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ANALYTICAL ARTICLES:

**UZBEKISTAN: GRAND STRATEGY
OR STRATEGIC FAILURE?**
Farkhad Tolipov

**BAKIEV-KULOV HONEYMOON IN KYR-
GYZSTAN: OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS**
Ainura Cholponkulova

**RULING PARTY'S LIST OF CANDIDATES
REVEALS PRESIDENT ALIYEV'S DESIRE
NOT TO "ROCK THE BOAT"**
Alman Mir Ismail

LONDON'S LESSONS FOR CENTRAL ASIA
Stephen Blank

FIELD REPORTS:

**CENTRAL ASIA: FUNDAMENTALISM, AND NOT
JUST ISLAMIC**
Zoya Pylenko

**SECURITY CHALLENGES TEST KAZAKHSTAN'S
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITMENTS**
Marat Yermukanov

**TURKMENBASHI GRANTS CITIZENSHIP TO
OVER 13, 000 PEOPLE**
Chemen Durdiyeva

**PROPERTY REFORMS IN GEORGIA: UNEM-
PLOYMENT VS. PROPERTY RIGHTS?**
Kakha Jibladze

NEWS DIGEST



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Contents

Analytical Articles

UZBEKISTAN: GRAND STRATEGY OR STRATEGIC FAILURE? Farkhad Tolipov	3
BAKIEV-KULOV HONEYMOON IN KYRGYZSTAN: OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS Ainura Cholponkulova	5
RULING PARTY'S LIST OF CANDIDATES REVEALS PRESIDENT ALIYEV'S DESIRE NOT TO "ROCK THE BOAT" Alman Mir Ismail	8
LONDON'S LESSONS FOR CENTRAL ASIA Stephen Blank	10

Field Reports

CENTRAL ASIA: FUNDAMENTALISM, AND NOT JUST ISLAMIC Zoya Pylenko	13
SECURITY CHALLENGES TEST KAZAKHSTAN'S HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITMENTS Marat Yermukanov	14
TURKMENBASHI GRANTS CITIZENSHIP TO OVER 13, 000 PEOPLE Chemen Durdiyeva	16
PROPERTY REFORMS IN GEORGIA: UNEMPLOYMENT VS. PROPERTY RIGHTS? Kakha Jibladze	17

<u>News Digest</u>	19
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EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

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Analytical article structure: Ideal length between 1000 and 1200 words.

KEY ISSUE: A short 100-word statement of your conclusions about the issue or news event on which the article focuses.

BACKGROUND: 300-400 words of analysis about what has led up to the event or issue and why this issue is critical to the region. Include background information about the views and experiences of the local population.

IMPLICATIONS: 300-400 words of analysis of the ramifications of this event or issue, including where applicable, implications for the local people's future.

CONCLUSIONS: 100-200 words that strongly state your conclusions about the impact of the event or issue.

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Those interested in joining *The Analyst's* pool of authors to contribute articles, field reports, or contacts of potential writers, please send your CV to: scornell@jhu.edu and suggest some topics on which you would like to write.

Svante E. Cornell

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UZBEKISTAN: GRAND STRATEGY OR STRATEGIC FAILURE?

Farkhad Tolipov

It is widely believed that Uzbekistan recently made a strategic turn in its foreign policy in favor of the Russian Federation and at the expense of its strategic partnership with the United States. It seems that not so much Russia as Uzbekistan is revitalizing the old-fashioned balance of power mode of geopolitics in Central Asia. The Uzbek government's latest foreign policy decision to shut down the American military base at Karshi-Khanabad following the Andijan tragedy is a result of strategic miscalculation rather than strategic wisdom.

BACKGROUND: At first glance, the recent tragedy in Andijan – a provincial Uzbek town in the Fergana Valley – is an internal affair of Uzbekistan. That is how Uzbekistan responded to demands from the U.S., EU, and OSCE on demands for an international investigation of the tragedy involving the alleged indiscriminate use of force against unarmed population in Andijan on May 12-13, 2005. However, Uzbekistan needed to comply with its international obligations taken, for example, within the OSCE or stemming from the Declaration on Strategic Partnership between Uzbekistan and the United States, signed on March 12, 2002. In this context, the unprecedented scale the Andijan tragedy has an obvious international dimension.

The dramatic events in Uzbekistan coincided with the chain of so-called colored revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. Numerous allegations that either such organizations as the Soros Foundation or the American state itself inspired and supported popular uprisings are circulating in the region. Moreover, there is an official consensus on this question within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), whose last summit indicated sharply that the six member-states of the SCO would not tolerate a prolonged American presence in Central Asia.

Unfortunately, there was no official rejection from the American side of all these allegations about a Western “democratic plot”. But meanwhile, there has been little evidence advanced by “victims of colored revolutions” that such a plot exists. Against the background of all this drama, Uzbekistan’s Foreign Ministry on July 29 delivered

a diplomatic Note to the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent, in which it tasked the American military contingent to withdraw from the country within 180 days.

Does the United States really deserve such a demarche of Uzbekistan? It should be pointed out that the U.S. attitude with respect to Uzbekistan has been principled from the very beginning of its independence, and has constantly been critical regarding the issue of democratization and protection of human rights. This was the case before the establishment of relations of strategic partnership, it was the same after 2002, and remains the same today. In this sense, nothing has changed in the American position, especially regarding the Andijan event. What is called Western/American pressure on Uzbekistan was not caused by the Andijan case only. So if this type of “pressure” did not obstruct the deployment of American forces on Uzbek soil, why then should it become the reason of withdrawal?

IMPLICATIONS: It is obvious that Uzbekistan’s demand for the base’s withdrawal was stipulated by Tashkent’s reaction to American pressure concerning Andijan, rather than by careful calculation of the country’s national interests.

On July 26, U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld made an urgent trip to Central Asia – to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – to discuss the positions of these two states towards American bases on their territories. The U.S. Defense Secretary was assured about these Central Asian states’ positive attitude towards continued American presence. They were quite supportive of the American

view that the military campaign against terrorists in Afghanistan is far from completed.

Kyrgyzstan's and Tajikistan's position appeared to be more prudent and balanced than could have been expected. They seemed to embarrass Uzbekistan because these states, which have always been pro-Russian in their foreign policy strategy since independence, demonstrated their loyalty with respect to America's presence, but, on the other hand, the country that had always looked pro-American turned in reality towards a pro-Russian position.

Such strategic confusion in Uzbekistan's foreign policy in fact leads to strategic failure because Uzbekistan consciously or unconsciously plays into the hands of geopolitical currents, or itself plays off inadequate old-fashioned zero-sum-game geopolitics. Uzbekistan will not overcome the difficulties and challenges of independence if it will regard the states of the geopolitical triangle – the U.S., Russia, and China – as permanent rivals, and worse, regard itself as the victim of geopolitical rivalry, instead of taking all measures toward inviting all sides of the triangle to constructive cooperation in Central Asia.

It is worth recalling that in May 2002 – during George W. Bush's visit to Moscow – Russia and America pledged to pursue policies in Central Asia based on the mutual acceptance of their respective interests and the will to cooperate for the sake of peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

Apparently, Uzbekistan's foreign policy strategy is based on an erroneous threat assessment and a mistaken understanding of its national interests. The real threat to Tashkent was not and is not American goals in Central Asia, but rather war or instability in Afghanistan, which still has not built its full-fledged statehood and nationhood.

On the other hand, Uzbekistan's real national interests dictate to spur the process of democratization. The latter is not so much what America wants for itself, it is rather what countries of the region need for themselves. Here, the new dilemma is whether the U.S. pressure for democratization vis-à-vis Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries is just pressure aiming at gaining geopolitical benefits, or emanates from good will aiming at gaining a more stable, prosperous and friendly nation in this part of the world.

Even with this pressure, the U.S. position was in any case as benign as possible because Washington always demonstrated its readiness to talk to the current Uzbek government and to continue cooperation with the current leadership. The American aspiration was not about regime change but rather “regime shake” – to warn that any abuse of law, any potential indiscriminate use of force contradicts Uzbekistan's international obligations in the field of human rights.

From the point of view of Grand Strategy, two dramas – investigation of the Andijan tragedy and the U.S. base withdrawal from Uzbekistan – will have deep and long-term implications for the fate of democracy and regional security in Central Asia.

CONCLUSIONS: It seems that Uzbekistan counts on Russian and Chinese support against “western interference” in its internal affairs. Interestingly and paradoxically, America insists in an international investigation of the Andijan violence and does not fear that its purported involvement in that rebellion stands to be revealed. But Uzbekistan, backed up by Russia and China, insists that America was behind the “revolution” attempt but doesn't want an investigation, which could uncover such an American “plot”. One side is most likely bluffing.

By and large, by rejecting any international call addressed to Uzbekistan about the fair investigation of the Andijan case, the state in fact rejects international assistance based on the good will approach and falls into international isolation. By and large, Andijan and the functioning of the U.S. military contingent on Uzbekistan's territory are two separate issues, although in a wider sense security and democracy become interrelated in the modern world. Uzbekistan seems to sacrifice its strategic partnership with the United States for the sake of saving the regime's image. Sooner or later, the world will know all about what happened in Andijan in May. This should better happen before serious damage is made to the Uzbek-American strategic partnership, for which there is now only very small hope.

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RUMSFELD IN KYRGYZSTAN: HALTING AMERICA'S FALTERING IN CENTRAL ASIA

Ainura Cholponkulova

The landslide victory of the southerner and ex-opposition leader Bakiev during the July Kyrgyz presidential election is the result of his strategic alliance with northerner Felix Kulov, the most charismatic politician in the country. Beyond any doubt, the majority of the electorate voted for the Bakiev-Kulov tandem, not for Bakiev personally. In the meantime, challenges remain regarding the political alliance which might expose to risk the democratic reforms in Kyrgyzstan. The clearly different outlook of the two leaders may yet turn out to be a time bomb in the country's quest for stability.

BACKGROUND: The presidential elections of July 10 ended the controversy over the legitimacy of the presidential power since the March Revolution that ousted former President Askar Akayev. The southerner and acting prime minister Kurmanbek Bakiev won the presidential race in an election competing with six candidates. According to civil society activists' polls, 88% of citizens voted against the ousted former regime and for stability in the country. Other critics said the electorate's credibility was given not only to Bakiev, but to the other prominent leaders of the new regime collectively, such as Felix Kulov, Roza Otunbaeva, and Azimbek Beknazarov. Moreover, the liberally-inclined electorate, including ethnic minorities, voted for the Bakiev-Kulov political alliance in favor of Kulov. Nevertheless, Bakiev's victory promises to be a serious exam of how he and his team tackle rampant poverty and deep-rooted corruption in the higher bodies of state authority. As a matter of fact, the test for Bakiev's leadership already started four months ago, shortly after he was swept to power as acting prime minister by the popular uprising. By now, the public expectations appear to be decreased as he publicly promises one thing, but delivers another. For instance, ongoing appointments at all levels of the state apparatus are largely based on regional preferences. The southerners gradually come to power ranging from the civil agencies to the educational institutions.

Another challenge for Bakiev is the sustainability of his tandem with Kulov, who was his most formidable rival for the presidency.

In May, the two signed an agreement that Kulov would not contest the presidency but be appointed Prime Minister in case of Bakiev's victory. The key purpose of the political alliance was to steer clear of a perilous split between the northern and southern clans. Under the deal, the future President would have control over foreign and domestic policy as well as military and security affairs while the Prime Minister would be in charge of the economy. However, it is generally known in political circles that Bakiev is weak in foreign policy and security issues while Kulov lacks solid experience in economic affairs.

IMPLICATIONS: The clumsiness of Bakiev's skills in security issues and international diplomacy was illustrated soon after the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit when, as newly elected President, he publicly raised the issue of a deadline for the U.S. military presence in Kyrgyzstan. The SCO summit's declaration as well as Bakiev's incautious message prompted the U.S. Defense Secretary's visit to Bishkek to iron out the problem. The government backpedaled and assured the U.S. that the base will by no means be closed as the SCO declaration should be viewed as the beginning of a dialogue. Kulov turned out to be a more skillful player in geopolitics, stating that

Kyrgyzstan should conduct a multi-layered foreign policy, to become a country where relations between the great powers meet and harmonize. It remains unclear how Bakiev and Kulov intend to combine their different outlook for Kyrgyzstan.

Despite Bakiev's calls for Kyrgyzstan as a self-sufficient nation that should develop its economy relying on its own resources, he nonetheless, does not seem to refuse aid from international donors. In domestic policy, he demonstrates a paternalistic approach, promising to provide everyone a deserving life. "We are obliged to pursue an economic and social policy that would secure the well-being of every family and human being", he said in his inaugural speech.

Kulov advocates the ideas of the business elite and technocrats, viewing Kyrgyzstan as the banking, financial, educational, and informational hub in the region. Compared with Bakiev's paternalistic view, Kulov's technocratic outlook is based on an opposite approach, encouraging people not only change their ways of thinking, but also to consolidate their aspirations as a community of leaders. Considering the people's mentality as the chief and long-term resource, this outlook suggests the need to break the old dependence-focused way of thinking, creating a new one under the slogan: "the world is your opportunity, the world is your market".

