

**Business & Politics in the Muslim World**  
**News Monitoring**  
**Weekly Report**  
**May 8to May 14, 2010**  
**Central Asia**  
**Uzma Siraj**

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- Uzbek President Orders Closure Of Private Notary Offices

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### **Azerbaijan**

### **Political Front**

- Karabakh Army Chief Dismisses Azerbaijani War Threats

STEPANAKERT, Nagorno-Karabakh -- The top military commander in the breakaway Azerbaijani region of Nagorno-Karabakh has brushed aside Azerbaijan's continuing threats to take back the disputed region by force, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports.

### **Geo Strategic Front**

### **Economic /Energy Front**

- Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania Sign Protocol On Gas Exports

BAKU -- The energy ministers of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Romania signed a protocol in Tbilisi today on forming a joint venture to export liquified natural gas (LNG) to Europe, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

- Azerbaijani Minister: We are interested in rapid implementation of Nabucco project

Azerbaijan is interested in rapid implementation of gas pipeline construction project Nabucco, Minister of Industry and Energy Natiq Aliyev told Trend's correspondent in Tbilisi. "The volume in which Azerbaijan will be involved in gas supplies to Europe via this route depends on the needs and scale," Aliyev said.

### **Social Front**

- Azerbaijanis Continue Evacuations Due To Massive Floods

BAKU -- More villages in southeastern Azerbaijan have been evacuated as flood waters continue to spread, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

Villages were being evacuated in the Imishli, Saatli, and Sabirabad districts on May 12. Flooding first began on May 7 in Sabirabad, which is located near the delta where the Araz River joins the Kura River.

### **Kazakastan**

#### **Political Front**

- Kazakh President Becomes 'Leader Of The Nation'

Kazakhstan's upper house of parliament has approved constitutional amendments granting President Nursultan Nazarbaev the status of "leader of the nation." The move was seen as merely a formality after the lower house of parliament approved the bill on May 12.

- Kazakh President Handed 'Leader Of The Nation' Status

As "leader of the nation," Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev would not only have final say on all policy, even if he leaves office, but be immune from investigation.

Kazakhstan's parliament has adopted constitutional amendments to confer the title of "leader of the nation" and an array of extraordinary benefits on President Nursultan Nazarbaev.

- Kazakh opposition slams proposal to give president "national leader" status

Almaty, May 6. Interfax-Kazakhstan - The opposition in Kazakhstan has slammed a proposal by lawmakers to give President Nursultan Nazarbayev the status of national leader. "This is an absolutely wrong idea. Nazarbayev and his entourage are demonstrating that they lack confidence (ahead of the elections). And they want to protect themselves with such a funny law," the co-chairman of the Azat (Freedom) Party, Bulat Abilov told Interfax on Wednesday.

- Kazakh lawmakers give president lifetime immunity

(AP) - Kazakh lawmakers have approved amendments to the constitution that will give President Nursultan Nazarbayev lifetime immunity from prosecution for acts committed during his rule and the right to approve important national and foreign policies after he retires.

#### **Geo Strategic Front**

- Kazakhstan 'Breaks Pledge' To Reopen Border With Kyrgyzstan

BISHKEK -- The Kyrgyz-Kazakh border remains closed despite what Bishkek says was an agreement between the two countries' leaders to reopen it, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

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

- Astana invites India to join its industrial program

Kazakhstan and India have a great potential for development of bilateral trade and economic cooperation, said the Secretary of State - Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan Kanat Saudabayev.

"We have huge reserves. The current annual trade between Kazakhstan and India standing at \$250 million matches neither your potential, nor ours," he said during the talks with Indian Foreign Minister S.M. Krishna on Wednesday in Astana.

- China opens up way for Kazakh grain exports to Asia

(bne) - Kazakhstan is planning to export up to 3 million tonnes of grain to East and Southeast Asia this year after China lifted a ban on such exports through its territory.

- Russian energy projects in Kazakhstan's oil and gas sector

(SRI) - Russian oil and gas companies have begun to expand into Kazakhstan in late 1990s, as they started to implement strategic plans to grow production capacity beyond Russia's borders. Russian companies, most prominently LUKOil, Rosneft, and Gazprom, are participating or planning to take part in at least eighteen major oil and gas projects.

- Kazakhstan to crack down on oil theft

An oil worker during construction of a pipeline in Kazakhstan

ASTANA - In a near future, Kazakhstan will introduce imprisonment of five to eight years for theft of oil from main pipelines. Up until now, in Kazakhstan the so-called oil pirates caught on the act got off lightly with a conditional sentence or a fine. But a new law introducing tougher punishment for theft of oil from pipelines has been presented to Majilis (lower chamber of Parliament).

- Russian shipyard completes third tanker for Kazakhstan

(SRI) - Russian Red Sormovo shipyard said last week it had completed the construction of a third sea tanker for Kazakhstan's state-owned maritime shipping company KazMorTransFlot.

The tanker, named Oral, is the last tanker built by Red Sormovo under a contract that the shipyard signed with KazMorTransFlot in April 2009 to build three sea tankers.

## **Social Front**

### **Kyrgyzstan**

#### **Political Front**

- Reports: Clashes Erupt In South Kyrgyzstan

BISHKEK -- Supporters of Kyrgyzstan's interim government have clashed with supporters of ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev in the south of the country, where Bakiev loyalists occupied several regional government buildings the previous day.

- Kyrgyz Protesters Demand Ousted President's Extradition

BISHKEK -- Some 2,000 protesters gathered today on Bishkek's central square demanding that ousted Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev be put on trial, one of several demonstrations in the capital, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Slain Kyrgyz Protesters' Relatives To Picket Belarusian Embassy

BISHKEK -- Relatives of people killed in clashes between Kyrgyz security forces and antigovernment protesters in Bishkek last month say they will picket the Belarusian Embassy to call for former President Kurmanbek Bakiev to be extradited, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz and Belarus services report.

- Closing In On Maksim Bakiev

It seems they're finally closing in on him. After more than a month of speculation as to the whereabouts of Maksim Bakiev, the son of Kyrgyz ex-President Kurmanbek Bakiev, Kyrgyz authorities on May 10 asked the Latvian government to detain him.

- Kyrgyz Interim Government Members Split On Constitution Plans

OSH, Kyrgyzstan -- Two key members of Kyrgyzstan's interim government have spoken against transforming the country into a parliamentary republic, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

#### **Geo Strategic Front**

- U.S., Russian Embassies Jointly Congratulate Kyrgyz On Victory Day

BISHKEK -- The Russian and U.S. embassies in Kyrgyzstan have issued a rare joint statement congratulating Kyrgyz on the celebration of Victory Day, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Kyrgyzstan Asks Latvia To Detain Ousted Leader's Son

Kyrgyzstan has asked Latvia to detain the son of ousted Kyrgyz leader Kurmanbek Bakiev. Andrejs Vasks, a spokesman for the Prosecutor General's Office, said Kyrgyzstan had issued a temporary detention request against Maksim Bakiev. Vasks said he had no information on whether Maksim Bakiev was in the country.

- U.S. vows more transparency over base in Kyrgyzstan

(AP) - A senior adviser to President Barack Obama said Friday that Washington will ensure greater transparency in the supply of aviation fuel to a key U.S. air base in Kyrgyzstan, where the previous government often was accused of corruption.

### **Economic /Energy Front**

### **Social Front**

- Kyrgyz Youth To Hold Forum On New Constitution

OSH, Kyrgyzstan -- Kyrgyz youth organizations are planning a forum in the southern city of Osh to discuss the country's new draft constitution, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

### **Tajikistan**

### **Political Front**

- Tajik President Puts State Body In Charge Of Religious Affairs

DUSHANBE -- Tajik President Emomali Rahmon has reinstated the State Committee on Religious Affairs to oversee the country's religious organizations, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

### **Geo Strategic Front**

- Iran Offers To Mediate Between Tajikistan, Uzbekistan

DUSHANBE -- Iranian Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi said in Dushanbe today that Iran is ready to try to alleviate tensions between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan at their request, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reported.

- Iranian defense minister in Tajikistan to discuss cooperation issues

DUSHANBE, May 13, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Iran's Minister of Defense and Logistical Support for Armed Forces, Brigadier General Ahmad Vahid, arrived in Dushanbe Wednesday evening on a two-day official visit at the invitation of his Tajik counterpart, Colonel-General Sherali Khairulloev.

### **Economic /Energy Front**

- Expansion of Tajik-Pakistani trade and economic ties discussed in Dushanbe

DUSHANBE, May 14, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Expansion of trade and economic ties between Tajikistan and Pakistan was a major topic of a meeting of Sharif Said, Chairman of Tajikistan's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI), with Hasnain Reza Mirza, Vice Chairman of the Pakistan Halal Products Development Board (PHPDB), which took place in Dushanbe on May 13, according to the CCI press service.

### **Social Front**

- Kulob mudflow death toll exceeds 10 and 40 other people reported missing

KULOB, May 8, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Friday evening, President Emomali Rahmon held an extraordinary meeting in the city of Kulob to discuss mitigation of effects of mudflows that hit the city and nearby areas on the night of May 6-7.

