

**Business & Politics in the Muslim World**  
**News Monitoring**  
**Jan 29 to Feb 4,2010**  
**Weekly Report**  
**Central Asia**  
**Uzma Siraj**

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**Political Front**

- Azerbaijani parliament begins spring session
- Azerbaijani Ruling Party Welcomes 500,000th Member

**Geo strategic Front**

- Azerbaijani official: Lifting visa requirements with Iran not on agenda
- Azerbaijani deputy FM: Caspian Sea delimitations talks to continue in March

- Azerbaijani parliament confirms mutual visa-free travel between Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan

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

- Energy Minister: Azerbaijan is becoming increasingly important in ensuring European energy security
- Iran eases rules of trade with Azerbaijan
- Azerbaijani, Greek national oil companies discuss cooperative opportunities
- Azerbaijan, Turkey agree on gas price
- Azerbaijani Minister of Industry and Energy visits United Kingdom

#### **Social Front**

- 23, 000 people vaccinated against swine flu in Azerbaijan's capital
- Turkish journalists visit Guba mass grave in Azerbaijan

#### **Kazakhstan**

##### **Political Front**

- Kazakh Parties Demand Probe Into Alleged Corrupt China Deal
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##### **Geo strategic Front**

- Azerbaijani parliament confirms mutual visa-free travel between Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan
- Kazakhs protest against China's growing influence
- KAZAKHSTAN: FOREIGN MINISTER'S ARRIVAL IN WASHINGTON HIGHLIGHTS DEMOCRATIZATION VS. SECURITY DEBATE
- Kazakhstan Offers to Hold Joint Military Exercises With Turkey
- Top Kazakh Diplomat Visits U.S. In OSCE Role

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

- Tengizchevroil optimistic on potential tax changes
- Kazakh oil fund to reach \$90 billion in 2020
- Russia remains Kazakhstan's key strategic partner in space exploration, Kazkosmos

##### **Social Front**

- Kazakh papers say libel suit bid to control media
- Kazakhstan under pressure to free rights defender

#### **Kyrgyzstan**

##### **Political Front**

- Parliamentary committee to consider pre-term dismissal of Social Democratic party members
- Kyrgyz Official Fired For Allowing U.S. Photographer's Exhibition
- Kyrgyz Protesters Defy Ban To Rally For Jailed Politician

##### **Geo strategic Front**

- Kyrgyz Establish Movement In U.S.

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

- Kyrgyzstan sets gas prices for 2010
- Kyrgyzstan to purchase Turkmen gas
- Kyrgyzstan to attend EXPO-2010 in Shanghai
- IMF grants Kyrgyzstan \$337.5M for 17 years of cooperation

## **Social Front**

- Infectious, parasitic diseases on rise in Kyrgyzstan in 2009

## **Tajikistan**

### **Political Front**

- Enlarged meeting of Tajik cabinet opens today
- President dissatisfied with activities of supreme court and prosecutor-general's office
- Supreme Court judges file lawsuits against three Tajik newspapers
- Ruling party hopes to win more than 80 percent of votes in Khatlon

### **Geo strategic Front**

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- IMF revises up global forecast to near 4% for 2010
- The government of Japan supports clean energy project in Tajikistan

### **Social Front**

- 72 of 81 religious organizations functioning in Tajikistan able to reregister
- IWRP organizes workshop for Tajik journalists on coverage of human rights issues

## **Turkmenistan**

### **Political Front**

### **Geo strategic Front**

- Presidents of Turkmenistan and France to identify new areas of cooperation
- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Nicolas Sarkozy meet in Paris

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- Kyrgyzstan to purchase Turkmen gas
- Turkmen natural gas brings heat to Urumqi and Beijing
- Investment forum of Turkmenistan opens in Abu Dhabi

### **Social Front**

- Ministry of Culture and Broadcasting of Turkmenistan looking for talents
- Turkmenistan forecasts warm and dry February

## **Uzbekistan**

### **Political Front**

### **Geo strategic Front**

- President of Uzbekistan to visit South Korea
- Uzbekistan urged the government of Tajikistan to run independent examination of the Rogun project

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- Cabinet sums up results of development of Uzbekistan in 2009

### **Social Front**

- Europe watchdog slams Uzbekistan media crackdown
- Uzbekistan: Islam Karimov criticized media for "toothless" approach

## **Summery**

### **Azerbaijan**

#### **Political Front**

- Azerbaijani parliament begins spring session

Milli Mejlis (Azerbaijani parliament) has launched the first meeting of the spring session today. The meeting was opened by playing national anthem. Speaker Ogtay Asadov delivered welcoming speech.

- Azerbaijani Ruling Party Welcomes 500,000th Member

BAKU -- The ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party (YAP) has registered its 500,000th member, and claims it now has more members than the Communist Party had in Azerbaijan during the Soviet era, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

#### **Geo strategic Front**

- Azerbaijani official: Lifting visa requirements with Iran not on agenda

Deputy Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan Khalaf Khalafov says lifting visa requirements with Iran is not on agenda at the moment. Khalafov told journalists in Tbilisi that Iran said visa regime had been unilaterally lifted for Azerbaijani citizens.

- Azerbaijani deputy FM: Caspian Sea delimitations talks to continue in March  
Negotiations on delimitation of the Caspian Sea will continue in March, Deputy Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan Khalaf Khalafov said. "We'll continue negotiations based on five-sided format on drawing up the conventions. Our next meeting will be held in the first quarter of the current year.

- Azerbaijani parliament confirms mutual visa-free travel between Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan

Milli Majlis of Azerbaijan (Azerbaijan Parliament) at the first meeting of spring session has confirmed the Agreement on mutual visa-free travel between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan.

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

- Energy Minister: Azerbaijan is becoming increasingly important in ensuring European energy security

Azerbaijan is becoming increasingly important in ensuring European energy security, Azerbaijan's Industry and Energy Minister Natig Aliyev said at a meeting with Romanian Deputy Economy, Trade and business Environment Minister and State Secretary for Energy Affairs Tudor Serban today.

- Iran eases rules of trade with Azerbaijan

The Islamic Republic of Iran will ease rules of trade with Azerbaijan, spokesman for the Iranian embassy in Azerbaijan Abbas Isgandari said. He said the decision was made on the occasion of 31st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution of Iran.

- Azerbaijani, Greek national oil companies discuss cooperative opportunities  
SOCAR's president Rovnag Abdullayev has today met chairman of the board of directors of the Public Gas Corporation of Greece (DEPA) Harry Sachinis to discuss prospects for cooperation between the two companies. Abdullayev praised the relationship between Azerbaijan and Greece.

- Azerbaijan, Turkey agree on gas price

Azerbaijan and Turkey have agreed on price of the Azerbaijani gas in the first stage of the Shah Deniz project, Head of the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) Rovnag Abdullayev said today.

- Azerbaijani Minister of Industry and Energy visits United Kingdom  
Minister of Industry and Energy of Azerbaijan Natig Aliyev was on a working visit to the United Kingdom on January 27-28, Azerbaijani embassy in London said.

The minister attended the conference on the role of Azerbaijan and Turkey in the energy security organized by the Conservative Friends of Turkey (CFT), the group associated with the British Conservative Party, at the Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs.

### **Social Front**

- 23, 000 people vaccinated against swine flu in Azerbaijan's capital  
Nearly 23,000 people have been vaccinated against H1N1 virus (swine flu) in Azerbaijan's capital, chief of Health Ministry's sanitary-epidemiology control sector Viktor Gasimov said.

- Turkish journalists visit Guba mass grave in Azerbaijan

A group of Turkish journalists lead by chief of Alanya Journalists Association Mehmet Ali Dim has visited Guba mass grave as part of their Azerbaijan trip.

### **Kazakhstan**

#### **Political Front**

- Kazakh Parties Demand Probe Into Alleged Corrupt China Deal

Timur Kulibaev, the Kazakh president's son-in-law ALMATY -- Leaders from the Kazakh Communist Party and the unregistered Algha (Forward) party are demanding an immediate investigation into accusations of corruption by President Nursultan Nazarbaev's son-in-law, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

- Kazakh Parties Demand Probe Into Alleged Corrupt China Deal

Timur Kulibaev, the Kazakh president's son-in-law  
February 04, 2010 ALMATY -- Leaders from the Kazakh Communist Party and the unregistered Algha (Forward) party are demanding an immediate investigation into accusations of corruption by President Nursultan Nazarbaev's son-in-law, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

#### **Geo strategic Front**

- Azerbaijani parliament confirms mutual visa-free travel between Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan

Milli Majlis of Azerbaijan (Azerbaijan Parliament) at the first meeting of spring session has confirmed the Agreement on mutual visa-free travel between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan.

- Kazakhs protest against China's growing influence

ALMATY, Jan 30 (Reuters) - Kazakh protesters scuffled with police on Saturday at a rally against their government's burgeoning ties with neighbouring China.

Many in Kazakhstan, a vast but thinly populated nation, are suspicious of China's growing influence in resource-rich Central Asia and accuse the government of selling out oil riches to their giant, energy-hungry neighbour.

- KAZAKHSTAN: FOREIGN MINISTER'S ARRIVAL IN WASHINGTON HIGHLIGHTS DEMOCRATIZATION VS. SECURITY DEBATE

Kazakhstan's foreign minister, Kanat Saudabayev, is in Washington from February 1-4. He is expected to seek US backing for two prestige events: a summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to be held in Kazakhstan; and a one-on-one

meeting between US President Barack Obama and Kazakhstani President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

- Kazakhstan Offers to Hold Joint Military Exercises With Turkey

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- Top Kazakh Diplomat Visits U.S. In OSCE Role

OSCE Chairman-in-Office Kazakh Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabaev  
Kazakh Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabaev begins a three-day U.S. visit today in his role as chairman of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- Tengizchevroil optimistic on potential tax changes

(SRI) - Tengizchevroil (TCO), the Chevron-led joint venture developing the giant Tengiz oil field, expects to reach a favorable deal with Kazakhstan, should the government decide to revise the current contract, Dow Jones reported on Wednesday citing a senior executive.

- Kazakh oil fund to reach \$90 billion in 2020

(SRI) - Kazakhstan plans to increase the assets in its sovereign fund to \$90 billion by 2020 from current \$24.4 billion while allocating \$8 billion a year from it on industrial development, President Nursultan Nazarbayev said on Friday.

- Russia remains Kazakhstan's key strategic partner in space exploration, Kazkosmos

Astana. February 2. Interfax-Kazakhstan - Russia remains the main strategic partner of Kazakhstan in space exploration, said the head of the National Space Agency of the Republic (KazKosmos) Talgat Musabayev.

### **Social Front**

- Kazakh papers say libel suit bid to control media

ALMATY, Feb 3 (Reuters) - Two Kazakh newspapers on Wednesday criticised a libel suit brought by President Nursultan Nazarbayev's son-in-law against them, saying it was an attempt to muzzle the country's independent media.

- Kazakhstan under pressure to free rights defender

ALMATY (Reuters) - A private foundation set up by billionaire financier George Soros on Tuesday urged Kazakhstan to free a jailed human rights defender, saying he was imprisoned in "an unfair trial".

