

Business & Politics in the Muslim World
News Monitoring
Weekly Report
Dec 13 to Dec 18, 2009
Central Asia
Uzma Siraj

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- Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan reaffirm policy for full cooperation

Economic /Energy Front

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- Turkmen-Japanese and Japanese-Turkmen economic cooperation committees hold meeting in Tokyo
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Summery

Azerbaijan

Political Front

• Azerbaijani political parties represented at parliament address U.S. embassy
 Political parties represented at the Azerbaijani Parliament addressed the U.S. embassy in Baku voicing protest against the U.S. Congress financial aid to Nagorno-Karabakh separatists from the budget bill 2010. Chairman of the Social Welfare Party, Member of the Parliament Khanhuseyn Kazimli said the letter was undersigned by the representatives of 12 political parties at the parliament.

Geo Strategic Front

• French president may visit Azerbaijan
 “President Ilham Aliyev’s visit to France was very successful”, chief of the international relations department of the Presidential Administration Novruz Mammadov said. He said this visit once more showed that relations between the two countries were in a high level.

• Meeting of Azerbaijan-Korea interparliamentary friendship groups held
 Korean parliamentarian Suh Byung Soo has praised the country’s relations with Azerbaijan. Byung Soo, who chairs a parliamentary working group with Azerbaijan at the Korean National Assembly, spoke to Azeri Parliament Speaker Ogtay Asadov on Tuesday.

• Isareli FM to visit Azerbaijan
 Chief of the Israeli Foreign Ministry’s Department for Asia and Eurasia Pinkhasa Avivi will visit Azerbaijan on Dec. 20-23. Azerbaijan-Israeli relations, as well as first official visit of Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman to Baku will be debated during Avivi’s visit.

Economic /Energy Front

- Head of SOCAR: Our gasoline and diesel fuel meet standards

The State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic's (SOCAR) gasoline and diesel fuel from the Heydar Aliyev Baku Oil Refinery fully meet international standards, SOCAR head Rovnag Abdullayev said today.

- SOCAR president: Azerbaijan, Turkey are closer to gas price deal

Azerbaijan and Turkey are closer to agree on a price for natural gas Azerbaijan supplies to Turkey, said Rovnag Abdullayev, president of Azerbaijan State Oil Company (SOCAR).

- Azerbaijan, Iran sign gas contract

SOCAR (State Oil Company of Azerbaijan) and the National Iranian Gas Export Company signed an agreement on supply of Azerbaijani gas to the northern provinces of Iran during the winter and an agreement on confidentiality, to hold negotiations on five-year contract (with possibility of extension) for the supply of Azerbaijani gas, said the statement by the Foreign Ministry of Azerbaijan

- Economist: Azerbaijan will be the world's third fastest-growing economy amid financial crisis

The cyclical economic upswing in the developed world will continue into the early part of 2010 and, apart from Eastern Europe, developing countries will recover relatively quickly from the 2008-09 financial and economic crisis.

Social Front

- EU Parliament Criticizes Azerbaijan On Media Curbs

The European Parliament has adopted a resolution critical of what it calls the deterioration of media freedom in Azerbaijan. The vote, by a show of hands, followed a parliamentary debate on freedom of expression in Azerbaijan.

- EU Shines Light On Azeri Media

Former Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis says that deteriorating media freedom in Azerbaijan reminds him of the Soviet period and that it is time for Baku to choose whether it wants to follow the European path, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

- Baku hosts concert in memory of national leader Heydar Aliyev

Azerbaijan's capital has hosted a concert to mark the 6th anniversary of death of national leader Heydar Aliyev. The concert, called A Tribute to Heydar Aliyev, has been arranged as part of the 3rd International Rostropovich festival.

- Over 100 religious communities reregistered in Azerbaijan

The State Committee for Work with Religious Associations has registered 30 religious communities more, the committee officials said. More than 100 religious communities have already been reregistered.

Kazakstan

Political Front

- Kazakh Court Rejects Appeal By Jailed Journalist

The Zhambyl regional appeals court in southern Kazakhstan has upheld the verdict against jailed independent journalist Ramazan Esergepov, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Esergepov's wife, Raushan Esergepova, told RFE/RL that her husband intends to appeal to Kazakhstan's Supreme Court. Esergepov, the owner and chief editor of the Almaty-based weekly "Alma-Ata Inform," was sentenced to three years of jail this summer for revealing state secrets in an article printed in his newspaper in November 2008.

Geo Strategic Front

- OSCE Official Hopeful Kazakh Chairmanship Can Help Georgia
An Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) official says Kazakhstan could play an important role in resolving tensions between Georgia and its breakaway regions when it takes over the OSCE chair in 2010, RFE/RL's Echo of the Caucasus reports.

- U.S. Wants Cooperation With Central Asia, But Also Progress On Rights, Democracy

If there was ever any doubt, it has been made clear that the Obama administration views Central Asia as an important part of U.S. foreign policy. George Krol, the U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs, sent the message during a special Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee hearing on December 15.

- U.S. Urges Kazakh Rights Progress As OSCE Chair

The United States urged Kazakhstan today to use its chairmanship of Europe's main rights and security watchdog to improve its own record. Rights groups have criticized the West for allowing Kazakhstan to assume the rotating chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2010, saying the nation is unfit to lead a group devoted to promoting democracy.

- Kazakhstan wants OSCE summit with Afghan focus

Kazakhstan aims to use its presidency of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to press for a resolution to the conflict in Afghanistan, the country's foreign minister said.

Economic /Energy Front

- BP sells stakes in CPC, Tengiz to Russian Lukoil

BP sold its interest in Kazakhstan's Tengiz oil field and the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) to Russian Lukoil, as it completed the long-awaited exit from Kazakhstan. Lukoil will pay \$1.6 billion in three installments over the next two years to acquire BP's 46-percent share in the Lukarco joint venture, which owns a 12.5-percent stake in CPC and a 5-percent holding in the Tengizchevroil project. Lukoil will also repay a \$43-million loan, the British oil company extended to Lukarco.

- China, Kazakhstan unveil landmark gas pipeline

The leaders of Kazakhstan and China jointly unveiled Saturday the Kazakh section of a natural gas pipeline that will tap into Central Asia's vast energy riches and loosen Russia's influence over the region.

- Kazakh agricultural sector grows 11% in 2009

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- China, Kazakhstan set to sign nuclear agreement

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Social Front

- Kazakhs Rally To Mark 1986 Student 'Uprising'

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- **Kazakh Protesters Arrested On National Holiday**

Almaty police say they detained 29 people today for a disturbance during demonstrations on Kazakhstan's Independence Day, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Almaty Deputy Mayor Serik Seidumanov told RFE/RL that the protesters were detained for "blocking public transportation on the street."

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- **Kyrgyz Supreme Court to improve judicial system's image**

The Supreme Court of Kyrgyzstan plans to improve image of the judicial system, Janyl Alieva Chairwoman of the court said Tuesday at the conference devoted to the 85th anniversary of the institution.

- **PM charges Emergency Ministry to pledge illegally allocated funds**

Daniyar Usenov Head of the Kyrgyz government charged the Emergency Ministry to pledge funds, illegally taken by the body from the emergency reserve within two weeks

- **Former military attorney named Justice Minister of Kyrgyzstan**

Former military attorney Kurmantai Abdiev, was appointed on post of the Justice Minister of Kyrgyzstan. The minister's candidacy was approved by President Bakiev and introduced to the cabinet by the premier Daniyar Usenov Tuesday morning.

Geo Strategic Front

- **Kyrgyz leader to attend CIS Heads of State informal summit in Almaty**

Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev will take part in the informal summit of the CIS heads of state in Almaty (Kazakhstan) on December 18-20, 2009.

Economic /Energy Front

- **Germany allocates Kyrgyzstan €8M for housing development**

Germany in the name of German Development Bank KfW allocates Kyrgyzstan €8million for housing development, Marat Sultanov, the Finance Minister of Kyrgyzstan said at a session of the social policy committee Monday.

- **Kyrgyzstan's Toktogul hydropower plant restarted**

Kyrgyzstan has received the French Republic's Human Rights Prize, Tolekan Ismailova director of Citizens Against Corruption human rights center told the press conference in the news agency 24.kg Monday.

- **Kyrgyz Parliament to moot 2010 budget**

Parliament of Kyrgyzstan will consider the draft republican 2010 budget and discuss amendments to the 2009 budget, press service of the parliament reported Tuesday.

Social Front

- **Russian Journalist Beaten In Kyrgyzstan**

A reporter for the Russian BaltInfo news agency was beaten in Kyrgyzstan's capital today, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Aleksandr Evgrafov told RFE/RL that two men in police uniforms forced him into a car that had no license plates and tried to search him.

- **MP: Health of Kyrgyz school students worsens gradually**

"Medical examinations revealed that health of school students in Kyrgyzstan worsens from year to year," a lawmaker Nurbybyu Kerimova said Monday at the session of parliamentarian committee on social policy. Today children are often diagnosed with thyroid, digestive, ear, nose and throat disorders.

Tajikistan

Political Front

- Late Tajik Minister's Group Charged With Plotting Breakout

A criminal case has been opened against 49 associates of late Tajik Emergency Situations Minister Mirzo Ziyoev, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Prosecutor-General Bobojon Bobokhonov told RFE/RL today that an investigation by the National Security Committee has shown that Ziyoev and 49 others were plotting an armed operation to release some of their supporters from jail.

- Majlisi Namoyandagon board considers amendments to the law on mandatory military service

-- The board (Shuro) of Tajikistan's lower chamber (Majlisi Namoyandagon) of parliament considered a bill requiring amendments to the country's law on mandatory military service at a December 14 meeting, presided over by its speaker, Saydullo Khairulloev

- President Rahmon sets date for parliamentary election

-- President Emomali Rahmon yesterday signed a decree designating elections to the parliament (Majlisi Oli) and local legislatures (Majlis), according to presidential press service.

- SDPT does not trust election observers from CIS and SCO

The Social-Democratic Party (SDPT) does not trust election observers from member nations of the CIS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

- 600 observers expected to monitor parliamentary elections in Tajikistan

-- The Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CCER) is doing its best to ensure holding of parliamentary elections in the spirit of democracy and transparency, the CCER head Mirzoali Boltuyev told reporters on December 16.

Geo Strategic Front

- Two Tajiks Wounded By Uzbek Border Guards

Uzbek border guards have shot and wounded two Tajik citizens along Tajikistan's border in the northern Panjakent district, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Economic /Energy Front

- Uzbek, Tajik Officials Discuss Gas Price For 2010

The head of Tajikistan's TajikTransGaz says gas negotiations with Uzbekistan are progressing but that there is still no agreement on a gas price for 2010, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

- Tajik Embassy in Beijing transfers money to help Roghun hydroelectricity project

- Employees of Tajik Embassy in Beijing, China have given up their three-day's wages to help implementation of the Roghun hydroelectricity project.

- New report on business environment in Tajikistan to be presented tomorrow

-- Presentation of a new report, Business Environment in Tajikistan through Eyes of Representatives of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), will take place at the State Committee for Investments and State-owned Property Management (GosKomInvest) in Dushanbe on December 16.

- Tajikistan to experience effects of global financial crisis in 2010 as well, says minister

The draft poverty reduction strategy paper for 2010-2012, which has been worked out by ministries and organizations of Tajikistan in cooperation with partners for development, is currently under consideration by the government, Minister of Economic Development and Trade Farrukh Hamraliyev told reporters in Dushanbe on December 16.

- Inflation for Jan-Nov 09 stands at 4.9 percent

In Tajikistan, gross domestic product (GDP) rose 3,1 percent in the year to November 30, 2009, reaching 18.3879 billion somoni (equivalent to 4.1 billion U.S. dollars), according to the State Committee for Statistics.

Social Front

- WHO Confirms 14 Swine-Flu Cases In Tajikistan

-- A World Health Organization (WHO) official has said there are 14 swine-flu cases in Tajikistan, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Craig Hampton, a technical officer at WHO's Disaster Preparedness Response office in Dushanbe, told RFE/RL that no one in Tajikistan has died from swine flu.

- Seminar to discuss national disaster risk management strategy takes place in Dushanbe tomorrow

A seminar on the national disaster risk management strategy and the plan of actions for implementation of this strategy will take place in Dushanbe tomorrow, according to the UNDP CO in Tajikistan.

- Tajik media watchdog decries limits on information access

-- Over the first eleven months of this year, monitoring by the National Association of Independent Mass Media of Tajikistan (Nansmit) of respect for the rights of journalists and the media has recorded 27 instances of a refusal to provide, or an attempt to limit access to information of significance for society,

- Tajik president leaves for Copenhagen to join UN climate change summit

President Emomali Rahmon today afternoon left for Copenhagen to join the UN climate change summit, according to presidential press service. Rahmon is scheduled to deliver a statement at the summit and hold a number of bilateral meetings in Copenhagen.

Turkmenistan

Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- Uzbeks, Turkmen To Ease Border Transit

Uzbek President Islam Karimov and Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov have signed an agreement to ease cross-border transit for people living along their common frontier, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports.

- Dmitry Medvedev to pay working visit to Ashgabat on December 22

During a telephone conversation on December 15, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev discussed prospects of the Turkmen-Russian cooperation, which is "successfully developing in all important areas such as the fuel and energy complex, energy, industry, military, technical and other areas.

- President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov receives Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Vice Prime Minister of Russia Igor Sechin discussed cooperation in the energy sphere and promotion of the most important joint projects aimed at the intensification of partnership at a meeting yesterday.

