

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING
VOL. 8 NO. 21
1 NOVEMBER 2006

Contents

Feature Article

- THE KONDOPOGA RIOTS: THE SIGN OF THINGS TO COME? 3
Dmitry Shlapentokh

Analytical Articles

- TURKEY: A LINCHPIN IN PIPELINE POLITICS 7
Ariel Cohen and Conway Irwin
- SALVAGING THE NORTH CAUCASUS BY INVESTMENTS: SURKOV'S LEAP OF LOGIC 10
Kevin Daniel Leahy
- KYRGYZSTAN'S WEAKNESS AND CENTRAL ASIA'S INSECURITY 12
Stephen Blank

Field Reports

- TAJIKISTAN PREPARING FOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 15
Zoya Pylenko
- MEETINGS BETWEEN PRESIDENT AND OPPOSITION IN KYRGYZSTAN
FAILED TO MATERIALIZE 16
Nurshat Ababakirov
- GEORGIAN OPPOSITION SUSPENDS BOYCOTT OF PARLIAMENT 18
Kakha Jibladze
- HIV SCANDAL IN SOUTH KAZAKHSTAN REVEALS POOR MEDICAL STANDARDS 19
Marat Yermukanov

- News Digest 21

THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

Editor

Svante E. Cornell

Assistant Editor, News Digest

Alima Bissenova

Chairman, Editorial Board

S. Frederick Starr

The Central Asia-Caucasus 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 & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center. 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. Articles should normally be based on local language news sources. Each 1000-1200 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 an 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."

Submission Guidelines:

Analytical Articles: Analytical articles require a three to four sentence Key Issue 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. The ideal length of analytical articles is between 1,000 and 1,300 words. The articles are structured as follows:

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

BACKGROUND: 300-450 words of analysis about what has led up to the event or issue and why this issue is critical to the region. Include background information about the views and experiences of the local population.

IMPLICATIONS: 300-450 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.

Field Reports: Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event, or about the work of an NGdO. 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. 700-800 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: scornell@jhu.edu and suggest some topics on which you would like to write.

Svante E. Cornell

Research Director; Editor, Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program

Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University

1619 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, USA.

Tel. +1-202-663-5922; 1-202-663-7723; Fax. +1-202-663-7785

Feature Article

THE KONDOPOGA RIOTS: THE SIGN OF THINGS TO COME?

Dmitry Shlapentokh

In late August-early September 2006, Kondopoga, a small industrial town in Karelia in North Russia, experienced a pogrom-type outburst. The event might be seen as just one of many similar ethnic clashes that have marked the history of post-Soviet Russia, differing only in scale. But it might also be the first sign of a process with many important implications for Russia. The potential importance can be seen from the ideology of those who engaged in the event as well as its political context.

The cause of the outburst was found in a local restaurant, Chaika, where the Azerbaijani owner had a quarrel with customers. The local police apparently did not intervene, and the owner called for the help of his Chechen friends, who arrived on the scene armed with metal stakes and knives and started to beat up the customers indiscriminately. Some witnesses claimed that they screamed, "Allah Akbar!" (God is great) and "Let's beat the Russians." At least a couple of Russians were killed and, some witnesses claim, quite brutally. The events led to a violent outbreak in Kondopoga, led mostly by ethnic Russians who attacked Chechens and other residents from the Caucasus, and their property. As a result, Chechens and other minorities usually referred to as

"people of Caucasian nationality" fled the city. Order was restored only after the deployment of the riot police.

From Eurasianism to Self-Centered Nationalism

The ideology of Western liberal capitalism, which started to spread in Russia at the end of the Gorbachev era never took root, and soon started to fade. The actual

implementation of the noble-sounding creed of Western liberal capitalism in real life was disappointing: many Russians soon discovered huge social polarization, unbridled corruption, and, especially at the beginning of Yeltsin's tenure,

rampant crime. Opposition to the Yeltsin regime, consisting of a motley array of nationalistic-minded Communists and hardliner nationalists usually known in post-Soviet parlance as the "Red-Brown" coalition, argued that all these problems were due to the destruction not just of the Soviet system but of the USSR as a mighty state.

By the end of the Yeltsin and especially the beginning of the Putin era, the ruling elite had actually



The Kondopoga Riots

incorporated many tenets of the opposition. It was proclaimed that while the USSR was unfortunately irreversibly lost, Russia was still a mighty state and in a way a replica of the USSR. The term “Rossiiane” became widely used to define those who lived in the Russian Federation. The term defined residents not in the narrow sense as citizens – the usual case in the West – but in broad terms as a quasi-nation or community forged by centuries of common life together. This notion harkened back to the image of the “Soviet people” as a “new community,” or to the “Eurasian” model, which has become quite popular.

The proponents of the Eurasian model emphasize that the people of Russia/Eurasia constitute a quasi-nation due to historical tradition and a common geopolitical space. But the notion of “Rossiiane” has started to be challenged by various forms of Russian nationalism. One form, supported by an increasingly assertive Russian middle class, implies that Russia is a state of ethnic Russians, not of “Rossiiane” consisting of various ethnic origins. Ethnic Russians, in this view, should maintain a dominant position over the minorities.



A Russian Extreme-Rightist

Another interpretation of the new approach – supported by the disenfranchised and impoverished majority – implies that Russia cannot and should not

dominate minorities, who increasingly challenge the ethnic Russians’ demographic dominance, and are better organized. Russia can neither assimilate nor Russify them. The best strategy is just to expel them and, if needed, shed the ethnic enclaves in the Federation where Russians cannot dominate completely. This kind of outlook apparently prevailed among those who participated in the Kondopoga outburst, where local Russians proposed expelling all people of “Caucasian nationality.” While their native town was their immediate concern, they believe these sorts of actions should take place all over the country. Not only should Chechens and other “Caucasians” be expelled, but other similar troublespots in the Caucasus should be abandoned.

An Internet discussion generated by the events revealed an entire program for abandoning the ethnic enclaves where Russians could not dominate by numbers or force. According to some of those who were engaged in this discussion, the enclaves to be abandoned included not just the troubling North Caucasus but even Khakassia in Siberia, on the grounds that the area has already been taken over by the Chinese. Some proclaimed that Russia, if cleansed from most minorities, should separate itself not only from ethnic enclaves but even from Moscow, the imperial and implicitly non-Russian city whose residents live at the expense of the rest of the country. The program of shedding the undesirable parts of the Russian Federation goes along with the program for regime change.

Putin as a Non- Russian Ruler

In the view of some of those who engaged in the event or discussed it on the Internet, the Putin regime’s attempt to keep ethnic enclaves inside the Federation, its repression of Russian nationalists, and what they regarded as catering to the economic interests of the minorities – from Chechens to Jews – indicated clearly that Putin is not representing the interests of ethnic Russians. His is a regime of alien forces that came to power by blood. Those of his persuasion proclaimed that it was Putin and his clique who had arranged for the apartment buildings in 1999 in Moscow and other

places in order to achieve power. Thus, in a peculiar ideological twist, Putin's attempt to keep ethnic enclaves such as Chechnya inside the Federation is related not with his nationalism but with his anti-Russianness and explains the nature of Chechens' response to events. For example, when Ramzan Kadyrov, Chechnya's pro-Moscow Prime Minister and viceroy of a sort, proclaimed that he would intervene to stop anti-Chechen pogroms, some of those who engaged in discussions stated that Kadyrov's boldness was a direct result of Putin's support. In fact, Putin, unsure whether his anti-Russian clique could rely on Russian forces, had planned to create a kind of Chechen janissary force – praetorian troops comprised of foreigners who would allow Putin and his anti-Russian clique to maintain their power over the helpless Russian masses.

One could argue that similar ideas, i.e. that the regime is basically anti-Russian, have been circulating among the enemies of Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and lately Putin for a long time. The point of Kondopoga was that these slogans and protest feelings started to acquire organizational flesh.

The New Soviets and New Bolsheviks

Troubling for the authorities is not the spreading of such views among those who were either directly or indirectly affiliated with the Kondopoga event, but the fact that the protest was well-organized. It is true that the event was marked by a splash of pogrom-type violence – but there was another aspect not much elaborated on by observers. There was a several-thousand-strong demonstration – a great feat for a small town – something Russia has not witnessed since the early 1990s.

The other important aspect of the Kondopoga affair is that contrary to the protest in 2005 caused by abolishing perks enjoyed by pensioners, all age groups participated in the demonstration. Moreover, the crowd not only conveyed their grievances to the authorities in a collective petition but also started to create their own *druzhina*, paramilitary detachments, presumably to protect the locals. They also demanded the creation of an independent commission to control and investigate

trade in the city. In fact, the locals had taken first step towards creating a parallel structure of power, a sort a replica of the grassroots Soviets in the 1905 Revolution when, as in the case of the Kondopoga event, they emerged amid a wave of ethnic strife, pogroms, and crime.

To take the analogy even farther, one could see the emergence of a new nationalistic “Bolshevism” in the “Movement Against Illegal Immigration,” which emerged a few years ago and proclaimed Russia's purification from “illegal” émigrés, actually from any non-Russians and particularly “non-whites”, as its major goal. Arriving on the spot, representatives of the movement tried to convince the local Russians that without cardinal changes, the life of ordinary Russians would not change for the better. The leaders of the movement almost instinctively followed Lenin's dictum about the importance of providing any spontaneous movement with clear ideology and leadership. The representatives of the movement imitated the Bolsheviks in the speed with which they spread their ideas; and they and other Russians placed hundreds if not thousands of their leaflets in the Moscow subway.

