

Business & Politics in the Muslim World
News Monitoring
Feb 19 to Feb 26,2010
Weekly Report
Central Asia
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Azerbaijan	
Political Front.....	4
Geo strategic Front.....	4
Economic/Energy Front.....	4
Social Front.....	5
Kazakhstan	
Political Front.....	5
Geo strategic Front.....	5
Economic/Energy Front.....	6
Social Front.....	6
Kyrgyzstan	
Political Front.....	6
Geo strategic Front.....	7
Economic/Energy Front.....	7
Social Front.....	7
Tajikistan	
Political Front.....	7
Geo strategic Front.....	8
Economic/Energy Front.....	8
Social Front.....	8
Turkmenistan	
Political Front.....	9
Geo strategic Front.....	9
Economic/Energy Front.....	9
Social Front.....	10
Uzbekistan	
Political Front.....	10
Geo strategic Front.....	10
Economic/Energy Front.....	10
Social Front.....	10

Out Line

Azerbaijan

Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- EU Envoy, In Baku, Says Media Freedom High On Agenda
- U.S official: U.S. desires to build strong relations with Azerbaijan remains unchanged
- Nagorno-Karabakh Forces 'Committed' To Cease-Fire

- Azerbaijan, Turkey to hold high-level military dialogue
- U.S. Undersecretary of State: U.S. and Russia not to have "Great Game" for energy resources - UPDATE

Economic/Energy Front

- Azerbaijan increases fruit and vegetable exports
- U.S. official: U.S. deeply interested in Nabucco project
- Azerbaijani oil products to be sold in Ukrainian market
- 17th International Caspian Oil & Gas Conference to discuss environmental issues in the Caspian basin
- Iran stands ready to buy 10bn cu.m. gas from Azerbaijan

Social Front

- Azerbaijan to consider joining Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution damage
- Baku hosts Health Days of Israel

Kazakhstan

Political Front

- Kazakhstan jails former Deputy Minister of Defense

Geo strategic Front

- Defendants In Kazakh-Israeli Military Hardware Case Sentenced
- Kazakhs Allow Trucks Into Kyrgyzstan After Weeks Of Delay
- Holbrooke Heads To Georgia After Ending Central Asia Tour
- Russia, Kazakhstan vow to improve OSCE's effectiveness
- Angela Merkel wants to visit Kazakhstan
- Kazakh Foreign Minister and China's leadership to discuss cooperation perspectives

Economic/Energy Front

- Tengizchevroil halts exports via BTC pipeline - energy minister
- KazMunaiGas net profit to decline in 2010 - executive
- Japanese investors in talks to build nuclear power plant in eastern Kazakhstan - governor

Social Front

- Kazakh Journalists Urge End To Newspaper's Harassment

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- Kyrgyz Opposition Parties Call For Ex-Minister's Release
- Jailed Former Kyrgyz Defense Minister To Appeal To Higher Court
- Kyrgyz Military Court Upholds Verdict For Former Defense Minister

Geo strategic Front

- Kyrgyzstan Confirms Iran Intercepted Plane, Arrested Two Passengers
- Moscow Chills Relations With Kyrgyzstan

Economic/Energy Front

- Kyrgyz Protest Electricity Price Hike

Social Front

- Kyrgyz Police Get Suspended Sentences In Journalist's Death

Tajikistan

Political Front

- 36 polling stations set up in foreign countries to allow Tajik citizens residing abroad to vote
- Five persons withdraw their candidacies from parliamentary elections
- Election observers from China arrive in Dushanbe
- Majlisi Namoyandagon board considers agenda of last session of outgoing parliament

Geo strategic Front

- Holbrooke Says Tajikistan Important For Outcome In Afghanistan
- U.S. special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan visits Tajikistan
- Tajikistan can play important role in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan, says U.S. Af-Pak envoy
- Emomali Rahmon, Abdullah Gul discuss prospects of Tajik-Turkish cooperation

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

- Court Begins Hearing Lawsuit Against Tajik Weeklies
- Tajik Pop Star Jailed For Helping Fiance Flee Court
- Russia's FMS office in Tajikistan hosts briefing on migration process today
- Dashoguz to host festival of Turkmen-Uzbek friendship

Turkmenistan

Political Front

- Turkmenistan Leader Says Open To Opposition Party
- New minister of trade and foreign economic relations appointed

Geo strategic Front

- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov invited to visit Qatar
- Central Asian and Caspian countries discuss preparations for International Conference on Disarmament

Economic/Energy Front

- Foreign experts suggest options for use of Turkmen sun and wind energy
- President of Turkmenistan receives senior management of U.S. company SouthOil
- Turkmenistan finds new oil deposit with flow rate of 300 tons per day
- International conference on alternative energy sources begins in Ashgabat

Social Front

Uzbekistan

Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- U.S. envoy: no plans to reopen Uzbek Afghan air base
- President of Uzbekistan meets with US Special Representative

Economic/Energy Front

- Korean cash to flow into Uzbekistan

Social Front

- Uzbek Officials Telling Villagers About Daily Food Rations
- Three Uzbeks Sentenced For Murder Of Theater Director
- Dashoguz to host festival of Turkmen-Uzbek friendship
- Uzbekistan: The number of suicides is growing among women of the Khoresm Oblast

Summery

Azerbaijan

Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- EU Envoy, In Baku, Says Media Freedom High On Agenda

BAKU -- The EU's special representative for the South Caucasus has told RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service that media freedom issues are high on his agenda as he begins a visit to Baku.

- U.S official: U.S. desires to build strong relations with Azerbaijan remains unchanged

The U.S continues to advocate the strengthening of relations with Azerbaijan, "U.S. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns said.

- Nagorno-Karabakh Forces 'Committed' To Cease-Fire

YEREVAN -- Military officials in Nagorno-Karabakh have denied violating a cease-fire following a report of casualties by Azerbaijan on February 18, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports.

- Azerbaijan, Turkey to hold high-level military dialogue

Azerbaijan and Turkey will hold high-level military dialogue in Ankara on Feb. 22, Azerbaijani Defense Ministry said. The prospects of cooperation between Azerbaijani and Turkish Armed Forces will be discussed during the three-day meeting.

- U.S. Undersecretary of State: U.S. and Russia not to have "Great Game" for energy resources - UPDATE

"The U.S. does not believe that is maturing "great game" between America and Russia for energy resources of the Central Asian countries. It is our firm belief that we can gain more by working together than against one another," U.S. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns said speaking at the Azerbaijani Diplomatic Academy.

The U.S. Embassy in Azerbaijan spread his speech.

Economic/Energy Front

- Azerbaijan increases fruit and vegetable exports

The State Customs Committee of Azerbaijan (SCC) says that this January country's export of vegetables and fruits rose by 5.99 percent compared to January 2009.

- U.S. official: U.S. deeply interested in Nabucco project

The U.S. is very interested in the Nabucco pipeline project, told TREND's Washington correspondent Neil Brown, Special Advisor to US Senator Richard G. Lugar.

- Azerbaijani oil products to be sold in Ukrainian market

By the end of March SOCAR (State Oil Company of Azerbaijan) will start to sell oil products in gas stations with SOCAR brand in Ukraine, SOCAR President said Rovnag Abdullayev said.

- 17th International Caspian Oil & Gas Conference to discuss environmental issues in the Caspian basin

This year, for the first time, the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan will support Caspian Oil and Gas, the 17th International Caspian Oil & Gas Conference Incorporating Refining & Petrochemicals. 2010 has been declared the Year of the Environment in Azerbaijan.

- Iran stands ready to buy 10bn cu.m. gas from Azerbaijan

Iran stands ready to buy from Azerbaijan up to 10 billion cubic meters of gas, the Iranian ambassador to Azerbaijan Mohammad Bagher Bahrami said in Baku on Feb. 25.

Social Front

- Azerbaijan to consider joining Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution damage

Azerbaijan's parliament is set to consider the country's joining the International Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage.

- Baku hosts Health Days of Israel

Health Days of Israel are underway in Baku.

Famous Baku-born neurosurgeon, having 45-year practice, author of 200 scientific works and 9 books Arkadiy Livshis has also arrived in Azerbaijan as part of the health days.

He said he often visits Baku but this time he came for joint work.

Kazakhstan

Political Front

- Kazakhstan jails former Deputy Minister of Defense

(Reuters) - A military court in Kazakhstan sentenced an Israeli businessman and a local defense official to 11 years in jail on corruption charges, Kazakh prosecutors said on Thursday.

Geo strategic Front

- Defendants In Kazakh-Israeli Military Hardware Case Sentenced

ASTANA -- A Kazakh military court has found former Deputy Defense Minister Kazhimurat Mayermanov and Israeli businessman Boris Sheinkman guilty of corruption and sentenced them both to 11 years in prison, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

- Kazakhs Allow Trucks Into Kyrgyzstan After Weeks Of Delay

BISHKEK -- Kazakh officials have allowed a group of trucks to enter Kyrgyzstan after holding many of them at the border for weeks, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Holbrooke Heads To Georgia After Ending Central Asia Tour

Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. special envoy to Pakistan and Afghanistan

U.S. special envoy Richard Holbrooke flew to Georgia today after ending a tour of Central Asian countries aimed at strengthening regional assistance in stabilizing Afghanistan. Speaking in Kazakhstan's capital Astana at the close of his trip today, Holbrooke told reporters that his stay in Georgia will be focused on Tbilisi's contribution to NATO-led forces in Afghanistan.

- Russia, Kazakhstan vow to improve OSCE's effectiveness

Moscow and Astana have a common view of how to turn the OSCE into an effective international organization, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said after talks with his Kazakh counterpart Kanat Saudabayev in Astana.

- Angela Merkel wants to visit Kazakhstan

Astana, February 22. Interfax-Kazakhstan – Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev had a telephone talk with Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel.

The Kazakh president's press office said that Angela Merkel congratulated Nursultan Nazarbayev on Kazakhstan's entering OSCE as chair.

