

Business & Politics in the Muslim World
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Weekly Report
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Central Asia
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Azerbaijan

Political Front

- Islamic Insurgents Sentenced In Azerbaijan

BAKU -- Some 31 members of an alleged Islamic insurgent group have been sentenced in Azerbaijan to various prison terms for forming a radical religious group and plotting to overthrow the government, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

- Azerbaijani Parliament Amends Election Law

BAKU -- Azerbaijan's parliament today passed controversial amendments to the country's election law, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

Geo Strategic Front

- Azerbaijan Evaluates Cost Of Nagorno-Karabakh War

BAKU -- Azerbaijan says the total amount of damage suffered by the country due to the war with Armenia over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh has been estimated at 70 billion manat (\$87 billion), RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports

- Medvedev Convenes Third Meeting Of Armenian, Azerbaijani Presidents

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev met on June 17 on the sidelines of the St. Petersburg Economic Forum with the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan to discuss the ongoing search for a solution to the Karabakh conflict.

- Armenian Leaders Visit Karabakh, Azerbaijan Conducts Military Exercises

YEREVAN -- Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian and Defense Minister Seyran Ohanian have visited Nagorno-Karabakh, almost one week after deadly fighting took place in the breakaway Azerbaijani region, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports.

- Armenian, Azerbaijani Clashes Continue In Karabakh

STEPANAKERT, Nagorno-Karabakh -- Intense skirmishes between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces around the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh continued on June 21, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports.

Economic /Energy Front

Social Front

- More Than 80 Detained In Baku Rally Attempt

BAKU -- More than 80 activists of the opposition Popular Front Party were detained in a rally attempt on June 19 in Baku.

- Rights Groups Urge Greater Pressure On Azerbaijani Government

International and Azerbaijani human rights groups have issued a joint appeal to the Council of Europe to take decisive measures to improve the human rights situation in Azerbaijan, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

- Eurovision Renegade: Still Paying The Price?

Remember Rovshan Nasirli, the Azerbaijani man who drew unwelcome attention from Baku security officials when he voted for rival Armenia in the 2009 Eurovision song contest?

- Rights Groups Urge Council Of Europe To Keep Up Pressure On Azerbaijan
International and local rights groups have issued an appeal to the Council of Europe urging it to take concrete measures to improve the human rights situation in Azerbaijan. The appeal was signed by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, the Polish Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Article 19, Rafto Foundation for Human Rights, and a number of other regional watchdogs.

Kazakastan

Political Front

- Kazakh Opposition Leaders Forced To Leave Town
QARQARALY, Kazakhstan -- Police forced leading members of the Kazakh opposition Azat Social Democratic Party to leave the central Kazakh town of Qarqaraly where they went to meet with supporters, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

- Activists Protest Kazakh Law On 'Leader Of Nation'
ALMATY -- Two Kazakh activists have protested the newly approved law declaring President Nursultan Nazarbaev the "leader of the nation" and giving him greater privileges and protection, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Geo Strategic Front

- Two Wounded At Kazakh-Uzbek Border
SARYAGHASH, Kazakhstan -- Two Kazakhs have been wounded in a shooting incident on Kazakhstan's southern border with Uzbekistan, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Kazakh Border Guard officials speaking on condition of anonymity told RFE/RL that a Kazakh border guard opened fire on June 17 at two men near the Darkhan border crossing.

Economic /Energy Front

- Kazakh Police Catch Eight Escaped Convicts, 13 On The Run
ASTANA -- Kazakh police have caught eight convicts who escaped from jail on June 22, but 13 are still at large, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Social Front

- Kazakh Copper Mine Explosion Kills Three
ALMATY (Reuters) -- An explosion killed three copper miners in central Kazakhstan today, mine owner Kazakhmys said.

- Kazakh Journalist Detained For Staging Protest
Kazakh police have detained journalist Yekaterina Belyaeva for holding an unsanctioned protest, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Belyaeva, who works for the Almaty-based newspaper "Vzglyad" (Look), came to the city's Independence Square on June 21 and unfolded a sign saying: "President, Give Us Back Our Constitution!"

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- Kyrgyz Security Chief: Bakiev Family, Islamic Militants Behind Ethnic Clashes
BISHKEK -- The head of Kyrgyzstan's State Security Service has accused relatives of ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev of planning and instigating recent ethnic clashes along with the Taliban and other regional Islamic militant groups, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- **Kyrgyz Officials Investigate Security Forces' 'Illegal Behavior'**
OSH, Kyrgyzstan -- The Kyrgyz authorities have launched an investigation into reported cases of beatings and robberies of Osh residents by security forces, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- **Kyrgyz Official Says Foreigners Among Detained Snipers**
BISHKEK -- Kyrgyz officials have said that seven of about 20 suspected snipers detained by security forces are foreigners, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- **Thousands Of Refugees Return As Kyrgyzstan Prepares For Referendum**
Kyrgyz officials say more than half of the ethnic Uzbeks who fled Kyrgyzstan's Osh and Jalal-Abad regions amid this month's clashes have returned from refugee camps in Uzbekistan.

- **Is Bakiev Heading Home?**
Kurmanbek Bakiev, the ousted president of Kyrgyzstan, could be returning to the conflict-torn Kyrgyz city of Osh – if rumors are to be believed.

- **Kyrgyz Constitutional Referendum Still Planned, Despite Unrest**
Kyrgyzstan's interim leader Roza Otunbaeva says authorities are still planning to go ahead with a planned referendum on a new constitution on June 27, despite hundreds of thousands of displaced residents and continuing security concerns linked to the deadly clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks.

- **As Kyrgyzstan Prepares For Referendum, Government Faces Predictions Of Collapse**
BISHKEK -- In a central hospital here in the capital, 20-year-old Ibragim Nurgazy lies on an ancient cot with dirty sheets, barely able to keep his eyes open. His mother Gulnara sits patiently by his side.

- **Bakiev Relative Accused Over Unrest Arrested In Kyrgyzstan**
Kyrgyz security forces have detained a nephew of ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev whom they accuse of playing a key role in recent ethnic unrest. Interior Ministry officials confirmed to RFE/RL that Sanjarbek Bakiev was arrested in mountains near the city of Jalal-Abad.

- **Suspected Organizers Of Ethnic Unrest Detained In Jalal-Abad**
JALAL-ABAD, Kyrgyzstan -- Officials in Kyrgyzstan's southern Jalal-Abad Oblast say they have detained 12 suspected organizers of the ethnic clashes between local Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- **Kyrgyzstan To Supply Fuel To U.S. Air Base Directly**
Kyrgyz authorities say they plan to set up a state-owned company to provide a U.S. air base with fuel, replacing a series of private intermediary firms set up under the recently deposed government.

Geo Strategic Front

- **EU Envoy Warns Of Regional Risk From Kyrgyz Instability**
BRUSSELS -- The top EU envoy for Central Asia has warned that recent instability in the south of Kyrgyzstan could spill over into other countries along the Ferghana Valley. Pierre Morel, the EU special representative for the region, also said the EU wants the referendum on Kyrgyzstan's new constitution to go ahead as planned on June 27.

- **UN Tells Security Council Kyrgyz Tensions Persist**
A top UN official says tension remains in southern Kyrgyzstan, site of recent violence that has killed hundreds and sparked a wave of refugees. The UN Security Council

received a closed-door briefing on the crisis from the UN assistant secretary-general Oscar Fernandez-Taranco.

- **Kyrgyz Official Says Russia Has Not Mentioned New Military Base**

BISHKEK -- A Kyrgyz interim government official says Russian authorities have not discussed with the new government the possibility of opening a military base in the southern Osh region, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- **Kyrgyzstan Ends Curfew Amid UN Warning Of Risk Of Violence**

Officials in Kyrgyzstan say they've lifted a state of emergency imposed in the wake of ethnic violence in its south, amid UN concerns about the risk of fresh tensions in the area. The country's interim government declared a state of emergency and imposed a curfew in parts of the south after bloody riots and ethnic clashes erupted in the southern city of Osh and surrounding areas two weeks ago.

- **Uzbek Exclave In Southern Kyrgyzstan Opens Borders**

BATKEN, Kyrgyzstan -- An exclave of Uzbekistan surrounded by Kyrgyzstan's southern Batken Oblast has been opened for transit of Kyrgyz vehicles and citizens, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Economic /Energy Front

Social Front

Tajikistan

Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- **Tajikistan supports international initiatives of Turkmenistan**

The Republic of Tajikistan fully supports the constructive international initiatives of Turkmenistan aimed at consolidating common efforts in the search for optimal solutions to current issues of concern to all mankind, and in particular on disarmament, said Foreign Minister of Tajikistan Khamrokhon Zarifi at the meeting with President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in Ashgabat on June 24. Khamrokhon Zarifi arrived in the Turkmen capital to participate in the International Conference on Disarmament in Central Asia and Caspian Basin.

- **All cargoes for ISAF are delivered to Afghanistan through Uzbekistan, U.S. Ambassador to Tajikistan says**

Dushanbe. June 25. "Asia-Plus" -- Situation with blockage of rail cargoes on the territory of Uzbekistan did not affect timely provision of the counter-terrorism coalition, the U.S. Ambassador to Tajikistan Kenneth Gross spoke at a press conference in Dushanbe today while answering questions of reporters regarding problems with neighboring state connected with deliveries of strategic cargoes for Tajikistan and cargoes designed for the counter-terrorism coalition in Afghanistan that are transited through the territory of Uzbekistan.

- **Tajikistan toughens border crossing procedures at Gorno-Badakhshan direction of Tajik-Chinese and Tajik-Afghan border**

Dushanbe. June 25. "Asia-Plus" -- Introduction of tough border crossing procedures at the Gorno-Badakhshan direction of the Tajik-Chinese and Tajik-Afghan border is

connected with the working visit of Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon to GBAO on the occasion of the 13th anniversary of the Tajik National Unity Day.

Economic /Energy Front

- Central Asia countries discuss possible rejoining of Tajikistan to United Energy System

Dushanbe. June 24. "Asia-Plus" -- Member states of the Central Asia Energy Coordination Council (CA ECC – Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) are discussing an opportunity of resuming the united energy system in concurrent mode, Novosti Kazakhstan Kazakh news agency reports citing Almasadam Satkaliev, President of KEOGOC company, as source.

- Tajik President launches construction of Ok-Su-2 small hydropower plant in Murgab region

Khorog. June 25. "Asia-Plus" -- In the course of his working trip on the occasion of the 13th anniversary of the National Unity Day, this morning Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon departed from Khorog to Murgab region.

Social Front

- First-ever daily newspaper to appear in Tajikistan

Dushanbe. June 25. "Asia-Plus" -- Imruz-news, the first-ever daily newspaper, will appear in Tajikistan. Date of the first issue remains unclear.

Turkmenistan

Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- ODIHR Head Buoyed By Turkmen 'Willingness To Engage'

A top official from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has praised what he calls a "new readiness" by Turkmen officials to "engage and cooperate" with his organization, RFE/RL's Turkmen Service reports.

- Tajikistan supports international initiatives of Turkmenistan

The Republic of Tajikistan fully supports the constructive international initiatives of Turkmenistan aimed at consolidating common efforts in the search for optimal solutions to current issues of concern to all mankind, and in particular on disarmament, said Foreign Minister of Tajikistan Khamrokhon Zarifi at the meeting with President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in Ashgabat on June 24.

- OSCE Secretary General highly rates Ashgabat's forum on disarmament issues

On June 24, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received the Secretary General of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, who arrived in Ashgabat to participate in the International Conference on Disarmament in Central Asia and Caspian Basin.

- Turkmenistan and Iran interested in enhancing cooperation

On June 24, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran Manouchehr Mottaki, who arrived in Ashgabat at the head of his country's delegation to attend the International Conference on Disarmament in Central Asia and Caspian Basin.

- International Forum in Ashgabat lays foundation for development of specific measures for disarmament in the region

The participants of the International Conference on Disarmament in Central Asia and Caspian Basin, which was held under the UN auspices in Ashgabat on June 24, adopted the final document that says the dialogue was productive and highly constructive.

- Turkmenistan speaks in favor of addressing issues of disarmament in Central Asia in the framework of UN

Turkmenistan is guided by the principle of prioritization and appropriateness of addressing issues of disarmament in the framework of international organizations and forums, primarily the United Nations and its Commission for Disarmament, using political and diplomatic instruments.

