

Central Asia

Caucasus

ANALYST

BIWEEKLY BRIEFING

Wednesday, August 27, 2003

VISIT THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST HOMEPAGE AT

<http://www.cacianalyst.org/>

**UPDATED FORTNIGHTLY
OVER 300 ARTICLES AND FIELD REPORTS IN ARCHIVES**

THE CENTRAL ASIA CAUCASUS INSTITUTE



JOHNS HOPKINS
UNIVERSITY



BIWEEKLY BRIEFING

Wednesday/August 27, 2003

ANALYTIC ARTICLES:**RUSSIAN ENERGY EXPANSION IN CAUCASUS: RISKS AND MITIGATION STRATEGY.....3***Mamuka Tsereteli*

Russia is skillfully capitalizing on the sensitive pre-election period in Georgia. President Vladimir Putin is trying to obtain substantial concessions from President Eduard Shevardnadze of Georgia, without promising much in return. A recently concluded deal by RAO UES on purchase of electricity generation and distribution assets, and current attempts by Gazprom to take over the natural gas pipeline and distribution networks in Georgia, may have significant political consequences not only for Georgia, but also for the entire region and U.S. interests there. The primary measure to mitigate this risk is to increase Western security guarantees and engagement through NATO structures.

THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN AND CHINESE CONNECTION TO DRUG TRADE IN CENTRAL ASIA5*Niklas Swanström*

Central Asia in the late 1990s gradually became a major trafficking route for heroin produced in Afghanistan. This has had increasingly serious implications for the public health, economic development, as well as security of Central Asian states, and arguably grown into being the main threat to the region's future. Recent reports suggest that drugs from China and Southeast Asia are increasingly being trafficked through Central Asia. In the absence of strong measures to thwart the booming drug trade, Central Asia is set to become a global hub for drug trafficking - potentially further endangering the security of regional states and societies.

MILITARY REFORM IN UZBEKISTAN: DEFINING THE PRIORITIES.....7*Roger N. McDermott & Farkhad Tolipov*

Military reform in Uzbekistan is aimed at creating a small, mobile and well-equipped army, to deal effectively with any external threats to national security, the main threat stemming from terrorism. The U.S. and Uzbekistan signed a 'strategic partnership' agreement in 2002, solidifying the relationship between the two states. The course of military reform has placed Uzbekistan's armed forces ahead of regional neighbors and will nevertheless require further commitment and international support, possibly testing the strength of the U.S.-Uzbek partnership, if it is to achieve the transformation that is envisaged by the leadership in Tashkent.

KARZAI'S GOVERNMENT RESHUFFLE: BETTER LATE THAN NEVER9*Rahimullah Yusufzai*

After a long and agonizing wait, President Hamid Karzai has moved to assert his fragile authority by replacing some of his governors in the provinces. He also made an effort to implement an earlier policy to bifurcate political and military offices. The most prominent victim of this policy was Herat's powerful Governor Ismail Khan, who was stripped of his job as military commander. Implementing the new policy posed challenges because those being replaced were reluctant to give up their powers. The decisions aimed at strengthening Karzai's grip on power, extending the writ of his government beyond Kabul, and curtailing the authority of the provincial warlords.

FIELD REPORTS:**OPPOSITION STEPS UP STRUGGLE IN AZERBAIJAN4***Gulnara Ismailova***GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE ALARMS KAZAKH FARMERS6***Marat Yermukanov***SEX EDUCATION BOOK BANNED IN KYRGYZSTAN.....8***Maria Utyaganova***DESPERATE CONDITIONS IN KYRGYZ PRISONS.....10***Aisha Aslanbekova***NEWS BITES.....11**

EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

The Analyst is an English language global Web journal devoted to analysis of the current issues facing the Central Asia-Caucasus region. It serves to link the business, governmental, journalistic and scholarly communities and is the global voice of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, The Johns Hopkins University-The Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. The Editor of the Analyst solicits most articles and field reports however authors may suggest topics for future issues or submit articles and field reports for consideration. Such articles and field reports cannot have been previously published in any form, must be written in English, and must correspond precisely to the format and style of articles and field reports published in *The Analyst* (www.cacianalyst.org) and described below.

The Analyst aims to provide our industrious and engaged audience with a singular and reliable assessment of events and trends in the region written in an analytical tone rather than a polemical one. *Analyst* articles reflect the fact that we have a diverse international audience. While this should not affect what author's write about or their conclusions, this does affect the tone of articles. Analyst articles focus on a newsworthy topic, engage central issues of the latest breaking news from the region and are backed by solid evidence. Each 700-900 word analytical article must offer a concise and authoritative statement of the event or issue in question. An article must provide relevant, precise and authoritative background information. It also must offer a sober and analytical judgment of the issue as well as a clinical evaluation of the importance of the event. Authors must cite facts of controversial nature to the Editor who may contact other experts to confirm claims. Since *Analyst* articles are based on solid evidence, rather than rumors or conjecture, they prove to be reliable sources of information on the region. By offering balanced and objective analysis while keeping clear of inflammatory rhetoric, The Analyst does more to inform our international readership on all sides of the issues.

The Editor reserves the right to edit the article to conform to the editorial policy and specifications of *The Analyst* and to reject the article should it not be acceptable to our editorial committee for publication. On acceptance and publication of the edited version of the article, The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute of The Johns Hopkins University-The Nitze School of Advanced International Studies will issue the honorarium to the author. The copyright for the article or field report will reside with the Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst. However, the author may use all or part of the contracted article in any book or article in any media subsequently written by the author, provided that a copyright notice appears giving reference to the contracted article's first publication by the "Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, The Johns Hopkins University-The Nitze School of Advanced International Studies."

Analytical Articles:

Analytical articles require a three to four sentence introduction to the article based on a news hook. Rather than a general, overarching analysis, the article must offer considered and careful judgment supported with concrete examples.

Analytical article structure:

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

BACKGROUND: 200-300 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: 200-300 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.

Specifications for Field Reports:

Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event, or about the work of an NGO. Field Reports address the implications the event or activity analyzed has for peoples' lives and their communities. Field Reports do not have the rigid structure of Analytical Articles, and are shorter in length, averaging ca. 500-700 words.

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: svante.cornell@pcr.uu.se and suggest some topics on which you would like to write.

Svante E. Cornell,

Deputy Director, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute

Editor, Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

The Johns Hopkins University

Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies

1619 Massachusetts Ave. N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20036

Tel. +1-202-663-7712; 1-202-663-7721

Fax. +1-202-663-7785; 1-253-550-4390

RUSSIAN ENERGY EXPANSION IN CAUCASUS: RISKS AND MITIGATION STRATEGY

Mamuka Tsereteli

Russia is skillfully capitalizing on the sensitive pre-election period in Georgia. President Vladimir Putin is trying to obtain substantial concessions from President Eduard Shevardnadze of Georgia, without promising much in return. A recently concluded deal by RAO UES on purchase of electricity generation and distribution assets, and current attempts by Gazprom to take over the natural gas pipeline and distribution networks in Georgia, may have significant political consequences not only for Georgia, but also for the entire region and U.S. interests there. The primary measure to mitigate this risk is to increase Western security guarantees and engagement through NATO structures.

BACKGROUND: On July 31, 2003 the U.S. power company AES Corp. announced its plans to sell its businesses in Georgia to the Russian power monopoly Unified Energy Systems of Russia. AES sold 75% of the Tbilisi electricity distribution company and the 9th block of the Gardabani Power station, and the right to manage hydroelectric power stations Khrami-1 and Khrami-2. This is the next step in the process of implementation of the UES' strategy to regain control over the electricity system of the entire former Soviet Union. Following the take-over of the Armenian power-generation facilities in a debt-for-asset swap, RAO UES is substantially increasing its presence in Caucasus.

One may wonder what makes Georgian assets so attractive for UES, since it is known that AES was losing money in Tbilisi and that the electric power system in Georgia is deteriorating rapidly due to corruption and incompetent management. Clearly, UES' knowledge of the business environment in Georgia and its potentially greater cooperation with the Georgian Government may help the company to obtain better results than AES, but the commercial attractiveness of this deal is questionable, as high returns on UES' investment in near future are not likely. It is worth to mention that in addition to Mr. Chubais, who manages UES, there are several very influential politicians on its Board of Directors, including Mr. Alexandr Voloshin, the Head of Presidential Administration, who chairs the Board.

As a parallel process in late May, Alexei Miller, the Chief Executive Officer of Gazprom, Russia's state-owned gas monopoly, visited Tbilisi and met with President Eduard Shevardnadze to discuss bilateral energy cooperation. The two sides agreed that Gazprom would invest in the rehabilitation of a natural gas pipeline connecting Russia's northern Caucasus city of Vladikavkaz to the Armenian capital, Yerevan, through Tbilisi. In addition, the two sides reportedly agreed to revive efforts to create GruzRosGazprom, a Russian-Georgian venture that would control the Georgian natural gas pipeline network. Plans for the creation of GruzRosGazprom were initially announced in October 2001, but were never finalized. The details of the current arrangements are not known, but it is expected that Gazprom will be the majority shareholder in the newly

created company and therefore will have the power to control the strategic Georgian gas pipeline network. As a modest compensation, Gazprom has offered to provide Georgia with natural gas for less than the \$60/Mcm that Georgia currently pays to the U.S.-registered trader Itera, which enjoys a monopoly on 1.7 Bcm/yr gas sales to Georgia. This element of the deal serves another strategic objective of Mr. Miller: to replace the gas trader Itera in the former Soviet republics and consolidate Gazprom's influence in those politically sensitive markets. In August 2002, a similar arrangement with Itera was proposed, but failed to materialize due to some internal opposition in Georgia and criticism from the United States.

