

Business & Politics in the Muslim World
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Central Asia
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Summery of Article Week 121

The Limits of Culture: Islam and Foreign Policy

This article is based on a book review < The limits of Culture; Islam and Foreign policy.

The author of this article has tried to explain, to what extent religion and culture influence the foreign policy decision making in this world. This article talks about area bordering Caspian region than impact of religion and culture in Central Asian states, Iran Pakistan, Afghanistan and especially the Taliban rule. The writer has made a comparison between foreign policy objectives of different states of the region. He has tried to explain the approach of these states, which is either materialistic or pragmatic.

Outline

Azerbaijan

Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- Azerbaijani-Russian relations reached level of strategic cooperation
- EU Hosts Eastern Neighbors Ahead Of Russia Summit
- U.S. Secretary of State Special Envoy Richard Morningstar to visit Azerbaijan

Economic /Energy Front

- SOCAR's Black Sea terminal transports Tengiz oil
- History, BP Oil Spill Haunt Caspian Sea

Social Front

- Amnesty International Says Rights Abuses Continue To Plague World

Kazakhstan

Political Front

- Kazakh President's Nephew Named Ruling Party Secretary

Geo Strategic Front

Economic /Energy Front

- Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan customs talks fail
- World Bank Approves \$1 Billion Loan To Kazakhstan

Social Front

- Kazakh Supreme Court Upholds Verdict Against Journalist
- Kazakhs Probe Mass Death Of Rare Saiga Antelope

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- Bishkek Plans To Revoke Former President Akaev's Immunity
- Kyrgyz Interim Official Will Not Run For President
- Kyrgyz Protesters Demand Greater Transparency From Interim Government
- Kyrgyzstan Asks Interpol To Help Catch Bakiev

Geo Strategic Front

- Turkish Embassy Official: Former Kyrgyz President Not In Turkey

Economic /Energy Front

- Tajiks In Bishkek Picket Uzbek Embassy, Demand Resumption Of Rail Traffic

Social Front

- Kyrgyzstan's Protesters For Hire

Tajikistan

Political Front

- Notorious Former Tajik Governor Dies In Prison
- Mizrob Kabirov appointed head of Majlisi milli's office
- Emomali Rahmon holds regular session of the government

Geo Strategic Front

- Emomali Rahmon meets with ex-president of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma
- Uzbek-Tajik Dispute Disrupts NATO Supplies To Afghanistan

Economic /Energy Front

- Tajiks In Bishkek Picket Uzbek Embassy, Demand Resumption Of Rail Traffic
- Fuel prices rapidly rise in Dushanbe

Social Front

- Tajik Islamic Party Official Accused Of Human Trafficking
- World Bank allocates additional \$2mln for Tajikistan's education modernization project

Turkmenistan

Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- Turkmen border guards get first drones
- Turkmenistan and India sign intergovernmental agreements
- President of Turkmenistan to visit India on May 24-26

Economic /Energy Front

- Ashgabat hosted Turkmen-Kazakh business forum
- Turkmens set to start work on new gas pipeline
- Turkmenistan Opts To Build Key Gas Pipeline On Its Own
- Turkmenistan and India to discuss construction of gas pipeline through Afghanistan and Pakistan
- Turkmenistan to start construction of "East-West" gas pipeline

Social Front

Uzbekistan

Political Front

- Prominent Uzbek Sports Journalist Jailed For Religious Extremism
- More Signs Of Karimova's Fall From Grace?
- Cluing In On The Uzbek Succession

Geo Strategic Front

- President receives SCO foreign ministers
- SCO foreign ministers meet in Tashkent
- Rail Traffic Between Uzbekistan, Southern Tajikistan Restricted
- Uzbek-Tajik Dispute Disrupts NATO Supplies To Afghanistan

Economic /Energy Front

- Afghanistan launches construction of railroad linking Mazari Sharif with Uzbek border

- Uzbekistan blocks cargoes provided for Afghanistan

Social Front

- UNICEF office in Uzbekistan is under Pressure

Summery

Azerbaijan

Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- Azerbaijani-Russian relations reached level of strategic cooperation

Transport links between Azerbaijan and Russia are developing rapidly. Russia is a big transport corridor, and it assumes great importance for Azerbaijan, head of public-political department of the Presidential Administration of Azerbaijan, Ali Hasanov, said in his speech at a forum 'Russia and Azerbaijan: modernity and prospects of cooperation' in Rostov.

- EU Hosts Eastern Neighbors Ahead Of Russia Summit

BRUSSELS -- Leading diplomats representing the 27 EU governments have met their counterparts from the six members of the bloc's Eastern Partnership -- Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan -- in the Polish Baltic resort of Sopot.

- U.S. Secretary of State Special Envoy Richard Morningstar to visit Azerbaijan

U.S. Secretary of State's Special Envoy for Eurasian Energy Richard L. Morningstar will visit Azerbaijan next week.

Economic /Energy Front

- SOCAR's Black Sea terminal transports Tengiz oil

At the Black Sea terminal of SOCAR in Kulevi, Georgia, transportation of crude oil has started.

- History, BP Oil Spill Haunt Caspian Sea

For years, the race to tap into the Caspian Sea's vast oil and gas resources has outweighed any desire to protect its delicate environment.

Social Front

- Amnesty International Says Rights Abuses Continue To Plague World

Watchdog Amnesty International has warned that human rights abuses continued to plague the world in 2009, with torture or ill treatment, unfair trials and imprisonment, and restrictions on free speech among the most common violations.

Kazakastan

Political Front

- Kazakh President's Nephew Named Ruling Party Secretary

ASTANA -- Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev's nephew has been named the secretary of the country's main political party, Nur-Otan (Shining Fatherland), RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Geo Strategic Front

Economic /Energy Front

- Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan customs talks fail

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia, May 21 (Reuters) - Russia and neighbouring Belarus and Kazakhstan have failed to reach agreement on some aspects of their joint customs union, their leaders said on Friday.

- World Bank Approves \$1Billion Loan To Kazakhstan

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev -- seen with the Belarus and then-Kyrgyz presidents -- has apparently won lots of World Bank confidence. The World Bank has approved \$1 billion in budget support for Kazakhstan to help the government implement its economic program.

Social Front

- Kazakh Supreme Court Upholds Verdict Against Journalist

The Kazakh Supreme Court has ruled against an appeal by a journalist convicted of revealing state secrets, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

- Kazakhs Probe Mass Death Of Rare Saiga Antelope

ASTANA -- Kazakh authorities have launched an investigation into the mass death of the endangered saiga antelope in the west of the country, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

The Prosecutor-General's Office spokesperson Nurdaulet Suindikov made the announcement in Astana on May 27.

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- Bishkek Plans To Revoke Former President Akaev's Immunity

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyzstan's interim government says it plans to deprive the first president of independent Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akaev, of immunity from prosecution, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Kyrgyz Interim Official Will Not Run For President

BISHKEK -- The first deputy chairman of Kyrgyzstan's interim government says he does not plan to run for president or compete in the parliamentary elections later this year, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Kyrgyz Protesters Demand Greater Transparency From Interim Government

BISHKEK -- About 100 protesters picketed the Kyrgyz parliament building in Bishkek today, demanding a detailed report on the interim government's activities for the last 45 days, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Kyrgyzstan Asks Interpol To Help Catch Bakiev

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyzstan's interim government has submitted a formal request to Interpol to assist in locating and arresting ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Interim Government Deputy Chairman Azimbek Beknazarov told journalists in Bishkek on May 27 that the exact whereabouts of Bakiev and his relatives is not clear.

Geo Strategic Front

- Turkish Embassy Official: Former Kyrgyz President Not In Turkey

BISHKEK -- Some 50 members of the Meken Sheyitteri (Martyrs of the Land) movement have picketed the Turkish Embassy in Bishkek to demand clarification of media reports that ousted Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev is in Turkey, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Some news agencies in Russia and Belarus reported on May 25 that Bakiev had left Belarus for a vacation in Turkey.

Economic /Energy Front

- Tajiks In Bishkek Picket Uzbek Embassy, Demand Resumption Of Rail Traffic

BISHKEK -- About 50 Tajik students and members of Kyrgyzstan's Tajik Association picketed the Uzbek Embassy in Bishkek today to demand the full resumption of rail traffic between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Social Front

- Kyrgyzstan's Protesters For Hire

It didn't take long for protests against the new government in Kyrgyzstan to start, nor should it really come as a surprise: it happened to the last government shortly after it came to power in 2005 as well.

Tajikistan

Political Front

- Notorious Former Tajik Governor Dies In Prison

DUSHANBE -- A former powerful governor from Tajikistan's northern Sughd Province has died in a Dushanbe prison, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Abdujalil Homidov, 65, was an influential businessman in his region.

- Mizrob Kabirov appointed head of Majlisi milli's office

DUSHANBE. May 28. "Asia-Plus" -- New staff rotations approved today, May 28, at a regular session of the government. According to the government's decree, former head of the Department of Finance of the President's Office Dilmurod Davlatov was appointed director of the State Agency for Material Procurement, Works and Services under the government of Tajikistan replacing Mahmadoir Sohibov, President's press service reported.

- Emomali Rahmon holds regular session of the government

DUSHANBE. May 28. "Asia-Plus" -- Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon is holding a regular session of the government.

Geo Strategic Front

- Emomali Rahmon meets with ex-president of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma

DUSHANBE. May 27. "Asia-Plus" -- Yesterday, May 26, President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon met with former President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma who arrived in Dushanbe with private visit. The sides have discussed Tajik-Ukrainian relations and talked about the perspectives, President's press service reported.

- Uzbek-Tajik Dispute Disrupts NATO Supplies To Afghanistan

DUSHANBE -- The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan says it "may have to reroute some shipments" that are stranded in Central Asia after Uzbekistan suspended rail traffic to Tajikistan's southern Khatlon district. ISAF spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Goetz Hasske told Reuters that "some carriages carrying NATO supplies were being held up," citing "ongoing political tensions in the area."