### **Kyrgyzstan**

#### **Political Front**

- Parliamentary committee to consider pre-term dismissal of Social Democratic party members

Profile parliamentary committee will consider pre-term dismissal of Social Democratic party members this Tuesday.

- Kyrgyz Official Fired For Allowing U.S. Photographer's Exhibition

BISHKEK -- President Kurmanbek Bakiev fired the chief of Kyrgyzstan's Culture Agency today for permitting U.S. photographer Sergei Melnikoff to hold a photo exhibit in Bishkek, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. The opening of "The Kyrgyz Land" photo exhibit by Melnikoff -- who has been critical of Russia -- was scheduled for February 11.

- **Kyrgyz Protesters Defy Ban To Rally For Jailed Politician**  
SOPU-KORGON, Kyrgyzstan -- More than 200 protesters rallied today in the southern Kyrgyz village of Sopus-Korgon to demand the release of imprisoned former Defense Minister Ismail Isakov, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

### **Geo strategic Front**

- **Kyrgyz Establish Movement In U.S.**

Organizer Ravshan Jeenbekov during a visit to RFE/RL's Washington office in 2008 Kyrgyz nationals in the United States have established a group called the Kyrgyz Movement for Democracy Abroad in Washington, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- **Kyrgyzstan sets gas prices for 2010**

Kyrgyzstan has set gas prices for all categories of consumers, Salamat Aitikeen, director of the Kyrgyz gas monopolist Kyrgyzgas told reporters in Bishkek Friday.

- **Kyrgyzstan to purchase Turkmen gas**

Kyrgyzstan will purchase gas from Turkmenia in the nearest future, Salamat Aitikeev, Director of Kyrgyzgas Company said Friday at a press conference.

In 2-3 years the republic will get Uzbek and Turkmen gas which will be supplied to China through a new gas pipe line.

- **Kyrgyzstan to attend EXPO-2010 in Shanghai**

Kyrgyzstan will take part in the World EXPO-2010 exposition to run in Shanghai (China) for the fifth time, the Kyrgyz Chamber of Commerce reported.

The exhibition is expected to open since May 1 and last for half a year, attracting participants from 240 countries and up to 70 million viewers.

- **IMF grants Kyrgyzstan \$337.5M for 17 years of cooperation**

The International Monetary Fund granted Kyrgyzstan \$337.5 million for 17 years of cooperation, parliamentary press service reported the results of the Parliament Speaker Zainidin Kurmanov's meeting with Nadeem Ilahi, Chief of the International Monetary Fund's Middle East and Central Asia Department.

### **Social Front**

- **Infectious, parasitic diseases on rise in Kyrgyzstan in 2009**

Increase in infectious and parasitic diseases rate was registered in Kyrgyzstan in 2009, National Statistics Committee said.

### **Tajikistan**

#### **Political Front**

- **Enlarged meeting of Tajik cabinet opens today**

DUSHANBE, January 29, 2010, Asia-Plus -- An enlarged meeting of the Tajik Cabinet to review the results of the past year's work has opened in Dushanbe today.

Heads of all ministries and organizations will make reports on the results of work carried out in 2009. Local experts say that usually, the president introduces staff changes at such meetings and today's enlarged meeting of the Cabinet will not be exception to this tradition, especially as the parliamentary election will be held next month and a number of members of the government have been nominated to run for election to the parliament

- **President dissatisfied with activities of supreme court and prosecutor-general's office**

DUSHANBE, January 29, 2010, Asia-Plus -- President Emomali Rahmon expressed dissatisfaction with activities of the Supreme Court and the Prosecutor-General's Office

In providing legality in the country, especially in determining tasks of the law enforcement agencies on preventing illegal allotment of lands, according to presidential press service.

- Supreme Court judges file lawsuits against three Tajik newspapers

DUSHANBE, January 30, 2010, Asia-Plus – Three judges from the Tajik Supreme Court and a Dushanbe court filed lawsuits against three independent newspapers today, Radio Liberty’ Tajik Service reported on January 29.

- Ruling party hopes to win more than 80 percent of votes in Khatlon

QURGHON TEPPA, February 4, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Pre-election race is progressing in Khatlon province as the People’s Democratic Party (PDPT) has joined the Islamic Revival Party (IRPT) in agitation campaign in the area.

### **Geo strategic Front**

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- IMF revises up global forecast to near 4% for 2010

DUSHANBE, February 2, 2010, Asia-Plus -- The global economy, battered by two years of crisis, is recovering faster than previously anticipated, with world growth bouncing back from negative territory in 2009 to a forecast 3.9 percent this year and 4.3 percent in 2011, the International Monetary Fund said in its latest forecast.

- The government of Japan supports clean energy project in Tajikistan

DUSHANBE, February 4, Asia-Plus -- Mr. Yoshihiro Nakayama, Chargé d’Affaires of the Embassy of Japan in Dushanbe, Mr. Hamrokhon Zarifi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan, today exchanged Notes concerning the Project for Introduction of Clean Energy by Solar Electricity Generation System in the framework of Japan’s Program Grant Aid for Environment and Climate Change, press release issued by the Japanese Embassy in Dushanbe said

### **Social Front**

- 72 of 81 religious organizations functioning in Tajikistan able to reregister

DUSHANBE, January 29, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Of 81 religious groups and organizations functioning in Tajikistan, 71 have been able to reregister by January 1, 2010, Asia-Plus has learned at the Department for Religious Affairs (DRA) at the Ministry of Culture (MoC).

- IWPR organizes workshop for Tajik journalists on coverage of human rights issues

DUSHANBE, January 29, 2010, Asia-Plus -- A two-day workshop for Tajik journalists, entitled “Journalists for Human Rights,” has opened at Tajik Journalists’ Union in Dushanbe today. The workshop is part of the project, Protection and Human Rights Education through Media in Central Asia, which is implemented by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) under the financial support of European Union.

### **Turkmenistan**

### **Political Front**

### **Geo strategic Front**

- Presidents of Turkmenistan and France to identify new areas of cooperation

"The forthcoming Turkmen-French negotiations in Paris will give a new powerful impetus to the inter-state relations in political, economic and cultural spheres that are

growing stronger year by year," Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said receiving yesterday Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the French Republic to Turkmenistan Pierre Lebovich.

- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Nicolas Sarkozy meet in Paris

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and President of the French Republic Nicolas Sarkozy met at the Elysee Palace on 1 February. The meeting was attended by the governmental delegations of the two countries.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- Kyrgyzstan to purchase Turkmen gas

Kyrgyzstan will purchase gas from Turkmenia in the nearest future, Salamat Aitikeev, Director of Kyrgyzgas Company said Friday at a press conference.

In 2-3 years the republic will get Uzbek and Turkmen gas which will be supplied to China through a new gas pipe line.

- Turkmen natural gas brings heat to Urumqi and Beijing

According Xinhua news agency with reference to the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), the transit of natural gas to Tszinbyan compressor station "towards Beijing and adjacent areas" began in the third week of January.

This event marked the commissioning of the western section of the "West-East" pipeline that was connected with the Turkmenistan-China transnational gas pipeline, via which gas is being supplied from Samandepi field in Turkmenistan through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, the agency said.

- Investment forum of Turkmenistan opens in Abu Dhabi

The International Investment Forum of Turkmenistan and exhibition of goods produced in Turkmenistan opened in the capital of the United Arab Emirates. The forum was organized by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Turkmenistan in collaboration with line ministries and departments, and IIR Xolding LTD (UAE).

### **Social Front**

- Ministry of Culture and Broadcasting of Turkmenistan looking for talents

The Ministry of Culture and Broadcasting of Turkmenistan has announced a creative contest titled "Moments" and invited photographers and cameramen - both professionals and amateurs to participate in the contest.

- Turkmenistan forecasts warm and dry February

Turkmenistan's meteorologists forecast warm February with average monthly temperature ranging from +2 to +7 degrees (from -3 to +2 degrees in Dashoguz province).

### **Uzbekistan**

#### **Political Front**

#### **Geo strategic Front**

- President of Uzbekistan to visit South Korea

President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov will pay a state visit to the Republic of Korea on 10-12 February on the invitation of the President of this country Lee Myung-Bak.

During the visit, issues of expansion and deepening of Uzbek-South Korean cooperation, as well as important regional and international problems will be considered.

- Uzbekistan urged the government of Tajikistan to run independent examination of the Rogun project

Shavkat Mirziyev, the Prime-Minister of Uzbekistan, urged his Tajik colleague Akil Akilov to run independent examination of the Rogun hydropower plant, Pravda Vostoka, the official Uzbek newspaper, reports.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- Cabinet sums up results of development of Uzbekistan in 2009

The Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan held a session on 29 January to consider the results of the socioeconomic development of the country in 2009 and the main priorities for 2010.

### **Social Front**

- Europe watchdog slams Uzbekistan media crackdown

ALMATY, Feb 2 (Reuters) - Europe's main democracy and security watchdog sharply criticised Uzbekistan on Tuesday for jailing and harassing journalists, saying there has been no real improvement in its media freedom. The former Soviet state has intensified its campaign against independent media over many years, driving international media out of the country and putting pressure on local reporters.

- Uzbekistan: Islam Karimov criticized media for "toothless" approach

On January 27 giving a speech at the joint session of Legislative house and Senate Oliy Mazhlis (lower and upper houses of the parliament), the President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov commented on local mass media.

## **Detailed Report**

### **Azerbaijan**

#### **Political Front**

- Azerbaijani parliament begins spring session

Mill Mejlis (Azerbaijani parliament) has launched the first meeting of the spring session today. The meeting was opened by playing national anthem. Speaker Ogtay Asadov delivered welcoming speech. He emphasized successful activity of the parliament in the last session and said about 80 bills and decisions were passed there. Asadov said the parliament strengthened its international relations even more in the last session. "We will fruitfully work in the spring session too." The speaker said the parliament would hear reports of the Cabinet of Ministers, Audit Chamber and Ombudsperson during the current session.

- Azerbaijani Ruling Party Welcomes 500,000th Member

BAKU -- The ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party (YAP) has registered its 500,000th member, and claims it now has more members than the Communist Party had in Azerbaijan during the Soviet era, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

YAP officials organized a special event on February 2, celebrated as Youth Day in Azerbaijan, to present a membership card and gift to Leman Farzaliyeva, a second-year law student at Baku State University. YAP Executive Secretary Ali Ahmadov said at the event that his party has "no competitors." He said that even if all the other registered political parties in Azerbaijan merged their memberships, the total would still be smaller than 500,000. Ahmadov added that every 10th citizen of Azerbaijan is a member of YAP. He said "young people constitute some 40 percent, or 200,000, of the party members."

RFE/RL has been contacted recently by Azerbaijani students who complained about being pressured to join the YAP and to pay the membership fees.

### **Geo strategic Front**

- Azerbaijani official: Lifting visa requirements with Iran not on agenda

Deputy Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan Khalaf Khalafov says lifting visa requirements with Iran is not on agenda at the moment. Khalafov told journalists in Tbilisi that Iran said visa regime had been unilaterally lifted for Azerbaijani citizens. "This issue is not of bilateral character. The abolition of visa regime is internal affair of every country. Lifting visa regime with Iran is not on our agenda," he said.

