

# CENTRAL ASIA OBSERVATORY

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CIDOB  
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 TAJIKISTAN

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Bimonthly article

Prof. Saodat Olimova\*

## Highlights

The main event of the past two months was the daring escape of 25 inmates from the National Security prison in downtown Dushanbe, not far from the residence of President Emomali Rahmon.

On the night of 23 August, one of the inmates attacked an officer on duty, seized his keys and released other inmates in the prison. The inmates captured weapons in the security room and proceeded to the prison gates where they were challenged by security staff. The ensuing skirmish resulted in five privates and one prison security officer being killed. The inmates then captured motor vehicles and escaped. President Rahmon immediately convened an emergency meeting of the heads of the country's security and law enforcement agencies. A special operation named "Interception" was mounted all over the country, headed by interior minister Abdurahim Kahhorov. Alert levels in the law enforcement agencies of Khatlon region, Gorno-Badahshan autonomous region and Sogd region were heightened. Military troops and equipment were transported into Rasht valley as one of the possible destinations for the escapees. Border guards all over the country were also alerted.

These massive security measures stem from the fact that some of the escapees are political opponents of the current regime and are liable to create a core of military opposition. They include several citizens of Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Russia and many of them have been accused of involvement with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Russian and Afghan security officers promised to join the campaign to capture them. With tensions in the country growing, the massive escape of political prisoners is viewed as extremely dangerous in that

it may well increase instability nationwide, although it is not expected to lead to civil war.

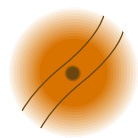
## Internal affairs

In the last months of the summer, food prices rose, ascribed by experts to the drought in Kazakhstan and Russia, these two countries being the main suppliers of grain and wheat to Tajikistan. President Rahmon called on families to hoard two-year supplies of food products, especially wheat. At the same time, Rahmon promised his compatriots that the problem of food security - "the major strategic task of the government" - would be resolved in the immediate future, to which end he urged his people to rationally utilize "every piece of land, increase the productivity of grains and achieve two grain harvests a year."

President Rahmon also spoke out against Tajik citizens studying in religious educational institutions abroad, urging parents to bring children studying in foreign madrasas and religious universities back to Tajikistan. "Many parents send their children to foreign madrasas and other Islamic education centres hoping to give them good religious education. Unfortunately, many children do not learn to become mullahs but step onto the path of terrorism and religious extremism", he said. Rahmon also said that local authorities have information on students studying abroad and their parents. He suggested that these students transfer to the State Islamic Institute and warned of the danger of extremist views spreading in Tajikistan itself. He urged security services and local authorities to increase supervision of all mosques to prevent the spreading of extremist views among believers.

The Tajik authorities have already attempted to bring back students studying in foreign religious

\*Deputy Director, Research Center Sharq, Dushanbe.



educational institutions. Several years ago, more than 700 Tajik students of Pakistani Islamic institutions were forced to return to Tajikistan. In 2009, a group of Tajik students of Iranian Islamic institutions returned and were formally accused of violating visa regulations.

Tajik students also attend Islamic institutions of Yemen, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Iran. Officially, there are 500 students from Tajikistan at Egypt's Al-Azhar University; the unofficial figure is 2,000. Citizens of Tajikistan are only allowed to continue their religious education abroad with official permission from local authorities.

Experts ascribe the popularity of these foreign institutions not only to the higher quality of religious education in these countries, but also to the lack of access to religious education in Tajikistan. Admission expenses at local universities in Tajikistan range from \$5,000 to \$20,000. Young people from Tajikistan therefore go abroad to attend religious schools that not only offer free tuition but also provide them with free clothing, board and lodging.

Religious affairs are coming under increasing scrutiny at local government level. Dozens of religious parties and movements have been pronounced illegal. In the last two years at one, local authorities have closed down dozens of unregistered mosques, prohibited women and teenagers from attending mosques, and prohibited children and students from attending their classes in religious garb. The governors of the market in Kurgan-tube, which is the administrative centre of Khatlon region, prohibited female sellers from wearing scarves to work (subject to a fine of 100 somoni, ie, \$25). In the Rudaki district near Dushanbe police arrested and beat up mullah Mavlavi Abdukahhor and his 17 students. The mullah was accused of "providing educational services in conditions which did not meet the sanitary norms."

