

# Why Uzbekistan and the U.S. fell out

#10-11  
5/12

The root cause is the attitude of the current U.S. administration, which regards its allies across the world as temporary props for pursuing American policy.

Vladimir Simonov

UZBEKISTAN, THE strategic kingpin of Central Asia that feels insulted by the West, has decided to order foreign troops out of its territory.

The other day, Uzbekistan prohibited NATO allies from using its land and airspace for operations in neighbouring Afghanistan. The Uzbek authorities insist the allied forces, above all German and Spanish, should leave the country by January 1, 2006. This year, Uzbekistan also told the United States, which is involved in a separate anti-terrorist operation in Afghanistan, to leave the Khanabad military base. Washington pulled out.

NATO and U.S. spokesmen describe this as Tashkent's overdramatic reaction to their criticism of the human rights situation in Uzbekistan. They claim this would not affect the logistics of the operation in Afghanistan. But independent military observers disagree.

It is interesting that Washington and the EU think criticism of a country's state of democracy may force it to cool relations with them. This when many states at the bottom of the U.S. State Department's list of "free" countries maintain friendly relations with Washington.

In the early 1990s, Uzbekistan regained its independence and became a confident player on the Central Asian market. Its natural resources, above all cotton, uranium, and gold, encouraged many Western companies to invest. And, NATO military experts were attracted by the favourable geo-strategic location of Uzbekistan that could be used to monitor of the vast territories of Russia and China.

Before 9/11, Uzbek leader Islam Karimov offered the U.S. military and security forces the possibilities they could not hope to get in any other Central Asian country. The Pentagon and the CIA started hunting for Osama bin Laden from the territory of Uzbekistan before invading Afghanistan. Penetration teams were sent and Predator unmanned aerial vehicles took off from Uzbekistan. Tashkent embraced the U.S. after the 9/11 tragedy, allowing it to use the Khanabad air force base and the Ko-kaity auxiliary airfield. At the same time, the German air force settled at the base in Termez.

Tashkent's foreign policy was based on the seesaw principle. From 1999 to

2002, Uzbekistan withdrew from the Collective Security Treaty signed with Russia and several other post-Soviet states, and joined the GUUAM group (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova). President-for-life Karimov is acting on the British principle: the country cannot have permanent friends, only permanent interests. In that period Uzbekistan's interests obviously moved toward the U.S.

## Differing assessments

But the affair did not come to fruition. The formal reason for the fallout were the events in Andijan where people died during the suppression of public unrest. The Uzbek rulers and the West differed in their assessment of the number of casualties and the nature of the unrest. The U.S. and the EU saw the Andijan events as ruthless suppression of a social outcry by Tashkent dictators. Islam Karimov put the blame on the Akromiya radical Islamic organisation and Western instigators.

As it often happens, the truth is somewhere in between. It is true that the revolt was preceded by the trial of some local businessmen who, as Akromiya members, were funded by the Islamic underground. But the social and economic situation in Uzbekistan, which has the biggest population in Central Asia, is far from stable. Over 80 per cent of Uzbeks and other nationalities live below the poverty line, of whom some 40 per cent earn no more than \$1 a month. The virus of radicalism could not find a better breeding ground.

However, it was not the issue of human rights that ruined the once friendly Tashkent-Washington relations. The root cause is the attitude of the current U.S. administration, which regards its allies across the world as temporary props for pursuing American policy. After getting the bases, Washington made no secret that it wanted Mr. Karimov replaced with a more controllable leader.

This is why Washington has taken a series of actions such as refusal to pay a respectable fee for the lease of the Uzbek bases. It also introduced economic and political sanctions against the Tashkent authorities, eventually threatening to institute proceedings against Mr. Karimov in the International Court. But Uzbekistan has so far proved to be a hard nut to crack. — **RIA Novosti**

THE HINDU

# Shifting balance in Central Asia

The contours of a “new security architecture” for Asia emerged at the Astana session of the SCO. This may signal the emergence of a new centre of global power that is prepared to challenge America’s omnipotence.

Vladimir Radyuhin

**T**HE BALANCE of power in Central Asia is tilting toward Russia for the first time since the United States established a foothold in the region after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

A shift in the geopolitical equations in former Soviet Central Asia has been prompted by the successful “tulip revolution” in Kyrgyzstan in March and a bloody, if unsuccessful, Islamist-led revolt in neighbouring Uzbekistan in May. The two events awakened the region’s leaders to the dangers of their post-9/11 multi-vector policy of building strategic ties with the U.S. while maintaining close relations with Russia.

The former Kyrgyzstan President, Askar Akayev, who was ousted in the March coup, and Uzbek President Islam Karimov, who survived the May uprising in Andizhan, blamed the West for orchestrating the turmoil in the region in an effort to install pro-Western regimes. Denying any role in the Central Asian trouble, the U.S. vowed to press ahead with the “freedom crusade” that had earlier brought West-oriented leaders to power in Georgia and Ukraine.

Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, whose regimes came under attack this year, were the two countries that allowed the U.S. to set up airbases in the region in 2001 for anti-Taliban operations in Afghanistan. While Kyrgyzstan had tried to balance its pro-American tilt by setting up a Russian airbase two years later, Uzbekistan demonstratively distanced itself from Russia.

## Back with Russia

However, Washington’s aggressive support for “velvet revolutions” in the former Soviet republics has pushed Central Asian states back into Russia’s embrace. During his visit to Moscow last month, President Karimov signed a defence pact under which Russia will revive military assistance to Uzbekistan and obtain the right to use Uzbekistan’s defence facilities for operations in the region. At the same time Mr. Karimov imposed restrictions on the flights of American planes from the Khanabad base, forcing the U.S. command to re-deploy some aircraft to Afghanistan.

Washington suffered an even bigger setback in Kyrgyzstan. A snap presidential election on July 10 became a triumph of traditional clan-based politics over Western-type democracy the U.S. has been trying to export to that country. Political stability destroyed by the “tulip revolution” was partially restored

thanks to a Russia-brokered deal between the southern and northern clans. Under an election pact between two most popular politicians representing the rival clans, the former Prime Minister, Kurmambek Bakiyev, agreed, if he won the snap presidential election, to appoint his main competitor and the former Interior Minister, Felix Kulov, as Prime Minister. The tandem swept the poll and helped avoid a crippling standoff between the north and the south.

Russia and China voiced strong support for an evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, path of development for Central Asia.

On July 2 the Presidents of Russia and China, Vladimir Putin and Hu Jintao, at their summit in Moscow issued a declaration on the “World Order in the 21st Century.” They rejected attempts to “ignore objective processes of social development of sovereign states and impose on them alien models of social and political systems.”

This approach met with grateful response in the region. Three days after the summit the leaders of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan joined Russia and China in rejecting “attempts at monopoly and domination in international affairs.”

“Concrete models of social development cannot be exported,” said a declaration adopted at a summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Astana, Kazakhstan on July 5. “The right of every people to its own path of development must be fully guaranteed.”

In a sign of the strategic reorientation of Central Asia, the Shanghai group called on the U.S. to set a deadline for the withdrawal of its bases from the region now that the anti-terror campaign in Afghanistan is coming to an end. The SCO members also proclaimed their joint resolve to fight “terrorism, separatism and extremism on the SCO territory by their own forces.”

The SCO’s new assertiveness should be seen in the context of a call by Russia and China in their World Order Declaration for “a new security architecture” that would promote “a just and rational world order based on the respect of the right of all countries to equal security.”

The contours of the “new security architecture” for Asia emerged at the Astana session of the SCO with the admission of India, Iran and Pakistan as observers into the organisation. This may signal the emergence of a new centre of global power that is prepared to challenge America’s omnipotence.

# Power grids and the new Silk Road in Asia

India and Pakistan hold the key to unlocking multiple routes of cooperation.

Siddharth Varadarajan

**W**HEN INDIA's External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, called on Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev during the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Astana last week, his host made a proposal which could — if implemented fully — alter the dynamics of the international market for oil and gas. "Now that the prospects for peace between India and Pakistan are so bright," Indian officials recounted Mr. Nazarbayev as saying, "why can't Kazakhstan think of supplying you oil via the Caspian Sea and Iran?"

Kazakhstan is not the only resource-rich Central Asian country to see the collateral benefits the India-Pakistan peace process can bring to the region.

Tajikistan President Emomali Rakhmonov, also in Astana for the SCO meet, told Mr. Singh he wanted India to invest in his country's power sector. If an Indian company were to set up a hydroelectric power plant in Tajikistan, Mr. Rakhmonov said, the electricity generated could be moved to India via the Wakhan Corridor in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Though the terrain is mountainous, the technology for erecting High Voltage Direct Current transmission lines in a cost-effective manner already exists. Tajikistan, with an abundance of fast moving rivers, is the world's third largest producer of hydroelectric power after the U.S. and Russia. Last month, Iran signed an MoU to start work on the 220 MW Sangtudin-2 project on the Vakhsh river in Nurek in western Tajikistan while the Russian utility company, UES, will build Sangtudin-1. Kyrgyzstan is another country with excellent prospects for hydel generation.

Since any Central Asian power lines passing through the Wakhan corridor would likely enter Pakistan in the 'Northern Areas' of undivided Jammu and Kashmir before moving across to the Indian side of the State, such a project could also help fuel the proposal to make the Line of Control "irrelevant."

As with the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline, which has now come on to the agenda after years of resistance from New Delhi, the principal bottleneck in both the Kazakh and Tajik projects is likely to be trust, not technology or finance. But if India has the political will and strategic gumption to see them through, these proposals could lay the foundations for a Pan-Asian energy grid linking the two energy surplus regions of West and Central Asia to the two energy-deficient ones of South and East Asia. In his speech to the Afro-Asian conference in Jakarta in April, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh spoke of the need for such cooperation: "While our continents include both



major producers and consumers of energy, the framework within which we produce and consume energy is determined elsewhere."

Even without the involvement of Iran, the United States is likely to oppose the emergence of any alternative energy framework in which producers and consumers from the continent trade directly with each other and use land routes — directly from Central Asia into China, and also southwards from Iran, Pakistan and India going eastwards into southern China — rather than the sea for transportation.

## U.S. pre-eminence & energy

U.S. pre-eminence in the world is linked to energy in three inter-related ways: first, through its direct and indirect control of the world's hydrocarbon trade, second, through the seignorage it derives from the 'petrodollar' and third, from its ability, as the world's only major maritime power, to "secure" (or block) sea lanes of communication vital to the energy imports of other countries. An Asian energy grid would, however, reduce the U.S. strategic thrust in the region along all three vectors. More so if some of the dire predictions about Saudi supplies tapering off — made most recently and effec-

tively by energy analyst Matthew R. Simmons in *Twilight in the Desert: The Coming Saudi Oil Shock and the World Economy* (Wiley, 2005) — prove to be correct.

By 2015, Kazakhstan's oil output is likely to be 3.5 million barrels a day. Though the Iranian option has long been seen in Astana as the shortest and most cost-effective route for exporting the region's hydrocarbons to the wider world, political pressure from the U.S. has so far blocked all consideration of this alternative. Not anymore. In the face of improving prospects for peace between India and Pakistan, Kazakhstan is looking anew at Iran.

Apart from its desire to isolate the Teheran Government, Washington has put all its political and financial muscle behind the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, which will funnel Caspian oil down to Turkey's Mediterranean coast for onward export through tankers. After years in the making, the BTC pipeline finally became operational last month, though with a limited throughput. A small amount of Kazakh oil is being moved through this route, with the bulk still going through the Russian pipeline network to the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk. Once the ambitious new 960-km West-East pipe-

line from Atasu to Alashankou in north-western Xinjiang is complete, Kazakhstan will have yet another export route. Last week, Chinese President Hu Jintao also reached an agreement with Mr. Nazarbayev for a feasibility study on a natural gas pipeline to China as well.

Currently, Kazakhstan sells some oil via swap arrangements with Teheran. Kazakh oil is shipped by barge to the Iranian Caspian port of Neka for onward distribution. In exchange, the Iranians supply an equal amount of oil to Kazakhstan's actual customer at their Persian Gulf terminal in Bandar Abbas. The Chinese had once made a proposal for constructing a pipeline to Neka from the Kazakh Caspian port of Aktau but legal disputes over the demarcation of the Caspian have put a halt to all under-sea projects. One idea is to build an overland pipeline through Turkmenistan into Iran or Afghanistan. In the interim, the barge-to-pipeline route will help prospective Kazakh customers like India source oil more cheaply than other routes.

After having earlier missed the bus, ONGC Videsh Ltd appears fully committed to working in Kazakhstan. The Indian 'mini-major' is now looking seriously at two offshore Kazakh blocks — Satpaev and Makhambet — and is finally opening a representative office in Astana. ONGC is also looking at buying whole or part of the \$2.4 billion Canadian-owned PetroKazakhstan, with a view to feeding the Alashankou pipeline.

With the Kazakhs looking at India as a regional balance to China and the Chinese worried about western pressure on Kazakhstan, the involvement of Indian companies would make for a more stable and cooperative environment. China plans to take the Kazakh pipeline all the way up to Lanzhou in Gansu province but is wary of making the requisite investment until it is assured of the stability of oil supplies.

Later this year, India's dynamic oil minister, Mani Shankar Aiyar, will play host to a Round Table of major energy producers and consumers from North, South, and Central Asia. Among the consumers will be India, China, Japan, and South Korea, while among the producers will be Iran, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

One of India's aims is to see what can be done to eliminate the 'Asian premium' paid by most Asian importers of crude oil but the one big idea that must also be explored is an Asian energy grid. Pakistan has not yet been invited since it is not one of Asia's "largest" consumers of oil and gas.

However, given the vital role Pakistan plays as the bridge connecting India to Iran and Central Asia, New Delhi would likely benefit by including Islamabad in the process right from the outset.

# Uzbekistan steps up pressure on U.S. to close base

Vladimir Radyuhin

Central Asia 10-15 9/19

**MOSCOW:** Uzbekistan is stepping up pressure on the United States to withdraw its air base set up in the Central Asian country for operations in neighbouring Afghanistan.

The Uzbek Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the Americans were allowed to use the air base at Karshi-Khanabad "in direct connection with the military operation in northern Afghanistan" for the overthrow of the Taliban regime after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States.

"Any other variants for U.S. military presence on the territory of Uzbekistan in the future were not considered by the Uzbek leadership," the ministry said.

"These fundamental principles must be placed at the centre of any discussions about prospects for the future presence of the U.S. military contingent at the Khanabad air field."

Uzbekistan also said that the United States had not paid takeoff and landing fees, as well as compensation for security services, new infrastructure, ecological damage and inconvenience to the local population.

The statement was issued two days after the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation called for the United States and its coalition allies in Afghanistan to set a date for withdrawing their military bases from Central Asia.

Last month Uzbekistan introduced severe restrictions on American flights from the Khanabad base forcing the U.S. command to redeploy some aircraft to Afghanistan.

Kyrgyzstan has joined Uzbekistan in calling on Washington to shut down its air base near the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek.

## "Part of anti-terrorist coalition"

"All of us are part of the anti-terrorist coalition, including our country. However, there is a time limit for everybody who comes to stay somewhere," acting Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Roza Otunbaeva said on July 6.

Washington has rejected the demands. The U.S. Embassy in Tajikistan, where the U.S. military also use air base facilities, said the U.S. military bases in the region continue to give active support to the continuing operations of the coalition forces in Afghanistan.

The bases "have been set up with express consent of the governments of the receiving states and will operate till each of the countries regards the facilities as a basis for its national security," the RIA Novosti news agency quoted the U.S. Embassy in Tajikistan as saying in a statement issued on Friday.

HINDU

## Russia's new move

Uzbek President Islam Karimov's recent visit to Moscow signals a revival of close strategic ties between Central Asia's most populous country and Russia.

Vladimir Radyuhin

LAST WEEK Russia demonstrated fresh resolve to fend off U.S. attempts to expand its influence in Central Asia by orchestrating "people's power revolutions" modelled after the pro-Western coups in Georgia and Ukraine.

A two-day visit by Uzbek President Islam Karimov to Moscow on June 28-29 signalled a revival of close strategic ties between Central Asia's most populous country and Russia.

The Uzbek leader came to Moscow to seek political support, as well as military and economic aid in the wake of a destabilising Islamic revolt in its second biggest city of Andizhan on May 13-14. Mr. Karimov has also come under strong pressure from the West to liberalise his authoritarian regime and allow an international probe into the Andizhan clashes that claimed 179 lives, according to Uzbek authorities, and hundreds of lives, according to human rights groups.

Russia, by contrast, demonstrated full support for Mr. Karimov. President Putin backed Mr. Karimov's claim that foreign-trained mercenaries had been behind the Andizhan violence. Mr. Putin said Moscow had information about the infiltration of Afghanistan-trained militants into Uzbekistan.

"We confirm getting intelligence on militants infiltrating (Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states) from Afghanistan," Mr. Putin said opening his meeting with Mr. Karimov on Tuesday.

The Russian leader listened sympathetically as Mr. Karimov linked Andizhan to "velvet revolutions" orchestrated by the United States in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, and hinted that the U.S. was also behind the Andizhan riots.

"The script-writers and stage managers (of the Andizhan events) used the same religious, extremist and radical forces... which they had battled so 'successfully' in Afghanistan and are now fighting in Iraq," the Uzbek leader said.

Mr. Karimov's visit to Moscow resulted in a revival of defence cooperation with Russia that had been broken off in 1999 when Uzbekistan refused to prolong its membership in the Collective Security Treaty, a defence pact set up by

former Soviet states. In the past few years Uzbekistan has been cosyng up to the U.S. in the hope of getting Western aid and investment and asserting a dominant position in Central Asia by balancing between Moscow and Washington. In the wake of the 9/11 events Uzbekistan agreed to the opening of a U.S. airbase on its territory for operations in Afghanistan.

However, the rise of religious extremism and the West's support for his political opponents forced Mr. Karimov to rethink his strategic options in favour of alliance with Russia. After Andizhan Tashkent imposed severe curbs on use of the base forcing the Pentagon to redeploy its transport aircraft to Afghanistan. Washington has responded by cutting military aid to Uzbekistan. For its part Moscow has agreed to resume defence cooperation with Tashkent.

