

Business & Politics in the Muslim World
News Monitoring
Weekly Report
July 10 to July 16, 2010
Central Asia
Uzma Siraj

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- Kyrgyz Interim President Names New Ministers
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- Tajik leader to receive head of Iranian president's office today

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Azerbaijan

Political Front

- Azerbaijani, Armenian Leaders Avoid Contact At Summit

The presidents of Armenia, Azerbaijan and five other ex-Soviet states meet in Yalta, Ukraine on July 10. YEREVAN -- The presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan avoided face-to-face talks on the sidelines of an informal summit of seven former Soviet republics held in Yalta, Ukraine over the weekend, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports.

Geo Strategic Front

- EU Special Reps To Caucasus, Moldova To Get New Lease On Life, For Now
EU vehicles leave a base in the Georgian town of Mukhrani for cease-fire monitoring in October 2008, just two months after the brief Georgia-Russia conflict.

- EU Launching Talks On Closer Ties With Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia
Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili (left) and European Union High Representative Catherine Ashton in the Black Sea city of Batumi on July 15.

Economic /Energy Front

Social Front

- Is Azerbaijan Deploying IDPs To Crush 'Wahhabis?'

Azerbaijani media last week reported that several people, including two police officers, were injured on July 6 during a large-scale brawl in the village of Shotlanly in the Terter district between local residents and internally displaced persons (IDPs) recently relocated there. Police from neighboring Agdam and Barda and Interior Ministry special-purpose troops were reportedly deployed to restore order.

Kazakastan Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- Two Killed In Shoot-Out On Kazakh-Kyrgyz Border

ASTANA -- Two Kyrgyz shepherds were killed and a Kazakh border guard wounded in a shoot-out on the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border, RFE/RL's Kazakh and Kyrgyz services report. Kazakh Border Guard Service deputy head Amangeldy Abylkanov told journalists in Astana that the incident took place near the Saty checkpoint on July 13.

- OSCE Foreign Ministers Set To Meet In Kazakhstan

Foreign ministers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) are set to start a two-day informal meeting at a resort area outside Kazakhstan's commercial capital Almaty.

Economic /Energy Front

- Kazakhstan Reimposes Taxes On Oil Exports

ALMATY, Kazakhstan -- Energy-rich Kazakhstan is restoring oil export tariffs as the government tries to eliminate shortfalls in the national budget. According to a government decree approved today, a tariff of \$20 will be levied on every ton of crude oil that is exported from the Central Asian nation.

- Russia to lend Kazakhstan \$700 million for power plant

(SRI) - Russia will lend Kazakhstan \$700 million to build the third unit of the Ekibastuz GRES-2 power plant, according to a loan agreement signed on Monday by the countries' presidents on the sidelines of the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) session in Astana, RIA Novosti reported.

Social Front

- Kyrgyz Complain To Kazakhs Over Web Report Amid Violence

The office of Kyrgyzstan's prosecutor-general has sent a complaint to Kazakh authorities about two journalists from a regional Internet site who were publishing during last month's deadly ethnic violence.

A child migrant worker from Kyrgyzstan picks tobacco leaves near the village of Koram, Kazakhstan.

This 12-year-old girl isn't doing her schoolwork. In fact, she says she has missed months of classes. That's because nearly every hour of her day is spent working in the tobacco fields of Kazakhstan alongside her parents, who are migrant laborers from neighboring Kyrgyzstan.

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- Another Top Kyrgyz Official Resigns To Run In Elections

BISHKEK -- Another official in Kyrgyzstan's interim government has announced his resignation in order to take part in upcoming parliamentary elections, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Kyrgyz Interim President Names New Ministers

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyz interim President Roza Otunbaeva appointed several new members to the country's caretaker government at a cabinet session on July 14, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- U.S.-Kyrgyz Talks Focus On Need For Stability, Democratic Reforms

BISHKEK -- A top adviser to U.S. President Barack Obama says his talks with Kyrgyz interim government officials this week focused on the democratization process as well as the need to bolster stability in the country's south, after last month's deadly ethnic violence there.

- Top Kyrgyz Officials Resign To Take Part In Parliamentary Elections

BISHKEK -- Two deputy chairmen of Kyrgyzstan's interim government have announced their resignations so they can campaign for the upcoming parliamentary elections, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Geo Strategic Front

- Senior U.S. Adviser Meets With Kyrgyz President In Bishkek

Michael McFaul, special assistant to the U.S. president and senior director for Russian and Central Asian affairs at the National Security Council, speaks at a news conference in Bishkek in May.

- OSCE Foreign Ministers Meet In Almaty On Kyrgyzstan

German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle visits a neighbourhood hit by ethnic unrest in Osh on July 16.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has said it would send a 52-member police force to southern Kyrgyzstan.

- Two Killed In Shoot-Out On Kazakh-Kyrgyz Border

ASTANA -- Two Kyrgyz shepherds were killed and a Kazakh border guard wounded in a shoot-out on the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border, RFE/RL's Kazakh and Kyrgyz services report.

Kazakh Border Guard Service deputy head Amangeldy Abylkanov told journalists in Astana that the incident took place near the Saty checkpoint on July 13.

Economic /Energy Front

Social Front

- Kyrgyz 'Revolutionaries' Demand Social Benefits

BISHKEK -- Some of the participants in the antigovernment demonstration on April 7 that contributed to the ouster of Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev are demanding social benefits from the government, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Red Cross Says Plight Of Missing In Kyrgyzstan Renewing Tensions

An ethnic Uzbek refugee shows photos of her missing grandsons on July 15.

The Red Cross has warned that the fate of missing people has renewed tensions in southern Kyrgyzstan, the scene of deadly interethnic riots last month.

- Kyrgyz Complain To Kazakhs Over Web Report Amid Violence

Ethnic Uzbeks on a street in the village of Vlksm, destroyed during recent clashes in Kyrgyzstan.

The office of Kyrgyzstan's prosecutor-general has sent a complaint to Kazakh authorities about two journalists from a regional Internet site who were publishing during last month's deadly ethnic violence.

Tajikistan

Political Front

- Tajik President's Son-In-Law Denies Ties To Company

DUSHANBE -- A Tajik government official who also is the son-in-law of President Emomali Rahmon has denied having any links to a private firm that collects tolls on a major road in Tajikistan, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Geo Strategic Front

- A Tajik Peace Recipe For Kyrgyzstan?

Government soldiers in the outskirts of Kabodien, Tajikistan in August 1997

Imagine relatives of yours were killed by angry mobs. Your house set alight. Your livelihood wrecked overnight. Knowing that such atrocities took place in the city you called home, and possibly even committed by your neighbors, how could you ever expect to return to life as normal?

- Uzbek Air-Traffic Controllers Delay Tajik Flight

KULOB, Tajikistan -- Uzbek air-traffic controllers refused for more than an hour on July 10 to allow a Tajik passenger plane to leave Uzbek airspace, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

- Tajik FM meets with head of Iranian' president's office

DUSHANBE, July 13, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi yesterday met here with visiting Head of Iranian President's Office also Chairman of the Council of Iranians Abroad, Mr. Esfandiyar Rahim Mashaei, according to the Tajik MFA information department.

- Tajik leader to receive head of Iranian president's office today

DUSHANBE, July 12, 2010, Asia-Plus - Tajik President Emomali Rahmon will receive visiting Head of Iranian President's Office also Chairman of the Council of Iranians Abroad, Mr. Esfandiyar Rahim Mashaei, today.

Economic /Energy Front

Social Front

- 13 athletes to represent Tajikistan in I Summer Youth Olympic Games

DUSHANBE, July 13, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Thirteen young athletes will represent Tajikistan in the I Summer Youth Olympic Games, Maliksho Nematov, the head of the Committee for Youth, Sports and Tourism Affairs, said in an interview with Asia-Plus.

"Among them are Bahodur Qodirov (free-style wrestling), Abduqodir Barotov (track and field), K. Zayniddinova (archery), Sh. Shukurova (taekwon-do WTF), D. Atabayev (track and field), and some others," Nematov said.

Turkmenistan

Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- King of Malaysia invites Turkmen president to visit his country

On July 14, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia Anifaha Bin Aman at "Serdar" hotel situated on the shore of the Caspian Sea. The Malaysian Foreign Minister arrived in Turkmenistan at the head of the high-level delegation of his country.

