

Business & Politics in the Muslim World
News Monitoring
April 9 to April 15, 2010
Weekly Report
Central Asia
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(RFE/RL) -- Kyrgyzstan's interim leader says the provisional government is considering arresting the country's president to put him on trial for the deaths of dozens of people in bloody clashes between antigovernment protesters and security forces earlier this week.

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- Turkmenistan and United States to hold political and business consultations
- Turkmenistan, Armenia to develop basis for economic cooperation
- Turkmenistan and Armenia to exchange trade missions
- Belarus ratifies agreement on motor transportation with Turkmenistan

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Azerbaijan

Political Front

- European Court Finds Azerbaijan Guilty Of Election Fraud

Azerbaijan has been criticized by the international community for its poor voting record BAKU -- The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has issued its first ruling on a complaint about election fraud in Azerbaijan and found the government guilty, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

Geo strategic Front

- Azerbaijani Ambassador to Russia to become CIS Interstate Fund for Humanitarian Cooperation chairman

Azerbaijani extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador to Russia Polad Bulbuloglu, a member of the CIS Council for Humanitarian Cooperation (CHC) and board member of the CIS Interstate Humanitarian Cooperation Foundation (IHCF) Polad Bulbuloglu will become the chairman of the IHCF Board May 2.

- Azerbaijani FM: Turkey confirms invariability of its position on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

Turkey has confirmed the invariability of its position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan Elmar Mammadyarov briefed the media on April 9, answering a question about today's meeting with Firudin Sinirlioglu, Turkish Foreign Ministry's adviser and special envoy of the Turkish Prime Minister.

- Azerbaijan, EU discuss bilateral cooperation

Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan Elmar Mammadyarov met European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy Stefan Fule to discuss bilateral relations, Eastern Partnership program and energy cooperation on April 9.

Economic/Energy Front

- Romanian President: Memorandum on Azerbaijan gas supplies to Romania is important for EU

The Memorandum of Understanding signed between Romania, Azerbaijan and Georgia to implement the project AGRI (Azerbaijan Georgia Romania Interconnect), is an important and essential step both for the three countries, and for the entire European Union, Financiarul reported citing Romanian President Traian Basescu.

- Azerbaijan ensures high economic growth during global recession

The Sixth Caspian International Banking and Finance Conference and Exhibition 2010 will be a good testing ground for discussing topical issues in light of the global financial crisis, Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA) Chairman Elman Rustamov said at the opening of the conference.

- Azerbaijan, Romania and Georgia sign memorandum on gas supplies – UPDATE
Azerbaijan, Georgia and Romania will sign a memorandum on cooperation in gas sphere in Bucharest today. Today Azerbaijan, Georgia and Romania signed a memorandum on cooperation in gas sphere in Bucharest, SOCAR Representation in Romania said.

- Turkish Ambassador to Azerbaijan commented on the gas negotiations between Baku and Ankara

Another round of talks between Turkey and Azerbaijan on gas prices will likely be sometime next month. Turkish Ambassador to Azerbaijan Hulusi Kilich, told ANS TV that he does not exclude a possible agreement.

Social Front

- Azerbaijan Police Disperse Rally, Detain Activists

Azerbaijani police have broken up an opposition rally against restrictions on freedom of assembly in the capital city and briefly detained demonstrators, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

- Jailed Azerbaijani Bloggers Transferred Outside Baku

BAKU -- Two Azerbaijani bloggers jailed on hooliganism charges have been transferred from a pretrial detention center in Baku to separate prisons, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

- Jailed Azerbaijani Journalist Expects Another Prison Term

BAKU -- The trial of journalist Eynulla Fatullayev on charges of illegal possession of drugs while in prison has begun in a Baku court, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

Fatullayev told the judge on April 9 at the start of his trial that he although he is innocent, he is certain he will be found guilty of the charges and sentenced to a fourth prison term.

Kazakhstan

Political Front

- Kazakh Opposition Activists Send Petition To Obama

ALMATY -- Opposition activists and independent journalists gave a petition to the U.S. Consulate in Almaty today urging President Barack Obama to reject Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev's invitation to attend an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) summit in Astana, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Geo strategic Front

- Kazakhstan To Provide Aid To Kyrgyzstan

ASTANA -- Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Masimov has said his country will provide the victims of the violent clashes between antigovernment protesters and Kyrgyz security forces with humanitarian aid, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

- KAZAKHSTAN: OBAMA-NAZARBAYEV MEETING DOES NOT YIELD OSCE SUMMIT PLEDGE

Kazakhstan's president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, granted the United States new over-flight rights for the resupply of US and NATO troops in Afghanistan, but his April 11 meeting with US President Barack Obama did not yield a clear commitment from Washington concerning the convening of an OSCE summit.

- STATE MEDIA CREATES DISTORTED PICTURE OF OBAMA-NAZARBAYEV MEETING

State-controlled media outlets in Kazakhstan have been competing to outdo each other with flattering portrayals of President Nursultan Nazarbayev's one-on-one meeting with Barack Obama on April 11. Kazakhstani news outlets also indicate that Astana is planning to host an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe summit in November, apparently with or without a US endorsement.

Economic/Energy Front

- India, Kazakhstan to conclude talks for civil nuclear deal

WASHINGTON: India and Kazakhstan will soon wrap-up inter-governmental negotiations on civil nuclear cooperation, a move that came after meeting of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

- Eni's investment in Kashagan totals \$4.5 billion as of 2009

(SRI) - Eni SpA, the Italian oil major, reportedly invested \$4.5 billion into the Kashagan oil field as of the end of 2009, according to the company's annual report.

- Ukraine: Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan Welcome to Join Gas Consortium

Ukraine may eventually consider the idea of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan joining the gas consortium Kyiv hopes to set up to manage its gas pipelines, First Deputy Ukrainian Prime Minister Andrey Klyuyev said during a briefing today, Kazakhstan Today reported, citing UNIAN.

Social Front

- Nazarbaev University To Open In Summer

ASTANA -- A new university in Astana named after Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev will open this summer, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Masimov told journalists today that 500 scholarships have been allocated for Nazarbaev University students. The opening ceremony is scheduled for July.

- Web browser that bypasses big brother a Kazakh hit

ALMATY (Reuters Life!) - A browser that bypasses censors has become the most popular way to access the Internet in Kazakhstan, a Central Asian state where sites critical of the government are often blocked, a Web statistics firm said.

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- Kyrgyz Clan Leaders To Urge Bakiev To Resign

BISHKEK -- An organization of Kyrgyz clans says it will send the representatives of 40 clans to meet with ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev to try to persuade him to officially resign, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Kyrgyz Court Fully Exonerates Former Defense Minister

BISHKEK -- A Kyrgyz military court has fully exonerated former Defense Minister Ismail Isakov, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Bakiev Reportedly Leaves For Kazakhstan

Bodyguards cleared the way for ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev as he left the scene after the shots were fired in central Osh on April 15.

(RFE/RL) -- Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev has reportedly flown out of the country to neighboring Kazakhstan. The reports said Bakiev had left to have consultation talks with Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev.

- New Kyrgyz Security Leadership Assures Public

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyzstan's National Security Service (SNB) has issued an address to the country calling on citizens to help the interim government reestablish order and stability, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Kyrgyz Interim Government Receives Offers Of Help, As Situation Still Tense

A supporter of President Kurmanbek Bakiev (left) argues with interim government followers attempting to hold a rally at the central square in Jalal-Abad on April 14.

- Kyrgyz President Sets Conditions For Resignation

BISHKEK/JALAL-ABAD, Kyrgyzstan -- Kyrgyzstan's embattled president, Kurmanbek Bakiev, has said in the face of a threat of attack that he is willing to resign if his security

is guaranteed. The head of the interim government, Roza Otunbaeva, told the Associated Press in an interview her team was offering security guarantees to Bakiev and his family if he stepped down and left the country.

- **Criminal Cases Begun Against Kyrgyz President's Sons, Brother**

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyzstan's acting prosecutor-general says criminal cases against President Kurmanbek Bakiev's two sons, Marat and Maksim, and his brother, Janysh, have been launched by the interim government, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Baitemir Ibraev told RFE/RL that the three face charges of premeditated murder and attempted murder.

- **Reporter's Notebook: The Mountain Roza Otunbaeva Has To Climb**

BISHKEK -- Roza Otunbaeva may be the head of Kyrgyzstan's interim government, but she's the country's chief mourner as well.

- **Acting Kyrgyz Leader Mulls Bakiev Arrest**

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyzstan's interim leader says the provisional government is considering arresting the country's president to put him on trial for the deaths of dozens of people in bloody clashes between antigovernment protesters and security forces earlier this week.

Roza Otunbaeva told Reuters that the arrest warrant for President Kurmanbek Bakiev's "relatives and accomplices" has already been issued."

- **Kyrgyz Interim Government Piles Pressure On Ousted President**

(RFE/RL) -- Kyrgyzstan's interim leader says the provisional government is considering arresting the country's president to put him on trial for the deaths of dozens of people in bloody clashes between antigovernment protesters and security forces earlier this week.

- **Defiant Kyrgyz Leader Addresses Supporters**

Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev has made his first public appearance since he was toppled last week, accusing his opponents of seizing power "by force" and refusing to step down. Bakiev was addressing a crowd of supporters in his home town of Teyit, in the south of Kyrgyzstan.

Geo strategic Front

- **U.S. Official To Meet With Kyrgyz Interim Government**

A senior U.S. official is due in Kyrgyzstan today to meet with the interim government. Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake will meet with interim leader Roza Otunbayeva and others.

- **U.S. Air Base In Kyrgyzstan Resumes Full Operations**

The U.S. air base in Kyrgyzstan vital to military operations in Afghanistan has resumed full operations, after unrest in the country caused suspension of troop transport flights.

The U.S. embassy said today in a statement that Manas air base has resumed normal activities.

- **U.S. Says Kyrgyzstan To Honor Base Agreements**

BISHKEK (Reuters) -- The interim leader of Kyrgyzstan has agreed to abide by previous agreements on Manas Airport, a key supply base for U.S. war efforts in Afghanistan, the U.S. State Department said.

- **Russian President Warns Of Kyrgyz Civil War, Urges START Ratification**

WASHINGTON (RFE/RL) -- Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has warned that Kyrgyzstan may be plunged into a civil war if the standoff between embattled President Kurmanbek Bakiev and the self-declared interim government is not resolved soon.

- **Regional States React To Kyrgyz Violence**

(RFE/RL) -- Most regional states are watching events in Kyrgyzstan. But few are saying much. Neighboring Uzbekistan has yet to make any official statement on the unrest in Kyrgyzstan, where an opposition coalition has claimed to have taken power following unrest that left at least 75 people dead.

- **U.S. Base In Kyrgyzstan Diverts Passenger Flights**

The United States says some 50,000 troops passed through the Manas air base on their way to or from Afghanistan in March. BISHKEK (Reuters) -- The U.S. military has reversed a decision to resume normal operations at its base in Kyrgyzstan and decided to divert all military passenger flights elsewhere and restrict cargo flights, officials said.

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

- **Kyrgyz City Residents Urged To Return Weapons**

TALAS, Kyrgyzstan -- Supporters of the interim government in Kyrgyzstan's northwestern city of Talas are campaigning for the return of weapons and ammunition taken by local residents from police and security forces during last week's uprising, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- **Case Launched Against Kyrgyz 'Computer Smasher'**

BISHKEK -- Bishkek police say they have charged a former presidential candidate with vandalizing the office of an independent newspaper, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Police investigator Bekjan Isakov told RFE/RL that Nurlan Motuev is charged with damaging private property on March 25, when he forced his way into the Bishkek offices of the independent "Uchur" newspaper and destroyed some of its computers.

Tajikistan

Political Front

- **Tajik Prosecutor General Sacks Public Prosecutors**

DUSHANBE -- Tajikistan's new prosecutor-general has fired 13 public prosecutors in what he says is an effort to reform the prosecutor's office, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Sherkhon Salimzoda, who was chairman of Tajikistan's Anticorruption Agency before being named prosecutor-general in mid-February, said at a press conference in Dushanbe on April 12 that the sackings were necessary because "there were many deficiencies in the prosecutors' activities."

Geo strategic Front

Economic/Energy Front

- **Tajik delegation attends ADB-sponsored high-level forum on climate change in the Philippines**

DUSHANBE, April 9, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Senior government officials and climate change experts from around the world gathered for the Climate Investment Funds (CIF) Partnership Forum in the Philippines in March to discuss financial measures to help developing countries mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change. Hosted by ADB, the meetings were an opportunity to review the impact of CIF, and to strengthen developing country participation in CIF climate action schemes.

- **Tajikistan's economy weathers bleak 2009, better times ahead, says ADB**

DUSHANBE, April 13, 2010, Asia-Plus -- A sharp reduction in workers' remittances mainly due to economic difficulties in Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation and weak

demand for Tajikistan's main export commodities of aluminum and cotton were the main factors in slowing Tajikistan's GDP growth by more than half in 2009, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) says in a major new report.

- World Bank supports to rehabilitate water supply system in Kulob

DUSHANBE, April 14, 2010, Asia-Plus -- The World Bank has provided 13.5 million U.S. dollars for rehabilitation of the water supply system in the city of Kulob, Asia-Plus has learned at the State Committee for Investments and State-owned Property Management (GosKomInvest).

Social Front

- 20 schools in GBAO to be connected to Internet by new school year

KHOROG, April 14, 2010, Asia-Plus -- 20 schools are expected to have been connected to Internet by the new school year, the GABO education directorate head Gahribsho Gharibshoyev said.

