

Business and Politics in the Muslim World

*Weekly Report on **Russia***
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Ilam Khan

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Summary of the Report:

Political:

Russia, NORAD complete joint air defense drills

The Russian Air Force and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) completed on Wednesday the active phase of joint anti-terrorism drills in the Far East. The exercise was carried out under a cooperative military agreement between Russia and the United States, which tasks NORAD, the bi-national U.S. and Canadian command, and the Russian Air Force to conduct a live-fly exercise for up to five days.

Russia and the U.S. should work together on missile defense shield

Even though U.S. radar systems are likely to be deployed in South-Eastern Europe as part of a missile defense shield, I see no threat for Russia if the Americans obtain some additional information seeing as they already safely monitor Russian territory from space.

Putin expects swift return to work at blast-hit Siberian coal mine

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin expects a West Siberian coal mine where up to 90 people died in two explosions in May to be fully operational again soon.

Clinton Says Senate ‘Must Act’ on Nuclear Arms Pact With Russia

The agreement, which is a priority for President Barack Obama, would replace the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START, that expired in December and left the former Cold War rivals with no way to verify each other’s nuclear weapons.

Medvedev Cracks Down on Russian Navy Administration

Medvedev also announced the dismissal of a number of senior representatives of the Russian Navy: Chief of Naval Aviation Nikolai Kuklev, deputy chief of naval aviation, Colonel Sergei Rasskazov, Acting Deputy Chief of Naval Aviation and Logistics Manakov, and head of the base number 2512, where the fire occurred.

Economic

E4 Group gets \$588m contract with OGC-6

Total investment into the power unit construction is reportedly estimated at \$588m. The unit’s power capacity is to top 400 MW, the firm said. Construction of the power unit is scheduled to be completed by February 28, 2014.

Forest Fires Cause Damage of \$15 Billion to Russian Economy

Experts started to calculate the losses, which the Russian economy suffered as a result of unusually hot summer and immense forest fires. The damage may total one percent of the GDP growth in 2010, which is equal to \$15 billion, or 450 billion rubles. For the time being, the experts take account of direct costs and negative short-term consequences for the economy.

Social/ Huminitarian:

Moscow homeless flee city over heat, smog

Last Friday was the worst day yet, but the smog abated on Tuesday, with the city's remaining residents gazing in wonder at the blue skies overhead - a sight they had not seen for easily a week.

Moscow Literally Burnt by the Sun

Moscow is suffocating. Thick toxic smog has been covering the sky above the city for days. The sun in Moscow looks like the moon during the day: it's not that bright and yellow, but pale and orange with misty outlines against the smoky sky. Muscovites have to experience both the smog and sweltering heat at once. Today, August 9, the temperature is expected to hit the level of 37-39 degrees above zero Centigrade.

Smog makes many change their lifestyle. Many people spend their time in air-conditioned places: in large shopping malls, in offices or even in cars.

Someone Wants Number of Drug Addicts in Russia to Grow with Methadone Help

From the point of view of "human rights activists" of the international level, Russia is showing "no respect towards human rights" since the nation does not intend to launch the program of replacement therapy for the treatment of drug addiction with methadone. Let us take a closer look at this drug - methadone - to try to understand what the expected and real consequences of such "rehabilitating therapy" could be, and why anyone would ever want to have this drug legalized in Russia.

Russia Today: HIV/AIDS: No right to be happy?

It is quite possible that the program was elaborated by big-hearted and noble-minded scientists. I would assume that they simply did not have a notion of the problem of drug addiction per se, that they approached drug addicts as individuals suffering from drug addiction. The scientists probably believed that everyone wanted to be cured of this addiction and one only needed to help them.

US Same-Sex Couples To Be Banned from Adopting Russian Children

The USA legally allows same-sex families in several states, and such families are considered absolutely adequate there. Russian specialists are certain, though, that homosexual couples must not be allowed to adopt children from Russia. In Russia, there is no territory which legally allows same-sex marriage.

Food/ Environment:

Russian heat no prelude to environmental catastrophe – scientist

Russia has been gripped by the worst heat wave in its modern history. Wildfires continue to rage across much of central Russia as the country experiences temperatures of up to and above 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit).

Moscow homeless flee city over heat, smog

Central Russia has been beset by a record-breaking heat wave since mid-June, which has been exacerbated by the worst drought since the 1970s.

Moscow smog from wildfires eases, gives temporary relief for residents

A scorching heat wave has gripped much of western Russia since mid-June, sparking wildfires and causing the worst drought in decades. Moscow and a dozen other cities have been wrapped in a thick layer of smog. Health experts say pollution levels are so high that breathing has become as dangerous as smoking several packs of cigarettes a day.

Agriculture minister says grain shortage in Russia unlikely

To date, 50 percent of the crops have been harvested, thus 40 million tons of grain have been gathered, the minister said during a meeting with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. Skrynnik added that 133 billion rubles (about 4.42 billion U.S. dollars) have been transferred to the farmers.