Economic /Energy Front

- Federation Council of Russia ratifies agreement with Turkmenistan on mutual protection of investments

The Federation Council approved the Federal Law "On Ratification of Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of Turkmenistan for the Promotion and Mutual Protection of Investments" at its regular plenary session on July 14. According to the press service of the upper house of the Russian parliament, investments of Russian investors in Turkmenistan and Turkmen investors in Russia are fully protected for the period of ten years.

Social Front

- Turkmenistan Plans To Allow Privately-Owned Media

President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov voiced support for the creation of new political parties as well as private media.

Uzbekistan

Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- UN Resident Coordinator praises Uzbekistan's efforts in responding to Kyrgyz crisis

UN country team in Uzbekistan highly evaluates the effective efforts of Uzbekistan in response to the humanitarian crisis, which became a result of the violence in Kyrgyzstan in June and led to mass flow of refugees to eastern regions of Uzbekistan, UN Resident Coordinator Anita Nirody said.

- President meets with German Vice Chancellor

President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov met with Vice Chancellor of Federal Republic of Germany, Minister of Foreign Affairs Guido Westerwelle, on July 15 at Oqsaroy. Welcoming the guest, the head of our state underscored the high level of mutual understanding and confidence reached between the two nations that is confirmed by the persistent progress in Uzbek-German cooperation in many spheres.

- Iranian Official Blames Uzbekistan For Hydropower Plant Delay

DUSHANBE -- Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad's chief of staff has blamed an Uzbek rail blockade for delaying the completion of a hydroelectric plant in southern Tajikistan that Iran is helping to build, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

- Uzbek Air-Traffic Controllers Delay Tajik Flight

KULOB, Tajikistan -- Uzbek air-traffic controllers refused for more than an hour on July 10 to allow a Tajik passenger plane to leave Uzbek airspace, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Economic /Energy Front

Social Front

Detailed Report

Azerbaijan

Political Front

- Azerbaijani, Armenian Leaders Avoid Contact At Summit

The presidents of Armenia, Azerbaijan and five other ex-Soviet states meet in Yalta, Ukraine on July 10. YEREVAN -- The presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan avoided face-to-face talks on the sidelines of an informal summit of seven former Soviet republics held in Yalta, Ukraine over the weekend, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports.

Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian's office said the summit attendees discussed ways of boosting "economic integration" within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). It reported no separate meetings between Sarkisian and other participants, who included Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Russia President Dmitry Medvedev.

Sarkisian and Aliyev have often used CIS summits for negotiations on the conflict over the breakaway Azerbaijani region of Nagorno-Karabakh. Sarkisian spokesman Armen Arzumanyan told RFE/RL ahead of the summit that no such meeting was planned at Yalta.

Aliyev and Sarkisian last met on June 17 in St. Petersburg, for talks hosted by Medvedev. That meeting was followed by the most serious Armenian-Azerbaijani cease-fire violation in Karabakh in more than two years, which heightened tensions between the conflicting sides.

Four Armenian soldiers and one Azerbaijani soldier were killed in fighting on the region's "line of contact" the night of June 18.

The United States, Russia, and France have urged both sides to exercise restraint and iron out their differences on a framework peace accord proposed by the OSCE's Minsk Group. They hope to broker further progress in the negotiating process at a meeting this week in Almaty, Kazakhstan between the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers.

However, recriminations traded between Baku and Yerevan in recent days have thrown doubt on the chances of a successful Almaty meeting. The Armenian Foreign Ministry on July 9 strongly denied Azerbaijani claims that the Almaty talks will focus on details of an Armenian troop withdrawal from Azerbaijani territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh. A spokesman for Bako Sahakian -- the leader of the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic -- said today that the authorities in Stepanakert have no expectations from the Almaty meeting because of Azerbaijan's "extremely nonconstructive" position.

Davit Babayan told RFE/RL that "[Baku's position] leaves no room for the search for a mutually acceptable compromise solution."

Babayan pointed to the Azerbaijani leaders' insistence that the principle of territorial integrity take precedence over that of peoples' self-determination as championed by the Armenian side.

"They must understand one thing," Babayan said. "For Karabakh, a return to 1988, in terms of both the status and territory, is out of the question."

Geo Strategic Front

- EU Special Reps To Caucasus, Moldova To Get New Lease On Life, For Now
EU vehicles leave a base in the Georgian town of Mukhrani for cease-fire monitoring in October 2008, just two months after the brief Georgia-Russia conflict.

BRUSSELS -- The European Union appears on the brink of reversing a controversial plan to scrap its 12 special representatives to places ranging from the South Caucasus, Moldova, and Central Asia to Afghanistan and the Great Lakes of Africa, officials in Brussels say.

EU ambassadors met today for the third time this month to decide the envoys' futures. Diplomats speaking on condition of anonymity say broad agreement is emerging among the 27 member states that the mandates of all 12 will be extended by at least six months and their long-term fates left open, pending later debate.

If confirmed by EU foreign ministers at their next meeting in Brussels on July 26, the decision would mean a reprieve for the bloc's South Caucasus envoy Peter Semneby, the Moldovan special representative Kalman Miszei, and their colleagues in Macedonia and the Middle East. According to diplomats four were singled out in May by the EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton to lose their jobs in short order.

'Proper Representation'

EU diplomats say Ashton wanted to settle the issue by bureaucratic fiat but that news reports of her plans provided the affected countries and EU members who opposed the move an opportunity to force it onto the broader political agenda. The diplomats say Ashton had secured the backing of larger states but had hoped to avoid a wider debate.

Ashton's spokeswoman, Maja Kocijancic, told RFE/RL that the EU is currently looking into ways to integrate the special representatives into the European External Action Service (EEAS), the bloc's new unified diplomatic arm, which was established by the Lisbon Treaty and headed by Ashton. The EEAS is expected to be operational on January 1.

Kocijancic said the debate within the EU continues, adding that there is no decision yet. Ashton's aim, her spokeswoman said, is to assure that the EU has "proper representation" in partner countries.

Sweden, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, the Czech Republic, and Italy have been among the countries pushing strongly for an extension of the mandates of all 12 EU special envoys without prejudice to their eventual fate.

Reports that the envoys were about to be recalled and replaced by lower-level officials located in Brussels caused an outcry in Georgia and Moldova. EU diplomats, too, noted privately that the moves would amount to downgrading the affected countries and regions -- as well as their conflicts -- on the EU list of priorities. It would also send an encouraging signal to rival powers.

Ashton's spokeswoman rejected suggestions that the changes suggested by the EU's top diplomat entail the dilution of the bloc's presence anywhere in the world.

"The EU wants its foreign policy to be more active and more effective in the world," Kocijancic said. The heads of EU representations in partner countries will be strengthened under the EEAS.

Strategic Question Marks

Diplomats say during the ambassadorial debates held behind closed doors in Brussels on July 1 and 12, Ashton and her right-hand man, the British diplomat Robert Cooper, argued that in the future the EU should nominate special representatives only in three specific cases: for events or crises where the EU has no representation on the ground; to regions which need strategic attention; or for exceptional countries or crises, such as in Burma.

Ashton and Cooper, however, did not directly address the strategic implications of retracting existing envoys, diplomats say. Officials say Ashton repeatedly alluded to the fact that some of the existing envoys -- without naming any -- pose problems with their independent views. This is understood to reflect the concerns of some of the larger member states which feel envoys like Semneby complicate their relations with partners such as Russia.

Ashton also opposes suggestions that the EU could upgrade some of the envoys by replacing them with political heavyweights hand-picked from the ranks of former foreign ministers.

Ashton has suggested the French diplomat Pierre Morel, the EU's special envoy to Central Asia as well as the Georgian-Russian Geneva talks, be retained in his present duties, operating out of Brussels. Conflict resolution in the South Caucasus is formally part of Semneby's job description.

Fallout For Ashton?

Ashton's plans are part of a larger drive to bring all of the EU's diplomatic corps under the control of the EEAS.