IMPLICATIONS: The policy of regaining control over the strategic energy assets of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union has already brought significant geo-economic advantages to Russia. But unlike Eastern European and Baltic states, where Western (NATO) strategic presence is already secured, Georgia is facing a direct security threat. As previous experience shows, Russia will use its control over the strategic energy assets of Georgia for political purposes. Unfortunately, weak and corrupt political elites in Georgia, both government and opposition, are busy with internal fights. They only pay attention to this development once it becomes an issue for internal politics.

But there may be some larger scale implications as well. On the gas side, if Georgia approves the deal with Gazprom, it will further facilitate the creation of a Eurasian gas monopoly led by Russia. In addition to Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, Russia is actively lobbying Azerbaijan to send its gas through the Gazprom network and the BlueStream line to Turkey, thus directly threatening the proposed South-Caucasus gas pipeline, which will connect the Shah-Deniz natural gas field in Azerbaijan to Turkey via Georgia by 2006. The Statoil-led group, which also includes BP, announced recently that the Azerbaijani field's proximity to Turkey makes its position very competitive despite a recession in Turkey and an associated drop in gas consumption. It is obvious that Russia is trying to prevent new entrants from obtaining a substantial stake in the Turkish gas market in order to maintain its dominance there.

Moreover, Russia is trying to prevent the opening of a new natural gas corridor connecting Turkey to Europe. Greece and Turkey already have an agreement on this subject, and just about the same time as Mr. Miller was visiting Tbilisi, Greece's state-owned gas company DEPA was negotiating deals to re-export natural gas from Azerbaijan through Georgia and Turkey to Western European countries. If this corridor is opened and new pipelines are built, they may be filled not only with gas from Azerbaijan, but also with gas from Iraq and potentially Iran, making competition for European markets much harder for Gazprom and substantially diversifying energy supplies to Europe.

CONCLUSIONS: Despite the successful security operation of the Georgian Government in the Pankisi Gorge and the ongoing U.S. Train-and-Equip military assistance program in Georgia, Russia maintains important mechanisms that it can use to leverage political influence in Georgia. Abkhazia is the key element in Russia's policy of keeping Georgia weak and unstable, but Abkhazia alone does not provide a sufficient tool for Russia to directly influence political processes in Georgia. With the Russian state-owned energy monopolies in Georgia, it is becoming easier for Russia to assert political control over Georgia.

Russia's activities in the energy sector in the Caucasus may expose the South Caucasus Energy Corridor and energy assets of Azerbaijan to serious political and economic risks. These developments also threaten the U.S. policy of multiple pipelines and in general, America's interest to have diversified energy supplies. The primary measure to mitigate those multiple risks is to expedite the integration of Georgia and other South Caucasian states in the broader Transatlantic partnership and in NATO. Only Western security guarantees can prevent Russia from manipulating with the situation in Georgia, and in the Caucasus as a whole. Continuing strong support for the development of pipeline projects of both oil and natural gas is needed, as is continuing support for the democratic political process in Georgia and for a free entrepreneurship-based economic recovery of Georgia.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Mamuka Tsereteli is the Executive Director of the America-Georgia Business Council and Adjunct Professor of international relations at American University in Washington, D.C. His areas of interests include economic security, political and economic risk mitigation strategies, and Business development.

OPPOSITION STEPS UP STRUGGLE IN AZERBAIJAN

Gulnara Ismailova

With the approaching presidential elections of October 15, the political situation in Azerbaijan is heating up by the day. Mass protest actions of the opposition are getting a more and more intensive character. The appointment of Ilham Aliyev as prime minister has meant that all instruments of power ahead of the elections will be in his hands. It will certainly rally the ruling elite around him. Moreover, it will allow him to greatly influence the pre-election situation. And finally, the leading countries of the West, as well as international organizations, have had to reckon with Ilham Aliyev's position, in fact acting as the head of the state.

However, the opposition is trying to activate its election campaign. In the Baku press club, a large meeting was held with the participation of the movement of intellectuals "Amal", leaders of political parties, NGOs and mass media. At this meeting, a wide social movement for the protection of democracy (MPD) was created. Its basic purpose is the mobilization of NGOs, political parties, mass media and citizens in order to prevent attempts of destabilization of a situation in the country.

A working body of the MPD will establish a continuous communication with power structures aiming to coordinate activity on the maintenance of stability and assisting the power structures in providing order. A concern was expressed at the meeting that tensions were increasing in Azerbaijan and would build up until the elections.

Other politicians, such as the chairman of the "Umid" party, MP Igbal Agazade, offered to hold an All-opposition forum. Agazade emphasized that under current conditions, the holding of presidential elections in October is in doubt. For this reason, the opposition should hold a forum and clearly state their sense of responsibility for the situation in the country.

The Organization of Karabakh's Liberation (OKL) has made the same demand to the oppositions. "There are opinions that the situation will get out of control and that the tensions between various groupings will increase. The struggle for power is at risk of spiraling out of control", a statement from OKL noted. According to the group, the opposition should take responsibility for a situation in the country. It suggested to create a new structure on the basis of the Coordination center of opposition (CCO). "Representatives of political parties, public organizations and mass media can take part in its work. This body's duty should be not to allow the country to gravitate towards a civil war".

A large meeting of representatives of opposition parties, human rights organizations and trade unions was also held recently. The Secretary general of the Democratic Party Serdar Jalaloglu declared that forces saw the appointment of Ilham Aliyev as a step towards the falsification of the forthcoming presidential elections, and a severe violation of the Constitution. Participants of the meeting have shown great discontent with the position of Turkey, the U.S. and Great Britain. But this time, the opposition is not going to stick only to

statements. It is going to act, i.e. hold a series of protest actions, even against the western powers, which it always considered as advocates of democracy in Azerbaijan.

On August 9, the opposition held a mass meeting with the requirement to carry out free elections with equal opportunities and conditions for all candidates. The CCO echoed this demand. Columns of demonstrators in central Baku demanded the democratization of the Election code; the carrying out of free and fair presidential elections; to provide equal opportunities and conditions for all candidates, etc.

However, under present conditions, the opposition has no any administrative levers of influence on the situation. Its financial opportunities are limited. It has several candidates for the presidency, but the forces of opposition are still neither united nor consolidated.

In an ideal situation, the opposition could expect for support in the dissatisfied portion of society, potentially making up the majority of voters, as well as support from international organizations and leading western countries interested in the development of democracy in Azerbaijan. However without a single candidate, the opposition is clearly unable to win.

The dissatisfied electorate does not believe in a victory of isolated opposition candidates in the presidential elections. Moreover, it has become clear that major forces in the West consider that even in case of an opposition victory in the elections, the winning candidate is likely to fail to provide stability in the country.

THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN AND CHINESE CONNECTION TO DRUG TRADE IN CENTRAL ASIA

Niklas Swanström

Central Asia in the late 1990s gradually became a major trafficking route for heroin produced in Afghanistan. This has had increasingly serious implications for the public health, economic development, as well as security of Central Asian states, and arguably grown into being the main threat to the region's future. Recent reports suggest that drugs from China and Southeast Asia are increasingly being trafficked through Central Asia. In the absence of strong measures to thwart the booming drug trade, Central Asia is set to become a global hub for drug trafficking - potentially further endangering the security of regional states and societies.

BACKGROUND: The situation in Central Asia has turned increasingly grim in recent years as the trafficking of opiates from Afghanistan has increasingly used the Central Asian route. United Nations statistics indicate that the Southern route for traffickers over Iran is stagnating or even declining in importance as the Iranian government has over the last decade made it gradually more difficult, and therefore expensive, for traffickers to transport their goods through the southern route. This forced traffickers to find easier and accessible routes to Europe, and with weak states and endemic corruption both in the regional governments in Central Asia and among Russian border troops stationed in Tajikistan, Central Asia has been an obvious choice.

The consequences have been serious for the region in terms of corruption, public health and security. Addiction rates are estimated at over 1% of the population, while corruption in state authorities has boomed.

Recent developments indicate that new drug smuggling routes originating in Southeast Asia and China are using Central Asia as a corridor for drugs to Europe. It has been evident that Southeast Asian traders have taken an interest in the weakened region of Central Asia as such a porous region decreases their transaction costs. The only serious limitation of this trade is the Chinese determination to stop drug smuggling. The Chinese borders are nevertheless relatively easy to penetrate, and in spite of an increased level of seizures by the Chinese government, seizures likely constitute only a fraction of the drugs that stay in China or continue over Central Asia to their final destinations. China is today the state in the world that seizes the largest amount of heroin and morphine - 20 percent of world seizures in 2002.

A significant amount of the Chinese drug trade is directed towards Central Asia, where networks of transportation already exist. Seizures in Central Asia have also increased, but are more a proof of increased smuggling than any indication of the effectiveness of the law enforcement agencies. Trafficking networks that control the drug trade in Central Asia have likely increased their effectiveness, and through increased volumes from China, they have received new sources of finances to further improve their capacity.

IMPLICATIONS: The rapidly increasing trafficking of drugs since the mid-1990s has had severe implications on the political, economic and social security in the region. Central Asia has seen a profound economic recession since independence in 1991, and as the legal economy remains very limited, drugs have become a primary, though illegal, business sector. Drug trade has in turn hindered the emergence of viable legal economies. Regional economies are increasingly criminalized as a greater proportion of the economy is controlled by drug money. Not only is the legal economy decreasing in strength, it is also being bought up by drug money; the result is that the legal economies are increasingly controlled by criminal interests. This has deepened the endemic corruption in the states.

