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 TAJIKISTAN

 MAY-JUNE 2010

Bimonthly article

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Highlights

The main events in May and June were natural disasters such as floods and mudslides, and polio infections.

Due to heavy rains in the first half of May, many districts of Tajikistan suffered from floods and mudslides, resulting in more than 40 people identified dead, 33 lost and many more injured. Over 5,000 buildings were destroyed, about 40 bridges were destroyed and tens of kilometres of highways and thousands of hectares of agricultural fields were flooded and destroyed. The city of Kulab and its suburbs were the most severely hit. On the night of 6-7 May, mudslides poured into the streets of Kulab and neighbouring settlements destroying houses, cars, animals and people. Military from the 201st Russian military base in Tajikistan provided emergency relief along with members of the committee of emergency situations of Tajikistan and the defence ministry. The government of Tajikistan, UN agencies and other international organizations offered assistance to the victims, who were relocated to tented camps.

Following the enactment of a special decree by the president of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov in the wake of a three-month blockade, the railroad authorities of Uzbekistan permitted the transfer of several Tajikistan-bound cargo trains heading toward Hatlon region, where Kulab is located. The cargo trains primarily carry food products and construction materials.

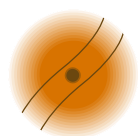
Many volunteers from all over the country began making donations for the victims of these natural disasters as soon as they hit the country. President Rahmon has issued a decree declaring that all

individuals who had suffered the loss of their residences and were currently living in tents should be relocated to new permanent housing by the end of November. A variety of people took part in the emergency relief operations, including government employees, local authorities, business representatives and unaffiliated individuals. In connection with the losses caused by the natural disasters, the government of Tajikistan requested assistance of \$5.3 million from the international community.

For the first time in 13 years, Tajikistan has experienced a new outbreak of polio (375 cases of Type-1 poliovirus infections). Two cases were lethal, as registered at the Ministry of Health between the end of March and 14 June. WHO says that Tajikistan has experienced 334 cases of polio infections, 15 of which were lethal. After this outbreak, a massive campaign to immunize all children aged 6 and under started in Tajikistan on 1 May, the third stage of the campaign being completed on 5 June. The campaign covered more than 1.13 million children up to the age of 6. The second stage of the campaign to immunize children aged 6 to 15 was launched on the 15-19 June. The health ministry also decided to immunize teenagers up to the age of 17. The campaign was supported by UNICEF, WHO, the EU and other international organizations. UNICEF contributed well over 10 million dosages of polio vaccine worth \$ 1.1 million.

Russia showed the most stringent reaction to the polio outbreak in Tajikistan, imposing a ban on the import of dried fruits from Tajikistan and prohibiting the admission of all children under the age of 6 from Tajikistan. In addition, the Russian authorities demanded the expatriation of all children with Russian citizenship from Tajikistan. These bans and restrictions were lifted at the beginning of July after

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the polio outbreak in Tajikistan had been brought under control.

Internal affairs

National Unity Day celebrations took place on 27 June in Khorog, the capital of Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous region. On 27 June 1997, after six years of civil war, President Rahmon and the leader of the United Tajik Opposition Said Abdullo Nuri signed peace agreements in Moscow in the presence of then Russian president Boris Yeltsin. This year's celebrations marked the first time in 13 years that the former members of the opposition did not participate. Muhiddin Kabiri, who became the leader of Islamic Renaissance Party after the death of Nuri, decided not to participate in this year's celebrations largely on account of the pressure that has been levied on members of the Islamic Renaissance Party and their prosecution at the hands of the current administration.

The leader of the Communist party of Tajikistan and MP Shodi Shabdolov also refused to participate in the National Unity Day celebrations in protest at the relocation of Lenin's statue in Khorog. A bust of Ismail Somoni, the founder of the Tajik state, replaced the statue. In the last few years, many statues of Lenin in different regions of Tajikistan have been replaced by statues of Ismail Somoni and classical Tajik and Persian writers.

Because of the presence of president Rahmon in Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous region at the National Unity Day celebrations, restrictions were placed on the arrival and departure of citizens across borders with China and Afghanistan.

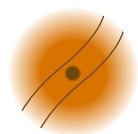
Blood donations took place during the national television marathon under the slogan "New Blood for Life." This event had been organized to commemorate International Blood Donor Day on 14 June, with one ton of blood being collected in

Tajikistan after 2,025 people donated their blood.