- Tajik Officials Reverse Ban Against Mobile Phone Ads

DUSHANBE -- Tajik industry and government officials say a government ban on mobile phone advertising in Dushanbe has been suspended, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

- Tajikistan Denies Imposing Travel Ban On Russian Children

DUSHANBE -- The Tajik Foreign Ministry has dismissed a statement by a Russian government official claiming that Russian children are barred from leaving Tajikistan, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

- Tajik Floods Kill 20 In Kulob

KULOB, Tajikistan -- Strong rains have caused floods that have killed at least 20 people in the Kulob area of the southern Tajik province of Khatlon, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Tajik rescue services reported on May 6 that the Tebalay River breeched its banks overnight in Kulob, leaving many people unable to reach higher ground. Authorities found 15 bodies in Kulob and five more in the Shuroobod district near the bank of the Tebalay River.

### **Turkmenistan**

#### **Political Front**

- Turkmen Parliament Amends Criminal Code

ASHGABAT -- The Turkmen parliament has approved a new edition of the country's Criminal Code that reduces the maximum sentence for the most serious crimes, RFE/RL's Turkmen Service reports.

- Facts testifying to involvement of law enforcement agencies staff in drug trafficking revealed

During a regular meeting of the State Security Council, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said that "the involvement of some staff of law enforcement agencies in the drug trafficking " indicates to "unsatisfactory educational work with personnel in the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

#### **Geo Strategic Front**

- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Viktor Yanukovich meet in Moscow

On May 8, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich held a meeting in Moscow, where they attend the informal CIS summit and festivities on the 65th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945.

- Turkmenistan wants to develop comprehensive relations with CIS countries

Turkmenistan views cooperation with CIS countries as one of directions of its foreign policy and build relations with countries of the CIS based on existing good traditions of friendship, mutual respect, equality and mutually beneficial partnership, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said on 8 May in Moscow during he informal summit of heads of CIS countries dedicated to the 65th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War.

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

- IMF gives positive assessment of socio-economic development of Turkmenistan

The delegation of the International Monetary Fund headed by IMF Deputy Managing Director Naoyuki Shinohara visited Ashgabat. During the visit, representatives of the IMF held a series of negotiations at the Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance of Turkmenistan.

- Turkmenistan proposes to hold Maritime Business Forum in Caspian Sea

Turkmenistan proposed to hold a Maritime Business Forum in the late summer this year, which will consider a range of issues relating to cooperation in trade, economy, transport and communications in the Caspian Sea.

#### **Social Front**

- Turkmenistan establishes baseline for calculation of social and other benefits

Turkmenistan established a baseline effective from 1 July 2010 worth Manat 50 for calculation of social and other payments, taxes and fees; and Manat 300 for calculation of state fees and fines under criminal and administrative laws.

## **Uzbekistan**

### **Political Front**

- Uzbek President Orders Closure Of Private Notary Offices

TASHKENT -- Uzbek President Islam Karimov has signed a decree to abolish private notary offices because they are creating a "criminal situation," RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports.

The decree states that the "pursuit of profit" among private notaries has led them to carry out fraud schemes with real estate agents and car dealers.

### **Geo Strategic Front**

- Iran Offers To Mediate Between Tajikistan, Uzbekistan

DUSHANBE -- Iranian Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi said in Dushanbe today that Iran is ready to try to alleviate tensions between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan at their request, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reported.

### **Economic /Energy Front**

### **Social Front**

- Explosion On Uzbek Bus Kills Six

TASHKENT -- At least six people were killed and several others injured when a bus exploded in Tashkent on May 11, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports. Police said the cause of the explosion was a faulty natural gas tank which had been installed on the roof of the bus, which was carrying some 25 textile-factory workers. High-level Uzbek security officials were at the site of the incident.

- Uzbek President Orders Closure Of Private Notary Offices

TASHKENT -- Uzbek President Islam Karimov has signed a decree to abolish private notary offices because they are creating a "criminal situation," RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports.

## **Detailed Report**

### **Azerbaijan**

#### **Political Front**

- Karabakh Army Chief Dismisses Azerbaijani War Threats

STEPANAKERT, Nagorno-Karabakh -- The top military commander in the breakaway Azerbaijani region of Nagorno-Karabakh has brushed aside Azerbaijan's continuing threats to take back the disputed region by force, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports. Lieutenant-General Movses Hakobian said on May 12 that the rhetoric from Baku is mainly for domestic political gain. "The resumption of the war would be unfavorable only for Azerbaijan," Hakobian told the press at Karabakh army positions east of the Armenian-controlled enclave. "It would be favorable for us because we [will] manage to easily achieve our objectives."

"And I think in that case we would solve the Karabakh-Azerbaijani conflict once and for all," added the general, who played a prominent role in the 1991-1994 war.

Hakobian's remarks were made on the 16th anniversary of the signing of a Russian-mediated, cease-fire agreement that ended the Armenian-Azerbaijani war over Nagorno-Karabakh. His statements echo those made by Armenian leaders recently.

President Serzh Sarkisian said earlier this year that an Azerbaijani assault on Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh would trigger "serious counterattacks." Defense Minister Seyran Ohanian similarly stated in January that Armenian forces have significantly beefed up fortifications around Karabakh in recent years and are prepared for renewed fighting.

Hakobian said the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic's army has received new military hardware and ammunition this year. "[We] have had quite a serious success in acquiring air-defense systems," he said.

Colonel-General Mikael Harutiunian, Armenia's chief military inspector and former defense minister, has been in Karabakh in recent days to visit frontline positions. He told journalists in Stepanakert on May 12 that "the Karabakh army is combat ready."

Azerbaijani leaders have long warned they will resort to military action over Nagorno-Karabakh if the long-running Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations fail to yield a settlement acceptable to Baku. Azerbaijani Defense Minister Safar Abiyev spoke in late February of the growing likelihood of "a great war" with Armenia.

The truce signed in 1994 has largely held and has left Armenian forces in control of virtually all of Nagorno-Karabakh and large parts of surrounding territory in Azerbaijan proper.

### **Geo Strategic Front**

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

- Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania Sign Protocol On Gas Exports

BAKU -- The energy ministers of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Romania signed a protocol in Tbilisi today on forming a joint venture to export liquified natural gas (LNG) to Europe, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

Georgian Energy Minister Aleksandre Khetaguri told reporters the project could prove very profitable. Azerbaijani Energy Minister Natiq Aliyev said the protocol envisages the construction of new Black Sea coast terminals in Romania and Georgia that will be linked to pipelines.

"It is a new corridor for Azerbaijan," Aliyev said. "This corridor will enable us to independently deliver our gas to Romania, also to Ukraine and Bulgaria. At the same time, we can cross to the Mediterranean Sea."

Aliyev said a feasibility study will be done that will take one year, after which financial issues will be discussed and funding sought.

"Companies or participating countries can finance the project," Aliyev said. "European Union organizations can also contribute to financing."

- Azerbaijani Minister: We are interested in rapid implementation of Nabucco project

Azerbaijan is interested in rapid implementation of gas pipeline construction project Nabucco, Minister of Industry and Energy Natiq Aliyev told Trend's correspondent in Tbilisi.

"The volume in which Azerbaijan will be involved in gas supplies to Europe via this route depends on the needs and scale," Aliyev said.

He said that Azerbaijan expressed interest in the project at the state level. However, Minister stressed that Azerbaijan has not taken any obligations to "Nabucco".

"We are interested in this project. The closer organizers will be to its realization, the more actively we begin to discuss the conditions of our participation in it," the minister said.

Construction of gas pipeline is planned to be launched in 2011, the first supplies - in 2014. Maximal capacity of pipeline will hit 31 billion cubic meters per year. About 30% of the total

project cost will be invested by Nabucco Gas Pipeline International shareholders, the remaining 70 % will be paid by loans.

### **Social Front**

- Azerbaijanis Continue Evacuations Due To Massive Floods

BAKU -- More villages in southeastern Azerbaijan have been evacuated as flood waters continue to spread, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

Villages were being evacuated in the Imishli, Saatli, and Sabirabad districts on May 12. Flooding first began on May 7 in Sabirabad, which is located near the delta where the Araz River joins the Kura River.

One death has been confirmed as a result of the floods when the body of a shepherd was found in the village of Cholgaraguney on May 12.

The water at Sarisu Lake also rose abruptly, forcing the evacuation of the nearby village of Narimankend. Landslides have also been reported in several areas after several days of heavy rain. Thousands of homes have been affected by the flood waters, and Azerbaijani soldiers have been deployed to help barricade vulnerable areas with sandbags.

President Ilham Aliyev visited the flooded areas on May 11 and met with regional government officials. He pledged to help compensate people for their losses and reportedly said 400 million manats (\$497.5 million) will be provided in aid.

A main dam on the Kura River is also reportedly at capacity.

Elnar Sultanov, director of the Environment and Natural Resources Ministry's Hydrometeorology Center, told RFE/RL on May 12 that the maximum capacity of the Mingachevir Reservoir in the western part of the country is 83 meters and the level of the water in the storage had reached 82 meters.

Sultanov said officials will have to release water from the reservoir to keep it from going over the dam. But such a release will increase the water level on the Kura River.

Sultanov said more rain is expected until May 14 and the flooding will only worsen.

Sultanov dismissed previous allegations by Azerbaijani officials that Iranian authorities had manipulated the water levels in some reservoirs near Azerbaijan to increase the amount of water in the Araz and Kura rivers.

"The main reason for the disaster is that the Kura is silted up and the amount of water entering the river exceeds the amount of water that leaves it where the Kura joins the Caspian Sea," he told RFE/RL. "We had too much rainfall in past weeks both in Azerbaijan and Georgia and the river is overloaded." He said the government must take immediate measures to widen the channels near where the Kura joins the Caspian Sea.

