

**Business & Politics in the Muslim World**  
**News Monitoring**  
**May 1 to May 7, 2010**  
**Weekly Report**  
**Central Asia**  
**Uzma Siraj**

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**Geo strategic Front**

- New Russian Negotiator Visits Armenia, Karabakh
- Azerbaijan, Israel to hold political talks this week

- U.S. officers will arrive in Baku today
- Erdogan holds his ground, Turkey stands by Azerbaijan

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- Turkish Minister Says Gas Deal Reached With Azerbaijan

### **Social Front**

- Azerbaijani Youth Leader Arrested, Whereabouts Unknown
- Police Disperse Mourners In Baku, Dozens Detained

### **Kazakhstan**

#### **Political Front**

- Kazakh Lawmakers Want President Named 'Leader Of The Nation'
- Key political risks to watch in Kazakhstan

#### **Geo strategic Front**

- Kazakh President Awards Pilot For Flying Ousted Kyrgyz Leader
- Kazakh-Kyrgyz Border Remains Closed, Despite Nazarbaev Promise
- Members of US-Kazakh consultations discussed Afghan conflict settlement prospects

### **Economic/Energy Front**

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### **Kyrgyzstan**

#### **Political Front**

- Kyrgyzstan Orders Ousted President's Extradition
- Kyrgyzstan: \$9 Million Found In Safe-Deposit Box Of Former Defense Minister
- Son Of Ousted Kyrgyz President Investigated For Corruption

#### **Geo strategic Front**

• Kyrgyzstan investigates U.S. air base fuel supplies  
(Reuters) - Kyrgyzstan's interim government said Tuesday it had launched a criminal inquiry into firms supplying fuel to the U.S. air base in the Central Asian nation, which prosecutors say belong to the family of its ousted leader.

- Kyrgyzstan investigates U.S. air base fuel supplies
- Kazakh President Awards Pilot For Flying Ousted Kyrgyz Leader
- U.S. Official To Urge Kazakhstan To Reopen Kyrgyz Border
- Kazakh-Kyrgyz Border Remains Closed, Despite Nazarbaev Promise
- Senior White House Adviser In Bishkek For Talks

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- Privatizations Of Resorts By Kyrgyz Ex-President Probed

### **Social Front**

- Kyrgyz Officials Recover Land From Squatters Near Bishkek

### **Tajikistan**

#### **Political Front**

#### **Geo strategic Front**

- Iran 'Proposes Visa-Free Travel' For Tajiks
- Tajikistan Rejects Iranian Offer For Visa-Free Regime

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- Kulma crossing on Tajik-Chinese border opens for traffic

### **Social Front**

- 31 cases of polio confirmed in Tajikistan, says Tajik health official
- Tajik Floods Kill 20 In Kulob
- Dushanbe Campaign Against Mobile Phone Ads Draws Fire

DUSHANBE -- A Tajik communications official has complained about the removal of Niqab Adds New Wrinkle To Tajikistan's Head-Scarf Ban

### **Turkmenistan**

#### **Political Front**

#### **Geo strategic Front**

- Turkmen-Chinese high-level talks held in Shanghai
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs says Turkmenistan never politicized its participation in energy projects

#### **Economic/Energy Front**

- International energy forum ends in Turkmenistan
- OSCE looks forward to further cooperation with Turkmenistan
- IMF gives positive assessment of socio-economic development of Turkmenistan

#### **Social Front**

### **Uzbekistan**

#### **Political Front**

#### **Geo strategic Front**

- Islam Karimov meets Chinese Finance Minister

#### **Economic/Energy Front**

- President Islam Karimov meets Korean Finance Minister
- Asian Development Bank Opens Meeting In Uzbekistan
- Uzbek Repatriate Jailed For Role In Andijon Protests

#### **Social Front**

### **Summery**

#### **Azerbaijan**

#### **Political Front**

#### **Geo strategic Front**

- New Russian Negotiator Visits Armenia, Karabakh

Igor Popov, the new Russian co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group.

YEREVAN -- Russia's new top negotiator on issues surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh visited the capital of the self-proclaimed republic today, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports.

- Azerbaijan, Israel to hold political talks this week

Azerbaijan and Israel reportedly will hold talks on political cooperation sometime this week. Prospects for political cooperation will be discussed by Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov in Israel this week.

- U.S. officers will arrive in Baku today

U.S. officers will arrive in Azerbaijan today, the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry said. Reportedly, the visit will take place in the framework of the Azerbaijan-USA working plan.

- Erdogan holds his ground, Turkey stands by Azerbaijan

During his speech addressed to the Turkish people, PM Erdogan said, that during Turkey's history, as well as during his ruling, the country always had warm feelings towards Azerbaijan.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- Turkish Minister Says Gas Deal Reached With Azerbaijan

The Nabucco project would bring Middle East gas through Turkey to Europe. 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 Youth Leader Arrested, Whereabouts Unknown

BAKU -- The chairman of the opposition Musavat Party's youth wing has been arrested and sentenced to 10 days in jail, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports. Azerbaijani Interior Ministry spokesman Ehsan Zahidov told RFE/RL that Tural Abbasli was sentenced for creating "social disorder."

- Police Disperse Mourners In Baku, Dozens Detained

BAKU -- Dozens of youths were arrested in Baku today as they attempted to mourn the victims of a mass killing at the State Oil Academy a year ago, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

### **Kazakhstan**

#### **Political Front**

- Kazakh Lawmakers Want President Named 'Leader Of The Nation'

ASTANA -- Three Kazakh parliament deputies today proposed giving President Nursultan Nazarbaev the official title "Leader of the Nation," RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

- Key political risks to watch in Kazakhstan

An intensifying succession struggle among Kazakhstan's political elite and the government's increasingly tough stance on foreign companies have fuelled investor concerns in Central Asia's biggest oil producer.

#### **Geo strategic Front**

- Kazakh President Awards Pilot For Flying Ousted Kyrgyz Leader

ASTANA -- Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev has given the pilot who flew the ousted Kyrgyz president out of Kyrgyzstan last month a special state award, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

- Kazakh-Kyrgyz Border Remains Closed, Despite Nazarbaev Promise

BISHKEK -- The Kazakh-Kyrgyz border remains closed despite talks via phone between Kyrgyz interim government head Roza Otunbaeva and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Members of US-Kazakh consultations discussed Afghan conflict settlement prospects

Astana. May 5. Interfax-Kazakhstan – A Kazakh delegation to Washington headed by Ambassador-at-Large for the Kazakh Foreign Ministry Omirtay Betimov has held a round of consultations dedicated to the Afghan issue.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

### **Social Front**

#### **Kyrgyzstan**

#### **Political Front**

- **Kyrgyzstan Orders Ousted President's Extradition**

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyzstan's interim government have ordered prosecutors to seek the extradition of former President Kurmanbek Bakiev, who was ousted in a violent revolt last month. Farid Niyazov, a spokesman for the interim government, told RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service in Bishkek on May 4 that the measure was signed by the head of the government, Roza Otunbaeva, and adopted unanimously.

- **Kyrgyzstan: \$9 Million Found In Safe-Deposit Box Of Former Defense Minister**  
BISHKEK -- Kyrgyz authorities say they have found almost \$9 million in cash belonging to former Kyrgyz Defense Minister Bakyt Kalyev in a safe-deposit box in a bank in Bishkek, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- **Son Of Ousted Kyrgyz President Investigated For Corruption**

Maksim Bakiev, the son of Kyrgyzstan's ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev, has been implicated in a corruption scandal which involved fuel delivery to the U.S. air base in the country. Local media on May 1 cited prosecutors as saying air base suppliers bought fuel from Kyrgyz companies, who in turn bought fuel from Russia.