Economic /Energy Front

- Tajiks In Bishkek Picket Uzbek Embassy, Demand Resumption Of Rail Traffic

BISHKEK -- About 50 Tajik students and members of Kyrgyzstan's Tajik Association picketed the Uzbek Embassy in Bishkek today to demand the full resumption of rail traffic between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Fuel prices rapidly rise in Dushanbe

In the past 24 hours gasoline prices in Tajikistan's capital raised by almost 15%. Only yesterday, May 20, in the first half of the day one liter of AI-95 gasoline was sold at a price of 3 Somoni 40 dirams (\$0,7) and this morning it grew up to 4 Somoni (\$0,9). Meanwhile, gasoline prices are keep growing and it is not clear when they will stop.

Social Front

- Tajik Islamic Party Official Accused Of Human Trafficking

KULOB, Tajikistan -- A regional leader of Tajikistan's Islamic Renaissance Party has been charged with human trafficking, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Abdulfattoh Abdukholiqov is the head of the Islamic Renaissance Party in the Vose district of Tajikistan's southern Khatlon Province. Davlat Najmiddinov, who heads the anti-organized-crime department in the province's Kulob district, told RFE/RL that Abdukholiqov and his accomplice paid \$500 to the mother of a 16-year-old girl whom they planned to sell to someone in Russia.

- World Bank allocates additional \$2mln for Tajikistan's education modernization project

DUSHANBE, May 26. "Asia-Plus" -- The Board of Directors of the World Bank has approved a \$2mln grant for the project aimed at modernization of Tajikistan's education system. According to WB, the goal of additional funding is to develop the system of evaluation of pupils progress and finally improve the quality of pedagogic techniques used for evaluation of the quality of education.

Turkmenistan

Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- Turkmen border guards get first drones

The border troops of Turkmenistan received new aircrafts designed to conduct air monitoring around the clock in all weather conditions. As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat, the performance of new aircrafts was demonstrated yesterday to President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov at Akdepe military airfield near the Turkmen capital.

- Turkmenistan and India sign intergovernmental agreements

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov held talks with Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh, as well as President of India Pratibha Devisingh Patil in New Delhi. As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports quoting the press service of the head of state, special attention was paid to issues relating to energy security and reliability of energy supplies to world markets.

- President of Turkmenistan to visit India on May 24-26

The governmental delegation of Turkmenistan led by President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov will visit the Republic of India on May 24-26. This was reported by the Vice-Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan Rashid Meredov at a regular government meeting.

Economic /Energy Front

- Ashgabat hosted Turkmen-Kazakh business forum

On May 26, Ashgabat hosted the Turkmen-Kazakh business forum organized by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Turkmenistan and the National Agency for Export and Investment "Kaznex Invest" (Kazakhstan).

- Turkmens set to start work on new gas pipeline

(AP) - Energy-rich Turkmenistan will start later this month building a pipeline linking its natural gas-rich fields in the east to the Caspian Sea coast in an effort to increase its export potential, a state newspaper said Monday.

- Turkmenistan Opts To Build Key Gas Pipeline On Its Own

Turkmenistan now plans to build the East-West natural-gas pipeline without outside help, according to information posted on the government's website and published in state newspapers today. The East-West pipeline should stretch some 1,000 kilometers, bringing some 30 billion cubic meters of gas from fields in the eastern part of the country to areas along Turkmenistan's Caspian Sea coast per year.

- Turkmenistan and India to discuss construction of gas pipeline through Afghanistan and Pakistan

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov has arrived in India on the first state visit. He is expected to discuss cooperation in the oil and gas industry and other spheres with the Indian side.

- Turkmenistan to start construction of "East-West" gas pipeline

Turkmenistan will start building the East-West pipeline with the capacity of 30 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year. A resolution authorizing the start of construction was signed by President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov.

Social Front

Uzbekistan

Political Front

- Prominent Uzbek Sports Journalist Jailed For Religious Extremism

TASHKENT -- The prominent Uzbek sports journalist Khairulla Khamidov has been sentenced to six years in jail on charges of associating with a banned Islamic group, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports.

- More Signs Of Karimova's Fall From Grace?

Another sign perhaps that Gulnara Karimova's empire is crumbling.

Former Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari, rumored to be the highest-paid football manager in the world, is leaving the Tashkent club, Bunyodkor.

- Cluing In On The Uzbek Succession

RFE/RL is closely following the troubles the Swiss-registered company Zeromax is facing, especially considering the energy company's reputed ties to the Uzbek president's head-turning eldest daughter, Gulnara Karimova.

Geo Strategic Front

- President receives SCO foreign ministers

President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov received members of the session of the Foreign Ministers Council of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states at Oqsaroy residence on May 22.

- SCO foreign ministers meet in Tashkent

The session of the Foreign Ministers Council of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states was held in Tashkent on 22 May. State secretary and foreign minister of Kazakhstan K.Saudabayev, foreign minister of China Yang Jiechi, vice foreign minister of Kyrgyzstan T.Makeyev, foreign minister of Russia S.Lavrov, foreign minister of Tajikistan H.Zarifi and foreign minister of Uzbekistan V.Norov participated in the meeting. SCO General secretary M.Imanaliyev and Director of SCO Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure Executive committee D.Jumanbekov also attended the session.

- Rail Traffic Between Uzbekistan, Southern Tajikistan Restricted

DUSHANBE -- Uzbekistan has suspended rail traffic to Tajikistan's southern Khatlon district, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. The Uzbek consul-general in Dushanbe, Zafar Rahimjonov, said on May 24 that floods in Uzbekistan have destroyed 11 kilometers of railroad tracks between the Amuzang and Termez stations and Uzbekistan does not have sufficient resources to guarantee its complete restoration.

- Uzbek-Tajik Dispute Disrupts NATO Supplies To Afghanistan

DUSHANBE -- The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan says it "may have to reroute some shipments" that are stranded in Central Asia after Uzbekistan suspended rail traffic to Tajikistan's southern Khatlon district.

Economic /Energy Front

- Afghanistan launches construction of railroad linking Mazari Sharif with Uzbek border

DUSHANBE. May 26. "Asia-Plus" -- The official opening ceremony for the construction of a new railroad linking Mazari Sharif with Uzbek border was held today in Afghan city of Hairaton, Afghan Ariana-TV reported today.

- Uzbekistan blocks cargoes provided for Afghanistan

At least 100 rail wagons loaded with energy cargoes which should be transported to Afghanistan through the territory of Tajikistan remain blocked in Uzbekistan, deputy head of the transportation service of the Tajik Railroad Andrey Tropin told the AP.

Social Front

- UNICEF office in Uzbekistan is under Pressure

Ferghana.Ru sources report the new UNICEF problem in Uzbekistan: the office space. Due to the reconstruction of several districts in Tashkent, the current UNICEF office is expected to be demolished while the new address is unknown yet.

Detailed Report

Azerbaijan

Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- Azerbaijani-Russian relations reached level of strategic cooperation

Transport links between Azerbaijan and Russia are developing rapidly. Russia is a big transport corridor, and it assumes great importance for Azerbaijan, head of public-political department of the Presidential Administration of Azerbaijan, Ali Hasanov, said in his speech at a forum 'Russia and Azerbaijan: modernity and prospects of cooperation' in Rostov.

"Under conditions of mutual cooperation with Russia, a project was implemented to enhance rationality of transport links for passenger and cargo transportation, as well as the project of South international transport corridor, which allow rail, road, marine and air transport to have an access to markets for goods and services," said Hasanov, Azerbaijan Railways JSC reported.

Hasanov said the Azerbaijani-Russian relations are based on principles of national leader Heydar Aliyev.

"Thanks to implementation of these principles, Azerbaijan has achieved significant results in terms of statehood. This is also due to the fact that Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev approaches Azerbaijani-Russian relations in terms of requirements of Heydar

Aliyev's political course. Good neighborhood and friendly relations with Russia, who enjoys more influence and prestige in the international arena, are the main foreign policy priorities of Azerbaijan. There is no problem between Azerbaijan and Russia, and our relations have reached the level of strategic cooperation," Hasanov said.

The event is also attended by Azerbaijani transport minister Ziya Mammadov and deputy chairman of Azerbaijan Railways JSC Gurban Nazirov.

- EU Hosts Eastern Neighbors Ahead Of Russia Summit

BRUSSELS -- Leading diplomats representing the 27 EU governments have met their counterparts from the six members of the bloc's Eastern Partnership -- Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan -- in the Polish Baltic resort of Sopot. The meeting, co-hosted by Poland and the current holder of the EU's rotating presidency, Spain, was the first senior EU-Eastern Partnership gathering in more than half a year.

It was seen as symbolically very important in a number of EU capitals keen to ensure that the rejuvenated EU-Russia relationship -- expected to progress with a long-term deal on visa-free travel at the Rostov-na-Donu summit next week -- does not overshadow partnerships with smaller neighbors. Afterward, Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos said today's meeting had confirmed that the European Union remains committed to the future of its six eastern neighbors.

Moratinos said that "politically speaking," the bloc had "demonstrated that the Eastern Partnership is one of the main priorities of the European Union."

Fighting For Attention

But there were signs of tension behind the scenes. In a last-minute decision, the EU's high representative for foreign affairs, Catherine Ashton, stayed away from the meeting, allowing EU Enlargement and Neighborhood Commissioner Stefan Fuele to deputize for her. At the final press conference, Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski pointedly thanked Fuele for attending and confirming that the Eastern Partnership remains "a priority for the European Commission."

Ashton's absence means that none of the EU representatives present in Sopot will attend the EU-Russia summit at Rostov-na-Donu on May 31. Among the EU's senior foreign-policy figures, Ashton alone will travel to Russia.

Catherine Ashton was a last-minute scratch.