Implications of Kondopoga

What is the implication of the events in Kondopoga? Skeptics could easily reason that these events could be easily ignored as just another episode of small-scale ethnic conflict in post-Soviet Russia. Indeed, the events were isolated and did not spread, as the nationalists had hoped. Riot police easily dispersed the crowd, and seemingly nothing came from the locals' call to create a parallel autonomous power structure. Finally, some historical examples could demonstrate that the central power can sustain what seems to be enormous pressures, as demonstrated by the 1905-1907 Revolution, when many contemporaries believed that the monarchy was surely about to fall.

Still, taking all these elements into consideration, one could consider that the Kondopoga events might be the beginning of an important process with far-reaching implications in the long run. To start with, the conditions for an ethnic brand of violence will not

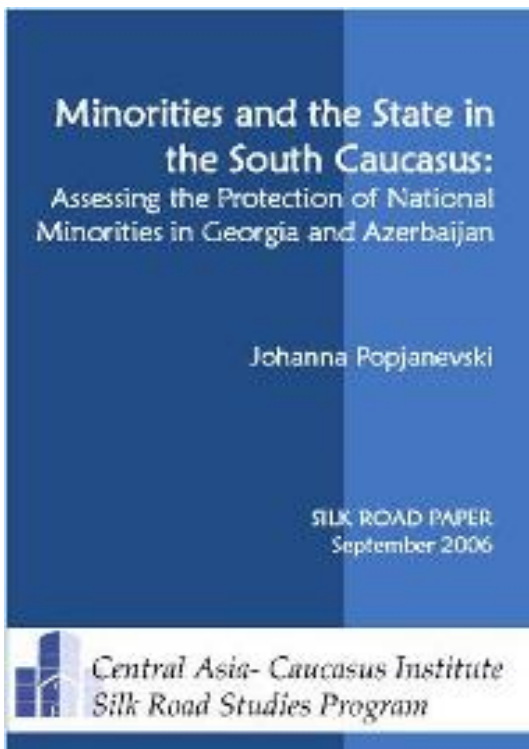
disappear. Second, the idea of the separation of Russia with ethnic Russians from ethnic enclaves would be quite pleasing for many ethnic leaders in these enclaves. Moreover, the mutual desire for “divorce,” shared by Russians and many ethnic minorities alike, could also be reinforced by strong, lingering regionalism, the desire of purely Russian regions if not to separate themselves completely from the center, then at least to minimize dependence on it.

Finally, while history has demonstrated that regimes can survive under what seems to be tremendous pressure, the same historical experience has demonstrated the opposite – the ease with which regimes that seem to be stable regimes fall. If, indeed, this were to happen, the Russia that would emerge out of this upheaval could be much smaller and would have a clear “national-socialist” bend, for its elite would be likely to redistribute property and quite likely increase the safety net for the “folk Russian”. The temptation, of course, is to see such a regime as quite dangerous for the West. But one should remember that such a regime—in sharp contrast to Nazi Germany—would be

inward-oriented and strongly against any expansion. Moreover, it would quite likely be strongly pro-Western. Indeed, all Russian skinheads and neo-Nazis have great respect for the European and American Right and even more for European/American neo-Nazis. As a matter of fact, those who participated in discussions relating to Kondopoga have quoted them with approval. Thus, those who participated in the Kondopoga events actually look for a much smaller, ethnically homogeneous national-socialistic Russia of sorts and also profess the idea of “fortress Russia.”

One might also add that “fortress Russia” could follow in many ways the ideas of “fortress Europe” and “fortress America,” where the fear of non-Caucasian émigrés is a sublimation or reflection of continued geopolitical and demographic changes of global dimensions.

Dr. Dmitry Shlapentokh is an Associate Professor of History at Indiana University, South Bend.



New Silk Road Paper!

Minorities and the State: Assessing the Protection of National Minorities in Georgia and Azerbaijan

by Johanna Popjanevski

This 88-page Silk Road Paper analyzes the protection of minorities in Georgia and Azerbaijan, against the background of the ambition by both states to develop an inclusive, civic concept of nationhood.

The paper is available from the offices of the Joint Center cited on the inside cover of this issue, or freely downloadable in PDF format from either www.cacianalyst.org or www.silkroadstudies.org.

TURKEY: A LINCHPIN IN PIPELINE POLITICS, MORE THAN EVER

Ariel Cohen and Conway Irwin

Although Turkey does not have substantial natural gas reserves, it has become the lynchpin in European leaders' plans to increase diversification of natural gas transit routes from Russia and energy-rich countries in the Middle East and Central Asia to energy-dependent economies throughout Europe. These plans are progressing, with the Nabucco pipeline as the main hope for the near future. Yet the future of Transcaspian pipelines, key to Turkey's future energy role, is far from clear.

BACKGROUND: EU countries rely on Russia for more than 40 percent of their natural gas imports. Russia controls the majority of gas pipeline infrastructure connecting Central Asia and Russia to Europe and denies other parties access to its excess pipeline capacity. Concerns over Russia's questionable business practices and reliability as an energy supplier have led European policy makers to support alternative routes for natural gas transport to EU markets, and they are turning to Turkey as a potential conduit for gas transit lines.

If proposed pipeline projects through Turkey come to fruition, natural gas will travel from Russia, the

Caspian, and the Middle East to Turkey, and on to the Mediterranean and Central and Western Europe. New pipelines would provide Turkey with transit revenues, cheap and plentiful oil and gas supplies for its growing economy, and elevated status as an essential link in the energy-supply chain.

Two gas pipelines currently run from Russia to Turkey: the eastern branch of the Trans-Balkan Pipeline, which reaches Turkey via Bulgaria, and Blue Stream, which runs from Isobilnoye, Russia to the Black Sea port of Dzhughba, then underwater to Samsun on the Turkish Black Sea coast. A



Nabucco Pipeline Project (European Union Map)

proposed Samsun-Ceyhan pipeline would transport gas from Blue Stream to Ceyhan on Turkey's Mediterranean coast. Another proposal, the Turkey-Israel Oil/Gas Pipeline, would deliver Azerbaijani and Russian gas to Haifa in Israel.

Pipelines from the Caspian region to Turkey are still at the construction or proposal stage. Those under construction include the South Caucasus Gas Pipeline, or Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (SCP), and the Turkey-Greece Interconnector. SCP, due for completion in late 2006, will pipe gas from the Shah Deniz field off Azerbaijan's Caspian coast to Erzurum in Turkey. The Turkey-Greece Interconnector, also due for completion in late 2006, will span the Dardanelles, connecting the natural gas grids of Anatolia in Turkey and Thrace in Greece.

The most important of the pipeline proposals are the Nabucco Pipeline and the Trans-Caspian Pipeline. Nabucco, with strong Turkish support and official approval from the EU, is expected to be built in 2008. It will provide a direct link between Caspian natural gas fields and European markets without Russia as an intermediary, bringing Azerbaijani, Kazakh, Turkmen, and Iranian gas from Erzurum to Austria via Romania and Hungary. A Trans-Caspian pipeline would link the large gas supplies of the eastern Caspian to Baku, presumably feeding Kazakh and Turkmen gas into SCP and subsequently Nabucco. These nevertheless remain on the planning stage.

Turkey would also like to build a gas pipeline from Iraq parallel to an existing oil pipeline from Kirkuk to Yumurtalik, near Ceyhan. However, Iraqi oil and gas supplies are unreliable, as its pipelines have been frequent targets of insurgent attacks, making further pipeline construction in Iraq unlikely in the near future. On August 19, 2006, separatists from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) attacked a natural gas pipeline in Turkey's Agri province, resulting in a massive explosion that disrupted gas deliveries from Iran. While workers were able to quickly repair the pipeline and resume gas flows on August 23, the attack highlights Turkey's emerging role as a

strategically pivotal country in the transit of natural gas.

IMPLICATIONS: Both European consumers and Caspian and Middle Eastern producers of natural gas stand to gain from Turkey's new role as a middleman. On the supply side, more buyers of Kazakh and Turkmen gas could result in more competitive price offers and greater demand for exports. On the demand side, a greater number of suppliers to energy-dependent economies would prevent any one supplier from exercising excessive market power.

Turkey would also derive political benefits from assuming a more significant role in the energy transit market. Turkey has long been a prospective EU member country, and as a valuable supplier of energy to Europe, it may have more leverage in EU accession negotiations.

However, Turkey's conflict with the resurgent PKK poses a threat to its energy infrastructure. Also, investment risks in many energy-supplier countries may obstruct pipeline projects. Turkmenistan, for example, is notorious for its murky business practices, including an almost complete lack of transparency and a reputation for arbitrary expropriation, raising fears that Turkmenistan will not honor contractual obligations regarding pipeline construction or sale of its natural gas supplies.

Moreover, Russian contractual obligations for future gas deliveries to Europe and Asia require substantial imports of Turkmen and Kazakh gas. If Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan begin exporting larger volumes of gas to Europe, then Russia may come up short in its contracts with foreign buyers. Russia will likely take measures to ensure that it meet its obligations, specifically by denying others access to Central Asian gas reserves. If the bulk of Caspian natural gas continues to rest in Russian hands, Turkey may not be able to procure the volumes of gas necessary to fill all the proposed pipelines.