Later this summer Russia will conduct the first joint military exercises with Uzbekistan since the break-up of the Soviet Union. During Mr. Karimov's visit to Moscow the two sides are reported to have signed a secret agreement on possible deployment of Russian forces in Uzbekistan in the event of regional destabilisation. Under the pact, Uzbekistan will allow Russia to use about 10 airfields on its territory.

Last month Kyrgyzstan's Acting President Kurmanbek Bakiyev did not rule out the opening of a second Russian military base in the country under the aegis of either the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), which groups Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, or the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), involving Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Russia's growing military presence in Central Asia is accompanied by closer security cooperation with China in the region. Ahead of Chinese President Hu Jintao's visit to Russia, which began on Thursday, Beijing said that the July 5 summit of the SCO would "take new measures to step up joint action by the member-states to maintain stability in the region and fight terrorism, separatism and extremism."

✓  
110-11

Central Asia  
5/2

# Central Asia — a region destabilised

M.K. Bhadrakumar

**D**URING HIS recent visit to Australia, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf detailed the fallout of the Afghan situation on regional security. Among the statesmen in the region there is no one better placed than Gen. Musharraf to speak on the phenomenon of trans-border terrorism, militancy and the "war on terror." That alone ascribes the utmost importance to the Pakistani leader's words.

Gen. Musharraf assessed that in "do-able" terms, from a soldier's perspective, "we should be able to bring a semblance of democracy that is sustainable, ensuring the integrity of Afghanistan" in 10 years. What had been achieved in the three-and-a-half-years since the American troops landed in Afghanistan was that "we've broken [Al-Qaeda's] cohesion" and its ability to function as a corporate entity, as a "homogeneous body able to execute operations in a command and control environment." But it would take 10 years for an "ultimate dismantling, ultimate elimination" of Al-Qaeda from the face of the region.

This is the first time that an attempt has been made to give the "war on terror" in Afghanistan a timeline. It helps. But the implications of what Gen. Musharraf said do not become any less startling. Ten years is a long time in politics.

It certainly helps to draw a balance sheet on the "war on terror" in Afghanistan. What has been achieved? The success so far on the security front is that the "war on terror" has dispersed various international militant networks thriving in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime. In October 2001, as the American troops moved in, the Taliban militia and its allied cadres retreated into the tribal agencies in Pakistan. Senior Pakistani military officials have stated in recent weeks that no foreign militants are any longer present in the tribal agencies.

The Western media have frequently suggested in recent months that the inaccessible Nooristan province in Afghanistan, sandwiched between

Just what is the U.S. mission in Afghanistan? The "war on terror" is providing a timeless, seamless context for geopolitics. *10-10 2/16*

Pakistan's Northern Areas and the remote Wakhan corridor (bordering China), has become the base camp for the Taliban and its Arab fraternity broadly known as Al-Qaeda. But, inexplicably, U.S. forces are yet to venture into the area. American military commanders and the authorities in Kabul have lately begun to admit that the claims that the Taliban is a spent force were made hastily. Indeed, it is becoming difficult to tell who is a Talib. The U.S.-sponsored strategy of wooing "moderate" Taliban into the political mainstream too is floundering. The flawed strategy is becoming exposed for what it was — providing the political justification or fig-leaf for the forced disarming and scattering of the main forces of the Northern Alliance, which had previously spearheaded anti-Taliban resistance.

Unfortunately, the U.S. has incrementally shifted to the Afghan Government the burden of curbing drug trafficking, which is a main source of funding for the militants. This though the Government in Kabul has no effective control of the country. Thus Afghanistan's opium production has touched an all-time high level today, and the militants have easy access to vast funding.

Meanwhile, the bulk of the militants belonging to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan or IMU (numbering 3000 to 5000 fighters), Uighur militant groups, and Chechen militants have established themselves in Tajikistan (where 93 per cent of the terrain consists of the Pamir mountain ranges) and parts of the Ferghana Valley. The Afghan-Tajik border region has become highly volatile. Last Tuesday, a bomb attack in downtown Dushanbe flagged how tenuous the eight-year-old Tajik peace settlement has become. Evidently, the U.S.-led "war on terror" in Afghanistan has spilled over to the Central Asian

region. The Central Asian region is getting destabilised.

An "Afghan connection" is showing up in the two cataclysmic events of March and May in Central Asia — the so-called "Tulip revolution" in Kyrgyzstan and the uprising in the Uzbek city of Andizhan in the Ferghana Valley. Despite the U.S. propensity to view these events through the prism of the Bush administration's democracy project, it is becoming difficult to ignore the disquieting questions that have arisen.

Kyrgyzstan is tottering on the brink of anarchy and may well descend into civil war. Under Russian counselling, a tenuous alliance between the northern and southern clan interests has been put in place for the moment but there is no certainty whether it will hold. Political violence has become a daily occurrence. An overall cult of violence is appearing. Also, a nexus has formed between criminals, drug mafia, and militant groups based in Afghanistan and Tajikistan with elements inside Kyrgyzstan. These forces are on the ascent. The weakening of state authority in Kyrgyzstan has worked to their advantage. The "Tulip revolution" has opened the door for the Hizb-ut Tahrir (which some suspect is the IMU's "political wing") to come to centre stage in southern Kyrgyzstan regions that form part of Ferghana Valley. The American rhetoric pigeonholing the "Tulip revolution" into hackneyed definitions of freedom looks not only ludicrous but an incitement to the forces of political Islam.

The developments in Andizhan have more ominous dimensions. The Ferghana Valley — a hotbed of Wahhabism and simmering nationality questions — may appear to be a limited space on the vast Central Asian landscape but accounts for a quarter of the entire region's population

and is shared uneasily between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The ghosts that Joseph Stalin had forcefully laid to rest are stirring.

On June 4, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said: "we have data showing that various extremist groups may have been involved, among them the Taliban and Chechen terrorists who, and we do know this, periodically meet with the Taliban on the territory of Afghanistan." Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov added on June 9: "We have irrefutable evidence of a foreign trace in these events... It is necessary to find the masterminds of the turmoil and the whereabouts of weapons seized from the local military unit and to find the answer to many other questions." Russian Defence Ministry sources claimed separately that there were 50 foreign nationals from Asian countries, including the CIS, among those who were killed or detained.

It stands to reason that as partners in the "war on terror," Washington and Moscow would have shared interest to probe any involvement of extremist elements in Andizhan events. A monitoring group from China, India, Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan and Russia amongst others has commenced its investigation. But the U.S. has refused to join the investigation on the plea that any enquiry must include "an international partner"; U.S. will not take part in the current investigation "as we do not see that as a substitute for an international investigation; we are considering all of our diplomatic options, including at the U.N... meantime, we're talking to member states of various international organisations to try to generate support for an international investigation... and we are actively working within the international community to try to generate support."

## Washington uneasy

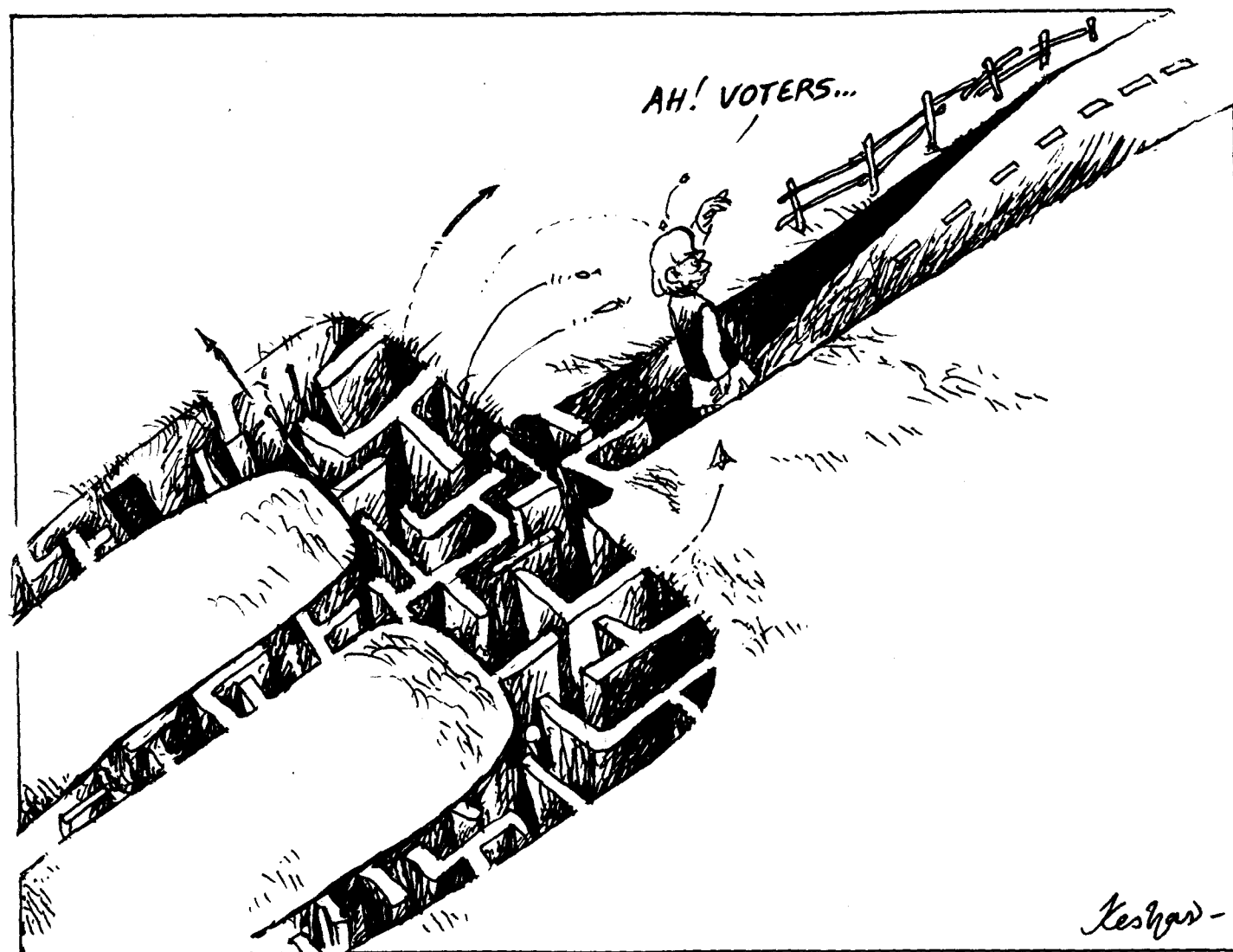
Washington seems to be uneasy that the enquiry over Andizhan events may come up with findings that cast aspersions over the "war on terror" in Afghanistan. Understandably so. Details are now emerging (what many had suspected all along) that American operatives have been in active contact with the IMU (which is suspected to be behind the Andizhan uprising). Not only that, reports that Tohir Yoldashev, the IMU leader, was killed by the U.S. troops in Afghanistan during the operations in 2001, appear to have been very much exaggerated. Actually, U.S. intelligence operatives held several clandestine meetings with Yoldashev and the IMU top brass in the recent months!

The strategy itself is not new. Some of the most obscure chapters of the Afghan *jihad* in the 1980s which lie hidden in the dusty archives of world capitals relate to Mujahideen operations (guided by American operatives in Peshawar) aimed at hitting inside Tajikistan — based on the U.S. assessment during the Cold War period that Muslim Central Asia, especially the Ferghana Valley, was the USSR's "soft underbelly." The strategy was abandoned following refusal by Ahmad Shah Massoud to cooperate. The Soviet army withdrew from the Panjshir Valley in 1984 on the basis of a tacit understanding with Massoud that as a *quid pro quo* he would not let the U.S. have access to the sensitive border regions of Tajikistan. (This explains U.S. hostility towards Massoud.) In the present context, the strategy has even greater validity as Muslim Central Asia also borders China's Xinjiang province.

Yoldashev's nexus with the American intelligence no doubt prompted Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov to go on record at the Russia-NATO Council meeting in Brussels last Friday that the U.S. and NATO forces were not doing enough in Afghanistan to check the "export of terrorism" but were concentrating instead on "imposing democracy without taking into account local habits and national traditions."

All this raises some profound questions. Washington may well seize Gen. Musharraf's statement for justifying the onward 10-year march of the "war on terror" in Afghanistan. But the central question remains: just what is the U.S. mission in Afghanistan? The "war on terror" is providing a timeless, seamless context for geopolitics.

## CARTOONSCAPE



*Keshaan*

# Will the Baku oil pipeline benefit locals?

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline has begun pumping oil. But will Azerbaijan benefit from the wealth that will follow?

Paul Brown

180-17  
19/6

**T**HERE ARE 800 manmade lakes on the edge of the Caspian Sea in an area that is known simply as Twenty. The lakes contain oil, tar and raw sewage as well as water — a mixture that in the summer months provides potent fumes and a breeding ground for malarial mosquitoes.

On parts of the site — which, established in 1847, is the oldest oil field in the world — a few remaining productive wells still work, with “nodding donkeys” pumping up the last of the oil. A few miles from this suburb of Azerbaijan’s capital Baku, in the country’s section of the Caspian Sea, a newer story is unfolding.

British Petroleum is developing what it says is a state-of-the-art, nearly pollution-free oilfield that will connect to the controversial but almost complete 1,762-km Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, which stretches from Azerbaijan to Turkey. Last week the oil finally started to flow through the pipe towards the Mediterranean where it will then travel by tanker to the U.K. to be refined and keep Britain’s cars and aeroplanes running.

## Environment-sensitive

Before arriving at the new sea terminal, the pipeline runs through environmentally sensitive areas in Georgia and has raised concerns about the human rights of local villagers in Turkey.

But BP believes all these problems have been settled and says the pipeline’s advan-

tage is that it avoids taking more oil tankers from the Black Sea through the Bosphorus Strait. It describes BTC as the largest energy project in the world.

The pipeline will transport a million barrels of oil a day, enough to turn impoverished Azerbaijan into a wealthy country almost overnight. By 2007 it will have an income of \$7 billion a year, even if oil falls back from its current price of almost \$50 a barrel to a modest \$25 a barrel. But despite predictions of untold wealth, there are concerns over whether the oil that will keep the U.K. running will be a blessing or a curse for its country of origin.

Inayat Mehtiyeva, whose shop is a few metres from the nearest oil lake that is fed by raw sewage from houses further up the hill, explains that, so far, no benefits can be seen. She says people rarely pay for the bread from her shop. “There is not much money, we operate a barter system. We swap things. Some people take bread and say they will pay later but they never come back. We really depend on God here.”

Along with 80 per cent of the other residents of Twenty, Mehtiyeva is a refugee. She has lived there for 12 years after fleeing from her home in Nagorno-Karabakh, an enclave of Azerbaijan on the border with neighbouring Armenia, during the war between the two countries. United Nations agencies say Armenia still occupies 14 per cent of Azerbaijan, although the Azeri Government claims it is 20 per cent.

Mehtiyeva, whose first name means faith, hopes that one day, with her two sons, she

can return home where life was simple but good. “Perhaps the oil money will help, but I do not know how. I know I cannot stay here. At the first opportunity, I will flee.”

Hasay Hasanov, a shipyard worker who works next to area Twenty, says his \$100-a-month pay is not enough. He is worried that his two children might catch malaria and wants the old oilfield cleaned up, but he does not think he will see any benefit from the new oil money. “What we want is a decent wage — \$300 a month — so we can afford more than just paying the rent and buying food.”

## Benefit or curse?

The World Bank’s country manager for Azerbaijan, Ahmed Jehani, is unsure whether the oil will be “a benefit or a curse.” He is afraid that other industries will wither away if the country relies on oil revenue alone. Politicians might become less responsive to the needs of the people, he says, because they would no longer rely on them for taxes. Rich resources could also lead to ethnic and other tensions, especially if the benefits are not shared.

Added to this are doubts about whether democracy in Azerbaijan is robust following the country’s election in October 2003. President Ilham Aliyev was voted in after the death of his father Heydar, whose giant presidential portraits still appear in their thousands all across the capital.

Furthermore, according to Transparency International’s 2004 index, Azerbaijan is one of the world’s most corrupt countries.

“This is a major concern of the World Bank,” says Mr. Jehani. “We need to get accountability in elections, in the assets. There is a deficiency of justice, access to courts, and lack of general transparency.”

He is hopeful, however. The Government has set up an oil fund which will publish all the details of money coming in and where it is invested. “This is a shining example of what can be done. Let us hope that temptations to divert money away from long-term investment do not prove too strong,” he says.

## Not first oil boom

Today’s oil boom in Baku is not the first. At the end of the 19th century, Azerbaijan provided more than half the world’s oil, and 60 per cent of Britain’s oil.

It supplied the cash for some of the most sumptuous Victorian stately homes in Britain, but left Baku with a legacy of oil pollution that the Soviet empire added to and left behind.

As Azerbaijan returns to an oil boom, it will again bolster profits far away, notably those of BP. But the oil from the new fields is expected to last only until 2020, after which time the country will produce just enough for the needs of its eight million people.

Mr. Jehani sums up: “It is a question of whether the money generated from these 15 years of the second oil boom will be invested to turn Azerbaijan into a modern and wealthy state, or whether it will be an opportunity wasted.” — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

# India, Ukraine sign host of agreements



Ukrainian Foreign Minister Borys Taraschuk with President Kalam in Kiev, Ukraine

**RITU SARIN**  
KIEV, JUNE 2

UKRANIAN President Viktor Yushchenko has stated that India "deserves" a seat in the expanded UN Security Council, making Ukraine the third country out of the four countries visited by President APJ Abdul Kalam, to have backed India's claim. Ukraine has now become the third country to have expressed its support for a UN Security Council seat for India after Russia and Iceland, during President Kalam's tour.

Besides garnering support for India on the UN body, the President's three-day visit to Ukraine has resulted in several other "target-oriented" announcements and collaborations. For one, during his banquet speech, President Kalam set an enhanced target of bilateral trade between India and Ukraine as \$ 5 billion by the year 2010. Bilateral trade between the two countries has doubled in two years and presently stands at around \$700 million, though tilting heavily in Ukraine's favour.