Turkmenistan

Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- Turkmen president invited to Bahrain

On April 12, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received Sheikh Faisal bin Rashid bin Isa Al Khalifa, member of the royal family of the State of Bahrain, son of the elder brother of the King of Bahrain. According to the press service of the President of Turkmenistan, the meeting was held in the seaside town of Turkmenbashi as part of the grand opening of new facilities in the resort place of Avaza.

Economic/Energy Front

The U.S. third largest oil company ConocoPhillips is in talks with the UAE company Mubadala to submit a joint application for extracting oil and gas from the Turkmen sector of the Caspian Sea, ITAR-TASS reports referring to the business circles of the London Oil Exchange.

- President of Turkmenistan receives EU Commissioner for Energy

Turkmenistan, having enormous hydrocarbon reserves confirmed by independent experts, is willing to consider any proposals to diversify export routes for Turkmen energy resources to world markets.

- Turkmenistan and United States to hold political and business consultations

In the near future Turkmenistan and the U.S. will hold political consultations, as well as the Turkmen-American business forum with participation of members of the U.S. Business Council.

- Turkmenistan, Armenia to develop basis for economic cooperation

The 2nd meeting of the intergovernmental Turkmen-Armenian commission on economic cooperation was held in Yerevan. The meeting was chaired by Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan Hydyr Saparlyev and Minister of Energy and Natural Resources of Armenia Armen Movsisyan.

- Turkmenistan and Armenia to exchange trade missions

In the course of the Turkmen-Armenian business forum Armenian Minister of Economy Nerses Yeritsyan announced the intention of the two countries to open trade offices in Ashgabat and Yerevan.

- Belarus ratifies agreement on motor transportation with Turkmenistan

Belarus has ratified an intergovernmental agreement with Turkmenistan on international motor transportation of passengers and cargos, ITAR-TASS reports. The document regulates international road haulage between states, transit through their territories, motor transportation to third countries and from them, as well as private travels by car from one country to another.

Social Front

- Turkmen Health Sector Criticized In Report

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) has published a report criticizing Turkmenistan's public health system, RFE/RL's Turkmen Service reports.

The report said that Turkmen health authorities underestimate the threat of infectious diseases, manipulate medical data, and consistently fail to meet international standards in medical care.

- New international airport to be inaugurated in Turkmenbashi

A modern international airport capable of accommodating all types of aircraft is ready for commissioning in the city of Turkmenbashi in Balkan province of Turkmenistan. In the course of the Cabinet meeting on April 9, Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov set a task for Deputy Prime Minister Nazarguly Shagulyev, who is in charge of the transport industry, and for the head of the State National Service "Turkmenistan", Batyr

Uzbekistan

Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- Russia-Uzbekistan: Moscow to meet Islam Karimov with the demonstration of political emigrants

The building of Uzbek embassy in Moscow

Ferghana.Ru already reported that Islam Karimov is going to give his first official visit to Russia under the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev. Last time the Uzbek leader visited Moscow on February 5-6, 2008.

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

- Uzbekistan's threatened cultural legacy

A clampdown on Uzbek intelligentsia and civil society is compromising the socio-cultural evolution of the country

One of the most totalitarian and repressive countries in the world is trying to form its own definition of cultural progress. Recently, the authorities in Uzbekistan have been arresting not only human rights activists, but also religious minorities, artists and health practitioners on the grounds of "disrespecting Uzbek culture and people".

Detailed report

Azerbaijan

Political Front

- European Court Finds Azerbaijan Guilty Of Election Fraud

Azerbaijan has been criticized by the international community for its poor voting record

BAKU -- The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has issued its first ruling on a complaint about election fraud in Azerbaijan and found the government guilty, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

The court ruled that the voting rights of Nemat Aliyev, a member of the opposition Azerbaijan Popular Front Party, were violated. The court ordered the Azerbaijani government to pay him the equivalent in Azerbaijani manats of 7,500 euros (\$10,023) in damages.

Aliyev registered as a candidate for the Barda electoral district in the 2005 parliamentary election. Zahid Oruj of the pro-government Ana Vatan Party was declared the winner of the vote in the district.

Aliyev appealed to the district election commission, claiming that the vote had been rigged by means of illegal intervention and ballot stuffing at the behest of local officials. The commission rejected his appeal, and the appeals court and the Supreme Court upheld the decision.

Aliyev appealed to the ECHR in Strasbourg in April 2006 to uphold his right to vote, to be elected in a free ballot, and to have a fair investigation of any complaint. It is the ECHR's 23rd ruling on Azerbaijan, but the first related to election fraud.

Azerbaijani human rights activists say dozens of similar election-related appeals have been filed with the court.

Geo strategic Front

- Azerbaijani Ambassador to Russia to become CIS Interstate Fund for Humanitarian Cooperation chairman

Azerbaijani extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador to Russia Polad Bulbuloglu, a member of the CIS Council for Humanitarian Cooperation (CHC) and board member of the CIS Interstate Humanitarian Cooperation Foundation (IHCF) Polad Bulbuloglu will become the chairman of the IHCF Board May 2. This decision was made Friday at a joint meeting IHCF and CHC, IHCF spokesman Alexander Kalugin said.

Currently, chairman of the IHCF Board is the Kazakh minister of education and science Zhanseit Tuimebayev.

Azerbaijan became the 8th country who signed the treaty on establishment of IHCF. The treaty was also signed by Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

- Azerbaijani FM: Turkey confirms invariability of its position on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

Turkey has confirmed the invariability of its position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan Elmar Mammadyarov briefed the media on April 9, answering a question about today's meeting with Firudin Sinirlioglu, Turkish Foreign Ministry's adviser and special envoy of the Turkish Prime Minister.

Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister described the meeting as "comprehensive," which, firstly covered the question of negotiations scheduled in Washington between Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan at the summit on nuclear safety.

With regards to Turkey's position on the impossibility of opening the border with Armenia without any tangible progress in resolving the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, Mammadyarov said that Ankara remains committed to its promises.

On Friday, the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister and Special Envoy of Turkish Prime Minister held a bilateral meeting which firstly focused on the negotiations and meetings planned in the framework of nuclear summit in Washington. Mammadyarov had a conversation with his Turkish counterpart in the morning, where these topics were also discussed.

"The Turkish side confirmed that it will take steps in matters that bring peace and stability to the South Caucasus, and will try to get a result from the meeting in Washington to begin progress, marked by the adoption of updated Madrid principles (by Armenia) and creating the possibility that we continue to work over a larger agreement," Mammadyarov said to joint press conference with EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, Stefan Füle, on April 9.

In his turn, the Commissioner Füle, who made his first official visit to Azerbaijan under his current mandate, highlighted the European Union's commitment to peaceful solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the work of the OSCE Minsk Group in this regard. According to him, the EU plans to take several important steps to resolve conflict and achieve peace in the region.

"Certain time ago, I spoke with the President of Armenia, and today held talks with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, they both expressed their commitment to peaceful resolution of the conflict," said Füle.

- Azerbaijan, EU discuss bilateral cooperation

Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan Elmar Mammadyarov met European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy Stefan Fule to discuss bilateral relations, Eastern Partnership program and energy cooperation on April 9.

Speaking to a post-meeting press conference, Mammadyarov said he also briefed the Commissioner on the ongoing political and economic reforms in Azerbaijan and the country's stance towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Fule, in turn, praised the political dialogue between Azerbaijan and EU and cooperation in economic development, energy security, democracy and human rights.

He described the meetings he held in Baku as "fruitful", and also underlined that some projects were planned to be realized jointly by Azerbaijan and EU.

On the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Commissioner said EU supports peaceful settlement of the dispute.

Economic/Energy Front

- Romanian President: Memorandum on Azerbaijan gas supplies to Romania is important for EU

The Memorandum of Understanding signed between Romania, Azerbaijan and Georgia to implement the project AGRI (Azerbaijan Georgia Romania Interconnect), is an important and essential step both for the three countries, and for the entire European Union, Financiarul reported citing Romanian President Traian Basescu.

On Tuesday, Azerbaijan, Romania and Georgia have signed a memorandum on cooperation in gas supplies in Bucharest. The document was signed by Azerbaijani Minister of Industry and Energy Natiq Aliyev, Minister of Economy, Romanian Commerce and Business Environment Adrian Videanu and Georgian Energy Minister Alexander Khetaguri. The project on supplies of liquefied Azerbaijani gas to Romania envisages the construction of two terminals for liquefied natural gas - one in Georgia, the

other one in Romania. According to preliminary data, the project cost will amount to 4.6 billion euros.

On Tuesday, Romanian President received Azerbaijani Minister of Industry and Energy Natiq Aliyev, Georgian Energy Minister Alexander Khetaguri at the palace Cotroceni. Romanian Minister of Economy, Trade and Business Environment Adrian Videanu, Georgian Ambassador to Romania Levan Metreveli and Azerbaijani ambassador to Bucharest Eldar Hasanov attended the meeting. "The agreement is equally a very important step for Azerbaijan, Georgia and Romania, as well as for the European Union," Basescu said.

At present, the construction of the terminal processing Azerbaijani gas at Georgia's Black Sea coast (SOCAR owns the oil terminal in Kulevi) and its transportation by ships to Romania or Bulgaria for further shipment to domestic gas pipeline network of Europe are being discussed. The project is being considered in two directions - LNG and CNG. First is the construction of gas liquefaction plant, and the second - delivery of gas directly to the ship for its compression. It deals with about 7-20 billion cubic meters of gas.

Balkans.com Business News reported that according to Azerbaijani Minister of Industry and Energy Natiq Aliyev, signing of the agreement is a historic event. It represents the importance for development of trade and economic relations between Romania and Azerbaijan. Videanu said that the CIS terminal project is an addition to the gas pipeline Nabucco, which aims to transport gas from the Caspian region and the Middle East to the EU countries. The Romanian side insists for the EU to give the project a priority status.

- Azerbaijan ensures high economic growth during global recession

The Sixth Caspian International Banking and Finance Conference and Exhibition 2010 will be a good testing ground for discussing topical issues in light of the global financial crisis, Central Bank of Azerbaijan (CBA) Chairman Elman Rustamov said at the opening of the conference.

Iteca Caspian is the conference and exhibition organizer.

"Last year was a serious challenge for Azerbaijan's economy, but at the same time international financial organizations see that Azerbaijan was well prepared and coped well," Rustamov said.

He said Azerbaijan has high rates of economic growth and is at the forefront for this indicator in the global recession.

"During the crisis, Azerbaijan focused on ensuring financial stability. Problems were inevitable, with an unexpectedly high growth rate on the Azerbaijani banking sector - 9-10 times. The crisis could have accelerated this process. But the CBA informed the banking sector and called for more conservative politics while building the pace of growth," Rustamov said.

According to the CBA official, global processes showed that foreign borrowings were the main indicator of the crisis' acceleration. Thus, the CBA limited its involvement in the banking sector through economic methods. As a result, the share of external borrowings in bank liabilities do not exceed 18 percent.

Amendments to a law on the central bank provided CBA the status of a mega-regulator, which allowed the bank to actively support the banking and real sectors in the crisis, Rustamov said.

"We provided strong support to stabilize companies, such as the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic and Azeraluminium," he said. "These included tax exemption, and a fivefold increase in bank deposit insurance coverage."

- Azerbaijan, Romania and Georgia sign memorandum on gas supplies – UPDATE
Azerbaijan, Georgia and Romania will sign a memorandum on cooperation in gas sphere in Bucharest today. Today Azerbaijan, Georgia and Romania signed a memorandum on cooperation in gas sphere in Bucharest, SOCAR Representation in Romania said.

According to representation, the document was signed by Minister of Industry and Energy of Azerbaijan Natic Aliyev, Minister of Economy, Commerce and Business Environment of Romania Adriean Videanu and Georgian Energy Minister Alexander Khetaguri.

"The signing will take place between the Ministry of Economy, Commerce and Business Environment of Romania, the Azerbaijani Ministry of Industry and Energy and the Ministry of Energy of Georgia.

The project envisages construction of two terminals for liquefied natural gas - one in Georgia, another in Romania. According to preliminary data, the project cost will amount to 4-6 billion euros.

Memorandum on the implementation of this project was signed between Georgia and Romania in October 2009, as well as between Romania and Azerbaijan earlier this year. It envisaged establishing a working group to sign a memorandum.

Today, the construction of the terminal processing Azerbaijani gas at Georgia's Black Sea coast (SOCAR owns the oil terminal in Kulevi) and its transport by the ships to Romania or Bulgaria for further shipment via domestic gas pipeline network of Europe are being discussed. The project is considered in two directions - LNG and CNG. The first one is the construction of gas liquefaction plant, and the second - delivery of gas directly to the ship for its compression. It deals with about 7-20 billion cubic meters of gas.

SOCAR President Rovnag Abdullayev said that there are intentions to prepare a feasibility study of the gas export project from the Black Sea coast of Georgia. "Preparation of feasibility study will allow us to identify the most advantageous option [gas exports via the Black Sea]. We have several options, including the export of LNG and CNG. There are also possibilities for transit through Turkey. The variety of these options will allow us to choose the right path," he said.

Abdullayev said that Romania and Bulgaria are interested in a project of gas export via the Black Sea. Talks are held with both parties now.

- Turkish Ambassador to Azerbaijan commented on the gas negotiations between Baku and Ankara

Another round of talks between Turkey and Azerbaijan on gas prices will likely be sometime next month.

Turkish Ambassador to Azerbaijan Hulusi Kilich, told ANS TV that he does not exclude a possible agreement.

