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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.

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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.

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NATO DEEPENS ITS PARTNERSHIP WITH CENTRAL ASIA

Roger N McDermott

NATO Secretary-General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, visited Central Asia October 18-21 with the express aim of further strengthening the Alliance's partnership with the region. Accompanied by Ambassador Robert Simmons, NATO's recently appointed Special Representative for Central Asia and the Caucasus, he discussed the War on Terror, Afghanistan and cooperation in defense reform with each of the five heads of state in Central Asia, confirming the high priority NATO attaches to deepening its partnership with these countries. His high profile tour indicates advances in building on the consensus achieved at NATO summit in Istanbul in June on moving forward, though the timescale and scope may be slower than some would like.

BACKGROUND: Some progress was made on the diplomatic front, amidst the predictable accolades heaped on each state for their cooperation in the War on Terror. Uzbekistan has proven strategically important and remains so, given its proximity to Afghanistan where NATO's has its peacekeeping role. However, many human rights groups have criticized western governments for their close military and security cooperation with Tashkent, raising potential problems in plotting a stable long-term course between NATO and Uzbekistan. Scheffer was unequivocal in his expression of support for the regime's stance and the future it has as a key partner for the alliance within the region: "The human rights situation in Uzbekistan will not anyhow hinder cooperation between NATO and Uzbekistan," he observed, noting the priority of seeking a long-term agreement on transit rights for the Alliance through the country into Afghanistan and continuing to cooperate in areas of mutual interest.

Kazakhstan was praised for its participation in Iraq, sending and maintaining a small contingent of its peacekeeping battalion (KAZBAT) despite the worsening of the security environment within Iraq and other nations choosing to withdraw their forces. Kazakhstan would like western assistance in expanding KAZBAT into a brigade, as well as furthering its own military reforms with special emphasis on border troops and developing its mobile forces. Scheffer highlighted how far Kazakhstan has gone in seeking closer cooperation with NATO, and acknowledged that the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programs must be expanding to include more joint exercises with Kazakhstan and that an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) should be drawn up and implemented. Scheffer reportedly told Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev that NATO is seeking to expand its cooperation with Kazakhstan beyond PfP, and wants to engage in constant dialogue since NATO values the benefits

of dialogue with Astana on the political and economic problems confronting the region.

Scheffer was similarly pleased by his reception in Bishkek, being thanked by Kyrgyz parliamentarians for bringing the region to the attention of the international community, and dispelling the stereotype of Central Asia as a remote region. Altay Borubayev, the Speaker of the Kyrgyz Assembly of People's Representatives specifically requested NATO's help in re-equipping the army and supplying weapons.

Tajikistan has led the way by signing an historic transit agreement with NATO to support ISAF forces deployed in Afghanistan. After meeting with Tajik President Rakhmonov, Scheffer hoped that similar agreements may be reached with other Central Asian states, in line with NATO's search for additional transit routes for its forces in addition to Termez in Uzbekistan.

A more unexpected source of success emerged during talks with Turkmenistan's President Niyazov. During extensive discussions of the challenges facing the region and stabilizing Afghanistan, tentative steps were initiated towards reaching a transit agreement with Turkmenistan; NATO experts and counterparts in Ashgabat will now begin working on the details of such an agreement. If successful, it would represent a marked step towards offering NATO practical support for its operations in Afghanistan.

IMPLICATIONS: The tour was publicized by NATO as a diplomatic success, successfully clarifying certain issues, such as Uzbekistan's troubled relationship with western democracies, and reaching a landmark agreement with Tajikistan on transit into Afghanistan. It equally served to solidify the growing links the Alliance is fostering with these former Soviet Republics, building on the political rhetoric at its the Istanbul summit. Practical measures have been taken to

deepen NATO's partnership with Central Asia, including appointing a Special Representative on the region and plans to send liaison officers to Central Asia and open NATO training centers. However, familiar with experiencing raised hopes, the Central Asian capitals now look for real practical evidence that this will affect their security environment and promote their own internal defense reform programs. PfP has proven a useful engagement tool, though it has also been limited in its scope to supply the necessary assistance to each country individually, since the programs are generic and therefore not tailored to suit specific needs of any one country. The needs of the Central Asian militaries are diverse and each country has to be treated separately and in sensitive ways that build trust and offer practical improvements to their armed forces and security structures. Unfortunately, in many of the regional defense ministries, this offer of greater Western involvement are often mistaken for a *carte blanche* supply of weapons and modern equipment. Yet what these post-Soviet structures require most fundamentally is assistance in moving away from their Soviet legacy forces, and enhancing their managerial systems and planning. Only once this has been addressed can other aspects of reform begin in earnest.

CONCLUSIONS: The Central Asian states are cautiously open to NATO's overtures aimed at helping to reform their armed forces; they understand their need to reform but fail to appreciate how best to implement it and look to the Alliance for technical experience and assistance. For NATO, the real challenge is moving forward in the region alongside Russia, examining areas of potential cooperation. Russia's opposition toward NATO's earlier expansion and hostility towards its interests in Central Asia are becoming entrenched. Russian media reported the NATO Secretary-General's tour of Central Asia

in negative language, bordering on scathing denunciation, to skepticism that the Alliance really knows what it is doing within Russia's southern sphere of influence. What is clear, however, in the aftermath of Beslan, is the emergence of greater impetus towards counter-terrorist cooperation between Russia and NATO, which may facilitate the development of a confluence of security interests in the region.

If NATO planners can identify a window of opportunity and capitalize on Russia's long experience of dealing with the region and move forward in a cooperative framework, based on openness and involving Moscow in the process, then there are grounds for optimism. Such an approach will reassure the Central Asian states, reduce regional tension, eschew great power competition and rivalry and bring opportunities for joint confidence building measures: Scheffer's next stop ought to be Moscow. However, the appointment of the Special Representative for Central Asia and the Caucasus may also point to

future trouble for NATO in its dealings with these regions: mistakenly lumping them together in the same generic process and placing them under the scrutiny of one political advisor to the Secretary-General, rather than fostering a more individually constructed approach to each of these countries. It is a potential error of judgment, and one that Moscow will watch carefully in the coming years. Meanwhile, the bilateral agreement between Russia and Tajikistan on amongst other security matters agreeing basing rights to Russia's 201st Motor Rifle Division in Dushanbe, will remind the Alliance that Russia will not leave the region in any hurry.

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GEORGIA: REVOLUTION HAS ENDED, KEY REFORMS STILL AHEAD

Jaba Devdariani

One year after the "Rose Revolution" that brought Mikheil Saakashvili and his allies to power, Georgians start to recover from the extended honeymoon with the new administration. Most of 2004 was devoted to shaping the new format and personnel of the Georgian authorities. Criticisms that surface now in Georgia mainly regard insufficient transparency of administration and continued human rights abuses. The key economic reforms, however, are still pending legislative approval this fall. Hence, the lasting impact of the "Rose Revolution" can only be gauged in late 2005.

BACKGROUND: On November 23, 2003 popular protests, spearheaded by the key opposition parties – New National Movement and United Democrats – forced the ageing

President Eduard Shevardnadze into resignation. Following this “Rose Revolution”, Georgian public voted the triad opposition leaders – Mikheil Saakashvili, Zurab Zhvania and Nino Burjanadze – overwhelmingly into the office. Analysts were suggesting initially, that the degree of hopes that Georgians pinned on the new government was unrealistically high. Responding to his own populist promises and public demands President Saakashvili undertook some drastic actions – such as arrests of the corrupt officials – which are now questioned on the grounds of human rights abuses.

The most visible success of Saakashvili’s government was to restore control over the Adjara Autonomous Republic by forcing its maverick authoritarian leader, Aslan Abashidze, out of office. This success has extended the honeymoon period for Saakashvili, which ended only as his policies fell short of re-capturing breakaway South Ossetia and led to armed clashes in August 2004.

The opposition and civil activists criticize the authorities for insufficient respect for human rights, for an attempt to build the new administration system on personal and partisan loyalty rather than merit-based competition, and in capping the freedom of media.

IMPLICATIONS: The criticisms of the Saakashvili administration have some grounds, but a superficial look is insufficient for making a judgment. The first year of the new government highlighted some key weaknesses of the Georgian political system which were obscured by the overwhelming impotence of Shevardnadze’s administration. A year after the Rose Revolution, it is clear that many institutions of the Georgian society, not only its government, need systemic overhaul.