Two bilateral agreements inked at the Maryinski Palace were a framework agreement for enhanced cooperation on peaceful use of

outer space and an agreement on standardisation, meteorology and conformity assessment. The Bureau of Indian Standards and the State Committee of Ukraine for Technical Regulation were the two signatory departments. Officials in Kiev said further agreements on education and culture were on the anvil, and would soon be finalised by

## **An announcement was made of a collaboration between Indian and Ukraine in the designing, manufacturing and marketing of a medium-sized aircraft**

the Ministry of Human Resources Development.

Keeping in mind the two countries' shared interests in space exploration, an agreement on collaborations with the National Space Agency of Ukraine was signed on India's behalf by ISRO chief G. Madhavan Nair. Nair said: "We will now work out a detailed blueprint of cooperation."

Interestingly, an announcement was also made of a collaboration between Indian and Ukraine in the designing, manufacturing and marketing of a medium-sized aircraft.



# Another move in the Great Game

The BTC pipeline is part of a wider U.S. plan to isolate Russia.

Vladimir Radyuhin

THE LAUNCHING of a trans-Caucasus oil pipeline on Wednesday marked a new round in the Great Game between the United States and Russia for control of the Caspian and Central Asia.

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline is a key element in the U.S. strategy to redraw the geopolitical map of the former Soviet Union and supersede Russia as a dominant force in the former Soviet Union. The U.S. has pushed through the project over more profitable pipelines via Russia and Iran to create an alternative export route for oil produced in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, which have so far depended on Russian pipelines to export their oil to Europe.

The \$4-billion BTC pipeline, built by a multinational consortium led by British oil giant BP, can carry over one million barrels a day from Azerbaijan across the Caucasian mountains through Georgia to the Mediterranean port of Ceyhan in Turkey. A gas pipeline running parallel to the oil pipe is to be completed next year.

## Russian objections

Russia has strongly opposed the BTC pipeline, claiming it was a political, rather than an economic project. "We believe that this pipeline is economically inexpedient," a Russian government source was quoted as saying. "Its rated capacity is 60 million tonnes of oil a year, but there is outlook for no more than 28 million tonnes of oil, and only half of it has been tapped so far."

The economic and political success of the U.S.-sponsored project depends on whether Kazakhstan will contribute significant amounts of oil for the pipe. President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan was in Baku to inaugurate the pipeline but stopped short of signing — as expected — an agreement on joining the BTC pipeline.

The BTC pipeline is part of a wider U.S. plan to set up a security structure for the region alternative to the Russia-dominated Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation led by Russia and China.

Under its Caspian Guard programme, the U.S. plans to deploy troops in the region under a trilateral alliance with Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan to provide joint military security for the BTC pipeline and the Caspian. At a later stage the alliance may incorporate Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Turkey, but lock out Russia.

This axis, together with the U.S.-promoted GUUAM alliance of Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova, will enable Washington to ex-

ercise control over an absolute majority of post-Soviet states and create a *cor-done sanitaire* around Russia.

Russia, which boycotted the BTC inauguration, has voiced strong objections to the Caspian Guard plan. "Russia will always oppose the presence of any foreign military contingents within the boundaries of the CIS," head of the Russian upper house international committee Mikhail Margelov said commenting on the launching of the BTC pipeline. "First and foremost, it is a question of [Russia's] national security. Foreign military presence in the region would look especially strange against the background of the coming pullout of Russian bases from Georgia."

## United against U.S.

Russia and China are trying to torpedo the U.S. plan by forging close political and economic links with their allies in the former Soviet Union. Moscow and Beijing backed President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan over his ruthless suppression of Islamist riots in the Fergana Valley earlier this month. Mr. Karimov has recently been moving away from the U.S., which has an anti-terror airbase in Uzbekistan, and drawing closer to Russia and China. Last month Mr. Karimov withdrew from GUUAM. Over the past year Russian companies have signed multi-billion deals to develop Uzbekistan's oil and gas fields.

The day the BTC pipeline was launched Mr. Karimov was in Beijing to sign a friendship treaty and a spate of contracts providing for \$1.5-billion Chinese investment in its gas and oil industry. China is also building a 10-million-tonne oil pipeline from Kazakhstan.

Russia is negotiating with Kazakhstan a long-term programme for carrying the bulk of Kazakh export oil via the Moscow-dominated Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) till the year 2020. Kazakhstan, which produced 45 million tonnes of oil last year, pumped 32 million tons for export via the CPC pipeline running from northern Caspian across Russia to the Black Sea port of Novorossiisk.

It is planned to expand the CPC capacity to 60 million tonnes by 2015. Last month Russia, Bulgaria and Greece signed a \$677-million agreement to build a trans-Balkan pipeline that will carry 35 million tonnes of Russian and Kazakh oil to the Mediterranean bypassing Turkey's crowded Bosphorus strait.

President Nazarbayev said last year that Russia was a "priority transit route for Kazakh oil."

While the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline is a major success for U.S. diplomacy, the Great Game is just unfolding and its outcome is far from clear.

# Key East-West oil pipeline opens

## Major competitor to traditional export routes for Caspian energy

**BAKU (AZERBAIJAN):** A major new U.S.-backed pipeline to bring oil directly from the Caspian Sea to Western markets and break Russia's long-time grip on the region's vast energy resources was formally launched on Wednesday in a ceremony attended by Presidents and other dignitaries.

U.S. Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman, who participated in the opening ceremony, read delegates a letter from U.S. President George W. Bush in which he hailed the \$4-billion project as a "monumental achievement."

"This pipeline can help generate balanced economic growth, and provide a foundation for a prosperous and just society that advances the cause of freedom," Mr. Bush said in the letter.

### Dignitaries present

The Presidents of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Kazakhstan were joined by other VIPs including Mr. Bodman and the head of British energy giant BP, John Browne, for the formal launch of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline. Russian President Vladimir Putin's spe-

cial representative for international energy cooperation, Igor Yusufov, had been expected to attend the event, but a Kremlin spokesman said in Moscow that he was forced to cancel his planned trip to Baku at the last minute due to illness.

The pipeline is expected to become a major competitor to traditional export routes for Caspian oil that pass through Russia.

In a step likely to irritate Moscow, Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev signed on to a declaration committing some of his country's vast oil reserves to transport through the pipeline just prior to the ceremony.

The move will help extend the BTC's life expectancy past 2010 when Azeri oil production is forecast to begin its decline if new fields are not developed. The former Soviet republic's participation in the project has until now remained under question as it navigated choppy diplomatic waters between Washington and Moscow. "The East-West energy corridor plays an important se-

curity role in the region and it is clear that economic growth and stability would not be possible without the export of oil," Turkey's President Ahmet Necdet-sezer said at the opening.

He said the pipeline would take pressure off Turkey's tanker-clogged Bosphorus Straits that link the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, another major maritime transport route for oil.

Georgia's President Mikhail Saakashvili stressed the geopolitical changes afoot in the region after the fall of the Soviet Union. "After the fall of a big empire we want sources of hydrocarbons to be protected and provide for stability of their transport," he said.

### Energy bridge

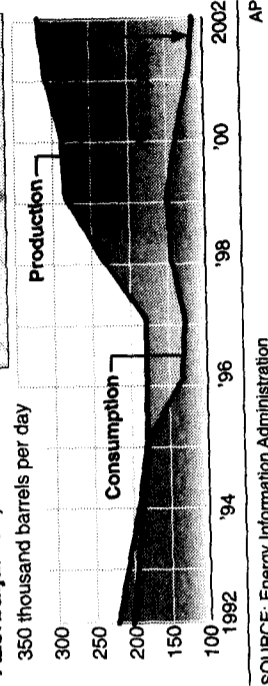
The 1,770-km-long pipeline will transform the Caucasus and Turkey into an energy bridge between the Caspian and the rest of the world and has shifted geo-strategic alliances in the Caucasus region and Central Asia.

But the presence of senior officials from the United States and other countries at Wednesday's ceremonies was tainted by a controversy as Azeri authorities continued to hold Opposition members detained in connection with the pipeline's opening. Police beat and arrested scores of

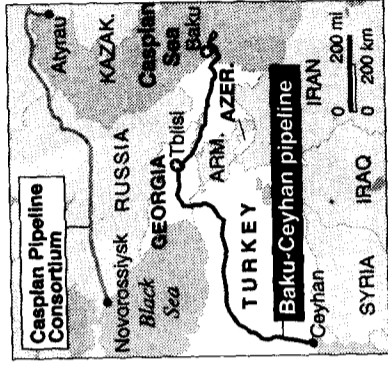
## Pipeline offers new economic prospects

The 1,100-mile Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline will be inaugurated Wednesday linking the Caspian to the Mediterranean. Until now Caspian states sent almost all their oil through Russian pipelines.

### Azerbaijan oil, 1992-2002



SOURCE: Energy Information Administration



people attending a peaceful rally last Saturday as part of a wider Opposition agitation. Authorities justified their action on grounds that the rally was held too close to the pipeline opening ceremonies.

The British oil giant BP holds a leading 30 per cent stake in the consortium running the pipeline. Other consortium members include Azerbaijan's state oil company SOCAR, Amerada Hess, ConocoPhillips, Eni, Inpex, Itochu, Statoil, Total, TPAO and Unocal.

The Caspian region produces a light crude of high quality but has suffered from its distance from the world's major consumers — North America, Europe, China and Japan. — AFP

# Uzbekistan: enemies bought, friends sold

The Uzbek upheaval is seen as a 'people power' movement but is likely to cement U.S. control of the region.

John Laughland

IN FRANCE, if not in Britain, the word "Timisoara" has become a byword for media manipulation. A massacre was reported in that Romanian town in 1989, setting off a series of events that led to the overthrow of Nicolae Ceausescu. First reports spoke of "3,000 to 4,000" dead; the numbers climbed swiftly through "12,000" to "70,000." Only when regime-change had been accomplished was the real number of dead in the clashes established at less than 200.

Other alleged massacres in the recent past have also turned out not to have been what had been claimed. Four years in, the prosecution in the Milosevic trial has still not proved that there was a massacre at Racak in Kosovo in January 1999 — one of the main pretexts for Nato's attack on Yugoslavia. Against such a background, there has been too little scepticism about reports from Uzbekistan, which seem to be following a well-worn propaganda formula.

## Still unclear

What happened in Andijan on May 13 is still unclear. The Uzbek Government claims there was a violent provocation by Islamists. Western commentators have blamed the Uzbek authorities out of hand. They have also repeated claims that people have been boiled alive — claims unsubstantiated by the two medical teams, from Canada and the United States, that conducted the autopsies on the alleged victims.

The twist this time is that President Karimov of Uzbekistan is presented as a pro-U.S. tyrant rather than a Soviet-era throwback — so anti-war left and liberal commentators have been co-opted into baying for his blood. Yet their support for the latest "people power" movement to shake a former Soviet republic is naive. They seem not to have noticed that Uzbekistan is home to precisely the same network of U.S.-funded non-governmental organisations, human rights activists and media outlets that helped to engineer pro-U.S. "revolutions" in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan.

Take the source of Friday's atrocity reports from Andijan: one "opposition journalist" from the website *ferghana.ru*, which seems to be a shop window for the Institute of War and Peace Reporting. IWPR, which has since provided the bulk of reports in the western press, is overwhelmingly funded by western governments and private foundations close to them: the U.S. State Department, USAid, the National Endowment for Democracy, the U.S. Institute for Peace, George Soros' Open Society Foundation, the British Foreign Office, the European commission, the OSCE, Unesco, and other European governments, among others.

People who reason that the U.S. supports



**ANXIOUS WAIT:** Relatives of people wounded during clashes between government forces and local protesters in the Uzbek town of Andijan near a hospital in the town on Thursday. — PHOTO: AFP

President Karimov, and will therefore turn a blind eye to his alleged excesses, do not understand the thrust of current American policy, which is to try to support and control all sides in any political equation. As in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan under former President Akayev, Uzbekistan is home to scores of western-backed NGOs that agitate politically for the opposition. For instance, Freedom House — a notorious CIA front and the main architect of the orange revolution in Ukraine — has an office in Tashkent.

## Calculated support

Ostensible U.S. support for a President like Mr. Karimov, moreover, gives the Americans the very proximity to a regime that they need in order to buy off turncoats within the power structure when the time comes for regime change; to believe that the current unrest in Uzbekistan will lead to anything other than the consolidation of American power in this strategically crucial region near China's border is to fail to understand how much U.S. foreign policy un-

der the neocons owes to the theory of permanent revolution. In the Soviet Union, even loyal party cadres lived under the constant threat of purge, and this kept them on their toes.

Moreover, as in Romania, an excessive focus on a particular person, usually the head of state, causes the appearance of regime change to mask the reality of continued control over the system as a whole.

The U.S.' dialectical reasoning is such that its "human rights activists" are happy to indulge Hizb-ut-Tahrir, the Islamist organisation accused of being behind violence in the Ferghana Valley. This alliance should come as no surprise to those who recall that the U.S. supported the *mujahideen* against the Soviets in 1979, or those who have noted the neocons' friendliness to the rebels in Chechnya today.

Although it is banned in Germany, Russia and many central Asian states for its alleged links to terrorism and anti-Semitism, Hizb-ut-Tahrir, which strongly denies any involvement in violence, operates out of head

offices in South Kensington. This may be why its role is never mentioned when Jack Straw denounces Tashkent.

Mr. Karimov was bounced into accepting a U.S. base in 2001 because, like many heads of state, he felt unable to resist remorseless American pressure. But since 2002 he has started to move closer to China, America's biggest rival and, with Russia, the key to understanding the U.S.' overall geopolitical strategy.

Washington is unforgiving towards people who think loyalty is a two-way street, and the Uzbek President is about to learn the lesson learned by Manuel Noriega, Saddam Hussein, Eduard Shevardnadze and scores of others: that it is better to be an enemy of the Americans than their friend. If you are their enemy, they might try to buy you; but if you are their friend they will definitely sell you. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

(John Laughland is a trustee of [www.oscewatch.org](http://www.oscewatch.org) and an associate of [www.sandersresearch.com](http://www.sandersresearch.com).)

20 MAY 2005 THE HINDU

# Uzbek troops reclaim rebel-held town

Associated Press

KORASUV (Uzbekistan), May 19. — Government troops easily retook an eastern Uzbek town from a rebel group that had earlier vowed to fight to build an Islamic state in the former Soviet republic, and arrested their leaders today.

Analysts had feared the rebels' apparent seizure of Korasuv could signal a new stage in unrest that erupted a week ago in the country's east, sparking a crackdown by security forces that Opposition activists said killed hundreds.

Residents, however, said about 200 government forces had moved in overnight, occupying the town that lies on the border with Kyrgyzstan and is home to about 20,000 people.

Some residents, speaking on condition their names not be used for fear of reprisals, said they heard no shots; others reported sporadic firing. After dawn today, about 20 troops with Kalashnikov assault rifles slung across their shoulders were deployed at the town's central square, and smaller groups of soldiers stood guard at government buildings.

Military helicopters occasionally flew overhead, but the town looked calm, with people walking around or riding bicycles. The border with Kyrgyzstan remained open, indicating government forces felt firmly in control.

Relatives of Bakhtiyor Rakhimov, a farmer turned rebel leader who



Uzbek guards question a woman holding a baby in the border town of Korasuv on Thursday. — AFP

yesterday claimed to have 5,000 supporters who would fight government forces, said his house was raided before dawn by 30 special forces troops, who hauled him and his 14-year-old son away.

"They beat him with rifle butts on the head and kicked him," said Rakhimov's wife, Gulchakhra.

Several of Rakhimov's aides were also arrested, and at least one neighbour was taken away in the sweep, said the man's wife, Orokhat Madusmanova.

Yesterday, Rakhimov had declared that Korasuv was "in the hands

of the people" and that "we will be building an Islamic state here in accordance with the Koran".

In Washington, State Department spokesman Mr Richard Boucher said: "Reports being compiled paint a very disturbing picture of the events and the government of Uzbekistan's reaction to them." He added: "It's becoming apparent that very large numbers of civilians were killed by the indiscriminate use of force by Uzbek forces." White House press secretary Mr Scott McClellan also condemned "the indiscriminate use of force against unarmed civilians".

MAY 20 1999

THE STATESMAN

MUSLIM LEADER ANNOUNCES UPRISING

# Diplomats assess Uzbek violence

**Associated Press**

ANDIJAN, May 18. — Diplomats and UN officials toured the eastern city of Andijan under government escort today to investigate widely differing accounts of recent bloodshed, as a rebel leader deepened the crisis in eastern Uzbekistan by announcing an Islamic uprising in his border town.

The government of President Islam Karimov quickly shrugged off Bakh-tiyor Rakhimov's claims as "nonsense", but the rebel leader asserted that his forces controlled Korasuv, a town of 20,000 on the Kyrgyz border, and were ready to fight any government troops that came to crush his rebellion. "We will be building an Islamic state here in accordance with the Koran," Rakhimov said. "People are tired of slavery."

Uzbek interior minister

Mr Zakir Almatov belittled the militant leader's claims. "It's all sheer nonsense, everything is normal there," he said when asked whether the government would move against the insurgents in Korasuv.

The uprising in Korasuv began with attacks on police and government posts on Saturday, a day after the region exploded in unrest with thousands of protesters taking to the streets in Andijan, in a rage over the trial of 23 Muslims and complaints of economic hardship.

In response to a request by Britain and others, Uzbek authorities allowed a visit to Andijan by a group of 35 diplomats and 30 journalists, who arrived today on a government-organised flight.

But British ambassador Mr David Moran expressed reservations. "I think we need to be realistic about how much can be achieved

in a whistle-stop tour in a large delegation format," he said. "I think what we need now is a systematic process of openness that will enable the international community to make an authoritative assessment of the scale and the nature of what happened here."

The group, traveling under police escort, toured a prison and an administrative building that were seized by militants during Friday's violence.

