

**Business & Politics in the Muslim World**  
**News Monitoring**  
**Sep 18 to 24, 2010**  
**Weekly Report**  
**Central Asia**  
**Uzma Siraj**

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- Reports: At Least Five Tajik Soldiers Dead After Attack
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#### **Economic/Energy Front**

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- Framework agreement on trans-Afghan gas pipeline construction signed
- Turkmenistan proposes to establish UN Energy Council
- Gas supply schedule via Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline for 2011 adopted
- American businessmen invited to visit Ashgabat more often
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- OSCE Criticizes Uzbek Treatment Of Journalists

## **Summery**

### **Azerbaijan**

#### **Political Front**

- Azerbaijan's ruling party publishes list of candidates for parliamentary elections  
The ruling New Azerbaijan Party (NAP) published a list of MP candidates for the upcoming parliamentary elections on Saturday, the party told Trend. The parliamentary election campaign began in Azerbaijan on Sept. 4.

- OSCE mission to monitor parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan  
The OSCE Mission to monitor the parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan will start its activity on September 28, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) said.

#### **Geo strategic Front**

- Obama, Aliyev Meet In New York As Washington Seeks To Improve Ties  
U.S. President Barack Obama (right) met with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly on September 24.

- Azerbaijan -- A Questionable Partner For The West  
The favorite line promoted by the Azerbaijani government and its apologists abroad is that Azerbaijan is "an indispensable strategic partner" of the United States. While the country's geographic location and energy riches present a genuine opportunity for such an alliance, there is nothing strategic about the current cooperation between the Azerbaijani petro-dictatorship and the United States.

- Nominee For U.S. Envoy To Azerbaijan Takes Two Steps Forward, One Step Back  
President Barack Obama's pick for the next U.S. ambassador to Azerbaijan cleared a key congressional hurdle on September 21 by winning the approval of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

- Iranian President Ahmadiejad expected to visit Azerbaijan  
Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is expected to visit Azerbaijan soon, according to the Iranian media.

- WILL GAS HELP RESOLVE THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT?  
Since August 2010, a rumor is spreading that the Azerbaijani State oil company, SOCAR, would be about to bid for the North-South pipeline, which ships Russian gas from Mozdok to Yerevan through Georgia. Such a move would give Baku control over 10-15% of the pipeline that delivers 80% of the Armenian gas imports, hence giving it new leverage over Yerevan.

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

- Azerbaijan transports 133.4 mln tons of oil via Baku-Ceyhan pipeline  
Azerbaijan transported 133.4 mln tons of oil via Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, 15.4 bcm of gas via Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline so far, SOCAR Vice President Khoshbakht Yusifzade said.

- Azerbaijan's Cabinet of Ministers discusses draft state budget for 2011  
Meeting of Cabinet of Ministers headed by PM Artur Rasizadeh was held today. According to Cabinet of Ministers, the projects of consolidated budget and state budget for 2011 and next three years, economic and social development conception of Azerbaijan for 2011 and next 3 years were discussed, forecast indicators for the same period were listened at the meeting.

- Azerbaijan to export oil products to Afghanistan

Azerbaijan plans to ship oil to new markets, Vice President of State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) for Investment and Marketing Elshad Nasirov said.

As a whole, Azerbaijan does not intend to increase volume of petroleum exports, as exports of crude oil is much profitable, Nasirov added.

- Azerbaijan, ADB agree on future projects

Azerbaijani Prime Minister Artur Rasizade and Asian Development Bank (ADB) Vice President Xiaoyu Zhao agreed on future projects today, the Cabinet of Ministers said. During the meeting, Zhao lauded the level of socioeconomic development in Azerbaijan.

### **Social Front**

- Families Of Jailed Azeri Bloggers Appeal To Obama

Relatives of two Azerbaijani bloggers jailed in a case condemned by rights groups have appealed to U.S. President Barack Obama to press for their release during talks with Azerbaijan's leader Ilham Aliyev.

### **Kazakhstan**

#### **Political Front**

- Kazakh Opposition Activists Detained

ATYRAU, Kazakhstan -- Two members of Kazakhstan's unregistered Algha (Forward) opposition party have been detained by police in the western city of Atyrau, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

#### **Geo strategic Front**

- Kazakh State Secretary invites US President to attend OSCE summit in Astana  
Astana. September 24. Interfax-Kazakhstan – Kazakhstan’s State Secretary and Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev has held a meeting with the US President Barack Obama in the framework of the 65th UN General Assembly session in New York.

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

- FAO Convenes Meeting On Grain Prices Worries

With memories fresh of the food crisis of two years ago, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is holding an extraordinary meeting today prompted by renewed global worries about high food prices.

- In Eurasia, Millions Worry About Beloved Buckwheat

Devastating fires and droughts are not the only consequences of the heat wave that hit much of the former Soviet Union this summer.

Millions of people across the region are now hit by another misfortune: buckwheat shortages.

- Two Explosions Damage Kazakhstan Natural-Gas Pipeline, Halting Shipments

Two explosions in western Kazakhstan damaged a pipeline carrying natural gas in the country, the Emergency Ministry said in a statement.

Flows were halted as emergency workers sought to extinguish the fires caused by the blasts, the ministry said.

### **Social Front**

- Eight Kazakh Inmates Self-Mutilate

QARAGHANDY, Kazakhstan -- Eight inmates at the notorious Dolinka prison in central Kazakhstan engaged in self-mutilation today, the latest in a series of such incidents in the country's jails, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

- Kazakh Border Guard Accused Of Rape

BISHKEK -- An investigation has been launched into the alleged rape of a Kyrgyz woman by a Kazakh border guard last week, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

The Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry informed journalists today that a videotape made in the Kazakh border guards' office at the Zhaisan checkpoint while the Kyrgyz woman was alone with the Kazakh guard has been retrieved and is being used as evidence.

- **Kazakh Activists Allege They Were 'Kept From Traveling To Almaty'**

ATYRAU, Kazakhstan -- Activists of the unregistered Kazakh opposition party Forward (Algha) were unable to travel to Almaty today for a discussion on organizing a referendum seeking President Nursultan Nazarbaev's resignation, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Adilzhan Kenzhegaliev, a coordinator for Algha's Atyrau branch, told RFE/RL that 15 party activists who planned to travel by train to Almaty could not do so as their seats were occupied by other passengers with valid tickets.

## **Kyrgyzstan**

### **Political Front**

- **Printing Of Ballots For Kyrgyz Parliamentary Vote Starts Under Strict Security**

BISHKEK -- The printing of ballot papers for Kyrgyzstan's October 10 parliamentary elections is proceeding amid tight security, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- **Dirtying Kyrgyzstan's New Political Field**

Kyrgyzstan holds parliamentary elections on October 10 amid great expectations -- for the first time, really, in post-Soviet Central Asia, there is a fresh and clean political field competing.

- **Kyrgyz Party Leader To Discuss Agreement With United Russia**

BISHKEK -- The Kyrgyz party led by former Prime Minister Feliks Kulov is discussing the signing of a cooperation agreement with Russia's ruling United Russia party, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- **Uzbekistan's President -- The Osh Mayor's Friend?**

You might think the president of a country called Uzbekistan -- literally, the land of the Uzbek -- wouldn't be well disposed to the mayor of a city in a neighboring country where scores of Uzbeks were killed last June. But you'd be wrong, at least according to the mayor of Kyrgyzstan's second city, Osh.

- **Two Former Kyrgyz Officials Will Not Be Amnestied**

BISHKEK -- Two former Kyrgyz officials have been deemed ineligible for amnesty under a decree signed earlier this month by Kyrgyz President Roza Otunbaeva, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- **Kyrgyz Judge Defends Conviction Of Ethnic Uzbek Rights Defender**

BISHKEK -- The lead judge in the case that led to ethnic Uzbek rights activist Azimjan Askarov being sentenced to life in prison in Kyrgyzstan denies that the charges were politically motivated and says one of the co-defendants testified against Askarov, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

### **Geo strategic Front**

- **Kyrgyzstan Closes Tajik Border After Clashes In Tajikistan**

BATKEN, Kyrgyzstan -- Kyrgyzstan has closed its border with Tajikistan following the deadly clashes between an armed extremist group and Tajik military forces in Tajikistan's Rasht province on September 19, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- **Russian-Kyrgyz Military Agreement To Be Signed By March**

BISHKEK -- A Russian military official says a new Russian-Kyrgyz agreement on military cooperation will be signed by March, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

General Valery Gerasimov, the deputy chief of staff of the Russian Armed Forces, told journalists in Bishkek today that all Russian military facilities in Kyrgyzstan will be brought under a single command.

- SCO to help ensure security in south Kyrgyzstan

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states will render assistance to Kyrgyzstan in ensuring security in the southern oblasts of the republic, RIA Novosti informs with reference to the public relations center of the Federal Security Service of Russia.

- Russian Military Delegation Begins Talks In Kyrgyzstan

BISHKEK -- A Russian military delegation has arrived in Bishkek for talks after Kyrgyzstan said it wanted more money to host Russian military facilities, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

### **Social Front**

- Relatives Demand Kyrgyz Security Officers' Release

BISHKEK -- Dozens of relatives of arrested Kyrgyz security officers gathered on the Old Square in Bishkek to demand their immediate release, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

One officer of Kyrgyzstan's elite "Alfa" security unit and eight officers of a second security unit were arrested in May this year for their role in the violent dispersal of mass antigovernment protests in Bishkek on April 7, during which 86 people were killed.

- Four Men Jailed For Using Mosques To Spark Kyrgyz Unrest

KARA-SUU, Kyrgyzstan -- A court in southern Kyrgyzstan has sentenced four men to four years in jail for using local mosques to set off deadly unrest in June, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

### **Tajikistan**

### **Political Front**

- Tajik Security Forces Search Homes Of Former UTO Fighters

GHARM, Tajikistan -- A former Tajik opposition commander says government forces have continued to surround and search the houses of ex-opposition fighters living in the central Rasht district, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

- Interior Ministry denies report about eight killed militants and three wounded government troops in Rasht

DUSHANBE, September 24, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Report about eight killed militants and three wounded government troops does not correspond to the facts, Thohir Normatov, the chief of the Interior Ministry staff, told Asia-Plus Friday afternoon.

- Tajikistan Blames Islamist Militants For Attack That Killed 25 Soldiers

Authorities in Tajikistan are blaming Islamist militants for an ambush that killed at least 25\* government troops in the country's eastern Rasht Valley on September 19.

- Reports: At Least Five Tajik Soldiers Dead After Attack

Suspected terrorists today attacked a convoy of troops in Tajikistan, leaving at least five soldiers dead. According to local media, the convoy was in eastern Tajikistan, about 185 kilometers east of the capital, Dushanbe, when it came under gunfire.

- Militants Suspected In Tajik Suicide Bombing Detained

The Interior Ministry in Tajikistan says it has detained three suspected Islamist militants in connection with a recent suicide bombing that killed two police officers and wounded 25 others.

### **Geo strategic Front**

- Tajik leader meets with NATO secretary general in New York

DUSHANBE, September 23, Asia-Plus -- President Emomali Rahmon met with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen in New York yesterday on sidelines of the 65th session of the UN General Assembly, according to presidential press service.

- Tajik president, Thai PM discuss cooperation issues

DUSHANBE, September 24, 2010, Asia-Plus -- On Thursday September 23, President Emomali Rahmon, who is currently in New York to attend the 65th session of the UN General Assembly, met with Prime Minister of Thailand Abhisit Vejjajiva, according to presidential press service.

- Kyrgyzstan Closes Tajik Border After Clashes In Tajikistan

BATKEN, Kyrgyzstan -- Kyrgyzstan has closed its border with Tajikistan following the deadly clashes between an armed extremist group and Tajik military forces in Tajikistan's Rasht province on September 19, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Tajikistan Says Five Killed In Counterterrorist Operation

DUSHANBE -- The Tajik Interior Ministry says that at least five supporters of former opposition commander Mirzokhuja Ahmadov were killed during an counterterrorist operation in the Rasht district, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

### **Social Front**

- Tajik capital hosts international song festival

DUSHANBE, September 18, 2010, Asia-Plus -- An international two-day song festival, entitled "The Sky of Commonwealth," kicked off in Dushanbe on September 17.

- Tajik pressure said to be growing over Islamic dress

DUSHANBE, September 18, 2010, Asia-Plus -- A branch of the Islamic Revival (IRP) in the city of Kulob has complained that authorities are pressuring women who wear the hijab, the Islamic head scarf, Radio Liberty reported on September 17.

### **Turkmenistan**

### **Political Front**

### **Geo strategic Front**

- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Angela Merkel discuss cooperation

Issues of cooperation in the energy sector, industry, transport and communications, agriculture and culture were on top of the agenda of the meeting between President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Federal Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel. As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat quoting the press service of the head of state, the meeting took place at the UN building on September 21.

- Turkmenistan puts forward five initiatives on Afghan settlement in UN

In his speech at the 65th session of the UN General Assembly, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov has elaborated on the issues of resolving the situation in Afghanistan and proposed his approaches to this problem to the international community.

- Turkmenistan to stay loyal to its neutral status



Turkmenistan's neutral status marking its fifteenth anniversary this year and recognized by the international community prevented the country from being drawn into any forms of regional rivalry and did not let anyone use the Turkmen military and economic potential on its side in potential conflicts.

- Turkmenistan calls for active Afghan engagement in major regional projects

"Today, there is a need for more active engagement of Afghanistan in promising transport, communication and energy projects in the region. It will give the Afghans confidence in their future, help them and their country feel full and equal participants of regional and global processes", said Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in an interview for the national mass media.