Russia combats wildfires in Chernobyl radiation zone

Environmental groups, including Greenpeace, have warned that radioactive particles which settled into the soil after the 1986 disaster could be thrown up into the air once again by wildfires and blown into other areas by the wind. Hundreds of wildfires, sparked by the hottest summer ever recorded in Russia, have engulfed large areas around Moscow and other parts of western Russia, choking the capital in smog for a week.

Moscow Under Gas Attack

The smog from forest and peat bog fires has shrouded Moscow on Friday morning again. The pungent smoke has covered almost the whole city. The gas attack is accompanied with extremely high temperatures. The city is about to brave another absolute record for summer temperatures on August 6: 40 degrees above zero Centigrade. Meteorologists said that the first week of August would become the hottest in 130 years of observations in Russia.

Nuclear Traction Engine To Take Russian Spacemen to Mars

In the past few years it seemed like Russia was ready to accept its role as a space power number two. Americans are building a new spaceship and packing their space suits for the Mars expedition, while Russia is modernizing its Soyuz yet again, built over 40 years ago. Like true cab drivers, Russia gives rides to the International Space Station to everyone who pays.

Geo-strategic:

Abkhazia says Russian missile deployment 'under agreement'

Russia also signed earlier this year agreements with South Ossetia and Abkhazia on establishing permanent Russian military bases there. The bases are located in Gudauta, Abkhazia, and in South Ossetia's capital Tskhinvali. Each base hosts up to 1,700 servicemen, T-62 tanks, light armored vehicles, air defense systems and a variety of aircraft.

Russian S-300 systems in Abkhazia threaten regional balance of forces – Georgia

The deployment of S-300 air defense systems in Georgia's breakaway region of Abkhazia threatens the balance of forces in the region, Georgia's State Minister for Reintegration Temur Yakobashvili said on Wednesday.

Russia proposes Ukraine to conduct joint naval drills more often - Navy Commander

The festivities usually include a military parade, a number of sport and cultural events and an exhibition of skills by naval personnel.

Russia 'deploys missiles' in breakaway region of Abkhazia

Russia says it has deployed S-300 anti-aircraft missiles in the breakaway region of Abkhazia in Georgia. The Georgian government - which refuses to acknowledge Abkhazia's independence - says it is "concerned" by the move. The announcement comes just days after an unscheduled visit by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to the region. Russia recognised Abkhaz independence in 2008 after winning a brief war with Georgia over nearby South Ossetia.

Russia Sign Uranium Supply Deal With South Africa

Russia is to provide South African nuclear power stations with uranium until at least 2017 in a key deal extending Moscow's trade ties in the continent. The contract, signed in the Kremlin on Thursday by President Dmitry Medvedev and visiting South African President Jacob Zuma, comes into effect next year.

Cyber:

Russian Court Bans Access to YouTube Entirely

A court of the city of Komsomolsk-on-Amur in Russia's Khabarovsk region, the Far East, ruled to restrict access to world's largest video hosting YouTube and four other websites, which, as legal experts believed, contained extremist materials, *Pravda.Ru* news service reports.

Detail of the Report:

Political Issues:

Russia, NORAD complete joint air defense drills

The exercise, dubbed Vigilant Eagle, was carried out on August 6-11, and involved Russian, Canadian and U.S. air force personnel operating from command centers at the Elmendorf airbase in Alaska, and in Khabarovsk, Russia.

"The personnel [involved in the drills] exhibited a high degree of professionalism in coordinating air missions and exchanging information," a senior Russian Air Force official said commenting on the outcome of the drills.

The exercise scenario, put together by NORAD and U.S. Northern Command, created a situation requiring both the Russian Air Force and NORAD to launch or divert fighter aircraft to investigate and follow a U.S. flagged Golfstream 4 plane on an international flight that has been taken over by terrorists.

The drills involved U.S. AWACS E-3B and Russian A-50 airborne warning and control aircraft, [Russian MiG-31](#) and [Su-27 fighters](#) and U.S. F-22 interceptors, along with refueling aircraft from both countries.

"These drills allow us to make a step forward in the Russian-NORAD cooperation on countering potential threats of aircraft piracy," the Russian official said.

Russia and the U.S. should work together on missile defense shield

It seems to me that we should change our attitude towards U.S. missile early-warning radar in Europe. Defense cooperation is a major problem both countries must solve if we are to radically alter our relationship. If the sides can work on missile defense together, they will be more than just partners – they will be allies. If we cooperate on this issue and build a common missile shield, then we will in effect bury the mutual nuclear deterrence between Russia and the United States, which remains to this day in organizational and technical terms. Working toward a common missile defense system is the most important step we can take to move beyond the idea of deterrence and develop a completely different approach to nuclear weapons.