The new trafficking routes through China to Central Asia are deepening the region's drug problem, and may result in making Central Asia a global drug trafficking hub. Traditionally, the primary areas affected by the drug trade have been Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, but as new drug traffickers are entering from Central Asia's eastern borders, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan will be affected to a much higher degree than before. The Chinese and Southeast Asian drugs have further strengthened the position of the drug trade over the legal economy.

This development has clear political implications. Central Asian states have been politically weak since independence, but the criminalization of the region has further weakened government structures in many countries, and the potential government response to the drug trafficking. The use of Central Asia as a trade route is dependent on state weakness, as drug traders can expect less problems and cheaper ways of transportation if regional governments are unable or unwilling to check their activities. The increased amount of criminal organizations in the region have further destabilized the states in the region. Rivalling Southeast Asian and Chinese networks seem to be entering the scene, where old networks that dealt with the Afghan trade were established. This raises the threat of an increased level of violence in the Central Asian states derived from the drug trade. To this should be added the risk of terrorist and extremist organizations with links to the drug trade destabilizing the region, as happened with the Islamic Movement of

Uzbekistan in 1999. The connection between political instability in drugs is clear: drug trade is expanding most notably in the areas of Central Asia and China that are weak and unruly or in conflict with the central government - Tajikistan, southern Kyrgyzstan, and parts of Xinjiang and Yunnan provinces of China are examples.

The social and humanitarian effects of the drug trade are already spiralling out of control, and an increased amount of drugs in circulation accentuates the long-term health risks in the region. The growth of HIV and Hepatitis C is directly related to the drug trade in the region today, and there have been indications that these could reach epidemic levels. The Central Asian region is not equipped to handle the developing health situation. The inclusion of the Southeast and Chinese trade is not only bringing more drugs through the region, but also increases the number of addicts through lower prices and increased accessibility. Human trafficking has also increased along the routes of trafficking, with a more organized prostitution and HIV as a result.

CONCLUSIONS: Central Asia has become the main drug trafficking route for the western and eastern European markets, transporting not only Afghan opiates but increasingly also becoming the route of choice for drugs from other parts of Asia. Local states were already at a loss handling the societal, economic and political fallout of the drug trade, and is by no means equipped to deal with yet further influxes of drugs. The Chinese and Southeast Asian route through Central Asia is accentuating the need to make Central Asia a major battlefield in the international cooperation against drugs. If there is true international support to combat drugs, large resources need to be directed towards the Central Asian region in order to mitigate the severe destabilizing effects of the drug trade on the economy, politics and not least society of the region.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Dr. Niklas Swanström is Associate Professor and Executive Director of the Silk Road Studies Program of Uppsala University, Sweden. <http://www.silkroadstudies.org>.

GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE ALARMS KAZAKH FARMERS

Marat Yermukanov

The harvest is nearing its final stage in Southern Kazakhstan, while in the North farmers have just started the campaign. If sunny dry weather persists for at least a month, the most important granaries in North Kazakhstan, Kostanay and Akmola regions will bring in roughly 10 million tons of wheat. Despite cautious optimism among farmers, the major problem of making grain production a profitable business remains.

The Ministry of Agriculture of Kazakhstan forecasts that this year, the country will produce a total of 12,8 million tons of grain, three million tons less than last year. But last year's crop was so poor in quality that many small farmers found that the trouble was not worth the expense and left their cornfields without harvesting them. Most grain producers had to sell their wheat with low protein content at a great loss to casual buyers or fed their crop to cattle. Far from bringing profit, crop production did not even cover expenses. That finally ruined the confidence of farmers in the national grain-trading company Prodkorporatsya, a state monopoly, which earlier promised to buy up the grain produced by farmers for no less than \$80 a ton.

Nevertheless, the government, in a bid to put the grain market under control, did not slacken its tight hold over farmers, constantly urging them to sell their produce to Prodkorporatsya. "We must not repeat mistakes of the past. The situation demands that we increase the production of more marketable hard wheat. We cannot let our grain out uncontrolled" said the Minister of Agriculture Akhmetjan Yesimov, addressing the farmers. He hinted that Prodkorporatsya would probably increase its purchasing price for wheat this year.

For many already ruined farmers, these words of comfort come too late. Nearly 30% of the more than 4,000 officially registered private farms in North Kazakhstan region went bankrupt last year as a result of the poor harvest. The reason is rooted not only in a lack of credit to buy pesticides and equipment: far more harm is done by the ever-present bureaucracy and corruption. "As soon as you got on your feet again after last year's failed crop and started doing a successful business, inspectors from the tax office, financial police, and local administration came up pestering you with ridiculously excessive demands. The most depressing thing is that nobody in the government deigns to listen to our grievances", complains Marat Shantemirov, a farmer from Shalakyn district in North Kazakhstan region.

Due to the dwindling fertility of soil and growing cultivation costs, the overall crop area in Kazakhstan was reduced from 23,3 million hectares in 1990 to 13,7 million hectares in 2003. Not only soil erosion and depletion of humus layers is responsible for the reduction of arable land. In many cases, the structuring of agricultural land was done by arbitrary decisions of governors in the regions.

Kazakhstan needs no more than 8 million tons of wheat for domestic consumption. If forecasts of rich harvest come true, the country will export 5,2 million tons, the key importers being Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Tajikistan, China, Ukraine and EU countries. The economic benefit from this depends on many factors.

Given the poor state of agriculture, the government's attempts to enhance the grain export potential of the country with little economic sacrifice seems to be impracticable. Kazakh grain producers are already facing bold challenges from Russian and Ukrainian competitors. True, these

countries are interdependent for food security. Ukrainian prime minister Viktor Yanukovich, who visited Kazakhstan early in August, reached an agreement with his Kazakh counterparts to purchase 1,2 million tons of grain for \$108,5 a ton. The deal aroused a wave of protests from grain traders in Kazakhstan. The price offered by Ukrainians is much lower than the price of grain imported by Ukraine from Russia. Last year Ukraine paid \$140 and \$180 a ton for Kazakh grain, depending on the quality of the wheat.

Most grain companies expressed their refusal to sell their wheat to Ukraine at that low price. The moment is highly embarrassing for the government, which is tied down to obligations to export 800,000 tons of wheat to Ukraine within the framework of the intergovernmental agreement only. Some kind of compromise was reached in that Ukraine would purchase last year's crop from grain storages. Additionally, the Kazakh side is bidding for preferential terms for exporters of Kazakh hydrocarbons to Ukraine.

It is yet to be guessed how much of politics is mixed in this tangle. Both countries have in recent months repeatedly declared their commitment to the Eurasian Economic Community and to close ties with Russia. Theoretically, a common agricultural policy could speed up the much-discussed economic and political integration of these countries. However, taking into consideration the different approaches to agricultural reform adopted by Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Russia, and an apparent clash of national interests, such a policy can hardly be expected to be worked out in foreseeable future. Apart from that, for Kazakhstan, two pillars of its economic security, oil and grain, is something that cannot be easily bargained away.

MILITARY REFORM IN UZBEKISTAN: DEFINING THE PRIORITIES

Roger N. McDermott and Farkhad Tolipov

Military reform in Uzbekistan is aimed at creating a small, mobile and well-equipped army, to deal effectively with any external threats to national security, the main threat stemming from terrorism. The U.S. and Uzbekistan signed a 'strategic partnership' agreement in 2002, solidifying the relationship between the two states. The course of military reform has placed Uzbekistan's armed forces ahead of regional neighbors and will nevertheless require further commitment and international support, possibly testing the strength of the U.S.-Uzbek partnership, if it is to achieve the transformation that is envisaged by the leadership in Tashkent.

BACKGROUND: The evolving and dynamic security environment in Central Asia has compelled regional states to re-examine their military capacity in the light of these changes, while struggling with the problems stemming from the Soviet legacy. Military reform has essentially revolved around attempts to restructure, re-equip and train modern, mobile, well trained and combat capable armed forces that have the capability of rapid reaction to security challenges from terrorism to guerrilla warfare. Uzbekistan has thus far proven the most successful in putting in place the basic building blocs for military reform and has consequently emerged with the most capable armed forces in the region.

Although based on the Soviet legacy forces on its territory, the Uzbek armed forces have sought to put their Soviet heritage behind them and actively pursue alternative, even western styles of force management. It is particularly noteworthy that ranging beyond the creation of its military districts, common in other Central Asian militaries, uniquely Uzbekistan has formed a Joint Chiefs of Staff; which offers a unified command for ground and air elements, but also integrates other military structures such as Interior and Border troops. In so doing it will enhance the rapid reaction of its forces to any crisis situation, avoiding the muddle to which other militaries in the region have proven susceptible. Other structural changes have included the downsizing of large tank and aviation units in favor of smaller units such as special operations and search and intelligence units. These innovations stem from a more adequate assessment of the possible operations theatre.

Steps have also been taken to implement western styles of military management. For instance, the development and implementation of the sergeant level within the army, through U.S. and other foreign assistance programs, has introduced an important element into the military structure, which will facilitate professionalization. Uzbekistan now has four sergeant training centers of its own. A center for modeling and simulation for the armed forces has also been established, alongside other reforms, intended to train and teach a new generation of well-educated Uzbek officers, capable of showing individual initiative.

Professionalizing its armed forces is also well underway. Uzbek Defense Minister Qodir Ghulomov, the only civilian defense minister within Central Asia, is a critical figure in

these plans. The professional army is to be built on a contract basis, stipulating all conditions of service including salaries, future career perspectives, social protection, as well as all duties related to military service. Only those who have already accomplished military training can be admitted to contract service. According to unofficial data, one third of the Uzbek army already consists of professionals.

