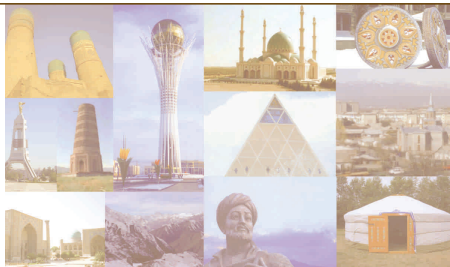


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UZBEKISTAN



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Bimonthly article

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Highlights

The year 2011 in Uzbekistan ended with a symbolic demonstration of the status quo of the state's domestic and foreign policy, which have not undergone any serious transformations despite the arrival of a new year which is expected to usher in far reaching changes. This paradox may well reflect the "silence before the storm".

Internal affairs

In November, it was reported that Uzbekistan's national security service had arrested the chief of the investigation department of the Karshi district agency of internal affairs, Colonel Vakhid Abdullaev, on suspicion of corruption. The minister of emergency situations Tursinkhan Khudaybergenov and the former President's advisor for law enforcement agencies Ravshan Muhitdinov were allegedly detained in December on suspicion of corruption and economic crime. This information was subsequently disproved. An anti-corruption "showcase" campaign may well be launched in the near future.

On 21 November, 16 people received long-term prison sentences ranging from 6 to 12 years for membership of the banned Islamist group. The court proceedings took place behind closed doors. According to human rights activists, the charges were trumped up and the defendants tortured.

At the initiative of President Islam Karimov, on 5 December the Senate adopted an amendment to Article 90 of the country's Constitution reducing the presidential term from seven to five years with a view to consolidating democratic principles of governance and strengthening the role of the parliament in conducting socio-economic and political reforms.

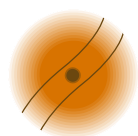
This is perhaps the most noteworthy news of this period. Observers and analysts have not managed to discern whether this political "innovation" applies to the incumbent or not. Interestingly, Karimov was elected in 2007 for a seven-year term of government on the basis of the then new election law, and it is two years before the end of his seven-year stint in power that he has initiated the return to the previous five-year term. It is unlikely that the President and his administration will have started preparing a successor scenario or some new process in 2012.

The 19th anniversary of the Constitution was celebrated on 8 December. In his traditional official speech to mark the occasion, President Karimov announced his evaluation of achievements in 2011, the year of small business and entrepreneurship, and proposed designating 2012 as the year of the strong family. It is a tradition in Uzbekistan to give a symbolic name to each year to symbolize the special attention the government will devote to a specific sphere. For example, 2010 was called a year of harmoniously developed generation; 2009, the year of developing and improving the countryside; 2008, the year of youth; 2007, the year of social protection; 2006, the year of charity and medical workers; 2005, the year of health. Incidentally, 1992 had already been designated as the year of the family, so it is strange that the same name has been proposed again.

In November, 5,094 Muslim citizens of Uzbekistan made a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. This year conditions had improved, notably in terms of medical services, transport and meals. Traditionally, this season engenders a great deal of enthusiasm in Uzbekistan and proved to be a great social and political event.

Biometrical passports were introduced for the first time in Uzbekistan in November. The issue of these

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new passports, as announced, will be completed by 2015. The biometrical passport not only contains all the standard information about the passport holder, but also new data such as fingerprints.

The official opening of the “Enlightenment Centre” took place on 16 November. The building has two main parts: the symposium palace and the national library, named after Alisher Navoi, Uzbekistan’s greatest poet. The symposium palace can accommodate 1,000 people and is equipped with modern information-communication technology, computers, Internet and Wi-Fi.

The national library comprises a museum of books, reading halls, a bookshop, a cinema centre, Internet and media-centre, and also a children’s room and relaxation room. It is also equipped to the highest modern standards and has an automatic book search system and electronic catalogue and database.

