

**Business & Politics in the Muslim World**  
**News Monitoring**  
**Weekly Report**  
**13 to 18 March 2010**  
**Central Asia**  
**Uzma Siraj**

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- Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan discuss perspectives of cooperation

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- Frederick Starr: Azerbaijan is a key potential supplier for alternative pipeline options

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- U.S. Helsinki Group Slams Baku Court's Refusal Of Bloggers' Appeal

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- Air Astana posts record profit in 2009

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- Kazakh Oil Company Director Fired Amid Massive Strike
- Kazakh Oil Company Leaders Meet With Striking Workers

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- First sitting of new Majlisi Namoyandagon takes place

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- Japan gives US\$1.5 million to WHO for improving healthcare on Tajik-Afghan border

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- Turkmen parliament unanimously votes for new laws
- Minister of Education of Turkmenistan received reprimand

#### **Geo Strategic Front**

- Tajik, Turkmen Presidents Discuss Afghanistan, Water Resources
- Russia highly values relations with Turkmenistan, Russian Foreign Ministry says
- Caspian countries prepare to adopt agreement on maritime security

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

- Interstate Coordination Water Commission to hold meeting in Ashgabat

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- President Kazakhstan arrived in Uzbekistan for official visit
- Uzbek-Kazakh cooperation expanding

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- Uzbekistan – heart of Central Asia” exhibition opens

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#### **Azerbaijan**

#### **Political Front**

- Azerbaijan's ruling party unveils election plans

The Azerbaijani ruling party unveiled its parliamentary elections preliminary plans. "We will not support candidates of other parties in the parliamentary elections because they have not created a coalition.

- Jailed Azerbaijani Opposition Journalist Pardoned

BAKU -- An Azerbaijani opposition journalist jailed on what supporters say were politically motivated charges has been pardoned, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

#### **Geo Strategic Front**

- NATO envoy for S. Caucasus to visit Azerbaijan next month

Special Representative of the NATO Secretary General for the South Caucasus Robert Simmons will visit Azerbaijan in April, Romanian ambassador to Azerbaijan Nikolae Ureki said.

- Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan discuss perspectives of cooperation

Azerbaijan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Elmar Mammadyarov met with deputy foreign minister of Kazakhstan Nurlan Yermekbayev on March 12.

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

- First oil from Chirag field to be achieved in 2013's fourth quarter

First oil from Chirag field is expected to be produced in 2013's fourth quarter, Bp-Azerbaijan Company said.

- Frederick Starr: Azerbaijan is a key potential supplier for alternative pipeline options

“BTC was the only achievement of US diplomacy in the region after the collapse of USSR”, Frederick Starr, Chairman of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, said.

#### **Social Front**

- U.S. Helsinki Group Slams Baku Court's Refusal Of Bloggers' Appeal

Emin Milli (right) was sentenced in November to 2 1/2 years in prison and Adnan.

The U.S. Helsinki Commission has criticized a Baku court's rejection of appeals by two Azerbaijani bloggers against their prison sentences, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

#### **Kazakhstan**

##### **Political Front**

- Kazakhstan creates new oil and gas ministry in a major government reshuffle (SRI) - In a government reorganization last Friday, Kazakhstan's president Nursultan Nazarbayev created a new oil and gas ministry and reshuffled the cabinet.

##### **Geo Strategic Front**

- Kazakhstan, Norway join forces in combating organized crime, drug trafficking and terrorism

Astana. March 15. Interfax-Kazakhstan - Astana and Oslo are signing a number of cooperation agreements in various fields. According to the statement from the Foreign Ministry, the parties are currently finalizing agreements on readmission of citizens and visa-free entering for holders of diplomatic passports.

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

- Oil and gas exports up in January

(SRI) - Kazakhstan exported 5.204 million tons of oil and gas condensate in January, up 16.7 percent compared to the same period last year, the State Statistical Agency reported. Export revenues in January amounted to \$2.756 billion.

- Air Astana posts record profit in 2009

(SRI) - Kazakhstan's flag carrier Air Astana reported a record profit of \$47 million on revenues of \$546 million for 2009, up 176 percent from 2008, according to the company's unaudited financial statements.

##### **Social Front**

- Kazakh Prison Warden Arrested For Extortion

KUSHMURUN, Kazakhstan -- The warden of a notorious Kazakh jail and one of his subordinates have been arrested on suspicion of extortion, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Police today said the two officers, whose names were not made public, were arrested on March 16.

- Thousands Evacuated As Floods Hit Eastern Kazakhstan

OSKEMEN, Kazakhstan -- Over 2,000 people have been evacuated from several villages in eastern Kazakhstan due to severe flooding caused by melting snow, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

- **Kazakh Oil Company Director Fired Amid Massive Strike**

ZHANAOKEN, Kazakhstan -- The director of the OzenMunaiGaz energy company was fired today amid a strike by thousands of oil workers in southwestern Kazakhstan, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

- **Kazakh Oil Company Leaders Meet With Striking Workers**

ZHANAOKEN, Kazakhstan -- Regional government officials and KazMunaiGaz oil and gas company managers are holding talks today with striking oil workers in the southwestern town of Zhanaozen, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

## **Kyrgyzstan**

### **Political Front**

- **Kyrgyz Opposition Party Leader's Car Searched**

A Kyrgyz opposition leader says police searched his car today as he left a major opposition rally, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Omurbek Tekebaev, head of the Ata-Meken (Fatherland) party and a former parliamentary speaker, told RFE/RL he was leaving the opposition-organized People's Congress in Bishkek when his car was stopped by police officers.

- **Kyrgyzstan: The opposition meeting set its requirements**

The kurultai (meeting) of the opposition forces, which took place on March 17 in Bishkek, was concluded by the document, outlining the requirements for the Kyrgyz government to be performed until March 24, 2010.

### **Geo Strategic Front**

### **Economic /Energy Front**

- **Kyrgyzstanis owes 231.5 million soms for natural gas**

As of February 1, 2010 in Kyrgyzstan debts of population for consumed natural gas amount to 231.5 million soms, the press service "Kyrgyzgas" told the news agency 24.kg.

- **Kurmanbek Bakiyev and ADB representative talks over water and power energy issues**

Director General of Asian Development Bank Central and Western Asia Department Juan Miranda and Kyrgyzstan's President Kurmanbek Bakiyev discussed the issues of water and energy complex of the country at the meeting. The own sources of the news agency 24.kg said there was no discussion that ADB will render assistance to the country in conducting environmental assessment of construction of Kamar-Ata-1.

### **Social Front**

- **RSF Warns Of Harassment Of Independent Media In Kyrgyzstan**

The media watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) says it is "dismayed" at the "unprecedented wave of harassment" directed toward independent and opposition news media in Kyrgyzstan.

- **Kyrgyz Rights Activist Goes Missing**

Ravshan Gapirov reportedly left his Osh home to attend an opposition-sponsored rally in the capital.

A well-known Kyrgyz rights activist has gone missing en route to an opposition-sponsored rally in the capital, Bishkek, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Fashion Week-2010 in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan)

Reportedly, the audience will see the National competition of cloth designers and accessories, brand-shows, photo and style competitions.

## **Tajikistan**

### **Political Front**

- Tajik President Rejects Criticism Of Parliamentary Elections

DUSHANBE -- Tajik President Emomali Rahmon has rejected criticism of last month's parliamentary elections, describing them as democratic and transparent, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

- Spiritual Leader Of Tajikistan's Islamic Party Dies

The funeral ceremony for Muhammadsharif Himmatzoda in Dushanbe on March 17.

DUSHANBE -- The spiritual leader of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) has died at the age 59 after a long illness, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

- First sitting of new Majlisi Namoyandagon takes place

DUSHANBE, March 16, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Under the RT Constitutional Law "On Elections to the Majlisi Oli," the Session of the Majlisi Namoyandagon (Tajikistan's lower chamber of parliament) is convoked by the president during a month after its election. According to the Majlisi Namoyandagon press service, the first regular sitting of the first session of the Majlisi Namoyandagon of the fourth convocation is taking place in Dushanbe today.