According to the Ambassador, bilateral negotiations on the issue of gas continues: "In the matter of gas there is a number of topics, the first of which is connected with the price of gas from the first phase of Shah Deniz and the second - with the volume of gas purchased by us from the second phase of Shah Deniz . The third issue relates to transit gas prices through Turkey and the volume of gas sold to Azerbaijan to the Turkish market."

H. Kilic, alleges that many issues have already been agreed on: "I believe that these negotiations will be held in upcoming month, and the agreement will finally be reached".

Social Front

- **Azerbaijani Police Disperse Rally, Detain Activists**

Azerbaijani police have broken up an opposition rally against restrictions on freedom of assembly in the capital city and briefly detained demonstrators, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

Baku deputy police chief Yashar Aliyev told journalists the rally was dispersed because it was not sanctioned by city officials.

He said "several people" were arrested due to "disobedience toward police." Opposition Musavat Party officials said more than 30 people were detained.

The protesters, who were primarily from the Musavat Party, gathered at a subway station near Baku's city hall and demanded the right to assemble where they wish.

Police officers and plainclothes police stood in their way and prevented them from proceeding to city hall, which is about 100 meters away.

The protesters chanted "freedom" and "equality" before police forcibly dispersed them. The detained activists continued chanting as they were driven away in minibuses and police cars. They were released a short time later.

Baku city hall has rejected requests for rallies in the city center for the past three years.

Instead, authorities designate venues for public gatherings on the city's outskirts, but opposition parties have said they are too inaccessible.

- **Jailed Azerbaijani Bloggers Transferred Outside Baku**

BAKU -- Two Azerbaijani bloggers jailed on hooliganism charges have been transferred from a pretrial detention center in Baku to separate prisons, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

On April 10, blogger Adnan Hajizada was moved to a prison in Guzdek, some 20 kilometers from Baku, which houses dangerous criminals and is notorious for its bad conditions.

The other blogger, Emin Milli, was transferred today to a prison in the central town of Salyan, some 120 kilometers from Baku. Their lawyers told RFE/RL the remote locations are likely to impede contact between the young men and their families and lawyers.

Hajizada and Milli were detained after a scuffle at a Baku restaurant in July 2009. They were found guilty in November of hooliganism and inflicting minor bodily harm and sentenced to two and 2 1/2 years in prison, respectively.

Human rights groups say the charges against the two are politically motivated in retaliation for their satirical comments about government policy.

A Baku appeals court upheld their conviction in March despite numerous international calls for clemency.

- **Jailed Azerbaijani Journalist Expects Another Prison Term**

BAKU -- The trial of journalist Eynulla Fatullayev on charges of illegal possession of drugs while in prison has begun in a Baku court, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

Fatullayev told the judge on April 9 at the start of his trial that he although he is innocent, he is certain he will be found guilty of the charges and sentenced to a fourth prison term.

Fatullayev was first jailed in 2007 for allegedly insulting the victims of the killings in Khojali -- where in 1992 Azeri civilians were killed by Armenian forces -- and subsequently on charges of instigating terrorism and tax evasion.

The consecutive prison terms add up to 8 and 1/2 years.

Fatullayev, who was editor of the independent newspaper "Realny Azerbaijan," claims the drugs were planted in his cell in December to create the pretext for keeping him in prison after the European Court of Human Rights issues a ruling on his appeal against his earlier convictions.

The court in Strasbourg is expected to announce its verdict this month.

Fatullayev demanded that further tests be conducted on blood samples that the prosecution claims prove he was using drugs, and that the experts who carry out those tests be summoned as witnesses together with fellow prisoners with whom he has regular contact.

The court has agreed to those requests.

International human rights organizations say Fatullayev's imprisonment is politically motivated and is "illegal." They have called on the authorities to release him.

Fatullayev was initially charged in 2007, months after he published an article in "Realny Azerbaijan" in which he accused senior Azerbaijani officials of ordering the 2005 killing of fellow journalist Elmar Huseynov.

Kazakhstan

Political Front

- Kazakh Opposition Activists Send Petition To Obama

ALMATY -- Opposition activists and independent journalists gave a petition to the U.S. Consulate in Almaty today urging President Barack Obama to reject Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev's invitation to attend an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) summit in Astana, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

During a meeting with Obama in Washington on April 11, Nazarbaev invited Obama to the summit planned for later this year. The last such summit of heads of OSCE member states was held in Istanbul in 1999.

The petition urges Obama to oppose Nazarbaev's proposal. Tatyana Trubacheva, the chief editor of the weekly "Respublika," told RFE/RL that Kazakhstan's chairmanship of the OSCE is questionable in light of its suppression of free speech.

Representatives of Kazakhstan's nonregistered opposition Algha (Forward) party and the opposition newspaper "Vzglyad" (Glance) were also present at the handing of the petition to a consular official.

Kazakhstan took over the year-long OSCE chairmanship from Greece in January.

Geo strategic Front

- Kazakhstan To Provide Aid To Kyrgyzstan

ASTANA -- Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Masimov has said his country will provide the victims of the violent clashes between antigovernment protesters and Kyrgyz security forces with humanitarian aid, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Masimov said he hopes the situation in neighboring Kyrgyzstan would normalize in a peaceful way in the near future.

Zhanybek Karibzhanov, the deputy speaker of the Kazakh Senate, is currently in Bishkek representing Kazakhstan as chairman of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Some 79 people were killed and an estimated 1,000 injured on April 6-7 in violent clashes between protesters and Kyrgyz police and security forces in Bishkek and other Kyrgyz towns and cities.

- **KAZAKHSTAN: OBAMA-NAZARBAYEV MEETING DOES NOT YIELD OSCE SUMMIT PLEDGE**

Kazakhstan's president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, granted the United States new over-flight rights for the resupply of US and NATO troops in Afghanistan, but his April 11 meeting with US President Barack Obama did not yield a clear commitment from Washington concerning the convening of an OSCE summit.

Kazakhstan is serving as the chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe during 2010 and the convening of a summit this year is a top diplomatic priority for Nazarbayev. [For background see the Eurasia Insight archive].

"President Obama recognized the historic occasion of President Nazarbayev and Kazakhstan's chair of the OSCE, and we agreed to work together to try to develop a substantive agenda for a possible OSCE summit, although no decisions were made as to whether or not there would be a summit this year," said Michael McFaul, senior director for Russia on the National Security Council.

In addition to agreeing on a new air route to ship military cargo through Kazakhstan into Afghanistan, Obama and Nazarbayev signed agreements on economic cooperation between the two countries and discussed the human rights situation in Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan already has been allowing some flights containing non-lethal military cargo over its territory, but that cargo took a long route eastward from the United States, over Europe, the Caspian Sea and then Kazakhstan, before heading to the Manas Transit Center in Kyrgyzstan.

The United States agreed with Russia last July to ship cargo through Russian airspace, but without being able to transit Kazakhstan, that pact was of little use. Now with the new Kazakhstan agreement in place, the United States can fly cargo northward over the North Pole, then south over Russia and Kazakhstan.

The new route "will save money, it will save time, in terms of moving our troops and the supplies needed into the theater," said McFaul in a conference call April 11 with reporters.

The air route through Russia and Kazakhstan does not appear to be a high priority among military officials who manage the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), a web of rail, road and air links that funnels supplies to US and NATO troops in Afghanistan. The agreement with Russia was originally proposed by Moscow as a concrete "deliverable" from Obama's trip to Moscow last July, said Andrew Kuchins, senior fellow for the Russia and Eurasia program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. The Pentagon puts a higher priority on being able to transport lethal equipment on the existing network, Kuchins said. Officials from US Transportation Command and US Central Command, the military commands in charge of the NDN, did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Obama and Nazarbayev also discussed the case of Yevgeny Zhovtis, a Kazakhstan human rights activist who was sentenced to four years in prison for vehicular manslaughter after a controversial trial. "The presidents agreed that we need to try to find a creative solution to solve this very difficult issue," McFaul said. "Many human rights organizations have raised this issue about the processes that were used to convict him. Let's just leave it at that, the fact that both Presidents had a very frank discussion about this case." [For background see the Eurasia Insight archive].

McFaul raised eyebrows when he appeared to suggest that Obama had downplayed Kazakhstan's spotty record on human rights and democracy. "Both Presidents agreed that it's never -- you don't ever reach democracy, you always have to work at it. And in particular, President Obama reminded his Kazakh counterpart that we, too, are working to improve our democracy," he said. Pressed on that statement later, McFaul denied that Obama was equating the United States with Kazakhstan. "There was no equivalence meant whatsoever," he said.

Human rights advocates praised the fact that Obama brought up the topic of Zhovtis with Nazarbayev. "It's a very good thing that Zhovtis' case was discussed at such a high level," said Rachel Denber, deputy director of the Europe and Central Asia division at Human Rights Watch. "But the real test will be going forward, what they [Kazakhstani officials] do now."

Also on April 11, General Electric and Kazakhstan's Joint Stock Company Locomotiv and Joint Stock Company Kurastyru Zauty signed an agreement to jointly produce 150 shunter locomotives, which are smaller locomotives used in rail yards to put together freight trains, and to make short hauls. Under the agreement, the first five locomotives will be built in the United States and the remainder in Kazakhstan.

Nazarbayev also assured Obama that, while Kazakhstan officials have suggested that contracts of foreign oil and gas companies might be altered to change the tax provisions, existing contracts would be honored. "There's been some dispute in the press that they might try to rewrite those [contracts] in terms of taxation. I think we came out very assured that that will not happen," McFaul said.

Nazarbayev was in Washington to attend a nuclear security summit in Washington. Obama praised Nazarbayev's decision to give up the nuclear weapons that Kazakhstan inherited upon the fall of the Soviet Union. "On non-proliferation and nuclear safety issues, President Obama praised Nazarbayev as really one of the model leaders in the world," McFaul said. (In a press release that the Kazakhstan Embassy in Washington sent out after the meeting, however, Obama's comments were edited to suggest a more general endorsement: "President Obama praised President Nazarbayev as 'one of the model leaders in the world,'" the release said.)

Several other regional leaders were among the 40 heads of state gathered in Washington for the summit. Obama met with President Serzh Sargsyan of Armenia on April 12, and was also scheduled to meet with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Obama was expected to press both on ratifying protocols that the two countries signed in 2009 to open up their common border and resume diplomatic relations. Erdogan and Sargsyan also held a 90-minute, face-to-face meeting on April 12.

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili also was in Washington for the summit, but will not meet Obama one-on-one. Instead, Saakashvili was due to meet with Vice President Joe Biden.

Editor's Note: Joshua Kucera is a Washington, DC,-based freelance writer who specializes in security issues in Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Middle East.

- STATE MEDIA CREATES DISTORTED PICTURE OF OBAMA-NAZARBAYEV MEETING

State-controlled media outlets in Kazakhstan have been competing to outdo each other with flattering portrayals of President Nursultan Nazarbayev's one-on-one meeting with Barack Obama on April 11. Kazakhstani news outlets also indicate that Astana is

planning to host an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe summit in November, apparently with or without a US endorsement.

News outlets have seized on the Obama-Nazarbayev meeting in Washington, held on the sidelines of a nuclear security summit, to portray Kazakhstan's leader as an elder statesman who carries great clout on the world stage, and who is so respected that Obama sought him out for advice.

The Liter newspaper, operated by the Nur Otan party that Nazarbayev heads, claimed that the presidential meeting topped the international news agenda, eclipsing other events, such as the April 10 airliner tragedy in which Polish President Lech Kaczyński and other top Polish officials were killed. "Yesterday news output from international news agencies and TV channels led with a report in which Kazakhstani leader Nursultan Nazarbayev and US President Barack Obama were exchanging opinions with interest," it reported on April 13.

Obama sought Nazarbayev out for advice on the situation in neighboring Kyrgyzstan, following the violent overthrow of the president, Liter added: "The head of the biggest power on the planet turned to the Kazakhstani president for advice on the situation in Kyrgyzstan." US officials have not indicated that the recent turmoil in Kyrgyzstan was brought up during the meeting. [For background see the Eurasia Insight archive].

Liter also talked up Nazarbayev's international image, saying that he is "as the meeting with Obama showed, the head of a strong, progressive state, a guarantor of stability and peace in the Central Asian region."

As chairman of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2010, Kazakhstan sent a special envoy, Zhanybek Karibzhanov, to Bishkek to help hasten a return to stability there. But Nazarbayev has personally adopted a muted stance toward events in neighboring Kyrgyzstan. [For background see the Eurasia Insight archive].

State TV also tried to give Nazarbayev's image a boost by broadcasting interviews with foreign experts. "Kazakhstan today arouses unfeigned interest among everyone," Janusz Bugajski, senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, told the channel in remarks broadcast on April 12. The CSIS in 2009 prepared a series of reports on Kazakhstan and its OSCE chairmanship that were funded by the Kazakhstani government. [For background see the Eurasia Insight archive].

"Kazakhstan is capable of consolidating all the countries of Central Asia. The United States understands this perfectly and also supports Kazakhstan on all positions," State TV quoted Bugajski as saying.

The report then showed Anthony Bowyer, program manager for the Caucasus and Central Asia at the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), describing Nazarbayev as "a great person historically."

State-controlled media outlets did not mention the fact that Obama raised with Nazarbayev the subject of human rights activist Yevgeny Zhovtis, imprisoned on vehicular manslaughter charges after a trial criticized internationally as unfair. [For background see the Eurasia Insight archive].

Outlets reported instead that an OSCE summit is expected to take place in Astana in November. The United States has not yet endorsed the convening of such a gathering. The summit has been one of Nazarbayev's top diplomatic priorities in recent months. [For background see the Eurasia Insight archive].

