of the Ferghana Valley -- is home to large numbers of Tajiks and Uzbeks. As Satkanbaev notes: "Russians, Dungans, are in the north, but here [in the south] there is not a large Russian population. Uzbeks make up about one-fourth of the population, but most of them live here in the south. I would say there are more than 800,000 [Uzbeks] here in the south."

Communication Breakdown

Communication between north and south is also tenuous. While regular flights link Bishkek to Osh, Jalal-Abad, and Batken, there are only two usable roads through the mountains to connect north to south. It is a full day's drive to travel the 650 kilometers between Bishkek and Osh.

Not all state channels from Bishkek reach the south, leaving southern residents more likely to receive their television and radio broadcasts from neighboring Uzbekistan than

from the capital. People in the north, meanwhile, are more apt to have Russian channels available for viewing.

For most Kyrgyz, none of the differences between north and south would be enough to lead either population to favor a regional split. There are key issues relevant to Kyrgyzstan's international relations on which there is no room for debate.

There are two foreign military bases in Kyrgyzstan -- one American and one Russian -- and both are located in the north. In geographic and strategic terms, their locations appear to make no sense. The U.S. "transit center" at Manas air base is used for supporting U.S. and NATO operations in Afghanistan, while the Russian base in Kant is part of a CIS Collective Security Treaty Organization agreement to create a counterterrorism base in Central Asia.

Both would be more logically located in southern Kyrgyzstan, where the trip to Afghanistan is shorter and where any terrorist or militant activities are more likely to be found. But the intense southern resistance to outside influence, particularly military, is something Bishkek is well aware of.

Geo strategic Front

- **Kyrgyz Rally At Kazakh Embassy Demands Nazarbaev Apologize**

BISHKEK -- Dozens of Kyrgyz activists have picketed the Kazakh Embassy in Bishkek to demand an apology from Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev for derisive comments he made about the uprising in Kyrgyzstan, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Ondurush Toktonasyrov, head of the "April 7" movement, told RFE/RL that the protesters want Nazarbaev to apologize for stating that the April 7 ouster of Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev was "not a revolution, but an act of banditry."

Speaking at the Eurasian Media Forum in Almaty on April 27, Nazarbaev also said that "this is a change of one elite by some other [elite] and a struggle for power."

Toktonasyrov added that protesters are also demanding that Kazakh authorities extradite some former officials from Bakiev's government who fled to Kyrgyzstan after the bloodshed that left more than 80 people dead.

Finally, he said the protesters "also urged the government of Kazakhstan to open the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border," which has been largely closed since April 7.

Kazakh Embassy official Talgat Zholdasov met with the protesters and accepted their petition. He promised them that the ambassador will be told of their demands.

Kazakhstan currently holds the chairmanship of the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE), of which Kyrgyzstan is also a member. Kazakh Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabaev and other Foreign Ministry officials were active in their capacity as OSCE chair in mediating for Bakiev's resignation and for him to leave Kyrgyzstan.

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

Tajikistan Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- **Tajikistan Asks Russia To Detain Suspected Islamic Militants**

KHUYAND, Tajikistan -- Tajik officials have asked Russia to detain and deport 41 people suspected of belonging to the banned Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Tajik General Rauf Yusufov, the senior Interior Ministry official in Tajikistan's northern Sughd Province, said on April 28 that all of the suspects are from Sughd. He said most currently live in or near Moscow and maintain ties with IMU members inside Tajikistan.

Yusufov claimed that the Moscow-based suspects are raising funds to support the IMU in northern Tajikistan. He also alleged that they force Tajik labor migrants in Russia to join the IMU and to pay membership fees.

The IMU is known to have some support in northern Tajikistan, especially in the Isfara district that borders Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

The Interior Ministry office in Sughd announced earlier this month that two suspected IMU activists had been deported from Russia.

During the Tajik Civil War (1992-1997), many IMU activists joined the United Tajik Opposition and fought against government forces. After the signing of the 1997 peace agreement ending the conflict, many of those IMU members moved to Afghanistan and joined armed Islamic groups. Last year the head of the IMU in Isfara, Anvar Qayumov, was detained in Afghanistan and deported to Tajikistan where he was sentenced to life imprisonment. At least 16 other suspected IMU members were jailed in Tajikistan last year, four of them for life.