"The goal of the trip is to disavow media allegations that didn't correspond to reality," said Uzbek deputy foreign minister Mr Ilkhom Nematov. Authorities did not allow the visitors to roam freely, citing security concerns, and showed them local residents who backed the official version of events. One of them, Mr Tursunbai Rustamov, said he was proud of his son, a police officer, who was "killed by militants".

19 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

# Uzbek Opp, govt differ on toll

1875 Central Press

ANDIJAN, May 17. — Authorities and Opposition leaders today offered widely diverging death tolls and accounts of the violence that has rocked Uzbekistan in recent days.

Officially, 32 troops and 137 others, most of them "terrorists" including foreign fighters, were killed in the eastern town of Andijan, Prosecutor-General Mr Rashid Kadyrov told a news conference in the capital, Tashkent. President Islam Karimov has blamed alleged Islamic militants for the unrest, and Mr Kadyrov denied that government forces had shot dead any civilians. "Only terrorists were liquidated by government forces," he said, flanked by Mr Karimov.

He said weapons for the attack had been brought from outside Uzbekistan, and that the militants killed several hostages and innocent civilians.

Opposition leaders and activists, meanwhile, blamed government troops for most of the killings. They allege that more than 500 people, many of them innocent civilians, were killed in Andijan, and that more than 200 others in nearby Pakhtabad died as they tried to flee the country.

Ms Nigara Khidoyatova, head of the unregistered Opposition Free Peasants Party, said her party had arrived at its figure of 745 killed in the two towns by speaking to relatives of the dead. "The count hasn't yet finished, and the death toll will rise," she added.

10 MAY 2007 THE STATESMAN

# Refugees: Uzbek dead in thousands

DEIRDRE TYNAN

**Kara-Suu (Kyrgyzstan), May 17:** Refugees who fled from the massacre committed by Uzbek security forces agreed on one thing yesterday: the number of dead is not 500 — the most common reported figure — but could be in the thousands.

As reports continued to come in of clashes spreading outside the town of Andizhan, a sergeant in charge of the bridge at the border village of Kara-Suu said he believed that 2,000 had been massacred during three days.

There is no way to confirm numbers offered by refugees, but it seemed likely that when the truth emerges, the massacre in Uzbekistan, an American ally in the fight against terrorism, could become the deadliest assault on civilians since the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989.

The Uzbek-Kyrgyz border at Kara-Suu was open periodically yesterday under the watchful eye of Kyrgyz soldiers armed with machine-guns.

The US, hardening its line on its ally, said today it was "deeply disturbed" by reports that soldiers fired on protesters. An Uzbek Opposition party said it had compiled a list of 745 people killed. Uzbekistan's prosecutor general said the toll was 169.

Kara-Suu, which is divided between the two former Soviet republics, was tense as traders hurried goods between the two sides of town, divided by a fast flowing river straddled by a makeshift metal bridge.

A few refugees from Andizhan remained in the town staying close to their Kyrgyz relatives and homes. Apart from the 500 believed dead in Andizhan on Friday, there were reports of further deaths in nearby areas.

Saidjahon Zaynabitdinov, the head of the local Appeal human rights group, said yesterday that government troops had killed about 200 demonstrators on Saturday in Pakhtabad, about 18 miles

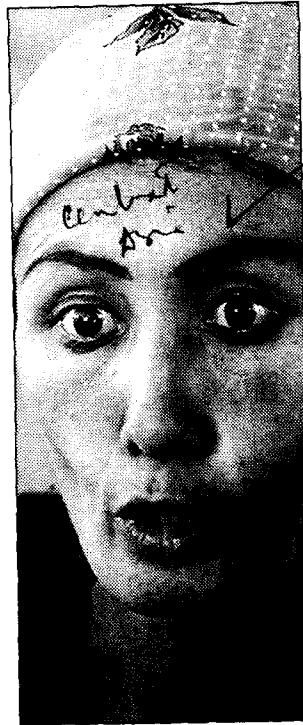
northeast of Andizhan.

Suvahuan, a mother of four in her 40s who fled the town on Saturday with her children, gave a harrowing account of the scene in Andizhan.

"They had snipers everywhere and they didn't care who they shot down. I saw hundreds of people dead in the street. I saw them shoot boys, women and children," she said "They shot at the crowd like animals. They were firing at us from helicopters. People got confused running everywhere, trying to hide in buildings or behind cars."

Rakhmat, a trader who crossed the hastily rebuilt Kara-Suu river bridge, said he saw desperate refugees drown in the river swollen by spring rains. "President Islam Karimov took that bridge down in 1999 because he didn't want us trading in Kyrgyzstan, that's half the reason why there were protests in Andizhan, it was poverty not politics that drove people on to the streets.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH



An Uzbek refugee talks to border guards at the check-point in the Kyrgyz village of Kara-Suu. (AFP)

## No let-up in Uzbekistan violence

Associated Press

ANDIJAN, May 16. — Gunfire persisted today in this eastern Uzbek city where security forces fired on protesters last week — a clash that reportedly left several hundred dead — and new reports emerged saying violence in nearby towns killed hundreds more, further threatening the government's stability.

The spreading unrest in a region bordering Kyrgyzstan — the worst since Uzbekistan gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 — left 11 people dead in clashes yesterday in a third town, witnesses said.

President Islam Karimov has denied the firing on demonstrators, but his authoritarian government has sought to restrict access for reporters in the affected areas.

If the reports of more than 700 deaths since Friday hold true and if Uzbek forces were behind the killing — as most reports indicate — the crackdown would be among the most violent in Asia since the massacre of protesters in China's Tiananmen Square in 1989.

17 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN



# Uzbeks busy burying their dead

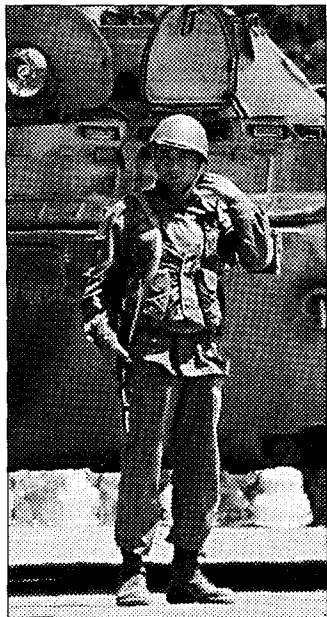
## Sniper fire and search for missing continue

Reuters  
Andijan, May 15

THE FAMILIES of some of the estimated 500 people killed by Uzbek troops in Andijan buried their dead on Sunday to the sound of continued sniper fire in the eastern town. Others searched desperately for their missing relatives.

Two days after an uprising in the mostly Muslim Central Asian state's Ferghana Valley, wet blood and body parts hastily covered in soil coat the pavements, streets, and gutters in the centre of this leafy city of 300,000 people. Soldiers and tanks were deployed on the streets that were mostly empty of people and cars. The exception was the morgue, where relatives came to look for their missing loved ones.

"I have been looking for two days for the bodies of my brothers," said Bakhadyr Yergachyov, clutching his siblings' passports. "They are neither at the morgue nor at the hospitals."



A soldier guards a government building in Andijan.

Human rights campaigner Saidzhakhon Zainabidinov estimated that up to 500 people might have been killed, which would make it the bloodiest incident in Uzbekistan's post-Soviet history. The slaying sparked panic in some quarters, causing up to 4,000 people to flee to the closed border with Kyrgyzstan.

On Friday, armed men broke 23 people standing trial for religious extremism out of prison along with 2,000 other prisoners, took 10 police hostage and occupied Andijan's local government building. Around 3,000 protesters opposed to President Islam Karimov staged a rally outside, which troops later dispersed by opening fire.

"They shot at us like rabbits," said a boy in his late teens standing outside School Number 15. Witnesses say part of the crowd fled towards the school, only to be caught in crossfire. The two-storey school's facade is pockmarked with at least 20 bullet holes, haphazardly grouped, and pools of wet blood mixed with water and dirt can be seen in the blocked open drains. A blood-soaked baseball cap lies in some bushes.

"The innocent perished," Nadyr, a worker at the Andijan market said. "They placed weapons near the killed civilians to make people think that they are terrorists." Like many, he blamed the repression and corruption of the government in impoverished Uzbekistan for driving people to protest and the ensuing violence.

Karimov, a close ally in the US war on terrorism, said on Saturday 10 police and troops had been killed and a higher number of rebels. He gave no figure for civilians killed.

An accurate death toll is impossible to come by as soldiers guarding the city morgue and hospitals denied entry to reporters amid a general media clampdown by the autocratic government. Local witnesses spoke of seeing up to 300 bodies.



A relative of one of those killed, Said Shakirov, cries during the funeral at Andijan on Sunday.

REUTERS

## 'I saw a 15-year-old die'

DMITRY AND Makhmud, friends who live near Andijan's central square, were eyewitness to much of what transpired in the city between late Thursday evening and Saturday.

"Very early on Friday, I heard that a curfew had been declared after parents of the prisoners managed to liberate them from the prison," Dmitry told AFP. "So I ran down to Bobur square," the main square in the city and site of the building housing the regional government administration. It was there that Dmitry, 33, encountered his friend Makhmud, a young entrepreneur.

"Some of the prisoners stood on a platform. They were telling the crowd not to get out of control and that they wanted justice

### EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT

to prevail," Makhmud said.

Local residents continued to stream into the square in a show of support. Calls such as "Democracy and Jobs!" and "Karimov Resign!" could be heard frequently from the crowd. Subsequently, the public prosecutor of Andijan "was led out in front of the protesters," Makhmud said. "He said, 'I made a mistake, but I'm going to appeal and everything will be worked out according to law'."

The prosecutor was referring to the charges against the 23 men on trial, a case that had

been a source of public indignation and frequent demonstrations in recent weeks.

At 5 o'clock, there was a break for Friday prayers, but leaders of the insurrection returned to speak to the local population.

About an hour later, two armoured military vehicles and a troop transport truck rolled through the square and many in the crowd began to panic. "Then soldiers from two other armoured vehicles began shooting at the people" several times and in a sweeping fashion, Dmitry said. "The men lay down on the ground, but not the women who may have thought that they were not at risk." Said Makhmud: "I saw a 15-year-old boy fall down dead."

AFP

# Uneasy calm prevails in Uzbek province

Death toll mounts as spectre of revolution looms large in the Central Asian state

Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW:** Even as tense calm descended on Uzbekistan's violence-hit province of Andijan in Ferghana Valley, the spectre of revolution was still looming large in the Central Asian state.

Reports from Andijan, the centre of riots last week, suggested that the city was returning to peaceful life on Sunday, with shops and markets opening and people burying those killed when troops moved in to suppress an armed revolt provoked by the trial of 23 local businessmen on charges of belonging to an Islamist group.

## 500 killed

The Ferghana.ru website reported that 500 may have been killed in Andijan, the claim is hard to verify as the city has been sealed off by the army and police.

Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov has blamed the violence on Islamic militants linked to the banned Hizb ut-Tahrir movement. This view is shared in Russia, whose President Vladimir Putin discussed the crisis on telephone with Mr. Karimov on Saturday. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Sunday the unrest in Andijan had been provoked by Taliban-type extremist groups, while Russian security and diplomatic sources said the militants had infiltrated from Afghanistan.

Whoever acted as a trigger, the events in Uzbekistan appear to have been influenced and indeed closely mirrored the begin-



**FLEETING VIOLENCE:** Residents leave Uzbekistan near the village of Korasuv, 50 km east of Andijan, on the border with Kyrgyzstan on Saturday as seen in this television image. - PHOTO: AP

ning of the "tulip revolution" in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan two months ago.

In fact Andijan is only a few dozen km from the Kyrgyz city of Osh where the "tulip revolution" began with the storming of a local administration building - just as in Andijan last Thursday.

Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev refused to use force and lost his job after rebels from Osh marched on the capital Bishkek and stormed the presidential palace.

President Karimov, who has ruled Uzbekistan with an iron hand, did not hesitate to have

the army put down the rebellion. It remains to be seen if the violent suppression of the revolt pacifies the country or provokes further unrest.

One fact is clear: "velvet revolutions" stage-managed by the United States in Georgia and Ukraine, and then carried over to

Kyrgyzstan, are threatening to explode in volatile Central Asia.

At the time of the Kyrgyz coup, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice confidently predicted that it was just a beginning, saying: "We know where we want to go."

The events in Andijan showed they do not know. The U.S., which has a military base in Uzbekistan, has nothing to gain and all to lose from destabilisation in Central Asia's most populous state, which moreover has a common border with Afghanistan.

## Explosive situation

The situation in the badly overpopulated and impoverished Ferghana Valley, home to a third of Uzbekistan's 26-million people live, is extremely explosive.

And any explosion in Uzbekistan, where Mr. Karimov has rooted out all political opposition to his regime, will inevitably be led by Islamists, who are the only organised force, even if driven underground.

In Andijan last week protesters demanded the release of Akram Yuldashev, who is serving a 17-year prison term for subversive activities as a leader of the radical Hizb ut-Tahrir movement.

Since the first extremist attacks in Namangan in December 1997, Uzbekistan has been the target of repeated Islamist raids, the most recent in March 2004, when 47 persons died in a spate of bomb and suicide attacks in Tashkent and other regions.

# Thousands flee Uzbekistan

## 200 killed in Friday's Andijan violence: UN



Andijan, May 14

THOUSANDS OF terrified Uzbeks fled for the border on Saturday but hundreds angrily returned to the square where police fired on demonstrators to put down an uprising against country's authoritarian US-allied leader. A human rights monitor said about 200 people were killed.

Uzbek President Islam Karimov said 10 government troops and "many more" protesters were killed but refused to be more specific. He spoke at a news conference in the capital Tashkent a day after the unprecedented clashes in his tightly controlled country, which he has led since before the 1991 Soviet collapse.

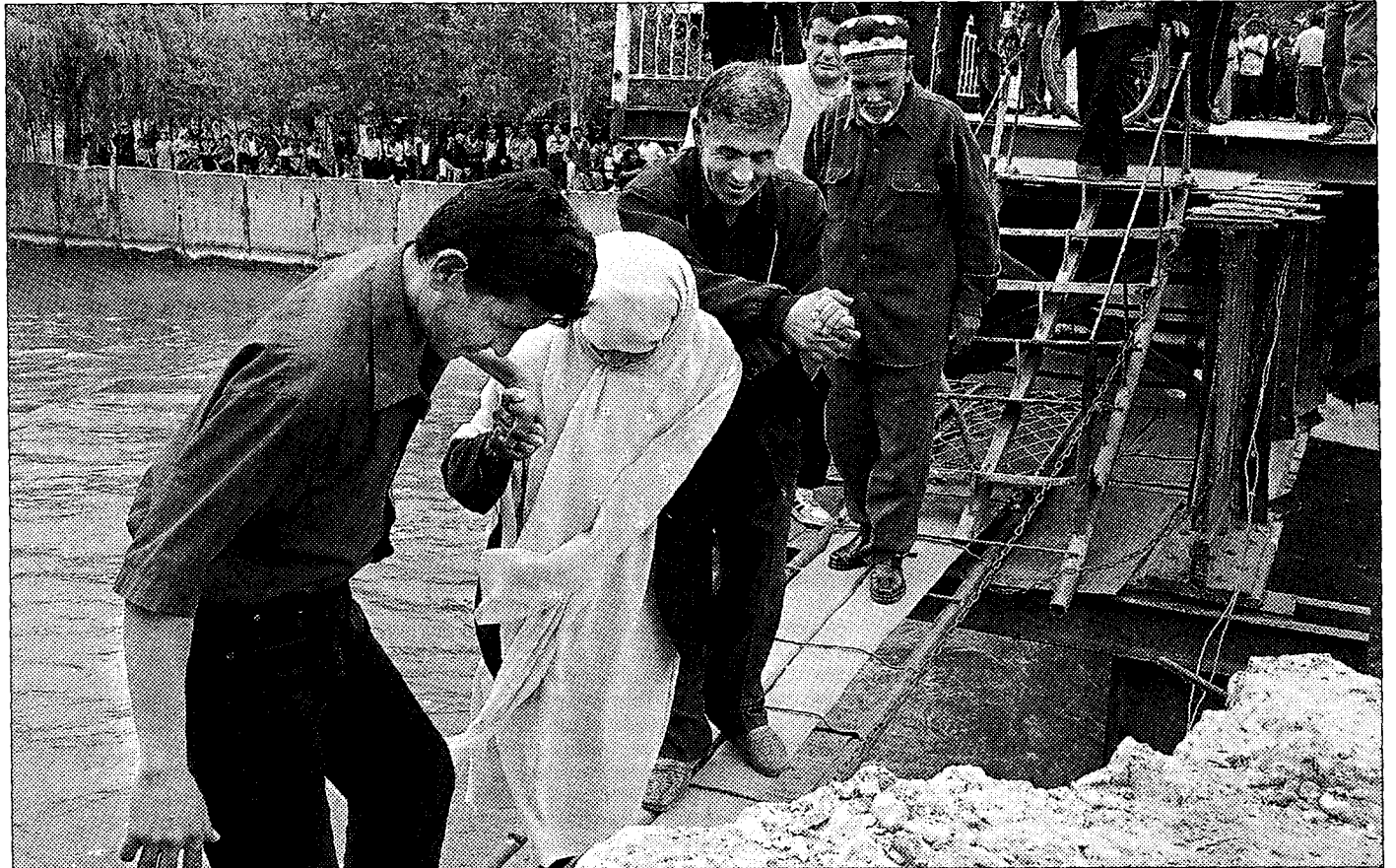
In the eastern city of Andijan, hundreds of protesters gathered at the square, displaying the bodies of six people killed in Friday's bloodshed and tearfully denouncing the government.

"Our women and children are dying," said Daniyar Akbarov, 24, who claimed to have seen at least 300 people killed in the violence.

Big military trucks loaded with soldiers cruised the streets and troops backed by armored vehicles surrounded the heavily fortified police headquarters.

An estimated 3,500 refugees fled Andijan on Saturday, gathering a few miles to the south at the Kyrgyzstan border, which was finally opened to them, Interfax reported.