- Emperor of Japan receives President of Turkmenistan

On December 17, the second day of the official visit of Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov to Japan, the Turkmen leader was received by Emperor Akihito. As

part of the meeting, the Emperor introduced the distinguished guest to his family. Thanking the emperor for the warm reception,

- Turkmenistan, Japan to sign bilateral documents

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov will leave on an official visit to Japan on December 15. As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent learned from the press service of the Turkmen Foreign Ministry, the program of the three-day visit to Japan includes "a number of important bilateral meetings and negotiations designed to bring the traditional cooperation to a qualitatively new level, corresponding to the enormous potential and interests of the peoples of the two countries."

- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Nursultan Nazarbayev hold talks in Ashgabat
President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev held talks in Ashgabat on December 13. The President of Kazakhstan arrived in Turkmenistan on a working visit to participate in the opening ceremony of the Turkmenistan - China gas pipeline.

- Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan reaffirm policy for full cooperation
President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov, who arrived in Turkmenistan on an official visit, held talks in Ashgabat on December 13. The visit of the Uzbek leader is timed to the opening of the Turkmenistan - China gas pipeline the route of which passes through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Economic /Energy Front

- New Turkmen-China Pipeline Breaks Russia's Hold Over Central Asian Gas
Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov (right) meets with his Chinese counterpart, Hu Jintao, in Ashgabat on December 13.

With one flick of a switch today, Russia's long-standing dominance and near monopoly over Central Asian natural-gas exports officially came to an end.

- Turkmen-Japanese and Japanese-Turkmen economic cooperation committees hold meeting in Tokyo

The Turkmen-Japanese and Japanese-Turkmen economic cooperation committees held a joint meeting in Tokyo on December 16, which was timed to the official visit of the President of Turkmenistan.

- First International Automobile Exhibition opens in Ashgabat
An international exhibition of road transport, first of its kind for Turkmenistan, opened today at the Ashgabat Exhibition Center "Sergi Koshgi".

- Turkmenistan - Uzbekistan - Kazakhstan - China gas pipeline launched
The international Turkmenistan - China gas pipeline was officially launched at Samandepi field in Lebap province of Turkmenistan on 14 December. The ceremony was attended by Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, Chinese President Hu Jintao, as well as Presidents of the transit countries - Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan and Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan.

- China to provide soft loans to Turkmenistan
Following the talks between President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and President of the People's Republic of China Hu Jintao in Ashgabat on December 13, there were signed the intergovernmental framework agreements on granting two soft loans to Turkmenistan.

- Turkmenistan and China to develop programme of cooperation in non-energy areas

President of the People's Republic of China Hu Jintao proposed to work out and sign a programme of medium- and long-term cooperation between China and Turkmenistan in non-energy areas at the talks with Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in Ashgabat on December 13.

Social Front

- Book On Turkmen President Presented In Parliament

A book about the life of Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov was presented today at Turkmenistan's parliament, RFE/RL's Turkmen Service reports.

- Turkmenistan To Mark Holiday Without Turkmenbashi Images

Turkmenistan is celebrating a major national holiday without its traditional images of late President Saparmurat "Turkmenbashi" Niyazov, RFE/RL's Turkmen Service reports. Neutrality Day, which is celebrated on December 12, is one of three major national holidays in Turkmenistan along with Independence Day and National Flag Day.

- President of Turkmenistan dissatisfied with national media

The President of Turkmenistan has severely reprimanded Maksat Altaev, chairman of "Altyn Asyr: Turkmenistan" channel of the Turkmen TV's General Directorate, for poor performance of his official duties, shortcomings in the work of the TV channel and deterioration of quality of TV programmes.

- December 14 declared annual professional holiday of Turkmen oil and gas workers

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov declared December 14 an annual professional holiday of workers of the oil and gas industry of the country in honor of the official launch of the Turkmenistan - China gas pipeline.

Uzbekistan

Political Front

- Uzbekistan's rating. Shall President Karimov take pride in "accomplishments"?

Speaking at the solemn conference dedicated to the 17th anniversary of the Constitution, Uzbek President Islam Karimov gave the local political beau monde chapter and verse on the "reforms on a major scale" under way in the republic and on the astonishing successes of his astute leadership over the previous two decades.

- Uzbekistan: The opposition leader Bakhodir Choriev is expelled from Uzbekistan

Bakhodir Choriev, the emigrant and the leader of Birdamlik (Solidarity) Uzbek opposition movement, which had recently returned home, was sent back to USA. The Voice of Freedom web page reports that last Saturday he was delivered to Tashkent international airport by the law enforcement officers of Uzbekistan, where he took a plane to the United States.

Geo Strategic Front

- Two Tajiks Wounded By Uzbek Border Guards

Uzbek border guards have shot and wounded two Tajik citizens along Tajikistan's border in the northern Panjakent district, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Abdurahmon Taylonov and Hofiz Normatov, both 37, are residents of the Panjakent district and reportedly tried to cross the Tajik-Uzbek border to visit relatives in the Urgut district of Uzbekistan's Samarkand region.

- Uzbeks, Turkmen To Ease Border Transit

Uzbek President Islam Karimov and Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov have signed an agreement to ease cross-border transit for people living along their common frontier, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports. The protocol signed on December 13 amends a 2004 bilateral agreement.

- Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan reaffirm policy for full cooperation

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov, who arrived in Turkmenistan on an official visit, held talks in Ashgabat on December 13. The visit of the Uzbek leader is timed to the opening of the Turkmenistan - China gas pipeline the route of which passes through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

- Switzerland to accept Uzbek Guantanamo detainee

On December 16 the Swiss government announced Wednesday that it has agreed to accept an Uzbek Guantanamo detainee for resettlement, Jurist.Law.Pitt.Edu reports. The unidentified detainee has been held at Guantanamo since 2005 but has never faced charges.

Economic /Energy Front

- Uzbek, Tajik Officials Discuss Gas Price For 2010

The head of Tajikistan's TajikTransGaz says gas negotiations with Uzbekistan are progressing but that there is still no agreement on a gas price for 2010, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Saidmamad Sharofiddinov told RFE/RL today that the two countries plan to complete gas talks in the next two weeks.

- Uzbekistan: The first POS terminals appeared in the markets of Tashkent

UzA official news agency of Uzbekistan learned from Toshbozortayerlovsavdo that over 30 POS (point of sale) terminals were set up in twelve markets of Tashkent; from now on, the local residents can use their debit cards there.

Social Front

- Uzbek Refugees In Sweden Rally For Jailed Muslim Women

Dozens of Uzbek refugees held a protest in Stockholm to support jailed Muslim women in Uzbekistan, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports. Exiled Uzbek imam Obidkhon Qori Nazarov told RFE/RL that the protest at the central Medborgplatsen square on December 16 was organized after the Uzbek community received news that 30 Muslim women were jailed in the southern Uzbek city of Karshi in November.

- Uzbek Photographer Charged With Defamation

A prominent Uzbek photographer/videographer has been charged with defamation and damaging the country's image because of the content of her photos and videos, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports.

Detailed Report

Azerbaijan

Political Front

- Azerbaijani political parties represented at parliament address U.S. embassy

Political parties represented at the Azerbaijani Parliament addressed the U.S. embassy in Baku voicing protest against the U.S. Congress financial aid to Nagorno-Karabakh separatists from the budget bill 2010. Chairman of the Social Welfare Party, Member of the Parliament Khanhuseyn Kazimli said the letter was undersigned by the representatives of 12 political parties at the parliament .Allocating \$8 million to Nagorno-

Karabakh separatists will certainly harm international credibility of the United States, he said. The members of the parliament asked the embassy to deliver their letter to the relevant organizations of the United States.

URL: <http://www.today.az/news/politics/58227.html>

Geo Strategic Front

- French president may visit Azerbaijan

“President Ilham Aliyev’s visit to France was very successful”, chief of the international relations department of the Presidential Administration Novruz Mammadov said. He said this visit once more showed that relations between the two countries were in a high level. “I saw once again that the national leader Heydar Aliyev was a great political and state figure. He made his first official visit to France. President Ilham Aliyev also made his first official visit to France. This visit showed that we have very good relations with this country not depending whosoever is the president of France,” he said. “It became clear during the negotiations that France attaches exceptional significance to Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus and doesn’t compare its cooperation with any other country. France was also an initiator of the idea to make relations at the level of strategic partnership in future. It has great significance,” he added. “One of the documents signed there was about the diplomatic passports that envisage free travel. Our cooperation is in very high level and France intends to develop it further. I believe the French president may visit Azerbaijan next year”.

URL: <http://www.today.az/news/politics/58266.html>

- Meeting of Azerbaijan-Korea interparliamentary friendship groups held

Korean parliamentarian Suh Byung Soo has praised the country’s relations with Azerbaijan. Byung Soo, who chairs a parliamentary working group with Azerbaijan at the Korean National Assembly, spoke to Azeri Parliament Speaker Ogtay Asadov on Tuesday. The Korean MP said the relations between Azerbaijan and Korea were developing in a number of areas, in particular political and economic ones. “Korean and Azeri companies enjoy good level of cooperation,” said Byung Soo, adding there was great potential to boost “this collaboration even more”. The Korean parliamentarian stressed the importance of high-level reciprocal visits for developing the overall relations between the two countries. Asadov echoed the Korean MP’s words, saying reciprocal visits and meetings “really contribute to boosting our bilateral relations”. “Visits by our leaders were marked by the signing of a number of important bilateral documents. During these visits we also held joint business forums.” The Azeri Speaker also praised Korean companies’ activities in Azerbaijan.

“There is a number of Korean companies which built successful business in our country. Among them are Hyundai, Samsung and LG.” Asadov hailed the two countries’ trade, saying “it is being increased every year”. The Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was also discussed, and Asadov said the dispute “must be solved based on the principle of Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity”. “Armenia continues to refuse resolutions by international organizations, including the UN Security Council, demanding withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces from Azerbaijan’s occupied lands,” said Asadov.

URL: <http://www.today.az/news/politics/58240.html>

- Israeli FM to visit Azerbaijan

Chief of the Israeli Foreign Ministry's Department for Asia and Eurasia Pinkhasa Avivi will visit Azerbaijan on Dec. 20-23. Azerbaijan-Israeli relations, as well as first official visit of Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman to Baku will be debated during Avivi's visit. Lieberman plans to visit Azerbaijan in Feb., 2010. This issue was discussed at the meeting of Azerbaijani and Israeli foreign ministers on Dec. 1 in Athens. URL: <http://www.today.az/news/politics/58288.html>

Economic /Energy Front

- Head of SOCAR: Our gasoline and diesel fuel meet standards

The State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic's (SOCAR) gasoline and diesel fuel from the Heydar Aliyev Baku Oil Refinery fully meet international standards, SOCAR head Rovnag Abdullayev said today. He was commenting on Standardization, Metrology and Patents Committee Chairman Ramiz Hasanov's recent statements about low gasoline quality at gas stations. "I can say with confidence that the quality of the gasoline and diesel produced by SOCAR meets the standards," he added. According to the company official, currently SOCAR produces gasoline and other fuel standards Euro-2 and Euro-3. Shortcomings in the fuels sold at gas stations are the fault of those facilities, he added. Earlier the State Committee on Standardization, Metrology and Patents held monitoring on the quality of petroleum products in Azerbaijan. "The monitoring revealed several shortcuts, as some stations mixed gasoline with different octane ratings," Hasanov said.

URL: <http://www.today.az/news/business/58191.html>

- SOCAR president: Azerbaijan,Turkey are closer to gas price deal

Azerbaijan and Turkey are closer to agree on a price for natural gas Azerbaijan supplies to Turkey, said Rovnag Abdullayev, president of Azerbaijan State Oil Company (SOCAR). According to him, the parties are drawing near to setting a price. "Experts from the both countries are working on this issue. There are some approximations on the issue," he added. Despite the fact that the new price has not been determined, Turkey will pay natural gas it bought since April 15, 2008 in accordance with the new price and pay off debts in installments, officials said earlier. Earlier, Azerbaijan charged Turkey \$120 per 1,000 cubic meters of gas. Azerbaijan has natural gas agreements with Georgia, Turkey, Russia and Iran at present. According to unofficial sources, Georgia pays \$180 per 1,000 cubic meters of Azerbaijani gas. Gas prices for Russia and Iran are calculated on a special formula agreed between the parties.

URL: <http://www.today.az/news/business/58166.html>

- Azerbaijan, Iran sign gas contract

SOCAR (State Oil Company of Azerbaijan) and the National Iranian Gas Export Company signed an agreement on supply of Azerbaijani gas to the northern provinces of Iran during the winter and an agreement on confidentiality, to hold negotiations on five-year contract (with possibility of extension) for the supply of Azerbaijani gas, said the statement by the Foreign Ministry of Azerbaijan. It is planned that from the beginning of the year, Azerbaijani gas will be delivered to Iran in certain volumes, in accordance with the capacity of existing infrastructure between countries. Currently, the infrastructure allows to deliver about 500 million cubic meters of gas per year. In the future, the sides intend to expand capacity by increasing the capacity of gas compressor stations. The gas price is not reported.

The Iranian Ambassador to Azerbaijan Mohammad Bagir Bahrami said earlier that Iran intends to purchase about 5 billion cubic meters of gas from Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan has

four directions of gas export, including Turkey, Georgia, Russia and Iran. At present, gas is exported to Turkey and Georgia. Azerbaijani gas will be exported to Russia from early 2010. At present, Azerbaijan exports gas upon swap conditions with further transfer of Iranian gas to provide the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.

Azerbaijan and Iran are connected with the Qazimahammad-Astara pipeline gas pipeline. Its length is 1474.5 kilometers, including the territory of Azerbaijan - 296.5 kilometers. Its capacity is 10 billion cubic meters per year. This route is a branch of the pipeline Gazakh-Astara-Iran, put into operation in 1971. Three compressor stations have been built in Qazimahammad, Agdash and Gazakh. The gas transportation system is 55 atmospheres. Pipe diameter is 1,200 mm.