But member states critical of the plans have pointed out that EU special representatives are appointed by the member states and can thus only be removed by the member states. Also, some capitals point out, the envoys whose positions will not disappear, will not join the EEAS but will continue to report directly to member-state ambassadors in Brussels. Consequently, officials say there has been strong pressure to exclude Ashton and her representatives from the debates on the future of the special representatives.

Ashton has been publicly criticized in a number of member states for being susceptible to pressure from Berlin and Paris, particularly in staffing decisions. The top civil servant in the EEAS will come from France, his deputies in turn from Germany and Poland. France and Germany are also said to have carved up between themselves some of the most lucrative EU ambassadorial positions outside the bloc.

- EU Launching Talks On Closer Ties With Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili (left) and European Union High Representative Catherine Ashton in the Black Sea city of Batumi on July 15

The European Union has announced that it is beginning talks to strengthen ties with Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia that will eventually result in formal association agreements.

Those agreements will provide a framework for deepened cooperation between Brussels and the three ex-Soviet states on a range of political and economic issues, including the possibilities of visa-free travel and free-trade regimes.

EU High Representative Catherine Ashton made the announcement of talks with Georgia today in the Black Sea city of Batumi.

"I strongly believe that by strengthening the relationship between Georgia and the European Union we can contribute to Georgia's democratic development, its long-term stability, [and] prosperity," she said alongside Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili.

"It's good for you and it's good for us. Stability and prosperity here enhances stability and prosperity in the European Union," she added.

Ashton's office said in a statement that talks on association agreements -- which usually take from one to four years -- will also be launched with Azerbaijan and Armenia when the high representative visits Baku on July 16 and Yerevan on July 19.

Association talks are already under way with Ukraine and Moldova.

Assurances To Georgia

Saakashvili hailed the launch of talks as a key step in the country's efforts to forge closer ties with the West.

"Georgia is Europe, Georgia is coming back to Europe," he said. "The goal of our reforms is to create the first European state in the Caucasus."

Some in Georgia have feared Western abandonment amid pushes by both the United States and the EU to strengthen ties with arch-rival Russia.

But those fears have been substantially assuaged in recent weeks, as Saakashvili hosted a number of top Western officials, including US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on July 5. Today, ahead of his meeting with Ashton, the Georgian president met with French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner.

Like Clinton, Kouchner expressed support for Georgia's territorial integrity, which has been challenged by Russia's recognition of the breakaway Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states.

He affirmed said that Russia would not interfere with Georgia's goal of an expanded relationship with the EU.

"We will always help Georgia in its talks with the EU to become an associate member," Kouchner said. "Russia does not decide who should become an EU member."

The talks are expected to give a boost to Saakashvili, who is seeking to rebuild his reputation as an effective, democratic reformer after the country's disastrous 2008 war with Russia and a 2007 crackdown on antigovernment demonstrators in Tbilisi.

The announcement of talks will also be read as sign of renewed EU commitment to the region as a whole.

Many had feared that the expansion-wary bloc was losing interest in the South Caucasus after reports in late May of a plan to scrap the post of EU special representative to the region.

Economic /Energy Front

Social Front

- Is Azerbaijan Deploying IDPs To Crush 'Wahhabis?'

Azerbaijani media last week reported that several people, including two police officers, were injured on July 6 during a large-scale brawl in the village of Shotlanly in the Terter district between local residents and internally displaced persons (IDPs) recently relocated there. Police from neighboring Agdam and Barda and Interior Ministry special-purpose troops were reportedly deployed to restore order.

But the Azerbaijani jihadist website milleti-ibrahim.com has posted a different version of the incident. It claims that "a huge crowd" of displaced persons armed with axes, knives, and guns attacked a small group of devout practicing Muslims who were forced to take refuge in the village mosque.

The website implies that the attack -- not the first of its kind -- was orchestrated by the Azerbaijani authorities. It further claimed that the Muslims, some of whom were seriously injured, have been arrested, but not their attackers.

The independent online daily zerkalo.az quoted unnamed Shotlanly residents as saying that "Wahhabis" were indeed involved in the fight. But it also offers a possible alternative explanation, again based on information from an anonymous informant: that the fight was between displaced persons from Agdam who had recently bought up property in Shotlanly, thereby incurring the wrath of local businessmen. Zerkalo.az further quoted Terter police chief Izzet Askerov as saying that the fight was the result of "personal

animosity" that had been brewing since mid-June, and that it was local residents who attacked the newcomers.

Kazakstan Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- **Two Killed In Shoot-Out On Kazakh-Kyrgyz Border**

ASTANA -- Two Kyrgyz shepherds were killed and a Kazakh border guard wounded in a shoot-out on the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border, RFE/RL's Kazakh and Kyrgyz services report.

Kazakh Border Guard Service deputy head Amangeldy Abylkanov told journalists in Astana that the incident took place near the Saty checkpoint on July 13.

Abylkanov said Kazakh border guards stopped a group of Kyrgyz shepherds moving a herd of horses from Kazakhstan to Kyrgyzstan along a high mountain path.

When the border guards asked the shepherds to show their identification documents, he said they opened fire and severely wounded a border guard.

"The border guards had to fight back and two of the shepherds, who turned out to be Kyrgyz nationals, were killed in the shoot-out," Abylkanov said.

Another man with the shepherds was detained, and Abylkanov said he confessed that he and his associates were trying to smuggle the horses into Kyrgyzstan.

The border guards confiscated three guns and 20 horses from the group.

Meanwhile, another group of five people was detained by border guards on the same stretch of the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border later on July 13. The group was moving some 400 goats and sheep from Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan.

Two of the five are Kazakh citizens, but the nationality of the other three is unknown. Two guns were confiscated from them.

Kyrgyz Border Guard Service Deputy Chairman Ilyaz Subankulov confirmed the incidents to RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service.

- **OSCE Foreign Ministers Set To Meet In Kazakhstan**

Foreign ministers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) are set to start a two-day informal meeting at a resort area outside Kazakhstan's commercial capital Almaty.

Kazakh Foreign Ministry spokesman Askar Abdrakhmanov said security in Europe and Eurasia as well as the situations in southern Kyrgyzstan and in Afghanistan will be on the agenda.

Kazakhstan, the current OSCE chairman, is also hoping to push forward its call to later this year host the first OSCE summit since 1999.

Economic /Energy Front

- **Kazakhstan Reimposes Taxes On Oil Exports**

ALMATY, Kazakhstan -- Energy-rich Kazakhstan is restoring oil export tariffs as the government tries to eliminate shortfalls in the national budget.

According to a government decree approved today, a tariff of \$20 will be levied on every ton of crude oil that is exported from the Central Asian nation.

Officials say output from oil fields operating under production-sharing agreements - costly projects in which Kazakhstan is pinning hopes for a new oil boom -- are exempt from the duty. Kazakhstan originally introduced an oil export tariff of \$110 per ton in mid-2008.

Those rates were gradually reduced to zero in the following months as the country's economy struggled amid falling global demand for oil.

- Russia to lend Kazakhstan \$700 million for power plant

(SRI) - Russia will lend Kazakhstan \$700 million to build the third unit of the Ekibastuz GRES-2 power plant, according to a loan agreement signed on Monday by the countries' presidents on the sidelines of the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) session in Astana, RIA Novosti reported.

The two existing units of the Ekibastuz GRES-2 power plant were built in the late 1980s-early 1990s. The third unit will increase the plant's installed capacity by 50 percent.

Construction of the plant's third unit began in 1990 but was subsequently frozen.

Ekibastuz GRES-2 is equally owned by Inter RAO UES and by the Kazakh government.

Social Front

- Kyrgyz Complain To Kazakhs Over Web Report Amid Violence

The office of Kyrgyzstan's prosecutor-general has sent a complaint to Kazakh authorities about two journalists from a regional Internet site who were publishing during last month's deadly ethnic violence.

The complaint says journalist Asror Muminov and website owner Valery Khlyupin were inciting ethnic hatred by writing and posting an article on centrasia.ru on July 3 that claimed "Kyrgyz were killing Uzbeks even in mosques" in the southern city of Osh last month, when there were clashes between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks resulting in hundreds of deaths.

The Kyrgyz prosecutor-general's office says it investigated those accusations with clerics at mosques in Osh and determined there was no truth to the article.