- **CSTO Rapid-Reaction Forces End Exercises In Tajikistan**

KHUYAND, Tajikistan -- Rapid-reaction forces of a regional security grouping have concluded military exercises in northern Tajikistan intended to combat insurgents, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

The Collective Security Treaty Organization's (CSTO) war games, called Boundary 2010, involved some 1,000 soldiers and military officers fighting an imagined group of 100 armed militants based in a remote village.

Colonel General Sherali Khayrulloev, Tajikistan's defense minister, told RFE/RL that only "terrorists from Afghan territory" are considered a threat by Tajikistan.

Tajik affairs expert Nematullo Mirsaid said such exercises are used by Russia to underline its military presence in the region and Moscow's keen interests in Central Asia.

Mirsaid agreed with Khayrulloev that the only terrorist threat to the region comes from Afghanistan. Abduvosit Salimzoda, a Tajik analyst, noted the absence of Uzbekistan and Belarus from the military exercises. Salimzoda said the maneuvers are useless because in 10 years CSTO forces have only done occasional training, but have not had any real combat experience. But Russian General Anatoly Logovitsin, the first deputy chief of staff of CSTO rapid-reaction forces, said the exercises show that CSTO forces are prepared for various threats. The CSTO groups Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Russia, Belarus, and Armenia. Belarus and Uzbekistan disagreed with the creation of the CSTO's rapid-reaction force and do not participate in its plans or military exercises.

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

- Polio Outbreak Reported In Tajikistan

The World Health Organization (WHO) has sent group of experts to investigate a polio outbreak in Tajikistan, where 10 children have reportedly died of the illness.

WHO spokeswoman Sona Bari told RFE/RL's Tajik Service that 128 cases of acute flaccid paralysis -- or weakness and loss of muscle control -- have been reported so far.

The reports amount to "a high number for a small country like Tajikistan," Bari said. "And samples of all those cases have not been tested yet. You have to test them in a lab to see whether they are actually polio. As far as I know, in the last numbers polio was detected in seven of the children," while other results are still pending, she said.

All the reported cases are in the southwest of the country, in an area bordering Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.

Tajikistan's last case of clinically confirmed polio occurred in 1997, and the WHO declared the country polio-free in 2002.

- Tajik Police Arrested In Death Of Detainee

Two police officers have been arrested in northern Tajikistan in connection with the recent death in police custody of Usman Boboev, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Boboev, 30, returned with his brother from Moscow to their hometown of Isfara in Tajikistan's northern Sughd Province in February.

He was arrested on suspicion of belonging to the banned Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). One month later, Boboev's body was returned to his family.

Another Isfara resident, Abdusabour Abduvahhob, told RFE/RL that Boboev's relatives said his body bore beating marks and burns that appeared to be from electric shocks.

Boboev's family filed a complaint with the local prosecutor's office. But Sughd's chief of police, General Rauf Yusufov, said Boboev died from epilepsy.

There have been previous cases of IMU suspects dying in police custody in Tajikistan, but this is believed to be the first time police officers have been charged in connection with the deaths

- Religious Freedom Group Sees Rise In Persecution

A Shi'ite Muslim in Iraq holds chains used in self-flagellation outside the Imam Hussein shrine during the Ashura observation in Karbala in December 2009.

A new report from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom warns that religious freedom across the globe is increasingly being threatened and oppressed by governments in human rights "hot spots."

In 2009, the group -- an independent U.S. government commission that monitors religious freedom worldwide -- surveyed 28 such countries and found evidence that freedom of religion was "being obstructed and trampled."

This year's list includes 13 "countries of particular concern," including all eight named last year (Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Uzbekistan) plus Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, and Vietnam.

The commission makes policy recommendations to the U.S. president, secretary of state, and Congress that are aimed at improving conditions in what it calls "that small but critically important point of intersection of foreign policy, national security, and international religious freedom standards."

After researchers and analysts document the laws, practices, and policies in places that prevent people from worshiping freely and without fear of persecution, the group issues

an annual report aimed at "exposing, countering, and correcting religious freedom abuses."

Cathy Cosman, a senior policy analyst at the commission, says the findings show that restricting religious worship has become an important tool for repressive governments to hold onto power.