To paraphrase Winston Churchill: "Nuclear weapons and the threat of their use, mutual deterrence and mutually assured destruction are the worst instruments for preventing a large-scale war except all the others." We need to move beyond this notion, at least in our bilateral relations. We do not need to deter each other from launching a nuclear attack, and yet this is our military posture to this day. Russia still has considerable potential for cooperation or developing a joint missile defense shield. We have carried out only nine joint exercises involving missile defense: five Russia-U.S. exercises, and four U.S.-

Russia-NATO exercises. We had no problems with zones of responsibility or managing the system. We need to move beyond the mistrust and begin full-scale cooperation. Then all other issues, including tactical weapons issues, will be easier to resolve.

Putin expects swift return to work at blast-hit Siberian coal mine

The Rospadskaya coalmine in the town of Mezhdurechensk was severely affected by two explosions that hit the mine on the night of May 8-9. Sixty-seven bodies have been recovered from the mine, with another 23 missing and presumed dead.

The accident is thought to have been caused by poor observation of safety regulations.

"I very much expect that the coal mine to be restored in the shortest time and will fully resume its work on schedule," Putin said.

The Kemerovo region's governor, Aman Tuleyev, told Putin the coal mine could resume operations next month.

"The more we drag out the restoration of the coal mine, the more comfortable people become. Dependency develops - it's possible to not work and get 40,000 rubles a month [about \$1,300]," Tuleyev said during a video conference with Moscow.

Putin urged the mine's authorities to have an "informal approach to solving the social issues" concerning the payments to the relatives of the deceased miners.

Clinton Says Senate 'Must Act' on Nuclear Arms Pact With Russia

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said the U.S. Senate must vote to ratify a treaty with Russia to cut nuclear weapons when lawmakers return in September from their monthlong recess.

"Our national security is at risk," Clinton said in a statement to reporters at the State Department in Washington. "It's been more than eight months since we've had inspectors on the ground in Russia" who give "a vital window into Russia's arsenal."

Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, delayed a vote by the panel to round up more bipartisan support. The extra time may help get more Republicans on board, he said. Democrats control the Senate 59-41, with 67 votes, or two-thirds, needed for ratification.

"When the Senate returns they must act," Clinton said today. The treaty "will advance our national security and provide stability and predictability between the world's two leading nuclear powers," she said.

Democrats, including Kerry, say the U.S. will need to set an example of arms cuts as Obama and other top officials press their counterparts to impose more of their own

sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program to complement United Nations penalties adopted earlier this year.

Republicans including Arizona Senator Jon Kyl have balked at a treaty they say could hamstring U.S. plans for a European missile defense system that Russia opposes.

Medvedev Cracks Down on Russian Navy Administration

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has taken a number of personnel decisions regarding the management of the Russian Navy in connection with the fire on the Navy base in Moscow.

"Navy Commander Admiral (Vladimir) Vysotsky must be issued a service incompetence note, Chief of Naval Staff and First Deputy Commander (Alexander) Tatarinov must be issued a service incompetence note, the Navy Chief of Logistics (Sergei) Sergeev must be dismissed," Medvedev said on Wednesday at the meeting of the members of the Security Council of Russia on fire safety at sensitive sites, Interfax reported.

"I am instructing the Defense Minister to dismiss a number of officers for committed disciplinary violations," the President said. The President also dismissed colonel Biront, head of the central air-technical base of naval aviation, from military service due to the failure to fulfill contract obligations. Medvedev warned that "if something similar happens elsewhere, in other departments, I will do exactly the same thing, without any regret."

Medvedev mentioned the explosion that occurred at the Ministry of Defense facility in Ulyanovsk in November of last year. "Then we took certain actions, but, as it is obvious from the current situation, they were insufficient. And despite the fact that I brought the Defense Ministry to work on putting out fires, to help the civilian population, unfortunately, in some cases, the ministry cannot defend itself," said the President.

He stressed that the fire that occurred at Ministry of Defense facility in the Moscow region had serious consequences. "Preliminary investigation on the matter with the Ministry of Defense has been conducted, but the investigation will continue. It has been revealed that what happened was just the failure of duty, gross negligence. The fire that was spreading at a fairly modest pace was not localized," the President said. He drew attention to the fact that "whereabouts of the leadership of the base during the fire was unknown."

As previously reported by the representative of the investigative committee, "On July 29, at 4pm at the warehouse located near Kolomna, a fire has occurred, which resulted in burning down of the headquarters, the financial part of the club, two bays for [cars](#) fleet, 13 storage facilities with air equipment for different purposes, and 17 open area storage units with cars." On July 30 fire was localized. No one was hurt.

The President has also warned the leadership of the Defense Ministry that it would also bear responsibility in case of recurrence of the situation that took place at Moscow Navy base, where the fire occurred.

At a meeting with Russia Security Council members on Wednesday, Medvedev instructed Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov to take the issues of fire safety at sensitive sites under the direct control.

"Conduct a meeting with the leadership of the Ministry and tell them that if something else gets on fire, everyone will be held responsible," Medvedev stated. Serdyukov responded assuring the President that "what happened on base number 2512 will not happen again."