Kyrgyzstan's prosecutor-general said the offices of centrasia.ru are located in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan wants Kazakh authorities to launch an investigation into charges the site incited ethnic hatred.

- Tobacco Workers In Kazakhstan Face Exploitation, Child Labor

A child migrant worker from Kyrgyzstan picks tobacco leaves near the village of Koram, Kazakhstan.

This 12-year-old girl isn't doing her schoolwork. In fact, she says she has missed months of classes. That's because nearly every hour of her day is spent working in the tobacco fields of Kazakhstan alongside her parents, who are migrant laborers from neighboring Kyrgyzstan.

"From 4 a.m. to 10 a.m., we go to the fields to gather [tobacco leaves]," the girl says. "At 11 a.m. and 1 p.m., we eat and thread [the leaves]. From 4 p.m. to 10 p.m. we gather again. Then thread until midnight, then sleep. Get up again at 4 a.m. And that goes on for a long time."

The girl is one of the dozens of farm workers who was interviewed by the New York-based NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) during fact-finding missions it conducted in 2009 in Kazakhstan's Enbekshikazakh district. Some 120 kilometers east of Almaty, it is the site of nearly all of the country's tobacco cultivation -- and according to HRW, the site of widespread exploitation of mainly Kyrgyz migrant workers and their children.

HRW's Rachel Denber

The HRW report, titled "Hellish Work," documents wage violations, forced labor, debt bondage, excessively long working hours, the absence of written contracts, exposure of

workers to pesticides, lack of clean drinking water, and illegal labor by children as young as 10 on the tobacco farms.

Rachel Denber, HRW's deputy director for Europe and Central Asia, says that one abuse often leads to another. "The payment structure is such that migrant workers get paid once at the end of the season by the volume of tobacco that they produce," she notes. "And that incentivizes child labor because these migrant workers travel with families and they need to get as many hands on the tobacco as possible."

Denber spoke to RFE/RL from Almaty, where the report was unveiled on July 14. Two days earlier, she met with Kazakh Commissioner on Human Rights Askar Shakirov and Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Protection Birzhan Nurumbetov to discuss the findings.

While the officials responded "with concern," according to Denber, she says the hundreds of thousands of migrant workers employed in Kazakhstan annually essentially have no rights. That figure includes nearly all of the more than 1,000 migrants, mainly from the southern Kyrgyz town of Nookat, who come to Kazakhstan annually for the nine-month tobacco farming season.

Pressure On Philip Morris

But of the numerous instances of migrant-worker exploitation that have come out of the region, the case of the Kyrgyz tobacco laborers is drawing particular international attention -- due to a very high-profile link.

The sole buyer of tobacco in the region is Philip Morris Kazakhstan, a subsidiary of Philip Morris International. The tobacco giant sells its products in some 160 countries, and with a market value of nearly \$90 billion, is one of the world's largest publicly traded companies.

Denber says HRW first brought its research to the attention of Philip Morris International in October, and has been in "extensive" contact with them ever since.

When asked to comment, Philip Morris International referred RFE/RL to a press statement posted on its website on July 14, the same day HRW's report was released. The statement says that Philip Morris International is "firmly opposed to child labor and all other labor abuses."

Wealthier Kazakhstan attracts migrant labor from other Central Asian countries.

Acknowledging that the HRW report "raises serious issues concerning child labor and conditions affecting migrant workers on tobacco farms in Kazakhstan," Philip Morris International writes that it has taken "immediate steps to strengthen the application of our existing policies and practices on child labor and to address the other areas of concern raised in their report."

First Steps Taken, More Needed

Among the steps, the company says it has strengthened contractual obligations for farmers, with the aim of establishing standards of treatment of workers. It also says it has implemented a system of third-party compliance monitoring to ensure changes are made; has reinforced the training of "farmers, workers, and our agronomists on the prevention of child labor"; and has expanded the "training and monitoring relating to migrant-labor rights and working and living conditions."

Denber adds that Philip Morris International has mandated that every farm supplying it with tobacco must offer pay on a regular schedule that does not fall below the minimum

wage and has also pledged to prohibit farm owners from confiscating workers' personal documents, a complaint documented by HRW.

On the ground, however, Denber says those pledges have not yet been realized. She believes the pledges are "all very positive, but so far, it doesn't seem as though much has changed. We were out in the fields for a couple of days recently and so far, in this season, there doesn't seem to be any big changes.

"I think it's really important to just keep following up," Denber adds. "I think that Philip Morris has taken a really important first step, but now the most important thing is to see the situation change."

Until it does, migrant workers like this man interviewed for the HRW report, remain at risk of having their identification documents used as collateral to make them stay through the tobacco season, and in many cases, do unpaid labor for landowners on the side.

The man says the farm owner "gathered all our passports and said he would register them with the police. He didn't return them until the night before we were preparing to return home. There was nothing in them -- neither the registration nor the residence permit."

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- Another Top Kyrgyz Official Resigns To Run In Elections

BISHKEK -- Another official in Kyrgyzstan's interim government has announced his resignation in order to take part in upcoming parliamentary elections, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

First Deputy Chairman Almazbek Atambaev sent a letter to interim President Roza Otunbaeva asking her to release him from his post. Atambaev is the head of the Social Democrats.

Deputy Chairmen Omurbek Tekebaev and Temir Sariiev filed similar letters on July 12. Tekebaev is the leader of the Fatherland (Ata-Meken) party and Sariiev heads the White Falcon (Ak-Shumkar) party.

Sariiev told journalists that all candidates in the government should resign to avoid a conflict of interest and to prevent them from abusing their government powers during the campaign.

Otunbaeva has also said she expects the resignations of government members who will be candidates in the elections, which are scheduled for October. Emil Kaptagaev, founder of the Great Unity Party, was named on July 13 as the chief of the presidential administration.

Meanwhile, Otunbaeva signed a decree the same day on a new structure for the government. The decree states that Kyrgyzstan's prison system, the border-guard service, the customs office, state registration service, financial markets, the treasury, taxation, and health care will be under the government, headed by the prime minister.

The new structure will come into being after the parliamentary elections. Until then, the presidential administration will function as the head of the government.

Otunbaeva's interim government was formed after the April 7 uprising that ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev.

- Kyrgyz Interim President Names New Ministers

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyz interim President Roza Otunbaeva appointed several new members to the country's caretaker government at a cabinet session on July 14, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

The new appointees were named to replace members who resigned so they can take part in parliamentary elections, which are scheduled for October.

Amangeldy Muraliev was named first deputy prime minister, and Aleksandr Kostyuk, Okomkhan Abdullaeva, and Jantoro Satybaldiev as deputy prime ministers.

Also recently appointed was Chorobek Imashev as minister of finance, Aysel Ryskulova as minister of migration and labor, Sabyrjan Abdukarimov as minister of health care, Mamasharip Turdukulov as minister of agriculture, and Sadyk Sherniyaz as minister of culture.

All other ministers in the interim government, who came to power after antigovernment protests ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev on April 7, retained their posts.

Bishkek-based political analyst Mars Sariev told RFE/RL that Otunbaeva's new deputy prime ministers are reasonable choices with experience working under the government of Bakiev and his predecessor, Askar Akaev.

Sariev added that it was "very good" that none of the new appointees has ties with any political party or group.

At the same time, he noted that the new cabinet is a so-called caretaker government that will be replaced after the parliamentary elections.

- U.S.-Kyrgyz Talks Focus On Need For Stability, Democratic Reforms

BISHKEK -- A top adviser to U.S. President Barack Obama says his talks with Kyrgyz interim government officials this week focused on the democratization process as well as the need to bolster stability in the country's south, after last month's deadly ethnic violence there.

Michael McFaul, director for Russian and Eurasian Affairs at the National Security Council, finished two days of meetings in Bishkek on July 14 that included talks with President Roza Otunbaeva and political leaders who are preparing for parliamentary elections scheduled for October.

McFaul also met with the heads of Kyrgyz-based nongovernmental groups and other civil society leaders.

Otunbaeva today appointed a caretaker government to administer the country -- which was roiled by deadly ethnic clashes in June -- until parliamentary elections in October. The new cabinet was named after key members of the interim government -- which has been in power since a popular uprising in April toppled former President Kurmanbek Bakiev -- resigned to campaign in the election.