Saakashvili consolidated and centralized executive power. A bill was passed to grant the President the right to disband the parliament in specific cases, which according to some tilted the balance of power towards the legislature. Still, the Parliament got the rights to vote out the Cabinet, which was not possible under the previous system. Saakashvili also put in place a full-fledged cabinet of ministers capable of policy-setting led by the influential Prime Minister – Zurab Zhvania.

Overwhelming support to his party granted the National Movement-Democrats coalition a constitutional majority at the Parliament. As National Movement-Democrats initially drew on a protest voters, many opposition parties lost their base of support. This has limited the partisan pluralism. Nonetheless, by fall 2004 opposition activism has resurfaced. Only the locus has shifted from still weak political parties to the civic movements, NGOs and professional unions. The debate over the draft Tax Code and the budget in October 2004 was spearheaded by the influential heads of parliamentary committees from the ruling party. This showed that the parliamentary majority is not necessarily a rubber stamp to government policies and that a healthy debate is possible. Further crystallization of dissenting opinions is likely to lead to reconstruction of the opposition political spectrum in the coming year.

The private media, which built its popularity on slamming the resented Shevardnadze administration, chose to gloss over criticisms of the new government responding to the dominating public opinion. Georgian media boomed on the eve of November 2003 elections, as the financial tycoons invested heavily in the media, jockeying for influence. After the Rose Revolution, some of the media tycoons no

longer considered this investment profitable and pulled the plug on private newspapers and TVs. The reputation of others, such as Erosi Kitsmarishvili of the influential Rustavi 2 station, was damaged due to very close links with the new authorities and political aspirations. This only highlighted how weak the financial base of the private Georgian media was and how extensively it was linked to the partisan groups of interest. New media regulations and legislation are needed to rectify the problem. The new liberal legislation on freedom of speech, which de-criminalized libel, was one step in supporting the freedom of media. A proposed bill on public broadcasting could represent yet another step.

The heaviest criticism relates to continued human rights abuses and cases of torture by police and in preliminary detention facilities. The Minister of Interior and Prosecutor-General were forced to act on mounting criticism on October 18 as they announced creation of 47 independent teams under the Ombudsman's Office, authorized to check all police detention premises at all times to record and prevent the cases of police brutality. The Prosecutor-General also announced that two high-ranking policemen were dismissed for malpractice and that criminal charges were brought against them. Apparently, the Human Rights groups maintain the clout to challenge the top levels of authority and demanding policy adjustments.

Perhaps the biggest institutional failure of the new authorities lies in apparent de-facto restrictions on the independence of the judiciary. Observers noted that judges exercise political self-censorship in sensitive cases and lean towards the decisions they think are endorsed by the authorities. President Saakashvili himself repeatedly made statements

that could have been seen as prejudicing the court. As a result, in all of the high-profile corruption cases the courts ordered pre-trial detention of the accused, a measure that is to be applied in very limited cases according to a "strict" interpretation of the Criminal Procedure Code. Human rights activists say that the accused were subjected to pressure, in some cases amounting to torture, to admit guilt and compensate for damages as assessed by the prosecution.

Saakashvili's administration faces daunting problems as the lack of educated and professional cadres in all walks of governance is apparent. It has taken some drastic steps to shake up some of the most stagnant and corrupt institutions – such as the ministry of defense and the traffic police. Nonetheless, critics point out that most appointments at the middle-management level are done based on personal and partisan loyalty. Reform of the civil service is lagging, while merit-based competitions for public positions are still few and far between.

CONCLUSIONS: Despite encouraging signs, the political landscape in Georgia remains in flux. The task for the new Georgian authorities in 2005 is to establish lasting, institutional changes. Analysts say the primary task of the new government is to tame the revolutionary spirit and revert to routine, transparent ways of governance. Saakashvili suggested that with passing the new Tax Code and the Law on Financial Amnesty the revolutionary stage of his government ends and the building stage begins.

Progress will also depend on Saakashvili's ability to act as more of a consensus-builder. His motivational leadership skills are apparent, but disdain for criticism has alienated some of his own allies. In 2005 the government must be able to deliver better thought-through policies,

based on consultation with interested stakeholders. Smooth operation of the government and president's public relations and information services, so far rather neglected, is important for bringing the message out. The new government also needs to cherish the support of Georgia's pro-democratic middle-

class, and invest in expanding its ranks by policies that encourage entrepreneurship, research and education.

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INDEPENDENT ELECTRONIC MEDIA NETWORK IN UZBEKISTAN SET TO CHALLENGE STATE TV IN ELECTION COVERAGE

Frederick Starr

On 11 December 2003 fifty independent TV and radio stations organized the "Association of Electronic Mass Media of Uzbekistan." This September the Association has formed a private TV network consisting of twenty-four stations. This network has now announced that it intends to provide detailed coverage of the forthcoming (26 December) Oliy Majlis elections. Further, it has declared that it will compete hard against the government TV channels in its coverage, seeking to identify and provide details on the ideologies, programs, and concrete actions of all the five competing political parties.

BACKGROUND: Private television in Uzbekistan dates to 1990, when Firdaus Abdukhalikov of Samarkand, a journalist by training, established STV or Samarkand Television. Since the USSR still existed, Abdukhalikov took his proposal directly to Moscow, where it was three times rejected. A chance meeting in May, 1990, at the Samarkand airport with future Uzbek President Islam Karimov (a Samarkand native) led to the issuance of the first license to a private TV channel, STV.

In most respects STV set the stage for the other independent electronic media and for the new national network as well. It is organized as a partnership rather than a joint stock company, and has twelve co-owners. It receives 100% of its income from the sale of advertisements and is considered in law a commercial station.

The director of STV is Bakhodir Sharapov, a very ambitious professional journalist whose recent interviews include US senators Shelby and Brownback. Under Sharipov's leadership STV has gone from two small studios with ageing Soviet equipment to six modern studios

and two radio stations, all with imported equipment. To some extent this success is the result of playing it safe and focusing on entertainment rather than news. Early in its existence STV was criticized for presenting programs on the traditional institutions of neighborhood self-government, the *mahallas*, and on the traditional New Year's celebration, Navruz. In both instances it was faulted for presenting information of a religious character. However, in the fourteen years of its existence STV has suspended transmission for only one day, 19 August 1991, at orders of the local Samarkand KGB.

However, more recently STV, as well as other independent stations, have grown somewhat bolder in their coverage. Talk shows have proven the ideal medium for greater openness. STV now offers five talk shows, all of which are transmitted live without delay, and all of which employ telephone call-in polls to register public opinion on the issues at hand. This was the first such system for registering public opinion in Uzbekistan.

Among recent talk show topics have been the position of women in Uzbek society, which engendered fierce debate. The final telephone tally favored women leaving the home to work by only two votes. Another recent topic (5 November) was the work of NGOs in Uzbekistan. Only a few months earlier George Soros' Open Society Institute had been denied registration for having begun operations before obtaining permission and out of an apartment limited to residential use. Yet at this program representatives of the US-based Eurasia Foundation and other groups made their case for NGOs in Uzbekistan.

On some issues STV's editorial stance has been openly proclaimed. On the one hand, it does not pretend to deal with the issue of terrorism

from a position of neutrality, and seeks instead to engage its journalists in the fight against terrorist groups. On the other hand, it has consistently supported full convertibility of the Uzbek currency and a range of concrete steps to make the Uzbek economy more attractive to foreign investors.

In all of these respects, STV has been at the forefront of the development of private television in Uzbekistan. It is not surprising, therefore, that the founder of STV, Mr. Abdukhalikov, should have been an organizer and now president of the Association of Electronic Mass Media of Uzbekistan, and that that body should now be launching a nationwide private TV network.

IMPLICATIONS: The Association, founded on 11 December 2003, embraces fifty of the ninety TV and radio stations in Uzbekistan. In an effort to create a "civilized" environment in the private mass media, it adopted a code for journalists specifying both their rights and responsibilities. Overall, the Association sees independent media as assuming a more prominent place in the civil society of Uzbekistan.

In September 2004 the Association announced the formation of NTT, the Uzbek acronym for "Non-Governmental TV Network." Its twenty-four participating stations (among them STV) will reach seventeen million people in 70% of the territory of Uzbekistan, and reach into neighboring Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan as well. The director of NTT is Mukhamedjon Sanginov, formerly head of the independent station in Pekabad.

A prominent feature of the new network is its explicit intention of providing full coverage of all elections, and of democratic reforms generally, including political parties, the

activities of the new Olij Majlis (parliament). It intends to organize debates among candidates, and to assure that they are arranged in such a way as to force participants to speak in detail on what they are for and against. "We are deliberately seeking to compete with the government's TV stations," says Abdukhalikov.