Foreign and international policy

In this respect there is call to highlight the intensification of relations with Islamic countries such as Iran and Afghanistan and the worsening of relations with neighbouring Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

The 37th session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers took place in Dushanbe on 18–20 May with the participation of over 80 delegations from member countries as well as countries with observer status, and international and regional organizations. In his speech, President Rahmon stressed that the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) may play an important role in establishing and strengthening the dialogue between cultures in the modern world, which is necessary in the current climate of increased tension between civilizations. Although OIC countries have different and sometimes polar views of important international issues, certain trends in Western countries are bringing them together: increasing Islamophobia, restriction of rights of Islamic minorities, unequivocal position toward the conflict in the Middle East, opposition to Iranian nuclear programme and the interference of Western countries in the affairs of Islamic countries. The OIC countries expressed their support of Iran's nuclear programme on the grounds that peaceful development of nuclear science is "a sovereign right of each nation." They expressed their support for the Palestinian people in their struggle against aggressors. They also called for the normalization of the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and the unification of the territories of Azerbaijan. As for the disputes between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the OIC secretary general pointed out that "Uzbeks and Tajiks used to live together for centuries in *Movarounnahr* (ancient name of Central Asia); therefore, all current contradictions should be resolved peacefully." Two resolutions were passed at this 37th session, one "On



the use of transit potentials of Afghanistan's neighbouring countries for the purpose of economic recovery" and the other "On the rational usage of water resources in Islamic world, the exchange of experience, information, and strengthening of cooperation."

The railroad blockade of Tajikistan-bound cargo trains continues. Although some cargo was allowed to pass toward the regions that had suffered from floods and mudslides in southern Tajikistan, Uzbekistan is still blocking Tajikistan-bound cargo trains on its territory. Currently, there are about 2,000 wagons on Uzbek territory: 499 wagons with fuel, 37 with bitumen, 67 with cement and 75 with other cargo, supposed to be heading for southern Tajikistan. Moreover, Uzbekistan is impeding the transit of NATO supply cargo trains bound for Afghanistan. More than 300 wagons with cargo for the antiterrorist coalition in Afghanistan are now in Uzbekistan. The cargo mostly includes food supplies, construction materials and airplane fuel.

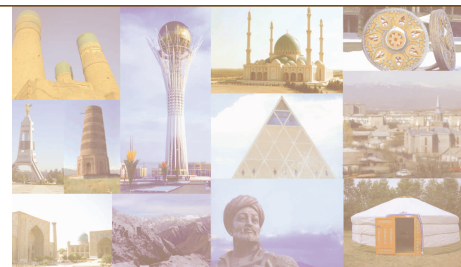
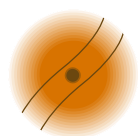
At the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit on 10-11 June, President Rahmon and President Karimov discussed current issues and prospects for the two countries. The two leaders focused on bilateral relations in the field of energy in Tajikistan and on the stable development of transport communications. The parties agreed on the transfer of cargo to Tajikistan barring cargo with equipment for Rogun hydroelectric power plant (HPP). While discussing the construction of Rogun HPP, President Rahmon showed his willingness to conduct a technical and ecological expert examination. The President also agreed to ensure transparency in relations and strengthen current connections.

Despite the agreements reached, the cargo blockade continues. This resulted in the temporary stoppage in the construction of Sanctuda-2, which is supported by Iran. The Iranian authorities responded by threatening the Uzbek authorities with the restriction

of Uzbekistan-bound cargo on the territory of Iran. The Iranian authorities also asked Turkmenistan to restrict transit of Uzbek trains. As a result, on 22 June 40 wagons arrived in Tajikistan from Uzbekistan for the first time in the last four months; 17 of these wagons contained construction materials for Sanctuda-2. After the arrival of the cargo, the construction of Sangtuda-2 was resumed.

In general, the deterioration of relations with Uzbekistan has contributed to strengthening relations with Iran. Along with stronger cooperation in economic and international political spheres, there has been an intensification in the field of security. The head of the Iranian defence department Ahmad Vahidi visited Tajikistan to discuss broadening cooperation between the countries against terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking. Representatives of the countries' defence departments signed an agreement on the strengthening of military and technical cooperation.

Security issues were responsible for the deterioration of relations with neighbouring Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz authorities blamed Tajikistan for encouraging inter-ethnic conflict in southern Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyz authorities claimed that the mass murder in Kyrgyz cities of Osh and Jalalabad was committed by citizens of Tajikistan who were hired by the relatives of the former Kyrgyz president Bakiyev, a claim that was refuted by the Tajik foreign affairs ministry. Tajikistan's national security office demanded an explanation and official confirmation of the participation of Tajik citizens in the events in Osh. Despite the absence of evidence, the Kyrgyz authorities continue to blame Tajik citizens, which is sparking fears that a new spate of conflict in Kyrgyzstan may erupt involving ethnic Tajiks. Despite these misgivings, Tajikistan was one of the first countries to offer help to the victims from southern Kyrgyzstan.