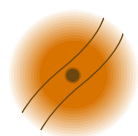
The closing down of the only private institution of higher education in Tajikistan, the Institute of Innovative Technology and Communications, continues. The licence of this institution was revoked by virtue of a Dushanbe court ruling dated 30 March 2010 on the grounds that it does not meet national educational standards in accordance with the findings of the education ministry. There are presently over 2,000 students and about 240 teachers at the institute.

It has been rumoured that the institute is being closed not only because private education is being discouraged but also for political reasons. Two opposition party leaders, Muhiddin Kabiri who heads the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan and Rahmatillo Zoyirov of the Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan, both teach at the institute.

The stand taken by the education ministry in relation to the revocation of the institute's licence has sparked concern among the American, British, French and German embassies in Dushanbe, who have issued a joint statement in this respect, also seconded by an EU delegation.

In July, the prosecutor-general's office and the anti-corruption authorities became involved in a dispute. The forced retirement in January of the prosecutor-general Bobojon Bobohonov -widely considered to be one of the last loyal members of president Rahmon's team- was followed by the dismissal of his son Faizullo Bobohonov, a prosecutor of Hissar district, who was subsequently arrested on charges of corruption and breach of official duty. This conflict sparked a heated public discussion about the spread of corruption at all levels of bureaucracy.

In August, the reconstruction of the Aini military airport close to Dushanbe was finally completed. This airport now has the infrastructure to serve all types of airplanes. The reconstruction of the airport was implemented with technical and financial support from India..



## Foreign and international policy

President Rahmon's visit to Iran and Russia and the activation of relations with the U.S. and NATO were the most important international policy events in the summer of 2010.

On 6 August, President Rahmon took part in the summit of the heads of three Persian-speaking countries (Tajikistan, Iran and Afghanistan), which took place in Teheran. The three countries discussed the strengthening of trilateral trade and economic relations in the fields of hydro-energy, investment and communication, and the implementation of major investment projects such as the construction of a railroad connecting all three countries with China.

On 18-19 August, President Rahmon met his Russian counterpart, President Dmitry Medvedev in Sochi to discuss sensitive issues concerning relations between the two countries. Russia agreed to normalize relations with its neighbour subject to the following terms and conditions being met: the implementation of the agreement on the stationing of the Russian military base at Aini airport in Tajikistan and the settlement of debts by the Tajik government with the Russian companies participating in Sangtuda HPP-1.

In addition to this meeting between presidents Rahmon and Medvedev, a joint meeting of the presidents of Russia, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan also took place in Sochi on 18 August. President Medvedev noted that the main goals of this meeting were to discuss the fight against terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking, and "the current difficulties with building a state in Afghanistan." The four countries agreed to step up the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking, described as a "threat to peace and stability." They also expressed their willingness to implement actions in coordination with the SCO and the OSCE. They

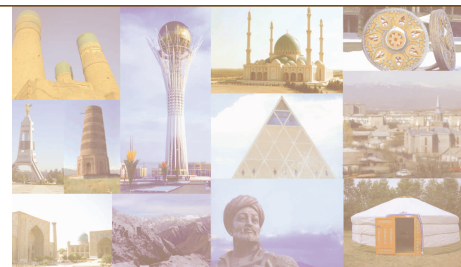
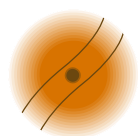
also discussed economic cooperation and cooperation in the field of energy and transport infrastructure, and assistance to the flood victims in Pakistan. President Rahmon subsequently visited Armenia where he took part in an unofficial summit of OSCE member countries.

The activation of relations with the U.S. and NATO was also a major international policy event. The first Special Representative to the Muslim Communities of the U.S. State Department Farah Pandith (in office since 15 September 2009) visited Tajikistan in July for the purpose of establishing relations with civil society and state leaders and finding ways to create initiatives for the common good.

Meanwhile, America has provided financial support for the new boarder guard complex at the Nijnii Panj checkpoint. The US Central Command (CENTCOM)'s programme for the struggle against drug trafficking financed this project to the tune of \$7.6 million. CENTCOM representative General Robert Livingston attended the opening of the complex. There are plans for America to finance several additional projects to improve the work of checkpoint Nijnii Panj.