- Russia supports all peace initiatives of Turkmenistan

Russia supports all peace initiatives of Turkmenistan aimed at consolidating the efforts of the international community to ensure peace and security, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Andrei Denisov said on June 23 during the meeting with Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. Andrei Denisov arrived in Ashgabat to attend the International Conference on Disarmament in Central Asia and Caspian Basin.

Economic /Energy Front

- TX Oil Ltd (USA) interested in cooperation with Turkmenistan in fuel and energy sector

On June 22, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received the heads of TX Oil Ltd (Texas, USA) company - Neil Mallon Bush, president of the company, and Mark Allen Bush, member of the Board of Directors.

- Turkmenistan and China hold first business forum

The Turkmen capital hosted the first Turkmen-Chinese business forum. Member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Secretary of the Central Commission of the CPC Central Committee Ho Guo Qiang, who is on a working visit to Ashgabat, participated in the forum as the guest of honor.

- Agreements reached on construction of second gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to China

On June 18, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received the member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Secretary of the Central Commission of the Central Committee of the CPC Ho Guo Qiang, who arrived in Ashgabat yesterday at the head of the delegation of the People's Republic of China.

Social Front

- UNDP Implements Project on Combating Desertification and Drought in Turkmenistan

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Global Environment Facility are implementing an environmental project in Turkmenistan aimed at sustainable management of land resources and combating desertification and drought.

- French Diplomat Sees Turkmen Desire To Improve Rights Situation

France's ambassador for human rights says he sees a genuine desire by Turkmen authorities to improve the human rights situation in Turkmenistan, RFE/RL's Turkmen Service reports. Ambassador Francois Zimeray recently visited Ashgabat and met with Turkmen authorities. He told RFE/RL that while the human rights situation is still poor, it

is better than under former President Saparmurat Niyazov, when "there were no human rights at all."

Uzbekistan

Political Front

- Kyrgyz Officials Visit Refugee Camps In Uzbekistan

ANDIJON, Uzbekistan -- An official delegation from Kyrgyzstan's Jalal-Abad region visited ethnic Uzbeks in refugee camps in neighboring Uzbekistan on June 22 and urged them to return home, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Geo Strategic Front

- Uzbek Exclave In Southern Kyrgyzstan Opens Borders

BATKEN, Kyrgyzstan -- An exclave of Uzbekistan surrounded by Kyrgyzstan's southern Batken Oblast has been opened for transit of Kyrgyz vehicles and citizens, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

- Ethnic Uzbek men rest at a refugee camp on the Kyrgyz side of the border with Uzbekistan on June 20.

JALAL-ABAD, Kyrgyzstan -- Thousands of ethnic Uzbeks have begun returning to Kyrgyzstan's southern Osh and Jalal-Abad regions from refugee camps in neighboring Uzbekistan, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Economic /Energy Front

Social Front

Detailed Report

Azerbaijan

Political Front

- Islamic Insurgents Sentenced In Azerbaijan

BAKU -- Some 31 members of an alleged Islamic insurgent group have been sentenced in Azerbaijan to various prison terms for forming a radical religious group and plotting to overthrow the government, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

The group was also found guilty of organizing attacks on currency exchange booths in Azerbaijan in 2007. The sentences given to the group members ranged from 3 to 15 years.

The group was also charged with helping Samir Mehdiyev (also known as Suleyman) -- who heads an insurgent group known as the Forest Brothers -- to escape from Azerbaijan after a deadly attack on the Abu Bekr Mosque in central Baku in August 2008.

Mehdiyev was later detained in Pakistan and extradited to Azerbaijan. The group whose members were sentenced on June 18 had been led by Azer Misirkhanov, known as Abdulla, who was killed in Afghanistan in 2009. He had been sentenced in 2001 for illegally crossing the Azerbaijani border and participating in an illegal armed group.

The verdict announced said Misirkhanov also plotted several terror acts prior to the presidential election in 2008 and had planned an explosion on the Baki-Novorossiisk oil pipeline.

- Azerbaijani Parliament Amends Election Law

BAKU -- Azerbaijan's parliament today passed controversial amendments to the country's election law, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

The bill, which was introduced by the ruling party, had been harshly criticized by the opposition and international organizations. The amendments include the shortening of the election campaign period from 75 days to 60 days. The law would also bar campaigning by candidates before the registration deadline. The shortened election cycle would mean candidates have 23 days to campaign, five days less than the currently cycle.

Ali Ahmedov, the executive secretary of the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party, said the amendments will increase the effectiveness of the election process. He said voters don't need to deliberate for long before deciding whom to vote for. Opposition and independent election watchdogs say the new campaign period is too short since there are virtually no alternative voices in the media. International organizations have criticized the Azerbaijani government for the lack of pluralism in the media and for restricting freedom of assembly for opposition groups. Meanwhile, Azerbaijani human rights ombudsman Elmira Suleymanova said on June 17 that she is ready to explain to the government the opposition's objections to the election law amendments. Suleymanova also said her office will monitor freedom of assembly during the run-up to parliamentary elections in November. "In an election year, freer conditions should be created for people," she said. Suleymanova was speaking on the sidelines of an international conference in Baku held under the auspices of the UN's cultural agency, UNESCO.

Geo Strategic Front

- Azerbaijan Evaluates Cost Of Nagorno-Karabakh War

BAKU -- Azerbaijan says the total amount of damage suffered by the country due to the war with Armenia over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh has been estimated at 70 billion manat (\$87 billion), RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

The calculation was announced on June 17 by Ali Hasanov, the head of the State Committee for Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). He said the amount of damage and the total cost will be reevaluated after Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani territories ends and all IDPs currently living in Azerbaijan proper return to their previous homes in Karabakh.

Hasanov said a large number of lawsuits by Azerbaijani IDPs have been filed with the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. He added that the Azerbaijani government is expected to increase spending from the State Oil Funds on IDP resettlement. "The State Committee was ordered to start the resettlement of IDPs from dormitory rooms and to build a new settlement in Agdam," Hasanov said. "With all of the new projects the overall budget spending for IDPs will exceed \$100 million in fiscal year 2010. Every single displaced family will be considered."

Hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh were displaced by the 1988-1994 conflict over the region between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces that left Armenians in control of most of Nagorno-Karabakh and much of the adjoining territory.

- Medvedev Convenes Third Meeting Of Armenian, Azerbaijani Presidents

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev met on June 17 on the sidelines of the St. Petersburg Economic Forum with the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan to discuss the ongoing search for a solution to the Karabakh conflict.

It was the sixth in a series of such trilateral meetings since Medvedev's inauguration as president in May 2008. According to a statement issued by Medvedev's office after the three-hour talks, the two sides made progress towards narrowing their differences on unspecified contentious issues.

Following the first such trilateral meeting, which took place near Moscow in early November 2008, the three presidents issued a written declaration formally affirming their commitment to a peaceful solution to the conflict on the basis of the so-called Madrid Principles drafted by the OSCE Minsk Group and presented to the two sides in November 2007.

At a subsequent meeting with Medvedev in Sochi in January 2010, the two presidents reportedly reached agreement on the final wording to the preamble of a revised version of the "principles." That preamble almost certainly reaffirms their shared commitment to resolve the conflict peacefully, within the framework of international law.

Further progress has been hindered, however, by Turkey's insistence (at the behest of Azerbaijan) on linking ratification of the two protocols signed in Geneva last October on normalizing Armenian-Turkish relations to concessions by Armenia in the Karabakh peace process, specifically the liberation of at least some of the seven districts of surrounding the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh republic that are currently under Armenian control.

The most recent variant of the so-called "Madrid Principles" reportedly envisaged a phased Armenian withdrawal from five of the seven Azerbaijani districts currently controlled by Armenian forces (Agdam, Fizuli, Jabrayil, Zangelan and Qubadli), but does not specify over what timeframe and in what order. It advocates "special modalities" for the Lachin corridor that links Nagorno-Karabakh and the Republic of Armenia, and the district of Kelbacar sandwiched between Karabakh and Armenia.

The Azerbaijani news agency 1news.az on April 17 quoted the Turkish daily "Hurriyet" as reporting that Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan told U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian President Medvedev that the Azerbaijani districts of Agdam and Fizuli should be liberated as a "desirable" first step. Doing so would, however, render the central section of Nagorno-Karabakh, including the capital, Stepanakert, and the nearby town of Shusha, vulnerable to an Azerbaijani attack.

Since mid-April, Azerbaijani politicians have floated various proposals concerning the timeframe for the anticipated Armenian withdrawal. Azerbaijani parliamentarian Tahir Rzayev was quoted in late May by day.az as saying that ideally Armenia should withdraw from the five districts simultaneously. He said such a withdrawal is of "strategic importance" for Azerbaijan. At the same time, he intimated that Baku would accept as a compromise the 2+3+2 model (meaning Agdam and Fizuli; then Jabrayil, Zangelan and Qubadli; then Lachin and Kelbacar).

More recently, National Socialist Party of Azerbaijan Chairman Rovshan Guseynov told the same news agency that agreeing on a gradual withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied districts would enable Armenia to drag out the settlement process. He argued that all occupied districts should be returned to Azerbaijani control immediately.

It is not clear whether the unspecified progress made in yesterday's meeting in St. Petersburg was related to the timetable for an Armenian withdrawal from occupied Azerbaijani territory. Not has there been any official confirmation or denial of media reports that President Medvedev plans to bring with him when he travels to Yerevan in August a refined version of the Madrid principles that calls for the initial withdrawal of Armenian forces not just from Agdam and Fizuli, but also from Kelbacar.

Meanwhile, the Russian daily "Versiya," which on occasion floats trial balloons on behalf of various Russian government bodies, on June 14 quoted an unnamed Russian Defense

Ministry source as saying that Russian peacekeeping forces could be deployed in the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh republic "within months," possibly in early August. The official said that Azerbaijani Defense Minister Colonel General Safar Abiyev has visited Moscow twice this year to negotiate the deployment. (Abiyev's most recent trip to Moscow was in late May.)

Turkey has reportedly responded to the purported Russian plans by warning Azerbaijani parliamentarians that it will retaliate immediately by sending troops to the Azerbaijani exclave of Naxcivan in line with the 1921 Treaty of Kars. "Versiya" further quoted veteran Azerbaijani presidential administration official Ali Hasanov as explaining that Turkish troops are entitled to enter Naxcivan within the framework of existing agreements on military cooperation between the two countries.

Some Azerbaijani experts have cast doubts on the veracity of the "Versiya" article. Azerbaijani parliamentarian Zahid Orudj told the online daily echo-az.com that he considers it disinformation. At the same time, he noted that Azerbaijan's recently adopted military doctrine makes provision for the deployment of foreign troops on Azerbaijani territory in accordance with international treaties to which Azerbaijan is a signatory.

Independent military expert Uzeir Djafarov similarly dismissed the "Versiya" article as disinformation in the run-up to Medvedev's visit to Armenia.

Any deployment of a peacekeeping force -- whether Russian or international -- in Karabakh and the surrounding districts would presumably be contingent on the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents formally signing the Basic/Madrid Principles, which are intended to serve as the basis for a comprehensive peace agreement. The signing of the "principles" also opens the door for the return to the negotiating table of representatives of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh republic.

- Armenian Leaders Visit Karabakh, Azerbaijan Conducts Military Exercises

YEREVAN -- Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian and Defense Minister Seyran Ohanian have visited Nagorno-Karabakh, almost one week after deadly fighting took place in the breakaway Azerbaijani region, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports.

Official sources in Yerevan said Sarkisian and Ohanian held separate meetings with Karabakh's political and military leaders in Stepanakert, the region's capital. They gave no details of the talks.

A short statement by the Armenian presidential press office said Sarkisian also inaugurated a military base and visited a military hospital to see soldiers wounded in the June 18-19 clashes with Azerbaijani forces.

Four Armenian soldiers and one Azerbaijani soldier were killed in what the Armenian side says was an overnight Azerbaijani attack on Armenian positions in the northeastern part of the region. The fighting occurred the day after Sarkisian met with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev in St. Petersburg for peace talks.

Sarkisian condemned the incident as an Azerbaijani "provocation" and linked it with the talks hosted by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. He also called for international condemnation of Azerbaijan.

The Azerbaijani military confirmed that clashes took place at the Karabakh outpost but blamed Armenian forces for the violent exchange. Officials in Baku also confirmed that the Azerbaijani serviceman was shot dead in Armenian-controlled territory.