- Azerbaijani deputy FM: Caspian Sea delimitations talks to continue in March

Negotiations on delimitation of the Caspian Sea will continue in March, Deputy Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan Khalaf Khalafov said. "We'll continue negotiations based on five-sided format on drawing up the conventions. Our next meeting will be held in the first quarter of the current year. We still continue the negotiations on some issues," he said.

"So, in 2007, during the Teheran summit, the heads of the states initiated a safety issue and made decision to appeal to Azerbaijan for the purpose of establishing security-related mechanisms with attraction of boundary, customs, law-enforcement, and other state bodies. It's possible to conclude the corresponding treaty for establishment such mechanisms. Azerbaijan has already drawn up the draft of the project," he added.

"Last year we held the first stage of the negotiations and the next stage of the negotiations is intended to be held in Baku. We have already notified our Caspian colleagues about the date of the meeting," he noted.

- Azerbaijani parliament confirms mutual visa-free travel between Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan

Milli Majlis of Azerbaijan (Azerbaijan Parliament) at the first meeting of spring session has confirmed the Agreement on mutual visa-free travel between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. As stated, the Agreement will boost development of friendly relations between the brotherly nations and strengthen mutual ties in economic, trade, scientific-technical, cultural and humanitarian spheres. The Agreement was signed on October 2, 2009 in Baku.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- Energy Minister: Azerbaijan is becoming increasingly important in ensuring European energy security

Azerbaijan is becoming increasingly important in ensuring European energy security, Azerbaijan's Industry and Energy Minister Natig Aliyev said at a meeting with Romanian Deputy Economy, Trade and business Environment Minister and State Secretary for Energy Affairs Tudor Serban today. In 2010, Azerbaijan will produce 52.5 million tons of oil and 28.1 billion cubic meters of gas, the minister said. At present, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline pumps about 900,000 barrels of oil per day, the minister added.

During the energy conference held in Georgia on Jan. 13, Romania suggested signing a tripartite memorandum of cooperation on development of gas transportation via Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania route. The Romanian government believes that this project is of great importance not only for Romania but also for gas supply of the EU. Romania has several alternative proposals to help finance this EU-backed project.

- Iran eases rules of trade with Azerbaijan

The Islamic Republic of Iran will ease rules of trade with Azerbaijan, spokesman for the Iranian embassy in Azerbaijan Abbas Isgandari said. He said the decision was made on the occasion of 31st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution of Iran.

Isgandari said the foreign ministry of Iran informed the embassy about the decision on Feb. 2.

- Azerbaijani, Greek national oil companies discuss cooperative opportunities

SOCAR's president Rovnag Abdullayev has today met chairman of the board of directors of the Public Gas Corporation of Greece (DEPA) Harry Sachinis to discuss prospects for cooperation between the two companies. Abdullayev praised the relationship between Azerbaijan and Greece. He briefed Sachinis on the ongoing energy reforms in his country, "as a result of which", he said, "Azerbaijan has become an exporter of natural gas." Abdullayev added his country exports gas to four of its neighbors. He also underlined realization of the Shahdeniz gas and condensate development project would allow Azerbaijan to transport gas to Europe. Sachinis, in turn, said his current visit would contribute to deepening cooperation between DEPA and SOCAR. He hailed the accomplishments in Azerbaijan's energy sector. Sachinis also reiterated his country's interest to buy gas from Azerbaijan.

- Azerbaijan, Turkey agree on gas price

Azerbaijan and Turkey have agreed on price of the Azerbaijani gas in the first stage of the Shah Deniz project, Head of the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) Rovnag Abdullayev said today.

"We have agreed upon issues concerning the gas price in the first stage," he said.

"The gas price in the second stage has not yet agreed upon. Therefore, a final decision on the whole package [of issues] has not been adopted yet." According to him, as the Azerbaijan-Turkey relations in the gas sector are currently being discussed within the package of questions, coordination of a single question without the consent of the others means absence of a final agreement. The package includes issues like the gas price in the first and the second stages of development of the Shah Deniz field, and transit conditions and the cost of transit. Presently, Turkey receives the Azerbaijani gas at a price of \$120 per 1,000 cubic meters. The contract for 'Purchase-Sale' concluded between partners of Shah Deniz project and Turkey stipulates that the cost of Azerbaijani gas from this field can be reviewed in a year after supplies are launched, i.e. a new price will be introduced since April 15, 2008. Under the current contract, Turkey must receive 6.6 billion cubic meters of gas from Shah Deniz in the first stage of the field's development. Under the second phase it is planned to produce roughly 20 billion cubic meters of gas a day. The reserves of Shah Deniz field are estimated at 1.2 trillion cubic meters. The contract to develop the offshore Shah Deniz field was signed on June 4, 1996. Participants to the agreement are: BP (operator) - 25.5 percent, Statoil Hydro - 25.5 percent, NICO - 10 percent, Total - 10 percent, LukAgip - 10 percent, TPAO - 9 percent, SOCAR-10 percent.

- Azerbaijani Minister of Industry and Energy visits United Kingdom

Minister of Industry and Energy of Azerbaijan Natig Aliyev was on a working visit to the United Kingdom on January 27-28, Azerbaijani embassy in London said.

The minister attended the conference on the role of Azerbaijan and Turkey in the energy security organized by the Conservative Friends of Turkey (CFT), the group associated with the British Conservative Party, at the Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs. Member of the British parliament, international spokesman for the

Conservative Party Lord Howell, business people, representatives of the Azerbaijani and Turkish companies, journalists, as well as representatives of the energy consulting companies attended the conference. Aliyev focused attention on the special role of oil and gas projects carried out with the participation of Azerbaijan in the European energy security and emphasized the steps taken towards diversification of energy routes. He informed about the reforms in the country's energy sector and opportunities for use of alternative energy sources. Aliyev met with the director general of the Department of Energy and Climate Change Will Cavendish during the visit.

### **Social Front**

- 23, 000 people vaccinated against swine flu in Azerbaijan's capital

Nearly 23,000 people have been vaccinated against H1N1 virus (swine flu) in Azerbaijan's capital, chief of Health Ministry's sanitary-epidemiology control sector Viktor Gasimov said.

He said 4,500 in Sumgayit and 500 people in Absheron have been vaccinated against swine flu. Gasimov noted that vaccination was also being carried out in other regions of the country. The process of vaccination will end in the country in mid-Feb. The World Health Organization (WHO) has sent 172,000 doses of swine flu vaccines to Azerbaijan. The first part of the vaccines - 90,000 doses were brought to the country on Jan. 8, the second part – 82, 000 doses on Jan. 14.

- Turkish journalists visit Guba mass grave in Azerbaijan

A group of Turkish journalists led by chief of Alanya Journalists Association Mehmet Ali Dim has visited Guba mass grave as part of their Azerbaijan trip.

The Turkish journalists were informed about vandalism and ethnic cleansing policy committed by Armenians against Azerbaijanis. The journalists said they were shocked by what they saw there, and vowed they would highlight the facts in the Turkish media.

The visit of the Turkish journalists is organized by the Azerbaijan Union of Parliamentary Journalists.

### **Kazakhstan**

#### **Political Front**

- Kazakh Parties Demand Probe Into Alleged Corrupt China Deal

Timur Kulibaev, the Kazakh president's son-in-law ALMATY -- Leaders from the Kazakh Communist Party and the unregistered Algha (Forward) party are demanding an immediate investigation into accusations of corruption by President Nursultan Nazarbaev's son-in-law, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Communist Party leader Serikbolsyn Abdildin and Algha party Chairman Vladimir Kozlov said in Almaty on February 3 that allegations last week by Mukhtar Ablyazov, the former chairman of Kazakhstan's BTA Bank, should not be ignored and an investigation should be launched. Ablyazov, who left Kazakhstan for London in 2009 after his BTA Bank was taken over by the government, made his allegations in statement on his website. He claimed that when the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) agreed several years ago to buy shares of Kazakhstan's AqtobeMunayGaz oil and gas company, Nazarbaev's son-in-law Timur Kulibaev made CNPC create an offshore company. Ablyazov said 49 percent of the offshore company's shares were sold to Darley Investment Services -- which is controlled by Kulibaev -- for \$49. Ablyazov claims that CNPC and some of its branches then bought the shares back from Darley Investment Services for \$165.9 million.

Kulibaev is an executive in many of Kazakhstan's energy-related businesses and the husband of Nazarbaev's second daughter, Dinara. On February 2, an Almaty district court ordered the seizure of several newspapers that printed Ablyazov's allegations. The court also banned the publishing of any reports "damaging the dignity and honor of Timur Kulibaev." Independent Kazakh journalists said the court decision is an effort to put political pressure on them. Kazakh journalist Sergei Duvanov said at a press conference in Almaty on February 3 that "prosecutors and courts in our country very often just implement political orders from above, ignoring the nation's major laws and repressing some media outlets." Seitkazy Mataev, the chairman of Kazakhstan's Union of Journalists, said Kulibaev is a public figure and as a public leader he must accept that newspapers will write about him. He said "If a public leader does not want newspapers to write about him/her, he/she should be a beekeeper [instead]."

- **Kazakh Parties Demand Probe Into Alleged Corrupt China Deal**

Timur Kulibaev, the Kazakh president's son-in-law

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### **Geo strategic Front**

- Azerbaijani parliament confirms mutual visa-free travel between Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan

Milli Majlis of Azerbaijan (Azerbaijan Parliament) at the first meeting of spring session has confirmed the Agreement on mutual visa-free travel between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. As stated, the Agreement will boost development of friendly relations between the brotherly nations and strengthen mutual ties in economic, trade, scientific-technical, cultural and humanitarian spheres. The Agreement was signed on October 2, 2009 in Baku.

- Kazakhs protest against China's growing influence

ALMATY, Jan 30 (Reuters) - Kazakh protesters scuffled with police on Saturday at a rally against their government's burgeoning ties with neighbouring China.

Many in Kazakhstan, a vast but thinly populated nation, are suspicious of China's growing influence in resource-rich Central Asia and accuse the government of selling out oil riches to their giant, energy-hungry neighbour. President Nursultan Nazarbayev said last month China had proposed renting a million hectares of Kazakh land to grow soya and other crops. The government later denied any plans to lease land to China. Shouting "Down with Nazarbayev!" and carrying banners depicting China as a threatening dragon, hundreds of people gathered in the biggest city Almaty. "Handing over land to foreigners should be forbidden," opposition activist Marzhan Aspandiyarova told the rally. Dozens of people tried to stage a march across Almaty and clashed briefly with police who blocked their way. Police detained one protester and broke up the crowd. Nazarbayev has been in power since 1989 and enjoys sweeping powers in the former Soviet republic. He tolerates little dissent and public criticism of the veteran leader is taboo. Analysts say China now controls nearly a quarter of Kazakhstan's annual oil output of 75 million tonnes. Kazakh oil is shipped to China via a pipeline with capacity of 10 million tonnes a year and there are plans to expand it. In 2009, China invested more than \$10 billion in projects in Kazakhstan. "They (the government) borrowed \$13 billion from China and now they want to pay it back with our land," Bolat Abilov, a leader of the opposition party Azat, said at the rally.

