

Business & Politics in the Muslim World
News Monitoring
April 2 to 8, 2010
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Central Asia
Uzma Siraj

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- Azerbaijan warns against Upper Karabakh deadlock

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- SOCAR exports over 13,000 tons of fuel in March

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- UN secretary-general arriving in Tajikistan today

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- UN Chief Urges Central Asians To Resolve Water Issues
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- Tajik, Russian finance ministers discuss training of specialists for Tajikistan
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- Representatives of 192 UN member nations invited to attend international water conference in Dushanbe

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- UN Chief In Turkmenistan On First Stop Of Central Asian Tour
- UN Secretary General arrives in Ashgabat
- Nicolas Sarkozy plans official visit to Ashgabat

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- Ashgabat hosts international water use forum
- Turkmen President to visit EXPO 2010 in Shanghai

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- UN's Ban To Meet Uzbek President Karimov
- President of Uzbekistan receives head of US Centcom.
- President meets with UN Secretary General
- UN Secretary General visits Uzbekistan
- SCO RATS Council holds session in Tashkent

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- UN's Ban Calls Aral Sea 'Shocking Disaster'
- Uzbekistan-Vietnam business forum held

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- UN's Ban Calls On Uzbekistan To Improve Rights Record

Summery

Azerbaijan

Political Front

- Azerbaijani Opposition Party Postpones Rally After Refusal

Demonstrations are only allowed in certain remote areas in Baku.

BAKU -- An Azerbaijani opposition party has postponed a protest after Baku authorities rejected a formal request to stage a protest outside city hall, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

- International organizations to assist Azerbaijan's parliamentary elections with plans

The OSCE Office in Baku, the Council of Europe Office in Azerbaijan and the EU Delegation to Azerbaijan will jointly present their plans for assisting the country to prepare for the 7th of November parliamentary elections, the OSCE official website said.

- Azerbaijani official: Government will create conditions for political parties to hold activities within law

The Azerbaijani government will create the necessary conditions for all political parties to hold activities under the law in the run up to the parliamentary elections. "If the activities are conducted within the law, the government will create all necessary conditions for this," head of the Azerbaijani Presidential Administration Social and Political Department, Ali Hasanov told journalists today.

Geo strategic Front

- Azerbaijan Conducts Counterterror Operations Along Russian Border

BAKU -- Azerbaijan's Interior Ministry has announced the start of large-scale operations in the northern Quba, Khachmaz, and Qusar districts that border on Russia, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports. The objective of the operations, which began on April 6, is to search for internationally wanted organized-crime and terrorist groups as well as other criminals, and to confiscate illegal weapons.

- Azerbaijan warns against Upper Karabakh deadlock

An Azerbaijani presidential executive said on Friday that Azerbaijan might bring a military intervention on the table regarding Upper Karabakh dispute if peaceful means failed. Ramiz Mehdiyev, the head of the Azerbaijani Presidential Administration, said that Azerbaijan preferred to solve Upper Karabakh dispute peacefully."

Economic/Energy Front

- EU Commissioner for Energy to visit Azerbaijan

EU Commissioner for Energy Günther Oettinger will arrive in Azerbaijan next week, said the head of EU Delegation to Azerbaijan Roland Kobia. Ambassador said that the visit showed the significance of Azerbaijan for EU as an energy supplier.

- Fourth International Caspian Oil and Gas Trading and Transport Conference to be held in Aktau

IV International Caspian Oil and Gas Trading and Transport Conference organized with the support of the Kazakh Ministry of Transport and Communications, Akimat of Mangistau region, the Trade-Industrial Chamber of Mangistau region will be held in Aktau on April 26 - 27. Representatives of the Turkmen Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources express the interest in participation in the conference.

- SOCAR exports over 13,000 tons of fuel in March

Marketing and economic operations department of Azerbaijan State Oil Company (SOCAR) exported 13, 317 tons of fuel, 177,499 tons of diesel oil, 11,309 tons of aircraft fuel and 235 tons of gasoline in March.

Social Front

- Azerbaijani University Criticized For Poor Security One Year After Massacre

BAKU -- Azerbaijan's Prosecutor-General's Office has warned about a lack of security measures at a university where a massacre took place nearly one year ago, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports. Rustam Usubov, Azerbaijan's deputy chief prosecutor, said

in a letter to Education Minister Misir Mardanov on April 2 that Baku's State Oil Academy is still unguarded and too easy for unauthorized people to enter.

- Torrential rains paralyze life in Azerbaijan's Agsu region

Private houses and state institutions, as well as 6 villages were flooded as a result of torrential rains in Azerbaijan's Agsu region on April 4-5, Region State Firefighting Service reported. Some 70% of Agsu city, more than 100 private houses, cellars, yards were flooded, movement became difficult as a result of stream waters which appeared after the heavy rain.

- Baku hosts conference to mark anniversary of Victory in Great Patriotic War

Scientific-practical conference on "Truth and fiction about the Great Patriotic War" dedicated to 65-year anniversary of the Victory in Great Patriotic War was held at the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan (ANAS) on April 8.

Kazakhstan

Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- Kazakhstan's Air Astana Suspends Flights To Bishkek

ASTANA-- Kazakhstan's main airline, Air Astana, said today it has suspended all flights to the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

- UN Chief Calls For Total Nuclear Disarmament

UNITED NATIONS (RFE/RL) -- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has urged world leaders to follow the example of Kazakhstan and "to realize the aspiration and dream of a world free of nuclear weapons."

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

- Chinese Man Jailed For Attack On Kazakh Newspaper

ALMATY -- A Chinese man has been sentenced by a Kazakh court to five days in jail for attacking the office of an independent newspaper, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. The Almaty court found Yan Shaolian, a shuttle trader, guilty on April 5 of attacking the Almaty office of "Zhas alash" on March 28.

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- Kyrgyz President Won't Back Down, As Opposition Claims Power

BISHKEK (RFE/RL) -- Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev has said he will not relinquish power to an opposition coalition that said it was forming an interim government in the wake of a violent uprising. In an interview with the Russian radio station Ekho Moskvyy, Bakiyev said, "I am the elected head of state and I do not accept any defeat."

- Who Is Roza Otunbaeva?

Roza Otunbaeva says she is now head of a temporary caretaker government.

Kyrgyz opposition leader Roza Otunbaeva has said she is now the head of a temporary caretaker government, after the opposition said it had taken power following violent protests in Bishkek.

- Kyrgyz Opposition Leader Hospitalized After Beating

OSH, Kyrgyzstan -- A leader of the opposition Ata-Meken (Fatherland) party in the southern city of Osh remains in serious condition after being severely beaten, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Abdykaim Kangeldiev was attacked by unknown assailants near his house on April 3.

- Further Demonstrations In Kyrgyzstan

BISHKEK (RFE/RL) -- Kyrgyz riot police today fired tear gas and stun grenades into a crowd of hundreds of antigovernment protesters in the capital Bishkek in a bid to disperse the crowd amid ongoing political turmoil.

- Opposition Rallies As UN Chief Visits In Kyrgyzstan

(RFE/RL) -- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has chided Kyrgyzstan for its worsening human rights records in a stinging rebuke to the country once regarded as Central Asia's most democratic state. Ban is on the second leg of a Central Asian tour that will take also him to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan.

- State Islam, Outsiders Compete For Influence In Central Asia

Muslim men pray during Friday Prayers at a mosque in Osh, Kyrgyzstan. Some Central Asians question whether their local clerics are influenced by politics and state doctrine. "Islam is a religion of knowledge," the cleric told a television audience. "Unfortunately, some people attempt to use Islam -- the religion of knowledge, goodness, and development -- wrongly or for their own selfish ends.

Geo strategic Front

- Russia Moves Toward Recognizing New Kyrgyz Authorities; U.S. Says Undecided

Russia has moved toward recognizing the self-proclaimed new leadership of Kyrgyzstan -- while the United States says it has not yet decided whether to recognize the new authorities.

President Kurmanbek Bakiev has meanwhile rejected calls that he resign, saying he remains Kyrgyzstan's legitimate leader -- while also acknowledging that he has been chased from the capital Bishkek and no longer controls any real levers of power. Reports say the security situation in Bishkek remains unstable, with gunfire and groups on the streets reported late on April 8. The new authorities have warned that looters could be shot.

- Kazakhstan's Air Astana Suspends Flights To Bishkek

ASTANA-- Kazakhstan's main airline, Air Astana, said today it has suspended all flights to the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

- Support From Kyrgyz Air Base 'Temporarily Suspended'

The NATO-led force in Afghanistan said today that flights supporting NATO operations in Afghanistan from an air base in Kyrgyzstan have been temporarily suspended following violent political upheaval in Bishkek. But a spokesman for the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, Lieutenant-Colonel Tadd Sholtis, says the move has not had any significant impact on operations or logistical support in Afghanistan.

- Otunbaeva: Air Base In Kyrgyzstan To Remain Open To U.S. Troops

The Kyrgyz opposition leader who claims to be the leader of a temporary "caretaker government" said today that a key air base in Kyrgyzstan will remain open to United States military forces.

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

Tajikistan Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- UN secretary-general arriving in Tajikistan today

DUSHANBE, April 5, 2010, Asia-Plus -- The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is arriving in Tajikistan today afternoon, according to the Tajik MFA information department.

Economic/Energy Front

- UN Chief Urges Central Asians To Resolve Water Issues (RFE/RL) -- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon arrived in Tajikistan and plunged directly into the most controversial topic in Central Asia -- water.

- Inflation for Jan-Feb reportedly stands at 5.4% in Tajikistan
DUSHANBE, April 3, 2010, Asia-Plus -- In Tajikistan, inflation for January-February this year stood at 5.4 percent, according to the CIS Interstate Committee for Statistics. Over the first two months of this year, the highest inflation rate among the CIS member nations has been reported in Ukraine – 11.3 percent.

- Tajik, Russian finance ministers discuss training of specialists for Tajikistan
DUSHANBE, April 8, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Training of personnel for Tajikistan's financial system was a major topic of a meeting of Tajik Finance Minister Safarali Najmiddinov within his Russian counterpart Aleksey Kudrin that took place in Moscow in early April on the sidelines of the fourth meeting of the council of the CIS finance ministers and the eighth session of the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC) Council for Financial and Economic Policy, according to the Ministry of Finance (MoF).

- Tajikistan-bound freight cars still being held up in Uzbekistan
DUSHANBE/QURGHON TEPPA, April 7, 2001, Asia-Plus -- Uzbekistan is continuing to hold up cargos bound for Tajikistan, Tajik railway officials say. Usmon Bobokalonov, the deputy head of Tajik Railways, told Asia-Plus Wednesday afternoon that the number of Tajikistan-bound freight cars stranded on Uzbek territory is now more than 2,000.

- Representatives of 192 UN member nations invited to attend international water conference in Dushanbe
DUSHANBE, April 7, 2001, Asia-Plus -- Dushanbe will host an international conference on the mid-term comprehensive review of the International Decade for Action "Water for Life" on June 8-10 this year. According to the Tajik MFA information department, representatives of 192 UN member nations, more than 60 international and regional organizations, international financial institutions, NGOs, business community, as well as international experts and researchers have been invited to attend the conference

Social Front

- Tajikistan marks World Health Day

DUSHANBE, April 7, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Like other countries of the world, Tajikistan is marking World Health Day today.