Foreign and international policy

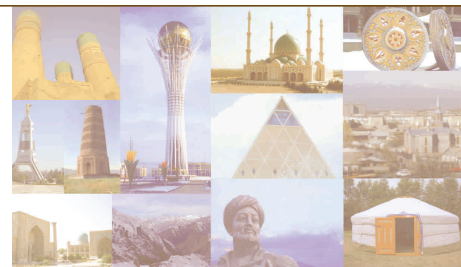
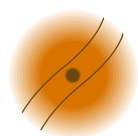
The Chief of U.S. Central Command General Vincent Brooks visited Uzbekistan late November. He met with defence minister Kabul Berdiev and discussed the issue of distribution among Central Asian countries of abundant military equipment and techniques of American troops withdrawing from Afghanistan. This has become a by-product of cooperation between Uzbekistan and the US concerning peace making and reconstruction in Afghanistan. It was decided that in the course of the withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan, the US military would leave some equipment in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan for the purpose of helping to strengthen the regional armies and provide for more security. For Uzbekistan this has a twofold advantage in that it represents an important acquisition for the army and enhances the country’s international profile and prestige due to its contribution to Afghan affairs and cooperation with the United States.

On 5 December President Karimov made a foreign policy statement during his inspection of the southern province, Kashkadarya. While attending the session of the province’s council of legislators, he made it clear that he does not support Russian prime minister Putin’s initiative to unify the former Soviet republics in a single economic space. He stated that unfortunately “some forces in the post-Soviet space are still thinking about restoring, albeit in a new form, an empire which once was called the USSR. People that have fully tasted freedom will never return to an old ideology and to the past”. A similar position was later expressed by the President in the aforementioned Constitution Day celebrations.

The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) held their summits on 20 December in Moscow, attended by President Karimov. Earlier this month President Lukashenko of Belarus made a very critical statement of what he termed Uzbekistan’s triple foreign policy game, which he qualified as incompatible with its membership in the CSTO. Karimov responded by participating in the CSTO and CIS summits, but his position was ambiguous just like these two organizations themselves.

On one hand Karimov acknowledged the “historical role” the CIS has played throughout the new post-Soviet independence period and said it was difficult to imagine what would happen if there were no CIS. On the other hand, his attendance of the CSTO summit was more reserved. He did not reject the proposal of coordination between all member states regarding the issue of deployment in their territory of military installations of foreign countries which are not members of the organization. But agreement on this issue has not been adopted yet.

So Karimov’s seeming optimism about the CIS and a moderate “no-veto approach” to the new CSTO proposal reflected once again Tashkent’s “one-step forwards, one step back” strategic posture within these two post-Soviet structures.



Uzbekistan's position was expressed in the CIS summit in terms of its long-term national interests which are commensurate with the country's need to modernize and comply with national legislation and international obligations. Uzbekistan confirmed that it remains in the team but could not demonstrate its desire to keep a distance in its relations with the United States and the West.

Hungarian President Pal Schmitt made an official visit to Tashkent at the invitation of President Karimov on 6 November. In the course of the visit bilateral relations as well as current international and regional issues were discussed. A joint Communiqué was adopted after the negotiations. A number of bilateral documents were signed including political, trade-economic, investments, scientific-technical spheres of cooperation. Today the annual trade exchange between two countries amounts to approximately \$37 million.

Economy and business enterprise

The government of Uzbekistan announced that GDP growth in 2011 was 8.4%, the growth of industrial production 9.3% and agricultural growth 6%. Government spending in 2011 on education was 7.3% of GDP and for healthcare 2.8% of GDP. By December 2011 the number of registered small business enterprises in Uzbekistan reached 247,200 and in the period January-November alone, 33,100 were created. In 2011 the share of small business in GDP reached 50.5%.

In December the National Air Company of Uzbekistan purchased its tenth A320 from the Airbus Consortium, thus marking the conclusion of a contract to this effect. In 2012-2013 "Uzbekistan Airways" plans to buy 4 Boeing-767-300ER and 2 Boeing-787 Dreamliner (2014-2016).

On 6 December the council of directors of the World Bank approved a new strategy of partnership with Uzbekistan for the period 2012-2015. According to this document the WB will finance projects to the tune of \$1.3 bn. in the spheres of water supply, sanitary, irrigation, energy, transport and private sector, as well as ongoing projects in the sphere of healthcare and education. The partnership strategy envisages joint work on the "Conception of structural transformation of economy of Uzbekistan until 2030". In the press conference in Tashkent on 10 December, the head of the WB representation Takuya Kamata reported that in the framework of this joint work on the Conception, there are plans to analyse ways of achieving value added in different industry sectors, to identify competitive sectors and define a strategy for their further development.

In December the joint venture Neo Sun Light in partnership with South Korea's Samsung Electronics launched the production of high quality microwave ovens with the Samsung brand. The new production line will have an expected production capacity of 100,000 microwaves and it is forecast that 50% of production will be exported.

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