- Kazakh Foreign Minister and China's leadership to discuss cooperation perspectives

Astana. February 22. Interfax-Kazakhstan – Kazakh Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev will pay an official visit to China on 22-24 February, reported the Foreign Ministry's spokesperson Askar Abdrakhmanov.

Economic/Energy Front

- Tengizchevroil halts exports via BTC pipeline - energy minister
(SRI) - Tengizchevroil, the Chevron-led joint venture developing the giant Tengiz oil field, has stopped pumping oil through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, Kazakhstan's Energy Minister Sauat Mynbayev said on Wednesday.

- KazMunaiGas net profit to decline in 2010 - executive
(SRI) - KazMunaiGas, Kazakhstan's national oil and gas company, expects its net profit to fall 25 percent in 2010 from KZT148 billion (\$1 billion) to KZT110 billion (\$744 million), its chief financial officer said on Thursday.

- Japanese investors in talks to build nuclear power plant in eastern Kazakhstan - governor

(SRI) - Japanese investors may help build a nuclear power plant in eastern Kazakhstan, the region's governor Berdybek Saparbayev said. According to Saparbayev's website, the governor met with unnamed Japanese "specialists" to discuss a feasibility study for a nuclear power plant in the region.

Social Front

- Kazakh Journalists Urge End To Newspaper's Harassment

Dozens of Kazakh journalists and human rights activists have urged senior government officials to allow unimpeded publication of the opposition weekly "Respublika," RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. In an open letter to Prime Minister Karim Masimov, Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabaev, and Prosecutor-General Kayrat Mami, the journalists requested an official government statement that publishing houses in Kazakhstan may print "Respublika."

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- Kyrgyz Opposition Parties Call For Ex-Minister's Release

BISHKEK -- Two Kyrgyz opposition parties have declared their support for calls to release former Defense Minister Ismail Isakov from prison, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Erk (Liberty) party leader Yuruslan Istanov told RFE/RL on February 25 that "people's patience has reached a critical point."

- Jailed Former Kyrgyz Defense Minister To Appeal To Higher Court

BISHKEK -- Former Kyrgyz Defense Minister Ismail Isakov, who was found guilty of corruption and sentenced to eight years in prison last month, will appeal his case to the Constitutional Court, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Kyrgyz Military Court Upholds Verdict For Former Defense Minister

BISHKEK -- A Kyrgyz military appeals court today upheld the verdict of former Kyrgyz Defense Minister Ismail Isakov, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Isakov was found

guilty of corruption and sentenced to eight years in prison last month. The military court's decision today was announced in a nearly empty courtroom.

Geo strategic Front

- Kyrgyzstan Confirms Iran Intercepted Plane, Arrested Two Passengers

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyzstan has confirmed that Iran forced one of its planes to land and arrested two of the passengers, apparently confirming Tehran's claim that it seized a top Sunni militant on a flight to the Central Asian country, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Taalaibek Turumbekov, deputy chief of Kyrgyzstan Aba Joldoru, the national airline, told RFE/RL that a plane flying from Dubai was made to land in the southern Iranian city of Bandar Abbas on February 23, escorted by two Iranian jets.

- Moscow Chills Relations With Kyrgyzstan

Relations between longtime allies Russia and Kyrgyzstan seemed as close as ever when Moscow agreed to provide Bishkek with a \$2 billion loan and a large grant in February 2009. The pledges, announced during a visit to Moscow by Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev, followed his surprise announcement that the Manas air base outside Bishkek would be closed. Considering Russia's vocal displeasure with the United States' use of the base as part of its military operations in Afghanistan, observers widely assessed the announcements as a quid pro quo.

Economic/Energy Front

- Kyrgyz Protest Electricity Price Hike

NARYN, Kyrgyzstan -- Some 600 people in the central Kyrgyz city of Naryn have protested against a price increase for electricity, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Social Front

- Kyrgyz Police Get Suspended Sentences In Journalist's Death

OSH, Kyrgyzstan -- Two Kyrgyz policemen found guilty of beating a journalist so badly that he later died have been given suspended sentences, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Tajikistan

Political Front

- 36 polling stations set up in foreign countries to allow Tajik citizens residing abroad to vote

DUSHANBE, February 20, 2010, Asia-Plus -- 36 polling stations have been set up in the CIS and far abroad countries to allow Tajik citizens residing abroad to vote, Muhibullo Dadajonov, head of office of the central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CCER), said in an interview with Asia-Plus.

- Five persons withdraw their candidacies from parliamentary elections

DUSHANBE, February 20, Asia-Plus -- Five of 153 persons who were registered as candidates to run for election to the Majlisi Namoyandagon (Tajikistan's lower chamber of parliament) in 41 single-mandate constituencies have withdrawn their candidacies from the elections, Ms. Mehrinisso Yuldosheva, a chief specialist with the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CCER), told Asia-Plus on Saturday, February 20. According to her, three candidates have left election race in Tursunzoda single-mandate constituency # 5 alone.

- Election observers from China arrive in Dushanbe

DUSHANBE, February 23, 2010, Asia-Plus -- At the invitation of Tajikistan's Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CCER) a group of election observers from China have arrived in Dushanbe.

- Majlisi Namoyandagon board considers agenda of last session of outgoing parliament

DUSHANBE, February 22, 2010, Asia-Plus -- The board (Shuro) of Tajikistan's lower chamber (Majlisi Namoyandagon) of parliament considered the agenda of the last sitting of the outgoing parliament at a February 22 meeting, presided over by Majlisi Namoyandagon speaker Saydullo Khairulloyev.

Geo strategic Front

- Holbrooke Says Tajikistan Important For Outcome In Afghanistan

(RFE/RL) -- U.S. envoy Richard Holbrooke said in Dushanbe today that Tajikistan was "a country of immense importance if one wants to have a peaceful outcome in Afghanistan," RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Speaking with reporters after meeting with President Emomali Rahmon, the U.S. envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan said Tajikistan was important for "ethnic and geographic and strategic reasons."

- U.S. special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan visits Tajikistan

DUSHANBE, February 19, 2010, Asia-Plus -- U.S. special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke is arriving in Dushanbe today evening.

Davlat Nazriyev, head of the Tajik MFA information department, says that tomorrow Mr. Holbrooke is scheduled to hold talks with President Emomali Rahmon.

- Tajikistan can play important role in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan, says U.S. Af-Pak envoy

DUSHANBE, February 20, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, made an official visit to Tajikistan on February 20. During his visit, he met with President Emomali Rahmon.

- Emomali Rahmon, Abdullah Gul discuss prospects of Tajik-Turkish cooperation

DUSHANBE, February 25, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Wednesday afternoon, President Emomali Rahmon had a telephone conversation with his Turkish counterpart, President Abdullah Gul, according to presidential press service.

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

- Court Begins Hearing Lawsuit Against Tajik Weeklies

Media watchdog Reporters Without Borders said that "there is clearly an all-out drive to intimidate news media and get them to censor their coverage of state authorities."

February 23, 2010

- Tajik Pop Star Jailed For Helping Fiance Flee Court

DUSHANBE -- Tajik pop singer Farzona Khurshed was sentenced today to two years in prison for helping her fiance escape from a courthouse last month, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. The Dushanbe district court also sentenced Farzona's fiance, Farrukh Ruziev, to 10 years in prison for fraud.

- Russia's FMS office in Tajikistan hosts briefing on migration process today

DUSHANBE, February 19, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Representative office of Russia's Federal Migration Service (FMS) is giving a news conference in Dushanbe today at 3:00 pm.

According to the Russian Embassy in Dushanbe, the press briefing is dedicated to issues related to changes and addenda made to the Russian migration legislation.

- Dashoguz to host festival of Turkmen-Uzbek friendship

A festival of friendship between fraternal Turkmen and Uzbek peoples will be held in the city of Dashoguz on 17-19 September 2010. It will be organized by the Ministry of Culture and Broadcasting of Turkmenistan and administration of Dashoguz province.

Turkmenistan

Political Front

- Turkmenistan Leader Says Open To Opposition Party

ASHGABAT (Reuters) - Turkmenistan's leader, accused by the West of trampling people's basic rights, today said he was open to the creation of an opposition party as part of moves towards democracy in the former Soviet republic.

- New minister of trade and foreign economic relations appointed

According to a decree of the President of Turkmenistan, Minister of Trade and Foreign Economic Relations Nokerguly Atagulyev was relieved of his duties in connection with a transfer to another post. He was replaced by Bayar Abayev, formerly Chairman of the Association of Food Industry of Turkmenistan.

Geo strategic Front

- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov invited to visit Qatar

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received a message from Emir of Qatar Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani.

"With a view to strengthening and further developing bilateral relations between our brotherly countries, I am pleased to invite Your Excellency to visit the State of Qatar on a date to be determined through diplomatic channels," says the message published in central print media of Turkmenistan.

- Central Asian and Caspian countries discuss preparations for International Conference on Disarmament

On February 23, Ashgabat hosted the second consultative meeting on preparation of the International Conference on Disarmament in Central Asia and the Caspian basin, which was proposed by the President of Turkmenistan at the 64th session of the UN General Assembly.

Economic/Energy Front

- Foreign experts suggest options for use of Turkmen sun and wind energy

Given the huge natural potential of the Karakum desert, there can be created a regional or even global proving ground for testing the latest technologies, developments and equipment for the use of renewable alternative energy sources. This was stated by Professor Romen Zakhidov from the Institute of Energy and Automation of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, who attended the international scientific conference titled "The use of alternative energy sources in Turkmenistan" in Ashgabat.

- President of Turkmenistan receives senior management of U.S. company SouthOil

On February 24, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received CEO of SouthOil company, Texas USA, Neil Mallon Bush, who conveyed to the head of state greetings on behalf of his father, former U.S. president George Bush senior, and handed Georg Bush's written message to the head of state.

- Turkmenistan finds new oil deposit with flow rate of 300 tons per day

Turkmen oilmen discovered a new high-flow rate oil deposit at well number 29 in Northern Goturdepe field. The discharge of the well, which was re-restored by specialists of the Goturdepebit units, is about 300 tons of oil per day from the depth of over 4 thousand meters

- International conference on alternative energy sources begins in Ashgabat

The international scientific conference titled "Issues related to the use of alternative energy sources in Turkmenistan" started in Ashgabat today. The conference brought together guests from 27 countries including Australia, Japan, Asian, European, American, Africa and other countries.