Another line dividing Bakiev and Kulov is their contrasting stances on the political and constitutional reforms ongoing in Kyrgyzstan. The recommendations of the Constitutional Council, comprising political parties and civil society organizations, to a larger extent coincide with Kulov's view on the constitutional reforms. Kulov has consistently called for a parliamentary type of governance. "The abolition of the bicameral legislature was an enormous political error with far-reaching effects," Kulov recently said. He argues a parliamentary system with a bicameral legislature would enable the effective coordination of various political and regional interests in the country. Bakiev's stance towards constitutional reforms conversely, is unpredictable. Looking back, a year ago as an opposition figure, Bakiev advocated a

parliamentary type of governance. Yet as interim Prime Minister, he rejected the idea of constitutional reforms, saying that he was no supporter of frequent amendments to the Constitution. Bakiev himself exonerated his view with reference to maintenance of political stability in Kyrgyzstan, exhausted by multiple protests. "The Constitution is fine and it is possible to work with it", he noted. The current Constitution provides the President with broad powers, putting him above the legislative, executive and judiciary branches of government. As a newly-elected President, Bakiev speaks for a strong Presidency, a strong Government and a strong Parliament which in his view is the basis for the development of the country. Moreover, the day after the inauguration he expressed discord with the current recommendations of the Constitutional Council saying they have been designed at redistributing power among the branches of government.

The final challenge that both Bakiev and Kulov face in their alliance is their entourage. Bakiev relies on his brothers, influential players in current political spectrum as well as heterogeneous circles of the political elite. Among of his team members, a majority are southerners and few are northerners. Bakiev's vulnerable spot is the absence of reliable ideological followers in his endeavors. Although his current supporters Prosecutor General Azimbek Beknazarov and Deputy Prime Minister Adakhan Madumarov were in the opposition camp along with Bakiev prior to March, neither shared a political persuasion with Bakiev.

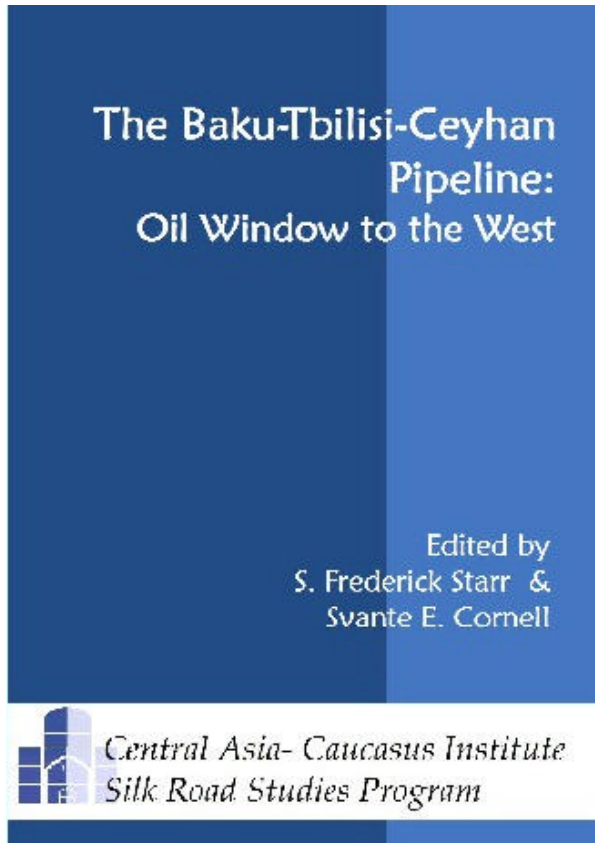
Kulov's entourage includes key players of his "Ar-Namys" Party, the urbanized elite and the power structures. Interestingly, right after Akayev's overthrow, Kulov's moderate behavior, thoughtful and farsighted actions rapidly won him the support of large portions of the technocratic bureaucrats, the youth, business elite, "intelligentsia" and ethnic minorities. However, by now in the government team none of Kulov's inner circle have been integrated. Bakiev recently reiterated he would stick with his prior team. Thus, it is still unclear whether Kulov will be able to push his associates to

governmental positions. Besides, Kulov has some frictions with influential players in Bakiev's entourage such as Deputy Prime-Minister Daniyar Usenov, Beknazarov, Madumarov, and Miroslav Niyazov, Secretary of the National Security Council.

CONCLUSIONS: During the inaugural ceremony on August 14, Bakiev in a message to the nation voiced time and again his paternalistic vision for Kyrgyzstan. The substance of the inaugural message as well as Bakiev's suggestion to set up a new Constitutional Council signaled the newly elected President and Kulov have not succeeded to bring their positions on the political and economic prospects for Kyrgyzstan closer. Besides, manipulating the general public and civil society organizations, both Bakiev and Kulov seek to

enlarge their powers under a new Constitution instead of leaving aside their political ambitions and designing a joint compromise strategy. Unless this changes, discord between the two Kyrgyz leaders (as in Ukraine) could precipitate a new political crisis in the Government, thus jeopardizing the democratic gains of the March events.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Ainura Cholponkulova was a Fulbright Scholar at the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute at SAIS last year. She is a Professor at the School of International Relations, Kyrgyz National University and at the Department of Public Service and Local-Self Governance, Presidential Academy of Management. She also works as an independent consultant with state agencies, politicians and international organizations.



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CONTENTS:

- 1. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: School of Modernity**
S. Frederick Starr
- 2. Geostrategic Implications of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline**
Svante E. Cornell, Mamuka Tsereteli and Vladimir Socor
- 3. Economic Implications of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline**
Jonathan Elkind
- 4. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: Implications for Azerbaijan**
Svante E. Cornell and Fariz Ismailzade
- 5. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: Implications for Georgia**
Vladimer Papava
- 6. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: Implications for Turkey**
Zeyno Baran
- 7. Environmental and Social Aspects of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline**
David Blatchford

RULING PARTY'S LIST OF CANDIDATES REVEALS PRESIDENT ALIYEV'S DESIRE NOT TO "ROCK THE BOAT"

Alman Mir Ismail

On August 16, the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan (New Azerbaijan) Party disclosed its long-awaited list of candidates for the November 6 Parliamentary elections. Although many speculations circulated in the Azerbaijani society about many new, young, reform-minded people making it to the list, the actual list kept the names of the most of the current Parliamentarians, indicating that President Aliyev does not desire too much to depart with the old guard. This might, in the long run, damage the President's reform agenda, as he might prove incapable to conduct the much-awaited cadre changes. At the same time, the situation around YAP's list shows how complex the pre-election situation is within the ruling elite and how President Aliyev is striving to preserve the unity of YAP.

BACKGROUND: President Ilham Aliyev was elected to the Presidency on October 15, 2003, on the expectation that he would conduct cadre changes and bring new, young faces into the government. Being young himself, President Aliyev was said to be wanting to give more power to the team of young, Western-educated and reform-minded specialists. This even caused rumors in the local media that President Aliyev was at odds with the "old guard", the team that once supported and served as the power base for his father, President Heydar Aliyev.

Yet, since his election, President Aliyev did not rush to fire off the old Ministers, instead replacing only four of them. Some analysts linked it to his weak position in the ruling elite and inexperience with the political leadership. Others claimed that he was not willing to upset the old team. Indeed, sudden changes in the ruling elite could lead to the latter joining to the opposition, causing much problems for the younger Aliyev in the long run. Thus, President Aliyev chose a gradual path of cadre change policy.

The upcoming Parliamentary elections on November 6 seemed like a good opportunity for President Aliyev to make another step in the cadre

reforms and bring a younger team into the legislative body and thus speed up the process of reform in the country. At the same time, analysts predicted that YAP's list of candidates would become a major battle between various regional-based and business power centers within the ruling elite, thus making it more difficult for the President to push "his list of candidates" through.

Indeed, the published list of candidates from the ruling party on August 16 showed that President Aliyev decided not to make – or proved incapable to make – radical changes to the Parliament's composition. The list included such deputies as Musa Musayev and Ahad Abiyev, notorious for their scandalous behavior in the Parliament and slanderous remarks towards NGOs, media and opposition. At the same time, the current speaker of Parliament, 77-year old Murtuz Aleskerov and the President's equally 77-year old uncle Jalal Aliyev will also seek re-election. So will old singer Zeynab Khanlarova and several other representatives of culture, known for their silence and absolute passiveness in the Parliament. Analysts were shocked and disappointed to see these conservative and outdated faces in YAP's list. It should be also noted that the candidate list of the ruling party

includes first lady Mehriban Aliyeva and the first-ever representative of the community of mountain Jews in Azerbaijan, Yevda Abramova.

IMPLICATIONS: YAP's published candidate list seemed to have eliminated the much-rumored fragmentation of the party into competing factions. From this point of view, President Aliyev may have managed to balance out the interests of various groupings within YAP and thus preserve the superficial unity of the ruling elite.

At the same time, those few people in the Parliament who did not make it to the YAP's list seem to be openly frustrated with the decision of the party and plan on running independently, against the decision of the party. The Head of the Parliamentary Committee on Economic Issues, Sattar Safarov, is one of them. Thus, the list of candidates nevertheless created a group of "unhappy" YAP members, who might in the future even join the ranks of the opposition. President Aliyev might consider appointing some of them to executive positions in order to avoid this outcome.

Meanwhile, a number of other YAP members and independent candidates/ businessmen/ heads of state enterprises, who are close to the ruling party, have also nominated themselves. In some election districts, the candidates from the "official" YAP list find themselves running against several other YAP or pro-YAP candidates. This situation shows that the struggle for seats in the Parliament is not over within the ruling party. Different business circles and power centers seem to be sponsoring these candidates to get more influence in the legislative body. This open lack of unity in the ruling party creates much criticism and sarcasm from opposition groups. In the past, YAP has always bashed at the opposition for its lack of unity, so this situation does not earn much credit to the ruling party.

Last week, the opposition daily *Azadliq* published an article in which it claimed that there exists an "alternative" list of YAP candidates to the "official" one. By doing so, it wanted to show that not

everything is calm and finalized within the ruling party and that some candidates might get elected from YAP even if they are not on the official list.

The same newspaper stated that YAP's list is a perfect indication of President Aliyev's loss to the old guard. The fact that so many old, passive and conservative faces have been re-nominated by YAP generates doubt on the capability of President Aliyev to get rid of the "old guard" and conduct overdue political and economic reforms in the country. The local analysts note that although President Aliyev desires these reforms, he hesitates to upset the power centers within the ruling party and thus "rock the boat" of stability in the country.

CONCLUSIONS: Eventually, President Aliyev has two choices: continue to balance the interests of the power centers, business groups and region-based clans within the ruling party by refraining from conducting massive changes and keeping all in their places; or ending his hesitation and implementing the cadre reforms. Should he choose the former option, the visual stability in the country and the ruling elite will be preserved, yet the continuous corruption and socio-economic problems will continue to raise frustration among the population and the international community. This might negatively affect the image of the President himself. Should he be inclined towards the latter option, this might win him much credit in the short run, but eventually he will end up having some fired officials and rich oligarchs switching sides and joining the opposition. This, in turn, might make the power struggle in the country even fiercer.

The upcoming Parliamentary election are hence unlikely to significantly refresh the ruling party. President Aliyev remains dependent on the "old guard", either due to weakness or a lack of will to make radical changes. In the long run, either scenario is risky for him.

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LONDON'S LESSONS FOR CENTRAL ASIA

Stephen Blank

Despite the fundamental disparity between Great Britain and Central Asian states and between London and their capitals, the bombings in London on July 7 and 21 contain critical lessons for Central Asian governments. These lessons learned will often be introduced without fanfare since we are dealing with authoritarian governments whose capitals are not global cities or media centers. Nevertheless these attacks will intensify already anxious regimes that they could be faced with outbreaks of mass violence incited by terrorist groups tied to Al-Qaida against them. And the consequences of these states' learning from London could be portentous.

BACKGROUND: The bombings in the London subway on July 7 and the ensuing foiled attempts at new bombings on July 21 focused global attention on the terrorist threat in Great Britain. But we should not ignore their lessons and implicit warning for the governments of Central Asia that do not command anywhere near the police experience and resources for adequate surveillance and monitoring, let alone suppression, of organized terrorist threats. For example, we can see from British reactions an increase in police monitoring and surveillance as well as heightened restrictions on the public practice of Islam in Great Britain. Accordingly we should expect enhanced supervision of politics in general and of religion in particular in Central Asian regimes, and not just in Uzbekistan which appears to be the most threatened by terrorism. Indeed, we can already see new restrictions being placed on the preaching of Islam and on NGOs in Kazakhstan as well as an intense campaign to saturate the Uzbek media with the government's view of the Andijan uprising. That particular campaign also goes hand in hand with increased repression at home against dissidents. And freed from the presence of an American base and accompanying lectures, Islam Karimov will likely go further to crush any outpost of opposition and label it fundamentalist. Similar trends to suppress political opposition are also discernible in Azerbaijan.

These moves suggest the first lesson learned by Central Asian regimes. If attacks on this scale could take place in a city as heavily policed as London that has been subject for so long a time to comprehensive police surveillance, they could also be carried out elsewhere and probably more easily. This fact alone should induce governments to enact more effective measures to increase their intelligence, police, surveillance, and military capabilities against terrorism. Thus we may actually see more cooperation among police, intelligence, and military forces of Central Asian states and the security organizations there: the Shanghai Cooperative Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Undoubtedly much of this cooperation, if it actually materializes, will receive little publicity. But it will probably be discernible in its implementation of greater policing of those states, often with foreign assistance. And it will also be discernible in the amount of increasing political repression that we can expect to see.