### **Geo Strategic Front**

- Tajik, Turkmen Presidents Discuss Afghanistan, Water Resources

DUSHANBE -- Tajik President Emomali Rahmon has held talks in Dushanbe with visiting Turkmen counterpart Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

### **Economic /Energy Front**

- ADB supports Tajik government's energy policy

DUSHANBE, March 16, 2010, Asia-Plus -- On Monday March 15, President Emomali Rahmon received visiting Director General of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Mr. Juan Miranda.

- Japan gives US\$1.5 million to WHO for improving healthcare on Tajik-Afghan border

DUSHANBE, March 13, 2010, Asia-Plus -- A new US\$1.5 million project to make 16 health facilities and the staff working in them better able to deal with humanitarian crises is being rolled out along the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border, the UN World Health Organization (WHO) said on March 12.

### **Social Front**

- Missing Kyrgyz Rights Activist In Detention In Tajikistan

DUSHANBE -- A Kyrgyz human rights activist who disappeared in Dushanbe last month is being held in a detention center for homeless people, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Muhammadsoleh Muhammadtohir told RFE/RL that his brother, Nematullo Botakoziev, is ill and needs medical treatment.

## **Turkmenistan**

### **Political Front**

- Turkmen parliament unanimously votes for new laws

The fifth session of the Mejlis of Turkmenistan of the fourth convocation was held in Ashgabat. Several new laws and regulations were put on the agenda. Heads of relevant ministries and departments, representatives of the media were also invited to attend.

- Minister of Education of Turkmenistan received reprimand

By the decree of the President of Turkmenistan, Minister of Education of the country Gulshat Mammedova has been reprimanded.

### **Geo Strategic Front**

- Tajik, Turkmen Presidents Discuss Afghanistan, Water Resources

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov with Tajik President Emomali Rahmon in Dushanbe on March 18.

- Russia highly values relations with Turkmenistan, Russian Foreign Ministry says  
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Sergey Lavrov is heading for Turkmenistan on a two-day working visit to discuss with the leadership of the country prospects for expanding economic relations and increasing trade. This was reported by ITAR-TASS with reference to the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrei Nesterenko.

- Caspian countries prepare to adopt agreement on maritime security  
Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan agreed on the main issues of the draft Agreement on joint activities at the level of border and customs services and internal affairs bodies to ensure security in the Caspian Sea.

### **Economic /Energy Front**

- Interstate Coordination Water Commission to hold meeting in Ashgabat

The Interstate Coordination Water Commission (ICWC) will hold a meeting in Ashgabat. The commission consists of heads of water departments of Central Asian states - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

### **Social Front**

#### **Uzbekistan**

#### **Political Front**

#### **Geo Strategic Front**

- President Kazakhstan arrived in Uzbekistan for official visit

Almaty. March 17. Kazakhstan Today - The President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, arrived for a two-day official visit in Uzbekistan, the agency reports citing official mass media.

- Uzbek-Kazakh cooperation expanding

President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev paid an official visit to Uzbekistan on 16-17 March. The official welcoming ceremony of the President of Kazakhstan was held at Kuksaroy residence on 17 March. The guard of honor was lined up in the honor of the high guest and state anthems of the two states were played. Islam Karimov and Nursultan Nazarbayev reviewed the guard of honor.

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

- Fifth UzEnergyExpo exhibition opens

The fifth international exhibition UzEnergyExpo-2010 opened at Uzexpocenter in Tashkent. The forum has been organized by the Uzbekenergo company, State Nature Protection Committee, Commerce and Industry Chamber and the Energy and Automation Institute of the Sciences Academy.

## **Social Front**

- Uzbekistan – heart of Central Asia” exhibition opens

The fifth photo exhibition “Uzbekistan – heart of Central Asia. Culture and development” opened in Tashkent. The event has been organized by the Arts Academy in cooperation with Commerce and Industry Chamber, UN Office and the Economic Review magazine.

## **Detailed Report**

### **Azerbaijan**

#### **Political Front**

- Azerbaijan's ruling party unveils election plans

The Azerbaijani ruling party unveiled its parliamentary elections preliminary plans. "We will not support candidates of other parties in the parliamentary elections because they have not created a coalition. We have participated independently in all elections and it will also be the same this time. We have enough potential and candidates for the independent participation in the elections," Deputy Executive Secretary of the New Azerbaijan Party (NAP) Mubariz Gurbanli said. Azerbaijan will hold parliamentary elections in autumn. The previous elections were held in November 2005. The elections use the majority system in Azerbaijan's 125 constituencies. According to Gurbanli, they cooperate only with parties that support NAP's platform and the policy of President Ilham Aliyev. "We will not create a coalition at the election. Participation of political parties in elections is regulated by the Electoral Code and our party does not interfere in this process in any way," he said. The ruling party will nominate candidates in all districts, he said. "The number of seats that we will take in parliament depends on voters. Citizens support the Ilham Aliyev's policy and the support to our party is based on that. We believe that voters will support our candidates. But in which district our candidate will win, will depend on a pre-election campaign, the personal qualities of the candidate, as well as on the election campaign in this region. So, we can say in advance that we want to preserve our majority in parliament. It is early to predict the number of MP," the MP said. According to Gurbanli, although the campaign has not officially started, the party is ready for elections. "Our staff potential is at a high level. That's why real and reserve candidates are known in connection with any election. However, in the current situation discussions are not carried out within the party to identify candidates for districts," he said.

- Jailed Azerbaijani Opposition Journalist Pardoned

BAKU -- An Azerbaijani opposition journalist jailed on what supporters say were politically motivated charges has been pardoned, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports. Qanimat Zahid, the editor in chief of "Azadliq" newspaper, was jailed for four years in 2007 on hooliganism charges.

He was among some 70 people pardoned today by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev.

#### **Geo Strategic Front**

- NATO envoy for S. Caucasus to visit Azerbaijan next month

Special Representative of the NATO Secretary General for the South Caucasus Robert Simmons will visit Azerbaijan in April, Romanian ambassador to Azerbaijan Nikolae Ureki said.

Simmons is expected to attend the NATO seminar in Baku on April 20-21 dedicated to the fulfillment of UN Security Council resolution 1540 about the conventional arms.

Romanian embassy in Baku has carried out the coordinating duty for NATO in Azerbaijan since last January.

- Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan discuss perspectives of cooperation

Azerbaijan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Elmar Mammadyarov met with deputy foreign minister of Kazakhstan Nurlan Yermekbayev on March 12.

According to press service of the Ministry, the sides discussed a number of issues, including current situation of Azerbaijan-Kazakhstan relations and perspectives for development of cooperation.

Mammadyarov also fully informed Yermekbayev on Azerbaijan's position in settlement of the conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Yermekbayev, in turn, said during the period of its OSCE chairmanship Kazakhstan will increase efforts over the soonest solution of the frozen conflicts, including Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict.

### **Economic /Energy Front**

- First oil from Chirag field to be achieved in 2013's fourth quarter

First oil from Chirag field is expected to be produced in 2013's fourth quarter, Bp-Azerbaijan Company said.

Total amount of the project is \$ 6 bln dollars. Of this amount, \$ 4 bln will be spent for construction of establishments and preliminary drilling program, while the remaining part for drilling of wells from platform, which is to be lasted at the end of 2024.

- Frederick Starr: Azerbaijan is a key potential supplier for alternative pipeline options

“BTC was the only achievement of US diplomacy in the region after the collapse of USSR”, Frederick Starr, Chairman of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, said.

According to analyst, the countries of the Caspian region are facing a common set of problems, but opinions about their causes vary from country to country.