McFaul said his meetings stressed the importance of bolstering the democratic process in Kyrgyzstan during the parliamentary election campaign, "both the actual physical conduct of the elections -- the Central Election Commission and the monitoring efforts that the international community, including the United States, are supporting -- as well as talking to political leaders about their plans for this election campaign process."

Last month, voters in Kyrgyzstan approved a new constitution that aims to make the country the first parliamentary democracy in Central Asia.

McFaul lauded Kyrgyzstan's leaders for the lengths to which they are going to hold competitive elections under difficult circumstances.

"In speaking with [Kyrgyzstan's] political leaders, I come away with the impression that this election is going to be a very competitive election," McFaul said. "That's the essence of democracy -- competition."

No Talk Of Manas

Kyrgyzstan is home to a U.S. transit center at Manas airport outside Bishkek that is vital for supplying troops in Afghanistan. But McFaul said that the issue was not on the agenda of his talks with Otunbaeva.

"I did have some discussions with other government officials about the transit center. But it was not the focus at all of this particular trip," McFaul said. "The last time I was here, [in May], I heard many questions about 'all the United States cares about is the transit center.' That is not our policy. It has never been the Obama administration's policy."

But McFaul said he did receive positive feedback from Kyrgyz interim officials about international involvement in an investigation into the ethnic violence that forced hundreds of thousands of people from their homes in southern Kyrgyzstan last month -- many of them ethnic Uzbek citizens.

"What is very important is that there has to be a very thorough investigation of what happened. We believe that there needs to be international involvement in that investigation," McFaul said.

"I was pleased to hear that that idea was shared by the government, and we are optimistic that we can find the right formulation so that all international organizations that want to be included in some kind of investigation will be included -- because it has to be an independent investigation with international involvement."

Reports Of Abuses In South

The U.S.-based group Human Rights Watch warned today that the torture and arbitrary detention of ethnic Uzbeks by security forces in southern Kyrgyzstan could lead to a new wave of conflict in the country.

Human Rights Watch said that Uzbeks were being "disproportionately" arrested -- and at times tortured -- as part of a government drive to investigate and punish those responsible for deadly ethnic riots last month.

McFaul said he raised the issue with officials and urged them to take steps to foster reconciliation.

"We are very worried and concerned about reports we hear about the violations of people's rights in the south, and particularly of Uzbek citizens here in Kyrgyzstan," McFaul said.

"We have raised those cases with the government of Kyrgyzstan," he added. "One of the principle challenges of the new government and the upcoming new parliament is to devise ways to stimulate reconciliation after the tragedies that we have witnessed. You can only have reconciliation if the rights of all citizens of Kyrgyzstan are respected. Not just of some."

McFaul said he did not travel to the troubled southern city of Osh during this week's visit. But he said he got the impression from his talks with government officials and Kyrgyz nongovernmental groups that good work appears to have been done to try to stabilize the situation there. Still, he said, "a lot of work remains" to ensure long-term stability in southern Kyrgyzstan, especially in Osh.

"The one thing -- the one factor in my opinion -- that is the greatest threat to Kyrgyzstan's current experiment with restoring democracy is renewed violence in places like Osh," McFaul said.

"That's why we are trying to do all that we can to help prevent renewed conflict -- both in our bilateral assistance, in our international assistance, and in our diplomatic relations with countries in your region and with Russia to try to work together to do what we can to facilitate long-term stability in the south of Kyrgyzstan."

McFaul said there was a "long discussion" between Obama and Dmitry Medvedev when the Russian president visited the United States on June 24. He said both Russia and the United States have similar interests in maintaining stability in Kyrgyzstan.

- **Top Kyrgyz Officials Resign To Take Part In Parliamentary Elections**

BISHKEK -- Two deputy chairmen of Kyrgyzstan's interim government have announced their resignations so they can campaign for the upcoming parliamentary elections, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Joomart Saparbaev, an aide to Deputy Chairman Omurbek Tekebaev, told RFE/RL that Tekebaev signed his resignation letter on July 12. He said Tekebaev wanted to take part in the elections -- which are scheduled for October -- as leader of the Ata-Meken (Fatherland) party.

Saparbaev said Tekebaev would officially announce his decision on July 13.

Earlier, Deputy Chairman and acting Finance Minister Temir Sariiev told journalists he also would resign from his post, on July 14. He also said he was resigning to take part in the elections.

Sariiev, who heads the Ak-Shumkar (White Falcon) party, explained that every Kyrgyz official who wants to be a candidate should resign to avoid conflict of interest and to prevent them from abusing their government powers during the campaign.

Kyrgyz President Roza Otunbaeva has said she expects the resignations of all members of the government who will be candidates for the elections.

Otunbaeva's interim government was formed after the April 7 uprising that ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiiev.

Geo Strategic Front

- **Senior U.S. Adviser Meets With Kyrgyz President In Bishkek**

Michael McFaul, special assistant to the U.S. president and senior director for Russian and Central Asian affairs at the National Security Council, speaks at a news conference in Bishkek in May.

BISHKEK -- U.S. President Barack Obama's chief adviser on Russia and Eurasia has met with Kyrgyz officials in Bishkek, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Michael McFaul, the U.S. special assistant for National Security Affairs and senior director of Russian and Eurasian Affairs, held talks with interim President Roza Otunbaeva to discuss U.S.-Kyrgyz relations.

McFaul delivered a telegram from Obama congratulating Otunbaeva on "the successful holding of the national referendum" on June 27 in which she was overwhelmingly approved by voters as president through 2011.

Otunbaeva and McFaul also discussed the October parliamentary elections, the socioeconomic situation in the country, and the normalization of the situation in southern Kyrgyzstan after last month's deadly ethnic clashes.

McFaul was expected to hold a press conference in Bishkek on July 14.

The visit is McFaul's second to Kyrgyzstan since antigovernment demonstrations in Bishkek toppled former President Kurmanbek Bakiiev on April 7.

- **OSCE Foreign Ministers Meet In Almaty On Kyrgyzstan**

German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle visits a neighbourhood hit by ethnic unrest in Osh on July 16.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has said it would send a 52-member police force to southern Kyrgyzstan.

Herbert Salber, director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Center, told reporters on July 16 the pan-European security bloc and Kyrgyzstan have agreed to dispatch the group to the regions of Osh and Jalal-Abad.

He was speaking during an informal meeting in Almaty, Kazakhstan, ahead of the July 17 meeting of foreign ministers from the 56-member OSCE.

The gathering in Almaty is focused on what is happening across the border in Kyrgyzstan, where violence erupted in the country's south in June.

Salber said that the group would comprise "52 policemen representing the OSCE member states," and an OSCE statement added that 50 more officers could later be sent. Salber gave no precise time frame for any possible mission, but the press release said the advisory group would spend four months in Kyrgyzstan.

The advisory group still requires unanimous approval, which could come when the ministers and other officials gather on July 17.

Bloody Ethnic Clashes

Clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks in the Osh and Jalal-Abad regions left at least 309 dead and displaced another 400,000.

With Kyrgyz officials estimating that some 2,500 homes, more than 100 commercial buildings, and 10 government buildings were destroyed or suffered major damage during the unrest, the situation remains volatile.

Ahead of the meeting, two foreign ministers were visiting Osh, Kyrgyzstan's second-largest city, to assess the situation for themselves.

German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle and his French counterpart Bernard Kouchner are flying into the city as part of a fact-finding tour that will also take them to Bishkek, where they will meet with President Roza Otunbaeva.

The OSCE meeting -- taking place at the Ak-Bulak resort outside Almaty -- comes amid a rising chorus of voices calling on the organization to take a more active role in helping stabilize the country.

Westerwelle in Osh

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's special envoy for Central Asia had urged the organization to send international police to Kyrgyzstan to provide technical advice to local security forces.

Kimmo Kiljunen told reporters last month that he thought the presence of international police advisers could "create an atmosphere of trust" that could help ease tensions. He added that he was recommending a force that would not include "peacekeepers in the military terms" but rather be "an international police operation to offer technical advice."

Kiljunen also said EU foreign ministers have discussed the option of sending police to provide crisis-management support. However, the European Union itself has yet to indicate it has any plans to do so.