Inevitably, such coverage will bring the new network into contact with the Electoral Commission. So far relations with that body have been correct and rather guarded but it is expected that they will sharpen if and when NTT provides more detailed coverage of the work of the Commission. Competition with the government TV is bound to force NTT to peer more closely at the Commission's work than will its official rival. How the Commission reacts to closer coverage will prove a serious test of its openness.

In the coverage of political parties, Abdukhalikov's goal for the new network is to force them to differentiate themselves from the government and from each other. In practice, this will mean defining where they differ from the presidential line, as well as where they agree with it. STV has begun by interviewing regional candidates and asking them to respond to call-in questions from voters. All this provides a test of the parties' readiness to engage in genuine parliamentary life.

As Abdukhalikov puts it, "As journalists we must familiarize society with the problems it faces and with non-governmental means of solving them. We intend to speak boldly and to sharpen the exchange between the new and the old, both now and in the future." Will NTT

align itself with one party or another? Both Abdukhalikov and Sharipov are members of the Fidokorlar ("Self-Sacrifice") Party, the former having been a deputy in parliament since the party's founding in 1998 and the latter being a regional party leader. Both will run for parliament in December. At the same time, it is expected that many, if not most, of the owners of private TV and radio stations, and of the new NTT, will be drawn to the new and well-funded Liberal Democratic Party, as it presents itself as the party of entrepreneurs.

CONCLUSIONS: It is too early to say whether the establishment of a nation-wide private TV network in Uzbekistan represents a step in the direction of openness and public participation in decision-making, or simply more of the same. However, the stated intentions of the new network is to sharpen the political exchange among parties and candidates and to engage the public in this exchange. This gives reason to believe that a new stage has been reached in Uzbekistan. Expect the intentions of the new network to be implemented with all the gradualism and caution that one expects from Uzbek public life. However, the new NTT network appears set to change the country's information culture, with implications also for foreign news outlets. STV already maintains contact with VOA's Uzbek Service and Deutsche Welle. It is likely that NTT will become a major supplier of independent information on that country to the international media.

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POLITICAL PARTIES, REGIONALISM AND THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN KYRGYZSTAN

Aya Telekova

During the presentation of his new book "Thinking of the future with optimism" at the Russian Diplomatic Academy in Moscow on September 13th, Kyrgyzstan's President Askar Akayev said the Georgian Revolution had been initiated by outsiders and constituted a challenge to all Post-Soviet States. He also said Shevardnadze's overthrow motivated him to write the book and that he now felt energized to successfully lead the country for several years. This statement alarmed not only opposition leaders, but also moderate parties in Kyrgyzstan. Putin's initiatives of reform in the political system after the Beslan massacre, and the parliamentary election results in Kazakhstan, to some degree shifted the election process in Kyrgyzstan.

BACKGROUND: Most political parties in Kyrgyzstan identify themselves either as in opposition or as centrists. In the early independence the main opposition parties had been set up by southerners. Absamat Masaliev, Adakhan Madumarov, Omurbek Tekebaev and other southern opponents are affiliated to the different opposition political parties. Until recently the only exception among the opposition figures was northerner Feliks Kulov, leader of the "Ar-Namys" party. Kulov, former Vice-President, Minister of National Security and mayor of Bishkek, is still in jail and recognized as a political prisoner by international human rights organizations. The other northern opposition figures are less known among the public and now engaged in the southern-led opposition bloc. Most centrist parties, on the other hand, were founded by northerners and favored by the President during the previous parliamentary election in 2000. The "Adilet" and "My country" parties are among them. To date, centrist parties along with independent candidates make up the majority of the parliamentary seats, allowing the President to control decision-making process in the Parliament. Many individual

candidates who won parliamentary seats in the South won with the President's support. Thus, Akayev has skillfully moderated frictions between the northerners and southerners by recruiting a pro-presidential elites to top positions and ensuring their loyalty.

One of the foremost opposition figures from the south is former Prime-Minister Kurmanbek Bakiev who resigned after Aksy tragedy in 2002. He was nominated a few months ago as a presidential candidate by the southern radically-inclined opposition. His Soviet and current political background as a top bureaucrat helped him unite southern opponents against Akayev. Bakiev and his family clan are known as one of the richest in the country and belong to a respected tribe in the south. In response to Akayev's Moscow statement announcing his intention to remain in power, Bakiev and his fellow opposition leaders most recently organized a new bloc, the "People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan". It aims to work out a common position over candidates in the upcoming parliamentary elections. The sudden death of Communist leader Masaliev, who led Kyrgyzstan for several years in the Soviet era, also formed an impetus for the bloc. Despite his

commitment to communist values, Masaliev remained a key ideologist among the southern elite, as most of them systematically tended to follow his advices. When Bakiev was officially announced as a presidential candidate, he was blessed by Masaliev. According to ongoing polls by the opposition newspaper "Moya stolitsa", Bakiev ranks in second place, he nonetheless, lacks charisma and eloquence. His Soviet experience of management as a plant director do not serve as credentials to think he would bring the market economy to a new level. But since the southern population is the largest in the country, he might count on support of southerners, including ethnic Uzbeks. The other presidential candidate from the south is 39 year-old Adakhan Madumarov, a very articulate speaker, who though serving in Parliament for a second term is political loner. His ambition prevented him from joining either Bakiev's or Kulov's opposition blocks. By now, the most formidable challenger to the incumbent Akayev is fellow northerner Kulov, who belongs to a noble tribe in the north. Surveys find Kulov holding the first place among presidential candidates. A former military commander, Kulov served under Akayev but is now in jail, considered a political prisoner. He has proper tribal credentials, and known as a moderate. If Kulov is elected president, he would not only enhance economic growth, increase judiciary independence, but also strengthen the power of the Interior and National Security Ministries. Like Putin, Kulov would inevitably be surrounded by military bureaucrats and the intelligence community, who might gradually narrow the activity of independent mass media and civil society groups.

IMPLICATIONS: As the upcoming parliamentary election approaches, the political

divide between opposition and centrist parties is currently becoming clear. Some mainly serve to back the president, like "Adilet" which is led, at least in name, by outstanding writer Chingiz Aitmatov. Aitmatov's election as a party leader was not accidental. First, Aitmatov publicly suggested Akayev as the first president of Kyrgyzstan. Second, Aitmatov and Akaev's wife have common roots in Talas region, one of the northern provinces. In recent local elections, the party scored several victories. The party's day-to-day leader is First Deputy Prime Minister Kybanychbek Jumaliev, a family loyalist to Akayev who hails from the South. Another Deputy Prime Minister, Djoomart Otorbaev, runs the centrist "My Country" party. Otorbaev is a westernized politician, advocating liberal economics and is surrounded by liberals from the business and academic communities. The party no longer appears favored by the Government. It came in third in the local elections of October 10, after the pro-presidential parties "Alga Kyrgyzstan!" and "Adilet". Despite Otorbaev's corporate style and very insightful strategic outlook for Kyrgyzstan, he and his party compose a minority within the ruling elite. Therefore, "My country" cautiously designs its long-term political agenda and takes wait-and-see position prior to the national elections. It is hampered by the defection of Foreign Minister Muratbek Imanaliev, who went on to form a party of his own.

The pro-presidential party "Alga Kyrgyzstan!" is intensifying its election campaigning across the country, supported by the President's daughter Bermet Akayeva. The party's campaign is reminiscent of election campaigning by the Communist Party during the Soviet era. For example, having used vast administrative resources "Alga Kyrgyzstan!"

came out on top in local elections with twelve seats. Yet, unlike Kazakhstan's President's daughter Dariga Nazarbaeva, Bermet is less politically mature and lacks necessary experience in public policy. The prospect of Bermet being groomed as a political leader to succeed her father is perilous, as the family's engagement lucrative economic activities along with the increasing impoverishment of the population is likely to bring about resistance throughout the country.

CONCLUSIONS: The struggle for political power is characterized first and foremost by an overshadowing contest between the country's two regions, the north and the south. Secondly, there is an equally significant confrontation

between the ruling family clan itself and an opposition-inclined elite attempting to take over power. Nevertheless, under the sizable and continuous support of international donors, a stubborn involvement of civil society activists in the electoral process as well as grass-roots support to independent political parties are set to make a considerable impact on the current political landscape in Kyrgyzstan. One major question remains unanswered, though: who will be able to successfully lead Kyrgyzstan and to move it towards full-fledged democracy?