“During the last decades of the Soviet regime, Moscow’s influence over the area began to wane, as investment was cut back and new revolutionary forces were emerging south of the Soviet border,” the analyst added.

Mr. Starr believes that new realities in the region are also significantly impacting energy developments and have potential implications for European energy security.

The current trends are not serving the energy security interests or integration purposes for either the region or the West.

“Azerbaijan is a key potential supplier for alternative pipeline options for the so-called Southern Corridor for natural gas, but the lag in finalizing the supply agreement with Turkey is causing delays in the development of the gas fields and their delivery infrastructure. As a result, European dependency on natural gas coming from the Russian pipeline system will only increase,” he added.

### **Social Front**

- U.S. Helsinki Group Slams Baku Court's Refusal Of Bloggers' Appeal

Emin Milli (right) was sentenced in November to 2 1/2 years in prison and Adnan.

The U.S. Helsinki Commission has criticized a Baku court's rejection of appeals by two Azerbaijani bloggers against their prison sentences, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

Emin Milli was sentenced in November to 2 1/2 years in prison and Adnan Hajizade to two years on charges of hooliganism arising from what the commission chairmen said "appeared to be a crude, government-arranged incident at a restaurant" in July 2009.

Both bloggers were well-known for their satirical comments on Azerbaijani government policy. The Baku court rejected their appeal on March 10.

Both men, and a number of rights groups, have insisted the incident behind the jailing was a provocation and the motives connected to their very public criticism of the government. Senator Benjamin Cardin (Democrat, Maryland), the U.S. Helsinki Commission chairman, said the bloggers' case "is the latest in a long series of setbacks for independent journalism and civil society in Azerbaijan."

Commission Co-Chair Congressman Alcee Hastings (Democrat, Florida), said it "illustrates the lack of independence of Azerbaijan's judicial system."

Congressman Robert Aderholt (Republican, Alabama) said the bloggers' conviction "seems to indicate a determination to stifle dissent before the parliamentary election later this year."

The U.S. Helsinki Commission wrote in December to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev expressing concern about the convictions and calling for a fair appeal process. Azerbaijani authorities did not reply to that letter.

### **Kazakastan**

#### **Political Front**

- Kazakhstan creates new oil and gas ministry in a major government reshuffle (SRI) - In a government reorganization last Friday, Kazakhstan's president Nursultan Nazarbayev created a new oil and gas ministry and reshuffled the cabinet.

Sauat Mynbayev, the former Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources, was appointed to head the new Ministry of Oil and Gas. The new ministry will take over a regulatory role of the oil and gas sector; a role which had been largely exercised by the national oil company KazMunaiGas.

"The ministry will relieve KazMunaiGas of inappropriate functions that create a conflict of commercial and state interests. The activities of KazMunaiGas should be purely commercial," Nazarbayev said.

Mynbayev was instrumental in renegotiating the agreement on the development of the giant Kashagan field with a consortium of international oil companies two years ago. Currently, he is spearheading Kazakhstan's efforts to win more advantageous terms at foreign-led oil and gas projects, including the Karachaganak gas condensate field.

Bakhyt Sultanov, the former Minister of Economy and Budget Planning, has been dismissed from his post and replaced by former Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade Zhanar Aitzhanova. The Ministry itself has been renamed the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. While its budget planning role has been moved to the Ministry of Finance, the new Ministry will take over responsibilities for trade.

In her earlier role, Aitzhanova was responsible for trade issues, including Kazakhstan's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Nazarbayev thanked Sultanov for his work at the Ministry of Economy and Budget Planning and said that he would shortly obtain a new post indicating that more government changes were planned. The Ministry of Industry and Trade has been reorganized to oversee Kazakhstan's industrial-innovative development and has been

renamed the Ministry of Industry and New Technologies. The ministry continues to be headed by Asset Isekeshov who also serves as Deputy Prime Minister. The Ministry of Culture and Information has been split into two separate ministries - the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Communication and Information. The Ministry of Culture will be headed by the former Minister of Culture and Information Mukhtar Kul-Mukhammed, while the Ministry of Communication and Information will be led by Askar Zhumagaliyev.

### **Geo Strategic Front**

- Kazakhstan, Norway join forces in combating organized crime, drug trafficking and terrorism

Astana. March 15. Interfax-Kazakhstan - Astana and Oslo are signing a number of cooperation agreements in various fields. According to the statement from the Foreign Ministry, the parties are currently finalizing agreements on readmission of citizens and visa-free entering for holders of diplomatic passports.

During the visit to Norway on March 11-March 12, the Executive Secretary of the Foreign Ministry Rapol Zhoshybayev and Deputy Justice Minister Astri Aas-Hansen expressed interest in signing agreements to combat organized crime, drug trafficking and terrorism. President Kazakhstan arrived in Uzbekistan for official visit

Almaty. March 17. Kazakhstan Today - The President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, arrived for a two-day official visit in Uzbekistan, the agency reports citing official mass media. The officials of Uzbekistan headed by the Prime Minister of the country, Shavkat Mirziyev, and the Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Uzbekistan, Boribay Zheksemin, met N. Nazarbayev at the airport Tashkent-2.

According to the president's press service, the heads of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan will hold meetings on Wednesday, March 17, in the first half of the day. After the meeting, the officials plan to sign about five bilateral documents. It is planned that in the second half of the day the President of Kazakhstan will lay flowers at the independence and humanism Monument and will visit Hazrati Imam complex and the mausoleum Tolebi in Tashkent. The diplomatic relations between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were established on November 23, 1992. The main document in mutual relations is the Contract of Eternal Friendship and the Contract on Strengthening of Economic Cooperation. Goods turnover between the countries, as of 2009, has been \$1 billion 196.3 million and has decreased in comparison with 2008 by 33.1 %.

### **Economic /Energy Front**

- Oil and gas exports up in January

(SRI) - Kazakhstan exported 5.204 million tons of oil and gas condensate in January, up 16.7 percent compared to the same period last year, the State Statistical Agency reported. Export revenues in January amounted to \$2.756 billion.

At the same time, Kazakhstan exported 1.681 billion cubic meters of natural gas for \$105.6 million and imported 453.5 million cubic meters for \$33.4 million. The country also exported 407,600 tons of oil products in January for \$142.1 and imported 126,300 tons for \$66.2 million.

- Air Astana posts record profit in 2009

(SRI) - Kazakhstan's flag carrier Air Astana reported a record profit of \$47 million on revenues of \$546 million for 2009, up 176 percent from 2008, according to the company's unaudited financial statements.

"Although there was a one-off currency gain of \$8.2 million after devaluation of the Kazakh tenge in February 2009, the result represents the effectiveness of cost saving measures from mid 2008," Air Astana president Peter Foster said in a statement. "The fact that we were not fuel hedged until April 2009 meant that we took full advantage of price falls. Add to that unit cost savings across the airline, and in particular the dismantling of general sales agency agreements in Kazakhstan and Russia following the implementation of IATA eBSPs in both markets, and the year was very satisfactory in spite of the drop in revenues." Air Astana is a joint venture between Kazakhstan's state investment and holding company Samruk Kazyna (51%) and British BAE Systems PLC (49%).

### **Social Front**

- **Kazakh Prison Warden Arrested For Extortion**

KUSHMURUN, Kazakhstan -- The warden of a notorious Kazakh jail and one of his subordinates have been arrested on suspicion of extortion, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Police today said the two officers, whose names were not made public, were arrested on March 16. According to local authorities, between January 28 and February 15, the arrested officers received three television sets, four home cinema systems, two mobile phones, a computer monitor, and over \$1,000 in cash from a relative of one prisoner. The regional branch of the National Security Committee is investigating the case. The jail is situated in the town of Kushmurun in Kazakhstan's northern Qostanay Oblast and is known for its very strict conditions.