China has lent Kazakhstan about \$13 billion in sectors ranging from oil to metals over the past year, a welcome infusion of liquidity for the Central Asian state's crisis-hit economy. A wary attitude towards China is deeply rooted among Kazakhs whose nomadic ancestors fought many wars against their eastern neighbour. Ties with China were also strained during Soviet times when Kazakhstan was under Moscow's rule. At the protest, anti-China sentiment ran high. "No Chinese soya beans on the Kazakh land!" shouted one protester. "Death to the Chinese panda!" (Editing by Maria Golovnina and Andrew Roche)

- KAZAKHSTAN: FOREIGN MINISTER'S ARRIVAL IN WASHINGTON HIGHLIGHTS DEMOCRATIZATION VS. SECURITY DEBATE

Kazakhstan's foreign minister, Kanat Saudabayev, is in Washington from February 1-4. He is expected to seek US backing for two prestige events: a summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to be held in Kazakhstan; and a one-on-one meeting between US President Barack Obama and Kazakhstani President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

The United States, of course, will be looking for something in return. The problem is that different constituencies within the US government disagree on what Washington's top priority should be: while some argue that the United States should push for Astana to adopt a faster democratization pace, others are seeking greater cooperation on security

issues, in particular Kazakhstani assistance in shipping military equipment to Afghanistan.

In January, Kazakhstan took over the chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe [OSCE]. Some human rights advocates in Washington argue that Kazakhstani officials have not fulfilled reform commitments made in connection with their country's selection as OSCE chair, and add that now is a good opportunity to press for stronger movement for those reforms. [For background see the Eurasia Insight archive].

Three US senators sent a letter to Saudabayev on January 19, calling on Kazakhstan authorities to carry out a procedural review of the case involving Yevgeny Zhovtis, a human rights activist in Kazakhstan who was convicted last year of vehicular manslaughter and sentenced to four years in prison. [For background see the Eurasia Insight archive].

"We remain concerned... that Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Freedom House, as well as Kazakh rights organizations, have raised questions about the investigation and trial that led to this verdict and allege that Mr. Zhovtis did not have the opportunity to exercise fully his right to defend himself," wrote Senators John Kerry (Democrat from Massachusetts), Robert Casey (Democrat from Pennsylvania) and Benjamin Cardin (Democrat from Maryland). A group of democratization-oriented groups (including the Open Society Institute) has sent a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, urging her to focus on human rights issues in her meeting with Saudabayev. [Editor's note: EurasiaNet operates under the auspices of the Open Society Institute].

Some elements within the State Department, too, have been pushing for the United States to press Kazakhstan harder on democratization during Saudabayev's visit. "When they come in talking about an OSCE summit, we, and a lot of the OSCE members, are telling them the same thing: we want to see [democratization] progress," said one State Department official, speaking to EurasiaNet on condition of anonymity.

While an announcement about an OSCE summit is possible during Saudabayev's visit, the United States and Kazakhstan are not likely to reach agreement on the question of an Obama-Nazarbayev meeting, which might take place on the sidelines of a nuclear security summit in the United States in April. US diplomats have indicated that they expect to talk generally about how Kazakhstan could best make its case for such a meeting, the official said.

Washington's policy toward Central Asia is increasingly oriented toward the region's role in the Afghanistan war, in particular the transit of military equipment via the Northern Distribution Network (NDN). [For background see the Eurasia Insight archive]. Kazakhstan in late January granted NATO member states overland transit rights for non-lethal equipment and supplies. Meanwhile, Astana has only allowed the United States limited rights to fly over the country with lethal equipment. While Russia and Uzbekistan have granted such rights, without greater cooperation from Kazakhstan, an air resupply route is not efficient. Thus, securing broader over-flight rights from Astana is a key aim for the United States.

The White House's National Security Council has convened a series of meetings to develop a unified US policy stance for Saudabayev's visit. A spokesman for the NSC

declined to comment to EurasiaNet on the substance of those discussions, saying "we are not going to comment on internal deliberations or meetings."

Military cooperation issues are likely to outweigh democratization desires when it comes to relations with Kazakhstan, said a second State Department official, also speaking on condition of anonymity. "The NDN trumps everything," the official said.

The Department of Defense did not return calls and emails from EurasiaNet seeking comment.

Because Saudabayev's visit is taking place within the context of Kazakhstan's chairmanship of the OSCE, human rights questions should be the focus of talks, the first State Department official said. Another visit later this month, by deputy foreign minister Kairat Umarov, will likely focus more on military issues.

Human rights advocates have been disappointed by recent public statements made by US government officials concerning Kazakhstan's OSCE chairmanship. Democratization activists say many such statements have glossed over shortcomings in Kazakhstan's rights record. [For background see the Eurasia Insight archive].

"Kazakhstan has successfully navigated the early stages of statehood," said Robert Blake, assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asia, at a Kazakhstan Embassy reception in Washington to mark the beginning of the OSCE chairmanship. "It has achieved a position of leadership on international security and economic development. And now, Kazakhstan, as the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, has an unprecedented opportunity to lead Central Asia towards a future of democracy and to advance its own reform agenda to unleash the creative energy of its people."

Saudabayev is scheduled to testify on February 2 before the US Helsinki Commission, where he is sure to face questions about Kazakhstan's rights record. "Regional security and energy issues are important and we expect that to be part of the agenda. But we want to make sure, particularly because of Kazakhstan's role in the OSCE, that human rights are included on the agenda," said Cardin, the co-chairman of the commission, in an interview with EurasiaNet. "Kazakhstan has gone through reforms, but there are other reforms that are needed. They still need to have a more open democratic society and build on democratic principles."

While Cardin said he expects Kazakhstan to implement more political reforms, he praised the country for how it has prepared for its OSCE chairmanship. "There's been more preparation done by this chair-in-office coming into office than I've ever seen before. They've spent a lot of time meeting with the US Helsinki Commission, reaching out to us," he said.

- Kazakhstan Offers to Hold Joint Military Exercises With Turkey

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On January 20, the Turkish Ambassador to Kazakhstan, Atilla Gunay, met the Kazakh Defense Minister Adilbek Zhaksybekov in Astana as part of a series of recent meetings to foster bilateral dialogue. Centered on military cooperation, it came three months after Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev visited Ankara to sign a strategic partnership agreement that emphasized closer military collaboration between the two countries. The meeting culminated in an offer to Turkey to hold joint military exercises for the first time as a new feature of their bilateral military cooperation. According to

Zhaksybekov, Nazarbayev's visit to Turkey provided an impetus for enhanced relations between the two states (Turkish Weekly, January 21). "We previously had such an agreement, but this time we have expanded and formalized it. It is aimed at the future," Nazarbayev stated following the negotiations with the Turkish President Abdullah Gul in October, 2009 ([www.kazakhstan.org.sg](http://www.kazakhstan.org.sg), October 23, 2009).

Military cooperation between Turkey and Kazakhstan has developed for more than a decade, but the two countries have not staged joint military exercises. Zhaksybekov underlined this very point when he suggested the initiative: "We want to carry out joint maneuvers with the Turkish armed forces as a new aspect in our military cooperation. Turkey is one of the priority partners of Kazakhstan in the area of defense" (Turkish Weekly, January 21). He also invited a Turkish delegation to attend Kazakhstan's first international armament exhibition KADEX 2010 in May ([www.mod.kz](http://www.mod.kz), January 19).

According to the defense minister, Turkey assists Kazakhstan in reforming the country's armed forces, training personnel, and equipping its Special Forces (Rakhat TV, January 20). Indeed, Turkey has supplied free military equipment to Kazakhstan and trained up to 500 Kazakh soldiers. There are approximately 60 Kazakh servicemen currently receiving military training in Turkey (Turkish Weekly, January 21). In an article in the Journal of Slavic Military Studies in December 2008, Roger McDermott noted that Ankara also assists Kazakhstan in upgrading its peacekeeping battalion (KAZBAT) to a brigade, which was the only Central Asian peace support unit sent to Iraq. Turkey has proven instrumental in establishing a Kazakh anti-terrorist unit, building the naval base at Aktau and the naval port at Yeraliyevo, in addition to providing training assistance and military vehicles for Kazakh Special Forces.

Turkish military assistance has helped Kazakhstan to strengthen its armed forces. Experts believe that Kazakhstan is one of the three leading CIS states, and that the country has developed its armed forces as one of the strongest militaries in Central Asia. It conducted 52 military exercises in 2009 alone, 14 more than in 2008. Interaction 2009 was noteworthy as it involved the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Collective Operational Reaction Forces (CORF). According to Zhaksybekov, this was "a serious examination," which the Kazakh military passed with "distinction" ([www.nvo.ng.ru](http://www.nvo.ng.ru), January 15). Kazakhstan has participated in military exercises within the framework of both NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) Program and the CIS that included Norak Anti-terror 2009 in Tajikistan, Combat Commonwealth 2009 conducted in Russia and Kazakhstan, as well as Steppe Eagle 2009 with the US and UK in Kazakhstan. It will also host the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Peace Mission exercises later this year (Turkish Weekly, April 29, 2009).

Astana wants to actively promote its "multi-vector" foreign policy by reaching out to countries and organizations other than Russia and the CSTO, SCO, and CIS. Thus, it expects deeper collaboration with the US as part of its new 2007 military doctrine and closer engagement with NATO in the framework of PfP, to foster anti-terrorist and peace support cooperation (EDM, April 17, 2007). NATO and Kazakhstan also adopted a second phase Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) that aims to enhance regional security and modernize the Kazakh armed forces ([www.nvo.ng.ru](http://www.nvo.ng.ru), January 22).

In this context, the Kazakh offer to hold joint military exercises with Turkey, a NATO member state with one of the largest militaries among Alliance countries, represents Kazakhstan's efforts to pursue an effective "multi-vector" foreign policy linked to its

strengthened geopolitical role in the energy-rich Caspian region. Enhanced military cooperation with Turkey might help Kazakhstan to form more effective energy and military partnerships with NATO and the EU, upgrade its counter-terrorist and peacekeeping capabilities, and enhance the combat readiness of its rapidly modernizing military. In turn, Turkish efforts to build strong military and energy connections and seek the normalization of its relations with neighboring regions complement Ankara's "zero-problem" foreign policy. The bilateral military cooperation between Ankara and Astana further helps to contain the regional ambitions of other powers and enables both countries to serve as secure inter-connectors of trade and energy flows from East to West.

As active regional players still lacking "military muscle," Kazakhstan and Turkey are therefore well positioned to benefit from enhanced defense cooperation. The Kazakh offer to hold joint exercises may prove appealing for Turkey, since its interests have long been overshadowed in Central Asia by the presence of Russia and China. In this connection, one might expect concern on the part of Russia, since its strategic position is increasingly affected by the regional engagement of China and Turkey in Central Asia generally and in Kazakhstan, the region's largest economy, in particular.