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FIELD REPORTS

KAZAKH SECURITY SERVICES TRUMPET VICTORY OVER “AL-QAIDA MEMBERS”

Marat Yermukanov

The population of Kazakhstan got used to frequent reports of detention of Hizb-ut-Tahrir members in various regions of Kazakhstan. But recent statement of the National Security Committee (KNB) of Kazakhstan beat all recorded crackdowns on terrorist nests ever undertaken in Kazakhstan. In a televised interview the first deputy director of the National Security Committee Vladimir Bozhko disclosed that security services have uprooted a network of the Al-Qaida terrorist organization in Kazakhstan.

According to him the terrorist group included 8 Kazakh and 4 Uzbek nationals, who had been perpetrating subversive activities in Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan under direct orders from two leaders (amirs) of the network, Akhmed Baimurzayev and Zhakshybek Baimurzayev. The latter, according to the National Security Committee, was the resident of Talas region of Kyrgyzstan and played a significant role during the incursions of Batken region in Kyrgyzstan by Islamic militants in 1999 and 2000. Reportedly, Zhakshybek Baimurzayev, who possessed Kazakh, Uzbek and Kyrgyz passports, and belonged to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), directed the activities of the terrorist group in Kazakhstan. Vladimir Bozhko held members of the group responsible

for a “series of terrorist acts in Uzbekistan” carried out this year and noted that Baimurzayev had received a solid training along with Amir Khattab, the Saudi-Chechen commander killed in Chechnia in 2002, and in terrorist training camps of Taliban and Al-Qaida. The whole story became “sensational news”, as phrased by some media sources, as it was the first time that the security services of Kazakhstan reported the detention of Al-Qaida members who were until recently exclusively associated with Afghanistan. Two events that preceded the detention of terrorists, allegedly Al-Qaida members, seem to be significant in this context. Last month four organizations, Al-Qaida among them, were banned by the Supreme Court of Kazakhstan as terrorist organizations. The decision was prompted by an application of the National Security Committee to the Supreme Court. Security services launched a wide-scale undercover operation, the main purpose of which was, as the nature of the current anti-terrorist campaign suggests, to substantiate the allegations about the existence of “extremist forces” in Kazakhstan officially made by the chief of the National Security Committee.

Second, the sensational news of the detention of members of Al-Qaida, an organization hitherto unknown to the Kazakh public, came

in the wake of the October 29 visit of the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to Kazakhstan. In his talks with president Nazarbayev, he thanked Kazakhstan for its anti-terrorist stance on international scene, particularly in Afghanistan and in Iraq. This gesture was taken in Kazakhstan as a signal to deepen the cooperation with the world superpower within the framework of combating international terrorism, which offers Kazakhstan the possibility to get more American military aid to strengthen its own security and polishes its image as an anti-terrorist state committed to democracy. And last, but not least, the National Security Service was reiterating all along that the source of terrorist threat in the region emanates from Uzbekistan (despite Uzbek allegations about the existence of terrorist camps in South Kazakhstan). This point was stressed again by Vladimir Bozhko who said that the arrested members of the terrorist group affiliated with the "Jamaat of Mujahids in Central Asia" Islamic extremist organization founded by militants of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan affiliated with Al-Qaida, directed all its activities against Uzbekistan. Bozhko categorically denied "unsubstantiated accusations" of the existence of terrorist training camps on the territory of Kazakhstan and added that security services of Kazakhstan have handed over 20 detained terrorists to their Kyrgyz and Uzbek counterparts. Almost simultaneously with the arrests of Al-Qaida members, the Prosecutor General's Office of Kazakhstan took a decision to extradite three residents of the South Kazakhstan region, suspected in the involvement in terrorist attacks in Tashkent and Bukhara region, to Uzbekistan. The only official explanation for

the extradition was that the names of the three, brothers Abdunabi and Azamat Kadyrakhunov and Yelmurat Mammatkulov were mentioned at the Supreme Court of Uzbekistan. It seems, the detention of the alleged Al-Qaida terrorists was also a part of an attempt of Kazakh Security Services to show that they are capable of efficiently counteracting the well-organized and internationally operating Al-Qaida organization, a universally recognized and more serious threat than Hizb-ut-Tahrir. It should be recalled that last year, the International Crisis Group warned the governments of Central Asia against banning the Hizb-ut-Tahrir organization, pointing out that declaring this religious organization outlawed could encourage authoritarian regimes in the region to discriminate people on religious grounds and violate human rights, slowing down the pace of political and economic reforms. In this circumstance, Al-Qaida seems to be a convenient trump card for security services to achieve propaganda goals. Nevertheless, this unprecedented and surprisingly easy victory of Kazakh security services over a well organized intricate network linked to Al-Qaida raises certain doubts. According to investigators, members of the terrorist organization did not plan terrorist attacks against Kazakhstan and they got their training in Taliban and Al-Qaida camps abroad. But no country was named in this connection. The National Security Committee announced that terrorists were looting private apartments in Shymkent (South Kazakhstan), acting like common criminals in order to finance their terrorist activities, although they were being funded from abroad. Again, no country or organization was specified.

GEORGIA'S BATTLE WITH CORRUPTION

Kakha Jibladze

Although Mikheil Saakashvili came to power without a battle, the war against corruption is proving bloodier. Just two weeks ago the Georgian public was loudly reminded that, despite growing criticism at home and abroad, the fight was alive and still claiming victories. But critics are claiming that Saakashvili is destroying the fabric of civil society with arrests unsupported by evidence.

In politics perception is just as powerful as fact, and the perception that the new regime is overstepping its authority is threatening to overshadow the progress made over the past year. On October 27 Zurab Tchiaberashvili, the mayor of Tbilisi, called a press conference after receiving a gift from Zurab Adamia, the head of a district in Tbilisi. The conference was aired live on television as Tchiaberashvili accused Adamia of bribery and fired him. Speaking before all the heads of districts, the mayor directed a question to Adamia while brandishing a watch rumored to cost over a thousand dollars. "I am asking you how can a head of a district, with a monthly salary of 150 lari (\$82) present me with this watch, which costs \$1500?" Tchiaberashvili then promised sweeping reform throughout the administrations of the Tbilisi districts before ending the press conference. On air, in front of the mayor, Adamia was not given an opportunity to address the allegation. The mayor did not stay to answer questions, instead merely tossed the watch in Adamia's general direction and left the room.

Theatrics notwithstanding, the conference gave the government a welcome opportunity to prove the need for tough measures against corruption still exists. Almost daily, briefs are published in local media announcing the arrest of some figure, whether a judge in Rustavi charged with taking \$10,000 or police officers taking bribes instead of issuing tickets. A few days before Adamia was fired for giving the mayor a watch, Saakashvili appeared on television, pleading with the Georgian people to help him fight corruption, saying he was just one man among a population of several million. He pledged to raise salaries at Tbilisi's airport, but a few weeks later customs officials at another check point, along the border between Georgia and Azerbaijan, were arrested during a raid by the financial police for taking bribes.

During the first few months after Saakashvili's phenomenal 96% vote victory in January, there were but a few whispers of concern about the new government's heavy-handed tactics against figures widely considered corrupt. The arrests of high-profile businessmen such as Eduard Shevardnadze's son-in-law Gia Jokhtaberidze were met with public support, as was the fact his wife paid the country's budget \$15 million before he was released. According to VOA News, the money was to be used to pay teachers' salaries and pensions.

According to Transparency International, Georgia ranked among the most corrupt countries surveyed for the 2004 report, placing it above neighboring Azerbaijan but worse off

than Russia, Armenia or Turkey. In a press release issued by Transparency on January 29, the organization outlined priorities for the new president in order to fight corruption. Peter Eigen, its chairman is quoted as saying that “the future stability of Georgia is dependent on making the fight against corruption priority number one.”

But over the past few months, an increasing number of political experts and international observers are accusing Saakashvili and his government of operating outside the rule of law and using their tough stance against corruption to mask a program of payback against political opponents. As early as February, reports published on Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s web site quoted Walter Schwimmer, the visiting Council of Europe Secretary General, when he warned the new government during a trip to Georgia on February 18: “The struggle against corruption should not exceed the limits of the law,” he said.