"Assist civil departments and learn how to defend yourselves," said Medvedev. He also instructed the Minister of Defense to maintain operative interaction with local authorities, "so that the governors stop calling the Ministry of Defense about every little issue."

"I had a conversation with the governor of Vladimir region. He said that there are issues of local significance and that they have to call almost a commander of the district to solve them. It is necessary that such matters are solved directly by unit commanders who would have all the authority, in the worst case scenario, who would call someone and check the situation," said Medvedev. He expressed the hope that these issues are solved.

The President also said that due to the spread of fires in the Russian regions, certain conclusions will be made. The conclusions will be preceded by debriefing with the governors and the Government.

"Before these conclusions are made, I will gather the governors and the government, and we will hold a debriefing to see who worked, and who did what," Medvedev said at a meeting with Russian Security Council members on Wednesday.

The President also stressed that "before these conclusions are made, we must put out the situation." According to Medvedev, the work being carried out today by MES is "at the limit." "They are doing great work, they are all heroes," the President said.

Economic:

E4 Group gets \$588m contract with OGC-6

Power generating company OGC-6 has signed a contract with engineering firm E4 Group to build a steam gas power unit at OGC-6's Cherepovets GRES power station, based in Vologda region, OGC-6 reports.

Total investment into the power unit construction is reportedly estimated at \$588m.

The unit's power capacity is to top 400 MW, the firm said.

Construction of the power unit is scheduled to be completed by February 28, 2014.

Forest Fires Cause Damage of \$15 Billion to Russian Economy

Analysts with HSBC and Uralsib forecast an industrial setback or even stagnation. The harvest of crops will drop to 60-65 million tons because of the drought in 2010. Russia's temporal ban on the export of crops will cause the losses of \$3 billion, which in its turn will trigger the growth of the food [inflation](#) up to 9.5 percent.

[Business/2010-08-09/russia-tourism-foreign-domestic.html" target="_blank">Russia](#)
Today: Muscovites getting out to anywhere cooler

Ecologists say that the Russian government will need to retrieve the system of the state forest protection, which was abolished during the reforms in 2005-2006. Otherwise, the situation with forest fires in the country will remain catastrophic. The authorities are undoubtedly guilty of the situation with the fires, since the forest protection system has been ruined, and the funding of this field has been decreased. The law stipulates EMERCOM's reaction to wildfires only when they threaten settlements.

Only 2.2 billion rubles were assigned for the struggle with wildfires in Russia in 2010. Therefore, extinguishing fires on one hectare of forest cost \$0,033. No one is currently responsible for preventing and extinguishing forest fires at early stages. Quite on the contrary, an employee, who shows an initiative at this point, can be accused of inappropriate spending.

About 70,000 foresters and nearly 130,000 other employees of the forest sector guaranteed fire safety in Russian forests prior to the reform. The personnel has been subsequently cut to 12,000 people . They have many other job duties to fulfill, which makes it very hard for them to look into the matter of fire prevention.

The situation with forest fires may repeat in the future, unless the government retrieves the special state-run forest service and creates the joint system of aviation protection of forests. If Russia had such a system, it would be possible to cut the damage five or even ten times and avoid human losses.

Social/ Humanitarian:

Moscow homeless flee city over heat, smog

Moscow's homeless are fleeing the capital to get away from the stifling heat and choking smog, officials said on Wednesday.

Almost every Muscovite who could fled the capital over the past fortnight to escape acrid smog from nearby raging peat and forest fires.

"The homeless, like all of us, try to leave Moscow when it is too hot on the street and it smells of smoke," said Andrei Pentyukhov, the Moscow city official in charge of homeless programs.

Central Russia has been beset by a record-breaking heat wave since mid-June, which has been exacerbated by the worst drought since the 1970s.

The heat wave looks set for yet another week as temperatures in Moscow are forecast to reach 37 degrees Celsius (98.6 degrees Fahrenheit) at the weekend.

Moscow Literally Burnt by the Sun

Death rate in Moscow has doubled recently because of the smog as compared to the same time period of the past year, although this information is not official. Smoke exacerbates the ecological situation in other Russian cities too. This morning the smog enveloped St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg.

Meteorologists say that the smog will remain in the city for several days. The wind direction is not going to change until Wednesday. Heavy rainfalls and thunderstorms are expected to occur in the middle of this week, and the ecological situation in the city will most likely improve, Interfax reports.

The head of Russia's EMERCOM Sergey Shoygu said that it could be possible to put the peat fires down in the Moscow region in five-seven days. About 7,000 people and nearly 2,000 units of equipment are currently involved in fire-extinguishing works.

Russia Today: Wildfires could spread to region irradiated by Chernobyl disaster

There is no official information to confirm the increase of the death rate in Moscow against the background of the extreme ecological situation. However, Russian newspapers say that there is every reason to believe that smog kills at least 200 people in the city every day.