The Kyrgyz government has joined the call for an international police presence, with Otunbaeva saying hours before the gathering that such a mission is needed for maintaining security in Osh.

"These [international police] forces will work temporarily, within a limited period of four months here," Otunbaeva said. "We are going to reconstruct the city [of Osh]. For instance, they are needed for maintaining security in the city of Osh. They will be unarmed."

International Inquiry Needed

In addition to an international police force, there are also expectations that the OSCE will lead an international investigation into the June events.

Otunbaeva on July 16 agreed to a proposal that an international commission, to be headed by Kiljunen, be formed to look into the unrest. The commission would include representatives of the OSCE, EU, and the UN, and Otunbaeva said it should work closely with the Kyrgyz investigative commission.

During a joint news conference with Westerwelle in Osh, French Foreign Minister Kouchner said, "We would like to know who these groups are that provoked these incidents. These incidents and animosities go back a long way, but there were clearly provocations in this case and we want to know about them. So we support this proposal for an international investigative commission."

Ole Solvang, a researcher for Human Rights Watch, told RFE/RL from Bishkek that the Kyrgyz government and the OSCE have discussed the subject in the run-up to the Almaty conference.

"We do know that there have been discussions going on, there have been discussions between the government and the OSCE about an international police force," Solvang says," and there have also been discussions between the Kyrgyz government and various actors about an international investigation and it is very much our hope that the OSCE meeting in Almaty this weekend will take that discussion forward."

Security Questions. Human Rights Watch earlier this month issued a call for the OSCE to send police forces and open an international investigation. The group reported on July 14 widespread cases of torture and arbitrary detentions in southern Kyrgyzstan of Uzbeks suspected of participation in the June violence. If the OSCE ministers and high representatives discuss the calls for a police mission and an international investigation, a major question would be how to balance the organization's interests with those of the region's own multinational security grouping, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

The CSTO, which is led by Russia and includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, is already sending equipment and funds to Bishkek to bolster the capabilities of Kyrgyz security forces. The CSTO has so far resisted sending any international police forces, despite early calls from Bishkek to do so. This weekend's OSCE meeting is also expected to discuss topics ranging from European security to engagement with Afghanistan and possible topics for an OSCE summit.

Kazakhstan, which currently heads the OSCE, has said it hopes to host a formal summit of the organization this year. The group's last major summit was in Istanbul in 1999.

- Two Killed In Shoot-Out On Kazakh-Kyrgyz Border

ASTANA -- Two Kyrgyz shepherds were killed and a Kazakh border guard wounded in a shoot-out on the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border, RFE/RL's Kazakh and Kyrgyz services report.

Kazakh Border Guard Service deputy head Amangeldy Abylkanov told journalists in Astana that the incident took place near the Saty checkpoint on July 13.

Abylkanov said Kazakh border guards stopped a group of Kyrgyz shepherds moving a herd of horses from Kazakhstan to Kyrgyzstan along a high mountain path.

When the border guards asked the shepherds to show their identification documents, he said they opened fire and severely wounded a border guard.

"The border guards had to fight back and two of the shepherds, who turned out to be Kyrgyz nationals, were killed in the shoot-out," Abylkanov said.

Another man with the shepherds was detained, and Abylkanov said he confessed that he and his associates were trying to smuggle the horses into Kyrgyzstan.

The border guards confiscated three guns and 20 horses from the group.

Meanwhile, another group of five people was detained by border guards on the same stretch of the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border later on July 13. The group was moving some 400 goats and sheep from Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan.

Two of the five are Kazakh citizens, but the nationality of the other three is unknown. Two guns were confiscated from them.

Kyrgyz Border Guard Service Deputy Chairman Ilyaz Subankulov confirmed the incidents to RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service.

Economic /Energy Front

Social Front

- Kyrgyz 'Revolutionaries' Demand Social Benefits

BISHKEK -- Some of the participants in the antigovernment demonstration on April 7 that contributed to the ouster of Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev are demanding social benefits from the government, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Some 50 activists picketed the government building in Bishkek asking for permanent social allowances from the government, similar to those given to veterans of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster and the Soviet-Afghan war.

The demonstrators said the social benefits should be given to all participants in the "revolution" and the relatives of those who died during the clashes between protesters and security forces.

No one from the government met with the demonstrators.

Kyrgyz interim President Roza Otunbaeva said in April that the government would make one-time cash payments to the families of those killed and injured in the unrest.

Officials say 86 people were killed and hundreds wounded during the violent antigovernment clashes in Bishkek and other cities in early April.

- Red Cross Says Plight Of Missing In Kyrgyzstan Renewing Tensions

An ethnic Uzbek refugee shows photos of her missing grandsons on July 15.

The Red Cross has warned that the fate of missing people has renewed tensions in southern Kyrgyzstan, the scene of deadly interethnic riots last month.

Nadine Bague, of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), said on July 15 that elucidating the fate of the disappeared would help "defuse tensions." The violence has reportedly left hundreds mostly ethnic Uzbeks dead.

The ICRC also appealed for \$26 million in additional funds to cover relief efforts in the region. The ICRC's statement emerged a day after Human Rights Watch said ethnic

Uzbeks were being disproportionately targeted in the probe into the clashes. The ICRC said it was trying to obtain access to detainees.

Kyrgyzstan's government today announced that it is setting up a national commission to investigate the violence. The commission is due to submit its findings in two months.

The government says it welcomes assistance from foreign experts.

But Western countries and rights groups have demanded an international inquiry.

- **Kyrgyz Complain To Kazakhs Over Web Report Amid Violence**

Ethnic Uzbeks on a street in the village of Vlksm, destroyed during recent clashes in Kyrgyzstan.

The office of Kyrgyzstan's prosecutor-general has sent a complaint to Kazakh authorities about two journalists from a regional Internet site who were publishing during last month's deadly ethnic violence.

The complaint says journalist Asror Muminov and website owner Valery Khlyupin were inciting ethnic hatred by writing and posting an article on centrasia.ru on July 3 that claimed "Kyrgyz were killing Uzbeks even in mosques" in the southern city of Osh last month, when there were clashes between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks resulting in hundreds of deaths.

The Kyrgyz prosecutor-general's office says it investigated those accusations with clerics at mosques in Osh and determined there was no truth to the article.

Kyrgyzstan's prosecutor-general said the offices of centrasia.ru are located in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan wants Kazakh authorities to launch an investigation into charges the site incited ethnic hatred.

Tajikistan

Political Front

- **Tajik President's Son-In-Law Denies Ties To Company**

DUSHANBE -- A Tajik government official who also is the son-in-law of President Emomali Rahmon has denied having any links to a private firm that collects tolls on a major road in Tajikistan, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Deputy Finance Minister Jamoliddin Nuraliev also told RFE/RL on July 9 that the Finance Ministry does not provide any funds for activities in Tajikistan by Innovative Road Solutions, the company in charge of the country's only toll road.

Nuraliev also said a government commission that recently audited the activities of the company did not find anything illegal.

Deutsche Welle had reported that Innovative Road Solutions was registered in the British Virgin Islands by a person named Jamoliddin Nuraliev.

Amonulloh Ashur, the head of Tajikistan's Antimonopoly Committee and a critic of the toll road, told RFE/RL it didn't matter who owns the firm. He said what was important is that the company has not coordinated its pricing policy with the Antimonopoly Committee.

The now 410-kilometer toll road from Dushanbe to Chanak links Tajikistan's capital with Uzbekistan through the northern province of Sughd.

The highway was recently upgraded by Chinese companies and paid for with a \$280 million loan from China. The Tajik government decided that in order to repay the loan to China, a toll would be collected for using the road starting on April 1.

Residents of the Varzob district just outside Dushanbe have protested strongly against the toll, and sent a 10,000-signature petition to Rahmon urging him to eliminate the levies.

In April, small cars and minibuses paid 30 dirams (\$.07) for every kilometer driven on the highway. Vehicles up to 7 tons had to pay 60 dirams, while larger vehicles paid 1.5 somonis (\$.35) per kilometer.

In May, Innovative Road Solutions cut their prices, with small cars and minibuses paying 10 dirams per kilometer. But Tajiks have continued to call for the abolition of the toll.

