

Business & Politics in the Muslim World
News Monitoring
Weekly Report
15 to 21 January 2010
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Uzma Siraj

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- U.S. Officials Says Armenian, Azerbaijani Presidents To Meet

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- Germany "places particular emphasis" on legal cooperation with Azerbaijan
- Azerbaijani MPs to protest against U.S Congress's decision to finance Nagorno-Karabakh separatists
- Turkish president to visit Azerbaijan

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- Azerbaijan will be best served with multiple gas export options
- Azerbaijani transport officials to attend OSCE economic and environment forum
- Azerbaijan to launch its satellite into orbit in 2012
- Azerbaijan state oil company increases own gas export by 26 percent
- Azerbaijan's national oil company to double gas exports to Russia

Social Front

- HRW Says Rights Defenders Being Increasingly Targeted By Abusive Governments
- 20th Anniversary Of 'Black January' Events In Azerbaijan
- Azerbaijan University of Languages to open Indian center
- Newspaper editor-in-chief gets 13 years in jail in Azerbaijan
- Azerbaijani President's Library prepares online resource about 20 January tragedy
- Azerbaijani president signs order to ensure social security of Azerbaijan's 9 millionth citizen
- Social spending priority in Azerbaijan's 2010 budget

Kazakhstan

Political Front

- Former Head Of Kazakh Antidrug Agency Arrested
- Ex-KNB Head Says Austrian Court Made Politically Motivated Verdict
- KNB Gives Kazakh Uranium Company Head New Lawyer
- Convicted Former Kazakh Official Gets Senior Job
- OSCE to focus more on security, less on democracy-Kazakhstan
- Opposition wants to be part of Kazakh official delegation in OSCE

Geo strategic Front

- U.S. Urges Kazakhstan To Lead By Example In OSCE

Economic/Energy Front

- Kazakhstan received USD 5.5 bln from TCO business activity in 2009
- PetroChina's Kazakh Venture Produces 5.7 Million Tons of Oil
- Asia Avto to begin assembly of Kia models in Kazakhstan
- Chevron Kazakh venture to raise oil output in 2010

Social Front

- Blizzard Shuts Down Almaty-Bishkek Highway
- Kazakh Group To Award Democracy Prize To Jailed Men

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- Kyrgyz High Court Rejects Bakiev's Presidential Council Idea
- Tajik Police Deny Suspect Arrested In Kyrgyz Journalist's Murder
- Son Of Jailed Kyrgyz Politician Vows To Challenge Government

- National Security Institute turns into highly dangerous service
- New opposition movement established in Kyrgyzstan
- Constitutional Court adopts Fundamental law amendments.

Geo strategic Front

- Wounded Kyrgyz Border Guard Remains In Uzbekistan
- Kyrgyz Guard Injured During Shootout On Uzbek Border
- Six Hizb ut-Tahrir activists detained in Kyrgyzstan
- President: Kyrgyzstan will get energy independence.
- Kyrgyzstan's GDP growth hit 2.3 percent in 2009
- Kyrgyz international reserve grew \$0.3bln in 2009

Social Front

- In Central Asia, Unofficial Madrasahs Raise Official Fears
- Jailed Former Kyrgyz Minister Urges Supporters To End Hunger Strike
- Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies get 10,000 domestic violence claims annually

Tajikistan

Political Front

- Turkmen Leader Replaces Top Energy Official
- Three political parties nominates their candidates for parliament in Isfara constituency
- Pre-election agitation campaign starts in Tajikistan

Geo strategic Front

- Tajik Police Deny Suspect Arrested In Kyrgyz Journalist's Murder

Economic/Energy Front

- President calls on Tajik businesspeople to make contribution to Roghun
- President meets with representatives of Tajik business community today
- Inflation for 2009 reportedly stands at 5 percent in Tajikistan
- GBAO's external trade turnover falls 50 percent last year
- USAID launches new agriculture project in Tajikistan – the goal is to increase farmers' incomes by 25%

Social Front

- Tajikistan readies plan to control Islamic study abroad

Turkmenistan

Political Front

- President of Turkmenistan reshuffles government

Geo strategic Front

- British Ambassador Presents Credentials to President of Turkmenistan
- Turkmenistan and Russia have large-scale long-term plans of joint work
- UN supports Turkmen stance on Afghan settlement

Economic/Energy Front

- Turkmen Leader Replaces Top Energy Official
- Ukrainian "Altcom" to start construction of bridge across Amu Darya in Turkmenistan
- President of Turkmenistan allocates land to private enterprises in Ashgabat for construction of facilities
- Turkmenistan reports economic growth in 2009

- Minister of Oil and Gas Industry and Mineral Resources of Turkmenistan dismissed
- Russia to buy 11 billion cubic meters of Turkmen natural gas in 2010

Social Front

- Turkmen Leader Orders Predecessor's Statue Removed
- Education minister to offer government to adopt new education legislation
- Representative of UN Office on Drugs and Crime for Central Asia visits Turkmenistan
- Uzbek secret services collect the records about independent journalists

Geo strategic Front

- The conflicts at Kyrgyz-Uzbek border became more frequent
- Drunken Saudi diplomat caught in Uzbekistan
- Oman's embassy to be opened in Uzbekistan

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

- Art Critics Back Uzbek Photographer Charged With Defamation

Summery

Azerbaijan

Political Front

- Azerbaijani CEC approves model of certificate on election of municipality member

Azerbaijan Central Election Commission (CEC) has approved the model of certificate on election of municipality member. Chairman of CEC Mazahir Panahov said at the meeting that the results of the municipal elections were summed up on Jan. 11.

Geo strategic Front

- Armenia's Ruling Party Says Opposition 'In Decline'

Republican Party of Armenia spokesman Eduard Sharmazanov

YEREVAN -- Armenia's ruling Republican Party (HHK) says a January 10 parliamentary by-election in Yerevan showed a decrease in the popularity for the main opposition Armenian National Congress (HAK), RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports.

- U.S. Officials Says Armenian, Azerbaijani Presidents To Meet

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev (left) in Chisinau in October with his Armenian counterpart, Serzh Sarkisian

STEPANAKERT, Nagorno-Karabakh -- Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian and his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev will meet later this week to discuss how to resolve the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, a U.S. diplomat told journalists in Stepanakert, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports.

- U.S. Officials Says Armenian, Azerbaijani Presidents To Meet

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev (left) in Chisinau in October with his Armenian counterpart, Serzh Sarkisian

STEPANAKERT, Nagorno-Karabakh -- Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian and his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev will meet later this week to discuss how to resolve the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, a U.S. diplomat told journalists in Stepanakert, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports.

- Germany "places particular emphasis" on legal cooperation with Azerbaijan
Director of the German Foundation for International Legal Co-operation Matthias Weckerling has said his country attaches special importance to legal and judicial collaboration with Azerbaijan. Speaking to chairman of Azerbaijan`s Supreme Court Ramiz Rzayev on the second day of his visit, Weckerling described the two countries` cooperation as "mutually advantageous".

- Azerbaijani MPs to protest against U.S Congress's decision to finance Nagorno-Karabakh separatists

The Azerbaijani MPs will visit the U.S to protests the U.S Congress's decision to allocate funds to the Armenian community of the Nagorno-Karabakh. "During our U.S visit, which starts Jan.21, we intend to conduct serious discussions over the U.S Congress's decision to finance Nagorno-Karabakh separatists," Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee member Zahid Oruj said. According to him, the meeting will be held in Washington and Colorado.

- Turkish president to visit Azerbaijan

Turkish President Abdullah Gul will pay official visit to Azerbaijan, Turkish officials said. The visit was scheduled for March, but its date was changed later.

Economic/Energy Front

- Azerbaijan will be best served with multiple gas export options

Azerbaijan could be a stable and dependable source of gas for Europe if price and transit issues can be solved with Turkey, Julia Nanay, senior director at the Global PFC Energy (Petroleum Finance Company) said.

- Azerbaijani transport officials to attend OSCE economic and environment forum

The representatives of the Azerbaijan`s Ministry of Transport will participate in the first part of the OSCE economic and environment forum to be held in Vienna, February 1-2.

- Azerbaijan to launch its satellite into orbit in 2012

Azerbaijan Ministry of Communications and Information Technologies has reported the work done in 2009 on launching of own communications satellite.

Communication Minister Ali Abbasov says that over the past year the ministry opened tenders for orbital launching of the country's first telecommunication satellite and plans to sign a contract on orbital position of the satellite with help of a consulting company late January and a main contract with producer company in February.“

- Azerbaijan state oil company increases own gas export by 26 percent

In Dec. 2009, the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) increased volumes of gas exports 57.1 percent as compared to 12.1 percent in Nov, the company said.

- Azerbaijan's national oil company to double gas exports to Russia

Gazprom and the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) have agreed that in 2009 Russia will acquire 1 billion cubic meters of the Azerbaijani gas instead of 500 million and in 2011 the volume of supply will be doubled and reach about 2 billion cubic meters. Today Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller and SOCAR President Rovnag Abdullayev hold working meeting in Moscow, Gazprom said.

Social Front

- HRW Says Rights Defenders Being Increasingly Targeted By Abusive Governments

Journalist and human rights activist Natalya Estemirova was abducted in the Chechen capital, Grozny, on July 15 and found dead in Ingushetia a short time later

- 20th Anniversary Of 'Black January' Events In Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is marking the 20th anniversary of the "Black January" violent crackdown by Soviet forces on the Azerbaijani independence movement during the collapse of the Soviet Union. On January 20, 1990, Soviet troops stormed the Azerbaijani capital, Baku, on the orders of the Kremlin in an ultimately failed attempt to save Communist rule and crush the opposition.

- Azerbaijan University of Languages to open Indian center

An Indian center will be opened in Azerbaijan University of Languages (AUL). Besides, a seminar on temple of the fire-worshippers and its connection with ancient Indian culture will be also held. Rector of the University, Chairman of the Milli Majlis commission on international and interparliamentary relations, professor Samad Seyidov, Indian Ambassador to Azerbaijan Debnad Show and teaching staff will attend the event.

- Newspaper editor-in-chief gets 13 years in jail in Azerbaijan

The Court of Grave Crimes finalized a hearing on the case of Nazim Guliyev, founder and editor-in-chief of the Ideal newspaper.

The court declared verdict on Jan. 15. Nazim Guliyev was sentenced to 13 years and three months in jail with confiscation of property. He will serve the term of sentence in a special penitentiary.

• Azerbaijani President's Library prepares online resource about 20 January tragedy
Azerbaijani President's Library has prepared online resource "Aggression. Baku. January 20, 1990". The resource was created according to the plan of measures approved by the order of the chief of Presidential Administration on the occasion of 20th anniversary of the 20 January tragedy, the library said.

- Azerbaijani president signs order to ensure social security of Azerbaijan's 9 millionth citizen

President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has signed an order to ensure social protection of the 9 millionth citizen of Azerbaijan. In accordance with the order, the Baku Mayor's Office was tasked to allocate an apartment to the child's family to improve their housing condition.

- Social spending priority in Azerbaijan's 2010 budget

Azerbaijan's 2010 State Budget places an emphasis on social spending, said deputy chief of the Parliament's social policy committee Musa Guliyev. "This year's social budget will be over 30 percent," he said.

Kazakhstan

Political Front

- Former Head Of Kazakh Antidrug Agency Arrested

ASTANA -- Former Kazakh antidrug agency head Askar Isagaliev, who was charged with abuse of power while in office, has been arrested in Turkey, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

- Ex-KNB Head Says Austrian Court Made Politically Motivated Verdict

PRAGUE -- The former head of the Kazakh National Security Service (KNB) says a "not guilty" verdict by an Austrian court in an alleged abduction attempt against him was made to please Kazakhstan, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

- KNB Gives Kazakh Uranium Company Head New Lawyer

ASTANA -- Dzhamilya Dzhakisheva, the wife of the former head of Kazakh uranium producer KazAtomProm, says the Kazakh National Security Service (KNB) has appointed a new lawyer for her husband, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

- **Convicted Former Kazakh Official Gets Senior Job**

ASTANA -- The convicted former head of Kazakhstan's national railway company has been appointed to a senior position with the state-owned oil and gas company KazMunaiGaz, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

- **OSCE to focus more on security, less on democracy-Kazakhstan**

VIENNA, Jan 14 (Reuters) - New OSCE head Kazakhstan said on Thursday it would refocus Europe's main security and rights watchdog on tackling terrorism and development issues and brushed off criticism of its own record on rights and democracy.

- **Opposition wants to be part of Kazakh official delegation in OSCE**

Almaty. January 14. Interfax-Kazakhstan – Kazakh opposition party Azat (Freedom) requested the OSCE member-states to discuss with Astana the issue of putting opposition representatives on the list of Astana official delegation in the Organization.

Geo strategic Front

- **U.S. Urges Kazakhstan To Lead By Example In OSCE**

ALMATY (Reuters) -- The United States urged Kazakhstan today to use its chairmanship of Europe's main security and human rights watchdog to lead by example and improve its own record.

Economic/Energy Front

- **Kazakhstan received USD 5.5 bln from TCO business activity in 2009**

ATYRAU. January 13. KAZINFORM /Andrey Sokolov/ In 2009 Kazakhstan received USD 5.5 bln from the "Tengizchevroil" LLP business activity which extracts oil in Atyrau region at Tengiz and King Deposits.

- **PetroChina's Kazakh Venture Produces 5.7 Million Tons of Oil**

Jan. 19 (Bloomberg) -- AO Mangistaumunaigas, a Kazakh oil producer half-owned by China's largest oil company, produced oil and gas equivalent of more than 6 million metric tons last year, China National Petroleum Corp. said in its newsletter.

- **Asia Avto to begin assembly of Kia models in Kazakhstan**

(SRI) - Asia Avto, Kazakhstan's largest car manufacturer, will launch the assembly of three models of the Korean Kia car company at its plant in Ust-Kamenogorsk in the second quarter of 2010, Asia Avto's president Yerzhan Mandiev told Interfax.

- **Chevron Kazakh venture to raise oil output in 2010**

Tengizchevroil, a Chevron-led (CVX.N: Quote, Profile, Research) Kazakh upstream venture, will raise oil output to 23.5 million tonnes this year from 22.5 million in 2009, it said on Wednesday.

Social Front

- **Blizzard Shuts Down Almaty-Bishkek Highway**

ALMATY -- The Almaty-Bishkek highway was closed today due to a blizzard that has stranded dozens of motorists, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. The highway is the major transportation route connecting Kazakhstan's largest city, Almaty, with Bishkek, the Kyrgyz capital.

- **Kazakh Group To Award Democracy Prize To Jailed Men**

A Kazakh opposition group will jointly award a democracy prize to a jailed journalist, rights activist, and businessman, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- **Kyrgyz High Court Rejects Bakiev's Presidential Council Idea**

Opponents say the reforms are intended to strengthen President Kurmanbek Bakiev's powers. BISHKEK -- The Kyrgyz Constitutional Court has rejected President Kurmanbek Bakiev's proposal for a still-to-be-created Presidential Council to appoint an interim president in emergencies, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- **Tajik Police Deny Suspect Arrested In Kyrgyz Journalist's Murder**

Regional Tajik police say they know nothing about the reported arrest of a man suspected in the 2007 murder of Kyrgyz journalist Alisher Saipov. Kyrgyz Interior Ministry spokesman Bakyt Seyitov told RFE/RL's Uzbek Service that his ministry was told on January 14 about the arrest of a Tajik citizen, Farrukh Sharakhmatullaev, by the Sughd police department.