- Turkmenistan stands against politicization of outstanding issues on the Caspian Sea

"Turkmenistan's position on the legal status of the Caspian Sea is very balanced and responsible. We are committed to continued engagement with partners in different formats in terms of constructive dialogue, respect and equality," said President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in an interview with the Turkmen mass media on the eve of his departure for New York.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- Chevron ready to participate in joint investment projects in Turkmenistan

The U.S. business circles fully support the Turkmen initiatives including those relating to ensuring global energy security aimed at facilitating the creation of necessary conditions for reliable energy supplies.

- Framework agreement on trans-Afghan gas pipeline construction signed

In the framework of the 11th meeting of the Steering Committee for Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project the heads of line ministries of the participating countries signed a framework agreement on construction of the pipeline. Representatives of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) also attended the meeting.

- Turkmenistan proposes to establish UN Energy Council

In his speech at the 65th UN General Assembly session in New York on 20 September, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov proposed to consider the issue of establishing the United Nations Energy Council that would provide a political framework and organizational modalities for a systematic, professional discussion of the entire complex of energy issues.

- Gas supply schedule via Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline for 2011 adopted

China and Central Asian countries have adopted a strategic plan on conditions of monthly gas supplies in winter 2010 and during 2011 as well as a schedule of regular maintenance of Turkmenistan-China trans-border gas pipeline, ChinaPRO business magazine reported referring to the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC).

- American businessmen invited to visit Ashgabat more often

The program of visit of Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov to New York included a business lunch meeting with members of the Business Council "Turkmenistan - USA".

- U.S. intends to build up contacts with Turkmenistan in oil and gas sphere

The U.S. businesses intend to build up productive contacts with Turkmenistan in the oil and gas industry, Special Envoy of U.S. Department of State for Eurasian Energy Richard

Morningstar said yesterday during the meeting with Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov.

## **Social Front**

### **Uzbekistan**

#### **Political Front**

- Uzbekistan's President -- The Osh Mayor's Friend?

You might think the president of a country called Uzbekistan -- literally, the land of the Uzbek -- wouldn't be well disposed to the mayor of a city in a neighboring country where scores of Uzbeks were killed last June. But you'd be wrong, at least according to the mayor of Kyrgyzstan's second city, Osh.

#### **Geo strategic Front**

- Islam Karimov visits USA while the correspondent of Voice of America is being prosecuted

At the behest of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on September 19 the President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov took off to New York with the purpose to attend the plenary session of UN General Assembly, dedicated to the Millennium development goals, Uzbek mass media report.

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

- Uzbekistan nationalizes business from Russia's WBD

Uzbekistan has de facto nationalized the local branch of Russia's largest dairy manufacturer, Wimm-Bill-Dann (WBD), "in profit of state," Kommersant business daily said on Tuesday, following the company's conflict with the powerful Uzbek National Security Service, RIA Novosti reports.

#### **Social Front**

- OSCE Criticizes Uzbek Treatment Of Journalists

One of the persecuted Uzbek journalists, Dilmurod Sayyid, whose wife and 6-year-old daughter died in an auto accident while traveling to visit him in prison in November 2009 September 24, 2010

## **Detailed Report**

### **Azerbaijan**

#### **Political Front**

- Azerbaijan's ruling party publishes list of candidates for parliamentary elections

The ruling New Azerbaijan Party (NAP) published a list of MP candidates for the upcoming parliamentary elections on Saturday, the party told Trend. The parliamentary election campaign began in Azerbaijan on Sept. 4.

Parliamentary elections are scheduled for Nov. 7. Previous elections in the legislature were held in November 2005. In Azerbaijan, parliamentary elections are held on the majority system in 125 electoral districts.

- OSCE mission to monitor parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan

The OSCE Mission to monitor the parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan will start its activity on September 28, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) said.

The mission, consisting of two expert groups, will arrive in Baku on Sunday, Sept. 26. A plan of work of the OSCE delegation during the stay in Azerbaijan will be presented at a

press conference on Tuesday, ODIHR spokesman Jens Eschenbacher told Trend. Ambassador Audrey Glover, head of ODIHR observation mission, will lead the mission. Previously, she headed an observation mission to the OSCE / ODIHR in the U.S. presidential elections in 2008.

The elections to the Azerbaijani parliament (unicameral parliament) are scheduled for November 7. According to a list submitted to the Central Election Commission, the number of voters constantly living in the country is about 5 million people.

The previous parliamentary elections were held in November 2005. The elections in Azerbaijan are held by the majority system in 125 electoral districts.

Two long-term group of experts of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to monitor the elections will arrive in Azerbaijan. They will carry out the pre-election monitoring and monitoring on the actual day of elections, the press-service said. One group, consisting of 16 people, will be located in the capital, the second one - consisting of 26 people will be placed in Azerbaijani regions.

Numerous observers from the OSCE will attend the elections. They will stay in the country only on election day. According to the ODIHR, roughly 450 short-term observers will attend the elections. The OSCE mission will issue a preliminary report on the day after the elections. The final report will be prepared within two months after the elections. Earlier, the EU, OSCE and CE missions in Azerbaijan declared their intention to propose joint projects in preparation for the upcoming elections.

These organizations stated in a joint statement that the project aims at supporting the efforts of governments and other organizations of Azerbaijan to improve the electoral process and elections in line with the OSCE, commitments of Azerbaijan to the Council of Europe and other standards for democratic elections.

It was also stated that the assistance will focus on strengthening the political dialogue, potential and independence of the Electoral Commission and other relevant organizations, media support. It will provide independent, impartial and full coverage of the campaign of all the candidates, encourage proper execution of the law on freedom of assembly, promote public interest, including women and youth to participate in the electoral process.

### **Geo strategic Front**

- Obama, Aliyev Meet In New York As Washington Seeks To Improve Ties

U.S. President Barack Obama (right) met with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly on September 24.

U.S. President Barack Obama has urged Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev to do a better job protecting human rights in his country during a rare face-to-face meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York.

A White House statement said Obama echoed the message he delivered to the UN General Assembly on September 23 and urged Aliyev to implement democratic reforms in the ex-Soviet republic. The statement also said Obama specifically appealed to Aliyev to free Adnan Hajizada and Emin Milli, two bloggers who posted a video satirizing the government who are serving jail sentences of more than two years.

The families of the two men publicly appealed to Obama this week to ask for their release, telling him his would "be a strong voice in the defense of free speech and fairness."

The White House said Obama also "expressed his appreciation for Azerbaijan's contributions to supporting the ISAF mission in Afghanistan" and "reaffirmed strong U.S. support for the OSCE Minsk Group process to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict."

The bilateral meeting was the latest attempt by the White House to mend relations with Baku. Obama is keen to repair frayed ties with Azerbaijan, which is a critical link in the Northern Distribution Network -- the supply line that delivers food and fuel needed by U.S. and NATO military forces in Afghanistan.

Imprisoned bloggers Emin Milli (left) and Adnan Hajizada

Azerbaijan is also a key player in Europe's energy security politics. With abundant oil and natural gas resources, and a location on the Caspian Sea, it's a key hub for delivering its own and Central Asia's energy supplies to Europe, bypassing Russia to the north and Iran to the south.

'Predator of Press Freedom'

But Washington has to perform a difficult balancing act with Baku. The two leaders met just one day after Obama delivered an impassioned speech at the UN General Assembly in which he said Washington would take a stronger role in promoting human rights and helping civil society groups that work to advance democracy around the world.

Under Aliyev, democratic freedoms have been under assault in Azerbaijan; journalists, democracy activists, and opponents of the government have been targeted for harassment and arrest. Reporters Without Borders counts Aliyev among its top 40 "Predators of Press Freedom." For his part, Aliyev has made no secret of his unhappiness with U.S. foreign policy in the region. A major cause of tension between the two governments is the U.S.-led effort to restore relations between Baku's close ally Turkey and Armenia, Azerbaijan's foe in the ongoing dispute over the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The mountainous region inside Azerbaijan, which was the site of a bitter six-year war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, has enjoyed de facto independence since a cease-fire was declared in 1994. But with an Armenian-majority population on the one hand, and legal ties to Azerbaijan on the other, Nagorno-Karabakh's long-term fate is far from settled.

Azeris 'Quite Unhappy' With U.S. Andrew Kuchins, who directs the Russia and Eurasia Program at Washington's Center for Strategic and International studies, says Baku feels the White House is ignoring its interests.

"The Azeris have been quite unhappy with the Obama administration and relations with the U.S. for the past year or so," Kuchins says. "The principal irritation has been the emphasis that the Obama administration took right from the [start] in pushing for Armenian-Turkish normalization without taking into consideration Baku's concerns that there must be some kind of progress toward resolution in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan before that normalization can take place."

The Obama administration has declared that the restoration of relations between Yerevan and Ankara is separate from efforts to find a resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, but Baku sees the two as linked.

Aliyev (right) meets with U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates in Baku in June.

It considers the status quo -- a closed border between Turkey and Armenia -- as working to its advantage in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Baku also fears that an open border

will strengthen Russia's hand in the region because its ally, Armenia, will become economically stronger.

Washington holds the opposite view -- that an Armenia which can trade freely with Turkey will become less dependent on Russia, more open to the West, and Moscow's influence will wane.

Despite these difficulties, Washington sees its relationship with Baku as strategically important and worth the effort to upgrade.

Two of Obama's top cabinet members have been to Baku in recent months to try and smooth things over. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited in July and Defense Secretary Robert Gates went in June, carrying a personal letter from Obama to Aliyev.

In that letter, Obama thanked Aliyev for Azerbaijan's contribution of military personnel in Afghanistan and for granting land and air rights to U.S. military aircraft and supply trucks.

He told Aliyev that the "peaceful resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" would remain a top U.S. foreign-policy priority and said, "It is my hope that we will be able to broaden and deepen our relationship in the months and years ahead."

Obama's message to Aliyev in New York will blunt some of the criticism that followed Clinton's visit this summer. Human rights groups in both Azerbaijan and the United States faulted her for not speaking out forcefully enough against the government's repressive policies.

The same critique has been leveled at the White House in its efforts to reset relations with Russia, but Kuchins says he disagrees with those who say the Obama administration is compromising its principles to shore up its strategic partnerships.

"The Obama administration has taken a quieter approach on human rights issues in the region and issues of civil society and democratic development, which has drawn some criticism," he says, "but to say that that we've turned a blind eye to it would be going way too far."

- Azerbaijan -- A Questionable Partner For The West

The favorite line promoted by the Azerbaijani government and its apologists abroad is that Azerbaijan is "an indispensable strategic partner" of the United States. While the country's geographic location and energy riches present a genuine opportunity for such an alliance, there is nothing strategic about the current cooperation between the Azerbaijani petro-dictatorship and the United States. Even the most basic elements of Baku's partnership with the West -- energy and security -- are casually threatened by Azerbaijani officials themselves.

For the past year, frustrated at growing criticism of its authoritarian policies and rampant corruption, as well as the perceived neglect of the Obama administration, the government in Baku repeatedly hinted about cutting back its cooperation to support NATO's efforts in Afghanistan. In November, Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov, in a speech at Columbia University in New York, even entered the heated internal U.S. debate on Afghanistan policy, citing the lack of any real American war strategy and predicting the failure of the U.S. troop surge.

Pro-government parliamentarians in Baku have suggested kicking out Western oil companies. The authorities also stopped state funding for Azerbaijani students studying in the United States, and the state-controlled media ratcheted up openly anti-American rhetoric.

How can the country that claims to be the "closest U.S. ally" in the region so easily undermine every significant link that ties it to American interests in that region?

Irreconcilable Difference?

The answer lies in the fundamental incompatibility between the system that rules Azerbaijan today and the idea of its reliable partnership with and eventual integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. After all, this is the country where pro-government mobs are deployed along with police to disperse opposition rallies, bloggers are subjected to brutal attacks by civilian-clothed "athletes" and then thrown into jail, journalists are killed or kept behind bars in defiance of the decision by European Court of Human Rights, and Western radio stations are banned from local airwaves.

In spite of the above-mentioned developments, both U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently visited Baku, trying to defuse the tensions. In an apparent attempt to please Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, Gates delivered a personal letter from U.S. President Barack Obama. And Clinton, to the dismay of rights groups and free-media advocates, even praised the regime for its nonexistent "progress" on human rights.

In a telling answer to these American reverences, the Aliyev regime responded by increasing and upholding jail sentences for the imprisoned journalists and bloggers whose cases Clinton raised during her Baku trip. Aliyev signed an agreement doubling natural-gas sales to Russia, which is seen to come at the expense of Azerbaijan's crucial supplies for the Western-backed Nabucco project.

Questioning The Course

Such actions by the Azerbaijani leadership should serve as sufficient evidence that it lacks any strategic commitment to the pro-Western course. The regime views its relations with the United States and other powerful democracies as a mere tactic for protecting its own very temporal interests. It has neither the will nor desire to reform, as it considers the introduction of even basic political freedoms a threat to its hold on power. It thus veers eagerly toward Russia when it has a disagreement with its Western partners.

Used to running the country by bullying opponents into silence, the Azerbaijani government seems to believe it can apply a similar strategy in foreign policy, albeit in a slightly more concealed manner. Indeed, looking at the recent U.S.-Azerbaijani discourse, one might conclude that the world's most powerful democracy is being forced by a small authoritarian petro-dictatorship to tone down the criticism of its human rights violations.

But U.S. policymakers should be aware of the real cost of continuing, unquestioning support to the Aliyev regime, which results in alienating the growing segments of the population unhappy with the government's corrupt and oppressive policies.