IMPLICATIONS: Clearly such military reforms bring teething problems. The ethnic composition of the Uzbek armed forces, for instance, has altered since its inception. After an initial hemorrhaging of Russian officers, mostly returning to Russia or Ukraine, during the early 1990s, today there are ethnic Russian officers serving alongside Uzbeks. However, not all officers speak Uzbek, whilst the soldiers now almost exclusively speak Uzbek, creating a language problem in the chain of command and control. The Uzbek Military Academy intends to resolve this through the use of more Uzbek language courses for its officers, hopefully eliminating the problem within two years.

Uzbekistan will need more military assistance to further its military reform, especially in the following key areas. More training is needed, specifically targeted on improving the educational standard of officers, so that their knowledge base extends beyond military expertise to political and social matters. In addition, there is a need for more English language teaching, especially if there is to be greater interoperability in future with NATO forces. Further, the use of the Uzbek language needs to be actively promoted within the armed forces.

Uzbekistan will also require significant help in its defense industry, in order to facilitate the production of modern equipment and weapons systems, and improve its capacity for repair and maintenance of its present systems. An increase in joint military exercises would benefit the Uzbek armed forces. They actively participated in CENTRASBAT exercises in the 1990s, and have been the lead regional participant in NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) exercises. Increasing the frequency, scope and structure of such exercises would help underpin Uzbekistan's military reform and give it a focal point for continuing on its path of westernizing its armed forces.

As the armed forces become more professional and modern, the demand for more sophisticated equipment rises, especially for the promotion of border security and stemming the flow of WMD materials through the region, requiring modern detection equipment. Night-vision goggles; body armor, communications equipment and helicopters for better troop mobility are all essential components in re-equipping the Uzbek armed forces.

Uzbekistan's ongoing military reform will contribute greatly to improving the security of the country, and will have regional implications. Furthermore, closer integration with the west, through NATO PfP programs and further joint exercises will be as a consequence of Uzbekistan's related priority for its armed forces: adopting western styles of management. Tashkent is gradually distancing its armed forces from their Soviet heritage, and genuinely reforming towards western methods and practices. Policy makers will have to ensure that the pace of reform does not exceed Uzbekistan's potential to support and properly implement military reform in full.

CONCLUSIONS: Unilateral military exercises are currently underway in Uzbekistan's south-western military district, intended to test the capability of the Uzbek armed forces to respond to a militant incursion, similar to the Batken

incursions of 1999 and 2000. Such exercises have become regular instead of sporadic, and are being held on a specific and difficult terrain (mountains, desert, steppe, valley). Western instructors attend and assist in conducting different stages of these exercises, that among other seek to develop methods and means of communication of different troops and units and their management. In future, such exercises may see Norwegian, Polish, Italian and German participation, among others, revealing better levels of interoperability with western forces. Such targets are not realized quickly, but only through painstaking commitment to reform. Essentially, the west will have to match this appetite for reform with equal enthusiasm for assistance programs to enhance training, equipping and working with an important regional NATO partner state.

AUTHORS' BIO: Roger N. McDermott is an honorary senior research associate, department of politics and international relations, university of Kent at Canterbury (UK). Farkhad Tolipov is an assistant professor in the department of international relations at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy in Tashkent and an affiliate of the Institute of Strategic and Regional studies under the President of Uzbekistan.

SEX EDUCATION BOOK BANNED IN KYRGYZSTAN

Maria Utyaganova

On July 24, on the orders of Education Minister Ishengul Boljurova, all 30,000 copies of the book *Healthy Living* were withdrawn from the libraries of all Kyrgyzstani schools. The following day, the authors of the book, designed to provide basic sex education to high school students, were sued by the Public Committee for Defense of the Honor and Dignity of the Kyrgyz Republic. The authors of the book and the publishing house are accused of offending traditional values and violating the mentality and customs of the Kyrgyz people.

The book *Healthy Living*, published with the support of the UNAIDS Program and the Kyrgyz Ministry of Education, had been in use since 1999. The book was initiated as the response to the outbreak of syphilis in 1997 and as a mean to educate and protect young people from venereal diseases. The book was published in Russian, Kyrgyz and Uzbek languages and dedicated to teach students about safe sex, pregnancy, abortion, and HIV/AIDS prevention, the harmful consequences of tranquilizers, drugs and alcoholism.

Minister Boljurova stated that she was forced to pull out the book after furious letters written by angry parents of high school students. The

Kyrgyz-language newspaper *Agym* published some of the letters complaining that the book deals with such topics as pregnancy, sex, sexually transmitted diseases, etc., in a too open and immoral way, offending traditional Kyrgyz sensibilities. In their letters, parents express their concern that information in the book is presented in such an open way that it will encourage early sexual activity among adolescents.

This turn of events has come as a surprise for the authors of the book as they have received lots of thankful letters from different educational establishments for the publication of the book. The author of the book Boris Shapiro, the head of the National AIDS Centre, does not agree with the accusations saying that the book was not aimed to encourage and stimulate sexual activity among teenagers. He expressed his regrets about the withdrawal of the book. There is no convenient substitute to replace *Healthy Living* except for the biology book with one chapter on sex education, mostly dedicated to health and hygiene. In addition, school teachers especially in rural areas blush and try to gloss over this chapter as quick as possible.

In an interview to Interfax, Shapiro pointed out the rapidly growing numbers of drug addicts and HIV-infected people, 20 percent of whom are

aged 15-24. In such an alarming situation, it is very dangerous and irresponsible to leave children without an official systematic sex education book. Taking into account the conservative nature and cultural taboos in discussing sex issues, such a book is vitally important to protect young people from pregnancy and STDs, including HIV. In a questionnaire conducted by RFE/RL, teenagers said that the book was very helpful as it provided the information that "they felt unable to bring up with their parents and that their parents were too shy to discuss with them".

Many experts condemn the decision of the education minister and say that continual conservatism, ignorance and denial of proper sex education will not stop young people from practicing sex but it will lead to the increase of HIV cases from 432 officially registered to several thousands. Shapiro said he suspects that the whole case against him and the co-authors of the book was started because of a \$18 million UN grant to the organization headed by him. He is sure that the case was initiated by someone who wants to take his position as the head of the AIDS centre and get full control of the grant money.

KARZAI'S GOVERNMENT RESHUFFLE: BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

Rahimullah Yusufzai

After a long and agonizing wait, President Hamid Karzai has moved to assert his fragile authority by replacing some of his governors in the provinces. He also made an effort to implement an earlier policy to bifurcate political and military offices. The most prominent victim of this policy was Herat's powerful Governor Ismail Khan, who was stripped of his job as military commander. Implementing the new policy posed challenges because those being replaced were reluctant to give up their powers. The decisions aimed at strengthening Karzai's grip on power, extending the writ of his government beyond Kabul, and curtailing the authority of the provincial warlords.

BACKGROUND: Almost all the governors in Afghanistan's 32 provinces were self-appointed. A number of them had been governors in the pre-Taliban period and they simply reoccupied their offices when the Taliban regime collapsed in November-December 2001. Others were appointed governors and military commanders by the dominant armed factions in their particular provinces. The Northern Alliance, which continues to dominate the Karzai government, had a major say in all such appointments. Karzai and other pro-West members of his cabinet lacked military muscle and were, therefore, in no position to appoint the governors of their choice. It was a fait accompli and Karzai was required to work with whoever was in office at the time of his appointment as interim President in December 2001.

Most of the governors also held office as military commanders, giving them unparalleled powers in the provinces. The combination of the two offices made all such warlords powerful enough to resist the authority of the central government. The Karzai government was thus confined to Kabul because it was dependent on the goodwill of the warlords-cum-governors to implement the center's decisions. Some months ago, President Karzai ordered the separation of the civil and military offices and made it clear that those holding political jobs of governors would have to give up their position as military commanders. Karzai's orders weren't taken seriously initially because some of his previous decisions remained unimplemented. In fact, some government officials that Karzai had sacked or transferred early this year managed to remain on their jobs in defiance of the President's orders.

In the process, Karzai earned the reputation of a President who made good speeches but lacked the will and the authority to turn his words into deeds. A number of governors and military commanders enjoyed an unsavory reputation owing to their brutal and tainted past. The US military authorities needed the services of the warlords in their war against al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Thus anyone willing to fight the al-Qaeda and Taliban was generously provided arms and money. The warlords not only became militarily strong but also managed to occupy the choicest offices in the post-Taliban administration. It was an anomalous situation because the US as a matter of policy wanted to strengthen the Karzai government but its policy of

arming and equipping the warlords made them strong enough to challenge Karzai and his cabinet.

The administrative reshuffle ordered by Karzai retained Ismail Khan as Governor of Herat but deprived him of his powers as the corps commander of the province. General Baz Mohammad Ahmadi replaced him as Herat's military commander. One of the first comments that Ahmadi made was with regard to the unnecessarily large military force that Ismail Khan had raised in the province. Ahmadi's stance would certainly accentuate his conflict with Ismail Khan, who has close ties to Iran, a reason that makes America keen to cut Ismail Khan down to size. Karzai also replaced Zabul's Governor Hamidullah Tokhi, a former Hekmatyar associate, and Urozgan's Governor Jan Mohammad Khan. Both were removed due to the worsening security situation in the two provinces, where Taliban forces have been active. Kandahar Governor Gul Agha Sherzoi was also replaced. Some military and security commanders were also replaced in Kandahar, Urozgan and Zabul to tackle the growing Taliban threat.