#### **Geo strategic Front**

- **Kyrgyzstan investigates U.S. air base fuel supplies**

(Reuters) - Kyrgyzstan's interim government said Tuesday it had launched a criminal inquiry into firms supplying fuel to the U.S. air base in the Central Asian nation, which prosecutors say belong to the family of its ousted leader.

- **Kyrgyzstan investigates U.S. air base fuel supplies**

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- **Kazakh President Awards Pilot For Flying Ousted Kyrgyz Leader**

Former Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev in Minsk

ASTANA -- Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev has given the pilot who flew the ousted Kyrgyz president out of Kyrgyzstan last month a special state award, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

- **U.S. Official To Urge Kazakhstan To Reopen Kyrgyz Border**

BISHKEK -- A senior foreign-policy adviser to U.S. President Barack Obama says he will urge Kazakh officials to reopen the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- **Kazakh-Kyrgyz Border Remains Closed, Despite Nazarbaev Promise**

BISHKEK -- The Kazakh-Kyrgyz border remains closed despite talks via phone between Kyrgyz interim government head Roza Otunbaeva and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Senior White House Adviser In Bishkek For Talks

BISHKEK -- A senior White House adviser is in Bishkek for talks with the interim government, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Michael McFaul, U.S. President Barack Obama's senior adviser on Russian and Eurasian affairs, met with Almazbek Atambaev, the deputy head of Kyrgyzstan's interim government.

#### **Economic/Energy Front**

- Privatizations Of Resorts By Kyrgyz Ex-President Probed

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyz acting Prosecutor-General Baitemir Ibraev says many properties near the Issyk-Kul lake resort that were privatized during President Kurmanbek Bakiev's rule are being investigated, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

#### **Social Front**

- Kyrgyz Officials Recover Land From Squatters Near Bishkek

BISHKEK -- Land that was violently seized by squatters outside of Bishkek last month is being returned to its owners, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

#### **Tajikistan**

#### **Political Front**

#### **Geo strategic Front**

- Iran 'Proposes Visa-Free Travel' For Tajiks

DUSHANBE -- Tajikistan's Foreign Ministry says Iran has officially proposed introducing visa-free travel between the two countries, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Spokesman Davlat Nazriev told RFE/RL that the issue would be discussed on May 8 and that Dushanbe was expected to accept the proposal. Nazriev said Hassan Qashqavi, Iran's deputy foreign minister for consular affairs, is to take part in the talks.

- Tajikistan Rejects Iranian Offer For Visa-Free Regime

DUSHANBE -- An Iranian government official said today that Tajikistan has rejected an offer to establish visa-free travel between the two countries, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

#### **Economic/Energy Front**

- Kulma crossing on Tajik-Chinese border opens for traffic

KHOROG, May 7, 2010, Asia-Plus - The Kulma crossing on the Tajik-Chinese border in the Murgab district, Gorno Badakhshan opened for traffic on May 6, the GBAO customs service chief Mehrafzoun Mehrafzounov, said in an interview with Asia-Plus.

#### **Social Front**

- 31 cases of polio confirmed in Tajikistan, says Tajik health official

DUSHANBE, May 4, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Laboratory tests have confirmed polio in thirty-one of 178 samples, Shamsiddin Jobirov, the director general of the Republican Immunoprophylactic Center under the Ministry of Health (MoH), announced at a seminar in Dushanbe on April 30.

- Tajik Floods Kill 20 In Kulob

KULOB, Tajikistan -- Strong rains have caused floods that have killed at least 20 people in the Kulob area of the southern Tajik province of Khatlon, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

- Dushanbe Campaign Against Mobile Phone Ads Draws Fire

DUSHANBE -- A Tajik communications official has complained about the removal of mobile phone advertisements from billboards in Dushanbe, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

- **Niqab Adds New Wrinkle To Tajikistan's Head-Scarf Ban**

It's been nearly a year since 18-year-old Fatima began wearing the niqab, a loose cloak that covers her from head to toe, leaving only her eyes exposed.

The Dushanbe resident, who declined to provide her full name, says she has studied Islam "for some time" and eventually came to the conclusion that wearing the niqab was befitting of her religious beliefs.

## **Turkmenistan**

### **Political Front**

#### **Geo strategic Front**

- **Turkmen-Chinese high-level talks held in Shanghai**

On May 2, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov met with President of China Hu Jintao at Shanghai's International Conference Centre in the framework of his state visit to China.

- **Ministry of Foreign Affairs says Turkmenistan never politicized its participation in energy projects**

On May 6, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan issued a press release in connection with recent reports by a number of international media quoting German company RWE saying that Turkmenistan is ready to sign a contract on gas supplies "as soon as a political decision has been reached."

#### **Economic/Energy Front**

- **International energy forum ends in Turkmenistan**

The international conference "Enhancing Regional Cooperation in Central Asia to Ensure Stable and Reliable Energy in Eurasia" took place in Ashgabat on May 3-4. The forum was organized by the Ministry of Oil and Mineral Resources of Turkmenistan jointly with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

- **OSCE looks forward to further cooperation with Turkmenistan**

On May 4, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received Secretary General of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, who arrived in Ashgabat on a working visit to attend the energy forum entitled "Strengthening Regional Cooperation in Central Asia to Ensure Sustainable and Reliable Energy in Eurasia," organized jointly with the Turkmen side, as well as the regional meeting of heads of OSCE missions in Central Asia.

- **IMF gives positive assessment of socio-economic development of Turkmenistan**

The delegation of the International Monetary Fund headed by IMF Deputy Managing Director Naoyuki Shinohara visited Ashgabat. During the visit, representatives of the IMF held a series of negotiations at the Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance of Turkmenistan.

### **Social Front**

## **Uzbekistan**

### **Political Front**

## **Geo strategic Front**

- Islam Karimov meets Chinese Finance Minister

President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov met with Xie Xuren, Minister of Finance of the People's Republic of China, in Oqsaroy on May 3.

Welcoming the guest, head of our state noted in particular, "I take this opportunity to thank the President of the People's Republic of China Mr. Hu Jintao for a decision to send such a representative delegation led by You to the 43rd Annual Meeting of the Asian Development Bank in Tashkent.

## **Economic/Energy Front**

- President Islam Karimov meets Korean Finance Minister

President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov met with Minister of Strategy and Finance of the Republic of Korea Yoon Jeung-Hyun, in Oqsaroy, May 4.

Having welcomed the guest, the head of state expressed satisfaction with the high level of dynamically developing relations between Uzbekistan and South Korea and noted in particular:

- Asian Development Bank Opens Meeting In Uzbekistan

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) opens its annual meeting today in the Uzbek capital, Tashkent. It's the first time the ABD and its 67 member states are holding the meeting in Central Asia.

- Uzbek Repatriate Jailed For Role In Andijon Protests

A court in the eastern Uzbek city of Andijon has sentenced Dilorom Abduqodirova to 10 years and two months in prison for her alleged role in deadly protests five years ago, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports.

## **Social Front**

## **Detailed Report**

### **Azerbaijan**

## **Political Front**

## **Geo strategic Front**

- New Russian Negotiator Visits Armenia, Karabakh

Igor Popov, the new Russian co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group.

YEREVAN -- Russia's new top negotiator on issues surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh visited the capital of the self-proclaimed republic today, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports. Igor Popov, the newly appointed Russian co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, was in Stepanakert to meet Bako Sahakian, the president of the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. "I am in a mood to make every effort to have the conflict resolved as soon as possible," he told journalists afterwards.

The Russian diplomat said his meeting with the Karabakh Armenian leader focused on "socioeconomic problems" facing the disputed region. He said they also discussed the ongoing reconstruction of Stepanakert airport. On April 28, Popov met Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian in Yerevan.