URL: <http://www.today.az/news/business/58231.html>

- Economist: Azerbaijan will be the world's third fastest-growing economy amid financial crisis

The cyclical economic upswing in the developed world will continue into the early part of 2010 and, apart from Eastern Europe, developing countries will recover relatively quickly from the 2008-09 financial and economic crisis. But according to 2010: country by country, just published by the Economist Intelligence Unit, the pick-up reflects the impact of unprecedentedly aggressive fiscal and monetary stimulus. Although the EIU maintains that the crisis has already inflicted its deepest wounds, it believes its impact will continue to be felt throughout 2010. "Moreover, downside risks to economic stability still abound."

These include:

- The risk of new asset bubbles forming in the wake of unprecedented monetary and fiscal loosening;
- Deflationary pressures in highly indebted countries;
- An increase in the frequency and intensity of social and political unrest, given increased unemployment, weak growth and impending fiscal austerity measures in many countries.

According to the EIU's 2010: country by country forecast, the world's GDP growth will pick up next year to 3.2% yr/yr from a contraction of 1.2% in 2009. It noted, however, that 12 countries will still experience economic contractions. Nearly half of these are in Eastern Europe, and Western and Eastern Europe together will be home to fully 15 of the world's 20 slowest-growing counties. Qatar (24.5%) will be the world's fastest-growing economy for the second consecutive year, followed by Turkmenistan (11%) and Azerbaijan (9.5%), China (8.7%), and Uzbekistan (8.1%).

Lithuania is predicted to experience the deepest decline (3.5%), followed by Venezuela (3.4%) and Puerto Rico (3%). Japan will lose its place as the world's second-largest economy to China.

URL: <http://www.today.az/news/business/58235.html>

Social Front

- EU Parliament Criticizes Azerbaijan On Media Curbs

The European Parliament building in Strasbourg

The European Parliament has adopted a resolution critical of what it calls the deterioration of media freedom in Azerbaijan. The vote, by a show of hands, followed a parliamentary debate on freedom of expression in Azerbaijan. The resolution, put forward by MEPs including former Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis, criticized the jailing of opposition journalists such as newspaper editor Eynulla Fatullayev and

called for their immediate release. It also called for the release of two bloggers, Emin Milli and Adnan Hacizade, who were jailed last month for hooliganism on what MEPs said appeared to have been politically motivated charges. "The widespread practice of harassment, prosecution, and conviction of opposition journalists [in Azerbaijan] is alarming," Tunne Kelam, an Estonian MEP, told the session. "We call on Azerbaijani authorities to release the journalists in jail without further delay. This concerns also two young bloggers." The resolution also urged authorities to renew FM radio licenses of a number of international broadcasters such as RFE/RL and the BBC World Service.

http://www.rferl.org/content/EU_Parliament_Criticizes_Azerbaijan_On_Media_Curbs/1907060.html

- EU Shines Light On Azeri Media

Former Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis says that deteriorating media freedom in Azerbaijan reminds him of the Soviet period and that it is time for Baku to choose whether it wants to follow the European path, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports. Landsbergis, a former dissident who became Lithuania's first president after it regained independence, is now an MEP and one of the most prominent co-initiators of a draft resolution condemning the worsening media climate in Azerbaijan. The draft motion for a resolution is to be discussed and voted on in the European Parliament on December 17, during a session devoted to breaches of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Landsbergis said Azerbaijan was walking on thin ice regarding its commitments to democratization and improvement of media freedom. "[There were] too many events, in a short time, worsening the situation in Azerbaijan but also damaging the good name and opinion about Azerbaijan in [the European] Union," Landsbergis told RFE/RL, citing the ban of foreign broadcasters and cases of journalists who remain in jail. "It looks like [the] Soviet Union in old times."

The draft resolution urges Azerbaijani authorities to "address the lack of police investigation into cases of violence and harassment against journalists and the fact that many crimes have so far gone unpunished." The document also stresses the importance of the swift decriminalization of defamation that often serve as legal means to jail dissident writers and journalists or impose self-censorship. It also "deplores" the jailing last month of bloggers Adnan Hacizade and Emin Mili on the basis of "highly unlikely criminal charges" and calls for their immediate release. Hacizade and Mili, who had written critically about Azerbaijan's government, were convicted of hooliganism charges in a case international rights groups say is politically motivated. "We would like to see Azerbaijan on a constant progress path, approaching the European Union by all points, including standards in media," Landsbergis said. "When [these] standards are not met, we are upset and we wish to talk about it openly to our friends."

http://www.rferl.org/content/EU_Parliament_Puts_Spotlight_On_Azerbaijan_/1906019.html

- Baku hosts concert in memory of national leader Heydar Aliyev

Azerbaijan's capital has hosted a concert to mark the 6th anniversary of death of national leader Heydar Aliyev. The concert, called A Tribute to Heydar Aliyev, has been arranged as part of the 3rd International Rostropovich festival. The event, conducted by Paul Watkins, featured works by Mozart and Beethoven. Among those in attendance at the concert were government and state officials, including Chairman of the Parliament Ogtay Asadov and Chief of the Presidential Administration Ramiz Mehdiyev.

URL: <http://www.today.az/news/society/58164.html>

- Over 100 religious communities reregistered in Azerbaijan

The State Committee for Work with Religious Associations has registered 30 religious communities more, the committee officials said. More than 100 religious communities have already been reregistered. Most of them are the Islamic communities, including several non-Islamic. The newly-registered communities will receive certificates at the State Committee on Dec. 17. The Committee said nearly 500 communities have applied for registration. According to the amendments to the law on religious views and freedom of faith, religious communities will not be allowed to operate without registration from Jan., 2010.

URL: <http://www.today.az/news/society/58255.html>

Kazakastan

Political Front

- Kazakh Court Rejects Appeal By Jailed Journalist

The Zhambyl regional appeals court in southern Kazakhstan has upheld the verdict against jailed independent journalist Ramazan Esergepov, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Esergepov's wife, Raushan Esergepova, told RFE/RL that her husband intends to appeal to Kazakhstan's Supreme Court. Esergepov, the owner and chief editor of the Almaty-based weekly "Alma-Ata Inform," was sentenced to three years of jail this summer for revealing state secrets in an article printed in his newspaper in November 2008. The weekly has since stopped publishing. Esergepov and his relatives say the case against him is politically motivated. Esergepov was arrested by the Committee of National Security (KNB) in January. His wife says he has not been allowed to be represented by his own lawyer since he was arrested and forced to have a state-appointed attorney defend him.

http://www.rferl.org/content/Kazakh_Court_Rejects_Appeal_By_Jailed_Journalist/1903662.html

Geo Strategic Front

- OSCE Official Hopeful Kazakh Chairmanship Can Help Georgia

TSKHINVALI, Georgia -- An Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) official says Kazakhstan could play an important role in resolving tensions between Georgia and its breakaway regions when it takes over the OSCE chair in 2010, RFE/RL's Echo of the Caucasus reports. Charalambos Christopoulos, the OSCE's special representative on unresolved conflicts, told RFE/RL on December 16 that because Kazakhstan is a former Soviet republic it could do a lot toward resolving the standoff between Tbilisi and its separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Christopoulos, who was visiting the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali, said Kazakh officials know the region well and have their own contacts in both Russia and Georgia, since they all used to be Soviet republics. He added that Kazakh politicians are well aware of the "peculiarities" of local attitudes and can therefore contribute positively to resolving the issue. Kazakhstan takes over the chairmanship of the OSCE from Greece in January.

http://www.rferl.org/content/OSCE_Official_Hopeful_Kazakh_Chairmanship_Can_Help_Georgia/1906924.html

- U.S. Wants Cooperation With Central Asia, But Also Progress On Rights, Democracy

If there was ever any doubt, it has been made clear that the Obama administration views Central Asia as an important part of U.S. foreign policy. George Krol, the U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs, sent the message during a special Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee hearing on December 15. "This administration does not consider Central Asia a forgotten backwater, peripheral to U.S. interests," Krol said. "The region is at the fulcrum of key U.S. security, economic, and political interests. It demands attention and respect and our most diligent efforts and the Obama administration to this very approach." The Central Asian states have always viewed the United States as a potentially valuable partner and ally, but the leadership in the five states also resented U.S. criticism of Central Asian rights violations and failure to respect basic freedoms. At least that was the state of relations throughout the 1990s. But after the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, Central Asia took on new importance for Washington. And now, with the United States entering a new phase of the war in Afghanistan that followed the 9/11 attacks, including a troop surge and a greater emphasis on taking the fight to Pakistan, Central Asia again is coming into focus. U.S. soldiers get off a plane from Afghanistan at an air base in Kyrgyzstan. That was evident from comments made by U.S. Senator Robert Casey (Democrat, Pennsylvania) during the hearing. "So while this hearing will focus on the main issues confronting the region, any examination of U.S. policy toward Central Asia must start with the conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan," Casey said. Casey explained that with "an increase in NATO troops headed to the region and an increasingly dangerous supply line through Pakistan, Central Asia potentially becomes even more important as we seek to get material into Afghanistan." The race for energy resources has also changed the relationship between the United States -- and the West in general -- and Central Asia, which abounds in hydrocarbon and other energy resources.

http://www.rferl.org/content/US_Wants_Cooperation_With_Central_Asia_But_Also_Progress_On_Rights_Democracy/1905973.html

- U.S. Urges Kazakh Rights Progress As OSCE Chair

ALMATY (Reuters) -- The United States urged Kazakhstan today to use its chairmanship of Europe's main rights and security watchdog to improve its own record. Rights groups have criticized the West for allowing Kazakhstan to assume the rotating chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2010, saying the nation is unfit to lead a group devoted to promoting democracy. The first ex-Soviet republic to assume the role, Kazakhstan has never held an election judged free and fair. Public criticism of President Nursultan Nazarbaev, in power for 20 years, remains taboo. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake, visiting Kazakhstan, told reporters: "We hope that Kazakhstan would continue to strengthen democracy and human rights in Kazakhstan during its chairmanship." The United States is one of the biggest investors in Kazakhstan, Central Asia's top oil producer, and U.S. support was instrumental in Kazakh efforts to get the OSCE role. Often a critic of political restrictions in many other transition economies, Washington has traditionally used softer diplomatic language toward Kazakhstan, where U.S. and other foreign oil companies control most energy deposits. Kazakhstan has chided the OSCE for its strong focus on human rights, saying it would shift attention towards security and economic matters when it takes over. Blake called for a balanced approach: "We...hope that during the chairmanship of Kazakhstan progress would be made on all three [OSCE] dimensions." When bidding for the OSCE

chair, Kazakhstan promised to liberalize its laws on elections, media, and political parties closer to democratic standards, but critics say reforms have been cosmetic. Blake said the United States was particularly keen for Kazakhstan to liberalize Internet use after its government this year adopted a bill allowing officials to block websites containing information deemed illegal.

http://www.rferl.org/content/US_Urges_Kazakh_Rights_Progress_As_OSCE_Chair/1903513.html

- Kazakhstan wants OSCE summit with Afghan focus

BERLIN, Dec 11 (Reuters) - Kazakhstan aims to use its presidency of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to press for a resolution to the conflict in Afghanistan, the country's foreign minister said. Kanat Saudabayev told Reuters in an interview that if Kazakhstan succeeded in staging the first OSCE summit in over 10 years in 2010, Afghanistan would be at the heart of it. "Afghanistan could well become the most important subject of the potential summit of the OSCE," Saudabayev said, speaking through an interpreter in Berlin. "Convening such a summit will be the most important priority of our chairmanship." The former Soviet republic is taking on the presidency of Europe's top security body despite criticism of its democratic institutions, with human rights groups pointing out that OSCE observers have not validated a single election in the state. An OSCE summit staged by the oil-producing nation would be the first since an Istanbul meeting in 1999, but many leaders from the 56 member states have yet to be convinced by the idea. Saudabayev, who was in Berlin to meet his German counterpart Guido Westerwelle, said a summit could revive the OSCE, which critics say has become increasingly ineffectual in recent years.

"For the past nine years the OSCE foreign ministers' council wasn't able to adopt political declarations, and I think this speaks volumes about the crisis in the organisation," he said. Kazakhstan, which is separated from Afghanistan by Uzbekistan, believes U.S. President Barack Obama's new policy towards Kabul will give a "fresh impetus" to international efforts to bring stability to the region, Saudabayev said. "Our president (Nursultan Nazarbayev) believes only military methods will not be enough to stabilise the situation there," he added. "To do that we need to pay more and more attention to the humanitarian side of efforts to stabilise Afghanistan." Obama's plan, announced this month, to send an extra 30,000 troops to Afghanistan with a view to begin pulling out by the summer of 2011, was what was needed "as the final way out of the situation there," the Kazakh foreign minister added. "Without the stabilisation of Afghanistan it's impossible to talk about stability in our region, but more generally about stability and security well beyond our region, so Afghanistan should be the main focus of international efforts," he said. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan act as transit nations for supplies to U.S. forces in Afghanistan. All but Kazakhstan have reported armed clashes with Islamists this year. Asked whether Afghanistan would ever become stable as long as foreign troops were in the country, Saudabayev said: "I think the keys for the stabilisation of Afghanistan lie within Afghanistan itself."