In a widely published open letter to President Saakashvili this October, several prominent civil leaders addressed their concerns, urging the president to rethink policies that undermine

civil liberties. Civil.ge, an Internet journal, interviewed one of the fourteen authors, legal expert and activist Davit Usupashvili, on November 1. Usupashvili, one of the authors of the country’s current constitution, spoke out against the way the government is fighting corruption and commenting on the lack of due process during these arrests, saying that most of the cases are not even fully investigated.

In the case of Adamia, although he was not given the opportunity to voice his side of the story during the press conference, he did speak to journalists afterward, denying the fact that the watch was worth so much money.

Although Usupashvili and other experts are painting a dark picture of the path Saakashvili and his government is taking, he has not lost total confidence. “...the authorities still have the chance to change these processes for the better and restore their image, both inside and outside the country.”

SECURITY MEASURES INCREASE AT AMERICAN UNIVERSITY – CENTRAL ASIA

Dariya Alieva

The beginning of the new academic year at the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) came with new reforms in the university administration and daily life at AUCA. Starting from September 27, 2004, the university administration introduced a series of

security measures to avoid potential terrorist threat to the university community and its assets. As the new security measures were implemented, it ignited a stream of various reactions among faculty, staff and students.

AUCA, based on the American curriculum, was created as the Kyrgyz-American School under the Kyrgyz State National University in 1993, and later was founded as the first Liberal Arts Institution in Central Asian region in 1997. The former US Vice President Al Gore and former first Lady Hillary Clinton attended the official opening ceremonies in 1993 and 1997. With a total enrollment of about 1050 students, AUCA is the Alma Mater of roughly 200 students graduating yearly from Central Asian region and outside. Today, the university is feared to be a possible target for terrorists hiding within Kyrgyzstan.

According to the 23 September memo released by the acting President John Drier, the university administration received serious warnings from the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek about possible terrorist attacks. “[U.S.] Ambassador [Stephen] Young and I agreed that AUCA is a potential target, and it would be prudent for us to take measures to mitigate these risks” noted President Drier. Starting from now on, all students, professors and other members of the university community have to present their identification cards to guards at the entrance. In this context, the Registrar’s Office was also immediately asked to expedite the process of issuing and distributing ID cards for those who don’t have them. Accordingly, a neck strings for carrying university IDs were also distributed throughout the university. The university guests have to register with the guards as well and carry a “ visitor” name tag while in the university.

As a part of the series of security measures, no cars will from now on be allowed to park in front of the university buildings. Delivery vehicles will also be searched for any possible weaponry or explosives to avoid any possible car bombs. The buildings of the university will

be patrolled by specially hired “third party security firm” guards. “Even the name American is irritating for terrorists” says a university guard at the entrance door. Along with procedures being implemented, voluntary training sessions on security, supported by U.S. Embassy in Bishkek, are being held for university staff, faculty and students. At the first security training at AUCA, the Chief Security Officer from the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek talked about precautions over what to do in case of conventional attacks, abductions or a terrorist attack using chemical or biological weapons. Some students thought these measures could create a certain level of paranoia among the university community. Some are pessimistic about the measures per se. “Oh, it does not matter. If terrorists really want to blow this place up, nothing will stop them” says an AUCA graduate.

In the meantime, these new security measures have caused some inconveniences among the students. A student or a faculty member could basically not enter the building in case they forgot their ID card. As a result, numerous cases of students not being able to get to their classes on time were encountered daily at the early stage of this security service functioning. But, according to the guards at the entrance doors, the majority of students understand the importance of the security procedures and react rather submissively. To lessen the level of discomfort at the entrance, additional telephones were installed so that the staff members, faculty and students could reach their offices and get their identification confirmed.

According to an October 15 follow-up memo by President Drier, the President’s Cabinet received “additional credible reports that locally based terrorist cells are planning an attack against American interests in Kyrgyzstan.” As

such, AUCA being the only American University in Central Asia appears to be a possible target. President Drier specifically wanted to “ask all of our [AUCA] foreign nationals (both teachers and students) to be on guard against the possibility of personal abduction.” In the meantime, the Secretary General of NATO, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer also visited AUCA on October 19 right before his scheduled meeting with the President Askar Akaev. At the meeting with the students of AUCA, Scheffer gave a speech emphasizing the

strategic role of Kyrgyzstan in the fight against terrorism and the urgent need to secure the country’s borders from flow of terrorists as well as religious extremists.

Thus, this new series of security measures at AUCA appears to be urgent and important to reduce the risk of any kind of terrorist threat. The latest tragic events in Beslan, Russia also point out that the threat of terrorism is very pervasive and that the security around the university needs to be strengthened.

PRIVATIZATION OF KYRGYZSTAN’S ENERGY SECTOR UNDER HEATED DEBATE

Nazgul Baktybekova

In the Kyrgyz Parliament’s Legislative Assembly, the issue of privatization of state enterprises has been under heated discussion for more than a month. The privatization proposal generated so much controversy that more than a dozen members of the Parliament made an appeal expressing opposition against considering the issue and refused to attend sessions. As some observers say, adoption or rejection of this controversial bill drafted by the Kyrgyz government might lead to the emergence of an unstable environment in the parliament and even to a parliamentary crisis.

The Kyrgyz government is proposing realization of the fourth stage of privatization of energy sector. As the initiators of the privatization policy claim, the energy sector for the last several years has been one of the most expensive sectors of the economy. Within the framework of this policy, “Severelektro” joint

stock company, which is reportedly on the verge of bankruptcy, will be given to concession.

According to Saparbek Balkybekov, the Director of “Severelektro”, in 2003 the company had commercial losses in the amount of 400 million soms. As Balkybekov explained, the enterprise is being given to concession to reduce losses and to attract investment in order to improve its technical resources. In the coming 5-10 years the company needs US\$50-80 million. Neither the company, nor the government have that money, says the Director.

Ravshan Jeenbekov, Head of the State Committee on State Property Management, in an interview to RFE/RL said that the energy sector nowadays is facing enormous problems, which the government is unable to resolve. The debt in the energy sector is nearly 6 billion som. The equipment is old and needs

renovation. The only way out of the situation is privatization of the sector, which would open the way for investment in the amount of 60-100 million US dollars, Ravshan Jeenbekov says.

However, some deputies have been very skeptical and many more deputies have been staunchly opposing the proposal of the government to privatize energy sector. Marat Sultanov, member of the Legislative Assembly, has expressed deep concern saying that if the privatization effort succeeds, the cost of supplying the population with electricity may increase. "Today supplying the population with electricity is not being easy. Electricity is turned off frequently. Privatization of the energy sector will increase the electricity fee and may lead to exacerbation of the existing problems", worries the member of the Parliament.

Other deputies hold more radical stance on the issue. In the opinion of Orozbek Duisheev, member of the Legislative Assembly, the executive branch in the last several years has been trying to artificially demonstrate the energy sector as an expensive sector with an intention to sell it. According to him, the energy sector is the most profitable sector in Kyrgyzstan and, for instance, in 2001 the energy sector brought 1.5 billion som in profits.

Adahan Madumarov, another member of the Kyrgyz parliament, is concerned about another aspect of the issue. According to him, privatization of the energy sector may have a dramatic impact not only on the economic independence, but it may also put the political independence of the state under threat.

Meanwhile, a protest action involving a number of political parties, non-governmental and public organizations recently took place in Bishkek. The aim of the action was to express opposition against privatization of the energy sector and to attract public attention to the issue. Bolot Januzakov, first deputy head of the presidential administration, in an interview to RFE/RL, said that there was no ground for holding protest actions and that the privatization issue should be resolved by relevant specialists who know the problem well. Omurbek Tekebaev, a Legislative Assembly member on the other hand said the protest action had a significant meaning as it allowed the people to express their opinion with regard to the government's policies. If such campaigns are conducted more actively and in other parts of the country, maybe it would make the government to reconsider its policies, he said.