Sarkisian's office gave few details of the talks, saying the two discussed "recent developments" in the Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiating process. Popov paid his first visit to Karabakh and Armenia in his new capacity one week after accompanying the Minsk Group's outgoing Russian co-chair, Yuri Merzlyakov, on a trip to Azerbaijan. The two

diplomats were joined there by the U.S. co-chair to the Minsk Group, Robert Bradtke, and received by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev.

In a subsequent joint statement also signed by the group's French co-chair, Bernard Fassier, the mediators spoke of "a new impetus to the advancement of a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on the basis of the Madrid principles."

They said they will meet in Vienna early next month to brief the Minsk Group on the current status of the Karabakh peace process. Reports in Azerbaijani media said the mediators are pressing for yet another meeting between Aliyev and Sarkisian. The two presidents plan to fly to Moscow on May 8 to attend events marking the 65th anniversary of the Soviet victory in World War II. Nagorno-Karabakh and much of the adjoining territory has been under the control of Armenian forces since a war with Azerbaijan that ended in 1994.

- Azerbaijan, Israel to hold political talks this week

Azerbaijan and Israel reportedly will hold talks on political cooperation sometime this week. Prospects for political cooperation will be discussed by Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov in Israel this week.

Two countries will hold political talks within the visit, that will take place on May 4-6, the Israeli Embassy in Azerbaijan said. During the visit Azimov will hold a number of meetings in the Israeli Foreign Ministry. In addition to bilateral cooperation, the sides will also discuss regional issues.

- U.S. officers will arrive in Baku today

U.S. officers will arrive in Azerbaijan today, the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry said. Reportedly, the visit will take place in the framework of the Azerbaijan-USA working plan. The visit aims to hold seminars related to the tasks of operational officers at the battalion and brigade.

- Erdogan holds his ground, Turkey stands by Azerbaijan

During his speech addressed to the Turkish people, PM Erdogan said, that during Turkey's history, as well as during his ruling, the country always had warm feelings towards Azerbaijan.

According to Erdogan, Turkey's participation in any processes that would harm Azerbaijani interests, isn't possible. Erdogan pointed out, that Azerbaijan should never doubt Turkey's sincerity and support. Remembering Barack Obama's speech on 24th of April, Erdogan once again said, that history should be decided by historians, and cannot be used as a political tool.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- Turkish Minister Says Gas Deal Reached With Azerbaijan

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

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 Youth Leader Arrested, Whereabouts Unknown**

BAKU -- The chairman of the opposition Musavat Party's youth wing has been arrested and sentenced to 10 days in jail, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

Azerbaijani Interior Ministry spokesman Ehsan Zahidov told RFE/RL that Tural Abbasli was sentenced for creating "social disorder."

He did not specify how or when Abbasli committed the crime. He also said he has no information on the whereabouts of Abbasli.

A relative of Abbasli's, Naiba Hasanova, told RFE/RL that people in plainclothes detained Abbasli as he was leaving an apartment block in Baku's Nasimi district on April 29. She said they pushed her away when she tried to help Abbasli before they drove off.

Police officers in the Nasimi district told RFE/RL that they had no information about Abbasli, and that they had no record of a person with that name being arrested. Abbasli's mother, Bashxanim Abbasova, says her son's detention might be connected with youth protests marking the first anniversary of a shooting spree at Azerbaijan's State Oil Academy that was violently dispersed by police today. Dozens of students were detained and several protesters injured.

On April 30, 2009, a Georgian citizen of Azerbaijani origin, Farda Gadirov, opened fire in the Oil Academy building, killing 12 and wounding 13.

Gadirov then killed himself when police attempted to arrest him.

- **Police Disperse Mourners In Baku, Dozens Detained**

BAKU -- Dozens of youths were arrested in Baku today as they attempted to mourn the victims of a mass killing at the State Oil Academy a year ago, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

On April 30, 2009, a gunman broke into the Oil Academy and opened fire on students and teachers, killing 12 people. When police tried to detain him, he killed himself. A student offers flowers to a policeman, as young mourners were dispersed. Police identified the gunman as a 29-year-old Georgian citizen of Azerbaijani descent.

Criminal proceedings have been opened against several other suspects on a number of charges, including terrorism. RFE/RL correspondents reported that police today blocked all roads to the Oil Academy as groups of students approached the site to lay flowers.

Several students were injured when police used force to disperse the crowd.

Dozens of students were detained and the police raided the office of an opposition youth group.

### **Kazakhstan**

#### **Political Front**

- **Kazakh Lawmakers Want President Named 'Leader Of The Nation'**

ASTANA -- Three Kazakh parliament deputies today proposed giving President Nursultan Nazarbaev the official title "Leader of the Nation," RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

The proposal would grant Nazarbaev the lifetime title and protect him from any prosecution for criminal or administrative wrongdoing as the country's leader. Deputies Amzebek Zholshybekov, Rozakul Khalmuradov, and Svetlana Ferkho -- members of the

pro-presidential Nur-Otan party -- made the proposal. Nur-Otan is the only party represented in the lower house of parliament. "President Nazarbaev is not just a president, he is the founder of modern Kazakhstan and therefore should be given the title 'Leader of the Nation,'" Zholshybekov said in parliament in Astana today. Nazarbaev already has immunity from prosecution -- under the 2000 law on the "First President of the Nation" -- so it's unclear what extra protection, if any, the proposed new title would grant. Zholshybekov said the law adopted 10 years ago needs to be amended as it is too old and does not correspond to the current level of "Kazakhstan's development." He said Nazarbaev's status as "Leader of the Nation" should be fully and legally defined on a constitutional level. In December, several members of parliament proposed making Nazarbaev president-for-life, although the procedure to pass the legislation was halted.

Some international organizations came out against the proposal.

Kazakhstan is the 2010 chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

- Key political risks to watch in Kazakhstan

An intensifying succession struggle among Kazakhstan's political elite and the government's increasingly tough stance on foreign companies have fuelled investor concerns in Central Asia's biggest oil producer.

Home to the world's biggest oil discovery in 40 years as well as considerable metals reserves, Kazakhstan has attracted more than \$100 billion in foreign investment since it gained independence in the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Yet, an unclear succession plan for its veteran leader and aggressive steps by the government to increase the state's role in the oil and gas sector have alarmed foreign investors in the vast steppe nation of 16 million.

Below is a list of key political risks in Kazakhstan.

#### SUCCESSION

President Nursultan Nazarbayev, 69, has been in charge for 21 years and has concentrated sweeping powers throughout the Central Asian nation. His current term in office ends in 2012 but he can run for an unlimited number of terms under constitutional changes his political party introduced in 2007. Nazarbayev has not identified any potential successors and this issue, according to analysts, is the biggest long-term risk in Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev has three daughters but no sons who could make obvious succession candidates.

According to the constitution, in the case of Nazarbayev's death, the speaker of the Senate, the upper chamber of parliament, would assume his powers for the rest of the term. If the Senate speaker is unable to do so, the speaker of the lower house, Mazhilis, would take over. The prime minister is third in line.

What to watch:

-- Nazarbayev's health. The president seems to be firmly in control of the situation and regularly appears in public. His absence for a prolonged time, or less frequent appearances on state television, could spark worries.

-- Election campaign. Should Nazarbayev choose a successor for the next poll, the candidate would have to be formally nominated by Nazarbayev's Nur Otan political party.

Possible contenders include:

Imangali Tasmagambetov, mayor of the capital Astana

Timur Kulibayev, Nazarbayev's son-in-law

Prime Minister Karim Masimov

Kairat Kelimbetov, head of the state welfare fund Samruk-Kazyna.