According to the Ministry of Health (MoH), they organize a mass campaign on buying shares in open joint-stock company (OJSC) Roghun on this occasion. Some 500 people,

including head of medical centers, hospital head physicians and ordinary medical workers, are expected to take part in this campaign, the source at a MoH said.

Turkmenistan

Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- UN Chief In Turkmenistan On First Stop Of Central Asian Tour

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is set to meet with Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov on the first stop of his tour.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has arrived in Turkmenistan's capital, Ashgabat, on the first stop of a tour of five Central Asian countries.

- UN Secretary General arrives in Ashgabat

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has arrived in the Turkmen capital. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan Rashid Meredov welcomed the distinguished guest at Ashgabat international airport.

- Nicolas Sarkozy plans official visit to Ashgabat

The establishment of the Turkmenistan-France working group on cooperation in the energy field along with the mixed commission on economic cooperation will help coordinate the development of relations between the two countries, said President of France Nicolas Sarkozy in his message to President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov.

Economic/Energy Front

- Ashgabat hosts international water use forum

On April 2, the International Water Forum "A Drop of water is a grain of gold" has convened in Ashgabat. During three days the participants will discuss new prospects for cooperation in the field of water management and rational water use, introduce themselves to the experience and latest achievements in this field.

- Turkmen President to visit EXPO 2010 in Shanghai

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov will visit Shanghai to attend festivities dedicated to the opening of EXPO 2010 Universal Exposition.

Turkmenistan will be represented at the World Exhibition for the first time. The pavilion area for the country's joint exposition will exceed 1000 sq meters. It occupies the "A" zone, one of the most advantageous locations on the "geographical map" of the exhibition, which will also house pavilions of China, the host country of EXPO-2010. The building's facade will be adorned by the national flag and emblem of Turkmenistan as well as the Turkmen carpet ornaments.

Social Front

Uzbekistan

Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- UN's Ban To Meet Uzbek President Karimov

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is scheduled today to meet with Uzbek President Islam Karimov, who has ruled the country since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

The meeting in Tashkent comes after a recent UN Human Rights Committee report criticized Uzbekistan and called for a fuller investigation of the brutal suppression of a 2005 uprising in the city of Andijon.

- President of Uzbekistan receives head of US Centcom

President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov received Commander of the US Central Command General David Petraeus at Oqsaroy residence in Tashkent on 6 April.

- President meets with UN Secretary General

President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov met with Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, in Oqsaroy on April 5.

- UN Secretary General visits Uzbekistan

Secretary General of the United Nations Organization Ban Ki-Moon paid a visit to Uzbekistan on 4-5 April. The head of the international organization initially visited Nukus, where he participated in the presentation of the activities to improve the environmental situation in the Aral Sea area.

- SCO RATS Council holds session in Tashkent

The 16th session of the Council of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was held in Tashkent on 2 April. Representatives of Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan participated in the meeting. The RATS Council condemned the terrorist acts that took place in Moscow in March, leading to numerous casualties, and called for the further consolidation of the efforts of SCO member states in fighting with terrorism.

Economic/Energy Front

- Ban Urges Restraint In Central Asia Water Dispute

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has urged restraint in a growing dispute between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan over the building of a massive Tajik hydroelectric dam.

Ban, who is in Tajikistan as part of a tour of Central Asia, told reporters he is "deeply concerned" over the dispute over the Rogun dam project. Uzbekistan fears the dam will reduce the flow of vital water to its cotton-growing areas.

- UN's Ban Calls Aral Sea 'Shocking Disaster'

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, on a tour of Central Asia, says the depletion of the Aral Sea is one of the planet's most shocking disasters. He is calling on Central Asian leaders to step up cooperation in solving the environmental problems associated with the shrinking of the Aral Sea, once the world's fourth-largest body of fresh water.

- Uzbekistan-Vietnam business forum held

The forum of business circles of Uzbekistan and Vietnam was held in Tashkent on 6 April. The participants of the event considered issues of development of bilateral trade, economic and investment cooperation. Minister of Economy of Uzbekistan Sunatilla Bekenov and Vice Prime Minister of Vietnam Hoang Chung Hai chaired the forum.

Social Front

- UN's Ban Calls On Uzbekistan To Improve Rights Record

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, in Uzbekistan on the third stop on his five-nation Central Asian tour, today told Uzbek authorities it is "time to deliver" on pledges to respect human rights. Ban addressed a group of some 200 students at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy, saying "you have an important place in the universal agreements that bind us as a community of nations."

Detailed Report

Azerbaijan

Political Front

- Azerbaijani Opposition Party Postpones Rally After Refusal

Demonstrations are only allowed in certain remote areas in Baku.

BAKU -- An Azerbaijani opposition party has postponed a protest after Baku authorities rejected a formal request to stage a protest outside city hall, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

Musavat Party spokesman Mehman Cavadoglu told RFE/RL on April 5 that the city's refusal caused his party to postpone the demonstration -- which is against the restrictions Baku has placed on protests -- until April 14. In 2008, the Baku authorities designated several locations on the city outskirts as permissible venues for mass gatherings. Opposition parties have rejected them as too inaccessible. The Musavat Party wants to protest against such restrictions on public gatherings in the capital.

But a request in mid-March to Baku Mayor Hacibala Abutalibov that the list of permitted venues be expanded was rejected, despite the fact that the only legal restriction on holding pickets and protests is that they not be held within 200 meters of government offices. Zaur Ramazanov of the Baku city council told RFE/RL the opposition should gather at the officially permitted venues. He pointed out that the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party made use of those venues during the 2008 presidential election campaign.

- International organizations to assist Azerbaijan's parliamentary elections with plans

The OSCE Office in Baku, the Council of Europe Office in Azerbaijan and the EU Delegation to Azerbaijan will jointly present their plans for assisting the country to prepare for the 7th of November parliamentary elections, the OSCE official website said. The aim of the projects is to support the efforts of the Government and other relevant actors to improve the electoral process and bring the conduct of elections into line with Azerbaijan's OSCE and CoE commitments and other standards for democratic elections. The assistance will concentrate on enhancing political dialogue, strengthening the capacities and independence of the electoral administration and other relevant actors; supporting a media environment that will ensure independent, unbiased and plural coverage of the electoral campaigns of all candidates; encouraging the proper implementation of the Law on Freedom of Assembly; and stimulating public interest and participation in the electoral process, including by women and young people.

- Azerbaijani official: Government will create conditions for political parties to hold activities within law

The Azerbaijani government will create the necessary conditions for all political parties to hold activities under the law in the run up to the parliamentary elections. "If the activities are conducted within the law, the government will create all necessary conditions for this," head of the Azerbaijani Presidential Administration Social and Political Department, Ali Hasanov told journalists today. Parliamentary elections will be held in Azerbaijan in fall 2010. Previous elections were held in November 2005. The elections are held according to the majority system in Azerbaijan's 125 constituencies.

Some opposition parties are planning to hold the campaign rallies. The socio-political situation in Azerbaijan is activated with upcoming of the parliamentary elections, Hasanov said. "In 2010, the opposition, neutral and pro-government parties are seriously prepared for the elections," her added.

Geo strategic Front

- Azerbaijan Conducts Counterterror Operations Along Russian Border

BAKU -- Azerbaijan's Interior Ministry has announced the start of large-scale operations in the northern Quba, Khachmaz, and Qusar districts that border on Russia, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports. The objective of the operations, which began on April 6, is to search for internationally wanted organized-crime and terrorist groups as well as other criminals, and to confiscate illegal weapons.

Interior Ministry official Ehsan Zahidov told RFE/RL that such operations were conducted every year in partnership with neighboring countries. He said this year the operations were being conducted under a mutual cooperation agreement with Russia.

On April 5, Azerbaijan's National Security Ministry issued a press release announcing the start of an operation in the northern Balakan district that also borders Russia. The ministry said the operation was aimed at neutralizing an organized group that was planning terrorist acts in Baku. It did not give further details. Azerbaijan has a long northern border with the Russian republic of Daghestan, where Islamic insurgents have been actively fighting Russian security forces.

- Azerbaijan warns against Upper Karabakh deadlock

An Azerbaijani presidential executive said on Friday that Azerbaijan might bring a military intervention on the table regarding Upper Karabakh dispute if peaceful means failed. Ramiz Mehdiyev, the head of the Azerbaijani Presidential Administration, said that Azerbaijan preferred to solve Upper Karabakh dispute peacefully. "However, we may bring other means, and military intervention, onto table in the future if necessary and if these peaceful means failed," Mehdiyev told editors-in-chief of newspapers and TV channels in Istanbul. Mehdiyev said Azerbaijan was losing its patience, and said Armenia was Russia's support in the Balkans and Russia had to be more sincere in solving this problem. The United States was also supporting Armenia," Mehdiyev said. "If there had been no one behind Armenia, it would have withdrawn from Upper Karabakh," Mehdiyev said. Also, Mehdiyev said signature of protocols between Turkey and Armenia would not harm Turkish-Azerbaijani relations because the two were sister countries. Mehdiyev said Azerbaijan and Turkey would discuss lifting visa procedures, and come to a conclusion soon. Armenia made territorial claims against Azerbaijan in 1988. In 1992 and 1993, Armenia occupied Azerbaijani territories in Upper Karabakh. Azerbaijan and Armenia signed a ceasefire in 1994.

The co-chairs of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) Minsk Group -- Russia, France, and the US -- are currently holding the peace negotiations.

Economic/Energy Front

- EU Commissioner for Energy to visit Azerbaijan

EU Commissioner for Energy Günther Oettinger will arrive in Azerbaijan next week, said the head of EU Delegation to Azerbaijan Roland Kobia. Ambassador said that the visit showed the significance of Azerbaijan for EU as an energy supplier.

Oettinger will leave for Baku from Ashgabat on April 14. He will meet with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, Foreign Minister, Minister of Industry and Energy and SOCAR president. South Corridor and Nabucco projects will be discussed at the meetings. The visit will end on April 16. Before Oettinger - EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European neighborhood Policy Stefan Fule will visit Azerbaijan on April 7.

He will visit Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Economic Development and meet with representatives of political parties and civil society. Kobia said that Fule would visit IDPs homes too. To him, it is a humanistic message on EU's care and support for IDPs.

- Fourth International Caspian Oil and Gas Trading and Transport Conference to be held in Aktau

IV International Caspian Oil and Gas Trading and Transport Conference organized with the support of the Kazakh Ministry of Transport and Communications, Akimat of Mangistau region, the Trade-Industrial Chamber of Mangistau region will be held in Aktau on April 26 - 27. Representatives of the Turkmen Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources express the interest in participation in the conference.

Addressing the organizers of the event, the administration of the ministry stressed that the "conference is a very important and interesting event for the formation of mutually beneficial cooperation with foreign countries and strengthening of business contacts." Conference will focus on the development of transport infrastructure, relationship of the Caspian Sea and the partner countries, the energy resources trade, logistics problems and their solutions, the analysis of ongoing and future oil and gas projects. Selection of the venue is not accidental. The only international sea port of the Republic functions in Aktau. As a result of investment projects, which aim to improve transport infrastructure, Aktau will be a crucial link between Europe and Asia. Representatives of such companies as Chevron, Shell, Litasco, Vitol, Petrom, Tethys Petroleum, Petromobil, OMV and other companies confirm their participation in the conference. The website of the conference is www.caspianoiltrading.com

- SOCAR exports over 13,000 tons of fuel in March

Marketing and economic operations department of Azerbaijan State Oil Company (SOCAR) exported 13, 317 tons of fuel, 177,499 tons of diesel oil, 11,309 tons of aircraft fuel and 235 tons of gasoline in March.