- **Son Of Jailed Kyrgyz Politician Vows To Challenge Government**

WASHINGTON -- Ruslan Isakov, the son of jailed former Kyrgyz Defense Minister Ismail Isakov, says he plans to start an opposition campaign against Kyrgyzstan's government, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. A former Kyrgyz army officer, Ruslan Isakov has been living in self-imposed exile in the United States since his father's arrest in late 2008.

- **National Security Institute turns into highly dangerous service**

National Security Institute has turned into a highly dangerous service, Aziza Abdirasulova leaders of Kylym Shamy human rights center said Friday at a session of the Public Parliament.

- **New opposition movement established in Kyrgyzstan**

New opposition movement is established in Kyrgyzstan, Mukar Cholponbaev one of the members of the Joint People's Movement told a press conference in Bishkek Monday. The organization will function on the basis of Eldik kenesh (People's council) movement established in Kyrgyzstan in 2006 and will inherit its name.

- **Constitutional Court adopts Fundamental law amendments**

The Constitutional Court of Kyrgyzstan has adopted initiated by the President amendments to the Fundamental law of the republic on Thursday.

As the news agency 24.kg earlier reported, the amendments deprive the president of a right to appoint Secretary of State.

Geo strategic Front

- **Wounded Kyrgyz Border Guard Remains In Uzbekistan**

BISHKEK -- A Kyrgyz border guard shot by Uzbek border guards on January 17 is still being kept in Uzbekistan, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- **Kyrgyz Guard Injured During Shootout On Uzbek Border**

TASHKENT/BISHKEK -- A Kyrgyz border official says a Kyrgyz border guard was injured and taken prisoner after a shootout at on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports.

- **Six Hizb ut-Tahrir activists detained in Kyrgyzstan**

At least six active members of an extremist religious organization Hizb ut-Tahrir have been arrested in Jети-Oguz district of Issyk-Kul region (Kyrgyzstan), press service of the Kyrgyz National Security Service reported. Officers have confiscated from the extremists leaflets, DVDs, extremist notes and illegally stored firearms.

Economic/Energy Front

- President: Kyrgyzstan will get energy independence

Kyrgyzstan will get energy independence in the nearest future, Kurmanbek Bakiev President of Kyrgyzstan said Friday at a session of the Chui regional administration.

Increasing volume of water in Toktogul water reservoir and launch of Kambarata-2 hydro-power plant will, in president's view, contribute to the process.

- Kyrgyzstan's GDP growth hit 2.3 percent in 2009

According to preliminary estimates, Kyrgyzstan's gross domestic product (GDP) has increased by 2.3 percent in 2009, the National Statistics Committee reported.

Not taking the Kumtor mining companies' revenues into account, economic growth in the republic averaged to 2.9 percent (196,423,1 billion soms) in 2009

- Kyrgyz international reserve grew \$0.3bln in 2009

Kyrgyzstan's international reserve grew by \$0.3 billion in 2009, the National Bank of Kyrgyzstan reported. Therewith, as of beginning of 2010, volume of the gross international reserve of Kyrgyzstan exceeded \$1,588,000,000, while the liquid reserve hit \$1,584,000,000.

Social Front

- In Central Asia, Unofficial Madrasahs Raise Official Fears

Muhtar Yusupbekov has no regrets about his decision to send his 12-year-old son Muhammad abroad to Egypt to study. Muhammad, his father says, used to attend a local Russian-language school in his native Bishkek, but "he always had a passion to study religion, especially the Koran.

- Jailed Former Kyrgyz Minister Urges Supporters To End Hunger Strike

BISHKEK -- Former Kyrgyz Defense Minister Ismail Isakov, who was sentenced to eight years in jail last week, today called on protesters to end a week-old hunger strike in his support, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies get 10,000 domestic violence claims annually

Law enforcement agencies get about 10 thousand domestic violence claims annually in Kyrgyzstan, Moldomusa Kongantiev the Kyrgyz Interior Minister said Monday at a parliament hearings on social and legal protection against domestic violence draft bill.

Tajikistan

Political Front

- Turkmen Leader Replaces Top Energy Official

Turkmen state media today say President Gurbanguli Berdimukhamedov has replaced the country's top oil and gas official. The daily "Neutral Turkmenistan" reports that the president dismissed Oraznur Nurmuradov for "unsatisfactory performance."

- Three political parties nominates their candidates for parliament in Isfara constituency

ISFARA January 19, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Primary organizations of the People's Democratic (PDPT), Islamic Revival (IRPT) and Social-Democratic (SDPT) parties in the city of Isfara, Sughd province have nominated their candidates for election to the Majlisi Namoyandagon (Tajikistan's lower chamber of parliament), Asia-Plus has learned from the electoral commission for Isfara single-mandate constituency # 20.

- Pre-election agitation campaign starts in Tajikistan

DUSHANBE, January 22, 2010, Asia-Plus -- All political parties that have submitted their party lists to the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CCER) and their

representatives registered to run individual constituencies as well as registered self-propelled candidates may begin pre-election agitation campaign, Muhibullo Dadajonov, an official with CCER, told Asia-Plus today.

- IRPT to compete for 32 of 35 seats in Vose legislature

KULOB, January 22, 2010, Asia-Plus -- The organization of the Islamic Revival Party (IRPT) in the Khatlon's Vose district will compete for 32 of 35 seats in local legislature, Abdufattoh Abdukholiqov, head of the IRPT organization in Vose, said in an interview with Asia-Plus.

Geo strategic Front

- Tajik Police Deny Suspect Arrested In Kyrgyz Journalist's Murder

Regional Tajik police say they know nothing about the reported arrest of a man suspected in the 2007 murder of Kyrgyz journalist Alisher Saipov. Kyrgyz Interior Ministry spokesman Bakyt Seyitov told RFE/RL's Uzbek Service that his ministry was told on January 14 about the arrest of a Tajik citizen, Farrukh Sharakhmatullaev, by the Sughd police department.

Economic/Energy Front

- President calls on Tajik businesspeople to make contribution to Roghun

DUSHANBE, January 15, 2010, Asia-Plus -- President Emomali Rahmon has met with representatives of Tajik business community today. The meeting that has been held at the Kokhi Borbad State Complex in Dushanbe brought together entrepreneurs from all regions of the country as well as a number of Tajik businesspeople working in Russia and some other CIS states.

- President meets with representatives of Tajik business community today

DUSHANBE, January 15, 2010, Asia-Plus -- President Emomali Rahmon is meeting with representatives of Tajik business community here today.

- Inflation for 2009 reportedly stands at 5 percent in Tajikistan

DUSHANBE, January 16, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Inflation for 2009 stood at 5 percent last year, according to the State Committee for Statistics. A monthly inflation rate in the consumer sector was 0.4 percent last year. A 2.3 percent increase in prices of products of food industry was reported last year and non-foodstuffs rose in cost by 6.78 percent in 2009.

- GBAO's external trade turnover falls 50 percent last year

KHOROGE, January 22, 2010, Asia-Plus -- In 2009, an external trade turnover of Gorno Badakhshan amounted to only 11.6 million U.S. dollars, which is 50 percent of the 2008 level, Yormamad Faqirov, deputy chief of the GBAO customs committee, told reporters in Khorog on January 21.

- USAID launches new agriculture project in Tajikistan – the goal is to increase farmers' incomes by 25%

DUSHANBE, January 22, 2010, Asia-Plus -- On Thursday January 21, 2010, Deputy Chief of Mission Necia Quast, Deputy Prime Minister Muradali Alimardon, Deputy Minister of Agriculture Sijovuddin Isroilov, and Regional Director of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in Central Asia Andrew Sisson officially opened a new USAID Productive Agriculture project for Tajikistan, according to the U.S. Embassy in Dushanbe.

Social Front

- Tajikistan readies plan to control Islamic study abroad

DUSHANBE, January 15, 2010, Asia-Plus – The Tajik Culture Ministry is preparing tighter controls for allowing Tajiks to study at Islamic universities and madrasahs abroad, Radio Liberty's Tajik Service reported on January 14.

Turkmenistan

Political Front

- President of Turkmenistan reshuffles government

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov made new appointments on 15 January at an expanded meeting of the Cabinet of Minister that summed up the results of 2009 and discussed the priorities of socio-economic development of Turkmenistan for 2010.

Geo strategic Front

- British Ambassador Presents Credentials to President of Turkmenistan

On January 20, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received the newly appointed Ambassador of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Turkmenistan, Keith Rennie Allan, who presented credentials to the head of state.

- Turkmenistan and Russia have large-scale long-term plans of joint work

Turkmenistan sees Russia as a reliable partner, and the two countries have large-scale plans of joint work in the long term, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said in the course of talks with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov yesterday.

- UN supports Turkmen stance on Afghan settlement

The United Nations wholeheartedly welcomes the position of Turkmenistan playing a special role in the process of building peaceful life and socio-economic development in neighboring Afghanistan. As the Ashgabat correspondent of Turkmenistan.ru reports, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Afghanistan Kai Eide stated about that yesterday during the talks with Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov.

Economic/Energy Front

- Turkmen Leader Replaces Top Energy Official

Turkmen state media today say President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov has replaced the country's top oil and gas official. The daily "Neutral Turkmenistan" reports that the president dismissed Oraznur Nurmuradov for "unsatisfactory performance."

- Ukrainian "Altcom" to start construction of bridge across Amu Darya in Turkmenistan

The financial-industrial group "Altcom" (Donetsk, Ukraine) will begin construction of a road bridge, Atamurat-Kerkichi, across the Amu Darya river in Turkmenistan before April of this year. This was reported by the company's deputy general director Mikhail Kovalev in an interview with the internet portal "Trans-Port."

- President of Turkmenistan allocates land to private enterprises in Ashgabat for construction of facilities

The Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs of Turkmenistan will build a business complex at its own expense in Turkmenbashi Avenue in Ashgabat. President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov signed a decree authorizing the allocation of a land plot of 2.2 hectares to the Union, the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat.

- Turkmenistan reports economic growth in 2009

Vice Premier Tuvakmamed Japarov made a report at a Cabinet meeting on 15 January on the macroeconomic indicators achieved by Turkmenistan in the course of its socio-economic development in 2009.

- Minister of Oil and Gas Industry and Mineral Resources of Turkmenistan dismissed

Analyzing the work of Turkmenistan's fuel and energy sector in the past year at an expanded government meeting on January 15, the President of Turkmenistan said that "certain leaders of oil and gas industry improperly execute their official duties, exercise passivity in addressing issues of industry development.

- Russia to buy 11 billion cubic meters of Turkmen natural gas in 2010

Turkmen gas supplies to Russia since their resumption in January 2010 total 30 million cubic meters a day, "Interfax-AGI" information agency said citing "Gazprom" company. The plan of supplies for January accounts for 934.2 million cubic meters of gas, which is about 11 billion cubic meters on an annualized basis (with the traditional annual two-week pause for preventive works).

Social Front

- Turkmen Leader Orders Predecessor's Statue Removed

The Neutrality Arch capped with a gold statue of the late Saparmurat Niyazov in Ashgabat

ASHGABAT (Reuters) -- Turkmenistan's president has ordered the removal of a prominent statue of former dictator Saparmurat Niyazov, in a move to assert his own authority and chip away at the personality cult of his predecessor.

- Education minister to offer government to adopt new education legislation

DUSHANBE, January 15, 2010, Asia-Plus -- The Ministry of Education intends to apply to the government for adoption of a new law on education.

Education Minister Abdujabbor Rahmonov told Asia-Plus that a working group had been set up at the ministry for working out the education bill."

- Representative of UN Office on Drugs and Crime for Central Asia visits Turkmenistan

The Regional Representative of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime for Central Asia, James Callahan, visited Turkmenistan. He held a number of meetings and negotiations with the State Coordination Commission on Drug Abuse under the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan, the State Customs Service, the State Service of Turkmenistan on Combating Drugs, the Ministry of Interior, and State Border Service of Turkmenistan.

Uzbekistan

Political Front

- Uzbek secret services collect the records about independent journalists

The Tashkent Public Prosecutor's office conducted the series of interrogations of several independent journalists, working in Uzbekistan. On January 7 five of them – Vasiliy Markov, Sid Yanyshhev, Abdumalik Boboev, Khusniddin Kutbiddinov and Marina Kozlova (that cooperated with various foreign mass media) were called for "an interview" with Bakhrom Nurmatov, the assistant Public Prosecutor of Tashkent.

Geo strategic Front

- The conflicts at Kyrgyz-Uzbek border became more frequent

Uzbek border guards are on the alert for the territory of neighboring state. Photo by Ferghana.Ru

Another incident took place at the border between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan: Uzbek border guards wounded and captivated Kyrgyz colleague at the marginal area of Mombekov frontier post, the Jalal-Abad border detachment.

- **Drunken Saudi diplomat caught in Uzbekistan**

Saudi Arabia's Prince Salman Bin Abdul Aziz (R), brother of King Abdullah, next to former US president George W. Bush (L) laughing it up.

A visiting Saudi diplomat's drunken misconduct in Uzbekistan feeds the speculation that Saudi officials switch religious allegiance as they travel abroad.

- **Oman's embassy to be opened in Uzbekistan**

The Sultanate of Oman's embassy is planned to be opened in Uzbekistan in 2010, a source in the Uzbek government said.

According to the interlocutor of the agency, the Sultan of Oman Qaboos bin Said has signed a decree stipulating the opening of Oman's embassy in Uzbekistan.

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

- **Art Critics Back Uzbek Photographer Charged With Defamation**

The International Association of Art Critics (AICA) has launched a campaign in support of Uzbek photographer Umida Ahmedova, who has been charged by the government with defamation, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports.

Detailed Report

Azerbaijan

Political Front

- **Azerbaijani CEC approves model of certificate on election of municipality member**

Azerbaijan Central Election Commission (CEC) has approved the model of certificate on election of municipality member. Chairman of CEC Mazahir Panahov said at the meeting that the results of the municipal elections were summed up on Jan. 11.

According to him, within five days after the declaration of the results of the elections, relevant constituency is to give a certificate to the municipality members. He noted that the model of the certificate will be determined by the CEC.

CEC Secretary Natig Mammadov introduced model of the certificate on election of municipality member and draft decision on approving the model. Following the discussions, the model of the certificate was approved.

Geo strategic Front

- **Armenia's Ruling Party Says Opposition 'In Decline'**

Republican Party of Armenia spokesman Eduard Sharmazanov

YEREVAN -- Armenia's ruling Republican Party (HHK) says a January 10 parliamentary by-election in Yerevan showed a decrease in the popularity for the main opposition Armenian National Congress (HAK), RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports. Eduard Sharmazanov, the chief HHK spokesman, argued that the opposition alliance failed to win the disputed vote despite the involvement of its leader, former President Levon Ter-Petrossian. Sharmazanov also pointed to the very low voter turnout -- some 20 percent -- in a constituency where he said opposition forces have traditionally done well. The low

turnout shows that HAK's "approval rating has declined all over Armenia, including the center of Yerevan, which is the most politicized part of the country," Sharmazanov said. The HAK claims that its candidate, the jailed journalist Nikol Pashinian, lost the election because the vote was rigged in favor of pro-government candidate Ara Simonian, who received 57 percent of the vote according to official results. Pashinian officially got 37.5 percent.

One HAK leader said last week that the opposition performance was "astonishing" given the fact that Pashinian is in prison and widespread vote buying, intimidation, and violence was perpetrated by Simonian's campaign. Sharmazanov refused to comment on the fraud allegations because he said the HHK did not have a candidate in the by-election. He dismissed opposition claims that the party, which is led by President Serzh Sarkisian, mobilized its "vote-rigging machine" to thwart Pashinian's victory.

- U.S. Officials Says Armenian, Azerbaijani Presidents To Meet

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev (left) in Chisinau in October with his Armenian counterpart, Serzh Sarkisian

STEPANAKERT, Nagorno-Karabakh -- Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian and his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev will meet later this week to discuss how to resolve the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, a U.S. diplomat told journalists in Stepanakert, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports.