The partnership was launched in May 2009 at the joint initiative of Poland and Sweden, but has struggled for profile within the bloc. The EU's southern member states see in it an unwanted competitor to EU southern outreach across the Mediterranean, while Germany and France appear worried it could complicate what they see as the bloc's strategically crucial relationship with Russia. A number of EU foreign ministers today sent lower-ranking officials as stand-ins. Among the neighbors, Armenia and Azerbaijan were represented by deputy foreign ministers.

Race For Visa-Free Travel

Today's meeting also failed to offer assurances to countries such as Ukraine and Moldova that Russia will not be allowed to upstage them in the visa-free-travel stakes -- a hugely symbolic issue for all eastern governments.

Officials say Russia is likely to secure an EU "road map" -- called "common steps" -- at the summit, effectively committing the bloc to lift visas at a yet-unspecified date.

Commissioner Fuele indicated today that Ukraine -- whose visa talks are the most advanced among the six Eastern Partnership members -- could expect a similar recognition two weeks after Russia.

"This is not an easy task because this is a technically demanding and politically very sensitive [one] at the same time," Fuele said.

"But I think we have already reached a moment where we're talking, as far [as] the Ukraine [is concerned], about a concrete action plan -- which I hope very much will be on the table at our accession council in mid-June."

Moldova, hamstrung by domestic political turmoil until late last year, should be next in line late this year. Georgia has signed a visa-facilitation accord with the EU -- meaning visas can be acquired more cheaply and quickly by its citizens. Armenia and Azerbaijan are yet to begin talks.

Belarus Excluded

All five have also either started negotiating new association agreements with the EU, or received the bloc's green light to do so. They also qualify for free-trade accords down the line. Belarus, owing to the refusal of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka to hold free and fair elections, is disqualified from EU concessions beyond financial and technical assistance.

Responding to a question from a Belarusian journalist, Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos today said human rights and democracy remained EU preconditions for closer ties with Minsk. "Human rights are the essence of the EU and we cannot talk about Europe without the defense [of] and commitment to human rights," he said.

Sikorski today also announced the formation of a "Friends of Eastern Partnership Group" that lists Russia among its members, alongside the United States, Canada, Japan, and Norway -- with the latter expected to contribute funds.

The EU has earmarked 1.9 billion euros (\$2.4 billion) for the six eastern partners between 2010 and 2013.

- U.S. Secretary of State Special Envoy Richard Morningstar to visit Azerbaijan

U.S. Secretary of State's Special Envoy for Eurasian Energy Richard L. Morningstar will visit Azerbaijan next week.

The US Embassy in Azerbaijan said that main purpose of Morningstar's visit to Azerbaijan is to attend the 17th Caspian Oil & Gas-2010 international exhibition and conference in Baku on June 1-4.

Morningstar will be accompanied by Jonathan Elkind, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of Energy. Morningstar will hold a number of bilateral meetings along with the oil and gas exhibition in Baku.

Economic /Energy Front

- SOCAR's Black Sea terminal transports Tengiz oil

At the Black Sea terminal of SOCAR in Kulevi, Georgia, transportation of crude oil has started.

This is the beginning of the next phase of development of the terminal. The oil received in the Kulevi terminal, has been produced in the Tengiz deposit of Kazakhstan. Currently, thanks to the railways of Georgia and Azerbaijan transportation of oil is being realized without difficulty. Last times goods turnover in the Kulevi terminal has increased by 3 times, which brings high profit not only to Azerbaijan, but also the entire region.

Total volume of the reservoir park of the terminal makes up 320 thousand, and delivery capacity of the mooring bridges- 8000-12000 cm/h.

- History, BP Oil Spill Haunt Caspian Sea

For years, the race to tap into the Caspian Sea's vast oil and gas resources has outweighed any desire to protect its delicate environment.

All five littoral states -- Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan -- have plans to further exploit the sea's estimated 44 billion barrels of oil reserves.

Such projects mean drilling new wells, highlighting risks for an incident that could cause a catastrophic oil spill in the landlocked sea -- the largest inland body of water on earth.

Mais Gulaliyev, co-chairman of Azerbaijan's Green Party, tells RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service he has called for measures to prevent such a threat from becoming reality.

"The accident in the Gulf of Mexico shows us that such a disaster could happen anywhere. The United States, with its super-modern technologies, is barely capable of stopping this disaster," Gulaliyev says. "You can imagine the scale of the damages to the environment from such incidents in countries like Azerbaijan."

At least 5,000 barrels of oil a day have been gushing into the Gulf of Mexico since an April 20 explosion destroyed a drilling rig leased and operated by BP, threatening unique wildlife refuges, beaches, and fishing grounds along the southern U.S. coast.

History Of Environmental Damage

Oil burns in a controlled fire in the Gulf of Mexico off the coast of Louisiana.

The dangers of the Caspian Sea's oil fields gained international attention during the last days of the Soviet Union, when a well at Kazakhstan's huge Tengiz oil field blew out in 1985. The well burned for more than a year before it was eventually put out.

Makhamet Khakimov tells RFE/RL's Kazakh Service that little has been done since the incident in which 3 million tons of oil and tens of billions of cubic meters of different kinds of gases were burned, harming the population and wildlife in the Atyrau region.

Dozens of platforms are currently operating across the Caspian Sea, mainly in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, which have been the focus of Western investment.

Oil exploration and production work have also developed in the remaining three littoral states. LUKoil last month kicked off commercial oil production in the Russian sector of the sea, launching the Yury Korchagin platform. Iran earlier this year started drilling its first exploratory well in the southern Caspian Sea -- the deepest part of the sea -- to search for oil. Meanwhile, Turkmenistan is continuing exploration of Caspian shelf deposits along with foreign partners.

Environmentalists say investments in energy projects have often been made to the detriment of local communities.

On May 13, Kazakh Deputy Minister for Environmental Protection Eldana Sadvakasova acknowledged that with the oil price decreasing, oil-extracting companies had "stopped performance of some measures or postponed them for the later periods."

In February, a Kazakh court fined the onshore Karachaganak natural-gas venture, which includes BG, Eni, Chevron, and LUKoil, for environmental violations including excessive waste dumping. The village of Berezovka, which is situated less than 5 kilometers from the field and is exposed to the field's toxic emissions, has been fighting for justice for years.

Environmentalists say energy development is also threatening already endangered species of fish such as the Beluga, Stellate, and Russian sturgeon, the kilka (Caspian sprat), as

well as the Caspian seal. In Turkmenistan, energy development is causing particular risk to the Krasovodsk Nature Reserve, home to hundreds of thousands of birds and more than 40 mammal species.

Greater Supervision, Transparency Needed

Energy firms operating in the region, however, argue that they are doing their utmost to ensure the safety of their infrastructure.

"I assure you that we have done and will continue to do everything possible to ensure the full technical security of all our operations in the Caspian," says Tamam Bayatli, public relations manager for BP Azerbaijan, which is involved in a number of exploration and production projects in the country.

"It has been and will remain our No. 1 priority to ensure technical safety and security of the people as well as to protect the environment."

Environmentalists and civil-society activists say the authorities should better supervise the energy companies' work and call for the terms of production-sharing agreements between energy companies and host governments in the Caspian region to be made public.

Kate Watters, executive director of Crude Accountability, a Virginia-based nongovernmental organization that focuses on environmental justice, says the public should be informed about the investments being made and about the environmental and social protection needed to be put in place to safeguard the environment and the health of the local inhabitants.

"The oil companies need to be held to the highest standards, and those standards maybe need to be reexamined," Watters says. "We have a case [in the Gulf of Mexico] where governments are relying on the expertise of private corporations and putting at risk entire populations and ecosystems based on promises that need to be demonstrably fulfilled before a project starts."

Improving Regulation, Or Just Talk?

At a conference in Astrakhan on April 28, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said all work related to the development of fields in the Russian sector of the Caspian is being conducted "in strict compliance with international environmental standards," applying zero discharge technology. This means that waste resultant of production activities is not discharged into the sea, but is collected before being rendered harmless and reprocessed. Putin also voiced hope that companies from other countries operating in the region will join in this initiative.

On the regional level, the five countries around the Caspian Sea have ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea, or Tehran Convention, and thus established a framework to jointly address and solve environmental problems in and around the sea.

But Watters is skeptical, saying the absence of public participation in the convention's preparation resulted in a relatively meaningless document.

As BP and the U.S. authorities battle to contain the spill in the Gulf of Mexico and issues of responsibility are being investigated, the U.S. administration has said it will review environmental procedures for offshore drilling.

And in Russia, the State Duma, or lower house of parliament, is considering the need for drafting a law on "environmental control and protection of seas from oil spills."

The head of the Duma's Committee for Natural Resources, Nature Management, and Environment, Yevgeny Tugolukov, announced the move on May 5 in comments on what conclusions Russia should make in the wake of the environmental disaster in the Gulf of Mexico.

And at a cabinet meeting on May 4, Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Masimov instructed the ministries for oil and gas and for environmental protection to inspect the country's oil-drilling platforms.

But Crude Accountability's Watters doubts the Kazakh measure will be effective. She notes that while BP "has this reputation all over the world for having the best technology, for being green, for being sustainable," the company is responsible for the spill in the Gulf of Mexico "and had absolutely no plan in place if something like this were to happen. So we have no guarantees that any Western company working in the Caspian would act any differently."

So while Watters believes the Kazakh government is acting correctly, "my question would be: 'Do they have the capacity to take care of an accident, should one happen?' And I think the answer is likely 'no.'"

Social Front

- Amnesty International Says Rights Abuses Continue To Plague World

Watchdog Amnesty International has warned that human rights abuses continued to plague the world in 2009, with torture or ill treatment, unfair trials and imprisonment, and restrictions on free speech among the most common violations.

The conclusions come in the group's annual "State Of The World's Human Rights" report, which documented abuses in 159 countries.

Long criticized for its human rights record, Russia showed few signs of improvement in 2009 despite pledges from the very top, according to Andrea Huber, Amnesty International's deputy program director for Europe and Central Asia.