In March, a price of one tonne of fuel stood at US \$ 756,54, aircraft fuel - 686,91 dollars, diesel oil - 654,12 dollars.

Social Front

- Azerbaijani University Criticized For Poor Security One Year After Massacre

BAKU -- Azerbaijan's Prosecutor-General's Office has warned about a lack of security measures at a university where a massacre took place nearly one year ago, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports. Rustam Usubov, Azerbaijan's deputy chief prosecutor, said in a letter to Education Minister Misir Mardanov on April 2 that Baku's State Oil Academy is still unguarded and too easy for unauthorized people to enter.

An official investigation showed that on April 30, 2009, Farda Gadirov -- an ethnic Azeri resident of Georgia -- entered the Oil Academy with two accomplices and shot dead 12 students and administrators at the school. He died at the scene, reportedly by killing himself. Thirteen other students were injured in the incident. The official probe also showed that Gadirov and other two suspects in the massacre -- Javidan Amirov and Nadir Aliyev -- had easy access to the building where the killings took place and were able to

study a plan of the facility. The letter noted that an emergency exit was also sealed to prevent students and teachers from leaving the building after the shooting started.

Usubov requested in the letter that the Education Ministry develop a security plan for all universities in the country and ensure that the security problems at the State Oil Academy are resolved. Education Ministry spokesman Bayram Huseynzade told RFE/RL that the ministry will study the request by the prosecutor's office to ensure it understands all of the prosecutor-general's concerns.

- Torrential rains paralyze life in Azerbaijan's Aghsu region

Private houses and state institutions, as well as 6 villages were flooded as a result of torrential rains in Azerbaijan's Aghsu region on April 4-5, Region State Firefighting Service reported. Some 70% of Aghsu city, more than 100 private houses, cellars, yards were flooded, movement became difficult as a result of stream waters which appeared after the heavy rain. Administrative buildings of the Statistic Department, "Kapital Bank", boarding-school, State Firefighting Service, Military Commissariat were flooded. The level of water tolls to 1 meter in some places of the city. Moreover, serious problems occurred in Padarchol, Bozavand, Dashdemirli, Aghabeyli, Garametti and Takla villages. Cellars and yards were flooded at about 70 private houses. Cars and forces of the State Firefighting Service of Aghsu and Goychay region have been involved in floating the water elsewhere. Deputy Head of Aghsu Region Executive Power, Chairman of Aghsu Emergency Situations Commission Igbal Mikayilov said that the reason of the flood is due to bad sewage system.

- Baku hosts conference to mark anniversary of Victory in Great Patriotic War

Scientific-practical conference on "Truth and fiction about the Great Patriotic War" dedicated to 65-year anniversary of the Victory in Great Patriotic War was held at the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan (ANAS) on April 8. The conference was opened by ANAS President Mahmud Karimov, who noted that, as for all peace-loving peoples on the Earth, Victory Day of May 9 is significant day for Azerbaijan, too.

He pointed out the Baku oil accounted for 85-95% of oil produced in the USSR during the war. ANAS President added, that 43 Azerbaijanis who fought in the WWII were heroes of the Soviet Union. Karimov spoke about contribution of scientists to the victory over the fascists. So, high-octane aviation gasoline invented by the Azerbaijani scientist Yusif Mammadaliyeva made victory over the enemy much closer. A new therapeutic technique by a prominent Azerbaijani surgeon Mustafa Topchibashov helped to save hundreds of military life.

Kazakhstan

Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- Kazakhstan's Air Astana Suspends Flights To Bishkek

ASTANA-- Kazakhstan's main airline, Air Astana, said today it has suspended all flights to the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Air Astana's press service told journalists that the decision was made due to the tense situation in Kyrgyzstan, where some 75 people were killed and an estimated 1,000 injured on April 6-7 in violent clashes between antigovernment protesters and Kyrgyz police and security forces. The company said it plans to resume flights to Kyrgyzstan by April 19. Meanwhile, the Kazakh Foreign Ministry says one of the victims in the Kyrgyz clashes

was a Kazakh national, Ilya Shiyani, from the southern Kazakh region of Zhambyl. The ministry did not say how or exactly where Shiyani died.

- **UN Chief Calls For Total Nuclear Disarmament**

UNITED NATIONS (RFE/RL) -- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has urged world leaders to follow the example of Kazakhstan and "to realize the aspiration and dream of a world free of nuclear weapons."

In Kazakhstan, on the last leg of his week-long Central Asian trip, Ban flew over the Ground Zero at the former nuclear-weapons test site at Semipalatinsk. Ban spoke humbly about the 450 atomic and hydrogen bombs detonated there and about the "terrible effect on people and nature." "They have totally destroyed our environment. Poisoned earth, rivers, and lakes, children suffering from cancer, birth defects," Ban said. Ban called on both U.S. President Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev to make a "really fresh start" when they meet on April 8 in Prague to sign the successor to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) between the Soviet Union and the United States.

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

- **Chinese Man Jailed For Attack On Kazakh Newspaper**

ALMATY -- A Chinese man has been sentenced by a Kazakh court to five days in jail for attacking the office of an independent newspaper, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. The Almaty court found Yan Shaolian, a shuttle trader, guilty on April 5 of attacking the Almaty office of "Zhas alash" on March 28. The Almaty-based organization "Adil soz" (A Just Word), which monitors media and journalists' rights, said Yan smashed the doors of the newspaper's editorial office and broke a window. Zhan Jianchao, the deputy chairman of an Almaty organization representing Chinese businesspeople, has officially apologized to the newspaper's editors and paid for the damage. Yan said at his trial he was drunk at the time. But "Zhas alash" editor in chief Rysbek Sarsenbai told journalists he was not satisfied with the court decision. He said the case should be reviewed and Yan should be deported from Kazakhstan.

"It is very strange that Mr. Yan consumed alcohol in one district of Almaty and, being drunk, decided to travel to another district to perpetrate an act of hooliganism," Sarsenbai said. Sarsenbai said the attack might be connected with recent articles in "Zhas alash" focusing on tensions in Chinese-Kazakh relations, especially the controversial issue of leasing Kazakh land to Chinese farmers. Sarsenbai noted that the newspaper's website recently suffered several cyberattacks that he suspects originated in China. He pointed out that the website is very popular among ethnic Kazakhs living in the northwestern Chinese province of Xinjiang.

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- **Kyrgyz President Won't Back Down, As Opposition Claims Power**

BISHKEK (RFE/RL) -- Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev has said he will not relinquish power to an opposition coalition that said it was forming an interim government in the wake of a violent uprising. In an interview with the Russian radio station Ekho Moskvyy, Bakiyev said, "I am the elected head of state and I do not accept any defeat." His remarks came after the opposition said it had taken control of the

government and dissolved parliament following the April 7 clashes between antigovernment protesters and police that left at least 75 people dead and hundreds more wounded. Roza Otunbaeva, a former foreign minister, said she was now head of a temporary caretaker government (see profile) after Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov signed a letter of resignation.

In an interview with RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service today, Otunbaeva said she would coordinate an interim administration for at least six months until a new constitution is drafted that would pave the way for "fair" presidential and parliamentary elections: But Bakiev, speaking to Ekho Moskvyy several hours later, said he did not intend to resign and accused the opposition of an armed seizure of power. "I think this is a real orgy [of violence] carried out by an armed group of people and I do not consider it my defeat," Bakiev said. He acknowledged, however, that he had been "stripped of any possibility" to influence events in the country at the moment. The statement from Bakiev was the first since the unrest erupted in the northwestern city of Talas on April 6. His exact whereabouts are still unclear, though he said he was currently in the south of the country -- his stronghold -- as the opposition had earlier suggested. Bakiev's statement of defiance capped another extraordinary day of events in Kyrgyzstan and raised the prospect of continued instability in the Central Asian country.

In Pictures: Kyrgyz Protests Turn Violent

In what appeared to be an early sign of recognition of the interim government, the website of Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said he spoke to Otunbaeva by phone today in her capacity as the "head of the Kyrgyz government of national confidence."

Otunbaeva -- who helped bring Bakiev to power in the 2005 revolution that toppled his predecessor, Askar Akaev -- had urged the president to resign, saying his business "in Kyrgyzstan is finished."

Bakiev's Whereabouts Unclear

Bakiev has yet to appear in public since the unrest erupted in the northwestern city of Talas on April 6, and his exact whereabouts were not immediately clear.

He reportedly fled the capital for the southern part of the country, where Otunbaeva said he was trying to rally supporters "in order to continue defending his positions." RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service correspondent in the southern city of Jalal-Abad said the regional governor told a crowd there today that Jalalabad was establishing a "committee" to protect Bakiev. Governor Koshbai Masirov said Jalal-Abad would not allow anyone to offend "our son," a reference to Bakiev, who hails from the region. There's also been no word from Prime Minister Usenov. The country's de facto rulers -- many of them political figures released just hours earlier from jail -- said they were in control of the army, police, media, the parliament, the White House, hospitals and Bishkek international airport. Among those released was Ismail Isakov, a former defense minister jailed on what supporters said were politically motivated charges of abuse of power. Isakov -- named by Otunbaeva as interim defense minister -- said people had nothing to fear now from the security forces, and described the security situation as stable.

"There is no reason to conclude that security is not being maintained in the country. The people's power has been established everywhere. The border guards are guarding the borders and carrying out their own duties," Isakov said. "There is just one matter that we need to stop activities of tiny clans of the corrupt families who care about their own interests, then, as I strongly believe, life will go on by its order."

However, RFE/RL Kyrgyz Service correspondents said the situation in Bishkek remained chaotic today. With continued looting and city residents setting up voluntary groups in an attempt to keep order, the self-proclaimed new interior minister, Bolot Sherniazov, ordered security forces to fire on looters. Some of the members of Otunbaeva's team were seen talking to crowds of people who were outside the White House.

A national day of mourning will be held on April 9 to honor victims of the April 7 clashes. RFE/RL's correspondent in the northern Chui Province also said there had been reports today that groups of Kyrgyz had attacked members of the local Dungan minority, a Muslim people of Chinese origin. In a radio address, Otunbaeva called on people "not to give in to provocations or destroy and loot the property of ordinary citizens." The chaos followed weeks of tension between the opposition and the government led by Bakiev, who opponents say has cracked down on independent media and fostered corruption. In other developments today, Russian news agencies reported that Moscow had sent 150 extra troops to its military base in Kant. The Kremlin also said it ordered increased protection for Russian diplomatic missions and other institutions in Kyrgyzstan. And the UN secretary-general and the current chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Kazakhstan, said they would send special envoys to Kyrgyzstan to monitor the situation. The European Union's foreign-policy chief, Catherine Ashton, called for a quick return to law and order and said the EU would offer emergency aid to Kyrgyzstan.