Robert Bradtke, who was named last year as U.S. cochairman of the OSCE Minsk Group, made his comments after earlier meeting in Stepanakert with Bako Sahakian, president of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. Bradtke said he thinks it is important "to come to Karabakh to hear the views of the people and the authorities." Bradtke did not specify the date or venue of the two presidents' meeting. Sarkisian and Aliyev met six times last year. Sahakian, for his part, reiterated during talks with Bradtke that the conflict cannot be resolved "without a direct dialogue between Azerbaijan and Karabakh."

- Azerbaijani president receives U.S. special envoy for Eurasian energy

President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev received today U.S. Special Envoy for Eurasian Energy Richard Morningstar on Jan. 15. The talks focused on energy cooperation between Azerbaijan and the United States and regional cooperation.

- Germany "places particular emphasis" on legal cooperation with Azerbaijan

Director of the German Foundation for International Legal Co-operation Matthias Weckerling has said his country attaches special importance to legal and judicial collaboration with Azerbaijan. Speaking to chairman of Azerbaijan's Supreme Court Ramiz Rzayev on the second day of his visit, Weckerling described the two countries' cooperation as "mutually advantageous". Rzayev echoed Weckerling's words, saying Azerbaijan "is keen to boost cooperation with Germany's judicial and legal authorities".

The first day of the trip saw the chief of the German foundation have meetings with Azeri Justice Minister Fikrat Mammadov and Chairman of the Constitutional Court Farhad Abdullayev.

- Azerbaijani MPs to protest against U.S Congress's decision to finance Nagorno-Karabakh separatists

The Azerbaijani MPs will visit the U.S to protests the U.S Congress's decision to allocate funds to the Armenian community of the Nagorno-Karabakh. "During our U.S visit, which starts Jan.21, we intend to conduct serious discussions over the U.S Congress's

decision to finance Nagorno-Karabakh separatists," Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee member Zahid Oruj said. According to him, the meeting will be held in Washington and Colorado. "During the visit, the Azerbaijani delegation composing Ganira Pashayeva, Gular Ahmadova and Igbal Agazade will meet with senators and discuss the US-Azerbaijani relations and the situation in South Caucasus," he added. He said meetings with representatives of the Azerbaijani and Turkish Diaspora organizations operating in the United States were not ruled out. "The U.S. is one of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs. During the meetings, we will stress the need to increase U.S. efforts in the process of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement under the framework of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity," he said.

- Turkish president to visit Azerbaijan

Turkish President Abdullah Gul will pay official visit to Azerbaijan, Turkish officials said. The visit was scheduled for March, but its date was changed later. Gul is expected to visit Azerbaijan early in May. Turkish ambassador to Azerbaijan Hulusi Kilic said that President Gul is expected to visit Azerbaijan this year, but didn't specify date of the visit. The ambassador added that such visits are natural between the friendly countries.

Economic/Energy Front

- Azerbaijan will be best served with multiple gas export options

Azerbaijan could be a stable and dependable source of gas for Europe if price and transit issues can be solved with Turkey, Julia Nanay, senior director at the Global PFC Energy (Petroleum Finance Company) said. "Europe depends on a number of gas suppliers, not just Russia. Azerbaijan is seen as an additional supply source once the second phase of Shah Deniz began producing later this decade," Nanay said. "Nabucco would allow Azerbaijan's gas to flow to the Central European countries that are seeking to diversify their gas sourcing," she said. Nanay said Azerbaijani gas must be transported across Turkey to get to these countries.

Speaking about the talks on the gas price between Azerbaijan and Turkey, Nanay said that taking into account the practice in the region, Turkey and Azerbaijan must reach a mutually acceptable agreement. Gas prices have definitely been moving higher in response to market forces, she said. She said Azerbaijan will likely to produce enough additional gas in future to supply a new pipeline to Europe across Turkey, as well as conclude contracts with Iran and other countries. "If the Nabucco pipeline is built, it will be able to provide Azerbaijan with options to ship its gas in several directions. If problems arise with one route, it can use another direction. Given the country's location, Azerbaijan will be best served with multiple gas export options," she said.

PFC Energy was founded in 1984. It conducts a comprehensive analysis and development of scenarios that are the foundation to develop strategies, evaluate investments and business decision-making at the global and regional levels.

- Azerbaijani transport officials to attend OSCE economic and environment forum

The representatives of the Azerbaijan's Ministry of Transport will participate in the first part of the OSCE economic and environment forum to be held in Vienna, February 1-2. The conference will deal with "Promoting good governance at border crossings, improving the security of land transportation and facilitating international transport by road and rail in the OSCE region".

- Azerbaijan to launch its satellite into orbit in 2012

Azerbaijan Ministry of Communications and Information Technologies has reported the work done in 2009 on launching of own communications satellite.

Communication Minister Ali Abbasov says that over the past year the ministry opened tenders for orbital launching of the country's first telecommunication satellite and plans to sign a contract on orbital position of the satellite with help of a consulting company late January and a main contract with producer company in February. "There is a delay in this work by about three months that is linked with taking into account the recommendations of the consulting company, the expert group and the Ministry of Finance. Thus, we expect to launch the satellite into orbit already in June 2012," the minister said.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev approved the State Program on creation and development of space industry under the related decree he signed earlier.

In accordance with the new decree, the Ministry of Communication was entrusted to coordinate execution of the state program. The measures are financed by the state budget, as well as other sources not banned by legislation. The Cabinet of Ministers was entrusted to solve issues, emerging from real decree.

- Azerbaijan state oil company increases own gas export by 26 percent

In Dec. 2009, the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) increased volumes of gas exports 57.1 percent as compared to 12.1 percent in Nov, the company said.

In Dec., gas exports totaled 146.58 million cu m against 93.3 million cu m in Nov., 83.2 million cu m in Oct., 62.8 million cu m in Sept., 53.75 million cu m in Aug., 40.85 million cu m in July, 41.83 million cu m in June, 50.86 million cu m in May, 100.69 million cu m in April, 90.65 million cu m in March, 99.45 million cu m in Feb., 167.32 million cu m in Jan. 2009 and 178.45 million cu m in Dec. 2008.

Nearly 1.03 bn cu m was exported in 2009 compared 818.93 million cu m in 2008.

In 2009, SOCAR increased its own gas export by 25.9 percent.

In 2010, due to contracts with Russia's Gazprom and Iran's NIGEC, SOCAR exports are estimated to rise two to three fold in 2010.

- Azerbaijan's national oil company to double gas exports to Russia

Gazprom and the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) have agreed that in 2009 Russia will acquire 1 billion cubic meters of the Azerbaijani gas instead of 500 million and in 2011 the volume of supply will be doubled and reach about 2 billion cubic meters. Today Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller and SOCAR President Rovnag Abdullayev hold working meeting in Moscow, Gazprom said.

Parties appraised successfully implemented agreements, noting that Gazprom and SOCAR will continue to consistently develop the energy dialogue between Russia and Azerbaijan. Alexei Miller reiterated feature of the current contract - no upper ceiling of the volume of purchases of gas in Azerbaijan and reaffirmed the readiness of Gazprom to buy as much gas as SOCAR will be able to deliver.

The medium-term contract on purchase-sale of Azerbaijani gas to Russia (with the possibility of extension) was signed between SOCAR and Gazprom in Baku Oct. 14. It covers 2010-2014. Under the contract, the Azerbaijani side will annually supply gas amounting to no less than 500 million cubic meters to Russia. The contract did not specify a limit to the gas supply volume. SOCAR will notify the opposite side of the amount which the company can deliver for the next six months.

Social Front

- HRW Says Rights Defenders Being Increasingly Targeted By Abusive Governments

Journalist and human rights activist Natalya Estemirova was abducted in the Chechen capital, Grozny, on July 15 and found dead in Ingushetia a short time later.

Governments responsible for serious human rights violations have intensified attacks against rights defenders and organizations that document abuse over the past year, according to the 20th-annual review of human rights practices around the globe by Human Rights Watch (HRW).

Iain Levine, program director at HRW, tells RFE/RL that the growth in the human rights movement in recent years has spawned a reaction from abusive governments that grew particularly intense in 2009.

"Partly as a result of the growing influence and profile of the international human rights movement, we're seeing an intensification of attacks against both human rights defenders and human rights organizations which document abuse and seek to promote and protect human rights," Levine says. "And this is a trend that we're seeing in many parts of the world, including in the former Soviet Union and Iran."

The 612-page report summarizes major human rights trends in more than 90 nations and territories worldwide over the past year.

In Depth: HRW's Findings On RFE/RL's Broadcast RegionThe document notes that some governments are so abusive against individuals and organizations that no domestic human rights movement can function, citing Eritrea, North Korea, and Turkmenistan.

But attacks on human rights monitors are not limited to authoritarian governments like Myanmar and China.

'Devastating Series'

HRW says there has been a sharp rise in armed attacks on human rights monitors in countries with elected governments that are facing armed insurgencies.

Although the armed conflict in Chechnya has wound down, the report cites "a devastating series of killings and threats against lawyers and activists fighting impunity in the North Caucasus." Other countries where human rights monitors were murdered in order to silence them included Kenya, Burundi, and Afghanistan. Levine says governments around the globe use a whole variety of tactics to repress and suppress human rights activists and organizations. "We've talked about the killings of human rights activists which we have documented in many countries in the world," Levine says. "We've seen the ways in which governments create a very hostile environment where human rights defenders are detained, harassed, or threatened. We see very restricted regulations being imposed NGOs. Russia perhaps is the worse country in the world for this."

HRW cites Iran and Uzbekistan as countries that openly harass and arbitrarily detain human rights workers and other critics.

Rhetoric To Real Action

To silence critics, the report says countries use the disbarment of lawyers (China and Iran), criminal charges -- often faked from staged attacks (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) --, and criminal libel laws (Russia and Azerbaijan). In order to press these countries to stop their assault on rights defenders, Levine says governments that support human rights, the United States in particular, need to make respecting human rights the center of

their practices and of their diplomacy. "We need the administration of President [Barack] Obama to move from the very effective rhetoric and the very powerful speeches that he's made to real action in placing human rights and the well-being of human rights defenders at the center of bilateral relations, whether it's with Russia, whether it's with China," Levine says. HRW says the United States has taken some steps forward to restore America's "credibility" in human rights, including the ending of "the CIA's coercive interrogation program."

But it says there's still much that can be done -- for example, "investigating and prosecuting those who have ordered, facilitated, or carried out torture and other ill-treatment."

- 20th Anniversary Of 'Black January' Events In Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is marking the 20th anniversary of the "Black January" violent crackdown by Soviet forces on the Azerbaijani independence movement during the collapse of the Soviet Union. On January 20, 1990, Soviet troops stormed the Azerbaijani capital, Baku, on the orders of the Kremlin in an ultimately failed attempt to save Communist rule and crush the opposition.

For several days, some 26,000 Soviet troops cracked down on protesters, firing into crowds, and killing more than 130 people and injuring 700. Moscow also decreed emergency rule, which lasted for more than a year. In October, 1991, Azerbaijan formally declared its independence from the Soviet Union.

- Azerbaijan University of Languages to open Indian center

An Indian center will be opened in Azerbaijan University of Languages (AUL).

Besides, a seminar on temple of the fire-worshippers and its connection with ancient Indian culture will be also held. Rector of the University, Chairman of the Milli Majlis commission on international and interparliamentary relations, professor Samad Seyidov, Indian Ambassador to Azerbaijan Debnad Show and teaching staff will attend the event.

Centers of USA, Great Britain, Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Korea and Indonesia have been already opened in AUL.

- Newspaper editor-in-chief gets 13 years in jail in Azerbaijan

The Court of Grave Crimes finalized a hearing on the case of Nazim Guliyev, founder and editor-in-chief of the Ideal newspaper.

The court declared verdict on Jan. 15. Nazim Guliyev was sentenced to 13 years and three months in jail with confiscation of property. He will serve the term of sentence in a special penitentiary. According to the indictment, Guliyev faced charges of extortion, extortion with use of force, extortion with a purpose of appropriating large size of property, hooliganism and illegal manufacturing, purchase, storage, transportation, transfer or selling of narcotics.

- Azerbaijani President's Library prepares online resource about 20 January tragedy

Azerbaijani President's Library has prepared online resource "Aggression. Baku. January 20, 1990". The resource was created according to the plan of measures approved by the order of the chief of Presidential Administration on the occasion of 20th anniversary of the 20 January tragedy, the library said. The online resource prepared in Azerbaijani, Russian and English will be presented on Jan. 18.

- Azerbaijani president signs order to ensure social security of Azerbaijan's 9 millionth citizen

President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has signed an order to ensure social protection of the 9 millionth citizen of Azerbaijan. In accordance with the order, the Baku Mayor's Office was tasked to allocate an apartment to the child's family to improve their housing condition. According to the document, 20,000 AZN was allocated to the child – Ahmadli Ilham Ilkin oglu from the Reserve Fund of the President of Azerbaijan, and the Central Bank was ordered to open a bank account for him.

- Social spending priority in Azerbaijan's 2010 budget

Azerbaijan's 2010 State Budget places an emphasis on social spending, said deputy chief of the Parliament's social policy committee Musa Guliyev. "This year's social budget will be over 30 percent," he said. "Strengthening the social protection of the population has always been the number one priority for the government." "Despite 2009 was the year of global crisis, Azerbaijan did not postpone the execution of social programs. The same will be in 2010," added Guliyev.

Kazakhstan

Political Front

- Former Head Of Kazakh Antidrug Agency Arrested

ASTANA -- Former Kazakh antidrug agency head Askar Isagaliev, who was charged with abuse of power while in office, has been arrested in Turkey, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Kazakh Interior Ministry spokesman Kuanyshbek Jumanov said in Astana today that Isagaliev was arrested on January 9 in the resort town of Antalya.

Jumanov said the ministry is discussing with Turkish officials the question of extraditing Isagaliev. Jumanov said the Interior Ministry's investigation committee initiated a criminal case against Isagaliev in October and had issued an international warrant for his arrest. Isagaliev was the head of Kazakhstan's antidrug agency from August 2008 until February 2009.

- Ex-KNB Head Says Austrian Court Made Politically Motivated Verdict

PRAGUE -- The former head of the Kazakh National Security Service (KNB) says a "not guilty" verdict by an Austrian court in an alleged abduction attempt against him was made to please Kazakhstan, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Former KNB head Alnur Musaev, who has lived in self-imposed exile in Austria since 2007, told RFE/RL on January 19 that it is "no coincidence" that the trial in Vienna started on January 14, the same day Kazakhstan was inaugurated as the chairman of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Defendant Ildar A., 61, a Kazakh native and Austrian citizen, was acquitted of espionage charges and found not guilty of attempts to kidnap Musaev and Rakhat Aliev, the former son-in-law of Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev. Ildar A.'s lawyer said his client will seek compensation for the year he spent in pretrial detention.

Musaev said there was an Austrian parliamentary investigation into alleged attempts by the KNB to influence current and former members of the parliament through bribes and media manipulation, but the findings of the investigation were not made public.

Musaev said he was attacked on July 17, 2008, by three men who tried to force him into a car. Musaev said he "managed to take psychological advantage of the men and even got the phone number of the group leader." Musaev added that the assailants ran away after a man who was waiting for him on the street approached the scene. Musaev said Ildar A. assisted the three in their abduction attempt, but that the defense falsified evidence.

In accusing the court, Musaev also admitted that he was not completely honest when he gave his testimony.

Musaev said he could not admit in court that he knew Ildar A. because as a KNB member he is bound by an oath to Kazakhstan. But he insisted he did not lie to the court because he said he did not know Ildar A. "personally" -- which he said is a fact.