### **Kazakastan**

#### **Political Front**

- Kazakh President Becomes 'Leader Of The Nation'

Kazakhstan's upper house of parliament has approved constitutional amendments granting President Nursultan Nazarbaev the status of "leader of the nation." The move was seen as merely a formality after the lower house of parliament approved the bill on May 12.

The amendments give Nazarbaev the right to have final approval on all policy moves in the country concerning both domestic and foreign policy -- even if he leaves office. They also give him lifetime immunity from investigation or prosecution. Critics have questioned the need for the changes, saying they only guarantee Nazarbaev's personal safety.

Nazarbaev, 69, has ruled the Central Asian state since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, before which he was its top Communist Party official. His current term expires in 2012, but in 2007 the parliament ruled that he should be able to stand for president as many times as he likes.

- **Kazakh President Handed 'Leader Of The Nation' Status**

As "leader of the nation," Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev would not only have final say on all policy, even if he leaves office, but be immune from investigation.

Kazakhstan's parliament has adopted constitutional amendments to confer the title of "leader of the nation" and an array of extraordinary benefits on President Nursultan Nazarbaev.

The legislation gives Nazarbaev final say in the country's domestic and foreign policy in the event that he leaves office, and also provides "the first president of Kazakhstan" with lifetime immunity from investigation or prosecution. The lower house, or Mazhilis, approved the bill on May 12 and the upper house gave its nod the following day. Amzebek Zholshibekov is a legislator from the pro-presidential Nur-Otan party and one the three deputies who introduced the bill last week. He says it merely reflected the will of the people.

"We don't think this is anything new. We just took into consideration the opinion of the people who believe Nazarbaev to be the initiator and architect of changes that improved our country," Zholshibekov tells RFE/RL's Kazakh Service. Darigha Nazarbaeva (left) and her ex-husband Rakhat Aliev

Zholshibekov says that "thanks to President Nazarbaev" Kazakhstan is chairing the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe this year, and next year will chair the Organization of the Islamic Conference. "Kazakhstan has become well-known worldwide," he adds.

#### Closing Off The Past

The law on the first president of Kazakhstan adopted in 2001 already gives Nazarbaev the right to address parliament or speak on national television or radio any time he wants even after he is president.

That same law also makes the "first president's" approval of new legislation mandatory, again even if he is no longer president. But the current bill goes even further. It excludes the possibility of investigating any actions Nazarbaev took or approved while he was president.

Nazarbaev has been linked to a U.S. corruption probe of an American businessman more than a decade ago and has faced accusations at home of siphoning off money from state coffers and putting it in a Swiss bank account.

In 2003, officials admitted Nazarbaev had put money in a Swiss bank account, but only as an emergency fund for the country if there should arise a period of hardship.

Not long after that, parliament confirmed a shadow capital amnesty for money taken out of the country and ordered all tax records up to that time be destroyed.

Also, and more serious, are allegations by Nazarbaev's former son-in-law, Rakhat Aliev, that the Kazakh president was connected to the killing of a key opposition figure in February 2006.

Nazarbaev's supporters have denied those accusations as an attempt to tarnish the president's reputation. None of these, or any other allegations, can be investigated once the bill is passed.

The new bill also guarantees that all the property and holdings of Nazarbaev "and his relatives living in his household" cannot be confiscated for any reason. Nazarbaev's daughter Dinara Kulibaeva is seen as his latest possible successor.

It is unclear if that includes Nazarbaev's three daughters, two of whom, Darigha and Dinara, have substantial shares in leading banks in Kazakhstan as well as other business ventures.

It is also unclear if that applies to Nazarbaev's grandchildren, some of whom, though young, are also enjoying great success in Kazakhstan's business world.

Protecting Him From What?

Critics have cried foul over the bill. One is Serikbolsyn Abdildin, who until April was head of Kazakhstan's Communist Party. Abdildin says that the new law wasn't proposed by legislators but "from further up in the government." He said Nazarbaev "didn't do anything especially useful for the people during these last 20 years. The decision doesn't serve any purpose for the government or the people. It only guarantees his personal safety."

That is a point many opposition figures have made in the week since the idea was mentioned in parliament. Vladimir Kozlov of the unregistered opposition Alga (Forward!) party questions the reasons for guarantees against investigations and prosecution.

"There is no need to defend an innocent person so persistently," Kozlov says, adding, "time after time these parliamentarians raise demands of immunity for him [Nazarbaev] and time after time they only prove the opposite [that Nazarbaev is guilty of something], isn't this true?"

Bulat Abilov of the opposition Azat (Freedom) Party says the decision showed Nazarbaev and his supporters are "not sure of themselves."

Some analysts have speculated that the bill was introduced at the behest of leading businessmen in Kazakhstan who are anxious to preserve the status quo, and hence their own futures, by ensuring Nazarbaev's dominance in politics. Former Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev had also gathered power around himself, some critics have noted.

Legislation passed in 2007 guarantees the "first president" has no term limit, although Nazarbaev will turn 70 in early July and there is still no clear successor.

Amantai Dandygulev, the editor of the Kazakhstan edition of Russia's "Novaya gazeta," says there is no real cause for concern, calling the bill a temporary event that affected only one person.

"This document will be in effect only so long as Allah allows Nazarbaev to live. No one and nothing is forever on this planet," Dandygulev says.

In Kyrgyzstan during the five years [that former President Kurmanbek] Bakiev was in power, the constitution was rewritten five times, always increasing the power of the executive branch," he adds. "So, using this as an example, we can say that this document's lifetime will only last if the next president is a chosen successor."

The bill now goes to the Senate, the upper house of parliament, on May 13 for approval. That seems to be merely a formality at this point.

The topic was introduced in parliament on May 5, though it was not on the agenda. Reports at that time indicated the issue would not be debated until late June, but a week later the lower house quickly approved it.

Further, both houses of Kazakhstan's parliament are filled with deputies from the Nur-Otan party, created in early 1999 with the sole purpose of seeing Nazarbaev reelected as president.

No opposition party is represented in Kazakhstan's parliament.

- Kazakh opposition slams proposal to give president "national leader" status  
Almaty, May 6. Interfax-Kazakhstan - The opposition in Kazakhstan has slammed a proposal by lawmakers to give President Nursultan Nazarbayev the status of national leader. "This is an absolutely wrong idea. Nazarbayev and his entourage are demonstrating that they lack confidence (ahead of the elections). And they want to protect themselves with such a funny law," the co-chairman of the Azat (Freedom) Party, Bulat Abilov told Interfax on Wednesday.

Abilov also said he would be monitoring the situation. "Naturally our reaction will follow," he said. Vladimir Kozlov, the leader of the unregistered opposition party Alga (Forward) said a law, giving Nazarbayev the status of national leader, would be too much.

"One should not defend the innocent so zealously. This has no sense and should be stopped. As long as the lawmakers keep demanding so insistently that he become immune, they keep confirming the opposite time and time again, don't they," Kozlov told Interfax.

Deputies of the lower house of parliament on Wednesday proposed passing two bills, granting Nazarbayev the status of national leader. The debates are expected to be held on June 25.

Nazarbayev was first elected president on April 24 1990, when Kazakhstan was part of the Soviet Union. He was then re-elected in direct elections in 1991, 1999 and 2005. His powers as president were extended in a national referendum in 1995.

- Kazakh lawmakers give president lifetime immunity

(AP) - Kazakh lawmakers have approved amendments to the constitution that will give President Nursultan Nazarbayev lifetime immunity from prosecution for acts committed during his rule and the right to approve important national and foreign policies after he retires.

Kazakh lawmakers give president lifetime immunity and powers after he retires

Kazakh lawmakers have approved amendments to the constitution that will give President Nursultan Nazarbayev lifetime immunity from prosecution for acts committed during his rule and the right to approve important national and foreign policies after he retires.

Under the changes approved by the Senate on Wednesday, 69-year-old Nazarbayev will be designated "leader of the nation," even after he steps down from office.

Nazarbayev will need to sign off on the changes before they can take effect. Backers of the amendments pointed to Nazarbayev's state-building achievements, likening him to George Washington and Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey and its first president.

Other measures passed by the Senate will make defacing images of Nazarbayev an offense and provide property owned by him and his family protection from confiscation.

Opposition parties have urged Nazarbayev not to sign the amendments. "We call on you to display political wisdom and civic responsibility by vetoing this law," Azat opposition party leaders Bulat Abilov and Zharmakhan Tuyakbai said in a letter addressed to Nazarbayev.

Nazarbayev has ruled the Central Asian nation with an iron fist since it gained independence amid the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. His current presidential term expires in 2012, but under legal changes approved by parliament in 2007, Nazarbayev is allowed to run for president indefinitely. Consolidation of Nazarbayev's tight grip over the country will come at a delicate time for the international image of Kazakhstan, which this year is chairman of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, a trans-Atlantic security and democracy group.

Oil-rich Kazakhstan has sustained considerable criticism from rights groups for its poor progress in developing democratic freedoms.

### **Geo Strategic Front**

- Kazakhstan 'Breaks Pledge' To Reopen Border With Kyrgyzstan

BISHKEK -- The Kyrgyz-Kazakh border remains closed despite what Bishkek says was an agreement between the two countries' leaders to reopen it, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Roza Otunbaeva, the leader of Kyrgyzstan's interim government, said that Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev agreed with her via telephone that the border would be opened on May 11.

But Kazakh border guard officials told their Kyrgyz colleagues that they had not received any command "from above" to open the border. Kyrgyz interim government deputy head Omurbek Tekebaev harshly criticized Kazakh authorities' refusal to open the border on May 11.