Rights activists have made frequent accusations of prisoner mistreatment at the jail, including beatings, solitary confinement, and torture. Prominent opposition politician Ghalymzhan Zhaqiyarov served his prison term there between 2002 and 2005.

- **Thousands Evacuated As Floods Hit Eastern Kazakhstan**

OSKEMEN, Kazakhstan -- Over 2,000 people have been evacuated from several villages in eastern Kazakhstan due to severe flooding caused by melting snow, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. The floods have completely destroyed local power and telephone lines and threaten to sweep away bridges. The floods are approaching the villages of Qyzyl Kesik, Qumkol, Kokzhyra, and Qarghyba.

The East Kazakhstan Oblast Department for Emergency Situations announced today that in all, 19 towns and villages with a combined population of almost 20,000 people could be affected.

On March 16, the flood waters destroyed a dam near the village of Qaraul. Two thousand residents were evacuated and at least 60 houses were damaged, but no casualties are reported.

- **Kazakh Oil Company Director Fired Amid Massive Strike**

ZHANAOZEN, Kazakhstan -- The director of the OzenMunaiGaz energy company was fired today amid a strike by thousands of oil workers in southwestern Kazakhstan, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Baqytqali Biseken was appointed as OzenMunaiGaz's director in December. Several thousand of the company's workers have been on strike since March 4; one of their major demands was Biseken's sacking.

The strike in the town of Zhanaozen was sparked by the company's decision to change the wage scale for workers, which they said reduced their salaries. Several dozen people - - including students and pensioners -- rallied in support of the striking workers on March 15 on Zhanaozen's central square and demanded a meeting with OzenMunaiGaz management and Kazakh Oil and Gas Minister Sauat Mynbaev.

One participant in the rally, Nursulu Otarbaeva, told RFE/RL that the striking workers are entitled to a response to their demands from company management. Otarbaeva added the protesters want Mynbaev to come to Zhanaozen and assure workers that OzenMunaiGaz shares have not been sold to Chinese companies and will not be sold to them in the future. Zhanaozen city administration official Orak Sarybopeev told RFE/RL on March 15 that it had received an official letter from the rally participants. Sarybopeev said the "situation has almost been resolved." He added that the company's existing wage scale will be preserved and that OzenMunaiGaz management said it will resign if strikers do not return to work.

But on March 14, KazMunaiGaz Exploration Production CEO Kenzhebek Ibrashev called on the striking workers unions and employees to start negotiations and to set up a conciliation commission. But union leader and striker Tabyn Ergenov told RFE/RL the strikers do not believe a commission can resolve the conflict. Ergenov said the strikers want to meet with the senior management of KazMunaiGaz -- the parent company of OzenMunaiGaz -- and Mynbaev and find out if OzenMunaiGaz shares have been sold to any foreign investors.

Meanwhile, the strike is continuing. Ergenov said the strikers have filed an appeal against a March 10 court ruling that declared the strike illegal.

KazMunaiGaz's press service told RFE/RL on March 15 that efforts to establish a constructive dialogue with the strikers had failed. It said the company is prepared not to apply disciplinary measures to those strikers who return to work. It also called on the strikers to make up for the missed work days so that the company can fulfill its monthly production plan.

The press service added that although the number of workers on strike has decreased, the decline in production is increasing and equaled 7,300 tons as of March 15.

- **Kazakh Oil Company Leaders Meet With Striking Workers**

ZHANAOKEN, Kazakhstan -- Regional government officials and KazMunaiGaz oil and gas company managers are holding talks today with striking oil workers in the southwestern town of Zhanaozen, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

KazMunaiGaz President Qayirgeldy Qabyldin visited the town on March 16 and held talks with the strikers. The two sides agreed to set up a conciliation commission to discuss the strikers' demands. Union leader and striker Tabyn Ergenov told RFE/RL that the strikers elected 12 delegates to take part in the conciliation commission, which has begun its work.

Several thousand workers at OzenMunaiGaz, a KazMunaiGaz affiliate, have been on strike since March 4. They are demanding the replacement of the official trade union leader; the annulling of the decision to change the workers wage scale, which they say reduced their wages; cuts in their annual work output; and the resignation of OzenMunaiGaz's director.

The last demand was met on March 16 when OzenMunaiGaz head Baqytqali Biseken was fired. Union leader Ergenov says the strike will continue during the talks within the framework of the conciliation commission.

## **Kyrgyzstan**

### **Political Front**

- **Kyrgyz Opposition Party Leader's Car Searched**

A Kyrgyz opposition leader says police searched his car today as he left a major opposition rally, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Omurbek Tekebaev, head of the Ata-Meken (Fatherland) party and a former parliamentary speaker, told RFE/RL he was leaving the opposition-organized People's Congress in Bishkek when his car was stopped by police officers. When Tekebaev asked them why his car was being searched, they told him they had been informed that he had a gun in the car. Tekebaev said he showed them his official permit to carry a special service-award pistol and the officers let him go.

Tekebaev had harshly criticized Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev and his policies in remarks to attendees at the rally.

- **Kyrgyzstan: The opposition meeting set its requirements**

The kurultai (meeting) of the opposition forces, which took place on March 17 in Bishkek, was concluded by the document, outlining the requirements for the Kyrgyz government to be performed until March 24, 2010.

The document demands to cancel new heating and electricity tariffs, return Kyrgyztelecom and Severelectro strategic enterprises to the state, free and justify all political prisoners and regime opponents, liquidate Central Agency for Development, Investment and Innovation (CADII), headed by President's son Maxim Bakiev, establish special commission for investigation of consultant Eugene Gourevitch's case, accused by Italian judges of financial crimes, relieve the brothers of the President from the office, and stop media filtering.

After the approval of the document, the opposition leaders established the executive committee, headed by Roza Otunbaeva. The parliamentary opposition leader was formally nominated as the new leader of the united opposition forces. It has to be mentioned that the previous leader Almazbek Atambaev lost presidential elections and withdrew into the shadows. Temir Sariiev, the Ak-Shumkar party Chairman, and few other opposition leaders were expelled from the united opposition for his critics of Atambaev. Today, they all are united under National Kurultai.

In the opinion of the observers, the requirements, set by National Kurultai before President Bakiev, will most likely be ignored and Kyrgyzstan is expecting vigorous opposition between the ruling party and its opponents. Obviously, the new instrument of opposition forces will become national kurultai and local branches of the Executive commission. "The opposition forces will avoid direct clashes with the government. It will use only non-violence and peaceful methods – the anonymous opposition member informed Ferghana.Ru – Many leaders realize that the government is interested in provocation and disorder. On the other hand, the protest capacity of people will be accumulated in the new commissions and this does not mean we will not organize meetings and demonstrations", the source indicated.

In case their requirements are not satisfied by March 24 the opposition leaders promised to organize kurultai in all regions of the republic.

Is Kyrgyz opposition able to reach its goals in the near future, considering total information vacuum and ban on meetings, is the matter of time. However, the analysts already gave positive comments about new opposition leader. Roze Otunbaeva is widely known internationally. She is not linked to any of the current regional clans and known as non-corrupted politician. Besides, as the deputy of Jogorku Kenesh, she is granted parliamentary immunity. It is interesting to note that during March revolution of 2005 Kurmanbek Bakiev was also elected as the Chairman of the Coordination Council.

Meanwhile, Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev wrote the book "March revolution: the historical choice of nation". The author analyses revolution trends and presents his vision of Kyrgyzstan's future as an independent state. Bakiev "specified the differences between revolution and coup and proved that it was democratic revolution". The book contains 488 pages, photos and 2005-2009 chronicles in Kyrgyzstan.