A second lesson concerns the strategic lessons that may be drawn by Al-Qaida and its associated organizations, including those in Central Asia. These attacks could presage a series of attacks against European and other states associated with the U.S. campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan,

including Central Asian or South Caucasian states. Their aim would surely be the destabilization and ultimate overthrow of these governments. Al-Qaeda, by its lights, might have good reason to suspect that sufficiently strong terror offensives, if they can be organized, could bring about such outcomes. Whether or not the Spanish government fell in 2004 due to the attacks in Madrid, Bin Laden and his cohorts clearly believe it did and, therefore, that Europe cannot withstand a terrorist offensive. Thus authorities in Denmark, Italy, and Poland now expect terrorism to come to them. But Bin Laden, Zawahiri and others might also believe that in Central Asia or Afghanistan, a well planned terror campaign could also obtain comparable results.

Third, the bombings in London and Sharm el Sheikh on July 22-23 reveal Al-Qaeda's and its associated entities' international scope and their continuing ability to recruit, organize, train, plan attacks, and maintain tight operational security. The bombers on July 7 were connected not just to Pakistani Madrassahs, but also to Egyptian citizens and to Palestinian terrorists. More such connections may be revealed over time. But we also know that Central Asian organizations like the IMU or Hizb ut-Tahrir are not dead and that Central Asian oppositionists and terrorists are in Afghanistan and Pakistan with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. We also know that fundraising for both North Caucasian and Central Asian groups is taking place in Europe. So the global network of Islamic terrorism continues despite foreign pressure.

IMPLICATIONS: Pakistan's continuing role as a center for terrorist recruitment, indoctrination, and training also must command our attention. Once again the Pakistani government says that it will go after these groups. But, as London showed, Pakistan's Madrassahs remain a center for indoctrination, recruitment, training, and organization of terrorists, indicating the insufficiency of past Pakistani policies to deal with Islamic terrorism. Destruction of this network must become the urgent object of unremitting and concerted global pressure. This means more than

forcing these schools to register with the government. Ultimately it also means subjecting the entire Pakistani state, military, and intelligence apparatus to thorough housecleaning and reform.

The attacks in London, Sharm el Sheikh and recently foiled attacks in Turkey remind us that Al-Qaeda believes itself at war with the rest of the world—and not just over Iraq. Consequently it remains a viable, strategic organization whose leaders, Bin Laden and Zawahiri, are executing a strategic plan. We may or may not understand it or grasp its strategic logic, but it appears quite clear that to them and to terrorists everywhere there is such a logic and those cells may understand it or may be free to choose targets of their own choice within its operational framework. In other words, there is no reason to believe that Central Asia, the South Caucasus, or Russia may have little to worry about.

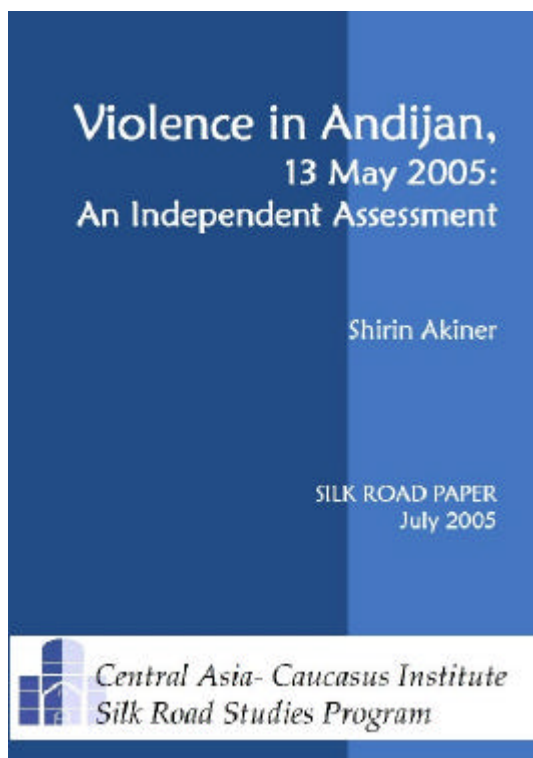
Many experts on Central Asia in America worry that Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have irretrievably slipped onto the trajectory of a failing state that could be vulnerable to forceful threats. The leaders of those governments and of their neighbors have every reason to be concerned that this could spill over to their territory or emanate from it given the large number of Uzbek refugees forced out of Uzbekistan. Indeed, in 2004 Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan each made known their apprehensions that Uzbekistan was exporting both terrorists and the threat of terrorism to them by its draconian policies. And those policies are unlikely to change after Andijan and the SCO's Astana Summit.

CONCLUSIONS: This has been a year of increasingly rapid change and shocks to the systems of Central Asian governments and they have responded by seeking more stability and by rejecting calls for greater democratization, with the possible exception of Kyrgyzstan. But even there we may have seen a replacement of elites masquerading as a "democratic revolution". External pressure to reform seems to these regimes to be an invitation for terrorists and fundamentalists, whom they regard as one and the same, to replace them.

Therefore we are likely to see increased police persecution, and police powers in the hands of the state to avert such outcomes. While Kazakhstan is attempting socio-economic reforms as well to prevent the outbreak of a large mass opposition, the other governments there do not have the means to conduct such a policy, even if they were so inclined. And in foreign affairs, the eviction of U.S. forces from their base in Karshi Khanabad suggests a severe diminution of American leverage on behalf of reform both in Uzbekistan and elsewhere. The confluence of these trends over time might yet paradoxically bring about exactly what these

governments most fear i.e. scenarios like those of London and Madrid. London has again shown that it “can take it” as it did in 1940-41. But can we be sure about states like Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan?

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FIELD REPORTS

CENTRAL ASIA: FUNDAMENTALISM, AND NOT JUST ISLAMIC *Zoya Pylenko*

Central Asia is perhaps more connected in people's minds with Islamic fundamentalism than with Christian fundamentalism. However, relatively speaking, no faith group has expanded as explosively as evangelical Christian groups after the collapse of the Soviet Union in Central Asia. This has occasionally caused tensions in society. The situation in Kyrgyzstan is no exception to this.

The constitution of Kyrgyzstan provides for freedom of religion. However, according to the 2004 International Religious Freedom Report 2004 of the U.S. State Department, the Kyrgyz government is concerned about the growing number of Christian groups, especially Protestants, preaching and working in Kyrgyzstan. Since a revolution swept the previous government from power in March this year, the authorities' rather negative attitude vis-à-vis such protestant groups hasn't changed, says Igor Rotar, a specialist on religious developments in Central Asia.

After the collapse of the atheist Soviet Union, many people for the first time in 70 years received the right to believe whatever they wanted. In Kyrgyzstan, as a result, the number of mosques and Russian Orthodox churches increased considerably (Islam and, for the sizeable Russian minority, Orthodox Christianity being the largest faith groups in the country). But Protestantism also expanded rapidly. According to the State Commission on Religious Affairs, (nominal) Muslims made up 84 percent of the total population

in 2001, but 79,3 percent in 2004. There currently are some 300 Protestant congregations in Kyrgyzstan, says Rotar. The biggest Protestant Church in Kyrgyzstan is the Church of Jesus Christ, with over 250 members. Other groups active in Kyrgyzstan include the Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. They have members among ethnic Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Kurds, Tatars and Russians.

Over the years, several conflicts resulted from conversions to Christianity in Kyrgyzstan, especially in the southern part of country. They included burial problems and the social exclusion and threats against newly-converted Protestants by their Muslim neighbors. The reasons for conversion remain controversial. Some officials claim a major reason is to gain money by converting; converts allegedly receive about \$50 a month for attending services. However, a more likely reason is that the very active protestant churches create an opportunity for many people to become part of a family that gives them a sense of safety and of being cared for – and which can provide them with interesting activities that the state no longer provides for. This is especially apparent in the provinces. Theatres and cinemas in small towns have been closed after the fall of the Soviet Union, creating a definite lack of entertainment. Drinking in filthy bars – or just on the streets – is about the only recreation available in such places.

Religion sometimes offers a way out of this. Quite a few people rediscover their Muslim roots. Others

turn to proselytizing protestant groups, who apart from the Bible have social programs on offer. On its website, the Church of Jesus Christ promises to “show the way of emancipation from the slavery of drunkenness, drug addiction, illnesses and diseases.” But in addition, one of the main aims of this church, still according to its website, is to organize youths’ spare time, with different youth music programs, study programs and conferences. So it’s easy to see why opponents of such groups say they win converts by unfair, non-religious means. Indeed, the rapid growth of Protestantism is not much appreciated in Kyrgyzstan. Muslims react angrily to people of their faith becoming Christian. After all, according to Islam, Muslims who renounce their faith are commonly thought to deserve the death penalty.

The Central Eparchy of the Russian Orthodox Church in Kyrgyzstan also strongly opposed last year’s proposed law “on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations”. It feared this law would make an influx of foreign missionaries to Kyrgyzstan possible. Still, most problems occur when Muslims convert to Christianity. There have been several of these in recent years. For example, in the village of Chon-Tash – some 15 kilometers

from the capital Bishkek – nearly all members of a Protestant congregation left the Church because of pressure by local Muslims villagers. And members of the Church of Jesus Christ were beaten when they arrived in Chon-Tash to preach. A similar situation occurred in the village of Kuruk-Kul, inhabited mainly by ethnic Uzbeks, in the southern Jalal-Abad region. Here, locals demanded punishment for those inhabitants of the village who had accepted Christianity. Some Kyrgyz converts to Christianity face problems even after their death. In Naryn, a Baptist convert was refused the right to be buried in the local, Muslim, cemetery.

These Christian groups, new for Kyrgyzstan, are commonly suspected of spreading provocative propaganda and receiving money from the U.S.. Such suspicions probably only intensified after the war on terrorism kicked off in late 2001. Evangelical Protestants suffer problems not only in Kyrgyzstan but all over the former Soviet space. For example, Baptists in Turkmenistan were accused on July 31 of being “non-believers” and “law-breakers” by police from the department for the struggle with terrorism and organized crime. Baptists also regularly suffer harassment and beatings in Christian Georgia.

SECURITY CHALLENGES TEST KAZAKHSTAN’S HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITMENTS

Marat Yermukanov

In the wake of the Andijan bloodbath, Kazakh authorities took unprecedented security measures ranging from heightened border control to expulsion of Central Asian refugees from the country, courting at the same time western democratic institutions. This double game reflects Kazakhstan’s painful vacillation between its

democratic commitments and resurging nostalgia for heavy-handed authoritarianism. Western demands for radical political reforms don’t quite fit in with Kazakhstan’s ambition to forge a union of Central Asian states.

Deeply alarmed at the chain reaction of popular groundswell against discredited regimes in CIS

countries, Kazakhstan's ruling power adopted the tactic of maneuvering between stubborn resistance to Western influence on what is considered "domestic affairs" and closer partnership with European democratic institutions. Fearing the aftermath of the disastrous regime change in Kyrgyzstan and the Andijan violence in Uzbekistan, Kazakh security services launched a large-scale hunt for migrants from Central Asian countries particularly targeting persons suspected of involvement in the Andijan riots. This pursued the double goal of vamping up the soured relations with Tashkent after repeated Uzbek accusations against Kazakhstan for allegedly harboring members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and minimizing the threat to Kazakhstan's political stability from the increasing stream of refugees.

In its excessive zeal to justify the massive expulsion of refugees seeking shelter in Kazakhstan, the National Security Committee (NSC) even admitted what had been categorically denied before. Shortly after the brutalities in Andijan the NSC officials told to the press that some members of the Jamaat of Mojahedeens of Central Asia extremist organization which operated in Kazakhstan were perpetrators of the Tashkent bomb blasts last summer. Reportedly, the terrorist gang included Kazakh nationals, four female suicide bombers among them, former militants of the IMU. The National Security Committee report says over the last four years 20 members of foreign terrorist organizations were extradited from the country.

In the present context, it looks more like a dubious cooperation with Uzbek security services than a mere act of preventing potential terrorist threats. This ambiguity can best be illustrated by Lutfulla Shamsuddinov's case, an Uzbek human rights activist detained in Almaty on July 1 on suspicion of being one of the string-pullers of Andijan events. The detention of the dissident put Kazakh authorities in an awkward situation. Under the UN 1951 Convention on the status of refugees, Kazakhstan had to provide shelter for Shamsuddinov who in Uzbekistan, however, was on the wanted list of terrorists. Finally, on July 12,

after long bargaining with international human rights organizations, Kazakh authorities handed the suspect over to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), reaping praises from European Union for this face-saving move. Aware that the unfriendly act would provoke accusations from the Uzbek side, the Prosecutor-General's Office of Kazakhstan asked Uzbek authorities for "understanding" the delicate circumstances.

With an eye to the coveted presidency of the OSCE in 2009, Kazakhstan has to observe human rights commitments strictly and show consistency in implementing comprehensive political reforms. Kazakhstan's path to closer cooperation with the European Union, OSCE, NATO and other organizations is strewn with contradictions as ever before. On the one hand, the regime has to adapt itself to the demands from international democratic institutions, on the other, it has to ensure its political security in anticipation of the upcoming presidential elections. The massive crackdown on NGOs, the belligerent calls from pro-presidential parties, verbal attack on the Soros Kazakhstan Foundation from Kazakh Foreign Minister Kasymzhomart Tokayev, undemocratic amendments to the laws and disrespect for the rights of refugees point to uneasy relations with the European Union. Kazakhstan's moves towards partnership with the European Union is curiously synchronized with efforts to build a sort of political and economic alliance with the rulers of Uzbekistan within the union of Central Asian nations projected by Nursultan Nazarbayev. Alliance with Tashkent obliges Astana to extradite dozens of Uzbek citizens, human rights activists fleeing their country, a step totally incompatible with European standards. The council for cooperation between the European Union and Kazakhstan was articulate enough in demanding recently that Kazakh authorities should discriminate between fighting terrorism and respecting human rights and effectively control the migration process.