The unprecedented violence began early on Thursday when a group of local citizens angry about the arrest



President Islam Karimov at a Press conference in Tashkent (top) and Uzbeks cross a restored bridge across the Shakhikhansai river near the town of Kara-Suu at the border between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan near Andijan (above).

of several prominent business owners stormed the prison where they were being held.

Earlier, soldiers loaded scores of bodies of those killed onto four trucks and a bus after blocking friends and relatives from collecting them, witnesses said.

Lutfulo Shamsutdinov, the head of the Independent Human Rights Organisation of Uzbekistan, said he saw about

200 victims being loaded onto trucks near the square in Andijan, the fourth-largest city with a population of 350,000.

Another witness who declined to be named said "many, many dead bodies" were stacked up by a school near the square. The city's hospital was cordoned off and officials could not be reached for casualty figures.

An AP reporter said she saw

at least 30 bodies. All had been shot, and at least one had his skull smashed. She said there were large pools of blood and hundreds of spent cartridges on the streets.

At one point, about 10,000 protesters gathered in the city centre to demand the resignation of Uzbek President Islam Karimov and his authoritarian government, who are allies of the US. The president's office described

the protesters as criminals and extremists.

Karimov issued a statement on Saturday blaming the violence on the Islamic radical group Hizb ut-Tahrir. He said their goal was to establish an Islamic state and to destroy the current constitutional system. He said 10 government troops and "many more" protesters were killed in the violence.

Agencies

# Religion and politics in Central Asia

M.K. Bhadrakumar

**T**HREE SUCCESSIVE waves of political Islam have swept across Central Asia during the 15-year period since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. They appear dissimilar. But they have common elements – the most important being that they all had extra-regional affiliations even as they sought to secure a habitation and name amidst the uncertainties endemic to the region's transition.

The first wave of political Islam appeared in Tajikistan in 1992 seeking to make the country an Islamic state. The Islamic rebels were initially concentrated in the southern provinces of Kulyab and Kurgan Tyube and were an indigenous force. But, incrementally, they linked up with elements in neighbouring Afghanistan. By 1996 they were operating from within Afghanistan. Some leaders were moving about in Pakistani cities.

True, the Tajik civil war involved factions, but there were ideological overlaps of secular democracy, nationalist reformism, and political Islam. A listing out of the parties involved in the protracted Tajik peace process under UN auspices (1994-96) is revealing – Russia, United States, Iran, Pakistan, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Organisation of Islamic Conference.

The American perceptions of the Tajik civil war (1992-96) were consistent: that it was a power struggle involving clans or regional cliques; that it was engineered by Russia with a view to justifying its military presence in Central Asia. The line of argument was that there were no Islamist elements in Afghanistan who were interested in a spillover into Central Asia; that the Taliban was an indigenous Afghan phenomenon that did not have any regional agenda; that the Afghan fratricidal strife was purely about capturing power in Kabul; and that the Taliban

## Any replication of the Taliban phenomenon in Central Asia could have far-reaching implications for the geopolitics of the region.

was in the long run a factor of regional stability.

With the dramatic ascendancy of the Taliban (leading to the capture of Kabul in 1996), however, Russia and Iran swiftly closed ranks and worked in concert to bring about a Tajik settlement, giving the United Tajik Opposition a role in the Government in Dushanbe. Much of this was possible through the astute diplomacy between Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeni Primakov and his veteran Iranian counterpart Ali Akbar Velayati. This led to a broad Russian-Iranian understanding over Central Asian security, which holds good even today. The Chinese-Russian "Shanghai initiative" coincided with this process. (The tangible signs of a link-up between Uighur militants and the Taliban began appearing by 1996).

The U.S. debunked the Tajik settlement as a patchwork but in the event the power-sharing formula worked to stabilise the Tajik situation. American diplomacy continued to move on the same track, actively encouraging Central Asian states to forge cooperative links with the Taliban Government in Kabul – that is, until the bombing of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998.

No sooner than the Tajik settlement came about, the Uzbek militants who fought alongside the Tajik Islamists broke away and openly linked up with the Taliban. The period 1996-2001 saw the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (as it came to be called) operating from Taliban-ruled areas within Afghanistan and stepping up its activities inside Central Asia, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan in particular.

IMU was the second wave of political Islam to appear in Central Asia. Russia once again took the leadership to counter the militant threat. (The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was still in the making.) On the other hand, the U.S. approach was once again argumentative – that Russia was "exploiting" a non-existent threat of militant Islam. However, the American stance took a U-turn with the 9/11 attacks. The U.S. secured military bases in Central Asia on the new imperative to forge a common front against "Islamic terror."

The collaboration with Al-Qaeda was certainly the IMU's (and the Taliban's) fatal mistake. In the American military intervention in Afghanistan in October 2001, IMU cadres were decimated. The rump elements retreated to Pakistan's tribal agencies. Some reports mention that they are presently in American custody.

### Rise of the Hizb-ut Tahrir

At any rate, in the void left by the IMU, a third wave of political Islam has appeared in Central Asia – the Hizb-ut Tahrir (Party of Islamic Liberation). Unlike the earlier manifestations of political Islam, HT claims to be a pan-Islamic movement. It subscribes to the goal of establishing a Shariah-based "Caliphate" in Central Asia, but targets Kyrgyzstan as the soft underbelly of the region. The majority of HT members are ethnic Uzbeks living in and around the Fergana Valley (Uzbekistan, southern Kyrgyzstan and northern Tajikistan), a bastion of Wahhabi faith throughout the last century.

HT remains in many ways an enigma wrapped in mystery – much like the Taliban was. American media organs periodically interview HT spokesmen, but no one knows where its leadership is based. HT is believed to be getting its financing from "Arab charities" and its branches in "some Western countries." The structure of HT resembles a secret hierarchical pyramid consisting of five-member cells, each with a leader. No two cells interact directly. Leaders of every four cells are grouped as a local body under a 'Naquib' who, in turn, belongs to a regional council headed by a 'Muta'amad' (head of a region). The Muta'amads work independently under the Amir's (Supreme Leader) supervision. The entire arrangement is on a "need-to-know" basis.

The great social and economic upheavals in the Central Asian region provided a fertile ground to HT. It recruited its cadres primarily from the deprived sections of society – especially unemployed youth. (The average monthly income for a Kyrgyz works out to three dollars). HT is most popular in the rural communities. Members are not required to have any detailed knowledge of Islamic principles but must subscribe to the Shariah-based goals of the party. Recruits vigorously undergo study classes stretched over several months on topics ranging from religion to world politics.

It is believed that HT has a parallel military structure. According to Western think tanks, HT's hard core would be in the region of 20,000 cadres. Central Asian security agencies put the figure as 60,000. By either reckoning, HT is indisputably the single biggest cadre-based political movement today in the region. American specialists on Central Asia have begun describing HT as the region's "most popular radical Islamic group."

The Central Asian countries and Russia proscribed the HT as a terrorist organisation. Uzbekistan blamed HT for several incidents of violence. The U.S. nonetheless refuses (unlike Germany) to list HT formally as a militant organisation, given HT's self-projection as a force of enlightened moderation.

The regime change in Kyrgyzstan has focussed attention on HT. Kyrgyzstan with its relatively free political climate is a stronghold of HT. With Kyrgyzstan's slide toward instability (amidst clan struggle, regional imbalances, extreme poverty, nationality questions and a fragmented polity), HT happens to be the net beneficiary of the "velvet revolution."

To quote the well-known scholar on Islamic militancy, Anatol Lieven, "In depressing circumstances, adherence to a radical Islamic network provides a sense of cultural security, a new community and some degree of social support – modest, but still better than anything the state can provide."

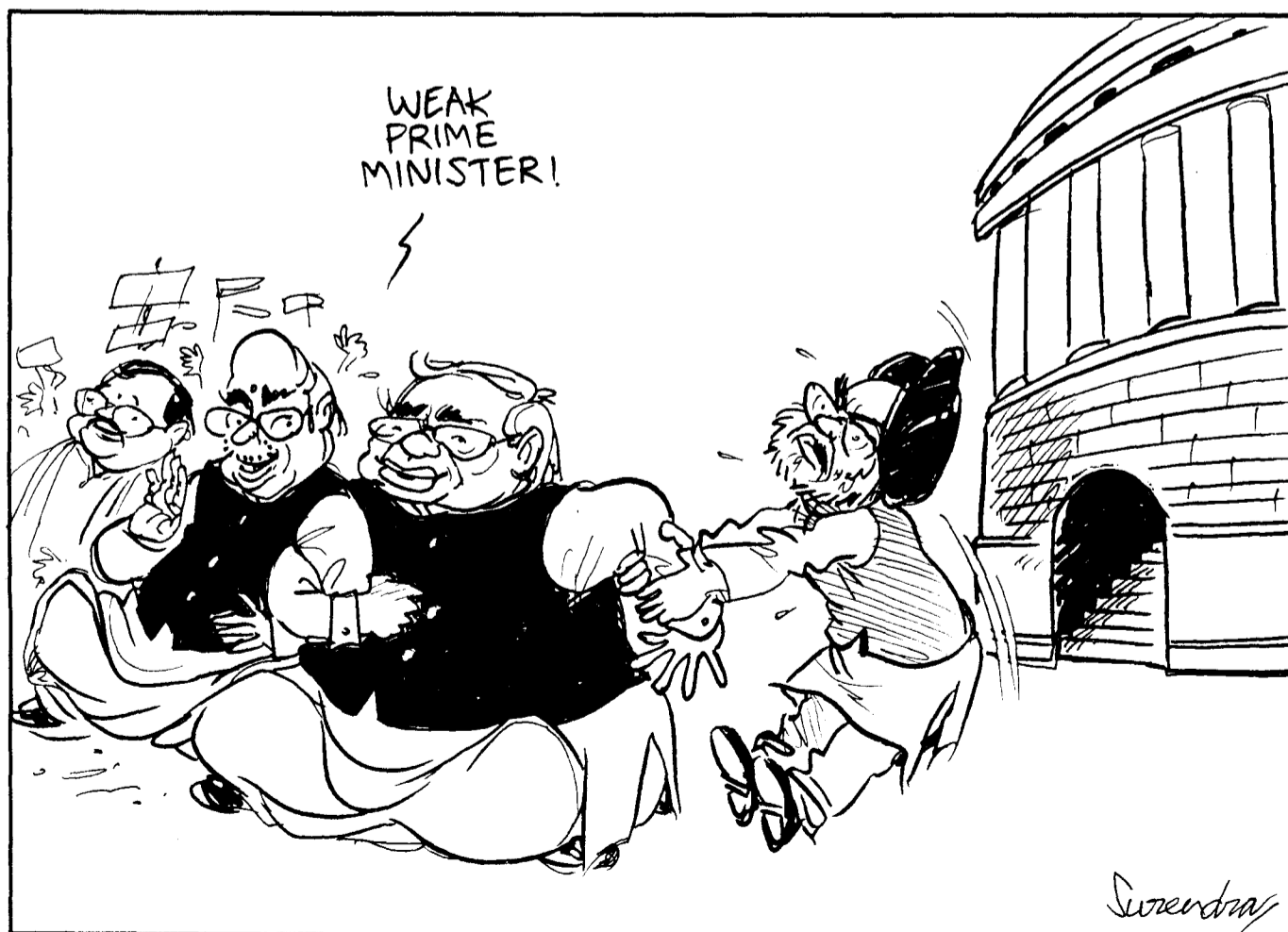
There is a contrary view of HT amongst Islamic circles in Central Asia. The leader of the Islamist movement in Tajikistan (where after all political Islam first surfaced in the post-Soviet space), Deputy Prime Minister Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda, warns of a nefarious plot to "remake Central Asia."

He says: "A more detailed analysis of HT's programmatic and ideological views and concrete examples of its activities suggests that it was created by anti-Islamic forces. One proof of this is the comfortable existence that HT enjoys in a number of Western countries where it has large centres and offices that develop its concept of an "Islamic Caliphate."

Could the Taliban phenomenon be replicating as a seamless phenomenon? In the competitive geopolitics of Central Asia, bordering Russia and China's Xinjiang, the implications could be far-reaching.

(The writer is a former Indian Foreign Service Officer with wide experience in Central Asia.)

### CARTOONSCAPE



# CASPIAN OIL

## Regional Growth And American Influence

By IGOR TOMBERG

The Caspian region today is a zone of the interests of various countries — the US, Russia, China, Japan and India — for it is a promising oil and gas province with resources exceeding those of the North Sea. Under the bottom of the Caspian Sea, which is the largest lake in the world, there is four per cent of the world gas and oil reserves. US experts estimate the recoverable oil resources there at 2.4 to 4.6 billion tons.

Most of the major oil companies have invested impressive sums in that region. Over the past five years the US investments in Central Asia and the Caspian region have increased from “insignificant sums” to \$30 billion. The reverse side of such investment is counteraction to laying a pipeline from Kazakhstan to China. There are fears in Washington that a considerable part of Caspian oil will run along Asian routes to China and India, which are greatly increasing the consumption of energy resources, becoming US rivals (at least in oil consumption). In Kazakhstan it is believed that the talks on building an oil pipeline to China are dragged out because of the opposition by the US, which does not want an alternative to the Baku-Ceyhan route.

### Partner and rival

The EU policy in regard to that region was shaped also under the influence of the new geopolitical situation after the break-up of the USSR. Europe's real interest, not politically motivated (like in the US), in the energy resources of Central Asia and the Caspian Basin complicates the shaping of a clear-cut European policy in that area. Europe may focus on solving geopolitical problems by economic methods. Probably Europeans will be revising their policy in regard to Russia, making it tougher in the context of their own interests in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

At the same time, increased state regulation in the Russian fuel and energy sector, for all its minuses, will have a positive effect on strengthening Russia's energy positions abroad. And then Europe will have to adapt itself to Russia's interests and plans (which, however, are yet to be finally formulated).

*The author is a research associate in the Centre for Foreign Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences*

China's interests in the Caspian region are quite understandable and predictable. The main threat to the country's remarkable development rate is the shortage of raw materials, primarily energy bearing resources, a problem that was spotlighted at the congress of the Communist Party of China. According to forecasts made by leading world experts, by 2010 China will import up to 120 million tons of oil annually

player has emerged among the five Caspian states, and its recoverable resources of hydrocarbons exceed, for instance, the Caspian resources of Iran.

A significant part of the USSR's oil and gas legacy — the network of main gas pipelines — has been preserved. The bulk of hydrocarbon raw materials from the region reach the foreign market through Russian pipelines, though there has appeared a



— twice as much as in 2002. By that time the Central Asian countries plan to increase oil production in the Caspian region. Meanwhile, the Persian Gulf zone, from where China imports most of its oil, is becoming increasingly unstable.

Nowadays China has been strengthening its positions in the region. The economic successes it has achieved over the past years allow it to back up its political interests by convincing economic and financial arguments. In this situation Russia's position appears to be somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, Beijing is Moscow's strategic partner and, on the other, it is a successful rival in the zone of its direct geopolitical and economic interests.

### OPEC for gas exports?

For the time being, the maximum of what is possible is Lukoil's presence in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Lukoil controls such big amounts of geological assets in the Caspian Sea that it has formed a kind of “corporate shelf” extending to the water zones of a few countries. In fact, a sixth

number of new oil and gas transportation projects, which are in a varying degree of preparedness.

After several months of cooperation with the new anti-terrorist alliance in Central Asia, President Vladimir Putin announced a reappraisal of the US large-scale military presence at the south-western borders of his country. Russia, he said, needs its own Central Asian alliance. The Russian President had in mind not military cooperation but cooperation in the sphere of energy — the vast resources of natural gas in that part of the world. He called on Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan that are rich in energy resources to agree to Russia's control over “the amount and direction of gas export from Central Asia”, and made it quite clear that from now on the gas issue is a priority at the highest state level.

As oil prices have been rising at a record-high pace of late, energy security has become a key issue of all significant international meetings and contacts. For instance, gas consumption in the US, according to the Department of Energy, will grow by 40

per cent by 2025. So, US dependence on this kind of fuel is growing. These circumstances may change the general tone of the US political dialogue with Russia, which boasts the world's largest gas resources.

For the time being the Gas Exporting Countries Forum does not correspond much to the Opec configuration. Some experts believe, however, that Russia will determine gas prices on a future integrated market. Combining the efforts of Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, which own immense gas resources, is an objective condition for creating a large regional gas alliance. Available sales markets like India, Pakistan, China and some other countries, make this idea even more attractive.

### Russian efforts

Moreover, it has been forecast that gas will account for up to 70 per cent among the sources of generating electricity. The only problem is that the demand for gas, and the very emergence of the gas market, depend on an increase in the share of liquefied natural gas supplies. Though gas processing is expensive today, the future belongs to LNG. Having paid the price now (by launching a large-scale construction of gas processing plants), the Russian energy companies will be able to dictate the prices on the world market.

Though Russia has become notably more active in the Central Asian and Caspian region, the present efforts are clearly not enough to counterbalance the increase of US influence there. The problem is that the leaders of the countries in the region do not go beyond the limits of the problems imposed on them by the Americans — development of democracy and human rights protection in the independent countries of Central Asia, combating terrorism, and so on — the problems traditionally used by Washington as an instrument of pursuing US interests.

The situation could be changed by solving the really important problem of raising the living standard, which is far more vital in Central Asia than democracy and human rights. The living standards in the region could be raised though effecting large-scale economic projects by major corporations, above all in the sphere of oil and gas production and transportation.

# The great game for Caspian oil

M.K. Bhadrakumar

Following the historic Yalta summit meeting with Joseph Stalin and Winston Churchill regarding the contours of post-World War II Europe, President Franklin D. Roosevelt quietly headed south-eastward for a secret meeting aboard the *USS Quincy* lying anchored near the Suez Canal. His caller was King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia.

A few years later, George Keenan, one of the greatest American diplomats of the 20th century, theorised that unless the U.S. went about securing the Gulf region's oil reserves as "our resources" (rather than "theirs" — Arabs'), its dominance as a world power would not be sustainable.