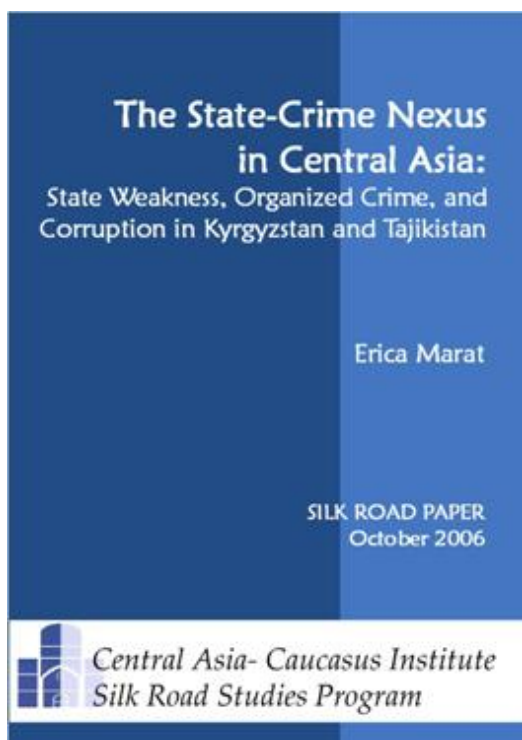
Turkey is a moderate Muslim state, but its leadership has recently displayed less affinity for the West and more for its Muslim neighbors. Iran

is an important natural gas supplier for Turkey, and in August 2006, Turkey and Iran developed a framework agreement on exporting Iranian gas to Europe through Turkish pipelines. The two countries' close trade ties could alienate Turkey's Western partners and strengthen reservations voiced by some EU leaders about Turkish membership in the EU, especially in light of current concerns in the West over Iran's nuclear enrichment program.

CONCLUSIONS: Political risks aside, Turkey will have ready access to diversified supplies of natural gas and income from existing pipelines and those under construction. These two benefits alone can drive economic growth. If Turkey can balance the interests and demands of the many parties with a

stake in its natural gas transport infrastructure, then its geopolitical location can be used to its advantage in both trade and foreign policy relations. Thus, as a critical player in transit shipping supply and distribution of oil and gas, Turkey will gain new sources of income and greater global influence. This will nevertheless require an active foreign policy with a determined strategy of its own, which will succeed in fending off monopolistic ambitions.

AUTHORS' BIO: Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., is Senior Research Fellow in International Energy Security at the Heritage Foundation. Conway Irwin is a 2005 graduate of the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University and a journalist with Argus Media.



New Silk Road Paper!

The State-Crime Nexus in Central Asia: State Weakness, Organized Crime and Corruption in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

by Erica Marat

This paper analyzes the divergent forms that relationships between organized crime and the state have taken in the two worst hit Central Asian states in the past decade.

This 138-page paper is available from the offices of the Joint Center cited on the inside cover of this issue, or freely downloadable in PDF format from either www.cacianalyst.org or www.silkroadstudies.org.

SALVAGING THE NORTH CAUCASUS BY INVESTMENTS: SURKOV'S LEAP OF LOGIC

Kevin Daniel Leahy

Vladislav Surkov, an influential advisor to President Putin, has compared the situation in the North Caucasus to an “underground fire”. In his view, the correct way to extinguish this blaze is through the promotion of greater private investment in the region. However, by encouraging businesspeople to invest heavily in this unstable, ill-governed, quasi-lawless area of the Russian Federation, Surkov, it would seem, is putting the proverbial cart before the horse. In the absence of law and order, potential investors will have little choice but to seek protection from local paramilitaries. By doing so, Surkov’s White Knights will merely reinforce the prevailing socio-economic raison d’être for this particularly insidious, quasi-political constituency.

BACKGROUND: During the course of an interview with the German magazine *Der Spiegel* in mid-2005, Russia’s deputy presidential chief of staff, Vladislav Surkov, expounded on the challenges facing his administration in the North Caucasus. Specifically, he identified the creation of jobs, the development of educational opportunities, and the advancement of youth outreach programs as priority tasks. Although this particular interview did not explain how Surkov and his colleagues planned to address these outstanding issues, a speech he subsequently made to a gathering of Russian businesspeople proved rather more revealing. Surkov used this opportunity to encourage his audience to forge closer ties with the Kremlin’s party of power, United Russia. Widely perceived as the political mastermind behind this party, Surkov eagerly talked up United Russia’s neo-liberal credentials, declaring a need “to focus on enhancing the liberal-orientated modern Europeanized wing of United Russia”.

Notably, he also encouraged regional political leaders to embrace the party: “After all, a party is a team, and it is better to depend on a team than on a handful of aides”. This advice has not been heeded by certain political leaders in the North Caucasus, who are nevertheless ostensibly pro-Russian in their outlook. While most have publicly embraced the party, many have yet to take it to heart and prefer to appoint extra-party acquaintances to key positions as their aides and personal assistants. The

conventional strictures of party politics – as considered from a western perspective – do not apply in the North Caucasus. In the final analysis, local branches of United Russia are seldom beholden to the party hierarchy. In fact, on occasion they have not been averse to committing what, in the eyes of Surkov, Boris Gryzlov (chairman of United Russia) and others, amounts to a cardinal sin: disloyalty to President Putin. For example, during the political mini-crisis which gripped Adygeya last April, the republican president, Khazret Sovmen, refused to accept an initiative by the Presidential Representative to the Southern Federal District, Dimitri Kozak, to quicken the process whereby Adygeya would be merged with neighbouring Krasnodar Krai. During the course of these events, the local branch of United Russia, which had previously been co-opted by Sovmen’s supporters, publicly endorsed the president’s recalcitrant stance. By thus opposing Kozak’s initiative, Sovmen and his party allies were in fact opposing President Putin – after all, by the very definition of his job title, Kozak is an executioner of the president’s will.

This tendency of regional party structures to “go native” has also caused problems elsewhere for the Kremlin, and has been exacerbated by the absence of a clear mechanism for enforcing the party whip among regional cadres. For instance, when Ramzan Kadyrov moved to suspend the activities of the Danish Refugee Council in Chechnya last February – a risqué initiative with constitutional implications

– he subsequently faced no censure from United Russia, apart from a mild injunction from Gryzlov to be more careful in future.

IMPLICATIONS: What, therefore, does it say about the true extent of the party's influence in the region, when a politician as injudicious as Ramzan Kadyrov is deemed suitable to head the Chechen branch of United Russia? Judging by remarks he made during his Annual Address to the Federal Assembly, President Putin agrees with Surkov that the promotion of private enterprise, not state investment, is the optimal means of improving the region's socio-economic situation. However, it would be interesting to hear what potential investors make of a situation whereby the local structures of Russia's de facto ruling party are essentially the playthings of entrenched local chieftains, solely preoccupied with enriching themselves and consolidating their grip on local power structures. The ideal neo-liberal economic scenario whereby government, be it of a national or a local character, assumes the impartial role of umpire between entrepreneurs, investors and competing businesses, simply does not exist in the North Caucasus.

As Grozny's recent parliamentary initiative, "On Special Conditions for Entrepreneurial Activity in the Territory of the Chechen Republic" made clear, Chechnya's pro-Moscow government is of one mind with Putin and Surkov on this issue. This bill proposed turning Chechnya into a "free economic zone" in order to encourage outsiders to invest in the republic. However, an investor who does his or her homework – as most are wont to do – will quickly become familiar with Kadyrov's long-standing reputation for extorting financial tribute from Chechen businesspeople. Even those who are already familiar with the unofficial conventions attached to doing business in Russia generally might bridle at the notion of paying Kadyrov "protection money". Many will also balk at the additional expense of employing the huge security retinues which will inevitably be required to protect their business interests on the ground. In a neo-liberal economy, one of the state's key roles is to provide law and order. As yet, state structures have been unable to ensure these conditions in the North

Caucasus. Indeed, the very structures that purport to uphold the law are often themselves involved in myriad criminal enterprises.

Despite its status as a proclaimed champion of neo-liberal values, United Russia has failed to rein in those regional figures whose actions pre-empt the creation of a "level playing field" for businesspeople. Those brave enough to invest in the region will inevitably require local muscle to protect their interests; as such, they will most likely function as patrons for local militias rather than saviours of region's increasingly destitute citizenry. Such a scenario harbours the familiar dimensions of the traditional Russian tactic of clientelage, albeit with a contemporary neo-liberal twist.

CONCLUSIONS: It has previously been noted that the rise of the *siloviki* in contemporary Russian politics has been offset, if not overtaken, by the parallel rise of a resurgent business elite. On this point, Sharon Werning Rivera and David W. Rivera observed in a recent article in *Post-Soviet Affairs* that, contrary to common perception, Russia's current political elite is "considerably more bourgeois than militocratic". Surkov and United Russia are the established political patrons of the former constituency; however, they are presently encouraging Russia's business community to invest in the North Caucasus although they – as representatives of the state apparatus – have singularly failed to uphold their end of the neo-liberal bargain by establishing a functional system of law and order in the region. As a result, in order to invest successfully in the North Caucasus, businesspeople will be obliged – by default, as it were – to fulfil a role theoretically reserved for the state's law enforcement agencies. The resulting prospect of outside investors hurrying to employ local paramilitary outfits for protection purposes threatens to further stimulate the most salient causes of the region's socio-economic ills – corruption, commercially-motivated violence and abuse of political power.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Kevin Daniel Leahy holds a postgraduate degree in International Relations from University College Cork, Ireland.