Amid the sycophantic pro-presidential coverage, the independent Respublika newspaper struck a discordant note, reporting an appeal by independent journalists to Obama, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel calling on them to reject Astana's bid to host a summit. "It has long been time, the signatories believe, to ask President Nazarbayev and officials why, even as [OSCE] chairman, Kazakhstan ignores the standards of the organization?" the text of the appeal, published on the Respublika website on April 12, stated.

Economic/Energy Front

- India, Kazakhstan to conclude talks for civil nuclear deal

WASHINGTON: India and Kazakhstan will soon wrap-up inter-governmental negotiations on civil nuclear cooperation, a move that came after meeting of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Kazakh President Noorsultan Nazarbayev.

External Affairs Minister S M Krishna, is scheduled to visit Kazakhstan next month to draw a road map to implement the agreements and initiatives that were agreed between the two countries when Nazarbayev, visited New Delhi in January 2009.

During a 45-minute meeting with Singh, on the sidelines of the Nuclear Security Summit here, Nazarbayev also invited Indian companies to invest heavily in Kazakhstan.

Singh and Nazarbayev also discussed the situation in the region including Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Both agreed on the importance of stability, security and economic development of Afghanistan and also expressed concern at production of narcotics and trafficking of narcotics.

"Nazarbayev was very appreciative of India's role in development and reconstruction of Afghanistan," External Affairs Ministry spokesman Vishnu Prakash, told journalists here, adding that he was of the view that once the situation in Afghanistan stabilises that would pave the way for direct surface link between India and Kazakhstan.

"The President invited Prime Minister to visit Kazakhstan, which he accepted," Prakash said. "President Nazarbayev mentioned to the Prime Minister that they were planning 170 major projects in a variety of sectors to speed up the industrialisation of Kazakhstan and invited Indian companies to participate in those projects.

He also noted that there was a Customs Union between Kazakhstan, Belarus and Russia and that Indian companies present there could supply their goods and services to the entire customs union so that they have a large area and population to cover," he added.

- Fugitive Kazakh Banker Arrested In United Arab Emirates

ASTANA -- The former chairman of Kazakhstan's Alyans Bank has been arrested in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Kazakh Interior Affairs press service told journalists on April 8 that an international arrest warrant for Chairman Erik Sultankulov and the former chairman of the Alyans Bank's directorate, Dauren Kereybaev, was issued in November.

The two former bankers are wanted in Kazakhstan for allegedly embezzling \$1 billion.

The Kazakh Interior Ministry said it is holding talks with UAE officials for Sultankulov to be extradited to Kazakhstan.

- Eni's investment in Kashagan totals \$4.5 billion as of 2009

(SRI) - Eni SpA, the Italian oil major, reportedly invested \$4.5 billion into the Kashagan oil field as of the end of 2009, according to the company's annual report.

The total sum consists of \$3.4 billion expenditures to develop the oil field and \$1.1 billion to acquire interests of partners that had exited the Kashagan consortium. Eni holds a 16.81-percent stake in the project, along with U.K.'s Shell, French Total, U.S.-based ExxonMobil and Kazakhstan's KazMunaiGas, all of which hold the same stake, and U.S.-based ConocoPhillips and Japanese Inpex which hold 8.4 percent and 7.56 percent, respectively.

Eni expects "further capital expenditure [...] to build the infrastructure needed for exporting production to international markets" in addition to costs for developing the field, according to its 2009 annual report. The first phase of the Kashagan project, before the field start pumping oil, will reportedly cost \$32.2 billion.

Eni said it expects daily output of 370,000 barrels in 2014, with production peaking at 1.5 million barrels, making the field one of the world's biggest.

- **Ukraine: Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan Welcome to Join Gas Consortium**

Ukraine may eventually consider the idea of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan joining the gas consortium Kyiv hopes to set up to manage its gas pipelines, First Deputy Ukrainian Prime Minister Andrey Klyuyev said during a briefing today, Kazakhstan Today reported, citing UNIAN.

At the same time, Klyuyev stressed that the idea was not currently being discussed.

"The issue has not been discussed...but anything can happen, everything depends on how the sides agree", he said.

On March 19, Klyuyev said the Ukrainian government was initiating the establishment of a tri-lateral gas consortium between Ukraine, Russia and the European Union with the possibility of later offering a concession on the pipeline.

Social Front

- **Nazarbaev University To Open In Summer**

ASTANA -- A new university in Astana named after Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev will open this summer, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Masimov told journalists today that 500 scholarships have been allocated for Nazarbaev University students. The opening ceremony is scheduled for July.

The university is expected to eventually host 20,000 students and teachers. In the beginning, the university will have only three major departments: engineering, natural sciences, and medicine.

By 2012, a graduate school of business and public policy is due to be opened, and doctorate and master's degree programs will also be available.

Admission to the primary courses will start this year, while further undergraduate courses will be launched in 2011.

Web browser that bypasses big brother a Kazakh hit

By SRI · April 14, 2010 · [Email This Post](#) · [Print This Post](#) · [Post a comment](#)

(Reuters Life!) - A browser that bypasses censors has become the most popular way to access the Internet in Kazakhstan, a Central Asian state where sites critical of the government are often blocked, a Web statistics firm said.

- **Web browser that bypasses big brother a Kazakh hit**

ALMATY (Reuters Life!) - A browser that bypasses censors has become the most popular way to access the Internet in Kazakhstan, a Central Asian state where sites critical of the government are often blocked, a Web statistics firm said.

The Norwegian developed Opera browser made by Opera Software has increased its market share sharply in the ex-Soviet state since it began to allow downloads of compressed web pages via a server outside the country -- a feature designed to speed browsing.

The Opera browser is now the most popular in the country with a market share of 32 percent, beating out rival products from Google, Microsoft and Apple, according to statistics for March from Web analytics firm StatCounter.

The browser has increased its popularity by 60 percent in the past year alone, Opera Software said.

Kazakhstan introduced a law last year allowing local courts to block access to Web sites whose content has been deemed "illegal," a step that human rights groups say amounts to censorship.

Some of the most popular blogging websites such as Livejournal.com and Google-run Blogger.com are now inaccessible to most of Kazakhstan's 3.2 million Internet users.

Both Livejournal.com and Blogger.com host blogs run by opponents of Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan's leader for 20 years who wields sweeping powers and is never criticized by domestic mainstream media.

However, the new edition of Opera introduced last year, Opera 10, allows users to view otherwise inaccessible Web pages using its Opera Turbo feature designed to speed up browsing over slow connections.

Kazakhstan ranked among the world's top 10 countries by the number of Opera Turbo users in January, according to a report by Opera Software.

The Norwegian software developer, however, does not advertise the "anti-censorship" feature of its product or see it as its key to success in Kazakhstan.

"We link such growth to the release of several new versions of Opera 10.x within the last year that perform significantly better than our earlier products," Opera Software spokesman Vladimir Isayev said in an email.

"As for accessing blocked resources -- we do not comment on that."

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- **Kyrgyz Clan Leaders To Urge Bakiev To Resign**

BISHKEK -- An organization of Kyrgyz clans says it will send the representatives of 40 clans to meet with ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev to try to persuade him to officially resign, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

The National Unity Society made the decision at a meeting in Bishkek today. It was decided that the names of those taking part in the clan delegation will be issued on April 16. No date for the meeting with Bakiev was announced.

Mukar Cholponbaev, head of the National Council movement and one of the leaders of the clan society, told RFE/RL that the society session discussed the current political crisis in the country over Bakiev and ways to prevent it from escalating into civil war.

Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev has reportedly flown out of the country to neighboring Kazakhstan. He has rejected demands that he resign from his office without preconditions.

There is a legend in Kyrgyzstan that Manas, the country's epic hero, united 40 clans to fight against invading Khitans. The Kyrgyz flag also includes 40 rays

of sun to symbolize these clans.

- Kyrgyz Court Fully Exonerates Former Defense Minister

BISHKEK -- A Kyrgyz military court has fully exonerated former Defense Minister Ismail Isakov, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Isakov was found guilty of corruption and sentenced to eight years in prison on January 11. He had pleaded not guilty and insisted that his case was politically motivated because of he joined the opposition to President Kurmanbek Bakiev.

Opposition leaders freed Isakov from prison after Bakiev fled the capital following violent clashes between security forces and antigovernment protesters on April 7.

Isakov's government awards and military insignia -- including the rank of general -- that were stripped from him by the military court in January were returned to him. Isakov is currently the acting defense minister in the self-declared interim government. He was defense minister under Bakiev from 2005-08, when he joined the opposition.

- Bakiev Reportedly Leaves For Kazakhstan

Bodyguards cleared the way for ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev as he left the scene after the shots were fired in central Osh on April 15.

(RFE/RL) -- Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev has reportedly flown out of the country to neighboring Kazakhstan. The reports said Bakiev had left to have consultation talks with Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev.

The reports came after Bakiev's bodyguards fired gunshots into the air to help him escape a crowd of opponents who disrupted his rally in the southern city of Osh earlier in the day. There were no reports of injuries.

The shots were fired when opponents of Bakiev moved towards his rally from a separate rival rally when Bakiev began to speak. After the shots were fired, Bakiev was hustled into a car and driven away from Osh, the country's second-largest city.

Bakiev fled to the south after protests against his rule last week erupted into violence, leaving more than 80 people dead.

Bakiev says he might step down if the interim government guarantees his and his family's security. He also said today that he has turned down an offer of political asylum in Belarus. The interim government says Bakiev must stand trial over the violence. A Russian government spokesman said Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has spoken on the phone with Bakiev. No details of their conversation late on April 14 were given.

An interim government sympathizer (with back to camera) faces Bakiev supporters in Osh on April 15. Calm Returned To City RFE/RL correspondent Bruce Pannier, who is in Osh, says calm has returned to the city hours after the shooting incident in a central part of the town. He says young men are guarding the local administration building and inspecting people wishing to enter but adds that many residents are just finding out about the shooting incident.

Some lawmakers from Bakiev's own Bright Path (Ak-Jol) party have joined the ranks of his opponents, calling for the president's impeachment.

Both Moscow and Washington -- both of which have air bases in Kyrgyzstan -- have offered assistance in efforts to break the ice with the country's interim leadership. On April 14, Russia pledged \$50 million in aid and loans to Kyrgyzstan. Within hours, visiting Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake had offered help to Kyrgyzstan's new government.

- **New Kyrgyz Security Leadership Assures Public**

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyzstan's National Security Service (SNB) has issued an address to the country calling on citizens to help the interim government reestablish order and stability, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

The statement assures Kyrgyz that the SNB will do everything it can to "preserve stability in the country in this very difficult period of its history." It adds that in order to implement the decisions of the self-declared interim government to strengthen democracy and the nation's security, the SNB will fulfill its duty and help the country "preserve its statehood and integrity."

Critics alleged that the SNB was a key tool for President Kurmanbek Bakiev in his persecution of opposition officials and independent journalists.

But Keneshbek Duishebaev is now in charge of the SNB as acting chairman of the state committee on national security, a post to which he was appointed by the interim government. Duishebaev was Kyrgyzstan's interior minister under former President Askar Akaev, who was ousted in the 2005 Tulip Revolution. Many observers attribute the ease with which protesters ousted the government to the fact that Duishebaev's forces did not fire on demonstrators. Duishebaev is also the leader of the opposition Justice party.

- **Pro-Bakiev Kyrgyz Lawmakers Back His Impeachment**

BISHKEK -- Several legislators from Kyrgyzstan's pro-presidential Ak-Jol (Bright Path) party have called for President Kurmanbek Bakiev's impeachment, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Ak-Jol deputy Begaly Nargozuev told RFE/RL today that a group of party members is pushing the idea of impeachment. Ak-Jol members said it would be a way of legally removing Bakiev from power and could help prevent any further violence in the country. Roza Otunbaeva, the head of Kyrgyzstan's self-declared interim government, dissolved parliament after the opposition took power on April 8. Ak-Jol held 71 seats in the 90-seat parliament at the time it was disbanded. It is not clear if parliament could be reconvened. If it was, an impeachment vote would need to be approved by two-thirds of the deputies. Bakiev, who fled Bishkek last week after clashes between security forces and antigovernment protesters, is in his native Jalal-Abad region in the southern part of the country. He has rejected calls by the interim government to resign without preconditions.

- **Kyrgyz Interim Government Receives Offers Of Help, As Situation Still Tense**

A supporter of President Kurmanbek Bakiev (left) argues with interim government followers attempting to hold a rally at the central square in Jalal-Abad on April 14.

Last updated (GMT/UTC): 14.04.2010 13:17

BISHKEK/JALAL-ABAD (RFE/RL) -- Visiting U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake has said Washington is prepared to help Kyrgyzstan's interim government formed in the aftermath of bloody antigovernment protests last week.

Blake, along with the head of the self-styled government, Roza Otunbaeva, spoke to reporters today after the two held a meeting in Bishkek.

He said that he had been sent to Kyrgyzstan by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to "express support for the steps that the provisional government thus far has undertaken to restore democracy and to establish a timetable to organize a new constitution and new elections in Kyrgyzstan." Blake is the most high-profile U.S. official to visit Kyrgyzstan since the protests began on April 7.

Kyrgyzstan hosts a U.S. military base at Manas airport outside Bishkek that plays a key part in the U.S.-led operations in Afghanistan.

Robert Blake said that he had been sent to Kyrgyzstan to "express support for the steps that the provisional government thus far." Otunbaeva said the future of the base was not discussed during her talks with Blake. The existing contract for the base outside Bishkek expires later this year.