The windfall of oil revenues masks the absence of any sustainable economic model in Azerbaijan. Petro-dollars are being squandered through corruption in multimillion-dollar projects with inflated costs, with only a little trickling down to the general population. All major industries are monopolies tightly controlled by the circle of ruling oligarchs, leaving no viable avenues for other businesses. A decline in oil prices or some other financial downturn can easily lead to violent unrest with unpredictable consequences. As happened with other countries in that region, the forces of dissent turning against the despotic and corrupt government might also retain unpleasant memories of U.S. support for the falling dictatorship.

Instead of futile and shortsighted efforts aimed at pleasing the ruling Azerbaijani dynasty, Western policies should focus on supporting those forces within Azerbaijan that promote the shared values of democracy and individual liberties. This is the basis upon which a true strategic alliance can be built.

- Nominee For U.S. Envoy To Azerbaijan Takes Two Steps Forward, One Step Back

President Barack Obama's pick for the next U.S. ambassador to Azerbaijan cleared a key congressional hurdle on September 21 by winning the approval of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Senators on the committee voted 17-to-two to approve Matthew Bryza as the top U.S. diplomat in Baku, a position that has been vacant for more than a year. His nomination must now be confirmed by the U.S. Senate, which usually approves the majority of nominations that have cleared the committee.

But a potential roadblock to Bryza's confirmation arose shortly after the vote when Senator Barbara Boxer (Democrat, California) placed a hold on the nomination, preventing the full Senate from voting on it.

RFE/RL later confirmed that Senator Robert Menendez (Democrat, New Jersey), who, along with Boxer, had voted against Bryza during the committee vote, had also placed a hold on the nomination.

#### Tough Questions

Bryza's nomination has been contentious and controversial from the start.

The career diplomat was one of the most visible U.S. officials in the Caucasus region under President George W. Bush, as deputy assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs.

He was also the U.S. co-chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Minsk Group, which seeks to broker a settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, a region that broke away from Azerbaijan after a war in the 1990s and is populated mainly by ethnic Armenians.

But Bryza's nomination, which was announced in late May, provoked an immediate and angry response from Armenian diaspora groups and some Armenian officials, who accuse Bryza of a pro-Azerbaijan bias. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee had originally scheduled a vote on Bryza for August 3, but it was postponed at the request of Boxer and pushed back until after Congress's summer recess.

Boxer, who represents California, the U.S. state with the largest Armenian-American constituency, was one of a number of senators who had strongly questioned Bryza at a July 22 hearing.

She had asked Bryza why he had not explicitly condemned Azerbaijan for its role in a June firefight near Nagorno-Karabakh that left one Azerbaijani and four Armenian soldiers dead. Armenian and Karabakh officials had described the clash as an act of Azerbaijani aggression, while Azerbaijan said the incident was a consequence of Armenia's failure to withdraw from its territory.

Bryza referred to an OSCE statement condemning the violence and said, "There is no military solution to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh."

"I agree with you," said Boxer in response, "but that's why I was looking for a more forceful answer in terms of the condemnation of Azerbaijan."

The California senator, along with fellow Democratic colleagues, also pressed Bryza on several other matters from his State Department days, including a quote attributed to him that said, "Armenia must agree that Nagorno-Karabakh is legally part of Azerbaijan," and his delay of three months in condemning Azerbaijani desecration of Armenian gravesites. In his defense, Bryza said his words had been incorrectly translated from Russian, and that he had needed time to clarify the circumstances surrounding the destruction of the graves.

"Being criticized or being thought of as being closer to one side or the other is part of the game, and I have to just remain always objective and deliver the tough messages when necessary," Bryza said.

#### Concerns And Support

At the September 21 vote, Boxer said she wasn't confident that Bryza would deliver those messages when it comes to confronting the government of Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev.

Barbara Boxer, Democratic senator from California

"Mr. Bryza has demonstrated a pattern of unwillingness to speak out forcefully in the face of continued Azerbaijani aggression toward Nagorno-Karabakh," she told the committee. "My 'no' vote today is a reflection of my belief that...we desperately need someone who unequivocally believes that we must stand up to threats of violence, wherever they come from, as we continue down the tough road to peace."

Bryza has received consistent support from Republican backers, however, including the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's top minority member, Richard Lugar (Republican, Indiana), who has praised the diplomat for "[advancing] United States interests by taking a balanced approach."

Ahead of the September 21 vote, the Armenian National Committee of American (ANCA), an influential Armenian lobbying group, sent letters to senators urging them to stop Bryza's nomination. Their website's headline was split between a message of congratulations on Armenia's Independence Day and a call to voters to press their senators on the Bryza nomination.

Aram Hamparian, ANCA's executive director, told RFE/RL after the vote that he was disappointed at the outcome, blaming it on a "business-as-usual" mentality in Congress.

"A lot of senators have a lot of reservations about the Bryza confirmation, but institutionally, there is a kind of built-in deference on the legislative side to presidential appointments," Hamparian. "And I think that very often legislators give the benefit of the doubt to a nominee even when they have some serious, serious reservations about that nominee."

He said his group would continue to rally senators' support to fight the confirmation.

The U.S. Azeris Network (USAN), an advocacy organization made up of U.S. citizens of Azerbaijani background, has supported Bryza's nomination since it was first announced.

In e-mailed comments to RFE/RL, USAN co-founder Adil Baguirov welcomed the result of the vote and said its members had sent "hundreds of letters" to Congress asking senators to consider the nomination without giving weight to "groundless allegations" against Bryza.

- Iranian President Ahmadinejad expected to visit Azerbaijan



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is expected to visit Azerbaijan soon, according to the Iranian media. The Iranian embassy in Baku confirmed the news without specifying an exact date.

- WILL GAS HELP RESOLVE THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT?

Since August 2010, a rumor is spreading that the Azerbaijani State oil company, SOCAR, would be about to bid for the North-South pipeline, which ships Russian gas from Mozdok to Yerevan through Georgia. Such a move would give Baku control over 10-15% of the pipeline that delivers 80% of the Armenian gas imports, hence giving it new leverage over Yerevan. It especially sheds light into the new strategy of Azerbaijan regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. While the shootouts have been increasing lately, Baku intends to use gas development to exert more pressure over Armenia.

#### BACKGROUND

At the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan was a weak country that had little except oil to attract the interest of international actors and great powers. Azerbaijani leaders quickly acknowledged this situation, hence defining oil development as a foreign policy tool. The composition of the Azerbaijan International Operating Company, which extracts oil from the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli oilfields, perfectly fit into this strategy. The United States (thanks to Amoco, McDermott, Pennzoil, and Unocal) were notably represented within it, as well as Europe (BP, Statoil, and Ramco) and Russia (Lukoil).

However, the main hope was to relate oil development to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Since the ceasefire of May 1994, close to 20% of Azerbaijan's territory was occupied, including the Lachin corridor. Following an idea from the U.S. National Security Council, Unocal pledged in early 1995 to build a "peace pipeline" that would cross Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia into Turkey. In the meantime, Heydar Aliyev proposed to his Armenian counterpart Levon Ter-Petrossian to link Azerbaijani oil exports to the Armenian withdrawal from the occupied territories.

Neither proposal produced any result. While waiting for Yerevan's answer to his proposal, Heydar Aliyev committed to a dual export option for Azerbaijani oil, one pipeline going north through Russia and another going west through Georgia. Moreover, leading international companies – Amoco and BP – firmly rejected the possibility that oil export would be tied up to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Both companies considered the instability of this region to pose a serious risk to the export routes.

This failure caused a reconsideration of the diplomatic impact of oil. Baku then perceived it as a tool for obtaining aid from international financial institutions and to gain international political support in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Azerbaijan hoped that the rising European and U.S. interests in its hydrocarbon resources would play in its favor on this issue. It also asked the U.S. companies to lobby in Washington for the suspension of Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, which bans U.S. support to Azerbaijan. While Section 907 was finally softened in October 2001, this strategy has so far been a failure. Neither the European Union, nor the United States have increased their support for Baku in the negotiations on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

#### IMPLICATIONS

When he came to power in late 2003, Ilham Aliyev decided to reconsider this energy strategy for the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict. He first decided to unify the Azerbaijani

energy sector so as to further intertwine hydrocarbons development with foreign policy. He appointed young and reliable people to key positions, providing him with unambiguous control over the country's energy policy. SOCAR progressively became the leading company in this sector, notably merging with Azerigaz in 2009 and with Azerkimya in 2010. Presently, it is the strongest actor on the Azerbaijani energy market, controlling the production, transportation and sale of Azerbaijani hydrocarbons resources. Once SOCAR had strengthened its position in Azerbaijan, it started investing in the neighborhood, mainly in Georgia and Turkey. In the former, it rapidly turned into the largest foreign investor (having invested around US\$ 470 million so far), controlling the Georgian gas market thanks to SOCAR Energy Georgia. This helped foster cooperation between Baku and Tbilisi, giving Azerbaijan more influence over Georgian regional policy. Since the Georgian Parliament approved the bill in early June, allowing for the privatization of the Georgian portion of the North-South pipeline, SOCAR has been considered as the favorite candidate – despite competition from Gazprom and KazMunaiGas – to take control of the pipeline due to its preferential relationship with the Georgian government. SOCAR is now the largest energy actor in Georgia and there is no economic reason not to invest in the Georgian hydrocarbons transportation sector.

In the meantime, Baku took advantage of the European and Turkish hunger for its gas resources to influence politics in the South Caucasus. First, it has linked its support for the European-driven Southern Corridor project to the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement. While the Obama administration was pushing the negotiations between Ankara and Yerevan forward, Brussels remained relatively passive. Baku made it clear to the European Commission, especially to Directorate General for Energy, that explicit support for this initiative would heavily undermine Azerbaijan's commitment to the Southern Corridor. The DG Energy then lobbied the Directorate General for External Relations as well as Javier Solana's Cabinet (which was then on the verge of being replaced by Catherine Ashton) to soften their support for the Turkish-Armenian dialogue. The increasing gas sales to Russia (up to 2 billion cubic meters a year in 2011) were a reminder to Brussels that Azerbaijan has alternatives for its gas exports.

Baku also linked the issue of Azerbaijani gas transit through Turkey to the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement. A political agreement on gas transit was signed only after the rapprochement collapsed. Now, as technical negotiations are ongoing between the Turkish pipeline company, BOTAS, and the Shah Deniz consortium led by SOCAR, Baku has made it clear that no deal can be found if there is a reset in this rapprochement. The opening of the Turkish-Armenian border is one of the few leverages Azerbaijan has over Armenia and it is not prepared to give it up. In addition, the rapid development of the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania gas Interconnector (AGRI) project, for which a political declaration was signed on September 14 2010, is here to remind Ankara that Baku has other gas transit alternatives.

## CONCLUSIONS

The resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has reached a deadlock. Despite hopes on mediation by the Kazakhstani OSCE presidency, the Almaty conference in June 2010 was a failure. The situation is even worsening on the ground, with shootouts increasing at the contact line between the two armies. While a military solution cannot seriously be considered due to international pressures, Azerbaijan is looking for alternative strategies to influence Armenia.

The Azerbaijani gas leverage may not last forever.

While unconventional gas is developing in Europe, the European hunger for gas is less and less stringent, at least before 2020. In the meantime, the Armenian Diaspora in the United States is still powerful, as the difficult nominating process of Matthew Bryza for the post of U.S. Ambassador in Azerbaijan illustrates. The takeover of the Georgian portion of the North-South pipeline would provide Baku with new leverage over Armenia. The latter would find itself in a very unusual and unexpected situation, with its enemy sharing the control of a huge share of its gas imports.

This is likely to increase tensions in the South Caucasus. Firstly, Yerevan could be tempted to aggressive responses to such a predicament. Secondly, the relationship between Armenia and Georgia may worsen after what Yerevan would consider a betrayal by the Saakashvili government. Once again, the stability of the South Caucasus may be at stake. Fear and resentment do not create a positive climate for peace negotiations. The United States, and above all the EU, must engage further with the region to decrease tensions and rebuild some confidence, in order to finally move forward with the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- Azerbaijan transports 133.4 mln tons of oil via Baku-Ceyhan pipeline

Azerbaijan transported 133.4 mln tons of oil via Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, 15.4 bcm of gas via Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline so far, SOCAR Vice President Khoshbakht Yusifzade said.

According to him, BTC has been in operation since 2006, annual capacity is 50 mln tons of oil and exported 133.4 mln tons of oil so far (September 20). "Azerbaijan exports oil and oil productions to 30 countries."

Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline has been in operation since 2007, annual capacity is 20 bcm and exported 15.4 bcm of gas so far. "Azerbaijan has exported gas to Iran since 2005, Russia since 2010."

Note that BTC shareholders are: BP-Azerbaijan» (30,1%), AzBTC (25%), «Chevron» (8,9%), «Statoil» (8,71%), TPAO (6,53%), ENI (5%), «Total» (5%), «Itochu» (3,4%), «Inpex» (2,5%), «ConocoPhillips» (2,5%) and «Hess» (2,36%).

Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum shareholders are: BP (technical operator -25,5%), «Statoil» (commercial operator - 25,5%), «Azerbaijan CQBK Ltd.» (10%), «LUKoil» (10%), NIKO (10%), «Total» (10%) and TPAO (9%).

- Azerbaijan's Cabinet of Ministers discusses draft state budget for 2011

Meeting of Cabinet of Ministers headed by PM Artur Rasizadeh was held today.