"If one assumes that the governments are primarily concerned with retaining their power and remaining in office, then they have engaged in systematically restricting the public influence of civil society in various ways, and then of course also [restricting] the media," Cosman says. "If one thinks of other potential groups that [have] the ability to mobilize large numbers of people, it [is] religious communities that are more or less the only groups that are left."

The report identifies what it calls "disturbing" trends in threats to freedom of religion around the world.

It cites evidence of the "exportation of extremist ideology," as in Saudi Arabia's dissemination of educational materials that the group says "instill hate and incite violence throughout the world."

It also finds states that are persecuting political opponents in the name of religion under blasphemy and apostasy laws, such as in Iran.

And it documents several examples of state-sponsored repression of religion.

According to the report, in Vietnam, people are imprisoned for reasons directly related to their exercise or advocacy of freedom of belief or religion; the government of "Egypt denies Baha'is, Coptic Christians, and other religious minorities basic rights; North Korea bans virtually all worship and imprisons in its labor camps even the grandchildren of people caught praying; and China seriously restricts religious activities, church governance, and places of worship."

For the first time in its 11 years of reporting on religious freedom around the world, the group has called on the U.S. government to impose a visa ban on and freeze the U.S. assets of one individual: Ramzan Kadyrov, the president of Chechnya.

The group says the action is justified by Kadyrov's "leadership the Chechen armed forces, which the European Court of Human Rights has found [to be] involved in severe human rights abuses."

Cosman says in former communist Europe and Central Asia, governments seem increasingly willing to try and gain influence over citizens' very thoughts.

"I think that this is an expression of the most Soviet impulses of the government of [this] part of the world, where they want to control what people think, and how they think," Cosman says. "And increasingly, they're acting on it."

She adds that, along with Russia, some Central Asian countries have recently widened the category of religious activities they feel justified in persecuting people for.

"The Uzbeks keep changing and expanding their definition of so-called religious extremism, so that now people who read the materials of a Turkish theologian called Said Nursi are viewed as engaging in extremist activities and unfortunately, that trend is also seen in Tajikistan and Russia," Cosman says.

The commission says it works closely with President Barack Obama's administration to make policy recommendations on how Washington can promote religious freedom through U.S. foreign policy channels.

But the White House did not officially accept the 2009 findings or named the specified countries as violators of religious rights. Neither did the administration of President George W. Bush between November 2006 and January 2009.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom on RFE/RL Broadcast Countries

Afghanistan

"In Afghanistan, conditions for religious freedom remain problematic, despite gains in freedom of religion or belief since the ouster of the Taliban regime in late 2001. The lack of effective government authority outside of Kabul and major provincial centers contributes to a deteriorating situation for religious freedom and other related human rights in many areas of the country. The government's inclination to accommodate traditional, restrictive views of human rights, specifically regarding women, was demonstrated in the controversy over a new family or personal status law for Shi'a Muslims. Nascent efforts at national reconciliation could potentially return Taliban or other insurgents hostile to international human rights standards to positions of influence."

Belarus

"Harsh religious freedom conditions in Belarus continued during the reporting period. The Belarusian government still restricts religious freedom under its 2002 religion law. Authorities harassed and fined members of certain religious groups, particularly Protestants. Foreign missionaries, clergy, and humanitarian workers affiliated with churches faced increased restrictions, including deportation and visa refusal or cancellation. Close supervision of religious life is state policy under the religion law, and an extensive government apparatus has stepped up efforts to limit the influence of religion and the activities of foreign religious workers."

Iran

"The government of Iran continues to engage in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, including prolonged detention, torture, and executions based primarily or entirely upon the religion of the accused. During the past year, and particularly since the June 2009 elections, the Iranian government's poor religious freedom record deteriorated, especially for religious minorities, in particular Baha'is as well as Christians and Sufi Muslims, including intensified physical attacks, harassment, detention, arrests, and imprisonment. Dissident Muslims were increasingly subject to abuse and several were sentenced to death and even executed for the capital crime of moharebeh, or 'waging war against God.' A revised penal code that would codify serious punishments, including the death penalty, on converts from Islam remains under consideration by the Iranian parliament. Heightened anti-Semitism and repeated Holocaust denial by senior government officials have increased fear among Iran's Jewish community. Since the 1979 Iranian revolution, members of minority religious communities have fled Iran in significant numbers for fear of persecution."