Tekebaev said Astana's decision to close the border has created an "economic blockade." He said all countries and international organizations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which is currently chaired by Kazakhstan, are interested in stabilizing the situation in Kyrgyzstan. But he said that Kazakhstan, as OSCE chairman, is for some reason reluctant to contribute to the normalization of the situation in Kyrgyzstan.

Kazakhstan closed the border on April 7, when clashes between security forces and antigovernment demonstrators toppled Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev.

The closure of the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border, the main import-export route for Kyrgyzstan, has seriously exacerbated the country's economic problems.

### **Economic /Energy Front**

- Astana invites India to join its industrial program

Kazakhstan and India have a great potential for development of bilateral trade and economic cooperation, said the Secretary of State - Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan Kanat Saudabayev.

"We have huge reserves. The current annual trade between Kazakhstan and India standing at \$250 million matches neither your potential, nor ours," he said during the talks with Indian Foreign Minister S.M. Krishna on Wednesday in Astana.

Saudabayev cited the Kazakh trade with China and Japan that reached \$17.5 billion and \$1.7 billion in 2008 as an example for India and Kazakhstan to follow. Saudabayev empathized that Kazakhstan welcomes both foreign investment and new technologies within the state industrial development and invited India to join the program. He also stressed that Kazakhstan views Indian Foreign Minister's visit as a consistent step that confirms the level of the Kazakh-Indian relations built during the state visit of Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev to India last year. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, the trade turnover between Kazakhstan and India in 2009 totaled \$253.3 million and \$367.8 million in 2008. Kazakhstan exports asbestos, steel, salt, sulfur, lime, cement and ferrous metals. The major items of Indian imports to Kazakhstan include tea, coffee, spices, tobacco, pharmaceutical products and plastic. Kazakh investments in India amount to \$63.3 million, while India have invested in Kazakhstan \$61.9 million so far.

- China opens up way for Kazakh grain exports to Asia

(bne) - Kazakhstan is planning to export up to 3 million tonnes of grain to East and Southeast Asia this year after China lifted a ban on such exports through its territory.

Overall, Kazakhstan is willing to export 3 million tonnes of grain via China this year as both Japan, the world's largest importer of grain, and South Korea look to the Black Sea grain belt as a new source of imports. Kazakhstan will export a total of 2 million tonnes of grain to South Korea in 2010, President Nursultan Nazarbayev announced during a visit to Seoul on April 22. Imports to South Asian countries with fast-growing populations and little available arable land are also increasing.

Until recently, Kazakhstan was unable to access these markets due to a Chinese ban on grain transit through its territory. However, from the beginning of this year the ban has been lifted. Kazakhstan's Contract Food Corporation, part of state holding company KazAgro, signed an agreement with China Cereals, Oils and Foods Corporation (Cofko) to export 20,000 tonnes of wheat during the spring of 2010; 50% of the total was delivered during the first two months of this year. "One of the perspective directions for Kazakhstan grain export is China and South

Asian countries,” says Zhanna Baitemirova, head of the analytical service at KazAgroMarketing. “In 2011-12, construction of a grain terminal on the Chinese border at Kostyk-Alashankou or Khorgos is planned. The terminal will have capacity of around 500,000 tonnes, and will include an elevator with storage capacity of 25,000 tonnes.”

Although China is a major grain producer, there are already signs the country will substantially increase imports this year, with Chinese companies signing contracts for additional imports from the US and Australia in early 2010.

Beijing is also very interested in using Kazakh lands to produce crops for Chinese consumption, which is likely to have been a factor in the decision to open up the country to Kazakh exports. However, this is an extremely contentious issue in Kazakhstan, with rumors of Chinese land purchases sparking rare demonstrations in Almaty. Kazakh government officials insist the law prohibits the sale of land to foreigners, but are considering leasing land to China.

Spreading the grain around

Even before China opened up its borders, Kazakhstan’s grain exports were becoming increasingly diverse. “The bulk of Kazakhstan’s grain exports were traditionally to [Commonwealth of Independent States] countries. However, in recent years their share decreased considerably. In 2006, it was 62%, but by 2009 it had decreased to 41%,” says Baitemirova.

Outside the CIS, Kazakhstan’s main export markets in 2009 were Iran, Turkey and Afghanistan, which accounted for 735,000 tonnes, 440,000 tonnes and 316,100 tonnes of grain respectively. Exports to Iran have increased rapidly from just 27,900 tonnes in 2006, and are set to increase further after the Kazakh grain terminal in Amirabad became operational in May. KazAgro plans to export up to 2 million tonnes of grain to Iran this year, KazAgro chairman Assylzhan Mamytbekov told a March 2010 grain conference in Astana.

Kazakhstan is also building a terminal in Baku, which, like the Amirabad terminal, will receive shipments from the new grain terminal at Kazakhstan’s Caspian port of Aktau. “Establishing transport infrastructure for grain export, including sea terminals in Aktau, Baku and Amirabad, will create conditions for the clear-cut ascendancy of Kazakh grain exporters among the Caspian littoral countries and in the Caucasus,” says Baitemirova.

At the same time, a new mill elevator complex is being built at Beyenu in the Mangistau region, which will make it possible to increase transport of grain and flour by road and rail transport to Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan.

- Russian energy projects in Kazakhstan’s oil and gas sector

(SRI) - Russian oil and gas companies have begun to expand into Kazakhstan in late 1990s, as they started to implement strategic plans to grow production capacity beyond Russia’s borders.

Russian companies, most prominently LUKOil, Rosneft, and Gazprom, are participating or planning to take part in at least eighteen major oil and gas projects. They include participation in two of Kazakhstan’s largest projects, Tengizchevroil and Karachaganak, in both of which Lukoil is a shareholder.

Rosneft and Lukoil have been active in exploration work on prospective areas Kurmangazy and Zhambai, which contain up to 1.8 billion and 6.5 billion crude oil equivalent, respectively. Gazprom and Lukoil also participate in the development of prospective primarily gas fields Khvalynskoye, Tsentralnoye, and Imashevskoye, which could contain up more than 450 billion cubic meters of natural gas and 230 million tons of liquid hydrocarbons.

Russian investments in Kazakhstan’s oil and gas sector have been estimated at \$4.5 billion, including \$1.3-1.4 in direct investment. Nonetheless, Russian activities have so far been

relatively limited, especially compared to Chinese companies which had consistently increased their share in Kazakhstan's oil and gas sector.

The prospects for increasing the share of Russian companies will depend largely on whether new offshore projects, including Kurmangazy, Khvalynskoye and Tsentralnoye, will indeed prove commercially viable. Should those fields, in which Russian companies hold significant interests, fulfill their promises, Russian companies' share in Kazakhstan's oil production could reportedly rise to 25 percent while its share in natural gas production could exceed 50 percent.

Their combined crude oil output could reach 6-7 million tons in 2010, 10.8 million tons in 2015, and 14-36 million tons in 2020, analysts expect. Meanwhile, their combined gas production could grow from about 3 billion cubic meters (bcm) in 2010 to 3-4.5 bcm in 2015 to 9-24 bcm in 2020.

However, Russian ambitions in Kazakhstan have been hampered by the global economic crisis which had led to postponement of investment and by the growing uncertainties about the once promising fields like Kurmangazy. Kazakhstan's portion of the Caspian Sea, once heralded as one of the world's most promising unexplored areas, has largely fallen short of expectations, easing enthusiasm of international oil companies to engage in difficult offshore projects.

Production agreements between Kazakh and Russian companies have so far reflected this uncertainty, as high-profile projects like Kurmangazy and Khvalynskoye have been put on hold and are not functioning as originally envisioned.

Last month, Lukoil started commercial production at the Korchagin deposit in Russia's portion of the Caspian Sea. Russian leaders expressed hope that the launch of the country's first major Caspian offshore energy development project will help revive the drive to develop deposits in the Russian and Kazakh sector of the Caspian Sea.

- Kazakhstan to crack down on oil theft

An oil worker during construction of a pipeline in Kazakhstan

ASTANA - In a near future, Kazakhstan will introduce imprisonment of five to eight years for theft of oil from main pipelines. Up until now, in Kazakhstan the so-called oil pirates caught on the act got off lightly with a conditional sentence or a fine. But a new law introducing tougher punishment for theft of oil from pipelines has been presented to Majilis (lower chamber of Parliament).

In Mangistau region, security guards found a makeshift cut into a main pipeline that extended into a small oil pipe of about a kilometer from which the enterprising criminals pumped oil. A few months earlier, in the same Mangistau region and on the same pipeline, another cut had been found that led directly to a private house some 120 meters away that was unofficially considered an oil distribution point.

The extent of this crime in the republic was discussed at Majilis last week. Deputy Valeriy Kotovich presented to his colleagues the new bill introducing tougher punishment for oil thefts through cutting into a pipeline and noted that the crime posed a serious threat to the security of the country's pipeline system. The illegal cuts into pipelines cause huge losses not only to the oil companies, but to the country's economy on the whole. "In addition, the oil spills that happen during the thefts affect the environment," he emphasized.

According to Kotovich, there have been over four hundred large illegal cuts into pipelines over the last five years alone. Starting from 2005, their number has been growing uncontrollably. "In 2005, 43 illegal cuts were registered in the oil pipelines of KazMunaiGas, in 2007 – 74, in into pipelines 2008 – 131, and in 2009 – 141," the MP said. Kotovich said that the reasons for such sad statistics are impunity and the liberalism of the current "oil piracy" law.