Washington Reaching Out To Both Sides

The international community -- including the United States, Russia, China and the United Nations -- has urged all sides to show calm and restraint. Before the opposition claimed control, Bakiev's son, Maxim, accompanied by Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Kadyrbek Sarbaev, left Bishkek for Washington to take part in government-level meetings.

Today U.S. State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said a State Department official met briefly this morning with Sarbaev to inform him that the scheduled meeting had been canceled. He added that in Bishkek this morning, the U.S. Embassy's charge' d'affaires had met with Otunbaeva, and said in both encounters, the U.S. message was that "we hope that calm will be restored in a manner consistent with democratic principles." "Our priority at this point is law and order and that democracy be established in accordance with the rule of law," Crowley said. "We continue to reach out to government officials and opposition leaders in every way that we possibly can." Crowley said there has been no U.S. contact with Bakiev, and when asked if Washington still considers him the president, the spokesman replied that U.S. officials are "in touch with government ministries ... and opposition figures" alike. "We stand with the people of Kyrgyzstan. We understand that there were specific grievances that resulted in the demonstrations that have produced an opposition that now says that it has effective control of the government," he said, adding, "We will continue to work to help Kyrgyzstan and the people of Kyrgyzstan to have a government that they can support and that functions in accordance with democratic principles."

U.S.-Russian Cooperation

U.S. officials also said today that they're working closely with Russia to respond to the changing situation in Bishkek. President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev discussed the latest developments before signing an arms treaty in Prague. At a press briefing following the signing, Michael McFaul, Obama's advisor on Russian

affairs, said the United States doesn't view the conflict as a proxy struggle between Washington and Moscow. Kyrgyzstan is home to a military base in the city of Manas that Russia tried to claim before the U.S. gained access to the facility as a supply line to Afghanistan. McFaul said the two leaders agreed that they have mutual interests in Kyrgyzstan's stability, and said that unlike at the beginning the Obama's term in office, when "there was a sense of 'it's us against them'" with regard to the competition for control of the Manas air base, "what was striking today, as we talked about our mutual interests and security in Kyrgyzstan, was that we were not talking in zero-sum terms. We were talking about our mutual interests there." The NATO-led force in Afghanistan today said flights supporting NATO operations in Afghanistan from the U.S. military air base at Manas had been temporarily suspended. However, a spokesman said the move had not had any significant impact on operations or logistical support in Afghanistan.

- Who Is Roza Otunbaeva?

Roza Otunbaeva says she is now head of a temporary caretaker government.

Kyrgyz opposition leader Roza Otunbaeva has said she is now the head of a temporary caretaker government, after the opposition said it had taken power following violent protests in Bishkek.

Otunbaeva, 59, is seen as different from other Kyrgyz politicians and has a reputation as "Ms. Clean." She's considered an articulate and pragmatic politician, and a moderate voice able to negotiate among the country's fragmented opposition groups. RFE/RL correspondent Bruce Pannier describes Otunbaeva as "one of the most experienced Kyrgyz politicians" and that "she might actually be the most experienced politician in Kyrgyzstan today. By Kyrgyz standards, she certainly has huge international experience." The former career diplomat speaks several languages -- English, French, and German, in addition to Kyrgyz and Russian -- and her lifestyle is considered "Westernized."

Joining The Opposition

Otunbaeva served as the country's first postindependence foreign minister in 1991 under President Askar Akaev. She again held the post in the mid-1990s and served as acting foreign minister in 2005 after the People's or "Tulip" Revolution that toppled Akaev. Akaev was forced to flee to Russia in March 2005 in the face of public demonstrations and the storming of government facilities by supporters of opposition leader Kurmanbek Bakiev, following disputed parliamentary elections. Otunbaeva had hoped to run in the February 2005 vote as a candidate for the opposition Ata-Jurt (Fatherland) political movement but was refused registration. When antigovernment protests erupted weeks later, Otunbaeva played a key role in fanning the flames of discontent. "First of all, we will try to change the whole system," she told a crowd of demonstrators before the elections. Soon after Bakiev was elected president in July 2005, he named Otunbaeva his acting foreign minister, but she failed to gain parliamentary approval. Many even speculated that Bakiev had a hand in that failure because he wanted to rid himself of a potential rival.

...Then Going Into Opposition

Less than a year later, Otunbaeva was still trying to change the system. She joined the opposition in January 2006, becoming the co-chairwoman of the Asaba political party. The party's key demands included constitutional reforms that would transform the current presidential system into one that afforded the parliament greater power. In an interview with RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service in March 2006, she accused the new government of

balking at promised reforms. "People had to feel something new within the last year. It is [understandable] that you cannot immediately make the factories work," Otunbaeva said. "However, if [the Kyrgyz government] stamped out corruption, then there would be a lot of money available [for reform]."

RFE/RL's Pannier says Otunbaeva's political record means she probably enjoys "one of the cleanest images" among Kyrgyz politicians -- at least as far as the public is concerned. "The 2005 revolution really started rolling when she was denied registration as a candidate. The fact that the Central Election Commission excluded her for many people proved that indeed it was going to be a rigged election," Pannier says. He says that after her six-month tenure as Bakiev's acting foreign minister, Otunbaeva left and "didn't show any interest in rejoining the state in any post." After joining the opposition, she "very quickly became the leading critic of President Bakiev and his government." On the foreign-policy front, Otunbaeva's experience in dealing with diplomatic issues and her pragmatism lead some observers to predict that she would follow a more consistent line than Bakiev when it comes to relations with Russia, China, and the United States.

Early Career

Otunbaeva's career started in the latter years of the Soviet Union and the first decade of Kyrgyzstan's independence. Born on August 23, 1950, in the southern city of Osh, Otunbaeva studied in Moscow, graduating in 1972 from the philosophy faculty of Moscow State University, where she subsequently completed graduate studies. Otunbaeva returned to the Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) in 1975 and taught for six years at Kirghiz State University before transferring to full-time work as a functionary for the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the republic's capital, Frunze (now Bishkek).

In 1986, she was appointed deputy chairwoman of the Kirghiz SSR Council of Ministers, and foreign minister. From 1989 to 1991, she worked at the Soviet Foreign Ministry in Moscow, before returning to Kyrgyzstan in late 1991 following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the 1990s, Otunbaeva alternated spells as foreign minister with diplomatic postings as an ambassador -- first to the United States and Canada (1992-94) and then to the United Kingdom and Ireland (1997).

Between 2002 and 2004, she worked for the United Nations in Georgia.

- **Kyrgyz Opposition Leader Hospitalized After Beating**

OSH, Kyrgyzstan -- A leader of the opposition Ata-Meken (Fatherland) party in the southern city of Osh remains in serious condition after being severely beaten, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Abdykaim Kangeldiev was attacked by unknown assailants near his house on April 3.

Osh hospital officials told RFE/RL that he was transferred to a neurology clinic on April 5 and may need to undergo brain surgery. Doctors say Kangeldiev has a large cranial hematoma and numerous other bodily injuries. His relatives say he is still unconscious.

- **Further Demonstrations In Kyrgyzstan**

BISHKEK (RFE/RL) -- Kyrgyz riot police today fired tear gas and stun grenades into a crowd of hundreds of antigovernment protesters in the capital Bishkek in a bid to disperse the crowd amid ongoing political turmoil.

The crowd had gathered outside the offices of the main opposition party, demanding the resignation of President Kurmanbek Bakiev just a day after authorities detained opposition leaders Almazbek Atambaev and Omurbek Tekebaev, head of the main

opposition Ata-Meten party. On April 6, thousands of protesters stormed government offices in the northwest town of Talas, demanding the resignation of President Bakiev. Riot police, firing tear gas and rubber bullets, kicked the protesters out, but after nightfall, protesters were reported to have retaken the building.

Internet access is reported down in some areas.

The clashes have erupted after weeks of tension between the opposition and the government of President Bakiev, which they accuse of cracking down on independent media and fostering corruption. A doctor at a hospital in Talas told RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service that at least 30 people were being treated for injuries sustained during the clashes. One person was reportedly shot with a rubber bullet fired from inside a police precinct.

RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports that Omurbek Tekebaev, a leader of the opposition Ata-Meken (Fatherland) party, was arrested at his home in Bishkek. Reports say that the former governor of Osh region, Anvar Artikov, and the former deputy speaker of the Kyrgyz parliament, Bolot Sherniyazov, were also arrested. In Talas, a large crowd outside the police department was demanding the release of protesters who have been arrested. Protesters defaced a billboard of President Kurmanbek Bakiev.

Detention Sparked Protests

The day's events began with the reported detention of opposition leader Bolot Sherniyazov, who had gone to the provincial administration building to obtain official permission for a rally planned for April 7. Some reports said Sherniyazov was detained briefly then released, though officials denied he was ever held.

Whatever the case, the reports of Sherniyazov's detention brought people to both the city's administration building and police station. With several thousand estimated to have gathered at the government office, some then led an attempt to take over the administration building. RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports that police did nothing to stop the group entering and then occupying the building. The crowd announced they had selected their own replacements as interim governor and deputy governor. "We have elected our leader," protester Janat Karabotoev told RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service. "We will hold the first session [of the people's] congress tomorrow," she added. "Our main demand is to get rid of the family-run system of governance. We are not afraid of anything. Nobody was frightened. The people's mood is just perfect. About 3,000 people are gathered there."

Governor As Hostage

The reports of the building's seizure brought the first official denial, with the Interior Ministry saying the building had not been occupied, but that a group of several dozen people, "including many in a state of intoxication," had entered and later left. However, events quickly proved many protesters had gained entry and were staying inside the building -- as Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov later acknowledged.

At an evening press conference convened to address the situation in Talas, Usenov said the situation was "stable" and denied a claim by opposition representatives -- Sherniyazov and Koisun Kurmanalieva -- that Governor Beishen Bolotbekov was being held hostage inside the administration building. Interior Minister Moldomusa Kongantiev said he was freed when the police temporarily regained control of the building.

Usenov warned that rallies planned for April 7 were illegal and warned people to stay away from them. Prosecutor-General Nurlan Tursunkulov said a criminal case had already been launched against protesters responsible for the "mass disorder" in Talas. He said it was aimed at what he called a violent seizure of power and change of the constitutional order. Asanbek Baytikov, the deputy chairman of the parliament's Committee for Defense and Rule of Law, said the protesters went too far and would answer to the law. "If there are any violations of the law, then those involved in it will be brought to justice. It is unacceptable to do illegal things," Baytikov said, adding that the governor must be appointed, not elected.

International Alarm

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called for restraint on all sides. Ban spoke as he wrapped up his first visit to Central Asia as UN secretary-general. Earlier in the week in Kyrgyzstan, Ban criticized Bishkek authorities for human rights violations. Human Rights Watch has called on the Kyrgyz government to allow peaceful opposition protests to take place on April 7, and to refrain from force to break up gatherings. The U.S. Embassy in Bishkek has expressed "concern" over the unrest. Dissatisfaction with Bakiev and his government has been growing for months. Bakiev came to power after the People's, or "Tulip" Revolution in March 2005 that ousted longtime President Askar Akaev, who many felt was turning the Kyrgyz government into a family business.

Opposition groups today are making the same claim about Bakiev, who has appointed his brothers to state positions and his 32-year-old son Maksim to head the state agency for economic development.