Kazakh authorities found themselves ill-prepared to cope with the predictable massive inflow of refugees

from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. According to the Astana city police, the number of illegal migrants from Central Asia, mainly from Uzbekistan, doubled in six months of the year. It is not ruled out that Uzbeks sheltering in refugee camps in Kyrgyzstan and subjected to ethnic discrimination

from the impoverished locals will head for Kazakh cities, aggravating the already delicate situation in the country's job market. If not addressed timely, this uncontrolled migration process is likely to create interethnic tension in the volatile region.

TURKMENBASHI GRANTS CITIZENSHIP TO OVER 13,000 PEOPLE *Chemen Durdiyeva*

On August 4, President Turkmenbashi the Great led a brief meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan. Besides the regular reshufflings of government officials, this time Turkmenbashi signed a special decree that allows over 13,000 people to attain permanent residency and citizenship of Turkmenistan. As the decree came into force, it turned into a major festival among the refugees in the country, and appeared to show President Niyazov as the most humane and generous leader.

The Prosecutor General, Gurbanbibi Atajanova speaking on state TV on the president's decree stated that people from three main categories are set to receive Turkmen citizenship and permanent residency. First, *prima facie* refugees who fled Tajikistan during the Tajik Civil War of the 1990s and had been living in Turkmenistan up until now qualify for receiving citizenship. As Mr. Niyazov said, the total number of refugees in this category consists of about 13,245 people. The Turkmen of Afghanistan who returned back to Turkmenistan so far also fall into the same category. Second, people who were sent for various reasons, including education or job seeking purposes, to other former USSR countries and thereby lost their Turkmen citizenship, also qualify for receiving citizenship. Third, longtime residents of Turkmenistan who had been living on the northern borders, particularly on the lands that Uzbekistan had been renting and

recently returned to Turkmenistan, may seek citizenship and permanent residency as well.

This move occurred after longtime negotiations between the governments of Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Recently, Tajikistan's embassy in Turkmenistan was reported to have contacted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tajikistan in order to simplify the procedures for its former citizens living in Turkmenistan to get Turkmen citizenship. The embassy's official letter says, "the draft agreement concerns the interests of over 15,000 of our former compatriots, ethnic Turkmen, who left the country for Turkmenistan for permanent residence during the [1992-97] civil war and intend to stay there forever. In line with our country's current legislation, all of them have virtually lost their citizenship of the Republic of Tajikistan."

The majority of refugees in Turkmenistan are believed to be ethnic Turkmen who have been waiting for this opportunity for a long time now. There are also representatives of other ethnicities among the refugees and as the common voice comes out of the festival, everybody is happy to rejoice the unexpected event. "This is the happiest day of my life. My daughter is going to school for the first time and now she can use all the rights given to a Turkmen citizen" says Gulayim who works in a carpet factory in Akhal region. Hussein, a tenant in a farm says, "we're six in the family and came here

from Tajikistan in 1995. Working in the fields and growing wheat, cotton, I managed to build a house and a beautiful garden. Now I get the citizenship. Couldn't be better!"

Facilitating the return of ethnic Turkmens back to Turkmenistan has been one of the main directions of the policy of National Revival. In this connection, Mr. Niyazov widely announced an "Open Doors" policy in the early 1990s and the Association of All the Turkmens in the World was created in the capital, Ashgabat.

Anita Linden, head of the UNHCR mission in Turkmenistan, praised the President on this particular move. Along with the UN permanent representative in Turkmenistan, Ms. Linden sent an official letter to President Niyazov where she noted that "by signing this decree on granting citizenship, Turkmenistan once again demonstrated its humanitarian responsibilities toward the refugees. We waited long for this to come."

PROPERTY REFORMS IN GEORGIA: UNEMPLOYMENT VS. PROPERTY RIGHTS?

Kakha Jibladze

During a televised presentation this month, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili unveiled a new approach to combat unemployment in the country. Although the proposal is not in effect yet, there was immediate reaction from some local economists who labeled the plan undemocratic.

According to the announcement, the government will reclaim property from private owners if the owners do not develop the property within a set time frame. There have been no reports on when this initiative will begin, however reportedly the proposal aims to reclaim valuable enterprises and property if it is proven that the private owners are not employing enough workers or utilizing the property to its full capacity.

Economists and others in Georgia have spoken up against the plan, claiming it is will make Georgia less attractive to investors and further weaken the rights of property owners in Georgia. They also maintain that the proposal is anti-democratic since if passed it would provide the government with a chance to seize private property. Those opposed to the plan also point out that while Georgian courts are still plagued by government interference and

corruption, there would be no clear forum for property owners to defend their claims.

However draconian the proposal appears to be, it seems to carry support within Georgian society and its popularity has been attributed to the widespread unemployment in the country. Unemployment has plagued Georgia since it reclaimed its independence in 1991. As a republic within the former Soviet Union, it boasted two major industrial centers but the majority of factories and manufacturing plants have closed and most of those that are still open are not operating at full productivity. According to official statistics, the unemployment rate in Georgia is somewhere between 6-17%. However, non-government reports and statistics put the number above 20%.

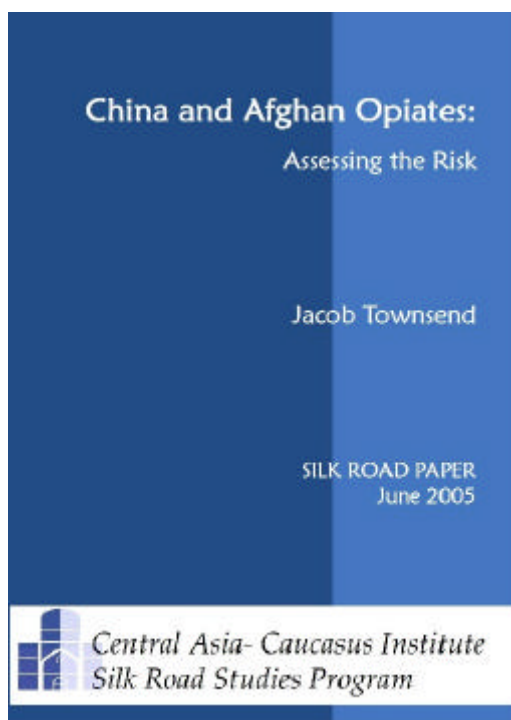
While the new government has promised to address the issue of unemployment, so far the reforms are having the opposite effect. Several hundred people were laid off over the summer when the government began restructuring Tbilisi State University. Earlier this year, the government also laid off dozens of bureaucrats in an effort to reduce the size of the government itself and combat

corruption. Measures taken against street traders and black market cigarette and alcohol sales have also cut into the livelihood of a large segment of the population. Details of the government initiative are still sketchy but it is believed that those enterprises that are reclaimed will then be sold as part of the privatization effort.

While Saakashvili has heralded privatization as a way to reinvigorate the job market, it is not clear how long it will take before people can return to work or how many of the former employees will actually be rehired once state owned enterprises are sold and begin to operate again. According to the Georgian Ministry of Economic Development, the Georgian state owns roughly 1,800 enterprises which employ over 180,000 people. In one case, the sale of the Ocean Shipping Company in Batumi, the new owners, Georgian Tankers Ltd, are reportedly

required to employ its current employees for the next several years.

If this new initiative becomes law, it could prove to help Saakashvili create more jobs as well bring more money into the central budget. If the Georgian government succeeds in selling its current property, and creating jobs via those sales, it will be easier to justify seizing private property. However the government risks further alienating Georgian society if proper measures are not taken to ensure the population that respectable businessmen have nothing to fear and that the government will utilize the seized property to boost the struggling job market. The overriding issue at stake is employing the thousands of Georgians who are currently out of work. If Saakashvili can lower the unemployment rate in Georgia, he will have a carte blanche from society to proceed with his reforms, however painful they may be.



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by Jacob Townsend

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NEWS DIGEST

CANADA MAY WELCOME REFUGEES FROM UZBEKISTAN

27 July

Canadian authorities are discussing with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) the possibility of accepting refugees from Uzbekistan, an official source at the Canadian embassy in Moscow told Interfax on Wednesday. "UNHCR has addressed several countries suitable for accepting refugees, including Canada on the issue of possible resettlement of Uzbek refugees currently staying in Kyrgyzstan. The talks with UNHCR continue," the source said. "A group of refugees is under the patronage of UNHCR that can produce additional information on the matter," the source said. (Interfax)

RUSSIAN OFFICIAL SLAMS INTL "DOUBLE STANDARDS" ON TERROR

27 July

Russia is preparing a set of new laws on terrorism, but "double standards on the forms of terrorism" hinder the drafting of international anti-terror agreements, a senior Russian Justice Ministry official said on Wednesday. "Today there is no common definition of terrorism, and each country is free to interpret this notion on the basis of its own political interpretations of various facts. As a result, events in Chechnya and acts by bandit groups on Russian territory are interpreted as rebel actions, while similar actions in other countries are considered terrorist acts," Yevgeny Zabarchuk said. (Interfax)

RUSSIA TRANSFERRING MATERIAL FROM GEORGIAN BASE TO ARMENIA

28 July

A convoy of vehicles belonging to the Russian 62nd military base stationed in the Georgian community of Akhalkalaki has been transferred to the Russian 102nd military base in Armenia's Gyumri, deputy commander of the Russian military contingent in the South Caucasus Col. Vladimir Kuparadze told Interfax. "This is not the beginning of the withdrawal of Russian military bases from Georgia, as some in the media have prematurely reported," Kuparadze said. "It is an excess of material that has been transferred from Akhalkalaki to Gyumri, we started to clear our bases in Georgia long before the Russian and Georgian foreign ministers concluded an agreement on the timeline for withdrawing the Russian bases," he said. (Interfax)

NO ORDER RECEIVED TO EXTRADITE UZBEKS - KYRGYZ MINISTER

28 July

Kyrgyzstan's acting Justice Minister Erkin Mamyrov said his ministry has not received an official warrant from the Prosecutor General's Office to extradite 12 Uzbek citizens being held in Osh to Uzbekistan. "I officially declare that no warrant of this kind has been received and no motor vehicles with Uzbek number plates, intended to transport the prisoners, have entered the territory of the Osh detention facility," Mamyrov told Interfax. Kyrgyz human rights organizations announced on Wednesday that the refugees might be extradited to Tashkent soon and that two vehicles with Uzbek number plates, intended to transport the prisoners, had arrived at the Osh detention facility. (Interfax)

INTERPOL HEAD SUPPORTS RUSSIA'S DEMAND FOR ZAKAYEV ARREST

29 July

Interpol Secretary General Ronald Kenneth Noble supports the Russian request for the arrest of Chechen separatist emissary Akhmed Zakayev in Britain. In an interview published in the Moskovsky Komsomolets daily on Friday, Noble said that the Russian request for Zakayev's arrest is absolutely lawful, and that Interpol has issued a Red Notice in support of the writ asking all countries to satisfy Russia's request. Noble warned British authorities that if they don't wish to extradite a suspect to the country demanding his extradition, they should face the fact that the person might commit crimes in British territory. (Interfax)

RUSSIA SHOCKED BY BASAYEV'S INTERVIEW ON ABC NEWS - MINISTRY

29 July

Russia is appalled by ABC News channel broadcasting an interview with Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev, the Russian Foreign Ministry said. "A recording of the interview with Chechen terrorist Shamil Basayev being broadcast in the USA by one of the most popular national channels with as extensive an audience as ABC News draws our bewilderment and indignation," says a release by the Russian Foreign Ministry's information department published at the ministry's web-site on Friday. "Airtime was given to one of the most notorious Chechen militants, who has stained himself with numerous terrorist attacks, including those at the

Dubrovka Theater Center and in Beslan, in which hundreds of civilians died, including children," the release said. (Interfax)

BAKU POLICE DISPERSE UNSANCTIONED RALLY

30 July

Baku police prevented activists from the opposition party Popular Front of Azerbaijan from organizing an unsanctioned rally near the private TV and radio company Leader on Saturday, an Interfax correspondent reported from the scene. About 50 activists gathered to protest against "the fabrication of libelous and false reports about the Azerbaijani opposition, particularly about Popular Front leader Ali Kerimli," he said. Police detained several participants but released them soon afterwards (Interfax)

THREE AZERBAIJANI YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS UNITE

30 July

Representatives of the youth organizations Yokh! (No!), Myagam (It's time!), and Volna (Wave) announced on 29 July that the three organizations have merged to form a new structure named Ary (Bee). Ary's primary objectives are the struggle against corruption in higher education and campaigning for free and fair elections. (zerkalo.az)

FEDERAL FORCES COME INTO CLASH WITH CHECHEN GUERRILLAS

30 July

Russian federal servicemen came into clash with a guerilla unit near the village of Makhkety in Chechnya's Vedeno district, a Chechen law enforcement source told Interfax on Saturday. One serviceman was wounded, the source said. Intelligence information indicates that the guerillas also suffered losses. An team of investigators are working at the scene now. (Interfax)