## **Geo Strategic Front**

### **Economic /Energy Front**

- Kyrgyzstanis owes 231.5 million soms for natural gas

As of February 1, 2010 in Kyrgyzstan debts of population for consumed natural gas amount to 231.5 million soms, the press service "Kyrgyzgas" told the news agency 24.kg. Reportedly, 419 consumers in the country have been cut off gas supply system for 2 months for nonpayment in 2010. "Consumer must pay for the consumed volume of natural gas within three days from the moment of getting a receipt. If the consumer has a debt of over 800 soms, he will be cut off gas supply without a warning", the press service informs.

As noted, a fine at the rate of 0.5 per cent of the main amount of debt is imposed for every day of payment delay.

- Kurmanbek Bakiyev and ADB representative talks over water and power energy issues

Director General of Asian Development Bank Central and Western Asia Department Juan Miranda and Kyrgyzstan's President Kurmanbek Bakiyev discussed the issues of water and energy complex of the country at the meeting. The own sources of the news agency 24.kg said there was no discussion that ADB will render assistance to the country in conducting environmental assessment of construction of Kambar-Ata-1.

Kyrgyzstan and Asian Development Bank have been discussing prospects for cooperation during the meeting. The head of the country, in particular, expressed gratitude to ADB for the rendered financial and technical support in implementation of projects in such key sectors of economy as transport, agriculture, prevention of emergency situations, education and development of infrastructure.

In his turn Mr. Miranda noted that ADB appreciates trusted partner relations with Kyrgyzstan and is interested in their further development. He also expressed gratitude for high appraisal of ADB's activity. "Awarding ADB with a state award – Danaker order – is an expression of recognition of the bank's contribution into the economy of your country", said the official representative of the delegation. During the meeting they also exchanged views on further strengthening of regional cooperation in Central Asia, particularly on the issues of trade policy and transport.

## **Social Front**

- **RSF Warns Of Harassment Of Independent Media In Kyrgyzstan**

The media watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) says it is "dismayed" at the "unprecedented wave of harassment" directed toward independent and opposition news media in Kyrgyzstan.

Kyrgyzstan is currently preparing for the fifth anniversary of the so-called Tulip Revolution that ousted President Askar Akayev.

RSF noted that leading independent news websites and the Kyrgyz-language radio and TV broadcasts of RFE/RL have been intermittently inaccessible for the past week. Local broadcasters that normally retransmit the programs were forced to stop on March 10.

In addition, Kyrgyz Internet users have been unable to access three leading news and information portals since March 9. They are Ferghana.ru, Centrasia.ru, and Paruskg.info, whose editor, Gennady Pavlyuk, was murdered last December.

Retransmission of the BBC's news programs was suspended by state broadcaster NTRK on March 15, ostensibly for technical reasons.

All these media had reported that an arrest warrant was issued in Italy for Yevgeny Gurevich, a businessman close to President Kurmanbek Bakiev's inner circle, on suspicion of ties to the mafia. The opposition responded by calling for the resignation of Bakiev and his son Maksim, who is a business associate of Gurevich.

The opposition press has been targeted for publicizing those calls for President Bakiev's resignation.

"Press freedom violations seem to be increasing in frequency and intensity," Reporters Without Borders said. "By harassing independent and opposition media and allowing those responsible for physical attacks on journalists to go unpunished, the authorities are assuming a decisive share of the blame for the extremely worrying deterioration in the situation."

The press freedom organization added: "We urge the president's office to quickly calm down and stop making the media suffer because of its paranoia. We also call on Kyrgyzstan's international partners, especially the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, to remind the authorities of the undertakings they have given to respect press freedom."

The media crackdown was one of the grievances aired by opposition supporters who rallied in Bishkek on March 17.

- **Kyrgyz Rights Activist Goes Missing**

Ravshan Gapirov reportedly left his Osh home to attend an opposition-sponsored rally in the capital.

A well-known Kyrgyz rights activist has gone missing en route to an opposition-sponsored rally in the capital, Bishkek, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Aziza Abdrasulova, the chairwoman of the Torch of the Century (Kylym Shamy) human rights center, told RFE/RL that Ravshan Gapirov planned to travel on March 16 from his home in the southern city of Osh to attend a nationwide opposition congress.

Friends of Gapirov planned to send a car with a driver to bring him to Bishkek. But relatives say Gapirov left the city in an unknown car. His whereabouts are still unknown and he has not contacted anyone since leaving Osh.

- **Fashion Week-2010 in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan)**

Reportedly, the audience will see the National competition of cloth designers and accessories, brand-shows, photo and style competitions. They will also manage to take part in art and business-seminars. The managers of the show promise to present more than 30 new collections during the Fashion Week-2010.

## **Tajikistan**

### **Political Front**

- Tajik President Rejects Criticism Of Parliamentary Elections

DUSHANBE -- Tajik President Emomali Rahmon has rejected criticism of last month's parliamentary elections, describing them as democratic and transparent, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Rahmon made the comments during an address at the opening session of parliament's lower chamber.

Rahmon said the February 28 parliamentary elections were democratic and transparent, and that voting took place peacefully.

It was his first response to international observers' claims that the elections failed to meet many basic democratic standards. The initial report by OSCE and EU monitors noted "certain small positive steps," and "a certain level of pluralism." But they also registered "serious irregularities on polling day including cases of ballot stuffing." Rahmon said that all of Tajikistan's past problems began after an election; for example, the civil war that began in 1992 was triggered by the opposition's refusal to acknowledge the victory of former Communist Party head Rahmon Nabiyev in the 1991 presidential ballot.

Rahmon said that in the past, political parties could not have waged their election campaign freely. He said that enmity towards opposition parties was not acceptable, and he proposed cooperating with them. But all key parliament positions were allocated to members of Rahmon's National Democratic Party of Tajikistan, which won 55 of the 63 parliament seats. As in previous parliaments, the posts of parliament speaker and deputy speakers were distributed between representatives of various regions.

Former Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Shukurjon Zuhurov, who was elected from the eastern Rasht region -- the main opposition stronghold during the civil war -- was elected speaker of the lower house. Former presidential administration head Amirsho Miraliev, who is from Rahmon's native Danghara district in the southern province of Khatlon, was appointed first deputy speaker. The two deputy speaker posts went to Nazira Ghafforova, from the northern Sughd Province, and Mirgand Shahbozov, from Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province.

- Spiritual Leader Of Tajikistan's Islamic Party Dies

The funeral ceremony for Muhammadsharif Himmatzoda in Dushanbe on March 17.

DUSHANBE -- The spiritual leader of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) has died at the age 59 after a long illness, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

He was buried this morning in the capital, Dushanbe. Muhammadsharif Himmatzoda was elected as the party's first leader in 1991 after it was officially registered. When civil war broke out in 1992, Himmatzoda left Tajikistan and joined the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) in exile, of which he was subsequently named deputy head. Himmatzoda returned to Tajikistan in 1997 after the signing of a UN-mediated peace agreement between the government of President Emomali Rahmon and the UTO.

In 2000, Himmatzoda was elected to the lower house of parliament as an IRPT member. He was reelected in 2005. When Said Abdullo Nuri died of cancer in 2006, Himmatzoda stepped down as party head to succeed him as IRPT's spiritual leader. He protested strongly against a new state law on religion passed one year ago that has curtailed the activities of several non-Muslim religious groups and failed to officially register others. A parliamentary commission revoked his benefits last year in retaliation for his opposition to the religion law, whereupon Himmatzoda resigned his parliament mandate. Himmatzoda had been suffering from cancer for the past four years and rarely left his home. The IRPT is the only officially registered religiously based political party in Central Asia.