Iraq

"In Iraq, the government continues to commit and tolerate severe abuses of freedom of religion or belief, particularly against the members of Iraq's smallest, most vulnerable religious minorities - Chaldo-Assyrian and other Christians, Sabeian Mandaeans, and Yazidis. Members of these groups continue to suffer from targeted violence, threats, and intimidation, against which they receive insufficient government protection. They also experience a pattern of official discrimination, marginalization, and neglect. In addition,

there continue to be attacks and tense relations between Shi'a and Sunni Iraqis. Other egregious, religiously motivated violence against women and girls, homosexuals, and Muslims who reject certain strict interpretations of Islam also continues."

Pakistan

"Serious religious freedom concerns persist in Pakistan, where religiously discriminatory legislation has fostered an atmosphere of intolerance. Positive steps taken by the current government have failed to reverse the resulting erosion in the social and legal status of members of religious minority communities and the ability of members of the majority Muslim community to discuss freely sensitive religious and social issues. A number of Pakistan's laws abridge freedom of religion or belief. Blasphemy laws have been used to silence members of religious minorities and dissenters within the majority Muslim community, and frequently result in imprisonment on account of religion or belief and/or vigilante violence. The Hudood Ordinances, Islamic decrees predominantly affecting women that are enforced alongside Pakistan's secular legal system, provide harsh punishments for alleged violations of Islamic law. Anti-government insurgents espousing an intolerant interpretation of Islam continue to impose a harsh, Taliban-style rule in areas under their control. The government's response to sectarian and religiously motivated violence continues to be inadequate, despite increased security operations against extremists."

Russia

"The status of religious freedom in Russia continued to deteriorate due to several negative new policies and trends, particularly government use of anti-extremist legislation against religious groups that are not known to use or advocate violence. National and local government officials increasingly violate the religious freedoms of Muslims and groups they view as non-traditional by enforcing other laws, including those on religious organizations and non-governmental organizations. Russian officials continue to describe certain religious and other groups as alien to Russian culture and society, thereby contributing to a climate of intolerance. Continued high levels of xenophobia and intolerance, including anti-Semitism, have resulted in violent, sometimes lethal, hate crimes. The Russian government has chronically failed to address these serious problems adequately, consistently, or effectively. The U.S. government should urge Russia to reform its overly broad law on extremism and other laws negatively affecting human rights and freedom of religion or belief, so as to ensure that they are not used to limit the fundamental freedoms of peaceful religious groups."

Tajikistan

"Religious freedom conditions in Tajikistan have deteriorated significantly over the past several years, as Tajik law and government policies place major restrictions on religious freedom. These restrictions primarily affect Muslims, but also single out minority religious communities. In 2009, the Tajik government passed a new religion law that codified some restrictions that had been informally implemented and introduced a framework for further restrictions. Also in 2009, a court ordered a Protestant church to vacate its building and its property was expropriated by the Dushanbe city government. Tajik authorities demolished several mosques in 2007, and in 2008 one church and the nation's only synagogue were bulldozed. Bans imposed in 2007 continued on Jehovah's Witnesses and two Protestant churches."

Turkmenistan

"Significant religious freedom problems and official harassment of religious adherents persist in Turkmenistan. Police raids and other forms of harassment of registered and unregistered religious groups continue more than three years after the death of longtime dictator Saparmurat Niyazov. The repressive 2003 religion law remains in force, imposing major difficulties for the legal functioning of religious groups. Despite decreased emphasis, the Turkmen government still maintains the former president's personality cult through the Ruhnama as a mandatory feature of elementary public education. Although the new president has taken some isolated positive steps, including the release of the country's former chief mufti, promised systemic legal reforms directly related to religious freedom and other human rights have not been made."

Uzbekistan

"The government of Uzbekistan continues to systematically abuse religious freedom and related human rights throughout the country. The government exercises tight control over all religious practice, and continues to arrest Muslims and close mosques that do not conform to government-prescribed practices or that it alleges are associated with extremist political programs. As of 2009, at least 4,500 non-conforming Muslims, including an increasing numbers of women, were estimated to be in prison, many of whom reportedly are denied the right to due process and subjected to torture. Official repression has extended to members of the country's small Protestant and Jehovah's Witnesses communities that until recently had been somewhat shielded from the government's anti-religious campaign. Uzbekistan has a highly restrictive law on religion that severely limits the ability of religious communities to function, leaving more than 100 religious groups currently denied registration."