In Kazakhstan, Musaev was stripped of his rank as KNB general and sentenced in absentia to 35 years in jail on criminal and political charges. Musaev said the Austrian court will also hear a case on a second abduction attempt against him in September 2008, when he was allegedly attacked by several armed men in Vienna.

RFE/RL was unable to reach Austrian Justice Ministry officials or the Attorney General's Office for reaction to Musaev's comments.

- **KNB Gives Kazakh Uranium Company Head New Lawyer**

ASTANA -- Dzhamilya Dzhakisheva, the wife of the former head of Kazakh uranium producer KazAtomProm, says the Kazakh National Security Service (KNB) has appointed a new lawyer for her husband, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Dzhakisheva told RFE/RL that the KNB presented the new lawyer, Bolat Isataev, to the judge of the Sary-Arka district court in Astana without the consent of her or her husband, Mukhtar Dzhakishev.

Dzhakisheva said Isataev made a statement in which he said their consent regarding his appointment is not required. She added that she is also concerned by Isataev's statement that he will need only two days to familiarize himself with Dzhakishev's case.

Dzhakishev's scheduled court session on January 18 was postponed because his lawyer, Nurlan Beisekeyev, was hospitalized. The next court hearing is scheduled for January 22. Dzhakisheva added that she has been denied permission to see her husband for the last two weeks. Dzhakishev and several of his managers were arrested in May on charges of theft and corruption. They have been held in a KNB jail in Astana since then.

The court hearings began on December 22 and are being held behind closed doors, despite a pledge by the Prosecutor-General Office to hold a transparent trial attended by the media. Dzhakishev's supporters consider the charges against him and his coworkers to be politically motivated.

- **Convicted Former Kazakh Official Gets Senior Job**

ASTANA -- The convicted former head of Kazakhstan's national railway company has been appointed to a senior position with the state-owned oil and gas company KazMunaiGaz, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Zhaksybek Kulekeev, who was sacked in April 2008 as head of the rail carrier for taking bribes and sentenced on November 13, 2008 to three years in prison on bribery charges, began working today as KazMunaiGaz's managing director of corporate development. His conviction barred him from holding any public post for several years. Kulekeev's lawyer, Salimzhan Musin, told RFE/RL that Kulekeev's new post does not violate the court ruling, since the institute is a joint-stock company and does not fit into the public-service category. Kazakh opposition member Alikhan Ramazanov told RFE/RL that Kulekeev's loyalty to the government allowed him to gain his new appointment in a public company. Ramazanov said that during the 2008 trial Kulekeev withheld details and names during testimony when he was charged with corruption, and "the government understood that [Kulekeev] will never betray them."

Opposition Ak Zhol party leader Alikhan Baymenov told RFE/RL that by appointing Kulekeev to this new job, the Kazakh government is admitting the case against him was phony. Serik Abdrakhmanov, the deputy chairman of the pro-presidential party Nur-Otan, told RFE/RL he believes Kulekeev was the victim of an unfair judicial proceeding. Kulekeev has worked previously for KazMunaiGaz and also served as Kazakhstan's education minister and the economy and trade minister.

- OSCE to focus more on security, less on democracy-Kazakhstan

VIENNA, Jan 14 (Reuters) - New OSCE head Kazakhstan said on Thursday it would refocus Europe's main security and rights watchdog on tackling terrorism and development issues and brushed off criticism of its own record on rights and democracy. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev said the Organisation for Security Cooperation had been slipping towards paralysis for a decade because of the West's fixation on imposing its political values on Eastern members that needed time for democratic evolution after decades of Communism.

"The decisive question for the OSCE for the future will be whether it can convert into a structure that recognizes the diversity of the world in the 21st century, or whether it will continue to be an organization segmented into blocs where the West remains aloof from the space 'east of Vienna'."

Human rights groups have protested over Kazakhstan leading the 56-nation OSCE through the group's rotating chair. They argue the former Soviet republic has never held a fair election and does not brook criticism of its president.

Recent rows between Western and ex-Soviet OSCE members include Russia's refusal to renew OSCE monitoring in pro-Western Georgia after a 2008 war over two separatist pro-Moscow Georgian regions, and Russian objections to OSCE election observers.

Nazarbayev said the fact the OSCE had not held a heads of state summit for 11 years showed its consensus method of decision-making was "in stagnation, if not in crisis".

OSCE DECLINE RISKS 'VOLATILE VACUUM'

"The OSCE is an organisation that cannot be replaced. Its stagnation or disappearance would create a volatile vacuum in the Euro-Atlantic area," he said in an address to the Vienna-based OSCE assembly conveyed by video link.

Rejecting accusations Kazakhstan's democratic reforms in the 20 years he has ruled have been cosmetic, Nazarbayev said building a democratic society "has been a conscious choice of our people and we will pursue further political liberalization."

Kazakh Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev told Reuters in an interview his country's democracy was "a work in progress".

Outlining Kazakhstan's priorities at the helm of the OSCE, Saudabayev highlighted counter-terrorism, tackling protracted conflicts and drug trafficking, reconstruction in Afghanistan -- which borders some ex-Soviet OSCE members.

He said nothing about democratic reforms in former Soviet states where presidents wielding monolithic power since the 1991 disintegration of the Soviet Union predominate.

Kazakhstan will concentrate OSCE resources as well on developing transcontinental transport corridors and promoting environmental and energy security, he told the Vienna meeting.

Kazakhstan has attracted dozens of billions of dollars of foreign investment in its oil and metals sectors since gaining independence when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Its economy grew by an average 10 percent a year from 2000 to 2007, before slowing sharply during the global crisis.

The United States last month urged Kazakhstan to improve its human rights record in tandem with its OSCE leadership.

Human rights groups accused Nazarbayev's government late last year of silencing critical voices before taking over the OSCE chair, for example by seizing several print runs of an opposition newspaper and fining it \$400,000 when a court found it guilty of causing a run on a state bank.

- Opposition wants to be part of Kazakh official delegation in OSCE

Almaty. January 14. Interfax-Kazakhstan – Kazakh opposition party Azat (Freedom) requested the OSCE member-states to discuss with Astana the issue of putting opposition representatives on the list of Astana official delegation in the Organization.

We suggest that all OSCE official delegations raise an issue before the OSCE permanent council about including members of the Kazakh democratic opposition, as an observer with the right to make statements, in the official delegation representing Kazakhstan in the OSCE," the party said in a statement.

Azat party believes that that such approach would facilitate the democratic processes in Kazakhstan and bolster the OSCE image as an institution of democracy, security and cooperation. According to the opposition, "it will help to press ahead with the process of political dialogue, to promote the principles of civilized politics in Kazakhstan and increase the contribution of Kazakhstan as the chair of the OSCE."

We are interested in giving international partners an access to an unbiased information about Kazakhstan and we expect a relevant and straightforward political analysis rather than promotion of autocracy," according to the statement. Azat also proposed to the Parliamentary Assembly (PA) of the OSCE to hold special hearings on the democracy in Kazakhstan.

Geo strategic Front

- U.S. Urges Kazakhstan To Lead By Example In OSCE

ALMATY (Reuters) -- The United States urged Kazakhstan today to use its chairmanship of Europe's main security and human rights watchdog to lead by example and 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) this month, 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. "The United States is eager to collaborate with Kazakhstan as it leads the OSCE by example and reflects in practice the principles of the organization in all three dimensions - security, economic, and human," U.S. ambassador to Kazakhstan Richard Hoagland said in a statement.

"The OSCE's work in the human dimension is a key priority and one where implementation of commitments must be taken most seriously. Kazakhstan has a critical and important opportunity to lead both by word and by deed." Kazakhstan has said the OSCE was too focused on the so-called "human dimension" -- human rights and

democracy -- and paid insufficient attention to other issues. 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. Not referring to Kazakhstan in particular, Hoagland said journalists in the OSCE region still faced dangers and media pluralism was lacking. "Elections that fail to achieve transparency and reflect the will of the people have also been a source of concern," Hoagland said. "Judiciaries too often serve as a tool of the few rather than a safeguard for the rule of law for all citizens."

The OSCE has never recognized elections in Kazakhstan as free and fair. Hoagland mentioned the conflict between Russia, Kazakhstan's close partner, and Georgia -- a tough issue for Kazakhstan which cautiously sided with Moscow in the wake of a brief 2008 war. "We believe the OSCE has a meaningful role to play in stability within and along Georgia's internationally recognized borders," he said. "To that end, we, along with many other participating states, remain committed to the re-establishment of an OSCE presence there that respects Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty."

Economic/Energy Front

- Kazakhstan received USD 5.5 bln from TCO business activity in 2009

ATYRAU. January 13. KAZINFORM /Andrey Sokolov/ In 2009 Kazakhstan received USD 5.5 bln from the "Tengizchevroil" LLP business activity which extracts oil in Atyrau region at Tengiz and King Deposits.

According to Coordinator of the Public and Governmental Affairs Department Svetlana Kaingaliyeva, the gross amount of payments covers royalty, different taxes, salary to Kazakhstani employees as well as the funds spent for procurement of goods and services. The largest sum of payments of the Company was fixed in 2008 - over USD 8 bln. This was caused by high price for oil in the world market. Totally, since the moment of the establishment of the joint American-Kazakhstani oil-extracting enterprise in 1993 Kazakhstan received USD 36 bln.

- PetroChina's Kazakh Venture Produces 5.7 Million Tons of Oil

Jan. 19 (Bloomberg) -- AO Mangistaumunaigas, a Kazakh oil producer half-owned by China's largest oil company, produced oil and gas equivalent of more than 6 million metric tons last year, China National Petroleum Corp. said in its newsletter.

Crude oil output was at 5.71 million tons and natural gas production reached 390 million cubic meters, CNPC said today, without giving comparative figures. Mangistaumunaigas is a joint venture between KazMunaiGaz National Co. and PetroChina Co., CNPC's Hong Kong-listed unit. The oil producer would probably reverse a two-year decline in 2009, its Chief Executive Officer Uzakbai Karabalin said in September. Mangistaumunaigas reached peak output in 2006, when it pumped 5.7 million tons, he said.

- Asia Avto to begin assembly of Kia models in Kazakhstan

(SRI) - Asia Avto, Kazakhstan's largest car manufacturer, will launch the assembly of three models of the Korean Kia car company at its plant in Ust-Kamenogorsk in the second quarter of 2010, Asia Avto's president Yerzhan Mandiev told Interfax. "We are talking about the assembly of the Cerato sedan and the Sorento SUV of the 2010 model year. Kia Mohave, designed specifically for the North American full-size SUV market,

was presented at the Detroit Auto Show in 2008. It has been introduced in the CIS markets at the end last year," Mandiev said. Currently, Asia Avto's factory specialists are receiving training in Kia facilities in South Korea. In addition to the assembly of the Kia models Asia Avto will begin the production of several new Skoda and General Motors models. "In the SUV segment, we will present the crossover model Skoda Yeti and the Cadillac SRX of the 2010 model year." "Asia Auto also intends to expand its dealer network. At the moment, it uses the services of the BIPEK AVTO holding. "It is the most extensive network in the country but we do not exclude cooperation with individual dealers and service centers in the regions," Mandiev said. Asia Avto has been established in 2003. Currently, the Ust-Kamenogorsk plant manufactures numerous models including the Lada Niva, Skoda Octavia, Skoda Superb, Chevrolet Captiva, Chevrolet Lacetti, Chevrolet Epica, and Cadillac Escalade.

- Chevron Kazakh venture to raise oil output in 2010

Tengizchevroil, a Chevron-led (CVX.N: Quote, Profile, Research) Kazakh upstream venture, will raise oil output to 23.5 million tonnes this year from 22.5 million in 2009, it said on Wednesday.

"We don't discuss forecasts any further than that, but we are working to continue to expand production from our existing facilities as well as on opportunities to invest in expansion projects similar to the Second Generation Plant," Tengizchevroil said in a written reply to questions from Reuters. The Second Generation Plant project, launched in 2008 along with a gas injection facility, allowed Tengizchevroil to nearly double its output. The company had earlier said it would increase annual production to between 36 million tonnes and 42 million by 2016. Tengizchevroil, owned by Chevron, ExxonMobil (XOM.N: Quote, Profile, Research), LUKOIL (LKO.HK: Quote, Profile, Research) and Kazakh state energy group KazMunaiGas [KMG.UL], is developing the giant Tengiz oil field in western Kazakhstan. (Reporting by Masha Gordeyeva; Writing by Olzhas Auyezov; Editing by David Holmes)

Social Front

- Blizzard Shuts Down Almaty-Bishkek Highway

ALMATY -- The Almaty-Bishkek highway was closed today due to a blizzard that has stranded dozens of motorists, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. The highway is the major transportation route connecting Kazakhstan's largest city, Almaty, with Bishkek, the Kyrgyz capital. Hundreds of vehicles are also backed up at a police blockade on the highway at the Kordai heights near the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border. The snow and heavy winds from the blizzard have made visibility very poor. Kazakh police are distributing food and warm drinks to drivers stuck on the highway as they try to clear it.

- Extreme Cold In Kazakhstan Halts Transport, Schools

Kazakh municipal workers remove ice in front of the presidential palace in Astana.

ASTANA -- Public transportation was suspended today in the Kazakh capital, Astana, and four northern regions due to extreme cold, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Kazakhstan's Emergency Situations Ministry announced that all public transportation in Astana is suspended, along with routes between the capital and other regions of the country. Schools were also closed in Astana and several other cities.

The temperature in the regions fell as low as minus 45 degrees Celsius in recent days.

All transportation services were also suspended in the East Kazakhstan, Pavlodar, North Kazakhstan, and Qaraghandy oblasts.

Astana officials also temporarily banned vehicles that use diesel fuel.

- **Kazakh Group To Award Democracy Prize To Jailed Men**

A Kazakh opposition group will jointly award a democracy prize to a jailed journalist, rights activist, and businessman, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

The unregistered Alga political group said the prize for outstanding contribution to democracy in Kazakhstan will be awarded to Yevgeny Zhovtis, the director of the nongovernmental Kazakh Bureau for Human Rights; Mukhtar Dzhakishev, the former head of Kazakh uranium producer Kazatomprom; and Ramazan Esergepov, the "Alma-Ata Info" newspaper editor.

The award ceremony will be held on January 19 at Communist Party offices in Astana.

Organizers said they had to change the original venue due to government pressure on the owners of the hotel where the ceremony was to take place.

The prize has been awarded since 2003 on January 19, which was declared "Democracy Day" at an assembly held by opposition members.

Zhovtis was sentenced in September to four years in prison for his role in a deadly traffic accident. Dzhakishev, who has been under arrest in prison since May, is accused of theft and corruption. Esergepov was found guilty in August of revealing state secrets after publishing some government documents and sentenced to three years in prison.

Supporters and human rights organizations say the charges and/or sentences against the three are politically motivated.

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- **Kyrgyz High Court Rejects Bakiev's Presidential Council Idea**

Opponents say the reforms are intended to strengthen President Kurmanbek Bakiev's powers. BISHKEK -- The Kyrgyz Constitutional Court has rejected President Kurmanbek Bakiev's proposal for a still-to-be-created Presidential Council to appoint an interim president in emergencies, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Court Chairwoman Svetlana Sydykova said today that the Presidential Council would not be able to appoint an interim president because it is proposed to be an advisory body whose measures only enter into force after they are signed by the president.

The court asked for more information about the Presidential Council.

Sydykova said the court approved other amendments to the constitution proposed by Bakiev that will eliminate several government bodies, including the state secretary post and the Security Council.

The Kyrgyz opposition criticized the court ruling. It wants changes to the constitution to be put to a referendum and it believes Bakiev is making changes that would allow a relative or close associate of his to be named interim president.