Tajik economist Hojimuhammad Umarov told RFE/RL that the firm's registration in the British Virgin Islands makes it difficult to follow its activities. Umarov said he didn't understand why parliament exempted the firm from paying more than a dozen different taxes.

Other analysts have suggested that the company was given favorable conditions because of close relations between the company's owners and high-ranking Tajik officials.

In April, Tajik Communication and Transport Minister Olim Boboev rejected that criticism, saying the company had won a tender for the work fairly. But the firm's technical director, Rustam Abdulloev, recently said no tender was held for the contract to operate the toll road.

Abdulloev also said the government gave concessions to his firm and that control of the highway would be returned to the government after an unspecified number of years.

Geo Strategic Front

- A Tajik Peace Recipe For Kyrgyzstan?

Government soldiers in the outskirts of Kabodien, Tajikistan in August 1997

Imagine relatives of yours were killed by angry mobs. Your house set alight. Your livelihood wrecked overnight. Knowing that such atrocities took place in the city you called home, and possibly even committed by your neighbors, how could you ever expect to return to life as normal?

It's a question that is surely being asked by thousands of displaced persons as they return home following the outbreak of bloody interethnic violence in southern Kyrgyzstan in June. As the government vows to rebuild the homes and communities of ethnic Uzbeks and ethnic Kyrgyz caught up in violence that left at least 275 dead and some 400,000 displaced, it must also find ways to reduce tensions and ensure they don't erupt again in the future.

Millions Displaced

If the Kyrgyz interim government is looking for an immediate example of how to get the mending process going, it need not look any farther than its southern neighbor, Tajikistan. In 1997, following the end of a five-year civil war, Tajikistan faced a similar test. And while there have been many setbacks, 13 years later Tajikistan's peace process has been widely hailed as a success.

It's not a perfect comparison. The Tajik war did not rise from ethnic divisions such as those seen recently in Kyrgyzstan, for example -- it was more a battle for political control fought between supporters of the Moscow-backed government in Dushanbe and its opposition led by the Islamic Revival Party (IRP). But the Tajik war did pit fellow civilians against each other -- residents of the southern Kulob region, "Kulobis," against those from the eastern Rasht Valley known as "Rashtis."

I've seen many bodies being brought for burial. When you see them first-hand, you can't help hating those who have done it.

In a conflict in which Kulobis were widely assumed to be government supporters, and Rashtis supporters of the opposition, at least 50,000 people were killed. Most of the victims were civilians, and 1.2 million -- some 20 percent of the country's population at the time -- were forced to leave their homes during the 1992-97 armed conflict.

For Suliko Salimova, a 50-year-old from a small village in southern Tajikistan near the Kulob region, the civil war conjures up painful memories.

"I left my house with only the clothes I was wearing. When I came back, I learned that my husband had killed and my house was burned down. I was left with absolutely nothing," Salimova says.

"When everybody else fled, my husband stayed behind. He said, 'I don't belong to any side of the conflict, why would they bother me?' But he was the first one to be killed. We found his body in a nearby brook."

Salimova lost four other relatives in addition to her husband, all targeted for being Rashtis. "My life will never be the same again after what I witnessed during civil war," she laments.

Gulrukhsor Safarova, a native of the Kulob region, has similarly painful memories.

"I saw many bodies [of Kulobis] being brought for burial. When you see them first-hand, you can't help hating those who did it. I didn't know who had done it, all I knew was that somebody was killing Kulobis. I remember having some strange feelings inside me," Safarova says.

Today the two women have each managed to achieve forgiveness, and even reside in the same district of Kumsangir, in the southern Khatlon Province.

Salimova says people need to reconcile, "no matter how painful it is," in order to move on. Safarova, recalling that she was eyed with suspicion when she first moved to the area at the height of the civil war, is happy to see Rashtis and Kulobis socializing together once again.

Money And Time

Such results were not easy to achieve, and they did not come about by accident. It required cooperation between the Tajik government, the opposition, and international organizations. It took money. And it took time.

The process began with the signing of an internationally mediated peace accord between the government and the United Tajik Opposition in June 1997.

But "signing a peace accord by itself does not mean people immediately start trusting each other," as Ibrohim Usmonov notes. "And you cannot give people an instruction to do so."

An ethnic Uzbek family in a refugee camp in the village of Kara-Su near the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border

Usmonov knows this first-hand. He was a prominent member of the key body established by the government and opposition to facilitate the road to peace and harmony -- the National Reconciliation Commission.

Recalling the many obstacles faced, Usmonov says "the biggest challenge was rebuilding trust between the two sides." And this, he says, "required concrete measures by government, political leaders, and international donors."

Measures included aiding the return of refugees and the displaced, rebuilding their homes, restoring their businesses, and reinstating returnees to their previous jobs.

"There was a rehabilitation program for victims of the conflict, which included psychological and financial support for those who had lost their relatives and properties," Usmonov says, noting that funding from international donors enabled Tajikistan to implement its peace program.

Usmonov points out that the government's role is crucial for building trust among people. "People need to see for themselves that the peace process is working and the government's promises are being carried out," he says.

Kumsangir district provides proof that today enough trust has been established for people to resume their normal lives.

Suliko Salimova, whose husband was killed for being a Rashti, has moved to Kumsangir, remarried, and become a merchant.

Safarova, who moved to Kumsangir from Kulob, who has since got a job with the local government dealing with women and family issues. "A few marriages between Kulobis and Rashtis have taken place in our district in recent years," Safarova says.

The two women admit there are times people snap at neighbors, blaming them for what has happened during the war. But as Salimova notes, "no one wants another war or conflict to grip our lives once again."

Ultimately, the success in restoring peace and unity in Tajikistan derives from "ordinary people's willpower and ability to forgive," according to Hikmatulloh Saifullozoda, head of the Dushanbe-based think tank Dialog and member of the Islamic Renaissance Party who was active in the National Reconciliation Commission.

"People knew that revenge wasn't a solution," Saifullozoda says. "People knew revenge would bring more violence, more bloodshed, so they made the only right choice, and that choice was peace."

- Uzbek Air-Traffic Controllers Delay Tajik Flight

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- Tajik FM meets with head of Iranian president's office

DUSHANBE, July 13, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi yesterday met here with visiting Head of Iranian President's Office also Chairman of the Council of

Iranians Abroad, Mr. Esfandiyar Rahim Mashaei, according to the Tajik MFA information department.

The sides discussed state and prospects of further expansion of bilateral mutually beneficial cooperation between Tajikistan and Iran. They, in particular, noted that there were no any obstacles in the way of expansion of cooperation between the two countries in the fields of economy, culture and sports.

Hamrokhon Zarifi and Esfandiyar Rahim Mashaei also considered issues related to the current situation the Central Asian region and Afghanistan.

- Tajik leader to receive head of Iranian president's office today

DUSHANBE, July 12, 2010, Asia-Plus - Tajik President Emomali Rahmon will receive visiting Head of Iranian President's Office also Chairman of the Council of Iranians Abroad, Mr. Esfandiyar Rahim Mashaei, today.

The head of Tajik MFA information department says Mr. Esfandiyar Rahim Mashaei arrived in Dushanbe for a working visit yesterday.

According to the Iranian Embassy in Dushanbe, Esfandiyar Rahim Mashaei is also scheduled to hold talks with Minister Oqil Oqilov and a number of other high-ranking Tajik state officials to discuss further expansion of mutually beneficial economic cooperation between Iran and Tajikistan.

He is also expected to sign with Tajik authorities a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on the establishment of Khane-ye Iran (House of Iran) in Dushanbe, the source at the Iranian Embassy noted.

Yesterday, Mr. Esfandiyar Rahim Mashaei reportedly took part at a ceremony of opening of the sports competition for the Abul-Qasim Firdawsi Cup at the Dushanbe Zurkhane (traditional Iranian sports club) on July 11.

Head of Iranian President's Office will also hold meeting with Iranians living in Tajikistan.

Economic /Energy Front

Social Front

- 13 athletes to represent Tajikistan in I Summer Youth Olympic Games

DUSHANBE, July 13, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Thirteen young athletes will represent Tajikistan in the I Summer Youth Olympic Games, Maliksho Nematov, the head of the Committee for Youth, Sports and Tourism Affairs, said in an interview with Asia-Plus.