KYRGYZSTAN'S WEAKNESS AND CENTRAL ASIA'S INSECURITY

Stephen Blank

18 Months after the Tulip Revolution of March 2005, Kyrgyzstan has not found stability. Its government remains an unstable configuration of factions based on the personalities of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev and Vice-President Feliks Kulov. And it is clear that they and their supporters are increasingly tempted to resort to authoritarianism to solve their problems. Indeed, the Chief of the National Security Service and his deputy, Bakiyev's brother, had to resign after being caught on videotape planting drugs in the luggage of the opposition leader.

BACKGROUND: Constitutional reform has not taken place, corruption and criminality is rampant and opposition leaders, no doubt aggrieved at their being left out of the spoils, complain that Bakiyev and Kulov have followed in Askar Akayev's footsteps as president by assigning choice economic plums to members of their families. Economically, as well, the country is not able to make major progress and the Russian economic presence has grown as Moscow has sought to help Kyrgyzstan overcome its crippling debts and backwardness which are exacerbated by a lack of exportable natural resources.

Since the Tulip Revolution in March 2005, many of the hopes generated by that event have dissipated. It is clear in hindsight that this event was not so much a revolution as it was a reshuffling of elites with the ineffectual and insufficiently resolute Akayev regime being shouldered aside. The aforementioned police scandal reflects not just the police's and security forces' politicization but also their corruption and links to drug traffickers, so it is clear that the corruption engendered from that trade has powerful protectors and connections. And that sector alone hardly exhausts the possibilities for corruption.

Government remains essentially a matter of personality and tribal factions and it is clear that

considerable popular unhappiness, if not outright opposition, continues. Kyrgyzstan has also seen an upsurge in violent attacks against it coming from the Tajik and Uzbek borders. While the regime invariably labels such attacks as emanating from Hizb ut-Tahrir, the rise in violence suggests a potential for unrest in the peripheries of the country or that could be exploited by Kyrgyzstan's neighbors. Accordingly Bishkek's rapprochement with Uzbekistan possibly rests on the understanding that that they both face a similar threat from popular unrest but also that Tashkent, if it chose to do so, could make life very uncomfortable for the Kyrgyz government.

Kyrgyzstan's economic weakness, manifested in a lack of exportable resources like oil and gas, the ubiquitous corruption, and crippling foreign debt – three factors that inhibit economic growth – have led it to seek greater foreign assistance as well. One reason for retaining the U.S. base at Manas was that Kyrgyzstan could not afford to let it go and the economic advantages accruing to it from increased American assistance are too great to surrender. At the same time, Kyrgyzstan has solicited Kazakhstan to increase foreign investment in the country and Russia to support greater Russian penetration of its hydroelectric and other assets. Russia and China clearly want to preserve the status quo and prevent

any further signs of unrest or so called color revolutions in Central Asia generally. And Russia has steadily increased the scope of its air base at Kant, making it a centerpiece of its regional military presence. But the more money it commits to stabilizing the situation in Kyrgyzstan, the more implicated it becomes in the success or failure of the regime which, despite Russian help, is no more secure than before. Yet Kyrgyz observers agree that Russian economic power is insufficient to truly retrieve the situation in Kyrgyzstan.



Bakiyev and Kulov: Seeing Eye to Eye? (AFP)

IMPLICATIONS: However the rapprochement with Russia and Uzbekistan clearly limits Kyrgyzstan's ability to carry out a truly multi-vectored foreign policy. Instead, analysts see "an asymmetric multi-vectored" foreign policy with the Russian and Uzbek vectors enjoying more prominence than do the others. Moscow and Beijing have brought great pressure to bear on Kyrgyzstan to oust the U.S. base, and it is quite likely that American economic capability plus the upsurge of the Taliban threat in Afghanistan were the factors that retrieved the situation for the United States here. But the inclination to Moscow and Tashkent carries with it the price of increased authoritarianism and repression, not to mention official corruption. In their wake follows economic stagnation and the continuing generation of the

political dry timber needed to spark a conflagration at the first sign of trouble.

While Kyrgyzstan remains a precarious state, it is not necessarily a failing state. It is possible that given foreign assistance and support by its neighbors, the government could continue to muddle through in the absence of any increased capability for dealing with the accumulating problems of internal or external security. But the failure to increase the government's ability to command popular support or increase its own capability for governing the country enhances possibilities for a more violent response when a crisis ensues. So while Kyrgyzstan may not be a failing state today, let alone a failed one, its inherent precariousness mandates a very close watch upon its future courses of action and their consequences.

Despite its weakness relative to other neighboring states like Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan's development is an important sign of the times in Central Asia. The "Tulip Revolution" led Russia and China to intensify their ideological and political offensives against America, charging it with support for anti-regime revolutions throughout Central Asia. It also helped them generate the idea of persuading Uzbekistan of this U.S. conspiracy or misguided policy in order to move Uzbekistan away from Washington and to place pressure on it to remove the U.S. base at Karshi Khanabad. This pressure turned out to be successful and this tactic could easily be repeated in Kyrgyzstan.

Second, the Tulip Revolution strengthened China's interest in military bases in Kyrgyzstan and possibly Uzbekistan. And it certainly strengthened Russia's interests in preventing anyone from having a base in the region and in intensifying its own program of assistance to Kyrgyzstan, and its own regional military footprint in Central Asia. The Tulip Revolution also generated an ongoing reconsideration of exactly what are the purposes of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. While the debate over the SCO continues and is by no means over, what is clear is that another such uprising could force the SCO into taking more forceful

action on behalf of its members' perception of regional security and the threats to it.

CONCLUSIONS: In other words, what happens in Kyrgyzstan does not stay in Kyrgyzstan. Its developments have repercussions that are transnational and its fragility could spread to other neighboring states and also involve important policy decisions in Moscow, Beijing, and Washington. Furthermore, given the inherently precarious and unstable situation there, it is all too easy for some unexpected development or surprise to generate the pressures that could lead to a major crisis in Kyrgyzstan, the equivalent either of the Tulip Revolution, whose success was by no means foreordained or foreseen, or of Uzbekistan's Andijan uprising which had tragic repercussions across the region and in world politics as well. Kyrgyzstan's enhanced links to Tashkent and

Moscow also suggest that if something were to happen in either of those two capitals that had important consequences for Central Asia, then Kyrgyzstan would not be able to escape the consequences of that at event, whatever they may be. Thus while Kyrgyzstan is by no means the most strategically important state in the region, it could be sign of things to come. And under the circumstances of its present political trends, if it is such a weather vane for future trends in Central Asia, then we have good reason to be very wary of what the future might bring to Kyrgyzstan and to its neighbors.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Professor Stephen Blank, Strategic Studies institute, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pa. 17013. The views expressed here do not represent those of the U.S. Army, Defense Department, or the U.S. Government

THE CHINA AND EURASIA FORUM QUARTERLY

Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program

Volume 4, No. 3

August 2006



New issue of the

China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly

The August 2006 issue of the China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly, edited by Dr. Niklas Swanström, is online.

The issue contains articles by Alan Rousso, Gulshan Sachdeva, Bates Gill, Ariel Cohen, Kathleen Hancock, and others.

The issue is freely available online through www.silkroadstudies.org or www.cacianalyst.org

FIELD REPORTS

TAJIKISTAN PREPARING FOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Zoya Pylenko

Tajikistan's presidential elections, scheduled for 6 November, on first sight offers voters a sizeable choice of competing candidates. But with two opposition parties – the Democratic Party and the Social-Democratic Party – boycotting the elections and with a third one – the Islamic Renaissance Party – failing to nominate a candidate, few observers doubt that the current president, Emomali Rahmonov, will comfortably win.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) registered five out of six presidential hopefuls – namely: Abdukhalim Gafarov, the leader of one wing of the Socialist Party that broke away from the main body earlier this year (thanks to government manipulation, critics allege) and has now officially been acknowledged as the country's official Socialist Party instead of the other wing; Amir Karakulov from the Agrarian Party (which was founded less than a year ago); Ismoil Talbakov, from the Communist Party; Olimjon Boboev, from the Party of Economic Reform (as the Agrarian Party, a brand-new party that was registered with conspicuous ease); and Emomali Rahmonov, from the People's Democratic Party.

According to one election observer, only Talbakov can be considered a more or less serious candidate, with support among the economically hard-hit elderly and the remaining Slavic community in Tajikistan.

The candidates had to collect 160,000 signatures (equivalent to 5 percent of the Tajik population) to be considered for registration by the CEC. This is a rather high figure; the OSCE/ODIHR, which will be monitoring the election, advises to lower the barrier of necessary signatures for registration to 1 percent of the electorate.