U.S. Embassy spokeswoman Kimberly McDonald told RFE/RL in Bishkek today the transit center has resumed its normal operations once again, after temporarily suspending flights from Manas due to the political upheaval in the country.

McDonald added that the provisional government has "full authority to look at the contracts and the decisions" on the U.S. lease of the air base and "to make those decisions in the future. But for now things will be continuing as normal."

As Otunbaeva met the visiting U.S. diplomat in Bishkek, her deputy Almazbek Atambaev was in Moscow to seek humanitarian assistance.

Atambaev called Russia his country's "strategic partner." He received a promise to help fill what Prime Minister Vladimir Putin called Kyrgyzstan's "empty coffers."

"I think we can offer humanitarian aid to Kyrgyzstan in the form of a \$20 million grant for immediate payments, for the purposes of social support," Russian Finance Minister Aleksei Kudrin said.

Kudrin added that Rosselkhozbank, the Russian Agricultural Bank, was "ready to offer a \$30 million loan at a reduced interest rate to the corresponding financial institution in Kyrgyzstan."

Confrontations In Jalal-Abad

Meanwhile, the situation remains volatile in the southern province of Jalal-Abad, where Bakiev, a native of the region, fled after riots in the capital. RFE/RL correspondent Bruce Pannier, who is in Jalal-Abad, said several hundred people tried to organize a "kurultai," or people's congress, to support the self-styled government in Bishkek.

However, they were soon dispersed by a group of Bakiev supporters, who Pannier said "grabbed the kurultai's microphone" and forced its participants to leave the central square.

He said that some 1,500 to 2,000 people staged a rally in downtown Jalal-Abad today to support Bakiev and condemn the president's opponents. Pannier said that the pro-Bakiev crowd "has changed. Yesterday, it was, probably, about half and half men and women; today it's, probably, 80-90 percent men, most of them young, most of them have a very serious or angry look on their [faces]." He also reported increasing rumors of ethnic unrest among Kyrgyzstan's Uzbek minority. Pannier reported seeing a "long, long column of Uzbeks marching" in Jalal-Abad, which he estimated at 2,000, and that a separate rally was being held at the local university.

Kurmanbek Bakiev greets supporters at a rally in the center of Jalal-Abad on April 13. "There are also rumors flying around town everywhere that Uzbeks are beating up Kyrgyz in different parts of the country, and rumors that Kyrgyz are beating up Uzbeks in different parts of the country, here in the south anyway," Pannier said. "That is kind of information people are getting down here at the moment."

It is expected that supporters of the interim government will try to organize their kurultai in Jalal-Abad later today.

Bakiev Standoff

As concerns about possible tensions in the province rise, Otunbaeva said her government had "enough forces in the south."

"We have control of the south," Otunbaeva said today. "We have everything that is necessary there." Bakiev said on April 13 he was willing to resign if the interim government guaranteed safety for him and his family. Bakiev's other conditions for resignation included starting preparation of a "snap presidential election to be held within two or three months."

The Associated Press has quoted Otunbaeva as saying her team was offering security guarantees to Bakiev and his family if he stepped down and left the country. However, Otunbaeva said today Bakiev must stand trial, though she did not rule out the possibility of talks with Bakiev, who has said he is ready to negotiate "Bakiev understands his current situation, so he says he wants to meet with leaders of the opposition, or rather the interim government now," she said. "We'll see. We need to work out the format of such a meeting."

- Kyrgyz President Sets Conditions For Resignation

BISHKEK/JALAL-ABAD, Kyrgyzstan -- Kyrgyzstan's embattled president, Kurmanbek Bakiev, has said in the face of a threat of attack that he is willing to resign if his security is guaranteed. The head of the interim government, Roza Otunbaeva, told the Associated Press in an interview her team was offering security guarantees to Bakiev and his family if he stepped down and left the country.

The news comes amid fears that possible fighting between Bakiev's staunchest forces and those loyal to the country's self-proclaimed government could take a heavy toll.

Speaking at a press conference in his home village of Teyit in the southern Jalal-Abad region, Bakiev said, "I will go into retirement if security is guaranteed for me and my relatives." Bakiev's other conditions for resignation included stopping "people from running around the street with guns," and starting preparation of a "snap presidential election to be held within two or three months."

Bakiev also invited Otunbaeva to visit him for talks. He added that Otunbaeva would fail if she tried to use force to detain him.

Earlier today, the government of Bakiev opponents had given him until the end of the day to surrender or face an attack in Jalal-Abad, where he fled after public protests were met with roundups of opposition figures and gunfire by security troops in a number of cities on April 7.

At least 82 died and more than 1,000 were reportedly injured in the capital and other cities during last week's violence.

Bakiev quickly fled the capital and sought refuge in southern Kyrgyzstan, opening the door for political rivals who have long complained of corruption and other abuses since Bakiev assumed the presidency in 2005.

Immunity 'Stripped'

The deputy head of the interim government, Azimbek Beknazarov, earlier today said a decree was issued stripping Bakiev of his immunity from prosecution. Beknazarov said that if Bakiev fails to surrender today, he will be arrested.

"A criminal case has been opened against the former president," Beknazarov said. "If he does not show up today after the rally, the special services will take measures to detain

him, because last night we stripped him of presidential immunity and now our law-enforcement bodies can detain him."

The interim cabinet in Bishkek has opened criminal cases against Bakiev and several of his immediate family members, notably his brother Janysh and his son Maksim.

Beknazarov said today the interim government also dissolved the Constitutional Court, "in order to prevent any attempts to use the Constitutional Court of Kyrgyzstan to destabilize the situation."

The self-proclaimed government has not yet been formally recognized by any nation or international body, although a number of foreign officials have contacted the "new leaders."

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin called the head of the new team, Roza Otunbaeva, last week, and a special OSCE envoy has met with Otunbaeva and members of her team in Bishkek.

Little Choice

Bakiev conceded on April 8 that he had lost control of virtually all levers of power.

Political and social tensions were already running high after Bakiev's disputed reelection in July, amid signs of widespread corruption and public disappointment since the 2004 Tulip Revolution that ushered him into the presidency.

He also cautioned that "a great deal of bloodshed" would ensue if those who asserted authority last week tried to kill him or seize him by force.

He has repeatedly asked the United Nations to send peacekeepers to northern Kyrgyzstan, where the capital lies, to help restore order.

Bakiev's supporters today rallied for the second day in Jalal-Abad. RFE/RL's correspondent at the scene said up to 4,000 people gathered in the center of the city, where Bakiev addressed his sympathizers.

But many of those gathered appeared to have been bystanders, the correspondent noted, saying that "less than half could actually be called supporters. While about 1,500 gathered on the city square did applaud enthusiastically when Bakiev arrived and spoke, the majority of people remained across the street from the square and did not join in calls of support for the Kyrgyz leader."

Return To Normal?

U.S. State Department spokesman Philip Crowley told reporters in Washington on April 12 that the United States recognized that "there's a process under way that, within six months' time, will produce a new government, one that we hope will be more democratic."

"There is a transitional administration [in Kyrgyzstan] that has taken over operation of government ministries. We recognize that reality," Crowley said. "It's not for us to say that today, the leader of Kyrgyzstan is Otunbaeva versus Bakiev."

Kyrgyzstan hosts both U.S. and Russian military bases. Otunbaeva said today her cabinet will renew the existing one-year lease for Manas, the U.S. military's air base in Kyrgyzstan that serves as a transport hub for troops and supplies into Afghanistan. In the interview with AP, Otunbaeva said the contract will be automatically extended when it expires in July.

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said today there are other options to Manas, but that the alternatives are "more expensive and more challenging." Also speaking today, the

head of U.S. Central Command, General David Petraeus, said the unrest in Kyrgyzstan has not slowed the arrival of U.S. troops to Afghanistan.

In the meantime, life in Bishkek appeared to be returning to normal. RFE/RL correspondent James Kirchick said schoolchildren could be seen in playgrounds across the capital.

He said there were signs that some had turned the page on a turbulent administration whose fiercest critics accused it of returning the country to the excesses of its first independent leader, Askar Akaev.

Kirchick also reported that a stone monument has been erected outside the White House in Bishkek to those who died in last week's protests.

One woman who brought her young son to the monument said that she was "afraid there will be more bloodshed because he's [Bakiev] gathering his relatives and supporters around him."

Askar Kakiev, a 75-year-old philosophy professor, said that "there were so many of our young people killed, this is really a grievance for our people."

Asked if Bakiev should go to jail, he said, "I don't know about that, it's up to the interim government. It should follow the law. Everyone should follow the law and the rules. The law should be cautiously preserved. It's a huge and terrible thing that happened to our people and I hope we never have to deal with it again in the future."

One captain in the security forces told RFE/RL that if there were any elements of the army or internal security force that remained loyal to Bakiev, they were sure to have fled with Bakiev to southern Kyrgyzstan.

- Criminal Cases Begun Against Kyrgyz President's Sons, Brother

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyzstan's acting prosecutor-general says criminal cases against President Kurmanbek Bakiev's two sons, Marat and Maksim, and his brother, Janysh, have been launched by the interim government, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Baitemir Ibraev told RFE/RL that the three face charges of premeditated murder and attempted murder.

Ibraev said the investigations were launched based on information provided by witnesses. He said arrest warrants for the three have been issued.

An investigation has also been launched against former Bishkek Mayor Nariman Tyuleev. Ibraev said that witnesses told investigators that looting and disorder in the capital were organized by Tyuleev's supporters.

The whereabouts of Marat, Maksim, and Janysh Bakiev are unknown.

Maksim was on a flight to the United States on April 6 as the head of an official delegation, but it's not known if he arrived.

There have been reports that Janysh -- who was head of the State Security Service and a presidential guard -- is still in Kyrgyzstan and possibly with his brother in the southern city of Jalal-Abad.

At least 75 people were killed and hundreds were injured in clashes on April 6-7 between antigovernment protesters and security forces.

- Reporter's Notebook: The Mountain Roza Otunbaeva Has To Climb

BISHKEK -- Roza Otunbaeva may be the head of Kyrgyzstan's interim government, but she's the country's chief mourner as well.

The 59-year-old former diplomat -- known to everyone here as “Roza” -- has emerged this week as the calm, motherly face to a chaotic domestic political situation.

On April 7, violent protests initially sparked by rising energy prices but magnified by growing anger over widespread corruption and a crackdown on opposition politicians and independent journalists forced Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev to flee the capital.

He is suspected to be holed up somewhere near his native city of Jalal-Abad in the southwestern part of the country. Failing to quell the riots, at least 79 people were killed in clashes with security forces and over 1,000 wounded.

In the wake of the downfall of Bakiev’s regime, Otunbaeva has had the supremely difficult task of rebuilding a shattered government, never mind reassuring a U.S. administration concerned about the status of its crucial Manas air base, while also balancing her country’s important relationship with its neighbor and top trading partner Russia.

But at a mass funeral outside Bishkek on April 10 for 16 of the men killed earlier this week, she put politics aside and spent most of the morning comforting her bereaved countrymen.

Making her way through huge crowds in a muddy field with only three bodyguards to protect her, Otunbaeva drove a beeline to a hill behind the stage where scores of grieving women -- the wives, aunts, grandmothers, and sisters of the men buried on a hill not far from the Ala-Too mountain range -- could be found wailing over their lost loved ones. The day before, she visited two hospitals in Bishkek where the lives of some of those wounded earlier this week hang in the balance.

“For the people who gave their lives, we must establish democracy and good government for Kyrgyzstan,” she told the crowd. “This is our obligation.” She also said that April 7 would be commemorated in the future as an official Day of Remembrance.

Calls For Vengeance

Most of the Kyrgyz citizens I’ve talked to in the past two days want to see Bakiev either dead or behind bars. When I asked a proponent of the former solution whether meting out fatal punishment so early in the stages of a people-powered revolution appealing to democratic ideals might mar its ostensibly liberal principles, he mischievously asked, “Who said the government has to kill him? He could just be taken care of by some of his own criminals.”

Gulperi Adilova, who attended the funeral, said that whatever happens to Bakiev, when he dies he should be cremated rather than buried, as cremation is forbidden in the Islamic tradition and Bakiev has lost the right to call himself a good Muslim.

Despite the anger at Bakiev, Otunbaeva has resisted calls for vengeance. Earlier this week, she offered the ousted leader a peaceful exit from the country if he offers his resignation, saying that the interim government would “guarantee his personal safety” should he do so.

But that offer appears to have since been rescinded by other forces within the interim government. On April 9, Deputy Acting Prime Minister Azimbek Beknazarov said that the government would issue a decree depriving Bakiev of his presidential immunity so that he can be prosecuted for crimes committed while in office.

Otunbaeva’s rise to her present position was foretold on March 17 when the main opposition parties gathered in Bishkek to draw up a list of grievances against the regime

and appointed a National Executive. They chose Otunbaeva to chair what was essentially a shadow government.

She has since announced that the country will hold a presidential election in six months. Yet the very reasons why Otunbaeva was such a natural choice for the position of interim leader -- her years abroad as foreign minister and ambassador to Washington and London and her lack of a domestic political machine because of it -- may prevent her from getting much farther in the rough and tumble of Kyrgyz politics.

While the interim government may be united in its dislike of the country's former rulers, it is also marked by the presence of many go-getting politicians like Temir Sariyev, who ran for president last year and may well do so again, and former parliament speaker Omurbek Tekebayev.

By its very nature, Kyrgyzstan's interim government has a shambolic feel to it. While most people are obviously glad to see Bakiev gone, whatever enthusiasm they have for the future is marked by a pervasive caution.