Social Front

Uzbekistan

Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- U.S. envoy: no plans to reopen Uzbek Afghan air base

ASTANA (Reuters) - The United States is not looking to re-open a key military base in Uzbekistan that was shut in 2005 in a diplomatic row, a U.S. envoy said on Sunday as he ended a rapid tour of former Soviet Central Asia. Uzbekistan, which shares a border with Afghanistan, evicted U.S. troops from the Karshi-Khanabad base after Washington condemned it over a violent crackdown on a protest in the town of Andizhan in May 2005. Relations have since improved, and some diplomats have suggested Washington may try to re-open the base.

- President of Uzbekistan meets with US Special Representative

President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov met with Richard Holbrooke, US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, at Oqsaroy on February 19, 2010.

Welcoming the prominent US diplomat, the head of Uzbekistan expressed the attitude of the country toward further development of Uzbek-American relations on a constructive basis to ensure peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Economic/Energy Front

- Korean cash to flow into Uzbekistan

South Korean firms are to explore for oil and gas in Uzbekistan after Uzbek President Islam Karimov, during a state visit to South Korea on February 10-12, signed an agreement for investment that could be worth more than US\$3.5 billion in developing the Surgil gas field and building a chemicals plant.

Social Front

- Uzbek Officials Telling Villagers About Daily Food Rations

ANDIJON, Uzbekistan -- Authorities in parts of Uzbekistan's eastern Andijon region have started telling people how much food they should eat, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports. Villagers in Maslakhat, in Andijon's Oltinkul district, told RFE/RL that local government officials visited every house in the village this week to give them advice on the amount of food every household should be consuming per day, week, and month.

- Three Uzbeks Sentenced For Murder Of Theater Director

TASHKENT -- Three men were sentenced in Tashkent on February 17 for the murder of Mark Vail, the director of Uzbekistan's prominent Ilhom Theater, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports.

- Dashoguz to host festival of Turkmen-Uzbek friendship

A festival of friendship between fraternal Turkmen and Uzbek peoples will be held in the city of Dashoguz on 17-19 September 2010. It will be organized by the Ministry of Culture and Broadcasting of Turkmenistan and administration of Dashoguz province.

- Uzbekistan: The number of suicides is growing among women of the Khoresm Oblast

According to Nazhot human rights group, the number of suicides among women is growing in the Khoresm Oblast of Uzbekistan. The cases of teenage suicides have become more frequent while most of the suicides are reasoned by harsh economic conditions, poverty and domestic violence.

Detailed report

Azerbaijan

Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- EU Envoy, In Baku, Says Media Freedom High On Agenda

BAKU -- The EU's special representative for the South Caucasus has told RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service that media freedom issues are high on his agenda as he begins a visit to Baku. Peter Semneby arrived in the Azerbaijani capital on February 23 for a three-day visit. He said his talks with officials as well as opposition and civil society figures would also touch on energy and human rights as well as regional issues such as Azerbaijan's conflict with Armenia over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region.

RFE/RL asked Semneby if he planned to raise recent amendments imposing new restrictions on the media, or the case of two bloggers jailed on what supporters say were politically motivated charges.

"These are issues that are high on our agenda and the list of issues that we bring up basically on every opportunity," he said. "I hope that we will see some movement forward in order for this not to grow [into] a more problematic issue in our relationship than it needs to be."

Semneby also described as "questionable" aspects of the amendments passed earlier this month. The changes make it an offence to photograph, videotape, or make an audio recording of anyone without their permission.

- U.S official: U.S. desires to build strong relations with Azerbaijan remains unchanged

The U.S continues to advocate the strengthening of relations with Azerbaijan, "U.S. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns said.

"I am glad to come to Azerbaijan for the first time since 1992. Much has changed in Azerbaijan and the rest of the world, but one thing has remained constant - a U.S. desire to build strong relations with Azerbaijan," he said today on results of his Baku visit.

According to him, he met with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and discussed a wide range of issues of bilateral cooperation."I will do everything in my power to build stronger relations between our governments and peoples of our countries," Burns said.

- Nagorno-Karabakh Forces 'Committed' To Cease-Fire

YEREVAN -- Military officials in Nagorno-Karabakh have denied violating a cease-fire following a report of casualties by Azerbaijan on February 18, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports.

Military spokesman Senor Hasratian said on February 19 that Stepanakert remains committed to the cease-fire regime along the line of contact with Azerbaijani armed forces. RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service quoted the country's Defense Ministry as confirming that three Azerbaijani soldiers were killed and another soldier was wounded "after exchanging fire with Armenian armed forces near the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region." The Azerbaijani ministry did not specify where the fighting took place, but a spokesman said the Armenian side also suffered casualties.

Hasratian told RFE/RL that he advised "searching for the causes of the Azerbaijani soldiers' deaths in the [low] morale of the Azerbaijani armed forces." He said allegations of casualties on the Armenian side are "a big lie."

Hasratian added that "the information spread by Azerbaijan once again does not correspond to reality." He said the names of the dead soldiers published in the Azerbaijani media suggested to him that they were not ethnic Azeris, which he claimed showed Baku's "policies towards ethnic minorities."

Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a cease-fire agreement in 1994 after three years of fighting as a result of which Karabakh-Armenian forces established control over the former, mostly Armenian-populated region of Soviet Azerbaijan and also expanded to seven districts within Azerbaijan proper.

Skirmishes and shootings are not a rare occurrence along what now is the line of contact between the Armenian and Azerbaijani armed forces, despite the assurances of both sides that they remain committed to the cease-fire.

- Azerbaijan, Turkey to hold high-level military dialogue

Azerbaijan and Turkey will hold high-level military dialogue in Ankara on Feb. 22, Azerbaijani Defense Ministry said. The prospects of cooperation between Azerbaijani and Turkish Armed Forces will be discussed during the three-day meeting.

It has not been announced yet who will lead the Azerbaijani delegation to the meeting to be held as part of the Azerbaijan-Turkey bilateral military cooperation plan. The high-level military dialogue was last held in Baku in Dec., 2008. Expansion of the cooperation in training of personnel, military medicine, military science, military law and military industry were discussed during the last military dialogue.

- U.S. Undersecretary of State: U.S. and Russia not to have "Great Game" for energy resources - UPDATE

"The U.S. does not believe that is maturing "great game" between America and Russia for energy resources of the Central Asian countries. It is our firm belief that we can gain more by working together than against one another," U.S. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns said speaking at the Azerbaijani Diplomatic Academy.

The U.S. Embassy in Azerbaijan spread his speech.

"While there are always elements of competition in energy matters, as in any commercial area, the U.S. does not believe that energy security is a zero-sum game," Burns said.

He said greater interconnectivity maximizes diverse sources and routes, ensures better market pricing, and protects against supply disruptions, for the good of all countries.

Today, Europe considers the Central Asia's energy resources as an alternative source, allowing it to reduce its dependence on gas imports from Russia, which will allow EU to increase its energy security. Europe and the U.S. support the Southern Corridor project that would bring gas from Central Asia to the EU on alternative routes.

Economic/Energy Front

- Azerbaijan increases fruit and vegetable exports

The State Customs Committee of Azerbaijan (SCC) says that this January country's export of vegetables and fruits rose by 5.99 percent compared to January 2009.

Last month's export made up 0.53 percent (\$7.568 million) of country's overall exports (\$1.428 bn).

In 2009, country's export of vegetables and fruits fell by 10.93 percent compared to the 2008 figure.

As of Jan. 1, 2010, export of this output made up 1.31 percent (\$192.55 million) of Azerbaijan's overall export (\$14.698 bn).

- U.S. official: U.S. deeply interested in Nabucco project

The U.S. is very interested in the Nabucco pipeline project, told TREND's Washington correspondent Neil Brown, Special Advisor to US Senator Richard G. Lugar.

"The U.S. is deeply interested on this project: " Nabucco pipeline will be a very solid project of energy security. We have to reinforce the priority over the energy sector. But most important right now is that we have to encourage Azerbaijan and Turkey to come up with a decision on the gas supplies between each other", Brown said. At present, Azerbaijan and Turkey hold talks on conclusion transit agreement on the Caspian gas supplies to Europe.

Nabucco gas pipeline project is worth \$7.9 billion. Participants of the project are Austrian OMV, Hungarian MOL, Bulgarian Bulgargaz, Romanian Transgaz, Turkish Botas and German RWE companies. Each company has a share of 16.67 percent.

Construction of the pipeline is planned to start in 2011, and first supplies to be delivered in 2014. Maximal capacity of the pipeline will be 31 billion cubic meters per year.

International shareholders will invest 30 percent of total cost of the project, the rest 70 percent will be paid with loans.

"We are interested in price stability on energy and lower prices. We also want economically stable countries in Central Asia and we want all of them to be strong and independent. Energy security is also vital for democratic consolidation and development for Eastern European countries. It's also important to develop the reliable energy supplies. For Europe it's important in term of economic growth and other factor", Brown said.

- Azerbaijani oil products to be sold in Ukrainian market

By the end of March SOCAR (State Oil Company of Azerbaijan) will start to sell oil products in gas stations with SOCAR brand in Ukraine, SOCAR President said Rovnag Abdullayev said.

According to him, SOCAR has purchased about 20 gas stations in Ukraine and world are underway to rebrand them. The company has also purchased a terminal of oil products in Odessa, Abdullayev noted. The gas stations will operate under SOCAR brand.

- 17th International Caspian Oil & Gas Conference to discuss environmental issues in the Caspian basin

This year, for the first time, the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan will support Caspian Oil and Gas, the 17th International Caspian Oil & Gas Conference Incorporating Refining & Petrochemicals. 2010 has been declared the Year of the Environment in Azerbaijan. In relation to this, one of the conference sessions will be devoted to current environmental issues in the Caspian basin and surrounding areas.