NEWS DIGEST

MINISTER SAYS CITIZENS OF 52 COUNTRIES HAVE BEEN KILLED IN NORTH CAUCASUS FIGHTING

4 November

Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said on 4 November that Russian forces in the North Caucasus have killed "terrorists from 52 countries of the world." "When we destroy such a terrorist, we do not accuse the state whose passport he carries of aggression against Russia," Ivanov said. "It is a question of how the state tries to help us in the investigation, whether it gives us information about how this man infiltrated Russia's territory." "Depending on how each country reacts to our requests, we determine whether it is sincere in the struggle against terrorism and build relations with that state accordingly," Ivanov said. He said that terrorism is a multifaceted phenomenon and that antiterrorism efforts must target "those who give [terrorists] material, financial, informational, or other help." (RFE/RL)

GEORGIA DECLINES CHECHEN OFFER TO RESTORE ORDER IN PANKISI GORGE

4 November

Georgian National Security Council Secretary Gela Bezhuashvili and Deputy Minister of State Security Batu Kutelia both said on 4 November that Tbilisi is competent to establish law and order in the Pankisi Gorge without any outside help. On 3 November, Reuters quoted Chechen First Deputy Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov as saying Chechen officials are "fed up" with Georgia's tolerance of Chechen militants in Pankisi and are ready to "establish order" there. Bezhuashvili proposed that Kadyrov focus his energy on establishing order in Chechnya. Kadyrov, undaunted, reiterated on 4 November that "we are ready to carry out a special operation in Pankisi" if orders to do so are issued, but this does not mean that "we are going to rush into Georgia at breakneck speed," Russian media reported. (ITAR-TASS)

DECREE RAISES MINIMUM WAGE IN TAJIKISTAN

5 November

President Rakhmonov signed a decree on 4 November raising the minimum wage and salaries of government employees as of 1 January 2005. Spokesman

Abdulfattoh Sharipov told the news agency that workers in science, health care, and social services will get a 100 percent raise, preschool and elementary school teachers a 70 percent raise, other teachers a 60 percent raise, and other state employees in the educational and cultural spheres a 50 percent raise. The minimum-wage unit, which is also used to calculate pensions, will increase from 7 somonis (\$2.50) to 12 somonis (\$4.30) in 2005. (Asia Plus-Blitz)

MINISTER SAYS AZERBAIJAN 'DOES NOT NEED IMF CREDITS'

5 November

During the ongoing parliament debate on the draft budget for 2005, Finance Minister Avaz Alekperov said on 5 November that Azerbaijan values advice from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), but does not need credits from that organization. Following the visit of an IMF delegation to Azerbaijan last month, it was announced that Baku will not receive the seventh tranche, worth approximately \$19 million, of a Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility loan program that is due to expire in March 2005. Due to protracted disagreements with the fund over economic liberalization, Azerbaijan has to date received only some \$60 million of the total \$120 million available under that program. (Turan)

RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY CONDEMNS INTERVIEW WITH CHECHEN FIELD COMMANDER

5 November

The Foreign Ministry has addressed an official protest to the Moscow bureau of Canada's "Globe and Mail" following the publication by that paper on 3 November of an extensive interview with radical Chechen field commander Shamil Basaev. The protest warned the head of the paper's Moscow bureau, who commissioned the interview, that it is unacceptable to grant publicity to "murderers and terrorists whose hands are stained with the blood of the Russian people, including the children of Beslan." (RFE/RL)

SOLDIERS' MOTHERS NGO BECOMES A PARTY

7 November

The United People's Party of Soldiers' Mothers held its founding congress on 7 November at which Valentina Melnikova was elected as leader. The new party is based on the nongovernmental Soldiers' Mothers Committee, which has existed for 15 years. One member of the group told NTV that "All the politicians whom we've backed during elections -- once our good name has helped them into office -- have turned their backs on us." In an interview with "Russkii kurer" on 5 November, Melnikova said that the party is "not satisfied with what is happening in Russia in the sector of human rights and socioeconomic rights." "The health sector is collapsing, and war is another problem," she declared. But the group's main goal, according to Melnikova, is to reform the armed forces and end conscription. Congress delegates unanimously condemned the proposal by Prosecutor-General Vladimir Ustinov to seize the families of terrorists. Melnikova explained to reporters that "Restricting the freedom of innocent people and holding them to blame for their relatives' actions is an attempt to turn modern politics into Stalinism." (RIA-Novosti)

TENSIONS HIGH IN UZBEK BAZAARS

8 November

There is continued tension in Uzbekistan over a presidential decree that triggered an unprecedented wave of civil disorder last week. The decree places new restrictions on trade and makes it very difficult for people to buy and sell. Friction is focused in the bazaars, especially those in Fergana Valley, the most populated eastern part of Uzbekistan. Bazaar traders said they could barely survive on what they make selling shoes and jumpers they buy across the border in China. And, under the new decree, even that trade will become almost impossible. It says the sellers must have a special licence and that tax officials will fine anyone without one and confiscate their goods. People are so angry and upset that many are close to despair. At one bazaar, traders torched cars and chased the tax officers out of the market. We have heard, too, how traders arranged plastic bottles of petrol around one bazaar, threatening to torch them if officials came in. These scenes are unprecedented in Uzbekistan, where demonstrators run the risk of huge trouble with the police, and it seems the local authorities are alarmed. Across Fergana we heard that they had suspended the decree, even though it was issued at the highest level. They say the bazaars can work normally for now, perhaps until the end of Ramadan in a week's time. The bazaars in Uzbekistan are of the utmost importance. They are the centre of economic and

social life, and, in this tightly controlled country, they are the main public places where thousands of people meet and talk freely every day. If the authorities lose the support of the bazaars, there could be serious consequences throughout the country. (BBC)

CHECHEN REBELS KILLED IN CLASHES

8 November

The pro-Moscow security forces in Chechnya say they have killed 22 separatist fighters loyal to rebel leader Shamil Basayev. Unconfirmed reports from senior officials claimed some of the fighters had been involved in the Grozny bombing which killed president Akhmad Kadyrov. Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev claimed responsibility for the May attack. The authorities did not say whether they suffered any losses in the latest fighting on Monday. Chechen deputy prime minister Ramzan Kadyrov, son of the assassinated president, said the fighting took place in the Vedeno region, about 50km (30 miles) south-east of Grozny. He told Itar-Tass that among the dead was Suleiman Khairulla, a senior top lieutenant of warlord Basayev and the self-proclaimed organiser of the stadium bombing that killed Mr Kadyrov and six others. Basayev has also claimed responsibility for the Beslan school hostage-taking in North Ossetia which left about 360 people killed. "It was our revenge for the 9 May act of terrorism," he said. But the Chechen president's press service RIA later denied that the man behind the bombing was killed in the attack. Ramzan Kadyrov, 28, controls a powerful militia in Chechnya that has often been accused of human rights abuses. Last week he said he was ready to send forces into Georgia to wipe out Chechen separatist rebels alleged to be hiding in the mountainous Pankisi Gorge area. The death of his father led to the election of pro-Moscow President Alu Alkhanov. (BBC)

INGUSHETIA'S MUSLIM CLERICS APPEAL TO PUTIN

8 November

The Spiritual Board of Muslims of Ingushetia has addressed an appeal to President Putin in connection with the wave of abductions of residents of the republic, ingushetiya.ru reported on 5 November. The appeal notes that at least 40 people are still missing after having been abducted by armed men in camouflage uniforms since the beginning of this year. Those still missing include Rashid Ozdov, a member of the staff of the local prosecutor's office, who was snatched in March and who is believed to have been murdered to prevent him from investigating earlier such abductions. The clergymen express gratitude to

Putin for having visited Ingushetia in the wake of the 21-22 June raids on Interior Ministry facilities. They then beg him to send to Ingushetia a commission to investigate the kidnappings, noting that the release of Ozdoyev would help to defuse social tensions. (RFE/RL)

SOME HOSTAGES RELEASED IN SOUTH OSSETIA

8 November

Following talks between Georgian and South Ossetian representatives, some, but apparently not all the several dozen hostages taken over the previous few days in the conflict zone were released. The Ossetian side released "several dozen" Georgian women, while the Georgians freed either nine or 10 Ossetians. But according to South Ossetian government spokeswoman Irina Gagloeva, several Ossetians remain in captivity. The hostages were snatched in retaliation after the abduction in the conflict zone on 3 November of Georgian Eldar Kakhniashvili. Georgian and South Ossetian police will conduct a joint search for him. They will be accompanied by field engineers after two Georgian television journalists covering the ongoing search for Kakhniashvili were seriously injured when they stepped on a land mine in the conflict zone on 6 November. (Caucasus Press)

FOUR GEORGIAN POLITICAL PARTIES BARRED FROM FUTURE ELECTIONS

9 November

Acting Central Election Commission (CEC) Chairman Zurab Nonikashvili said on 9 November that four political parties that failed to comply with a legal requirement to submit to the CEC details of their expenditures during the 28 March parliamentary election campaign have been stripped of the right to contest future elections. The four parties are the Democratic Revival Union (headed by Aslan Abashidze, ousted former leader of the Adjara Autonomous Republic), National Revival, the All-Georgian People's Alliance (formed in late 2003), and the National Democratic Party-Union of Traditionalists alliance. (Caucasus Press)