This country already experienced the ecstasy of democratic promise in the guise of the 2005 Tulip Revolution, an exhilarating period quickly dampened by the onset of Bakiev's frequent crackdowns and human rights abuses.

At today's interment, an already depressing day was heightened when an elderly woman fainted on stage, the funeral's master of ceremonies frantically calling for a doctor as mourners headed for the cars and buses waiting on the other side of the field.

It was a fitting end to an uncertain week, and may portend chaos yet to come.

- Acting Kyrgyz Leader Mulls Bakiev Arrest

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyzstan's interim leader says the provisional government is considering arresting the country's president to put him on trial for the deaths of dozens of people in bloody clashes between antigovernment protesters and security forces earlier this week.

Roza Otunbaeva told Reuters that the arrest warrant for President Kurmanbek Bakiev's "relatives and accomplices" has already been issued."

Otunbaeva said her government would not use force against Bakiev, but that she could not guarantee his safety from those seeking revenge.

Meanwhile in the southern region of Jalalabad, a defiant Bakiev said he did not order the shootings. He said he would not resign and that any attempt to kill him would "drown Kyrgyzstan in blood."

The president, who fled the capital after his government was overthrown on April 7-8, said United Nations peacekeeping forces were necessary to prevent "continuing chaos" in the country.

- Kyrgyz Interim Government Piles Pressure On Ousted President

(RFE/RL) -- Kyrgyzstan's interim leader says the provisional government is considering arresting the country's president to put him on trial for the deaths of dozens of people in bloody clashes between antigovernment protesters and security forces earlier this week.

Roza Otunbaeva told Reuters that the arrest warrant for President Kurmanbek Bakiev's "relatives and accomplices" has already been issued."

Otunbaeva said her government would not use force against Bakiev, but that she could not guarantee his safety from those seeking revenge.

Bakiev is in hiding in his stronghold in the south of the country, from where he repeated his vow not to step down.

Earlier, provisional government deputy head Omurbek Tekebayev said on Kyrgyz radio: "Bakiev must resign and announce his decision to the people." Local media reported special forces had been dispatched to Bakiev's stronghold in the south of the country, where he's in hiding.

Calm has largely returned to the capital Bishkek after security forces assumed full control of the city overnight for the first time since the uprising on April 7, when thousands took to the streets to protest corruption and authoritarianism.

A third of people in Kyrgyzstan live below the poverty line.

Bakiev Defiant

Interim government chief of staff Edil Baisalov told RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service the government would not negotiate with the deposed president.

"I would like to emphasize very clearly that we haven't held any negotiations with Kurmanbek Bakiev," he said, "and we will never make such decision [to talk to him]."

Baisalov said the government was acting to protect Bakiev's life, although he didn't specify what measures are being taken.

"Every day some groups of self-organized people are coming to us," he said, "asking for arms, saying 'We'll find him ourselves, we have to take revenge, we'll kill him,' and so on. That's why we're taking action to protect Bakiev's life. Our actions shouldn't be considered an attempt to arrest him, but to protect him."

Bakiev, who himself came to power during street demonstrations five years ago, remained defiant on April 11, calling for United Nations peacekeepers to prevent "chaos" in the country. He told Reuters he wouldn't step down, but that he's ready for negotiations with the provisional government "in the interests of the country."

"I'm not going to strike a pose that I'm a president, I'm not giving up my credentials despite such casualties and you can do whatever you want, let the country fall into chaos," he said. "That's not my position. Although they are indeed an illegitimate government, let's sit at the negotiating table and try and get to a legitimate level [of discussion]."

Bakiev said he hasn't fled the country because he's not to blame for the protesters' deaths. He said he'd been targeted in his office during the demonstrations by a sniper, who missed only because Bakiev had left the room to stretch his legs. He said he didn't order troops to shoot at civilians, but that his guards had retaliated by themselves.

"I express my deepest condolences to the families who lost their children, relatives," he said. "But I would like to reiterate that the first shots have been fired from there. The services that were protecting the White House were well equipped not to allow this. They used tear gas, rubber bullets. But when the shots were fired at the White House, aimed at the president's windows, it was natural for security forces to fire back without any orders. It resulted in huge human casualties."

Bakiev warned any attempt to kill him would "drown Kyrgyzstan in blood," and invited an independent international commission to investigate this week's events.

Jockeying For Position

RFE/RL correspondent Bruce Pannier, who's in Jalal-Abad, says there are fewer people than usual on the city's streets, but that otherwise the city of 25,000 appears calm.

Residents say they haven't seen any protests or clashes and aren't worried about possible violence. Most locals say they support the country's new interim government.

Jalal-Abad's new acting mayor, Meder Usenov, who says he was installed by local opposition groups three days ago, says members of the old administration have left office, some after handing in resignations. He says the former regional governor stepped down, saying he was too sick to remain in office, and that police and military are loyal to the new authorities.

"Except for his relatives," Usenov said, "Bakiev has no support in this area right now."

Asked why portraits of Bakiev are still hanging around the city, Usenov said municipal workers haven't gotten around to removing them.

He said the interim authorities don't know where Bakiev is hiding.

In Bishkek, politicians are jockeying for positions in the provisional government.

Government chief of staff Baisalov said the country's new leaders would announce plans to overhaul the constitution within two weeks. He said the powerful presidency would be weakened in favor of a parliamentary system, but that it's not clear if the office would be abolished.

Kyrgyzstan hosts a U.S. air base vital for supplying troops in Afghanistan. The U.S. State Department says Otunbaeva told Washington it would not be closed.

- **Defiant Kyrgyz Leader Addresses Supporters**

Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev has made his first public appearance since he was toppled last week, accusing his opponents of seizing power "by force" and refusing to step down. Bakiev was addressing a crowd of supporters in his home town of Teyit, in the south of Kyrgyzstan.

At least 81 people were killed on April 7 when riot police and troops opened fire on protesters against Bakiev's rule in the capital Bishkek. Bakiev fled the city and was replaced by an interim government. The interim government says he must resign and has threatened to arrest him. Bakiev says any attempt to seize or kill him would result in bloodshed. He has called on the United Nations to send a contingent of peacekeepers to restore order in the country.

Geo strategic Front

- **U.S. Official To Meet With Kyrgyz Interim Government**

A senior U.S. official is due in Kyrgyzstan today to meet with the interim government. Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake will meet with interim leader Roza Otunbayeva and others.

He will be the highest U.S. diplomat to go there since President Kurmanbek Bakiev fled last Also today, the first deputy leader of Kyrgyzstan's interim government, Almaz Atambaev, is due in Moscow for talks.

Speaking at a Washington think tank, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has warned Kyrgyzstan is on the verge of civil war, and could turn into "a second Afghanistan."

Bakiv says he might step down if the interim government guarantees his and his family's safety. The interim government had said it would arrest Bakiev if he did not surrender by April 13. But reports from Bakiev's home near Jalal-Abad in southern Kyrgyzstan late April 13 say there was no sign of government forces around his home. Earlier in the day, our correspondent says several thousand Bakiev supporters rallied in Jalal-Abad, denouncing the interim government. Amid reports of looting and general lawlessness, about 300 representatives of small and mid-size businesses -- such as supermarkets and kiosks -- have appealed to Temir Sariiev, the interim finance minister, for protection.

The South African mining company, Gold Fields, meanwhile, said villagers had taken over a camp housing its geologists in the northwest, prompting the company to pull out its staff.

- U.S. Air Base In Kyrgyzstan Resumes Full Operations

The U.S. air base in Kyrgyzstan vital to military operations in Afghanistan has resumed full operations, after unrest in the country caused suspension of troop transport flights.

The U.S. embassy said today in a statement that Manas air base has resumed normal activities.

The embassy also said that Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake will visit Kyrgyzstan on April 14.

He will meet with members of the Kyrgyz provisional government to follow up on the discussions started by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton with the head of the provisional government, Roza Otunbaeva on April 10.

- U.S. Says Kyrgyzstan To Honor Base Agreements

BISHKEK (Reuters) -- The interim leader of Kyrgyzstan has agreed to abide by previous agreements on Manas Airport, a key supply base for U.S. war efforts in Afghanistan, the U.S. State Department said.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke with Kyrgyzstan's Roza Otunbaeva by phone, Assistant Secretary P.J. Crowley said in a statement. "Ms. Otunbaeva confirmed the Kyrgyz administration will abide by previous agreements regarding the [airport]," Crowley said. "The Secretary is dispatching Assistant Secretary Robert Blake out to Kyrgyzstan to follow up on her discussion."

The call came after the United States stopped all troops flying to Afghanistan via the base as security concerns persisted following the uprising in the Central Asian republic.

The Manas base is key to the U.S.-led war effort in Afghanistan, but a thorn in the side of Russia, which has given its support to the overthrow of President Kurmanbek Bakiev in a poor ex-Soviet state that it sees as part of its back yard.

An envoy from the Organization For Security And Cooperation In Europe said the new provisional government had held talks with Bakiev on ways to end the crisis. Bakiev has retreated to a secret location in his stronghold in the south, and had offered the new rulers negotiations. It was not clear how the talks were conducted or whether the aim went beyond discussing the terms of Bakiev's departure -- the only issue the interim government had said it would discuss. But Bakiev told Russian "Newsweek" magazine he was prepared to resign, according to excerpts from an interview released ahead of publication. "Yes, I am ready. If they want me to resign," he was quoted as saying by the Interfax news agency. "But I do not know what I will get in exchange. Therefore, we have to meet and discuss." "My plan of action is to preserve stability at least in the south of Kyrgyzstan. I will do everything possible to prevent a civil war as the people who are being appointed (to senior posts) also cause certain discontent."

Otunbaeva, interim leader of a country where a third of the 5.3 million population live below the poverty line, has offered Bakiev safe passage abroad if he steps down.

Visiting OSCE envoy Zhanybek Karibzhanov told reporters:

"I can't say anything yet on the results of the talks but the most important thing is that the process has started." Up to 10,000 mourners gathered on the edge of Bishkek at a funeral to commemorate at least 78 people killed when troops loyal to Bakiyev shot into crowds of protesters on April 7. In a reflection of the lingering tension, the U.S. military Central

Command said all military passenger flights had been suspended from Manas, and cargo flights were not guaranteed.

A U.S. official in Washington said the decision was made by the base commander on security grounds.

Pentagon officials say Manas is key to the war against the Taliban, allowing around-the-clock flights in and out of Afghanistan. About 50,000 troops passed through last month.

Kyrgyzstan's interim government has said Russia is its key ally and some leading ministers have said the U.S. lease on the base could be shortened. A top Russian official said this week there should be only one base in Kyrgyzstan: Russia's Kant base.

- Russian President Warns Of Kyrgyz Civil War, Urges START Ratification

WASHINGTON (RFE/RL) -- Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has warned that Kyrgyzstan may be plunged into a civil war if the standoff between embattled President Kurmanbek Bakiev and the self-declared interim government is not resolved soon.

Medvedev made the comments at Washington's Brookings Institution on April 13 after the close of the White House's Nuclear Security Summit. The Russian leader told the audience that "the risk of Kyrgyzstan breaking apart into the south and the north really exists." "What is most important now is to prevent a civil war," Medvedev said. "And I believe that Kyrgyzstan is on the verge of a civil war now, and all [political] forces in Kyrgyzstan should understand their responsibility to the Kyrgyz nation, the Kyrgyz people, and the future of the Kyrgyz state."

Last week the Kyrgyz prime minister resigned and Bakiev fled Bishkek after antigovernment protests turned deadly. More than 80 people died in the clashes and some 1,000 were injured. On April 13, Bakiev said he would step down if security is guaranteed for himself and his relatives. Opposition leaders stripped Bakiev of his presidential immunity and gave him until the end of the day to surrender.

Ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev speaks during a news conference in southern Kyrgyzstan on April 13.

In reference to those developments, Medvedev said, "Some [Kyrgyz] political leaders will have to make a decision about their fate." He cautioned that Kyrgyzstan must not become a "failed state" and called for calm in resolving the political standoff.

"We understand perfectly well what a civil war means in the current conditions," Medvedev said. "If, God forbid, it starts today, it will immediately attract terrorists and extremists of all kinds, because such conflicts create the best possible conditions for radical movements, and Kyrgyzstan may turn into a second Afghanistan as it used to be some time ago."

Important New START

In his wide-ranging comments, the Russian leader also advocated simultaneous U.S. and Russian ratification of the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which he and Obama signed in Prague on May 8.

The treaty, which significantly reduces the number of deployed warheads in the U.S. and Russian arsenals, must be ratified by both the U.S. Congress and the Russian Duma to take effect.

Medvedev suggested that the two bodies coordinate their ratification votes in an effort to keep political maneuvering to a minimum.

A deeply partisan mood in the U.S. Congress and legislative elections this fall have cast doubt on the willingness of the U.S. Senate to ratify the treaty.

Medvedev urged U.S. senators to act. "If there is no ratification, that means we have returned to the Soviet times when such treaties were not ratified," he said. Medvedev said he was open to working with U.S. President Barack Obama on possible further cuts in the arsenals of both countries, and said the historic nature of the START replacement should not be underestimated. He called it a sign of newfound cooperation between the two countries, saying, "We have managed to change the atmosphere" in relations between Moscow and Washington.

WTO Talks, Iran Sanctions

Medvedev also called on the United States to support Russia's effort to join the World Trade Organization (WTO). Russia is the world's largest economy not included in the global trade body and maintains the United States has hindered its efforts to join. Russian accession talks to the WTO began in 1993, but have repeatedly been stalled by trade or tariff issues.