Meanwhile, Azerbaijan said it has conducted one of its biggest-ever military exercises monitored by President Aliyev.

The Azerbaijani Defense Ministry said it completed the large-scale maneuvers involving thousands of troops, 100 tanks, 125 artillery pieces, and about two dozen warplanes. A ministry statement cited by Azerbaijani news agencies said they simulated a response to "military aggression against Azerbaijan" resulting in the restoration of the country's territorial integrity.

The statement added that Aliyev watched the "main phase" of the unpublicized exercises, which it said started on June 21.

And officials from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) today monitored the volatile situation near the site of the violence, the worst Armenian-Azerbaijani cease-fire violation in two years.

The Foreign Ministry of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic said Karabakh Armenian officers at the scene briefed OSCE monitors on what they claimed was an "insidious attack by an Azerbaijani sabotage unit."

In a separate statement, the Karabakh army reported continuing skirmishes with Azerbaijani forces along various sections of the heavily fortified "line of contact." No casualties were reported.

The co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group issued a statement on June 21 condemning "the use of force and...the senseless loss of life." It said such an incident is an "unacceptable violation of the 1994 cease-fire agreement and is contrary to the stated commitment of the sides to refrain from the use of force or the threat of the use of force."

- Armenian, Azerbaijani Clashes Continue In Karabakh

STEPANAKERT, Nagorno-Karabakh -- Intense skirmishes between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces around the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh continued on June 21, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports.

News reports said an Azerbaijani soldier was shot dead early today in what the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry said was an Armenian attack on Azerbaijani Army positions in the Fizuli district southeast of Nagorno-Karabakh. "The Armenians retreated, suffering losses," the Azeri-Press Agency said, citing the ministry.

Karabakh Armenian military officials insisted their forces suffered no fresh casualties on June 21, in the worst Armenian-Azerbaijani cease-fire violations in over two years.

The latest outbreak of violence began late last week. Four Armenian soldiers and one Azerbaijani soldier were killed in what authorities in Stepanakert and Yerevan described as an overnight Azerbaijani assault on a Karabakh Armenian army outpost in the northeastern part of the breakaway Azerbaijani region on the night of June 18-19.

Exchanges of automatic and sniper gunfire along the main Armenian-Azerbaijani Line of Contact -- east and north of the disputed region -- appear to have intensified since then.

The Defense Army of the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) claimed on June 21 that Azerbaijani troops breached the cease-fire regime as many as 284 times since June 20. An army spokesman told RFE/RL that none of its soldiers was hurt as a result of the violations.

The Azerbaijani Defense Ministry claimed, however, it was the Armenians who fired at its forces using automatic rifles and machine guns in various sections of the heavily fortified frontline.

The Karabakh military has also identified the four Armenian conscripts who were killed on the night of June 18-19. The incident occurred just over a day after the presidents of

Armenia and Azerbaijan met in St. Petersburg for peace talks hosted by their Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev.

Official Yerevan portrayed it as a further indication that the Azerbaijani leadership is "doing everything" to scuttle the Karabakh peace process mediated by Russia, the United States, and France. Officials in Baku dismissed the claim.

"Such skirmishes have taken place frequently of late," a spokesman for the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry, Eldar Sabiroglu, told APA on June 20. "Armenian Army units retreated this time, suffering big losses."

Arman Melikian, a Yerevan-based former Nagorno-Karabakh foreign minister, called on June 21 for an official inquiry into the deadly clash.

"First of all, we must clarify why Azerbaijani special forces tried to break through Armenian positions in that area," he told RFE/RL. "Was it a weak link or are there some strategic facilities there? To what extent were our forces prepared to face such an attack?" Echoing statements by other Armenian politicians and pundits, Melikian also said the reported Azerbaijani attack was aimed at intimidating the Karabakh Armenians and prodding the international community to seek more Armenian concessions to Azerbaijan. "I think Azerbaijan and Turkey are in a great hurry to solve the [Nagorno-Karabakh] problem," Melikian said. "They understand that if a breakthrough in their favor doesn't come within the next year, it will never come."

Economic /Energy Front

Social Front

- More Than 80 Detained In Baku Rally Attempt

BAKU -- More than 80 activists of the opposition Popular Front Party were detained in a rally attempt on June 19 in Baku.

The activists were protesting government restrictions on freedom of assembly, including the banning of any protest actions in the central squares of the capital.

- Rights Groups Urge Greater Pressure On Azerbaijani Government

International and Azerbaijani human rights groups have issued a joint appeal to the Council of Europe to take decisive measures to improve the human rights situation in Azerbaijan, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports.

The appeal calls on the council to push the Azerbaijani leadership to conduct crucial judicial reforms in order to ensure the independence of the judiciary and to remind the Azerbaijani government about its international obligations in the sphere of human rights.

The appeal was signed by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, the Polish Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Article 19, the Rafto Foundation, and a number of other regional watchdogs.

Berit Lindeman, a woman, adviser and information head at the Norwegian Helsinki Commission, told RFE/RL that "we have to remember that the Azerbaijani government has signed on to a number of commitments to undertake dutiful reform to implement freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, democratic elections.

And they haven't done it, so we need to use institutions to continue pressuring Azerbaijan."

She added that "from an Azerbaijani perspective, I understand perfectly that it might seem a total waste [of time] to have another statement on the situation

in Azerbaijan." But she said "it is important to keep Azerbaijan high on the agenda because it is very easily forgotten."

The rights groups also urge the Council of Europe to encourage the Azerbaijani government to drop all charges against activists and journalists jailed for political reasons, including bloggers Adnan Hajizade and Emin Milli. The two young men were sentenced in November to 2 and 2 and 1/2 years in prison, respectively, for hooliganism and inflicting minor bodily harm after being arrested in a scuffle at a restaurant in July 2009.

Lenur Kerimov, a representative of the Polish Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, said the efforts are worthwhile, as raising awareness often translates into increased pressure against the regime, which he said may eventually bring results.

"We realize perfectly that one appeal will not solve the problems in Azerbaijan and won't stop the violation of human rights [there]," he said. "But it is our role to constantly monitor the situation, and the appeal serves to alert international public opinion that human rights are constantly under threat in Azerbaijan."

He added: "We won't achieve human rights without a struggle -- and that [requires] very long and arduous work."

- Eurovision Renegade: Still Paying The Price?

Remember Rovshan Nasirli, the Azerbaijani man who drew unwelcome attention from Baku security officials when he voted for rival Armenia in the 2009 Eurovision song contest?

Interrogators from the National Security Ministry traced the rogue vote for Inga and Anush's "Jan-Jan" to Nasirli's mobile phone, then summoned him in for questioning and a stern lecture on "ethnic pride" and "national security." (Nasirli may have stirred the pot by praising the Armenian song as sounding "more Azeri" than Azerbaijan's own offering.) More than a year after the Eurovision scandal, Nasirli is back in the news.

RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports the 26-year-old was detained and beaten by police after attending a June 19 pro-democracy rally organized by the Freedom Bloc opposition group in Baku. Jamil Hajiyev, a member of Azerbaijan's Democratic Party, was among five protesters detained during the rally. He told RFE/RL that when the detainees were taken to police headquarters, an argument broke out between Nasirli and several police officers. Hajiyev says Nasirli was severely beaten by police, including the deputy chief of the Baku central police department, Yashar Aliyev.

"He was beaten in the head so much that his eyelids were swollen shut. He couldn't see," Hajiyev said.

A second detainee, Tofiq Zeynalli, a member of the Popular Front party, says he was also beaten by Aliyev. Baku police officials deny the beatings took place.

Nasirli's lawyer, Mensum Bayramov, was also detained after arriving at the police station to provide legal assistance to the detainees. Human rights ombudsman Elmira Suleymanova has appealed to prosecutors to thoroughly investigate the case and punish those responsible for any beatings.

It is not clear whether Nasirli, an activist with no party affiliation, was targeted because of his past run-in over Eurovision. A court has ordered him and the other detainees to spend 15 days behind bars.

- Rights Groups Urge Council Of Europe To Keep Up Pressure On Azerbaijan

International and local rights groups have issued an appeal to the Council of Europe urging it to take concrete measures to improve the human rights situation in Azerbaijan. The appeal was signed by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, the Polish Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Article 19, Rafto Foundation for Human Rights, and a number of other regional watchdogs.

“From the Azerbaijani perspective, I understand perfectly that it might seem a total waste [of time] to have another statement on the situation in Azerbaijan,” Berit Lindeman of the Norwegian Helsinki Commission told RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service. “But the counterquestion is: What is the alternative? I think it is important to keep Azerbaijan high on the agenda because it is very easily forgotten. There are so many crises in the world and so many burning issues”

The appeal calls upon the Council of Europe to push the Azerbaijani leadership to conduct crucial judicial reforms in order to ensure the independence of the courts and to remind the government of Azerbaijan about its international obligations in the sphere of human rights.

“We have to remember that the Azerbaijani government has signed onto a number of commitments to undertake dutiful reform to implement freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, democratic elections,” Lindeman said. “And they haven’t done it. So we need to use institutions to continue pressuring Azerbaijan.”

Imprisoned bloggers Emin Milli (left) and Adnan Hajizada

The rights groups also urge the oldest European watchdog on human rights to call upon the Azerbaijani government to drop all the charges against activists and journalists who are behind bars for political reasons.

Among those arrested are two bloggers -- Adnan Hajizada and Emin Milli -- who were sentenced to two and 2 1/2 years in prison, respectively, on hooliganism charges for publicly criticizing the government. Their case made headlines around the world. Despite numerous calls by parliamentarians, rights watchdogs, and government officials to release the bloggers, they remain imprisoned.

But Lenur Kerimov, a representative of the Polish Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, believes it is worth continuing the calls, as raising awareness often translates into mounting pressure against the regime, which may eventually bring tangible results.

“We perfectly realize that one appeal will not solve the problems in Azerbaijan and won’t stop the violation of human rights,” Kerimov told RFE/RL. “But it is our role to constantly monitor the situation, and the appeal serves to [mobilize] international public opinion that human rights are constantly under threat in Azerbaijan.

“We won’t achieve human rights without a struggle, and that is very long and arduous work.”

Kazakstan

Political Front

- Kazakh Opposition Leaders Forced To Leave Town

QARQARALY, Kazakhstan -- Police forced leading members of the Kazakh opposition Azat Social Democratic Party to leave the central Kazakh town of Qarqaraly where they went to meet with supporters, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Party co-chairman Bolat Abilov and party presidium members Baltash Tursumbaev and Tokhtar Aubakirov arrived in Qarqaraly, in Qaraghandy Oblast, on June 20 to meet with about 100 local activists.

But when they arrived in the city center police apparently tried to detain Abilov, prompting a scuffle between officers and party activists. Abilov and his colleagues then left the city.

The incident took place on the street named after Aubakirov, who is Kazakhstan's first cosmonaut and has been awarded the Hero of the Soviet Union and Hero of Kazakhstan awards.

Aubakirov, 63, said police did not give a reason for their actions. He after the incident that he never thought authorities in his hometown would meet him as an enemy on the street renamed in his honor.

"There was a time when local authorities were more than happy to greet me here and crowds of people gathered here to say hello," he said. "It is a shame and pity that things are so different now."

Aubakirov was born in Qarqaraly and the street was named after him to commemorate his first flight into orbit on October 2, 1991. He joined the opposition Azat Social Democratic Party and became a member of its presidium last year.

- **Activists Protest Kazakh Law On 'Leader Of Nation'**

ALMATY -- Two Kazakh activists have protested the newly approved law declaring President Nursultan Nazarbaev the "leader of the nation" and giving him greater privileges and protection, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Independent journalist Sergei Duvanov and rights activist Andrei Sviridov held signs on Almaty's Square of the Republic on June 16 that read "The Law on The Nation's Leader Is the Nation's Shame!"

Police did not interfere in the protest action. But Duvanov and Sviridov were summoned to the court afterward, found guilty of holding an unsanctioned demonstration, and fined \$480 each.

The law declaring Nazarbaev leader of the nation was printed in Kazakhstan's state-run media on June 15. It gives Nazarbaev special powers for the remainder of his life, including immunity from prosecution. It also makes it impossible for any of his or his family's land or other possessions to be confiscated.