The Caspian Oil and Gas exhibition and conference will be supported by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev.

At a special meeting dedicated to the Year of the Environment in Azerbaijan, President Aliyev said: "2010 will be inscribed in the history of Azerbaijan as a pivotal year in improving the environmental situation".

The organisers hope that the traditional International Caspian Oil & Gas Conference Incorporating Refining & Petrochemicals will contribute to the discussion of current issues related to the environmental situation in the region. Support for the Caspian Oil and Gas project is provided by the Ministry of Industry and Energy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR).

The exhibition and conference are organised by ITE Group PLC (UK), and the co-organiser is the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

- Iran stands ready to buy 10bn cu.m. gas from Azerbaijan

Iran stands ready to buy from Azerbaijan up to 10 billion cubic meters of gas, the Iranian ambassador to Azerbaijan Mohammad Bagher Bahrami said in Baku on Feb. 25.

"Iran is ready to buy as much gas from Azerbaijan as the country can supply. We are ready to buy up to 10 billion cubic meters of gas from Azerbaijan," said Bahrami.

Currently, the ambassador said, Azerbaijan supplies Iran about two million cubic meters of gas. Of this volume, approximately 800,000 cubic meters of gas is delivered under the "swap" transactions to the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and 1.2 million cubic meters of gas within the signed short-term contract.

SOCAR and NIGEC signed a short-term contract for gas supplies to Iran in January. The contract envisages supplying Azerbaijani gas to Iran until March-April of 2010; totaling about 100 million cubic meters (1.2 million cubic meters of gas per day). Supplies will be delivered to the northern Iranian regions, which are isolated from the main gas fields.

Earlier, the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) mentioned its intention to build a new pipeline to export gas to Iran. Presently, work on a new Sangachal-Azadkend-Astara pipeline is underway. It is expected that construction of the new pipeline will begin in 2010.

The capacity of the new pipeline, 200-kilometer long, will be 18 million cubic meters of gas (6.57 billion cubic meters per year). The decision to build a new pipeline was made because the existing pipeline connecting Azerbaijan and Iran makes it impossible to increase gas exports to the South. Construction is expected to end in 2012 and it will be financed by SOCAR.

Azerbaijan and Iran are connected with the Gazi-Magomed-Astara-Bind-Biand gas pipeline, 1,474.5-kilometers long. Its capacity was 10 billion cubic meters a year, but now it is lower. This route is a branch of the Gazakh-Astara-Iran pipeline commissioned in 1971. Three compressor stations -- Gazi-Magomed, Aghdash and Gazakh -- were built.

Social Front

- Azerbaijan to consider joining Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution damage

Azerbaijan's parliament is set to consider the country's joining the International Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage.

According to Valeh Alasgarov, head of the parliament's committee on natural resources, energy and environment, joining the convention would help Azerbaijan increase its international trade.

The Convention was adopted in 2001 to ensure that adequate, prompt, and effective compensation is available to persons who suffer damage caused by spills of oil, when carried as fuel in ships' bunkers.

The Convention applies to damage caused on the territory, including the territorial sea, and in exclusive economic zones of States Parties. Forty-nine countries have so far joined the convention.

- Baku hosts Health Days of Israel

Health Days of Israel are underway in Baku.

Famous Baku-born neurosurgeon, having 45-year practice, author of 200 scientific works and 9 books Arkadiy Livshis has also arrived in Azerbaijan as part of the health days.

He said he often visits Baku but this time he came for joint work.

Livshis will receive patients at "ATLAS" clinic center in Baku and operate them if necessary. He is a specialist in neurosurgeon, neurouology and neuro-ortopedia.

Attending the meeting therapist toxicologist, Professor Eldar Gorin said that every second person complains of spine pain in Azerbaijan.

The purpose of joint work with Israeli specialist is to use the modern medical practice.

He also noted that "Woman health" program will soon start, famous Israeli doctors in this sphere will be invited to Baku.

Kazakhstan

Political Front

- Kazakhstan jails former Deputy Minister of Defense

(Reuters) - A military court in Kazakhstan sentenced an Israeli businessman and a local defense official to 11 years in jail on corruption charges, Kazakh prosecutors said on Thursday.

- Kazakhstan jails Israeli businessman

ALMATY (Reuters) - A military court in Kazakhstan sentenced an Israeli businessman and a local defense official to 11 years in jail on corruption charges, Kazakh prosecutors said on Thursday.

Boris Sheinkman, an Israeli citizen, and Kazhimurat Mayermanov, a former deputy defense minister, were tried behind closed doors after being accused of arranging a deal to buy defective military hardware from Israel.

"Israeli citizen (Boris) Sheinkman has been sentenced to 11 years in prison for fraud and bribery," the prosecutor general's office said in a statement. It said Mayermanov would serve the same jail term for abuse of power and bribery.

The two have not been available to comment over the case. The prosecutor's office did not say whether Sheinkman and Mayermanov had pleaded guilty. The Israeli embassy in Kazakhstan could not be reached for comment. Arrests and convictions of foreign business representatives are rare in Kazakhstan, an oil-exporting Caspian nation seeking

to promote an investor-friendly image abroad. Mainly Muslim Kazakhstan, which like many other ex-Soviet republics is home to a large Jewish minority, has good relations with Israel including in the high tech and military sectors. Influential Kazakh Defense Minister Daniyal Akhmetov resigned shortly after Mayermanov's arrest in what analysts saw as a sign of an intensifying power struggle in the elite where groups vie for influence over President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Geo strategic Front

- Defendants In Kazakh-Israeli Military Hardware Case Sentenced

ASTANA -- A Kazakh military court has found former Deputy Defense Minister Kazhimurat Mayermanov and Israeli businessman Boris Sheinkman guilty of corruption and sentenced them both to 11 years in prison, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Both had their property confiscated. Sheinkman, a former Kazakh citizen and career officer in the Kazakh Army, was also stripped of his military rank of colonel and government awards. The Prosecutor-General's Office announced the February 24 verdict after a closed trial. In April, the National Security Committee (KNB) said it was investigating the case of unnamed Defense Ministry officials charged with purchasing faulty artillery and other defense systems from Israeli firms.

The KNB said that as a result of the deal, the government incurred losses of \$82 million.

- Kazakhs Allow Trucks Into Kyrgyzstan After Weeks Of Delay

BISHKEK -- Kazakh officials have allowed a group of trucks to enter Kyrgyzstan after holding many of them at the border for weeks, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Kyrgyz businessmen had been complaining that dozens of trucks bound for Kyrgyzstan were stopped without explanation by Kazakh customs officials at the Konusbaev checkpoint on the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border and at the Hargos checkpoint on the Kazakh-Chinese border. Most of the trucks were coming from China, Turkey, and Iran. Many had been kept at the border since February 1. Some businessmen were told that the delay was connected to Kazakhstan's membership in the customs union with Russia and Belarus, which came into force on January 1 and created changes in customs procedures.

- Holbrooke Heads To Georgia After Ending Central Asia Tour

Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. special envoy to Pakistan and Afghanistan

U.S. special envoy Richard Holbrooke flew to Georgia today after ending a tour of Central Asian countries aimed at strengthening regional assistance in stabilizing Afghanistan. Speaking in Kazakhstan's capital Astana at the close of his trip today, Holbrooke told reporters that his stay in Georgia will be focused on Tbilisi's contribution to NATO-led forces in Afghanistan.

"I'm going from here to Georgia to review the Georgian battalion which is going to Afghanistan, but once again my trip has nothing to do with Georgian-Russian relations. It's about Georgia's extraordinarily important contribution to the international effort in Afghanistan," Holbrooke said.

Holbrooke, who met today with the Kazakh prime minister and foreign minister, praised Kazakhstan as "a solid strategic partner."

"Kazakhstan is the largest, wealthiest, and most successful country in the region, it has conducted a multi-directional foreign policy with great skill under the leadership of President Nazarbaev," Holbrooke said.

"Secondly the resources available to Kazakhstan which are only beginning to be tapped, are going to be of immense importance to the world and give Kazakhstan an opportunity to emerge as a developed nation within a few years, if they manage their resources right." Kazakh Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev, for his part, said "Kazakhstan has always been there for the United States as a solid strategic partner since September 11, 2001." During a stop in Tajikistan earlier, Holbrooke said talks in Dushanbe had also focused on energy and regional water use. Holbrooke said in Dushanbe that Tajikistan was "a country of immense importance if one wants to have a peaceful outcome in Afghanistan."

- Russia, Kazakhstan vow to improve OSCE's effectiveness

Moscow and Astana have a common view of how to turn the OSCE into an effective international organization, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said after talks with his Kazakh counterpart Kanat Saudabayev in Astana.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which comprises 56 states, was created in 1975 as a forum intended to unite the East and the West amid the Cold War.

However, in recent years, Russia has repeatedly criticized the organization for its inability to assure international security and stability.

The OSCE, which has failed to sign a charter, held its latest high-level summit in 1999. The latest declaration was adopted in 2002.

Kazakhstan, which currently holds the organization's rotating chair, has pledged to hold an OSCE summit in 2010.

"We fully support the plans of Kazakhstan's chairmanship in the OSCE," the Russian foreign minister said.

"We have a common vision of how we should act for the year to complete successfully as regards reforming the body and turning it into a full-fledged international organization, which assures a really universal approach to all security aspects and acts on the basis of respect for all its member states", he added.

Lavrov pledged to actively develop OSCE's economic strategy during Russia's chairmanship.

On February 15, during a meeting with his Kazakh counterpart Nursultan Nazarbayev in Moscow, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev also supported Kazakhstan's initiative to hold an OSCE summit.

- Angela Merkel wants to visit Kazakhstan

Astana. February 22. Interfax-Kazakhstan – Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev had a telephone talk with Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel.

The Kazakh president's press office said that Angela Merkel congratulated Nursultan Nazarbayev on Kazakhstan's entering OSCE as chair. In his turn, the Kazakh president thanked the chancellor for the help and support Germany is offering Astana, especially Kazakhstan's initiative to hold an OSCE summit in Astana.