According to Bakiev's proposal -- which was made in October as part of a package of reforms -- several new government institutions in addition to the Presidential Council will be formed.

Bakiev proposed that the Presidential Council -- to be made up of the president, his chief of staff, the parliament speaker, prime minister, and the head of the Central Development Agency, currently the president's son, Maksim Bakiev -- would have the power to appoint an interim president from among its staff if the president is ill or otherwise unable to perform his duties.

The constitution currently dictates that the parliament speaker and then the prime minister would become interim president in case the president is unable to serve.

Opposition Ata Meken party leader Omurbek Tekebaev told RFE/RL that Bakiev's reforms are aimed at "strengthening his personal power" and violate the constitution.

The President's Office said the amendments do not violate the law because, according to the constitution, the president can "form, eliminate, and restructure" subordinate state institutions.

- Tajik Police Deny Suspect Arrested In Kyrgyz Journalist's Murder

Regional Tajik police say they know nothing about the reported arrest of a man suspected in the 2007 murder of Kyrgyz journalist Alisher Saipov. Kyrgyz Interior Ministry spokesman Bakyt Seyitov told RFE/RL's Uzbek Service that his ministry was told on January 14 about the arrest of a Tajik citizen, Farrukh Sharakhmatullaev, by the Sughd police department. Seyitov said the ministry and Prosecutor-General's Office are currently trying to secure the suspect's extradition to Kyrgyzstan. But Dilyavar Alizoda, a police department spokesman in the northern city of Sughd, told RFE/RL today that reports of a man being arrested in connection with the killing of Saipov are untrue.

Sharakhmatullaev was allegedly named by Abdufarid Rasulov, who has been sentenced in Kyrgyzstan for his role in Saipov's murder.

In February, Kyrgyz police detained Rasulov in Kyrgyzstan's Batken region for drug trafficking and discovered a pistol without a serial number that was shown to be the weapon used to shoot Saipov. Rasulov said the pistol was given to him in December by Sharakhmatullaev. Saipov, 26, an ethnic Uzbek and editor in chief of the Osh-based newspaper "Siyosat" ("Politics"), was shot dead as he left his office in central Osh on October 24, 2007. Saipov had also worked as a correspondent for RFE/RL and the Voice of America. His relatives and colleagues said he may have been killed by Uzbek secret services in retaliation for his critical articles about Uzbek President Islam Karimov and his government.

- Son Of Jailed Kyrgyz Politician Vows To Challenge Government

WASHINGTON -- Ruslan Isakov, the son of jailed former Kyrgyz Defense Minister Ismail Isakov, says he plans to start an opposition campaign against Kyrgyzstan's government, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. A former Kyrgyz army officer, Ruslan Isakov has been living in self-imposed exile in the United States since his father's arrest in late 2008.

He told RFE/RL his goal is to create a political movement abroad to challenge "the antidemocratic regime of President Kurmanbek Bakiev." Isakov said that under Bakiev's leadership, Kyrgyzstan is coming closer to "a catastrophic downfall" as "journalists are being killed, the population is getting poorer, and opposition leaders are declared 'enemies of the nation.'" On January 11, Ismail Isakov was found guilty of corruption and sentenced to eight years in jail. He pleaded not guilty to the charges and said the verdict against him was a "political order" made by top Kyrgyz officials. Rights activists say the case against Isakov was politically motivated because the politician broke with Bakiev's government in 2008 and joined the opposition.

- National Security Institute turns into highly dangerous service

National Security Institute has turned into a highly dangerous service, Aziza Abdirasulova leaders of Kylym Shamy human rights center said Friday at a session of the Public Parliament. "Exactly the Kyrgyz special services are engaged in economic and

political persecutions. We demand immediate reforming of the institution. We are not aware what it deals with. All previously detained political leaders are placed at a pre-trial detention center of the National Security Service access to which is banned even for the ombudsman,” Abdirasulova said.

In the activist’s opinion, the special services oppress not only mature politicians but young people who do not agree with policy of the country’s leadership.

- New opposition movement established in Kyrgyzstan

New opposition movement is established in Kyrgyzstan, Mukar Cholponbaev one of the members of the Joint People’s Movement told a press conference in Bishkek Monday.

The organization will function on the basis of Eldik kenesh (People’s council) movement established in Kyrgyzstan in 2006 and will inherit its name. Members of the movement believe that political changes in the last ten years made life of the people worse. Leading enterprises and large deposits are purchased by foreign investors. “The country gets no profits from its natural resources,” Cholponbaev said. The only way out, in his view, is change of the political system and government regime. “We need to return to the constitution of 1993, which was the only fundamental law adopted by legitimate parliament with fulfillment of all terms. All the amendments have been passed later illegally,” he said. Associates of the organization think their movement will be more efficient than the other opposition parties. “People here are members of the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan, Ata-Meken and other political associations. They work directly with population and organize pickets and protests actions at places. Now they unite. We are ready to cooperate with supporters of our program,” the member of the movement said. “We are open for all unstained. Our aim is to return the constitution of 1993. We strive for flourishing and socially oriented country, for affordable education and medical service,” Roza Nurmatova, an associate of the movement said.

- Constitutional Court adopts Fundamental law amendments

The Constitutional Court of Kyrgyzstan has adopted initiated by the President amendments to the Fundamental law of the republic on Thursday.

As the news agency 24.kg earlier reported, the amendments deprive the president of a right to appoint Secretary of State. The post has been abolished as a part of the state administration reforms in the country. The draft bill also provides for abolishment of the president’s executive office, the Security Council, the National Guard and the leader’s powers on their forming. The document also proposes to delegate powers on establishment of Presidential conference and other consultative and coordinating bodies to the head of the state. Representatives of the civil society will be expectedly involved in the bodies’ activity to work out recommendations on the most essential, socially important issues and problems. Current version of the Constitution provides possibility for the parliament speaker to execute presidential powers, the right is passed over to the prime minister if the speaker is not able to do it. The bill proposes to authorize another person, chosen by the President’s Council. The council will include representatives of the President’s Institute, Parliament, government and other bodies and organizations.

The draft bill was submitted to the Kyrgyz Parliament for consideration at the end of 2009, however the lawmakers decided to postpone discussion of the document and hand it over to the Kyrgyz Constitutional Court. In general, the court has endorsed the

amendments but with a reservation that the President's Council would not be entitled to propose a person for execution of president's authority.

Geo strategic Front

- Wounded Kyrgyz Border Guard Remains In Uzbekistan

BISHKEK -- A Kyrgyz border guard shot by Uzbek border guards on January 17 is still being kept in Uzbekistan, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Cholponbek Turusbekov, the deputy chairman of the Kyrgyz Border Guard Service, told RFE/RL that the man was wounded in a shootout between Kyrgyz and Uzbek border guards on January 17 and taken away by Uzbek guards. He was reported on January 18 to be in satisfactory condition in an Uzbek hospital. Kyrgyz officials said they are working to secure the guard's release.

The incident took place along the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border near the village of Chek in Kyrgyzstan's south.

- Kyrgyz Guard Injured During Shootout On Uzbek Border

TASHKENT/BISHKEK -- A Kyrgyz border official says a Kyrgyz border guard was injured and taken prisoner after a shootout at on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports.

The official, Judar Isakulov, told RFE/RL that the incident at the Mombekov border crossing in the southern Kyrgyz region of Jalalabad was sparked by a conflict between four Kyrgyz and two Uzbek border guards. Isakulov said about 10 local Uzbeks joined the dispute and started throwing stones at Kyrgyz border guards while more Uzbek border guards arrived and began shooting. One Kyrgyz border guard was reportedly wounded and taken into Uzbekistan.

Isakulov said Uzbek border officials said the captured Kyrgyz border guard was transported to a hospital in the eastern region of Andijon and is in satisfactory condition.

Jalalabad regional administration official Uruzali Korasartov told RFE/RL that Kyrgyzstan has opened a criminal case against Uzbek officials and is investigating the causes of the incident. He said measures are being taken to return the captured border guard to Kyrgyzstan. The incident is second this year. On January 2, two Kyrgyz border guards were detained by Uzbek police in the Ala-Buka area of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border after allegedly trying to steal a cow from an Uzbek village. They were released on January 6. The two countries currently recognize about 900 kilometers of their joint border, but some 600 kilometers are still in dispute. Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan agreed during a December visit to Tashkent by Kyrgyz Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov to restart an intergovernmental commission on the delimitation and demarcation of the border. The commission held its first meeting after a five-year break on December 29 in Tashkent.

There have been numerous border incidents between the two countries, several of them resulting in violence. Uzbekistan has also periodically closed its border crossings with Kyrgyzstan.

- Six Hizb ut-Tahrir activists detained in Kyrgyzstan

At least six active members of an extremist religious organization Hizb ut-Tahrir have been arrested in Jeti-Oguz district of Issyk-Kul region (Kyrgyzstan), press service of the Kyrgyz National Security Service reported. Officers have confiscated from the extremists leaflets, DVDs, extremist notes and illegally stored firearms.

A criminal case was initiated according to the Article 299/1 - Organized activity fueling national, ethnic, religious or interregional conflicts and the Article 299/2 - Purchase,

storage, transportation and forwarding of extremist materials or producing and distribution, deliberate usage of symbols or attributes of extremist organizations of the Kyrgyz Criminal Code.

Economic/Energy Front

- President: Kyrgyzstan will get energy independence

Kyrgyzstan will get energy independence in the nearest future, Kurmanbek Bakiev President of Kyrgyzstan said Friday at a session of the Chui regional administration.

Increasing volume of water in Toktogul water reservoir and launch of Kambarata-2 hydro-power plant will, in president's view, contribute to the process. "In the next one-two years the republic will be able to export electricity to its neighbors," Bakiev said.

Besides, rotating blackouts will be stopped in 2010. "We come out of the energy crisis started in the republic two years ago," the leader added.

- Kyrgyzstan's GDP growth hit 2.3 percent in 2009

According to preliminary estimates, Kyrgyzstan's gross domestic product (GDP) has increased by 2.3 percent in 2009, the National Statistics Committee reported.

Not taking the Kumtor mining companies' revenues into account, economic growth in the republic averaged to 2.9 percent (196,423,1 billion soms) in 2009. Therewith, industrial development rate reduced by 6.4 percent. In 2009, Kyrgyz production output made up 97,249 billion soms. A 4.7 percent growth was traced in the mining sector, while processing industry and energy sector faced 7.8 and 1.3 percent decline respectively.

Gross output of agriculture and forestry sectors grew by 7.4 percent along with investments in the basic capital (19.7 percent increase). In money terms, capital investments hit 38,690,5 billion soms for the year.

Considerable decline in sales turnover with other countries was traced in 2009, so export rates in January-November 2009 averaged to \$1,169,8 billion, having dropped by 21.9 percent. Therewith, import rate reduced by 26.8 percent and reached \$2,686,7 billion in the republic.

- Kyrgyz international reserve grew \$0.3bln in 2009

Kyrgyzstan's international reserve grew by \$0.3 billion in 2009, the National Bank of Kyrgyzstan reported. Therewith, as of beginning of 2010, volume of the gross international reserve of Kyrgyzstan exceeded \$1,588,000,000, while the liquid reserve hit \$1,584,000,000. Last year, the gross international reserve of Kyrgyzstan reached \$1,224,620,000, while the liquid reserves hit \$1,222,740,000. Over \$1.2 billion of international reserve is kept in securities, foreign currencies and deposits, about \$90 million – in gold and the rest in other assets.

Social Front

- In Central Asia, Unofficial Madrasahs Raise Official Fears

Muhtar Yusupbekov has no regrets about his decision to send his 12-year-old son Muhammad abroad to Egypt to study. Muhammad, his father says, used to attend a local Russian-language school in his native Bishkek, but "he always had a passion to study religion, especially the Koran." Concerned that their home country could not provide an environment conducive to learning, Muhammad's parents decided to enroll their budding scholar at an Egyptian madrasah, where he enjoys a well-rounded curriculum that includes Islamic studies as well as Arabic and English. Yusupbekov says he is proud of Muhammad, and hopes he returns to Kyrgyzstan as a "good Muslim and good human being."

"We are happy, because nowadays many parents are worried that their kids will get involved in drugs and alcoholism, and it's dangerous for them," Yusupbekov says. "In a Muslim country, there is a 100 percent guarantee your kids will stay clear of such risks." An increasing number of parents in Central Asia, especially in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, are opting to send their children to madrasahs to ensure they receive a sound Islamic education.

Often, they settle on state-approved madrasahs in their home countries. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, nearly 3,000 students were enrolled in 52 officially registered madrasahs in 2009. The country also offers nine officially approved Islamic-based institutions of higher education, including an Islamic university in Bishkek.

Although no enrollment figures are available, there are at least 20 officially registered religious schools and an Islamic University in Tajikistan.

Some parents, like the Yusupbekovs, choose officially sanctioned Islamic schools abroad. According to Kyrgyzstan's Mufti Murataaly Juman Uulu, some 400 Kyrgyz citizens are currently studying in Islamic schools in Turkey and in Arab countries. These students enroll in programs mutually agreed upon by the respective states and are aided by government grants, with the host nation taking care of most expenses. Others draw on private funds to study abroad.

Unsanctioned Education

But there is another option: madrasahs abroad that have not been approved, or are even unknown by the state. This is the option that has officials worried that the younger generation could be indoctrinated by radical groups that preach extremist forms of Islam and harbor deep-seated hatred toward Central Asia's secular states.

The precise number of Central Asian students studying at unsanctioned religious schools abroad is difficult to pinpoint. Regional media estimate that at least 4,000 young men from Tajikistan alone study at unofficial religious schools in Pakistan, Iran, and in Arab countries without the government's knowledge. The Tajik Embassy in Islamabad says that between 250 and 300 Tajik men and boys -- some as young as 10 years old -- study at unofficial madrasahs in Pakistan. According to centrasia.ru, a popular Russian-language website, there is a "special set of religious groups" in the region involved in recruiting young men and women interested in an Islamic education. The website claims thousands of young people have been illegally sent by such groups to Iran, Pakistan, and Arab states, where it alleges they are "brainwashed" with radical and terrorist ideas.

Tajik diplomats in Pakistan confirm such claims, saying the majority of such students have entered the country illegally, mostly through Afghanistan and Iran. "It is an alarming situation that the majority of them study in underground madrasahs -- in so-called religious schools that have no official license to operate," says Zubaidullo Zubaidov, the Tajik ambassador to Pakistan.

"In these madrasahs, students twice a year receive a set of traditional Pakistani clothes and a few soaps," Zubaidov says. "They live in basements or in mosques and eat whatever handout they're given by the mosques. What exactly do they study in such conditions?"

"When you speak to these young men," Zubaidov continues, "you quickly notice that their views of their own country and society have completely changed."

- Jailed Former Kyrgyz Minister Urges Supporters To End Hunger Strike

BISHKEK -- Former Kyrgyz Defense Minister Ismail Isakov, who was sentenced to eight years in jail last week, today called on protesters to end a week-old hunger strike in his support, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Isakov's lawyer, Azimbek Beknazarov, told protesters in Bishkek that he had met with Isakov, who thanked them for their support but urged them to stop the strike. But hunger strike leader Topchubek Turgunaliyev of the United Popular Movement (UPM) told RFE/RL that Isakov's supporters intend to continue the protest until Isakov is fully acquitted of the charges against him.

There are currently five people on hunger strike in Bishkek and nine people in the remote Alai district in Osh region, Isakov's hometown. Several people ended the strike because of deteriorating health.

About 40 people have taken part in the hunger strikes in Isakov's support, replacing those who were too weak to continue.