- Top Kazakh Diplomat Visits U.S. In OSCE Role

OSCE Chairman-in-Office Kazakh Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabaev

Kazakh Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabaev begins a three-day U.S. visit today in his role as chairman of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. A ministry spokesman said Saudabaev would meet with U.S. government officials and members of Congress to discuss bilateral relations as well as Astana-Washington ties within the OSCE. The spokesman said Saudabaev would also speak at a gathering of the U.S. Helsinki Commission and the Atlantic Council think tank. Meetings with leading U.S. business representatives are also scheduled.

On February 5, Saudabaev is due to speak at the UN Security Council session about Kazakhstan's chairmanship of the OSCE. Kazakhstan took over the yearlong OSCE chairmanship from Greece in January. When bidding for the OSCE chair, Kazakhstan pledged to liberalize its laws on elections, the media, and political parties to bring them closer to democratic standards. But human rights organizations claim the changes were mostly cosmetic and that Kazakhstan is unfit to lead an organization devoted to democracy promotion.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- Tengizchevroil optimistic on potential tax changes

(SRI) - Tengizchevroil (TCO), the Chevron-led joint venture developing the giant Tengiz oil field, expects to reach a favorable deal with Kazakhstan, should the government decide to revise the current contract, Dow Jones reported on Wednesday citing a senior executive.

"We can sort something out" in the event the stable tax regime, guaranteed under the current contract, is changed, Carl Brannen, portfolio manager at TCO told Dow Jones, praising the consortium's relationship with the Kazakh government. Brannen said that TCO hasn't been contacted by the Kazakh authorities over the potential contract revisions.

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev warned last month that foreign ventures enjoying special protective status may lose their immunity from changes in tax

legislation. Some of the country's largest projects, including Tengizchevroil, operate under production-sharing agreements (PSAs) negotiated in the 1990's. The agreements, signed when Kazakhstan struggled to lure foreign investors into the country, have provided the companies with stable tax regimes for the duration of the contracts, running as long as 40 years. Tengizchevroil, currently Kazakhstan's largest upstream venture, produced 22.5 million tons of crude oil in 2009 and plans to raise production to 37-38 tons by 2016.

- Kazakh oil fund to reach \$90 billion in 2020

(SRI) - Kazakhstan plans to increase the assets in its sovereign fund to \$90 billion by 2020 from current \$24.4 billion while allocating \$8 billion a year from it on industrial development, President Nursultan Nazarbayev said on Friday. The National Fund, modeled after Norway's Government Petroleum Fund, accumulates excess tax revenues from oil and gas and other extractive industries. It has been created as a means to limit excess money supply as well as a rainy-day fund. Last year, the government had drawn heavily on the fund using it to finance a large chunk of its \$20 billion stimulus package.

"Starting from this year, the [annual] transfer [from the fund] into the budget will be fixed at the absolute amount of \$8 billion. This transfer should first of all be used for industrial development purposes," Nazarbayev said in an annual address to the nation. "National Fund assets should increase to \$90 billion by 2020 which would make up at least 30 percent of gross domestic product."

Nazarbayev also said budget deficit excluding oil revenues must be cut to 3 percent by 2020 from 11 percent seen in 2009 and 10.3 percent forecast this year.

Kazakhstan has benefited from the high oil prices in the last decade, as its economy grew by an average of 10 percent from 2000-2007. Even in 2009, as other former Soviet countries saw their economies shrink by double digits, Kazakhstan recorded a modest growth. Moreover, Kazakhstan has begun to assert itself as a major energy player in its own right and increased its role in the country's oil sector dominated by global majors.

"Thanks to the fund, not only did we implement anti-crisis measures, but we also returned to the state key assets we had had to sell in hard times," Nazarbayev said.

Kazakhstan has increased its stake in the Kashagan project, the country's largest and most high-profile project, in 2008 and has recently sought to buy a stake in the Karachaganak project, the only major development without the participation of the Kazakh national oil company KazMunaiGas.

- Russia remains Kazakhstan's key strategic partner in space exploration, Kazkosmos

Astana, February 2. Interfax-Kazakhstan - Russia remains the main strategic partner of Kazakhstan in space exploration, said the head of the National Space Agency of the Republic (KazKosmos) Talgat Musabayev.

"We are cooperating with many countries with expanded space programs, but Russia will always be our key strategic partner in space," Musabayev told reporters on Tuesday in Astana.

However, Musabayev noted, Kazakhstan's space policy aims at "many-faceted cooperation. "I have not seen a single state that would cooperate exclusively with one state only," he added.

### **Social Front**

- Kazakh papers say libel suit bid to control media

ALMATY, Feb 3 (Reuters) - Two Kazakh newspapers on Wednesday criticised a libel suit brought by President Nursultan Nazarbayev's son-in-law against them, saying it was an attempt to muzzle the country's independent media.

Kazakhstan holds the rotating chairmanship of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) this year but rights groups say the former Soviet Central Asian country is unfit to head an organisation promoting democracy.

Timur Kulibayev, married to Nazarbayev's daughter Dinara and sometimes tipped as his possible successor, sued three local newspapers for defamation after they published a letter from an exiled Kazakh banker last week accusing Kulibayev of corruption.

A Kazakh court has since ordered the seizure of the print runs of the three newspapers and banned them from publishing anything that could damage Kulibayev's reputation.

"I personally see this as an act of political pressure on media outlets the state doesn't like," said Igor Vinyavsky, editor of the opposition newspaper Vzglyad. In a separate statement, Vzglyad and fellow opposition newspaper Respublika said the order amounted to censorship.

"The country that chairs the OSCE has made it taboo to mention the name of the president's son-in-law ... in the independent press," the joint statement said.

"It is now official that censorship has been entrenched in this country." The two newspapers said they had been singled out because they criticised the government.

"We urge OSCE countries and our Western colleagues to demand that Kazakhstan ... stop curbing free speech and interfering in the work of independent media," the joint statement said. The third newspaper involved, Kursiv, did not sign the statement but has also criticised the court for seizing its print run. Public criticism of Nazarbayev, in power for 20 years, and his family is taboo in Kazakhstan. Independent media say they work under pressure from the state and accuse Nazarbayev of trying to silence dissent in the vast oil-rich country. Kazakhstan says it is committed to implementing democratic reforms but will not mimic Western political systems. Kulibayev, 43, is deputy chief executive of state welfare fund Samruk-Kazyna which controls state-run companies in sectors including energy, metals and railways. He has not commented on the case despite repeated efforts to reach him. A Samruk-Kazyna representative contacted on Wednesday declined to comment.

- Kazakhstan under pressure to free rights defender

ALMATY (Reuters) - A private foundation set up by billionaire financier George Soros on Tuesday urged Kazakhstan to free a jailed human rights defender, saying he was imprisoned in "an unfair trial". The ex-Soviet nation is under scrutiny from the West this year after it assumed the 2010 rotating chairmanship of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on promises to bring more democracy.

Yevgeny Zhovtis, a prominent government critic and civil rights lawyer, was jailed for four years over a road accident late last year in a case his supporters said was politically motivated and part of the state campaign to silence dissent. The Open Society Institute urged the Kazakh government to free Zhovtis and open a fresh investigation into the case.

"Zhovtis is one of Kazakhstan's most dedicated human rights lawyers, and we are deeply disturbed that he has been imprisoned after an unfair trial," James A. Goldston, executive director of the Open Society Justice Initiative, said in a statement. "With Kazakhstan chairing the Organisation for Cooperation and Security in Europe this year, it needs to

show that it respects basic standards of law and justice." The government has denied any political motivation behind the case and said the trial had been in line with the law. Humanitarian groups have long accused Kazakhstan of failing to fix its patchy rights record. A vast nation stretching between China, Russia and the Caspian Sea, Kazakhstan has never held an election judged free and fair by Western observers, and President Nursultan Nazarbayev, in power for 20 years, tolerates little opposition to his rule. In hearings held last September, Zhovtis, who chaired Soros Foundation Kazakhstan between 1999 and 2002, was sentenced to four years for fatally hitting a pedestrian on a highway outside the financial capital Almaty. Zhovtis says he could not have prevented the accident. There were no allegations that he was drunk or speeding. Also last year, a court accused the opposition Respublika newspaper of slander and several of its print runs were seized. Another opposition newspaper, Taszhargan, was effectively closed after a court ruling that found it guilty of slander.

### **Kyrgyzstan Political Front**

- Parliamentary committee to consider pre-term dismissal of Social Democratic party members

Profile parliamentary committee will consider pre-term dismissal of Social Democratic party members this Tuesday.

The parliamentary ethics and regulation committee of Kyrgyzstan will hear to the report of the head of the disciplinary committee Boris San, about long absence of Social Democratic party members - Baktybek Beshimov and Kubanychbek Kadyrov.

Former head of the Social Democratic group Baktybek Beshimov, fled the country and now stays in the U.S. with his family and Kubanychbek Kadyrov was announced internationally wanted after the presidential election in Kyrgyzstan in July 2009.

- Kyrgyz Official Fired For Allowing U.S. Photographer's Exhibition

BISHKEK -- President Kurmanbek Bakiyev fired the chief of Kyrgyzstan's Culture Agency today for permitting U.S. photographer Sergei Melnikoff to hold a photo exhibit in Bishkek, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. The opening of "The Kyrgyz Land" photo exhibit by Melnikoff -- who has been critical of Russia -- was scheduled for February 11. Kubanychbek Isabekov, a Kyrgyz legislator from the ruling Ak Jol (Bright Path) party, said in parliament today that Melnikoff's exhibit cannot be held in Kyrgyzstan because he has criticized Russia and called it "the country of slaves." Isabekov said, "Russia is our major strategic partner, how can we allow such a person to hold his exhibits here in this country [after he makes such statements]?" Bakiyev responded by firing Culture Agency head Sultan Raev immediately after the parliament session. Kyrgyz legislator Begaly Nargozuev told RFE/RL that the decision to sack Raev was unusual. He said Melnikoff has been working in Kyrgyzstan for 10 years and has not made his critical comments about Russia while in Kyrgyzstan. "This is about art, it has nothing to do with politics," Nargozuev said. Melnikoff, 54, was born in Russia as the son of a Soviet military officer. He immigrated to the United States in the late 1980s. He told RFE/RL that the parliament "behaved in a very strange way. When it discusses an American artist's exhibition about Kyrgyz nature, it means it is discussing the relations between the United States of America and Kyrgyzstan, not just [relations] between me and Russia."

Melnikoff added that his opinion about Russia is "my own personal business" and that "it sounds a bit strange that the Kyrgyz parliament is discussing relations between Melnikoff and the Russian Federation, doesn't it?"

Melnikoff has been particularly critical of Russian policies in the North Caucasus and the general human rights situation there.

- **Kyrgyz Protesters Defy Ban To Rally For Jailed Politician**

SOPU-KORGON, Kyrgyzstan -- More than 200 protesters rallied today in the southern Kyrgyz village of Sopus-Korgon to demand the release of imprisoned former Defense Minister Ismail Isakov, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Isakov was found guilty of corruption and sentenced to eight years in jail on January 11. He pleaded not guilty and said the case against him is politically motivated because of his opposition activities. Local authorities officially banned today's gathering.