Medvedev said his country should join the WTO "without humiliation or new demands." Saying that Russian accession into the body had become politicized, Medvedev added, "They have made the WTO into a carrot to hang in front of us and say, 'If you behave nicely you will get in.'"

Medvedev also called for increased bilateral investment between the United States and Russia and said that the recent successful cooperation between the two countries should be extended into the economic sphere.

On the subject of international suspicion over Iran's nuclear program, the Russian president warned against sanctions that would punish Iranian citizens.

But he added that world powers would have to consider sanctions against Tehran unless it proves that its nuclear program is intended only for civilian purposes.

- Regional States React To Kyrgyz Violence

(RFE/RL) -- Most regional states are watching events in Kyrgyzstan. But few are saying much. Neighboring Uzbekistan has yet to make any official statement on the unrest in Kyrgyzstan, where an opposition coalition has claimed to have taken power following unrest that left at least 75 people dead.

But Tashkent has closed its border with Kyrgyzstan and limited its own media coverage of the unrest there.

About 15 percent of Kyrgyzstan's population is ethnic Uzbek, raising the danger of a spillover of events from next door. Even before the current unrest, the Uzbek border had been partially closed, with limits on the number of Kyrgyz citizens admitted.

Kazakhstan, too, has closed its border with Kyrgyzstan, but less tightly. It is barring vehicles from entering unless they are driven by returning Kazakh citizens.

Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Masimov said his country hoped the situation in Kyrgyzstan would normalize by peaceful means soon. He also promised humanitarian aid to help victims of the fighting.

Kyrgyzstan's two other neighbors, China and Tajikistan, have expressed sympathy but nothing more. China has said that as a "friendly neighbor" it hopes "order can be restored as soon as possible and relevant issues can be resolved through legal channels." Tajikistan has called the crisis Kyrgyzstan's "internal affair."

Farther afield, Turkmenistan has made no official reaction and is offering its citizens no media coverage of events.

'Will Of The People'

Elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, reaction has been more vocal. "We regret the instability, disturbances, and violence in Kyrgyzstan," Ali Ahmadov, executive secretary of the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party, told journalists on April 8. "The same incidents occurred there five years ago and show that a government that is not based upon and formed according to the people's will does not exist long."

Belarus has officially expressed concern over the events in Kyrgyzstan and called on all sides to solve issues without bloodshed. And Ukraine has warned its citizens to refrain from travelling there.

In Georgia, one leading legislator told journalists that the events in Kyrgyzstan underline what happens when governments do not engage in dialogue with their opponents. "Any confrontation and bloodshed is unacceptable. The most important thing now is to put an end to that and to solve all issues through negotiations," Deputy parliament speaker Mikheil Machavariani said. "The authorities should have sought a dialogue with the opposition. Let me remind you that all this began with social issues and only afterwards transformed into a political problem -- after the leaders of the opposition were arrested."

Russian Assurances

So far, only Moscow has taken direct action to support one or another of the sides in the Kyrgyz crisis.

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin spoke on the phone on April 8 with Roza Otunbaeva, becoming the first known foreign leader to call her once she claimed to be in charge. Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Putin told Otunbaeva that Moscow was ready to offer humanitarian aid to Kyrgyzstan.

Russia has also dispatched two battalions of paratroopers to its Kant air base in Kyrgyzstan. The soldiers have reportedly been sent to assure the safety of Russian citizens stationed at the base.

- U.S. Base In Kyrgyzstan Diverts Passenger Flights

The United States says some 50,000 troops passed through the Manas air base on their way to or from Afghanistan in March. BISHKEK (Reuters) -- The U.S. military has reversed a decision to resume normal operations at its base in Kyrgyzstan and decided to divert all military passenger flights elsewhere and restrict cargo flights, officials said. The fate of Manas air base, a central cog in the U.S. war effort in Afghanistan, has been in question since an uprising this week that forced the president to flee the capital, Bishkek. The new Kyrgyz leadership has said it might shorten the U.S. lease on the base.

Earlier, Manas spokesman Major Rickardo Bodden told Reuters the base was again operating normally. But the U.S. military's Central Command, which oversees the base, said later in the day that all military passenger flights had been suspended and cargo flights were not guaranteed. It did not explain its decision.

"While normal flight operations at Manas were resumed on Friday afternoon, the decision was made Friday evening to temporarily divert military passenger transport flights," a Central Command spokesman said. "Decisions on conducting other, non-passenger-related, flight operations from the base will be made on a case-by-case basis." A U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said it was a security-related decision made

by the base commander on the ground at Manas. Personnel at Manas have not been allowed to leave the base since deadly clashes erupted on April 7.

Pentagon officials say Manas is key to the war effort against the Taliban, allowing round-the-clock flights in and out of neighboring Afghanistan with about 50,000 troops passing through the base last month alone.

The fate of the base is being watched closely for signs of whether the new government will foster closer ties to the United States or Russia, which considers Kyrgyzstan part of its sphere of influence.

A senior Russian official this week called for the Manas base to be closed

Still, the uprising may simply lead to fresh haggling over the air base, which has provided a lucrative source of income to Kyrgyzstan's governments.

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

- **Kyrgyz City Residents Urged To Return Weapons**

TALAS, Kyrgyzstan -- Supporters of the interim government in Kyrgyzstan's northwestern city of Talas are campaigning for the return of weapons and ammunition taken by local residents from police and security forces during last week's uprising, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Local businesses have announced financial payments will be made to those who return weapons to the new authorities. It is unclear how many guns were confiscated by antigovernment protesters during the clashes, when the demonstrators occupied the city hall and main police station. Siren Sheishenov, a coordinator of the self-declared interim government in Talas, told RFE/RL today that one rocket-propelled grenade launcher, seven pistols, 12 AK-47 assault rifles, four Winchester rifles, and some 350 bullets had so far been returned to police. The clashes in Talas on April 6 spurred even larger antigovernment protests in the capital, Bishkek, the following day.

President Kurmanbek Bakiev was forced to leave Bishkek for his native village in the country's south. Officials say 84 people were killed and more than 1,000 injured during the unrest.

- **Case Launched Against Kyrgyz 'Computer Smasher'**

BISHKEK -- Bishkek police say they have charged a former presidential candidate with vandalizing the office of an independent newspaper, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Police investigator Bekjan Isakov told RFE/RL that Nurlan Motuev is charged with damaging private property on March 25, when he forced his way into the Bishkek offices of the independent "Uchur" newspaper and destroyed some of its computers.

Motuev admitted that he destroyed the equipment, but said his actions were motivated by the newspaper's "erroneous articles that hurt his personal dignity and honor." He said after the incident that the newspaper had been "insulting" and "libeling" him for a long time. Motuev, 39, added that he does not trust the local courts to prosecute a case against the newspaper, and that is why he decided to "punish the newspaper in that way."

Motuev ran for president in 2009. He was arrested in 2006 and charged with illegal business activities, including embezzling money from the sale of coal. He now heads the small Joomart (Generous) movement, which was supportive of President Kurmanbek Bakiev.

Tajikistan

Political Front

- Tajik Prosecutor General Sacks Public Prosecutors

DUSHANBE -- Tajikistan's new prosecutor-general has fired 13 public prosecutors in what he says is an effort to reform the prosecutor's office, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Sherkhon Salimzoda, who was chairman of Tajikistan's Anticorruption Agency before being named prosecutor-general in mid-February, said at a press conference in Dushanbe on April 12 that the sackings were necessary because "there were many deficiencies in the prosecutors' activities." Salimzoda, 53, said three of those fired were accused of not preventing corruption in their offices. He said eight were found not to be applying property laws in their work and the other two were suspected of covering up crimes.

No criminal cases have yet been opened against the fired procurators.

President Emomali Rahmon named Salimzoda to replace Bobojon Bobokhonov, who had been a rival of Salimzoda when he headed the Anticorruption Agency. Salimzoda added that human rights activist Nematullo Botakoziev, a Kyrgyz citizen, is not being detained in Tajikistan. Kyrgyzstan has asked that Botakoziev be extradited, but Salimzoda said Tajik authorities are asking for Kyrgyz officials to clarify their request and the charges against him. Rights groups said Botakoziev was being held in detention in Tajikistan.

Salimzoda said if there is evidence that the Kyrgyz case against Botakoziev is political, Tajikistan will have to consider his request for asylum based on Tajik law. Human Rights Watch and other international rights groups have urged Tajikistan not to send Botakoziev to Kyrgyzstan. He is wanted by Kyrgyz officials for organizing mass protests in 2008.

Tajikistan's ombudsman, Zarif Alizoda, said in March that the Norouz holiday had resulted in a delay in the investigation into Botakoziev's case.

Geo strategic Front

Economic/Energy Front

- Tajik delegation attends ADB-sponsored high-level forum on climate change in the Philippines

DUSHANBE, April 9, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Senior government officials and climate change experts from around the world gathered for the Climate Investment Funds (CIF) Partnership Forum in the Philippines in March to discuss financial measures to help developing countries mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change. Hosted by ADB, the meetings were an opportunity to review the impact of CIF, and to strengthen developing country participation in CIF climate action schemes.

"I found this CIF Partnership Forum to be very useful to share Tajikistan's experience in addressing climate change issues. It was also useful to learn how other countries are dealing with similar problems," said Mr. Zaynullo Sharipov, Ecology and Emergencies Division, President's Office, who headed the Tajikistan delegation to the Forum.

The CIF are implemented by Multilateral Development Banks – the African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Inter-American Development Bank, and World Bank Group – to provide interim funding for priority climate change responses while the new global financial architecture is negotiated. ADB, based in Manila, is dedicated to reducing poverty in the Asia and Pacific region through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable

growth, and regional integration. Established in 1966, it is owned by 67 members – 48 from the region. In 2009, it approved \$16 billion of loans, \$1.11 billion of grant projects, and technical assistance amounting to \$266.8 million.

- Tajikistan's economy weathers bleak 2009, better times ahead, says ADB

DUSHANBE, April 13, 2010, Asia-Plus -- A sharp reduction in workers' remittances mainly due to economic difficulties in Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation and weak demand for Tajikistan's main export commodities of aluminum and cotton were the main factors in slowing Tajikistan's GDP growth by more than half in 2009, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) says in a major new report.

"Remittance inflows in 2009 were \$1.8 billion, which is about 37% of GDP, a nearly one-third drop from those in 2008. This hit private consumption, import demand, and house construction, especially in rural areas, where many households depend on remittances," says Makoto Ojira, ADB's Country Director for Tajikistan.

ADB's flagship annual economic publication, Asian Development Outlook 2010 (ADO 2010), released today, says that prospects for Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation will improve in the next two years, and aluminum and cotton prices are also likely to rise. It is also expected that noncotton agriculture will experience healthy growth. In view of these projections, Tajikistan's economic growth is expected to rise to 4.0% in 2010 and 5.0% in 2011.

"In 2009, inflation in Tajikistan came down to average 6.5% from 20.4% in 2008, and it is projected to be 10.8% and 9.5% in the next 2 years," says Qahhor Aminov, Economics Officer of the ADB's office in Tajikistan.

Weak capacity of public institutions, governance, and accountability is the first item on the Tajikistan's development agenda, followed by successful implementation of the current reform initiatives. Though the government has started to improve the business and investment environment, infrastructure bottlenecks, including chronic wintertime electricity shortages, remain a major challenge.

ADO 2010 includes comprehensive economic analysis of more than 40 economies in developing Asia and the Pacific, and examines aggregate trends and medium-term prospects by subregion— East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central and West Asia, and the Pacific—in the context of global economic movements.

Tajikistan joined ADB in 1998, and to date has received total assistance of about \$560 million in concessional loans, grants and technical assistance from this institution.

ADB, based in Manila, is dedicated to reducing poverty in the Asia and Pacific region through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration. Established in 1966, it is owned by 67 members - 48 from the region. In 2009, it approved \$13.2 billion of loans, \$1.1 billion of grant projects, and technical assistance amounting to \$267 million.

- World Bank supports to rehabilitate water supply system in Kulob

DUSHANBE, April 14, 2010, Asia-Plus -- The World Bank has provided 13.5 million U.S. dollars for rehabilitation of the water supply system in the city of Kulob, Asia-Plus has learned at the State Committee for Investments and State-owned Property Management (GosKomInvest).

The source says the project is funded due to a grant from the International Development Association (IDA), which is the part the World Bank. According to him, a total cost of

the project is 15 million U.S. dollars and Tajik government's contribution to the project amounts to 1.5 million U.S. dollars dedicated.

He added that a tender was announced for implementation of this project and all interested companies could apply for participation in the project.

Social Front

- 20 schools in GBAO to be connected to Internet by new school year

KHOROG, April 14, 2010, Asia-Plus -- 20 schools are expected to have been connected to Internet by the new school year, the GABO education directorate head Gharibsho Gharibshoyev said.

According to him, six schools in Khorog and two in each of seven districts of the region that have appropriate technical conditions have been selected to be connected to Internet. "In Khorog, schools can be connected to Internet through one of two Internet providers functioning in the city -- Telecom Technology or Tojik Telecom, while in the districts, schools can be connected to Internet only through Tojik Telecom," Gharibshoyev said.

According to the GBAO education directorate, all high schools functioning in Gorno Badakhshan have computer classes. In all, 1,662 computers and 264 printers have been installed at high schools in the region to this day. The school computer access rate in Gorno Badakhshan is now 16 students per one computer.