- First sitting of new Majlisi Namoyandagon takes place

DUSHANBE, March 16, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Under the RT Constitutional Law "On Elections to the Majlisi Oli," the Session of the Majlisi Namoyandagon (Tajikistan's lower chamber of parliament) is convoked by the president during a month after its election. According to the Majlisi Namoyandagon press service, the first regular sitting of the first session of the Majlisi Namoyandagon of the fourth convocation is taking place in Dushanbe today. As usual, the first regular sitting will consider a number of organizational issues. The Majlisi Namoyandagon will elect the chairman and his deputies and adopt the Reglament of its activity. The Chairman of the Majlisi Namoyandagon is elected by secret ballot by a majority of the total number of members of the Majlisi Namoyandagon. The procedure for electing deputy chairmen of the Majlisi Namoyandagon is determined by the Reglament of the Majlis. The first sitting of the Majlisi Namoyandagon will be opened by the eldest member, who will conduct the sitting until the chairman of the Majlis is elected. The Majlisi Namoyandagon is the professional parliament and it effectuates its works in the form a Session. The Session of the Majlisi Namoyandagon is conducted during a year, from the first working day in October to the last working day in June. We will recall that parliamentary elections were held in Tajikistan on February 28, 2010.

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

The ruling People's Democratic Party (PDPT) won elections in 39 of 41 single-mandate constituencies and two other seats in the single-mandate constituencies were split between the Agrarian Party (APT) and the Party of Economic Reforms. Besides, 16 members of the PDPT, two members of the Islamic Revival Party (IRPT), two members of the Communist Party (CPT), one member of the APT and one member of the Party of Economic Reforms were elected to the parliament through the party list system.

In all, PDPT won 55 seats out of 63 in the Majlisi Namoyandagon. The results mean little changed from the previous parliament where PDPT held 57 seats.

According to some experts, Shukurjon Zuhurov, formerly Minister of Labor and Social Protection, will be elected Chairman of the Majlisi Namoyandagon.

### **Geo Strategic Front**

- Tajik, Turkmen Presidents Discuss Afghanistan, Water Resources

DUSHANBE -- Tajik President Emomali Rahmon has held talks in Dushanbe with visiting Turkmen counterpart Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Rahmon told a joint press conference that the talks focused on the use of water resources, including for hydroelectric power. He stressed that the international community knows that Tajikistan suffers from a deficit of electricity during winter.

"Tajikistan's firm position in the area [of energy] is not only to meet the legitimate and logical need to use its natural resources, including water, to provide the country's economy and population with vital energy, but also to take into account our common regional interests," Rahmon said.

Rahmon said that the positions of his country and Turkmenistan on Afghanistan, as well as on the fight against terrorism and drug-trafficking, coincide.

He added that two countries have invited Afghanistan to cooperate in projects involving communications, roads, and gas pipelines and power lines linking Tajikistan and Turkmenistan via Afghanistan.

Six bilateral economic and cultural agreements were signed. According to Rahmon, they cover cooperation in transport, air communications between the two countries, hydropower, natural gas, labor, and migration.

Berdymukhammedov also indirectly rejected criticism from other countries in the region of the construction under way of a massive reservoir in the Karakum Desert in Turkmenistan.

Tajik Foreign Ministry spokesman Davlat Nazriev told RFE/RL that Berdimuhammedov will travel tomorrow to Rahmon's native town of Danghara in southern Tajikistan to celebrate the Norouz spring holiday there.

### **Economic /Energy Front**

- ADB supports Tajik government's energy policy

DUSHANBE, March 16, 2010, Asia-Plus -- On Monday March 15, President Emomali Rahmon received visiting Director General of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Mr. Juan Miranda.

Mr. Miranda is the Director General of the Central and West Asia Department covering 10 countries -- Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

According to presidential press service, the sides discussed state and prospects of further expansion of cooperation between the Government of Tajikistan, including ADB's assistance program in the country, which focuses on strengthening regional cooperation through improving energy and transport infrastructure, and private sector development.

President Rahmon, in particular, noted that the ADB is one of large donors of Tajikistan and stressed that to-date, Tajikistan has received preferential loans for 372 million U.S. dollars, grants for 162 million U.S. dollars and technical assistance for 34 million U.S. dollars from the ADB.

The sides discussed issues related to implementation of Tajik government's anti-crisis program as well as energy and transportation projects being implemented in Tajikistan and in the region.

Mr. Miranda highly appraised the anti-crisis measures taken by the Tajik government and noted that according to the ADB estimates, Tajikistan's economy would be growing noticeably this year, presidential press service said.

The ADB official also noted that the ADB would allocate US\$100 million to support Tajikistan's anti-crisis programs and that that amount might be increased.

Mr. Miranda said that the ADB seconded Tajik government's energy policy and intended to support it and he also hailed Tajik government's decision to carry out the techno-economic and environmental and social studies for the Roghun hydroelectricity project, according to presidential press service.

In the course of the talks, the two also discussed issues related to conducting feasibility study for construction of other hydropower plants on the territory of Tajikistan, construction of power transmission line from Tajikistan to Afghanistan and the construction of a railway link connecting Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Iran, the source said.

We will recall that Mr. Miranda accompanied by Deputy Director General Werner Liepach, and Senior Adviser Tatsuya Kanai arrived in Tajikistan on March 15 to have talks with senior government officials and donors. Today, the delegation is departing for Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Tajikistan joined ADB in 1998, and to date has received total assistance of about \$560 million in concessional loans, grants and technical assistance from this institution. ADB's grant assistance package to Tajikistan for 2010 is about \$74 million. The assistance program is expected to support energy and private sector development.

ADB, based in Manila, is dedicated to reducing poverty in the Asia and Pacific region through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration. Established in 1966, it is owned by 67 members – 48 from the region.

- Japan gives US\$1.5 million to WHO for improving healthcare on Tajik-Afghan border

DUSHANBE, March 13, 2010, Asia-Plus -- A new US\$1.5 million project to make 16 health facilities and the staff working in them better able to deal with humanitarian crises is being rolled out along the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border, the UN World Health Organization (WHO) said on March 12.

The yearlong project is being funded by the Government of Japan and implemented by the World Health Organization and by the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), a French nongovernmental organization active in Tajikistan since 1996

"Natural disasters, including flooding, in southern Tajikistan and conflict in neighboring Afghanistan endanger the health of thousands of people and over-burden hospitals and clinics, many of which can't cope with extra demands to deliver health care," said Dr Santino Severoni, WHO's Representative to Tajikistan. "The aims of this new project are to equip and prepare health facilities to provide health care during and after crises and to train health staff to prevent and treat diseases."

The project has two components. The first, being led by WHO, is to improve the ability of 16 Tajik hospitals in vulnerable districts along the 1200 kilometer border with Afghanistan to withstand disasters and emergencies and provide health care in their wake.

More than 1.2 million Tajik people are expected to benefit from the project through having access to better health care, as well as refugees displaced by conflict in Afghanistan. At least 4400 Afghan refugees are currently registered in Tajikistan, more than double the number for this time last year.

The second component is being run by ACTED to help communities in the Panj and Qumsangir districts recover from severe flooding that occurred in 2009. Primary health care facilities damaged in the flooding will be rehabilitated, staff will be trained in combating water-borne diseases, preventing and treating childhood infectious diseases and promoting good hygiene, and medicines will be bought and distributed to prevent diarrhea and other similar illnesses.

Heart disease, hypertension and respiratory infections are the top three causes of death in Tajikistan. The most vulnerable segments of the population are young children, pregnant or lactating women, the elderly, and people with disabilities or suffering from chronic diseases. District health authorities have limited resources, lack essential medicines and medical supplies, and do not have adequate skills to prepare for and respond to crises.

The deterioration in rural food security in Tajikistan in 2007 and its continued drought until 2008, when it experienced its worst winter in 44 years, impacted heavily on health facilities and their ability to treat patients. During the worst phase of the 2007-2008 crisis, just 5-10% of patients had their needs covered on admission to health facilities.

In the meantime, the UN News Center reported on March 11 that the United Nations is helping Tajikistan, a mountainous country prone to natural disasters, enhance its capacity to withstand catastrophes such as floods, avalanches and earthquakes which often destroy homes in the country.