"We heard a couple of human rights pledges by President [Dmitry] Medvedev, but unfortunately, those haven't arrived on the ground," Huber said. "One major concern is of course the volatile situation in the North Caucasus. The impunity and the lack of rule of law is really pervasive and is a huge concern. We've seen disappearances, killings, arbitrary detention -- and civilians are pretty much held hostage between violence by both armed groups as well as law enforcement officials."

The report's authors said violations in Russia continued to extend beyond the North Caucasus as well, with human rights defenders, lawyers, and journalists threatened or attacked, racist reprisals on the upswing, and widespread impunity for offenders.

Also marring Russia's record last year, the report said, was unfair detention and trials, as well as trumped-up charges against critics of the government.

Asian And Caucasus Problems

Similar obstacles to justice were also in evidence in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

"For example, in Azerbaijan, a journalist, Eynulla Fatullayev, had been charged with three different sets of charges, and when the European Court for Human Rights confirmed that those were trumped-up charges and he had to be released, right in time a fourth set of charges had been brought forward against him," Huber said. "So we are in a situation where in the whole region, governments do not protect human rights defenders but rather, they clamp down on dissent."

While the ill treatment and prison death of Russian lawyer Sergei Magnitsky made headlines, less documented cases of prisoner abuse were also all too common last year in Russia and Central Asia, said Huber, who cites Kazakhstan as a top offender.

"One focus that we had on Kazakhstan in the past is torture and ill treatment. And unfortunately, those practices are pervasive, especially in the very beginning of detention, in the period of the first days, where it might not even be formally recognized that the person has been detained," Huber said. "Unfortunately, there is also basically no way to hold anybody accountable, because your detention might not even be recorded in an official document." The countries of the former Soviet Union were far from alone in their rights abuses in 2009. Iran's brutal crackdown on demonstrators in the wake of last June's disputed presidential election drew condemnation. The report said freedom of expression was being suppressed to an unprecedented level, with mobile-phone networks and Internet communications blocked. In Pakistan, women continued to be the victims of "honor killings," and discrimination against Roma remained pervasive in Serbia.

In Iraq, the report noted that while violence was broadly down, government forces and armed political groups continued to commit gross human rights abuses. Amnesty International faulted the United States for continuing to hold detainees at the Bagram air base in Afghanistan "in violation of international standards."

The Bright Side

But the report noted some human rights progress in 2009. It praised the spread to new countries of international jurisdiction, the ability to prosecute suspects abroad under international law, even when they receive impunity for crimes at home.

It also commended the International Criminal Court for issuing an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir -- who's being sworn in today for another term -- on crimes against humanity. It was the first time a sitting head of state faced the charges.

Amnesty International called on Russia, China, and the United States to join the ICC.

Kazakastan

Political Front

- Kazakh President's Nephew Named Ruling Party Secretary

ASTANA -- Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev's nephew has been named the secretary of the country's main political party, Nur-Otan (Shining Fatherland), RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Nur-Otan First Deputy Chairman Nurlan Nigmatullin announced that Kayrat Satybaldy would be the party's new secretary. He said Satybaldy would coordinate party operations on the military, the "patriotic upbringing of Kazakh youth," and cooperation with youth and veterans organizations.

Nur-Otan is officially led by Nazarbaev. All 77 seats in Kazakhstan's lower chamber of parliament, the Majilis, are held by Nur-Otan members.

Satybaldy is a son of Nazarbaev's younger brother. In the mid-1990s he officially changed his surname from Nazarbaev to Satybaldy.

In the late 1990s, Satybaldy was named the deputy governor of Astana. He was later appointed to leading positions in the KNB security service and the oil company Kazakhoil.

Satybaldy was promoted to the rank of major general at the age of 35. He later left the military and worked in the state transport company, Kazakhstan Temir Joly.

Geo Strategic Front

Economic /Energy Front

- Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan customs talks fail

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia, May 21 (Reuters) - Russia and neighbouring Belarus and Kazakhstan have failed to reach agreement on some aspects of their joint customs union, their leaders said on Friday.

"We couldn't agree on all the issues," Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said in a statement issued to reporters in Russia's second city of St. Petersburg, where they met to discuss the union.

"There are sensitive questions for the economies of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan... For the next two weeks we will continue to agree our positions at an expert level," Putin said.

The ex-Soviet nations agreed earlier this year to establish the union to boost trade and investment. From July 1, the trio was meant to adopt a common external tariff, finalise rules and start redistributing the duties they collect.

Putin said duties within the auto and aviation industries held great importance for Russia, and were stumbling blocks in the talks. "If we give up our position that we took in previous years then we will inflict a lot of damage on our car industry," Putin said in the statement. Putin's Belarussian counterpart, Sergei Sidorsky, said in a statement oil duties were holding the union back.

A Russian delegation source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told reporters there was a chance finalising the union could be delayed beyond July 1.

Sidorsky said that duties on oil and oil products were the issues they could not agree on -- nodding at January's protracted row between Moscow and Minsk over a new supply deal.

"We could not close the gap in their positions," he said. Russia has refused to abolish export duties on oil it sells to Belarus, something analysts say Minsk had expected and seen as the key reason to join the pact. Instead, Moscow has offered Belarus only limited duty-free supplies. At the beginning of the year Russia and Belarus were involved in a month-long oil supply row that had threatened to disrupt oil flows to European Union members Germany and Poland.

- World Bank Approves \$1Billion Loan To Kazakhstan

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev -- seen with the Belarus and then-Kyrgyz presidents -- has apparently won lots of World Bank confidence. The World Bank has approved \$1 billion in budget support for Kazakhstan to help the government implement its economic program.

Motoo Konishi, the World Bank's regional director for Central Asia, said approval of the funds, called a "Development Policy Loan," reflects confidence by the World Bank in the "direction of economic policies and reforms" of the Kazakh government. The World Bank said in a statement that the loan will help support the government's economic program by focusing on fiscal policy, management of the budget, and banking regulation.

"Kazakhstan is borrowing \$1 billion from the World Bank to finance the 2010 republican budget deficit, support growth, and maintain higher social commitments stipulated in the budget," Bolat Zhamishev, Kazakhstan's minister of finance, was quoted in the statement as saying. Kazakhstan has forecast economic growth this year of 1.5-2 percent. The World Bank says it has provided 35 loans to Kazakhstan worth more than \$5.2 billion since 1992.

Social Front

- **Kazakh Supreme Court Upholds Verdict Against Journalist**

The Kazakh Supreme Court has ruled against an appeal by a journalist convicted of revealing state secrets, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Ramazan Esergepov, who was chief editor and owner of the independent weekly newspaper "Alma-Ata Info," was found guilty after publishing an article in November 2008 that he said revealed links between a businessman and the National Security Committee (KNB). He was sentenced to three years in prison in August 2009.

Musatay Bektasov, the lawyer of businessman Sultan Makhmadov who was sentenced to seven years in jail in the same case, told RFE/RL that he will appeal to the Prosecutor-General's Office in order to have the entire case reviewed.

In January, a prison appeals commission in the southern town of Taraz, where Esergepov is serving his sentence, rejected Esergepov's request for early parole. Under Kazakh law, Esergepov has the right to be paroled after serving one-third of his prison term.

His supporters and human rights organizations say the case against him is politically motivated. His newspaper has closed down since his arrest.

- **Kazakhs Probe Mass Death Of Rare Saiga Antelope**

ASTANA -- Kazakh authorities have launched an investigation into the mass death of the endangered saiga antelope in the west of the country, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

The Prosecutor-General's Office spokesperson Nurdaulet Suindikov made the announcement in Astana on May 27.

Suindikov repeated earlier official remarks that an outbreak of pasteurellosis, an infection of the lungs, had killed about 12,000 antelopes in West Kazakhstan Oblast's Zhanybek district this month.

On May 25, Yerlan Nysanbaev, chairman of the regional Forestry and Hunting Department, told journalists that the number of the animals found dead was 2,000, and that all of them appeared to have been poisoned.

The saiga antelope was nearly extinct in the 1920s but made a comeback in the 1950s thanks to conservation efforts. But the saiga antelopes' horns are increasingly used in Chinese traditional medicine and the animals are often the victims of poaching.

The saiga antelope is classified as critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The total saiga population is estimated at about 50,000. They live mainly in the republic of Kalmykia in southern Russia, three areas of Kazakhstan, and two remote areas of Mongolia.

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- **Bishkek Plans To Revoke Former President Akaev's Immunity**

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyzstan's interim government says it plans to deprive the first president of independent Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akaev, of immunity from prosecution, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Interim government deputy leader Azimbek Beknazarov told journalists today that the government is discussing a special decree on stripping Akaev, head of state from 1990-2005, of immunity. Akaev was ousted during the so-called Tulip Revolution in March 2005. He and his family have lived in Moscow since then.

In April, the interim government deprived Akaev's successor as president, Kurmanbek Bakiev, of immunity. Bakiev was toppled by antigovernment protests on April 7 and had

to resign and leave the country. He is currently residing in Belarus at the invitation of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Bakiev and some of his relatives and former associates are wanted in Kyrgyzstan for alleged abuse of power, corruption, financial mismanagement, and ordering security forces to open fire on the demonstrators on April 7. Over 80 people were killed and several hundred injured in those protests.

- **Kyrgyz Interim Official Will Not Run For President**

BISHKEK -- The first deputy chairman of Kyrgyzstan's interim government says he does not plan to run for president or compete in the parliamentary elections later this year, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Almazbek Atambaev, the chairman of the Social Democratic Party who ran for president in 2009, told journalists in Bishkek on May 25 that his major duty is to assist the interim government's leader, Roza Otunbaeva, who is also Kyrgyz president during the country's transition period. Kyrgyzstan's current leadership came to power on April 7 after mass antigovernment protests toppled President Kurmanbek Bakiev. The interim government plans to hold a referendum on the country's new proposed constitution and whether Otunbaeva should continue to lead the country. Parliamentary elections are scheduled for October 10. A new president is expected to be elected by the end of 2011.