Isakov's sister, Rapiya Isakova, told RFE/RL that the protesters gathered near the house of Isakov's parents. Many protesters came from neighboring villages. The gathering was coordinated by the Committee to Protect Ismail Isakov.

Ten people, including Isakov's 85-year-old mother Anipa Mamatisaeva, have held a three-week hunger strike in protest against Isakov's imprisonment.

### **Geo strategic Front**

- **Kyrgyz Establish Movement In U.S.**

Organizer Ravshan Jeenbekov during a visit to RFE/RL's Washington office in 2008

Kyrgyz nationals in the United States have established a group called the Kyrgyz Movement for Democracy Abroad in Washington, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Thirty members living in New York, Pennsylvania, Florida, California, and Illinois gathered at Washington's city library on January 31 to discuss the new movement's purpose and planned activities. An organizer and former Kyrgyz government minister, Ravshan Jeenbekov, told RFE/RL that the movement's major goal is to promote democracy in Kyrgyzstan.

Ruslan Isakov, whose father, former Kyrgyz Defense Minister Ismail Isakov was sentenced to eight years in jail earlier this month, told RFE/RL that the inaugural meeting adopted an "address to the Kyrgyz nation" to inform countrymen about the movement's creation and its major goals. Jeenbekov claims that more than 1 million Kyrgyz have left the country for political and economic reasons and says all are welcome to join the new movement. The Kyrgyz Movement for Democracy plans to begin a new satellite television channel accessible in Kyrgyzstan.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- **Kyrgyzstan sets gas prices for 2010**

Kyrgyzstan has set gas prices for all categories of consumers, Salamat Aitikeen, director of the Kyrgyz gas monopolist Kyrgyzgas told reporters in Bishkek Friday.

According to the latest regulation by the Kyrgyz Energy Ministry, gas costs for residential subscribers remained unchanged. "In the north of the country users will pay 13.52 soms per 1 cubic meter, while in the south – 12.92 soms," Aitikeev said. Therewith, industrial, state-run and commercial enterprises will pay 14,350 soms 14 tyiyns in the north and 13,845 soms 4 tyiyns in the south.

- **Kyrgyzstan to purchase Turkmen gas**

Kyrgyzstan will purchase gas from Turkmenia in the nearest future, Salamat Aitikeev, Director of Kyrgyzgas Company said Friday at a press conference.

In 2-3 years the republic will get Uzbek and Turkmen gas which will be supplied to China through a new gas pipe line. One more pipeline is laid in Kazakhstan from Caspian gas deposits to Central Asia. "At the time there are no alternatives to Uzbek gas in the republic. Nowadays we can not buy gas in Turkmenia as we have to pay for transit to Uzbekistan and the gas will cost us much more expensive," the director said.

- Kyrgyzstan to attend EXPO-2010 in Shanghai

Kyrgyzstan will take part in the World EXPO-2010 exposition to run in Shanghai (China) for the fifth time, the Kyrgyz Chamber of Commerce reported.

The exhibition is expected to open since May 1 and last for half a year, attracting participants from 240 countries and up to 70 million viewers. The theme of Expo 2010 is "Better City, Better Life," representing the common wish of the whole humankind for a better living in future urban environments. This theme represents a central concern of the international community for future policy making, urban strategies and sustainable development.

Kyrgyzstan is going to represent its independent exposition.

World Expositions are galleries of human inspirations and thoughts. Since 1851 when the Great Exhibition of Industries of All Nations was held in London, the World Expositions have attained increasing prominence as grand events for economic, scientific, technological and cultural exchanges, serving as an important platform for displaying historical experience, exchanging innovative ideas, demonstrating esprit de corps and looking to the future.

- IMF grants Kyrgyzstan \$337.5M for 17 years of cooperation

The International Monetary Fund granted Kyrgyzstan \$337.5 million for 17 years of cooperation, parliamentary press service reported the results of the Parliament Speaker Zainidin Kurmanov's meeting with Nadeem Ilahi, Chief of the International Monetary Fund's Middle East and Central Asia Department. The speaker outlined necessity of an effective cooperation in the post-crisis period. "In course of the meeting, Kurmanov suggested discussion of restructuring and possible remission of Kyrgyzstan's debts to IMF," the press service added. At the time the fund is reportedly working with the Kyrgyz government on short-term, medium-term and long-term country development programs. The sides have discussed maintenance of the republican energy sector and socially vulnerable population amid utility hikes.

### **Social Front**

- Infectious, parasitic diseases on rise in Kyrgyzstan in 2009

Increase in infectious and parasitic diseases rate was registered in Kyrgyzstan in 2009, National Statistics Committee said.

Pertussis incidence grew 4.8 times, tuberculosis – by 5.2 percent, syphilis - by 7.2 percent while viral hepatitis rate increased by 6.7 percent for the period.

Therewith, malaria and bacterial meningitis rate reduced three and 1.6 times respectively in the republic, the committee reported.

### **Tajikistan**

#### **Political Front**

- Enlarged meeting of Tajik cabinet opens today

DUSHANBE, January 29, 2010, Asia-Plus -- An enlarged meeting of the Tajik Cabinet to review the results of the past year's work has opened in Dushanbe today.

Heads of all ministries and organizations will make reports on the results of work carried out in 2009. Local experts say that usually, the president introduces staff changes at such meetings and today's enlarged meeting of the Cabinet will not be exception to this tradition, especially as the parliamentary election will be held next month and a number of members of the government have been nominated to run for election to the parliament. According to information received from the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CCER), three members of the Government – Minister of Labor and Social Protection Shukurjon Zuhurov, Minister of Land Reclamation and Water Resources Said Yoqubzod and Chairman of the State Committee for Statistics Mirgand Shabozov – have been nominated to run for election to the Majlisi Namoyandagon (Tajikistan's lower chamber of parliament).

Besides, current head of President's Executive Office, Amirsho Miraliyev, tops a list candidates of ruling People's Democratic Party (PDPT) that will be elected to the Majlisi Namoyandagon through a proportional, party list system.

Under the country's legislation, all these persons should be relieved of their posts.

- President dissatisfied with activities of supreme court and prosecutor-general's office

DUSHANBE, January 29, 2010, Asia-Plus -- President Emomali Rahmon expressed dissatisfaction with activities of the Supreme Court and the Prosecutor-General's Office In providing legality in the country, especially in determining tasks of the law enforcement agencies on preventing illegal allotment of lands, according to presidential press service.

President's criticism came during an address to an enlarged meeting of the government reviewing the results of the past year's work that is going on in Dushanbe today.

Reporting on the results of work carried out by the Agency for State financial Control and Combating Corruption in 2009, the anticorruption chief Fattoh Saidov noted that the agency conducted 1.155 inspections last year and according to findings by the agency, corruption cost Tajikistan at 70.5 million somoni in 2009.

Chairman of the State Committee for Investments and State-owned Property (GosKomInvest) Davlatali Saidov, Minister of Economy and Industries Gul Sherali, Barqi Tojik (Tajik electricity supplier) Chairman Abdullo Yorov and Tojiktransgaz (Tajik state natural-gas distributor) Saidmamad Sharofiddinov also reported on the results of work carried out by their institutions in 2009. The Barqi Tojik deputy chairmen Nourmahmad Kholnazarov, Sharif Isoyev and Safarali Sadulloev were sacked for serious shortcomings in their work.

It was noted that nationwide shift to energy-saving light bulbs allowed the country saving 875 million kWh of electrical power.

The head of state ordered to increase the supply of daily electricity to residential customers in Khatlon to 10 hours and residential customers in Sughd to 11 hours. It was also noted that residential customers in districts subordinate to the center (RRPs) have already had electricity 10 hours per day.

- Supreme Court judges file lawsuits against three Tajik newspapers

DUSHANBE, January 30, 2010, Asia-Plus – Three judges from the Tajik Supreme Court and a Dushanbe court filed lawsuits against three independent newspapers today, Radio Liberty' Tajik Service reported on January 29.

The judges said three weeklies: "Ozodagon," "Farazh," and "Asia-Plus" printed quotations in their most recent editions from a press conference in which a lawyer accused the judges of issuing unfair punishments. Two weeks ago, lawyer Solehjon Juraev invited journalists to a press conference at which he said Judges Fakhriddin Dodomotov, Nur Nurov, and Ulughbek Mamadshoev had sentenced a group of 33 businessmen from the northern city of Isfara to long prison sentences despite weak evidence of their crimes.

The judges said on January 29 that the newspapers did not ask them to comment and printed biased statements that have no basis. They asked for 5.5 million somoni (\$1.26 million) as compensation for the moral damage caused by the comments in the articles.

Judge Mamadshoev told RFE/RL that he filed the lawsuit as a private citizen because he thinks the newspapers ignored the media law.

Zafar Sufi, the chief editor of "Ozodagon," said the press conference was, of course, one-sided but the newspapers are prepared to also print responses from the judges.

The latest court cases against the newspapers follow two others against independent publications in the last week. Some analysts say the pressure being applied to the media is related to the February 28 parliamentary elections.

- Ruling party hopes to win more than 80 percent of votes in Khatlon

QURGHON TEPPA, February 4, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Pre-election race is progressing in Khatlon province as the People's Democratic Party (PDPT) has joined the Islamic Revival Party (IRPT) in agitation campaign in the area.

Eshonbouri Esanqulov, head of the executive committee of the PDPT organization for Khatlon, told Asia-plus today that registered candidates from their party have begun to hold meetings with voters. "We have prepared the schedule of meetings with voters and our candidates are meeting with their voters in accordance with this schedule," Esanqulov said, noting according to their preliminary estimates, the PDPT is expected to win more than 80 percent of votes in the province.

"Except PDPT and IRPT, other political parties do not have their primary organizations, and therefore, the main struggle for seats in parliament will be between the PDPT and IRPT," said the head of the PDPT organization in Khatlon, "But the Islamic Revival Party does not have so many members in Khatlon; that is why we are sure that we will win more than 80 percent of votes here."

In the meantime, the IRPT leader Muhiddin Kabiri also stressed in an interview with Asia-Plus on January 31 that his party will struggle seriously for votes in Khatlon.

### **Geo strategic Front**

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

- IMF revises up global forecast to near 4% for 2010

DUSHANBE, February 2, 2010, Asia-Plus -- The global economy, battered by two years of crisis, is recovering faster than previously anticipated, with world growth bouncing back from negative territory in 2009 to a forecast 3.9 percent this year and 4.3 percent in 2011, the International Monetary Fund said in its latest forecast.

But the recovery is proceeding at different speeds around the world, with emerging markets, led by Asia relatively vigorous, but advanced economies remaining sluggish and still dependent on government stimulus measures, the IMF said in an update to its World Economic Outlook (WEO), published on January 26.

The IMF said it had revised upwards its earlier forecast for global growth by  $\frac{3}{4}$  percentage point from the October 2009 forecast.