Foreign companies, who invested in Kazakhstan heavily throughout its post-Soviet history despite Western concerns about its patchy human rights record, are likely to embrace any candidate who would guarantee the continuity of their contracts.

#### ELITE INFIGHTING

Several groups led by Nazarbayev's relatives and allies are competing for influence with the veteran leader.

Some members of the "inner circle" have fallen out with Nazarbayev and left Kazakhstan, which has led to reshuffles in the government, changes in asset ownership and brief periods of political instability.

In one such case, Nazarbayev's former son-in-law, Rakhat Aliyev, fled Kazakhstan and accused the president of usurping power after being accused of kidnapping local bankers and planning a state coup.

Aliyev's departure led to a purge in security services and a government takeover of several key media outlets.

What to watch:

-- High-profile corruption cases which have become a common tool of the domestic political struggle, analysts say. Any high-profile criminal cases or accusations could shed light on who in Nazarbayev's inner circle might be falling out of favour.

-- Government reshuffles could signal the weakening of one group and the strengthening of another.

#### RESOURCE NATIONALISM

The Kazakh government has taken steps in the last few years to raise its role in the key energy sector, buying stakes in some of the largest domestic projects run by foreign majors. Acquisitions usually followed campaigns in which the government accused companies of environmental violations or tax evasion or breaking contract terms.

In the latest case, the government has said it wants a stake in the consortium developing the Karachaganak oil and gas field and accused it of tax evasion. [ID:nLDE63S08R]

Investors and diplomats have in private expressed concern over the government's tactics, saying it could scare off investment at a time when the economy needs fresh liquidity to kickstart new projects.

What to watch:

-- How the Karachaganak case unfolds.

-- Legislation changes. Moves to toughen regulation in sectors such as mining could signal increasing government interest in industries beyond the strategic oil and gas sector.

#### UNREST NEXT DOOR

Unrest in a neighbouring country, such as Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan, could provoke tensions in southern regions of Kazakhstan which border the two nations.

Kazakhstan reacted to the April 7 revolt in Kyrgyzstan by closing the border with its neighbour. There was no major impact on Kazakhstan's economy, dominated by oil and metals exports to Russia, China and Western markets, but some cross-border trade in farming and consumer goods has been hit.

What to watch:

-- The situation in Kyrgyzstan. The interim government, led by ex-foreign minister Roza Otunbayeva, appears to be in control but the impoverished Muslim country remains volatile.

The fear is that radical Islamist groups may use any power vacuum to gain strength, particularly in the restive Ferghana valley straddling Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

-- Developments in Uzbekistan. Like Nazarbayev, Uzbek leader Islam Karimov, in power since 1989, has not picked a successor. More populous than Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan is however much poorer and less developed, which exacerbates social tensions.

For political risks to watch in other countries, please click on [ID:nLDE6430Y1]

### **Geo strategic Front**

- **Kazakh President Awards Pilot For Flying Ousted Kyrgyz Leader**

ASTANA -- Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev has given the pilot who flew the ousted Kyrgyz president out of Kyrgyzstan last month a special state award, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Nazarbaev gave senior pilot Igor Beilin the Aibyn (Glory) Order of the second degree today for flying Kurmanbek Bakiev from the southern Kyrgyz city of Jalal-Abad to the Kazakh town of Taraz on April 15.

Other members of the military plane's crew were awarded with less prestigious state medals on May 6.

Bakiev -- who fled the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, during deadly clashes between antigovernment protesters and security forces on April 7 -- is currently in Belarus. Nazarbaev stated after Bakiev arrived in Kazakhstan that his departure "prevented bloodshed in Kyrgyzstan."

Kyrgyz authorities have officially asked Belarus to extradite Bakiev, who along with his relatives is wanted by Kyrgyzstan's interim government for alleged corruption and the bloodshed that occurred on April 7.

Twenty former officials from Bakiev's government have thus far been arrested in Kyrgyzstan. More than 80 people were killed and hundreds injured in the clashes between protesters and police.

- **Kazakh-Kyrgyz Border Remains Closed, Despite Nazarbaev Promise**

BISHKEK -- The Kazakh-Kyrgyz border remains closed despite talks via phone between Kyrgyz interim government head Roza Otunbaeva and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Edil Baisalov, the chief of staff of Kyrgyzstan's interim government, told RFE/RL that Otunbaeva and Nazarbaev spoke on the phone on May 4 to discuss reopening the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border, which has been closed by Kazakhstan since clashes between antigovernment protesters and security forces on April 7 that ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev.

Baisalov said Nazarbaev explained the decision to close the border by the fact that an unknown numbers of weapons had been taken by protesters from Kyrgyz police during the deadly clashes, mainly in Bishkek, that left more than 80 people dead and hundreds of others injured.

Baisalov said Nazarbaev pledged to reopen the border as of May 5. But the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border remained closed, RFE/RL reported.

The closure of the border by Kazakhstan has hurt many Kyrgyz businesses.

- Members of US-Kazakh consultations discussed Afghan conflict settlement prospects

Astana. May 5. Interfax-Kazakhstan – A Kazakh delegation to Washington headed by Ambassador-at-Large for the Kazakh Foreign Ministry Omirtay Betimov has held a round of consultations dedicated to the Afghan issue.

The delegation has met with the US Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke, his deputy Paul Jones, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia David Sedney and other representatives of the US state agencies, the Kazakh Foreign ministry reported on Tuesday.

According to the statement, the sides discussed their cooperation in the realization of educational programs for the Afghan population; human resource development; joint efforts in the reconstruction of Afghanistan; healthcare issues; development of trade relations and the attraction of Kazakhstan's investments into the Afghan economy, including mining, energy sector and agriculture.

The sides have agreed to further investigate the Afghan situation noting that said issue could become one of the key points of the agenda for the OSCE summit that Kazakhstan plans to hold this year.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

### **Social Front**

#### **Kyrgyzstan**

#### **Political Front**

- Kyrgyzstan Orders Ousted President's Extradition

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyzstan's interim government have ordered prosecutors to seek the extradition of former President Kurmanbek Bakiev, who was ousted in a violent revolt last month. Farid Niyazov, a spokesman for the interim government, told RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service in Bishkek on May 4 that the measure was signed by the head of the government, Roza Otunbaeva, and adopted unanimously.

"With this decree, the provisional government reaffirms that the people of Kyrgyzstan have removed Kurmanbek Bakiev from the post of president," Niyazov said.

The order came in a decree that lifted Bakiev's immunity and also ordered prosecutors to open a criminal investigation against him for his involvement in a bloody crackdown on protesters in Bishkek last month.

Bakiev is currently in Belarus, where he fled in the aftermath of the turmoil, which left 85 people dead.

However, Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said on May 4 he would not hand over Bakiev.

Lukashenka told Reuters that an extradition request for Bakiev would be "hopeless and humiliating for the interim government."

- Kyrgyzstan: \$9 Million Found In Safe-Deposit Box Of Former Defense Minister

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyz authorities say they have found almost \$9 million in cash belonging to former Kyrgyz Defense Minister Bakyt Kalyev in a safe-deposit box in a bank in Bishkek, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Acting Prosecutor-General Baitemir Ibraev told RFE/RL that besides the money, official stamps from Bishkek districts were found in other safe-deposit boxes.

He said the stamps may have been used to legitimize documents by officials in the government of ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev involving illegal financial transactions. An investigation is under way.

Kalyev has been arrested by police and is being detained.

Bakiev and his government fled the capital on April 7 amid clashes between antigovernment protesters and security forces that killed more than 80 people and injured hundreds.