The dramatic episode in 1945 underscored the centrality of oil in the geopolitics of the 20th century. Equally so, the current rivalries in the Caucasus and Central Asia, known as the "great game," have at their core the U.S.' struggle for controlling the region's oil and gas reserves.

## Russia's influence

The rivalries in the Caspian have three broad directions: (i) replacing Russia's traditional influence over the principal sources of energy in the Caspian region, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan; (ii) establishing political domination of the nearby regions — Georgia, Ukraine, Afghanistan — through which the oil and gas can be taken bypassing Russia (and Iran), to the international market (principally Western Europe and the U.S.); and, (iii) safeguarding the pipelines (by direct military presence, through NATO's eastward expansion or through sponsoring a regional security alliance such as GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova), which is led by Ukraine and Georgia at the moment.

Several factors are adding to the piquancy of the great game. There have been new "entrants" into the Caspian — especially China and India and the European countries. Though the U.S.

## The entry of China and India into the race for the oil and gas in the Caspian region has upset the U.S. calculus.

investments in the Central Asian and Caspian region in the hydrocarbon sector stand at \$30 billion, the political objective of establishing absolute dominance becomes elusive. To compound the difficulty, Russia, China and India are at varying levels of cooperation (or coordination) in the Caspian energy sector. The European countries that heavily rely on Russian energy supplies are also striving to develop their own access to Caspian oil independent of Russia (and the U.S.). However, the European endeavours in this direction have been somewhat upstaged by the American control over Georgia and Ukraine, thanks to the well-timed "velvet revolutions."

From the American perspective, China and India have appeared in the Caspian at a particularly awkward moment. If these two countries persist in their present vigour in securing Caspian supplies for their long-term energy security — and they are rapidly growing economies — a lot of the Caspian oil may end up flowing through "Asian routes" without any benefit to the U.S.

## China ahead

China is ahead of India in the race for Caspian energy. As part of its "go west" policy for developing its western regions, it completed a 4,200-km pipeline from Shanghai to the Tarim Basin in August 2004. This is to be linked to Kazakhstan (and potentially to Turkmenistan and Iran). In 1996, China signed an agreement with Kazakhstan on a 3,000-km, \$9 billion pipeline linking the Caspian basin to Xinjiang; and work is proceeding briskly.

India, apart from its expanding cooperation with Russian oil fields, is poised to enter the

region by investing in the joint Russian-Kazakh Kurmangazy oil fields. During President Vladimir Putin's visit to India last December, a memorandum of understanding was signed for the two countries to expand their cooperation into joint exploration and distribution of natural gas from the Caspian basin.

The entry of China and India into the Caspian oil and gas race upsets U.S. interests in several ways. First, the Baku-Ceyhan (BC) oil pipeline that the U.S. promoted since 1998 is to be completed this fall. The \$4 billion 1,600-km pipeline from Baku to the Turkish eastern Mediterranean port of Ceyhan has been conceived as a trunk route for the Western market. It bypasses Russian territory and opens up for the first time a route for Caspian oil other than through the existing Russian pipelines. Thanks to the "rose revolution", the U.S. has gained "control" over Georgia, the transit route for the BC pipeline.

But, the pipeline's economic viability is predicated on the assumption that Kazakhstan too can be "persuaded" to feed it with its Caspian oil. Enter Russia, China and India, putting a premium on Kazakh oil! Competition from Russia (to route Kazakh oil through Russian pipelines) was expected but the entry by China and India as consumers of Kazakh oil becomes an unkind cut at this juncture.

Secondly, by the time the Kazakhstan-China pipeline is completed at the end of this decade, if India also joins up (as seems probable) and, furthermore, if a branch line is developed from China to India (which is entirely conceivable within the climate of developing Sino-Indian relations), the ultimate horror in the U.S.' energy

calculus for the Caspian will take shape — an authentically Asian "grid" for Caspian oil.

Thirdly, the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline. While discourses on the project have understandably focussed on Iran's gas supplies, we may note that both Turkmenistan (which has a pipeline connecting Iran) and Azerbaijan (which has initiated cooperation with Iran and Russia for a North-South transportation route giving Russia direct access to the Gulf region) gain an opportunity to route their gas to South Asia via Iran.

Indeed, there is some loud thinking that an Iranian pipeline is eventually extendable through Indian territory to China's Yunnan province. Yet another "Asian gas grid" tapping Caspian energy!

Now, as per U.S. strategy, Caspian gas is primarily intended for the Western market (not South Asia).

As far back as 1996, a consortium of Bechtel, General Electric and Shell began negotiating with Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan on a Trans-Caspian gas pipeline heading to the European market that would substantially reduce Europe's dependence on Russian supplies. But due to Turkmen and Azeri "intransigence", the project lies on the backburner. If regime changes can be effected in Azerbaijan and/or Turkmenistan either through a "velvet revolution" or a good old-fashioned coup, the Trans-Caspian project can be swiftly revived. (The struggle is on.)

The Indian discourses about the American demarche over the Iran pipeline, therefore, cannot narrowly focus on the U.S.-Iran nuclear standoff as the basis of Washington's concerns. It is ludicrous that with oil prices soaring above \$50 a barrel (and estimated to touch \$100 in the coming months), Iran will find it hard to spare resources to finance its nuclear programme unless it initiates a gas pipeline to India. As for U.S. sanctions against third countries investing in Iran's energy sector, Washington has never once invoked the 1996 Iran Sanctions Act — it is meant to bully countries that easily take fright. Actually, since 1995, Washington repeatedly waived the sanctions whenever involvement by Russian, Japanese, Malaysian or European companies in Iran's energy sector came to light. In fact, American companies themselves are present in Iran's energy sector at the moment, including Halliburton, which U.S. Vice-President Dick Cheney headed!

## Demarche to India

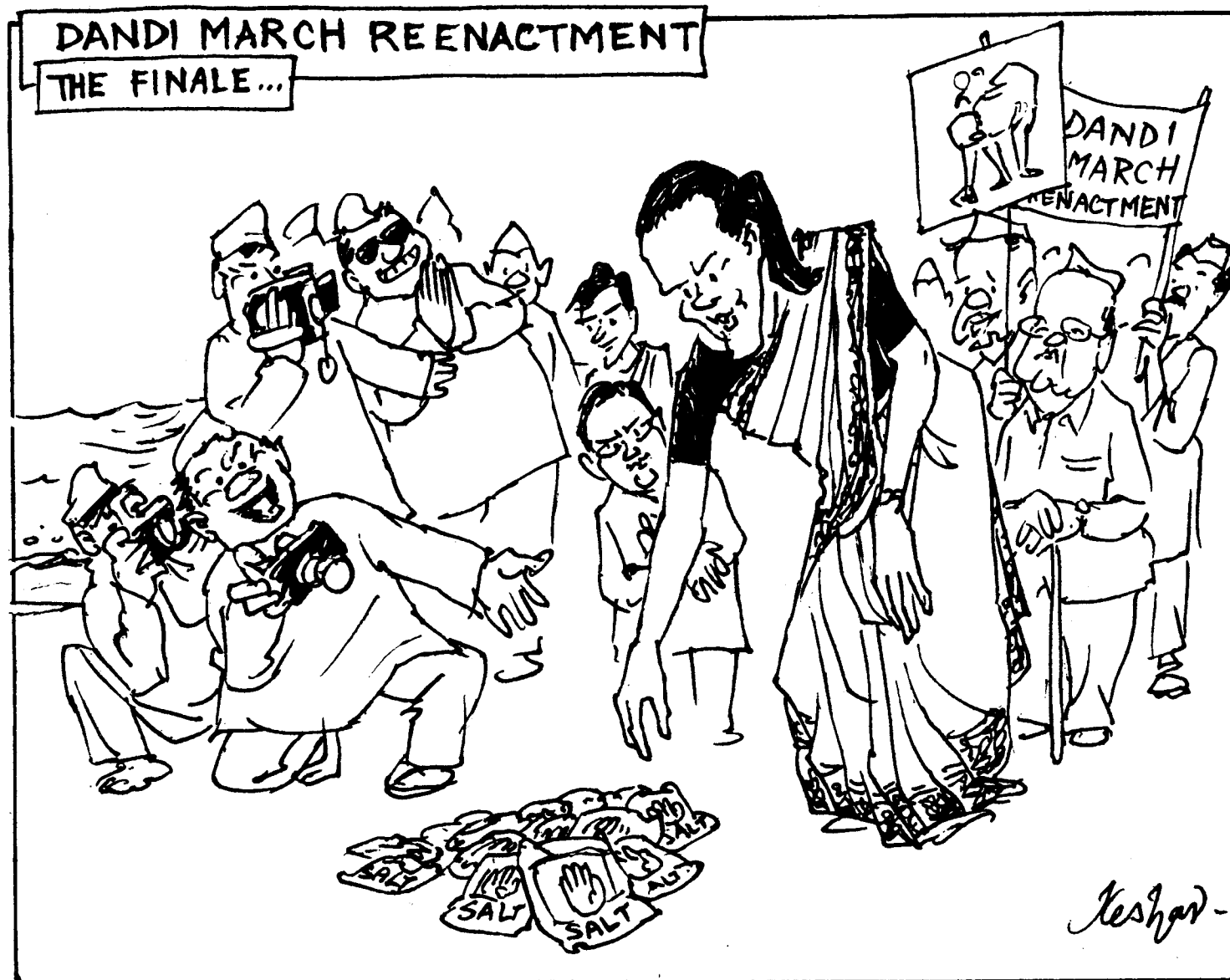
Thus what lies behind the U.S. demarche to India over the Iran pipeline is a very fundamental question: why should India aspire to take initiatives for an Asian grid if the U.S. could promise to look after its energy needs?

A prominent member of the U.S. strategic community, Stephen Blank of the U.S. War College, wrote recently (on the eve of the visit by the U.S. Secretary of State to Delhi) that while India is "highlighting its capabilities and ambitions" apropos energy security, given "its vulnerabilities and the inherent dilemmas of the economic dimension of its ties with the U.S.", India must balance its dependence upon Iranian and Russian energy with its need for U.S. support. "...India's close ties with Iran could cause trouble with the U.S."

Mr. Blank detailed the U.S. concerns: "Beyond India's ties with Iran [lie] Turkmenistan and its [India's] growing energy investments in Russia proper. India is also active in Kazakhstan. It has formally bid for immediate participation in the Tengiz and Kashagan oil fields and the Kurmangazy and Darkhan exploration blocks. India is also interested in 9 other exploration blocks in and around the Caspian Sea ... They [India and China] also see it [Central Asia] as a place where they can expand and what they believe is their growing power in world affairs. Both states believe that the future is theirs, that they already are or should be regarded as world powers and that the future or the ideal state of world politics is one of multipolarity or polycentrism where they are each one of those centres or poles."

Mr. Blank counsels India to eschew its "ambivalence about relying on market mechanisms". He would like Delhi to place trust in the "effectiveness and viability" of market mechanisms to take care of India's energy security rather than embark on adventures hoping to "lock in" oil and gas supplies over the long term.

KESHAV



# CHANGE IN KYRGYZSTAN

## Akayev's Downfall Entirely Of His Own Making

By APRATIM MUKARJI

Three days before the astonishingly swift change of guard in Bishkek on 24 March, Kyrgyzstan's opposition coalition leader Kurmanbek Bakiyev, an economist and a former prime minister who is presently the interim prime minister, told the media, "The president is still not prepared for negotiations. Let him show the initiative. If the president warms to the idea of talks, this would be a big plus. If not, this would be a big minus for him and his administration".

On the same day, the United States embassy in Bishkek said in a statement, "The embassy urges both the demonstrators and the government to resolve differences peacefully and with respect for the rule of law". The previous day, 20 March, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which had monitored the parliamentary elections of 27 February and 13 March, and had corroborated the opposition allegations of a rigged election, also called for an immediate dialogue between the two sides.

### Dual power

Nobody was apparently expecting the turn of events that occurred on 24 March. Yet, indications of a collapsing presidential authority were becoming available day by day as the popular protest movement kept spreading in the economically poor and geographically isolated south.

By 22 March a "dual power" scenario had come to be established with the regime maintaining control in the economically advanced north and the opposition holding sway in the south. But nobody foresaw an immediate conclusion of the growing confrontation. Though the ousted president described the popular movement as a coup on the day, he had dismissed it as a "temporary phenomenon" only two days earlier and declared that he had no intention to resign (even after fleeing the country on 24 March, he said in an e-mail statement that he had not resigned from the presidency and that he would be back soon to regain power). Significantly, he had stated on 22 March that he would not order use of force to remove the street demonstrators in the southern cities of Jalal-Abad and Osh.

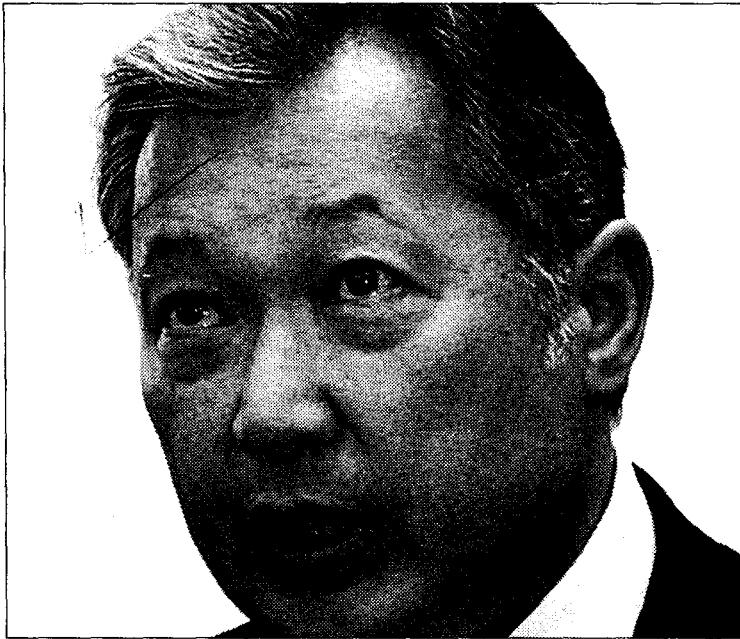
In truth, however, he had already lost the power to do so. Contrary to the government propaganda, local police officers and demonstrators had taken over the law and order machinery; excellent control was being exercised in public places and in the streets, and the spring festival of Navruz was being celebrated in both the cities. Overnight the Akayev regime had been rendered irrelevant in the south.

By appearing to be reasonable, Mr Akayev was clearly attempt-

ing to force the opposition either to slow down the momentum of its movement or to create a more critical situation out of frustration which would make it easier for him to handle. The opposition, on the contrary, suspected that he was moving toward decla-

regime changes in Georgia and Ukraine.

There is supreme irony in the ill-fated camaraderie of the three oppressive rulers. While Mr Karimov and Mr Nazarbayev fit neatly into the average mould of the ex-communist-turned-self-



ring an emergency and imposing martial law in the country. Thus, the very tactic of apparent reasonableness in effect alerted and stiffened the opposition's resolve to force the president to bow down and quit rather than prolong the political instability and exploit the vacuum that could have conceivably ensued.

In the midst of all this posturing, the forcible and brutal evacuation of the government headquarters in Jalal-Abad and Osh in which some Kazakhs reportedly participated confirmed the opposition suspicion. The demonstrators swiftly retook the buildings from the security forces.

Significantly, as the determination of the opposition to face the president stiffened day by day, the advice to strike a compromise with the opposition came not only from the Americans and the Europeans but also from the two other neighbourhood presidents who were obviously uneasy with fears of a rash move by Mr Akayev. While the government of the President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov counselled that the crisis should be resolved in a "peaceful way, without any outside interference", that of the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev advised the Kyrgyz government and the opposition to find a "common language" and avoid the use of force.

### Liberal origins

Only three weeks earlier, the presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan had begun to toy with the concept of forming a Central Asian Union linking the three autocratically ruled countries ostensibly for "common economic interests". But, to their critics, the proposed body would have been more likely to help each other out in the kind of crisis that had forced

proclaimed-democrat that reigns almost all over the former Soviet Union republics, Mr Akayev was initially an honourable exception. The first presidency of Kyrgyzstan came the way of this non-communist, internationally renowned and respected physicist and president of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences and a close associate of the Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov, after the celebrated novelist Chingiz Aitmatov declined the offer made to him.

True to his reputation, Mr Akayev began his first presidential term fifteen years ago on a strictly democratic note and continued on this course even when all around him the Central Asian presidents had persistently made a mockery of the democratic façade and concentrated all powers in their hands, eliminated political opposition, hounded out independent media, human rights groups and non-governmental organisations promoting civil society, and turned the republics into veritable autocracies.

However, as the Kyrgyz economy began to founder, poverty and unemployment rose, and popular disaffection began to crystallise into frequent and uncomfortable questioning of authority leading to visible protests. Political opposition grew stronger, the other presidents prevailed upon Mr Akayev to follow suit and suppress the opposition. It was Mr Karimov in particular, who was by far the most repressive head of state and government even then and has since only grown more dictatorial, who insisted that his efforts to counter terrorism in Uzbekistan were being thwarted by Kyrgyzstan's liberal policy towards political opposition and Muslim radicalism.

Mr Akayev's ability to be a fair ruler had also been dissipated by his immediate family's greed for

wealth and power, and his friends' hurried exploitation of the benefits of his prolonged tenure in office. Not surprisingly, the looting spree let loose in the streets of Bishkek and elsewhere since 24 March had mostly targeted the immovable and moveable assets owned by his family and his friends.

Between 1991 and 1995, Kyrgyzstan under Mr Akayev (then the sole popularly elected president in the region) was the only Central Asian republic to have held free and fair elections, leading to a thriving parliamentary opposition. It was also the first country in the region to go for economic liberalisation and privatisation of state enterprises under the guidelines of the International Monetary Fund. It was from 1996 onward, however, that the president and parliament began to clash over state policies.