Turns out, oil theft through illegal cuts into pipelines is equaled to a simple theft, and the pipeline oil theft cases practically never make it to the court. “After all, a pipeline is a strategic facility. The stability of export supplies is affected, and the business reputation of Kazakhstan as a reliable provider of energy resources is damaged,” Kotovich said.

Representatives of the oil producing and oil transport companies have raised the same very concerns on so many occasions over all these years. “We have analyzed the litigation situation for these cases, and we have come to a discouraging conclusion. Not only are the people who participate in these criminal activities very often released right in the court room but they also get to keep their cars and the telephones they use to negotiate (their deals). All this creates impunity,” KazMunaiGas General Business Manager Serikbek Elshibekov told New Europe. “People who do this use professional tools. Very quickly they manage to cut into an export pipeline of a considerable thickness. Then, sometime later, (they manage) to return there and to start pumping oil from the pipeline,” he added.

At this point, it is still difficult to establish the exact damage caused by the criminal activities of the pipeline thieves to the oil companies in the country. “This includes not only the volumes of stolen oil, but also the cost of pipeline repairs and rehabilitation of soil after oil spills. To-date, the indirect damage alone from the cuts into pipelines has exceeded one and a half billion tenge or 10 million US dollars,” Deputy Nurlan Nigmatullin added.

The stolen oil goes to the many hidden mini-refineries and is then sold free of any tax or other duties. Considering the current prices for oil and for fuel and lubricants, the oil pirates’ profits are enormous.

Regarding the volumes of stolen oil, Nigmatullin said that, for example, late December last year, in Atyrau region, seven 20-tonne KAMAZ trucks carrying about 140,000 tons of stolen oil from the Zhanaozen–Kenkiyak pipeline were apprehended. The case was handed over to the law enforcement authorities. But on 14 January this year, the same group was caught again with the same seven Kamaz trucks. “Now calculate the volumes of thefts! And the current laws are such that the people caught get off with nothing more than a fright and go back to their business. To put an end to such lawlessness, we have decided to amend the current law to toughen the punishment for this category of crime,” Nigmatullin said.

According to him, the first version of the new bill does away with the fines and establishes the punishment of imprisonment of five to eight years instead. “As we worked on this bill, we felt a certain pressure from some persons concerned who questioned such tough measures. But when the damage to the country, at a very conservative estimate, exceeds a billion and a half tenge, such a clampdown is absolutely necessary,” the MP said.

In addition, subject to the punishment will be not only those doing illegal cuts into pipelines or transporting the stolen oil, but also those who keep stolen oil receiving points. So far, Majilis has approved the bill in the first reading. The bill has also received a positive expertise opinion in the government and in a commission made up of representatives of the bodies of justice and prosecutor’s office.

- Russian shipyard completes third tanker for Kazakhstan

(SRI) - Russian Red Sormovo shipyard said last week it had completed the construction of a third sea tanker for Kazakhstan’s state-owned maritime shipping company KazMorTransFlot.

The tanker, named Oral, is the last tanker built by Red Sormovo under a contract that the shipyard signed with KazMorTransFlot in April 2009 to build three sea tankers. Red Sormovo delivered the first tanker, named Aktau, in September 2009, while the second tanker, Aktobe, successfully passed relevant sea trials in April 2010.

The tanker is 150 meters long, 17.3 meters wide, with a capacity of 13,000 tons deadweight. The tanker is capable of carrying up to three grades of petroleum products.

## **Social Front**

### **Kyrgyzstan**

#### **Political Front**

- Reports: Clashes Erupt In South Kyrgyzstan

BISHKEK -- Supporters of Kyrgyzstan's interim government have clashed with supporters of ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev in the south of the country, where Bakiev loyalists occupied several regional government buildings the previous day.

RFE/RL correspondents say shots were heard as the two groups clashed in the city of Jalal-Abad and several people were wounded, at least one reportedly with gunshot wounds. It was not immediately clear who fired the shots.

Today's clashes came after Bakiev supporters on May 13 occupied regional government buildings in the southern cities of Osh, Jalal-Abad, and Batken. Government supporters today regained control of the provincial government headquarters in Osh after scuffles with Bakiev loyalists.

The interim government has accused supporters of Bakiev of trying to stage a coup.

Bakiev, who was ousted in an uprising last month, fled Kyrgyzstan and is now in Belarus.

- Kyrgyz Protesters Demand Ousted President's Extradition

BISHKEK -- Some 2,000 protesters gathered today on Bishkek's central square demanding that ousted Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev be put on trial, one of several demonstrations in the capital, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Bakiev, who fled the country last month, is currently in exile in Belarus. More than 80 people died and hundreds were injured in antigovernment protests on

April 7. The interim government that came to power after Bakiev left have accused him of giving an order for security services to open fire on demonstrators in Bishkek.

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has said he will not extradite Bakiev to Kyrgyzstan.

Interim government official Farid Niyazov told RFE/RL that the gathering was peaceful and no violence occurred. He said today that Roza Otunbaeva, the head of the interim government, is visiting the relatives of those who were killed on April 7.

A few thousand people also rallied in front of the parliament building in the capital today in support of Nariman Tuleev, who was dismissed as mayor of Bishkek by the interim government because of his ties to Bakiev.

Additionally, a counterdemonstration to the pro-Tuleev rally was led by Almazbek Atambaev, a deputy head of the interim government. A crowd of some 2,000 went with Atambaev to the parliament building, but the pro-Tuleev crowd had mostly dispersed by the time Atambaev and his followers arrived.

- Slain Kyrgyz Protesters' Relatives To Picket Belarusian Embassy

BISHKEK -- Relatives of people killed in clashes between Kyrgyz security forces and antigovernment protesters in Bishkek last month say they will picket the Belarusian Embassy to call for former President Kurmanbek Bakiev to be extradited, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz and Belarus services report.

Nuria Aydabosunova, spokeswoman of the Bishkek-based nongovernmental organization Martyrs of the Land, told journalists today that the protesters' main demand is for Belarusian officials to send Bakiev to Kyrgyzstan to stand trial for his role in the clashes on April 7 that led to 86 deaths and hundreds of injuries. Bakiev fled Bishkek on April 7 and eventually went into exile in Belarus. Kyrgyzstan's interim government has issued an arrest warrant for Bakiev and several of his relatives and close associates.

They are wanted for charges including abuse of power, embezzlement, and their roles in ordering security forces to open fire on protesters during the uprising.

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has stated he will not extradite Bakiev.

- Closing In On Maksim Bakiev

It seems they're finally closing in on him. After more than a month of speculation as to the whereabouts of Maksim Bakiev, the son of Kyrgyz ex-President Kurmanbek Bakiev, Kyrgyz authorities on May 10 asked the Latvian government to detain him.

A criminal case was launched against Maksim shortly after anti-government demonstrations forced his father to flee the capital on April 7. Kyrgyzstan's Acting Prosecutor-General Baitemir Ibraev told RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service that he faced charges of premeditated murder and attempted murder.

The younger Bakiev has also been accused by Kyrgyzstan's interim leaders of siphoning off money from fuel contracts connected to the Manas air base, a key transit hub for U.S. operations in Afghanistan. In advance of the Kyrgyz government's Latvian request, the international police agency Interpol circulated an arrest warrant for Maksim Bakiev in connection with fraud.

The warrant, complete with obligatory blurred photo (ostensibly from Maksim's passport), was requested by the Pervomay district court of Bishkek.

Not surprisingly, a link to the warrant was posted on the Livejournal page of the user "maksimbakiev," whose activities I have tracked in previous posts.

But the Latvian request was met by shrugs, at least in public, by officials in Riga. Andrejs Vasks, a spokesman for the Prosecutor General's Office, said he had no information on whether Maksim Bakiev was even in the country. He said his office had asked the Kyrgyz side for clarification, describing its request as "unclear and contradictory."

But there are strong signs that Maksim Bakiev is indeed somewhere inside the Baltic nation. This, it seems, is not just another rumor.

Latvian news agency LETA, citing unnamed officials, reported on April 13 that Maksim Bakiev was already in the country. His arrival was "said to have been discussed with state institutions, including the Foreign Ministry." Guntars Grinums, head of LETA's Foreign News Department, assured me over the phone that his news sources were "bullet-proof" and "very reliable."

Again citing unnamed officials, LETA reported that Maksim Bakiev left Latvia on April 16.

The following week, the Latvian TV show, "Nothing Personal," reported that he had returned via private jet, accompanied by his wife and several others, including, perhaps, the wife of ex-President Kurmanbek Bakiev. The show reported that the jet had arrived from Minsk, Kurmanbek Bakiev's current location.

Maksim Bakiev also has a powerful friend and partner in Latvia. Businessman Valery Belokon splits the ownership of the investment company Maval Aktivi with Maksim, and Maksim is deputy chairman of Belokon's Riga-based brewing company, Kimmels. Maksim has also reportedly helped Belokon set up a gold-mining company and a bank in Kyrgyzstan.

Today, Latvian police announced today that they had begun searching for the ousted president's son. What will happen if and when they find him is another question.

Latvian newspaper "Dienas Bizness" has an article today that examines possible scenarios, which include a Bakiev asylum plea, string-pulling by the influential Belokon, and even a decision not to extradite Bakiev in the end.