Economy and business enterprises

Developments in this respect are mostly related to electricity, namely difficulties with the export of electric power and a drastic rise in fuel prices.

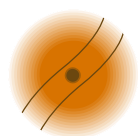
Currently, Tajikistan has a surplus of electric power but very few opportunities to sell it abroad. Because of the unusually high level of rainfall, water basins in Tajikistan collected a considerable amount of water. The water level in the local rivers is also unusually high. As a result a large quantity of electric power is being produced, which is sufficient not only to cover internal demand but also for export abroad. However, a number of obstacles inhibit the export of electricity, the main one being the absence of accessible markets. Neighbouring countries - Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan- are themselves exporters of electric power and compete with Tajikistan on foreign markets. The countries that would like to import electric power from Tajikistan such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and India are not connected with Tajikistan through the power lines. Kazakhstan and Russia also would like to import cheaply produced electricity from Tajik hydroelectric power plants, but the transfer of electric power to these countries is possible only through the power grids of Uzbekistan, which refuses to transit Tajik electric power. Therefore, because of the absence of the export markets, Tajikistan daily produces only 40 million kW/h of electric power while the surplus of water is dumped. The Nurek hydroelectric plant daily produces about 30 million kW/h, of which 0.2 million kW/h is exported to neighbouring Afghanistan. Currently, in order to increase the export of the electric power to Afghanistan, the electricity transmission gridline (ETG) of 220 kW Sangtuda - Puli Humri is being constructed. The construction of the 118-kilometre ETG on the territory of Tajikistan is almost complete, but the construction of the ETG on the Afghan territory is slow because of the lack of enthusiasm of the Afghan party. In June, the government of Tajikistan

addressed the president of Afghanistan with a request to accelerate the rate of construction of the projected ETG 220 kW Sangtuda-Puli Humri on Afghan territory. If the Indian companies KEC International and RPG Transmission can extend the ETG toward the city of Kunduz, Tajikistan will be able to export electric power by the end of July.

One example of the successful activation of economic relations with Afghanistan is the second international exhibition "Economic Development of Afghanistan," which took place in Dushanbe on 25 June and also a business forum that was organized by Tajik and Afghan business circles. Seventy Afghan companies operating in areas such as food production, agriculture, jewellery and textiles presented their products at the exhibition. After the first exhibition in 2009 in Tajikistan, 20 joint Afghan-Tajik ventures were launched. Trade turnover between Tajikistan and Afghanistan in 2009 reached \$71.1 million, exceeding the previous year's turnover by over \$31 million. Exports from Tajikistan to Afghanistan reached \$29 million and imports from Afghanistan to Tajikistan \$44 million.

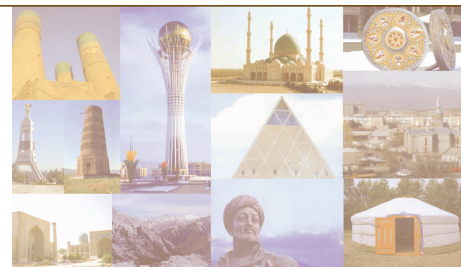
In May, in the space of two weeks alone, prices for gasoline and related products drastically increased, reaching more than a dollar per litre of gasoline. Commercial car owners, transport workers and taxi drivers were the first to suffer from the rise and almost stopped operating.

One of the reasons for the increase in fuel prices was the introduction of customs duties and their increase in Russia. Since 1 May 2010, customs duties on the light mineral oil (gasoline, diesel oil, kerosene) that Russia exports have increased \$10.2 per ton, from \$193.5 to \$203.7. It is necessary to take into account that prior to 1 May, Tajik importers of these products did not pay any customs duties. Tajikistan imports 70% of mineral oil from Russia and the rest from Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Russian suppliers occupy a large share of the market for oil



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products in Tajikistan, with Russia's Gazprom-neftegaz-Tajikistan controlling about 40% of the market.

After the introduction of these customs duties and their subsequent increase, prices for oil products in Tajikistan rose 30%. As a result, the prices for other commodities are expected to grow as well.

A number of Tajik experts consider that the introduction of custom duties on oil products forms part of the pressure strategy being employed by the Russian authorities to force Tajikistan to prolong the presence of the Russian military base in Tajikistan for the next 20-25 years. Other experts believe that the rise in oil products does not stem from any action on the part of the Russian authorities.

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