Economic /Energy Front

- BP sells stakes in CPC, Tengiz to Russian Lukoil
(SRI) - BP sold its interest in Kazakhstan's Tengiz oil field and the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) to Russian Lukoil, as it completed the long-awaited exit from Kazakhstan. Lukoil will pay \$1.6 billion in three installments over the next two years to

acquire BP's 46-percent share in the Lukarco joint venture, which owns a 12.5-percent stake in CPC and a 5-percent holding in the Tengizchevroil project. Lukoil will also repay a \$43-million loan, the British oil company extended to Lukarco. With the transaction, BP will have no investments in Kazakhstan. In April, the company sold its 49.9 percent-stake in the Kazakhstan Pipeline Ventures joint venture, which holds a 1.75 percent stake in CPC, to KazMunaiGas, the Kazakh national oil company, for \$250 million. According to industry analysts, the move was widely expected since BP's interest in the pipeline was bigger than its interest in the Kazakh fields that feed it, making the project commercially unviable for the company. This has led to BP's opposition to a doubling of the CPC pipeline capacity and ultimately to its exit. "We wish CPC every success in achieving the planned expansion of the pipeline, which is important to Kazakhstan and Russia," David Peattie, BP's head of Russia and Kazakhstan, said in a statement. BP reportedly plans to focus on its investments in Russia and Azerbaijan. The company is one of the largest foreign investors in Russia and its TNK-BP joint venture is the country's third-largest oil producer, generating more than \$25 billion of net income and distributing more than \$20 billion in dividends since being set up in 2003. In Azerbaijan, BP and its partners have invested more than \$20 billion to tap Caspian Sea oil fields in Azerbaijan and export more than 1 million barrels of crude a day via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline.

<http://silkroadintelligencer.com/2009/12/13/bp-sells-stakes-in-cpc-tengiz-to-russian-lukoil/>

- China, Kazakhstan unveil landmark gas pipeline

(AP) - The leaders of Kazakhstan and China jointly unveiled Saturday the Kazakh section of a natural gas pipeline that will tap into Central Asia's vast energy riches and loosen Russia's influence over the region.

China, Kazakhstan unveil landmark gas pipeline China, Kazakhstan unveil natural gas route tapping into Central Asia's energy riches

The leaders of Kazakhstan and China jointly unveiled Saturday the Kazakh section of a natural gas pipeline that will tap into Central Asia's vast energy riches and loosen Russia's influence over the region. The pipeline, due to come online in days, is part of China's efforts to secure energy supplies for its booming economy. The 1,300-kilometer Kazakhstan-China pipeline is the Central Asian nation's first export route that completely bypasses Russia. The commissioning ceremony in the southern Kazakh township of Otar was watched by televised link from the capital, Astana, by Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev and his Chinese counterpart, Hu Jintao. "This is a grand construction project that will in time resurrect the ancient Silk Route," Nazarbayev said during the ceremony. Kazakh state energy company KazMunaiGaz says the pipeline will eventually be able to transport 30 billion cubic meters of gas annually from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Capacity could be boosted to 40 billion cubic meters, the company said. Gas deliveries to China through the pipeline are expected to hit around 13 billion cubic meters in 2010, with supplies fulfilling pipeline capacity by 2013, after the route has been definitively completed. Building the Kazakh section cost \$6.7 billion and took more than 4,000 workers to complete in under two years, KazMunaiGaz said. The bulk of financing for the project was supplied by the state-run China Development Bank, which has provided much of the funding for the Asian giant's energy shopping spree over recent months. Hu is due to travel onward to Turkmenistan, where he will attend a ceremony this week

marking the start of gas deliveries from the Central Asian nation. The entire 7,000-kilometer (4,300-mile) Turkmenistan-China pipeline cuts through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan into China's far western Xinjiang region. Commencement of gas deliveries from Turkmenistan to China comes as the former Soviet nation remains mired in a dispute with Russia. Turkmenistan has until recently sold most of its gas to Russia. However, supplies have been suspended since a pipeline blast in April that Turkmenistan blames on Gazprom. The pipeline has been fixed, but deliveries to Russia have not resumed, which some international experts have estimated may be costing Turkmenistan \$1 billion in monthly losses.

<http://silkroadintelligencer.com/2009/12/12/china-kazakhstan-unveil-landmark-gas-pipeline/>

- Kazakh agricultural sector grows 11% in 2009

c The minister said that despite the unfavorable weather conditions and adverse impact of the global crunch, "the agricultural sector has maintained the development pace and thus, contributed to the food safety of the country." Kurishbayev noted that the rise in production was reported for almost all crops: the grain harvest that exceeded 23 million tons and 700,000 tons of oil seed yield have been record high this year. "Fruit, rice, potato and grape production was 20%-22% up from the year before, while fodder crops also showed a 20% increase as compared to the last year," the minister said. The total agricultural produce for 2008 was valued at 1.316,4 trillion tenge, 5.6% down from 2007.

http://www.interfax.kz/?lang=eng&int_id=10&news_id=3153

- China, Kazakhstan set to sign nuclear agreement

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The agreement, once signed, will allow the resource-rich Kazakhstan to offer substantial help to China, which has a rising demand for nuclear plants. China Guangdong Nuclear Power Co from China's major economic engine, Guangdong province, has begun cooperating with Kazakhstan's state nuclear power firm for uranium, according to the source. A legal framework such as an intergovernmental agreement is necessary for more cooperation in the nuclear energy field, said Kairat N. Kelimbetow, chief executive officer of Kazakhstan's sovereign wealth fund Samruk Kazyna. Kelimbetow, who is in charge of the state-funded enterprises and state-owned finance in Kazakhstan, said the two countries have been negotiating for the past two months over the nuclear agreement. As China is set to increase its nuclear power supply, there is a huge potential for cooperation, Kelimbetow told China Daily. Kazakhstan, a nation rich in natural resources, is set to surpass Canada and Australia to become the world's biggest uranium producer in 2010, according to its national plan.

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-12/15/content_9177468.htm

Social Front

- Kazakhs Rally To Mark 1986 Student 'Uprising'

Kazakh opposition leaders lay flowers in commemoration of the 1986 uprising in Almaty.

ALMATY -- cOpposition Azat party leaders Bolat Abilov and Zharmakhan Tuyaqbai along with State Language movement leader Mukhtar Shakhanov laid flowers at the Independence Monument on the square. Islamic prayers were also recited to commemorate the people who were killed and injured during the 1986 protests. Other protesters shouted pro-Kazakh slogans. Police monitored the rally but did not intervene in

the unauthorized demonstration. The three-day demonstrations in Almaty 23 years ago were against the Kremlin's decision to replace then-Soviet Kazakhstan leader Dinmukhamed Kunaev with Russian Gennady Kolbin -- who had never worked in Kazakhstan. They were the first mass anti-Moscow protests during Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's term in office. Security forces violently ended the protests and an unknown number of people were killed and injured. Hundreds of other protesters were expelled from universities. The Kazakh opposition blames current President Nursultan Nazarbaev for his strong support of Moscow's decision to replace Kunaev and to crack down on the student protests. His pro-Kremlin support at the time led to his being promoted by Kolbin to the post of Kazakh prime minister. Nazarbaev replaced Kolbin in 1989. Tuyaqbai, who was Kazakhstan's deputy prosecutor-general in 1986, apologized to all participants of those protests who attended the gathering today. He said many people in Kazakhstan did not realize exactly what was happening on Almaty's central square or the significance of the protests. Tuyaqbai added that the so-called Almaty events of December 1986 should instead be officially called an "uprising." He also said that the so-called victims of the protests should be called "heroes" and not "victims."

The demonstrators at today's protest also read the text of a petition demanding that December 17 be marked as an official day of mourning in Kazakhstan before peacefully disbursing.

http://www.rferl.org/content/Kazakhs_Rally_To_Mark_1986_Student_Uprising/1906874.html

- **Kazakh Protesters Arrested On National Holiday**

ALMATY -- Almaty police say they detained 29 people today for a disturbance during demonstrations on Kazakhstan's Independence Day, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Almaty Deputy Mayor Serik Seidumanov told RFE/RL that the protesters were detained for "blocking public transportation on the street." Dozens of young people marched to Almaty's city center after a concert held for the country's Independence Day. Kazakh activists today also marked the 23rd anniversary of the start of massive, three-day student demonstrations against the Kremlin decision to replace then-Soviet Kazakhstan leader Dinmukhamed Kunaev with Russian Gennady Kolbin, who hadn't ever worked in Kazakhstan. It was the first mass anti-Moscow gathering in the former Soviet Union during President Mikhail Gorbachev's term in office. The protests were violently dispersed by security forces and several people died and many more injured in the crackdown. Hundreds of other protesters were banned from universities. The exact number of those killed is unknown. The Kazakh opposition says President Nursultan Nazarbaev was "on the other side of the barricade then."

http://www.rferl.org/content/Kazakh_Protesters_Arrested_On_National_Holiday/1906003.html

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- **Kyrgyz Supreme Court to improve judicial system's image**

The Supreme Court of Kyrgyzstan plans to improve image of the judicial system, Janyl Alieva Chairwoman of the court said Tuesday at the conference devoted to the 85th anniversary of the institution. The country will open institute of court enforcement officers, therewith qualification courses for judges will be held at special educational centers. Spokespersons of all courts will provide objective information and develop

cooperation with mass media. “Courts’ staff will be enlarged, as for the moment number of cases for consideration twice exceeds the fixed norm for a judge,” Alieva said. At least 24 thousand civil, criminal, administrative, economic cases were tried in 2008, while 90 percent of judgments were given for the plaintiffs.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/community/2009/12/15/9943.html>

- PM charges Emergency Ministry to pledge illegally allocated funds

Daniyar Usenov Head of the Kyrgyz government charged the Emergency Ministry to pledge funds, illegally taken by the body from the emergency reserve within two weeks.

The Prime Minister entrusted new leadership of the ministry with forming of group to deal with construction of a house for emergency officers in Osh. Head of the government promised that the ministers’ cabinet will cover finances, illegally allocated for construction of the building by the ex-emergency minister. Usenov asked Bakyt Torobaev, the new head of the ministry to submit plan of the institution’s work for 2010 within a month and voiced his intention to participate in a session of the ministry, planned for January 2010.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/politic/2009/12/15/9942.html>

- Former military attorney named Justice Minister of Kyrgyzstan

Former military attorney Kurmantai Abdiev, was appointed on post of the Justice Minister of Kyrgyzstan. The minister’s candidacy was approved by President Bakiev and introduced to the cabinet by the premier Daniyar Usenov Tuesday morning. The new minister was born in the village of Kara-Kulja, Osh oblast of Kyrgyzstan. In 2001 he served as a prosecutor of the Osh oblast, than an assistant prosecutor general and first assistant to the prosecutor general. Since December 2003 he took the post of the military attorney and served in reserves for several years.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/politic/2009/12/15/9930.html>

Geo Strategic Front

- Kyrgyz leader to attend CIS Heads of State informal summit in Almaty

Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev will take part in the informal summit of the CIS heads of state in Almaty (Kazakhstan) on December 18-20, 2009. The summit is expected to touch upon challenging topics of international politics, cooperation and regional security. Besides, the participants will exchange views over providing economic, humanitarian and political security in the region before the 10th anniversary of EurAsEC and beginning of Kazakhstan’s chairmanship in the community and OSCE in 2010. The summit will be attended by Kyrgyz, Armenian, Belarus, Kazakh, Russian, Tajik and Turkmen leaders.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/politic/2009/12/18/9972.html>

Economic /Energy Front

- Germany allocates Kyrgyzstan €8M for housing development

Germany in the name of German Development Bank KfW allocates Kyrgyzstan €8million for housing development, Marat Sultanov, the Finance Minister of Kyrgyzstan said at a session of the social policy committee Monday. The session’s agenda focused on discussing the draft project on granting loan and financial support to Kyrgyzstan as part of the housing development project. At least €7.5 million is allotted in form of credit and the rest 0.5 million is a grant. “The Kyrgyz Finance Ministry will hand over the sum to specially selected financial institutions at 8 percent annual interest for 20 years with five-year grace period. A mortgage company is established under the Kyrgyz Development

Fund at the time. Its capital will make up \$20-30 million,” Sultanov said. As to the minister, the project is directed at increasing of opportunities for state employees and social workers to buy social housing. Members of the committee have adopted the draft project.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/politic/2009/12/14/9926.html>

- Kyrgyzstan's Toktogul hydropower plant restarted

Kyrgyzstan has received the French Republic's Human Rights Prize, Tolekan Ismailova director of Citizens Against Corruption human rights center told the press conference in the news agency 24.kg Monday. The €15 thousand prize is reportedly awarded only to five nominees from 150 organizations in 60 countries of the world. The money will be spent on financing of one of the Citizens against corruption's projects. “The project is directed at development of cooperation between human rights centers, mass media and population,” Ismailova said. “There is no development of Kyrgyzstan without freedom of choice and press,” the prizewinner said.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/community/2009/12/14/9922.html>

- Kyrgyz Parliament to moot 2010 budget

Parliament of Kyrgyzstan will consider the draft republican 2010 budget and discuss amendments to the 2009 budget, press service of the parliament reported Tuesday.

Today the drafts will be considered by the budget and finance committee of parliament, while on December 17-18 the issues will be passed to the chamber. The members of parliament are going to view the main principles of the budget law in the Kyrgyz Republic and consider amendments to the Tax Code, namely the property tax.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/politic/2009/12/15/9928.html>

Social Front

- Russian Journalist Beaten In Kyrgyzstan

A reporter for the Russian BaltInfo news agency was beaten in Kyrgyzstan's capital today, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Aleksandr Evgrafov told RFE/RL that two men in police uniforms forced him into a car that had no license plates and tried to search him. When he resisted they beat him, he said. Evgrafov said the men instructed him not to write "bad things" about Kyrgyzstan, adding that he should not try to "exonerate former Kyrgyz authorities." Evgrafov said the attack is connected to his journalistic activities. On December 9, unknown assailants attacked and beat Aleksandr Knyazev, the director of the Bishkek branch of the Commonwealth of Independent States Institute. Knyazev has often criticized the foreign policy of the Kyrgyz government. The same day, former Kyrgyz Security Council Secretary Bolot Januzakov was also beaten and hospitalized. Januzakov was a close associate of former Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev, who fled the country in 2005 and currently lives in Moscow.

http://www.rferl.org/content/Russian_Journalist_Beaten_In_Kyrgyzstan/1906005.html

- MP: Health of Kyrgyz school students worsens gradually

“Medical examinations revealed that health of school students in Kyrgyzstan worsens from year to year,” a lawmaker Nurbyubyu Kerimova said Monday at the session of parliamentarian committee on social policy. Today children are often diagnosed with thyroid, digestive, ear, nose and throat disorders. “Medical check-ups at schools showed that every forth-fifth student has serious health problems, which is often caused by lack of needed medications,” Kerimova said.