- **Son Of Ousted Kyrgyz President Investigated For Corruption**

Maksim Bakiev, the son of Kyrgyzstan's ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev, has been implicated in a corruption scandal which involved fuel delivery to the U.S. air base in the country. Local media on May 1 cited prosecutors as saying air base suppliers bought fuel from Kyrgyz companies, who in turn bought fuel from Russia.

The Kyrgyz firms were owned by Maksim, and investigators say his father had relaxed import duties for his companies. Numerous investigations have been launched into the activities of Kurmanbek Bakiev's government, which has been accused of money laundering and abuse of office.

### **Geo strategic Front**

- **Kyrgyzstan investigates U.S. air base fuel supplies**

(Reuters) - Kyrgyzstan's interim government said Tuesday it had launched a criminal inquiry into firms supplying fuel to the U.S. air base in the Central Asian nation, which prosecutors say belong to the family of its ousted leader.

- **Kyrgyzstan investigates U.S. air base fuel supplies**

BISHKEK (Reuters) - Kyrgyzstan's interim government said Tuesday it had launched a criminal inquiry into firms supplying fuel to the U.S. air base in the Central Asian nation, which prosecutors say belong to the family of its ousted leader.

Deposed President Kurmanbek Bakiyev left the country last month after a violent revolt which killed dozens when protesters clashed with police and stormed government buildings. He fled to Belarus where he remains.

Fuel supply contracts for the Manas air base, which plays a key role in supporting the war in Afghanistan, have provoked scorn from Kyrgyzstan's new leaders, who say the Bakiyev family profited unfairly from such deals. "A criminal case has been launched against Maksim Bakiyev (Bakiyev's son)," said Ulan Diykanbayev, a spokesman for the prosecutor general's office. His whereabouts were not known.

He added that the companies in question had failed to pay customs duties on fuel they imported from Russia.

A spokesman for the interim government, Farid Niyazov, said the U.S. Senate is carrying out its own investigation, but declined to give more details.

U.S. President Barack Obama's adviser on Russia and Eurasia, who was in Bishkek Tuesday to meet the head of interim government Roza Otunbayeva, ruled out corruption at Manas. "I've read lots of stories about black holes and corruption and things that happened. They are not... true," Michael McFaul told reporters adding that the U.S. would make public all payments it had made to Kyrgyzstan and local companies.

Bakiyev threatened to shut Manas down last year but agreed to extend the lease after the United States offered to raise the annual fee to \$60 million a year. McFaul said Tuesday a quarterly tranche of \$15 million would be wired this week. Russia, which backs the new

government, has long dreamed of evicting the United States from ex-Soviet Central Asia, which it still views as its traditional sphere of influence.

Monday, Kyrgyzstan placed rewards of up to \$100,000 on Maksim and three brothers of Bakiyev for "grave crimes," following formally charging the ousted leader in absentia a week ago for a massacre.

Government spokesman Niyazov said main Manas suppliers Red Star Enterprises Limited and Mina Corp Limited had both registered abroad and continue to operate.

"But the probe is ongoing and when it is over law enforcement bodies will make their suggestions and we do not rule out that (Manas) will be recommended to switch suppliers," Niyazov said.

After the April 7 turmoil, Bakiyev said Russia might have played a role in removing him from power, although Moscow has denied involvement.

- **Kazakh President Awards Pilot For Flying Ousted Kyrgyz Leader**

Former Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev in Minsk

ASTANA -- Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev has given the pilot who flew the ousted Kyrgyz president out of Kyrgyzstan last month a special state award, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Nazarbaev gave senior pilot Igor Beilin the Aibyn (Glory) Order of the second degree today for flying Kurmanbek Bakiev from the southern Kyrgyz city of Jalal-Abad to the Kazakh town of Taraz on April 15.

Other members of the military plane's crew were awarded with less prestigious state medals on May 6.

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Twenty former officials from Bakiev's government have thus far been arrested in Kyrgyzstan.

More than 80 people were killed and hundreds injured in the clashes between protesters and police.

- **U.S. Official To Urge Kazakhstan To Reopen Kyrgyz Border**

BISHKEK -- A senior foreign-policy adviser to U.S. President Barack Obama says he will urge Kazakh officials to reopen the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Michael McFaul, Obama's adviser on Russia and Eurasia, told RFE/RL in Bishkek today that he would bring up the border issue when he goes to Almaty later today for meetings with Kazakh officials on the situation in Kyrgyzstan.

McFaul arrived in Bishkek on May 4 and has held several meetings with members of Kyrgyzstan's interim government and representatives of nongovernmental organizations.

The Kazakh-Kyrgyz border has been closed by Kazakhstan since deadly clashes between antigovernment protesters and security forces in Bishkek on April 7 that ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev, who fled to Belarus.

The border closure has affected many businesses and led to problems at several major markets in Kyrgyzstan.

Interim government spokesman Edil Baisalov told RFE/RL on May 5 that Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev said the decision to close the border was based on reports that unknown numbers of weapons had been taken by protesters from Kyrgyz police during the clashes, which left more than 80 people dead and hundreds of others injured. Baisalov said Nazarbaev pledged to reopen the border as of May 5, but it has remained closed.

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The closure of the border by Kazakhstan has hurt many Kyrgyz businesses.

- **Senior White House Adviser In Bishkek For Talks**

BISHKEK -- A senior White House adviser is in Bishkek for talks with the interim government, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Michael McFaul, U.S. President Barack Obama's senior adviser on Russian and Eurasian affairs, met with Almazbek Atambaev, the deputy head of Kyrgyzstan's interim government.

The government press office said McFaul expressed the U.S. administration's readiness to help Kyrgyzstan "build a democratic society and ensure stability."

Atambaev said bilateral relations had been positive, but that there had been clear signs in recent years of "double standards."

The interim government has said previously that Washington overlooked rights abuses under the previous government of President Kurmanbek Bakiev in its resolve to maintain a key air base in Kyrgyzstan. Washington has denied this. The interim government took power after the ouster of former President Kurmanbek Bakiev in an uprising last month.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- **Privatizations Of Resorts By Kyrgyz Ex-President Probed**

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyz acting Prosecutor-General Baitemir Ibraev says many properties near the Issyk-Kul lake resort that were privatized during President Kurmanbek Bakiev's rule are being investigated, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Ibraev told RFE/RL that three investigative groups are currently researching documents related to the privatization of several resorts in the Issyk-Kul area by relatives and close associates of Bakiev.

Ibraev added that it was unclear who were the actual owners of some of the resorts. He said the investigations could last at least two months.

Bakiev, who was toppled by mass antigovernment protests on April 7, is currently in exile in Belarus.

The whereabouts of many of his relatives and former associates who are wanted by Kyrgyzstan's interim government for corruption and other crimes are unknown.

Issyk-Kul -- which is about 175 kilometers east of Bishkek -- is the second-largest mountain lake in the world.

### **Social Front**

- **Kyrgyz Officials Recover Land From Squatters Near Bishkek**

BISHKEK -- Land that was violently seized by squatters outside of Bishkek last month is being returned to its owners, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Officials at the Interior Ministry in the Chui region told RFE/RL that police and locals have gotten about 1,000 squatters who forcibly occupied land near the village of Maevka, a village outside the capital, to leave the area.

Police are investigating the illegal seizure of the real estate and have detained several organizers of the land grab. The Bishkek mayor's office announced that none of the territory used by local farmers near Bishkek will be given to squatters to build houses.

The squatters began taking the land shortly after antigovernment protesters clashed with security forces in Bishkek on April 7. Eventually, thousands of people had occupied land and established measured plots they said they would use to build homes. Some landowners tried to defend their property, which led to clashes. Five people were killed and several injured and many village residents' houses and cars were set on fire.