Emergency services of the Russian capital report a record increase of calls. The medical personnel was instructed not to hospitalize people, except for extreme cases. Paramedics are having a hard time too because they work very intense hours in the vehicles with no air conditioning systems. Sometimes paramedics need help themselves.

If a patient gets hospitalized, they have to face unbearable conditions there too since most of Russian hospitals are not air conditioned.

An employee of a Moscow morgue said they were usually receiving 20 dead bodies a day, but the number had doubled or even tripled during the recent three or four weeks, The Moskovsky Komsomolets newspaper said.

Someone Wants Number of Drug Addicts in Russia to Grow with Methadone Help

Pravda.Ru has reported before that international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), better known in Russia as "human rights organizations" were in unison concerned about the appointment of Yuri Fedotov, a Russian official, as the chairman of the UN Crime and Drugs Office. They believe that Russia can not represent this office of the United Nation because there is "no respect for human rights" in the country. Moreover, they claim that Russia is not willing to work on the solution of the problem of

heroin production in Afghanistan and refuses to introduce the "replacement therapy" program with the use of methadone.

As for methadone, the point of the replacement program, as it is stated, is to replace heroin with weaker and cheaper methadone. This drug can be taken orally, without injections, which reduces the risk of catching HIV infection and, supposedly, even favors the gradual social recovery of a drug addict. In addition, the drug is distributed among drug addicts, which supposedly reduces the level of crimes motivated by drug addiction.

Russia Today: HIV/AIDS: No right to be happy?

It is worthy of note that a number of countries such as Germany, Denmark, England and others have tried the methadone program but subsequently banned it. So what is happening?

This is a matter of complete, albeit intelligent unreality. A drug addict wants to get high, and they will fight for it. Only a few of them can cure themselves of this disease - those, who did not have an intention of developing addiction to drugs, but became drug addicts, let's say, incidentally.

The majority of them proceed, increasing their doses and varying narcotic substances. To put it in a nutshell, they replace weaker drugs with stronger substances that offer a longer effect. It is worthy of note that the inventors of new opiate substances represented them as strong pain-killers with practically no side effects. Heroin was originally invented as a pain-killer too.

Maybe it is enough to walk so many times into the same water? It has been some 300 years already.

The problem of drug addiction can in no way be solved with the help of drugs - what is so difficult about it to understand here?

At first they said that methadone would be distributed only in extreme cases not to let an addict either infect others with AIDS or commit crimes over a dose. If the program is proved successful, it would then be offered for all drug addicts - here's your free dose, friend, take it.

The symptoms produced by the withdrawal of methadone are a lot stronger than those of heroin - they last for weeks, not just days. It is practically impossible to bid farewell to methadone. It simply develops yet another addiction for a drug addict. Methadone does not develop aversion to other narcotic substances: a person continues to take other substances plus methadone.

Andrey Sannikov, a Russian journalist from Ekaterinburg, said: "A drug addict, who tried methadone at least once, will start taking it afterwards permanently. This drug is more expensive today in Ekaterinburg than heroin - from \$170 to \$300 for one gram. The

production process for methadone is very cheap: 2.5 rubles per gram, and the process itself is just as simple as that of acetic acid. It's possible to produce thousands of tons of this drug. The cost of methadone is a very low one taking into consideration the scale of its production."

As for rehabilitation, which a drug addict is supposed to experience - let's think being two steps ahead of it. Let's take a perfect case: a drug addict does not do illegal drugs, does not take even alcohol, but takes a dose of methadone daily. What such a person can expect?

He or she will not be able to find a job which stipulates responsibility. Methadone will continue to cause irreparable damage to person's health, and even an agreeable employer will not be thrilled about frequent sick-leaves of a new employee. Such a person will not be able to live without their rehab and will not be able to go somewhere.

Is this called rehabilitation? This is a form of control over a drug addict, not more than that.

US Same-Sex Couples To Be Banned from Adopting Russian Children

The Russian authorities have started to regulate the process of adoption of Russian orphans by US family couples. The director of the Department for Upbringing and Socialization of Children, Alyona Levitskaya, stated at a news conference that the talks with the USA pertaining to the bilateral agreement on adoption had entered their final stage. The document will come in legal effect until the end of this year.

"The new agreement brings the US and Russian laws into harmony and accommodates differences," Levitskaya said.

Numerous moot questions have emerged during the talks, the official added. The Russian side in the negotiations had to take considerable efforts to establish its case and introduce amendments. It was especially hard to alter the regulations which would ban same-sex couples from adopting Russian children.

The Russian family law clearly defines a family couple as a voluntary union between a man and a woman.

Nearly all discrepancies between two legislations in the new agreement have been removed. The new document will also abolish the institution of independent adoptions. Now it will be impossible to adopt a child through mediators and lawyers. A US family couple will be able to adopt a Russian child only through authorized agencies - there are 40 of them in the new agreement.