IMPLICATIONS: If implemented in letter and spirit, the administrative changes would bolster Karzai's reputation and serve as a warning to other governors and military commanders. It would send a strong message that the central government is keen to extend its writ to the provinces and implement its decisions. Governors and military commanders still reluctant to cooperate with Karzai would either have to fall in line or risk losing some of their powers. The message being sent is clear: the U.S. and its Western allies are determined to strengthen President Karzai. Some warlords also interpreted U.S. backing for Karzai as a signal that he would be supported in his bid to seek election as President in elections next June.

The move to strip Ismail Khan of his military powers was the most significant attempt to date by Karzai to assert his authority and widen his popular base. It was also a warning to Uzbek warlord Abdur Rasheed Dostum, who operates as nominal deputy defense minister but refuses to abandon his power-base in northern Afghanistan and come to Kabul to take up his responsibilities. Dostum's rivalry with Tajik warlords Atta Mohammad has kept Mazar-i-Sharif and other northern cities and provinces in turmoil and frustrated donors and aid workers pursuing reconstruction work in that area. Moreover, military commanders loyal to defense

minister Marshal Mohammad Qasim Faheem would also view all this with alarm. Though untouched by the administrative reshuffle, they would remain alert to any move that could weaken their position in future. However, Ismail Khan is unlikely to willingly accept decisions that erode his power. He could possibly team up with former mujahideen colleagues to stop Karzai and his pro-West, liberal and royalist supporters from dominating Afghanistan. They are likely to receive Iran's backing in such a project. Russia too is close to the former mujahideen, particularly to those grouped in the Northern Alliance. The struggle for power in Kabul could, therefore, create a pro-West camp led by Karzai and former king Zahir Shah's supporters pitted against the pro-Moscow and pro-Tehran camps comprising former Mujahideen groups.

CONCLUSIONS: Karzai's hand was forced by the surge in violence in parts of the country to make his move. By ordering the administrative changes, Karzai not only made a bid to extend his government's influence but also address the concerns of the UN and aid organizations who have repeatedly stressed that deteriorating security was the main challenge facing war-ravaged Afghanistan. If successfully implemented, the reshuffle would make governors and

military commanders to obey Karzai's policies, accept the writ of the central government and transfer revenues generated in their provinces and from customs duties on Afghanistan's borders to Kabul.

However, one would have to wait whether Karzai can build upon this move and order more changes in the administration. Of particular interest would be his ability to order changes in the composition of the defense ministry, which is dominated by minister Faheem's Tajik followers from the Panjsher Valley. Donors have linked their financial support for a countrywide disarmament drive with reforms that would make the defense ministry and the slowly emerging Afghan National Army ethnically balanced. Karzai's ability to make the army and police a truly national force would help overcome the deep ethnic divisions that still plague Afghanistan and improve his standing among his people.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Rahimullah Yusufzai is an executive editor of The News International, Islamabad. He is also a correspondent of the BBC, ABC News and Time magazine. He has published research papers on Afghanistan and travelled widely in that country to cover the Afghan story since the communist revolution of April 1978.

DESPERATE CONDITIONS IN KYRGYZ PRISONS

Aisha Aslanbekova

Prisons in Kyrgyzstan are in a desperate condition. Insufficient nutrition, overcrowding, spread of infectious diseases are problems that have been flourishing in Kyrgyz prisons. Taking up serious measures and reforming the penitentiary system of the country as a whole is urgently needed in order to prevent a further worsening of the situation.

One of the most serious problems in Kyrgyz prisons is overcrowding. The organization "Penal reform International" put Kyrgyzstan among the 20 countries, which have the highest ratio of prison population. At present in Kyrgyzstan, a country with a total population of 5 million people, the number of prisoners constitutes 22,000 people. This, according to the head of the medical department of the central penitentiary administration Akylbek Muratov, twice exceeds the norm. Meanwhile, as the Human Rights Bureau in Bishkek reports, the number of convicts in Kyrgyzstan is growing by 2,500-3,500 people each year. Prisons, penal colonies, and pre-trial detention places are full of people to such an extent that the convicts have to sleep in turns.

As a solution to the problem of overcrowding, some have been proposing to build new prisons. However, given the difficult economic and social situation in the country, the idea of spending taxpayers' money on building new prisons is unlikely to be supported. At the same time, others have been explaining the cause of overcrowding in prisons by the unfairness of the judicial system, and have been suggesting, first of all, to humanize the

judicial system and to reform the penitentiary system as a whole.

Another painful problem that the prisons in Kyrgyzstan are facing is the spread of infectious diseases and the poor medical treatment of the convicts. According to Akylbek Muratov, around 4,500 prisoners are infected with tuberculosis. This is half of all tuberculosis-infected people throughout the country. About 200 convicts are infected with HIV. As the Ministry of Justice reports, each year about 20 percent of the convicts die from illnesses such as tuberculosis, HIV, cholera, and dysentery. Poor sanitary and hygienic conditions in prisons, insufficient nutrition, and poor medical treatment only exacerbate the situation. Every day 15 soms (ca. 30 cents) are spent for food of a prisoner and 5 som (ca. 10 cents) for medical treatment while according to standards, this amount should be four and nine times larger, respectively. According to the representative of the Kyrgyz Justice Ministry Anvarbek Kadyrov, one prisoner, after being released, can infect 80-100 people. Therefore, the Justice Ministry and the Ministry of Health have been trying to cure infected prisoners before releasing them. However, their attempts have been seriously impeded by such problems as the lack of resources and the lack of specialists in the prisons. There is a desperate need for qualified medical specialists in Kyrgyz prisons. In order to address this issue, a bill on the "Penitentiary system bodies and institutions" has been worked out in the country, but it has not been adopted yet. As Deputy Minister of Justice Tashtemir Aitbaev says, the adoption of this law could facilitate the

improvement of the situation, as it contains concrete mechanisms for providing proper working conditions for medical specialists in the penitentiary system. If the law passes, medical specialists of the penitentiary system would have stable salaries, would be entitled to fringe benefits and would be paid more than colleagues working in other subdivisions of the law enforcement bodies.

Meanwhile, the Kyrgyz Ministry of Justice with the assistance of the Soros Foundation in Kyrgyzstan has started the realization of a project on "Reforming the penitentiary system in the Kyrgyz Republic", in the framework of which a working group was formed. The group includes representatives of a number of governmental institutions, international and non-governmental organizations. The newly-formed structure is responsible for developing concrete suggestions on improving the healthcare system in prisons. The first results of its work will be presented this year in mid-December.

In Kyrgyzstan, conditions in prisons have been deteriorating year by year. Prison population has become a threatening source of infectious diseases in the country, which is due to a number of problems such as malnutrition, overcrowding and poor medical treatment. Unless a series of serious measures is taken, the situation may easily exacerbate. Although this threatening situation has been realized and the Kyrgyz government has been trying to address it, even in the presence of a strong desire, it is unlikely to get down to reforms alone. Involvement of international organizations and outside support is vital for the attempts to succeed.

NEWS BITES

GEORGIA FAILS TO MEET IMF DEADLINE

15 August

For lack of a quorum, the Georgian parliament failed on 15 August to endorse the budget sequester proposed by the government in response to demands made in early July by a visiting International Monetary Fund (IMF) delegation. The fund had made disbursement of the third and final installment of a Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility loan contingent on sweeping budget cuts, passage of a new Tax Code, and the abolition of cuts in electricity tariffs. Minister of State Avtandil Djorbenadze, who came to parliament to brief deputies on the planned budget cuts, blamed speaker Nino Burdjanadze for the legislature's failure to ensure the government met the IMF deadline of mid-August. Burdjanadze told deputies on 15 August that the IMF representative in Tbilisi has granted the parliament several days' grace to approve the budget cuts. (Caucasus Press)

GERMANY WON'T GIVE TERMEZ AIR BASE TO NATO, AMBASSADOR SAYS

15 August

German Ambassador to Uzbekistan Martin Haecker told a press conference in Tashkent on 14 August that Germany has no intention of handing over to NATO its air base at Termez on the Uzbek-Afghan border. Haecker said the Uzbek government handed over the base for use by German forces as long as they are taking part in the activities of the international antiterrorism coalition in Afghanistan. The ambassador noted that the Bundeswehr had modernized the Termez base, which can now accommodate up to nine large transport planes. (Deutsche Welle)

CHECHEN OFFICIALS DENY DISPLACED PERSONS UNDER PRESSURE TO RETURN

15 August

Claims by a UNHCR official that Chechen displaced persons currently living in tent camps in neighboring Ingushetia are being pressured to return to Chechnya are untrue, Chechen Minister for Nationalities Affairs Taus Dzhabrailov told Interfax on 15 August. He added Chechens are returning from Ingushetia voluntarily. On 14 August, Chechen Prime Minister Anatolii Popov told journalists in Moscow that all camps in Ingushetia for Chechen displaced persons will be closed by 1 October. He said housing will be made available in Grozny for those who wish to return, while accommodation will be found in Ingushetia for those who wish to remain there. (Interfax)

AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITION DEMANDS PRIME MINISTER'S DISMISSAL

16 August

Between 8,000 and 20,000 people participated in a march and rally in Baku on 16 August to protest the appointment of President Heidar Aliev's son, Ilham, as prime minister and to demand his dismissal from that post. They further demanded that equal conditions be created for all candidates in the 15 October presidential election. On 15 August, the Constitutional Court ruled that in the event that President Aliev dies or resigns before 15 October, there would be no need to cancel the planned elections and schedule a new ballot. (Interfax)