US ENVOY OPPOSES KIDNAPPER TALKS

10 November

A top US envoy visiting Afghanistan has said there should be no negotiations with kidnappers of three UN workers. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage said the US believed talks would only "encourage more" abductions. Annetta Flanigan from

Northern Ireland, Shqipe Habibi from Kosovo and Filipino Angelito Nayan were abducted in Kabul on 28 October. The kidnappers have demanded the release of 26 Taliban prisoners in return for the hostages' lives. Speaking on the second day of a two-day visit to Afghanistan, Mr Armitage said he was praying for the safe return of the hostages. However, he added: "It is the United States view that negotiating with the hostage-takers, compromising with hostage-takers only encourages more." Spokesmen for the hostage-takers have said they have been in negotiations with the Afghan government and UN, but those authorities have said little about any talks. On Tuesday, Afghan President Hamid Karzai said: "We're working very hard to have the safe and secure release of the UN workers who have helped us in Afghanistan tremendously." The UN workers were taken from their vehicle in a busy Kabul street. On Tuesday, Ms Flanigan and Ms Habibi were allowed to call relatives, the first confirmation they were alive since a video showing them was released 10 days ago. A group calling itself the Army of Muslims says it is holding the hostages, who had been helping to organise the presidential election on 9 October. Mr Armitage has used his visit to praise the success of those elections. "The whole world just witnessed almost a miracle in the election of October 9," he said. However, he said it was essential that the programme of "disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration" of private militias be speeded up before parliamentary elections are held next spring. The envoy said the US was fully committed to supporting Afghanistan. "The only possible change that might occur in the next four years of George W Bush is to accelerate even further our assistance and support for Afghanistan," he said. Mr Armitage stressed that US forces would leave the country, but only when Afghan troops could take over fully - at a time he could not predict. "From the beginning, we've said that we desire no permanent military presence in the region," he said. Mr Armitage also said he had no idea where al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden was. "As we all know, there are many holes in which he can hide. I am confident, however, that sooner or later we will find him. We will stick our head into the right hole and there he'll be." (BBC)

TURKMEN AMNESTY FREES 9,000

10 November

The Turkmen Prosecutor-General's Office announced on 9 November that 9,000 prisoners have been released under an amnesty in honor of the Muslim holiday of Laylat al-Qadr. Among the freed prisoners are 150 foreign citizens. A full list of prisoners covered by the

amnesty was published in national newspapers on 24 October. End-of-Ramadan amnesties for prisoners convicted of lesser offenses have been an annual tradition in Turkmenistan since parliament passed a law on amnesties in 1999. According to turkmenistan.ru, 130,000 prisoners have been amnestied in the country over 12 years of independence. (RFE/RL)

TAJK COURT SENTENCES 20 HIZB UT-TAHRIR ACTIVISTS

10 November

A court in Sughd Province on 9 November sentenced 20 individuals to prison terms ranging from three to eight years for criminal activities on behalf of the banned extremist organization Hizb ut-Tahrir, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reported. The defendants, who included one ethnic Russian and a former National Security Committee officer, were found guilty of inciting strife along national and religious lines and calling for the overthrow of the state. The group was arrested in Khujand in early 2004. Mahmud Sotiboldiev, a lawyer for the accused, told RFE/RL that the defendants were forced to confess under torture. (RFE/RL)

PLATFORM MOVE SUGGESTS IRAN CASPIAN DRILLING TO BEGIN IN 2005

10 November

Iran is planning to move its largest platform, the Iran-Alborz oil platform, into the Caspian by June 2005 to allow drilling in the area, the Tehran Times reported. The 25,000-tonne platform is also the region's largest platform, with capacity to drill up to 400 metres with direct anchorage and even deeper with pre-anchorage. South and south-west Caspian depths are estimated at 700 to 1,000 metres, the report added. The movement of the platform is a strong indication that Iran is planning to conduct further exploration and drilling in its share of the Caspian basin, despite the fact that the dispute over the territorial division of the inland sea has still to be resolved. Iran continues to hold out for a 20% share of the basin, although its coastline covers only 13% of the area. Moves by Kazakhstan in particular to develop its Caspian acreage have increased the urgency of a settlement, although Iran may also opt to drill in areas contiguous with its shoreline while still holding out for a greater stake in any final division of the area. (WMRC)

KARABAKH STILL HOPES TO PARTICIPATE IN PEACE PROCESS

10 November

Arkadii Ghukasian, president of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, told the Armenian television program Haylur on 8 November that the Karabakh authorities "are ready to negotiate with Azerbaijan in any format, with or without Armenia," according to Armenian Public Television as cited by Groong. "We are ready to discuss with Azerbaijan any issues, starting with the status of refugees [from Nagorno-Karabakh] and the territories [surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh that are currently controlled by the Karabakh armed forces]," Ghukasian continued. But he pointed out that "Azerbaijan is not ready today to negotiate with Karabakh, and in fact Azerbaijan's current position is an ultimatum." Azerbaijani leaders have consistently argued that Azerbaijan is at war with Armenia and can negotiate only with Armenian officials on the terms of a conflict settlement. (RFE/RL)

GROUP BELIEVED TO HAVE LINKS WITH AL QAEDA UNCOVERED IN KAZAKHSTAN

11 November

Kazakh security agencies have uncovered and put an end to the activities of the group Central Asia Mujahedeen Jamaat, which is believed to be a cell of the international terrorist network al Qaeda, First Deputy Chairman of the Kazakh National Security Committee Vladimir Bozhko said. "The National Security Committee has put an end to the activities of a deeply clandestine terrorist group, Central Asia Mujahedeen Jamaat, which was acting in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia and had links with the organization al Qaeda," Bozhko announced at a news conference in Astana on Thursday. The special services earlier detained the leaders and members of the Central Asia Mujahedeen Jamaat and also their accomplices. Among the detainees are nine Kazakh citizens, four Uzbek citizens, and also four female residents of the Southern Kazakhstan region, who had been trained to act as suicide bombers, he said. Security agents found and seized about 1,000 copies of literature and about 2,000 audio and video cassettes which contained calls to terror, including Osama bin Laden's addresses, Bozhko said. They also found fake passports and equipment for their manufacture, components of explosive devices, weapons, and ammunition, he said. In addition to the funds that the group was raising inside the country, they were also financed from abroad, he said. In addition, while investigating the activities of this organization, the

National Security Committee detained Uzbek citizen Abos Usmonov, who "received instructions from abroad to prepare terrorist attacks against a top official in Uzbekistan together with his accomplices," he said. The Jamaat was controlled from abroad through appointed leaders, or emirs, Bozhko said. One of them was Akhmat Bekmurzayev, an Uzbek citizen, who was killed in an operation to prevent terrorist attacks in Uzbekistan in March 2004, Bozhko said. Another emir, Zhakshybek Biimurzayev, an ethnic Kyrgyz and a Kyrgyz citizen, had Uzbek and Kazakh passports and was responsible for organizing terrorist attacks in Tashkent, he said. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

AFGHANISTAN PULLS CABLE CHANNELS

11 November

Cable TV channels showing raunchy Bollywood movies and foreign music videos have been taken off air in Afghanistan by the government. Viewers have been able to watch foreign channels, including much-loved Indian films, since the Taleban fell in 2001. Bollywood movies were banned under the hardline Taleban rulers. Cable TV was also banned for a time in 2003 for being un-Islamic following complaints about "half-naked singers and obscene scenes from movies". The BBC's Roland Buerk in the capital Kabul said cable channels had been off air for two days and it was unclear whether the ban would be permanent. Waheed Mujda, a spokesman for the country's supreme court, said: "The high session of the ministers have decided to ban cable TV until a cable broadcasting law is made." More than a dozen cable stations broadcasting from places such as India, Pakistan and Dubai have been available in Kabul. (BBC)

REGIONAL MUSLIM LEADER CALLS FOR PRAYERS FOR IRAQIS IN AL-FALLUJAH

12 November

The chief Muslim cleric in Tyumen Oblast, Fatykh Garifullin, has asked that prayers be said for fellow Muslims in Al-Fallujah, Iraq, islam.ru reported on 9 November. "The fate of those martyrs under siege in Al-Fallujah awaits all those who do not agree to dance to the tune of [U.S. President George W.] Bush and his circle, if the world community does not stop the war in Iraq," Garifullin said. Garifullin called on all Muslims to pray for fellow believers, so that "Allah will help the heroic people of Iraq to stand up for their independence and freedom." As of November 2002, Tyumen Oblast had 64 mosques and 67 Russian Orthodox churches, according to islam.ru on 12 November 2002. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH COMMUNICATIONS MARKET GROWS A THIRD IN 9 MTHS