Food,Energy/ Environment:

Russian heat no prelude to environmental catastrophe - scientist

The record-breaking heat wave that has engulfed Russia since mid-June is not a prelude to a global environmental catastrophe, an environmental expert said on Wednesday.

"Deviations in different regions are due to the general instability of the climate system," Mikhail Kabanov said. "There is a constant rearrangement of this system, and as a result there can be different anomalies, including extreme ones."

"There has been... a warming before, and then it has been cold again," he said. "Such fluctuations of climate happen all the time."

Scientists have yet to determine to what extent these fluctuations have been deformed by the "anthropogenic factor," he said.

Kabanov said that this year's "scenario" is unlikely to repeat itself in the next few years.

Moscow homeless flee city over heat, smog

Moscow's homeless are fleeing the capital to get away from the stifling heat and choking smog, officials said on Wednesday.

Almost every Muscovite who could fled the capital over the past fortnight to escape acrid smog from nearby raging peat and forest fires.

"The homeless, like all of us, try to leave Moscow when it is too hot on the street and it smells of smoke," said Andrei Pentyukhov, the Moscow city official in charge of homeless programs.

Last Friday was the worst day yet, but the smog abated on Tuesday, with the city's remaining residents gazing in wonder at the blue skies overhead - a sight they had not seen for easily a week.

The heat wave looks set for yet another week as temperatures in Moscow are forecast to reach 37 degrees Celsius (98.6 degrees Fahrenheit) at the weekend.

Moscow smog from wildfires eases, gives temporary relief for residents

Concentration of carbon monoxide in Moscow's air has abated, however may slightly increase in the evening, an expert from the State Environmental Protection Organization Mosekomonitoring said on Tuesday.

"Currently, the concentration of carbon monoxide in Moscow is within the norm," she said.

Rain in several of Moscow's districts has helped disperse the smog that has been suffocating Muscovites over the last few days.

"But there is a probability that the concentration of harmful substances will slightly rise by evening," she added.

An emergency situation caused by wildfires and burning peat bogs in Moscow region have continued unabated for the last couple of weeks.

Even Russian Prime Minister [Vladimir Putin took part in extinguishing forest fires on Tuesday in Ryazan Province](#) on board an amphibious firefighting airplane.

The Russian head of government was the co-pilot for half an hour aboard a Be-200 plane scooping up water from the nearby Oka River and dumping it on raging forest fires some 200 kilometers southeast of Moscow.

He dumped approximately 12 tons of water on each of two fires, extinguishing both completely.

The record-breaking heat wave in Moscow will continue through mid-August, meteorologists say.

Agriculture minister says grain shortage in Russia unlikely

Russia will not experience serious grain shortages despite an ongoing drought, Agriculture Minister Yelena Skrynnik said Wednesday.

The most pessimistic forecast predicts that Russian farmers will harvest 60 million tons of grain this fall, down 30 percent compared to last year due to severe drought and wildfires.

In case the drought continues even in early September, farmers would sow extra spring crops, Prime-Tass news agency reported.

In 2009, the harvest amounted to 97.1 million tons. Most optimistic scenarios predicts this year's harvest will reach 67 million tons.

Russia combats wildfires in Chernobyl radiation zone

Russia is mounting extra patrols to fight wildfires in a region hit by nuclear fallout from Chernobyl, amid fears that radiation could spread.

Crews put out several fires in Bryansk, the emergencies ministry said, amid concern that wind or fire could whip up radioactive particles in the soil.

Officials say they are assessing the danger and there is no cause for panic.

Fires have swept western Russia for a week, though officials say many are now under control.

The area engulfed by fires has halved, they say. An area of 92,000 hectares (350 sq miles) is now on fire, compared to Tuesday's figure of 174,000 hectares, the emergencies ministry said in a statement.

Moscow enjoyed clear skies on Wednesday after rains helped cleanse the air after a week of heavy smog.

But more than 600 fires are still burning in different parts of the country, including around the capital, and weather forecasters are warning the smoke could soon return.

Radiation fears

The chief of the forest protection service said his agency had increased patrols around the forests in Bryansk, the part of Russia that suffered the most from the Chernobyl disaster in what was then Soviet Ukraine.

"There is a danger, but we are controlling the situation," agency chief Vladimir Rozinkevich told the AP.

The death rate in Moscow doubled to 700 people a day, mortuaries were overflowing, flights were disrupted and factories were forced to shut down.

Official sacked

Many Russians blame the government for being poorly prepared to handle the crisis - which it denies.

Moscow's mayor refused to return from his holiday early to help deal with the crisis, and a top forestry official has been sacked for the same reason.

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin took to the air on Tuesday in a water bombing jet to douse fires in one of the worst hit regions.

Moscow Under Gas Attack

The smog from wildfires ravaging the Moscow region has been tormenting Moscow for several weeks already. Today's smog is the thickest ever. The level of the air pollution in the city continues to grow. The concentration of carbon monoxide, suspended particles and specific hydrocarbons in the air has exceeded maximum allowable levels. The pollution of the air is expected to grow. "We expect a very intense air pollution in the capital," an official said.