Isakov, a lieutenant-general who served as Kyrgyzstan's defense minister from 2005-08, was found guilty of issuing an apartment to someone based on false documents.

He was a close associate of Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev and became defense minister shortly after the March 2005 Tulip Revolution that brought Bakiev to power.

Isakov was appointed secretary of the National Security Council in May 2008. He left the post in October 2008 and joined Kyrgyzstan's political opposition.

Isakov's supporters and human rights groups say the case against him is in retaliation for his opposition activities.

- Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies get 10,000 domestic violence claims annually

Law enforcement agencies get about 10 thousand domestic violence claims annually in Kyrgyzstan, Moldomusa Kongantiev the Kyrgyz Interior Minister said Monday at a parliament hearings on social and legal protection against domestic violence draft bill.

At least 97 percent of the victims are women. "However, increase in number of crimes committed by women is traced at the time. Investigations have shown that at least 87 percent of female inmates committed a crime having suffered domestic violence for a long time," Kongantiev said. "Acting legislation requires amendments. In the first place we need to introduce complex approach, coordination of all agencies meant for protection from domestic violence. Besides, we need to amend the Administrative responsibility Code, that is to introduce public works for violators. We believe the punishment will be an effective measure for reduction of domestic violence incidence," the minister said.

As to the official, all law enforcement agencies are fully provided with temporary guard orders to activate the violence control. "New more effective forms of the orders have been worked out recently. In 2008-2009 there were issued at least 1.150 temporary orders," he added

Tajikistan

Political Front

- Turkmen Leader Replaces Top Energy Official

Turkmen state media today say President Gurbanguli Berdimukhamedov has replaced the country's top oil and gas official. The daily "Neutral Turkmenistan" reports that the president dismissed Oraznur Nurmuradov for "unsatisfactory performance."

Nurmuradov, who had been in the job for only three months, will be replaced by his former deputy, Bayramgeldy Nedirov.

- Nomination of candidates for parliament completed on Friday

DUSHANBE, January 16, 2010, Asia-Plus -- The process of nomination of candidates for parliament through a proportional, party list system from a single, countrywide constituency has been completed, Alisher Safarov, a lawyer with the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CCER), told Asia-Plus Friday (January 15) afternoon.

According to him, the Social-Democratic Party (SDPT) submitted its party list to the commission on Wednesday, January 13.

“All eight political parties officially functioning in the country have submitted their party lists to commission for consideration and registration,” the lawyer said.

He added that the process of nomination of candidates to run for elections to the Majlisi Namoyandagon (Tajikistan’s lower chamber of parliament) was completed on January 15. “In all, some 150 candidates have been nominated to run in parliamentary elections in single-mandate constituencies,” Safarov said.

The Majlisi Namoyandagon has 63 members, who are directly elected for a period of 5 years. 22 are elected through a proportional, party list system from a single, countrywide constituency. To win seats, parties must pass a five percent threshold. The remaining 41 members are elected from single-mandate constituencies under a majoritarian system.

- Three political parties nominates their candidates for parliament in Isfara constituency

ISFARA January 19, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Primary organizations of the People’s Democratic (PDPT), Islamic Revival (IRPT) and Social-Democratic (SDPT) parties in the city of Isfara, Sughd province have nominated their candidates for election to the Majlisi Namoyandagon (Tajikistan’s lower chamber of parliament), Asia-Plus has learned from the electoral commission for Isfara single-mandate constituency # 20.

PDPT has nominated Professor Amirkhon Katayev, IRPT has nominated known journalist Muhib Qurbon and SDPT has nominated Mamadjon Abdulloyev, head of the SDPT organization for Isfara, the source at the electoral commission said.

- OSCE/ODIHR to observe parliamentary elections in Tajikistan

DUSHANBE, January 19, 2010, Asia-Plus -- The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) today formally opened an election observation mission for the 28 February parliamentary elections in Tajikistan.

In line with its commitment as an OSCE participating State, Tajikistan has invited ODIHR to monitor the elections. The observation mission is led by Artis Pabriks, a former Foreign Minister of Latvia.

On the occasion of the formal opening of the election observation mission deployed by the OSCE's ODIHR to observe the parliamentary elections in Tajikistan, the mission held a news conference in Dushanbe yesterday afternoon. The election observation mission head Artis Pabriks was the main speaker to introduce the mission.

During the news conference, it was noted that the mission comprises 17 international experts from 16 OSCE participating States based in Dushanbe, and 20 long-term observers to be deployed across the country. In addition, ODIHR requested 150 short-term observers.

The mission will assess the overall framework and conduct of the elections. This includes the legal framework, the political campaign, the role of the media, the work of the election administration and the complaints and appeals process. On election day, observers will follow the voting, counting and tabulation process.

The observers will meet with relevant governmental authorities, candidates, political parties, the judiciary, civil society and the media.

A media monitoring component will follow the coverage of the elections by major public and private broadcast networks.

For these elections, the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission will join efforts with the delegation of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

A statement of preliminary findings and conclusions will be issued on the day after the elections. A comprehensive final report on the overall findings of the mission will be published approximately two months after the completion of the election process.

The ODIHR election observation mission and the OSCE Mission to Tajikistan operate separately under their specific mandates.

- Pre-election agitation campaign starts in Tajikistan

DUSHANBE, January 22, 2010, Asia-Plus -- All political parties that have submitted their party lists to the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CCER) and their representatives registered to run individual constituencies as well as registered self-propelled candidates may begin pre-election agitation campaign, Muhibullo Dadajonov, an official with CCER, told Asia-Plus today.

According to him, by CCER's resolution all political parties running in the elections and their representatives are given 30 minutes of free air time each on national radio and TV channel, Shabakai Avval (Channel One), while candidates running elections in single-mandate constituencies and their representatives are given 15 minutes of free air time each.

Besides, representatives of political parties and registered candidates, running elections in the single-mandate constituencies, have the right to publish articles about political parties and candidates (up to eight double-spaced pages, font 14) in state-run print media free of charge. Dadajonov added that reels about political parties and candidates for election to the parliament would be demonstrated on national TV channels on the basis of payment.

- IRPT to compete for 32 of 35 seats in Vose legislature

KULOB, January 22, 2010, Asia-Plus -- The organization of the Islamic Revival Party (IRPT) in the Khatlon's Vose district will compete for 32 of 35 seats in local legislature, Abdufattoh Abdukholiqov, head of the IRPT organization in Vose, said in an interview with Asia-Plus.

Besides, the IRT organization in Vose has nominated five candidates to run for election to the Khatlon regional legislature. "We have also nominated Qurbonkhon Zirayev to run for election to the Majlisi Namoyandagon (Tajikistan's lower chamber of parliament) in the Vose single-mandate constituency," Abdukholiqov said. Zirayev, 49, graduated from Tajik Agricultural Institute. He is head of farming unit in the village of Qurbonshahid in the Vose district.

Geo strategic Front

- Tajik Police Deny Suspect Arrested In Kyrgyz Journalist's Murder

Regional Tajik police say they know nothing about the reported arrest of a man suspected in the 2007 murder of Kyrgyz journalist Alisher Saipov.

Kyrgyz Interior Ministry spokesman Bakyt Seyitov told RFE/RL's Uzbek Service that his ministry was told on January 14 about the arrest of a Tajik citizen, Farrukh Sharakhmatullaev, by the Sughd police department.

Seyitov said the ministry and Prosecutor-General's Office are currently trying to secure the suspect's extradition to Kyrgyzstan.

But Dilyavar Alizoda, a police department spokesman in the northern city of Sughd, told RFE/RL today that reports of a man being arrested in connection with the killing of Saipov are untrue.

Sharakhmatullaev was allegedly named by Abdufarid Rasulov, who has been sentenced in Kyrgyzstan for his role in Saipov's murder. In February, Kyrgyz police detained Rasulov in Kyrgyzstan's Batken region for drug trafficking and discovered a pistol without a serial number that was shown to be the weapon used to shoot Saipov.

Rasulov said the pistol was given to him in December by Sharakhmatullaev.

Saipov, 26, an ethnic Uzbek and editor in chief of the Osh-based newspaper "Siyosat" ("Politics"), was shot dead as he left his office in central Osh on October 24, 2007.

Saipov had also worked as a correspondent for RFE/RL and the Voice of America.

His relatives and colleagues said he may have been killed by Uzbek secret services in retaliation for his critical articles about Uzbek President Islam Karimov and his government

Economic/Energy Front

- President calls on Tajik businesspeople to make contribution to Roghun

DUSHANBE, January 15, 2010, Asia-Plus -- President Emomali Rahmon has met with representatives of Tajik business community today.

The meeting that has been held at the Kokhi Borbad State Complex in Dushanbe brought together entrepreneurs from all regions of the country as well as a number of Tajik businesspeople working in Russia and some other CIS states.

Address the meeting, President Rahmon informed those present on measures taken by the government to promote development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the country.

He in particular, noted that amendments had been made to the country's laws on joint-stock companies, limited liability societies, state registration of legal entities and individual entrepreneurs, and bankruptcy as well as the tax code to promote further development of entrepreneurship in Tajikistan.

Import of production-technological equipments and agricultural machines, medical equipments and medicines, as well as delivery of scientific-technical literature, fictitious and children literature, magazines and newspapers, children's goods are exempted from VAT and customs duties, presidential press service reported.

The head of state charged the Ministry of Justice and the State Committee for Investments and State-owned Property Management to work out a draft law on the licensing system in Tajikistan in the first half-year of 2010 and submit it for consideration to the government.

President noted, "We will not be able to solve problems facing the country until the Roghun HPP and other hydropower plants are constructed, and local entrepreneurs, merchants and investors should support this good cause."

Rahmon once again called on Tajik entrepreneurs working inside and outside the country to make contribution to the construction of the Roghun.

- President meets with representatives of Tajik business community today

DUSHANBE, January 15, 2010, Asia-Plus -- President Emomali Rahmon is meeting with representatives of Tajik business community here today.

The meeting that is taking place at the Khokhi Borbad State Complex in Dushanbe is expected to discuss a broad range of issues related to problems facing Tajik business community, including tax burden on entrepreneurs, customs procedures and administrative obstacle in the way of development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the country.

Some local entrepreneurs have told Asia-Plus that they will raise all these issues with the president.

We will recall that Tajik businessman Zayd Saidov told Asia-Plus on December 30, 2009 that poor access to short-term loans and high interest rates on them pose serious problems for development of private business in Tajikistan. According to him, Tajik private business has urgent needs in government's support. He plans to bring the tax collection issue to president's attention. "The large number of taxes and high tax rates are hurting Tajik producer. If we want domestic producers to manufacture competitive goods it is necessary to ease the tax burden on them," Saidov said.

In the meantime, the source at the State Committee for Investments and State-owned Property Management said that participation of Tajik business community in construction of the Roghun hydroelectric power plant (HPP) would also be discussed at the meeting.

- Inflation for 2009 reportedly stands at 5 percent in Tajikistan

DUSHANBE, January 16, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Inflation for 2009 stood at 5 percent last year, according to the State Committee for Statistics.

A monthly inflation rate in the consumer sector was 0.4 percent last year.

A 2.3 percent increase in prices of products of food industry was reported last year and non-foodstuffs rose in cost by 6.78 percent in 2009. Over the report period, prices and rates for services rendered to the population increased by 13.8 percent.

We will recall that inflation for 2008 reportedly stood at 11.8 percent and for 2007 at 19.7 percent. In the meantime, 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 December 2009 was 90.96 somoni (equivalent to some US\$20.8) per one family member per month, and with the norm for a balanced diet it was 182.19 somoni (equivalent to some US\$41.5), the State Committee for Statistics reported.

- GBAO's external trade turnover falls 50 percent last year

KHOROG, January 22, 2010, Asia-Plus -- In 2009, an external trade turnover of Gorno Badakhshan amounted to only 11.6 million U.S. dollars, which is 50 percent of the 2008 level, Yormamad Faqirov, deputy chief of the GBAO customs committee, told reporters in Khorog on January 21.

"Over the report period, the region carried out foreign economic operations 3,000 less and the volume of commodities imported into the region decreased by 6,400 tons, or 18 percent, compared to 2008," Faqirov said.

According to him, delivery of Chinese-made cars (mostly family cars, which are used in Tajikistan as fixed-route taxis) to the region through the border-crossing checkpoint Kulma significantly decreased. "In 2009, only 1,678 cars were delivered to Gorno Badakhshan through the crossing Kulma, while in 2008, more than 6,000 vehicles were delivered to the region from China," the GABO customs official noted.

He added that local customs officers last year seized 10 kilograms of narcotics, including some 9 kilograms of heroin, last year.

- USAID launches new agriculture project in Tajikistan – the goal is to increase farmers’ incomes by 25%

DUSHANBE, January 22, 2010, Asia-Plus -- On Thursday January 21, 2010, Deputy Chief of Mission Necia Quast, Deputy Prime Minister Muradali Alimardon, Deputy Minister of Agriculture Sijovuddin Isroilov, and Regional Director of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in Central Asia Andrew Sisson officially opened a new USAID Productive Agriculture project for Tajikistan, according to the U.S. Embassy in Dushanbe.

“One in two people in Tajikistan depend on agriculture for their livelihood. But because most farmers can't get adequate inputs, resources, technology and markets, their yields are low and they earn low incomes.

This USAID project will support farmers so they can increase agricultural yields and productivity and strengthen links to end markets. This will make farmers more competitive in regional and global markets and, ultimately, they will earn more money,” said Ambassador Gross during the opening ceremony in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

Over the next five years, this \$9.7 million project will work to expand the production of crops in rural communities in Sughd, western Khatlon and districts surrounding Dushanbe. The project has identified five crops for potential expansion: apricots, lemons, onions, tomatoes and melons. Farmers also will receive support to expand livestock production.

In cooperation with local community and financial institutions, the USAID project will provide farmers with training, seeds, fertilizers and other farming necessities, and help farmers get financing and other support they need to reach the project’s goal: increase farmers’ incomes by 25 percent.

ACDI/VOCA, Mennonite Economic Development Association (MEDA), International Center for Soil Fertility and Agricultural Development (IFDC) and E-NOETEC Consulting will implement the project. The Productive Agriculture Project is one of the many assistance projects USAID implements in Tajikistan on behalf of the American people. Since 1993, the American people have provided more than \$300 million in assistance programs that support the economic growth, democratic institutions, health care, and education systems of Tajikistan.

Social Front

- Tajikistan readies plan to control Islamic study abroad

DUSHANBE, January 15, 2010, Asia-Plus – The Tajik Culture Ministry is preparing tighter controls for allowing Tajiks to study at Islamic universities and madrasahs abroad, Radio Liberty’s Tajik Service reported on January 14.

Idibek Ziyoev, the head of the ministry's religion department, told RFE/RL that hundreds of young Tajiks go unregistered to such foreign schools because the country doesn't sign bilateral agreements to coordinate the flow of Tajiks who attend Islamic schools.

He said such measures would be forthcoming, without providing details.

Ziyoev said there are no reliable statistics on the number of Tajiks who are studying at Islamic schools abroad and officials fear a lack of control over the process could lead to some students joining hard-line Islamic groups.

Abdualol Alizoda, the head of the pro-government Tajik Islamic Institute, told RFE/RL that some students who have graduated from foreign religious schools have returned to

Tajikistan with fundamentalist Islamic theories, which he said are held by members of the Salafiya branch of Islam.

He said this can cause religious confrontation within Tajik families, most of whom practice the Hanafi version of Islam.

Tajik officials are reported to be especially concerned by students who study Islam in unofficial or semiofficial madrasahs in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran.

Some such schools are blamed for spreading extremism that then gets reimported to students' home countries.

But Amrullo Nizom, who studied at an Islamic school in Pakistan, told RFE/RL that such concerns by the government are unjustified.