Still, the government seems to be trying to make the



*The Government Building in Dushanbe: Rakhmonov's to Keep?
(Photo by groverdean, virtualtourist.com)*

elections appear fair and honest. All candidates will get 30 minutes on state television to make his case for the presidency (president Rahmonov can be seen much more often on television because the media pay minute attention to his daily doings) and international observers and foreign media have been invited to monitor the elections. But observers and media representatives must register no later than 20

days before the elections, which, according to the OSCE, creates obstacles for short-term observers.

Tajikistan is expecting more than 700 international observers, more than 100 of whom are with the OSCE. It will be the first time that the OSCE will be monitoring presidential elections in Tajikistan. It earlier monitored the parliamentary elections of 2000 and 2005, which were deemed to fall short of OSCE standards. Other observers come mainly from the CIS. There will also be some 18,000 local observers, according to the CEC.

But many people still think their vote will change nothing – and plan to stay at home on election day instead. A 20-year-old student of the capital's Agrarian University says he won't vote – and neither will most of his friends and relatives. "I'm sure that even if all Tajik people agreed not to vote for the current president, he would win again". When asked why he does not want to vote for an alternative candidate, he cynically said: "What is the sense? When somebody reaches power in our country, even if it is a new person, he will do the same things [to steal] money."

A 30-year-old entrepreneur is of much the same opinion. "I haven't voted in the last four elections and I won't vote now. It doesn't matter what you do. They will always claim that turnout was very high."

The Democratic Party and Social-Democratic Party call the upcoming elections illegal, claiming that according to the constitution, one and the same person can't be elected more than twice to the presidency. And Rahmonov was elected in 1994 and 1999. Supporters of the president however say Rahmonov can run two more times after the constitution was changed in 2003, with a "clean slate".

The Islamic Renaissance Party has not nominated a candidate, not to damage Tajikistan's international reputation: "We did not want to place our country and our party at the front line of criticism that Islamic movements are very active here," the party's leader, Muhiddin Kabiri, told the Tajik Service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

The candidates who do take part in the election are not very visible. Apart from small election posters at bus stands (and one big one of Rahmonov in the centre of town) there is hardly any agitation, and no excitement – except when on 9 October five internet sites that carried information critical of the government were blocked. Subsequently, on 12 October three of them, including www.ferghana.ru, were made available again. But the incident adds weight to the expectations of one election observer that the upcoming vote, again, will not reach OSCE standards.

MEETINGS BETWEEN PRESIDENT AND OPPOSITION IN KYRGYZSTAN FAILED TO MATERIALIZE

Nurshat Ababakirov

Considering the contentious mood between the president and the opposition, the rally on 2 November planned by the latter seems inevitable. Although there were some attempts for a dialogue, the belligerent sides continuously failed to make concessions, thus prompting some sense of unpredictability for November 2.

On October 21, President Kurmanbek Bakiyev was supposed to meet with the opposition's leaders. But this failed due to an unexpected increase in the number of people in the president's entourage, which contradicted the previously agreed composition of participants – the president, prime minister, and head of the president's administration face to face with 14 representatives of the

opposition. The opposition promptly turned down its intention to proceed with the meeting. It believes the president wanted to confront it with the leaders of pro-presidential parties and non-governmental organizations, and to set himself as an arbiter. It reinforced the opposition's conviction that the president easily abandons entered agreements.

On October 27, President Bakiyev announced at a the roundtable with nongovernmental organizations that he would present his own draft of a new constitution, aspects of which were not mentioned, to parliament before November 20. The president admitted that the constitutional reform process was "a little" delayed. "Now, the people are ready for reforms", he reasoned, mentioning his public intention for a referendum planned for this December.

The president also visited the Issik-Kul, Jalalabad, and Batken oblasts to "meet" the people. It is believed that President Bakiyev tried to gain political support and to reduce the necessity for constitutional reforms. Despite the open discontent of non-governmental organizations and political parties, the president still blames a handful of politicians in the parliament for destabilizing the country. The president does not exclude the possibility to dissolve the parliament if the political crisis continues until the end of the year.

As the date of the rally approaches, the statements of the opposition and the president have become increasingly confrontational, blaming each other for the suspension of constitutional reforms. Almazbek Atambaev, a hardliner leader of the Social-Democratic party, said publicly that the president is a "political corpse", referring to the president's failed reaction to the demands, which have dragged on since April.

The leaders of movement For Reforms say that they are capable of keeping the rally going for a week. "I am sure that the outcome will be clear in a day or two", says a member of the opposition, parliamentarian Melis Eshimkanov. He anticipates two outcomes: either the president conforms, or

there is a serious clash, which might resemble the aftermath of the March 2005 events. Nevertheless, the opposition assures that they will not break into the white house. On March 24, the opposition did not plan to do so either, but it ended up overthrowing the former president, Askar Akaev.

The opposition claims that its lines are being filled with people from law-enforcement agencies, the National Security Service, the president's administration, university teachers (calling for the resignation of Minister of Education Nur uulu Dosbol), and other disappointed people. This may be explained by a genuine dissatisfaction of the people as well as by the opposition's hawkish attitude, which by calling for politicians to define their positions implicitly says people are either "with us or against us".

Considering the direness of the situation on the rally, with the crowd possibly reaching up to 20,000 people, the movement For Reforms plans to provide security by coordinated efforts with law-enforcement officers totaling 2,000 people. On the other hand, the impartiality of some law-enforcement officers is questioned, as some may be supporting the demands of the opposition.

Even though the opposition itself rejects it, some political experts like Alexander Knyazev say the opposition's unity is temporary, and based on the aim to get rid of President Bakiyev. "What matters is not a single person but the system", emphasizes Almazbek Atambaev. The representatives of the movement For Reforms made known that they have come to a consensus over the constitution. Nevertheless, they discredit the tandem between the president and prime minister, which, as they say, lost its purpose, to balance the north and south.

Agym, an opposition-oriented newspaper belonging to Melis Eshimkanov, revealed the rumor that President Bakiyev, his brothers, and General Prosecutor Kambaraly Kongantiev moved their families out of Bishkek. It also says that the government is working on means to oppose the protestors.

Prime Minister Felix Kulov and the Parliament's Speaker Marat Sultanov, who try to keep a position of neutrality in the political confrontation, ask the sides to come to an agreement in order to avoid an escalation of the political crisis.

Nonetheless, it seems like a paralyzing blow to the president has already been dealt: Russian services officially confirmed Boris Berezovsky's visit to Kyrgyzstan, which the president so strongly denied.

GEORGIAN OPPOSITION SUSPENDS BOYCOTT OF PARLIAMENT

Kakha Jibladze

On October 23 the Georgian opposition 'suspended' its six month boycott of parliament sessions. Although there is little evidence that the boycott made any impact on Georgian politics, it does prove that the splintered oppositional parties can – largely – join forces when needed.

David Gamkrelidze, the leader of the oppositional party the New Rights and the head of its faction in the parliament, announced he and his followers would return to the parliament in the wake of President Mikheil Saakashvili's proposal to amend articles of the Georgian Constitution concerning the president's re-election. While Gamkrelidze did not mention the president's announcement specifically, he did note that there were a lot of 'important' issues coming up for debate in the parliament and the opposition wanted to be heard.

Earlier other opposition parties also announced their decision to end the boycott. Originally, three major parties – the New Rights, Conservative, and Industrial party – all participated in the boycott, as well as the parliament faction the Democratic Front, which consists of members from the Conservative party and the Republic party. Later attempts to form a wider boycott against the local government elections were not successful.

A joint effort by the opposition to condemn the government's actions in upper Kodori Gorge (Upper Abkhazia) over the summer was also largely ineffective after the government was able to prove

there were few human casualties and it was able to regain control over the previous renegade region.

The boycott, which was announced in March, was a last ditch effort by the opposition to give their pleas a wider platform. At the time, the political situation in the country had shifted and Saakashvili, although clearly still supported, had lost popularity in the wake of the Sandro Girgvliani murder scandal and the government's decision to impose fines if merchants did not use a government approved cash register.

However, even as the usually bickering parties found common ground over the scandals, the individual parties' motivation to join the boycott was mixed. At the time, the New Rights stood behind the boycott as a vehicle to push for Interior Minister Vano Merabishvili's resignation, while the parliament faction the Democratic Front stated it was also a move to push for stricter measures against MPs with business interests. In March, Republican MP Valeri Gelashvili was stripped of his mandate by a decision pushed through the ruling party-controlled parliament at record speed.

Currently, it appears the opposition is chiefly concerned with the administration's handling of the ongoing crisis with Russia. According to Industrial party member and MP Zurab Tkemaladze, Georgian prime minister Zurab Noghaideli is not providing appropriate responses to the opposition's request for more information about government plans to deal with the embargo, transportation

blockade and over 800 deportees that are returning to Georgia.

However, the ruling party appears less than impressed with the opposition's newly discovered public voice. According to statements to the press on Monday, Noghaideli remarked that he "does not worry" about the opposition's "discontent."

In addition, National Movement parliamentary leader Maia Nadiradze dismissed the opposition's demands for a harsher stance against Russia. According to New Right member Giorgi Mosidze, the boycott was successful because it brought some international attention to the Georgian parliament and the plight of the underrepresented opposition parties. The Saakashvili administration has been under pressure from international groups to lower the 7 percent cutoff for a seat in the parliament and make other adjustments to provide more balance to the legislative body.

However the ruling party and the administration have repeatedly stated that while they agree the country needs an opposition, it is not their fault the existing parties are struggling.