[Russia Today: Moscow smoke menaces underground](#)

The work of Moscow's Domodedovo International Airport has been disrupted as a result of the smoke. The visibility on the runway is less than 400 meters. The airport works on actual weather: the commanders of arriving planes make personal decisions on landing. Six planes have already landed on the reserve airdrome at Sheremetyevo Airport.

Critical ecological situation in Moscow generated rumors about dangerous consequences, particularly cancer, which Muscovites may have as a result of the gas attack in the city.

"It's like smoking. Lung cancer may develop if one smokes a lot and for a long period of time. A month or two of this smoke in the air will not lead to such a result," a medical specialist said.

Psychologists say that anomalous weather phenomena, such as smog and fires, may develop various phobias with people. "Someone is afraid of losing their homes and possessions in fire, others think that they may suffocate at night, so they do not sleep," a psychologist said.

At least 52 people died in wildfires raging throughout Russia, the health and social development ministry said on Friday.

"A total of 471 people turned for medical help and 72 were hospitalized, 43 fire victims are currently in hospitals and 52 have died," the ministry said.

Wildfires are raging in 22 Russian regions. On Thursday, NASA satellites Terra and Aqua registered 535 hotspots from wildfires across Russia, RIA Novosti reports.

Health experts say pollution levels are so high that breathing has become as dangerous as smoking several packs of cigarettes a day.

Nuclear Traction Engine To Take Russian Spacemen to Mars

Vitaly Lopota, the head of Russia's Energia Space Corporation, reported when and how Russian spacemen would travel to Mars.

At the 34th academic readings devoted to space issues held in Bauman Moscow State Technology University in memory of Sergey Korolyov, Vitaly Lopota, president and chief engineer of Energia Space Corporation, made an astonishing statement. He presented a clear, balanced and modern development plan for Russian pilot-controlled space technology. The plan included deadlines, a well-thought strategy and weak points (which is particularly plausible, since otherwise the plan would sound like an arrogant attempt at success rather than an engineering plan).

The International Space Station (ISS) is the most expensive project in the world. Participating countries have already invested 120 billion dollars into it. Even wealthy Americans had to tighten their belts and first abandon their shuttles (this year), and then their Moon program (the Congress recently cut the program's budget).

No one is planning to close the ISS in 2015 as it was intended 10 years ago because the money has been already paid. The station is finally fully equipped. Last week the Americans attached the new wing called Tranquility to it. Its seven illuminators provide the view of the ISS and Earth.

It was decided to keep the station until 2020. There are talks, however, that the station will be hanging in orbit until 2028 or even longer. Why not? It could be turned into the base for preparing interplanetary expeditions. Old, worn out modules could be replaced with new ones.

There is a danger for Russia to get bogged down in this project. Even if Russia builds a new ship, we might still remain a mere space cab driver while replacing Soyuz with Rus'. Then we will be number two for sure. Many experts I talked to were concerned about this issue. And then, Lopata made his crucial statement.

The Russian pilot-controlled program will develop concurrently with Rus' and rockets for in-orbit delivery.

In the 50 years of space era the humanity learned very well how to deliver cargo to low earth orbit. Bringing 20 to 30 tons 300 to 500 kilometers above Earth does not pose a problem. But this is what the experts call the "stopover technology" (throwing a satellite in required orbit and burning the [fuel](#)).

Geo-strategic:

[Abkhazia says Russian missile deployment 'under agreement'](#)

The deployment of S-300 air defense systems in Abkhazia is in compliance with the current defense cooperation agreement with Russia, the foreign minister of the former Georgian republic said on Wednesday.

"The deployment of the S-300 system is part of our bilateral agreements on military cooperation," Maxim Gvindzhia said.

Russian Air Force head Col. Gen. Alexander Zelin said earlier on Wednesday S-300 systems had been placed in Abkhazia to protect the airspace of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He did not say how many S-300s were deployed.

Gvindzhia said the deployment was necessary due to the "constant threat" coming from "Georgia and its supporters."

"Therefore, we are ready for everything," he said.

Valery Yakhnovets, the defense minister of South Ossetia, another breakaway Georgian republic, said although his country had a reliable air defense system, the deployment of an S-300 complex on its territory "would not be superfluous."

An advanced version of the S-300 system, the S-300PMU1, has a range of over 150 kilometers (over 100 miles) and can intercept missiles and aircraft at a wide range of altitudes, making it effective in warding off air and missile strikes.

Russia recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia two weeks after a five-day war with Georgia in August 2008, which began when Georgian forces attacked South Ossetia in an attempt to bring it back under central control.

[Russian S-300 systems in Abkhazia threaten regional balance of forces - Georgia](#)

The commander of the Russian Air Force, Col. Gen Alexander Zelin announced earlier on Wednesday that Russia had deployed S-300 missiles in Abkhazia to protect the

airspace of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in conjunction with other air defense means deployed by the Ground Forces.