According to Cabinet of Ministers, the projects of consolidated budget and state budget for 2011 and next three years, economic and social development conception of Azerbaijan for 2011 and next 3 years were discussed, forecast indicators for the same period were listened at the meeting.

During the developing of state budget project the development strategy of the state, increasing of defense potential and economic power of our country, strengthening of energy and food safety, support to entrepreneurship, financing of aimed state programs and other important problems have been taken into account. State budget income makes AZN 12 061 mln. Expenditure is forecasted AZN 12 748 mln.

Share of social spending in the budget is prognosticated with the growth compared with the current year. The expenditure for aimed programs, financing of events, science,

education, health, culture, ecology, agriculture, social security, social protection and other spheres is planned to be increased. The consolidated budget income for the next year is forecasted to be AZN 15 557.6 mln and expenditure – AZN 15 129.4 mln.

During the making of forecast of macro-economic indexations the forecasts of international organizations, bank and financial organizations have been analyzed. At the end of the meeting, the Cabinet of Ministers decided to submit the state budget project to the president of the country.

- Azerbaijan to export oil products to Afghanistan

Azerbaijan plans to ship oil to new markets, Vice President of State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) for Investment and Marketing Elshad Nasirov said.

As a whole, Azerbaijan does not intend to increase volume of petroleum exports, as exports of crude oil is much profitable, Nasirov added. "Presently, Azerbaijan exports oil mainly to Georgia. At the same time, we export jet fuel to Greece and Italy and diesel fuel to the Mediterranean region," he said. Nasirov noted that Azerbaijan has already identified promising new markets for export of petroleum products.

"We will be export diesel fuel, gasoline and kerosene for aviation to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan. Oil will be shipped to Asghanistan by ferries till Turkmenistan and from there - by rail. The volume of petroleum to be exported from Azerbaijan to the market is not so large. "

In January-August 2010, consumers received 4.2 million tons of petroleum products (including exports), which is 5.5% more the same period of last year.

Nearly 57.5% were used to meet domestic demand while 42.5% was exported. About 39.3% petroleum accounted for diesel fuel, 18.7% - gasoline, 9,4% - of kerosene for aviation, 3,8% - fuel oil, 3.7% - liquefied natural gas, 3.5% - bitumen , 1,3% - lubricating oil, and 20,3% - other petroleum products.

- Azerbaijan, ADB agree on future projects

Azerbaijani Prime Minister Artur Rasizade and Asian Development Bank (ADB) Vice President Xiaoyu Zhao agreed on future projects today, the Cabinet of Ministers said. During the meeting, Zhao lauded the level of socioeconomic development in Azerbaijan. The sides discussed the process of implementing infrastructure projects in Azerbaijan, analyzed their results, and identified promising areas for future cooperation. They also agreed on the implementation of projects in the energy, road transport, agricultural, water supply, and sewage system rehabilitation and reconstruction sectors.

Until September 2007, the total portfolio of projects financed by the ADB under state guarantee was worth \$104 million. Three projects are being financed by the ADB in Azerbaijan since 1999.

However, as a result of the approval of Multitranches Financing Facility (MFF) funding for transportation projects worth \$500 million, the portfolio has increased to \$304 million.

The bank granted credit worth \$160 million in 2008 for energy projects and \$55.4 million for road projects. As a result, the ADB portfolio for Azerbaijan increased to \$519.4 million. After the approval of credit worth \$75 million from the MFF, the portfolio hit \$594.4 million. The ADB is a major player in the direct funding of the Azerbaijani banking sector.

To date, the ADB has approved credit lines for Azerbaijani banks worth \$56 million, excluding loan agreements signed this week with five banks for the Trade Finance Program and the issuance of revolving loans. However, plans to expand the banking sector portfolio to \$120 million have been delayed due to global processes.

A loan allocated for a cement plant was the first ADB investment in infrastructure in the private sector of Azerbaijan.

The 67-member ADB was established in 1966. Its headquarters are located in Manila in the Philippines. Azerbaijan joined the ADB in December 1999 and its share in the bank's capital is 0.5 percent.

The ADB's leading shareholders Japan and the United States (31.2 percent), India and China (12.8 percent), Australia, and South Korea and Canada (16 percent).

### **Social Front**

- Families Of Jailed Azeri Bloggers Appeal To Obama

Relatives of two Azerbaijani bloggers jailed in a case condemned by rights groups have appealed to U.S. President Barack Obama to press for their release during talks with Azerbaijan's leader Ilham Aliyev.

The families of Adnan Hajizada and Emin Milli, jailed last year, issued an open letter to Obama asking him to raise the case during talks with Aliyev scheduled for September 24 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly.

In their appeal, the families called on Obama to come "to the defense of free speech and fairness."

Hajizada, a video blogger and member of the opposition OL! movement, and activist and blogger Milli, were jailed in November 2009 for 24 and 30 months for hooliganism after an alleged brawl in a cafe.

Their supporters say they were victims of an unprovoked attack, imprisoned as a warning to other activists after posting a satirical swipe at the authorities in which Hajizada held a fake news conference dressed as a donkey.

Rights groups say the charges were fabricated and the trial flawed.

### **Kazakhstan**

#### **Political Front**

- Kazakh Opposition Activists Detained

ATYRAU, Kazakhstan -- Two members of Kazakhstan's unregistered Algha (Forward) opposition party have been detained by police in the western city of Atyrau, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Adilzhan Kenzhegaliev, a coordinator for the party's Atyrau branch, told RFE/RL that Almagul Dzhirensheeva and Raikhan Kenzhegulova were detained as they prepared to leave Atyrau for Almaty. There they planned to take part in a discussion organized by Algha on initiating a referendum on whether President Nursultan Nazarbaev should resign. The discussion is scheduled for September 25.

#### **Geo strategic Front**

- Kazakh State Secretary invites US President to attend OSCE summit in Astana  
Astana, September 24. Interfax-Kazakhstan – Kazakhstan's State Secretary and Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev has held a meeting with the US President Barack Obama in the framework of the 65th UN General Assembly session in New York.

Saudabayev presented Obama with a personal invitation letter from President Nursultan Nazarbayev to take part in the OSCE summit in Astana on 1-2 December, Kazakh Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

“Obama has gratefully accepted the invitation and conveyed his best wishes to President Nazarbayev reaffirming US commitment to further strengthen close cooperation with Kazakhstan,” reads the press-release.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- **FAO Convenes Meeting On Grain Prices Worries**

With memories fresh of the food crisis of two years ago, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is holding an extraordinary meeting today prompted by renewed global worries about high food prices.

Delegates at FAO's Rome headquarters will try to find a way to restore stability.

In a statement, the FAO said participants would "share information on recent market instability and examine the role of market information and transparency for crops such as grains and rice."

The FAO's monthly index of food prices has risen by one-quarter since early 2009. Increases are particularly felt in developing countries, where food makes up a large proportion of household spending.

Rising food prices have sparked riots in Mozambique and are prompting fears of a repeat of the massive price spike that caused unrest in several countries across the world two years ago.

But UN officials have been stressing the current situation is nowhere near the emergency crisis in 2007-08.

Laurine Simon, an analyst at the French-based monthly publication on cereals markets "Strategie Grains," tells RFE/RL that's because stocks are now up -- about one-fifth higher in the past year alone -- and projected global harvests are expected to be adequate.

"We have a decrease of global production compared to last year, which is mainly due to the situation in Russia and Ukraine," Simon says. "In the European Union, we have a generally stable wheat production compared to last year. In the United States, we have a slight increase. But the important factor is the increase of stocks."

### **Devastating Drought**

The Rome meeting was expected to look at a Russian grain export ban that came into force last month and which has been blamed as one key factor in higher global prices.

Sergei Sukhov, deputy director of the Department on Regulation of Food and Agriculture Markets at the Russian Agriculture Ministry, and Sergei Levin, director-general of United Grain Company, the state agent for purchasing and commodity interventions on the grain market of Russia, were scheduled to attend the gathering.

The export ban was decided after this summer's record-high temperatures, compounded by a devastating drought and forest fires, destroyed one-quarter of the country's crops and cut harvest forecasts.

But the president of Russia's Grain Union, Arkadi Zlochevski, told Reuters that reserves will allow the country to meet demand at home.

"We have lost almost a third of what we expected initially. But anyway we will have 62 or 65 millions of tons in granaries," Zlochevski said. "And taking into consideration the reserves, and they are now the biggest in history -- the state statistics center says this is

about 26 million tons -- this is enough to satisfy all national needs in this season. Exports are banned."

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, whose country is one of the world's largest wheat exporters, has said Moscow could lift its ban later this year when the final harvest figures arrive.

Prices on buckwheat went up by more than 10 percent this month after worried Russians rushed to buy up their staple food.

The extreme weather has also affected the harvest in other major grain producers in the region, including Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

Earlier this week, Kazakhstan's Agriculture Ministry announced that the country's grain harvest this year will be 40 percent lower than last year. The Ukrainian government expects the country's grain harvest to be 15 percent lower.

In late August, Auezkhan Darinov, the president of the Union of Farmers of Kazakhstan, told RFE/RL's Kazakh Service that the drought may result in the bankruptcy of up to 20 percent of Kazakh farmers who will be unable to pay their debts because heat destroyed their crops.

Export bans in some 40 countries during the food price crisis two years ago caused a dramatic drop in cereal stocks. UN officials have been pressing for coordinated strategies to avoid a repeat of that scenario, which was blamed for a rise in the number of hungry people worldwide.

That reached a record in 2009 -- more than 1 billion -- though it has since eased to an estimated 925 million this year.

The agency is to make public its quarterly outlook on cereal supply and demand during their closed-door meeting today.

- In Eurasia, Millions Worry About Beloved Buckwheat

Devastating fires and droughts are not the only consequences of the heat wave that hit much of the former Soviet Union this summer.

Millions of people across the region are now hit by another misfortune: buckwheat shortages.

The scarcity of buckwheat, a regional food staple, has translated into rocketing prices. It has also triggered a number of practices reminiscent of the past such as panic-buying, speculation, and hoarding.

This grocery shopper in the Belarusian region of Hrodna complained to RFE/RL's Belarusian Service: "What can we, the little people, do when we have leadership like this all around? Why should Belarusians have to suffer and purchase [buckwheat] for high prices, when we grew enough and have plenty? Everything that trickles down to us we have to buy for insane prices."

Such a reaction is anything but trivial in countries like Russia, Ukraine, or Belarus, where millions of people eat buckwheat every day.

Breakfast, Lunch, And Dinner

RFE/RL correspondent Merkhat Sharipzhanov is among buckwheat enthusiasts who regularly consume the beloved staple as a cereal for breakfast, a side dish, stuffing, or pancakes.

"We learnt about buckwheat when we were schoolchildren. It was my favorite porridge for lunch at school. It was very cheap and also it was very popular for households because it was so easy to cook," Sharipzhanov said.

"Of course, [I ate] buckwheat on a daily basis when I was a soldier in the Soviet Army in 1981, 1982, and 1983. Among other porridges, buckwheat was the yummiest, the most nutritious, and the most popular one among soldiers."

In Russia, this summer's record-high temperatures, compounded by a devastating drought and forest fires, has destroyed one-quarter of the country's crops and cut harvest forecasts.

According to some estimates, the buckwheat crop in Russia -- the world's top producer -- may more than halve this year following another poor harvest in 2009. As a result, the average price for buckwheat jumped from 31 rubles (\$1) per kilo in June to 47 rubles (\$1.50) in late August, according to official statistics.

The extreme weather has also affected the harvest in other countries in the region, particularly Ukraine -- the world's third-largest buckwheat producer -- where areas growing buckwheat have halved in recent years. Acknowledging the shortage's potentially destabilizing effect, officials in the region are taking the issue seriously.

They say they are working to alleviate the buckwheat shortage but insist reserves will allow the countries to meet this year's demand. Some governments have introduced or are considering introducing export bans or restrictions.

#### Folklore Food

Buckwheat is not necessarily as central to the region's diet as wheat, but it is considered more of a distinctly national food.

Irena Chalupa, the director of RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service, says "buckwheat is part of the dietary fabric of Ukrainian life." "I particularly remember the [2005] Orange Revolution, when people started camping out in the streets. Many people, Kyiv residents, brought them food. It was winter and they would bring them boiled buckwheat, seasoned with salt and pepper, perhaps butter or oil, sometimes with a few mushrooms thrown in," she says.

#### Buckwheat: the food of armies

RFE/RL's Belarus Service Director Alexander Lukashuk points out that Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin's henchman, Vyacheslav Molotov, who died at 96, adored buckwheat and considered it a key to a long and healthy life.

Lukashuk says the Soviet regime extensively promoted buckwheat, which is valued for its nutrients.

"If one opens a Soviet newspaper 50 years ago, one would find quite a number of articles titled 'The Communist Party's Care for Buckwheat,' 'Those who Underestimate Buckwheat,' 'Buckwheat -- a Valuable Source of Nutrients,'" he says.

Despite its name, buckwheat isn't related to any grain, but is the fruit of a broadleaved plant. This little brown triangular kernel is believed to have originated in China.

Sharipzhanov says it traveled to Eastern Europe along with Asian invaders

"It is believed that it was brought to Russia and further to Eastern Europe by Mongol Tatar invaders who first invaded China and knew what buckwheat was. In the Czech Republic for instance, it is called 'pohanka' -- which means pagan or pagan's food," Sharipzhanov says. "When Mongol Tatars invaded Eastern Europe centuries ago, they managed to survive droughts, feeding their horses with buckwheat and eating it themselves." Buckwheat has since colonized the region's cuisine but also its folklore and traditions such as harvesting and pulling songs.