### Increasing autocracy

Thereafter, Mr Akayev's credibility plummeted fast as political and economic crises compounded his follies of trying to rein in political opposition by resorting to increasing authoritarianism. In his bid to stay in power undemocratically, Mr Akayev went to the extent of making the puppet parliament approve a law on 26 June 2003 granting lifelong immunity to him and to two former Kyrgyz Communist Party bosses who had run the government during the Soviet period. The same law also granted Mr Akayev certain lifelong privileges, including a permanent seat on the country's National Security Council, a pension equivalent to 80 per cent of his presidential salary, and a car and driver. The law also empowered him to live in his official residences, in both Bishkek and the Issyk-Kul resort, for life. Besides, the law allowed the state to pay his direct family members annual stipends and cover their medical and communications costs.

Mr Akayev's downfall is thus entirely of his own making; and this is one reason why even President Vladimir Putin of Russia, who had earlier retreated tactically from the inherently foolish notion of supporting the defeated official Ukrainian president candidate Viktor Yanukovich, had no hesitation in declaring on 25 March that his government was ready to cooperate with the Kyrgyz opposition.

The Georgian and Ukrainian presidents Mikhail Saakashvili and Viktor Yushchenko have also moved in fast to support a peaceful settlement of the Kyrgyz crisis (despite cold-shouldering by the beleaguered Mr Akayev who dismissed the opposition politicians as criminals when on 24 March, as he was on his way out, Mr Saakashvili offered mediation). The discredited Mr Akayev would only render his country and the region further disservice if he persisted with any effort to drum up support for himself and seek to create further trouble in Kyrgyzstan.

# Kyrgyz leader under pressure

Reuters  
Bishkek, March 31

KYRGYZSTAN'S ACTING President came under mounting pressure on Thursday to let ousted veteran leader Askar Akayev return home to resign, despite apprehensions that it could re-ignite violence in the Central Asian country.

Contradicting Kurnmanbek Bakiyev's stand, parliament speaker Omurbek Tekebayev said Akayev could return with

appropriate safety guarantees. "Akayev's speedy resignation is the key to holding a new poll," he explained.

The ousted president drove a wedge among the post-coup leaders of his ex-Soviet state as they strove to assert their authority by offering to resign if he was given security guarantees on his return.

The indecision over whether Akayev's offer should be accepted to clear the way for new elec-

tions has added to tension in the poor ex-Soviet state after last week's coup.

Dimitrij Rupel, chairman of the Organisation of Security and Cooperation (OSCE) in Europe, set himself at odds with acting President Kurmanbek Bakiyev when he said that excluding Akayev from talks would be dangerous "in this unstable situation".

It was the OSCE that declared the parliamentary elections held in late February and early March

flawed - a judgment that fed protests in the south of the country finally leading to the March 24 coup in the capital.

Bakiyev met Rupel on Thursday and assured him that the new government would press ahead with democratic reforms with respect for human rights.

However, political analysts say Kyrgyzstan could be set for the authoritarianism that has always been the hallmark of the region.

01 APR 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES



# Russia, China vow to stabilise Kyrgyzstan

By Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW, MARCH 28.** Russia and China have vowed to stabilise the situation in Kyrgyzstan following last week's coup that ousted the President, Askar Akayev.

In a telephone conversation today the Foreign Ministers of Russia and China "reaffirmed the resolve of both sides to give all possible help to efforts to normalise the situation (in Kyrgyzstan) and restore law on the basis of the Constitution," said the Russian Foreign Ministry on Monday.

The new Kyrgyz Parliament, whose election triggered a coup ousting the President, Askar Akayev, has formally taken over from the old legislature as the new leaders tried to overcome a

constitutional deadlock.

A paralysing standoff between the old and new legislatures was resolved on Monday with the former agreeing to bow out. The newly elected deputies promptly chose a Speaker and re-confirmed the Opposition leader, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, as Prime Minister.

## Contact with Akayev

Initially Mr. Bakiyev was named Acting Prime Minister by the old legislature following the March 24 anti-Akayev revolt, despite the fact that its authority had by then expired.

The newly elected Speaker, Omurbek Tekebayev, said a special parliamentary commission would establish contact with Mr. Akayev, who is in Rus-

sia, to seek his voluntary resignation. This would open the way to the holding of a presidential election.

The Russian President, Vladimir Putin, ordered his Ministers to see what help Russia can give Kyrgyzstan. On Saturday Mr. Bakiyev requested Mr. Putin to help stabilise the situation.

Mr. Putin also instructed the military to go ahead with joint wargames with Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian states planned for early next month in Tajikistan. He said Kyrgyzstan's new leaders confirmed to him that their troops would take part in the games organised by the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, which unites Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Belarus and Armenia.

# Anatomy of a revolution

By M.K. Bhadrakumar

*In Kyrgyzstan, there have been deviations from the revolutionary script choreographed in Washington and finessed in Georgia and Ukraine.*

THE MYSTIQUE of all revolutions is that they acquire a dynamics of their own and result in unforeseen culminations. Two classic examples of the 20th century were the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The Mensheviks replaced the Czarist regime in Russia while the revolution was gathering steam and within months, power passed into the hands of the Bolsheviks. The 'fedayeen' of the cadre-based Tudeh Party (communists) lent the foot soldiers for the overthrow of the Shah's rule in Iran and themselves became the victims of the Islamic takeover of the successor regime.

The "revolution" in the Central Asian state of Kyrgyzstan has already thrown up surprises. A comparison with the two earlier "colour" revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine will be a good starting point. First, the striking similarities between the three "revolutions" must be duly noted. All three are meant to signify the unstoppable spread of the fire of liberty lit by the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq in the aftermath of 9/11.

But behind the rhetoric, the truth is that the U.S. wanted regime change in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan because of difficulties with the incumbent leadership. The leaders of all the three countries — Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia, Leonid Kuchma in Ukraine, and Askar Akayev in Kyrgyzstan — had enjoyed the support of the U.S. during most of their rule. Washington had cited them repeatedly as the beacons of hope for democracy and globalisation in the territories of the former Soviet Union.

Their trouble began when they incrementally began to edge towards a resurgent Russia under Vladimir Putin. They had reasons for doing so. Russia could offer them tangible cooperation in the vital economic sphere that was not forthcoming from the West — subsidised energy supplies, investment and trade. And all the three countries are strategically placed in the post-Soviet space. They comprise Russia's "near

abroad." Washington has been expanding its influence in the arc of former Soviet republics — in the Baltics, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia — in the recent years with a tenacity that worries Moscow.

Kyrgyzstan's strategic importance in this sense cannot but be stressed. Moreover, it borders China's Xinjiang; a sizeable population belonging to the Uighur community lives there with a track record of militancy. Though singularly lacking in natural resources — with the exception of water and breath-taking Alpine scenery — geographically it is a hub of Central Asia, sharing borders with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

But Kyrgyzstan's similarity with Georgia and Ukraine ends here. Of all dissimilarities, the most conspicuous one was that the two main protagonists — the leaderships in Bishkek and Moscow — prepared themselves for the revolution. Ever since 2003 when Mr. Akayev decided on allowing Russia to establish a full-fledged military base in Kant he knew he was on the American "watch list." The political temperature within Kyrgyzstan began to rise. The Americans made it clear in many ways that they desired a regime change in Bishkek. The U.S. began supporting all conceivable elements arrayed against Mr. Akayev.

Thus in a way it became a slow motion revolution. One main element was missing — surprise. The revolutionary script choreographed in Washington and finessed in Georgia and Ukraine became redundant in Kyrgyzstan — swiftly usurp power, and legitimise it with lightning speed, with all this unfolding in a blaze of revolutionary idiom, packaged and presented with incredible real time media coverage.

A crucial factor has been Moscow's approach to the impending revolution. It was faultless. Moscow

had evidently drawn its conclusions about what happened in Ukraine. It had no problems with Mr. Akayev remaining in power but never displayed its options. It took care not to be vilified as being against democracy and liberty in Kyrgyzstan. In fact, Moscow even hosted visits by the Kyrgyz Opposition.

This inability to monopolise the Opposition deprived the U.S. of a crucial pre-requisite of the "colour" revolution — a unified opposition as in Georgia or Ukraine under a single leader. From this point onward, several factors inevitably came into play: the clan structure of Kyrgyz society; issues of regional imbalance; the explosive nationality question (Kyrgyz versus Uzbek); and incipient tendencies of political Islam in the provinces bordering the Fergana Valley.

Mr. Akayev, on his part, would also seem to have done his homework. His clan base lay in the north and he refused to negotiate with the Opposition in the southern Osh-Jalalabad region where the "revolution" erupted. When the "revolution" refused to spread to the north, the Opposition brought into Bishkek (in the north) its militant supporters from Jalalabad, who finally staged the "revolution" in the dormant capital on March 23. (This also partly explains the violent scenes that ensued.)

Thus, in plain terms, we have a curious scenario where the locus of power in the country has overnight shifted into the hands of the southerners for the first time in history. Mr. Akayev simply withdrew with an abruptness that none expected. But no sooner was it announced that Kurmanbek Bakiyev, Opposition leader from the south, would be the acting President and Prime Minister that Mr. Akayev spoke up, objecting to the legitimacy of power transfer in Bishkek.

Russia swiftly endorsed Mr. Bakiyev's leadership. Referring to the new

leadership, Mr. Putin said: "We know these people pretty well and they have done quite a lot to establish good relations between Russia and Kyrgyzstan."

On the other hand, from the unenthusiastic tone of the formally worded response from Washington it is clear that the revolutionary script has got lost in the Central Asian steppes. Indeed, Central Asia is a difficult region with inscrutable ways rooted in centuries of history and tradition.

Influential sections of American opinion have begun to question the "legitimacy" of the transfer of power in the Kyrgyz "revolution." The pro-American elements in the fragmented Opposition (from the northern clans) have even suggested that Mr. Akayev be allowed to return, reassume office and a "legitimate" transfer of power be effected in Bishkek!

Kyrgyzstan, after Lebanon, is the second Muslim country where an attempt at guided "revolution" has taken maverick turns. This brings into scrutiny the efficacy of manipulating "people's power" in alien cultures.

Kyrgyzstan's problems are of poverty. Average daily income for a Kyrgyz is less than a dollar a day. A university professor earns something like Rs.3000 a month. The economy is just about recovering from the trauma of the Soviet Union's disintegration. Nothing brings this out more poignantly than the fact that a significant source of the country's income today is generated out of renting military bases to the U.S. and Russia for the "war on terror." What the country needs is economic assistance in making a successful transition. If a single day's outflow of what the U.S. is spending on its military occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq could be earmarked for Kyrgyzstan, it could make all the difference.

Of all the major players on the Kyrgyz scene — the U.S., Russia, China, and the European Union — it is only the U.S. that has rooted for a "revolution" in Kyrgyzstan as the panacea for the country's problems.

(The writer is a former Indian Foreign Service Officer with wide experience in the Central Asian regions.)

# Central Asia in transition

The slow transition of Central Asia from Soviet-style governance to modern democratic political structures is far from complete and there is no let up in the process. In Kyrgyzstan, Opposition protests against last month's parliamentary elections have taken the form of street protests and strident demands for the removal of President Askar Akayev who fled to Russia after presidential and governmental headquarters were stormed in Bishkek, the capital, on Thursday. Two rival parliaments are competing for power.

Some fear that the competing parliaments and the split in the Opposition will plunge the country into further turmoil. Both parliaments, the new one elected in the disputed vote that sparked massive discontent and the one that lost the election, each claimed to represent the people.

The restive southern part of the country around the cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad was the first to express disaffection, with strong demonstrations by protesters that had to be put down firmly by the security forces. Bishkek is normally more tranquil than the south. It was affected by looting, brought under control by police and civilian volunteers. Protesters have been given dire warnings by the minister in charge of security, and if they persist the situation could become fraught. Thus the economically least developed of the Central Asian Republics has followed others onto a path of political uncertainty.

The successful "velvet" or "coloured" revolutions elsewhere - "rose" in Georgia, "orange" in the Ukraine - seem to have encouraged the Opposition in Kyrgyzstan. Unstoppable mass protests in these two countries had the effect of forcing out leaders who claimed to have won the electoral contest.

Dubious polling procedures that might have gone unregarded some years ago were exposed and sullied the victory claims of the old guard. Deep divisions between the north and south of the country produced protest groups that would not be silenced and were prepared to fight to the bitter end. Moreover, a number of external agencies were active in identifying the shortcomings of the elections and helping to focus the protests.

In some respects, what is now being wit-

nessed in Kyrgyzstan is not dissimilar to what was seen in these earlier elections.

The Kyrgyz parliamentary elections of last month have not been given a clean chit by the large number of mainly European observers who monitored them. They found that the procedures fell short of the commitments given by the government and did not reach international standards for democratic elections.

These findings seem to have helped trigger the protests which bring to mind the

## wide angle

SALMAN HAIDAR

Kyrgyzstan has some special features that set it apart from many of the other republics in its area and thus complicate the political course that President Akayev's opponents seem to have chosen. Like its immediate neighbours, this country bears the imprint of Stalin's redrawing of boundaries to serve Soviet security interests.

The Ferghana Valley, original home of the emperor Babur, was arbitrarily divided into three by Stalin and distributed among the sur-

reduce the country's capacity to meet popular demands for a better life. Unlike its neighbours to the right and left, Kyrgyzstan is not well endowed with natural resources, having little or no oil, gas or mineral deposits, and insufficient fertile agricultural land.

Its economic vulnerability made Kyrgyzstan ready to do the IMF's bidding when it became independent, for that seemed the best way of attracting resources from abroad. For some years, it was held up as a model for the others which were less ready to liberalise their economies.

It also provided base facilities to the USA to conduct its aerial war against Afghanistan. In this it was not alone but its role was crucial and the base it provided remains in American hands as part of a worldwide security cordon. Having been so ready to cooperate, and having been held up as a model not so long ago, the Kyrgyz cannot be blamed if they are bewildered by the change of priorities among its former friends that have suddenly cast them in an unfavourable light and could threaten the regime's durability.

The southern part of this region in transition lies just across the mountains from us, a couple of hours' flight from New Delhi. India is the democratic success story of the whole area, so there is reason for us to be actively involved in observing, perhaps helping to guide, the processes of democratic change. Our growing economy enlarges the possibility of significant economic collaboration with the region that has long been keen to find new ways of trading with us.

Many years ago they had raised the possibility of using the Karakoram Highway for this purpose. At that time, we had demurred, because this goes through PoK. Today, when the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus has begun to roll, movement of Indian goods across the Karakoram Highway to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan may not seem so inconceivable.

Whether it proves feasible or not, what is important is that India should take a visible interest in this region and emerge as a key partner in its political and economic development.

(The author is a former Foreign Secretary, Government of India.)



Kyrgyz honour guard soldiers march along the central square of Bishkek on Sunday. Heavy snowfall seized the Kyrgyz capital, paralysing political activities in the streets of Bishkek after the toppling of the nation's Soviet-era regime. - AFP

"coloured" revolutions that proved so decisive elsewhere. The message throughout the region seems to be that although the Soviet-style establishment holds on to power and is capable of simulating modern democratic practice to consolidate its hold, popular protest and the demand for genuine democracy cannot be stopped and will spell the end for the old regime. Kyrgyzstan is in focus today, it could be Uzbekistan and Tajikistan tomorrow.

rounding republics. From the start there have been tensions between the disparate parts of Kyrgyzstan, aggravated by sectarian religious factors. Osh, scene of the present-day tumult, witnessed serious rioting in the early 1990s and has often tended to be at odds with the Bishkek-based regime.

It could be that disaffection induced by reports of electoral shortcomings has revived old feuds and quickened dormant hostilities. Shortcomings in its economic development

# Kyrgyz leaders jostle for power

**Bishkek, March 28** (Reuters): Kyrgyzstan plunged deeper into confusion today when a parliament, whose disputed election led to a coup ousting President Askar Akayev, assumed authority and the new leaders jostled for power.

With the impoverished Central Asian state looking increasingly rudderless, differences emerged between acting President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, named within hours of the March 24 coup that forced Akayev to flee, and Felix Kulov, a popular Opposition leader in charge of security.

But they got a helping hand from Russian President Vladimir Putin who promised to get emergency aid going to Moscow's ex-Soviet ally which says it needs food and fuel.

The constitutional crisis has stoked tension in the mainly Muslim state of five million where mass looting broke out after the coup, although there was calm since last night.

"Today we have two Presidents ... in some areas three or four governors and up to six regional leaders in the provinces," declared the speaker of the new parliament.

"We need to stop the disintegration of authority which is threatening the integrity of state," Omurbek Tekebayev told journalists, adding that



**An elderly man at a demonstration against the coup in Bishkek on Monday. (Reuters)**

Akayev still remained the legal head of state.

"The rule of the Kalashnikov (rifle) would take over throughout the country if the crisis was unresolved," he said. The new legislature, discredited though it is by the disputed February, March election that triggered the coup, assumed authority when the old assembly bowed out today.

"The old parliament has ... passed all responsibility to the new one. They do not want friction," deputy Nikolai Bailo said.

The bizarre development only underscored the uncertainty among the country's new authorities.

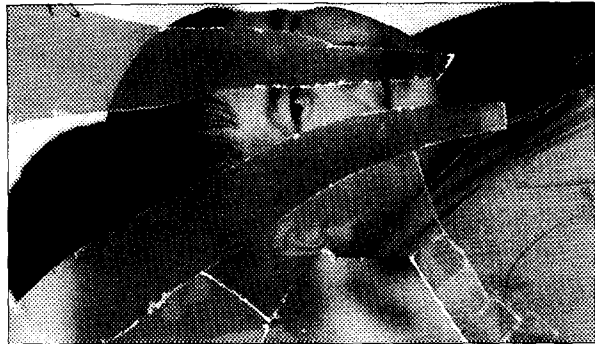
Tekebayev told deputies that parliament's first task would be to confirm Bakiyev as Prime Minister.

He said nothing about Bakiyev's appointment by the old parliament as acting President, but described its decision to name June 26 for new presidential elections as illegal.

Russian leader Putin, who spoke to Bakiyev on Saturday and whose country has given refuge to Akayev, said in televised comments: "The political processes there (in Kyrgyzstan) are stormy, but they are not yet finished. We are not going to comment yet on what is happening."