UZBEKISTAN RELEASES KYRGYZ REPORTER DETAINED BY BORDER GUARDS

30 July

Uzbekistan has released Kyrgyz journalist Erkin Yakubzhanov, who Uzbek border guards detained at the Dustlik customs checkpoint on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border on July 18. The journalist was released on Friday evening and is now back home, the Kyrgyz Interior Ministry told Interfax on Saturday. Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry envoy for southern Kyrgyzstan, Baktur Adanov, is expected to meet with Yakubzhanov on Saturday afternoon. Kyrgyzstan had held negotiations with Uzbekistan to have the journalist released from July 18, the first day of his detention, the Foreign Ministry said. The Dustlik checkpoint separates Kyrgyzstan's Osh region and

Uzbekistan's Andizhan region. The journalist was detained whilst he was interviewing Uzbek citizens crossing the border to take refuge in Kyrgyzstan. According to some local media, Yakubzhanov gathered information for a regional project entitled 'Fergana Valley - Valley of Peace'. Other sources claim he was acting under a contract with Radio Liberty. (Interfax)

UZBEK REFUGEES ARRIVE IN ROMANIA FROM KYRGYZSTAN

1 August

A group of 439 Uzbek refugees arrived in Romania on 29 July from Kyrgyzstan, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. One refugee expressed a desire to return to Uzbekistan and refused to leave Kyrgyzstan; he is still in Bishkek, RFE/RL reported. Acting Kyrgyz Deputy Prime Minister Adakhan Madumarov told journalists in Almaty, where he was meeting with the local governor, that Kyrgyzstan has fulfilled its obligations to the UN in carrying out the evacuation, Interfax reported. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called Kyrgyz President-elect Kurmanbek Bakiev to thank the Kyrgyz authorities for allowing the refugees to leave for a third country. The refugees' stay in Romania will be temporary, lasting up to six months. Various reports listed Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, and the United States as possible final destinations for the refugees, who fled Uzbekistan after violence in Andijon on 12-13 May. (RFE/RL)

APPEALS COURT ANNULS VERDICT AGAINST PROMINENT AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITIONIST

2 August

Azerbaijan's Appeals Court ruled on 2 August to rescind the guilty verdict handed down in October to Rauf Arifoglu, editor of the opposition newspaper "Yeni Musavat." Arifoglu was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for his imputed role in the clashes between police and opposition supporters in Baku in the wake of the disputed October 2003 presidential election. Arifoglu is the last of seven leading oppositionists sentenced in connection with those clashes to have had his sentence annulled. (Turan)

DEMOCRATS TO RUN IN THE CHECHEN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

2 August

Russian democratic parties plan to participate in the parliamentary elections in Chechnya and set up a faction in the republic's parliament, Musa Sadayev, chairman of the Coordinating Council of Chechnya's Democratic Forces, told a news conference at the Interfax main office in Moscow on Tuesday. State Duma deputy and Republican Party of Russia member Vladimir Ryzhkov, Our Choice party leader Irina Khakamada and

representatives of Chechen democratic movements are attending the news conference, as well. "Today, all democratic parties have established their branches in the Chechen republic. The leadership and members of these parties clearly understand that unifying these democratic forces is the only way to win a victory, or at least set up a democratic faction in the parliament of the Chechen republic," he said. The Chechen branches of democratic parties and non-governmental organizations agreed at a recent meeting to consolidate and compile a single list of Republican Party of Russia candidates, he said. Chechnya's democrats call for demilitarizing Chechnya and rooting out "the image of the 'Chechen terrorist' and 'Chechen enemy' in Russian society," Sadayev said. Their other goals include countering unemployment, cracking down on crime, tightening control over security officials, and tackling refugees' problems. (Interfax)

FEDERATION COUNCIL SPEAKER WELCOMES UZBEK EVICTION OF U.S. MILITARY

2 August

Federation Council speaker Sergei Mironov said on 1 August that Uzbek officials made the correct decision by giving the United States six months to withdraw its troops from the Karshi-Khanabad air base. "The Uzbek authorities took an absolutely pragmatic and logical step," Mironov said before going on to suggest that the antiterrorist operation in neighboring Afghanistan is over and "it's time for the Americans to leave Uzbekistan." Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said last week that Russia set out no timetables regarding U.S. bases in Central Asia and that decisions on such issues are made by "the Central Asian governments alone." China and Russia are pressing regional governments to end agreements allowing for a U.S. military presence, "Argumenty i fakty," No. 30, commented adding that China has pledged to compensate Central Asian countries for any related withdrawal of U.S. economic aid. (RFE/RL)

UZBEK FOREIGN MINISTRY BLASTS REFUGEE EVACUATION

2 August

In an official statement on 1 August, Uzbekistan's Foreign Ministry harshly criticized the recent evacuation of 339 Uzbek refugees from Kyrgyzstan to Romania as a "violation of all procedures and norms of international law and UN resolutions," official news agency UzA reported. The ministry said the evacuation was unnecessary because the "displaced citizens" posed no threat to security on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border. Blaming "outside forces" for pressuring Kyrgyzstan, the statement concluded, "Uzbekistan's Foreign Ministry views all of this as the unacceptable and crude interference of outside forces in an attempt to play the card of the so-called

'Uzbek refugees' and continue the undeclared information war, which was planned, like the 'Andijon operation' itself, long before the tragic events of 13 May in Andijon." (RFE/RL)

AKAYEV LIKELY TO BECOME MOSCOW UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR

2 August

Kyrgyzstan's former president Askar Akayev has been offered teaching and research work at the Moscow State University. University Rector Viktor Sadovnichy has proposed that Akayev give lectures to post-graduates and doctors of the Systems Mathematics Institute which Sadovnichy heads, a source in the University management told Interfax. "Akayev agreed and we expect him to begin work in September," the source said. (Interfax)

KYRGYZ PROTESTERS BLOCK ROAD TO GOLD MINE

2 August

A group of 300 people from five villages in the Jeti-Oguz District of Kyrgyzstan's Issyk-Kul Province have been blocking the Barskoon-Kumtor highway for six days in an attempt to win compensation for a 1998 mining accident, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported on 1 August. The protesters want Canada's Centerra Gold, which owns the Kumtor gold mine in Kyrgyzstan, to compensate them for a 1998 cyanide spill that they say has killed more than 300 people over the last seven years. Mining-industry representatives say that they paid compensation in full at the time of the accident and that any objections now should be addressed to the Kyrgyz government. Protester Asankadyr Junushbaev told RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service that if the demonstrators' demands are not met, they plan to march on the Kumtor mine. (RFE/RL)

SOME UZBEK REFUGEES IN KYRGYZSTAN ARE CRIMINALS - PROSECUTOR

3 August

The Kyrgyz Prosecutor General's Office has evidence that 15 of the Uzbek refugees who fled to Kyrgyzstan following the May uprising in Andizhan in Uzbekistan committed crimes and can be extradited. "The Prosecutor General's Office has reliable evidence that proves these 15 Uzbek citizens' involvement in grave crimes," Prosecutor General Nurlan Zheenaliev said in a statement. "The crimes of a non-political nature that were perpetrated by these people provide grounds for our refusal to apply international acts on refugee status to them," Zheenaliev said. (Interfax)

AZERBAIJAN CLOSE TO DEAL ON HOSTING US FORCES: REPORT

3 August

Azerbaijan is close to agreement with the United States on the establishment of a US military presence following the eviction of American forces from Uzbekistan, a Russian newspaper said Wednesday. "A decision wanted by Washington has almost ripened," the Nezavisimaya Gazeta newspaper quoted an unnamed source close to Azerbaijan's foreign ministry as saying. The president of the strategic Caspian country, Ilham Aliyev, "in the end will give his agreement to the deployment in the country of an American military contingent," the source said. Last week the ex-Soviet Central Asian state of Uzbekistan announced it was giving the United States 180 days to close an air base there used to support operations in nearby Afghanistan. Nezavisimaya Gazeta said the question of stationing US forces in Azerbaijan was on the agenda of the country's foreign minister, Elmar Mamedyarov, who was in Washington this week for talks with senior administration officials. In talks at the Pentagon, Mamedyarov would discuss "not only general prospects for military cooperation... but an extremely concrete question -- the possibility of transferring the American base from Uzbekistan to Azerbaijan," the newspaper said, summarising the views of unnamed analysts. In response to Wednesday's report, a spokesman for Azerbaijan's defence ministry, Ramiz Melikov, told AFP the ministry had "not held any discussions regarding this issue." "According to the constitution of Azerbaijan, there can be no bases of other states on the territory of the country. But if such a decision were to be taken it would be made by the president and we have not received any such information," Melikov said. Nezavisimaya Gazeta cited a source in the Azerbaijani security forces as saying that a team of US military instructors was already in Azerbaijan looking at two possible sites for hosting the US military, one close to the capital Baku and the other close to the border with Iran. (AFP)

CHECHNYA BANNING GAMING BUSINESS FOREVER - KADYROV

4 August

Chechnya is ending gaming business for good, Chechen First Deputy Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov said on Thursday. "The ban on the gaming business in the Chechen Republic will be irrevocable," he said at a Gudermes meeting with heads of district administrations. The administration heads and gaming industry representatives discussed ways of changing the business. Gaming facility owners asked Kadyrov to give them time to close down their facilities. It was agreed to close gaming facilities in Chechnya before August 25. Kadyrov promised comprehensive assistance to every businessman who closes a gaming facility and sets up something else. (Interfax)

KAZAKH OPPOSITION BLOC OFFICIALLY REGISTERED

4 August

The opposition bloc For a Just Kazakhstan announced on 3 August that it was officially registered by the Kazakh authorities the previous day. The bloc described its registration as "the common victory of democratic forces." Bloc leader Zharmakhan Tuyakbai is the presumptive unified opposition candidate in Kazakhstan's upcoming presidential election, which will be held in either December 2005 or December 2006. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKHSTAN TO JOIN BAKU-TBILISI-CEYHAN PIPELINE IN OCTOBER

4 August

Energy Minister Vladimir Shkolnik announced in Aktau on 4 August that Kazakhstan will join the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline project in October. Shkolnik said the eventual connection between Aktau in Kazakhstan and Baku in Azerbaijan will initially function as an independent link carrying 7.5 million tons of oil a year. The hook-up to the BTC will also involve the construction of a new storage and transport terminal in Kuryk, a port 76 kilometers outside Aktau. The entire project will be timed to coincide with the beginning of production at Kazakhstan's Kashagan oil field. Production at Kashagan is expected to begin in 2008, according to ExxonMobil's Kashagan development plan. (Kazakhstan Today)

TURKMEN PRESIDENT GRANTS CITIZENSHIP TO 13,000 PEOPLE

5 August

President Saparmurat Niyazov has signed decrees granting Turkmen citizenship to 13,245 people, mainly former Tajik citizens who fled Tajikistan during that country's 1992-97 civil war. The report noted that most are ethnic Turkmen. Others covered by the decrees include residents of territory recently returned to Turkmenistan from Uzbekistan. Niyazov also signed resolutions granting residence permits to 3,053 displaced persons, most of them former citizens of Tajikistan. (turkmenistan.ru)

MORE BIRD LOSSES REGISTERED IN KAZAKHSTAN, AVIAN FLU SUSPECTED

5 August

New cases of death of domestic and wild birds have been registered in the East Kazakhstan and Akmola districts in Kazakhstan. The Emergency Situations Ministry told Interfax on Friday that the death of 364 chickens in seven households were reported in Krasny Yar, East Kazakhstan on Thursday. "All poultry farms in the

region are now operating in closed mode. Preventive steps are being taken in keeping with a comprehensive plan," the ministry said. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

KYRGYZSTAN MAY ASK U.S. TO CLOSE ITS AIR BASE - EXPERT

5 August

Kyrgyzstan may follow Uzbekistan's example and ask the United States to set a deadline for a withdrawal of its Air Force base, Valentin Bogatyryov, director of the Kyrgyz international institute of strategic studies under presidential auspices, told Interfax on Friday. "It may happen this autumn after the parliamentary elections in Afghanistan," Bogatyryov said. "As political life in Afghanistan is brought back to normal, it means that legitimate bodies of power, among them the president and parliament, should be established there. As we know, this process will be finalized this autumn, when parliamentary elections are due to be held in that country. Thus, I can say that after the elections it will be necessary to raise the issue of completing the mission of the anti-terrorist coalition's military bases," he said. (Interfax)

KYRGYZSTAN WAITING FOR A COUNTRY TO ACCEPT UZBEK DETAINEES

5 August

Prosecutor-General Azimbek Beknazarov told RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service on 4 August that Kyrgyzstan is willing to hand over 15 Uzbek citizens currently detained in Osh to any country that is willing to grant them refugee status and accept them. But they could face deportation to Uzbekistan if no one accepts them. "Today, not one state is willing to take them," Beknazarov said. "Under such circumstances, I have no other option but to deport them to Uzbekistan." He said that representatives of the Office of the UN High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) have left Bishkek for Europe, where they will have 10 days to find a country willing to accept the 15. The 15 Uzbek citizens fled Uzbekistan after violence in Andijon on 12-13 May along with more than 400 of their compatriots, who were recently airlifted to Romania. Kyrgyz authorities later detained the 15 on the basis of materials provided by Uzbek officials, who charge that the men are criminals. Zafar Khakimov, head of the Migration Department in the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry, told RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service on 4 August that four of the 15 have asylum-seeker status, while four were refused such status because they were allegedly serving sentences in Uzbekistan for drug-related offenses. International organizations and Western governments have strongly urged against the Uzbek citizens' return to Uzbekistan, arguing that they could face government reprisals at home. (RFE/RL)