Chalupa says that in Ukraine, buckwheat has become a euphemism for adultery.



"To jump into buckwheat' means to commit adultery. And I can think of a multitude of literary references to this. It's something that Ukrainians often use as a phrase, as a manner of speech," Chalupa says.

"Why buckwheat? I have absolutely no idea, because it doesn't really grow that high -- five feet, or 1.5 meter, would probably be the maximum. So it isn't such a very high thing to grow so you could hide in there and commit adultery. But, I suppose if you're committed to do it, you can find ways of doing it even in the lowest [crops]."

- **Two Explosions Damage Kazakhstan Natural-Gas Pipeline, Halting Shipments**

Two explosions in western Kazakhstan damaged a pipeline carrying natural gas in the country, the Emergency Ministry said in a statement.

Flows were halted as emergency workers sought to extinguish the fires caused by the blasts, the ministry said.

The pipeline was originally designated to transport gas from Turkmenistan in the south. State-run AO Inter Gas Central Asia had reversed the flow to deliver gas from Beineu to Uzen in western Kazakhstan before the explosions, Sergei Sarsenov, an official at the company's Aktau-based unit, said by phone today.

He declined to say when the gas flow may start.

Madina Makhanova, a spokeswoman at Astana-based Inter Gas Central Asia, wasn't immediately available to comment when reached on her office telephone.

### **Social Front**

- **Eight Kazakh Inmates Self-Mutilate**

QARAGHANDY, Kazakhstan -- Eight inmates at the notorious Dolinka prison in central Kazakhstan engaged in self-mutilation today, the latest in a series of such incidents in the country's jails, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Natalya Gorina, spokeswoman for the Qaraghandy Oblast Committee for Penitentiary and Correction System Control, told journalists that the eight men demanded free movement within the penitentiary, unlimited parcels from their relatives, and the introduction of a voluntary cleaning schedule in place of the present compulsory one.

Gorina said an investigation has been opened. She did not identify the prisoners or say how seriously they are injured or whether they have been hospitalized.

Meanwhile, alarmed relatives are converging on the prison to try to find out details of what happened. There have been numerous such cases of self-mutilation by prisoners in recent months. Kazakh human rights activists have urged the authorities to improve prison conditions. They say human rights are routinely abused in Kazakh prisons.

- **Kazakh Border Guard Accused Of Rape**

BISHKEK -- An investigation has been launched into the alleged rape of a Kyrgyz woman by a Kazakh border guard last week, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

The Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry informed journalists today that a videotape made in the Kazakh border guards' office at the Zhaisan checkpoint while the Kyrgyz woman was alone with the Kazakh guard has been retrieved and is being used as evidence.

The incident is said to have taken place on September 17 when Kazakh border guards were checking passengers on the Bishkek-Moscow train at the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border.

The young woman was taken to the office by a Kazakh guard. She returned in tears to her compartment, saying she had been raped. Passengers blocked the tracks for five hours demanding the arrest of the officer in question. The suspect is currently being held at a

local detention center. The Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry said its embassy in Kazakhstan was monitoring the investigation.

- **Kazakh Activists Allege They Were 'Kept From Traveling To Almaty'**

ATYRAU, Kazakhstan -- Activists of the unregistered Kazakh opposition party Forward (Algha) were unable to travel to Almaty today for a discussion on organizing a referendum seeking President Nursultan Nazarbaev's resignation, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Adilzhan Kenzhegaliev, a coordinator for Algha's Atyrau branch, told RFE/RL that 15 party activists who planned to travel by train to Almaty could not do so as their seats were occupied by other passengers with valid tickets.

The activists planned to go to Almaty to take part in a discussion organized by Algha on initiating a referendum asking people whether Nazarbaev should resign.

The discussion is scheduled for September 25. Kenzhegaliev said Kazakhstan's security services have organized the double-ticketing situation to prevent the activists from attending the Almaty event. Also today, a court in Atyrau fined two Algha activists \$35 each for resisting police. Almagul Dzhirensheva and Raikhan Kenzhegulova were detained by police as they prepared to leave Atyrau for Almaty earlier this week.

### **Kyrgyzstan**

#### **Political Front**

- **Printing Of Ballots For Kyrgyz Parliamentary Vote Starts Under Strict Security**

BISHKEK -- The printing of ballot papers for Kyrgyzstan's October 10 parliamentary elections is proceeding amid tight security, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

The Bishkek-based Uchkun publishing house began printing the ballot papers earlier this week. Central Election Commission (BSK) member Nurlan Sheripov told RFE/RL that the printing was being monitored by representatives of the National Security Service, police, and the BSK in order to prevent the illegal printing of extra ballots.

Sheripov said ballot papers would be distributed to polling stations 10 days before the election. More than 2.8 million ballots will be printed.

The total number of registered voters is 2,726,000, but thousands of families that fled the country during the interethnic violence in the southern Osh and Jalal-Abad oblasts in June have still not returned to Kyrgyzstan.

The Prosecutor-General's Office has also launched an investigation into the parliamentary and presidential elections held in Kyrgyzstan in 2007 and 2009.

Investigators say the elections held under former President Kurmanbek Bakiev -- criticized by international organizations as not meeting international standards -- may have been manipulated and rigged.

Bakiev was ousted in April after clashes between anti-government demonstrators and police.

- **Dirtying Kyrgyzstan's New Political Field**

Kyrgyzstan holds parliamentary elections on October 10 amid great expectations -- for the first time, really, in post-Soviet Central Asia, there is a fresh and clean political field competing.

But the reemergence this month of a sex tape featuring the leading contender in the current race shows that dirty-tricks politics is alive and well in Kyrgyzstan.

The target is Omurbek Tekebaev, the leader of the Ata-Meken (Fatherland) party, which polls say is likely to win the most votes among the 29 parties contesting the election. If

those predictions are accurate, it would put Tekebaev on the inside track to be Kyrgyzstan's next prime minister, which owing to new constitutional changes will be the most powerful position in the country.

A video of Tekebaev cavorting with a woman, naked, in a hotel room has mysteriously resurfaced nearly two years after it was first posted on the web. It shows Tekebaev using a belt to induce erotic asphyxiation on his partner and is interspersed with faux campaign slogans such as "We won't let anyone bring us to our knees" and "I'll give you democracy."

Obviously no one knows who posted (or reposted) the video, but the intent to smear Tekebaev's reputation is clear enough.

It's a mark on an election that so far has been remarkable for its lack of scandals and accusations. With no political elite ruling the country, the prospects for one of the freer and fairer polls ever seen in Central Asia are good, and seen as a positive break from the past.

Interestingly, this smear attempt comes at a time when seemingly no one is in a strong enough position to influence the results. The video appears to have had no impact on the campaign, and has not gained traction as a topic in the media or on the street.

As for Tekebaev, it is not the first time someone has tried to blacken his reputation. In 2006, customs officials at Warsaw airport detained Tekebaev after finding 695 grams of heroin in a matryoshka doll. It turned out that Janysh Bakiev, a brother of former President Kurmanbek Bakiev, had plotted to plant the heroin on Tekebaev and then inform Polish law enforcement to be on the watch for the then-opposition leader.

When the sex video first appeared last year, Tekebaev declined to comment on it and the Kyrgyz political world seemed not to want to know any more about it.

- **Kyrgyz Party Leader To Discuss Agreement With United Russia**

BISHKEK -- The Kyrgyz party led by former Prime Minister Feliks Kulov is discussing the signing of a cooperation agreement with Russia's ruling United Russia party, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Emil Aliev, a member of Kulov's Ar-Namys (Dignity) party, told RFE/RL today that Kulov flew to Moscow to meet with United Russia officials about signing such an agreement.

Ar-Namys held its eighth congress in Bishkek on September 18. A delegation from United Russia led by Vladimir Pekhtin took part, as did one from Kazakhstan's pro-presidential Nur-Otan party.

Pekhtin said at the congress that United Russia is very interested in cooperation with Ar-Namys. Kulov, 62, was prime minister in 2005-06 under President Kurmanbek Bakiev. He had previously been vice president in 1992-93, and also served as interior minister, Chuy province governor, and Bishkek mayor.

Kulov was jailed for corruption under President Askar Akaev in 2001. He was released and cleared of all charges after the 2005 Tulip Revolution that ousted Akaev.

Kyrgyzstan will hold parliamentary elections on October 10.

- **Uzbekistan's President -- The Osh Mayor's Friend?**

You might think the president of a country called Uzbekistan -- literally, the land of the Uzbek -- wouldn't be well disposed to the mayor of a city in a neighboring country where

scores of Uzbeks were killed last June. But you'd be wrong, at least according to the mayor of Kyrgyzstan's second city, Osh.

I met Mayor Melis Myrzakmatov in late July. I'd heard about him, a lot about him, during my trip to Osh in June, especially from the Uzbek population of the city. But what I couldn't expect was that when we met, on the mayor's desk would be a copy of the Holy Koran and a small book written by Uzbek President Islam Karimov.

I don't remember that Myrzakmatov quoted from the Koran but I do remember him picking up the small book and quoting Karimov. On the way out of his office he made sure I received a copy of the newspaper "Osh shamy" that had large pictures of Myrzakmatov and Karimov on the front page (Karimov's picture on top, of course).

Karimov (above) and Myrzakmatov share a page, if not an opinion on the OSCE.

Myrzakmatov went to Bishkek toward the end of August and the government in the capital, Myrzakmatov claimed upon his return, failed in its attempt to detain him and have him removed as Osh mayor. Even as a triumphant Myrzakmatov made these claims before a crowd outside his office, he again quoted President Karimov.

Strange, I thought, that the ethnic Kyrgyz mayor of a city where Kyrgyz had killed a large number of Uzbeks would have such a model, a hero even. I wondered if it wasn't out of fear more than respect that Myrzakmatov so publicly displayed respect for the Uzbek president. Like him or not, Karimov is a tough customer and he commands the best security service in Central Asia.

In any case, Karimov has not said anything about Myrzakmatov. But Karimov may have had Myrzakmatov in mind when he addressed the UN Millennium Development Goals summit in New York on September 20. Karimov said there should be an international investigation into the June events in southern Kyrgyzstan (no Andijon comments please, one topic at a time).

That probably wouldn't sit well with Myrzakmatov. Kyrgyzstan's government agreed to have a small group of unarmed OSCE police sent to southern Kyrgyzstan since local forces proved inadequate to stop the violence in June and reports of police and security forces targeting Uzbek neighborhoods continue as of late September.

Myrzakmatov has been at the forefront of efforts to call off sending these foreign police to his city. The Osh mayor claims he speaks for the people of the city (though I can guarantee that the city's Uzbeks want the OSCE police there).

But now Myrzakmatov's "friend" is calling for a much more invasive foreign presence in Osh. I wonder if the Osh mayor will be quoting any of the Uzbek president's speech at the UN.

- Two Former Kyrgyz Officials Will Not Be Amnestied

BISHKEK -- Two former Kyrgyz officials have been deemed ineligible for amnesty under a decree signed earlier this month by Kyrgyz President Roza Otunbaeva, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Former State Property Minister Tursun Turdumambetov and former Defense Minister Bakyt Kalyev have been charged with economic crimes. Jusupbek Akmatov, who is a member of the state commission for investigating financial malpractice by members of the former government, said today that neither Turdumambetov nor Kalyev would be protected by Otunbaeva's amnesty decree.

The September 3 decree applies to all people implicated in economic crimes provided they admit their guilt and agree to reimburse the state for damages. They also are required to submit an application for amnesty with all supporting documentation by October 1.

Investigators uncovered \$5.8 million allegedly belonging to Kalyev in the AziaUniversalBank earlier this year. Kalyev reportedly has not expressed an intention to compensate the state for damages.

Akmatov said the financial damage Turdumambetov inflicted on the state had yet to be assessed. Akmatov said Turdumambetov was not eligible for amnesty because of his refusal to cooperate with the investigating commission.

Turdumambetov and Kalyev were in their posts when President Kurmanbek Bakiev was ousted in April.

- Kyrgyz Judge Defends Conviction Of Ethnic Uzbek Rights Defender

BISHKEK -- The lead judge in the case that led to ethnic Uzbek rights activist Azimjan Askarov being sentenced to life in prison in Kyrgyzstan denies that the charges were politically motivated and says one of the co-defendants testified against Askarov, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Askarov and seven other ethnic Uzbeks were found guilty on September 15 of murdering policeman Myktybek Sulaimanov and organizing ethnic clashes between ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in the village of Bazar-Korgon on June 12-13.

Five of the defendants, including Askarov, were sentenced to life in prison and the confiscation of their property. Two others who initially pleaded guilty but later changed their pleas were sentenced to 20 years in jail, and one person was sentenced to nine years in prison.

The case against Askarov has been criticized by some Kyrgyz officials as well as by outside observers for the manner in which the trial was held as well as the harsh sentence. But the judge who chaired Askarov's trial, Nurgazy Alimkulov, told RFE/RL on September 17 that all claims that the case against Askarov was politically motivated are baseless. He said Askarov's guilt was proven both by investigators who worked on the case and by testimony given in court by witnesses, including a bodyguard, and one of Askarov's co-defendants.

He said that on June 12 "Askarov arrived at the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border near Seidykum village, where ethnic Uzbeks had gathered intending to cross the border in order to escape the clashes."

Alimkulov then says Askarov "called on [ethnic Uzbeks] to take the governor hostage" after a district governor arrived trying to urge people not to flee.

Alimkulov said Askarov then returned to an area called Bazar-Korgon and helped organize ethnic clashes there. He said evidence showed that Askarov used a tractor trailer to "call on local ethnic Uzbeks to resist Kyrgyz" and to "fight, provoking clashes and mass disturbances."