### **Tajikistan**

#### **Political Front**

#### **Geo strategic Front**

- **Iran 'Proposes Visa-Free Travel' For Tajiks**

DUSHANBE -- Tajikistan's Foreign Ministry says Iran has officially proposed introducing visa-free travel between the two countries, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Spokesman Davlat Nazriev told RFE/RL that the issue would be discussed on May 8 and that Dushanbe was expected to accept the proposal. Nazriev said Hassan Qashqavi, Iran's deputy foreign minister for consular affairs, is to take part in the talks.

Dushanbe-based analyst Qosim Bekmuhammad says that whenever the idea of visa-free travel with an Islamic country is under consideration, some people worry -- unduly, he says -- that it might give an opportunity to Islamic extremists.

Suhrob Sharifov, the head of the Center for Strategic Studies affiliated with the Tajik president's office, says that he understands security concerns, but that the development of cultural and scientific ties should take precedence.

Similar proposals have been made several times in recent years, but Tajikistan has only agreed to visa-free travel for diplomatic passport holders and other people traveling on state business, so-called service passports holders.

News / From Our Bureaus

- **Tajikistan Rejects Iranian Offer For Visa-Free Regime**

DUSHANBE -- An Iranian government official said today that Tajikistan has rejected an offer to establish visa-free travel between the two countries, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Hassan Qashqavi, Iran's deputy foreign minister for consular affairs, said in Dushanbe at the end of a four-day visit that Tajikistan is not ready to agree to Tehran's proposal to abolish visa requirements.

But he said Tajik officials did agree to issue one-year multiple visas for Iranian entrepreneurs who invest up to \$500,000 in the country and three-year multiple visas for Iranians who have invested more than \$500,000 in Tajikistan.

Qashqavi also noted that Iranian and Tajik students are eligible to receive three-year visas. He added that along with having a visa-free regime for holders of diplomatic passports they are also considering a further easing of visa restrictions.

Dushanbe-based Tajik affairs expert Muzaffar Olimov said the decision to reject Iran's offer is political. Olimov noted that it is similar to the issue of Tajikistan, Iran, and Afghanistan agreeing to create a joint television network but due to political reasons not carrying through on the project.

Tajikistan and Iran also announced today that a Tajik Consulate will be opened in the northeastern Iranian city of Mashhad and an Iranian Consulate in the northern Tajik city of Khujand.

#### **Economic/Energy Front**

- Kulma crossing on Tajik-Chinese border opens for traffic

KHOROG, May 7, 2010, Asia-Plus - The Kulma crossing on the Tajik-Chinese border in the Murgab district, Gorno Badakhshan opened for traffic on May 6, the GBAO customs service chief Mehrafzoun Mehrafzounov, said in an interview with Asia-Plus.

"The crossing works every day, from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm, except weekends and holidays, from May through November," Mehrafzounov said, noting that the issue of organization of the year-round operation of the crossing has not yet been solved.

We will recall that crossing has worked in this regime since May 1, 2008. The Tajik-China trade route, opened in 2004, runs from Khorog, the capital of Gorno Badakhshan in southeastern Tajikistan, over a high-altitude plateau and then down into China, where it ends in the city of Kashgar, 700 kilometers away.

As conditions are so tough at the Kulma border crossing, which is located on a mountain pass 4,400 meters high, until May 1 2008, the gateway had stayed open only 15 days out of every month, while from November through April it had been closed altogether.

In the meantime, Yormamad Faqirov, the deputy chief of the GBAO customs service, noted that compared to January-April 2009 cargo transportation volumes to the region from abroad have decreased over the first four months of this year by more than 660 tons.

#### **Social Front**

- 31 cases of polio confirmed in Tajikistan, says Tajik health official

DUSHANBE, May 4, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Laboratory tests have confirmed polio in thirty-one of 178 samples, Shamsiddin Jobirov, the director general of the Republican Immunoprophylactic Center under the Ministry of Health (MoH), announced at a seminar in Dushanbe on April 30.

The seminar was dedicated to issues related to the coverage of the polio immunization campaign in media.

“Among those contracting the disease are adult people under the age of 24 and even children who had been vaccinated against polio,” Jobirov said. According to him, an outbreak of the disease has killed one child and two adults in Tajikistan.

The member of the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Committee for Certification of Polio Eradication, Mr. Donato Greco pointed out the significance of the coverage of the immunization campaign in media. He stressed that 32000 children every year die in the European region from vaccine-preventable diseases.

Mr. Ayadil Saparbekov, Chief of Health and Nutrition in UNICEF Tajikistan, noted that the first round of the National Immunization Days against polio would start on May 4 and similar polio immunization campaigns would also be carried out in all neighboring countries of the Central Asian region, where the polio cases were reported.

We will recall that almost four million doses of UNICEF-procured oral polio vaccine (OPV) were delivered to Dushanbe on April 27. The vaccine was procured by UNICEF with support from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The first round of the National Immunization Days against polio will take place on May 4-8, 2010 and will be followed by another two rounds on May 18-22 and June 1-5. Almost 1.1 million children aged 0 to 6 across Tajikistan will receive two drops of the live-saving polio vaccine during each round. Experience in outbreak interventions has shown that quick and repeated vaccination campaigns targeting children are highly effective in stopping outbreaks.

Polio has recently reappeared in Tajikistan after a 13-year absence.

- Tajik Floods Kill 20 In Kulob

KULOB, Tajikistan -- Strong rains have caused floods that have killed at least 20 people in the Kulob area of the southern Tajik province of Khatlon, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Tajik rescue services reported on May 6 that the Tebalay River breached its banks overnight in Kulob, leaving many people unable to reach higher ground. Authorities found 15 bodies in Kulob and five more in the Shuroobod district near the bank of the Tebalay River.

More than a dozen people are missing, RFE/RL reports. Many of the bridges in Kulob have been damaged or destroyed and people living in some parts of the city suffered severe damage to their homes. Authorities said dozens of buildings, roads, telephone lines, and other infrastructure in Khatlon's Shuroobod, Muminobod, and Vose districts have also been destroyed. Many people were stranded on the roofs of their houses waiting for emergency teams to rescue them by helicopter. Mirzoali Miraliev, the head of Kulob's Health Ministry, said that some 50 people were treated for injuries on May 7. Military units from the Russian base in Kulob took part in the rescue operation and offered their armored vehicles to help transport victims to safer areas.

- Dushanbe Campaign Against Mobile Phone Ads Draws Fire

DUSHANBE -- A Tajik communications official has complained about the removal of mobile phone advertisements from billboards in Dushanbe, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Ghaffor Erkaev, the head of the Association of Tajik Mobile Communication Companies, told RFE/RL that although advertisements for tobacco and alcohol are illegal in Tajikistan, there is no ban on mobile phone advertisements. The removal of the billboards was ordered earlier this month by the office of Dushanbe Mayor Mahmadsaid

Ubaidulloev. Erkaev said all the advertisements were prepaid and that the billboard business is beneficial to mobile phone companies and advertising agencies.

He said the billboard removal had come as a surprise. Last month in his annual address to parliament, President Emomali Rahmon said Tajikistan, with a population of 7 million, had 6 million mobile phone numbers and 500,000 Internet users.

According to Rahmon, the annual profit of mobile companies is more than 1.4 billion somoni (\$320 million), most of which he said goes to foreign companies. Rahmon also instructed Health Minister Nusratullo Salimov to start a television campaign explaining what Rahmon said was the harm mobile phones cause to people, especially children.

Economist Masud Sobirov said that removing the billboards will not hurt mobile phone providers much because they have a good base for their development and should be able to find other ways to advertise their services.

But some experts say mobile phones have become an important tool for the spread of information and that is why authorities are putting the industry under pressure.