SUSPECTED TALIBAN REBELS KILLED

7 August

US and Afghan troops have killed eight suspected Taleban militants in a lengthy gun-battle in southern Afghanistan, officials say. The clash was part of the latest of a series of military operations in Zabul province against fighters said to be loyal to the former Taleban government. Rebel fighters have intensified their attacks in the run-up to the Afghan parliamentary elections in September. Several pro-government clerics and officials have been targeted. There has been no word from the Taleban on the latest violence. "During the operation we killed eight Taleban and captured three others," a local police commander, Ghulam Rashoul Aka, is quoted as saying by the AFP news agency. Reports say at least one Afghan soldier was injured in the clash. In a separate incident, a candidate in next month's parliamentary elections escaped unhurt after an attempt on his life in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, reports quote police as saying. A man opened fire on Omer Safi when he was walking in a crowd, the AFP news agency reports. "The man has been arrested - investigation is ongoing," police official Sher Jan Durrani told AFP. Suspected Taleban insurgents have stepped up raids on US and Afghan government targets in the past three months in southern parts of Afghanistan, including Uruzgan and Kunar provinces. US forces say they expect insurgents to try and raise the level of violence ahead of parliamentary elections scheduled for September. (BBC)

KABUL 'FACES \$ 19 M POLL SHORTFALL'

8 August

The United Nations says Afghanistan still faces a shortfall of \$19m to fund parliamentary elections next month. A UN spokeswoman in Kabul, Ariane Quantier, said the shortfall remained despite new pledges totalling \$12m in recent days. The UN drew attention to the gap last week saying international donors had failed to fully honour commitments, threatening preparations for the poll. Remnants of the former Taleban regime have vowed to disrupt the elections. The parliamentary polls will be the first since the movement was ousted in December 2001. (BBC)

OPPOSITION PARTY LEADER CALLS YOUTH MOVEMENT CHAIR'S ARREST SUBVERSION

8 August

Popular Front Party (PFPA) chairman Ali Karimli has refuted reports on the Yeni Fikir (New Thought) youth movement chairman's Ruslan Bashirli's cooperation with the Armenian secret service. The reports and relevant TV broadcasts are another subversion of Azerbaijani secret service, Karimli told a news conference. The Prosecutor's Office issued a report on Thursday saying that while visiting Tbilisi, Bashirli plotted with the

Armenian secret service to stage a coup and provoke stand-off in Azerbaijan. It also said that the chairman and another representative of Yeni Fikir went to the Georgian capital on Karimli's instruction. Karimli said that the individuals that spoke with Bashirli during the visit presented themselves as representatives of Georgian non-government organizations. The PFFA chair said that a while ago, one of these persons, who are now known to serve Armenian secret service, visited Baku, presenting himself as a businessman, and met with him. If he works for Armenian secret service, how did he manage to enter the city? Where were government agencies then? Karimli went on to say that after Bashirli returned from Georgia, he met with him in Baku. Bashirli then said that while in Tbilisi, a Georgian businessman offered him money, but he refused. I am not sure now - either Bashirli was not saying the truth or this part was removed from the TV footage, the PFFA chair said. Karimli noted that he was disappointed with some statements by Bashirli. I was frustrated by what he said about the Upper Garabagh conflict and the US plans to stage a revolution in Azerbaijan. He was in a drunken state when he made those statements. Karimli also said that he believes that various psychotropic substances were mixed in the drinks that Bashirli had with the mentioned individuals. The PFFA chairman did not rule that Russian secret service agencies may be involved in the incident, as the reports on the matter and the videotape showing the conversation Bashirli had in Tbilisi were submitted to the Prosecutor's Office by a Russian citizen. Bashirli bears not criminal but moral responsibility for the incident, said Karimli. (Baku Today)

OSCE SLAMS VIOLENT ATTACKS ON OPPOSITION IN AZERBAIJAN

9 August

Europe's top election-monitoring body, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, on Tuesday condemned the violent attacks directed at the opposition in Azerbaijan. "We strongly condemn these acts of violence. It is unacceptable that groups of private citizens decided to take justice into their own hands," the Head of the OSCE Office in Baku, Maurizio Pavesi said. Violent protests have erupted around the offices of the opposition National Front of Azerbaijan party over the past two days after the authorities announced the arrest of an opposition figure with alleged ties to Armenian secret police. Demonstrators on Monday exchanged volleys of stones and bottles, in which no one was injured, and bizarrely beat each other with flowers in another demonstration on Tuesday. Tensions flared after Ruslan Bashirli, leader of the Yeni Fikir (New Thought) youth opposition group, was arrested for allegedly accepting money from enemy Armenian agents to fund a

revolution in Azerbaijan. The group shares an office with the National Front party. Anti-government parties have dismissed those allegations as part of a state-sponsored smear campaign meant to damage the opposition ahead of parliamentary elections in November. Pavesi called on the authorities to prevent "violent and unauthorized public meetings," or risk the electoral campaign's "deterioration." The last national vote, the 2003 presidential elections in which Ilham Aliyev took over from his father Heydar Aliyev, ended in two days of rioting and hundreds of arrests. (AFP)

AZERBAIJAN POSTS HIGHEST CIS INDUSTRIAL GROWTH IN H1

9 August

Azerbaijan posted the highest industrial growth, up 20.1% year-on-year, among CIS nations in January-June, the CIS Interstate Statistical Committee said. Growth was 10.5% in Belarus, 8.9% in Tajikistan, 5.0% in Ukraine, 7.0% in Kazakhstan, 4.6% in Moldova, 12.8% in Georgia, 4.0% in Russia and 5.3% in Armenia. Industrial output fell 9.8% in Kyrgyzstan. The committee did not give figures for Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan. CIS industrial growth was 5% year-on-year, against 9% in January-June 2004. GDP also grew 5% in the Commonwealth as a whole. GDP grew 4% in Ukraine, 8.1% in Tajikistan, 8.9% in Belarus, 10.2% in Armenia, 16.5% in Azerbaijan, 2.4% in Kyrgyzstan and 5.1% in Russia. (Interfax)

US SOLDIER KILLED IN AFGHANISTAN

9 August

A US soldier and at least 16 militants have been killed in an attack on a US and Afghan patrol in southern Zabul province, the US military says. In a separate incident, two other US soldiers were wounded by a roadside bomb in Ghazni province. Also in Ghazni province, suspected Taliban militants killed a doctor and a bystander in an attack on a clinic. Afghanistan has recently seen a rise in violence, amid preparations for September's parliamentary elections. Speaking after the US soldier's death, Brig Gen James G Champion, said Afghan and US forces would "continue this search and attack mission to ensure there are no enemy safe havens in this region." In the other incident, four suspected Taliban militants attacked a medical clinic killing a doctor and a bystander in central Afghanistan, officials say. Police reached the area and arrested two of the militants who were injured in the clash, according to Ghazni province governor Haji Sher Alam. A man claiming to speak for the Taliban said they carried out Monday's attack in Andar district. "We killed the doctor, Mohammed Hashim, because he was a former communist and he was also spying for the Americans," said Abdul Latif Hakimi, who says he is a Taliban spokesman. Mr Hakimi also told the AFP news agency that the doctor was a candidate in the

parliamentary elections. The UN-supported Joint Electoral Management Body and the interior ministry both deny this. Afghanistan suffers from a severe brain drain and a lack of specialists after decades of unrest. The country is said to have only one doctor per 50,000 inhabitants. (BBC)

TRIAL OF ARRESTED TURKISH SCHOLAR OPENS IN YEREVAN

10 August

A Turkish scholar who researched Ottoman history in Armenia's state archives went on trial in Yerevan on Tuesday nearly two months after his controversial arrest on smuggling charges which caused an uproar in U.S. and Turkish academic circles. Yektan Turkyilmaz, a 33-year-old doctoral student at the U.S. Duke University, is facing between four and eight years in prison for trying to take old books out of Armenia without a mandatory government permission. The opening session of the trial adjourned less than an hour after its beginning at the request of one of Turkyilmaz's newly hired lawyers who said he needs more time to familiarize himself with the case. The presiding judge at the court of first instance in Yerevan's Malatia-Sebastia district scheduled the next hearing for Friday. Among those attending the first hearing were local human rights activists and officials from the U.S. embassy in Armenia. Turkyilmaz, who became last May the first Turkish scholar to be granted access to the Armenian National Archive, was charged under Article 215 of Armenia's Criminal Code which envisages equally tough punishment for smuggling of cultural treasures and weapons of mass destruction. He insisted during the pre-trial investigation that he was unaware of Armenian laws regulating the export of old books and other artifacts and therefore does not deserve imprisonment. Turkyilmaz has attracted strong support from fellow academics in the United States, Turkey and Armenia. More than 200 of them have signed an open letter to President Robert Kocharian describing the accusations as "disproportionate" and calling for his release. Also demanding his liberation was Bob Dole, a former pro-Armenian member of the U.S. Senate. "To detain him on grounds as dubious as these calls into question Armenia's commitment to democracy in the first place," Dole wrote to Kocharian last week. Individuals convicted of smuggling have rarely ended up in jail in Armenia. Hence, growing questions about reasons for the severity of the charges leveled against the Turkish national of Kurdish extraction. The chief prosecutor at the trial, Koryun Piloyan, refused to explain them on Tuesday. "You don't look at the issue correctly," Piloyan told RFE/RL. "[Turkyilmaz's] deed corresponds to that article of the Criminal Code." (RFE/RL)

REGIONAL BRANCHES OF AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITION PARTY ATTACKED

10 August

Protesters stormed the regional offices of the opposition Azerbaijan Popular Front Party in Lenkoran, Sumgait, and Nakhichevan on 10 August, shouting derogatory slogans. But thanks to the agreement reached on 9 August between leading AHCP activists and Interior Minister Ramil Usubov, police prevented a further attack on the AHCP headquarters in Baku. The protesters, whom the AHCP suspects have been mobilized by the Azerbaijani authorities, accuse the AHCP and its chairman, Ali Kerimli, of collusion with opposition youth activist Ruslan Bashirli, who was arrested on 3 August on charges of plotting to overthrow the Azerbaijani leadership with financial help from Armenian intelligence. (Turan)

U.S. EMBASSY CALLS FOR IMPARTIAL INVESTIGATION INTO AZERBAIJANI COUP ALLEGATIONS

10 August

The U.S. Embassy in Baku released a statement on 10 August stressing the need for "a fair and impartial investigation" into the accusations brought by the Prosecutor-General's Office against Bashirli. The statement also stressed that those accusations should be evaluated by a court of law, and not the media. It reaffirmed Washington's hopes that the Azerbaijani authorities will ensure that the 6 November parliamentary elections are fair and transparent, and that they will condemn unwarranted attacks on political parties or individual politicians and permit all political forces "to pursue their election campaigns without harassment or unsubstantiated allegations." (Turan)

SOUTH OSSETIA ASKS INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS TO INTERVENE FOR DETAINEES IN GEORGIA

11 August

The representative for human rights representatives to the president of the unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia has asked for UN, OSCE, and nongovernmental groups' assistance to determine the local whereabouts of 15 men from South Ossetia who are being held in Georgian prisons. David Sanakoev made the request in a letter to UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Manfred Novak, to Roy Reeve, head of the OSCE office in Tbilisi, and to Amnesty International and the International Committee of the Red Cross. The detainees reportedly include two men suspected of involvement in the 1 February car bombing in Gori that killed three people. Also on 11 August, South Ossetian Foreign Minister Murad Djioev similarly asked Vladimir Chkhikvishvili,

Russia's ambassador in Tbilisi, to try to secure the release of the two bombing suspects. (Caucasus Press)

YUSHCHENKO ARRIVES IN TBILISI

12 August

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko arrived in Tbilisi on Friday afternoon. Yushchenko and his wife were met at the airport by Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili. The Ukrainian president's visit is unofficial, which is why there will be no press conference at the airport, a Georgian presidential administration spokesman told reporters. Reporters were not allowed to enter the airport. (Interfax)

KAZAKHSTAN BANS POULTRY SALES DUE TO BIRD FLU WORRIES

12 August

Kazakhstan's Agriculture Ministry has banned the sale of live poultry and eggs in all regions of the country where bird flu has been discovered. Bird flu has been reported in at least four provinces, with the H5N1 strain, which has been responsible for human infections in other countries, confirmed in Pavlodar Province. Asylbek Kazhuratov, head of the Agriculture Ministry's veterinary department, told a news conference in Astana on 12 August that further outbreaks of bird flu cannot be ruled out "because the wild birds that spread the infection can settle anywhere." He noted that more than 5,000 birds have been culled in infected areas. The Agriculture Ministry also stated in a 12 August press release that authorities in affected areas have in some cases failed to implement effective measures to deal with outbreaks. (ITAR-TASS)