The constitutional bill was adopted by both chambers of parliament -- the Senate and Mazhilis -- in mid-May and signed by their respective chairmen and Prime Minister Karim Masimov.

Although Nazarbaev refused to sign the bill, it becomes law in Kazakhstan without the president signing it as long as the president does not veto it.

Duvanov told journalists that "20 years from now everyone will be laughing at the law on the leader of the nation and those who are keeping silent now will feel ashamed then."

He cited a saying by American author Mark Twain: "The citizen who thinks he sees that the commonwealth's political clothes are worn out, and yet holds his peace and does not agitate for a new suit, is disloyal; he is a traitor."

Geo Strategic Front

- **Two Wounded At Kazakh-Uzbek Border**

SARYAGHASH, Kazakhstan -- Two Kazakhs have been wounded in a shooting incident on Kazakhstan's southern border with Uzbekistan, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Kazakh Border Guard officials speaking on condition of anonymity told RFE/RL that a Kazakh border guard opened fire on June 17 at two men near the Darkhan border crossing.

They said the men, who are both Kazakh citizens, were wounded and taken to a hospital in the village of Akzhol.

No further details were available. It is not clear why the border guard opened fire.

Kazakhstan announced on June 17 that it would no longer allow ethnic Uzbeks with Kyrgyz passports to enter the country.

Economic /Energy Front

- **Kazakh Police Catch Eight Escaped Convicts, 13 On The Run**

ASTANA -- Kazakh police have caught eight convicts who escaped from jail on June 22, but 13 are still at large, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports.

Kazakh Justice Ministry spokesman Yerbolat Yerimbet said in Astana that the 21 convicts managed to escape from the GM 172/1 maximum-security labor camp in Kazakhstan's western Manghystau Oblast with the help of an unknown group of individuals who came in two vehicles.

Yerimbet said that after driving up to the walls of the prison they opened fire on a guard tower. He said the number of prisoners who tried to escape was higher, but several were shot dead by prison guards.

Maqsut Sarqulov, the chief physician of the Manghystau Oblast Health Clinic, told RFE/RL that one Interior Ministry soldier and one guard were wounded in the incident and were hospitalized.

Meanwhile, local media is reporting that seven bodies were brought to the morgue in Aqtau, the capital of the remote region and nearest town. It is not clear if any guards are among the dead.

Social Front

- **Kazakh Copper Mine Explosion Kills Three**

ALMATY (Reuters) -- An explosion killed three copper miners in central Kazakhstan today, mine owner Kazakhmys said.

Kazakhmys is the world's eighth-largest copper miner and its shares trade on the London Stock Exchange. A company spokeswoman, reading from a news statement, said a fourth miner had also been injured in the explosion, which occurred at about 10 a.m. local time at the Stepnoi underground mine in the town of Satpayev, Karagandy region.

Kazakhmys said it had set up a special commission to investigate the cause of the explosion. Kazakhmys expects to produce about 300,000 tons of copper cathode this year. It recently concluded all sales contracts for 2010, signaling strong demand for copper worldwide, including in China, the world's largest consumer.

- **Kazakh Journalist Detained For Staging Protest**

Kazakh police have detained journalist Yekaterina Belyaeva for holding an unsanctioned protest, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Belyaeva, who works for the Almaty-based newspaper "Vzglyad" (Look), came to the city's Independence Square on June 21 and unfolded a sign saying: "President, Give Us Back Our Constitution!"

She told journalists who came to the square that she was protesting the constitutional law on the "Leader of the Nation" that was adopted last week.

The new law bestowed on President Nursultan Nazarbaev the title Leader of the Nation and gave him immunity from prosecution. In addition, his property and that of members of his family cannot be confiscated.

Several police officers took the sign from Belyaeva by force and told her that she did not have permission to stage a protest. Belyaeva answered that she has permission in accordance with Kazakhstan's Constitution, which guarantees freedom of assembly.

Rights activist Ghalym Ageleuov tried to intervene and help Belyaeva, but he was forced by a policeman to the edge of the square. Belyaeva was pushed into a police car and driven away.

Prominent journalist Sergei Duvanov and rights activist Andrei Sviridov were fined for a similar protest action last week.

Kazakhstan currently holds the chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, whose mandate includes such issues as human rights and freedom of the press.

Kyrgyzstan

Political Front

- **Kyrgyz Security Chief: Bakiev Family, Islamic Militants Behind Ethnic Clashes**
BISHKEK -- The head of Kyrgyzstan's State Security Service has accused relatives of ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev of planning and instigating recent ethnic clashes along with the Taliban and other regional Islamic militant groups, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Keneshbek Duishebaev told journalists in Bishkek today that he has information that Bakiev's son Maksim met with activists of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in Dubai in April.

Maksim Bakiev

Duishebaev provided no evidence and there is no way to independently confirm the claims. In May, Duishebaev said, two members of Bakiev's family held talks in Afghanistan with Taliban field commanders and representatives of the IMU and the United Tajik Opposition. He said they discussed "the operation to destabilize Kyrgyzstan's southern regions." The United Tajik Opposition dissolved in the years after the 1997 end to Tajikistan's civil war, but a small number of its former members are thought to have continued militant activity in Afghanistan.

According to Duishebaev, the Bakiev family paid up to \$30 million to implement their destabilization plans. Duishebaev added that 15 IMU fighters of Uzbek origin came to southern Kyrgyzstan from Pakistan via Tajikistan to provoke the ethnic clashes between local Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks in the southern regions of Osh and Jalal-Abad. He said the group was led by an Uzbek citizen known as Ilhom.

Over 250 people were killed and hundreds injured during the ethnic clashes that started in Kyrgyzstan's southern city of Osh on June 10-11 and later spread to Jalal-Abad. About 75,000 ethnic Uzbeks fled from southern Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan's Andijon region. The majority of them returned to Kyrgyzstan this week.

Kurmanbek Bakiev, who had to resign and flee to Belarus after mass antigovernment protests in early April, told journalists in Minsk on June 23 that he had nothing to do with the current violence in southern Kyrgyzstan.

- **Kyrgyz Officials Investigate Security Forces' 'Illegal Behavior'**

OSH, Kyrgyzstan -- The Kyrgyz authorities have launched an investigation into reported cases of beatings and robberies of Osh residents by security forces, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Osh Oblast Deputy Commandant Zamirbek Moldoshev told RFE/RL that during the disarming of some ethnic Uzbek groups in Osh and while removing street barricades some security troops behaved rudely, beat people, and robbed them of valuables in some cases. He said the Osh Prosecutor's Office has launched an investigation into the cases.

Kyrgyz security forces and police conducted operations in several Osh districts on June 22 and June 21 after several days of violent clashes between ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. Two people died in one of the raids on June 21.

Local citizens -- mainly ethnic Uzbeks -- have complained that they were beaten and robbed by Kyrgyz police and security troops during the operations.

At least 208 people were killed and thousands injured in the violence in Osh and Jalal-Abad.

Hundreds of thousands of people, mainly ethnic Uzbeks, have fled their homes in the wake of the conflict. As many as 100,000 -- mostly women and children -- fled to Uzbekistan.

- **Kyrgyz Official Says Foreigners Among Detained Snipers**

BISHKEK -- Kyrgyz officials have said that seven of about 20 suspected snipers detained by security forces are foreigners, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Kyrgyz State Security Service chief Keneshbek Duishebaev made the announcement while telling journalists on June 22 that the suspects were captured in special operations by security forces in Kyrgyzstan's Jalal-Abad and Osh regions.

Duishebaev did not specify the citizenship of the detained foreign nationals. He said that 40 explosives and 20 guns were confiscated in the city of Osh during security operations on June 21.

Kyrgyz rights activists criticized security forces for the alleged violent treatment and robbery of ethnic Uzbeks during a special operation in Osh's Nariman district the same day. The Kyrgyz interim government stated earlier in the day that security forces had to open fire as some inhabitants of Nariman district refused to surrender their weapons and resisted the operation to remove barricades on the streets.

Osh Oblast Deputy Commandant Zamirbek Moldoshev told RFE/RL that Osh prosecutors have launched investigations into the cases of alleged beatings and robberies of ethnic Uzbeks in Nariman.

Kyrgyz interim President Roza Otunbaeva visited several Uzbek districts in Osh and Jalal-Abad on June 22, including Nariman, where she met with local inhabitants promising them a full and thorough investigation into the events that led to the ethnic clashes. The Kyrgyz Health Ministry announced that the confirmed death toll in clashes between ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in the Osh and Jalal-Abad regions since June 10 had reached 251 people. Nearly 2,000 others have been reported injured in the violence.

- **Thousands Of Refugees Return As Kyrgyzstan Prepares For Referendum**

Kyrgyz officials say more than half of the ethnic Uzbeks who fled Kyrgyzstan's Osh and Jalal-Abad regions amid this month's clashes have returned from refugee camps in Uzbekistan.

Some 70,000 Kyrgyz nationals have returned so far, they say. The deputy head of the Kyrgyz border service, Cholponbek Turusbekov, earlier told journalists that more than 10,000 had returned within the previous 24 hours alone.

FORUM: Should Kyrgyzstan Hold Its Constitutional Referendum Now Or Later?

As many as 100,000 ethnic Uzbeks are estimated to have fled Kyrgyzstan for Uzbekistan in the wake of clashes between ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Osh and Jalal-Abad that began on June 10. The official number of dead from the violence has risen to 251, but interim leader Roza Otunbaeva has said that the death toll is probably closer to 2,000.

The number of returnees could not be independently verified, but a spokeswoman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Uzbekistan, Natalia Prokopchuk, confirmed that "significant numbers of refugees" were returning.

Welcoming Neighbors

Reuters said Uzbek soldiers called names over a loudspeaker as women and children collected their belongings and boarded buses for the short ride from their camps to the border-crossing point.

One returnee who'd fled to Uzbekistan with her three children, 40-year-old Jamilya Khaidarova, spoke to RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service after coming back to her home in the Jalal-Abad region.

"Now we are staying in our home town of Bazar Korgon, in Kyrgyzstan," Khaidarova said. "Roads are open and our neighbors were very happy to see us; they have been waiting for us. We were 78 people coming together in one bus. We safely came back together with all relatives. Our houses haven't been destroyed and we found that everything is OK here."

Another Bazar Korgon resident, Asanbay aji Khabirov, said most of his neighbors had come back and that "our life is getting better. We regularly get humanitarian aid such as oil, rice, flour."

"Our family members came back safely home," he said. "Eighty percent of the people have been back to the mahallas [local communities] and only 20 percent remain [away]. The situation is good; all people are friendly to each other."

Another returnee was more apprehensive.

Minura Valiyeva, who was among the refugees returning to their burned-out homes in the city of Osh, spoke to Reuters in the village of VLKSM on the Kyrgyz side of the border.

"[We are returning full of] bitter feelings," Valiyeva said. "We are afraid that the same might happen again; we don't wish anybody anything like this."

She added that she was uncertain of what she would find in Osh.

Jalal-Abad Oblast Governor Bektur Asanov, who visited refugee camps in Uzbekistan's southeastern Andijon region on June 22, told RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service that assistance would be provided to the returned refugees.

"I can guarantee as governor of the Jalal-Abad region -- please don't trust any provocative statements -- that hopefully everything will be good," Asanov said. "It has been decided from the financial side that all people whose houses were burned down or destroyed will receive compensation money. We've got around 500 tons of food in Jalal-Abad, and we are giving it to all those who are returning. Those people whose houses were burned down are getting tents and mattresses. Next week we will start giving out construction materials and money."

The Toll Of Violence

As refugees begin to trickle back into their ruined neighborhoods, the cash-strapped Kyrgyz government faces the massive cost of reconstruction.

Aid agencies have said up to 1 million people may have been affected by the violence, including 300,000 displaced internally and 100,000 who fled to Uzbekistan.

The United States has announced that it intends to provide a total of more than \$48 million to programs for humanitarian relief, reconstruction, and community stabilization in Kyrgyzstan and the border region of Uzbekistan. More than \$20 million of that total has been provided or authorized so far.

Large-scale unrest has ceased in the country's south. But Elisabeth Byrs, spokeswoman of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, said on June 22 that insecurity and ethnic tensions were hindering humanitarian operations in southern Kyrgyzstan.

Separately, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) said it was leading talks involving European Union foreign ministers on the possible deployment of a police force in southern Kyrgyzstan.