GAZPROM AND TURKMEN OFFICIALS AGREE ON PIPELINE RECONSTRUCTION

18 August

Turkmen Deputy Prime Minister Yolly Gurbanmuradov, who oversees the country's oil-and-gas industry, signed an agreement with Gazprom CEO Aleksei Miller in Moscow on 18 August on the reconstruction and expansion of the gas-pipeline system connecting Central Asia with Russia. Development of the pipeline system is a necessary precondition for full implementation of the gas-delivery agreement signed in Moscow in April between Gazprom and Turkmenistan because the existing system does not have the throughput capacity envisioned in that agreement. An additional agreement was signed on 18 August on the delivery by the Russian firm Gazeksport of equipment and services as partial payment for Turkmen gas deliveries in 2004-06. (RIA-Novosti)

13 CANDIDATES REGISTERED FOR CHECHEN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

18 August

As of 15 August, Chechnya's Central Election Commission had registered 13 candidates for the 5 October presidential election. Applications for registration by pensioner Khasan Dadaev and by Shamil Buraev, head of the Achkhoy-Martan District administration, were rejected on the grounds that the two men failed to provide the required information about the bank accounts from which they intended to fund their respective campaigns. On 16 August, Chechen administration head Akhmed-hadji Kadyrov, the clear favorite in the ballot, said Chechen militants are seeking to derail the ballot in a bid to preserve Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov's political influence, according to Interfax. But Russian journalist and Chechnya specialist Anna Politkovskaya wrote in "Novaya gazeta" on 15 August that armed thugs commanded by Kadyrov's son, Ramazan, are threatening rival candidates. One of those candidates, Aslanbek Aslakhonov, who represents Chechnya in the State Duma, said in a 15 August

interview with "Nezavisimaya gazeta" that Kadyrov's private army has at its disposal every kind of weapon imaginable, with the exception of atomic bombs and Topol intercontinental ballistic missiles. (RFE/RL)

JAILED KYRGYZ OPPOSITION LEADER LOSES SUPREME COURT APPEAL

18 August

Kyrgyzstan's Supreme Court on 15 August refused to overturn the 10-year prison sentence of former Vice President and national security chief Feliks Kulov, now head of the Ar-Namys Party and one of the country's most prominent opposition figures, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported on 16 August, quoting acting Ar Namys leader Emil Aliev. Party members are convinced the Supreme Court decision was dictated by the authorities, Aliev said, and the party intends to appeal to an international court and to international human rights organizations. The charges against Kulov include abuse of office and other criminal actions committed during his government service. The opposition says the charges were politically motivated. (RFE/RL)

KYRGYZ AND UZBEK PRIME MINISTERS MEET ON BORDER ISSUES

18 August

Kyrgyz Prime Minister Nikolai Tanaev, at the head of a delegation of Kyrgyz government officials, met with his Uzbek counterpart Otkir Sultonov on 15 August in Tashkent to discuss the delimitation of the two countries' common border. The Uzbek side said that the shooting of a Kyrgyz citizen by an Uzbek border guard in July is under investigation and the guilty parties will be punished. However, the Uzbeks insisted that the Kyrgyz side bore some responsibility for the incident. Earlier, the Uzbek Foreign Ministry said the blame was entirely on the Kyrgyz side. After the talks, a Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry official said the Uzbek side refused to discuss a Kyrgyz demand that Uzbekistan remove its land mines from the border area. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH PEACEKEEPERS LEAVE FOR IRAQ

19 August

A first group of 14 service personnel from Kazakhstan's KazBat peacekeeping battalion set out for Iraq on 19 August, with the rest of the 27-person contingent departing the following day. The group -- comprising military engineers, eight officers, and three interpreters -- is scheduled to remain in Iraq for six months. The group is to work on land-mine removal and water extraction. This is Kazakhstan's first peacekeeping mission. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

UP TO 100 KYRGYZ CITIZENS BEING FORCED TO WORK OFF DEBTS IN CHINA

19 August

The case of three Kyrgyz citizens caught while attempting to cross into Kyrgyzstan from China without documents has drawn attention to the detention of as many as 100 Kyrgyz by Chinese businesspeople, to whom the Kyrgyz reportedly owe

money. According to the three Kyrgyz detained on the border, the debtors are being forced by their Chinese creditors to work as slaves. The three told officials they had to perform heavy labor for periods from seven months to three years. Their passports had been taken away by their creditors. The Kyrgyz border service has told the media that it does not consider the three to be criminals and expects more of the Kyrgyz "slaves" to try to enter Kyrgyzstan the same way. (Deutsche Welle)

TWO AGREEMENTS ON U.S. ASSISTANCE SIGNED IN TAJIKISTAN

19 August

U.S. Ambassador to Tajikistan Franklin Huddle has signed two agreements on assistance to Tajikistan. One agreement involves the award of grants totaling \$56,000 to 12 nongovernmental organizations under the embassy's democracy-support program. The total amount of the program for the year is \$100,000, some of which is going to independent media and to educational projects, including teaching democratic principles to local administrators. The second agreement involved the delivery of \$3.2 million of U.S. food aid to Tajikistan. (Interfax)

AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITION BEGINS TALKS ON SELECTING SINGLE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

19 August

The six opposition candidates for the 15 October Azerbaijani presidential election have begun discussing the possibility of endorsing a single opposition candidate to challenge incumbent President Heidar Aliev and his son, Ilham, both of whom are running as candidates from the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party. Musavat Party leader Isa Gambar told journalists on 18 August that opposition parties are discussing various aspects of pre-election cooperation. He added that the talks on a possible single candidate do not involve just the "big three" -- himself, Azerbaijan National Independence Party Chairman Etibar Mamedov, and Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (progressive wing) Chairman Ali Kerimli -- but also other opposition parties that he declined to name. Six of the 12 registered candidates represent the opposition, but at least one of them -- independent candidate Lala Shovket Gadjeva -- has made it clear that she will not pull out of the race in favor of a rival opposition candidate. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIAN PARLIAMENT REJECTS PRESIDENT'S CRITICISM

19 August

In his regular Monday radio interview, President Eduard Shevardnadze criticized parliament deputies on 18 August for failing to enact "vitaly important" bills, including the budget sequester and the bill he proposed personally that designates bribing voters a criminal offense. He called on deputies to discuss and approve the proposed budget cuts without delay. An International Monetary Fund delegation that visited

Georgia earlier this summer made disbursement of the third annual installment of a Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility loan contingent upon enacting budget cuts by 15 August. On 19 August, parliament speaker Nino Burdjanadze rejected Shevardnadze's criticism, pointing out that she is not a schoolmistress and cannot constrain deputies to attend parliament like recalcitrant students. (Caucasus Press)

AZERBAIJANI ORGANIZATION PROTESTS CONGRESSIONAL STAFFERS' VISIT TO KARABAKH

20 August

The Baku-based Organization for the Liberation of Karabakh addressed a request on 20 August to the U.S. embassy in Azerbaijan to clarify the rationale for the visit on 19 August of a group of congressional staffers to the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR). The statement characterized that visit as showing disregard for the constitution, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan. During their visit to Stepanakert, the nine-person delegation met with Ashot Ghouljan, the unrecognized enclave's foreign minister, who thanked them for the humanitarian aid Washington has provided and outlined the NKR's approach to a negotiated solution to the Karabakh conflict. (Turan)

GEORGIAN PRESIDENT THREATENS TO BLOCK RUSSIA'S ACCESSION TO WTO

20 August

Addressing a government session in 20 August, Eduard Shevardnadze noted that Russia will need Tbilisi's support for its bid to join the World Trade Organization (WTO), and should therefore resolve its problems in bilateral relations with Georgia. Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister Tamar Beruchashvili listed among those problems Russia's economic ties with the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia and its failure to prevent the smuggling of contraband into Georgia from North Ossetia. (Interfax)

TURKMEN HELSINKI GROUP FOUNDED IN BULGARIA

20 August

A group calling itself the Turkmen Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights held its first meeting in Sofia on 19 August. According to the group's chairman, Kadzhigul Bekmetova, the Bulgaria-based organization has 16 members, nine of whom are ethnic Turkmen. An unspecified number live in Turkmenistan. It is supported by the Bulgarian Helsinki group and the International Helsinki Federation. Bekmetova told "Kommersant-Daily" that the group's objective is to defend human rights in Turkmenistan and to gather and publicize facts about the real situation in the country, starting with the compilation of a list of political prisoners and their relatives who have been mistreated by the authorities. Later, the group hopes to distribute information inside Turkmenistan about international human rights standards.

(Interfax)

U.S. SENATOR MEETS UZBEK PRESIDENT, DISCUSSES COOPERATION

20 August

Senator Richard Lugar (Republican, Indiana), chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, told journalists in Tashkent on 19 August that he has discussed cooperation between the United States and Uzbekistan in health care and in developing agriculture and small business during his meetings with President Islam Karimov and Foreign Minister Sodik Safaev in Samarkand that day. Lugar added that \$14 million is being given to Uzbek virologists to develop treatments for various infectious diseases, and \$10 million has been approved under the Nunn-Lugar program for reducing the threat of the proliferation of nuclear and biological weapons. (uzreport.com)

RUSSIA'S POPULATION CONTINUES TO DECLINE AND ALCOHOL GETS LARGE SHARE OF THE BLAME

21 August

Russia's population dropped by 454,200 during the first half of 2003 to 144.5 million, according to the State Statistics Committee. The birthrate lagged behind the death rate. The death rate overall rose by a factor of 1.7, while the number of deaths in some regions jumped by a factor of 2-3. Migration increased by 1.2 percent compared with the first half of 2002. "Politburo," No. 26, argued that Russia's main demographic problem is not the low birthrate -- which is common in modern, developed countries -- but the high adult death rate. According to the weekly, the leading causes of death in Russia are typical neither of developed nor developing countries. One important factor in the high death rate is alcohol consumption, and there is a close direct correlation between the alcohol consumption per person and the death rate. After the anti-alcohol campaign launched by former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1986, the death rate fell. According to Aleksandr Nemtsov, director of the information and research department of the Moscow Psychiatric Scientific Research Institute, alcohol consumption correlates not only with the general death-rate dynamics -- when it increases, the death rate increases -- but also with many other leading causes for death -- with the exception of infectious diseases. (RFE/RL)

U.S., COUNCIL OF EUROPE EXPRESS CONCERN OVER PRESSURE ON AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITION PARTIES.