Along with the update to its forecast, the IMF also released a new assessment of global financial conditions in its Global Financial Stability Report (GFSR). It said that financial markets have rebounded since the lows of last March, the result of improving economic conditions and wide-ranging policy actions by governments.

The WEO forecast said that in advanced economies, the beginning of a rebuilding of corporate inventories and the unexpected strength of U.S. consumption had contributed to a rebound in confidence, and inflation was expected to remain contained. But high unemployment rates, rising public debt, and, in some countries, weak household balance sheets present further challenges to the recovery.

The IMF report said that the varying pace of recovery across countries called for a differentiated response in the unwinding of measures used to stimulate the economy and combat the crisis.

Due to the still-fragile nature of the recovery, fiscal policies need to remain supportive of economic activity in the near term, and the fiscal stimulus planned for 2010 should be implemented fully. However, given growing concerns about fiscal sustainability, countries should also make progress in devising and communicating exit strategies.

Crucially, there remains a pressing need to continue repairing the financial sector in advanced and hardest-hit emerging economies. In these cases, policies are still needed to tackle bank's impaired assets and restructuring. Unwinding the financial sector support measures gradual; it can be facilitated by incentives that make measures less attractive as conditions improve.

Policymakers will also need to move boldly to reform the financial sector with the objectives of reducing the risks of future instability and rethinking how the potential fallout of financial crises would be borne in the future, while at the same time making the sector more effective and resilient.

At the same time, some emerging market countries will have to design policies to manage a surge of capital inflows. Macro-prudential policies can be used to address the potential for bubbles at an early stage by limiting a buildup in risks.

- The government of Japan supports clean energy project in Tajikistan

DUSHANBE, February 4, Asia-Plus -- Mr. Yoshihiro Nakayama, Chargé d'Affaires of the Embassy of Japan in Dushanbe, Mr. Hamrokhon Zarifi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan, today exchanged Notes concerning the Project for Introduction of Clean Energy by Solar Electricity Generation System in the framework of Japan's Program Grant Aid for Environment and Climate Change, press release issued by the Japanese Embassy in Dushanbe said.

The Japan's Program Grant Aid for Environment and Climate Change is a component of the "Cool Earth Partnership" mechanism. In 2008 the Government of Japan announced this new financial mechanism as another form of assisting the developing countries in their efforts to achieve economic prosperity through enhancing energy efficiency, utilizing clean energy and thus contributing to the reduction of greenhouse gases emissions. Moreover the mechanism will target developing countries that are potentially vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change and initiate measures in mitigating and adapting to climate change.

As a result of substantial feasibility surveys conducted by the Japanese side and consultations held with the concerned authorities of Tajikistan, the Government of Japan made a decision to allocate up to ¥450 million (about USD 5 million) for the execution of the Project for Introduction of Clean Energy by Solar Electricity Generation System. The Project, which will last for less than one year, envisages the supply and installation of photovoltaic system at the National Medical Center of the Ministry of Health of Tajikistan (with the capacity of 110 kW) and at the Research Institute of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Perinatology (with the capacity of 30 kW), which are considered as one of the main healthcare facilities not only in Dushanbe, but on the country level as well. The solar panels to be installed will supply the mentioned facilities with reliable and environmentally friendly energy source to prevent electricity disruptions, reduce electricity costs and facilitate overall utilization of renewable energy sources in Tajikistan.

### **Social Front**

- 72 of 81 religious organizations functioning in Tajikistan able to reregister

DUSHANBE, January 29, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Of 81 religious groups and organizations functioning in Tajikistan, 71 have been able to reregister by January 1, 2010, Asia-Plus has learned at the Department for Religious Affairs (DRA) at the Ministry of Culture (MoC).

We will recall that under the new law on religions adopted in March 2009, all religious groups and organizations should be reregistered with a MoC by January 1, 2010.

“All religious organizations that filed their properly prepared documents in time were reregistered with the ministry,” the source said, noting that nine other religious groups were not reregistered because they failed to submit documents for re-registration by January 1, 2010.

In the meantime, Radio Liberty’s Tajik Service reported on January 27 that the Jewish congregation in Dushanbe, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormon church), several Baptist churches, and the International Preaching House failed to file papers by January 1 and have been declared.

RFE/RL’s Tajik Service says that according to official statistics, there were 247 grand mosques and 2,969 daily-prayer mosques registered in Tajikistan by January 1.

- IWRP organizes workshop for Tajik journalists on coverage of human rights issues

DUSHANBE, January 29, 2010, Asia-Plus -- A two-day workshop for Tajik journalists, entitled “Journalists for Human Rights,” has opened at Tajik Journalists’ Union in Dushanbe today. The workshop is part of the project, Protection and Human Rights Education through Media in Central Asia, which is implemented by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) under the financial support of European Union.

According to the IWPR Dushanbe Office, Yuri Gusakov, director of the Karaganda branch of Kazakhstan’s Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, has been invited to conduct the training. “The main objective of the training is in making Tajik journalists aware of principles of human rights and human rights activity for further coverage of this subject in the press,” the source said.

### **Turkmenistan Political Front**

## **Geo strategic Front**

- Presidents of Turkmenistan and France to identify new areas of cooperation

"The forthcoming Turkmen-French negotiations in Paris will give a new powerful impetus to the inter-state relations in political, economic and cultural spheres that are growing stronger year by year," Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said receiving yesterday Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the French Republic to Turkmenistan Pierre Lebovich.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat quoting the press service of the head of state, the President of Turkmenistan and the French diplomat noted with satisfaction the existing mutual interest in expanding the fruitful partnership in several key areas, including in the format of Turkmenistans dialogue with EU member countries. "France is looking forward to your visit, which is associated with great hopes for the further successful development of productive cooperation between the two countries," Pierre Lebovich said. The diplomat expressed confidence that in the near future the French business community will considerably expand its presence in the promising Turkmen market through participation in new joint projects.

- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Nicolas Sarkozy meet in Paris

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and President of the French Republic Nicolas Sarkozy met at the Elysee Palace on 1 February. The meeting was attended by the governmental delegations of the two countries. During the meeting, the presidents of both countries reaffirmed their intention to strengthen bilateral cooperation, particularly in the economic field.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports quoting the press service of the head of state, the sides singled out the fuel and energy sector, transport, communications, agriculture and several other major industries as priorities of business partnership. Particular emphasis was made on the interaction in the field of urban development. According to the sides, there are also great prospects for cooperation in the electric power and chemical industries.

As Nicolas Sarkozy noted, France, as elsewhere in the world, is closely following and warmly welcoming innovative reforms initiated by Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, the successful implementation of which enables the country to maintain high economic growth despite the global crisis, making Turkmenistan more attractive for foreign partners. During the negotiations, the sides noted the need to establish an Intergovernmental Commission on economic cooperation for development of interaction in a systematic manner.

Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov invited Nicolas Sarkozy to visit Turkmenistan at any convenient time. The Turkmen leader's offer was accepted with gratitude. The timing of the visit will be specified through diplomatic channels.

During the visit, the president of Turkmenistan received French Minister of Economy, Industry and Employment Christine Lagarde in the residence assigned to him. Today, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov is expected to meet with government officials and leaders of the French Senate, as well as the Director General of UNESCO. Moreover, a joint business forum will be held in Paris. Leaders of prominent French companies were invited to participate in the forum.

## **Economic/Energy Front**

- Kyrgyzstan to purchase Turkmen gas

Kyrgyzstan will purchase gas from Turkmenia in the nearest future, Salamat Aitikeev, Director of Kyrgyzgas Company said Friday at a press conference.

In 2-3 years the republic will get Uzbek and Turkmen gas which will be supplied to China through a new gas pipe line. One more pipeline is laid in Kazakhstan from Caspian gas deposits to Central Asia. "At the time there are no alternatives to Uzbek gas in the republic. Nowadays we can not buy gas in Turkmenia as we have to pay for transit to Uzbekistan and the gas will cost us much more expensive," the director said.

- Turkmen natural gas brings heat to Urumqi and Beijing

According Xinhua news agency with reference to the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), the transit of natural gas to Tszinbyan compressor station "towards Beijing and adjacent areas" began in the third week of January.

This event marked the commissioning of the western section of the "West-East" pipeline that was connected with the Turkmenistan-China transnational gas pipeline, via which gas is being supplied from Samandepi field in Turkmenistan through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, the agency said.

According to estimates of experts, the gas flow will help mitigate the situation in Beijing, which faces gas shortage because of the huge increase in consumption of gas in conditions of extremely cold winter. Thus, in the winter season gas volumes supplied to the domestic market will increase by about 1 billion cubic meters.

Turkmen gas has already reached Urumqi (the administrative center of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region), which became the first consumer of gas in China. With the commissioning of the western part of the second "West-East" pipeline, which was launched on 31 December 2009, the problem of gas shortage in the city has been completely removed.

It is expected that the construction of 8653-kilometer pipeline, which originates in Khorgos (Xinjiang) and will run to Shanghai, Guangzhou and Hong Kong, will be completed by the end of 2011. According to CNPC, "owing to the stable situation with the production at the Turkmen field, the Khorgos station "receives about 6.6 million cubic meters of gas daily."

It should be recalled that the new gas pipeline "Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan-China" was launched in mid-December last year at a ceremony attended by President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and the leaders of China, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

- Investment forum of Turkmenistan opens in Abu Dhabi

The International Investment Forum of Turkmenistan and exhibition of goods produced in Turkmenistan opened in the capital of the United Arab Emirates. The forum was organized by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Turkmenistan in collaboration with line ministries and departments, and IIR Xolding LTD (UAE).

According to official reports, the chief goal of the first investment forum of Turkmenistan abroad is attracting investments and increasing export potential of its economic sectors such as oil and gas, energy, textile, transportation and telecommunications, construction, agriculture and water management.

The forum will bring together over 270 foreign participants, who represent big investment companies, major industrial corporations from the United Arab Emirates, UK,

Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Italy, Japan, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Latvia, Australia and other countries.

The Turkmen delegation includes members of the government, heads of ministries and departments, large enterprises, administrations of the city of Ashgabat and provinces, representatives of the private sector of Turkmenistan.

### **Social Front**

- Ministry of Culture and Broadcasting of Turkmenistan looking for talents

The Ministry of Culture and Broadcasting of Turkmenistan has announced a creative contest titled "Moments" and invited photographers and cameramen - both professionals and amateurs to participate in the contest.

General terms and conditions of the contest were published in Neutral Turkmenistan newspaper. The theme of the contest is broad. It includes topics such as economics, social life, culture and art, modern architecture of Turkmenistan, the Turkmen capital, national traditions and customs, nature and others.

According to the announcement, special requirements will apply to quality and artistic level of works, their originality and imagery. There will be also assessed individual creativity of participants, for which there are no limits in terms of age or the number of submitted works. Applicants may submit their own color or black and white photographs, a series of photographs, collages, short videos of various genres.

The contest will last until April 15. The winners will get cash prizes, others - incentive bonuses. In addition, some of the best young writers, who distinguished themselves in the contest, will be eligible to study at universities abroad.