Kimmo Kiljunen, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's special representative for Central Asia, told reporters in Bishkek that an international police operation would create an "atmosphere of trust."

Some fear a constitutional referendum on June 27 could trigger new violence. The referendum, if passed, would reduce the president's powers and strengthen the parliament. But opponents of holding the plebiscite note that many people in Osh will simply be unable to vote.

The OSCE said it will not send short-term observers to monitor the referendum due to "the current security situation." However, it said 13 election experts based in Bishkek and 12 long-term observers deployed across the country would monitor the vote. Kyrgyzstan election commission member Galia Alymbekova said about 100 foreign observers were expected to arrive to monitor the voting.

Reuters quoted Akylbek Sariyev, the chairman of the Kyrgyz Central Election Commission, as saying that six ethnic Uzbek women working in preparation for the referendum were briefly held hostage in Osh on June 21 before being released unharmed.

The interim government that took power after President Kurmanbek Bakiev's ouster in April has accused his supporters of fueling the recent violence in an attempt to derail the referendum.

At a press conference on June 23 in the Belarusian capital, Minsk, where he has sought refuge, Bakiev said he had "no intention" of influencing Kyrgyz politics or the referendum.

"In no way am I trying to influence [Kyrgyz] politics, or the referendum, or anything else, or even pass judgments, but still they blame us for everything," Bakiev said. "I'm not going to take any part in what's going on in Kyrgyzstan today."

Bakiev also denied accusations that he funneled money stolen from Kyrgyzstan to Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka to help pay for Belarus's Russian gas debt. Kyrgyz authorities announced on June 22 that they were seeking to move parliamentary elections forward by a month to early September in a bid to ease tensions. The deputy

head of the interim government, Omurbek Tekebaev, said on national television that "legitimate organs of power must be formed with the least possible delay."

Meanwhile, officials in Kyrgyzstan's southern Jalal-Abad Oblast say they have detained 12 suspected organizers of the ethnic clashes between local Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, according to RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service.

- Is Bakiev Heading Home?

Kurmanbek Bakiev, the ousted president of Kyrgyzstan, could be returning to the conflict-torn Kyrgyz city of Osh – if rumors are to be believed.

Bakiev, who has been living in Belarus since fleeing the country in April, has not publicly mentioned any planned trip home, where he could face trial for alleged involvement in the killing of antigovernment protesters in Bishkek.

The rumors may be exaggerated, but two recent developments suggest that Bakiev might be willing to take the risk. After all, he has said he is still the legitimate president of the country.

A local official who asked not to be named told our correspondent today that Bakiev's return to the city is imminent.

Further fueling rumors, the ousted Kyrgyz leader abruptly canceled an interview he was scheduled to hold on June 22 in Minsk. Bakiev was due to meet with a small group of journalists, including a correspondent from RFE/RL's Belarus Service.

The head of Bakiev's security detail, a member of the Belarusian KGB, today told RFE/RL that the interview had been canceled because of "new circumstances."

- Kyrgyz Constitutional Referendum Still Planned, Despite Unrest

Kyrgyzstan's interim leader Roza Otunbaeva says authorities are still planning to go ahead with a planned referendum on a new constitution on June 27, despite hundreds of thousands of displaced residents and continuing security concerns linked to the deadly clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks.

Speaking on June 21 on a visit to Jalal-Abad in southern Kyrgyzstan, in the region of the unrest, Otunbaeva said any delays in holding the referendum could lead to more instability. The constitutional referendum was scheduled following the ouster in an April revolt of former President Kurmanbek Bakiev.

This month's ethnic clashes in southern Kyrgyzstan have left more than 200 people confirmed dead and led to some 400,000 people fleeing their homes, with tens of thousands crossing into neighboring Uzbekistan. Otunbaeva has said she believes the final death toll could hit 2,000.

Interim authorities have blamed Bakiev for being behind the clashes. He has denied any involvement.

- As Kyrgyzstan Prepares For Referendum, Government Faces Predictions Of Collapse

BISHKEK -- In a central hospital here in the capital, 20-year-old Ibragim Nurgazy lies on an ancient cot with dirty sheets, barely able to keep his eyes open. His mother Gulnara sits patiently by his side.

A resident of Osh in the south of the country, she says her son was caught up in the violence there this month when he ventured into the street to help a soldier who'd just been shot. As he approached, Nurgazy was shot four times. Two others near him were killed. Asked why her son was targeted, she shrugs. "We don't know who started the violence, or why."

Twenty-year-old Ibragim Nurgazy at a Bishkek hospital on June 23

There's deep uncertainty about how and why hundreds of people -- or thousands, by some estimates -- were killed in ethnic violence this week, and it's prompting a wave of rumors, international conspiracy theories, and growing animosity. There's heated talk about Tajik mercenaries, Russian special forces, drugs traffickers, and local elites helping orchestrate the violence.

The clashes have seriously shaken the interim government that took power after popular protests in April. The country's new leaders are pinning their hopes on a June 27 referendum to legitimize their rule. But amid speculation over the government's imminent collapse, it's far from clear what will happen in this strategically important country.

Like many ethnic Kyrgyz in the capital of this impoverished country, Djildiz Djildosheva is angry about what she says is the Western media's portrayal of the violence as a killing spree by Kyrgyz against minority Uzbeks. Djildosheva, who's vice president of the Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Friendship Society, repeats the common opinion here that ethnic Uzbeks -- who own many businesses and hold significant influence in the south -- were incited to violence by unknown professional mercenaries.

"Local Uzbeks say they were armed in advance and told to take to the streets when a signal was given," Djildosheva says. "They were led to a university dormitory, where many Kyrgyz girls were brutally raped and killed."

'Destructive Forces'

There's been no evidence of mass rapes, or that Uzbeks set off the violence. Many Kyrgyz in Osh say the killing spree was sparked by a fight between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in a local casino. But people in the capital say Kyrgyz began killing Uzbeks in revenge only after they attempted to seize power in the south.

The Osh casino where many ethnic Kyrgyz claim the killing spree was sparked

But not everyone's sure. Southern Kyrgyzstan's largest city, Osh, is the stronghold of Kurmanbek Bakiev, who was ousted as president in early April. Amid Bakiev's resignation and departure from the country, the government says, his son Maksim planned the violence to destabilize the country. They say long-simmering ethnic tensions needed only a small spark to explode in an orgy of violence later joined by organized criminal groups and local police forces.

The government lost control of the south for several days. But despite an ongoing state of emergency in two regions, interim leader Roza Otunbaeva promises to go ahead with a national referendum on June 27. It will ask people to vote over support for the current leadership along with changes to the constitution that would weaken the president's power and move Kyrgyzstan toward a parliamentary political system.

Finance Minister Temir Sariiev says those who organized this month's violence aimed to disrupt the referendum, and that it's crucial that they don't succeed.

"Canceling the referendum would mean success for those destructive forces. That's why the majority of the population demands the referendum proceed as planned, whatever the difficulties and moral issues involved," Sariiev says. "The fate of the state and the people is at stake."

Finance Minister Temir Sariiev

But many question the decision to hold the referendum so soon after this month's traumatic events. Political analyst Mars Sariiev says the violence dealt a body blow to the

government, which is holding the referendum as a last-ditch attempt to legitimize its power.

"The referendum is an attempt to save face and hold on to power because its ratings are falling very fast," he says.

The New Opposition

Whatever the referendum's result, Mars Sariev believes the government won't last until parliamentary elections to be announced after the referendum.

He says Otunbaeva is moving fast because this month's violence has given new impetus to a nascent political opposition led by siloviki, or strongmen -- former military and security generals who held high positions under Bakiev. One of their leaders is Omurbek Suvanaliev, a former interior minister who heads the Ata-Jurt Party based in southern Kyrgyzstan. Another is a former military general named Miroslav Niyazov, head of the El Armany Party.

Speaking in his sprawling office in a new Bishkek business complex, Niyazov says Kyrgyzstan isn't ready for a parliamentary system. He criticizes the plan for a referendum as dangerous, saying the vote will be falsified.

"Mass falsifications are traditional for us here," Niyazov says. "But times have changed now, and such rigging can lead to a social explosion with unpredictable consequences."

Former Security Council Secretary Miroslav Niyazov

Niyazov refuses to speculate about who's responsible for this month's violence, saying the government is solely to blame for failing to guarantee the country's security. He says Kyrgyzstan's current leaders have "lost the moral right" to rule, and predicts they'll be ousted within five months.

"The government has completely discredited itself. Blood has been spilled, mass killings have taken place, thousands have been injured," Niyazov says. "Any person in power would have to take responsibility; otherwise expect to be swept from power. But these people don't want to take any responsibility."

Niyazov says he wants to help "bring order" to Kyrgyzstan. He says the country must decide its future "in consultation" with Russia, praising Moscow for its "great wisdom" in not intervening in this month's violence.

Analyst Sariev says that's no surprise. Although Russia initially supported Otunbaeva, he says her government has disillusioned Moscow, which is now backing the siloviki, along with Kyrgyzstan's other authoritarian neighbors who see the precedent of a referendum over a change of power as a threat to their own governments at home.

"As the interim government loses its authority, the power of the siloviki is growing, and that suits regional players such as Russia, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, who want to see strong presidential power in Kyrgyzstan," he says. "As the state falls apart and destabilization continues, I think there could be a seizure of power."

Lingering Problems

Finance Minister Sariev denies talk of a government collapse and Russia's support for the siloviki, calling it "the dream of the government's opponents," including those who took part in organizing this month's violence. He admits the government faces crushing obstacles, including a mounting deficit, crumbling economy, and plunging tax revenues. The government will appeal for hundreds of millions of dollars in aid from the World Bank and other international donors at a conference in Bishkek next month.

Despite the mounting criticism, most people passing by the Soviet-era fountains of Bishkek's central square on a typically hot day say they support the government and will vote in the referendum. Talaigul Muratalieva praises the interim leaders for ousting Bakiev, saying the referendum will be crucial for helping calm bubbling tensions between the country's ethnic groups.

"We need the referendum to stop war in this country, for people to live together peacefully," Muratalieva says.

Doctors tend to a man's gunshot wounds following the ethnic violence in Osh.

But as Kyrgyzstan prepares to vote on June 27, there are worries that failure to bring some measure of calm here will help destabilize other Central Asian countries, all of which have large populations of multiple ethnic groups. Most believe Russia refused to send peacekeepers to its southern neighbor partly for fear of being seen by Kyrgyz as protecting Uzbeks and being dragged into the kind of civil war that engulfed Soviet-occupied Afghanistan in the 1980s.

As Uzbek refugees return to their burned-down houses and shops, analysts believe the long-term effects on the social fabric are only surfacing. The official death count stemming from the violence in southern Kyrgyzstan stands at just over 250; but the interim government has said as many as 2,000 died, and there are suggestions that at least 5,000 people and probably many more were killed.

Khadyr Malikov, director of the Center on Religion, Law and Politics, says as Uzbek and Kyrgyz families bury their dead, the desire for revenge is growing on both sides.

"The last time this kind of violence broke out [in 1990], it took at least five years to settle," Malikov says. "This time if the government doesn't take the right steps toward conflict resolution, it could turn into an ongoing clash."

Malikov says that can only happen with the help of Kyrgyz society. The first step, he says, is for the government to win support in the referendum. "It's really a vote for security and stability," he says. "If we can do that, Kyrgyzstan can still set an example for the rest of Central Asia."

- **Bakiev Relative Accused Over Unrest Arrested In Kyrgyzstan**

Kyrgyz security forces have detained a nephew of ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev whom they accuse of playing a key role in recent ethnic unrest. Interior Ministry officials confirmed to RFE/RL that Sanjarbek Bakiev was arrested in mountains near the city of Jalal-Abad.

The 27-year-old is accused of organizing deadly clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Jalal-Abad two weeks ago.

On June 24, the Kyrgyz State Security Service accused Bakiev's relatives of hiring Islamist militants to organize the unrest in the southern cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad that left more than 250 people dead and forced hundreds of thousands to flee their homes.

- **Suspected Organizers Of Ethnic Unrest Detained In Jalal-Abad**

JALAL-ABAD, Kyrgyzstan -- Officials in Kyrgyzstan's southern Jalal-Abad Oblast say they have detained 12 suspected organizers of the ethnic clashes between local Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Jalal-Abad regional Prosecutor Kanybek Turdumambetov told journalists that the detained individuals may have been involved in organizing or igniting the violence that

took place in the region from June 12-15. The clashes in Jalal-Abad started two days after ethnic violence broke out in the nearby southern city of Osh on June 10.