According to the press office, Nursultan Nazarbayev and Angela Merkel discussed the status and perspectives of the Kazakh-German relations. The Kazakh president commented with satisfaction on the German companies' participation in the industrialization projects of Kazakhstan. Nursultan Nazarbayev also said he was quite content with his visit to Germany in 2009. Angela Merkel said that she would like to visit Kazakhstan this year.

- Kazakh Foreign Minister and China's leadership to discuss cooperation perspectives

Astana. February 22. Interfax-Kazakhstan – Kazakh Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev will pay an official visit to China on 22-24 February, reported the Foreign Ministry's spokesperson Askar Abdrakhmanov.

The sides will discuss the current situation and perspectives of the countries' bilateral and multilateral cooperation, said Abdrakhmanov at a Monday press briefing in Astana.

In addition, Saudabayev is scheduled to speak at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences with a lecture entitled "Kazakhstan - China: strategic partnership for peace and prosperity of the region."

Economic/Energy Front

- Tengizchevroil halts exports via BTC pipeline - energy minister

(SRI) - Tengizchevroil, the Chevron-led joint venture developing the giant Tengiz oil field, has stopped pumping oil through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, Kazakhstan's Energy Minister Sauat Mynbayev said on Wednesday.

Mynbayev said the move could be linked to disagreement over transit fees charged by BTC but gave no details.

"If Chevron does not like the fees, it is up to Chevron to use the routes it likes better," Mynbayev told reporters. "Which is precisely what they have done." According to Mynbayev, Tengizchevroil is BTC's only Kazakh supplier and shipped "insignificant" volumes through the pipeline. In 2009, Tengizchevroil shipped 1.951 million tons of crude oil via the BTC pipeline, according to the Azeri State Statistics Agency. The company ships most of its crude using the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) pipeline, the Atyrau-Samara pipeline, and a rail link to the Black Sea port of Batumi.

Tengizchevroil produced 22.53 million tons of crude oil in 2009.

Kazakhstan plans to significantly increase its exports via the BTC pipeline as its largest oil field, Kashagan, comes online in 2013.

- KazMunaiGas net profit to decline in 2010 - executive

(SRI) - KazMunaiGas, Kazakhstan's national oil and gas company, expects its net profit to fall 25 percent in 2010 from KZT148 billion (\$1 billion) to KZT110 billion (\$744 million), its chief financial officer said on Thursday.

"This is a conservative outlook," Asiya Syrgabekova told reporters, without detailing why the company projected a lower profit this year. KazMunaiGas reportedly bases the projection on an average crude price of \$60 per barrel.

- Japanese investors in talks to build nuclear power plant in eastern Kazakhstan - governor

(SRI) - Japanese investors may help build a nuclear power plant in eastern Kazakhstan, the region's governor Berdybek Saparbayev said. According to Saparbayev's website, the governor met with unnamed Japanese "specialists" to discuss a feasibility study for a nuclear power plant in the region. The project must gain government approval, Saparbayev said. Japanese investors in Kazakh uranium production include Toshiba Corp., Nuclear Fuel Industries, Ltd., Kansai Electric Power Co., Inc., and Sumitomo Corp. Kazakhstan became the world's biggest uranium producer in 2009, with full-year production expected to reach 13,900 metric tons of uranium, according to the state uranium company Kazatomprom. Kazakhstan has the second largest reserves of uranium, trailing Australia.

Social Front

- **Kazakh Journalists Urge End To Newspaper's Harassment**

Dozens of Kazakh journalists and human rights activists have urged senior government officials to allow unimpeded publication of the opposition weekly "Respublika," RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. In an open letter to Prime Minister Karim Masimov, Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabaev, and Prosecutor-General Kayrat Mami, the journalists requested an official government statement that publishing houses in Kazakhstan may print "Respublika." Among those signing the letter were Seitqazy Mataev, chairman of the Journalists Union; Tamara Kaleeva, president of the media-monitoring NGO Adil Soz (Just Word); and Adil Dzhaliyov, chairman of the Almaty-based NGO Media Alliance of Kazakhstan. In recent months, the weekly's editors have been constrained to print issues of the newspaper in their offices under modified titles such as "Golos respubliki" (Voice of the Republic) and "Moya respublika" (My Republic), because no publishing house in Kazakhstan would print the weekly. The editors of "Respublika" believe printing houses have been ordered not to publish the paper. Kazakhstan is currently the chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, a 56-member regional security organization that works to promote a range of issues, from democratization to free media, fair elections to minority rights.

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- **Kyrgyz Opposition Parties Call For Ex-Minister's Release**

BISHKEK -- Two Kyrgyz opposition parties have declared their support for calls to release former Defense Minister Ismail Isakov from prison, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Erk (Liberty) party leader Yuruslan Istanov told RFE/RL on February 25 that "people's patience has reached a critical point."

He added that if the government continues to ignore widespread demands from rights activists, former colleagues, and other supporters to free Isakov, the opposition may demand President Kurmanbek Bakiev's resignation.

The Ata-Meken (Fatherland) party also announced that it supports the campaign to have Isakov released.

Hundreds of Isakov's supporters have staged protests and hunger strikes in Bishkek and Isakov's home district of Alai since he was found guilty of corruption and sentenced to eight years in prison on January 11.

Isakov was a close associate of Bakiev and was appointed defense minister shortly after the 2005 Tulip Revolution that brought Bakiev to power. Isakov was named National Security Council secretary in May 2008.

Five months later he resigned and joined the opposition. Isakov and his supporters say the charges against him are politically motivated.

- **Jailed Former Kyrgyz Defense Minister To Appeal To Higher Court**

BISHKEK -- Former Kyrgyz Defense Minister Ismail Isakov, who was found guilty of corruption and sentenced to eight years in prison last month, will appeal his case to the Constitutional Court, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Isakov's lawyer, Azimbek Beknazarov, told RFE/RL on February 22 that there were constitutional violations during the military appeals court process that ended on February 19. The court upheld Isakov's conviction.

Beknazarov added that Isakov will soon be transferred to a different prison. Meanwhile, activist Taalai Zikirov told RFE/RL that Isakov's supporters are planning to march from Isakov's remote home region of Alai toward Bishkek and will block the road from Osh to Erkechtam. Hundreds of Isakov's supporters have staged protests and hunger strikes in Bishkek and Alai since he was sentenced on January 11. Isakov was a close associate of President Kurmanbek Bakiev, who appointed him defense minister shortly after the 2005 Tulip Revolution. Isakov was named National Security Council secretary in May 2008. Five months later he resigned and joined the opposition. Isakov and his supporters say the charges against him are politically motivated and the direct consequence of his decision to join the opposition.

- **Kyrgyz Military Court Upholds Verdict For Former Defense Minister**
BISHKEK -- A Kyrgyz military appeals court today upheld the verdict of former Kyrgyz Defense Minister Ismail Isakov, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Isakov was found guilty of corruption and sentenced to eight years in prison last month. The military court's decision today was announced in a nearly empty courtroom. Isakov refused to attend the reading of the verdict in the courtroom. He insists all charges against him are politically motivated because he joined the opposition after leaving the government. Isakov's lawyers left the courtroom earlier to protest Judge Tilek Abdrashitov's decision to give their client a chance for "the last testimony" -- a final comment after the verdict is read -- without allowing him time to prepare.

It is not clear if Isakov plans to appeal the verdict in the Supreme Court. Hundreds of Isakov's supporters have been holding protest marches and hunger strikes in Bishkek and his native district of Alai since he was sentenced on January 11.

Geo strategic Front

- **Kyrgyzstan Confirms Iran Intercepted Plane, Arrested Two Passengers**
BISHKEK -- Kyrgyzstan has confirmed that Iran forced one of its planes to land and arrested two of the passengers, apparently confirming Tehran's claim that it seized a top Sunni militant on a flight to the Central Asian country, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Taalaibek Turumbekov, deputy chief of Kyrgyzstan's national airline, told RFE/RL that a plane flying from Dubai was made to land in the southern Iranian city of Bandar Abbas on February 23, escorted by two Iranian jets. Turumbekov said Iranian security forces arrested two of the 119 passengers on board. He said the plane was later allowed to continue its flight to Bishkek:

"The plane was forced to land at Bandar Abbas airport, while flying over Iranian territory. They held the plane for three-four hours, checked it, and kept two people," Turumbekov said. The aircraft belonged to Kyrgyzstan's Istok-Avia company. There has been no comment so far from the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry. Iranian authorities announced on February 23 that they had seized the leader of the Sunni rebel group Jundallah, Abdolmalek Rigi, on a flight from Dubai to Bishkek. It was unclear who was the second passenger taken out of the plane, but Iranian media reported that at least one more Jundallah member had also been arrested in the operation. Jundallah confirmed its leader's arrest on a blog (junbish.blogspot.com) that has been carrying statements by the group in recent years.

- **Moscow Chills Relations With Kyrgyzstan**

Relations between longtime allies Russia and Kyrgyzstan seemed as close as ever when Moscow agreed to provide Bishkek with a \$2 billion loan and a large grant in February 2009. The pledges, announced during a visit to Moscow by Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev, followed his surprise announcement that the Manas air base outside Bishkek would be closed. Considering Russia's vocal displeasure with the United States' use of the base as part of its military operations in Afghanistan, observers widely assessed the announcements as a quid pro quo. That appraisal seemed to grow more likely when Bakiev and his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev later signed a memorandum that would bring more Russian troops to Kyrgyzstan and allow Moscow to establish another military base there. The developments caused concern near and abroad. In Washington, officials scurried to find an alternative air bridge to supply the military campaign in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan, meanwhile, shuddered at the thought of Moscow allying with its neighbors in regional squabbles.

One year later, however, Moscow is not concealing its anger with the Kyrgyz government and has frozen its financial pledges. Uzbekistan appears to be trying to use the discord to advance its own regional ambitions. And the United States is again using Manas, not as a base, but as a "transit station."