Another Tajik who studied at a Saudi Islamic university said young Tajiks will continue to travel to foreign religious schools because the schools in Tajikistan are too poor and only teach Islam in a manner approved by the government.

Turkmenistan

Political Front

- President of Turkmenistan reshuffles government

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov made new appointments on 15 January at an expanded meeting of the Cabinet of Minister that summed up the results of 2009 and discussed the priorities of socio-economic development of Turkmenistan for 2010.

The head of state dismissed Minister of Textile Industry Khodjamyrat Metekov for shortcomings in work and appointed Aynabat Babayeva in his place, who previously held the post of Minister of State - Chairman of State Joint Stock Corporation Turkmenhaly. By the decree of the president of Turkmenistan, Ogulhadzhat Ishangulyeva was appointed new chairman of SJC Turkmenhaly.

The president also dismissed Chairman of the State National Service "Turkmenhowayollary" Gurbanyaz Tirkishov in connection with his transfer to another job. Batir Kakalyev, who previously worked as the general director of the air transport enterprise "Turkmenistan", was appointed new chairman of "Turkmenhowayollary".

The head of state appointed Rozymyrat Seyitkulyev Minister of Railway Transport, who until recently worked as acting head of the ministry. Having signed the relevant decree, the Turkmen leader instructed the new minister to pay close attention to issues related to strengthening the material-technical base of the industry.

Chairman of the National Hydrometeorology Committee under the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan Kakamyrat Yazyev was dismissed for shortcomings in work. Batyr Hallyev, deputy chairman of this committee, was appointed to this position.

Having described as positive the work of acting Chairman of the Board of the State Bank for Foreign Economic Affairs of Turkmenistan Rahymberdi Dzhepbarov, the president signed a decree on his appointment as chairman of the bank.

Chairman of the Commercial Bank of Turkmenistan "Prezidentbank" Dovran Babayev was released of his post for failing to perform his duties. He was replaced with Nurgeldi Sazakov, who previously worked as Deputy Chairman of the National Commercial Bank "Halkbank.

Geo strategic Front

- British Ambassador Presents Credentials to President of Turkmenistan

On January 20, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received the newly appointed Ambassador of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Turkmenistan, Keith Rennie Allan, who presented credentials to the head of state.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat quoting the press service of the head of state, during the meeting the sides "discussed a number of priority issues of bilateral partnership based on equality, mutual respect and mutual benefit."

"Turkmenistan attaches importance to cooperation with Great Britain, including in the framework of deepening the dialogue with the European Union," Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said. According to him, there are ample opportunities to enhance trade and economic ties and to diversify mutually beneficial partnership.

"UK sees Turkmenistan as a reliable and promising partner, the British ambassador said in turn. Businessmen of Great Britain and Europe in general are highly interested in expanding its presence in the dynamically developing Turkmen market and participating in new joint projects."

- Turkmenistan and Russia have large-scale long-term plans of joint work

Turkmenistan sees Russia as a reliable partner, and the two countries have large-scale plans of joint work in the long term, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said in the course of talks with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov yesterday. He arrived in Ashgabat leading a high-profile delegation of his country. "Turkmenistan has always been committed to the spirit of friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation with Russia, with which the Turkmen people share a common history and desire for peace and prosperity," the Turkmen leader said.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat quoting the press service of the head of state, during the meeting the sides discussed the current state and prospects of traditional co-operation which is "successfully developing both on a bilateral basis and in the framework of well-known international and regional structures."

It was noted that Turkmenistan and Russia see a broad prospect for joining the existing profound potential and its further utilization in all key areas, primarily in the energy sector, agriculture, transport and communication, and humanitarian spheres."

Speaking about strengthening trade and economic relations, the sides noted that the opening of trading houses - of Turkmenistan in Moscow and of Russia in Ashgabat will greatly facilitate their development.

- UN supports Turkmen stance on Afghan settlement

The United Nations wholeheartedly welcomes the position of Turkmenistan playing a special role in the process of building peaceful life and socio-economic development in neighboring Afghanistan. As the Ashgabat correspondent of Turkmenistan.ru reports, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Afghanistan Kai Eide stated about that yesterday during the talks with Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov.

According to him, "the active cooperation between Turkmenistan and the UN is an important factor in strengthening peace and security in Central Asia".

"Turkmenistan as well as the entire world community is interested in establishing lasting peace in Afghanistan", Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said during the meeting. "Today our countries have ambitious plans. They primarily relate to the important projects in energy and transport initiated by the Turkmen side. According to the president, these

projects will create favorable conditions for the stabilization of Afghanistan and will be an important factor in strengthening the regional cooperation.

Turkmenistan supplies liquefied gas and electricity to Afghanistan at reduced prices, provides ongoing humanitarian assistance and implements a number of important projects in various fields at its own expense.

Economic/Energy Front

- Turkmen Leader Replaces Top Energy Official

Turkmen state media today say President Gurbanguli Berdimukhamedov has replaced the country's top oil and gas official.

The daily "Neutral Turkmenistan" reports that the president dismissed Oraznur Nurmuradov for "unsatisfactory performance."

Nurmuradov, who had been in the job for only three months, will be replaced by his former deputy, Bayramgeldy Nedirov.

- Ukrainian "Altcom" to start construction of bridge across Amu Darya in Turkmenistan

The financial-industrial group "Altcom" (Donetsk, Ukraine) will begin construction of a road bridge, Atamurat-Kerkichi, across the Amu Darya river in Turkmenistan before April of this year. This was reported by the company's deputy general director Mikhail Kovalev in an interview with the internet portal "Trans-Port."

According to Kovalev, "a camp for the company's builders is currently being erected on the bank of the Amu Darya river, the design of the bridge has been completed, and actual construction will begin any day." "We will start for sure in the first quarter," he said. At the same time, the deputy general director of the company noted that the commissioning of the bridge will not be delayed and is scheduled for October 2012 as planned.

Kovalev also said that the cost of the project is US \$ 159 million. The total length of the road bridge with coastal fortifications will be 1415 meters, and the width - 11.5 meters.

It should be recalled that according to the decree of Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov of 17 September 2009, Turkmenavtoyollary State Concern (Turkmen roads) entered into a contract with "Altcom", who won an international tender for the construction of the bridge.

- President of Turkmenistan allocates land to private enterprises in Ashgabat for construction of facilities

The Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs of Turkmenistan will build a business complex at its own expense in Turkmenbashi Avenue in Ashgabat. President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov signed a decree authorizing the allocation of a land plot of 2.2 hectares to the Union, the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat.

The president signed a similar document in relation to Gul Zaman firm. The firm is expected to build at its own expense a fashion and flower house in a plot of land of 2 hectares located on the southeast side of the intersection of Bitarap Turkmenistan Avenue and Oguz Khan Street in the city of Ashgabat.

It should be recall that earlier the President of Turkmenistan allocated 30 hectares of land in Baharly district of Akhal province for construction of the country's first full cycle poultry complex "Gush Toplumy with a view of supporting private entrepreneurship in the country.

- Turkmenistan reports economic growth in 2009

Vice Premier Tuvakmamed Japarov made a report at a Cabinet meeting on 15 January on the macroeconomic indicators achieved by Turkmenistan in the course of its socio-economic development in 2009. According to him, Turkmenistan retained high rates of socio-economic growth and managed to avoid the negative impact of the global financial crisis.

Following 11 months of 2009, the GDP increased by 6,1% at comparable prices. By industries, the GDP growth amounted to: in construction - 2,9%, agriculture - 8,5%, transport and communication - 5,2%, trade - 20,6%, services - 11,2%.

The growth rate of retail turnover in 2009 amounted to 15,9% compared with the corresponding period in 2008. In January-November of 2009, foreign trade turnover increased by 4.1% compared with similar period in 2008.

The total volume of capital investments from all sources of funding in 11 months of 2009 increased 2 fold compared with the corresponding period in 2008.

Following 11 months of 2009, the average monthly salary in the country rose by 10,9%, while inflation rate was 0%, compared with the corresponding period in 2008

In 2009, the state budget saw a surplus of 2,3% that will be transferred to offset the 2010 state budget deficit. The stabilization fund is being replenished steadily.

- Minister of Oil and Gas Industry and Mineral Resources of Turkmenistan dismissed

Analyzing the work of Turkmenistan's fuel and energy sector in the past year at an expanded government meeting on January 15, the President of Turkmenistan said that "certain leaders of oil and gas industry improperly execute their official duties, exercise passivity in addressing issues of industry development." As an example, the head of state cited the inadequate performance of the Ministry of Oil and Gas Industry and Mineral Resources, the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) said.

The President of Turkmenistan dismissed Minister of Oil and Gas Industry and Mineral Resources Oraznur Nurmyradov for serious shortcomings in work. Bayramgeldi Nedirov, formerly deputy head of the ministry, was appointed temporary acting minister.

- Russia to buy 11 billion cubic meters of Turkmen natural gas in 2010

Turkmen gas supplies to Russia since their resumption in January 2010 total 30 million cubic meters a day, "Interfax-AGI" information agency said citing "Gazprom" company. The plan of supplies for January accounts for 934.2 million cubic meters of gas, which is about 11 billion cubic meters on an annualized basis (with the traditional annual two-week pause for preventive works).

It should be recalled that starting from January 9 Turkmen gas state concern "started exports of natural gas to Russia via gas main Dovletabat - Deryalyk. The sides agreed in December last year to resume supplies of Turkmen gas amounting to 30 billion cubic meters annually. Relevant amendments and additions were made to the long-term contract on the purchase and sale of natural gas on the result of talks between Presidents Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Dmitriy Medvedev in Ashgabat. The document says that gas supplies "will be based on the price formula, which corresponds to the conditions of the European gas market."

Social Front

- Turkmen Leader Orders Predecessor's Statue Removed

The Neutrality Arch capped with a gold statue of the late Saparmurat Niyazov in Ashgabat

ASHGABAT (Reuters) -- Turkmenistan's president has ordered the removal of a prominent statue of former dictator Saparmurat Niyazov, in a move to assert his own authority and chip away at the personality cult of his predecessor.

Niyazov ran the former Soviet Central Asian republic for 21 years, surrounding himself with an elaborate cult of personality before his death in 2006.

Known as Turkmenbashi, or the leader of all Turkmen, Niyazov renamed calendar months after members of his own family.

Since taking power in 2007, President Kurbanguly Berdymukhammedov has reversed some of Niyazov's more bizarre reforms and removed lingering signs of his predecessor's personality cult.

Today, the capital Ashgabat is dominated by giant portraits of Berdymukhammedov who has introduced some market reforms but retained an authoritarian political system. Some critics accuse him of building a cult of his own.

The removal of the statue and the 75-meter-tall Arch of Neutrality tower which it tops will "improve the architectural image of Ashgabat," state-run news agency Turkmen Khabarlary said late on Sunday.

The 12-meter high gold-plated effigy, which rotates to face the sun, is one of the capital's main landmarks and can be seen from almost anywhere in the city center. Berdymukhammedov first suggested removing it in 2008.

A new, higher tower will be built in a southern suburb of the city to replace "the tripod" - a nickname Ashgabat residents have given to the old monument which stands on three legs.

- Education minister to offer government to adopt new education legislation

DUSHANBE, January 15, 2010, Asia-Plus -- The Ministry of Education intends to apply to the government for adoption of a new law on education.

Education Minister Abdujabbar Rahmonov told Asia-Plus that a working group had been set up at the ministry for working out the education bill. "A separate article in this draft law will be dedicated to status of teachers," said the minister, "It will determine types of benefits teachers will get. Of course, we will take into account potential of the country's budget while determining all these benefits."

We will recall that the education law currently in force was adopted in 1993 and it has been amended several times.

- Representative of UN Office on Drugs and Crime for Central Asia visits Turkmenistan

The Regional Representative of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime for Central Asia, James Callahan, visited Turkmenistan. He held a number of meetings and negotiations with the State Coordination Commission on Drug Abuse under the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan, the State Customs Service, the State Service of Turkmenistan on Combating Drugs, the Ministry of Interior, and State Border Service of Turkmenistan. The senior UN official also held talks in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan. One of the main topics of discussions was the further expansion of contacts, in particular, the ongoing work to reform Turkmenistan's legislature in this area, as well as training of Turkmen specialists and fitting the appropriate structures with modern equipment.

Uzbekistan

Political Front

- Wounded Kyrgyz Border Guard Remains In Uzbekistan

BISHKEK -- A Kyrgyz border guard shot by Uzbek border guards on January 17 is still being kept in Uzbekistan, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Cholponbek Turusbekov, the deputy chairman of the Kyrgyz Border Guard Service, told RFE/RL that the man was wounded in a shootout between Kyrgyz and Uzbek border guards on January 17 and taken away by Uzbek guards.

He was reported on January 18 to be in satisfactory condition in an Uzbek hospital. Kyrgyz officials said they are working to secure the guard's release.

The incident took place along the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border near the village of Chek in Kyrgyzstan's south.

- Uzbek secret services collect the records about independent journalists

The Tashkent Public Prosecutor's office conducted the series of interrogations of several independent journalists, working in Uzbekistan. On January 7 five of them – Vasiliy Markov, Sid Yanyshhev, Abdumalik Boboev, Khusniddin Kutbiddinov and Marina Kozlova (that cooperated with various foreign mass media) were called for "an interview" with Bakhrom Nurmatov, the assistant Public Prosecutor of Tashkent. Vasiliy Markov and Abdumalik Boboev refused to show up without official notice; the rest of journalists met Mr. Nurmatov.

Each of the journalists was presented their own detailed record with articles, bio and other documents. Mr. Nurmatov informed that these documents were delivered from National Security Service (NSS) and Uzbek Foreign Affairs Ministry.

According to Khusniddin Kutbiddinov, Bakhrom Nurmatov named four or five author pseudonyms from the opposition websites. He inquired if the journalist was working for such websites as Turonzamin, Ferghana.Ru, Centrasia. Nurmatov also asked about money transfers from abroad, his relations with the family of convicted journalist Dilmurod Sayid, cooperation with Human Rights Watch, Freedom House and Ezgulik. Bakhrom Nurmatov was also concerned if Kutbiddinov ever provided negative information about Uzbekistan.

Khusniddin Kutbiddinov

"I did not know others were also invited. I had the impression that Public Prosecutor's office had certain suspicions – Khusniddin said. – However, leaving the office I noticed other guys"

Sid Yanyshhev shared that Bakhrom Nurmatov invited him for a talk and affirmed there was legal persecution of the journalist. "He asked about my participation in the international conferences, our (together with Vasiliy Markov) trip to the Andijan Oblast, our detention by the border service guards, law enforcement and national security officers. Nurmatov also inquired about my possible cooperation with Galima Bukharbaeva (the editor of independent Uznews.net website) and IWPR (British Institute for War and Peace)" Sid Yanyshhev highlighted.

Sid Yanyshhev

Responding to Nurmatov's argument on "biased" and "tendentious" coverage Sid said that, vice versa, he always gave different opinions on the issue. "He asked me to describe my journalist activity – employers, conferences and negative comments about

Uzbekistan". Yanyshv said that the goal of the interrogation is still unclear to him; he was just told that his record was provided by NSS and Foreign ministry.

Similar questions were addressed to Marina Kozlova that cooperated with Transition online and Associated Press few years ago; however, when the authorities rejected her accreditation application as AP correspondent she quitted the job with AP. On the day, following the interrogation date, Marina left for Chisinau. Her mother informed that Public Prosecutor officers asked about revenues, articles, written under pseudonyms. Yet, Nurmatov underlined that no criminal case has been filed against Marina and she is able to leave Uzbekistan.

It has to be underlined that these were unofficial meetings with no official claims. At the same time, the journalists de facto learned that their activities are being monitored and treated as "undesirable".