He said investigators have opened 30 criminal cases and that a total of 313 cases of attacking and burning houses have been registered in Jalal-Abad in connection with the ethnic clashes in that city.

Officials said 47 bodies had been found in Jalal-Abad.

At least 250 people have been reported killed and thousands wounded in the two cities during the clashes. Some 75,000-100,000 ethnic Uzbeks -- mainly women, children, and old people -- are thought to have fled to neighboring Uzbekistan.

On June 22, tens of thousands of the refugees began going back to Kyrgyzstan.

- **Kyrgyzstan To Supply Fuel To U.S. Air Base Directly**

Kyrgyz authorities say they plan to set up a state-owned company to provide a U.S. air base with fuel, replacing a series of private intermediary firms set up under the recently deposed government.

A decree signed today by acting President Roza Otunbaeva orders the company to be formed over the next 10 days.

Kyrgyz prosecutors say that companies owned by Maksim Bakiev, the younger son of ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev, avoided almost \$80 million in taxes on aviation fuel sold to the Manas base.

The United States uses Manas to supply its forces fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Geo Strategic Front

- **EU Envoy Warns Of Regional Risk From Kyrgyz Instability**

BRUSSELS -- The top EU envoy for Central Asia has warned that recent instability in the south of Kyrgyzstan could spill over into other countries along the Ferghana Valley.

Pierre Morel, the EU special representative for the region, also said the EU wants the referendum on Kyrgyzstan's new constitution to go ahead as planned on June 27. Morel made his comments before the European Parliament's foreign affairs committee in Brussels today. The hour-long question-and-answer session was the first public appearance of the veteran EU envoy after a fact-finding visit to Kyrgyzstan last week.

His audience consisted of a dozen or so scattered EU deputies struggling to use up their allotted speaking time.

EU special representative Pierre Morel

Morel -- who said he had left a meeting of EU ambassadors busy "mobilizing resources" for Kyrgyzstan -- sought to impress on his listeners the gravity of the situation.

The situation is "difficult, very difficult, because apart from the future of the country, it puts into question the security and stability of the entire Central Asian region," Morel said.

Regional stability is an important EU policy objective, given Central Asia's significant energy resources and proximity to Afghanistan. Morel said there has been too little EU engagement with Kyrgyzstan in the past, despite the country's attempts to break with authoritarianism. Only France and Germany have embassies in Bishkek, and an EU delegation was established only in February.

Blame Placed On Bakiev

The EU envoy blamed the "clan" of ex-President Kurmanbek Bakiev, ousted in April after a popular revolt, for fomenting the unrest in Kyrgyzstan's south earlier this month

which saw scores of people killed in clashes between ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. Morel said Bakiev's loyalists, led by his brother, made a "concerted effort" to provoke the clashes in a bid to regain power. Bakiev, who is now in Belarus, has denied any connection to the violence. Morel said that during his trip he spoke to civil society activists who had been on the ground in Osh during the turmoil. He also noted the presence of drug gangs and Islamic extremists in the southern cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad. Another factor, Morel said, was the "lack of attention and effort" from Bishkek, and the inadequacies of the local law enforcement forces, which were overrun, with many police killed. The EU diplomat said the bloc is now looking for a "role" in the country alongside the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), without "duplicating" the work of either. Morel said the EU's focus is on fostering democracy in Kyrgyzstan. "The message of the European Union is very clear. We call for a road map for a return to democracy. First, public order; second, the rule of law: and, third, a return to a genuinely democratic constitution," he said.

Morel said the EU wants the June 27 referendum on a new constitution to go ahead.

He noted the constitution -- with elections to follow in October -- will not usher in a fully parliamentary system, but a "mixed" one where a popularly elected president still has wide powers.

But, Morel said, the elements of parliamentarianism in the new constitution should "balance" the president's role and break what he called the "Kyrgyz cycle" of street protests against autocratic rulers being usurped by clan leaders acting in their own narrow self-interest.

The EU has released 5 million euros (\$6.14 million) in humanitarian aid, and another 6 million is in the pipeline for electoral support and civil society initiatives.

- UN Tells Security Council Kyrgyz Tensions Persist

A top UN official says tension remains in southern Kyrgyzstan, site of recent violence that has killed hundreds and sparked a wave of refugees. The UN Security Council received a closed-door briefing on the crisis from the UN assistant secretary-general Oscar Fernandez-Taranco.

He said while the situation in Osh and Jalal-Abad had calmed, fears of fresh violence persist. According to Reuters, Russia's UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin said the crisis was ultimately an internal matter that the Kyrgyz government would need to work out.

- Kyrgyz Official Says Russia Has Not Mentioned New Military Base

BISHKEK -- A Kyrgyz interim government official says Russian authorities have not discussed with the new government the possibility of opening a military base in the southern Osh region, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Interim government Deputy Chairman Azimbek Beknazarov made his comments to RFE/RL in response to a report in the Russian newspaper "Nezavisimaya gazeta" citing an unnamed source on the Russian Army's General Staff saying the Kremlin is planning to establish a new military base in southern Kyrgyzstan.

Russian military expert Vladimir Mukhin told RFE/RL's Tajik Service that the information about Moscow's intention to set up such a base in Osh is accurate. He added that Russia will start negotiations with Kyrgyz authorities on the issue after the country's referendum on a new constitution scheduled for June 27.

But military expert Aleksandr Golts told RFE/RL's Uzbek Service that it is unlikely that Russia is planning to establish any kind of new military base in Kyrgyzstan because it would be difficult to maintain troops at such a base.

About one year ago, Russia presented the idea to establish a new military base in southern Kyrgyzstan under the auspices of the Common Security Treaty Organization, which is comprised of several former Soviet republics.

But Uzbek President Islam Karimov expressed opposition to such a plan, saying that a new military base could affect interethnic stability in Kyrgyzstan's south with its mixed population of ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz.

- **Kyrgyzstan Ends Curfew Amid UN Warning Of Risk Of Violence**

Officials in Kyrgyzstan say they've lifted a state of emergency imposed in the wake of ethnic violence in its south, amid UN concerns about the risk of fresh tensions in the area. The country's interim government declared a state of emergency and imposed a curfew in parts of the south after bloody riots and ethnic clashes erupted in the southern city of Osh and surrounding areas two weeks ago.

The violence, which soon spread to the neighboring Jalal-Abad province, killed hundreds of people and forced some 400,000 others from their homes. Most of the victims were ethnic Uzbeks, a sizable minority in southern Kyrgyzstan.

'Exhaustive' Security Measures

Interim leader Roza Otunbaeva said the state of emergency would end by June 26, as the country geared up for a referendum the following day on a new constitution. "At the same time, we will take exhaustive measures to provide security in towns and villages," Otunbaeva said. Today, officials quoted by AFP confirmed that the curfew had been lifted overnight. On June 25, soldiers were casting their ballots, in order to be able to provide that security on voting day.

The new constitution would significantly reduce presidential powers and give more clout to parliament. It also would prevent a single political party from gaining more than 50 percent of parliamentary seats.

Kyrgyzstan Crisis Page

Otunbaeva urged people to take part in the referendum, saying bringing order and peace "is impossible without the adoption of a constitution."

Many in the south, however, remain skeptical about the referendum. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe has said it would not send short-term observers to monitor the referendum in the south due to a lack of security.

RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports that a 28-year-old college student, Meerim Pazylova, was shot dead overnight on June 24-25 in Osh for violating the curfew. According to law-enforcement agencies, Pazylova was shot after she refused to obey a police order to stop her car. A top UN official warned on June 24 that while the situation in Osh and Jalal-Abad had calmed, "interethnic tensions and rumors of impending violence persist."

Amnesty International has blasted Uzbekistan for forcing refugees of the violence to return to Kyrgyzstan, and warned that Kyrgyz authorities have been premature in calling for those people to return to their homes. The situation in Kyrgyzstan was discussed behind closed doors at the UN Security Council, where council members received a briefing on the crisis from UN Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco.

He underlined concerns about the "impact any renewed violence could have for Kyrgyzstan and the wider region."

Coordinated U.S. Response

The Kyrgyz crisis was also discussed during the June 24 meeting between U.S. and Russian presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev in Washington.

The two presidents said they agreed to coordinate their diplomatic and humanitarian aid efforts in Kyrgyzstan, which hosts both U.S. and Russian military bases.

Medvedev expressed concern that the political situation in the country could spiral out of control.

"We hope the election process [in Kyrgyzstan] will produce a viable government that is capable of resolving the tasks that the state confronts now. Otherwise Kyrgyzstan will face degradation and, unfortunately, possible division," Medvedev said.

"And all of us are concerned that radicals may come to power under such conditions and then we'll have to face the same tasks that are now being solved in other regions -- I mean, for example, the tasks that are being solved in Afghanistan now."

Obama and Medvedev discussed the situation in Kyrgyzstan

Medvedev added that, as chairman of a regional security group made up of former Soviet states -- the Collective Security Treaty Organization -- he is prepared to act if conditions justify sending a peacekeeping force.

CSTO Secretary General Nikolai Bordyuzha, who visited Kyrgyzstan on June 25, told reporters that the CSTO council has established a temporary working group led by General Vladimir Berezhnoi. He said the group includes representatives from all CSTO member states and will be stationed in Osh and Jalal-Abad.

Bordyuzha also promised "assistance" to Kyrgyzstan's law-enforcement agencies, although he did not offer specifics.

"We believe that Kyrgyzstan has the [security and military] personnel today to act on its territory on its own," Bordyuzha said. "[Kyrgyz] law-enforcement agencies need assistance and that assistance will be provided. All presidents [of CSTO member states] have said they will provide as much law-enforcement assistance to Kyrgyzstan as possible." The situation in southern Kyrgyzstan has been tense since the country's previous President Kurmanbek Bakiev was toppled in the aftermath of an antigovernment uprising in Bishkek in April.

The interim government has blamed Bakiev supporters for financing and fueling violence in the south, a region where support for Bakiev -- a native of Jalal-Abad province -- has been strongest.

On June 24, Kyrgyz officials went further, accusing Bakiev's relatives of colluding with the Taliban and other regional Islamic militants in planning and instigating the ethnic clashes in Osh and Jalal-Abad.

The UN and United States have called for an independent probe into the violence.

- Uzbek Exclave In Southern Kyrgyzstan Opens Borders

BATKEN, Kyrgyzstan -- An exclave of Uzbekistan surrounded by Kyrgyzstan's southern Batken Oblast has been opened for transit of Kyrgyz vehicles and citizens, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Officials in the Batken Oblast administration told RFE/RL that the Sokh exclave would only stay open for vehicles for three days, until June 28, due to the referendum on Kyrgyzstan's new constitution scheduled for June 27.

People in Batken have to cross the exclave, which is under Uzbekistan's jurisdiction, when traveling to other parts of southern Kyrgyzstan.

Sokh officials closed their borders with Kyrgyzstan when ethnic clashes between local Uzbeks and Kyrgyz started on June 10 in the Osh region.

Economic /Energy Front

Social Front

Tajikistan

Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- Tajikistan supports international initiatives of Turkmenistan

The Republic of Tajikistan fully supports the constructive international initiatives of Turkmenistan aimed at consolidating common efforts in the search for optimal solutions to current issues of concern to all mankind, and in particular on disarmament, said Foreign Minister of Tajikistan Khamrokhon Zarifi at the meeting with President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in Ashgabat on June 24. Khamrokhon Zarifi arrived in the Turkmen capital to participate in the International Conference on Disarmament in Central Asia and Caspian Basin.

The head of state and his guest exchanged views on the current state and prospects of Turkmen-Tajik cooperation across the entire range of spheres, including trade, economic, cultural and humanitarian spheres, and discussed the possibility of expanding partnerships in energy and transport and communications sectors, the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) said.

- All cargoes for ISAF are delivered to Afghanistan through Uzbekistan, U.S. Ambassador to Tajikistan says

Dushanbe. June 25. "Asia-Plus" -- Situation with blockage of rail cargoes on the territory of Uzbekistan did not affect timely provision of the counter-terrorism coalition, the U.S. Ambassador to Tajikistan Kenneth Gross spoke at a press conference in Dushanbe today while answering questions of reporters regarding problems with neighboring state connected with deliveries of strategic cargoes for Tajikistan and cargoes designed for the counter-terrorism coalition in Afghanistan that are transited through the territory of Uzbekistan.