- Opposition Rallies As UN Chief Visits In Kyrgyzstan

(RFE/RL) -- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has chided Kyrgyzstan for its worsening human rights records in a stinging rebuke to the country once regarded as Central Asia's most democratic state. Ban is on the second leg of a Central Asian tour that will take also him to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan.

"For the United Nations, the protection of human rights is a bedrock principle if a country is to prosper," Ban said today in a speech to the Kyrgyz parliament. "Recent events have been troubling, including the past few days. I repeat: all human rights must be protected, including free speech and freedom of the media," he added. Ban's visit has encouraged opposition and rights activists to voice their grievances, and protesters today sought to draw his attention to what they see as widespread rights violations. They chanted "freedom" and "help us" as Ban arrived at the parliament building in Bishkek to give a speech. "Honestly, we are concerned about the mounting risk of clashes between the civil society and authorities," Toktaiym Umetalieva, a former presidential candidate who now heads an association of nongovernment organizations, told RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service: "The United Nations must solve this problem by using its leverage and addressing that issue with our dear Mr. Kurmanbek Bakiev."

- State Islam, Outsiders Compete For Influence In Central Asia

Muslim men pray during Friday Prayers at a mosque in Osh, Kyrgyzstan. Some Central Asians question whether their local clerics are influenced by politics and state doctrine.

"Islam is a religion of knowledge," the cleric told a television audience. "Unfortunately, some people attempt to use Islam -- the religion of knowledge, goodness, and development -- wrongly or for their own selfish ends." "It's a message that might not appear extraordinary -- the virtues and peaceful nature of Islam have long been espoused

-- until you consider the source. As imam-khatib at Tashkent's Kukeldash Mosque, Anvar Qori Tursunov enjoys the backing of the Uzbek authorities, making it apparent that his words address not only Islamic adversaries, but perceived enemies of the state itself. In the ideological vacuum left by the demise of communism, religion reentered the scene in Central Asia. And with officially sanctioned Islam pitted against outside interpretations that authorities do not want to take root, the region's regimes have deployed clerics like Tursunov in an ongoing battle for influence. Central Asia's Islamic history dates back more than a millennium, but for most of the 20th century, the region was part of the Soviet Union, cut off from the rest of the Islamic world. With the fall of the USSR, the newly independent states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan quickly re-embraced their Islamic heritage. Islamic groups saw fertile recruiting ground in the region, with its 50 million primarily Sunni Muslims. Since making their entrance to the region, they have posed an immense challenge to clerics like Tursunov in thousands of officially registered mosques. Zeyno Baran, a senior fellow and director for the Center for Eurasian Policy at the Hudson Institute in Washington D.C., says that the governments of Central Asia were unprepared for the arrival of widely divergent religious groups from outside the region. "Central Asia was perfect ground and many of the governments in Central Asia at the time, including Uzbekistan, did not understand that not all Islamic groups are the same," Baran says. "They did not know and they did not understand that some of them are radical, some of them have political ideologies." Over time, the states of Central Asia tried to strengthen the voice of their official interpretations of Islam by silencing the outsiders. Hizb-ut Tahrir from the Middle East, Tablighi Jama'at from Pakistan, Salafiya from the Arab world, and Nurchilar from Turkey were banned, among other groups. But despite these bans, continued reports of arrests of various prohibited groups' followers in Central Asia suggest that they enjoy significant support, and that their appeal may even be on the rise.

Competing Sects

The chief mufti of Kyrgyzstan's Spiritual Directorate, Murataaly-Hajji Jumanov, the highest Islamic official in his country, explains the need to combat outside Islamic groups. "Their brainwashing of some of our citizens is a big problem," Jumanov tells RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service. "We can't hide our heads in the sand and ignore them, we have to prevent this and maintain order. Otherwise we will have problems later."

The preferred alternative preached by Jumanov and other state clerics is the region's traditional Hanafi School of Islamic Law -- considered by some to be the most liberal of the four schools of Sunni Islam (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, Hanbali) -- mixed with Naqshbandi Sufism, a mystic order whose founder, Baha-ud-Din Naqshband Bukhari, came from Central Asia.

This form of Islam, its official adherents believe, best reflects the values of Central Asia's mostly Turkic and Persian peoples, and the region's rich Islamic history is often invoked by clerics and Islamic scholars as they exhort people to resist forms of Islam arriving from other countries.

But another element of the region's history works against state Islam. Sultans, emirs, khans, and others tried for centuries to bend Islamic clerics to their will, knowing that Islam was the greatest unifying force in their regions, and therefore both the biggest potential threat to their regimes and the best way of legitimizing their rule.

Today's regimes, in this respect, are no different than their predecessors.

Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda of Tajikistan has a unique perspective on the modern role of Islam and the state in Central Asia. He was the Qazi Qalon of Tajikistan, the country's highest Islamic imam, in the last years of the Soviet Union and first years after Tajikistan became independent.

He joined the Islamic opposition that was fighting government forces during the 1992-97 Tajik civil war and was forced to flee the country. But he and other opposition figures were amnestied as part of the agreement that ended the war, and he has been back in Tajikistan for more than a decade.

Turajonzoda, who since his return has held state positions not related to religion, tells RFE/RL's Tajik Service there is a clear connection between the state and the imams preaching in mosques. "Some 90 percent of imams are appointed by the government, by local government [officials] and offices of the security agency," Turajonzoda says. "Even the law says that imams are supposed to be appointed by worshippers at the mosques with the approval of the government. But it is actually the government that selects who the imams will be, and when they appoint imams it is clear [the government] controls the mosque through these protégés."

Clerics Under Pressure

The influence of the state is apparent in mosques throughout Central Asia. As Kudrat, who spoke to RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service on condition that his full name not be used, explains, official clerics are not entirely free to say what they wish.

Kudrat prays five times daily and goes to mosque when he can -- "Fridays for sure," he says -- but laments that "our clerics are very restricted and talk only about the way to behave. We need to learn about politics also."

Qosimi Bekmuhammad, a Tajik expert on politics and religion, supports Kudrat's impression. State clerics, he says, "avoid speaking about important topics, the problems of today and tomorrow, and concentrate on topics from 500 years ago."

Adding to the problem, according to the Hudson Institute's Baran, is that some state-trained clerics are simply unable to answer all the questions youths have regarding social justice or identity issues. Seeing the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, they get conflicting messages about whether the West is at war with Islam, and what they should be doing, because state-trained imams focus "primarily on Islamic ethics and [are] purely sticking to religious areas."

"They are not able to always answer the questions that the youths have, and then the youth goes to the charismatic and self-appointed religious leaders or imams who do then provide them often with black-and-white answers that seem satisfactory," Baran says.

This failure to address contemporary issues exposes a significant vulnerability of state Islam in Central Asia, according to Bekmuhammad.

While he does not think that a large number of young people have been attracted to outside Islamic groups, he recognizes that the social conditions in Central Asia have led some to join up with outside, and potentially violent, forms of Islam.

"Never say all youth do this, but some do," Bekmuhammad says. "There are several reasons. First, there are socioeconomic conditions. There are no jobs. These problems have been in the country for 15 years and have led to disappointment among young people." The youth of Central Asia, Bekmuhammad says, are looking for advice and spiritual instruction on how to be good Muslims and still survive in the modern world. And this is where state imams are not delivering an adequate message. In their effort to

recruit new followers, outside Islamic groups also seize on state Islam's connection to secular authorities to discredit its message.

Separation Of Mosque And State

Ayubkhan is a member of Hizb-ut Tahrir, a group formed by Palestinians in the 1950s that is officially banned throughout Central Asia. Ayubkhan currently lives in Kyrgyzstan's section of the Ferghana Valley. He spoke to RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service, on condition that his full name not be used, about why he has no faith in state Islam.

"The mufti and his people -- in a democratic country they don't have to do what the government says. There is a law on religion and the government being separate," Ayubkhan says. "Politicians should not be involved in the mufti's affairs and the mufti should not follow government orders. The Koran says the mufti should follow Shari'a. I don't see the mufti doing this."

Tajik expert Bekmuhammad notes that young people who join outside Islamic groups "often do so because they feel governments in their countries have too much influence in Islam, whereas they would rather Islam had a dominant influence in government."

Hizb-ut Tahrir member Ayubkhan backs Bekmuhammad's assessment.

"I study Shari'a and study Hizb-ut Tahrir. I found out that Hizb-ut Tahrir teaches exactly what the Prophet Muhammad wanted us to know," Ayubkhan says. "The Holy Koran is the ideology of Hizb-ut Tahrir -- not just how a person should live in society but how a person should serve other people."

Body And Soul

State clerics themselves portray the relationship between official Islam and secular authorities in Central Asia as inevitable. Omurbek, the press secretary for Kazakhstan's Muslim Religious Directorate, speaks of a symbiosis between Islam in his country and the state. "According to our constitution the state and religion are separate. But, in fact, we can't divide the body from the soul of a human being," Omurbek says. "A human being has reason, a body, and a soul, and we can't separate them. It's not possible." And Omurbek is insistent that it is not the state that is influencing Islam, but Islam that is influencing politicians. "God forbid there would be such a thing! To the contrary, our president himself built a huge mosque in the town where he was born," he says. "Following his example, many rich people, governors, mayors, and others are building many mosques." Kyrgyzstan's chief mufti Jumanov says there is no reason for conflict between Islam and secular authorities in his country. "First of all, of course, in a secular country sometimes there are different opinions on religion, but during my time as mufti I haven't seen any problem or conflict," Jumanov says. "On the other hand, our state is following the correct policy toward Islam. From our side we are trying to work on a path where religion doesn't have any conflict with state policy." There are, of course, the examples to the contrary. One notable conflict between state Islam and the secular authorities happened in the most authoritarian of the Central Asian states, Turkmenistan. In 2002, Turkmenistan's chief mufti, Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah, objected to having passages from authoritarian President Saparmurat Niyazov's "Rukhnama," his lengthy spiritual guide, inscribed on the walls of a new mosque alongside passages from the Koran. The mufti was sacked, convicted of plotting to kill the president, and jailed for 22 years. So state imams do have limitations on what they can say, and authorities expect those imams to support the state.

‘Connections To Terrorism’

For many Central Asians dissatisfied with their governments, Islamic opposition groups represent the best and sometimes seemingly only hope for changing the system. This may explain why Central Asian governments often portray these outside Islamic groups as having links to terrorism. There is no question that some members of these groups clearly are violent. In one recent example, Imam Anvar Qori Tursunov of Tashkent's official Kukeldash Mosque was stabbed outside his home on July 31, 2009. Several Islamic militants killed in a security operation in the Uzbek capital in August were blamed for the attack. In neighboring Tajikistan, the small extremist group Bayat has for years been tied to sometimes deadly attacks against non-Muslims and state-approved Islamic clergy. But while Central Asian states often resort to describing adherents of alternative forms of Islam as "terrorists," the label is sometimes false. Former high imam Turajonzoda rejects charges that all the foreign Islamic groups have connections to terrorism.

"I'm not really sure they are terrorists," Turajonzoda says. "I'm against terrorism myself, against forcibly propagating ideas, against extremism. But most of these organizations are terrorists in name only." Turajonzoda says that by trying to paint all these Islamic groups with the same brush, Central Asia's governments and state imams only discredit themselves. Central Asians see how some groups behave and perceive them as pious, not violent. This leads people to question the motives of authorities and state imams in branding all groups as terrorists. Others suggest alternative methods of dealing with the outside Islamic groups.