Turkmenistan

Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- Turkmen president invited to Bahrain

On April 12, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received Sheikh Faisal bin Rashid bin Isa Al Khalifa, member of the royal family of the State of Bahrain, son of the elder brother of the King of Bahrain. According to the press service of the President of Turkmenistan, the meeting was held in the seaside town of Turkmenbashi as part of the grand opening of new facilities in the resort place of Avaza.

The Sheikh conveyed greetings of the King of Bahrain, Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa to the Turkmen leader. The King of Bahrain also sent a written message to President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov with the invitation "to visit Bahrain at any time convenient to him."

"The Turkmen leader reciprocated the best wishes to the King of Bahrain and all members of the royal family, expressing confidence in the further successful continuation of productive relations to which Turkmenistan attaches special importance," the press service said.

Economic/Energy Front

The U.S. third largest oil company ConocoPhillips is in talks with the UAE company Mubadala to submit a joint application for extracting oil and gas from the Turkmen sector of the Caspian Sea, ITAR-TASS reports referring to the business circles of the London Oil Exchange. It is noted that the last year's attempt of ConocoPhillips and Russian company "Lukoil" to obtain a license from the Government of Turkmenistan to explore and develop three blocks was unsuccessful. In 2008, ConocoPhillips and Mubadala secured an area for the joint development in the Kazakh sector of the Caspian Sea.

- President of Turkmenistan receives EU Commissioner for Energy

Turkmenistan, having enormous hydrocarbon reserves confirmed by independent experts, is willing to consider any proposals to diversify export routes for Turkmen energy resources to world markets. This was stated by Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov on April 14 during the meeting with the European Union Commissioner for Energy, Günther Oettinger, who arrived in Turkmenistan at the head of a high-profile delegation to participate in the 1st International Gas Congress of Turkmenistan.

In turn, the European Commissioner expressed full interest of the European partners to establish a full-scale, mutually beneficial partnership with Turkmenistan in the energy sector and to implement new joint projects.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports quoting the press service of the Turkmen leader, during a meeting the sides "exchanged views on the current state and prospects of enhancing cooperation between Turkmenistan and the European Union within the framework of common goals and objectives to ensure peace and global security, including energy security."

On this day, the EU delegation headed by the Commissioner for Energy also held talks at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Government of Turkmenistan.

- Turkmenistan and United States to hold political and business consultations

In the near future Turkmenistan and the U.S. will hold political consultations, as well as the Turkmen-American business forum with participation of members of the U.S. Business Council.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat, this was announced by President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov at the Cabinet meeting yesterday.

The head of state noted "the exceptional importance of these events" and instructed Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan Rashid Meredov to begin preparations.

- Turkmenistan, Armenia to develop basis for economic cooperation

The 2nd meeting of the intergovernmental Turkmen-Armenian commission on economic cooperation was held in Yerevan. The meeting was chaired by Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan Hydyr Saparlyev and Minister of Energy and Natural Resources of Armenia Armen Movsisyan.

According to the official press release, the meeting agenda included a wide range of issues covering virtually the entire spectrum of bilateral cooperation, of which trade and economy, fuel-energy sector, chemical industry, transport and communications as well as agriculture were named the priority areas. A separate subject of discussions was the topic of building up human relations, primarily in education, science and health spheres, as well as strengthening and expanding the cultural contacts as an important component of the Turkmen-Armenian relations. Following the meeting, there was signed a protocol.

In those days, there was also held an exhibition of textile and carpet products of Turkmenistan at the exhibition hall of the Government House in Yerevan, which was opened by Armenian Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan. In his speech he stressed that "good neighborly relations between the two countries need economic support," and in that sense Turkmenistan and Armenia have a large untapped potential.

According to the Armenian news agency, all the exhibited specimens were purchased by visitors on the first day of the exhibition.

To date, Turkmenistan exports to Armenia textiles, oil and oil products worth US \$ 14 million annually. The total annual trade turnover between the countries amounts to US\$ 20 million. Armenia mainly exports cognac, agricultural products and jewelry products to Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan registered 10 enterprises with the capital of the Republic of Armenia, and four projects in the oil and gas industry are being implemented in Turkmenistan with the participation of Armenian companies.

- Turkmenistan and Armenia to exchange trade missions

In the course of the Turkmen-Armenian business forum Armenian Minister of Economy Nerses Yeritsyan announced the intention of the two countries to open trade offices in Ashgabat and Yerevan.

As the Minister noted, the parties already reached specific agreements to this effect, and the relevant documents undergo the internal approval process in both countries, ARKA news agency reports.

"The signing of these agreements will help establish direct business contacts between the countries that will serve as an incentive to open trading missions, organize exhibitions, and develop trade and economic relations," Nerses Yeritsyan said.

According to him, "it will lead to further development of the entire spectrum of bilateral economic cooperation for which a relevant legal basis has been already put in place."

The business forum in Yerevan was attended by members of the Government of Turkmenistan and the Republic of Armenia, as well as representatives of 40 major Armenian companies.

- Belarus ratifies agreement on motor transportation with Turkmenistan

Belarus has ratified an intergovernmental agreement with Turkmenistan on international motor transportation of passengers and cargos, ITAR-TASS reports. The document regulates international road haulage between states, transit through their territories, motor transportation to third countries and from them, as well as private travels by car from one country to another.

According to Deputy Minister of Transport and Communications of Belarus Nikolai Verkhovets, who presented the document in the Parliament, "the agreement will not only widen and deepen the relations between the countries, but will also create the best conditions for mutually advantageous exchange of goods, services and ideas in the Belarusian-Turkmen cooperation."

The Belarusian parliament also ratified a second agreement with Turkmenistan on cooperation and mutual assistance in customs matters. The official representative of the State Customs Committee of Belarus Sergei Borisyuk said that the adoption of the agreement was necessitated by increased trade between the two countries.

Social Front

- Turkmen Health Sector Criticized In Report

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) has published a report criticizing Turkmenistan's public health system, RFE/RL's Turkmen Service reports.

The report said that Turkmen health authorities underestimate the threat of infectious diseases, manipulate medical data, and consistently fail to meet international standards in medical care.

"People in Turkmenistan are being failed by a health-care system more concerned with its image abroad than with tackling the real threat to public health posed by infectious disease," the MSF report said.

MSF's medical director, Dr. Leslie Shanks, criticized international organizations operating in Turkmenistan for not sufficiently pressuring the Turkmen authorities.

"International organizations in the country, such as the World Health Organization and UNICEF, are perpetuating these problems by giving a veneer of legitimacy to misinformation from the government and to practices that are not only ineffective, but often dangerous," Shanks said.

MSF began working in Turkmenistan in 1999 but pulled out of the country last year. The group says it left because it felt that it was unable to bring about change in the country's health-care system due to a lack of cooperation from the government.

- New international airport to be inaugurated in Turkmenbashi

A modern international airport capable of accommodating all types of aircraft is ready for commissioning in the city of Turkmenbashi in Balkan province of Turkmenistan. In the course of the Cabinet meeting on April 9, Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov set a task for Deputy Prime Minister Nazarguly Shagulyev, who is in charge of the transport industry, and for the head of the State National Service "Turkmenistan", Batyr Kakalyev to ensure international standards of services at a new air port.

In addition, the head of state instructed Vice Premier Tuvakmammed Dzhaparov together with senior management of the national airline "Turkmenistan" to consider lowering prices of aviation fuel for refueling of aircrafts on transit routes through Turkmenistan. According to him, it is necessary to take full advantage of the international airport in the city of Turkmenbashi, which enjoys a favorable position - the crossroads of important transport routes.

"We should also consider the issue of establishing a free economic zone here, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said at the meeting. This will provide significant foreign exchange revenues to the state budget, give impetus to the development of services, and transform the Turkmenbashi International Airport into a major transit hub." Speaking of this, the President of Turkmenistan issued instructions to prepare proposals and present them at the next Cabinet, the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) said.

Uzbekistan Political Front

Geo strategic Front

- Russia-Uzbekistan: Moscow to meet Islam Karimov with the demonstration of political emigrants

The building of Uzbek embassy in Moscow

Ferghana.Ru already reported that Islam Karimov is going to give his first official visit to Russia under the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev. Last time the Uzbek leader visited Moscow on February 5-6, 2008.

According to Russian President's press-service, the official visit is scheduled to April 19-20, 2010.

On April 19 Moscow will meet Islam Karimov with the protest action in front of Uzbek embassy, organized by Central Asian political emigrants' community (CAPEC).

Bakhrom Khamroev, the political emigrant and currently Russian citizen, informed Ferghana.Ru that several times they "raised the problems, Karimov created for Uzbek people. At the protest action we are going to tell him about the solutions. We will tell him good bye".

The human rights advocates urged all Russian community and intellectual elite, not indifferent to people of Uzbekistan, participate in the demonstration, also supported by Memorial human rights center.

The demonstration is scheduled to 11.00-13.00 at the Pogorel alley, opposite to Uzbek embassy in Russia. Telephone contact is: 8-926-533-0409.

Economic/Energy Front

Social Front

- Uzbekistan's threatened cultural legacy

A clampdown on Uzbek intelligentsia and civil society is compromising the socio-cultural evolution of the country

One of the most totalitarian and repressive countries in the world is trying to form its own definition of cultural progress. Recently, the authorities in Uzbekistan have been arresting not only human rights activists, but also religious minorities, artists and health practitioners on the grounds of "disrespecting Uzbek culture and people".

This begs the very basic question, what is culture? One of the most accepted definitions, found in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, defines culture as "the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behaviour that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations."

Historically, this pattern for the transmission of knowledge in Uzbekistan has been incredibly rich. An important location on the Silk Road route, the territory of Uzbekistan has been home to artists and spiritual leaders such as Alisher Navoi (15th century), famous for the cyclical collection of poems, The Hamsa; historians such as Abu Rayhan al-Bruni (11th century) who wrote a pioneering study on India; and leading medics like Ibn Sina (11th century), who wrote The Cannon of Medicine. Once porous to the ideas and information that the Silk Road carried, the World Heritage Site cities of Bukhara and Samarkand attest to the fact that Uzbekistan was a land where ideas were born and arts flourished: a haven for intellectuals.

Since President Karimov came to power in 1991, however, Uzbek intelligentsia has been virtually deprived of the freedoms inherent to cultural development. Citizens cannot form associations without prior approval from the government, which is often restricted on a number of politically motivated grounds. Since the Andjian Massacre of 2005, where the government opened fire on protesters and killed as many as 500 people, more than 300 NGOs have been forced to close operations. And this is despite the fact that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, protecting the freedom of association, was the first international legal document which Uzbekistan signed after proclaiming independence.

The legal barrier to freedom of association restricts the ability of groups of people to form organisations which can receive grants, conduct activities, and express a collective voice and positions on issues ranging from government elections to healthcare to gardening. Numerous religious minorities such as the Hare Krishnas, Baptists, and even minority Islamic sects have been refused registration again and again, essentially prohibiting alternative spiritual development in the country.

Besides restricting the development of collective thought and action, the Karimov regime has kept tight reins on the type of information which can flow inside the country. The media is fully censored, and websites such as the BBC World Service and Wordpress are unavailable, making it extremely difficult for Uzbek citizens to exchange information with the outside world. Even inside the country, the media is forced to practice a form of self-censorship, muting any remotely oppositional positions for fear of closure and arrest. Any perceived political opposition is subject to heavy surveillance, arbitrary short-term house arrest, and compromise of phone lines and email inboxes.

In the past year, persecution of independent thought has spread over into non-political spheres. One no longer needs to be in opposition to the government to fear persecution. It is enough to be in some way perceived to be in opposition to the culture of Uzbekistan, to be viewed as enemy of the state. Recently, the arrests of an ethnological photographer and sex education worker on such grounds have demonstrated that the culture of contemporary Uzbekistan has no space for the flow of new information or generation of knowledge for the improvement of future generations.

A clear example of this is the case of Umida Akhmedova. In February 2010, Akhmedova, an Uzbek photographer, was found guilty of "libel" and "insult" charges for her photographic and cinematographic work documenting the lives and culture of the Uzbek people. Her works featured the Uzbek countryside, contrasts between the modern and traditional, and life in the streets. The court decided, with the help of "expert testimonies", that her art essentially did not portray the country in the right way. Although Umida was granted presidential amnesty, in large due to international pressure, the verdict set a new precedent for the Uzbek intelligentsia. No longer can artists exercise their freedom of expression without an overarching fear that the government may decide that their work is "insulting" to the culture of Uzbekistan, and therefore grounds for imprisonment.

In another case, a health practitioner, Maksim Popov was sentenced to seven years in prison apparently as punishment for his work to raise public awareness on the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. Popov was the leader of NGO Izis, which focuses on work with drug addicts, sex workers and on HIV prevention. He is also the author of the book HIV and Aids Today, which was published with the support of Unicef and Population Services International. This book, explaining STD prevention, was deemed "illegal" by the criminal court of Tashkent, based on the findings of a commission of experts that it is disrespectful to the national culture and the Uzbek people.

These examples are indicative not only of the fact that the clampdown on civil society in Uzbekistan is increasing in both severity and breadth, but also that this form of repression is compromising the socio-cultural evolution of the country. While socio-cultural evolution theories abound, the common agreement amongst academics and practitioners is that cultures and societies change over time, taking into account changes in the external environment and internal systems, and incorporating the cultural heritage of the past. Culture is dynamic, and restricting its growth will only negatively affect the development of the society. In looking back at the cultural richness during flow of information on the Silk Road route, one can only hope that the Uzbekistan of today will allow its artists,

academics and social workers to exercise their fundamental freedoms, in order to carry the country's cultural legacy into the modern times.

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