"Among them are Bahodur Qodirov (free-style wrestling), Abduqodir Barotov (track and field), K. Zayniddinova (archery), Sh. Shukurova (taekwon-do WTF), D. Atabayev (track and field), and some others," Neamtov said.

The 2010 Summer Youth Olympic Games (officially known as I Summer Youth Olympic Games) is the inaugural event of the Summer Youth Olympics, a major international sports and cultural festival to be celebrated in the tradition of the Summer Olympic Games from August 14-26 2010, during the XXIX Olympiad. The Games will be held in Singapore, in a decision announced on February 21 2008 after mail voting by 105 members of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). More than 3,500 athletes will participate in Youth Olympic Games (YOG). The YOG will feature 26 sports, forming a total of 31 disciplines.

Turkmenistan

Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- King of Malaysia invites Turkmen president to visit his country

On July 14, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia Anifah Bin Aman at "Serdar" hotel situated on the shore of the Caspian Sea. The Malaysian Foreign Minister arrived in Turkmenistan at the head of the high-level delegation of his country.

According to the press service of the President of Turkmenistan, the distinguished guest conveyed warm greetings to Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov along with an invitation on behalf of the senior leaders of his country - King Mizan Zainal Abidin and Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak - to visit Malaysia at any convenient time.

According to Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, Turkmenistan is interested "in establishing a comprehensive mutually beneficial cooperation with Malaysia, which has accumulated vast experience in implementing market reforms and attracting foreign investments."

Economic /Energy Front

- Federation Council of Russia ratifies agreement with Turkmenistan on mutual protection of investments

The Federation Council approved the Federal Law "On Ratification of Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of Turkmenistan for the Promotion and Mutual Protection of Investments" at its regular plenary session on July 14. According to the press service of the upper house of the Russian parliament, investments of Russian investors in Turkmenistan and Turkmen investors in Russia are fully protected for the period of ten years.

The sides shall guarantee the protection of investment and income of investors from expropriation or nationalization, except in cases where such measures have been taken in the public interest and in accordance with the procedure established by the national law followed by payment of prompt and adequate compensation. Upon expiration, the agreement is automatically extended for the successive five-year period if neither party notifies the other in writing of its intention to terminate the document twelve months prior to the expiration of the agreement.

It should be recalled that the State Duma ratified the agreement on July 2 this year. The document was signed following the talks between the presidents of Turkmenistan and the Russian Federation at the Grand Kremlin Palace on 25 March 2009 with the aim to promote and develop mutually beneficial trade and economic, scientific and technical cooperation through the creation of an enabling environment for investments.

Social Front

- Turkmenistan Plans To Allow Privately-Owned Media

President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov voiced support for the creation of new political parties as well as private media.

People in Turkmenistan -- where all media is state-controlled -- may soon be reading privately-owned newspapers and magazines.

In televised remarks during a cabinet meeting, President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov announced plans to allow the creation of private newspapers in the country.

"Proposals for the founding of private newspapers and magazines can be prepared and work on this matter can be accelerated," Reuters quotes Berdimukhammedov as saying.

Berdymukhammedov also said the country's union of industrialists and entrepreneurs should also launch its own publication focusing on business success stories.

"Likewise, if there are those who want to create new parties, we will support them too," the president said, although he also noted that the establishment of political parties should not be rushed, AFP reports.

Turkmenistan is the only post-Soviet country without privately-owned media. The country's five television channels, 25 newspapers, 15 magazines and one news agency are all state-owned.

Uzbekistan Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- UN Resident Coordinator praises Uzbekistan's efforts in responding to Kyrgyz crisis

UN country team in Uzbekistan highly evaluates the effective efforts of Uzbekistan in response to the humanitarian crisis, which became a result of the violence in Kyrgyzstan in June and led to mass flow of refugees to eastern regions of Uzbekistan, UN Resident Coordinator Anita Nirody said.

In her letter to President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov, Anita Nirody expressed deep gratitude to the head of the state and the country's government for close, effective and timely interaction with the United Nations agencies, which had been provided with immediate access to refugee camps created on the territory of Uzbekistan after the first wave of disorder in Kyrgyzstan.

Upon the invitation of the government of Uzbekistan, the UN Resident Coordinator, as well as representatives of the UNICEF and the WHO that visited refugee camps and received first-hand information on their state, were amazed by the high level of selflessness and measures undertaken by the leadership of Uzbekistan, Anita Nirody said in her letter.

Following consultations with the government of Uzbekistan, United Nations agencies, including UNHCR, UNICEF, World Food Program, UN OCHA, World Health Organization, UNFPA and others sent employees and humanitarian aid, which included blankets, foodstuffs, water, sanitary and hygienic items, as well as first medical aid kits for refugees.

"After the return of refugees in the end of June, the humanitarian aid of the United Nations, which was delivered to Uzbekistan, was forwarded to the neighboring Kyrgyzstan. In this regard, we express our special gratitude to the government of Uzbekistan for the support of our activities," Anita Nirody said.

Expressing hope for further interaction, UN Resident Coordinator said she believed joint efforts to solve the refugee situation would help to further strengthen cooperation between the United Nations and the government of Uzbekistan.

- President meets with German Vice Chancellor

President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov met with Vice Chancellor of Federal Republic of Germany, Minister of Foreign Affairs Guido Westerwelle, on July 15 at Oqsaroy. Welcoming the guest, the head of our state underscored the high level of

mutual understanding and confidence reached between the two nations that is confirmed by the persistent progress in Uzbek-German cooperation in many spheres.

Germany is one of the key political, economic and trade partners of our country in Western Europe. Uzbekistan and the Federal Republic cooperate closely in bolstering regional security and stability in Central Asia. Advancing relations between the two nations has also facilitated enhancing the mutually beneficial cooperation between Uzbekistan and the European Union.

In Uzbekistan, major investment projects are implemented in various sectors of economy with the participation of German banks. Higher education and research institutions of the two countries have built equally practical ties. Within these relations, joint research projects have been conducted in sophisticated dimensions of industrial development, agriculture, efficient use of natural resources.

During the meeting at Oqsaroy, Guido Westerwelle expressed his sincere gratitude to the head of our state for the warm welcome and reiterated Germany's willingness to boost its comprehensive interactions with Uzbekistan in many directions. According to the Vice Chancellor, our country has been making a remarkable input into securing peace and stability in the region by consistently advocating, among other things, to address the situation in Afghanistan with non-military means. In addition, the German foreign minister gave his high appraisal of the reasonable and constructive stance of the Republic of Uzbekistan with regard to the recent events in Kyrgyzstan.

Further development of bilateral cooperation and other topics of common interest have also been discussed at the event.

- Iranian Official Blames Uzbekistan For Hydropower Plant Delay

DUSHANBE -- Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad's chief of staff has blamed an Uzbek rail blockade for delaying the completion of a hydroelectric plant in southern Tajikistan that Iran is helping to build, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Isfandiar Rahim Mashaei said after meeting in Dushanbe on July 12 with Tajik President Emomali Rahmon that Uzbekistan's blockade of rail traffic bound for Tajikistan has kept crucial construction materials from arriving at the Sangtuda-2 plant.

He said construction of the plant is at least six months behind schedule.

Mashaei inspected the Sangtuda-2 construction site during the weekend and met with Tajik Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi. He also participated in ground-breaking ceremonies for an "Iranian House" and a fitness club in Dushanbe.

Uzbekistan began the rail blockade of wagons bound for Tajikistan briefly last fall. It resumed the blockade early this year while publicly opposing construction of Tajikistan's controversial Roghun hydropower plant.

Tashkent says the plant will divert too much water from flowing to Uzbekistan and will damage the country's agricultural output.

Iranian officials warned Tashkent last month about the rail blockade, threatening to retaliate by preventing railway cars from Turkmenistan from crossing the border into Uzbekistan.

Economic ties between Iran and Tajikistan are expanding. Iran has invested in several other strategic projects in Tajikistan, including a \$30 million tunnel that would help link the central and northern parts of the country.

But in May, Tajikistan rejected an Iranian proposal for visa-free travel between the two countries.

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Economic /Energy Front

Social Front