"The point is that all cargoes designed for the counter-terrorism contingent are delivered to Afghanistan through Uzbekistan," Ambassador Gross has said.

He also said that the U.S. Government cooperates closely with both Tajik and Uzbek authorities in the given direction. "We hope that cargoes that are destined to and going from Tajikistan will be delivered without any barriers," he stressed.

In February 2009 Tajikistan allowed NATO to use its land communications to transit non-military cargoes to Afghanistan.

- Tajikistan toughens border crossing procedures at Gorno-Badakhshan direction of Tajik-Chinese and Tajik-Afghan border

Dushanbe. June 25. "Asia-Plus" -- Introduction of tough border crossing procedures at the Gorno-Badakhshan direction of the Tajik-Chinese and Tajik-Afghan border is connected with the working visit of Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon to GBAO on the occasion of the 13th anniversary of the Tajik National Unity Day.

Such frontier control has been introduced along Tajik-Chinese and Tajik-Afghan border, the Tajik National Security Committee told the AP. "New border control procedures will not affect persons who travel to other countries through the territory of Tajikistan and persons with diplomatic passports," the source said. The newly introduced regime will last till the end of the month.

Tajik law enforcement agencies are also in intensified regime till the end of this month.

Economic /Energy Front

- Central Asia countries discuss possible rejoining of Tajikistan to United Energy System

Dushanbe. June 24. "Asia-Plus" -- Member states of the Central Asia Energy Coordination Council (CA ECC – Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) are discussing an opportunity of resuming the united energy system in concurrent mode, Novosti Kazakhstana Kazakh news agency reports citing Almasadam Satkaliev, President of KEOGOC company, as source.

Such issue was raised by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan at CA ECC's 10th session, Satkaliev said on Wednesday, June 23.

"We believe that the move will strengthen reliability of energy supplies in our countries and will contribute to sustainability of energy supplies," he said.

In 2009 Tajikistan was disconnected from the united energy system for a series of violations. Therefore, Tajikistan's energy system operated in isolated mode in the past autumn and winter period.

Satkaliev explained that Tajikistan will not be able to rejoin the united energy system without Uzbekistan's consent since all decisions in the CA ECC should be made with the consent of each member state.

According to Bahrom Azimov, First Deputy Chairman of the Barki Tojik power and light holding, Tajikistan has a huge potential to export energy and the republic is ready to export cheap energy to other Central Asia countries.

"We have agreed [with Uzbekistan] to start negotiations and make related decision depending on the results," he said.

Eso Sadullaev, Head of Uzbekenergo's National Dispatch Center, confirmed Uzbekistan's readiness to continue negotiations in the given direction.

"There were a series of technical violations last year. Now we are trying to clear them out in order to ensure sustainability of the system in the future. As all controversial issues are settled we'll start talking about possible resume of the joint energy system's work in concurrent mode," he said.

KEGOC President also noted that all countries of Central Asian region will benefit from the work of the joint energy system in concurrent mode since this will open way for export and transit energy supplies.

“Additionally, Central Asian states have potential to participate in the united market which is being formed in the frameworks of the Customs Union,” Satkaliev added.

- Tajik President launches construction of Ok-Su-2 small hydropower plant in Murgab region

Khorog. June 25. “Asia-Plus” -- In the course of his working trip on the occasion of the 13th anniversary of the National Unity Day, this morning Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon departed from Khorog to Murgab region.

Upon his arrival to Murgab region President Rahmon laid a capsule to the foundation of a Ok-Su-2 small hydropower plant, Shohtolib Shohkosimov, a spokesman for the chairman of the district, told the AP.

According to Latif Shozodaev, Head of the Department of Economic Development and Antimonopoly Policy of the district, productive capacity of this power plant is more than 2000 kilowatt.

“The existing Ok-Su-1 hydropower plant produces nearly 200 kilowatt and is unable to provide central Murgab with electricity. The construction of this new power plant will significantly improve current situation with provision of electricity,” he said, stressing that the construction of the new hydropower facility will be funded by the Government of Germany.

Shohkosimov said that in the course of his visit to Murgab, and taking into account current situation with provision of local citizens of this high-mountain region with electricity, President Rahmon will provide poor families of the region with 160 solar batteries.

In the second half of the day President Rahmon will leave for Ishkashim region.

Social Front

- First-ever daily newspaper to appear in Tajikistan

Dushanbe. June 25. “Asia-Plus” -- Imruz-news, the first-ever daily newspaper, will appear in Tajikistan. Date of the first issue remains unclear.

Rajabi Mirzo, Chief Editor of Imruz-News, told the AP that the edition will focus on informational and analytical direction. Talking about the objectives of the new edition, Rajabi Mirzo said “we have no daily newspapers at all and someone had to open this market. I decided that I can do that.”

He said the edition is a commercial project and editors are planning to make it economically profitable by providing the population with daily news and analytical materials. First issues of the edition will have 4 pages and will be increased in the future.

Rajabi Mirzo noted that the date of the first issue has not been fixed yet. “And there is a range of reasons for that. There is an ongoing work on preparation of the newspaper’s office and selection of journalists. All attracted journalists undergo specific training course since 80% of them are new persons in the Tajik journalism. Additionally, we have to train them to specific work in daily newspaper since journalists have already forgotten the principles of daily work for the past 20 years,” he said.

Rajabi Mirzo cited distribution as one of the main problem for the newspaper. However, he said, editor are designing the future distribution scheme and as soon as this issue is settled the final date for the first issue of the edition will be fixed.

Rajabi Mirzo said not a single structure is connected with the publication of the newspaper. The founders (Imruz-News company) took loan in one of the Tajik banks.

According to Tajik Ministry of Culture, at least 20 editions have been registered in Tajikistan in the past few months, including such weekly editions as Olamafruz, Iqbol, Shikorchi, Payvand, Zaminsoz, Hikikati Sughd, Dermatolog, which specify on concrete directions.

Turkmenistan Political Front

Geo Strategic Front

- ODIHR Head Buoyed By Turkmen 'Willingness To Engage'

A top official from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has praised what he calls a "new readiness" by Turkmen officials to "engage and cooperate" with his organization, RFE/RL's Turkmen Service reports.

Janez Lenarcic, the director of the OSCE's Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), gave details of his visit to Ashgabat last week in an interview with RFE/RL's Turkmen Service on June 21.

He said that ODIHR has proposed cooperation with Turkmenistan in such spheres as the legislative framework for elections, the law on public organizations, the development of civil society in general, and human rights education.

Specifically, ODIHR has offered to make available to Turkmen authorities a translation into Russian of a compendium of good practices on human rights education jointly authored by ODIHR, the UN, and the Council of Europe.

Lenarcic said he was encouraged that his offers of assistance were well-received but stressed that ODIHR's role is to advise and that implementation of its recommendations and proposals is the responsibility of individual OSCE member states, in this case Turkmenistan:

"We don't implement together with them. We assist. We offer the examples. We offer the expertise. We offer the good practices," Lenarcic said. "But whether this is used and how and when is up to the authorities."

Asked whether he raised the issue of restrictions on political activity in Turkmenistan, Lenarcic said that he discussed with the Turkmen Foreign Ministry the law on public organizations. He said he stressed during that discussion the importance for any country of allowing the unrestricted development of civil society.

Lenarcic said he also met with representatives of officially registered Turkmen NGOs to discuss the problems they face. He said there is "a lot of room for improvement" with regard to the authorities' attitude toward civil society.

- Tajikistan supports international initiatives of Turkmenistan

The Republic of Tajikistan fully supports the constructive international initiatives of Turkmenistan aimed at consolidating common efforts in the search for optimal solutions to current issues of concern to all mankind, and in particular on disarmament, said Foreign Minister of Tajikistan Khamrokhon Zarifi at the meeting with President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in Ashgabat on June 24. Khamrokhon Zarifi arrived in the Turkmen capital to participate in the International Conference on Disarmament in Central Asia and Caspian Basin.

The head of state and his guest exchanged views on the current state and prospects of Turkmen-Tajik cooperation across the entire range of spheres, including trade, economic, cultural and humanitarian spheres, and discussed the possibility of expanding

partnerships in energy and transport and communications sectors, the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) said.

- OSCE Secretary General highly rates Ashgabat's forum on disarmament issues

On June 24, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received the Secretary General of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, who arrived in Ashgabat to participate in the International Conference on Disarmament in Central Asia and Caspian Basin.

The head of the well-recognized international organizations congratulated the Turkmen leader on the great success of the forum and expressed confidence that the conference will "help consolidate efforts towards the development of mutually agreed approaches to establishing a positive cooperation for the welfare and sustainable development in the region and throughout the world."

As President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov emphasized, by pursuing a policy of peacefulness, neighborliness and "open doors" Turkmenistan implements in practice the status of a neutral state, which was endorsed by the world community, to establish a broad dialogue with all concerned nations to ensure global security and stability, finding optimal solutions to global problems.

During the meeting, the Turkmen leader and the head of the OSCE exchanged views on prospects for further cooperation in various fields and defined the main areas of bilateral cooperation, taking into account the priorities and objectives.

- Turkmenistan and Iran interested in enhancing cooperation

On June 24, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran Manouchehr Mottaki, who arrived in Ashgabat at the head of his country's delegation to attend the International Conference on Disarmament in Central Asia and Caspian Basin.

According to the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH), positively assessing the prospects for interstate cooperation, the President and his guest noted the interest of both countries in building up a dialogue that should meet the national interests. As the leader of Turkmenistan noted, Turkmenistan and Iran accumulated vast experience of fruitful cooperation reinforced by the successful implementation of several large-scale joint projects designed to serve the welfare and prosperity of not only the two peoples but also the entire region.

In an interview with TDH, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said that he and the President of Turkmenistan discussed issues related to implementation of joint projects and, in particular, acceleration of the construction of the transcontinental railroad Kazakhstan - Turkmenistan - Iran. The minister also said the Iranian leadership sees Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov's instructions to intensify work on the reconstruction of interstate highways Ashgabat - Badzhigiran, which he made during the recent meeting of the Government of Turkmenistan, as a manifestation of good friendly relations.

- International Forum in Ashgabat lays foundation for development of specific measures for disarmament in the region

The participants of the International Conference on Disarmament in Central Asia and Caspian Basin, which was held under the UN auspices in Ashgabat on June 24, adopted the final document that says the dialogue was productive and highly constructive.

The representatives of Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as major international and regional organizations - the United

Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Organization of Islamic Conference, Organization of the Treaty on Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons said they were determined to fully support the process of global disarmament, including reducing the arsenal of weapons of mass destruction."

According to the official report, in the plenary sessions the forum the participants conducted a detailed review and analysis of the issues of disarmament and participation of Central Asian and Caspian Sea states in the relevant agreements. The forum discussed the international legal framework of disarmament issues and ways of its improvement as well as the role of international organizations in addressing these issues in global and regional dimensions and the possibility of their assistance to regional states in this field. According to the conference participants, the Ashgabat meeting "created a solid platform for concrete actions and further exchange of views on issues of collective security and, thereby, promoted peace and stability in the region."

- Turkmenistan speaks in favor of addressing issues of disarmament in Central Asia in the framework of UN

Turkmenistan is guided by the principle of prioritization and appropriateness of addressing issues of disarmament in the framework of international organizations and forums, primarily the United Nations and its Commission for Disarmament, using political and diplomatic instruments. This was stated by President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in his welcome address to the participants of the International Conference on Disarmament in Central Asia and the Caspian basin, which opened in Ashgabat today. "I am firmly convinced that there is no alternative to the joint work to develop constructive approaches to establishing multilateral cooperation," he stressed.

According to him, the problem of disarmament is highly relevant for the regions of Central Asia and the Caspian Basin that are being "rapidly drawn into the orbit of the world political arena as one of its leading centers." "The Central Asian region and the Caspian region are currently a crossroad for transport corridors and energy bridges of the Eurasian continent, an inexhaustible fount of hydrocarbons of world importance. This suggests that the fate of the security of the continent and, indeed, the whole world is largely decided here," the president said.