Economic/Energy Front

- Kyrgyz Protest Electricity Price Hike

NARYN, Kyrgyzstan -- Some 600 people in the central Kyrgyz city of Naryn have protested against a price increase for electricity, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. The demonstration was held on February 24 in Naryn's central park. Participants held placards with such slogans as "We can't pay the new prices for electricity" and "Government, listen to us!" The demonstrators adopted an appeal to the government and the parliament demanding a lower price for electricity in this mountainous region. They gave the Kyrgyz authorities 10 days to meet their demand. Naryn Mayor Almaz Kulmatov left his office to meet with the protesters. He promised to convey their demands to officials in Bishkek. Police surrounded the protesters but did not intervene. The government announced late last year that utility prices would be increased in stages beginning in January.

Social Front

- Kyrgyz Police Get Suspended Sentences In Journalist's Death

OSH, Kyrgyzstan -- Two Kyrgyz policemen found guilty of beating a journalist so badly that he later died have been given suspended sentences, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. A court in the southern region of Osh found Shukurbek Nurmatov and Kurgazy Batyrbek-uulu guilty of abuse of authority and inflicting bodily harm on independent journalist Almaz Tashiev on July 4, 2009.

Tashiev died in the hospital six days later. Nurmatov and Batyrbek-uulu were given five-year prison sentences, but they were suspended. Tashiev, 32, worked for the independent newspaper "Agym" (Stream). Three other police officers are being investigated for their suspected involvement in the attack. Tashiev's relatives said some 14 police officers participated in the incident.

Tajikistan

Political Front

- 36 polling stations set up in foreign countries to allow Tajik citizens residing abroad to vote

DUSHANBE, February 20, 2010, Asia-Plus -- 36 polling stations have been set up in the CIS and far abroad countries to allow Tajik citizens residing abroad to vote, Muhibullo Dadajonov, head of office of the central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CCER), said in an interview with Asia-Plus.

According to him, eight polling stations have been set up in the Russian cities of Moscow, St. Petersburg, Novosibirsk, Samara, Volgograd, Kemerovo, Perm, and Yekaterinburg.

“Two polling stations have been set up in the United States (at the Tajik Representative Office to the United Nations in New York and the Tajik Embassy in Washington) and two other polling stations have been set up in Afghanistan (in Kabul and Mazar-i Sharif),” said Dadajonov, “Besides, polling stations have been set up at the Tajik embassies in Almaty, Ankara, Beijing, Berlin, Bishkek, Brussels, Islamabad, Minsk, Tashkent, Tehran, etc.”

According to official data, some 1 million Tajik nationals have left the country seeking better employment opportunities or for studying.

- Five persons withdraw their candidacies from parliamentary elections

DUSHANBE, February 20, Asia-Plus – Five of 153 persons who were registered as candidates to run for election to the Majlisi Namoyandagon (Tajikistan’s lower chamber of parliament) in 41 single-mandate constituencies have withdrawn their candidacies from the elections, Ms. Mehrinisso Yuldosheva, a chief specialist with the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CCER), told Asia-Plus on Saturday, February 20. According to her, three candidates have left election race in Tursunzoda single-mandate constituency # 5 alone. Among them are the Communist Party (CPT) representative Mashhurbony Nabiyeva, representative of the Party of Economic Reforms Ibrohim Yunusov and self-propelled candidate Rahmon Sharipov.

Thus, three candidates will compete for a seat in the Majlisi Namoyandagon in the Tursunzoda constituency – Barakatullo Atokhoja, nominated by the People’s Democratic Party (PDPT), Haitbobo Haitov, nominated by the Agrarian Party (APT), and self-propelled candidate Alisher Hamidullo.

Besides, Nazri Asazoda, who was nominated by the PDPT to run for the parliament in Hisor single mandate constituency # 7, has also withdrawn his candidacy and three candidates are now competing for a seat in the parliament in this constituency – representative of the Islamic Revival Party (IRPT) Abdunabi Berdiyev, the CPT representative Abroriddin Aloviddinov and representative of the Party of Economic Reforms Sharofiddin Sirojev.

Muqimjon Bozorov, who was competing for a seat in the Majlisi Namoyandagon as self-nominated candidate in Panjakent single-mandate constituency # 21 (Sughd province), has also left the election race.

The PDPT representative Shakarbek Samadov and two self-propelled candidates -- Shodibek Ahmadov and Khalifa Matloub -- are now competing for seat in the parliament in the Panjakent single-mandate constituency.

Of 63 seats in the Majlisi Namoyandagon, 22 seats come from party lists and the remainder is elected in first-past-the-post races.

- Election observers from China arrive in Dushanbe

DUSHANBE, February 23, 2010, Asia-Plus -- At the invitation of Tajikistan’s Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CCER) a group of election observers from China have arrived in Dushanbe. According to the Tajik Embassy in Beijing, the

delegation consists of six persons and led by Ambassador at Large Chzhoy Syaopei (phonetically spelled).

On election day, together with election observers from other foreign countries and international organizations they will monitor the voting process.

In the meantime, a polling station at the Tajik Embassy in Beijing will open on February 28 at 8:00 am to allow Tajik citizens residing and studying in China to vote.

- Majlisi Namoyandagon board considers agenda of last session of outgoing parliament

DUSHANBE, February 22, 2010, Asia-Plus -- The board (Shuro) of Tajikistan's lower chamber (Majlisi Namoyandagon) of parliament considered the agenda of the last sitting of the outgoing parliament at a February 22 meeting, presided over by Majlisi Namoyandagon speaker Saydullo Khairulloyev. Muhammadato Sultonov, a spokesman for the Majlisi Namoyandagon, said that the board, in particular, discussed amendments to the laws on public service, amnesty to physical and legal entities in connection with legalization of their funds, as well as the civil code. The board also considered a number of other issues. According to him, all these issues have been tabled the agenda of the last session of the outgoing parliament that will take place on February 24.

Geo strategic Front

- Holbrooke Says Tajikistan Important For Outcome In Afghanistan

(RFE/RL) -- U.S. envoy Richard Holbrooke said in Dushanbe today that Tajikistan was "a country of immense importance if one wants to have a peaceful outcome in Afghanistan," RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Speaking with reporters after meeting with President Emomali Rahmon, the U.S. envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan said Tajikistan was important for "ethnic and geographic and strategic reasons."

Holbrooke also said the greatest danger to regional stability came not from the Taliban but from Al-Qaeda's use of regional sanctuaries to train terrorists.

"I think the real threat in this region is less from the Taliban than from Al-Qaeda, which wants to train international terrorists, but that is an issue of common concern to the United States and to all the countries of this region, and by all the countries I definitely include Pakistan and China and India," Holbrooke said.

Holbrooke added that he and Rahmon "talked especially about energy and water and about Tajikistan's capabilities to help deal with the water crisis in other parts of the region, especially Pakistan and India."

The U.S. envoy's stop in Tajikistan, which shares a 1,340-kilometer border with Afghanistan, is part of a tour of Central Asia that began earlier on February 17.

On February 19, Holbrooke met with Uzbek President Islam Karimov for talks on Afghanistan, and he also met with Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev.

- U.S. special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan visits Tajikistan

DUSHANBE, February 19, 2010, Asia-Plus -- U.S. special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke is arriving in Dushanbe today evening.

Davlat Nazriyev, head of the Tajik MFA information department, says that tomorrow Mr. Holbrooke is scheduled to hold talks with President Emomali Rahmon. The sides are expected to discuss bilateral cooperation between Tajikistan and the United, regional security issues as well as the current situation in Afghanistan. Ambassador Holbrooke coordinates the interagency effort to advance the United States' strategic goals in

Afghanistan and Pakistan. He was appointed as special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan on January 22, 2009.

Mr. Richard C. Holbrooke served as the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, where he was also a member of President Clinton's cabinet (1999-2001). As Assistant Secretary of State for Europe (1994-1996), he was the chief architect of the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement that ended the war in Bosnia. He later served as President Clinton's Special Envoy to Bosnia and Kosovo and Special Envoy to Cyprus on a pro-bono basis while a private citizen. From 1993-1994, he was the U.S. Ambassador to Germany.

He has received over twenty honorary degrees and numerous awards, including several Nobel Peace Prize nominations. He was the Founding Chairman of the American Academy in Berlin, a center for U.S.-German cultural exchange; formerly President and CEO of the Global Business Coalition, the business alliance against HIV/AIDS; and former Chairman of the Asia Society. Previous NGO board memberships have included the American Museum of Natural History, the National Endowment for Democracy, the Citizens Committee for New York City, the Council on Foreign Relations, and Refugees International. He was Director Emeritus of The Africa-America Institute, was on the Advisory Board of MEMRI, was a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and formerly a member of the U.S. Board of Governors of Interpeace, and a former Professor-at-Large, Brown University.

- Tajikistan can play important role in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan, says U.S. Af-Pak envoy

DUSHANBE, February 20, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, made an official visit to Tajikistan on February 20. During his visit, he met with President Emomali Rahmon.

Speaking to reporters after a meeting with Tajik leader, Ambassador Holbrooke noted that, during his meeting with President Rahmon, they discussed the situation in Afghanistan, the role of Tajikistan in stabilizing the country, and regional energy partnerships. He noted that this is his third meeting with high-ranking Tajik state officials in six months, and he expects to have more in the future.

The U.S. Af-Pak envoy noted that Tajikistan can play an important role in stabilizing Afghanistan. "During today's meeting, President Rahmon informed me about the situation in Tajikistan, Central Asia and Afghanistan," Ambassador Holbrooke said, noting that Tajik leader dwelled at length on relations between Tajikistan and Afghanistan and expressed gratitude to the U.S. Government for the Tajik-Afghan bridge built in Nizhny Panj.

According to him, they also discussed construction of a new bridge connecting Tajikistan and Afghanistan. They also considered issues related to implementation of the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA-1000) and water-and-energy problems in the region. Besides, answering questions of reporters, Ambassador Holbrooke noted that the real threat in the region is less from the Taliban Movement than from Al-Qaeda terrorist network, which wants to train international terrorists, but that is an issue of common concern to the United States and to all countries in the region. "The U.S. Government calls on all countries of the world, in particular, the countries of the European Union, China and Russia to combine efforts to fight international terrorism that poses threat to the whole civilized world," Mr. Holbrooke noted.