Turkmenistan Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- President of Turkmenistan leaves for China on visit

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov stated today his official visit to China. The Turkmen leader will hold talks with President Hu Jintao and meet a number of heads of major Chinese companies.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat quoting the press service of the head of state, during the visit Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov will take part in the opening of the Shanghai World Exposition "EXPO 2010" where Turkmenistan will have its pavilion.

This is the first time that Turkmenistan participates in the international fair. Visitors will be able to get acquainted with rich centuries-old traditions of the Turkmen people and their modern achievements. More than thirty branch ministries and departments and representatives of private business of Turkmenistan will demonstrate their potential, products and opportunities for cooperation.

Economic/Energy Front

- May 20 set as Turkmenistan's National Day at EXPO 2010

May 20 will be the National Day of Turkmenistan in the framework of the Universal Exposition EXPO 2010 in Shanghai. More than 200 Turkmen artists will attend the event. On this day, visitors will be able to get acquainted with rich centuries-old

traditions of the Turkmen people and their modern achievements as part of concerts, presentations and round tables.

This is the first time that Turkmenistan participates in the international fair. The pavilion area of the joint exposition of the country will exceed 1000 square meters. It is one of the advantageous locations on the "geographical map" of the exhibition - zone "A" that also will house pavilions of the host-country of EXPO-2010 - China. The building's facade will be adorned with pictures of the national flag and emblem of Turkmenistan, as well as national carpet ornaments - gels.

More than thirty branch ministries and departments of Turkmenistan will for six months display their products at the largest economic forum in China. A distinctive feature of the Turkmen pavilion will be multimedia touch screens helping visitors to learn about the centuries-old culture of the country, get acquainted with its natural landscapes and recreational resources.

According to recent information, 189 countries and 57 international organizations will participate in EXPO-2010. As specialists note, about 70 million people, most of whom represent the international business community, will visit EXPO-2010 in Shanghai, which will be held from May 1 to October 31, 2010 under the motto "Better City - Better Life"

- Ashgabat to host international conference on energy security of Eurasia

Ashgabat will host a conference titled "Strengthening regional cooperation in Central Asia to ensure sustainable and reliable energy supplies in Eurasia" on May 3-4, 2010.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports, the Ministry of Oil and Gas Industry and Mineral Resources of Turkmenistan was instructed to organize and hold the conference.

As President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said at a government meeting, the forum is intended to become "another important step in advancing Turkmenistan's initiatives in the sphere of formation of a new architecture of global energy security that received widespread international support. The head of state instructed the relevant officials to ensure the high organizational level of the conference.

- First billion cubic meters of gas reaches China via Turkmenistan - China gas pipeline

As of 5:00, April 27, a total of 1 billion cubic meters of natural gas reached China via the Turkmenistan - Uzbekistan - Kazakhstan - China gas pipeline. According to "Renmin Ribao" newspaper, the volume of daily gas supply exceeds 7.5 million cubic meters. Natural gas imported from Central Asia meets the quality requirements of the state standard of China.

It should be recalled the Trans-Asian gas pipeline with the total length of more than 7000 km was officially launched on 14 December 2009 with participation of the presidents of Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and China. It is expected that the pipeline, through which China will receive 40 billion cubic meters of Turkmen natural gas annually for 30 years, will come up to full capacity by 2012.

Social Front

- Traditional festival of World Turkmens starts near Ashgabat

The third traditional festival of World Turkmens titled "Turkmenistan - land of transformations" started near Ashgabat today. Turkmen families from the Russian

Federation, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Germany, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan arrived in their historical homeland to participate in this event.

During four days guests from abroad and from all five regions of Turkmenistan will cook Turkmen dishes, demonstrate national rituals, handicrafts, make art presentation, play music, sing songs and dance in Ak Bugday place, which is home to an impromptu Turkmen village with bright yurts.