- **Kyrgyz Protesters Demand Greater Transparency From Interim Government**

BISHKEK -- About 100 protesters picketed the Kyrgyz parliament building in Bishkek today, demanding a detailed report on the interim government's activities for the last 45 days, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. The protesters also demanded more transparency in the interim government's financial operations. The rally was sparked by a recorded telephone conversation allegedly between leading members of the interim government that appeared on the Internet and in other media over the weekend. The conversation included voices that strongly resembled interim government members Almazbek Atambaev, Temir Sariyev, and Azimbek Beknazarov discussing large sums of money allegedly being used in suspicious-sounding operations.

Prosecutor-General Baitemir Ibraev told journalists today that the recorded conversation had been intentionally edited in a way to distort the meaning. Communist Party leader Iskhak Masaliev was arrested last week after a telephone conversation was broadcast by media outlets in which he and other politicians discussed organizing mass protests in southern Kyrgyzstan. The interim government, which is made up of former opposition leaders, came to power after President Kurmanbek Bakiev fled the capital during clashes between antigovernment protesters and security forces on April 7 that killed 86 people and left hundreds of others injured. The interim government will hold a referendum on a new constitution on June 27 and parliamentary elections on October 10.

- **Kyrgyzstan Asks Interpol To Help Catch Bakiev**

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyzstan's interim government has submitted a formal request to Interpol to assist in locating and arresting ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Interim Government Deputy Chairman Azimbek Beknazarov told journalists in Bishkek on May 27 that the exact whereabouts of Bakiev and his relatives is not clear.

Bakiev was ousted on April 7 after a bloody uprising that left over 80 people dead and hundreds injured. He and his family members left the country for Belarus at President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's invitation on April 15. The interim government that came to power in the wake of the antigovernment protests officially charged Bakiev, his brother

Janysh, who was commander in-chief of the presidential security forces, and his eldest son Marat with "mass murder." Bakiev's second son, Maksim, is wanted in Kyrgyzstan for alleged financial crimes. According to Kyrgyz investigators, Maksim Bakiev may have embezzled over \$70 million during his father's five-year tenure as president.

Geo Strategic Front

- Turkish Embassy Official: Former Kyrgyz President Not In Turkey

BISHKEK -- Some 50 members of the Meken Sheyitteri (Martyrs of the Land) movement have picketed the Turkish Embassy in Bishkek to demand clarification of media reports that ousted Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev is in Turkey, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Some news agencies in Russia and Belarus reported on May 25 that Bakiev had left Belarus for a vacation in Turkey.

An embassy official came out of the building to assure the protesters that Bakiev was not in Turkey. Meken Sheyitteri was established by relatives of the victims of last month's clashes between security forces and antigovernment protesters that resulted in Bakiev's ouster and brought an interim government to power. Over 80 people died and hundreds were injured during the April 7 protests. Bakiev and some of his relatives and former associates are wanted in Kyrgyzstan for alleged abuse of power, corruption, financial mismanagement, and ordering security forces to open fire on the demonstrators.

Economic /Energy Front

- Tajiks In Bishkek Picket Uzbek Embassy, Demand Resumption Of Rail Traffic

BISHKEK -- About 50 Tajik students and members of Kyrgyzstan's Tajik Association picketed the Uzbek Embassy in Bishkek today to demand the full resumption of rail traffic between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

According to the protesters, hundreds of tons of humanitarian aid intended for the victims of recent landslides and floods in Tajikistan are held up at the Uzbek-Tajik border as the Uzbek authorities refuse to allow cross-border rail traffic. The protesters handed a petition to an Uzbek Embassy official. Uzbekistan has described the rail delays as technical, but Dushanbe has accused Tashkent of deliberately blocking the shipments.

Social Front

- Kyrgyzstan's Protesters For Hire

It didn't take long for protests against the new government in Kyrgyzstan to start, nor should it really come as a surprise: it happened to the last government shortly after it came to power in 2005 as well.

My big question relates to an often overlooked aspect of the protests in 2005 and many of the protests that have followed in Kyrgyzstan since. Just how many of the participants in the protests against the interim government that erupted in southern Kyrgyzstan from May 12 to 14 were paid to be there? There were numerous allegations that organized criminal groups played a role in the 2005 revolution by paying people to come out and protest -- in some cases for, and in other cases against the government. There were also allegations that heroes of the Tulip Revolution turned to criminal groups to fund the protests that eventually toppled the last ousted president, Askar Akaev. These accusations were supported by the fact that several deputies in parliament were killed in the months after the revolution in what appeared to be disputes between criminal groups. After being chased out of Bishkek earlier in April, the latest president-turned-exile, Kurmanbek Bakiev, fled to his home territory in the south to try to regroup and reclaim his

presidency. That attempt included the ill-fated journey to Osh on April 15 to gather support in Kyrgyzstan's second-largest city.

Word around Jalal-Abad on April 14 and 15 was that the Bakiev team was offering 7,000 Kyrgyz soms (\$153) per carload of people who would come to Osh. Officials in the interim government said protesters in the south in mid-May were funded by \$1.5 million sent to the country to pay off protesters. Some, and maybe most, of the people protesting in Kyrgyzstan do so out of personal convictions or loyalty to a political figure. But not all it seems. Stories continue to circulate that some are protesters for hire, and we'd love to find out who their sugar daddy is.

Tajikistan

Political Front

- Notorious Former Tajik Governor Dies In Prison

DUSHANBE -- A former powerful governor from Tajikistan's northern Sughd Province has died in a Dushanbe prison, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Abduljalil Homidov, 65, was an influential businessman in his region. He died on May 25. In 1992, his son married the daughter of then-Prime Minister Abdumalik Abdullajanov. Homidov was then elected provincial governor. Both men were fired from their respective posts in 1993. But in 1994, President Imomali Rahmon invited Homidov to join his team and reinstated him as Sughd governor, though he dismissed him a year later. At that point Homidov aligned with renegade Colonel Mahmud Khudoiberdiev, who launched several unsuccessful bids from his base in Uzbekistan to seize power in Tajikistan.

Homidov was apprehended in 2001 when he returned secretly to Sughd to attend his sister's funeral. He was charged with participating in Khudoiberdiev's failed rebellions and with an assassination attempt on then-Sughd Governor Qosim Qosimov. Tajik historian Nurali Davlatov told RFE/RL that Homidov made a serious mistake when he sided with Khudoiberdiev, who had the covert support of the Uzbek government. Davlatov said Homidov even supported the idea of incorporating northern Tajikistan into Uzbekistan.

- Mizrob Kabirov appointed head of Majlisi milli's office

DUSHANBE. May 28. "Asia-Plus" -- New staff rotations approved today, May 28, at a regular session of the government. According to the government's decree, former head of the Department of Finance of the President's Office Dilmurod Davlatov was appointed director of the State Agency for Material Procurement, Works and Services under the government of Tajikistan replacing Mahmudzoiir Sohibov, President's press service reported. Under another government's decree first deputy head of the Central Department for Protection of State Secrets under the government of Tajikistan Mizrob Kabirov was appointed head of the Majlisi Milli's office replacing Muzaffar Ashurov. Ashurov, on his turn, was appointed head of the Department of Constitutional Guarantees of the President's Office.

- Emomali Rahmon holds regular session of the government

DUSHANBE. May 28. "Asia-Plus" -- Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon is holding a regular session of the government.

According to the President's press service, the government will discuss the results of development of the republic for the last month and consider future development plans. In addition, Tajik lawmakers will discuss elimination of consequences of natural disasters which hit Tajikistan in early May.

Geo Strategic Front

- Emomali Rahmon meets with ex-president of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma
DUSHANBE. May 27. "Asia-Plus" -- Yesterday, May 26, President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon met with former President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma who arrived in Dushanbe with private visit. The sides have discussed Tajik-Ukrainian relations and talked about the perspectives, President's press service reported. "Tajik leader highly evaluated the role of Leonid Kuchma in the process of establishment and development of many-sided relations between our country and Ukraine," the source has said. The sides have also stressed that Tajikistan and Ukraine have significant potential for the development of bilateral relations in all directions and expressed their confidence that they will be developed for the welfare of the two nations, the source reported.

- Uzbek-Tajik Dispute Disrupts NATO Supplies To Afghanistan
DUSHANBE -- The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan says it "may have to reroute some shipments" that are stranded in Central Asia after Uzbekistan suspended rail traffic to Tajikistan's southern Khatlon district. ISAF spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Goetz Hasske told Reuters that "some carriages carrying NATO supplies were being held up," citing "ongoing political tensions in the area." NATO ships nonlethal military cargo, such as fuel and food, to support its military operations against the Taliban through Central Asia on its way to Afghanistan. The deputy head of Tajikistan's state railway company, Usmon Kalandarov, says 2,500 carriages bound for Tajikistan were being held on Uzbek territory as of May 24. He said more than 300 of those carriages contained NATO cargo bound for Afghanistan. Tajikistan has accused Uzbekistan of deliberately blocking shipments, but Tashkent said the delays have been "technical." Relations between the two neighbors deteriorated over Tajik plans to complete the construction of a hydroelectric power plant in Roghun. Tashkent objected to that project, claiming it would exacerbate existing water shortages in the region.

Economic /Energy Front

- Tajiks In Bishkek Picket Uzbek Embassy, Demand Resumption Of Rail Traffic
BISHKEK -- About 50 Tajik students and members of Kyrgyzstan's Tajik Association picketed the Uzbek Embassy in Bishkek today to demand the full resumption of rail traffic between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. According to the protesters, hundreds of tons of humanitarian aid intended for the victims of recent landslides and floods in Tajikistan are held up at the Uzbek-Tajik border as the Uzbek authorities refuse to allow cross-border rail traffic. The protesters handed a petition to an Uzbek Embassy official. Uzbekistan has described the rail delays as technical, but Dushanbe has accused Tashkent of deliberately blocking the shipments.