In a speech remarking on the National Movement's landslide victory in the local elections, Saakashvili

bemoaned the state of the country's opposition. "'I am not happy with these shameful results and the defeat of the opposition... Even a very effective government loses its effectiveness if it lacks a constructive opposition," Saakashvili said on October 9 according to the internet based news service Civil.ge. "We want you [the opposition parties] to be stronger. Of course we do not want them [the opposition] to come to power, because it will lead to nothing good, but they should be more organized."

The Georgian opposition has long been plagued by internal bickering and ineffectual political maneuvering. While public support for the ruling party has fallen – as evident in the low turnout for the local elections – there is no real sign that any opposition party is attracting disenfranchised voters. The ability to join together is one step toward increasing the opposition's strength and power. However, unless they can develop a strong platform based on real issues instead of populist measures designed to steal the spotlight for a few moments, it is unlikely that the Georgian opposition will ever develop the political muscle to take on the National Movement.

HIV SCANDAL IN SOUTH KAZAKHSTAN REVEALS POOR MEDICAL STANDARDS

Marat Yermukanov

At the September 20 session of the Security Council, President Nursultan Nazarbayev severely criticized the health minister of Kazakhstan and the governor of the region for failing to cope with the situation in Shymkent, the southern city where more than seventy children were infected with HIV. Immediately after the session health minister Yerbolat Dosayev and the governor of South Kazakhstan Bolat Zhilkishiyev were sacked. Although the situation is gradually getting back to normal, root causes of the infection are still there.

The shocking news that nine toddlers in children's clinics of Shymkent contracted AIDS reached the public late in March. A group of parliament members sent an inquiry to the Health Ministry and demanded a thorough investigation into the case. Furious parents and relatives stormed newspaper offices. Obviously hoping that the incident in Shymkent was an isolated case, health authorities merely tried to calm down passions and resorted to cover-up tactics. In the meantime, the number of children with symptoms of AIDS grew

rapidly. When the issue was put on the agenda of the September session of the Security Council and President Nazarbayev publicly announced the dismissal of the health minister and the governor of the South Kazakhstan region, around sixty children had been reported HIV positive.

Nobody in the cabinet and Health Ministry is willing to accept responsibility for the infection of the children, although numerous investigations into the case showed the occurrence of criminal negligence and substandard blood transfusion equipments. Doctors apparently carried out unauthorized blood transfusions tests without bothering to properly sterilize multiple-use syringes. Former health minister Yerbolat Dosayev, who was later replaced by Anatoliy Dernovoy, shifted the blame on the regional health department of South Kazakhstan and the governor of the region. The latter was replaced by former mayor of Astana Omirzaq Shokeyev, who upon his arrival in Shymkent took harsh measures, sacking the head of the regional health department and some high-ranking officials of the regional government. Dernovoy, the new health minister, said each family of the HIV-infected 76 children will get 8,800 tenghe (ca. \$70) every month as compensation for health and moral damages. These measures come too late for six children who died from the infection.

Experts point out that given the poor state of health care infrastructure in Kazakhstan, a disaster of the Shymkent scale could happen in any city and at any time. Many hospitals lack qualified medical workers and use obsolete equipment. Paradoxically, the decline in medical standards takes place at a time when the allocation of funds from the state budget is steadily increasing. It is an open secret to everyone that every year huge amounts of money allocated for regional health care programs are squandered away without trace.

Among other reasons is the high unemployment rate and poverty in densely populated South Kazakhstan, which exceeds the national average level. South Kazakhstan is notorious for abnormally high child mortality rates. Investigations into the

infection case in Shymkent revealed that some blood centers provided hospitals with blood donated by unemployed people and Uzbek migrant workers for 100 tenghe. Rampant corruption in medical institutions leave a loophole for poorly trained doctors who work their way to clinics in the big cities through bribes. Health minister Dernovoy disclosed his plans to purge unqualified medical workers from hospitals. But it will definitely take years to remedy the situation in the health care system.

Shymkent came into the limelight because public outcry was strong enough to reach the president's office. But in other places, the state of health protection is no better. A press release issued by the health ministry on October 1 cites the official registration of 6,943 HIV infected people and 426 people with AIDS. According to the ministry, 369 people died from the disease. Qaraghandy region, with 1,722 cases of HIV infection, holds the first place and is followed by Almaty and Pavlodar regions. The health ministry admits that this year the number of HIV-infected persons increased by a factor of 1.9 compared to last year. Alarmingly, health ministry officials list 86 children under the age of 14 among the HIV-infected.

Some experts attribute the spreading HIV cases to the equally threatening scale of drug addiction. The Deputy Chairman of the committee for struggle against drug trafficking at the Ministry of Interior, Galym Mustafin, said that in seven months, his office seized 114 kilos of heroin and 13 tons of other drugs, but in the same period 99 drug users died as a result of overdoses. The number of registered drug abusers exceeds 54,000.

In pursuit of macroeconomic achievements, Kazakhstan's government has neglected the social areas, and above all, health care for many years. The eruption of the HIV scandal in Shymkent awakened the authorities to the dangers of that lopsided development. It is unlikely that Kazakhstan's health care system will be placed on a sound footing so soon without a radical reform and support from the World Health Organization and UN institutions.

NEWS DIGEST

TWO MILITANTS ELIMINATED IN DAGESTAN

18 October

Two militants have been eliminated in Dagestan's Navolaksky district, a police spokesman told Interfax. The militants were killed after a three-member criminal armed group clashed with an Interior Ministry reconnaissance squad. The third militant fled into a wooded area. He is being sought by police, the spokesman said. (Interfax-South)

PLANE CRASHES IN UZBEKISTAN, 15 PEOPLE KILLED

19 October

On October 19, an An-2 plane crashed in Uzbekistan, killing 15 people, a REGNUM correspondent is told at Uzbekistan's Emergency Ministry. "At 07:30 a.m. on October 19, an An-2 plane belonging to Uzbekiston Havo Yullari Airlines crashed in Tashkent Region," they said at the ministry. The plane was on a training flight with troops of Uzbekistan's Defense Ministry onboard. According to preliminary reports by the emergency ministry, the crew lost control over the aircraft because of bad weather conditions, landed roughly outside the airdrome territory, which resulted in destruction of the plane and killing of 15 people onboard, 2 crew members and 13 troops.

To investigate circumstances and causes of the crash, a governmental group is established of the National Security, Defense Ministry, Interior Ministry and Prosecutor General's Office officials. The group is instructed to provide for making the people aware of results of the investigation. Families of the crash victims are rendered all possible assistance. (Regnum)

UNDP EXPERT: KYRGYZ MAILUU-SUU IS BEING POLLUTED BY GERMAN WASTE

19 October

"I do not know how true statements are that the Kyrgyz city of Mailuu-Suu is one of the ten most polluted places in the world, as I have no idea of basing on what criteria the Blacksmith Institute carried out its comparison," United Nations Development Program national expert Talaybek Makeev. The expert recognizes there are serious environmental problems in

Mailuu-Suu: "There is a major storage facility for radioactive waste from uranium processing there; by the way, the waste there is not only local, but also brought from Germany." According to Talaybek Makeev, there is a danger of wash-out of the waste into Mailuu-Suu River that runs in the Uzbek section of Ferghana Valley. The expert noted that "if anything pushes the radioactive waste into the river, Mailuu-Suu will bring them right up to Uzbekistan." "Fortunately, Uzbekistan is ready for such developments; international institutions carried out events to improve coordination between Kyrgyz and Uzbek authorities and emergency agencies," he explained. According to the expert, the Uzbek authorities have taken necessary measures: if dangerous agents get into water, the polluted water will go to sedimentation tanks through the irrigative network constructed by Uzbekistan. The radioactive waste storage facility is under close watch of international and local experts. "Now, projects financed by the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development are being implemented at the facility. Using money of international donors, works on strengthening cover of the storage facility and preventing from torrents are being carried out," Talaybek Makeev is quoted as saying. Population of Mailuu-Suu, which is called among the ten most polluted places in the world by Blacksmith Institute, is now not more than 15,000. (Regnum)

REPORT ON NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT WILL BE DISCUSSED AT THE NATO PA AUTUMN SESSION

20 October

A report on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will be submitted for discussion at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's autumn session, says the head of the Azeri delegation to the NATO PA Ziyat Askerov. A source from the Azerbaijani Parliament reports Askerov to say that the document is almost ready. Not everything is satisfactory in it though: for example, the report says that "15% of Azerbaijan's territories are occupied and that there are 600,000-700,000 refugees and internally displaced persons." That's why the

Azerbaijani side has protested against this point and has offered its amendments. "We have also provided them with documents proving that Nagorno-Karabakh is Azerbaijan's historical land and that Armenians were just resettled there." The draft of the report was discussed with the chairman of the Sub-Committee on Future Security and Defense of the NATO PA Defense and Security Committee Vahid Erdem during his visit to Baku. (Regnum)