TURKMEN LEADER SACKS HEAD OF STATE OIL COMPANY

13 August

President Saparmurat Niyazov has signed a decree removing Saparmamed Valiev from his ministerial post as head of Turkmenneft, the state oil company, turkmenistan.ru reported on 13 August. The report stated that Valiev was removed for "serious deficiencies in his work and abuse of office." The president charged that a preliminary investigation has revealed evidence of Valiev's involvement in corrupt practices and ordered law-enforcement officials to complete a full investigation in 20 days. Niyazov appointed Karyagdy Tashliev, first deputy director of Turkmenneft, acting director and oil minister. Valiev, who had headed Turkmenneft since 1997, asked Niyazov to forgive him but the president declined, Reuters reported. "I won't forgive you anything," Niyazov reportedly said. "Go and work as a manual laborer." (RFE/RL)

UZBEKISTAN DEPORTS JOURNALIST

15 August

Uzbek authorities on 13 August deported Igor Rotar, a correspondent for Forum 18, the Norway-based religious-freedom organization reported on its website (<http://www.forum18.org>) the same day. The report noted that Uzbek authorities, who had detained Rotar upon his arrival at Tashkent airport on 11 August, officially deported Rotar only after unsuccessful attempts to force him "to buy his own ticket [out of Uzbekistan] and claim that he was not deported." Forum 18 noted, "Uzbekistan's unjustified detention and formal deportation of a widely respected religious freedom reporter, along with the continued crackdown on the independent media, raises many serious issues of freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom to defend human rights and the safety of journalists carrying out their legitimate work." In an interview with fergana.ru on 14 August, Rotar, a Russian citizen who works as a correspondent for Forum 18 and is a contributor to the U.S.-based Jamestown Foundation, said that Uzbek security personnel told him: "How long are you going to get on our nerves? Buy a ticket wherever you want, or else we'll beat you up." Rotar said the security officers who detained him did not use force against him, however. The correspondent, who has written extensively about issues of religious freedom in Uzbekistan for Forum 18, planned to investigate alleged repression against Protestants in northern Karakalpakistan; Rotar told fergana.ru that he did not link his detention and deportation to this specific issue, but rather to a general crackdown on media in Uzbekistan in the wake of violence in Andijon on 13 May. (RFE/RL)

KULOV APPOINTED ACTING KYRGYZ PM

15 August

Felix Kulov has been appointed acting prime minister of Kyrgyzstan, the presidential press service told Interfax on Monday. "On August 15 President Kurmanbek Bakiyev entrusted Felix Kulov with the duties of prime minister. This decree came into force with immediate effect," the press service said. (Interfax)

TURKISH NATIONAL RESEARCHING GENOCIDE PLEADS NOT GUILTY IN ARMENIAN SMUGGLING CASE

15 August

Turkish scholar Yektan Turkyilmaz told a Yerevan district court on 12 August that he did not deliberately try to smuggle valuable antique books out of Armenia, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. Turkyilmaz, who spent two months in Armenia earlier this summer conducting research into the 1915 genocide, was apprehended on 17 June at Yerevan's Zvartnots Airport. He had 89 rare books, some dating from the 17th century,

in his luggage when he was detained. Turkyilmaz said in court on 12 August, that he was unaware of the legal requirement to obtain official permission to export any books published more than 50 years ago. The prosecution claims that he was informed of that requirement by a Yerevan bookseller who sold him some of the volumes in question. Also on 12 August, U.S.-born opposition politician and former Foreign Minister Raffi Hovannisian deplored the prosecution of Turkyilmaz, arguing that "it is hard to imagine a more powerful blow to international affirmation of the Armenian genocide than this trial," RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIA CONDEMNS PLANNED ABKHAZ WAR GAMES

15 August

Georgian Minister for Conflict Resolution Giorgi Khaindrava condemned the military maneuvers that commenced in Abkhazia's Ochamchira Raion on 15 August as a gross violation of existing agreements, and he appealed to the Russian peacekeeping force deployed in the conflict zone to intervene to stop them. Some 6,000 army, navy, and air-force personnel and reservists are taking part in the exercises, which according to Republic of Abkhazia Defense Minister Lieutenant General Sultan Sosnaliev are intended to demonstrate how prepared the unrecognized republic is to repel any aggression. In an interview in the June, No.23, issue of the newspaper "Severnyi Kavkaz," published in Nalchik, Sosnaliev stressed that Abkhazia is systematically strengthening its armed forces purely for defensive purposes, and he expressed concern at Georgia's ongoing military buildup. (Caucasus Press)

SOME 1,000 MILITANTS ACTIVE IN CHECHNYA - OFFICIAL

15 August

Up to 1,000 militants are currently operating in Chechnya, head of the Chechen State Council Taus Jabrailov said at a Monday news conference at the Interfax central office. "They number about 1,000," he said responding to a question from reporters. There are 100 to 150 foreign mercenaries in Chechnya, he added. "They are mercenaries who have no religion and the main thing [for them] is money," Jabrailov said. (Interfax)

RUSSIA TELLS GEORGIA TO RETURN CARGO SEIZED FROM PEACEKEEPERS

15 August

The Russian embassy in Tbilisi has described as a provocation the seizure of a cargo for Russian peacekeeping forces in the zones of the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts. "On

August 12, Georgian officials stopped two trucks of the Collective Peacekeeping Force and the Joint Peacekeeping Force, carrying cargo for the peacekeeping battalions, despite the fact that both vehicles had signs identifying them as belonging to the peacekeeping battalions, as well as accompanying documents," The Russian embassy in Georgia said in a statement on Friday. "This action violates existing agreements. The Russian embassy demands that the cargo be returned, apologies presented and that provocations of this kind stop," the Russian embassy said. (Interfax)

TURKMENISTAN NEARLY COMPLETES SHAKE-UP OF OIL AND GAS SECTOR

16 August

Presidential fury completed Monday full circle of the oil and gas sector of Turkmenistan when the head of Turkmengeologia was removed from his job. State minister and chairman of state concern Turkmengeologia, Orazmuhammet Agageldiyev, was removed through a presidential decree because of 'serious drawbacks' in his work. He has been replaced by Ishanguly Nuriyev, who would be on probation for a period of six months. The weeding out process started several weeks ago when Yolly Gurbanmuradov, deputy prime minister responsible for oil and gas sphere, was fired under a stack of charges. He has since been sentenced to a long prison term. Later, the heads of Turkmenneftgaz and Turkmenneft were also removed from their jobs under similar charges that range from abuse of office, bribery and corruption to misappropriation of public property and nepotism. Except of some subsidiary organizations, the main entities of the Turkmen oil and gas sector have now undergone change of command. (www.newscentralasia.com)

BLAIR SEEKS DECISION ON UZBEKS IN LINE WITH UN CONVENTIONS

16 August

British Prime Minister Tony Blair said he hopes that a decision on the 15 Uzbek refugees being held at a pre-trial detention center in the Kyrgyz city of Osh will be made in compliance with UN conventions in a letter to Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who was inaugurated on August 14, 439 Uzbek refugees who fled to Kyrgyzstan after a May uprising in the southern Uzbek city of Andizhan have already been flown to third countries. The Uzbek authorities accuse the 15 remaining refugees of being involved in serious crimes and demand their extradition. Meanwhile, the UN refugee agency has so far granted refugee status to 12 of them. (Interfax)

LAWYER SAYS ARRESTED AZERBAIJANI YOUTH LEADER SUBJECTED TO 'TORTURE'

17 August

Elchin Gambarov, an attorney representing Ruslan Bashirli, leader of the opposition youth group Yeni Fikir, was quoted on 17 August by echo-az.com as saying that Bashirli was systematically beaten the day following his arrest earlier this month in such a way as not to leave marks on his body. Bashirli was taken into custody on 3 August shortly after returning from a visit to Tbilisi during which -- to judge from video footage shown on Azerbaijani television -- he accepted money from men identified as Armenian intelligence agents and pledged to destabilize the political situation in Azerbaijan. He has been charged with seeking to overthrow the country's leadership. Gambarov said interrogators tried, without success, to coerce Bashirli into giving testimony incriminating Ali Kerimli, chairman of the progressive wing of the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party. (RFE/RL)

BAGAPSH URGES SAAKASHVILI TO RECOGNIZE ABKHAZIA INDEPENDENCE

17 August

President Sergei Bagapsh of the self-proclaimed republic of Abkhazia has urged Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili to recognize Abkhazia's independence. "Saakashvili has the reputation of a great democrat in the West and has chances to make history by recognizing Abkhazia's independence," Bagapsh said at a press conference at the Interfax main office on Wednesday. (Interfax)

FOREIGN MINISTRY: RUSSIA AGAINST THE 'FORCIBLE DEMOCRATIZATION'

17 August

OF CIS Deputy Foreign Minister Grigorii Karasin wrote in "Rossiiskaya gazeta" on 16 August that "Russia cannot agree to the forcible democratization of post-Soviet space" and considers "color revolutions" as falling within that category of democratization. He added that Russia believes "forcible democratization" will lead to destabilization and the growth of extremism in the region. He also said Russia has vital interests in the CIS and will persistently defend them. At the same time, Russia understands that other countries have their own interests in the CIS region and can protect these interests "in a fair competition of ideas and concepts, not power," Karasin concluded. Karasin was presumably responding to the recent initiative, unveiled by the Georgian and Ukrainian presidents, to create a "commonwealth of democracies of the Baltic, Black Sea and Caspian regions." (RFE/RL)

KYRGYZ PROSECUTOR WANTS TO STRIP EX-PRESIDENT, DEPUTIES OF IMMUNITY

18 August

Prosecutor-General Beknazarov has said that his office is preparing a request for parliament to strip former President Askar Akaev of immunity from prosecution, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported on 18 August. Beknazarov said that two-thirds of the legislature will need to approve the request in order to clear the way for the prosecution of the ex-president, who is currently residing in Russia, for crimes allegedly committed during his time in office. Beknazarov noted that similar requests are being readied to strip a number of parliamentary delegates of their immunity. He also told RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service that a criminal case against former National Bank head Ulan Sarbanov and former presidential administration head Medet Sadyrkulov has been handed over to the courts. The case charges the two men with illegally giving former President Akaev \$400,000 in 1999. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIAN SPECIAL FORCES KILL GUNMAN AT TV HEADQUARTERS

18 August

Georgian special forces shot dead a gunman who broke into the headquarters of the Rustavi 2 television company in Tbilisi on Thursday. Special forces freed the member of staff whom the attacker, armed with a handgun, had taken hostage. The gunman, who has not yet been officially identified, was killed after fruitless talks with special forces. (Interfax)

CHECHEN GUERRILLA LEADER KILLED BY POLICE

18 August

Kazbek Batalov, leader of a Chechen separatist guerrilla group of up to 30 people, has been killed in a police operation "to blockade and liquidate a group of bandits," the police chief of Chechnya's Sunzha district said on Thursday, citing "updated information." (Interfax)

VILLAGERS WANT ETHNIC CHECHENS EVICTED OVER ETHNIC CLASHES

19 August

Villagers demanded at a meeting on Friday that ethnic Chechens who were found responsible for the clashes with ethnic Kalmyks in the village of Yandyki in the Russian region of Astrakhan be evicted from Yandyki, regional governor Konstantin Markelov said. But "we will act strictly within the limits of the law" as regards possible evictions, Markelov told Interfax. Markelov said that grievances against local police were also voiced at the meeting, which brought together residents of Yandyki, as well as those of three nearby villages and the town of Lagani, in the neighboring Russian region of Kalmykia. The head of the regional police authority decided at the meeting to dismiss the police chief of

Liman district, where Yandyki is located, Markelov said. (Interfax)

CHECHEN MINISTER'S HOUSE BLOWN UP

19 August

An explosion ripped through the house of Chechen Housing and Utilities Sector Minister Abu Sugaipov in the village of Avtury in the republic's Shali district on Friday. Six people, among them small children, were injured, district administration deputy chief Ramzan Tasukhanov told Interfax. "Law enforcement agencies have come to the conclusion that unidentified individuals planted a powerful explosive device on the roof or in the attic. The house was virtually destroyed. Investigators are working at the scene and a manhunt for the criminals has been launched," Tasukhanov said. (Interfax)

KAZAKH ELECTION SET FOR DECEMBER

19 August

Kazakhstan's constitutional court has decided that the country's presidential election should be held this December. The opposition had campaigned for a December poll, while some government officials had argued that it should be held towards the end of next year. President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who has been in power for more than 15 years, has already said he will stand again. But he could face a greater challenge this time, as analysts say the opposition has become more effective. "It is the view of the constitutional court that the next election of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan should take place on the first Sunday of December of the year 2005," court chairman Ivan Rogov told reporters. The constitutional court's decision must be confirmed by parliament. The controversy over the poll's timing had centred on different articles of the Kazakh constitution. The opposition had pointed out that article 41 says the presidential term is seven years, and President Nazarbayev's present term began in January 1999. But members of the government had stressed that article 94 stipulates that the election should take place on the first Sunday in December following the end of a presidential term - which would set an election date for 3 December 2006. However, the opposition accused advocates of this later date of just playing for more time. Another revolution? Kazakhstan has never held an election judged free and fair by Western observers. President Nazarbayev recently warned of the destabilising effects of importing Western-style democracy too rapidly to Central Asia. His remarks followed a wave of popular uprisings in the region, including neighbouring Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Some observers have suggested this vast oil-rich country could be another candidate for the popular revolutions which have now unseated three post-Soviet presidents. Kazakhstan has the same problems as other countries in the region - of

widespread corruption and an elite which has grown very rich through shady business practices. But life for many people in Kazakhstan has actually been improving, partly because of massive foreign investment in Caspian Sea oil, and this has blunted the demand for rapid political change. (BBC)