- Niqab Adds New Wrinkle To Tajikistan's Head-Scarf Ban

It's been nearly a year since 18-year-old Fatima began wearing the niqab, a loose cloak that covers her from head to toe, leaving only her eyes exposed.

The Dushanbe resident, who declined to provide her full name, says she has studied Islam "for some time" and eventually came to the conclusion that wearing the niqab was befitting of her religious beliefs.

"People stare at me in streets," she says. "Some of them call me 'ninja.' But I don't care. It makes my faith even stronger."

In the past year, the number of Tajik women wearing the niqab has grown considerably -- with the trend most evident among women in their late teens or early 20s.

The niqab's rising popularity comes despite a partial ban imposed in 2007 on the comparatively more revealing hijab, branded as an unnecessary foreign import. The wearing of that head scarf, popular among many Tajik Muslim women, is not allowed in state institutions, some public places, and shops. Surayo Nabieva, a secondary-school teacher in the northern city of Khujand, says the Tajik authorities now face a dilemma. "We thought the hijab was extreme," she says. "Now there is the niqab, which makes the hijab look moderate."

#### Element Of Arab Culture

Belgium's recently approved ban on Muslim women wearing veils that cover their entire face -- as well as similar legislation being considered in France -- provide examples of the most extreme methods for dealing with the issue. As Tajik authorities ponder the situation, some experts argue that not only do clothing bans fail to keep foreign religious influences at bay, they may end up having the opposite effect.

A young Tajik woman wearing a hijab (file photo)Many in predominantly Muslim Tajikistan regard the niqab as an element of Arab culture -- one that does not fit with the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam practiced by most Tajik Muslims, which does not require women to cover their faces. Tajikistan's Council of Ulema, a state-backed independent religious body, has called on believers to stick to tradition by wearing the Tajik costume consisting of a medium-length, colorful dress worn with trousers.

But as the influence of religion grows in Tajik society, the country can expect to see more women opting for the hijab or niqab as religious diversity rises. Singling out those

believers for official scrutiny, observers argue, won't diminish their beliefs or prevent them from looking outside Hanafi tradition.

Fatima says her decision to wear the niqab has led to harassment, with passersby treating her with suspicion or even calling her a "Wahhabi," a term widely used in Tajikistan for religious extremists.

**Violates Constitution**

Bakhtiyor Nasrulloev, a lawyer who specializes in family law and women's rights, is campaigning to have the ban on head scarves in Tajik schools lifted.

"The ban violates the Tajik Constitution in two ways," says Nasrulloev, who does not see any connection between the ban on head scarves and growing use of the niqab. "First, according to the law, every Tajik citizen has the right to practice their religion of choice. And secondly, every citizen has the right to an education. Denying these young women their education because they wear the hijab is against Tajik law."

Many Muslim women now remove their hijabs just before entering the grounds of universities or schools. Many who have refused have been expelled. Parents of hijab-wearing students, conservative religious groups, and the Islamic Renaissance Party -- the only officially registered Islamic party in Central Asia -- all accuse the Education Ministry of violating citizens' rights. At least one female student has sued the ministry, unsuccessfully.

Education officials appear unbowed. Fourth-year university student Ganjina Sharifova was expelled from Tajik National University on April 26.

"I always comply with the ban when I'm inside the university building and put on my hijab after I leave the building," she says. "But the dean of the university saw me wearing the hijab on my way to the dormitory."

So far, the wearing of the niqab has been seen mostly in the Tajik capital, Dushanbe. But Khujand schoolteacher Nabieva laments that it won't be long before the trend spreads to other regions.

"I don't like the niqab. No one among my family or friends approves of it," Nabieva says. "But I'm afraid it is becoming a fixture of everyday life and no one seems to be able to stop it."

## **Turkmenistan Political Front**

### **Geo strategic Front**

- Turkmen-Chinese high-level talks held in Shanghai

On May 2, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov met with President of China Hu Jintao at Shanghai's International Conference Centre in the framework of his state visit to China.

During the talks, the sides noted that bilateral trade increased almost 40 times compared with the year 2000 and totaled about half a billion US dollars in the past year. Discussing the issues of further cooperation, the leaders of the two states identified areas such as transport, telecommunications, tourism, infrastructure construction.

China, guided by friendly interstate relations, will issue a gratuitous grant worth 70 million yuan for development of the social sphere of Turkmenistan, Hu Jintao said.

He also confirmed China's readiness to increase quota for Turkmen students in higher education establishments of China and send more teachers of Chinese language to

Turkmenistan. According to him, China is also ready to share with Turkmen partners its extensive experience in the tourism industry, which is now rapidly developing in Turkmenistan.

In turn, Turkmenistan's president expressed confidence that direct contacts between representatives of public and private structures of the two countries in the framework of EXPO-2010 will give provide a good impetus to establish business contacts and explore new opportunities for partnerships.

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs says Turkmenistan never politicized its participation in energy projects

On May 6, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan issued a press release in connection with recent reports by a number of international media quoting German company RWE saying that Turkmenistan is ready to sign a contract on gas supplies "as soon as a political decision has been reached."

The Foreign Ministry underlines that this allegation is "not true and contrary to the principles governing Turkmenistan in its relations with partners that are well-known in international energy circles."

"First, in its international cooperation in the gas sphere, Turkmenistan is guided only by economic expediency and mutual commercial benefit. At the same time, Turkmenistan has never politicized its participation in energy projects.

Second, pursuing the diversification of exports of its energy resources to the international markets, the Turkmen side strictly follows a principle of selling Turkmen energy resources at the border of Turkmenistan. At the same time, being a producer of raw materials and being able to provide the necessary amounts to consumers, our country does not associate this role with participation in any international energy projects or schemes of energy sales outside the borders of Turkmenistan.

Third, throughout the period of Turkmenistan's partnership with RWE concern, the issue of procurement of Turkmen natural gas to fill a concrete pipeline was not raised. Arrangements that Turkmenistan and RWE made relate to other aspects of cooperation, which are well known and were previously reported in the press," the Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan said.

Given the above mentioned, the assumption of some "political decisions" the lack of which allegedly hampers the purchase of Turkmen gas by RWE concern cause misunderstanding, the press release says.

The Turkmen side expressed hope that RWE company, being a partner of Turkmenistan and being well aware of the principles of Turkmenistan's energy policy, "will take adequate measures in response to a number of media publications that do not reflect the real situation."

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- International energy forum ends in Turkmenistan

The international conference "Enhancing Regional Cooperation in Central Asia to Ensure Stable and Reliable Energy in Eurasia" took place in Ashgabat on May 3-4. The forum was organized by the Ministry of Oil and Mineral Resources of Turkmenistan jointly with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The forum brought together 120 participants from more than 20 countries, including representatives of the world's leading energy companies, as well as diplomatic missions and international organizations accredited in Turkmenistan, national and foreign media.

The OSCE Secretary General, Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, spoke at the forum. He noted that the Ashgabat conference was another step in ensuring the stability and reliability of energy in the continent, in which the OSCE intends to take active part, and Turkmenistan, as one of the major oil and gas producers in the world, enters the international arena as a proponent of joint efforts to ensure stable supply of energy. "

For two days the forum participants discussed the importance of the Eurasian continent in global energy security, the fundamentals and principles of forming a stable energy market, looked for ways to ensure the unhindered flow of energy and cooperation in this area and worked on the development of an appropriate international legal framework.

- OSCE looks forward to further cooperation with Turkmenistan

On May 4, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received Secretary General of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, who arrived in Ashgabat on a working visit to attend the energy forum entitled "Strengthening Regional Cooperation in Central Asia to Ensure Sustainable and Reliable Energy in Eurasia, organized jointly with the Turkmen side, as well as the regional meeting of heads of OSCE missions in Central Asia.