Through its Disaster Risk Management Programme, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) is supporting the country's Committee of Emergency Situations and Civil Defense to strengthen its search-and-rescue capacity nation-wide.

New buildings are being erected while existing ones are being rehabilitated, including in the capital, Dushanbe, to provide office space, storage capacity and resting areas for search-and-rescue teams.

Specialists from Sweden's Civil Contingencies Agency will train staff in line with international standards.

The UN rushed emergency aid to the country in January after an earthquake measuring 5.3 on the Richter scale affected some 7,000 people and destroyed more than 100 houses, the UN News Center said.

### **Social Front**

- Missing Kyrgyz Rights Activist In Detention In Tajikistan

DUSHANBE -- A Kyrgyz human rights activist who disappeared in Dushanbe last month is being held in a detention center for homeless people, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Muhammadsoleh Muhammadtohir told RFE/RL that his brother, Nematullo Botakoziev, is ill and needs medical treatment. Botakoziev sought political asylum in Tajikistan after Kyrgyz authorities accused him of organizing mass protests in 2008 and issued a warrant for his arrest. The Tajik Interior Ministry has confirmed that Botakoziev was arrested. Officials say his case is being investigated by Tajikistan's National Security Committee.

Muhammadtohir expressed concern that international organizations have failed to publicize his brother's plight. He said he fears Tajik authorities will deport Botakoziev to Kyrgyzstan where he could face a lengthy prison sentence.

Dushanbe-based human rights activist Payam Furughi told RFE/RL's Tajik Service that this is not the first time a Kyrgyz citizen has been detained in Tajikistan. He said that

several years ago Muhammadali Salimzoda, a Kyrgyz citizen born in Tajikistan, was held for five months before officials informed his family he was under arrest.

Furughi added that Botakoziev is being held in a detention center with criminals and has been deprived of meeting with his relatives or lawyers.

## **Turkmenistan**

### **Political Front**

- Turkmen parliament unanimously votes for new laws

The fifth session of the Mejlis of Turkmenistan of the fourth convocation was held in Ashgabat. Several new laws and regulations were put on the agenda. Heads of relevant ministries and departments, representatives of the media were also invited to attend.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports referring to the Mejlis, the parliamentarians considered the draft laws of Turkmenistan "On Customs Service", "On Culture", "On Communications", "On Government Property of Turkmenistan Abroad", "On Amendments to the Law of Turkmenistan "On Hydrocarbon Resources", " On Amendments to the Tax Code of Turkmenistan". MPs also reviewed and approved the draft resolution of the Mejlis "On ratification of the Agreement between the Government of Turkmenistan and the Government of the Republic of Italy on support and protection of investments."

Following the meeting the Turkmen parliament "approved and voted unanimously for the new laws tailored to the national interests of Turkmenistan and the universal norms of international law," the Mejlis said.

- Minister of Education of Turkmenistan received reprimand

By the decree of the President of Turkmenistan, Minister of Education of the country Gulshat Mammedova has been reprimanded.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat quoting the press service of the head of state, the reason for this was unsatisfactory performance of duties by the Minister, the low level of organization of work to implement reforms in the education system and delayed implementation of instructions given to her.

### **Geo Strategic Front**

- Tajik, Turkmen Presidents Discuss Afghanistan, Water Resources

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov with Tajik President Emomali Rahmon in Dushanbe on March 18.

DUSHANBE -- Tajik President Emomali Rahmon has held talks in Dushanbe with visiting Turkmen counterpart Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Rahmon told a joint press conference that the talks focused on the use of water resources, including for hydroelectric power. He stressed that the international community knows that Tajikistan suffers from a deficit of electricity during winter.

"Tajikistan's firm position in the area [of energy] is not only to meet the legitimate and logical need to use its natural resources, including water, to provide the country's economy and population with vital energy, but also to take into account our common regional interests," Rahmon said.

Rahmon said that the positions of his country and Turkmenistan on Afghanistan, as well as on the fight against terrorism and drug-trafficking, coincide.

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Tajik Foreign Ministry spokesman Davlat Nazriev told RFE/RL that Berdimuhammedov will travel tomorrow to Rahmon's native town of Danghara in southern Tajikistan to celebrate the Norouz spring holiday there.

- Russia highly values relations with Turkmenistan, Russian Foreign Ministry says  
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Sergey Lavrov is heading for Turkmenistan on a two-day working visit to discuss with the leadership of the country prospects for expanding economic relations and increasing trade. This was reported by ITAR-TASS with reference to the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrei Nesterenko.

"During the visit the sides plan to discuss prospects for expanding mutually beneficial economic relations, increasing trade and cooperation between Russian regions and Turkmenistan," the Russian diplomat said.

"Russia highly values the relations with Turkmenistan and attaches great importance to further strengthening and development of mutually beneficial bilateral cooperation and interaction in political, trade-economic, cultural, educational and other fields," said Andrei Nesterenko. The program of Lavrov's visit includes meetings with President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Vice-Premier, Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan Rashid Meredov.

"There will be an exchange of views on topical international issues, the situation in Central Asia, the expansion of cooperation between the foreign ministries of Russia and Turkmenistan, Nesterenko said. Russia believes that the visit will further strengthen the traditionally friendly Turkmen-Russia relations and development of fruitful cooperation."

- Caspian countries prepare to adopt agreement on maritime security  
Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan agreed on the main issues of the draft Agreement on joint activities at the level of border and customs services and internal affairs bodies to ensure security in the Caspian Sea. This was announced by Deputy Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan Khalaf Khalafov at the final press conference after the meeting of Deputy Foreign Ministers of the five Caspian littoral states held last week in Baku.

"We succeeded in agreeing on all major issues of this draft document," he said, noting that the differences of the parties on the remaining outstanding issues are not pressing. "We hope that the remaining outstanding issues will be addressed at our upcoming meetings. We have already started preparations for the next one that we plan to hold in about two months in Baku," Khalafov said.

According to RIA Novosti, the draft agreement on security in the Caspian Sea provides for multilateral cooperation in various fields at the level of border guards, anti-drug services, Ministries of Emergency Situations, Interior Ministries, port and transport

authorities, bodies for security of oil infrastructure as well as bodies on the fight against drug trafficking, weapons, contraband, illegal activities at sea and human trafficking.

### **Economic /Energy Front**

- Interstate Coordination Water Commission to hold meeting in Ashgabat

The Interstate Coordination Water Commission (ICWC) will hold a meeting in Ashgabat. The commission consists of heads of water departments of Central Asian states - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Vice-Premiere Myratgeldi Akmammedov reported on preparations for this meeting at a meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan on 12 March. He also reported on preparations for the international forum "A Drop of Water - A Grain of Gold" and exhibition dedicated to the world experience and advanced technologies in the efficient use of water resources scheduled for April 2-4.

As the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) said, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov stressed the importance of the upcoming events for the further development of constructive international cooperation and issued instructions to organize them at a high level.

It should be recalled that the Interstate Coordination Water Commission was established in 1992. Represented jointly by five ministers of water management, the ICWC oversees management and development of water resources, sustainability of natural and hydro processes on transboundary waters in the region of Central Asia.

### **Social Front**

#### **Uzbekistan**

#### **Political Front**

#### **Geo Strategic Front**

- President Kazakhstan arrived in Uzbekistan for official visit

Almaty. March 17. Kazakhstan Today - The President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, arrived for a two-day official visit in Uzbekistan, the agency reports citing official mass media.

The officials of Uzbekistan headed by the Prime Minister of the country, Shavkat Mirziyev, and the Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Uzbekistan, Boribay Zheksemin, met N. Nazarbayev at the airport Tashkent-2.

According to the president's press service, the heads of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan will hold meetings on Wednesday, March 17, in the first half of the day. After the meeting, the officials plan to sign about five bilateral documents.