Tursunbai Bakir Uluu, a former Kyrgyz ombudsman, has called for legalizing Hizb-ut Tahrir in his country. This, he believes, would allow the group to publicly demonstrate what it has to offer, while removing the element of mystery that may attract some to the Islamic sect. His appeal was rejected and Hizb-ut Tahrir remains banned in Kyrgyzstan and throughout Central Asia. "I think the region in general still suffers from knowing too little about Islamic history and their own history, because Central Asia once upon a time used to be the center of Islamic civilization," says the Hudson Institute's Baran. "Across the Silk Road there were great centers of Islamic learning where scientific thinking and spirituality and rationality and knowledge spread from Central Asia to the rest of the Islamic world and brought great civilization."

It's a message that official clerics like Tursunov of Tashkent's Kukeldash Mosque might incorporate in future sermons. Confidence in traditional belief systems, combined with the ability to communicate those beliefs today, might prove to be the most effective way of countering the influence of outside Islam.

Saida Kalkulova and Erzhan Karabek of RFE/RL's Kazakh Service, Venera Djumataeva of RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service, and Iskander Aliev and Salimjon Aiubov of RFE/RL's Tajik Service contributed to this report

Geo strategic Front

- Russia Moves Toward Recognizing New Kyrgyz Authorities; U.S. Says Undecided

Russia has moved toward recognizing the self-proclaimed new leadership of Kyrgyzstan -- while the United States says it has not yet decided whether to recognize the new authorities.

President Kurmanbek Bakiev has meanwhile rejected calls that he resign, saying he remains Kyrgyzstan's legitimate leader -- while also acknowledging that he has been chased from the capital Bishkek and no longer controls any real levers of power. Reports say the security situation in Bishkek remains unstable, with gunfire and groups on the streets reported late on April 8. The new authorities have warned that looters could be shot. There were no reports of any casualties overnight. Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on April 8 telephoned opposition figure Roza Otunbaeva -- soon after she announced she was head of a new temporary administration. Putin has offered Russian aid following this week's unrest that has killed at least 75 people and left hundreds of others injured.

Flash Analysis: What's Next For Kyrgyzstan?

In Washington, State Department spokesman Philip Crowley said U.S. officials were in contact with both opposition figures and officials of the Bakiev government. He said the United States was not taking a side and was watching events carefully.

"There is a president [Bakiev] who has not yielded power. There's an interim leadership that claims to be in charge of the government. We are talking to both. It is not for us to take sides one way or the other. Our interest here is with the people of Kyrgyzstan and a peaceful resolution of the situation," Crowley said. Officials said Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and U.S. President Barack Obama discussed Kyrgyzstan before signing an arms control treaty in Prague on April 8. Opposition figures said there were no plans to close a U.S. air base at Manas at Kyrgyzstan that is used to support operations in Afghanistan. Opposition figures in the past have called for the base to be shut down. Russia also operates an air base in Kyrgyzstan. Meanwhile, a mourning ceremony and funerals are being held today in Kyrgyzstan for those killed in the unrest.

- Kazakhstan's Air Astana Suspends Flights To Bishkek

ASTANA-- Kazakhstan's main airline, Air Astana, said today it has suspended all flights to the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Air Astana's press service told journalists that the decision was made due to the tense situation in Kyrgyzstan, where some 75 people were killed and an estimated 1,000 injured on April 6-7 in violent clashes between antigovernment protesters and Kyrgyz police and security forces. The company said it plans to resume flights to Kyrgyzstan by April 19. Meanwhile, the Kazakh Foreign Ministry says one of the victims in the Kyrgyz clashes was a Kazakh national, Ilya Shiyan, from the southern Kazakh region of Zhambyl. The ministry did not say how or exactly where Shiyan died.

- Support From Kyrgyz Air Base 'Temporarily Suspended'

The NATO-led force in Afghanistan said today that flights supporting NATO operations in Afghanistan from an air base in Kyrgyzstan have been temporarily suspended following violent political upheaval in Bishkek. But a spokesman for the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, Lieutenant-Colonel Tadd Sholtis, says the move has not had any significant impact on operations or logistical support in Afghanistan.

The United States is leasing the Manas air base in Kyrgyzstan as a main regional hub for logistical support of NATO operations in Afghanistan. Sholtis said today that some aircraft at Manas have been "relocated" and that flights between Manas and Afghanistan have been "temporarily suspended." The United States embassy in Kyrgyzstan says the Manas air base itself continues to function. Earlier today, the Kyrgyz opposition leader

who claims to be the leader of a temporary "caretaker government" said Manas will remain open to United States military forces. Roza Otunbaeva says U.S. forces can continue to use the Manas to supply NATO troops in Afghanistan.

- Otunbaeva: Air Base In Kyrgyzstan To Remain Open To U.S. Troops

The Kyrgyz opposition leader who claims to be the leader of a temporary "caretaker government" said today that a key air base in Kyrgyzstan will remain open to United States military forces. Roza Otunbaeva, whose claim to power follows the apparent ouster of President Kurmanbek Bakiev on April 6 in a day of violent upheaval, said U.S. forces can continue to use the Manas air base to supply NATO troops in Afghanistan. The air base is considered vital to the campaign against the Taliban.

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

Tajikistan

Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- UN secretary-general arriving in Tajikistan today

DUSHANBE, April 5, 2010, Asia-Plus -- The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is arriving in Tajikistan today afternoon, according to the Tajik MFA information department.

The visit to Tajikistan is part of Mr. Ban's first official visit to Central Asia since becoming Secretary-General. During his stay in Tajikistan, Mr. Ban will hold talks with President Emomali Rahmon, Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi and a number of other high-ranking Tajik state officials. The sides are expected to discuss issues related to providing regional security, cooperation within the framework of the United Nations and other international organizations as well as problems of use of water in the Central Asian region and environmental protection. The UN secretary-general is also scheduled to familiarize himself with construction of hydroelectricity power plants on the Vakhsh River. We will recall that Ashgabat, Turkmenistan was the first stop on Mr. Ban's visit to Central Asia. Mr. Ban discussed human rights and other global and regional issues with the President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov. From Ashgabat, Mr. Ban on April 3 traveled to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, where he met President Kurmanbek Bakiyev and Foreign Minister Kadyrbek Sarbayev. On April 4, Ban headed to Uzbekistan, where he met President Islam Karimov. The final leg of the UN chief's Central Asian trip is Kazakhstan on April 6-7. There, Ban is to meet with President Nursultan Nazarbayev and members of parliament.

Economic/Energy Front

- UN Chief Urges Central Asians To Resolve Water Issues

(RFE/RL) -- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon arrived in Tajikistan and plunged directly into the most controversial topic in Central Asia -- water.

Ban said water has already been a primary issue in conversations with leaders in Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan."The question is how to use common resources for common prosperity," Ban said. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan do not have the hydrocarbon resources their Central Asian neighbors have and the two

mountainous countries suffer chronic energy shortages that are particularly noticeable in winter months. The solution to their energy problem seems to be developing hydropower potential, which is enormous in both countries. But downstream countries, Uzbekistan in particular, oppose plans to build immense hydropower plants in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan because of fears water released from reservoirs in winter for electricity will lead to insufficient amounts of water for irrigation downstream in spring and summer.

As Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have gone ahead with their hydropower projects, Uzbekistan has grown increasingly anxious and critical of the projects. Uzbekistan has tried to enlist the support of two other downstream countries, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan.

Ban today noted the tensions and urged the Central Asian countries to cooperate in use of resources. "That is why I am visiting Central Asia, before tensions grow worse," Ban said. "Whether it is oil and natural gas or water, these resources should be used fairly and harmoniously, respecting the interests of neighboring countries."

Importance Of Mediation

The focus of Uzbekistan's objections is Tajikistan's Roghun dam project. The Tajik government has advertised it as a key to energy independence and for months has been encouraging the public to invest in its construction. Tashkent recently stopped freight cars bound for Tajikistan, in part, Dushanbe says, because they were carrying some construction material for Roghun. Ban said he was "deeply concerned" about the dispute. Ban urged patience from all five countries, pointing out that an environmental assessment team from the World Bank would soon be in the region to start work. "Therefore all parties concerned should refrain from unilateral actions until the World Bank has concluded its technical assessment of Tajikistan's proposed hydropower projects," Ban said. Tajikistan seems to have a slightly different interpretation of how the World Bank is approaching Central Asia's water issue. Tajik Foreign Minister Hamrakhon Zarifi said not just Tajik hydropower projects need to be evaluated. Zarifi said that Tajik President Emomali Rahmon told Ban "that there is need of serious and competent international environmental expertise of all irrigation systems in Central Asia, including all existing reservoirs and other diversions that have a negative impact on the environment." Some Tajik experts have argued that their neighbor's frivolous use of water is responsible for water shortages in downstream countries, while Uzbek experts argue the problems of water use start in upstream countries. Ban mentioned the UN's Center for Preventative Diplomacy, located in Turkmenistan, as a vehicle for helping resolve Central Asia's water problems. Turkmenistan was Ban's first stop on his current Central Asian tour and the center was among the first places Ban visited.

- Inflation for Jan-Feb reportedly stands at 5.4% in Tajikistan

DUSHANBE, April 3, 2010, Asia-Plus -- In Tajikistan, inflation for January-February this year stood at 5.4 percent, according to the CIS Interstate Committee for Statistics. Over the first two months of this year, the highest inflation rate among the CIS member nations has been reported in Ukraine – 11.3 percent. The lowest inflation rate for this period has been reported in Kyrgyzstan – 1.8 percent. In Armenia, inflation for the same two-month period stood at 8.2 percent, Russia – 7.6 percent, Kazakhstan – 6.2 percent, Moldova – 4.4 percent, and Azerbaijan – 2.8 percent. The CIS Interstate Committee for

Statistics does not have inflation rates for Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in its report. The average CIS inflation rate for January-February 2010 amounted to 8 percent.

- Tajik, Russian finance ministers discuss training of specialists for Tajikistan
DUSHANBE, April 8, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Training of personnel for Tajikistan's financial system was a major topic of a meeting of Tajik Finance Minister Safarali Najmiddinov within his Russian counterpart Aleksey Kudrin that took place in Moscow in early April on the sidelines of the fourth meeting of the council of the CIS finance ministers and the eighth session of the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC) Council for Financial and Economic Policy, according to the Ministry of Finance (MoF).

The two also discussed joint measures to mitigate effects of the global financial and economic crisis and develop financial and banking systems, the source at a MoF said.

- Tajikistan-bound freight cars still being held up in Uzbekistan
DUSHANBE/QURGHON TEPPA, April 7, 2001, Asia-Plus -- Uzbekistan is continuing to hold up cargos bound for Tajikistan, Tajik railway officials say. Usmon Bobokalonov, the deputy head of Tajik Railways, told Asia-Plus Wednesday afternoon that the number of Tajikistan-bound freight cars stranded on Uzbek territory is now more than 2,000. "700 cars loaded with diesel fuel, more than 50 car loaded with aviation kerosene, more than 100 cars carrying what and flour as well as other car containing essential goods bound for Dushanbe are still being held up in Uzbekistan without any reasons," Bobokalonov said. He added that Uzbekistan was currently allowing some 40-50 cars carrying alumina and some nonessentials to move into Dushanbe per day.