- **Kyrgyz Interim Government Members Split On Constitution Plans**

OSH, Kyrgyzstan -- Two key members of Kyrgyzstan's interim government have spoken against transforming the country into a parliamentary republic, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Acting Defense Minister Ismail Isakov made the statement today during a rally in the southern city of Osh at which Roza Otunbaeva, the chairwoman of Kyrgyzstan's interim government, spoke in favor of a parliamentary republic. Otunbaeva and other leaders in the new government announced their intention to establish a parliamentary republic to preclude a return to the authoritarian rule that developed under ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev and his predecessor, Askar Akaev, who was also forced from office after a mass uprising in 2005.

Otunbaeva said at the meeting that recent history "fully showed that [a government based on] presidential power does not work in this country." She added that a parliamentary form of rule is the most appropriate system for Kyrgyzstan. But Isakov said Kyrgyzstan's constitution corresponds to the realities in the country and that "strong presidential power is needed in the country." At the same meeting, Azimbek Beknazarov, a deputy head of the interim government, also said he is in favor of Kyrgyzstan maintaining a system with a strong president. Beknazarov is a leader of the Asaba party and previously served as Isakov's attorney when he was being tried by the previous government for corruption. The interim government -- which is made up mostly of former opposition party leaders -- came to power on April 7 after antigovernment protesters forced Bakiev to flee the capital. A constitutional council has been established to work on a draft constitution that is to be finalized and presented to the public by May 20. A national referendum on the constitution is scheduled for June 27.

### **Geo Strategic Front**

- **U.S., Russian Embassies Jointly Congratulate Kyrgyz On Victory Day**

BISHKEK -- The Russian and U.S. embassies in Kyrgyzstan have issued a rare joint statement congratulating Kyrgyz on the celebration of Victory Day, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

"The strong friendship between us, the Russian and American ambassadors to the Kyrgyz Republic, reflects that same spirit of cooperation that allowed us to vanquish our common enemy during World War II," the statement reads. "In commemoration of that most destructive and bloody of wars in which more than 50 million people perished, we today bow our heads again to the heroism of those who shed their blood and gave."

The victory over Nazi Germany in 1945 is marked in former Soviet countries on May 9, but Kyrgyz authorities have decided not to publicly celebrate the 65th anniversary of the event due to mourning for last month's deadly clashes between antigovernment demonstrators and security forces that left 86 people dead and hundreds injured.

The April 7 protests toppled President Kurmanbek Bakiev, who is in exile in Belarus. Both the U.S. and Russian governments have shown strong support to Kyrgyzstan's interim government as the successor to Bakiev and his government. Kyrgyzstan is the only country in the world that hosts both U.S. and Russian military bases.

- **Kyrgyzstan Asks Latvia To Detain Ousted Leader's Son**

Kyrgyzstan has asked Latvia to detain the son of ousted Kyrgyz leader Kurmanbek Bakiev.

Andrejs Vasks, a spokesman for the Prosecutor General's Office, said Kyrgyzstan had issued a temporary detention request against Maksim Bakiev. Vasks said he had no information on whether Maksim Bakiev was in the country. He added that his office had asked the Kyrgyz side for clarification, describing its request as "unclear and contradictory."

Maksim Bakiev has been implicated in a corruption scandal involving fuel delivery to Manas, the U.S. air base Kyrgyzstan. Former President Kurmanbek Bakiev was toppled in an uprising last month and has since fled to Belarus.

- U.S. vows more transparency over base in Kyrgyzstan

(AP) - A senior adviser to President Barack Obama said Friday that Washington will ensure greater transparency in the supply of aviation fuel to a key U.S. air base in Kyrgyzstan, where the previous government often was accused of corruption.

US vows greater transparency over fuel supply deals for its air base in Kyrgyzstan

A senior adviser to President Barack Obama said Friday that Washington will ensure greater transparency in the supply of aviation fuel to a key U.S. air base in Kyrgyzstan, where the previous government often was accused of corruption.

Perceived improprieties over a fuel supply deal with the Manas base, which Kyrgyz prosecutors believe financially benefited members of the recently ousted government, have severely dented the standing of the United States in the impoverished Central Asian nation.

Clarifying the procedure of how fuel is purchased would help eliminate speculation about activities at the base, White House official Michael McFaul told The Associated Press in a telephone interview from the Kazakh capital, Astana.

"A lot of this information is available publicly, but we want to put it together in one place, and we are even considering having a website where we have all the payments from the transit center that happen," McFaul said.

Kyrgyz prosecutors say that companies owned by a son of deposed President Kurmanbek Bakiyev avoided almost \$80 million in taxes on aviation fuel sold to Manas base, which acts as a key refueling point for warplanes flying over Afghanistan and a major hub for combat troop movement. Domestic and international critics have suggested the United States may have turned a blind to irregularities in the fuel supply procedure to ensure the future of the base.

The fate of the base was cast into doubt early last year when Bakiyev's government said it would terminate the lease. Kyrgyzstan later agreed to allow U.S. forces to stay after the annual rent was raised to about \$63 million from \$17 million. Manas was redesignated a "transit center" as part of the deal. The U.S. hold on the base came under threat again last month after Bakiyev was ousted in a violent uprising and a provisional government took charge.

The acting prime minister, Roza Otunbayeva, has since promised to extend the current base agreement for another year after it expires in July. But she and other leading members of the government have complained vocally in the past that their pleas for assistance were ignored by Washington when they were in the opposition and facing oppression from Bakiyev's government. "We are falling down dramatically, and the United States doesn't care," Otunbayeva told The Associated Press in February. But McFaul denied that the Obama administration had abandoned its commitment to democracy-promotion in favor of U.S. strategic interests in Kyrgyzstan — namely, the Manas transit center.

"That is not our policy in Kyrgyzstan or in any other country," he said. "The moment we have now creates an opportunity for us to be more clear and more direct in articulating President Obama's vision." McFaul, who was in Kyrgyzstan earlier this week, said he also has urged the provisional authorities to investigate the bloody events of April 7 that propelled them into power.

They have to date failed to heed calls for an independent international commission to investigate the clashes between government troops and demonstrators in which at least 85 people died. Possible solutions could include a bilateral effort with the United States government or a broader international option "to create impartiality and to get the facts right, and to lead to some kind of truth and also reconciliation," McFaul said.

### **Economic /Energy Front**

### **Social Front**

- Kyrgyz Youth To Hold Forum On New Constitution

OSH, Kyrgyzstan -- Kyrgyz youth organizations are planning a forum in the southern city of Osh to discuss the country's new draft constitution, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Maksat Joldoshbekov, a member of the nongovernmental organization Youth Congress, told RFE/RL that representatives from most Kyrgyz youth organizations and movements are expected to take part in the gathering on May 11. A constitutional committee appointed by Kyrgyzstan's interim government is working on the draft constitution, which is expected to transform the country from a presidential to a parliamentary system of government. A referendum on the constitution will be held in June. The major issues to be discussed by the forum's delegates are the role and participation of youth in Kyrgyzstan's economy, international relations, and democratic governmental and educational institutions.

The establishment of a Youth Ministry in the new government and the participation of youth organizations in outlining and implementing the government's policies are also on the forum's agenda.

### **Tajikistan**

### **Political Front**

- Tajik President Puts State Body In Charge Of Religious Affairs

DUSHANBE -- Tajik President Emomali Rahmon has reinstated the State Committee on Religious Affairs to oversee the country's religious organizations, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Rahmon appointed Abdurahim Kholiqov on May 12 to lead the committee, which will take over duties previously carried out by the Culture Ministry. Kholiqov previously worked as an official in Rahmon's administration.

Tajik religious-affairs analyst Saidahmad Qalandar told RFE/RL that the control and regulation of religious organizations in the country has become increasingly important, which is why the duty has been removed from the Culture Ministry and given to a specific body.

Saidibrohim Nazar, an activist in the Islamic Renaissance Party, agreed that the committee is important in regulating religious affairs, but he said Kholiqov is not a well-known person in this regard.

The Culture Ministry's directorate of religious affairs, which previously controlled matters of faith in Tajikistan, had responsibilities including sending people on the annual hajj, the registration of mosques and churches, and regulating the import of religious literature.

### **Geo Strategic Front**

- Iran Offers To Mediate Between Tajikistan, Uzbekistan

DUSHANBE -- Iranian Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi said in Dushanbe today that Iran is ready to try to alleviate tensions between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan at their request, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reported.

Vahidi, who is on a two-day official visit to Tajikistan, identified Dushanbe's commitment to completing construction of the Roghun hydroelectric power station as a point of contention between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

Uzbek officials have strongly protested the Roghun project as taking too much water away from Uzbekistan, which needs it for agricultural use.

Vahidi said Tajikistan and Uzbekistan should try to improve bilateral relations as regional development is contingent on cooperation between all regional states.

He acknowledged that Tajikistan's water resources could enable it to generate electricity for export to neighboring countries. He is scheduled to visit the Sangtuda-2 hydroelectric power station that is under construction in southern Tajikistan. Iran is financing that project.

Vahidi met in Dushanbe today with Tajik President Emomali Rahmon and his Tajik counterpart, Colonel General Sherali Khayrulloev. He described military cooperation between Iran and Tajikistan as satisfactory, adding that unspecified new developments in bilateral relations provide an opportunity to activate unused potential.

Noting persistent instability in Afghanistan, Vahidi advocated three-way cooperation between Iran, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan in combating drug trafficking and terrorism.

Military cooperation between Tajikistan and Iran began in 1997. Iran has offered scholarships for Tajik officers to study at Iranian military

universities and also helped Tajikistan to build a factory that makes military uniforms.