"The efforts of the international community led to the establishment of the fundamental international legal framework to ensure strategic security, which includes agreements and conventions on various types of weapons of mass destruction that withstood the test of time and regional agreements on the establishment of zones free from nuclear weapons. Fully supporting the thrust, essence and meaning of these important documents, Turkmenistan stands for the further strengthening and development of the international legal framework to ensure global stability and security," the head of state said.

He also stressed that Turkmenistan attaches great importance to the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, located in Ashgabat, and considers it important that the Centre takes part in the development of an effective model of international cooperation and coordination of the disarmament process.

"We believe that the existing model of positive neutrality of Turkmenistan linked with the peculiarities of the international situation is an effective format for interaction to

discuss various issues of regional life, including those aimed at promoting the disarmament process, and to develop mutually acceptable solutions. Within the framework of this format, there emerge the outlines of new, standing mechanisms of international dialogue in the area of Central Asia and the Caspian basin. This format opens to the world community good opportunities for positive impact on the course and nature of events in the region. It is in this that I see the main goal of this forum," said the President of Turkmenistan and wished the participants of the conference fruitful work.

- Russia supports all peace initiatives of Turkmenistan

Russia supports all peace initiatives of Turkmenistan aimed at consolidating the efforts of the international community to ensure peace and security, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Andrei Denisov said on June 23 during the meeting with Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. Andrei Denisov arrived in Ashgabat to attend the International Conference on Disarmament in Central Asia and Caspian Basin.

The guest noted the timeliness and relevance of the proposal of the Turkmen leader to hold an international forum on disarmament issues.

During the exchange of views on the status and prospects of the Turkmen-Russian cooperation, the head of state and the first Deputy Foreign Minister reiterated the commitment of the two countries to intensify the political dialogue, and discussed priorities for the further development of partnership.

Wishing the leaders the Russian Federation all the best and continued success in their work, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov emphasized that the partnership with Russia, which is based on centuries-old relations of friendship and mutual understanding, remains one of the most important vectors of Turkmenistan's foreign policy strategy, the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) said.

Economic /Energy Front

- TX Oil Ltd (USA) interested in cooperation with Turkmenistan in fuel and energy sector

On June 22, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received the heads of TX Oil Ltd (Texas, USA) company - Neil Mallon Bush, president of the company, and Mark Allen Bush, member of the Board of Directors.

The head of "TX Oil Ltd" conveyed warm greetings to the Turkmen leader on behalf of his father and brother, former presidents of the United States of America - George Bush senior and George Bush junior, who addressed their best wishes to Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov.

During the exchange of views on the prospects of partnership, Neil Mallon Bush and Mark Allen Bush expressed readiness of "TX Oil Ltd", specializing in the energy sector, to actively participate in joint projects in Turkmenistan.

"We come from Texas, which is considered the U.S. oil capital, and we plan to bring to Turkmenistan experts and the most advanced technologies in the future to develop and explore oil and gas resources of Turkmenistan," the head of the company said.

President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, in turn, emphasized that the Turkmen side stands ready to consider and examine in detail all incoming proposals in this regard, the State News Agency of Turkmenistan (TDH) said.

- Turkmenistan and China hold first business forum

The Turkmen capital hosted the first Turkmen-Chinese business forum. Member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Secretary of the Central Commission of the CPC Central Committee Ho Guo Qiang, who is on a working visit to Ashgabat, participated in the forum as the guest of honor.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports from Ashgabat, the business forum was attended by over forty leading Chinese companies, including CNPC, ZTE, Huawei, Lenovo, Sinofert. The Turkmen side was represented by the organizations of Turkmenistan's leading industries - fuel and energy complex, transport and communications, tourism, construction industry, agriculture, food and textile, as well as the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs.

The businessmen of Turkmenistan and China have declared their full commitment to further strengthening the strategic partnership. It was noted that 37 enterprises with Chinese capital are fruitfully working in Turkmenistan, implementing 57 investment projects totaling more than US \$ 4,163 billion and more than Yuan 2,328 billion.

In turn, the vast Chinese market has been recognized as very attractive for Turkmen goods. In this regard, both sides acknowledged great prospects for the export of hydrocarbons and their products, agricultural products, and a wide range of other goods.

Following the plenary session, the Business Forum continued its work in the format of bilateral meetings to discuss specific details of cooperation.

- Agreements reached on construction of second gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to China

On June 18, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov received the member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Secretary of the Central Commission of the Central Committee of the CPC Ho Guo Qiang, who arrived in Ashgabat yesterday at the head of the delegation of the People's Republic of China.

As the Turkmenistan.ru correspondent reports quoting the press service of the Turkmen leader, taking into account the agreements reached earlier on preparation of a new agreement on the further development of Turkmen natural gas exports to Chinese consumers, the Turkmen president and the high-level representative of China discussed and agreed on issues relating to construction of the second line of the Trans-Asian gas pipeline.

Upon completion of the talks the sides signed an intergovernmental agreement on economic and technological cooperation and a framework agreement.

Today, as part of the program of the visit to Turkmenistan, Ho Guo Qiang will speak at the opening of the Turkmen-Chinese Business Forum, which will be attended by over 100 representatives of 40 enterprises from China.

Social Front

- UNDP Implements Project on Combating Desertification and Drought in Turkmenistan

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Global Environment Facility are implementing an environmental project in Turkmenistan aimed at sustainable management of land resources and combating desertification and drought. The project titled "Capacity-building and On-the-Ground Investments for Sustainable Land

Management" is being implemented jointly with the Ministry of Nature Protection of Turkmenistan and GTZ in three natural zones of Turkmenistan - Nohur, Karakum and Sakarchaga located in Akhal and Mary provinces.

According to a press release issued by UNDP, the project supported the initiative of the local population in the project area Nohur to adjust the number of livestock and, as an alternative, develop horticulture and fruit gardening with the view of preventing degradation of pastures. The project conducted a hydrogeological research that resulted in drilling four wells for irrigation purposes and building 17 dams of various sizes to prevent erosion of soil. The local population also planted fruit trees in the area of 10 ha that are watered by drip irrigation for the development of fruit gardening. Seedlings of Turkmen juniper were also planted in the area of 42 ha to restore juniper forests.

In the project area Karakum the project supported the construction of eight new and repairing of six existing wells for even and rational use of desert pastures in remote areas. The project helped local people to build mechanical protections made of reed mats and seedlings of Haloxylon in the area of 27 ha to stop the advance of sand dunes around villages.

In the project area Sakarchaga work is under way to introduce high-quality drainage systems and land reclamation technologies to prevent degradation of cultivated lands and restore saline lands. The project activities resulted in restoration of 50 ha of degraded land that can be now used in agriculture. About 35 ha of land were prevented from degradation though preventive leveling. In addition, a new collector-channel was built, and the existing collector was cleaned. The project also assisted in constructing nine water-regulating and two water-gauge installations.

Overall, the project regularly holds workshops for land users on the possible application of various advanced methods of agriculture and the effective use of water resources. A significant part of the project activities is related to research work such as inventory and grazing of pastures, monitoring of pastures using satellite imagery, study of methods of fighting pest and stimulation of germination and growth of seedlings of juniper, as well as monitoring the salinity of lands in all three project areas.

In 2010, the project plans to finalize the community-based activities, conduct a series of trainings on pasture land management and sustainable agricultural management.

- French Diplomat Sees Turkmen Desire To Improve Rights Situation

France's ambassador for human rights says he sees a genuine desire by Turkmen authorities to improve the human rights situation in Turkmenistan, RFE/RL's Turkmen Service reports. Ambassador Francois Zimeray recently visited Ashgabat and met with Turkmen authorities. He told RFE/RL that while the human rights situation is still poor, it is better than under former President Saparmurat Niyazov, when "there were no human rights at all."

Zimeray acknowledged that there have been no major improvements in the situation since Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov became president after Niyazov's death in 2006.

But he said there is a desire for improvement, which he said is the first and most important step. Zimeray said he saw a clear wish to improve specific aspects of human rights in Turkmenistan, including those regarding the judiciary, prisons, and other aspects of the legal system.

Zimeray said he was not allowed to visit any prisons. He told RFE/RL he had hoped to meet with two people tried and sentenced for having spoken to a French TV journalist but

was unable to do so. Their families and lawyers do not even know if they are still alive. Zimeray said he thinks it is counterproductive only to criticize Turkmenistan for failings such as police brutality, dismal prison conditions, and unfair trials.

"My point is not only to judge, to shame, to blame," Zimeray said. "It's also to encourage, to say 'OK, this is what I felt in your country, this is what I understood from our conversations, and I deeply encourage you to go ahead, and we will support you in this direction.'" He said France hopes to open a dialogue with Turkmen officials focusing on very specific issues such as how to judge minors and what kind of prison regime to create for them.

He said a dialogue between professionals -- police and military officials -- from both countries is likely to be more effective than discussions between rights activists.

Uzbekistan

Political Front

- **Kyrgyz Officials Visit Refugee Camps In Uzbekistan**

ANDIJON, Uzbekistan -- An official delegation from Kyrgyzstan's Jalal-Abad region visited ethnic Uzbeks in refugee camps in neighboring Uzbekistan on June 22 and urged them to return home, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Jalal-Abad Governor Bektur Asanov led a delegation that met in Andijon with Uzbek Interior Minister Bahodiy Matlyubov and Emergency Situations Minister Tursun Hudoiberdiyev. They toured several camps that are housing the ethnic Uzbeks who fled the Kyrgyz cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad after ethnic clashes with Kyrgyz began on June 10.

Asanov met with several groups of refugees and urged them to return to Kyrgyzstan, saying that the situation there is under control and that international humanitarian aid has arrived. But many refugees expressed concern about their safety if they returned to Kyrgyzstan.

At least 208 people were killed in the clashes and hundreds of thousands fled their homes.

Andijon regional Governor Ahmadjon Usmonov told the Kyrgyz delegation that there are some 75,000 refugees from the Jalal-Abad and Osh oblasts at 57 camps in eastern Uzbekistan near Andijon, which is 40 kilometers from Osh.

Geo Strategic Front

- **Uzbek Exclave In Southern Kyrgyzstan Opens Borders**

BATKEN, Kyrgyzstan -- An exclave of Uzbekistan surrounded by Kyrgyzstan's southern Batken Oblast has been opened for transit of Kyrgyz vehicles and citizens, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

Officials in the Batken Oblast administration told RFE/RL that the Sokh exclave would only stay open for vehicles for three days, until June 28, due to the referendum on Kyrgyzstan's new constitution scheduled for June 27.

People in Batken have to cross the exclave, which is under Uzbekistan's jurisdiction, when traveling to other parts of southern Kyrgyzstan.

Sokh officials closed their borders with Kyrgyzstan when ethnic clashes between local Uzbeks and Kyrgyz started on June 10 in the Osh region.

- Ethnic Uzbek men rest at a refugee camp on the Kyrgyz side of the border with Uzbekistan on June 20.

JALAL-ABAD, Kyrgyzstan -- Thousands of ethnic Uzbeks have begun returning to Kyrgyzstan's southern Osh and Jalal-Abad regions from refugee camps in neighboring Uzbekistan, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports.

The Kyrgyz Border Guard said some 35,000 ethnic Uzbek refugees had crossed the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border en route for their homes in Kyrgyzstan.

Jalal-Abad Oblast Governor Bektur Asanov, who visited several refugee camps in Uzbekistan's Andijon region on June 22, told RFE/RL that about 1,200 ethnic Uzbek refugees had left camps for Kyrgyzstan earlier in the day. He added that thousands more began leaving for the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border after he visited the refugee camps and were headed toward the cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad.

Asanov said about 10,000 ethnic Uzbeks from Kyrgyzstan's Jalal-Abad Oblast are still in refugee camps in Uzbekistan. He added that all of them will have returned home in a day or two.

As many as 100,000 ethnic Uzbeks are estimated to have fled Kyrgyzstan for Uzbekistan in the wake of clashes between ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan's southern regions of Osh and Jalal-Abad that began on June 10.

At least 208 people were killed and thousands injured in the violence, and hundreds of thousands of people fled their homes.

He added that Uzbek Interior Minister Bahodir Matlyubov, Emergency Situations Minister Tursun Hudoiberdiyev, and Andijon regional Governor Ahmadjon Usmonov assured him they consider the tragic events to have been a provocation by a "third force."

Asanov said 124 babies have been born in the refugee camps since June 10.

Economic /Energy Front

Social Front

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