UZBEK PROSECUTORS DENY SUSPECT HAS DIED UNDER TORTURE

20 August

The Uzbek Prosecutor General's Office on Saturday denied a report that one of the four men who fled to Kyrgyzstan after May's riots in the Uzbek city of Andizhan but have later come back to Uzbekistan died under torture. All four "are charged with direct participation in the attacks on the buildings of the regional administration and law and order [agencies] and on a military base, with killing hostages and civilians, and with hijacking cars," Svetlana Artykova, spokeswoman for the office, told Interfax. She said the four former refugees were currently in preventive detention. Artykova said that the four men had returned to Uzbekistan voluntarily and turned themselves in. "Evidence of the voluntary return of these people is a reply from the Kyrgyz Prosecutor General's Office dated July 5 of this year that no consideration had been given to the demands of the Uzbek Prosecutor General's Office to extradite these people as they had returned to Uzbekistan voluntarily," Artykova said. (Interfax)

GEORGIA LEFT WITHOUT POWER OVER BREAKDOWN ON HIGH-VOLTAGE POWER TRANSMISSION LINE

21 August

Power cuts to Tbilisi and virtually to all districts in eastern Georgia were caused by a breakdown on a high-voltage power transmission line. According to preliminary data, the transmission line was snapped by gale winds, a thunderstorm and a lightning, which put out of action a section of the power transmission line. Initially, electricity was not supplied to strategic projects in Tbilisi and other cities in Eastern Georgia. The trunk railway and the Tbilisi subway ground to a standstill. Water was not supplied to residential areas. True, according to the latest reports, power supplies resumed to the Tbilisi underground and other strategic projects in the city. A duty officer at the Inguri hydropower station (largest power station in the country) told Tass by phone that the hydropower plant "operates normally, and electricity is supplied to western areas of the country", but power is not supplied to the country's east over the breakdown on the Imereti and Kartli power transmission lines. (Itar-Tass)

PUTIN PROMISES TO SIGN DECREE ON PARLIAMENTARY VOTE IN CHECHNYA

21 August

Russian President Vladimir Putin said at a working meeting with Chechnya's President Alu Alkhanov, Prime Minister Sergei Abramov and Deputy Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov that he will sign a decree to set the parliamentary elections in the republic for November 27, 2005. The meeting took place at the Bocharov Ruchei residence in the Black Sea resort of Sochi on Sunday. "The political situation and social life in the republic today allows us to suggest that you set the date for the elections," Alkhanov said. Holding the polls on November 27 "will make it possible for us to finalize the establishment of all branches of power in the Chechen republic this year, which will help ensure a certain level of political stability and create the environment for the republic's economic development," he said. "I very much hope that it will become another step toward a political settlement in the republic, because I think that all political forces whose objective is to revive the republic should be represented and work in parliament," Putin said. "Irrespective of one's political preference, regardless of whether people like them [political forces] or not, they all have the right to have their representatives in parliament," he said. (Interfax)

MILITANT KILLED IN CHECHNYA

22 August

A militant from field commander Kazbek Batalov's group was killed during a special operation in the village of Assinovskaya in the Sunzhen district of Chechnya. The group has been pursued in the region for several days, the district interior department told Interfax on Monday. The pursuit began after an attack on the house of the Roshni-Chu village administration chief in the Urus-Martan district, the department said. (Interfax)

PIPELINE SECURITY EXERCISES UNDERWAY IN GEORGIA

22 August

Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey have launched headquarter exercises that will center on operations to safeguard the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline. "The headquarter exercises are taking place in Tbilisi and will continue for a week. They involve 52 specialists from the three nations' military agencies and special services," a spokesman for the Georgian Defense Ministry told Interfax. "The main objective of the exercises is to practice our joint action program that can be applied if any crises erupt, primarily in the event of any terrorist threat to the oil pipeline," he said. (Interfax)

POLICE ARE COMBING SHALI DISTRICT TO STAMP OUT REMNANTS OF MILITANT GROUP

22 August

The Chechen police are combing the outskirts of the village of Avtury, Shali district to eliminate the remnants of a militant group. Chechen Interior Ministry spokesman Ruslan Atsayev told Interfax on Monday that a special police unit clashed with militants near Avtury Sunday night. "Operational reports say up to four militants were killed and an examination of the scene proves that," he said. Four policemen and one local resident were slightly wounded in the exchange of fire. The area has been sealed off. Atsayev said that a police vehicle came under fire from the woods when it was driving to the operation area. (Interfax)

RICE MEETS KAZAKHSTAN FM ON SECURITY, ENERGY

22 August

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met with Kazakhstan Foreign Minister Kasymzhomart Tokayev on security, energy and democratic reforms, officials said. Department of Defense and White House officials this week. Kazakhstan was among six nations under the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) security bloc that last month called for a deadline for the pull-out from Central Asia of US-led bases. The group, also including Russia, China, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, signed a declaration calling for deadlines for closure of military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, set up in 2001 by the US-led coalition that toppled Afghanistan's Taliban leadership. It was not known whether the base issue cropped up in Tokayev's discussions with Rice. Ahead of the talks, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said Monday he expected them to "review bilateral relations and mutual interests on a number of different issues, including security, energy, democratic reform and the importance of free and fair presidential elections in Kazakhstan in December." Energy-rich Kazakhstan's decision to hold the December polls ended a bitter row on the election date, with opponents of long-serving President Nursultan Nazarbayev describing it as a victory. Many supporters of Nazarbayev had wanted the polls to be held in December next year. Kazakhstan has vast proven oil reserves and remains highly attractive to major energy investors from Russia, China and the United States. (AFP)

PRESIDENT OF AZERBAIJAN ILHAM ALIYEV RECEIVES PACE PRESIDENT RENE VAN DER LINDEN

22 August

President of the Azerbaijani Republic Ilham Aliyev received the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Rene van der Linden, 22 August. Head of the Azerbaijan State mentioned his meeting with the PACE President in Warsaw, noting that the

meeting set up good chances for discussion of the questions of mutual interest. Stating that huge works are being realized in the country for democratization of society, President Ilham Aliyev expressed confidence the visit of PSCE President would serve closer familiarization with the development process in Azerbaijan. Mr. Rene van der Linden noted the Council of Europe supports the process of reforms in Azerbaijan. Underlining that settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan, Nagorno Karabakh conflict is the major question for Azerbaijan Mr. Linden expressed consent for peacemaking efforts of Azerbaijan in this direction. PACE President said that during his visit to Armenia he has discussed the issue with the Armenian side either and expressed hope for sooner resolution to the problem. In the meetings, also discussed were other questions of mutual interest. (AzerTag)

SAAKASHVILI VISITS ARMENIA

22 August

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili arrived in Armenia on August 21 for a two day informal visit to hold talks with his Armenian counterpart Robert Kocharian, Georgian and Armenian media sources reported. Saakashvili is reportedly accompanied by the Armenian Defense Minister Irakli Okruashvili. The Armenian President paid an informal visit to Georgia in April and held talks with Saakashvili in Georgia's ski resort Gudauri. (Civil Georgia)

KYRGYZ EX-PM RETURNS FROM EXILE

22 August

Kyrgyzstan's former Prime Minister, Nikolai Tanayev, has arrived from self-imposed exile in Russia to face allegations over abuse of power. He quit his post when the former president fled the ex-Soviet republic during an uprising in March. Mr Tanayev, who denies any wrongdoing, says he has not been formally charged with any crime. He says he has returned home voluntarily and will co-operate with the investigation into his activities. A spokesman for the chief prosecutor's office said Mr Tanayev is accused of abuse of office and damaging the national budget. In another development, a warrant was issued for the arrest of former President Askar Akayev's son-in-law, Adil Toigonbayev. The warrant is in connection with a corruption case involving Mr Toigonbayev's fuel company, which supplied the American military base just outside Bishkek. The Akayev family was generally believed to control many of Kyrgyzstan's most profitable businesses, though family members always denied it. Mr Akayev, who remains in exile in Russia, has immunity from prosecution in Kyrgyzstan as a former president. (BBC)

CHINA TAKES A GREAT LEAP FORWARD INTO KAZAKHSTAN

August 22

CNPC's purchase of PetroKazakhstan marks a great leap forward for China into Kazakhstan's booming oil business, where so far western and Russian investors have held sway. The \$4.18bn deal would be the most expensive oil acquisition ever in Central Asia, providing CNPC with 150,000 barrels a day of oil production in central Kazakhstan just 1,000km from the Chinese border plus access to promising exploration acreage. It will also facilitate the company's plans to establish a pipeline to carry Kazakh oil east to China. (FT)

AFGHAN RAIDS 'KILL 100 MILITANTS'

22 August

More than 100 suspected militants have been killed in the past three weeks in operations in southern and eastern Afghanistan, the US military says. More than 40 were killed in operations in eastern Kunar province, where the US lost 19 personnel in June. Another 65 died in fighting in southern Zabul province, the US military said. The Taleban have stepped up violence ahead of next month's parliamentary elections but on Monday said they would not attack polling stations. On Sunday, suspected insurgents killed four US soldiers with a roadside bomb in Daychopan, in Zabul. SEAL deaths The coalition forces' "Operation Whalers" in Kunar province was launched to "clear the way for successful elections", the US military said. "We had over 29 separate engagements with enemy forces that resulted in over 40 enemy killed in action and many others wounded," said Lt Col Jerry O'Hara. Maj Gen Jason Kamiya said insurgents had a choice of joining the democratic process or "to continue to live in the shadow of continued military confrontation, violence, death and defeat". It is not possible to independently verify the US figures and the Taleban have not yet commented on them. Kunar's mountainous region has witnessed several deadly attacks on US forces in recent weeks by suspected insurgents who have vowed to derail the 18 September poll. In June, three Navy SEALs were killed in fighting in Kunar and a helicopter sent to rescue them went down, possibly under enemy fire, killing 16 more US personnel. The BBC's Andrew North in Kabul says since then US and Afghan forces have been concentrating on Kunar, trying to root out insurgents. However, sources have told the BBC that al-Qaeda supporters are still active in the area, in some cases using videos of insurgent attacks in Iraq to try to recruit people. But our correspondent says the latest statement from the Taleban's purported spokesman, Latifullah Hakimi, that they will hold off from attacks on polling stations may afford some comfort as that is largely what happened at last year's presidential elections. A US spokesman was cautious but said he hoped "this was a

sign of better things to come". On Sunday, Latifullah Hakimi, said Taliban fighters had detonated the roadside bomb that killed four US soldiers in Zabul. Three US soldiers were also hurt. Also on Sunday a second bomb hit a US embassy convoy near Kabul, injuring two officials. (BBC)

KYRGYZ PROSECUTORS TAKE TESTIMONY FROM FORMER PREMIER

22 August

Former Kyrgyz Prime Minister Nikolai Tanaev arrived in Bishkek on 22 August and met with Prosecutor-General Azimbek Beknazarov. Tanaev, who faces three criminal cases in Kyrgyzstan, went free after his testimony; prosecutors had initially wanted to arrest him, but after he voluntarily appeared to present testimony they agreed to release him on his own recognizance after he signed a statement that he will not leave the country. Maksim Maksimovich, the lawyer representing Tanaev, told reporters that his client met with Prosecutor-General Beknazarov for two and a half hours in the morning. Tanaev faces a variety of corruption charges but maintains his innocence. Maksimovich explained, "He did not plead guilty, but said that everything he had done was for the benefit of the state." Tanaev fled Kyrgyzstan after street protests toppled President Askar Akaev on 24 March for Russia, where he was born. (ITAR-TASS)

FORMER KYRGYZ PRESIDENT'S SON-IN-LAW FACES CRIMINAL CHARGES

22 August

The Kyrgyz Prosecutor-General's Office announced on 19 August that it has charged Adil Toigonboev, the son-in-law of former Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev, with fraud, embezzlement, and tax evasion, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz

Service reported. An arrest warrant has been issued and Toigonboev is currently being sought in connection with the charges. Prosecutors said that in one episode, Toigonbaev hid \$16 million in profits from Aalam Service, a service company that supplied the U.S. air base in Manas with jet fuel.(RFE/RL)

TURKMEN LEADER BANS RECORDED MUSIC AT EVENTS, ON TV

August 23

Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov has banned the playing of recorded music at public events, on television and at weddings in a bid to fend off foreign influences. A decree signed by Niyazov and published in newspapers "bans the use in Turkmenistan of sound recordings... at musical performances on state holidays, in broadcasts by Turkmen television channels, at all cultural events organised by state and social institutions, in places of mass assembly and at weddings and celebrations organised by the public." In comments carried by the official daily newspaper Neitralny Turkmenistan, Niyazov said there was a need "to protect true culture, including the musical and singing traditions of the Turkmen people, from the negative influences of factors that to them are foreign." Niyazov has ruled this natural gas-rich country of some five million people virtually single-handed since Soviet times. He has closed down Soviet-built institutions such as ballet and opera theatres that staged Western classical music. Radio and television programmes are dominated by performances of his own poems and philosophical writings set to music. Niyazov is in the habit of presenting favoured performers of traditional music with official awards and cash prizes of as much as 10,000 dollars (8,200 euros). (AFP)