- Iranian defense minister in Tajikistan to discuss cooperation issues

DUSHANBE, May 13, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Iran's Minister of Defense and Logistical Support for Armed Forces, Brigadier General Ahmad Vahid, arrived in Dushanbe Wednesday evening on a two-day official visit at the invitation of his Tajik counterpart, Colonel-General Sherali Khairulloev.

During his stay in Tajikistan, Mr. Ahmad Vahid is scheduled to hold talks with President Emomali Rahmon, Chairman of the Majlisi Milli (Tajikistan's upper chamber of parliament) Mahmadsaid Ubaidulloev, Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi and Defense Minister Sherali Khairulloev, Faridoun Mahmataliyev, a spokesman for the Ministry of Defense, said.

According to him, the sides are expected to discuss issues related to military and military-technical cooperation, and training of military officers for the Tajik national army at Iranian military schools.

In the meantime, Iran's news agency IRNA reports that Brigadier General Ahmad Vahid said upon arrival in Dushanbe that he and his Tajik counterpart would sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on defense cooperation.

Brigadier General Ahmad Vahid who was speaking with IRNA reporter at Dushanbe International Airport added, "We hope to be able to draw new horizons for bilateral defense cooperation and a good model for constructive relations, leading to boosted security and strengthened regional stability during this visit."

He said, "Since the Islamic Republic of Iran is pursuing the establishment and expansion of regional lasting security as a major tactical strategy, we believe that bilateral, multilateral and regional consultations can in addition to materializing that objective ensure securing the national interests of the regional nations, as well as their wellbeing, peace of mind and territorial integrity."

### **Economic /Energy Front**

- Expansion of Tajik-Pakistani trade and economic ties discussed in Dushanbe

DUSHANBE, May 14, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Expansion of trade and economic ties between Tajikistan and Pakistan was a major topic of a meeting of Sharif Said, Chairman of Tajikistan's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI), with Hasnain Reza Mirza, Vice Chairman of the Pakistan Halal Products Development Board (PHPDB), which took place in Dushanbe on May 13, according to the CCI press service.

Sharif Said briefed Hasnain Reza Mirza on priorities of Tajikistan's economy. He noted that trade cooperation between the two countries had good potential and it was necessary to continue developing business relations, expanding investment policy, launching joint ventures, organizing exhibitions, etc. Hasnain Reza Mirza, for his part, noted that Pakistan entrepreneurs were interested in expansion of trade cooperation with Tajikistan and agreed that holding of exhibitions would play an important role in promoting further expansion of trade and economic cooperation between the two countries.

The sides also discussed possible themes of the future exhibitions, noting that there are some transportation problems, the CCI press service said.

The Pakistan Halal Products Development Board (PHPDB) was set up as an autonomous body under the auspices of the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry in December 2009. The board is linked to the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) through Islamic Chamber Research and Information (ICRC). The board has 16 members with 11 from the private sector and five from the public sector.

#### **Social Front**

- Kulob mudflow death toll exceeds 10 and 40 other people reported missing

KULOB, May 8, 2010, Asia-Plus -- Friday evening, President Emomali Rahmon held an extraordinary meeting in the city of Kulob to discuss mitigation of effects of mudflows that hit the city and nearby areas on the night of May 6-7.

Speaking at the meeting, President Rahmon noted that according to data provided by the Committee for Emergency Situations (CES) and Kulob authorities, seven people were killed by mudflows in the city and the district of Kulob and 40 other people have been reported missing. Besides, two residents of the village of Sangdara in the Muminobod district, some 30 kilometers of Kulob, were killed by the Friday mudflows, and six residents of the Shuroobod district are reported missing.

He added that more than 1,500 houses were damaged and 12 bridges were destroyed by mudflows that hit the Kulob zone on Friday. In the Muminobod district alone, 80 residential buildings were affected in six villages, 30 of them are destroyed to the extent of being unsuitable for living, the president said, noting that Vose and Shuroobod districts were also seriously affected by mudflows. Mudflows damaged some 100 kilometers of roads in the Kulob zone.

The president ordered to assess actual volumes of damage caused by disaster to the Kulob zone. A special republican commission for mitigation of the disaster effects was set up and Deputy Prime Minister Murodali Alimardon heads this commission.

The President also ordered to build new houses for the disaster-hit population until November 6. The Committee for Land Management is to allot land for construction of a new settlement for families, whose houses are located in the disaster-prone area. Rahmon also proposed to relocate those who agree to the Danghara district. In the meantime, Asia-Plus reporter for Kulob says that at least eight women and children were buried without registration with medical services.

The Kulob mudflow death toll is rising as water level in the Tebalay River is reducing. Local journalist Asliddin Dostiyev told Asia-Plus on Saturday that he saw himself that the bodies of 1-

to-2 year girl and 3-to-4 year-old boy had been dug out. "Their relatives buried them without registration with medical services," Dostiyev said.

Besides, according to some sources, several bodies were found near the village of Margak in the Kulob district. Thus, according to various data, the number of those killed by Friday mudflows may reach 20 people. The disaster occurred Friday early in the morning, at about 1:40, as the Tebalay River overflowed its banks. The mudflow that carried thousands cubic meters of slurry and broken trees with it was so powerful that people even did not have time to leave their houses. Another powerful mudflow seriously damaged a school building in the Dahana village, some 18 kilometers of Kulob Friday afternoon. Fortunately, all school students were evacuated. Number of mudflows also hit the Vose, Muminobod and Shuroobod districts.

Rescue teams from CES as well as servicemen from the Ministry of Defense (MoD) and the regiment of Russian military base 201 deployed in Kulob have worked in the disaster area, evacuating people and mitigating effects of the disaster.

Government structures and international organizations are continuing to provide assistance to the disaster-hit population.

- Tajik Officials Reverse Ban Against Mobile Phone Ads

DUSHANBE -- Tajik industry and government officials say a government ban on mobile phone advertising in Dushanbe has been suspended, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Ghaffor Erkaev, head of the Association of Tajik Mobile Communication Companies, told RFE/RL on May 11 that Dushanbe officials have reversed their previous decision to remove advertisements for mobile phones from billboards in the Tajik capital. Shuhrat Nematboev, the deputy head of Tajikistan's State Committee on Investments, told RFE/RL that the decision by the Dushanbe Mayor's Office to remove the billboards was hurting mobile phone companies' business and had "spoiled their work environment."

He said state lawyers are checking the legality of the billboard ban. Meanwhile, billboard advertisements for mobile phones are being restored in Dushanbe and the surrounding areas.

Erkaev said some officials misunderstood Tajik President Emomali Rahmon's message when he spoke against the excessive use of mobile phones during his annual address to parliament last month. Rahmon said Tajikistan, with a population of 7 million, had 6 million mobile phone numbers.

He added that the annual profit of mobile companies is more than 1.4 billion somoni (\$320 million), most of which, he said, goes to foreign companies. Rahmon also instructed Health Minister Nusratullo Salimov to start a television campaign explaining what Rahmon said was the "physical harm" mobile phones cause, especially to children.

Marina Rozhkina, a spokeswoman for the Russian-owned mobile phone company Bee-line, told RFE/RL in Dushanbe that mobile phone companies pay their taxes and have an active role in donating to charities and sponsoring sports teams.

Other major mobile phone operators in Tajikistan include the Tajik-American Babilon Mobile, Tajik-Russian company MLT, and Chinese-owned TK Mobile. The Indigo mobile phone company recently changed its name to TSL and sold 40 percent of its shares to the Agha Khan Foundation, with the rest being held by the Scandinavian company Telia Sonera.

Rahmon also criticized mobile phones during his annual address last year and told the Education Ministry to ban mobile phones from schools and universities.

- Tajikistan Denies Imposing Travel Ban On Russian Children

DUSHANBE -- The Tajik Foreign Ministry has dismissed a statement by a Russian government official claiming that Russian children are barred from leaving Tajikistan, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Tajik Foreign Ministry spokesman Davlat Nazriev told RFE/RL that Russian children could enter or leave the country without any restrictions.

According to Russian officials, some 1,000 children with Russian citizenship live in Tajikistan with their parents. They say the Tajik Health Ministry rejected a request on May 8 by Gennady Onishchenko, Russia's chief health inspector, to help Russian children leave Tajikistan.

Onishchenko imposed a ban last week on Tajik children under the age of 6 from entering Russia because of a polio outbreak.

The World Health Organization (WHO) diagnosed several polio cases in Tajikistan last month. Twelve children have since died from the disease.

Tajik Deputy Health Minister Azam Mirzoev said he has no reports of any Tajik children infected with polio traveling to Russia. WHO spokeswoman Sona Bari told RFE/RL that if polio cases are discovered in any country the organization recommends the vaccination of all children under 15 who arrive or leave the country. Some 4 million doses of vaccine have been sent to Tajikistan and a mass immunization program is under way.

Onishchenko also banned the import of dried fruit from Tajikistan. Tajik Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi asked Russia last week to rescind that ban.

- **Tajik Floods Kill 20 In Kulob**

KULOB, Tajikistan -- Strong rains have caused floods that have killed at least 20 people in the Kulob area of the southern Tajik province of Khatlon, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports.

Tajik rescue services reported on May 6 that the Tebalay River breeched its banks overnight in Kulob, leaving many people unable to reach higher ground. Authorities found 15 bodies in Kulob and five more in the Shuroobod district near the bank of the Tebalay River.

More than a dozen people are missing, RFE/RL reports. Many of the bridges in Kulob have been damaged or destroyed and people living in some parts of the city suffered severe damage to their homes. Authorities said dozens of buildings, roads, telephone lines, and other infrastructure in Khatlon's Shuroobod, Muminobod, and Vose districts have also been destroyed.