URL: <http://eng.24.kg/community/2009/12/14/9924.html>

Tajikistan Political Front

- Late Tajik Minister's Group Charged With Plotting Breakout

DUSHANBE -- A criminal case has been opened against 49 associates of late Tajik Emergency Situations Minister Mirzo Ziyoev, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Prosecutor-General Bobojon Bobokhonov told RFE/RL today that an investigation by the National Security Committee has shown that Ziyoev and 49 others were plotting an armed operation to release some of their supporters from jail. He added that the accused include 11 militants with Russian and Uzbek citizenship. Bokokhonov added that eight of the group members were affiliated with the banned Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. No further details of the criminal case are available. Ziyoev -- also known as Mirzo Jaga -- was one of the top military commanders of the United Tajik Opposition during the 1992-97 civil war. He was shot dead on July 11 during a special security operation in the eastern Tavil-Dara district. Tajik officials said he was killed in an ambush by his own supporters, an explanation that they reject.

http://www.rferl.org/content/Late_Tajik_Ministers_Group_Charged_With_Plotting_Breakout/1904781.html

- Majlisi Namoyandagon board considers amendments to the law on mandatory military service

DUSHANBE, December 14, 2009, Asia-Plus -- The board (Shuro) of Tajikistan's lower chamber (Majlisi Namoyandagon) of parliament considered a bill requiring amendments to the country's law on mandatory military service at a December 14 meeting, presided over by its speaker, Saydullo Khairulloyev. Muhammadato Sultonov, a spokesman for the Majlisi Namoyandagon, said that the board also considered and endorsed the agenda of the next sitting of the sixth session of the Majlisi Namoyandagon of the third convocation that will be held on December.

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/16/60370.html>

- President Rahmon sets date for parliamentary election

DUSHANBE, December 15, 2009, Asia-Plus -- President Emomali Rahmon yesterday signed a decree designating elections to the parliament (Majlisi Oli) and local legislatures (Majlis), according to presidential press service. Under the decree, the election of deputies of the Majlisi Namoyandagon (Tajikistan's lower chamber of parliament) and members of legislatures (Majlis) of Gorno Badakhshan, provinces, City of Dushanbe, cities and districts will take place on February 28, 2010. The election of members of the Majlisi Milli (Tajikistan's upper chamber of parliament) will be held on March 25, 2010. The head of state also sent a list of new members of the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CCER) for confirmation to the Majlisi Namoyandagon. Under the country's Constitution, the Majlisi Namoyandagon forms the Central Commission for Elections and Referendums, elects and recalls chairman, deputy chairman and members of it upon the recommendation of the President. Yesterday, President Rahmon also met with persons, nominated to the CCER and called on them to organize free and transparent elections in accordance with the country's legislation.

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/16/60396.html>

- SDPT does not trust election observers from CIS and SCO

DUSHANBE, December 18, 2009, Asia-Plus -- The Social-Democratic Party (SDPT) does not trust election observers from member nations of the CIS and the Shanghai

Cooperation Organization (SCO). The SDPT is against participation of election observers from the CIS and SCO states in the upcoming parliamentary elections in Tajikistan because it does not trust them, the SDPT leader Rahmatillo Zoirov said in an interview with Asia-Plus. “Usually, three groups of international observers participate in elections in Tajikistan – from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), CIS and SCO,” said Zoirov, “From the legal point of view, all election observer missions should act in accordance with single standards and ideally, their conclusions on the election results should be similar. However, for some reasons, conclusions of the OSCE observers always do not agree with conclusions made by the CSI and SCO representatives.” Moreover, there is no necessity in separate participation of the election observer missions of the CSI and SCO in Tajik elections, because all member nations of the SCO, except China, are member nations of the CIS and the OSCE participating States, according to him. “Besides, the CIS and the SCO always send observers to monitor elections in Tajikistan who are not lawyers,” said Zoirov, “They usually monitor just the voting process on election day not more than two or three hours, while rest the time, they attend dinner parties given for them by officials, causing financial and moral damage.” “In the meantime, I have never seen that officials could get permission to give such parties for the SOCE election observers. They (OSCE election observers) do not touch even a cup of tea during the election process, because they do not have time for that and they mainly care about proper implementation of mission placed on them,” Zoirov stressed. We will recall that the head of the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CCER), Mirzoali Boltuyev, told reporters on December 16 that some 600 international observers are expected to arrive in Tajikistan to monitor parliamentary elections that will be held on February 28, 2010. According to him, election observers will come mainly from the CIS states, Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC), SCO, OSCE and the European Union.

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/311/60541.html>

- 600 observers expected to monitor parliamentary elections in Tajikistan

DUSHANBE, December 17, 2009, Asia-Plus -- The Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CCER) is doing its best to ensure holding of parliamentary elections in the spirit of democracy and transparency, the CCER head Mirzoali Boltuyev told reporters on December 16. “However, the commission also needs all-out support from political parties, candidates and the people of Tajikistan,” said Boltuyev, “If political parties and candidates participating in elections do not procrastinate, an efficiency of our work will be much higher.” According to him, some 600 international observers are expected to arrive in Tajikistan to monitor parliamentary elections that will be held on February 28, 2010. “Observers will come mainly from the CIS states, Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union,” Boltuyev noted. In the meantime, the first meeting of the CCER that took place yesterday discussed organizational issues related to duties of the CCER members. Muhibullo Dodojonov was elected to head CCER’s office. The meeting participants also considered formation of constituencies, creation of the CCER news center and establishment of a commission for consideration of complaints and applications.

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/311/60515.html>

Geo Strategic Front

- **Two Tajiks Wounded By Uzbek Border Guards**

PANJAKENT, Tajikistan -- Uzbek border guards have shot and wounded two Tajik citizens along Tajikistan's border in the northern Panjakent district, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Abdurahmon Taylonov and Hofiz Normatov, both 37, are residents of the Panjakent district and reportedly tried to cross the Tajik-Uzbek border to visit relatives in the Urgut district of Uzbekistan's Samarkand region. The parents of Taylonov and Normatov told RFE/RL that they are not being allowed to visit their sons, who were hospitalized in Urgut. Several Tajiks told RFE/RL that since Jarteppa -- the only checkpoint in Panjakent, which borders the Samarkand region -- has been closed for 2 1/2 years and they must cross the Tajik-Uzbek border illegally. Tajik border guards told RFE/RL that this was the fourth case of Uzbek border guards shooting Tajiks in Panjakent in 2009.

http://www.rferl.org/content/Two_Tajiks_Wounded_By_Uzbek_Border_Guards/1903736.html

Economic /Energy Front

- **Uzbek, Tajik Officials Discuss Gas Price For 2010**

DUSHANBE -- The head of Tajikistan's TajikTransGaz says gas negotiations with Uzbekistan are progressing but that there is still no agreement on a gas price for 2010, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Saidmamad Sharofiddinov told RFE/RL today that the two countries plan to complete gas talks in the next two weeks. But he added that Uzbekistan is insisting to keep the 2009 gas price -- some \$240 per 1,000 cubic meters of gas. Sharofiddinov said world gas prices have fallen and therefore Tashkent should decrease its price as well. He added that Tajikistan expects Uzbekistan to decrease its price for gas by 30 percent. Tajikistan planned to buy some 550 million cubic meters of gas from Uzbekistan in 2010. Uzbekistan supplies some 95 percent of Tajikistan's gas needs and disagreements between the two countries in recent years have caused Uzbek officials to turn off the gas flow to Tajikistan that has led to severe energy shortages, particularly during the winter.

http://www.rferl.org/content/Uzbek_Tajik_Officials_Discuss_Gas_Price_For_2010/1903921.html

- **Tajik Embassy in Beijing transfers money to help Roghun hydroelectricity project**
DUSHANBE, December 14, 2009, Asia-Plus -- Employees of Tajik Embassy in Beijing, China have given up their three-day's wages to help implementation of the Roghun hydroelectricity project. According to information posted on the embassy's website, the funds have been transferred to the Roghun bank account in Amonatbank (Tajikistan's savings bank).

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/198/60356.html>

- **New report on business environment in Tajikistan to be presented tomorrow**
DUSHANBE, December 15, 2009, Asia-Plus -- Presentation of a new report, Business Environment in Tajikistan through Eyes of Representatives of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), will take place at the State Committee for Investments and State-owned Property Management (GosKomInvest) in Dushanbe on December 16. The report, which is part of common efforts taken by International Finance Corporation, SECO and DFID, is aimed at promoting improvement of the business environment in Tajikistan. It is based on survey of 1,500 representatives of SMEs that was conducted in July-October 2008.

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/49/60412.html>

- Tajikistan to experience effects of global financial crisis in 2010 as well, says minister

DUSHANBE, December 17, 2009, Asia-Plus -- The draft poverty reduction strategy paper for 2010-2012, which has been worked out by ministries and organizations of Tajikistan in cooperation with partners for development, is currently under consideration by the government, Minister of Economic Development and Trade Farrukh Hamraliyev told reporters in Dushanbe on December 16.

According to him, the document is a continuation of priorities for development determined by the national development strategy designed for the period till 2015 and stipulates public management reforms, improvement of investment climate and creation of favorable conditions for private sector as well as strengthening of capacity. The national development strategy, in particular, notes that Tajikistan will experience negative effects of the global financial and economic crisis in 2010 as well, the minister said. "We have studied all countries, with which we have trade and economic relations, export/import operations, including flow of funds," noted Hamraliyev, "Our partner countries project GDP growth, i.e. they expect the crisis effects to begin reducing in 2010." We will recall that the joint ceremony of signing the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2010-2015 and UNDP Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP) 2010-2015 took place in Dushanbe on December 16. The UNDAF 2010-2015 comprises 4 thematic areas, namely 1) Poverty Reduction and Governance; 2) Food and Nutrition Security; 3) Clean Water, Sustainable Environment, and Energy and 4) Quality Basic Services. The UNDAF elaboration process took place in close collaboration with the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Tajikistan, the Government of Tajikistan, Civil Society and the Donor Community with the aim of improving the lives of the people of Tajikistan, especially the most vulnerable. UNDP Tajikistan CPAP 2010 – 2015 directly addresses priorities of the Government of Tajikistan's National Development Strategy (NDS) and is in complete alignment with the UNDAF 2010-2015 and Country Programme Document for Tajikistan (CPD) 2010 – 2015. CPAP 2010-2015 focuses its interventions in the areas of (1) Poverty Reduction and Achievement of MDGs, (2) Reducing burden of HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis, (3) Good Governance, (4) Crisis Prevention and Recovery, and (5) Environment and Sustainable Development. CPAP 2010-2015 will be implemented in close collaboration with key partners and stakeholders including Government Institutions, Donor Agencies and Civil Sector. The overall planned budget of CPAP 2010-2015 is \$ 166,306,000.

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/49/60494.html>

- Inflation for Jan-Nov 09 stands at 4.9 percent

DUSHANBE, December 16, 2009, Asia-Plus -- In Tajikistan, gross domestic product (GDP) rose 3,1 percent in the year to November 30, 2009, reaching 18.3879 billion somoni (equivalent to 4.1 billion U.S. dollars), according to the State Committee for Statistics. Inflation for January-November 2009 stood at 4.9 percent. Prices of products of food industry rose 2.1 percent in eleven months to December, 2009. A 6.3 percent increase in prices of non-foodstuffs has been reported in January-November 2009. Over the same eleven-month period, prices and rates for services rendered to the population have increased by 13.7 percent. The cost of the set of food products included in the

consumer basket for actual consumption (based on figures from households studied during 2008) in prices as of the end of November 2009 was 90.00 somoni per one family member per month, and with the norm for a balanced diet it was 180.00 somoni.

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/34/60436.html>

Social Front

- WHO Confirms 14 Swine-Flu Cases In Tajikistan

Tajik schoolchildren requested to wear face masks in order to prevent swine flu.

December 16, 2009

DUSHANBE -- A World Health Organization (WHO) official has said there are 14 swine-flu cases in Tajikistan, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Craig Hampton, a technical officer at WHO's Disaster Preparedness Response office in Dushanbe, told RFE/RL that no one in Tajikistan has died from swine flu. Health Ministry spokeswoman Maysara Qurbonova told RFE/RL that 14 of the 225 samples tested were found to be swine-flu positive. She said nine of the swine-flu patients are foreigners from China, India, and Russia and the remaining five -- which include two children -- are Tajiks living in Dushanbe. Qurbonova added that all 14 swine-flu patients are getting medical treatment and some have already been released from the hospital. Tajik authorities reported last week that a 32-year-old woman in the northern province of Khujand had died with swine-flu symptoms. But WHO officials in Dushanbe said today she did not die from swine flu.

http://www.rferl.org/content/WHO_Confirms_14_SwineFlu_Cases_In_Tajikistan/1906000.html

- Seminar to discuss national disaster risk management strategy takes place in Dushanbe tomorrow

DUSHANBE, December 14, 2009, Asia-Plus -- A seminar on the national disaster risk management strategy and the plan of actions for implementation of this strategy will take place in Dushanbe tomorrow, according to the UNDP CO in Tajikistan. The meeting organizers include the UNDP CO in Tajikistan and Tajikistan's Committee for Emergency Situations (CES) and Ministry of Economic Development and Trade (MEDT). Participants in the seminar will discuss subjects such as disaster risk management and development; institutional mandates and legal issues; disaster risk assessment; preparedness and response; and management of knowledge: education, training and public awareness, the source said.