UNREST AT TENGIZ OIL FIELD PROBED IN KAZAKHSTAN

22 October

Two criminal probes have been launched into Friday's unrest at the Tengiz oil field in the Atyrau region of western Kazakhstan on charges of hooliganism and premeditated destruction of property. "Some of the suspected organizers have been detained. We must arrest all perpetrators, uncover the cause of the unrest and carry out a swift, exhaustive and unbiased investigation," Atyrau Regional Prosecutor Rakhimbek Mamyrbayev told Interfax on Saturday. A fight erupted on Friday between more than 300 workers of the Senimdi Kurylys sub-contractor firm, all of them Kazakh citizens, and over 100 citizens of Turkey. One hundred and fifteen Turkish workers asked for medical attention and two of them were hospitalized. None of the Kazakh workers suffered serious injuries. Three cars and three makeshift barracks were overturned. It was not the first massive fight between Turkish and Kazakh workers at Tengiz. About 150 Kazakh and Turkish workers got to blows at Tengiz in spring 2005. Three sustained injuries. Over 30 workers were dismissed after the incident. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

RUSSIA NOT PLANNING TO RESUME FLIGHTS TO GEORGIA - LAVROV

23 October

Russia is not planning to resume flights to or from Georgia, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said. "The answer is simple: we are not planning to do this," Lavrov said in response to a question at a meeting with European business figures in Moscow on Monday. (Interfax)

GEORGIA ATTEMPTS TO CREATE ALTERNATIVE S. OSSETIAN GOVT - KOKOITY

24 October

The Georgian leadership has launched a campaign of repression against Ossetians resident in Georgia in order to force them to establish an alternative South Ossetian government, South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoity claimed. "The head of the Ossetian

diaspora in Georgia Tengiz Gagloyev was detained in Tbilisi today. He is currently in the Georgian State Security Ministry, where he is being persuaded to stage alternative elections for the position of South Ossetian president," Kokoity told Interfax on Tuesday. "The Georgian leadership has begun repressing Ossetians in order to make them create a pro-Georgian puppet government. It is planned that former South Ossetian Prime Minister Dmitry Sanakoyev will be proposed as a presidential candidate," he said. (Interfax)

ABKHAZIA TO RESUME TALKS ONLY IF GEORGIA WITHDRAWS FROM KODORI - BAGAPSH

25 October

Talks on the settlement of the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict may only resume if Tbilisi returns to the 1994 Moscow agreement, Abkhaz President Sergei Bagapsh said at a news conference in Sukhumi on Wednesday. "We'll get back to the talks after Georgia implements the Security Council's resolution and removes armed formations and various governments from the upper part of the Kodori Gorge," Bagapsh said. "Abkhazia did not withdraw from the negotiations by violating the Moscow agreement. Georgia herself quit the process," he said. "If the UN secretary general's group of friends for Georgia decides to maintain contacts with the so-called Abkhaz government in exile - this is their right. But then they will visit Abkhazia only as private individuals or tourists, not as diplomats," Bagapsh said. (Interfax)

GEORGIA PREPARING TO USE FORCE IN ABKHAZIA, S. OSSETIA - IVANOV

26 October

The Georgian leadership is inclined to use force in resolving conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russian Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said. "Judging by all appearances - we are sensing and seeing them - the Georgian leadership is inclined to resolve the conflict by force, and this would naturally lead to unpredictable consequences for the residents of these very small ethnic groups living on Georgian territory," Ivanov said at a joint news briefing with NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. (Interfax)

POLICE CONTROLS SITUATION IN KYRGYZSTAN'S OSH

27 October

The situation in the city of Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan is stable and under the control of Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies. Members of two local public organizations clashed in Osh's central square on

Thursday. Local media reported on Friday that some 50 members of the 'Protection of Legality' public organization planned a protest action on October 26 in the central square of the city demanding "a reshuffling at the offices of regional authorities." However, members of the 'March People's Revolution' public organization drove the protesters out of the square. Some people sustained injuries in the clash, the media reported. (Interfax)

DEPORTATION OF UZBEK BY RUSSIA IS CRITICIZED

27 October

Russia has deported an Uzbek man to his home country despite a last-minute order by the European Court of Human Rights that the deportation be stayed pending a review. Rustam Muminov was sent back to Uzbekistan on Tuesday evening, about 20 minutes after the court, whose decisions are legally binding on Russia, issued an injunction to stop the deportation. "Our greatest concern is for Muminov's protection from torture or other ill treatment," said Holly Cartner, Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "Russia must take immediate steps to reverse its action of placing Muminov in harm's way." Muminov was detained on Oct. 17 at the offices of a migrants' rights group in Moscow. He is wanted in Uzbekistan on charges of membership in Hizb ut-Tahrir, an Islamic organization that is banned in the Central Asian republic. Uzbekistan has a documented history of torturing prisoners, according to human rights organizations. In August, Russian authorities halted the deportation of 13 Uzbeks after the European Court intervened. The court, located in Strasbourg, France, enforces the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, drawn up by the Council of Europe, an international body founded after World War II to defend human rights, parliamentary democracy and the rule of law.

Russia ratified the convention in 1998, agreeing to accept the court's decisions as binding. It is unusual for Russia to openly flout court rulings, and it was unclear whether officials here were aware of the ruling in sufficient time to stop the deportation. "The very fact that the European Court urgently issued an interim measure in Muminov's case indicates just how serious his claim to harm is," Cartner said. "It's astounding that Russian authorities could have permitted this deportation to go forward." Russia currently holds the rotating chair of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers. Human Rights Watch said the deportation also appeared to violate Russian law because it took place before Muminov had a chance to appeal the deportation order. A hearing was scheduled to be heard in Moscow on Thursday. Muminov was first detained

in Lipetsk, about 250 miles southeast of Moscow, in February. The Russian prosecutor general's office declined to press Uzbekistan's extradition request, but local officials detained Muminov again after his release in September, this time on a charge that he lacked a residence permit. (Washington Post)

TURKMENISTAN MARKS 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF INDEPENDENCE

27 October

Turkmenistan marked the 15th independence anniversary with a military parade and a theatric performance on the main square of Ashgabat on Friday. President and Supreme Commander Gen. Saparmurat Niyazov inspected the parade, a source at the governmental press service said. Aircraft, armored personnel carriers, anti-aircraft missile systems, tanks and Akhaltekin horses took part in the parade, which was followed by a performance of artists from five regions of Turkmenistan. A new Ashgabat canal, the Turkmen Fairy Tale World theme park and a ropeway were opened on the occasion. Five regional theatres moved into new buildings, and over 20 apartment houses were commissioned. "Turkmenistan may join the number of developed countries," Niyazov said in a Thursday report on results of the 15-year development period. "Turkmenistan has about 7 million residents and about \$8,000 worth of national products per capita. Since 2000 the annual GDP growth amounted to 20% or more. Foreign trade has reached \$10 billion. We import \$3-4 billion worth of products, and export \$7 billion worth." Horse races and music performances will take place around the country, and 30-minute fireworks will climax the celebrations. (Itar-Tass)

KAZAKHSTAN SWITCHING TO LATIN ALPHABET

30 October

Kazakhstan will develop its national language and switch from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet. Proposals to open English language centers and advanced language studies at secondary schools shall be submitted to the government by December 15, in line with a resolution adopted at the Friday meeting of the government chaired by Prime Minister Danial Akhmetov. "The government discussed support to Russian and Slavic associations and the cultural centers of other ethnic groups in studying the state language," the governmental press service said. A governmental commission will analyze the switch to the Latin alphabet in Turkey, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan and submit proposals by March 15. (Interfax)

CSTO SECRETARY-GENERAL VISITS UZBEKISTAN

30 October

Nikolai Bordyuzha, the secretary-general of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), is expected in Tashkent today for talks with Foreign Minister Vladimir Norov, Defense Minister Ruslan Mirzaev, and other Uzbek officials. Russia's Interfax-AVN military news agency says Bordyuzha will discuss preparations for upcoming CSTO meetings in Belarus. Talks will also focus on the security situation in Central Asia. Uzbekistan resumed its membership in the CSTO on the sidelines of a CIS summit in August. It left the organization in 1999 as part of what observers then described as efforts to redirect its foreign policy toward the West. Its readmission into the military alliance coincided with a cooling of its relations with Europe and the United States following last year's military crackdown in Andijon. Besides Uzbekistan and Russia, the CSTO is composed of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. (RFE/RL)

HYUNDAI: TALKS WITH UZBEKISTAN COLLAPSE

30 October

Hyundai Motor Co. said Monday talks with the Uzbekistan government to buy state-owned UZ-Daewoo Motors have collapsed over differences on the acquisition price. The talks "totally broke down," said Hyundai Motor spokesman Jake Jang, citing a disagreement over the purchase price. He had no other details. Since early this year, Hyundai Motor, the world's sixth-largest automaker, had been in talks with the Uzbekistan government to purchase the auto plant, formerly owned by South Korea's now-defunct Daewoo Group. With a production capacity of 200,000 vehicles a year, the Uzbekistan plant, which began operations in August 1996 in the eastern part of the Central Asian country, currently assembles cars based on kits supplied by GM Daewoo Auto & Technology Co., the South Korean unit of General Motors Corp. Hyundai Motor's acquisition plan was aimed at securing a bridgehead in emerging auto markets like Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Hyundai, which is pursuing an aggressive global expansion, already has factories in China, India, Turkey, the United States and plans one in the Czech Republic. (AP)

THEME PARK OPENS IN TURKMENISTAN

30 October

A theme park designed by Turkmenistan's eccentric dictator as a national version of Disneyland has opened in the ex-Soviet nation's capital. Visitors are

greeted by characters of Turkmen folklore, some of which resemble Western magic creatures. Khudoiberdy repels an attack of evil spirits, and obese Bovendjik swallows everyone he sees.