- Turkmenistan forecasts warm and dry February

Turkmenistan's meteorologists forecast warm February with average monthly temperature ranging from +2 to +7 degrees (from -3 to +2 degrees in Dashoguz province). Turkmenistan expects rainfalls at less than normal level, and the average number of days with snow will not exceed 5 days in most areas of Turkmenistan.

In Ashgabat, in the first ten days of February, daily temperature will range from +3 ... +5 to +13 ... +15 degrees, and in the second and third decade of February it will range from +4 ... +6 to +17 ... +19 ° degrees. Weather instability is determined by the South Caspian cyclones.

As "Neutral Turkmenistan" newspaper wrote today, warm weather already caused the appearance of primroses - white crocuses, and wild cherry blossoming in Kopetdag mountains, while buds of deciduous trees have swelled in the capital.

It is reported that maximum temperatures recorded in Turkmenistan in different years in February range from +28 to +33 degrees, and minimum temperatures - from -27 to -17 degrees.

### **Uzbekistan**

#### **Political Front**

#### **Geo strategic Front**

- President of Uzbekistan to visit South Korea

President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov will pay a state visit to the Republic of Korea on 10-12 February on the invitation of the President of this country Lee Myung-Bak.

During the visit, issues of expansion and deepening of Uzbek-South Korean cooperation, as well as important regional and international problems will be considered.

The sides are expected to sign a number of bilateral documents, aimed at deepening cooperation of the two countries in various areas.

- Uzbekistan urged the government of Tajikistan to run independent examination of the Rogun project

Shavkat Mirziyev, the Prime-Minister of Uzbekistan, urged his Tajik colleague Akil Akilov to run independent examination of the Rogun hydropower plant, Pravda Vostoka, the official Uzbek newspaper, reports.

Reminding that several times the government of Uzbekistan addressed the authorities of Tajikistan, Russia and international organizations, Mirziyev underlined that principled position of Uzbek side on this issue is reasoned by the fact that the Rogun hydropower plant project was developed almost 40 years ago, based on outdated project, construction and technological decisions.

300-meter high dam of the Rogun hydropower plant will be erected here. Photo of Tajeconomy.Wordpress.com

Uzbek Prime-Minister believes that prior to examining the possible consequences of building such enormous object the following things need to be carefully considered: "- the damage that can be caused by such project may hurt weak environmental balance in the region, also considering Aral Sea disaster; - this project may affect the volumes and content of Amu Daria since the survival of millions of people in this region with sharply continental desert climate directly depends on the availability of fresh and irrigation water, particularly in the period of systematic shortage of water;- the safety level of this project from anthropogenic threats and, first of all, earthquakes (the expected place of Rogun construction is located in higher seismicity zone at the joint fissure line. Several 10-point earthquakes took place here). The possible scale of the humanitarian disaster that can be reasoned by the break of dam and lead to hundred thousand people is scary.

Mirziyev said that "the threat is that such hydropower plants as Toktogul and Nurek, built over 35 years ago, have not been properly repaired in the last 20 years; the accidents, causing real threat to entire region, are becoming more frequent". He also reminded about recent accident at Sayano-Shushen hydropower plant (Russia).

"The legality of Uzbekistan's position on this issue was totally supported by such influential international and financial institutions as the United Nations Organization, the European Union, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Islamic Development Bank, Russian Federation and its public associations, and other countries", the Uzbek Prime-Minister says. – "However, our repeated appeals were totally ignored by the government of the Republic of Tajikistan that forces the accelerated construction of this project, disregarding possible consequences and appropriate project and technical analysis. At the same time, the number of Russian design and construction companies work for this project; obviously, they are not really interested in the possible negative outcomes of this project".

Shavkat Mirziyev urged Tajikistan to run independent examination under the guidance of UN and its authorized structures that can independently evaluate both the validity of the project and all possible consequences, including the issues of environmental and water balance, anthropogenic disaster threats. According to Uzbek Prime-Minister, Tajikistan

should continue the design and construction of the Rogun hydropower plant only after producing positive results in the research area.

"In case the positions of the Republic of Uzbekistan are ignored we have the right to address international community and world environmental organizations in order to prevent possible catastrophic outcomes of this project implementation", Uzbek Prime-Minister underlined.

The Rogun hydropower plant is the Soviet long term project the completion of which was initiated in September of 2007. According to the project, 6-aggregate Rogun hydropower plant has 335-meter high dam, capable to produce 3.6 million kilowatt-hours of electricity. This will allow the republic to overcome energy crisis and reach new level of economic achievements. The first two aggregates must be finished no later than in the beginning of 2012. The republic needs 6 billion somoni (\$1=4.4 somoni) in order to finish the construction of the Rogun hydropower plant.

By the decision of the government of Tajikistan, entire population is involved in the construction of the strategic object: since January 6 the Rogun stocks have been publicly offered. Overall, the state issued 5 million shares and certificates for total sum of 6 billion somoni (about \$1.3 billion). According to the Finance Ministry, national IPO already collected over 150 million US dollars.

### **Economic/Energy Front**

- Cabinet sums up results of development of Uzbekistan in 2009

The Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan held a session on 29 January to consider the results of the socioeconomic development of the country in 2009 and the main priorities for 2010.

President Islam Karimov participated in the session. In his speech, the head of the state said that thanks to correct development and modernization strategy, and mobilization of efforts for implementation of 2009-2012 Anti-Crisis Program, the country managed not only to withstand the challenges of the global crisis, but ensure stable economic and social growth.

Macroeconomic stability and stable economic growth rates are a proof of the correctness of the economic course chosen by Uzbekistan and acknowledged as the Uzbek model of economic reforms, the President noted.

Last year, the GDP of Uzbekistan increased by 8.1%, industrial production by 9%, agricultural production by 5.7%, retail trade turnover by 16.6% and paid services by 12.9%. The state budget was implemented with a surplus without cuts in budget spending, while the inflation level did not exceed the forecast and comprised 7.4%, the head of the state said.

The measures to strengthen the banking and financial sector have allowed to increase the cumulative capital of the banks two times in the past two years, while the share of bank credits used for investment purposes has reached 70%.

The country has implemented a complex of measures to ensure financial stability of the enterprises of the real sector, mainly through modernization of production, reduction of the products' cost price, expansion of cooperative ties among local companies and stimulating internal demand. The volume of localized production increased 2.3 times last year, with launch of more than 120 new types of products.

Thanks to support and stimulation of the local exporting enterprises in the conditions of unfavorable conjuncture at world markets, export volumes increased by 2.4% last year.

Uzbekistan has pursued the policy of structural transformation and diversification of the economy, modernization and technical renewal of production, and attraction of investments, mainly foreign ones. New production capacities were launched last year in the automobile building, construction materials, chemical, food, light, pharmaceutical and other industries. Car and railway transport systems and communications have also seen extensive development. The anti-crisis measures taken in 2009 have allowed creating more than 940,000 new workplaces, including over 500,000 in the rural areas.

In his speech, the President also drew attention to the existing unsolved problems and touched upon the most important tasks in the country's socioeconomic development in 2010. The head of the state entrusted the heads of the state and economic management bodies, as well as local authorities, to take required measures to continue and deepen reforms in the economy, implementation of strategic investment projects and strengthening the banking and financial system.

Islam Karimov also highlighted the importance of the implementation of all measures included in the 2010 State Program "Year of harmoniously developed generation", speeding up construction of rural housing and infrastructure, increasing employment and people's incomes.

#### **Social Front**

- Europe watchdog slams Uzbekistan media crackdown

ALMATY, Feb 2 (Reuters) - Europe's main democracy and security watchdog sharply criticised Uzbekistan on Tuesday for jailing and harassing journalists, saying there has been no real improvement in its media freedom. The former Soviet state has intensified its campaign against independent media over many years, driving international media out of the country and putting pressure on local reporters.

The media freedom arm of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) said it was "deeply concerned by the continuing harassment of journalists in Uzbekistan".

In early January, a group of Uzbek reporters -- most of whom have in the past contributed to international media outlets -- were summoned to the prosecutors office and interrogated on their activities, the reporters involved said.

Although no formal accusations were made, the event sent alarm bells through a handful of independent reporters left in the country, most of them journalists with Web-based media. "In spite of the constructive dialogue that has been developing between my Office and the Uzbek authorities, there has been no improvement in Uzbekistan's press freedom situation," OSCE media freedom representative Miklos Haraszti said in a letter to the Uzbek foreign ministry.

"As recent developments show, arrests of journalists and other forms of harassment are still taking place in violation of OSCE media freedom commitments."

A strategic Central Asian nation bordering Afghanistan, Uzbekistan drew international condemnation in 2005 when state troops opened fire on protesters in the town of Andizhan. Witnesses and reporters said hundreds of people were killed. The government has since accused Western media of playing a role in organising the anti-government revolt in Andizhan. Most international media are now unable to report from the mainly

Muslim nation since their press accreditations were revoked in the crackdown following the 2005 Andizhan protests. Reuters covers Uzbekistan from neighbouring Kazakhstan. Uzbekistan's foreign ministry could not be reached for comment despite numerous Reuters attempts to reach its spokesman by telephone from Kazakhstan. Rights groups say there are thousands of political prisoners in Uzbekistan including journalists. Uzbek photojournalist Umida Akhmedova was accused by the authorities last month of slander and faces up to three years in jail for a series of photos depicting daily life in Uzbekistan, according to rights groups and her supporters. "We are outraged by this new wave of harassment against the few remaining independent journalists in Uzbekistan," the Committee to Protect Journalists said last month.

"This blatant intimidation campaign must end," it said. (Editing by Louise Ireland)

- Uzbekistan: Islam Karimov criticized media for "toothless" approach

On January 27 giving a speech at the joint session of Legislative house and Senate Oliy Mazhlis (lower and upper houses of the parliament), the President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov commented on local mass media.

According to Uzbek leader, the local media remain "toothless". Karimov believes that today's conditions have set the task to strengthen the role of mass media in the system of civil society institutions. Further liberalization of mass media, active involvement of non-government press, radio, television, and their expansion in Internet must ensure publicity and openness of reforms, conducted in the republic, as well as facilitate the gradual emergence of stronger civil society, Karimov supposes.

"It is necessary to create additional conditions for better coverage of both foreign and domestic policy by mass media, considering the pluralism of opinions on the events in the country and outside. Special attention should be paid to the launch of legal mechanisms, targeted at further development of media technical base, financial and ethical stimulating of employees. Competitive compensation of labor, financial and ethical incentives assume higher independence, freedom of editorial office among newspapers and magazines and their responsibility", Uzbek President said.

It has to be mentioned that the words of Uzbek leader sound more than strange, away from reality and even hypocritically. In the last years nearly all independent mass media in the republic have been shut down; despite legislative liquidation of censorship, officially "authorized" press, radio and television energetically advertise "the national achievements under the leadership of wise President". Dozens of journalists, which cooperated with foreign mass media earlier, had to leave the country while the rest of them, staying home, are being suppressed by the government.

Overall, it is the government that knowingly prevents "gradual emergence of strong civil society" and "higher freedom for newspapers and magazines".

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