"In the meantime, the passage of freight trans bound for Khatlon province through Uzbek territory has been suspended since March 16 and some, 1000 Khatlon-bound freight cars are being held up in Uzbekistan," Bobokalonov stressed. Deputy head of the shipment department of Tajik Railways' branch for Khatlon, Saidjon Yodgori, says 181 cars carrying diesel fuel, 210 cars carrying gasoline, 60 cars loaded with wheat flour, 15 cars loaded with grains, as well as seven cars containing equipment and 42 cars containing cement and other cargos necessary for construction of the Sangtuda-2 hydropower plant have been stranded on Uzbek territory since March 16. According to him, the blockade has inflicted serious damage on both the local entrepreneurs and Tajik Railway's branch in Khatlon. Yodgori noted that the delays in rail cargo bound for Khatlon has led to some 10-percent increase in gasoline prices in the province in recent days. "Fuel shortages has affected the seed-planting season in the province," he said. The blockade has caused a dispute between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Tajikistan has accused Uzbekistan of intentionally blocking the freight transiting through its territory, while Uzbekistan has blamed technical problems, along with bad weather and an increase in freight traffic. The Uzbek Embassy in Dushanbe said on March 26 that Uzbekistan was fulfilling "its obligations under international agreements on ensuring the passage of nonmilitary and humanitarian goods to Afghanistan."

- Representatives of 192 UN member nations invited to attend international water conference in Dushanbe

DUSHANBE, April 7, 2001, Asia-Plus -- Dushanbe will host an international conference on the mid-term comprehensive review of the International Decade for Action "Water for Life" on June 8-10 this year. According to the Tajik MFA information department, representatives of 192 UN member nations, more than 60 international and regional organizations, international financial institutions, NGOs, business community, as well as

international experts and researchers have been invited to attend the conference. Heads of international and regional organizations such as the United States, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the CIS Executive Committee, the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC), as well international research and financial institutions are expected to attend the conference. In all, 500 foreign participants are expected to take part at the conference.

President Emomali Rahmon will inaugurate this high-level international conference (HLIC) that will provide an opportunity for in-depth discussions of the following aspects of the mid-term comprehensive review (MCR) – practicing integrated water and resources management mechanisms (IWRM), improving irrigation and agricultural water productivity, adaptation to climate change, mobilizing financial resources, strengthening institutional and technical capacities, gender, water governance, etc.

At the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, as a result of increasing economic, social and environmental pressures and crises, freshwater has moved to the top of the international agenda as an issue for global concern and action. The year 2010 marks the mid-point of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Life” and provides an opportunity for a mid-term comprehensive review of achievements during the first half of the Decade, with the provision of policy guidance for the remainder of the Decade, with a view to accelerating progress towards the water-related internationally-agreed development goals.

Social Front

- Tajikistan marks World Health Day

DUSHANBE, April 7, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Like other countries of the world, Tajikistan is marking World Health Day today.

According to the Ministry of Health (MoH), they organize a mass campaign on buying shares in open joint-stock company (OJSC) Roghun on this occasion. Some 500 people, including head of medical centers, hospital head physicians and ordinary medical workers, are expected to take part in this campaign, the source at a MoH said.

In the meantime, the World Health Organization (WHO) country office in Tajikistan organizes an event dedicated to the World Health Day at the Poytakht Center in Dushanbe today. Representatives of international organizations active in the country are taking part in the event. A number of known Tajik music groups are participating in the cultural program of the event, the source said.

Besides, Mr. Santino Severoni, WHO Representative in Tajikistan, and Mr. Azam Mirzoyev, deputy health Minister of Tajikistan, will give a news conference.

World Health Day is celebrated every year on April 7, under the sponsorship of the World Health Organization (WHO). In 1948, the World Health Organization held the First World Health Assembly. The Assembly decided to celebrate April 7 of each year, with effect from 1950, as the World Health Day. The World Health Day is celebrated to create “awareness of a specific health theme to highlight a priority area of concern for the World Health Organization (WHO)”. Activities – related to that particular theme and the resources provided – continue beyond April 7, that is, the designated day for celebrating the World Health Day.

World Health Day 2010 focuses on urbanization and health. With the campaign "1000 cities - 1000 lives", events are organized worldwide calling on cities to open up streets

for health activities. Stories of urban health champions will be gathered to illustrate what people are doing to improve health in their cities.

Turkmenistan Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- UN Chief In Turkmenistan On First Stop Of Central Asian Tour

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is set to meet with Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov on the first stop of his tour.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has arrived in Turkmenistan's capital, Ashgabat, on the first stop of a tour of five Central Asian countries.

Ban is expected today to hold talks with Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov and to visit the UN Regional Center For Preventive Diplomacy For Central Asia and Turkmenistan's National Institute For Democracy And Human Rights, according to the Turkmen government website, turkmenistan.gov.tm.

From Turkmenistan, Ban is due to travel on to Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan in the coming days.

The United Nations has said Ban's trip is expected to focus on regional cooperation, disarmament, efforts to combat climate change, and promoting development to reduce poverty. Human rights advocates have also expressed hope that Ban will address rights concerns during his meetings with Central Asian leaders.

- UN Secretary General arrives in Ashgabat

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has arrived in the Turkmen capital. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan Rashid Meredov welcomed the distinguished guest at Ashgabat international airport.

According to the UN News Center, today the Secretary General will be received by Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, visit Turkmenbashi mausoleum, the Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy and National Institute for Democracy and Human Rights. The framework of the visit also includes a tour of the Akhalteke Equestrian Sports Complex.

Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Lynn Pascoe, Head of the Economic Commission for Europe Jan Kubis and Head of the Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia Miroslav Jenca accompany Mr. Ban Ki-moon in his trip.

"The visit of the head of the United Nations to Ashgabat is another clear sign of the ever-increasing role of the Central Asian region with neutral Turkmenistan occupying key positions in the world system of coordinates," the Turkmen State News Agency (TDH) official statement released on the eve of the visit says.

The current visit "will open a new phase in the history of the traditional cooperation, will greatly expand the scope of fruitful strategic interaction of Turkmenistan and the United Nations in the interests of peace and common prosperity," the statement says.

- Nicolas Sarkozy plans official visit to Ashgabat

The establishment of the Turkmenistan-France working group on cooperation in the energy field along with the mixed commission on economic cooperation will help coordinate the development of relations between the two countries, said President of

France Nicolas Sarkozy in his message to President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov.

"Our partnership in the energy field will be enhanced owing to the efforts made by French companies on the development and export of rich hydrocarbon resources of Turkmenistan," he said. Nicolas Sarkozy stressed that in this context he is "particularly pleased with an opportunity" to visit Turkmenistan. The date of the visit is being discussed between the Foreign Ministries of both countries.

In his letter the French president also welcomed the mutual desire to "strengthen bilateral cooperation in major areas such as energy, infrastructure, tourism, construction and communications." As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat, the text of the message, which was published in today's central media, was handed to the Turkmen president by the French senator, personal representative of the President of the French Republic for development of political and economic relations between France and Central Asia, Aymeri de Montesquiou Fezensak.

During the meeting, which was also attended by the head of CIFAL company Gilles Remy and French Ambassador to Turkmenistan Pierre Lebovich, the sides exchanged views on the prospects of Turkmen-French cooperation in priority areas. The head of CIFAL announced his intention to build productive cooperation with Turkmenistan in the energy sector, industrial and civil engineering, communications and electronics, consulting and expert services.

Economic/Energy Front

- Ashgabat hosts international water use forum

On April 2, the International Water Forum "A Drop of water is a grain of gold" has convened in Ashgabat. During three days the participants will discuss new prospects for cooperation in the field of water management and rational water use, introduce themselves to the experience and latest achievements in this field.

The Forum agenda includes the international exhibition "World experience and latest technology for effective use of water resources" and the conference. The exhibition located on the territory of the capital's Exhibition Center is aimed to demonstrate the achievements of water resources management in Turkmenistan, the advanced R&D products and technology. The world-known companies - leaders in production of equipment and technology for the water industry - take part in the exhibition, the Turkmen State News Agency (TDH) reports.

President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov has sent a welcoming address to the forum participants.

"In our mind, every drop of precious water, giving life to all beings on earth, is equivalent to the grain of gold", the address says in particular. "Following the wise precepts of our ancestors, we hold sacred the traditions of our fathers and grandfathers, always strive to cherish water as a precious asset, consistently carry out the most important measures for the rational and efficient use of water resources".

- Turkmen President to visit EXPO 2010 in Shanghai

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov will visit Shanghai to attend festivities dedicated to the opening of EXPO 2010 Universal Exposition.

Turkmenistan will be represented at the World Exhibition for the first time. The pavilion area for the country's joint exposition will exceed 1000 sq meters. It occupies the "A" zone, one of the most advantageous locations on the "geographical map" of the

exhibition, which will also house pavilions of China, the host country of EXPO-2010. The building's facade will be adorned by the national flag and emblem of Turkmenistan as well as the Turkmen carpet ornaments.

More than thirty ministries and departments of Turkmenistan will exhibit their products at the largest economic forum in China. Multimedia touch screens, with the help of which the visitors will be able to learn about the country's centuries-old culture and get acquainted with its natural landscapes and recreational resources, will become a distinctive feature of the Turkmen pavilion.

As part of EXPO-2010, the National Day of Turkmenistan will be held with round tables and presentations of the cultural heritage of Turkmenistan organized.

In general, approximately 270 countries and international organizations will take part in EXPO-2010. According to forecasts, about 70 million people, most of them representing the world's business community, will visit the World Expo in Shanghai to be held from May 1 to October 31, 2010, under the motto "Better City - Better Life".

Social Front

Uzbekistan

Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- UN's Ban To Meet Uzbek President Karimov

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is scheduled today to meet with Uzbek President Islam Karimov, who has ruled the country since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

The meeting in Tashkent comes after a recent UN Human Rights Committee report criticized Uzbekistan and called for a fuller investigation of the brutal suppression of a 2005 uprising in the city of Andijon. Opposition and rights groups claim that hundreds were killed, but authorities insist the reports are exaggerated and angrily reject any criticism. Ban is on a five-nation tour of Central Asia, his first to the region as UN secretary-general. One issue Ban is raising is the region's generally poor human rights record. On April 3, Ban called the drying up of the Aral Sea one of the world's worst environmental disasters, after touring the shrinking sea by helicopter. He called on regional leaders to do more to solve the problem. Once the world's fourth-largest lake, the sea has shrunk by 90 percent since the rivers that feed it were largely diverted in a Soviet project to boost cotton production in the arid region.

In a presentation to Ban before his flyover, Uzbek officials complained that dam projects in Tajikistan will severely reduce the amount of water flowing into Uzbekistan. Impoverished Tajikistan sees the hydroelectric projects as potential key revenue earners.

- President of Uzbekistan receives head of US Centcom

President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov received Commander of the US Central Command General David Petraeus at Oqsaroy residence in Tashent on 6 April.