I showed up in the public prosecutor's office on January 8.

Alexey Volosevich

Bakhrom Nurmatov showed me the folder, provided by Foreign Ministry, while my publications were carefully piled up by the monitoring department (The Center for mass media monitoring under Uzbek agency for communication and information), special structure, established in 2002 instead of the censorship institute. The Center monitors the content of media and web pages in the search for "suspicious" articles.

Overall, Nurmatov asked the same questions about my employers, membership in the news agencies. He inquired about my attendance of international seminars and cooperation with Uznews.net and IWPR.

Again, I was told that my articles are "biased" and "tendentious". As an example, he named few of my articles. I wrote down the statement that my articles were not biased.

This is the first act of intimidation against journalists in Uzbekistan. The most of the named journalists are not in the staff of news agencies, but free-lance reporters. Since it is impossible to fire Internet-journalist or put the pressure on his employer the only instrument of law enforcement bodies is the legal persecution.

Three months ago Andrey Kudryashov, the famous journalist and Ferghana.Ru reporter, personally met Ishnor Djaborov, the press-secretary of Foreign Ministry.

Andrey Kudryashov

"I was officially registered as Ferghana.Ru news agency correspondent in the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2005-2007 – Andrey Kudryashov shares. – In this period I had no conflicts with the authorities. After the expiration of license I quitted full-time commitment with Ferghana.Ru although I still published few non-journalist stories about historical and natural beauties of Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries. By the way, many of them were reprinted by the number of governmental and oblast-based newspapers of Uzbekistan (such Khoresmskaya Pravda, Gzt.uz and others) without mentioning the author. I showed understanding since many editions in Uzbekistan may have deficit of interesting stories.

On October 16, 2009 I was invited for a talk at the Foreign Ministry where I was told that my publications contain "biased" opinion. I argued that I always underlined my personal, subjective opinion that does not have to become the common opinion. I also explained that due to health issues I was not working for media sources – no contracts, no tasks. This is another reason why I am not able to bear responsibility for reprinting and citing of

my texts and phrases both in Uzbekistan and abroad. Afterwards, I was offered to sign the statement where I confirmed I was aware of responsibility for cooperating with foreign mass media without authorization in Uzbek Foreign Ministry.

I believe once EU cancelled last sanctions against Uzbekistan and considering new friendship period with USA, the pressure campaign – the shutdown of Cinema Museum, criminal persecution of artist Umida Khamidova and interrogations of independent journalists – has the common goal to intimidate liberal thinkers so that other were afraid to write, photograph and produce movies without official authorization. I was never the opposition member. However, I see high risk of turning into totalitarian society. Authoritarian rule suppresses the political opponents. Totalitarian regime punishes everyone for counteraction, lack of loyalty, independence and free thinking – Andrey Kudryashov notes.

I interpret this story as the attempt to muzzle very few independent journalists. After Andijan massacre in May of 2005 high pressure was imposed on foreign media and their staff. IWPR, BBC, Ozodlik Radio (Uzbek Service of RFE/RL) left the republic.

The pressure on independent opinion has continued since 2005. In February, 2006 the government issued a decree, according to which foreign correspondents were not allowed running activities without the authorization of Foreign Ministry. The decree was granted absolute priority over all other laws in the republic.

On March 23, 2006 Tashkent Public Prosecutor's Office filed the criminal case against Natalia Beshueva, the correspondent of Deutche Welle, for "tax avoidance" charges (although Uzbekistan and Germany signed the agreement on avoidance of double taxation in 1999). The journalist was also accused of working without Foreign Ministry's accreditation (the first precedent since the adoption of new rules).

Natalia Bushueva had to go through the number of challenges. In one night the unknown group of people posted the announcement that the journalist was selling 3-bed room apartment and offering intimate service. Natalia was bombarded by the phone calls. To summarize, the Deutche Welle correspondents in Uzbekistan had to stop working for the radio station while Natalia Bushueva left the country.

In 2008 the correspondents of Associated Press and Reuters stopped operations.

Today, only 38 foreign journalists have accreditation from Uzbek Foreign Ministry, most of which represent super-loyal to the government Russian, Chinese, Turkish, Kyrgyz, Azerbaijani, Iranian and other "friendly" mass media and very few western (France-Presse, Le Suar) correspondents that carefully analyze their for "the bias".

Besides, all government-sponsored media journalists are also strictly controlled by the government. The inexcusable actions for them are, for example, educational trips to western countries. In 2009 Sobirjon Yakubov and Bekkul Egamkulov, the journalists of Uzbek newspapers, were fired for "suspicious" trip to Paris. Dmitry Povarov, one of the best economics journalists in Uzbekistan, was dismissed for several months stay in France.

The others are simply placed in jail. According to New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, as of December 1, 2009 Uzbekistan ranked 6 in the world by the number of journalist prisoners after China (24), Iran (23), Cuba (22), Eritrea (19) and Burma (9). There are 7 journalist prisoners in Uzbekistan: Mukhammad Bekzhanov, Yusuf

Ruzimuradov, Gairat Mekhliboev, Ortikali Namazov, Djamshid Karimov, Solijon Abdurakhmanov and Dilmurod Sayid.

At the beginning of 2005 Uzbekistan had 80-100 western and independent journalists while today their number dropped to 15-20. The sources of news for population are such radio stations as Ozodlik, BBC, Voice of America and Free Dolina as well as Internet although most of the news and human rights websites, covering the events in Uzbekistan, are blocked.

According to Press Freedom Index from Reporters Without Borders – Uzbekistan ranks 160th out of 175 surveyed countries. In the similar Freedom House rating Uzbekistan is placed in 189th position out of 195. In this concern, the statements of US government, indicating the serious improvements of human rights situation in Uzbekistan, are at least not too sincere.

Geo strategic Front

- The conflicts at Kyrgyz-Uzbek border became more frequent

Uzbek border guards are on the alert for the territory of neighboring state. Photo by Ferghana.Ru

Another incident took place at the border between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan: Uzbek border guards wounded and captivated Kyrgyz colleague at the marginal area of Mombekov frontier post, the Jalal-Abad border detachment.

According to press-office of Kyrgyz Border Service, on January 17 during the service at the border four Kyrgyz military officers located two Uzbek border guards near Chek settlement on Kyrgyz side. The short conversation resulted in the conflict.

The group of 9-10 observers, the citizens of Uzbekistan, showered stones on Kyrgyz guards. Few minutes later, another Uzbek patrol arrived and inflicted fire damage without prior notice. One of the Kyrgyz border guards was wounded and taken by Uzbek soldiers. At the moment, Kyrgyz side is taking the appropriate measures to investigate the reasons of the conflict and take the captivated border guard back.

It has to be mentioned that the conflicts at Uzbek-Kyrgyz border are frequent events. Ordinarily Uzbek media pay no attention to them but in 2010 two of them broke with the precedent.

In the first days of new year Uzbek TV channels in Ferghana valley amazed the audience with "open" coverage of the border conflict that took place on January 2, 2010. The Namangan Oblast TV company showed the professional video, close to journalistic investigation. Later on this video was shown in Andijan.

According to Uzbek journalists, on January 2, 2010 Iliaz Alymkulov and Askarbek uulu Daniyar, the border guards from Alabuka border detachment of Kyrgyzstan, entered Uzbekistan, trying to reach Uzbek girl that was pasturing the cattle. Kyrgyz guards demanded to give up the frontier crosser. The local dwellers disarmed the guards that spent few days in the local police office.

The witness Bakhtier Mirzaboev affirmed that Kyrgyz soldiers were going to take cattle to Kyrgyz territory with the purpose to demand ransom.

The length of Uzbek-Kyrgyz border is 1375 kilometers. The intergovernmental commission for border delimitation and demarcation has not been active in the last five years. There are few dozens of disputed areas with total length of over 300

kilometers. "We are fed up; these actions upset the relations of two nations and republics", Bakhtier said in the video.

Ilhom Haitov, another resident of the village, said the Kyrgyz senior sergeant, who arrived in the place of incident, left his soldiers. Overall, the interviewees imply that "these bad border guards cannot undermine century-long friendship between two nations".

According TV channel, Kyrgyz border guards enjoyed good treatment in Uzbek police office. Both of them said that sergeant Sultanov forced them to cross the border.

At the same days Namanganskaya Pravda wrote: "Needless to say, the seizure of Uzbek cattle became normal action for Kyrgyz border guards that use power to extort money from peaceful Uzbek civilians".

In the first days, following the incident, Kyrgyz Border Service refused to comment on situation, referring to official holidays. On January 8, Uzbek authorities freed Kyrgyz border guards. Later on Cholponbek Turusbekov, the deputy Head of Border Service, provided official comments:

- At the moment the soldier are back in Kyrgyzstan. – Turusbekov shared – Their health condition is ok and there are no physical injuries. One of them is in the hospital because he was wounded by shovel".

According the Border Service deputy Head, the current situation is stable at the border. However, we were not able to learn what happened to those soldiers and sergeant.

- We have to be ready to the incidents at this sector – Cholponbek Turusbekov noted. – The local authorities of both states must work with population. Until the border demarcation and delimitation is over such issues will continue to emerge.

Unlike other border areas, where Uzbekistan was digging anti-tank ditches, this area is relatively unsecured so that even little kid can cross it with no problem. The locals see the reason of such selective approach in the Uzbek water reservoir, located near the border with Kyrgyz Republic. The anonymous district official said that after one of many incidents the local dwellers wanted to attack Uzbek team that guards the dam. "This is not the solution" he said.

Commenting on the video, broadcasted by Uzbek TV channels, the official was filled with indignation. "To be honest, both sides are involved in the extortions. However, it is very impudent and cynical to blame Kyrgyz side only".

Today, at least three republican and five regional Uzbek TV channels cover southern Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyz side can only offer two national and 3-4 local channels that cover certain districts.

The major reason of the incidents is livestock – says Elena Ivanova, the local human rights activist and Head of Egida-Shans public foundation. – There are no borders for livestock. Kyrgyz residents in the village often times complained that they had to pay money to Uzbek border guards to get their livestock back.

Turusbekov also says that the residents of Uzbek village often times cross the border in order to saturate their livestock at the river at Kyrgyz territory. This was the reason for the detention of Kyrgyz border guards. He said that, stating that Kyrgyz border guards wanted to take away her cow, Uzbek woman realized she illegally crossed the border.

In the opinion of Elena Ivanova, the only solution of continuous conflicts is the erection of fences and ditches. However, there have been many cases when parts of the houses of

one country nationals were located in the territory of another republic. Ivanova also shares there are four village districts, bordering Uzbekistan: Aktaly, Akkurgan, Pervomay and Baltagulov. Each one of them has its own "rules".

The locals pay 250 Uzbek sum or 5-10 Kyrgyz som (\$1=44 som) per person to both Kyrgyz and Uzbek border guards at Aktaly checkpoint for illegal transfer to another side. In the opinion of Elena Ivanova, the situation is deteriorated by both sides, especially by Uzbek soldiers in the Pervomay village district.

Similar case with the exemption of submachine guns took place few years ago in the Nooken district of the Jalal-Abad Oblast: in the Kyrgyz village of Aral two Uzbek border guards demanded the kickback from Kyrgyz civilians. Demonstrating intrepidity, Kyrgyz civilians were able to take them to the local police office.

Despite obvious reasons of the incidents at Kyrgyz-Uzbek border the roots of the conflicts go back to many years ago.

After the completion of national-territorial demarcation in 1924-1927 the changes in the border map were not legally documented. This is how the exclaves emerged both in Kyrgyz and Uzbek territories. After gaining independence, such uncertainty, unnoticeable in the friendly Soviet times, turned into threat for territorial integrity and political stability in the region. Only in 2008 there were 21 border incidents. Here is the conflict record for 2009:

- Drunken Saudi diplomat caught in Uzbekistan

Saudi Arabia's Prince Salman Bin Abdul Aziz (R), brother of King Abdullah, next to former US president George W. Bush (L) laughing it up.

A visiting Saudi diplomat's drunken misconduct in Uzbekistan feeds the speculation that Saudi officials switch religious allegiance as they travel abroad.

The official, named Aala Nazi Saad, was sighted for instances of disturbing of public peace, abuse and damage to private property on the Christmas Eve, Uzbek radio, Central Asia reported.

Saad was reportedly thrown out of a local nightclub where he had drunken enough to lose control and display immorality.

He then crashed his car into a parked vehicle, fought with its owner and hurled abuses at him before fleeing the scene.

The radio station voiced its concern and surprise that such officials are 'Muslims' within their own borders but forsake their religion as soon as they leave their homelands. Wahhabism, an extremely intolerant interpretation of Islam, is the official religion in Saudi Arabia.

Wahhabists are notorious for imposing severe strictures on females and using political influence to oppress the Kingdom's Shia minority. The Saudi Wahhabists, also known as Salafis, have been further blamed for fueling and funding terrorism against Shia Muslims as well as others across the world.

- Oman's embassy to be opened in Uzbekistan

The Sultanate of Oman's embassy is planned to be opened in Uzbekistan in 2010, a source in the Uzbek government said.

According to the interlocutor of the agency, the Sultan of Oman Qaboos bin Said has signed a decree stipulating the opening of Oman's embassy in Uzbekistan.

Opening of Oman's Embassy was discussed during Uzbek President Islam Karimov's visit to the Sultanate in October 2009.

It was reported that the Uzbek President paid his state visit to Oman October 4-5, 2009.

As a result of negotiations held during the visit, the sides signed inter-governmental agreements on the basis of cooperation and relations between countries on trade and economic cooperation, air communication, as well as more than ten documents in oil and gas, chemical and construction industries, higher education, tourism and investments.

The parties also agreed to open their embassies in Tashkent and Muscat.

Cooperation between Uzbekistan and Oman has been consistently developing on the basis of the principles of friendship and mutual trust. There are regular consultations between foreign ministries of the two countries. Uzbekistan and Oman have similar views concerning prevention of such threats as terrorism, extremism, arms smuggling and drugs.

Uzbekistan and Oman actively cooperate within international organizations such as the UN, the Organization of Islamic Conference. Cooperation with Oman gives Uzbekistan new opportunities to strengthen relations with Arab countries. Oman considers Uzbekistan as a leading country in Central Asia.

Expansion of ties with Uzbekistan will allow Oman to intensify cooperation with Central Asian region as a whole.

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

- Art Critics Back Uzbek Photographer Charged With Defamation

The International Association of Art Critics (AICA) has launched a campaign in support of Uzbek photographer Umida Ahmedova, who has been charged by the government with defamation, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports.

The Paris-based art organization has published an appeal to Uzbek authorities to acquit Ahmedova. The appeal is signed by nearly 1,000 artists, art critics, journalists, and rights activists from around the world. The AICA appeal calls on the Uzbek government to dismiss the charges against Ahmedova on the grounds that art is not journalism and cannot be viewed "as an agent" of defamation. (For a slideshow of Ahmedova's work, The AICA said it is attempting to draw the attention of the international community and rights organizations to Ahmedova's case.

It says that if Ahmedova's case is not stopped, "any photo taken on the Uzbek streets could become a pretext for legal charges."

Ahmedova, 54, was arrested on December 16 and charged with defamation and damaging Uzbekistan's image with a series of photos and videos she took in remote villages that she used for the documentaries "The Burden Of Virginity" and "Customs Of Men And Women." The films focus on poverty and gender inequality in Uzbekistan.

The documentaries were sponsored by the Swiss Embassy in Tashkent.

Ahmedova, who has contributed photographs to RFE/RL's Uzbek Service, says the charges against her are "groundless" and "absurd."

If found guilty, Ahmedova could face a fine and up to two years in a labor camp or up to six months in prison.

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