Askarov's lawyer, Nurbek Toktakunov, told journalists in Bishkek on September 16 that there were numerous procedural violations during Askarov's trial.

Toktakunov said he was not allowed to meet with his client on a regular basis and the defendants' witnesses were not given the floor during the trial. He added that the defendants' lawyers were under constant pressure and received threats from the slain policeman's relatives and supporters.

Chinara Bechelova, the policeman's widow, told RFE/RL on September 17 that she and her relatives did not threaten Toktakunov, they were just overly emotional after hearing the details of her husband's death.

"Look, my husband was severely beaten, completely smashed [to the ground]. Then they poured gasoline on his body. At the trial they testified that [my husband] was still alive and moving when they set him on fire. When we heard that we could not control ourselves and just wanted to ask the lawyer how he could defend such people," Bechelova said. "We shouted at him, since we're only human. If he had just calmly explained to us that he was doing his job as a lawyer, we would have calmed down, of course. But he started panicking and shouting that he is being killed. After he panicked the situation got worse."

Aziza Abdrasulova, the chairwoman of the Bishkek-based human rights organization Kylym Shamy (Torch of the Century), stated on September 16 that Askarov was a key individual in trying to prevent the deadly clashes between ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in southern Kyrgyzstan.

Abdrasulova said that in May, Askarov warned officials in the Kyrgyz interim government about possible provocations that could lead to an ethnic conflict in the Osh and Jalal-Abad oblasts.

Abdrasulova said she was present at a late-May meeting between Askarov and the interim government's representative in the south, General Ismail Isakov, in which Askarov provided Isakov with information regarding the possible outbreak of interethnic violence in the region.

"Now, the person who risked his safety and life to prevent the ethnic clashes has been found guilty of organizing the ethnic clashes, and that is ridiculous," Abdrasulova told journalists.

Isakov has not commented on Abdrasulova's comments.

Kyrgyz Security Council Secretary Marat Imankulov told RFE/RL on September 17 that he never heard about Askarov's involvement in attempts to prevent the clashes. He said he was surprised by Abdrasulova's statement.

"As for Aziza Abdrasulova's statement, I have never heard that before, frankly. When Askarov gave [such information] was it an oral statement or a written one? I have never seen anything like that in any reports on my desk," Imankulov said. "Also at that time I was not in this post, I was working in Moscow. If that sort of data was provided [by Askarov] it surely should be discussed at the Security Council and proper conclusions should be made."

Kyrgyz Ombudsman Tursunbek Akun told RFE/RL after the verdict against Askarov was announced that his office had conducted an alternative investigation into Sulaimanov's killing and came to the conclusion that Askarov is not guilty.

### **Geo strategic Front**

- Kyrgyzstan Closes Tajik Border After Clashes In Tajikistan

BATKEN, Kyrgyzstan -- Kyrgyzstan has closed its border with Tajikistan following the deadly clashes between an armed extremist group and Tajik military forces in Tajikistan's Rasht province on September 19, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Kyrgyz Border Guard Service Deputy Chairman Cholponbek Turusbekov told RFE/RL that Kyrgyz security forces from the Naryn, Issyk-Kul, Chui, and Talas oblasts have been deployed to Batken Oblast to control the Kyrgyz-Tajik border.

Tajik authorities say armed militants killed at least 23 servicemen on September 19 near the town of Garm, not far from the Tajik-Kyrgyz border.

- Russian-Kyrgyz Military Agreement To Be Signed By March

BISHKEK -- A Russian military official says a new Russian-Kyrgyz agreement on military cooperation will be signed by March, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

General Valery Gerasimov, the deputy chief of staff of the Russian Armed Forces, told journalists in Bishkek today that all Russian military facilities in Kyrgyzstan will be brought under a single command.

Gerasimov said Russia's military air base in Kant, its military communication point in Chaldovar, a torpedo testing station in Issyk-Kul, and a seismic station in Maily-Suu will be under one military command, according to the new agreement.

The Russian Defense Ministry delegation headed by Gerasimov arrived in Bishkek on September 20 and began talks with Kyrgyz military officials on bilateral military cooperation the following day.

Gerasimov said at the press conference today that the possibility of opening a Russian military training camp in Kyrgyzstan's southern Osh Oblast was not discussed during the talks. He added that one of the issues discussed was the possible opening of a joint Russian-Kyrgyz military base in Kyrgyzstan.

Gerasimov also announced that a visit to Bishkek by Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov scheduled for September 25 has been canceled, but did not say why. Serdyukov was expected to travel to Bishkek with the chief of Russia's Border Guard Service, Vladimir Pronichev.

Kyrgyz media reported that Serdyukov and Pronichev would sign agreements with Kyrgyz military officials on bilateral cooperation.

Kyrgyzstan said last week it wants a several-fold increase in the \$4.5 million rent that Russia pays for leasing military facilities in Kyrgyzstan. The possibility of Russia providing armaments in partial payment of the lease is reportedly also under consideration. The U.S. military annually pays some \$60 million to Kyrgyzstan to lease a military transit center at Manas Airport outside of Bishkek.

- SCO to help ensure security in south Kyrgyzstan

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states will render assistance to Kyrgyzstan in ensuring security in the southern oblasts of the republic, RIA Novosti informs with reference to the public relations center of the Federal Security Service of Russia.

According to the agency, the decision on the SCO assistance has been taken at a session of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure Council in Almaty. Representatives of Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russian, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan took part in the session. "During the session there was a hearing of information of the Kyrgyz representative in the SCO RATS Council "On the events in south Kyrgyzstan and measures on stabilization of the situation, taken by competent bodies of Kyrgyzstan," the statement reads.

The Russian FSB's public relations center emphasized that "the SCO RATS Council took a decision to render assistance to the Kyrgyz party, including by means of tuning up timely exchange of information on possible ambitions and attempts of international terroristic, separatist and extremist organizations on destabilization of the situation in the region."

- **Russian Military Delegation Begins Talks In Kyrgyzstan**

BISHKEK -- A Russian military delegation has arrived in Bishkek for talks after Kyrgyzstan said it wanted more money to host Russian military facilities, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

The Russian delegation is headed by General Valery Gerasimov, deputy commander of the Armed Forces General Staff.

The Kyrgyz Defense Ministry press service said the delegation started talks with Kyrgyz military officials today. First Deputy Defense Minister General Asylbek Ormokoev is reportedly heading the Kyrgyz negotiating team.

On the agenda are Russian-Kyrgyz military cooperation and proposed amendments to bilateral agreements on leasing military facilities.

Kyrgyzstan said last week it wants a several-fold increase in the \$4.5 million rent that Russia pays for leasing military facilities in Kyrgyzstan. The possibility of Russia providing armaments in partial payment of the lease is also under consideration.

The United States pays Kyrgyzstan \$60 million per year for the lease of a military transit center at Manas airport, near Bishkek. Kyrgyzstan is the only country in the world that hosts both U.S. and Russian military bases.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

### **Social Front**

- **Relatives Demand Kyrgyz Security Officers' Release**

BISHKEK -- Dozens of relatives of arrested Kyrgyz security officers gathered on the Old Square in Bishkek to demand their immediate release, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

One officer of Kyrgyzstan's elite "Alfa" security unit and eight officers of a second security unit were arrested in May this year for their role in the violent dispersal of mass antigovernment protests in Bishkek on April 7, during which 86 people were killed.

The relatives say the jailed officers were just following orders and instructions given to them by their commanders. The April 7 clashes led to the ouster of President Kurmanbek Bakiev.

The interim government headed by Roza Otunbaeva that then took over the country started an investigation into the clashes.

- **Four Men Jailed For Using Mosques To Spark Kyrgyz Unrest**

KARA-SUU, Kyrgyzstan -- A court in southern Kyrgyzstan has sentenced four men to four years in jail for using local mosques to set off deadly unrest in June, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

The Kara-Suu district court in southern Osh Oblast convicted the four residents of the villages of Shark and Nariman today of "organizing mass disorder" in the region on June 10. Court Chairman Koichubek Jobonov told RFE/RL that the four, all ethnic Uzbeks, were found guilty of using the minarets of local mosques to "call for mass disorder."

The court found that the four men intoned the Azan -- the traditional Islamic call for prayer in Arabic -- at a time when prayers were not due. Local Uzbeks construed the unscheduled Azan as an alarm and started gathering en masse at local mosques, which prompted an escalation of interethnic tension, Jobonov said.

Investigators found that deadly ethnic clashes between local Uzbeks and Kyrgyz on June 10 started with those sudden appeals for people to come to the mosques. According to witnesses, the calls were made around midnight, which is a very unusual time for the call



to prayer. According to investigators, the calls from minarets were the signal to Uzbeks to attack local Kyrgyz.

At least 393 people died and hundreds were injured during the ensuing violence in Osh and neighboring Jalal-Abad Oblast.

## **Tajikistan**

### **Political Front**

- Tajik Security Forces Search Homes Of Former UTO Fighters

GHARM, Tajikistan -- A former Tajik opposition commander says government forces have continued to surround and search the houses of ex-opposition fighters living in the central Rasht district, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Mirzokhuja Ahmadov told RFE/RL that government forces began searching the houses of former fighters from the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) soon after the deadly attack in the nearby Kamarob Gorge on September 19, in which at least 25 police officers and soldiers were killed by unknown assailants.

The UTO fought in the 1992-97 Tajik civil war against the administration of President Emomali Rahmon.

Ahmadov said this morning that government forces surrounded the houses of some former UTO fighters in the village of Takoba and then searched them. He said at least 30 former UTO fighters were afraid of being arrested and were hiding in the nearby mountains.

Ahmadov warned that former opposition fighters could join the rebel group that was responsible for the attack on government forces because of the actions of the government. Tajik Defense Ministry spokesman Faridun Mahmadiyev confirmed that house searches were carried out and noted that government forces were operating according to intelligence information they received and did not break any laws.

Mahmadiyev told RFE/RL that the task of government forces was not to arrest former opposition fighters but to detain the people responsible for the September 19 attack.

Meanwhile, on September 20 local council deputy Husnuddin Davlatov, who disappeared in Dushanbe on September 10, was shown on state television.

He said he was arrested by government forces because he had supplied his brother, Alovuddin Davlatov, with explosives and military uniforms.

Husnuddin Davlatov added that his brother organized a training camp for local and foreign youth in which he taught them how to carry out terrorist attacks. He said he was sorry for his actions and urged his brother to stop fighting and to surrender to the authorities. The Rasht district council today stripped Husnuddin Davlatov of his immunity as a politician, allowing him to be prosecuted.

Husnuddin Davlatov was one of two members of the Islamic Renaissance Party on the Rasht district council. Rasht authorities today issued a curfew from 8 p.m. until 6 a.m.

### **NEWS**

- Interior Ministry denies report about eight killed militants and three wounded government troops in Rasht

DUSHANBE, September 24, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Report about eight killed militants and three wounded government troops does not correspond to the facts, Thohir Normatov, the chef of the Interior Ministry staff, told Asia-Plus Friday afternoon.

“There are no new casualties among the government forces,” said Normatov, “The information that three other militants were killed in the counterterrorist operation in Rasht is also not true.”

According to him, Tajik law enforcement authorities are currently documenting crimes committed by the armed group of Mirzokhouja Ahmadov and other persons and operation to hunt down Mullo Abdullo (Abdullo Rahimov), Mirzokhouja Ahmadov, Alovuddin Davlatov and their armed supporters is under way.

In the meantime, Russia’s news agency Itar-Tass reported today that according to reliable sources, three government troops were wounded and at least eight militants were killed in the counterterrorist operation carried out in Rasht.

We will recall that five supporters of former opposition commander Mirzokhouja Ahmadov were killed and one other was captured during the counterterrorist operation in Rasht on September 22. The operation was launched after a September 19 attack on a military convoy that killed at least 25 soldiers of the Ministry of Defense.

- Tajikistan Blames Islamist Militants For Attack That Killed 25 Soldiers

Authorities in Tajikistan are blaming Islamist militants for an ambush that killed at least 25\* government troops in the country's eastern Rasht Valley on September 19.

Defense Ministry officials say the ministry's convoy came under grenade attack in Kamarob Gorge in Rasht Valley, a one-time stronghold of the Islamic opposition that fought the government in a civil war in the 1990s.

The Defense Ministry condemned the attack as a "terrorist" and "cowardly" act. It blamed former opposition commanders Alovaddin Davlatov and Abdullo Rahimov – known as Mullo Abdullo – for the ambush.

Ministry spokesman Faridun Mahmadaliev said several foreign nationals, including militants from Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Pakistan, were among those who carried out the attack.

"Using the holy religion of Islam as a cover, they want to undermine Tajikistan's peace and stability and turn Tajikistan into a center of the region's radical and rebellious Islamic forces," Mahmadaliev said.

#### Critical Condition

Authorities say additional government forces have been sent to the area -- some 185 kilometers east of the capital, Dushanbe -- to hunt down the attackers.

Several soldiers were reportedly taken to a local hospital with gunshot injuries, some of them in critical condition.

Bodies of the dead soldiers were flown to Dushanbe by helicopter. RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports that one of the dead soldiers, 19-year-old Alisher Umarali, was buried today in his native village of Chavala in the southern Rudaki district.

President Emomali Rahmon, who is currently in New York to attend the UN General Assembly, offered his condolences to the soldiers' families and called on law-enforcement agencies to hunt down the attackers.

Local residents say there is an increased presence of government troops in the area, with some roads blocked and helicopters flying overhead.

Local officials said the situation in Kamarob was again "stable."