- Fuel prices rapidly rise in Dushanbe
In the past 24 hours gasoline prices in Tajikistan's capital raised by almost 15%. Only yesterday, May 20, in the first half of the day one liter of AI-95 gasoline was sold at a price of 3 Somoni 40 dirams (\$0,7) and this morning it grew up to 4 Somoni (\$0,9). Meanwhile, gasoline prices are keep growing and it is not clear when they will stop. Only yesterday the Tajik Anti-Monopoly Service warned that due to the increased export duty for light oil products (gasoline, diesel fuel and kerosene) exported from Russia wholesale fuel suppliers can artificially create fuel deficit at Tajik oil market or

unreasonably raise fuel prices. Tajik Anti-Monopoly Service has set up special working groups to prevent such situation in cities and regions of the country.

Head of the Department of Information, Recordation and International Relations Elena Rahimova told the AP that wholesale suppliers and businessmen dealing with fuel supplies in Tajikistan have enough reserves and should not use the existing situation for unreasonable rise of prices and incomes. "In other words, the existing reserves should be sold at prices which were observed before May 1 this year," she said.

Oil suppliers refrain from any comments on the given situation. "Comments on the rise in gasoline prices will be presented on Monday May 24," Gazprom Neft – Tajikistan company, which supplies 33% of oil products to Tajikistan market, told the AP.

Meanwhile, Tajik expert Shahobiddin Zieyev believes that oil suppliers usually use such situations to raise prices. "Businessmen think only how to speculate such situations," he said. "They never care that growth in fuel prices automatically causes the growth in prices for all other products."

He added that related governmental structures, namely the state anti-monopoly service, should urgently interfere into this situation and turn the prices to their previous level.

Zieyev added that other countries, even Russia, conduct emergency governmental meetings attracting related structures in case of such situations.

Social Front

- Tajik Islamic Party Official Accused Of Human Trafficking

KULOB, Tajikistan -- A regional leader of Tajikistan's Islamic Renaissance Party has been charged with human trafficking, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Abdulfattoh Abdukholiqov is the head of the Islamic Renaissance Party in the Vose district of Tajikistan's southern Khatlon Province. Davlat Najmiddinov, who heads the anti-organized-crime department in the province's Kulob district, told RFE/RL that Abdukholiqov and his accomplice paid \$500 to the mother of a 16-year-old girl whom they planned to sell to someone in Russia. Najmiddinov said the girl was found at Abdukholiqov's house last month with travel documents and an air ticket from Dushanbe to the Russian city of Yekaterinburg.

But Abdukholiqov told RFE/RL that the girl was his relative and that he was trying to help her by arranging her marriage in Russia. Abdukholiqov added that the \$500 was the bride price, which should be paid to any Muslim girl by her

future husband. Najmiddinov rejected Abdukholiqov's explanation. He said that the girl's sister was sold to a Tajik businessman in Kazakhstan and lived there as his second wife, but the authorities sent her back to Tajikistan.

The girls' mother, Toji Valieva, told RFE/RL that her husband has spent 28 years in prison and that it was not easy to feed and raise seven children on her own.

She said she thought marrying her daughters at a young age was preferable to risking an uncertain future for them. The Islamic Renaissance Party has not yet commented on the allegations against Abdukholiqov.

- World Bank allocates additional \$2mln for Tajikistan's education modernization project

DUSHANBE. May 26. "Asia-Plus" -- The Board of Directors of the World Bank has approved a \$2mln grant for the project aimed at modernization of Tajikistan's education system. According to WB, the goal of additional funding is to develop the system of

evaluation of pupils progress and finally improve the quality of pedagogic techniques used for evaluation of the quality of education. The funds will be allocated for the construction and purchase of equipment for recently established National Testing Center (NTC). The overall goal of NTC lies in supervision and provision of reliable form of education, including admission of students to universities, passing exams and evaluation of students' knowledge level. The grant will be allocated to Tajik Education Ministry within three years. The funds will be provided by the World Bank's International Development Association.

Turkmenistan

Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- Turkmen border guards get first drones

The border troops of Turkmenistan received new aircrafts designed to conduct air monitoring around the clock in all weather conditions. As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat, the performance of new aircrafts was demonstrated yesterday to President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov at Akdepe military airfield near the Turkmen capital.

There were demonstrated capacities of the aircraft fitted with special equipment and the drone. The aircrafts will significantly strengthen control over protection of the state border, prevent illegal crossing of the state border and smuggling of drugs.

Borders of Turkmenistan are borders of peace and friendship, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said after the demonstration. We will continue to take all necessary measures to ensure that our borders remain impregnable when it comes to assaults on the peaceful fabric of life of Turkmenistan, and any threats to national security."

- Turkmenistan and India sign intergovernmental agreements

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov held talks with Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh, as well as President of India Pratibha Devisingh Patil in New Delhi.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports quoting the press service of the head of state, special attention was paid to issues relating to energy security and reliability of energy supplies to world markets. The Indian side expressed interest in the speedy implementation of TAPI project providing for construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, as well as participation of Indian experts in the exploration, development and production of hydrocarbons in Turkmenistan.

Speaking about bilateral relations, the sides noted the need to further enhance the cooperation. The sides agreed that the Intergovernmental Turkmen-Indian commission for trade, economic, scientific and technological cooperation can become the most effective mechanism.

Following the talks, bilateral documents were signed at an official ceremony. They include intergovernmental agreements on trade and economic cooperation, cooperation in science and technology, exemption from visa for holders of diplomatic passports. There was also signed the program of educational exchange and the program on cooperation in the field of science, education, culture, arts, tourism, sports and mass media for 2010-2012.

On the same day, the sides also signed a Memorandum of Understanding between the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Turkmenistan and the Confederation of Indian Industry.

Today, on the final day of state visit to the Republic of India, the President of Turkmenistan will visit the city of Agra, where he will view with famous Taj Mahal.

- President of Turkmenistan to visit India on May 24-26

The governmental delegation of Turkmenistan led by President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov will visit the Republic of India on May 24-26. This was reported by the Vice-Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan Rashid Meredov at a regular government meeting. According to him, following the talks of the Turkmen leader with the top leadership of India, the sides are expected to sign a package of bilateral documents "designed to become a reliable platform for expansion and strengthening of the traditional long-term cooperation on a number of priority areas."

Stressing the importance of the forthcoming Turkmen-Indian talks at the highest level, the President noted that "the policy of comprehensive cooperation with India, as one of the fastest growing countries in the world, is a priority aspect of Turkmenistan's foreign policy aimed at promoting broad cooperation with all interested partner-countries." The Turkmen leader emphasized the importance of further enhancing bilateral relations in political, economic and humanitarian spheres, as well as early implementation of new and important joint projects.

Economic /Energy Front

- Ashgabat hosted Turkmen-Kazakh business forum

On May 26, Ashgabat hosted the Turkmen-Kazakh business forum organized by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Turkmenistan and the National Agency for Export and Investment "Kaznex Invest" (Kazakhstan).

The meeting at the capital's President Hotel was attended by a delegation from Kazakhstan composed of representatives of the State Corporation for insurance of export credits and investments, as well as managers and senior officials of more than 30 companies such as Grain Union of Kazakhstan, Crown Exports, Say-Nar, Kazneftegazmash, Byelkamit, Buran Boiler, StalTsink and others. Turkmenistan was represented by several ministries and departments, the State Commodity and Raw Materials Exchange and the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs.

During the meeting, the sides exchanged views on the prospects of further development of mutually beneficial cooperation, including in agriculture - in the field of grain, seed, flour and bread, the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) said.

Foreign trade turnover between the two countries amounted to more than \$ 170 million in 2009. Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan are building up interaction in the energy sector, transport and communications, engineering, construction materials and mineral fertilizers.

- Turkmens set to start work on new gas pipeline

(AP) - Energy-rich Turkmenistan will start later this month building a pipeline linking its natural gas-rich fields in the east to the Caspian Sea coast in an effort to increase its export potential, a state newspaper said Monday.

Turkmens set to start work on new gas pipeline

Turkmenistan set to start building new gas pipeline needed to boost exports to Russia, Europe.

Energy-rich Turkmenistan will start later this month building a pipeline linking its natural gas-rich fields in the east to the Caspian Sea coast in an effort to increase its export potential, a state newspaper said Monday.

Rebuffing numerous offers by Russian companies to construct the 1,000-kilometer route, President Gurbanguli Berdymukhamedov said work on the pipeline will be carried out by Turkmen state companies, Neutral Turkmenistan reported. Russia and Europe are both vying for a share in Turkmenistan's gas riches, but transporting those resources to either market will require a new route traversing the Central Asian nation to reach the starting points of proposed export pipelines from the Caspian coast. Neutral Turkmenistan said building the East-West pipeline is "a practical step in the implementation of large-scale plans for Turkmenistan to diversify its energy export routes to world markets."

The newspaper said the pipeline will have an annual capacity of 30 billion cubic meters. Deliveries through the route are expected to start in June 2015. A major contributor to the East-West pipeline will be the vast Southern Yolotan-Osman field, located near Afghanistan's western border, the newspaper said. Independent auditors Gaffney, Cline and Associates said earlier this year that the field may hold up to 16 trillion cubic meters of gas, making it one of the largest in the world. Output at the field could reach 30 billion cubic meters of gas annually within three to five years, the auditors said. The United States and European Union are seeking to channel Central Asian gas into the planned Nabucco pipeline, which would run from the Caspian Sea to Europe, circumventing Russia. Ensuring Nabucco's viability would likely require Turkmen gas carried through a subsea pipeline across the Caspian Sea. But delimitation of the Caspian Sea remains a point of contention between the five nations that surround it and could thwart prospects for Nabucco. Meanwhile, Moscow has pinned its hope of cornering the Turkmen gas market on the creation of a new pipeline from Turkmenistan's Caspian coast, running through Kazakhstan and linking up with Russian state company Gazprom's grid. The presidents of Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan signed off on an agreement to build the pipeline in May 2007, but no real progress has been made on the project so far.