The theme park's opening was part of lavish celebrations of Turkmenistan's 15th independence anniversary that followed the 1991 Soviet collapse. President Saparmurat Niyazov, Turkmenistan's former Communist boss, has ruled for 20 years with an iron fist, eliminating opposition and creating an elaborate cult of personality.

He has ordered everyone to call him the Great Turkmenbashi, or Father of All Turkmen. He penned several poetry books and the Rukhnama, a code of moral guidelines in which world history is centered on Turkmenistan.

In recent years, Niyazov has tapped the country's vast energy wealth for outlandish projects — a huge, man-made lake in the Kara Kum desert, a vast cypress forest to change the desert climate, a ski resort and a 130-foot pyramid.

Visitors are greeted by characters of Turkmen folklore, some of which resemble Western magic creatures. Khudoiberdy repels an attack of evil spirits, and obese Bovendjik swallows everyone he sees. The theme park's opening was part of lavish celebrations of Turkmenistan's 15th independence anniversary that followed the 1991 Soviet collapse. President Saparmurat Niyazov, Turkmenistan's former Communist boss, has ruled for 20 years with an iron fist, eliminating opposition and creating an elaborate cult of personality. He has ordered everyone to call him the Great Turkmenbashi, or Father of All Turkmen. He penned several poetry books and the Rukhnama, a code of moral guidelines in which world history is centered on Turkmenistan. In recent years, Niyazov has tapped the country's vast energy wealth for outlandish projects — a huge, man-made lake in the Kara Kum desert, a vast cypress forest to change the desert climate, a ski resort and a 130-foot pyramid. (AP)

RELATIVES OF ARMENIAN PARLIAMENT SHOOTING VICTIMS AGAIN ALLEGE COVER- UP

30 October

On the eighth anniversary of the October 27, 1999 parliament massacre, relatives of the eight senior officials killed again accused the Armenian leadership of failing to identify and apprehend the masterminds behind the shootings, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. The victims included parliament speaker Karen Demirchian and his two deputies, and Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsian. The five gunmen headed by former journalist Nairi Hunanian were tried and

sentenced in December 2003 to life imprisonment. Demirchian's son Stepan, who is chairman of the opposition People's Party of Armenia, told journalists on October 27 that "the authorities have done everything not to establish the truth and to cover up the crime." Sargsian's brother Aram similarly alleged that the authorities have done "everything not to solve the crime." (RFE/RL)

KAZAKHSTAN DESERVES BORAT'S JOKES, SAYS POLITICIAN

31 October

British comedian Sacha Baron Cohen would have never chosen Kazakhstan for his jokes if the country was free of corruption and human rights abuses, a leading opposition politician said on Tuesday. Cohen has angered the Kazakh government with the portrayal of his fictional Kazakh television reporter Borat and his misogynistic, racist and anti-Semitic views. Cohen's jokes have become a public relations headache for Kazakhstan as the former Soviet country seeks to position itself as a modern nation of well-educated professionals and a major non-OPEC oil exporter.

But Galymzhan Zhakiyanov, a Kazakh opposition leader, said it was only natural that Cohen should ridicule his country. But Galymzhan Zhakiyanov, a Kazakh opposition leader, said it was only natural that Cohen should ridicule his country. "Instead of fighting Borat we should look at other circumstances that have harmed our country's image," he told the zonakz.net liberal news Web site. "If human rights and freedoms were not being violated, if Kazakhstan did not become famous for its corruption scandals around the world, then Sacha Cohen would've chosen some other country for his jokes." Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev has been criticized by opponents for cracking down on civil liberties, freedom of speech and not doing enough to fight corruption in his oil-rich country. (Reuters)

'TOURISM ALONG SILK ROAD' FAIR HELD IN UZBEKISTAN

31 October

The 12th International Tourism Fair 'Tourism Along Silk Road', which brought together about 120 firms and agencies from over 20 countries wrapped up in Uzbekistani capital of Tashkent. Representative of Azerbaijan Ministry of Culture and Tourism Sabina Karimova attended the event. Printed advertising materials and stands reflecting Azerbaijani picturesque surroundings were demonstrated at the fair (Azertag)

KYRGYZ OPPOSITION AGREE TO HOLD TALKS WITH PRESIDENT

31 October

Leaders of the Kyrgyzstan opposition have given consent to hold talks with the republic's president Kurmanbek Bakiyev, an activist of the political movement For Reforms Melis Eshimkanov told Itar-Tass on Tuesday. "We'll go in full strength," he said. The movement unites the leaders of the Kyrgyz opposition. On Monday, speaking in parliament Bakiyev offered a dialogue to the opposition and appointed the meeting date for Tuesday. Previous attempts of the power and opposition to reach agreement ended in failure and each side put the blame on the other. The talks between the president and opposition will be held against the background of a protest rally of the opposition in downtown Bishkek scheduled for November 2. The movement For Reforms has promised to make the action indefinite and demand Bakiyev's resignation if Bakiyev fails to meet a number of demands, including the formation of the "national trust" government and launch the country's constitutional reform. (Itar-Tass)

BOMB KILLS NATO SOLDIERS IN AFGHANISTAN

31 October

Three NATO soldiers were killed when their patrol ran into a roadside bomb in Afghanistan's eastern province of Nuristan on Tuesday, military officials said, as violence surged ahead of the first winter snowfalls. A fourth soldier was wounded in the blast, a NATO spokesman said. The nationality of the soldiers was withheld, but U.S. troops form the bulk of NATO force deployed in the remote, mountainous province. A Taliban-led insurgency has intensified this year, surprising NATO generals who took over command of foreign forces in Afghanistan from the United States, with more 3,100 people killed in the past 10 months. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the blast in Nuristan, where loyalists of a militant leader and former prime minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar are also active. In a separate incident, two NATO soldiers were wounded when a suicide bomber blew himself up near the soldiers' convoy in Ghazni province to the southwest of Kabul, a spokesman for the organization said. One Afghan policeman along with the bomber died in the attack, a provincial official said. NATO has reported high numbers of Taliban casualties in a series of clashes across the south and east, as fighting ramped up during mild autumnal weather. On Monday, NATO said its forces killed 75 insurgents in a clash in the southern province of Zabul and in an air strike in neighboring Kandahar. One NATO soldier was killed in Zabul. A Taliban spokesman, Qari Mohammad

Yousuf, however, put militant losses at only a handful, and said most of the people killed were Afghan villagers. This year's violence is the worst experienced since U.S.-led coalition troops overthrew the Taliban government in 2001, and hundreds of civilians, aid workers, Afghan troops have been among the casualties. Over 150 foreign troops have been killed. NATO has some 31,000 troops under its command in Afghanistan, the biggest ground operation by the alliance in its history. (Reuters)

SOURCE SAYS UZBEK GOVERNMENT WILL TAKE OVER MINING JOINT VENTURE

1 November

The Uzbek government may take control of Zarafshan-Newmont, a recently bankrupted gold-mining joint venture that was previously half-owned by U.S. company Newmont Mining, Reuters reported on October 31, citing an unidentified source involved in the proceedings. According to the source, the government will either sell Newmont's stake to a local investor or make the company 100 percent state-owned. Newmont pulled out of Uzbekistan after an Uzbek court declared the joint venture bankrupt in light of a \$49 million claim for back taxes. Britain's Oxus Gold, which also owns a joint venture in Uzbekistan, recently received a \$224 million claim for back taxes. (RFE/RL)

CHECHEN FORUM OPENS IN GROZNY

1 November

The first congress of the Assembly of Peoples of Chechnya opened in Grozny on October 31, Russian media reported. Addressing the approximately 300 delegates, who included representatives of other North Caucasus republics, pro-Moscow administration

head Alu Alkhanov stressed Chechnya's economic achievements over the past two years, adding that the situation in

the North Caucasus as a whole is no longer

"complicated." Chechen Prime Minister Ramzan

Kadyrov did not attend the congress as he was

summoned urgently to Moscow, according to

"Nezavisimaya gazeta" on November 1. Dukvakha

Abdurakhmanov, speaker of the lower chamber of the

Chechen parliament, told RIA Novosti before the

congress opened that participants would not propose

Kadyrov's candidacy to replace Alkhanov as republic

head, as many observers had anticipated. At the same

time, he added that "in the hearts of the population,

Kadyrov is already" republic head. (RFE/RL)

PUTIN, SAAKASHVILI COULD MEET DURING CIS SUMMIT IN MINSK - GEORGIAN MINISTER

1 November

The Russian and Georgian presidents could meet

during a conference of the CIS heads of state in

Minsk, Georgian Foreign Minister Gela Bezhuashvili

has said. "One of the purposes of my visit to Moscow

is to discuss the possibility of a bilateral meeting at the

highest level. Such contacts are possible during a

conference of the CIS heads of state in Minsk,"

Bezhuashvili said. He said he did not meet with the

Russian president during his current visit to Moscow

and that such a meeting "was not planned."

Bezhuashvili reiterated that he did not see

insurmountable obstacles in relations between

Moscow and Tbilisi. "It is necessary to display a desire

and political will. I am not inclined to view things

pessimistically," he said. (Interfax)