Welcoming the guest, the head of the state said the level of the current Uzbek-American relations was strong and stable, and are developing on a constructive and equal basis. Uzbekistan and the USA are interacting in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan and this country's socioeconomic rehabilitation. Uzbekistan provides practical assistance to its southern neighbor, supplying Afghanistan with electricity, construction materials and

foodstuffs, as well as participating in construction of transport infrastructure. At the meeting in Oqsaroy, General David Petraeus expressed sincere gratitude to the President of Uzbekistan for the warm welcome and noted that the US administration was interested in strengthening bilateral relations. He also highlighted the importance of the initiatives of the leadership of Uzbekistan in stabilizing the situation in the neighboring Afghanistan.

During the talks, the sides exchanged opinions on the issues of further development of Uzbek-US cooperation and other areas of mutual interest.

- President meets with UN Secretary General

President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov met with Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, in Oqsaroy on April 5.

Welcoming the guest, the head of state pointed out the high level of rewarding cooperation of the republic with the UN on a number of critical areas of regional development. “Mr Secretary General, I consider your visit to the region, including Uzbekistan, a landmark occasion and evidence to immense concern of the UN with our region. The visit constitutes a fine opportunity to identify the issues in providing for stability and security, sustainable development, use of water and energy as well as mineral resources, protection of environment, and many other subjects that bother the peoples in the region,” said the head of nation. The UN leader put in his turn: “I am delighted to work with my Uzbek colleagues in addressing the common issues on agenda between Uzbekistan and our Organization. When having a flight trip over the Aral Sea, I personally got convinced of the extent of adverse impact this disaster has had on the region’s entire ecosystem. I met with people living in this area of environmental devastation. It is hard to underestimate the challenges the whole region has faced.

“I greatly welcome Uzbekistan’s presidency in Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which is indisputably essential in maintaining the peace, security, and addressing the numerous pressing regional and international issues.”

Critical in cooperation between Uzbekistan and the United Nations are issues of countering current threats and challenges, mitigating the impact of environmental degradation and Aral Sea catastrophe, as well as various other topics of contemporary international relations. Our republic has elaborated a number of initiatives with regard to settling the conflict in the neighboring Afghanistan and has provided practical assistance in the implementation of various UN programs on socio-economic reconstruction of that country. With the initiative of Uzbekistan as the country presiding currently at Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the UN General Assembly approved last December a Resolution on Cooperation between the UN and SCO. Effective combination of colossal experience and capacities of international organizations of such class is expected to create new prospects in ensuring international and regional security.

At the meeting in Oqsaroy, Ban Ki-moon thanked the head of our state for the warm welcome, stressing in particular the interest of the UN in consolidating its cooperation with Uzbekistan. UN Secretary General expressed his high acclaim of the steady and constructive approach of our nation’s leadership to addressing the pressing issues of regional and international development. As an outcome of this meeting between President Islam Karimov and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, Joint Declaration on

Cooperation between Secretariats of the United Nations and Shanghai Cooperation Organization is signed.

- UN Secretary General visits Uzbekistan

Secretary General of the United Nations Organization Ban Ki-Moon paid a visit to Uzbekistan on 4-5 April. The head of the international organization initially visited Nukus, where he participated in the presentation of the activities to improve the environmental situation in the Aral Sea area. Programs and projects, implemented under the leadership of the President Islam Karimov, to stabilize the environmental situation in the region, soften the consequences of the crisis, improve health and ensure social protection of the population, are giving positive results. Measures are being taken to preserve the nature and revive the biodiversity.

At the presentation, detailed information on the environmental situation in the Aral Sea region was provided. UN Secretary General, accompanied by Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev, got acquainted with the environmental situation in the area. "Having seen the consequences of the ecological crisis in the region, I personally received evidence of the complexity of the environmental situation in the Aral Sea area," Ban Ki-Moon said. "This is a serious warning for the whole humanity. This global problem should be solved by all states of the region collectively." UN Secretary General met the professors and students of the University of World Economy and Diplomacy in Tashkent. During the meeting, the continuous development of relations between Uzbekistan and the UN, as well as close cooperation with structures like UNICEF and UNESCO was noted. It was emphasized that activities implemented under the leadership of the President Islam Karimov to create the required conditions for preparation of highly qualified professionals, and wide-scale reforms in the higher education field were giving notable results. Ban Ki-Moon familiarized himself with the activity and the study process at the university and highly evaluated the educational system and the conditions created for the students here.

- SCO RATS Council holds session in Tashkent

The 16th session of the Council of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was held in Tashkent on 2 April. Representatives of Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan participated in the meeting. The RATS Council condemned the terrorist acts that took place in Moscow in March, leading to numerous casualties, and called for the further consolidation of the efforts of SCO member states in fighting with terrorism.

The complex measures of the SCO member countries to assist Russia in ensuring safety of events related to celebrations of the 65th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-45, as well as Uzbekistan in ensuring security of the SCO summit in Tashkent were approved. The participants listened to the reports of the RATS Executive Committee director D.Djumanbekov on the implementation of the RATS Council decisions and of the SCO member states' program of cooperation in fighting terrorism, separatism and extremism for 2007-2009. The draft RATS Council report to the SCO Heads of States Council on the RATS activity in 2009 was approved.

The meeting participants also considered issues of improvement of cooperation in fighting terrorism, separatism and extremism. They agreed that the RATS activities were adequate to the modern challenges and threats in fighting the "three evils".

To deepen cooperation, the sides agreed to hold regular meetings of competent bodies to exchange information and to create a group to coordinate the joint fight with illegal activities of one of the large international terrorist organizations. In the framework of the Program of cooperation of SCO member states in fighting terrorism, separatism and extremism for 2010-2012, the sides approved the proposal to hold joint anti-terrorist drill in 2010 on the territory of Russia.

The participants also agreed to hold the next session of the SCO RATS Council in September in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Economic/Energy Front

- Ban Urges Restraint In Central Asia Water Dispute

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has urged restraint in a growing dispute between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan over the building of a massive Tajik hydroelectric dam.

Ban, who is in Tajikistan as part of a tour of Central Asia, told reporters he is "deeply concerned" over the dispute over the Rogun dam project. Uzbekistan fears the dam will reduce the flow of vital water to its cotton-growing areas.

Ban said all parties concerned should refrain from unilateral action until the World Bank's international assessment team has finished its technical assessment of Rogun later this year. He said all resources should be used "fairly and harmoniously," respecting the interests of neighbouring countries. He described this as a collective responsibility for all of the leaders of Central Asia. In Dushanbe, Ban has held talks with Tajik President Emomali Rahmon on topics including Afghanistan, human rights, and climate change.

- UN's Ban Calls Aral Sea 'Shocking Disaster'

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, on a tour of Central Asia, says the depletion of the Aral Sea is one of the planet's most shocking disasters. He is calling on Central Asian leaders to step up cooperation in solving the environmental problems associated with the shrinking of the Aral Sea, once the world's fourth-largest body of fresh water. Ban today took a helicopter tour of the Aral Sea, which borders Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. In a press release, Ban said the tour was "a vivid testament to what...happens when we waste our common natural resources, when we neglect our environment, when we mismanage our environment." "Millions of people have lost their places, their livelihoods were destroyed.... I was so saddened to see this for myself," Ban said in the statement.

The sea shrank by 90 percent after the Soviet Union diverted rivers to support cotton production in the arid region. After arriving in the western Uzbek city of Nukus, Ban pledged to urge all Central Asian leaders to "sit down together and try to find the solutions" to the devastation of the Aral Sea. Ban is to meet Uzbek President Islam Karimov later today.

- Uzbekistan-Vietnam business forum held

The forum of business circles of Uzbekistan and Vietnam was held in Tashkent on 6 April. The participants of the event considered issues of development of bilateral trade, economic and investment cooperation. Minister of Economy of Uzbekistan Sunatilla Bekenov and Vice Prime Minister of Vietnam Hoang Chung Hai chaired the forum. The Vietnamese businessmen received information on the priority directions of attraction of investments in the economy of Uzbekistan. Vietnam is one of the reliable partners of Uzbekistan in the Asia-Pacific region. The cooperation between the two countries is based on many interstate, intergovernmental and interdepartmental documents.

In Uzbekistan, 10 joint ventures created with Vietnamese investments operate. They specialize on trade, food and silk industries. Hoang Chung Hai praised the current level of cooperation between the two countries and expressed readiness of Vietnam's businesses to expand cooperation with Uzbekistan. At the end of the business forum, a cooperation exchange with participation of Uzbek and Vietnamese companies was held. The members of the Vietnam's delegation also visited a number of ministries and departments of Uzbekistan for talks on cooperation development.

Social Front

- UN's Ban Calls On Uzbekistan To Improve Rights Record

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, in Uzbekistan on the third stop on his five-nation Central Asian tour, today told Uzbek authorities it is "time to deliver" on pledges to respect human rights. Ban addressed a group of some 200 students at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy, saying "you have an important place in the universal agreements that bind us as a community of nations." Ban said he had similarly urged Uzbek President Islam Karimov to pay more attention to the issue of human rights when the UN secretary general met earlier with the Uzbek leader. Ban said "I expect that the Uzbekistan government will lead by example."

While calling on Uzbekistan to show greater respect for human rights, Ban was careful not to mention any specific examples and avoided bringing up the subject of Andijon.

The UN Human Rights Committee issued a critical report on Uzbekistan less than two weeks ago, in which there was a call for a fuller investigation into May 2005 violence in Andijon. The Uzbek government continues to say 187 people were killed when troops opened fire on protesters in an attempt to quell a coup attempt. Witnesses report the casualty toll was several times higher and that the majority of people killed by Uzbek troops in Andijon were peaceful demonstrators.

Ban has been carrying the message of greater respect for human rights to the Central Asian countries he has visited already -- Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan -- and is likely to be repeating that message as he travels further to Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. Ban's trip has also focused on water issues in Central Asia, where water has always been scarce, but also where the population is continuing to increase rapidly. Ban flew around the Aral Sea on April 4 in a helicopter to view the damage caused by inefficient and over use of water for irrigation. Ban called it one of the worst environmental disasters of the world.

The secretary general visited the town of Muynak, once a fishing village but now located many kilometers from the shore of the shrinking Aral Sea. Ban said, "Standing on piers, on what were once piers, I could not see anything - I could see only a cemetery of ships marooned in the sand. It was shocking." The water from Central Asia's two great rivers -- the Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya -- is so overused by the region's population that the Syr-Darya no longer reaches the Aral Sea and the Amu-Darya is just a trickle by the time the river meets the sea.

Once the fourth largest inland body of water the greatly shrunken Aral is now ringed by white alkaline soils that winds blow for hundreds of kilometers in all direction, damaging the health of people living in those areas.

Water is certain to be an issue when Ban travels further to Tajikistan later today. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are in the midst of a huge dispute over Tajikistan's plans to build large hydropower plants. Tajikistan says it needs the power plants to alleviate the country's chronic power shortages, especially during winter months.

Uzbekistan fears that water diverted through Tajikistan's hydropower plants in winter to generate electricity will leave downstream countries, such as Uzbekistan, short of water for agriculture. Though Uzbekistan objects to Tajikistan constructing more of these plants, Uzbek authorities have not reduced the price Tajikistan must pay for supplies of Uzbek natural gas, which remains the chief source of energy for Tajikistan.

Both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are important transit countries for supplying military and civilian efforts in Afghanistan, Central Asia's neighbor to the south.

Central Asia is also rich in energy resources such as oil, natural gas and uranium that give the region further international importance. Ban has been careful to emphasize his message of respect for human rights while recognizing the value of the region for the international community.

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