U.S. Undersecretary of State Robert Blake (South and Central Asian Affairs) visited Tajikistan and discussed the situation in the region. He expressed an interest in mediating tensions between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan by conducting direct and constructive talks between the two countries. On 19 August Blake said that his country was going to construct a national practise centre for military forces in Karatag near Dushanbe and that it would offer \$10 million to finance this project.

During the visit of Michael McFaul (advisor to the U.S. president), relations between Tajikistan and the U.S. were discussed. McFaul highlighted the "productiveness" of the talks that had focused on multilateral cooperation between Tajikistan and US and the current situation in Afghanistan. During



talks with President Rahmon, various issues was discussed, notably energy, communication and transport.

According to U.S. data, the number of joint projects between Tajikistan and America has increased in recent years. Speaking of further aid for Tajikistan, the U.S. Ambassador to Tajikistan Kenneth Gross pointed out that the total amount of the U.S. aid to Tajikistan in 2010 came to \$65 million, 11.1% higher than the previous year.

NATO Secretary General Anders Rasmussen made a short stop in Tajikistan on his way to Afghanistan. NATO's special representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia countries Robert Simmons visited Tajikistan at the end of August. During talks with President Rahmon, regional security and the situation in Central Asia and Afghanistan were discussed.

## **Economy and business enterprises**

Tajikistan has started to recover from the recession. The long-term barriers for economic growth are the small size of national economy, the narrow industrial base and limited access to external markets. Another barrier to economic growth in Tajikistan is the unattractive investment climate due to undeveloped legislation in the regulation of industries and protection of investors. It is to this end that the government is implementing reforms to lower the administrative costs of establishing enterprises and of external financing, to improve the system of registration of ownership and to lower trade barriers.

According to the data from the National Bank of Tajikistan, the gold reserves of Tajikistan in the first quarter of 2010 increased by 25.7%, reaching \$441.6 million. In this period 416 kg of gold was purchased on the domestic market and 1 ton on the external market. In the year to June, inflation in Tajikistan rose 2.8%. According to the State Statistical

Committee, the unemployment rate is 12%.

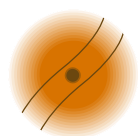
Since 1 July, average wages in Tajikistan have increased 33%. In general, the average monthly real wage in services and trade amounted to \$70.9 in May, 17.3% higher than last year. The highest salaries are to be found in the sphere of financial services where the average monthly wage is \$274.3. The monthly average wage is \$209.3 in communication services, \$206.5 in construction and \$185.6 in transportation. On average, agriculture, forestry and fisheries employees earn the lowest monthly salaries: \$18.8, \$30.4 and \$34.3 respectively. The situation is further aggravated by constant delays with salary payments, notably in the transport, construction, and industrial production and fisheries sectors.

It is still unclear how the funds collected for the construction of Roghun HPP will be allocated. The finance ministry has announced a second tender for commercial banks to allocate these funds. The first tender, implemented at the end of May, was unsuccessful because the finance ministry could not accept the conditions offered by the commercial banks. These banks were offering an average interest rate of 0.6% whereas the ministry was expecting a refinancing rate of at least 8%.

A number of cotton ginneries including *Kabol-textiles* and *Rishtai Hisor* stopped operating because of the shortage of raw materials. Other textile companies also lowered production. One of the main reasons for this is the lack of free funds to purchase raw materials rather than the increase in cotton prices.

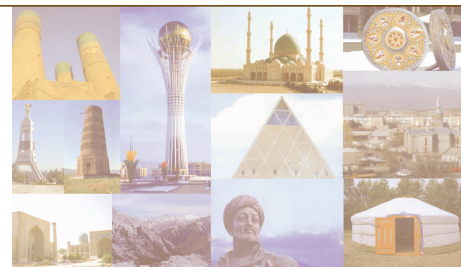
The conflict sparked by the results of the independent audit of the state aluminium company TALCO continues. Despite heated discussions of this issue in the media, the results of the audit have not been published.

Despite the rapid development of mobile communications in Tajikistan, two companies offering



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mobile communication services in the country are on the brink of bankruptcy because of debts to the state monopoly Tajik Telecomm for the use of frequencies. Meanwhile, the number of occasions when Tajik Telecomm blocked the use of frequencies by commercial mobile service providers has increased. Commercial mobile service providers are worried by the initiative promoted by officials from the transport and communication ministry, which requires all commercial agreements between domestic and foreign mobile service providers to include Tajik Telecomm as an intermediary.

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