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/38/60352.html>

- Tajik media watchdog decries limits on information access

DUSHANBE, December 14, 2009, Asia-Plus -- Over the first eleven months of this year, monitoring by the National Association of Independent Mass Media of Tajikistan (Nansmit) of respect for the rights of journalists and the media has recorded 27 instances of a refusal to provide, or an attempt to limit access to information of significance for society, Abdfattoh Vohidov, the coordinator of Nansmit's monitoring service, said in an interview with Asia-Plus. According to him, the monitoring has revealed that journalists' access to information is subject to increasing limitations as any serious political events such as elections approach in Tajikistan. "Access to socially significant information still remains one of the most topical problems in the country and limits on information access may take different forms," said Vohidov, "For example, journalists are not allowed to attend news conferences under the various pretexts; thus, Jamshed Marouf, a reporter for

the Khujand-based newspaper Sughd was not allowed to attend a news conference given by the Sughd governor just because he wore jeans. Ms. Madina Pochoyeva, a reporter for the Khujand-based newspaper Sogdiyskaya Pravda asked local official at a news conference about extortion in preschool institutions and after that, they called her to the kindergarten, which her son attends, and asked her not put such questions any more.”Vohidov noted that many journalists complained that they could not get information from a source because his [source] direct boss did not allow him to communicate with journalists. He added that low- and medium-level officials got in touch with journalists unwillingly. “Analysis of limits on information access has shown that when any acute problem arises, officials are trying to avoid meeting with journalists. For instance, by health minister’s order medical workers were not allowed to communicate with journalists over the death of Khurshed Bobokalonov, the head of the admission department at the Republican Oncology Center.” The monitoring service coordinator noted that the banking system has always been taboo not only for journalists. Officials have usually justified that by saying that there are banking secrets. “In the meantime, journalists apply to banks only for information of significance for society,” said Vohidov, “However, banks refuse to provide even the socially significant information.”

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/41/60364.html>

- Tajik president leaves for Copenhagen to join UN climate change summit

DUSHANBE, December 15, 2009, Asia-Plus -- President Emomali Rahmon today afternoon left for Copenhagen to join the UN climate change summit, according to presidential press service. Rahmon is scheduled to deliver a statement at the summit and hold a number of bilateral meetings in Copenhagen. State Adviser to the President for International Affairs Erkin Rahmatulloyev and Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi are accompanying the president on this trip. Governmental representatives from 170 countries accompanied by other governmental representative, NGO's, journalists and others have been attending the UN climate change conference in Copenhagen that was launched on December 6 and runs till December 18. The closing stages of the UN conference is being attended by 105 world leaders who will try to seal a deal after years of bitter debates over how to divide up the burden of emissions curbs and who should pay. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Executive Secretary, Mr. Yvo de Boer, said that the Copenhagen climate negotiations must yield an ambitious, sweeping agreement to capitalize on pledges by countries to fight global warming. In the meantime, the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned on December 14 that the world stood at the crossroads between a sustainable future and a path to catastrophe, the UN News Center reported. “Now is the moment to act,” he told a news conference at United Nations Headquarters in New York ahead of the culmination later this week of the UN climate change summit in Copenhagen, where some 115 heads of State and government, including the leaders of the world’s top two emitters of greenhouse gases, China and the United States, will gather to hopefully seal the deal on an agreement. Mr. Ban appealed to negotiators to redouble their efforts, find room for compromise and make a final push. “If everything is left to leaders to resolve at the last minute, we risk having a weak deal – or no deal at all. And this would be a failure of potentially catastrophic consequence,” he said. UN officials have said there are three key layers of action that governments must agree to in the course of the Copenhagen summit:

fast and effective implementation of immediate action on climate change; ambitious commitments to cut and limit emissions, including start-up funding and a long-term funding commitment; and a long-term shared vision on a low-emissions future for all. The UN Secretary-General acknowledged that the negotiations are difficult and complex – “among the most ambitious ever to be undertaken by the world community” – and noted the strong passions and hard bargaining under way. Mr. Ban also announced that he would appoint Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai as a Messenger for Peace on climate change, calling her “an excellent choice” in light of her long record of achievement in environmental conservation and sustainable development.

<http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/289/60427.html>

Turkmenistan

Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- Uzbeks, Turkmen To Ease Border Transit

ASHGABAT -- Uzbek President Islam Karimov and Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov have signed an agreement to ease cross-border transit for people living along their common frontier, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports. The protocol signed on December 13 amends a 2004 bilateral agreement. Karimov, who is on a two-day visit to Turkmenistan for the opening ceremony of the Turkmenistan-China natural-gas pipeline, said the Uzbek-Turkmen talks are deeply symbolic for bilateral relations. No specifics about the changes in border-crossing procedures were immediately reported. Rozagul, a woman from the western Uzbek town of Khorezm, told RFE/RL that people living in the Uzbek-Turkmen border area are very happy to hear about simplified procedures to cross the border. She said that currently the border can be crossed only once per month and after a payment of some \$8. Rozagul said that many people were often unable to visit their relatives in Turkmenistan for weddings and other family events. A representative from the Khorezm-based organization Najot told RFE/RL that in the last 10 years some 62 Uzbek citizens have been shot dead by Turkmen border guards

- Dmitry Medvedev to pay working visit to Ashgabat on December 22

During a telephone conversation on December 15, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev discussed prospects of the Turkmen-Russian cooperation, which is "successfully developing in all important areas such as the fuel and energy complex, energy, industry, military, technical and other areas." This was reported by the press service of the Turkmen leader. Dmitry Medvedev confirmed his decision to pay a working visit to Ashgabat on December 22, in the course of which the heads of Turkmenistan and Russia will hold high level talks. During the visit, Dmitry Medvedev and Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov will inaugurate a new modern building of the Turkmen-Russia school named after A. Pushkin, "that has become a powerful symbol of strong humanitarian ties between the two friendly countries," the press service said.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16025&type=event&sort=date_desc

- President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov receives Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Vice Prime Minister of Russia Igor Sechin discussed cooperation in the energy sphere and promotion of the most important joint projects aimed at the intensification of partnership at a meeting yesterday. As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat quoting the press service of the Turkmen president, the guest handed to the Turkmen president a written message from President Dmitry Medvedev and warm greetings from Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, both expressing "a strong interest in expansion and deepening of the fruitful dialogue with Turkmenistan." The President of Turkmenistan highly rated the results of his recent working visit to Russia, during which the parties discussed and specified key areas of co-operation built on the basis of equality and maximum consideration of mutual interests, the press service said.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16026&type=event&sort=date_desc

- Emperor of Japan receives President of Turkmenistan

On December 17, the second day of the official visit of Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov to Japan, the Turkmen leader was received by Emperor Akihito. As part of the meeting, the Emperor introduced the distinguished guest to his family. Thanking the emperor for the warm reception, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov emphasized that Turkmenistan attaches great importance to strengthening the relations of friendship and multifaceted partnership with Japan as one of the world most developed countries. While noting the constructive nature of the Turkmen-Japanese cooperation in bilateral and multilateral formats, in particular in the framework of the well-known international organizations, he emphasized that nowadays Turkmenistan and Japan not only share common economic goals but also focus on practical solutions to pressing problems of humankind, including the problem of global security. During the meeting, which was held in a friendly and confidential atmosphere, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Emperor Akihito exchanged views on the prospects for intensifying the Turkmen-Japanese dialogue and singled out trade-economic and humanitarian spheres as priority areas of mutually beneficial partnership. The sides specifically noted the importance of further strengthening the traditional cultural ties that help the two peoples to better know each other, the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) said.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16036&type=event&sort=date_desc

- Turkmenistan, Japan to sign bilateral documents

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov will leave on an official visit to Japan on December 15. As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent learned from the press service of the Turkmen Foreign Ministry, the program of the three-day visit to Japan includes "a number of important bilateral meetings and negotiations designed to bring the traditional cooperation to a qualitatively new level, corresponding to the enormous potential and interests of the peoples of the two countries." One of the central themes of the upcoming meetings will be the discussion of opportunities to enhance the strategic cooperation between the sides in the fuel and energy sector to which Turkmenistan and Japan attach high importance, the press-service said. A set of bilateral documents that are meant to significantly expand the scope of the traditional Turkmen-Japanese cooperation is ready for signing. Other than this, the 8th meeting of the Turkmen-Japanese Economic Committee will be held in the Japanese capital as part of the visit. The committee is

responsible for identification of key areas for interaction and specification of the general approaches to building mutually beneficial cooperation at a new level of bilateral relations.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16017&type=event&sort=date_desc

- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Nursultan Nazarbayev hold talks in Ashgabat
President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev held talks in Ashgabat on December 13. The President of Kazakhstan arrived in Turkmenistan on a working visit to participate in the opening ceremony of the Turkmenistan - China gas pipeline. During the talks that were held in a friendly and warm atmosphere, the leaders of the two neighboring countries discussed a wide range of issues of interstate cooperation that is successfully developing in bilateral and regional formats. While confirming their intention to develop effective partnerships across the whole spectrum, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Nursultan Nazarbayev noted the profound potential of cooperation in the energy sector and transport and communications, the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) said. During the meeting the presidents discussed a number of issues of regional and international policies of mutual interest. Today, as part of his working visit, Nursultan Nazarbayev will visit Lebap province to attend the opening of the Turkmenistan - Uzbekistan - Kazakhstan - China. The heads of the four countries through which the pipeline is running will also participate.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16009&type=event&sort=date_desc

- Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan reaffirm policy for full cooperation
President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov, who arrived in Turkmenistan on an official visit, held talks in Ashgabat on December 13. The visit of the Uzbek leader is timed to the opening of the Turkmenistan - China gas pipeline the route of which passes through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. According to the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH), the two leaders expressed the profound satisfaction with the progressive development of bilateral relations and reaffirmed their countries' policies for a full-fledged cooperation. Noting that the advantageous geographical location of both countries contributes to the successful combining of their capacities, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov suggested that the relevant structures of the two countries should work in a systematic way to create a programme that could become a peculiar "road map" for cooperation in the sphere of road, rail and air transport. Stressing the importance of the traditional Turkmen-Uzbek humanitarian cooperation, the Turkmen leader proposed to consider the possibility of holding a festival of friendship of the two peoples in Dashoguz province of Turkmenistan in the spring of 2010. On the results of talks in Ashkhabad, the sides signed a package of bilateral documents. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Islam Karimov signed a Protocol on Amending the Agreement between Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan on mutual visits of citizens and on simplified procedures for citizens living in border areas of 19 November 2004, as well as a Joint Turkmen-Uzbek statement. There were also signed a cooperation programme between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2010-2011 and an

Agreement between Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan on the joint Turkmen-Uzbek commission for trade-economic, scientific-technical and cultural cooperation.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16008&type=event&sort=date_desc

Economic /Energy Front

- New Turkmen-China Pipeline Breaks Russia's Hold Over Central Asian Gas

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov (right) meets with his Chinese counterpart, Hu Jintao, in Ashgabat on December 13.

With one flick of a switch today, Russia's long-standing dominance and near monopoly over Central Asian natural-gas exports officially came to an end. The massive Turkmenistan-China pipeline, which will carry natural gas from eastern Turkmenistan through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan into China's northwestern Xinjiang region, went on line today during an inauguration ceremony attended by regional leaders. It marks the first time in more than a decade that a pipeline has been constructed to pump gas out of the region, and the biggest-ever effort to export Central Asian gas without using Russian routes. The ceremony in Samandepe, the starting point of the 1,833-kilometer pipeline that originates in Turkmenistan's gas-rich but previously untapped east, took place just over three years after the China-funded project was agreed upon. Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov called the launch of the new pipeline "a new chronicle in the relations of our countries" that "will stand as a golden page" in their history. Joining the Turkmen president to witness the event were the presidents of China, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan -- Hu Jintao, Nursultan Nazarbaev, and Islam Karimov, respectively -- whose countries are all involved in the project.

http://www.rferl.org/content/TurkmenistanChina_Gas_Pipeline_To_Open/1903108.html

- Turkmen-Japanese and Japanese-Turkmen economic cooperation committees hold meeting in Tokyo

The Turkmen-Japanese and Japanese-Turkmen economic cooperation committees held a joint meeting in Tokyo on December 16, which was timed to the official visit of the President of Turkmenistan. Following the visit, members of the Turkmen government delegation and representatives of Japanese companies signed a framework agreement on the implementation of joint projects. The list of signed documents includes Framework Agreement on the project of construction of plants to produce ammonia and urea in the town of Mary with a consortium of companies "Kawasaki Plant Systems, Ltd" and "Sojitz Corporation", Framework Agreement on construction project in Tejen for producing urea, methanol and ammonia with consortium of companies "Mitsubishi Heavy Industries" and "Mitsubishi Corporation", Framework Agreement between State Concern Turkmenhimiya and "Sojitz Corporation" for design, equipment supply and technical advice for the plant to produce caustic soda and other chemical products in the town of Jebel. Other than that, the sides signed a license agreement between the state corporation Turkmenkhimiya and the company "Asahi Kasei Chemical Corporation", Memorandum of Understanding between the state concern Turkmengaz and the companies "JGC Corporation" and "Itochu Corporation" for efficient processing of natural gas, Memorandum of Cooperation between the Institute of Strategic Planning and Economic Development of Turkmenistan and the Japan Association for Trade with Russia and the Newly Independent States. The sides also agreed to intensify bilateral

trade and economic relations, and conduct on a regular basis both special and multi-purpose business forums, trade and economic exhibitions and fairs.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16032&type=event&sort=date_desc