- Emomali Rahmon, Abdullah Gul discuss prospects of Tajik-Turkish cooperation
DUSHANBE, February 25, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Wednesday afternoon, President Emomali Rahmon had a telephone conversation with his Turkish counterpart, President Abdullah Gul, according to presidential press service. The sides discussed state and prospects of further expansion of bilateral mutually beneficial cooperation between Tajikistan and Turkey. Expansion of economic cooperation was a major topic of the conversation. The two also exchanged views on a number of international and regional issues being of mutual interest.

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

- Court Begins Hearing Lawsuit Against Tajik Weeklies

Media watchdog Reporters Without Borders said that "there is clearly an all-out drive to intimidate news media and get them to censor their coverage of state authorities."

February 23, 2010

DUSHANBE -- A Tajik court has begun hearing a lawsuit against three independent publications, in a case international rights activists say is part of a crackdown on press freedom ahead of upcoming elections, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Three judges, including two from the Supreme Court, brought the libel action against the weeklies "Asia-Plus," "Farazh," and "Ozodagon" for their coverage of a press conference on corruption and bias in the judicial system.

In mid-January, the journalists reported on the press conference in which a lawyer said the judges -- Fakhridin Dodometov, Nur Nurov, and Ulughbek Mamadshoev -- had sentenced a group of 33 businessmen from the northern city of Isfara to long prison terms despite weak evidence of their crimes. The judges maintain that the printed allegations against them are false, and sued the papers for 5.5 million somonis (\$1.26 million) in damages. Some 50 journalists, NGO representatives, and other were present outside the courtroom today to show their support for the accused newspapers. In an interview with RFE/RL's Tajik Service ahead of today's hearing, the editors of the three newspapers and their lawyer said the judges were merely seeking monetary gain through the claim. They also said the judges should have asked for their responses to be printed before taking legal action -- a step required by Tajik media law. Nuriddin Karshiboev, the head of the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan, told RFE/RL that the lawsuit was representative of a recent push by officials to shrink press freedoms and encourage journalists to censor themselves.

Earlier this month, the Paris-based media watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) criticized the Tajik authorities for "harassing the media" ahead of the February 28 parliamentary elections. In their statement, RSF also said that "there is clearly an all-out drive to intimidate news media and get them to censor their coverage of state authorities." Mamadshoev, one of the three judges claiming libel, told RFE/RL's Tajik Service that he filed the lawsuit as a private citizen -- not as a representative of the Supreme Court.

Today's session was a preliminary hearing. It comes in the wake of other libel suits brought by officials against Tajik publications. In late January, a court fined the weekly "Paykon" 300,000 somonis (\$69,000) in a libel suit brought by Tajikstandart, a government agency that monitors the quality of imported goods. The Agriculture

Ministry has also brought a libel suit against the "Millat" newspaper, in which it's demanding 1 million somonis (\$229,000) in damages.

That case is set for late March.

- Tajik Pop Star Jailed For Helping Fiance Flee Court

DUSHANBE -- Tajik pop singer Farzona Khurshed was sentenced today to two years in prison for helping her fiance escape from a courthouse last month, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. The Dushanbe district court also sentenced Farzona's fiance, Farrukh Ruziev, to 10 years in prison for fraud. Two police officers were found guilty of neglecting their duties and given jail terms of two years and 18 months, respectively.

The lawyer for Farzona -- who is known by her first name -- said she and her client would not accept the verdict and have asked for a retrial. They said they would appeal the court ruling if that request was rejected. According to Dilovar Mizrob, Farzona's promoter and producer, Ruziev pled guilty to the charges against him and said he is the one who acted wrongly in leaving the courthouse. He said Farzona did not know that his trial was not finished.

Prosecutors accused Farzona of helping Ruziev flee the courthouse on January 16 by asking police to allow him to speak with her outside the courtroom. The police agreed and the pair then left the building and drove to a resort outside Dushanbe, where the police apprehended them.

Farzona, 20, said she assumed that if he was able to leave the courtroom, he was free to go. Farzona's mother, Surayo Qosimova, and her sister Shabnam Surayo -- both well-known singers in Tajikistan -- were present in court. They urged the judges to consider that Farzona is young and did not intend to commit a crime. Qosimova fainted after the verdict was announced. The trial was attended by many famous Tajik entertainers. Dozens of Farzona's fans waited outside the courthouse for the verdict.

- Russia's FMS office in Tajikistan hosts briefing on migration process today

DUSHANBE, February 19, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Representative office of Russia's Federal Migration Service (FMS) is giving a news conference in Dushanbe today at 3:00 pm. According to the Russian Embassy in Dushanbe, the press briefing is dedicated to issues related to changes and addenda made to the Russian migration legislation.

Konstantin Poltorarin, deputy head of the FMS directorate for international and public relations, will be the main speaker to introduce amendments made to the Russian migration legislation, the source said.

- Tajik media development support issues discussed in Dushanbe

DUSHANBE, February 22, 2010, Asia-Plus -- A roundtable meeting to discuss issues related to supporting development of Tajik media has opened in Dushanbe today.

The meeting has brought together representatives from Tajik media and media organizations as well as representatives of donor organizations, including the OSCE Office in Tajikistan, Tajik Branch of Open Society Institute/Assistance Foundation (OSI/AF-Tajikistan), UNDP, and a number of diplomatic missions and international organizations active in the country. Representatives from donor organizations are considering their plans of supporting development of Tajik media in 2010. In the meantime, representatives from Tajik media and media organizations will inform donor organizations of their plans for development of media market in Tajikistan.

- Dashoguz to host festival of Turkmen-Uzbek friendship

A festival of friendship between fraternal Turkmen and Uzbek peoples will be held in the city of Dashoguz on 17-19 September 2010. It will be organized by the Ministry of Culture and Broadcasting of Turkmenistan and administration of Dashoguz province.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov signed a resolution to this effect in the course of the February 26 meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers. He instructed relevant officials to ensure the proper level of organization of the festival and approved the composition of the festival's organizing committee.

Turkmenistan

Political Front

- Turkmenistan Leader Says Open To Opposition Party

ASHGABAT (Reuters) - Turkmenistan's leader, accused by the West of trampling people's basic rights, today said he was open to the creation of an opposition party as part of moves towards democracy in the former Soviet republic.

President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, in power for three years, chairs the only political party in Turkmenistan and allows no public criticism or opposition to his rule.

A new party would not be expected to be a real opposition force, in a country where no public figure would risk his career by criticizing state policies, though rights groups would be expected to welcome it as a step forward.

"We could register a new political party this year within the framework of the constitution if someone comes up with the initiative to do so," Berdymukhammedov told a government meeting. "Creating opposition parties would be an important event in the social and political life of the country," he added. "Our society will continue to develop in a democratic way." Berdymukhammedov came to power after the death of Saparmurat Niyazov, who ruled the Caspian nation through a mixture of Stalinist repression, personality cult and eccentric decrees such as a long-standing ban on gold teeth.

The new leader promised to open up the country and mend its image abroad, promoting foreign investment and reform. Critics say he has made progress in economic reform but has failed to introduce political freedom. Central Asia's biggest gas producer, Turkmenistan is trying to break away from Russia's orbit and forge closer relations with Europe, a potentially huge gas consumer. Berdymukhammedov has pursued an increasingly independent foreign and trade policy, building new pipelines to China and Iran and allowing Western companies to explore possibilities in its strategic sectors. But Turkmenistan is still ranked alongside North Korea in the 2009 press freedom index of Reporters Without Borders.

U.S.-based Freedom House included Turkmenistan in its 2009 list of the world's worst human rights violators.

- New minister of trade and foreign economic relations appointed

According to a decree of the President of Turkmenistan, Minister of Trade and Foreign Economic Relations Nokerguly Atagulyev was relieved of his duties in connection with a transfer to another post. He was replaced by Bayar Abayev, formerly Chairman of the Association of Food Industry of Turkmenistan.

Deputy Chairman of the Food Industry Association Oranyaz Rejepov was appointed acting chairman of this association, the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat quoting the press service of the President of Turkmenistan.

Geo strategic Front

- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov invited to visit Qatar

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received a message from Emir of Qatar Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani.

"With a view to strengthening and further developing bilateral relations between our brotherly countries, I am pleased to invite Your Excellency to visit the State of Qatar on a date to be determined through diplomatic channels," says the message published in central print media of Turkmenistan.

The Emir of Qatar expressed confidence that the meeting in Doha will provide a good opportunity to exchange views on issues of mutual concern and discuss ways to develop friendship and mutually beneficial interstate cooperation.

- Central Asian and Caspian countries discuss preparations for International Conference on Disarmament

On February 23, Ashgabat hosted the second consultative meeting on preparation of the International Conference on Disarmament in Central Asia and the Caspian basin, which was proposed by the President of Turkmenistan at the 64th session of the UN General Assembly.

According to the press service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, delegations of foreign ministries and diplomatic missions of Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan attended the meeting.

During the meeting, which was held in a constructive and businesslike atmosphere, the parties exchanged views on issues relating to organizational and content-related aspects of the forthcoming forum, the ministry said. In particular, delegations discussed the draft agenda of the conference, which is expected to include such items as review and analysis of the situation on Disarmament in Central Asia and the Caspian basin, the international legal framework for disarmament and its improvement, the role of international organizations in addressing issues of disarmament in the global and regional context. A communique was adopted at the end of the meeting.

"The meeting reaffirmed the interest of Central Asian and Caspian Sea countries in the successful outcome of the forthcoming international conference as an effective factor in the context of the international community's efforts to strengthen stability and security in the world," the Turkmen Foreign Ministry noted.

Economic/Energy Front

- Foreign experts suggest options for use of Turkmen sun and wind energy

Given the huge natural potential of the Karakum desert, there can be created a regional or even global proving ground for testing the latest technologies, developments and equipment for the use of renewable alternative energy sources. This was stated by Professor Romen Zakhidov from the Institute of Energy and Automation of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, who attended the international scientific conference titled "The use of alternative energy sources in Turkmenistan" in Ashgabat. According to him, "it will give extra impetus for acceleration of development of scientific fields in Turkmenistan and the region as a whole."