'We Are Not Involved'

Some of the former opposition fighters were swift in condemning the attack and distancing themselves from it.

Olim Odilov, a former Islamic militant who lives in the area, said he – and his fellow former opposition fighters, who have returned to civil life -- have "no idea" who carried out the ambush.

"We are not involved in any of this," Odilov said. "So far, no one knows what has exactly happened there. It's not yet clear to us or to the government. We have no links to this attack. We are staying in our homes. If we were part of this, we would be long gone."

Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda, a prominent religious and political figure with the opposition during the civil war, today condemned the attack as a "horrific crime."

The ambush comes amid an ongoing operation by government troops to recapture 18 detainees who escaped from a high-security prison in Dushanbe last month.

A total of 25 inmates, including several high-profile Islamic militants and opponents of Rahmon, escaped from the national security committee's prison on the night of August 22. Seven of them have so far been recaptured in nearby districts. Several Afghan, Uzbek, and Russian nationals of North Caucasus origin were among the escapees.

Former Stronghold

Government forces have since been positioned in Rasht Valley as part of the search operation.

Rasht Valley is a former stronghold of Islamic opposition forces that fought against Rahmon's secular government in the 1992-97 civil war before the two sides signed a national peace and reconciliation accord. Most of the former Islamic fighters reintegrated to civil life and many of their commanders were given official posts in central and local law-enforcement agencies.

However, some former commanders – most notably, Abdullo – refused to accept the peace treaty and instead fled to Afghanistan, where they reportedly became close to the Taliban and Al-Qaeda.

According to media reports, Tajik authorities believe Abdullo has returned to his native Rasht Valley along with a number of militants.

Last week, the country's interior minister, defense minister, and a deputy head of the State Committee for National Security traveled to Rasht district to seek former opposition commanders' support in tracking down Abdullo and other militants.

The high-ranking officials held a five-hour meeting with former Islamic commanders Mirzokhuja Ahmadov and Shoh Iskandarov, trying to assure them the recent dispatch of government forces to Rasht Valley was not aimed at them, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reported. Earlier this month, two people died in what authorities said was the country's first suicide bombing, at a police station in the northern city of Khujand.

- Reports: At Least Five Tajik Soldiers Dead After Attack

Suspected terrorists today attacked a convoy of troops in Tajikistan, leaving at least five soldiers dead.

According to local media, the convoy was in eastern Tajikistan, about 185 kilometers east of the capital, Dushanbe, when it came under gunfire.

Authorities suspect the attack was the work of terrorists, many of whom escaped jail in August during a mass prison break and took to the mountains.

The attack took place near the headquarters of a rebellion in the 1990s that left tens of thousands dead in the country.

- **Militants Suspected In Tajik Suicide Bombing Detained**

The Interior Ministry in Tajikistan says it has detained three suspected Islamist militants in connection with a recent suicide bombing that killed two police officers and wounded 25 others.

A ministry spokesman said the three suspects were all members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, a militant group affiliated with Al-Qaeda that the United States has branded a terrorist organization.

The three militants are suspected of planning the September 3 attack, in which two suicide bombers drove a car packed with explosives into the gate of a regional police headquarters in the northern city of Khugand.

The attack was believed to be the first suicide bombing in the Central Asian country.

### **Geo strategic Front**

- **Tajik leader meets with NATO secretary general in New York**

DUSHANBE, September 23, Asia-Plus -- President Emomali Rahmon met with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen in New York yesterday on sidelines of the 65th session of the UN General Assembly, according to presidential press service.

The sides discussed issues related to cooperation between Tajikistan and the North Atlantic Alliance.

The UN secretary general expressed gratitude to Tajik leader for Tajikistan's support for international anti-terrorist coalition in Afghanistan.

The sides expressed satisfaction with cooperation between Tajikistan and NATO within the framework of the NATO Partnership for Peace Program as well as in border control and demining operations in Tajikistan.

Opening of the NATO library at Tajik National University is a striking example of mutually beneficial and fruitful cooperation.

President Rahmon noted that Tajikistan attached significance to implementation of a special program in cooperation with NATO on joint fight against terrorism. Tajik leader called on NATO to more actively join the implementation of economic projects in countries bordering Afghanistan in order to promote reconstruction of economy of Afghanistan itself.

- **Tajik president, Thai PM discuss cooperation issues**

DUSHANBE, September 24, 2010, Asia-Plus -- On Thursday September 23, President Emomali Rahmon, who is currently in New York to attend the 65th session of the UN General Assembly, met with Prime Minister of Thailand Abhisit Vejjajiva, according to presidential press service.

In the course of the talks, Rahmon and Abhisit discussed bilateral cooperation between Tajikistan and Thailand as well as the process of implementation of bilateral agreements signed in Bangkok and Dushanbe in 2005.

They also agreed to set up a joint Tajik-Thai commission for trade and economic cooperation.

The sides outlined sectors like agriculture and tourism as areas that could drive the bilateral trade between the two countries.

- **Kyrgyzstan Closes Tajik Border After Clashes In Tajikistan**

BATKEN, Kyrgyzstan -- Kyrgyzstan has closed its border with Tajikistan following the deadly clashes between an armed extremist group and Tajik military forces in Tajikistan's Rasht province on September 19, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Kyrgyz Border Guard Service Deputy Chairman Cholponbek Turusbekov told RFE/RL that Kyrgyz security forces from the Naryn, Issyk-Kul, Chui, and Talas oblasts have been deployed to Batken Oblast to control the Kyrgyz-Tajik border.

Tajik authorities say armed militants killed at least 23 servicemen on September 19 near the town of Garm, not far from the Tajik-Kyrgyz border.

- Tajikistan Says Five Killed In Counterterrorist Operation

DUSHANBE -- The Tajik Interior Ministry says that at least five supporters of former opposition commander Mirzokhuja Ahmadov were killed during an counterterrorist operation in the Rasht district, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

The Interior Ministry added that Ahmadov's house was attacked by rockets and the fate of Ahmadov is unknown.

Sources inside the Rasht district, which is about 200 kilometers east of Dushanbe, told RFE/RL that after the attack on Ahmadov's house another former opposition commander, Shoh Iskandarov, had reportedly joined the militants.

Ahmadov told RFE/RL on September 21 that government forces began searching the houses of former United Tajik Opposition (UTO) fighters in the Rasht district after a September 19 attack on a military convoy that killed at least 25 soldiers.

The UTO fought in the 1992-97 Tajik civil war against the administration of President Emomali Rahmon. The Interior Ministry said it was continuing an intensive search operation.

Rasht authorities issued a curfew on September 21 from 8 p.m. until 6 a.m.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

### **Social Front**

- Tajik capital hosts international song festival

DUSHANBE, September 18, 2010, Asia-Plus -- An international two-day song festival, entitled "The Sky of Commonwealth," kicked off in Dushanbe on September 17.

The "Sky of Commonwealth" festival is held instead of the "Five Stars: Intervision" contest that has been postponed for already two years. The Sky of Commonwealth festival is organized by Tajikistan's Ministry of Culture and Committee for TV and Radio-broadcasting in cooperation with CIS Interstate Fund for Humanitarian Cooperation (IFHC).

Variety stars from all the CIS states have arrived in Dushanbe to attend the festival. Tajikistan is represented by Tahmina Niyozova, who awarded a grand prize of the "Five Stars: Intervision" contest in 2008, and Alen Abulfayzov, who was to represent Tajikistan in "Five Stars: Intervision" contest in 2009.

The festival general producer, Ms. Yulia Morozova, said that IHFC had assumed all expenses on holding of the festival.

- Tajik pressure said to be growing over Islamic dress

DUSHANBE, September 18, 2010, Asia-Plus – A branch of the Islamic Revival (IRP) in the city of Kulob has complained that authorities are pressuring women who wear the hijab, the Islamic head scarf, Radio Liberty reported on September 17.

Local IRP leader Mahmadsarif Nabiev suggests that the harassment began after a visit to the region last month by President Emomali Rahmon.

Rahmon was reportedly heard to make disparaging comments about women in "Islamic clothing" in Kulob.

Since then, Nabiev says, several local officials have tried to ban women wearing Islamic dress from schools, universities, and even from working in the local bazaar. Nabiev says women have asked his party to champion their right to dress as they choose.

He also says that in meetings with locals in southern Kulob on August 23, Rahmon urged parents to bring their children back from Islamic schools (madrasahs) abroad and advised women to wear Tajik national dress.

Nabiev says local officials and police misinterpreted Rahmon's comments and have increased pressure on women who wear head scarves and other clothing viewed as Islamic.

On September 1, as students celebrated the start of the school year, Rahmon met with students in Dushanbe and repeated concerns that many young Tajik girls choose to wear Islamic clothing.

Kulob resident Fotima Rahimova tells RFE/RL that her daughters were told not to wear head scarves and not to cover their hair or they would face fines of up to 500 somoni (\$114). Rahimova adds that officials attributed their crackdown to Rahmon's instructions. Contacted by RFE/RL, Davlat Amirov, the Education Ministry's Kulob branch director, can neither confirm nor deny that fines were handed out to people who wore Islamic clothes at schools and universities. But he stresses that the Tajik government and the Education Ministry mandated a uniform that should be worn at schools and universities, and he says authorities must enforce that regulation.

While a ban on the hijab at schools and universities is nothing new in Tajikistan, a ban of the hijab in bazaars and other markets would be.

Safarkhuja Qudratov, a merchant in the Kulob bazaar, confirms that local officials recently met with her and other female workers at the bazaar and instructed them not to wear Islamic clothes.

But Tohir Odinaev, the deputy head of Kulob's main bazaar, says officials merely advised women to wear "national" clothes and did not say that anything is mandatory.

IRP members criticize the recent actions and say such polarizing approaches play into the hands of Islamic extremists.

## **Turkmenistan Political Front**

### **Geo strategic Front**

- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Angela Merkel discuss cooperation

Issues of cooperation in the energy sector, industry, transport and communications, agriculture and culture were on top of the agenda of the meeting between President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Federal Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel. As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat quoting the press service of the head of state, the meeting took place at the UN building on September 21.

The Federal Chancellor of Germany confirmed the high interest of Germany's business circles and Europe as a whole to expand their presence in the Turkmen market. In turn, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov emphasized the Turkmen side's willingness to

strengthen and expand in every possible way effective contacts with Germany, "which is one of the largest long-term partners of Turkmenistan."

Angela Merkel appreciated the speech delivered by the President of Turkmenistan at the 65th session of the UN General Assembly and expressed Germany's support for initiatives of the Turkmen side on the issue of security of energy transit.

- Turkmenistan puts forward five initiatives on Afghan settlement in UN

In his speech at the 65th session of the UN General Assembly, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov has elaborated on the issues of resolving the situation in Afghanistan and proposed his approaches to this problem to the international community. Given its neutral status, the Turkmen side expressed readiness to host a UN-sponsored high-level meeting on confidence-building measures in Afghanistan and the development of effective government institutions.

In addition, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov offered assistance in training Afghan specialists in Turkmenistan for Afghan governance structures in different industries under the auspices of the UN programmes.

Another proposal is about the construction of a railway from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan with possible extension on the Afghan territory with the participation of international organizations, donor countries and international financial institutions.

The Turkmen leader also spoke of the need to urgently build the trans-Afghan gas pipeline (TAPI), which, in his opinion, could have a significant impact on the economic development of Afghanistan, to help address major social problems, including employment, attract investments and positive impact on the political situation in the country.

"Fifth. Turkmenistan is ready to consider increasing supplies of its electricity to Afghanistan, as well as expanding its energy infrastructure for the subsequent connection to the facilities in the Afghan territory. We invite the international community through the United Nations to discuss this proposal," said Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov.

- Turkmenistan to stay loyal to its neutral status

Turkmenistan's neutral status marking its fifteenth anniversary this year and recognized by the international community prevented the country from being drawn into any forms of regional rivalry and did not let anyone use the Turkmen military and economic potential on its side in potential conflicts. President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said about that in his interview to the local mass media.

"Having become an independent state, Turkmenistan made its sovereign choice in favor of the neutral foreign policy model. Despite the permanently changing political situation, emergence of regional and global configurations, our country is loyal to this choice based on the clear understanding of its role and place in the contemporary world," he stressed.

"At the global level, we have succeeded in building stable partnership relations with major powers and main global centers - the USA, Russia, China and the European Union. In the regional context Turkmenistan has established friendly and equal relations with countries across its borders and other neighbors in the region," noted the president in the interview.

"I remember quite lively the debates among politicians, diplomats, journalists following the emergence of the first neutral state in the person of Turkmenistan on the geopolitical map of Asia. Although the majority has accepted this fact positively, there were some views on the likelihood of Turkmenistan's "self-isolation", its dropping out from the

participation in international affairs. The time has shown that such, in fact farfetched, forecasts did not come true and were refuted by the real deeds," emphasized the head of state.

Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov recalled Turkmenistan's participation in the settlement of the complicated social and political situation in Tajikistan in 1995-1996, as well as the country's participation in peacemaking efforts of the United Nations in peaceful political resolution of civil confrontation in Afghanistan in late 1990s.

- Turkmenistan calls for active Afghan engagement in major regional projects

"Today, there is a need for more active engagement of Afghanistan in promising transport, communication and energy projects in the region. It will give the Afghans confidence in their future, help them and their country feel full and equal participants of regional and global processes", said Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in an interview for the national mass media.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat, the head of state gave an extensive interview for the Turkmen media yesterday before leaving for New York to participate in the 65th session of the UN General Assembly.