It is planned that in the second half of the day the President of Kazakhstan will lay flowers at the independence and humanism Monument and will visit Hazrati Imam complex and the mausoleum Tolebi in Tashkent.

The diplomatic relations between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were established on November 23, 1992. The main document in mutual relations is the Contract of Eternal Friendship and the Contract on Strengthening of Economic Cooperation. Goods turnover between the countries, as of 2009, has been \$1 billion 196.3 million and has decreased in comparison with 2008 by 33.1 %.

- Uzbek-Kazakh cooperation expanding

President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev paid an official visit to Uzbekistan on 16-17 March. The official welcoming ceremony of the President of Kazakhstan was held at Kuksaroy residence on 17 March. The guard of honor was lined up in the honor of the high guest and state anthems of the two states were played. Islam Karimov and Nursultan Nazarbayev reviewed the guard of honor.

At the face-to-face talks, the presidents discussed the present state and perspectives of bilateral relations, cooperation within international structures, as well as regional and international problems representing mutual interest.

The heads of two states considered the issues of security. They stressed the need for joint actions to fight and prevent such threats as terrorism, extremism, drug and arms smuggling, as well as proliferation of the weapons of mass destruction.

Islam Karimov touched upon the Afghan problem. Establishment of peace and stability in Afghanistan is one of the important conditions in strengthening security and stability in Central Asia and in other regions.

The presidents discussed bilateral and multilateral cooperation in information, energy and environmental security. At the same time, taking into consideration the importance of the food security, they considered issues of fighting plant pests and diseases, as well as smuggling of contaminated products.

Islam Karimov and Nursultan Nazarbayev continued the negotiations with participation of the official delegations of the two countries. The talks focused on the trade-economic and humanitarian cooperation.

Despite the ongoing financial and economic crisis in the world, the mutual trade between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan continues increasing, the sides said. Since 2007, this figure has been reaching more than USD 1 billion annually. Notably, the share of raw materials has been decreasing, while the share of industrial production with high added value has been growing.

The trade and economic cooperation is one of the most important parts of the inter-state relations. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have a huge potential in this area, which has not been used fully. Both sides expressed interest in increasing bilateral trade and reconsidering the export and import structure.

Uzbekistan produced planes, cars, buses, trucks, agricultural machinery, cable products and construction materials, processes cotton and silk, grows fruit and melon and gourd. Kazakhstan has a demand for these products. At the same time, there is a wide field of activity for the Kazakh exporters on the Uzbek market.

Production, supply and transit of energy is another effective area of cooperation. In 2009, a gas pipeline was laid from Turkmenistan to China through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, which is a bright example of successful multilateral cooperation. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan possess large reserves of energy carriers. There are preconditions for the development of relations in this area.

Transport communications of the two states allow increasing incomes from international transit. The use of automobile roads and railways as an interconnected and single system should be improved, and the coordinated activities to ensure free and fast movement of export-import and transit cargoes should be continued.

The two countries have been implementing the Economic Cooperation Program for 2006-2010 and the Economic Cooperation Strategy for 2007-2016. These documents outline prospective directions of bilateral cooperation in trade, water and energy complex,

investments and finance, transport and communications, customs and innovations. Their implementation will allow increasing the bilateral trade several times.

The participants of the negotiations said direct links should be established between the businessmen, industrial enterprises and the regions of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

The economic, scientific, technical and intellectual potential of the two countries serves as a reliable basis for the joint organization of high-tech enterprises and production of high added value goods. Considering that Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have large resources of raw materials, the added value could be effectively increased, especially in textile, chemical and oil and gas sectors.

The scientific and economic potential of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan opens good perspectives for efficient use of water resources, including melioration and irrigation. Development and introduction of water saving technologies and information exchange in this area remain very important. This, in turn, helps solve a number of environmental problems. During the negotiations, the issues of rational use of water and energy resources in Central Asia were also considered. The sides stated that interests and security of all countries of the region should be taken into account during construction of hydrotechnical objects on the trans-boundary rivers.

The cultural and humanitarian cooperation between the two countries covers areas of science, education, culture and art, healthcare, tourism and sports. The Uzbek and Kazakh delegations exchanged views on boosting this cooperation.

On the results of negotiations, Islam Karimov and Nursultan Nazarbayev signed the Joint Communiqué of the Presidents. Other signed documents include Intergovernmental agreement on allocation of land for construction of diplomatic missions, the Program of cooperation between the foreign ministries for 2010-2011 and the Program of cultural and humanitarian cooperation for 2010-2012.

At the press conference that followed the negotiations, the presidents said the talks were constructive and open.

“Both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are interested in development of mutual cooperation,” Islam Karimov said. “In 2009, the bilateral trade turnover made up USD 1.3 billion, which is two times more than in 2006.”

“Uzbekistan is a large state in Central Asia and an ancient cultural center,” Nursultan Nazarbayev said. “Despite the world financial and economic crisis, in 2009, the economy of Uzbekistan developed stably. Our countries have large potential for expansion of mutual cooperation.”

In the second half of the day, presidents Islam Karimov and Nursultan Nazarbayev visited the Mustaqillik (Independence) Square in the center of Tashkent. The high guest laid flowers to the Monument of Independence and Humanism, which is a symbol of freedom, bright future and noble aspirations of the people.

The President of Kazakhstan also got acquainted with the recently built “Uzbekistan” International Forums Palace. He highly evaluated the wide-scale construction and improvement works held in Tashkent.

Nursultan Nazarbayev visited Hazrati Imam (Hastimom) complex, familiarized himself with Hazrati Imam mosque, Muyi Mubarek madrassah and the unique manuscript of the holy Koran – Usman Mushafi.

### **Economic /Energy Front**

- Fifth UzEnergyExpo exhibition opens

The fifth international exhibition UzEnergyExpo-2010 opened at Uzexpocenter in Tashkent. The forum has been organized by the Uzbekenergo company, State Nature Protection Committee, Commerce and Industry Chamber and the Energy and Automation Institute of the Sciences Academy.

Uzbekistan possesses huge industrial and scientific potential, and the energy sector plays an important role in the development of the country's economy. The main goal of the energy industry is providing efficient, quality and reliable energy supply to the economy and the population.

The required power capacity is being achieved through measures of power saving, increasing the efficiency of the use of fuel and energy resources, introduction of the new equipment and technologies.

The exposition is divided into three main sections, namely, Energy; Clean Energy. Power Saving; and Electric Technologies. They feature the latest achievements of the domestic and foreign technologies in renewable energy, small energy, power accumulation and transformation systems, environmental monitoring systems, equipment for extraction, processing and production of energy from fuel and others.

The leader of the power energy sector of Uzbekistan is the state joint-stock company Uzbekenergo, which is currently reconstructing and modernizing the generating capacities and power networks. The company unites 54 enterprises and organizations working in the energy sector.

The established capacity of the country's power stations is 12.4 million kWh. The length of the electrical networks is more than 238,500 km. 38 investment projects worth a total of over USD 3.5 billion, currently implemented in the sector, will help ensure stable functioning of the energy system and increase export potential.

Among the participants of the UzEnergyExpo-2010 are companies from Austria, Germany, China, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

### **Social Front**

- Uzbekistan – heart of Central Asia” exhibition opens

The fifth photo exhibition “Uzbekistan – heart of Central Asia. Culture and development” opened in Tashkent. The event has been organized by the Arts Academy in cooperation with Commerce and Industry Chamber, UN Office and the Economic Review magazine.

The exhibition features more than 200 photographs made by foreign visitors of Uzbekistan, among them scientists, diplomats, teachers and others. The works reflect the cities and nature, as well as the people of the country.

The rich history, beautiful nature, unique culture and architectural monuments of Uzbekistan have always attracted the attention of the world community, the participants of the exhibition said.

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