"This move primarily contradicts the cease-fire agreement [between Russia and Georgia] concluded on August 12 [2008]," Yakobashvili said in an interview with Novosti-Georgia news agency.

"The deployment of this class of air defense systems is not only aimed against Georgia, it also changes the balance of forces in the region," the Georgian minister said.

Yakobashvili added that Russia's actions were also aimed against NATO and said Georgia would protest the S-300 deployment in international organizations.

Russia recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia two weeks after a five-day war with Georgia in August 2008, which began when Georgian forces attacked South Ossetia in an attempt to bring it back under central control.

Russia also signed earlier this year agreements with South Ossetia and Abkhazia on establishing permanent Russian military bases there.

The military bases are located in Gudauta, Abkhazia, and in South Ossetia's capital Tskhinvali. Each base hosts up to 1,700 servicemen, T-62 tanks, light armored vehicles, air defense systems and various aircraft.

In response to Russia's actions, Tbilisi accused Moscow of aggression and violation of international laws, severed diplomatic relations with Russia and declared Abkhazia and South Ossetia occupied territories.

[Russia proposes Ukraine to conduct joint naval drills more often - Navy Commander](#)

Russia proposed Ukraine to conduct joint Russian and Ukrainian naval drills more often, Russian Navy Commander Admiral Vladimir Vysotsky said.

"[There is] a proposal to reduce periods of time between these events," Vysotsky said after parade marking Russia's Navy Day.

He said that the countries should hold naval exercise annually instead of one in a year led by Russian and Ukrainian fleets' commanders alternately.

Russia celebrates the Navy Day on the last Sunday of July.

Russia 'deploys missiles' in breakaway region of Abkhazia

In a statement released by the Russian government, air force commander-in-chief General Alexander Zelin said the role of the missiles would be "anti-aircraft defence of the territory of Abkhazia and South Ossetia".

The self-styled Abkhaz "foreign minister", Maxim Gvinjia, later contradicted Gen Zelin, telling the BBC that the general's statement on the S-300s had been "misinterpreted".

But Georgia's Deputy Prime Minister Temur Yakobashvili expressed anxiety over Russia's statement.

"This should be of concern not only for Georgia but also for other regional actors including Nato," he told the AFP news agency.

"It is very obvious that Russia is using these occupied territories as a military platform for larger plans than only Georgia".

Strong ties

The second anniversary of the brief war in 2008 has been used by the Russian government to emphasise its ties with the breakaway regions.

During his recent visit to Abkhazia, Mr Medvedev reiterated Russia's support for its independence and promised more financial aid.

Last year Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin announced that Moscow would pay for part of the region's defence infrastructure.

In August 2008, fighting in Georgia's breakaway region of South Ossetia escalated into war between Georgia and Russia.

Russian forces quickly drove Georgian troops out of first South Ossetia then Abkhazia before a peace deal was signed.

However so far only Venezuela, Nicaragua and the tiny Pacific island of Nauru have joined Russia in recognising the independence of the two regions.

Russia Sign Uranium Supply Deal With South Africa

Sergey Kiriyyenko, chief of the Russian atomic agency Rosatom, told that the deal would push Russia to control some 45 percent of South Africa's uranium market, according to *BusinessWeek*.

It was Zuma's first state visit to Moscow since becoming President in 2009. He is leading a political and [business](#) delegation that consists of 11 Ministers.

Addressing a news conference in the Kremlin after talks with Zuma, Medvedev said the deal was 'just a beginning' in developing the immature relations between the two countries.

Both the leaders discussed trade and investments in minerals, energy, science and technology, defense and aerospace, *RTT News* says.

Cyber:

Russian Court Bans Access to YouTube Entirely

Prosecutors of the city conducted a monitoring of the Internet and found several resources of extremist content, the experts concluded.

One of the websites contained excerpts from Adolf Hitler's renowned work *Mein Kampf*, which was officially recognized in Russia as an extremist book several months ago. On YouTube, the prosecutors found an extremist video titled "Russia for Russians," which is included on the federal list of extremist materials.

[Russia Today: Russian court bans YouTube](#)

The court ordered the local provider to cut access to several Russian online libraries and youtube.com website.

A spokesperson for the Internet provide in the city claimed that the company did not own the resources and therefore could not act responsible for their content. Moreover, the provider does not have any rights to restrict access to information if subscribers do not infringe upon the conditions of the use of the Internet.

Google's division in Russia claimed that the ruling of the court of Komsomolsk-on-Amur to restrict access to five Internet websites, as well as to the international video hosting YouTube had been made in violation of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, *RIA Novosti* reports.

"The court ruling restricts access not to separate videos, but to the whole website. Therefore, it deprives users of free access to information. It is worthy of note that YouTube contains a lot of information including the channel of the Russian president," Alla Zabrovskaya, a spokeswoman for Google Russia said.