"In general, I am optimistic about the future of Afghanistan. The recent developments in this country make me believe that the settlement is achievable by peaceful means, through negotiations," the Turkmen leader stressed. According to him, Turkmenistan with its neutral status is ready to host under the UN aegis a high level international meeting on confidence building measures, strengthening the accord and development of state government institutions in Afghanistan.

Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov also called for drafting a long-term Program of Rehabilitation of Afghanistan under the UN umbrella. In his opinion, such program must, first of all, include projects on creation of transport and communication networks, electric power supply infrastructure, establishment of diverse industries, construction of schools, hospitals and other social facilities.

The Turkmen leader also said that Afghanistan's participation in TAPI gas pipeline project running from Turkmenistan to India was one of the important aspects of the neighboring country's involvement in the peaceful process.

- Turkmenistan stands against politicization of outstanding issues on the Caspian Sea

"Turkmenistan's position on the legal status of the Caspian Sea is very balanced and responsible. We are committed to continued engagement with partners in different formats in terms of constructive dialogue, respect and equality," said President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in an interview with the Turkmen mass media on the eve of his departure for New York.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports, the head of state also said that Turkmenistan was the initiator of the first summit of Caspian littoral states, which was held in Ashgabat in the spring of 2002.

"We are fundamentally opposed to politicizing any outstanding issues on the Caspian Sea. In particular, the delimitation of the seabed and subsoil of the Caspian Sea is a legal issue that must be resolved exclusively in the legal field and in accordance with international norms. So we take this issue out of the brackets of our relations with the Caspian states, with each of which we have developed an active and multifaceted



cooperation in political, economic, cultural and humanitarian spheres and as part of future projects in the field of transport, energy, shipbuilding, shipping and communications," he said.

"We intend to further build and expand this cooperation as it serves the common interest, provide excellent opportunities for progress and welfare of the peoples of the Caspian states," Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- Chevron ready to participate in joint investment projects in Turkmenistan

The U.S. business circles fully support the Turkmen initiatives including those relating to ensuring global energy security aimed at facilitating the creation of necessary conditions for reliable energy supplies. Chevron's Vice President Jay Prior said about this at the meeting with Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in New York, September 19. During the meeting, the Turkmen leader and his guest discussed prospects of the corporation's participation in joint investment projects in the oil and gas sector. In particular, Jay Prior expressed Chevron's readiness to offer Turkmenistan its services and experience in all areas, including oil and gas prospecting and extraction, processing and transportation, petrochemical industry and off-shore works.

In turn, the Turkmen leader expressed Turkmenistan's readiness to study proposals on the long-term cooperation with the corporation, including training of national staff and specialists for the oil and gas industry.

- Framework agreement on trans-Afghan gas pipeline construction signed

In the framework of the 11th meeting of the Steering Committee for Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project the heads of line ministries of the participating countries signed a framework agreement on construction of the pipeline. Representatives of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) also attended the meeting.

The managers of the line companies signed the Protocol of Amendments to chapters of the agreement on sale and purchase of natural gas. The meeting participants also discussed and agreed on a draft agreement between the governments of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India on implementation of TAPI gas pipeline project.

In addition, the meeting approved the schedule of regular meetings of TAPI Technical Working Group and Steering Committee in October-November, which will finalize the agreements. These documents will be presented at the Summit of heads of states participating in the project, scheduled for December in Ashgabat.

According to the official report, the Turkmen side made a presentation of the report of an independent auditor, Gaffney & Cline Company, on the certification of reserves in Southern Yoloten deposit. According to the guests, the reserves of this huge deposit "vividly demonstrate the ability of Turkmenistan to ensure long-term supplies of natural gas to world markets," the report says.

- Turkmenistan proposes to establish UN Energy Council

In his speech at the 65th UN General Assembly session in New York on 20 September, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov proposed to consider the issue of establishing the United Nations Energy Council that would provide a political framework and organizational modalities for a systematic, professional discussion of the entire complex of energy issues.

According to the Turkmen leader, in the current conditions it is only the UN with its universal legitimacy, enormous moral authority, existing legal framework and extensive

experience in addressing issues of global importance who is able to provide conditions for a broad dialogue on energy issues and, in case of reaching agreements, be the guarantor of their implementation.

In his speech, the Turkmen leader once again drew attention of the international community to the relevance of establishing uniform principles, distinct rules governing relations between producers, transit countries and consumers of energy resources.

According to him, in this regard Turkmenistan intends, during this session, to put forward an initiative on the adoption of a General Assembly resolution establishing a UN expert group to develop an international mechanism of stable energy supplies in the world.

- Gas supply schedule via Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline for 2011 adopted

China and Central Asian countries have adopted a strategic plan on conditions of monthly gas supplies in winter 2010 and during 2011 as well as a schedule of regular maintenance of Turkmenistan-China trans-border gas pipeline, ChinaPRO business magazine reported referring to the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC).

According to the released data, in 2011 China will import 17 billion cub m of Central Asian gas. Currently, the throughput capacity of the pipeline is up to 24.5 million cub m of gas per day, or about 9 billion cub m per annum. In all, up to 40 billion cub m of gas a year is expected to be supplied via 7 thousand km long Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan-China gas pipeline for 30 years.

- American businessmen invited to visit Ashgabat more often

The program of visit of Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov to New York included a business lunch meeting with members of the Business Council "Turkmenistan - USA".

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports quoting the press service of the Turkmen leader, the parties informally discussed issues of Turkmen-American cooperation in various areas, exchanged their specific requests and wishes for planning further activities. The meeting was attended by representatives of Boeing, Caterpillar, Chevron, John Deere, Exxon Mobil, Case New Holland, Marathon Oil, Sikorsky, Conoco Phillips, Honeywell and others.

Addressing the audience, the Turkmen President expressed confidence that the role of the Business Council "Turkmenistan - USA" on coordination of interaction in various areas, organization of business contacts between the entrepreneurs of both countries, analyzing the state of bilateral relations, aiming at finding new areas of co-application of forces will be further increased.

Stressing that such work is now very much in demand and that it needs an additional impetus, the head of state reiterated the Turkmen side readiness to provide all possible assistance and support. The head of state invited members of the Business Council to visits Turkmenistan more often, the press-service said.

- U.S. intends to build up contacts with Turkmenistan in oil and gas sphere

The U.S businesses intend to build up productive contacts with Turkmenistan in the oil and gas industry, Special Envoy of U.S. Department of State for Eurasian Energy Richard Morningstar said yesterday during the meeting with Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat quoting the press service of the head of state, the sides exchanged opinions on perspectives of bilateral cooperation in key areas.

As the Turkmen leader noted, Turkmenistan as an energy power is focused on expansion of cooperation with world leading companies in using its rich natural resource potential in line with Turkmenistan's plans to create a diverse network of alternative routes for Turkmen energy resources to world markets and the radical modernization of the industrial infrastructure of the energy industry.

## **Social Front**

### **Uzbekistan**

#### **Political Front**

- Uzbekistan's President -- The Osh Mayor's Friend?

You might think the president of a country called Uzbekistan -- literally, the land of the Uzbek -- wouldn't be well disposed to the mayor of a city in a neighboring country where scores of Uzbeks were killed last June. But you'd be wrong, at least according to the mayor of Kyrgyzstan's second city, Osh.

I met Mayor Melis Myrzakmatov in late July. I'd heard about him, a lot about him, during my trip to Osh in June, especially from the Uzbek population of the city. But what I couldn't expect was that when we met, on the mayor's desk would be a copy of the Holy Koran and a small book written by Uzbek President Islam Karimov.

I don't remember that Myrzakmatov quoted from the Koran but I do remember him picking up the small book and quoting Karimov. On the way out of his office he made sure I received a copy of the newspaper "Osh shamy" that had large pictures of Myrzakmatov and Karimov on the front page (Karimov's picture on top, of course).

Karimov (above) and Myrzakmatov share a page, if not an opinion on the OSCE.

Myrzakmatov went to Bishkek toward the end of August and the government in the capital, Myrzakmatov claimed upon his return, failed in its attempt to detain him and have him removed as Osh mayor. Even as a triumphant Myrzakmatov made these claims before a crowd outside his office, he again quoted President Karimov.

Strange, I thought, that the ethnic Kyrgyz mayor of a city where Kyrgyz had killed a large number of Uzbeks would have such a model, a hero even. I wondered if it wasn't out of fear more than respect that Myrzakmatov so publicly displayed respect for the Uzbek president. Like him or not, Karimov is a tough customer and he commands the best security service in Central Asia.

In any case, Karimov has not said anything about Myrzakmatov. But Karimov may have had Myrzakmatov in mind when he addressed the UN Millennium Development Goals summit in New York on September 20. Karimov said there should be an international investigation into the June events in southern Kyrgyzstan (no Andijon comments please, one topic at a time).

That probably wouldn't sit well with Myrzakmatov. Kyrgyzstan's government agreed to have a small group of unarmed OSCE police sent to southern Kyrgyzstan since local forces proved inadequate to stop the violence in June and reports of police and security forces targeting Uzbek neighborhoods continue as of late September.

Myrzakmatov has been at the forefront of efforts to call off sending these foreign police to his city. The Osh mayor claims he speaks for the people of the city (though I can guarantee that the city's Uzbeks want the OSCE police there). But now Myrzakmatov's "friend" is calling for a much more invasive foreign presence in Osh.

I wonder if the Osh mayor will be quoting any of the Uzbek president's speech at the UN.

## **Geo strategic Front**

- Islam Karimov visits USA while the correspondent of Voice of America is being prosecuted

At the behest of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on September 19 the President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov took off to New York with the purpose to attend the plenary session of UN General Assembly, dedicated to the Millennium development goals, Uzbek mass media report.

This will be his first visit since 2005 when the relations between USA and Uzbekistan deteriorated dramatically because Bush administration had seriously criticized the actions of Uzbek military and President Karimov for "non-selective and non-proportional" use of armed power against the insurgents in Andijan, which resulted in the death of hundreds of people. The culmination of undermined Uzbek-American relations was shutdown of American base near Khanabad city in southern Uzbekistan. Realizing the importance of geopolitical loss, US have been trying to rebuild the relations with President Karimov, using every case to inform that human rights situation in Uzbekistan "improved significantly" and continues to improve every year. Nonetheless, this position has not really improved bilateral relations yet.

While President Karimov is visiting USA, the authorities in Uzbekistan are prosecuting Abdumalik Boboev, one of very few free journalists in Uzbekistan and the correspondent of Voice of America. He is incriminated the number of charges: "slander" and "insult" against governmental bodies, "illegal entrance to the Republic of Uzbekistan", as well as "preparation and dissemination of materials, threatening public security", meaning the journalistic investigations, conducted by Abdumalik Boboev in the last four years for Voice of America, financed by US government. He may be sentenced to 5-8 years of jail. At the same time the fact that Islam Karimov is illegitimate president (the Constitution of Uzbekistan says that one person may not be elected three times) is ignored by the Prosecutor General's office of Uzbekistan.

## **Economic/Energy Front**

- Uzbekistan nationalizes business from Russia's WBD

Uzbekistan has de facto nationalized the local branch of Russia's largest dairy manufacturer, Wimm-Bill-Dann (WBD), "in profit of state," Kommersant business daily said on Tuesday, following the company's conflict with the powerful Uzbek National Security Service, RIA Novosti reports.

"In fact, they took away our business," Marina Kagan, a member of WBD's Management Board, was quoted by Kommersant as saying after Monday's decision by a Tashkent city court to transfer WBD's property in Tashkent to the Uzbekistan state. "We intend to file an appeal to Uzbekistan's highest court."

Kagan said it was not a serious loss for the company, adding that WBD had invested \$5 million in its Uzbekistan business.

A source familiar with the situation told Kommersant the decision was due to a conflict between WBD and the country's National Security Service, which controls all large businesses in the country including foreign investment, as well as its role in combating dissent and insurgency. Uzbekistan's Interior Ministry declined to comment.

WBD launched its business in Uzbekistan in 2004 after buying 77 percent of local company Toshkentsut for \$131,400. In 2005, the Uzbekistan authorities offered it tax

privileges, which were to last until 2011. But problems for WBD began in 2009, when the tax authorities started checks on the firm.

Three months ago, a Tashkent court opened a criminal trial against WBD Tashkent's management, including former Chief Executive Officer Alexandra Usova. WBD management was accused of creating organized criminal groups, breaking tax and budget legislation and embezzlement.

Kommersant quoted a source at the Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry saying Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov had discussed the matter during a phone conversation, with Karimov maintaining a tough stance on the issue.

### **Social Front**

- OSCE Criticizes Uzbek Treatment Of Journalists

One of the persecuted Uzbek journalists, Dilmurod Sayyid, whose wife and 6-year-old daughter died in an auto accident while traveling to visit him in prison in November 2009  
September 24, 2010

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has voiced alarm over the treatment of journalists in Uzbekistan.

The OSCE's freedom of the media representative, Dunja Mijatovic, said in a statement that she is "alarmed by the unrelenting judicial pressure exerted upon independent journalists in Uzbekistan."

Writing to the Uzbek foreign minister, Vladimir Norov, Mijatovic expressed concern for two journalists, Abdumalik Boboyev and Vladimir Berezovski, prosecuted for alleged libel.

Mijatovic also expressed concern about three other journalists -- Dilmurod Saiid, Solijon Abdurahmanov, and Hairullo Khamidov -- who are currently serving jail sentences of between six and 12 1/2 years.

In her letter to the Uzbek foreign minister, Mijatovic wrote that "non state-media in Uzbekistan continue to be the target of unrelenting judicial harassment and this is a matter of serious concern to me."

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