During the meeting, Marc Perrin de Brichambaut said the OSCE looks forward to a fruitful interaction with the dynamically developing Turkmenistan whose neutral status is a positive factor in maintaining peace and stability in the region.

According to the head of the OSCE, Turkmenistan, owing to its geopolitical position, should be considered a key link between Europe and Asia. Expressing support for new international initiatives of President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, including energy security and the issue of disarmament, Marc Perrin de Brichambaut expressed OSCE's high interest in implementing new joint projects in these important areas.

In the context of discussions of priorities issues of cooperation the Turkmen leader and the head of the OSCE agreed on the key aspect of cooperation, having confirmed their commitment to continue joint work in such important areas as ensuring peace and security in the region, border security, combating drug trafficking and organized crime and terrorism, the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) said.

- IMF gives positive assessment of socio-economic development of Turkmenistan

The delegation of the International Monetary Fund headed by IMF Deputy Managing Director Naoyuki Shinohara visited Ashgabat. During the visit, representatives of the IMF held a series of negotiations at the Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance of Turkmenistan.

As the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) reports, following the talks the head of the delegation praised the country's ongoing financial policies and outlined prospects for further cooperation. He noted that, in general, the IMF positively assessed the socio-economic development of Turkmenistan at the current stage. According to him, the country has made significant progress in economic reforms, namely the unification of the exchange rate and denomination of national currency, the adoption of measures to improve and strengthen the banking sector and tax system, and implementation of investment policy.

The IMF welcomes the on-going social reforms implemented in Turkmenistan, including in education and health, as well as measures taken to support and develop small and medium businesses, said Naoyuki Shinohara. He also confirmed the IMF's readiness to

continue cooperation with Turkmenistan in the banking-financial sector and other spheres.

## **Social Front**

### **Uzbekistan Political Front**

#### **Geo strategic Front**

- Islam Karimov meets Chinese Finance Minister

President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov met with Xie Xuren, Minister of Finance of the People's Republic of China, in Oqsaroy on May 3.

Welcoming the guest, head of our state noted in particular, "I take this opportunity to thank the President of the People's Republic of China Mr. Hu Jintao for a decision to send such a representative delegation led by You to the 43rd Annual Meeting of the Asian Development Bank in Tashkent. It will surely provide a corresponding impetus and weight to an international forum of such level. We in Uzbekistan highly appreciate and value the close, friendly relations established between our countries, and know well what lies behind the current growth of China's prestige and influence in world affairs, which was laid in the renowned reforms course by Deng Xiaoping".

The constructive nature of Uzbek-Chinese summit meetings has proved particularly critical in the steady development of bilateral relations. Contacts between specialists and representatives of business circles of our nations at different levels have been constant and productive. Uzbekistan and China vigorously cooperate, in particular, in the framework of Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The most favored nation regime in trade and economic cooperation between our countries has been practical since 1994. China has established itself as one of the major economic partners of Uzbekistan. In 2009, for instance, mutual trade turnover exceeded two billion US dollars. 223 Uzbek-Chinese joint ventures are active in our country.

During the meeting in Oqsaroy, Xie Xuren expressed his sincere gratitude to the head of our nation for the warm welcome, highly appraising the magnitude and practical effect of the Uzbek model of economy and the anti-crisis program successfully implemented in the Republic of Uzbekistan.

A thorough exchange of views regarding the prospects for further expansion of bilateral relations in trade, economic and investment spheres took place in the course of the talks.

#### **Economic/Energy Front**

- President Islam Karimov meets Korean Finance Minister

President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov met with Minister of Strategy and Finance of the Republic of Korea Yoon Jeung-Hyun, in Oqsaroy, May 4.

Having welcomed the guest, the head of state expressed satisfaction with the high level of dynamically developing relations between Uzbekistan and South Korea and noted in particular: "I well remember our meeting in Seoul this February. It was a conversation pretty rich in content and important for us. We even decided to definitely meet in Tashkent in the course of Your participation in the ADB international forum. Today You are our welcome visitor and dear guest. And the fact that we have established quite confidential relations with President Lee Myung-bak furthermore underscores the

closeness and trust-based cooperation that has been forming for many years between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Republic of Korea”.

Traditionally, the friendly cultural and economic ties between our countries, united by common interests and aspirations, are permeated with a spirit of strategic partnership and a determination to further strengthen amity between the two fraternal peoples. Regular Uzbek-Korean summits confirm this time and again. Bilateral contacts serve to jointly explore promising areas of cooperation and elaborate mutually beneficial projects in various spheres, particularly biggest of which are implemented in the hydrocarbon, mining, transport and logistics, banking and finance, and many other areas.

Republic of Korea is considered one of the most reliable and time-tested economic partners of Uzbekistan with a joint realization of a number of strategically important investment projects. One of them, in particular, is a free industrial and economic zone and international multimodal logistics center in Navoi. The cooperation with KOGAS Corporation is particularly noteworthy, especially in the construction of Ustyurt gas chemical complex aimed at not only field development with high-tech, but also production of ready products – polyethylene and polypropylene. In the framework of this project it is intended to attract investments worth more than 3 billion US dollars.

As a result of the most favored nation regime in economic relations between Uzbekistan and South Korea, the volume of mutual trade turnover amounted to 1.2 billion US dollars in 2009 alone.

During the meeting in Oqsaroy, Yoon Jeung-Hyun expressed his sincere gratitude to the head of our nation for the warm welcome, stressing the Korean side’s interest in expanding the scales of mutually beneficial ties with Uzbekistan. Minister of Strategy and Finance of the Republic of Korea underpinned that Tashkent became the site for an international forum of Asian Development Bank owing primarily to the successfully implemented Uzbek model of development acknowledged by many leading countries as effective.

“In the context of global financial and economic crisis Uzbekistan has demonstrated the robustness of protective mechanisms inherent in the national model of economy effectively applied today in practice”, the guest emphasized.

Issues related to further enhancement of trade, economic and investment cooperation between Uzbekistan and the Republic of Korea have been discussed during the conversation.

- Asian Development Bank Opens Meeting In Uzbekistan

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) opens its annual meeting today in the Uzbek capital, Tashkent. It's the first time the ABD and its 67 member states are holding the meeting in Central Asia.

Some 3,000 delegates including heads of state, central bankers, and finance ministers, are expected to attend the four-day meeting.

The NGO Forum on the ADB -- a network of 250 civil society organizations monitoring the bank's operations -- is boycotting the meeting in protest over the human rights record of Uzbek President Islam Karimov.

- Uzbek Repatriate Jailed For Role In Andijon Protests

A court in the eastern Uzbek city of Andijon has sentenced Dilorom Abduqodirova to 10 years and two months in prison for her alleged role in deadly protests five years ago, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports.

Abduqodirova, 44, was among at least 400 refugees from Uzbekistan who were evaluated by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) following the bloody government suppression of a demonstration in Andijon in May 2005 during which hundreds of people were killed.

Abduqodirova, a housewife with four children, emigrated to Australia but returned to Uzbekistan on January 7 and was arrested at the Tashkent airport.

She was released five days later but arrested again in March and charged with illegally exiting and entering the country, infringing on the constitution, and taking part in a mass uprising. An observant Muslim who wore head scarves, Abduqodirova appeared bare-headed in court on April 29 when she pleaded guilty to the charges. Her relatives noted that Abduqodirova appeared extremely upset and exhausted at the trial and would not look at them while in court. Abduqodirova's brother, Muhammadjon Muminov, alleges she was drugged or tortured to confess to the crimes that he said she did not commit. She was sentenced by the court today.

## **Social Front**

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