15 November

Kazakhstan's communications market grew 32.6% year-on-year to 119.4 billion tenge in January-September, the national statistics agency told *Interfax*. Mobile communications generated 33.7% of the revenue, long-distance telecommunications 29%, local telecommunications 9.1%, data transfer 6%, radio and television 3.8% and postal services 2.9%. The mobile communications market soared 63.7% year-on-year. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

KAZAKHSTAN'S PARLIAMENT OKS 2005 BUDGET

15 November

Kazakhstan's parliament on Monday approved the oil-rich Central Asian nation's 2005 budget, sending the draft to President Nursultan Nazarbayev for his signature. The budget envisions a deficit equal to 1.7 percent of gross domestic product, down slightly from 1.9 percent of GDP in 2004. Revenues are forecast to rise 45 percent from 2004 to 1,128 billion tenge (US\$8.7 billion, euro6.7 billion). Expenditures are expected to total 1,242 billion tenge (US\$9.5 billion, euro7.3 billion), a nearly 44 percent increase from 2004. The government of the former Soviet republic, which has extensive oil and natural gas resources, has forecast GDP growth of 7.9 percent next year, up from an estimated 7 percent this year. The inflation rate is expected to be between 4.9 and 6.5 percent next year, according to the budget. Nazarbayev, who has 15 days to approve the budget, is expected to sign it. (AP)

COUNTERTRAFFICKING PROJECT RESCUES 179 VICTIMS

15 November

Nodira Karimova, coordinator of the International Organization for Migration's countertrafficking project in Uzbekistan, told a news conference in Tashkent on 12 November that the project has rescued 179 victims of human trafficking in its first year. Karimova said that the project had helped the victims to return home from abroad. A report by RFE/RL's Uzbek Service the same day quoted Muzaffar Aminov, a Surkhondaryo resident who recently returned from Russia, as saying that many Uzbeks are currently employed as virtual slaves in Russia. Victims of human traffickers told RFE/RL that most of the people in the criminal gangs that prey on Uzbeks desperate for work are also Uzbeks. (RFE/RL)

UZBEK OPPOSITION GROUP ANNOUNCES ELECTION BOYCOTT

15 November

The Davra Kengashi, an NGO that brings together representatives of Uzbekistan's opposition parties and human rights activists, announced at a press conference in Tashkent on 12 November that it will boycott 26 December parliamentary elections, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reported. The group, which includes representatives of the unregistered opposition parties Erk and Birlik, made the decision after the opposition made numerous unsuccessful attempts to register candidates through initiative groups. At the news conference, Erk (Freedom), Birlik (Unity), and Ozod Dehqonlar (Free Peasants) party representatives told journalists that local authorities used every possible formal pretext -- from rejecting signatures to ignoring document submissions -- to prevent initiative groups from registering candidates. Moreover, some opposition activists suffered police harassment and even physical attacks by unidentified individuals. (RFE/RL)

SOLDIERS MOTHERS TO HOLD TALKS WITH CHECHEN SEPARATIST ENVOY

15 November

The Union of Soldiers Mothers Committees is planning to meet with Chechen separatist envoy Akhmed Zakayev on November 23 or 24, the group has announced. "The Soldiers' Mothers' talks with Zakayev, who was authorized to meet with us by Maskhadov, is to take place in late November, most probably on November 23 or 24, in Brussels," the Union's executive secretary Valentina Melnikova told Interfax on Monday. She was informed about the upcoming talks by European Parliamentary Deputy Bart Staes, Melnikova said. "I talked about this with Mr. Staes by telephone on November 12," she said. "After we receive visas at the Belgian Embassy, we shall form a delegation, which I have been authorized to lead. The main goal of the talks is to find a way out of the Chechen impasse and to stop the bloodshed in Chechnya," she said. The Chechen leadership has responded negatively to the Soldiers Mothers' initiative to meet with representatives of the Chechen separatists. "If the members of the Soldiers Mothers Committee are citizens of Russia, we are surprised by their wish to meet with those whom law enforcement bodies are accusing of terrorism and who are being sought for to be brought to justice," Chechen State Council Chairman Taus Dzhabrailov earlier told Interfax. "I don't understand the soldiers' mothers' initiative. Why is this public organization proposing

talks and offering to act as a mediator? Why on earth? Talks with Maskhadov and his people must be conducted by prosecutors, not by public organizations," Dzhabrailov said. This opinion is shared by Chechen First Deputy Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov, who earlier told Interfax: "Not a single sober-minded person will sit at a negotiating table with terrorists known throughout the world." He described Maskhadov's proposal to establish contacts with the Soldiers Mothers Committee as a propaganda gimmick, aimed at launching yet another political campaign for the separatist ringleaders. (Interfax)

ARMENIAN PRESIDENT 'NOT OPTIMISTIC' OVER KARABAKH PEACE PROCESS

16 November

Speaking on 15 November at his joint press conference with visiting Estonian counterpart Arnold Ruutel, President Kocharian said he "does not have much optimism" at present over the prospects for resolving the Karabakh conflict, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. Kocharian identified as the two major obstacles to a negotiated settlement Azerbaijan's refusal to acknowledge representatives of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic as a full-fledged party to the conflict and Azerbaijan's reluctance to embark on regional cooperation. (RFE/RL)

RADICAL AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITION PAPER CEASES PUBLICATION

16 November

The opposition daily "Yeni Musavat" ceased publication on 16 November due to major financial problems. The paper, which has a track record of not always checking facts prior to publication, has lost a series of libel suits brought by senior officials in which the court imposed draconian fines and sequestered the paper's bank accounts. As a result, it is in debt to the privately owned publishing house Chap Evi, which has refused to publish further issues as the paper cannot pay in advance for supplies of newsprint. "Yeni Musavat" Editor in Chief Rauf Arifoglu was one of seven prominent opposition figures sentenced to prison terms last month on charges of inciting violence in the wake of the disputed October 2003 presidential election. (Turan)

AZERBAIJAN DOESN'T PLAN TO HOST FOREIGN MILITARY BASES

16 November

Azerbaijan is not negotiating the deployment of foreign military bases in its territory, Azerbaijani

Foreign Minister Elmar Mamedyarov told Interfax. "I am telling you that we are not holding any talks on the deployment of foreign military bases in the territory of Azerbaijan," he said. "A military base is a regular facility that cannot be deployed overnight. It requires stage-by-stage negotiations. I can definitely tell you that the Foreign Ministry is not holding them," he said. "We don't intend to offer our territory for attacking any states," Mamedyarov said. Asked about possible accession to NATO he said: "The question should probably be addressed to NATO and its member-countries." "We are expanding cooperation quite intensively," he added. He reminded Interfax that Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev presented a plan of individual partnership with NATO in Brussels in May. "We expect NATO countries to approve it and in its framework we will continue our cooperation that will be individual in nature and have a higher level," he said. Mamedyarov stressed that Azerbaijan is a member of the anti-terrorist coalition with servicemen stationed to Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo. (Interfax-Azerbaijan)

**COURT SAYS RUSSIAN TERRITORIES
CANNOT CHANGE ALPHABETS**

16 November

Constituent territories of the Russian Federation have no right to decide for themselves which alphabet to

choose for the languages of ethnic minorities, the Constitutional Court has ruled. The court upheld the constitution's law on the languages of the Russian people, which states that the national languages of ethnic minorities shall rely on the Cyrillic alphabet while other alphabets must be approved by federal law, an Interfax correspondent reported. In this way, the court declined a plea from the State Council and Supreme Court of Tatarstan to declare the provision unconstitutional. (Interfax)

**UP TO 200 FOREIGN MERCENARIES
OPERATING IN CHECHNYA - IVANOV**

17 November

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said up to 200 foreign mercenaries are operating in Chechnya. "Our intelligence suggests there are from 150 to 200 foreign mercenaries in Chechnya," Ivanov told a conference of high-level military officials in Moscow on Wednesday. "The analysis of information we are receiving indicates that mercenaries from more than 50 countries have taken part in the counter-terrorist operation in Chechnya," said Ivanov. "The worst threat we are confronted with today is international terrorism. Its scope and forms of operations against Russia may only be described as a real war against our country," the defense minister said. (Interfax)