- First International Automobile Exhibition opens in Ashgabat

An international exhibition of road transport, first of its kind for Turkmenistan, opened today at the Ashgabat Exhibition Center "Sergi Koshgi". The exhibition was organized by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Turkmenistan and the Turkish exhibition company "Meridyen Uluslararası Fuarçılık San. Ve Tic.Ltd.Sti." Automobile giants from Russia, Belarus, Germany, Turkey, Korea, Sweden, Uzbekistan and other states are among the exhibitors, the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) reports. Manufacturers of automobile oils and various types of transportation fuel also participate in the forum. According to the organizers, the exhibition was designed as the international auto show, presenting different types of vehicles - from passenger cars and vans to cranes and tractors. Heavy automotive and farm equipment are displayed in the open spaces of the exhibition center. The exhibition also features service and garage equipment, technical control and testing devices, spare parts and all kinds of accessories for automobiles. President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov sent a welcome address to the exhibitors. As the head of state noted, "in recent years, the fast growing road transport industry of Turkmenistan has turned into one of the leading sectors of the national economy." The Turkmen leader expressed confidence that the international exhibition in Ashgabat will open new opportunities to expand contacts with companies interested in joint work, and will be very important for further expansion of cooperation of Turkmen and foreign entrepreneurs in the road transport sector.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16037&type=event&sort=date_desc

- Turkmenistan - Uzbekistan - Kazakhstan - China gas pipeline launched

The international Turkmenistan - China gas pipeline was officially launched at Samandep field in Lebap province of Turkmenistan on 14 December. The ceremony was attended by Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, Chinese President Hu Jintao, as well as Presidents of the transit countries - Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan and Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan. The heads of the four states participated in the opening of a set of industrial and infrastructure facilities that ensure the work of the pipeline. The first gas treatment plant, which was built on the right bank of the Amu Darya river, will feed the pipeline with 5 billion cubic meters of tank gas annually. The set of facilities also includes gas gathering points, compressor stations, a gas measuring installation, engineering and external communication networks. A large group of existing wells have undergone a major overhaul and several new wells have been drilled at Samandep field. It is expected that the 7,000 km long pipeline, through which up to 40 billion cubic meters of Turkmen natural gas will be supplied to China annually for the next 30 years, will reach the projected capacity by 2012. The total length of the international gas pipeline in the territory of Turkmenistan is 184,5 km, in Uzbekistan - 490 km, in Kazakhstan - more than 1300 kilometers, in China - more than 4500 kilometers. As the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) noted, "the construction of a new gas transport system for Turkmen gas exports marked the successful implementation of Turkmenistan's energy strategy that is now making a huge

contribution to the creation of an improved database of global energy security." The new pipeline will "not only strengthen the economic power of our country, safe and prosperous life of our people, but will also serve the interests of the peoples of the region and the world," the agency said.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16014&type=event&sort=date_desc

- China to provide soft loans to Turkmenistan

Following the talks between President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and President of the People's Republic of China Hu Jintao in Ashgabat on December 13, there were signed the intergovernmental framework agreements on granting two soft loans to Turkmenistan. According to the agreements, the export-import bank of China will provide funds to implement the third phase of reconstruction of communication networks of Turkmenistan and the second phase of purchase of railway passenger cars from China. As part of the ceremony, the sides also signed an intergovernmental agreement on avoidance of double taxation and prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income. In addition, according to official reports, the Government of Turkmenistan and the Corporation of China "LENOVO" signed a Memorandum, while the Ministry of Communications of Turkmenistan and Chinese Huawei Technologies Ltd concluded a commercial contract.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16013&type=event&sort=date_desc

- Turkmenistan and China to develop programme of cooperation in non-energy areas

President of the People's Republic of China Hu Jintao proposed to work out and sign a programme of medium- and long-term cooperation between China and Turkmenistan in non-energy areas at the talks with Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in Ashgabat on December 13. The sides identified promising areas for interaction such as transport, telecommunications, construction materials, and construction of infrastructure facilities. Noting the complementary nature of the economies of the two friendly countries, Hu Jintao stressed the importance of the "soonest start of the Chinese-Turkmen cooperation committee that is designed to play an important role in building long-term partnership," the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) said. During the meeting it was noted that compared to the year of 2000 trade turnover between Turkmenistan and China increased almost forty times to some half a billion U.S. dollars. Today, China is one of the largest foreign trade partners of Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan registered 35 enterprises with Chinese capital and 53 investment projects implemented in the oil and gas and telecommunications, transport, agriculture, textile, chemical and food industries, healthcare and construction spheres. With regard to energy cooperation, Hu Jintao stressed the importance of the forthcoming launch of the Turkmenistan - China gas pipeline as "a landmark project of cooperation between the two countries, promising real benefits to all countries of the region." President of China confirmed willingness of the Chinese partners to continue the successful cooperation, including in such promising areas as exploration, joint development of gas fields, transportation and processing of hydrocarbon resources.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16012&type=event&sort=date_desc

Social Front

- Book On Turkmen President Presented In Parliament

ASHGABAT -- A book about the life of Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov was presented today at Turkmenistan's parliament, RFE/RL's Turkmen Service reports. "The Grandson Who Makes Grandfather's Dream Come True," written by Tachmammet Jurdekov, is dedicated to Berdymukhammedov's life and achievements. The presentation was attended by parliament deputies, representatives of public organizations, academics, journalists, teachers, and university students. State media called the book's publication a "remarkable" event in the "social, political, and cultural life of Turkmenistan." A Turkmen official said the book spotlights Berdymukhammedov's activities and aims to strengthen the "democratic foundation" of the country and its "international prestige." The book was released on December 14 prior to the opening ceremony of the Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline, which state media described as "the grandiose project of the third millennium."

http://www.rferl.org/content/Book_On_Turkmen_President_Presented_In_Parliament/1906001.html

- Turkmenistan To Mark Holiday Without Turkmenbashi Images

A statue of former Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov stands in the center of Ashgabat.

ASHGABAT -- Turkmenistan is celebrating a major national holiday without its traditional images of late President Saparmurat "Turkmenbashi" Niyazov, RFE/RL's Turkmen Service reports. Neutrality Day, which is celebrated on December 12, is one of three major national holidays in Turkmenistan along with Independence Day and National Flag Day. Traditionally, two weeks prior to its celebration, the emblems depicting the Neutrality Monument -- which has a rotating golden statue of Niyazov and sits in central Ashgabat -- are placed in public places, on the facades of state buildings and showcased in all media. But this year the UN symbol, the Turkmen flag, and five "gols" -- famous carpet patterns from five Turkmen provinces -- were used instead. The Neutrality Monument was erected to commemorate the country's permanent neutral status, as approved by the UN General Assembly on December 12, 1995. Niyazov -- who was well-known for his personality cult -- had at least one city and many streets, squares, schools, farms, districts, food products, and even a month on the calendar renamed after him. Since Niyazov's death, President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov has had some of the old names restored and many of Niyazov's portraits have been removed from billboards and other places around the country.

The Turkmen government even reportedly announced plans last year to move the Neutrality Monument from the capital city's center to another site in Ashgabat, although it has not yet been moved.

http://www.rferl.org/content/Turkmenistan_To_Mark_Holiday_Without_Turkmenbashi_Images/1902388.html

- President of Turkmenistan dissatisfied with national media

The President of Turkmenistan has severely reprimanded Maksat Altaev, chairman of "Altyn Asyr: Turkmenistan" channel of the Turkmen TV's General Directorate, for poor performance of his official duties, shortcomings in the work of the TV channel and deterioration of quality of TV programmes. As the Turkmestan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat, the text of the Turkmen President's resolution was published today in the

central print media of the country. Maksat Altayev has been warned that he will be relieved of his post if he fails to promptly correct the flaws in the work. During a government meeting on December 15, the Turkmen leader noted that "there are still clear shortcomings in the work of the national media that should serve as a conductor of the ideology of the epoch of new Revival, and timely and comprehensively cover all the events happening in the country." In this regard, the President of Turkmenistan criticized his Press Secretary for shortcomings in the organization of the effective operation of national media.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16024&type=event&sort=date_desc

- December 14 declared annual professional holiday of Turkmen oil and gas workers

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov declared December 14 an annual professional holiday of workers of the oil and gas industry of the country in honor of the official launch of the Turkmenistan - China gas pipeline. "Given the fact that workers of the oil and gas, power and geology industries marked their professional holiday together on the second Saturday of September, the head of state proposed to separate the Day of Energy Industry from the Day of Oil and Gas Industry and establish a separate holiday," the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) reports.

Speaking at the regular government meeting, the head of state expressed gratitude to all who organized the gas pipeline opening ceremony at a high level. "The Trans-Asian gas pipeline will be a major factor in strengthening energy security in Asia and will contribute to ensuring stability of the entire system of continental political and economic ties, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov stressed. Most importantly, the implementation of this ambitious transnational project designed for the long term will promote the welfare of the peoples of Turkmenistan and other countries in the region."

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16023&type=event&sort=date_desc

Uzbekistan

Political Front

- Uzbekistan's rating. Shall President Karimov take pride in "accomplishments"?

Speaking at the solemn conference dedicated to the 17th anniversary of the Constitution, Uzbek President Islam Karimov gave the local political beau monde chapter and verse on the "reforms on a major scale" under way in the republic and on the astonishing successes of his astute leadership over the previous two decades.

"Our country has made colossal progress that is recognized and appreciated all over the world," Karimov plainly stated. He explained that a great deal had to be done yet before Uzbekistan could take its rightful place among the advanced countries and reminded those present of the necessity to "be critical in estimates of what has been done, to beware euphoria, to borrow from other countries' experience and achievements, and to remove with firm resolve the barriers still encountered on the way."

Wrapping up his speech, the Uzbek leader recounted what he thought was behind all this smashing success. "Now that the international community appreciates our achievements and successes on the way to development to a democratic state, civil society, modern economy and to a deserving place in the world, one might wonder what all these

accomplishments are based on. They are based on and rooted in our history, cultural and spiritual legacy of the people, its intellectual potential, and capacity for heroic deeds."

What successes was Karimov talking about? Who did he warn against being carried away? There is no saying, regrettably. Better to try and consider what the international community really thinks about Uzbekistan with its accomplishments. Fortunately, it presents no problems. Here is a brief update on accomplishments of Uzbekistan.

According to the latest Transparency International rating (this is a non-governmental international organization studying corruption the world over), Uzbekistan rates the 174th on the list of 180 countries.

Transparency International's CPI Rating (CPI stands for Corruption Perception Index) gauges levels of corruption in different state sectors. TI never misses an opportunity to announce that the CPI below 3 points is crying shame, an indication that the authorities of the country in question refuse to regard corruption as a threat to national security and security of the population or to take measures against it. Uzbekistan's CPI in 2009 was gauged at 1.7. Only six countries in the world (Chad, Iraq, Sudan, Burma, Afghanistan, and Somalia) are worse than Uzbekistan in terms of corruption. Shall we proceed? Karimov referred to "the intellectual potential and capacity for heroic deeds" of the Uzbek people. Let us consider the UNDP (UN Development Program) annual report on the human potential development level in 182 UN members. Where the human potential development index is concerned, Uzbekistan rates the 119th, right after Equatorial Guinea (118th) and before Kyrgyzstan (120th) and Tajikistan (127th) trailed by Namibia (128th). Commendable neighborhood indeed. Intellectual level of the Uzbek population has been declining for years - it was rated once 94th, then 95th, 101st, 107th, 111th, and finally 113th two years running. Degradation is undeniable. The state of affairs with freedom of the media is even worse. Reporters Sans Frontieres rated Uzbekistan the 160th among 175 countries whose press freedom index this organization gauged the last time. Uzbekistan is behind "freedom-loving" countries like Libya (156th), Rwanda (157th), Equatorial Guinea (158th), and Pakistan (159th). Nice company, isn't it? Freedom House's Map of Press Freedom 2009 evaluated freedom of the media (everything from printed to electronic) as well conditions for journalism, degree of state control over the media, economic and political situation in 195 countries. Uzbekistan rated the 189th i.e. among the countries with the least free media. Three Central Asian neighbors Kyrgyzstan (158th), Kazakhstan (169), and Tajikistan (171st) did better than Uzbekistan. It seems that only in Cuba, Erythraea, Libya, Burma, Turkmenistan, and North Korea the situation is worse than it is in Karimov's Uzbekistan.

The ease of doing business index annually updated by The World Bank Group is another telling indicator. A high ranking means that conditions for businesses are truly favorable. The lower down the list, however, the harder life becomes for businesses.

The 2009 ease of doing business index includes 183 countries and Uzbekistan is the 150th on it. Kyrgyzstan is in the 41st slot, Kazakhstan in the 63rd, Tajikistan in the 152nd. Uzbekistan is followed by African countries with rare exceptions like Haiti (151st), Iraq (153rd), Afghanistan (160th), Bolivia (161st), Lagos (167th), Venezuela (177th), and a couple of island states. Economic freedom index compiled by Heritage Foundation and The Wall Street Journal since 1995 rated Uzbekistan the 148th on the list of 183 countries.

Other Central Asian countries rated the 74th (Kyrgyzstan), 83rd (Kazakhstan), 122nd (Tajikistan), and 169th (Turkmenistan). They are trailed by Erythraea, Zimbabwe, Cuba, and North Korea. (The list also includes Afghanistan, Iraq, Liechtenstein, and Sudan but exact data on them are lacking.)