Many people were stranded on the roofs of their houses waiting for emergency teams to rescue them by helicopter. Mirzoali Miraliev, the head of Kulob's Health Ministry, said that some 50 people were treated for injuries on May 7.

Military units from the Russian base in Kulob took part in the rescue operation and offered their armored vehicles to help transport victims to safer areas.

## **Turkmenistan**

### **Political Front**

- **Turkmen Parliament Amends Criminal Code**

ASHGABAT -- The Turkmen parliament has approved a new edition of the country's Criminal Code that reduces the maximum sentence for the most serious crimes, RFE/RL's Turkmen Service reports.

The amendments to the existing Criminal Code passed in parliament on May 10 include reducing from 25 years to 15 years the maximum term of imprisonment for violent crimes and introducing a system of fines as an alternative to being jailed. The new version also includes articles aimed at combating terrorism and economic crimes. It also aims to improve legal practices. Timirhan Nasrihanov, leader of the Turkmenistan Association of Lawyers in exile, told RFE/RL that the amendments could permit the adoption of a special decree on the release of political prisoners

sentenced for "serious crimes" under President Saparmurat Niyazov, who died in December 2006. Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov, who succeeded Niyazov as president, said in a speech to the State Security Council in March that the country's legal system must be improved to conform to international standards. Berdimukhammedov is expected to sign the new edition to the Criminal Code to make it law.

- Facts testifying to involvement of law enforcement agencies staff in drug trafficking revealed

During a regular meeting of the State Security Council, President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said that "the involvement of some staff of law enforcement agencies in the drug trafficking " indicates to "unsatisfactory educational work with personnel in the Ministry of Internal Affairs." The head of state demanded that the responsible officials take immediately appropriate measures against those who chose the path of crime in search of personal profit and disgrace the high rank of law enforcement officers."

The President also said that the country approved the special program "Goknar-2010". Within the framework of this program all regions of Turkmenistan have set up special headquarters involving large numbers of people, special transport and helicopters in order to more effectively combat drug trafficking.

### **Geo Strategic Front**

- Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and Viktor Yanukovich meet in Moscow

On May 8, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov and President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich held a meeting in Moscow, where they attend the informal CIS summit and festivities on the 65th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945.

As part of the conversation the Turkmen leader congratulated the Ukrainian counterpart on his election to the high post and wished him "every success in the noble work for the prosperity of Ukraine and welfare of its people."

The sides expressed mutual interest in the comprehensive expansion of long-term partnership in several key areas, highly rating the prospects for further development of the traditional inter-state dialogue. Among the priority areas of cooperation, along with traditional cooperation in the energy sector, the sides identified trade and economy, urban planning and transportation, where Turkmenistan has been successfully implemented large scale projects.

According to the report, the sides discussed separately the possibilities of closer cooperation in the humanitarian sphere, where they also accumulated the positive experience of joint work.

- Turkmenistan wants to develop comprehensive relations with CIS countries

Turkmenistan views cooperation with CIS countries as one of directions of its foreign policy and build relations with countries of the CIS based on existing good traditions of friendship, mutual respect, equality and mutually beneficial partnership, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said on 8 May in Moscow during he informal summit of heads of CIS countries dedicated to the 65th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War.

As the President of Turkmenistan noted, Turkmenistan has in recent years "significantly increased its participation in the activities conducted within the framework of the CIS with the focus on realization of the existing potential for multilateral cooperation. Speaking about prospects for further cooperation, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov named as the most urgent the projects for development of transport and communications infrastructure and partnerships in the energy sector.

"The CIS is a natural transportation corridor along the North-South and East-West routes, providing access to major world markets. Based on this, we see great prospects for the

transnational railway Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran, which is under construction, as well as intensification of maritime transportation between CIS countries in the Caspian Sea," stressed the head of Turkmenistan.

Turning to the prospects of partnership in the energy sector, the president focused on the huge resource and transit potential of the CIS, noting that "successful implementation of joint projects for the construction of new transnational pipelines can give a powerful impetus to economic and social development for producer countries, transit countries and consumers.

### **Economic /Energy Front**

- IMF gives positive assessment of socio-economic development of Turkmenistan

The delegation of the International Monetary Fund headed by IMF Deputy Managing Director Naoyuki Shinohara visited Ashgabat. During the visit, representatives of the IMF held a series of negotiations at the Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance of Turkmenistan.

As the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) reports, following the talks the head of the delegation praised the country's ongoing financial policies and outlined prospects for further cooperation. He noted that, in general, the IMF positively assessed the socio-economic development of Turkmenistan at the current stage. According to him, the country has made significant progress in economic reforms, namely the unification of the exchange rate and denomination of national currency, the adoption of measures to improve and strengthen the banking sector and tax system, and implementation of investment policy.

The IMF welcomes the on-going social reforms implemented in Turkmenistan, including in education and health, as well as measures taken to support and develop small and medium businesses, said Naoyuki Shinohara. He also confirmed the IMF's readiness to continue cooperation with Turkmenistan in the banking-financial sector and other spheres.

- Turkmenistan proposes to hold Maritime Business Forum in Caspian Sea

Turkmenistan proposed to hold a Maritime Business Forum in the late summer this year, which will consider a range of issues relating to cooperation in trade, economy, transport and communications in the Caspian Sea. This proposal was made by President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov on May 7 at a meeting with Governor of Astrakhan Region Alexander Zhilkin "to give further impetus to business activities and fruitful exchange of experiences."

In turn, the head of the region offered the Turkmen partners services of Astrakhan region organizations for the integrated study of marine biological resources of Turkmenistan.

He also expressed readiness of Astrakhan shipyards to join major projects for the construction of facilities to develop oil fields in the Turkmen Caspian shelf.

### **Social Front**

- Turkmenistan establishes baseline for calculation of social and other benefits

Turkmenistan established a baseline effective from 1 July 2010 worth Manat 50 for calculation of social and other payments, taxes and fees; and Manat 300 for calculation of state fees and fines under criminal and administrative laws.

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov signed a decree to this effect. Under the decree, the Ministry of Economy and Development and the Ministry of Finance were instructed to prepare jointly with the Ministry of Justice proposals within one month for making appropriate amendments to the legislation of the country and submit them to the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat, the decree provides for the official establishment of a baseline for calculation of social and other payments, taxes, government fees,

finances deducted from the statutory minimum and average monthly wage, as well as the accruals under the criminal and administrative law (except for the baseline to determine the minimum pension and the accrual of state benefits).

## **Uzbekistan**

### **Political Front**

- Uzbek President Orders Closure Of Private Notary Offices

TASHKENT -- Uzbek President Islam Karimov has signed a decree to abolish private notary offices because they are creating a "criminal situation," RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports.

The decree states that the "pursuit of profit" among private notaries has led them to carry out fraud schemes with real estate agents and car dealers.

"The existing notary system, allowing the practice of both state and private notaries, does not allow the system to carry out all of the duties it should," the decree said. There are nearly 200 private notary offices in Uzbekistan -- 45 of them in the capital, Tashkent -- with more than 1,000 notary officers working in them. The presidential decree, which became known last week, has not been officially announced. Instead private notaries were told that the order banning their activities would come into force on May 15.

A private notary in Tashkent who didn't want to be named told RFE/RL that many notary offices have already stopped providing their services and people are already lining up in long queues at state-run notary offices. "It's such a mess, everybody's sitting and waiting for their turn there," he said. "And we [private notaries] are ordered to sit at home and do nothing."

Private notaries in Uzbekistan were already sharing 50 percent of their income with the government. A notary from the Kashkadarya region suggested that with its latest decision the government will now get control of all of the money and notary activity will return to the way it was during Soviet times. Uzbek officials claim there were massive violations of the law by private notaries, referring to 110 cases during the past two years in which private notaries were brought to court and charged with fraud. But officials have said nothing about violations among state-run notaries -- and the notary who spoke to RFE/RL said that the situation regarding fraud is the same in both private and state-run notary offices.

"The closing of private notaries will allow authorities to be able to embark upon a campaign to find wealthy people and to better trace the movement of their properties [through public notaries], because such information was not always available from private notaries," the notary said.

### **Geo Strategic Front**

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### **Economic /Energy Front**

#### **Social Front**

- Explosion On Uzbek Bus Kills Six

TASHKENT -- At least six people were killed and several others injured when a bus exploded in Tashkent on May 11, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports. Police said the cause of the explosion was a faulty natural gas tank which had been installed on the roof of the bus, which was carrying some 25 textile-factory workers. High-level Uzbek security officials were at the site of the incident. The gasoline-powered bus had been converted to use natural gas to save money. Thousands of drivers -- predominantly private taxi drivers -- have switched to using natural gas in Uzbekistan. In 2007, the Uzbek government ordered a gradual switch from gasoline to natural-gas-powered engines as the latter fuel is more readily available, costs half as much, and is considered more ecologically friendly. Uzbek President Orders Closure Of Private Notary Offices

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state-run notaries -- and the notary who spoke to RFE/RL said that the situation regarding fraud is the same in both private and state-run notary offices.

"The closing of private notaries will allow authorities to be able to embark upon a campaign to find wealthy people and to better trace the movement of their properties [through public notaries], because such information was not always available from private notaries," the notary said. The incident occurred two days before the fifth anniversary of the killings in the southeastern city of Andijon. The government has stepped up security nationwide to ensure there are no commemorations of the 2005 event, in which hundreds of protesters were shot dead by security forces.

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