21 August

In a statement released on 21 August, U.S. State Department official Joanne Propovicz noted Washington's concern that some candidates wishing to contest the 15 October presidential election have been denied registration, and that opposition politicians are subjected to harassment, Turan reported. She said the United States hopes the ballot will be conducted in accordance with international standards, that all qualified candidates will be able to participate and be granted

equal access to the media, and that the voting will be free and fair. She said Washington urges the Azerbaijani government to refrain from violence against participants in opposition protests and to "cease the harassment of opposition leaders and their associates." Meanwhile, Council of Europe Secretary-General Walter Schwimmer similarly called on the Azerbaijani authorities to ensure that all presidential candidates have equal access to the media. Schwimmer expressed concern at the detention by police of editors and representatives of journalists' unions in Baku on 26 July. (Turan)

INFANT-MORTALITY RATE IN UZBEKISTAN REMAINS HIGH

21 August

Although Uzbekistan has succeeded in lowering its infant-mortality rate from 38.1 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1989 to 18.3 in 2001, the rate remains high in comparison with other CIS and European countries, according to the 2003 UNICEF Social Monitoring report. According to UNICEF, Uzbekistan has the lowest infant-mortality rate among the Central Asian CIS states, while Turkmenistan has the highest -- 20.1 deaths per 1,000 live births. The reasons for the high infant mortality rates in Central Asia -- according to UNICEF, up to 12 times higher than in developed countries -- were given as poverty, the poor health and nutrition of pregnant women, infectious diseases, and low-quality medical care. According to uzreport.com, UNICEF suspects that Uzbekistan's infant-mortality rate is actually much higher, but the country's official figures are obtained using the Soviet definition of infant mortality rather than the internationally accepted World Health Organization definition. (uzreport.com)

U.S. EMBASSY IN TURKMENISTAN PROTESTS EVICTION OF PUBLIC-AFFAIRS SECTION

21 August

The U.S. Embassy in Ashgabat posted on its website (<http://www.usemb-ashgabat.usia.co.at>) on 20 August the text of a formal protest to the Turkmen Foreign Ministry concerning a Turkmen government order to the embassy's public-affairs section (formerly, part of the U.S. Information Agency or USIA) to vacate its offices, which are located in a building outside the embassy compound. According to the embassy protest, the Foreign Ministry promised to find a mutually acceptable solution for the public affairs section, so the 18 August removal order represented a violation of that pledge. The embassy argued that the public affairs section is an integral part of the U.S. mission in Turkmenistan and therefore is inviolable under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. It described the notice to vacate as a "serious political provocation" and added that it expects the ministry to withdraw the order. (RFE/RL)

REGISTRATION DEADLINE EXPIRES FOR CHECHEN PRESIDENTIAL BALLOT

21 August

The deadline for submitting applications to register to contest the 5 October Chechen presidential elections expired at 6 p.m. Moscow time on 20 August. Of the 13 applicants, journalist Ruslan Zakriev and pensioner Zaindi Movlatov were found not to have submitted the required minimum 10,800 signatures in their support and were denied registration. Eleven other candidates have either submitted signatures or paid a deposit of 4.5 million rubles (\$150,000) or both. They are Chechen administration head Akhmed-hadji

Kadyrov; Moscow-based businessman Malik Saidullaev; Grozny University lecturer Avkhat Khanchukaev; poet Nikolai Paizullaev; Groznetgaz Deputy Director Kutuz Saduev; former Achkhoy-Martan Raion administrator Shamil Buraev; Chechen Deputy Military Commandant Colonel Said-Selim Tsuev; chief inspector for the Southern Russia Federal District Abdulla Bugaev; Aslanbek Aslakhanov, who represents

Chechnya in the Russian State Duma; Khusein Dzhabraïlov, deputy director of Moscow's Hotel Rossiya; and former Chechen Deputy Premier Khusein Bibilatov. "Gazeta" on 21 August quoted Aslakhanov as saying he has borrowed the deposit money rather than endanger the lives of his supporters, whom Kadyrov's armed thugs have reportedly threatened to kill, by collecting signatures. (RFE/RL)

PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE'S SON IN FIERCE FIGHTING IN SOUTHERN CHECHNYA

21 August

A special police unit loyal to administration head Kadyrov's son, Ramzan, together with Russian troops, engaged in fierce fighting, using heavy artillery and military aircraft against a group of Chechen fighters in the village of Avtury in Shali Raion on 20 August, Interfax and chechenpress.com reported. Interfax quoted a Chechen Interior Ministry spokesman as saying that the Chechen force was commanded by Arab mercenary Abu-Walid, and that it was surrounded. Chechenpress.com reported on 21 August that the Chechen fighters broke through the surrounding troops and escaped to the mountains, having killed 25 of Ramazan Kadyrov's men and no less than 15 Russian servicemen. (RFE/RL)

HEAD OF KYRGYZ HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE REPLACED

22 August

The controversial head of the Kyrgyz Human Rights Committee (KHRC), Ramazan Dyrlydaev, was replaced on 25 August at a special committee conference in Bishkek. Dyrlydaev, who is known for his uncompromising criticism of the government, was replaced by Bolot Tynaliev, former KHRC coordinator for Issyk-Kul Oblast, whom Dyrlydaev considers to be unduly influenced by the government. Some KHRC members have accused Dyrlydaev of misusing foreign grant funding, particularly some from the Dutch group Hivos. Dyrlydaev rejects the charges and says they are part of a government plot against him. He is presently living in

Vienna, where he has close ties to the International Helsinki Federation. (akipress.org)

MOSCOW AUTHORITIES TO 'PROTECT' MIGRANT WORKERS

22 August

More than 60 illegal immigrants have been detained at the Moscow International Air Show since it opened on 19 August, and deportation orders have already been issued for four illegal migrants from Uzbekistan. Moscow Vice Mayor Valerii Shantsev declared on 20 August that city authorities do not intend to rescind the new registration rules for people from other cities arriving Moscow to work. According to Shantsev, the rules might be amended, but "we will protect these people, who should not become 21st-century slaves." NTV reported earlier that under the new rules, any enterprise wishing to employ a person who is registered as a resident of another city will have to submit 12 application forms and documents, and a special commission will take up to one month to study each application. (RFE/RL)

U.S. GIVES UZBEK BORDER TROOPS 17 TONS OF COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT

23 August

The U.S. Embassy in Tashkent handed over 17 tons of communications and other equipment worth \$1.8 million to the Uzbek border and customs services on 22 August. The equipment --which includes surveillance equipment, protective and medical supplies, transport, and radios and antennas -- is part of a program for export control and border protection that is being financed by the U.S. State Department. According to the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent, since the start of the program in April 2000, the government of Uzbekistan has received \$5.3 million worth of equipment and training. Lieutenant General Gafurjon Tishaeu, head of Uzbekistan's Committee for Protecting the State Border, attributed the U.S. generosity to the common U.S. and Uzbek interest in fighting terrorism, drug and weapons trafficking, and organized crime. (RIA-Novosti)

U.S. GIVES UZBEK BORDER TROOPS 17 TONS OF COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT

23 August

The U.S. Embassy in Tashkent handed over 17 tons of communications and other equipment worth \$1.8 million to the Uzbek border and customs services on 22 August. The equipment --which includes surveillance equipment, protective and medical supplies, transport, and radios and antennas -- is part of a program for export control and border protection that is being financed by the U.S. State Department. According to the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent, since the start of the program in April 2000, the government of Uzbekistan has received \$5.3 million worth of equipment and training. Lieutenant General Gafurjon Tishaeu, head of Uzbekistan's Committee for Protecting the State Border, attributed the U.S. generosity to the common U.S. and Uzbek

interest in fighting terrorism, drug and weapons trafficking, and organized crime. (RIA-Novosti)

UN DRUGS CHIEF VISITS AFGHANISTAN

24 August

The head of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has arrived in Afghanistan to visit projects connected with Afghanistan's illegal narcotics industry. Antonio Maria Costa will visit two of Afghanistan's main poppy growing areas in the north east of the country. Afghanistan is the source of about three quarters of the world's supply of opium, which is made from the poppy flower. The north of Afghanistan has had a bumper crop this year as good winter snows have watered the fields of brilliant red, purple and white poppies. Dr Costa has arrived on a regular visit to inspect the work of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, which is trying to reduce poppy cultivation here and the illegal export of opium and its derivative, heroin. Afghanistan supplies most of the opium and heroin consumed in Europe and in Afghanistan's neighbors, Pakistan and Iran. Dr Costa is meeting the Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, in Kabul and he will also travel to Badakhshan and Nangrahar in the north and east, two of Afghanistan's main poppy growing provinces. President Karzai's government has banned poppy cultivation, but eradicating the lethal flower is difficult because it is one of the few sources of income in the impoverished areas where it is grown. A farmer can make several thousand dollars from a poppy harvest, whereas growing wheat or other crops would provide barely a subsistence living. Opium has long been used as a traditional medicine in Afghanistan, but heroin consumption has not been a significant problem. But a recent survey by the UN suggested that the use of opium, heroin and other narcotics in Kabul is also on the rise. (BBC)

AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITION LEADERS FAIL TO REACH AGREEMENT ON SINGLE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

25 August

The leaders of Azerbaijan's four most influential opposition parties -- Isa Gambar (Musavat), Etibar Mamedov (Azerbaijan National Independence Party), Ali Kerimli (Azerbaijan Popular Front Party [AHCP]-reformist wing), and Rasul Guliev (Democratic Party of Azerbaijan) -- failed to reach agreement during talks in London on 24 August on selecting a single opposition candidate to contest the 15 October presidential election. Kerimli stated earlier this month that he would withdraw his candidacy if agreement was reached on a single candidate, but later he said he was reluctant to do so as he believes most voters will vote for him. Gambar, Mamedov, and Kerimli are all registered to contest the ballot, from which Guliev was barred on the grounds that he is resident in the United States and holds U.S. permanent residency. The four leaders did, however, agree to establish a movement for democratic stability, the primary objective of which is to replace the current stability

which, the four say, is based on military and police repression with voluntary stability based on popular consensus. (Turan)

OPERATIONS CONTINUE AFTER UP TO 50 'TALIBAN' KILLED IN AFGHANISTAN

25 August

Afghan troops backed by US-led forces were continuing operations after local officials said up to 50 suspected Taliban were killed and 75 arrested in ground and air raids across violence-racked southeastern Afghanistan. "In this operation 40 to 50 Taliban were killed and their bodies are still laying on the ground," a spokesman for the Zabul provincial government Ahmadullah Watan Dost told AFP by satellite telephone late Monday. Some 1,000 Afghan soldiers supported by dozens of US-led coalition troops were carrying out an anti-extremist operation in Zabul's Daychopan district, 300 kilometres (190 miles) southwest of Kabul. The operation was executed against suspected Taliban and al-Qaeda bases in Daychopan's Dozi mountains, Watan Dost said. The bases were "smashed to dust" by coalition bombing, he said, adding that there were no reported Afghan or coalition casualties. Five suspected Taliban were also arrested. The Zabul operation was launched after at least 14 people were killed in fighting over the weekend in Zabul and Uruzgan provinces where local officials said up to 300 Taliban were regrouping in the mountains. Southeast Afghanistan is in the grip of a wave of violence from suspected resurgent Taliban fighters, who are believed to be regrouping in neighbouring Pakistan's remote border tribal regions. Earlier this month around 100 people died in attacks, clashes with militants and fighting between rival militias over a one-week period. In Paktika province, east of Zabul, hundreds of Afghan National Army troops backed by coalition forces arrested more than 70 suspected militants during operations near the Pakistan border where up to 33 people were killed in clashes a week ago. "The operation is still going on and they have arrested more than 70 suspected Taliban," Paktika deputy security commander Shawali Sarhowzawall said late Monday. Colonel Davis confirmed Operation Warrior Sweep, which was launched in Paktia and Paktika by US, Italian and Afghan troops in July, was continuing but did not give any other details. One US soldier died after a clash in Paktika province on Wednesday, bringing to 31 the number of coalition troops killed in Afghanistan since the October 2001 start of the US-led assault to topple the Taliban regime. A 12,500-strong US-led coalition force is currently hunting fugitives from the Taliban and the al-Qaeda terrorist group, mainly along the 2,400-kilometre (1,500-mile) Afghan-Pakistan border. (AFP)

GEORGIAN PRESIDENT CASTIGATES PARLIAMENT

25 August

In his regular Monday radio interview, Eduard Shevardnadze accused parliament deputies on 25 August of ignoring national interests by absenting themselves from the ongoing emergency parliament session in order to campaign for

reelection in the ballot scheduled for 2 November. He appealed to deputies to pass on 26 August the budget cuts and amendments to the Tax Code demanded by the International Monetary Fund. Shevardnadze also deplored parliament's failure to pass a bill he proposed designating as a crime attempts to bribe voters. In addition, Shevardnadze charged that unnamed forces are trying to block economic development in Georgia. (Caucasus Press)

FOUR GEORGIAN PEACEKEEPERS INJURED IN IRAQ

25 August

Four sappers from the Georgian contingent serving with the international stabilization force in Iraq were hospitalized with burns on 25 August after explosives they were transporting detonated for reasons that remain unclear. The Georgian contingent of some 70 men arrived in Iraq on 3 August. (Caucasus Press)

OFFICIAL REQUESTS PROTECTION FOR CHECHEN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

26 August

TsIK Chairman Veshnyakov told journalists in Moscow on 25 August that the commission has asked the Federal Security Service (FSB) to provide protection for candidates in the 5 October Chechen presidential election. Chechen Election Commission Chairman Abdul-Kerim Arsakhanov said that once registered, presidential candidates will be provided with security guards and mobile phones. But three days later, Russian presidential aide Sergei Yastrzhembskii said in an interview with "Rossiiskaya gazeta" that Chechen presidential candidates would not be provided with security guards. "The Moscow Times" reported on 8 August that would-be presidential candidates soliciting support from voters were being subjected to harassment and intimidation by security guards loyal to Chechen administration head Akhmed-hadji Kadyrov. (RFE/RL)

TAJIK LABOR MINISTER SAYS MEDIA REPORTS ON TAJIKS IN RUSSIAN JAILS ARE EXAGGERATED

26 August

Tajik Minister of Labor Mamadsho Ilolov told a news conference that domestic and foreign media reports on the number of Tajik labor migrants in Russian jails -- usually given as around 40,000 -- are exaggerated, "Tojikiston" reported on 21 August. Ilolov said that Tajik citizens find themselves in jail in Russia because they do not know the Russian laws that are applicable to them. He admitted that there are Tajiks in jails throughout Russia, but added that the number is probably half the 40,000 often given by the media. Because Tajiks do not need visas to travel to Russia, they cannot be deported from there, despite media reports to the contrary. However, they can be subject to administrative expulsion, as were 300 Tajik labor migrants who were recently expelled from Kemerovo. The newspaper quoted Tajik legal authority Hojimuhammad Umarov as saying that

the Tajik labor authorities should develop a program to inform labor migrants about the laws of the countries in which they intend to seek work. (RFE/RL)

RUSSIA, IRAN TO SIGN NUKE FUEL DEAL IN SEPTEMBER

26 August

Russia and Iran, keen to ease U.S. concerns over their nuclear ties, will sign in September an agreement requiring Tehran to return nuclear waste to Moscow, a Russian Atomic Energy Ministry official said on Tuesday. Russia has pressed ahead with plans to build a nuclear plant at the southern port of Bushehr in Iran despite criticism from Washington, which accuses Tehran of seeking to develop nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian program. "The agreement will be signed very soon, perhaps by the end of September. Last week, the Russian government instructed our ministry to sign the protocol in the nearest future," the official told Reuters on condition of anonymity. As soon as the protocol is signed, Russia will ship fuel to Iran for the Bushehr reactor, which will then process it to generate power and send all spent nuclear material -- which can be converted to weapons grade material -- back to Russia. The official said the document would be signed during a regular visit by a ministry delegation to the Islamic Republic in coming weeks, but the precise date of the signing was yet to be decided. U.S. Undersecretary of State John Bolton, a key U.S. arms official, is in Moscow for what is seen as an attempt to persuade Russia to halt nuclear cooperation with Iran and bring the issue of Tehran's nuclear ambitions before the U.N. Security Council. Iran, which says it is ready to sign the agreement with Russia, has dismissed the U.S. charges, saying it wants to develop nuclear power to satisfy a booming demand for electricity and save its oil and gas reserves for export. (Reuters)

DRUGS FROM AFGHANISTAN FLOOD RUSSIA

27 August

Heroin from Afghanistan is sweeping through Russia with drug trafficking operations extending across the nation's eleven time zones, a senior government official said Tuesday. "A heroin attack from the south has become the most acute problem for us," said Alexander Mikhailov, deputy head of Russia's newly-established drug control committee. In a move which highlighted the Kremlin's concern about the rapid spread of drugs, President Vladimir Putin set up the committee in March, naming Viktor Cherkosov, a longtime confidant and fellow KGB veteran, to head it. Soon after the new committee started work last month, officials reported the nation's largest ever drug bust -- 920 pounds of heroin found in a truck stopped just outside Moscow. Mikhailov said Tuesday that the bust was worth over \$22 million based on market prices. During the first half of this year, Russian border guards alone have confiscated 3.2 tons of drugs, half of it heroin, Mikhailov said at a briefing with foreign reporters. The amount of drugs seized probably accounts for roughly 10 percent of the actual flow, he added. Russia has between 3 and 4 million drug users out of a population of about 145.5 million, and the consumption of heroin has jumped 23 times between 1998 and 2002, Mikhailov said. He said that about 70 percent of heroin in Russia originated in Afghanistan, which accounts for about three quarters of the world's opium, the raw material for producing heroin. The opium production in Afghanistan has skyrocketed since the fall of the hardline Taliban regime, which successfully suppressed production. After the U.S. troops flushed out the Taliban in late 2001, impoverished Afghan farmers quickly turned back to lucrative poppies as their main source of income. "The U.S. military action in Afghanistan has effectively stirred a hornet's nest," Mikhailov said. (AP)