The Economist Intelligence Unit (analytical division of The Economist) began rating countries by the Global Peace Index in 2007. As is clear from the title, it is an indicator of countries' peace-loving nature. Of 144 countries on the 2009 index, Uzbekistan rates the 106th. No need to elaborate on where annual reports of Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International place Uzbekistan. Web sites of these organizations are placed off bounds for Internet users in Uzbekistan. What else can be said? Possession of HRW's "Leaden Rain" report on the May 2005 events in Andijan was what journalist and former HRW activist Umida Niyazova was charged with in 2007. Considering other items on the bill of indictment, the journalist was sentenced to seven years imprisonment (an amnesty set her free, eventually). The Uzbek authorities repeatedly deny HRW functionaries accreditation in Uzbekistan using all sorts of pretexts. All of that are what Karimov referred to when elaborating on accomplishments en route to a democratic state and to the rightful place in the world - as well as on appreciation of these achievements by the international community. Are they what one might take pride in?

<http://enews.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=2596>

- Uzbekistan: The opposition leader Bakhodir Choriev is expelled from Uzbekistan Bakhodir Choriev, the emigrant and the leader of Birdamlik (Solidarity) Uzbek opposition movement, which had recently returned home, was sent back to USA. The Voice of Freedom web page reports that last Saturday he was delivered to Tashkent international airport by the law enforcement officers of Uzbekistan, where he took a plane to the United States. According to Dilorom Iskhakova, the leader of Birdamlik branch in Uzbekistan, informed the agency that Bakhodir Choriev arrived in USA and she talked to him over the phone. The dissident shared that anonymous special service officers invited him to Tashkent to return his personal belongings, had talks in the public prosecutor's office and then he was delivered to the airport. Dilorom also informed that the Birdamlik leader had open date ticket to the states while the law enforcement officers booked the next available flight. They also promised that next time they will take stricter measures against him. We reported earlier that on October 16, 2009 Bakhodir Choriev, the leader of Birdamlik movement, unexpectedly returned to Uzbekistan after five years of stay in USA. He announced that he was going to continue open political activity at home and organize the congress of the movement, scheduled long ago. Immediately after his arrival in Tashkent Bakhodir Choriev faced problems: his computer, green card, passport, few hundreds of T-shirts with Birdamlik harakati (Birdamlik Movement) sign, to be handed out to the participants of the upcoming congress, were all taken away. After a long conversation, the law enforcement officers recommended the opposition leader to leave the capital city and remain in native Shahrisabs (in the Kashkadaria Oblast in the south of the republic) for the duration of stay. Despite the warnings, Choriev visited Tashkent to meet the investigator and then travelled to few other oblasts of the country; however, this resulted in troubles for civil society leaders. Thus, after meeting the Birdamlik leader Djizak-based human rights activist Bakhtier Khamraev and his colleague Mamir Azimov were beaten, the Voice of Freedom said. On November 24 the opposition leader even tried to organize the national meeting of the Birdamlik members

in the city of Shahrisabs. According to Choriev, the attempt did not achieve its goal: it was attended only by the members from Kashkadaria Oblast. The rest members were blocked by police outside the oblast.

<http://enews.ferghana.ru/news.php?id=1497&mode=snews>

Geo Strategic Front

- Two Tajiks Wounded By Uzbek Border Guards

PANJAKENT, Tajikistan -- Uzbek border guards have shot and wounded two Tajik citizens along Tajikistan's border in the northern Panjakent district, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Abdurahmon Taylonov and Hofiz Normatov, both 37, are residents of the Panjakent district and reportedly tried to cross the Tajik-Uzbek border to visit relatives in the Urgut district of Uzbekistan's Samarkand region. The parents of Taylonov and Normatov told RFE/RL that they are not being allowed to visit their sons, who were hospitalized in Urgut. Several Tajiks told RFE/RL that since Jarteppa -- the only checkpoint in Panjakent, which borders the Samarkand region -- has been closed for 2 1/2 years and they must cross the Tajik-Uzbek border illegally. Tajik border guards told RFE/RL that this was the fourth case of Uzbek border guards shooting Tajiks in Panjakent in 2009.

http://www.rferl.org/content/Two_Tajiks_Wounded_By_Uzbek_Border_Guards/1903736.html

- Uzbeks, Turkmen To Ease Border Transit

ASHGABAT -- Uzbek President Islam Karimov and Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov have signed an agreement to ease cross-border transit for people living along their common frontier, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports. The protocol signed on December 13 amends a 2004 bilateral agreement. Karimov, who is on a two-day visit to Turkmenistan for the opening ceremony of the Turkmenistan-China natural-gas pipeline, said the Uzbek-Turkmen talks are deeply symbolic for bilateral relations. No specifics about the changes in border-crossing procedures were immediately reported. Rozagul, a woman from the western Uzbek town of Khorezm, told RFE/RL that people living in the Uzbek-Turkmen border area are very happy to hear about simplified procedures to cross the border. She said that currently the border can be crossed only once per month and after a payment of some \$8. Rozagul said that many people were often unable to visit their relatives in Turkmenistan for weddings and other family events. A representative from the Khorezm-based organization Najot told RFE/RL that in the last 10 years some 62 Uzbek citizens have been shot dead by Turkmen border guards.

http://www.rferl.org/content/Uzbekistan_Turkmenistan_To_Ease_Border_Transit/1903700.html

- Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan reaffirm policy for full cooperation

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov, who arrived in Turkmenistan on an official visit, held talks in Ashgabat on December 13. The visit of the Uzbek leader is timed to the opening of the Turkmenistan - China gas pipeline the route of which passes through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. According to the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH), the two leaders expressed the profound satisfaction with the progressive development of bilateral relations and reaffirmed their countries' policies for a full-fledged cooperation.

Noting that the advantageous geographical location of both countries contributes to the successful combining of their capacities, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov suggested that

the relevant structures of the two countries should work in a systematic way to create a programme that could become a peculiar "road map" for cooperation in the sphere of road, rail and air transport. Stressing the importance of the traditional Turkmen-Uzbek humanitarian cooperation, the Turkmen leader proposed to consider the possibility of holding a festival of friendship of the two peoples in Dashoguz province of Turkmenistan in the spring of 2010. On the results of talks in Ashkhabad, the sides signed a package of bilateral documents. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Islam Karimov signed a Protocol on Amending the Agreement between Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan on mutual visits of citizens and on simplified procedures for citizens living in border areas of 19 November 2004, as well as a Joint Turkmen-Uzbek statement. There were also signed a cooperation programme between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2010-2011 and an Agreement between Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan on the joint Turkmen-Uzbek commission for trade-economic, scientific-technical and cultural cooperation.

http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=16008&type=event&sort=date_desc

- Switzerland to accept Uzbek Guantanamo detainee

On December 16 the Swiss government announced Wednesday that it has agreed to accept on Uzbek Guantanamo detainee for resettlement, Jurist.Law.Pitt.Edu reports. The unidentified detainee has been held at Guantanamo since 2005 but has never faced charges. The detainee has been cleared for release since 2005, but could not be returned to Uzbekistan for fear of persecution. The USA's accusation that the man has links with terrorist groups has never been proven. The US authorities have assured Switzerland that the man has been neither prosecuted nor convicted, and that he constitutes no danger to public safety. In addition, Switzerland has not had any feedback from any other foreign security authority that would render the transfer unjustifiable. Pending approval by the US Congress, the detainee will be transferred and resettled in Geneva.

The Guantanamo jail is designated for detainees, accused by US authorities of various crimes and, specifically, enemies at the US naval base in Guantanamo (Cuba). Wikipedia says that the jail was established in January of 2002 when first 20 Talibs, accused of "Islamic extremism" were delivered there. Over 750 foreigners, seized by American army in Afghanistan and Pakistan, were brought to Guantanamo in 2002-2006. Allegedly, all of them were Al-Qaeda and Taliban members. However, in this period 250 people were released, transferred to other jails and sent to their home countries. On January 21, 2009 US President Barack Obama ordered to disband the prison. Many Guantanamo prisoners were detained without official accusations. Amnesty International, other human rights activists and prisoners themselves affirm that the detainees were exposed to tortures, sanctioned by US government and President Bush. In its turn, Pentagon noted that such actions cannot be considered as brutal.

<http://enews.ferghana.ru/news.php?id=1502&mode=snews>

Economic /Energy Front

- Uzbek, Tajik Officials Discuss Gas Price For 2010

DUSHANBE -- The head of Tajikistan's TajikTransGaz says gas negotiations with Uzbekistan are progressing but that there is still no agreement on a gas price for 2010, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Saidmamad Sharofiddinov told RFE/RL today that the two countries plan to complete gas talks in the next two weeks. But he added that

Uzbekistan is insisting to keep the 2009 gas price -- some \$240 per 1,000 cubic meters of gas. Sharofiddinov said world gas prices have fallen and therefore Tashkent should decrease its price as well. He added that Tajikistan expects Uzbekistan to decrease its price for gas by 30 percent. Tajikistan planned to buy some 550 million cubic meters of gas from Uzbekistan in 2010. Uzbekistan supplies some 95 percent of Tajikistan's gas needs and disagreements between the two countries in recent years have caused Uzbek officials to turn off the gas flow to Tajikistan that has led to severe energy shortages, particularly during the winter.

http://www.rferl.org/content/Uzbek_Tajik_Officials_Discuss_Gas_Price_For_2010/1903921.html

- Uzbekistan: The first POS terminals appeared in the markets of Tashkent UzA official news agency of Uzbekistan learned from Toshbozortayerlovsavdo that over 30 POS (point of sale) terminals were set up in twelve markets of Tashkent; from now on, the local residents can use their debit cards there. This fact was also confirmed by Bakhodir Saidov, the head of OJSC Farhod dekhon bozori (the Farhad bazaar) which said that four POS terminals had been installed at this market. «In 2010 we are planning to significantly increase the number of POS terminals», Saidov promised. Ferghana.Ru correspondents took a walk around Tashkent bazaars in order to personally see what was going on. There are four VISA POS terminals at the Farhad market and all of them are concentrated at the same place. DUET cards are temporarily out of service. (DUET (Direct Universal Electronic Transaction) the local payment system, launched by UZKART Interbank processing center that unites 18 banks of Uzbekistan. The payments are processed in national currency – editorial note).

Four terminals for one big market are not many, considering the fact that most of the city dwellers were forced to use bank cards. Only few food items can be purchased at the Farhad market by the bank card while the rest foodstuff is purchased for cash only.

Even being aware about the terminals it is not easy to locate them at the bazaar. For instance, Ferghana.Ru correspondent was able to find POS terminals only with the help of local administration while it turned out impossible to find the payment terminals at the markets of Katartal, Mirabad and Alay bazaars.

Since it is so difficult to locate the terminals there are no lines, whatsoever; the customers use cash only.

It has to be mentioned that massive sale of debit cards started in Uzbekistan over five years ago. The salaries of many workers were forcedly transferred to debit cards. At the same time, people faced the problem of cash withdrawals at POS terminals and ATMs. As a result, the purchasing power of Uzbekistanis went down since the cardholders had no opportunity to use cards in the shops and especially bazaars, very popular in the republic and where the prices are quite lower than in supermarkets. Over the time, the problem has been partially solved.

<http://enews.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=2595>

Social Front

- Uzbek Refugees In Sweden Rally For Jailed Muslim Women
STOCKHOLM -- Dozens of Uzbek refugees held a protest in Stockholm to support jailed Muslim women in Uzbekistan, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports. Exiled Uzbek imam Obidkhon Qori Nazarov told RFE/RL that the protest at the central Medborgplatsen

square on December 16 was organized after the Uzbek community received news that 30 Muslim women were jailed in the southern Uzbek city of Karshi in November. He said the protesters wanted to express their condemnation of the Uzbek officials' actions and their support for the jailed women. Hasan Temirov, an Uzbek refugee, told RFE/RL that some 60 people participated in the protest. He said protesters held banners with slogans such as "Freedom to jailed women" and "Stop repression against ordinary Muslims" written in English, Uzbek, and Swedish. Temirov said Swedish people also showed interest in the protest, which was covered by the media. He added that the protest was organized with the support of Nadejda Atayeva, an Uzbek rights activist in exile who heads the Paris-based Association for Human Rights in Central Asia. Temirov said protesters also sent letters to the Swedish parliament, the EU Presidency (which is held by Sweden), the Swedish prime minister, and international human rights organizations to draw attention to the case. On November 5, Mehriniso Hamdamova, 40, a teacher of a religious course for women at Karshi's Kuk Gumbaz Mosque, as well as many of her female relatives -- including her sister, a daughter-in-law, and nieces -- along with some other women were arrested and jailed.

In early December, five of the women were released. But the others remain jailed and are charged with various political and religious-extremism offenses.

http://www.rferl.org/content/Uzbek_Refugees_In_Sweden_Rally_For_Jailed_Muslim_Women/1906483.html

- Uzbek Photographer Charged With Defamation

A prominent Uzbek photographer/videographer has been charged with defamation and damaging the country's image because of the content of her photos and videos, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports. Umida Ahmedova, 54, took a series of photos and video at obscure Uzbek villages that she used for two documentaries in a project sponsored by the Swiss Embassy in Tashkent. Ahmedova told RFE/RL that Uzbek officials disapprove of her photos used in the documentaries "The Burden Of Virginity" and "Customs Of Men And Women," which focus on poverty and gender inequality in Uzbekistan. Ahmedova, who has contributed photographs to RFE/RL's Uzbek Service, said the charges against her were "groundless" and "absurd." Tashkent police investigator Nodir Ahmadjonov told RFE/RL that experts in the Prosecutor-General's Office found her photos and videos to be defamatory and insulting. The Uzbek Communication and Information Agency initiated the case against Ahmedova, who has been ordered not to leave Uzbekistan while an investigation is carried out.

If found guilty, Ahmedova could face a fine and be sentenced to up to two years in a labor camp or up to six months in prison. Ahmadjonov added that Ahmedova could be released under an amnesty without being acquitted. Ahmedova's films were shown at the One World film festival in Prague in 2006, where they were popular with audiences.

http://www.rferl.org/content/Uzbek_Photographer_Charged_With_Defamation/1906455.html