Energy ties between Russia and Turkmenistan were damaged in April 2009, when a pipeline explosion blamed on Moscow by Turkmen authorities interrupted supplies. After an almost eight-month standoff, Turkmenistan began to supply 30 billion cubic meters of gas annually — a substantial reduction from the 50 billion cubic meters that Russia was buying before the blast.

China also made a dramatic entry into the competition for Central Asian gas last year, when a new pipeline joining Turkmenistan and China began operating in December. Turkmen gas deliveries to China through the pipeline are expected to increase annually until reaching 40 billion cubic meters in 2015.

- Turkmenistan Opts To Build Key Gas Pipeline On Its Own

Turkmenistan now plans to build the East-West natural-gas pipeline without outside help, according to information posted on the government's website and published in state newspapers today. The East-West pipeline should stretch some 1,000 kilometers, bringing some 30 billion cubic meters of gas from fields in the eastern part of the country to areas along Turkmenistan's Caspian Sea coast per year. One major contributor to the

pipeline is expected to be the South Yolotan-Osman field, which was assessed by the British advisory company Gaffney, Cline, and Associates, as containing reserves of some 14 trillion cubic meters, making it one of the biggest in the world. When the idea for the pipeline first came up, it was planned to link it to the Pri-Caspian pipeline that Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Russia agreed to build, exporting Central Asian gas via Russia to Europe. Russian companies were in talks with Turkmenistan about building the pipeline but relations between Turkmenistan and Russia worsened quickly after a mysterious explosion along a different gas pipeline in April 2009 cut off supplies of Turkmen gas to Russia. The two countries were in talks about lowering the price of Turkmen gas at that time. Turkmenistan's president put state companies in charge of completing the pipeline by 2015, which could be good news for the European Union-backed Nabucco gas pipeline that should be completed about the same time and counts on including Turkmen gas.

- Turkmenistan and India to discuss construction of gas pipeline through Afghanistan and Pakistan

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov has arrived in India on the first state visit. He is expected to discuss cooperation in the oil and gas industry and other spheres with the Indian side. During the visit, the sides will also sign agreements in various spheres of bilateral cooperation. This was reported by the director of the Eurasian Department of the Indian Foreign Ministry, Ajay Bisariya. The program of the three-day visit of the President of Turkmenistan includes meetings with President of India Pratibha Patil, Vice-President Hamid Ansari, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. "They will discuss a wide range of issues of Indo-Turkmen cooperation and current international issues," the representative of the Indian Foreign Ministry said.

Ajay Bisariya stressed that one of the important topics of negotiations in the framework of this visit will be cooperation between New Delhi and Ashgabat in the oil and gas sector. In this regard, he recalled the gas pipeline project "Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India." According to preliminary data, the length of the pipeline could amount to almost 1,7 thousand km. It will allow for exports of 100 million cubic meters of gas per day from the Turkmen deposit Dowletabat, 60 percent of which will be exported to India. On the results of the visit of Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov to New Delhi the sides are expected to sign "4-5 agreements on cooperation between India and Turkmenistan in the sphere of economy, science and technology, culture, education". "This is a goodwill visit that will help to strengthen friendly relations between the peoples of our countries," the representative of the Indian Foreign Ministry noted.

- Turkmenistan to start construction of "East-West" gas pipeline

Turkmenistan will start building the East-West pipeline with the capacity of 30 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year. A resolution authorizing the start of construction was signed by President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov.

"The new gas pipeline will connect the eastern region of the country, where the largest natural gas reserves are concentrated, with the rapidly developing central and Caspian region of Turkmenistan," the head of state said. According to him, the East-West gas main "will make it possible to provide almost all factories and other facilities located throughout the country with natural gas."

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat, the president instructed Turkmengaz and Turkmennebitgazgurlushik state concerns to "carry out the design and

construction of the pipeline, including the ground support communications in a segment stretching from "Shatlyk" gas compressor station at the Dovletabat-Deryalyk gas pipeline to "Belek-1" station.

The construction will be funded by Turkmengaz state concern, the resolution says. The works are scheduled to begin in June 2010, and the gas pipeline should be commissioned in June 2015.

Social Front

Uzbekistan

Political Front

- **Prominent Uzbek Sports Journalist Jailed For Religious Extremism**

TASHKENT -- The prominent Uzbek sports journalist Khairulla Khamidov has been sentenced to six years in jail on charges of associating with a banned Islamic group, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports.

The court in the town of Gulbakhor near Tashkent found Khamidov and 18 others guilty of being members of the extremist Islamic group Jihadchilar (Jihadists). Khamidov's co-defendants were given sentences ranging from suspended jail terms to six years in prison. Khamidov, 34, was found guilty of "organizing and actively participating in a banned social or religious group" and "production and distribution of literature threatening social order and security." Khamidov 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.

- **More Signs Of Karimova's Fall From Grace?**

Another sign perhaps that Gulnara Karimova's empire is crumbling.

Former Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari, rumored to be the highest-paid football manager in the world, is leaving the Tashkent club, Bunyodkor. Scolari said the club wanted to reduce costs and had suggested cutting short his contract, which was due to run until December. "If we reach an agreement, I'll will be free to decide my future," Scolari said in a telephone interview from Tashkent. Bunyodkor is owned by Zeromax, the company widely tied to the Uzbek president's daughter, Karimova. In recent weeks, there have been reports that Zeromax is winding down its operations.

- **Cluing In On The Uzbek Succession**

RFE/RL is closely following the troubles the Swiss-registered company Zeromax is facing, especially considering the energy company's reputed ties to the Uzbek president's head-turning eldest daughter, Gulnara Karimova.

The demise of Uzbekistan's biggest foreign investor -- Zeromax was formally shut down this week -- was taken as a sign that the 37-year-old Karimova's ascension to the throne is in jeopardy.

Gulnara Karimova has often been mentioned as a successor to her aging "Big Papa," President Islam Karimov, but she is not the only one. Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyayev is also on the short list of names bandied about when discussing who will be the next leader of Uzbekistan.

Interestingly enough, it was Mirziyayev who first launched the anticorruption drive that zeroed in on Zeromax, which is also seen as the origin of complaints by Russian officials about the role of "middlemen" in Russian-Uzbek gas deals.

One of these middlemen is Zeromax, the only Western company working in Uzbekistan's gas industry. Suddenly Zeromax is out, its Uzbek officials under criminal investigation and Uzbekistan's gas and oil industry gets a new supervisor -- Prime Minister Mirziyaev. It is too early to say Gulnara's star has fallen. She continues to reside in Spain while making occasional stops in Switzerland, where she is among the country's richest women with an estimated wealth of \$570 to \$665 million, represents her native country as Uzbekistan's representative to the UN, and has a partnership with Chopard to produce her own line of jewelry. But while Mirziyaev appears to be taking a bigger role in Uzbekistan -- his most recent trip abroad was to Moscow, where he represented Uzbekistan at the ceremony with other CIS leaders commemorating the end of World War II -- Gulnara seems to be taking bigger hits.

Geo Strategic Front

- President receives SCO foreign ministers

President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov received members of the session of the Foreign Ministers Council of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states at Oqsaroy residence on May 22.

The current meeting of the council sums up all the preparatory work and defines the documents that would be included in the agenda of the upcoming SCO summit. Signing of these documents will serve to further development of the organization, President Islam Karimov said.

At the meeting in Oqsaroy, preparation to the SCO Heads of States Council session, scheduled for 10-11 June in Tashkent, was considered. Besides, important issues of strengthening regional security were also discussed. The President of Uzbekistan drew the attention to the importance of optimization and improvement of mechanisms of adopting decisions by various structures of the SCO. The meeting participants, in their turn, stressed the importance of the efforts of Uzbekistan in increasing the SCO authority and expansion of economic cooperation in the region. The active position of Uzbekistan in defining the SCO development strategy and on a wide range of modern world policy issues is giving positive results, the guests said. One of the important results of Uzbekistan's activity during its chairmanship in the SCO was unanimous adoption of the UN General Assembly Resolution on cooperation between the UN and the SCO, as well as signing of a Joint declaration on cooperation between the UN and SCO secretariats. These documents defined the legal bases and prospects of the two organizations' practical interaction. The heads of the SCO foreign ministries' delegations sincerely thanked President of Uzbekistan for warm reception and expressed confidence that the upcoming SCO summit in Tashkent would be held on the highest level.

- SCO foreign ministers meet in Tashkent

The session of the Foreign Ministers Council of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states was held in Tashkent on 22 May. State secretary and foreign minister of Kazakhstan K.Saudabayev, foreign minister of China Yang Jiechi, vice foreign minister of Kyrgyzstan T.Makeyev, foreign minister of Russia S.Lavrov, foreign minister of Tajikistan H.Zarifi and foreign minister of Uzbekistan V.Norov participated in the meeting. SCO General secretary M.Imanaliyev and Director of SCO Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure Executive committee D.Jumanbekov also attended the session. The heads of the delegations were received by President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov.

The session of the SCO Foreign Ministers Council was held under the chairmanship of the Uzbek side. In the context of preparation to the SCO Heads of States Council session, planned for 10-11 June in Tashkent, the foreign ministers considered priority tasks of strengthening cooperation within the organization. They considered important regional and global problems, situation in the world, issues of strengthening stability and security in Central Asia, and expansion of SCO contacts with multilateral organizations.

The heads of delegations expressed solidarity with the people of Kyrgyzstan in the current difficult situation. Security and stability on the SCO territory is closely linked to security and stability in each member state, the session participants said.