The festival has been organized by the Humanitarian Association of World Turkmen, the Ministry of Culture and Broadcasting of Turkmenistan and the administration of Akhal province with the view of highlighting the commonality of cultures, traditions and historical destinies of representatives of the Turkmen people residing in different parts of the world, who now have the opportunity to liaise closely with the historical homeland.

According to the official report, the overseas compatriots will be offered a cultural program that includes familiarization with the expositions of Turkmenistan's largest museums, sightseeing tour of the Turkmen capital and its environs.

Uzbekistan

Political Front

- Prominent Uzbek Sports Journalist's Trial Opens

TASHKENT -- The trial began today of prominent Uzbek sports journalist Khairulla Khamidov and 14 others charged with activities associated with a banned Islamic group, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports.

The trial is taking place in Gulbakhor, a town near Tashkent. The defendants are charged with "organizing or actively participating in a banned social or religious group" and "production and distribution of literature threatening social order and security."

Khamidov, 34, is well known in Uzbekistan for his popular Islamic radio program, his work as a soccer commentator, and his poetry. His arrest in January sparked an unusually strong wave of protest in Uzbekistan.

He and the other defendants could be given five-year jail sentences if found guilty.

The trial is being held behind closed doors and all roads from Tashkent to Gulbakhor are being controlled by police, RFE/RL reports.

Geo strategic Front

- President meets Member of China's State Council

President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov met with Meng Jianzhu, Member of State Council, Minister of Public Security of the People's Republic of China, in Oqsaroy on 23 April.

According to the President's press service, the head of our state noted that priority aspects of Uzbek-Chinese cooperation include deepening the political dialogue, further reinvigoration of joint efforts in bolstering the regional security, including within frameworks of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), boosting the trade and investment cooperation for mutual benefit.

As the guest stated, efforts by Uzbekistan's leadership to revitalize the SCO activity in many areas of regional cooperation, especially during our nation's presidency in the Organization, have enjoyed broad international support.

President of Uzbekistan stressed that this country, located like China in close proximity to hotbeds of armed conflict, attaches a strategic importance to maintaining regional stability and security.

In efforts to improve the effectiveness of partnership within SCO, prospects for raising the effectiveness of decision-making mechanisms to shore up the standing of the Organization and its structural units, have been discussed.

Member of PRC State Council Meng Jianzhu expressed sincere gratitude to head of our republic for the warm welcome, as well as confidence in the fact that activities planned within SCO frameworks under the chairmanship of Uzbekistan, including the state visit of PRC President Hu Jintao to the republic, will be at the highest level.

Economic/Energy Front

- Uzbek, Chinese ministries sign cooperation protocol

Meng Jianzhu, Member of State Council, Minister of Public Security of China, held a meeting with Bakhodir Matlyubov, Minister of Internal Affairs of Uzbekistan, on 24 April in Tashkent.

The sides discussed issues of expansion of bilateral cooperation in counteracting terrorism, separatism and extremism, drug traffic and other transnational organized crimes, as well as strengthening regional security and stability.

They emphasized that relations between Uzbekistan and China in the field of security were developing steadily, like in all other directions.

At the end of the meeting, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Uzbekistan and the Ministry of Public Security of China signed a Protocol on further development of cooperation for 2010-2011.

- Uzbekistan-ADB cooperation developing dynamically

President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov received President of the Asian Development Bank Haruhiko Kuroda on 30 April, on the eve of the 43rd Annual meeting of the ADB Board of Governors, at Oqsaroy residence in Tashkent.

Welcoming the guest, the head of the state noted that the ADB was considered one of the most authoritative and influential international financial institutions, with which Uzbekistan has been connected by ties of long-standing and reliable partnership. The consistently implemented strategy of ADB cooperation with Uzbekistan is the proof of that.

“Let me thank you for the choice of Tashkent as the venue for the Asian Development Bank meeting. Holding an international forum of such level in Tashkent is a great honor for our country. At the same time, this is an event of historic significance,” Islam Karimov said.

“At the latest meetings of governors of the Asian Development Bank, four large investment project worth over USD 1.14 billion were approved. These projects cover such important areas as improving transport and communication infrastructure, drinking water system, development of communal services, construction of combined-cycle plants at Talimarjan thermal power station, and support of small businesses and private entrepreneurship through the country’s commercial banks,” President of Uzbekistan said.