According to "Neutral Turkmenistan" newspaper, foreign experts, who attended the conference, offered a lot of other promising projects in this area taking into account local

specifics. Among them is a project to create a joint compression station with the use of wind energy in the desert areas of Turkmenistan.

Professor Hanno Shaumberg from the Technological University of Hamburg (Germany) presented a forward looking plan, which was developed under the TEMPUS project, for the use of solar energy in Turkmenistan. The project provides for training of local specialists, introduction of the production of base materials (monocrystalline or polycrystalline silicon) and the expansion of production technology to the solar modules and complete solar power stations. According to the scientist, "using solar energy, Turkmenistan will be in a position to save a large amount of energy, which is now generated using oil and natural gas."

President of the Research Institute of Central Asia Lio Ok Rehn said that the Korean side offered several projects to Turkmenistan, including sewage treatment plants using alternative energy sources and their use in irrigation of green areas.

- President of Turkmenistan receives senior management of U.S. company SouthOil

On February 24, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received CEO of SouthOil company, Texas USA, Neil Mallon Bush, who conveyed to the head of state greetings on behalf of his father, former U.S. president George Bush senior, and handed Georg Bush's written message to the head of state.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat quoting the press service of the head of state, the guests was briefed on the "main priorities of Turkmenistan's energy strategy, as well as plans to modernize the oil industry and diversify routes for Turkmenistan's energy resources to the world markets."

Neil Mallon Bush expressed high interest of SouthOil in establishing a productive cooperation with Turkmenistan in the energy industry. He also stressed the desire of big U.S. businesses to expand cooperation with Turkmenistan, who is "enjoying a reputation of a solid and reliable partner in the international business circles."

- Turkmenistan finds new oil deposit with flow rate of 300 tons per day

Turkmen oilmen discovered a new high-flow rate oil deposit at well number 29 in Northern Goturdepe field. The discharge of the well, which was re-restored by specialists of the Goturdepe units, is about 300 tons of oil per day from the depth of over 4 thousand meters.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent has learnt from the Turkmennebit state concern, this success has been achieved solely by the Turkmen specialists, who initiated the development of deposits on the Caspian Sea coast for the first time without foreign partners.

As of today, a ground has been laid at Northern Goturdepe to drill a 5 thousand meter deep exploration well. At the same time, it is planned to start drilling deep directional wells there. This latest technology, known as cluster drilling, makes it possible to drill several wells in different directions from a single point with deviation of 300-400 meters from the wellhead. This will result in a substantial increase in bed thickness and production, Turkmennebit concern noted.

- International conference on alternative energy sources begins in Ashgabat

The international scientific conference titled "Issues related to the use of alternative energy sources in Turkmenistan" started in Ashgabat today. The conference brought together guests from 27 countries including Australia, Japan, Asian, European, American,

Africa and other countries. The list of foreign participants feature scientists, members of the Academies of Sciences, heads of universities, research organizations and companies, representatives of the International Solar Energy Center, the International Council of Solar Energy and others.

The delegation of Turkmenistan to the conference includes specialists of research institutions, universities and other entities relevant to the topic of the conference. During the two-day forum participants will discuss issues related to the use of solar and wind energy and alternative energy sources.

"We view alternative energy sources, rightly referred to as "energy of the future", as a priority area for the further modernization of the national fuel and energy complex," President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov stressed in his welcoming address to the forum participants.

Speaking about prospects of "green technologies" in Turkmenistan, he noted that "the range of use of alternative sources of energy in the active development of desert areas adjacent to the man-made sea in the Karakum desert - the Turkmen Lake, as well as the implementation of such large-scale project as the establishment of the national tourist zone Avaza on the Caspian Sea coast will be significantly expanded."

Social Front

Uzbekistan

Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- U.S. envoy: no plans to reopen Uzbek Afghan air base

ASTANA (Reuters) - The United States is not looking to re-open a key military base in Uzbekistan that was shut in 2005 in a diplomatic row, a U.S. envoy said on Sunday as he ended a rapid tour of former Soviet Central Asia. Uzbekistan, which shares a border with Afghanistan, evicted U.S. troops from the Karshi-Khanabad base after Washington condemned it over a violent crackdown on a protest in the town of Andizhan in May 2005. Relations have since improved, and some diplomats have suggested Washington may try to re-open the base.

Speaking after a visit to Uzbekistan, Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke ruled out the possibility when asked about it in neighbouring Kazakhstan.

"No," he said. "But Uzbekistan does provide us with a valuable opportunity to transit materials to Afghanistan and that is important. (As for) the military base - no."

Keen to restore its sour relations with the West, Uzbekistan -- Central Asia's most populous and ethnically divided nation -- has agreed to host the new NATO supply route for Afghanistan.

- President of Uzbekistan meets with US Special Representative

President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov met with Richard Holbrooke, US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, at Oqsaroy on February 19, 2010.

Welcoming the prominent US diplomat, the head of Uzbekistan expressed the attitude of the country toward further development of Uzbek-American relations on a constructive basis to ensure peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Today, Uzbekistan supplies this country with energy, soft commodities, builds transportation system and provides aid in different spheres of socioeconomic reconstruction. For example, the volume of Uzbek energy supplied to Afghanistan has increased several times this year. Uzbek specialists construct the Hairaton – Mazari-Sharif railway. Large volumes of humanitarian goods and cargo are delivered to Afghanistan through the territory of Uzbekistan.

At the talk, Mr Holbrooke thanked the Uzbek leader for the warm welcome and underscored the interest of American administration in strengthening the mutual cooperation with Uzbekistan to maintain regional security. The US Special Representative stressed the particular importance of the position of Uzbekistan to address the Afghan conflict. Prospects of bilateral cooperation development as well as other topics of mutual interest were discussed at the meeting.

Economic/Energy Front

- Korean cash to flow into Uzbekistan

South Korean firms are to explore for oil and gas in Uzbekistan after Uzbek President Islam Karimov, during a state visit to South Korea on February 10-12, signed an agreement for investment that could be worth more than US\$3.5 billion in developing the Surgil gas field and building a chemicals plant.

Surgil is on the northwestern Ustyurt plateau, which has 16 known deposits of oil and gas. The Korean investment should boost development of the plateau's resources. Once the gas processing plant is up and running, it will produce polypropylene and polyethylene plastics, some of which will be exported to Russia and Iran.

Economic analysts say the Surgil gas plant should allow

Social Front

- Uzbek Officials Telling Villagers About Daily Food Rations

ANDIJON, Uzbekistan -- Authorities in parts of Uzbekistan's eastern Andijon region have started telling people how much food they should eat, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports. Villagers in Maslakhat, in Andijon's Oltinkul district, told RFE/RL that local government officials visited every house in the village this week to give them advice on the amount of food every household should be consuming per day, week, and month.

One man said officials gave printouts with detailed information on the recommended rations. The instructions say a person should consume 38 grams of raisins, 300 grams of vegetables, 82 grams of tomatoes, 110 grams of meat, and 384 grams of milk per day.

Another villager told RFE/RL that the idea is "crazy and ridiculous." He said he cannot afford to buy the recommended rations for the eight members of his family. "They say one person should consume over 3.5 kilos of meat per month, but my whole family of eight eats just one kilogram of meat per month," he said.

A local official named Azizbek told RFE/RL that the introduction of rations for every family in the village was done based on instructions from the central government and the presidential administration.

- Three Uzbeks Sentenced For Murder Of Theater Director

TASHKENT -- Three men were sentenced in Tashkent on February 17 for the murder of Mark Vail, the director of Uzbekistan's prominent Ilhom Theater, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports.

Vail was stabbed to death near his home in Tashkent on September 6, 2007. The court gave Yokub Ghofurov a 19-year sentence, and Alisher Sattorov and Kahramon Pulatov 17-year jail terms after finding them guilty of premeditated murder. Lawyers for Sattorov and Pulatov told journalists that they will ask the court to reduce their clients' prison terms to 13 years. Police failed to apprehend a fourth suspect, Umid Ishokov, who is the alleged mastermind of the murder. Uzbek officials said Ishokov may be living in the United States. Vail was the founder of the Ilhom Theater. His "Imitations of The Koran," a performance based on a poem by Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin, had led some to accuse him of insulting Islam.

- Dashoguz to host festival of Turkmen-Uzbek friendship

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As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov signed a resolution to this effect in the course of the February 26 meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers. He instructed relevant officials to ensure the proper level of organization of the festival and approved the composition of the festival's organizing committee.

- Uzbekistan: The number of suicides is growing among women of the Khoresm Oblast

According to Nazhot human rights group, the number of suicides among women is growing in the Khoresm Oblast of Uzbekistan. The cases of teenage suicides have become more frequent while most of the suicides are reasoned by harsh economic conditions, poverty and domestic violence.

On January 14, 2010 22-year old Nargiza Ollaberganova, the mother of two kids, hanged herself. Her friends say that frequent home scandals, rooted in financial problems, made her commit a suicide. On January 29, 2010, driven by the same reasons, 15-year old Mahliye Rahimboeva also committed suicide. 17-year old Yulduz Ibragimova had big dose of Dimedrol, but the doctors managed to rescue her; the reason of the suicide attempt is the same – poverty.

Human rights activists note that many cases of suicide and violence against women are not publicly discussed due to imperfect legislation and absence of investigation mechanisms.

In the totalitarian regimes the suicide statistics is classified as top-secret data, inaccessible by wide public since such information shows how the state respects and ensures the rights of its citizens, Nazhot says.

The organization reminds that even Soviet statistics was reporting suicide cases: for instance, 1989 270 cases of suicides among women were reported throughout Uzbekistan.

Today, such information is prohibited to be published by Uzbek media. The number of suicides is growing. The deterioration of socio-economic conditions, total poverty among population, undermined psychological condition of people especially in rural areas make the number of suicides grow (first of all, among women).

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