SCO member states, while being committed to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Kyrgyzstan, confirmed readiness to provide required assistance and support to the country. The participants stated that over the period since the last SCO Heads of States Council on 15-16 June 2009 in Yekaterinburg, Russia, a significant work had been carried out to further strengthen the organization, expand practical interaction in the political, economic and humanitarian areas, as well as develop external contacts. The SCO activity helps solve socioeconomic problems and ensure security and stability in the region. It was emphasized that strengthening stability in Central Asia remained the most important task of the SCO member states in the area of security. The ministers confirmed their intention to expand cooperation in areas like joint counteraction to terrorism, separatism and extremism, illegal drug trade and organized transnational crime.

The meeting participants expressed serious concern over the complex situation in Afghanistan, which continues representing threats of terrorism, illegal drug trade and transnational organized crime. They stressed that ensuring security and stability in Central Asia was impossible without the solution of problems related to Afghanistan.

The SCO member states acknowledged the leading role of the UNO in coordinating efforts of international community in settling the situation in Afghanistan. They believe solution of the Afghan problem cannot be reached through only military methods and call for promotion of the negotiation process under the UN aegis with participation of the Afghans in the interest of making Afghanistan a peaceful and stable state.

The session participants agreed that deeper regional economic cooperation, creation of favorable conditions for trade and investments, strengthening practical interaction in trade, finance, energy, transport, communications, agriculture, science and technologies would help ensure security and stability in the whole region.

Proving the openness of the SCO for other countries of the region, the ministers approved the draft document on the terms of adoption of new members to the organization. Approval of the document at the upcoming Heads of States Council in Tashkent would become the start of the process of formation of the mechanism of expansion of the SCO.

The heads of delegations welcomed the signing of the Joint declaration on cooperation between the UN and SCO secretariats on 5 April in Tashkent. Initiated by Uzbekistan, the document outlines the main principles and directions of cooperation between the two organizations, as defined in the resolution A/64/183 of the UN General Assembly of 18 December 2009.

The permanent bodies of the SCO were recommended to boost cooperation with the UN, ASEAN and other international organizations and structures on issues of security and stability, as well as economic, social and humanitarian development.

The ministers called for fuller realization of the cooperation potential in various areas with SCO observers and dialogue partners. SCO General secretary M.Imanaliyev presented the report on the work of the SCO Secretariat over the past year, which was approved by the heads of the delegations

- Rail Traffic Between Uzbekistan, Southern Tajikistan Restricted

DUSHANBE -- Uzbekistan has suspended rail traffic to Tajikistan's southern Khatlon district, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. The Uzbek consul-general in Dushanbe, Zafar Rahimjonov, said on May 24 that floods in Uzbekistan have destroyed 11 kilometers of railroad tracks between the Amuzang and Termez stations and Uzbekistan does not have sufficient resources to guarantee its complete restoration. Tajik officials say the Tajik railroad company offered to rebuild that stretch of railroad at its own expense but the Uzbek side has rejected that offer. There are two other rail routes linking Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, one in the north and one to Dushanbe. Some freight is still being transported along those routes, even though Uzbekistan imposed temporary restrictions on May 7 on the crossborder passage of both passengers and freight due to an outbreak of polio in Tajikistan. Tajik official Andrey Tropin said that some 969 freight cars with fuel, cement, and construction materials bound for Tajikistan are stranded in Uzbekistan. Numerous Tajik officials have complained that during the last four months Uzbekistan held up some 2,000 freight cars from Russia, Turkmenistan, and Iran bound for Tajikistan.

- Uzbek-Tajik Dispute Disrupts NATO Supplies To Afghanistan

DUSHANBE -- The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan says it "may have to reroute some shipments" that are stranded in Central Asia after Uzbekistan suspended rail traffic to Tajikistan's southern Khatlon district.

ISAF spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Goetz Hasske told Reuters that "some carriages carrying NATO supplies were being held up," citing "ongoing political tensions in the area." NATO ships nonlethal military cargo, such as fuel and food, to support its military operations against the Taliban through Central Asia on its way to Afghanistan.

The deputy head of Tajikistan's state railway company, Usmon Kalandarov, says 2,500 carriages bound for Tajikistan were being held on Uzbek territory as of May 24. He said more than 300 of those carriages contained NATO cargo bound for Afghanistan. Tajikistan has accused Uzbekistan of deliberately blocking shipments, but Tashkent said the delays have been "technical." Relations between the two neighbors deteriorated over Tajik plans to complete the construction of a hydroelectric power plant in Roghun. Tashkent objected to that project, claiming it would exacerbate existing water shortages in the region.

Economic /Energy Front

- Afghanistan launches construction of railroad linking Mazari Sharif with Uzbek border

DUSHANBE. May 26. "Asia-Plus" -- The official opening ceremony for the construction of a new railroad linking Mazari Sharif with Uzbek border was held today in Afghan city of Hairaton, Afghan Ariana-TV reported today.

President of Asian Development Bank (ADB) Haruhiko Kuroda and local Afghan officials took part in the ceremony. "The new line between Mazari Sharif and Hairaton will let reduce the number of obstacles and barriers that emerge during rail transportations and will contribute to the development of trade and will speed up the long-awaited deliveries of humanitarian aid," Ariana-TV quotes Mr Kuroda as saying.

“The road will turn Afghanistan into an important route center for regional trade and commercial transportations and, what is most important, will let Afghanistan change its position at the global and regional arena.” According to Afghanistan.ru, ADB allocated \$165mln for the construction of this road. The road construction will be finished by the end of the year. New branch line will link Afghanistan with Uzbekistan’s railroads and will open access to European and Asian markets. Afghanistan is planning to develop its network of railroads and, thus, develop its internal infrastructure and improve transport (and as a result economic) link with other states, including Pakistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

- Uzbekistan blocks cargoes provided for Afghanistan

At least 100 rail wagons loaded with energy cargoes which should be transported to Afghanistan through the territory of Tajikistan remain blocked in Uzbekistan, deputy head of the transportation service of the Tajik Railroad Andrey Tropin told the AP.

According to him, situation with transit of rail cargoes to Tajikistan through the territory of Uzbekistan remains unchanged. “In the past 24 hours Uzbekistan allowed transportation of 30 wagons, 27 of which are loaded with cargoes provided for UN,” he reported. Meanwhile, Tropin noted that Uzbekistan has blocked the transit of rail wagons in Khatlon direction.

He stressed that a total of 2.182 wagons, 968 of which are waiting transportation to Kurgon-Teppa, 1.214 to Dushanbe, remain blocked on the territory of Uzbekistan. He said that the number of blocked wagons may be higher than the officially reported figure. “These are only those wagons which we are able to observe,” he stressed. “Yesterday Tajik rail officials have signed an open letter addressed to EU countries and international organizations in which Tajikistan urges to provide assistance in resolution of the given situation,” Tropin reports. Uzbekistan says the blockage of rail wagons is connected with frequent mudslides which have destroyed Termez-Amuzang section of the railroad, but Tajikistan is not satisfied with such explanation. “Uzbekistan continues to ignore repeated requests of Tajik rail officials who offer their Uzbek colleagues related assistance,” he stressed.

Social Front

- UNICEF office in Uzbekistan is under Pressure

Ferghana.Ru sources report the new UNICEF problem in Uzbekistan: the office space. Due to the reconstruction of several districts in Tashkent, the current UNICEF office is expected to be demolished while the new address is unknown yet.

"They've already packed up their things," said the source who requested anonymity. - UNICEF executives, mainly foreigners, will temporarily relocate to other UN offices in Tashkent, but local personnel who were already said to be crowded into inadequate quarters before the order are apparently being sent on a forced vacation for an undetermined period".

UNICEF, the UN's International Children's Fund of United Nations Organization. The goal of UNICEF is to protect children’s rights and support children’s right for safe, healthy and happy childhood. UNICEF was established in 1946 in order to assist children, harmed in the World War 2. Since 1953 UNICEF has been providing charity assistance to the children across the world. UNICEF targets at raising funds and

conducting programs, defending the rights of those children, facing emergency situations, and rescuing their lives.

UNICEF has operated in Uzbekistan since 1994. It is interesting to note that among its major partners in Uzbekistan UNICEF fund mentions Ministers Council, Healthcare Ministry, National Education Ministry, Justice Ministry, the Republic of Uzbekistan women's committee, the Supreme Court, Prosecutor General's office and other state institutions. Ferghana.Ru learned that Uzbek government officially informed UNICEF that its Tashkent office will be wrecked; allegedly, the new park zone will be erected in the area of current location of UNICEF office (Istiklol Street, opposite to Officers' Club. The Uzbek Foreign Ministry, as the agency, cooperating with all international organizations, is managing the relocation of UNICEF office in Tashkent. "However, they are sending us to Tashkent khokimiyat (municipal authority – editorial note); in its turn, the khokimiyat offers commercial building with very high rental costs we cannot cover – says Ferghana.Ru source. – All these years UNICEF has been assisting the government of Uzbekistan in the solution of many problems. The last UNICEF initiative in the republic was children's immunization against poliomyelitis. The campaign was organized and sponsored by UNICEF in cooperation with the World Health Organization Uzbek mass media have not even mentioned this".

It has to be mentioned that office space is the big issue for all UN bodies in Uzbekistan. UN Head in Uzbekistan is also based in the office that is going to be wrecked (the old building of the school). Last year, many office rooms were flooded with water because of the damage in the pipes. "After the accident we have run cosmetic repairs. Nonetheless, we desperately need more space – says well-informed source. – There are many of us. You can see cracks in the UNICEF office walls. The building may not be able to handle the earthquake".

Last month during a visit to Central Asia, Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon visited the UNICEF building together with Uzbek Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev, but only for five minutes, and the staff was unable to alert him to the issue of the move.

Ferghana.ru obtained a comment on the report from a UNICEF official in Uzbekistan. According to him, "at the present time, together with the authorities of Uzbekistan, we are looking for a new building for resettlement. We believe that this is a normal process when a city is being reconstructed, and we don't see any problem in this".

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