Uzbekistan, jointly with the Asian Development Bank, is implementing large projects in priority sectors of economy, which focus on development of strategically important and vital industries. Effective implementation of these projects, developed in conjunction with ADB specialists, has become possible thanks to the country’s legal basis of reforming and liberalizing the economy, as well as favorable investment climate.

The 43rd Annual Meeting of the ADB, which starts its work in Tashkent these days, is the first forum of such level in the region of Central Asia and is a recognition of the

effectiveness of the “Uzbek model” of development by the international community. On 2-4 May, the meeting of finance ministers of ASEAN+3 will also be held in Tashkent, where the ADB’s Strategy 2020 will be discussed, along with issues of reforming the global financial architecture, regional cooperation and post-crisis development in Asia, protection of the environment and climate change.

The leading experts and reputable international financial institutions, including the Asian Development Bank, acknowledge that the current level of economic development of Uzbekistan is an example of stable state of basic indicators and stable dynamics of economic growth in the conditions of global recession.

Haruhiko Kuroda emphasized that Uzbekistan was one of the few countries in the world where stable economic and social development rates were ensured. In his opinion, the basis for success of the “Uzbek model” is also the fact that the leadership of Uzbekistan did not rely solely on external borrowing, but has taken active steps to diversify the economy and ensure rational management of rich mineral, industrial and agricultural resources and, most importantly, the powerful and highly intellectual human potential in modern conditions.

The ADB President expressed his sincere gratitude to the President of Uzbekistan for the warm reception, assuring of the ADB’s commitment to further expand and develop partnership relations with Uzbekistan in various sectors of economy and social development.

- President of Uzbekistan receives World Bank VP

President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov received World Bank Vice-President for Europe and Central Asia Philippe Le Houérou at Oqsaroy residence in Tashkent on 30 April.

Welcoming the guests, the head of the state emphasized the strategic character of jointly implemented projects in priority sectors of the country’s economy and consistent expansion of cooperation between Uzbekistan and the World Bank.

“Participation of the World Bank representatives in the Asian Development Bank’s annual meeting in Tashkent confirms the high level of relations between Uzbekistan and the World Bank,” President Islam Karimov said.

Participation of a high-profile delegation of the World Bank and several other foreign banking and financial institutions in the 43rd ADB Annual Meeting, which opens in Tashkent, is noteworthy. This again demonstrates the broad recognition by the international community of the efficiency of the Anti-crisis program implemented in the country and the “Uzbek model” of economic development.

In cooperation with this leading international financial institution, about 20 projects in various sectors of the economy and social development are being successfully implemented. They cover areas like structural changes in agriculture, rehabilitation of irrigation and drainage systems, modernization of communal services, as well as improving healthcare and education, and environmental protection.

At the meeting in Oqsaroy, Philippe Le Houérou expressed his sincere gratitude to the head of the state for the warm reception and noted that holding an international forum of such level in Uzbekistan, which is an example of stable economic growth in the conditions of the global financial crisis, had a particular importance. He also stressed that the present ADB meeting would be another proof of the investment attractiveness and confirmation of the correctness of further modernization of Uzbekistan.

During the talks, the sides exchanged views on the implementation of joint projects and prospects for further development of cooperation between Uzbekistan and the World Bank.

Social Front

- Uzbekistan participates in immunization week

Events related to the European Immunization Week are being held in Uzbekistan for the second time. The week is being coordinated by the European regional bureau of the World Health Organization.

During the week, to last until 1 May, vaccination of children and awareness raising activities among the population are planned. The family polyclinics will hold seminars for doctors, educational specialists and the general public. Children aged below 2 in Uzbekistan are vaccinated against infectious diseases for free. In 2002, the country was certified by the WHO as the poliomyelitis free zone. Diseases like measles and German measles have also been eliminated in Uzbekistan.

Sources

<http://www.rferl.org/>

<http://www.reuters.com/>

<http://kazinform.kz/eng/>

<http://www.interfax.kz>

<http://www.bloomberg.com/>

<http://silkroadintelligencer.com/>

<http://eng.24.kg/>

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/>

<http://www.turkmenistan.ru/>

<http://enews.ferghana.ru>