He said key Russian ministries should work out a plan to funnel food and other aid to Kyrgyzstan.

The new leaders have warned of civil war erupting and Bakiyev's supporters say a plot to kill him has been uncovered.



AP  
A man looks through a broken window in downtown Bishkek.

# Kyrgyzz Opp claims control, sets poll date

Associated Press  
Bishkek, March 26

**KYRGYZSTAN'S PARLIAMENT** on Saturday set June 26 as the date for elections to replace President Askar Akayev, who was ousted two days earlier when demonstrators stormed government headquarters, the legislature's press service said.

It was not immediately clear whether elections would also be called for parliament, but former opposition leaders now in power have suggested a new legislative vote would be held sometime after a presidential election.

Results of this year's disputed parliamentary elections, that triggered the opposition push

for Akayev's ouster, were annulled by the Supreme Court after Thursday's takeover. However, the previous parliament has still been declared valid.

The parliament's action came as a semblance of calm returned to the capital after two nights of looting and sporadic gunfire that marred celebrations of the sudden political change.

Iskander Sharshiyev, an opposition leader whose group has been working with the police to restore order, said three people were killed in clashes between police and looters.

But interior ministry spokesman Nurdin Jangarayev said the situation is under control. "Everything was normal

Lawmakers from the previous parliament's upper house elected a speaker. They also discussed the possibility of legitimising interim leader Kurmanbek Bakiyev's position by making him Prime Minister, instead of just acting Prime Minister.

**Plan to protest coup:** Thousands of people gathered in Akayev's home region on Saturday and said they planned to head for the capital to protest against his ousting.

Dushebayev, Keneshbek Dushabayev, whom Akayev named as interior minister shortly before being swept from power on Thursday, said he expected people to set off by car, bus and even horseback for Bishkek soon. "They may go

there today, they may go there tomorrow. But they will definitely go there," he asserted. Demonstrators said they were mainly motivated by concern about the legality of Thursday's coup and the lawlessness and looting that had followed. "Our demand is to stop this lawlessness in Bishkek. The seizure of power is illegal. We do not support President Akayev, but the change of power should have been carried out according to the law," said one of the protesters.

They numbered about 3,000, but said they expected to attract the support of many thousands more as they travelled the 90-km distance from the Kamen region to the capital.

## Akayev in Moscow, says Russian media

**MEDIA REPORTS** emanating from Russia said Akayev arrived in the country late on Friday night. "Akayev arrived in Moscow on Friday night," NTV channel reported. The ousted leader arrived here from Kazakhstan, reports said quoting

members of the restored legislature made up of lawmakers who served before the disputed election met in one room, while politicians elected in the recent voting gathered in another.

last (Friday) night, better than the previous night. We were working with volunteers all night. We have calmed the people down," he asserted.

In the parliament building,

AP, Moscow



**SHOWING THE DOOR:** Protesters rally after storming the government headquarters in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on Thursday. — AP

## Protests bring down Akayev Government

By Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW, MARCH 24.** The Opposition has overthrown the Government in Kyrgyzstan, after protesters stormed the presidential compound in the capital Bishkek and the President, Askar Akayev, fled the country.

Hundreds of Opposition supporters broke through police lines and forced their way into the main Government building on Thursday. This followed clashes when Government loyalists attacked thousands of

demonstrators who converged on the square in front of the Government complex to demand the resignation of the President. The crowd fought back and pushed towards the Government building. Police fired blank shots to stop the attackers, but stopped short of using live ammunition citing orders from the President.

Protesters detained the Defence and Security Ministers, but the President had left the Government building two hours earlier and some reports said he

had left for Moscow, while his family was flown by helicopter to the neighbouring Kazakhstan.

### Freed from prison

The Opposition also captured the state television and released from prison one of its most popular leaders, the former Vice-President, Felix Kulov. Several dozen persons were taken to hospital with various injuries but no casualties were reported.

Large-scale protests have been sparked by allegations of massive vote rigging in the Feb-

ruary and March parliamentary election, which gave pro-Government candidates over 90 per cent of seats in the new Parliament. In the last few days, protests spread with lightening speed from the south, where Opposition supporters overran Government offices in several cities, to the north, which had so far remained calm.

### Emergency session

Opposition leaders have set up a Coordination Committee and called for an emergency ses-

sion of the former Parliament to fill the power vacuum.

Thursday's developments came as a surprise to the Opposition. "I had no idea things could come to this when we organised the protest rally today," the Itar-Tass news agency quoted the former Prime Minister, Kyrmanbek Bakiyev, as saying.

Kyrgyzstan became the third former Soviet republic after Georgia and Ukraine where the change of regime has come through the so-called "velvet revolution."

# Chaos in Kyrgyzstan as Prez flees

Reuters  
Bishkek, March 24

**KYRGYZSTAN'S OPPOSITION** looked to have seized control of the Central Asian country on Thursday after days of violent protest but there was no word on the whereabouts of President Askar Akayev, the man it wants to oust.

Rumours flew that Akayev had fled the mountainous country which appears likely to become the third ex-Soviet state in two years to see its entrenched leadership fall to popular protests after disputed elections, following Ukraine and Georgia.

Opposition leader Felix Kulov denied media reports that quoted him as saying Akayev had resigned. "Akayev's resignation will come when we find him," he told reporters.

Kulov was freed from jail earlier in the day by opposition protesters after they seized the main government building in the capital Bishkek and took control of the national television station.

Thousands of demonstrators, cheered on by residents, took to the streets to demand Akayev resign after 14 years in office and annual what they say were fraudulent parliamentary election results.

"We will establish order. We will not allow looting. We will hold our own elections to start our rule," former prime minister and opposition figure Kurmanbek Bakiev said.

There was speculation that Akayev might have flown to neighbouring Kazakhstan or sought sanctuary in a Russian airbase, 20-km outside the capital. The local head of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which had criticised the February and March elections, said Akayev might have left the country.

"Our nation has suffered incredibly ... the people and I myself are ready to cut Akayev's throat with our own teeth. If he doesn't step down we will topple him by force," said protester Talant Kushpakov, 30.

Earlier this week, the opposition took control of two key towns in Kyrgyzstan's poorer south, scene of bloody ethnic conflict in the dying days of the Soviet Union, where resentment is strong against the better off north. Kyrgyzstan, a country of five million bordering China, lies in an energy-rich region where Washington and Moscow vie for influence. Both have a military base outside the capital.

Thousands of protesters were repelled in their first bid to enter

the heavily defended White House — the seat of government. But, on their second attempt, security forces moved out of the way and let them in.

One protester could be seen waving a flag from the second floor. Above, another protester tossed documents out to the cheering crowd of thousands below. The square nearby was splattered with pools of blood.

"This is a popular revolution and the power is in the hands of the people, we don't fear anyone any more," said Askat Dukenbayev, a professor from the local American University.

At least 30 people were reported injured in the clashes with pro-Akayev supporters in Bishkek, a city of 800,000.

Many demonstrators wore pink and yellow arm bands which are rapidly becoming the colours of anti-Akayev protest — much as orange was the campaign colour in Ukraine and the red rose the symbol of the Opposition in Georgia.

Unlike Ukraine and Georgia, there is no single unifying opposition leader in Kyrgyzstan. But Bakiev played a leading role in events on Thursday and could turn out to be a key figure.

The unrest is certain to undermine the autocratic, mostly pro-Moscow leaders in the rest of ex-



AFP  
Opposition supporters celebrate on top of an armoured personnel carrier after the Presidential palace fell.

Soviet Central Asia compared to er protests elsewhere by clamping down on an already weakened Opposition. Earlier Akayev's newly-appointed interior minister and hardline former top policeman had hinted he would have little tolerance for anything but peaceful protest.

# Stakes rise in Kyrgystan uprising

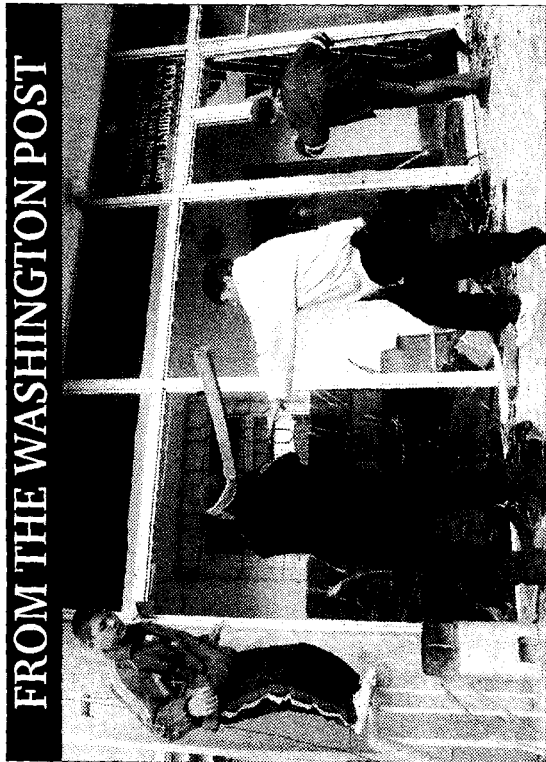
DAVID HOLLEY  
MOSCOW, MARCH 21

**P**ROTESTERS rallying against President Askar A. Akayev burned down police headquarters on Monday in the southern Kyrgystan city of Jalal-Abad, raising tensions in a country considered key to US hopes for democracy in Central Asia.

The attack on the police building came in response to pre-dawn action by special police units who briefly took back control of a regional administration office that had been occupied by demonstrators since early March. A crowd estimated at about 20,000 soon recaptured the Governor's office and then marched on the police building, freeing protesters detained there and setting it on fire, witnesses said.

Protesters also briefly took over the airport and used trucks to dump soil and gravel on its runway, in an effort to prevent the government from flying in security reinforcements. The police who drove demonstrators out of the Governor's office were believed by protesters to have been flown in from Bishkek, the capital.

Most observers said they did not



FROM THE WASHINGTON POST

Protesters break the windows and doors of a state office in the southern Kyrgyz town of Osh on Monday. Reuters

know about any deaths in the clashes, and Presidential spokesman Abdyl Se-gizbayev said there were none. But the Russian news agency *Interfax*, in a brief report quoting an anonymous police source, said that up to 10 people may have died. "The rioters are armed only with sticks. I didn't see any firearms," Chulpan Ergesheva, head of the Jalal-Abad office of the Coalition for

Democracy and Civil Society, a human rights group, said in a telephone interview. "But the people are very edgy, very irritated and angry... I am afraid if troops arrive in the city, that may result in big-scale bloodshed."

Akayev (60) who has been President since 1990, has pledged to step down later this year as required by the Constitution. His departure could set

an important example for a democratic transfer of power. Akayev is viewed as one of the less authoritarian leaders in a region known for strongman rule. His opponents fear that he plans to remain in power by amending the Constitution or holding a referendum to secure another five-year term.

The crisis was triggered by Opposition claims that many of their candidates were cheated of victory in Parliamentary elections held February 27 and March 13. The official results gave Akayev overwhelming control of Parliament in this poor and mountainous former Soviet state of 5 million people.

The protesters are demanding "the resignation of President Akayev, the annulment of the results of the Parliamentary election, the holding of new Presidential and Parliamentary elections and the freeing of all those who were arrested this morning," Ergesheva said.

Nurvaze Mamatov, a member of the Opposition leadership, said in a telephone interview that protesters were still in the city's central square. "We are the only authority existing now in the Jalal-Abad region," he said. "We will wait until someone from the government comes and negotiates our

demands with us." The protesters "don't want to use violence," he said. "This is a peaceful protest of people who didn't want to put up with the injustice done to them during the election when the real results were stolen from the people," he said.

Both critics and supporters of Akayev see the growing protests as modeled after peaceful uprisings in Georgia two years ago and in Ukraine last year that forced out governments accused of electoral fraud.

In Washington, D.C., the US State Department issued a statement urging talks to achieve a peaceful resolution. "We are concerned by incidents of violence in Jalalabad and other parts of the country," the statement said. "We call on all parties in Kyrgyzstan to engage in dialogue and resolve differences peacefully and according to the rule of law."

Presidential spokesman Se-gizbayev said that the government "is now looking for ways for its local representatives to hold talks with the leaders of the protesters". The Presidential aide stressed that police had been ordered to shoot only into the air and not to fire against the demonstrators.

—LATWP



# Kyrgyzstan govt offices stormed by 10,000 demonstrators

Associated Press  
Bishek, March 20

AT LEAST 10,000 pro-democracy protesters stormed a police station and occupied several state buildings in Kyrgyzstan on Sunday, a government spokesman said, in the biggest demonstration since allegedly fraudulent elections last month.

The government said it was ready to negotiate with the protesters who have demanded President Askar Akayev's resignation. "We hope there will be no further violence," presidential aide Abdil Seghizbayev said. Opposition leader Kurmanbek Bakiyev said talks would only be possible if Akayev himself sits down at the negotiating table. "All other lower level negotiations will be just a waste of time," he said.

Police fled to the roof of their station, firing shots into the air to deter the stone-throwing protesters in the southern city of Jalal-Abad, regional government spokesman Orazaly Karasartov said.

He said smoke could be seen rising from the police station and that protesters broke windows. Local civic activist Cholpon Ergesheva said 20,000 people took in the protests and that the demonstrators had taken over the governor's office in Jalal-Abad.

Several people were believed to be injured, though it was not clear how many. Ergesheva said two of the three buildings at the police station had been burnt down and that all the police officers had fled.

Some protesters remained at the police station while others occupied the nearby mayor's office after the soldiers guarding that building also left, Ergesheva informed.

Jalal-Abad governor Jusup Sharipov said there were not enough police officers in the region to immediately restore order. The riot was the latest in a string of nationwide protests sparked by the February 27 parliamentary elections in which President Akayev's allies fared overwhelmingly well.

HO-14 Central Asia

## Trouble in Kyrgyzstan

By Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW, MARCH 1.** Ruling parties in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan headed for victory in parliamentary elections on Sunday in the two Central Asian states amid allegations of massive violations.

Preliminary results in Kyrgyzstan showed that the party of power, Alga Kyrgyzstan (Forward Kyrgyzstan), set up by the President, Askar Akayev's daughter, Bermet Akayev, has captured eight out of 28 seats filled in Sunday's vote. This party together with allies is expected to dominate the 75-member Parliament after a run-off is held in two weeks. The President's son, Aidar Akayev, won 80 per cent of the votes in his father's home constituency. Mr. Akayev's daughter, Bermet, is leading in her district with 45 per cent.

Opposition threatened to stage a "velvet revolution" in

Kyrgyzstan modelled on the "rose revolution" in Georgia and the "orange revolution" in Ukraine, but Sunday's vote passed peacefully, with scattered Opposition protests reported only in provinces.

In neighbouring Tajikistan, the President, Imomali Rakhmonov's People's Democratic Party won 80 per cent of the votes in the 63-member Lower House. Apart from Mr. Rakhmonov's party, the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan and the Communist Party got two seats each.

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which monitored the Central Asian elections, said the polls fell short of international standards and accused authorities of wide-spread irregularities. Observers from Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States did not report any violations.

# The great game in Central Asia

By Vladimir Radyuhin

*The American encouragement of velvet revolutions in the former Soviet republics poses a threat to peace and stability in Central Asia.*

10-10  
2/11

**T**HE "ORANGE REVOLUTION" in Ukraine that brought a pro-Western leadership to power in the second biggest ex-Soviet state after Russia now threatens to spill over to Central Asia, with potentially dire consequences for regional stability.

Ukraine became the second newly independent state after Georgia where massive public protests led by youth movements trained and funded by Western organisations swept away post-Soviet regimes that vacillated between Russia and the West, and installed Governments committed to joining the Western camp.

Both Georgia and Ukraine are now being cast in the role of pacemakers of "velvet revolutions" in other post-Soviet states. Within days of the Opposition leader, Viktor Yushchenko's victory in a disputed presidential election in Ukraine, Georgia's President, Mikhail Saakashvili, who led a "revolution of roses" in his country a year ago, came to Ukraine to sign a "Carpathian Declaration." It described the recent political changes in the two countries as "a new wave of liberation of Europe which will lead to the final victory of freedom and democracy on the European continent."

Mr. Saakashvili declared that Georgia and Ukraine have formed a "democratic bridge" in the former Soviet Union, and that other governments in the region should "accept the reality that the democratic model has no alternative."

Ukraine's newly appointed Prime Minister, Yulia Tymoshenko, who was the fiery leader of the "orange revolution" in Kiev, further clarified the mission of the Tbilisi-Kiev axis, promising in her typical straightforward manner to "peacefully export the orange revolution wherever it may be possible."

During the stormy election campaign in Ukraine, would-be revolutionaries from other ex-Soviet states flocked to that country to gather experience in staging coloured revolutions.

The next likely target for such a revolution is Kyrgyzstan, where parliamentary elections are scheduled for February 27 and a presidential poll is due in October. The United States has been actively preparing the ground for a "revolution of tulips" in Kyrgyzstan to replace President Askar Akayev, a staunch ally of Russia, with a pro-American leader. The U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Linn Pasco, who was the moving spirit behind the "orange revolution" in Ukraine, has brought together a powerful Opposition coalition of former allies of the Kyrgyz President, while the U.S. Ambassa-

dor in Kyrgyzstan, Stephen Young, publicly called for a "peaceful transfer of power" and promised financial aid to ensure a "fair election."

In a recent interview, Mr. Akayev explained why Kyrgyzstan had been picked for a "velvet revolution." The technology of such revolutions works only in countries that have already embarked on the road of democracy, but is ineffective against authoritarian or dictatorial regimes, he said.

"I am sure this technology will not work in Turkmenistan, but it may work in Kyrgyzstan, which has established such fundamentals of democracy as numerous opposition parties, free media and over 5,000 non-governmental organisations," he said.

Indeed, the democratic process has made considerable headway in Kyrgyzstan over the 15 years that Mr. Akayev, a former scientist, has held the reins of power. Neighbouring Uzbekistan or Tajikistan cannot boast such democratic credentials, but their leaders do not fear "velvet revolutions." None of the five parties that contested parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan in December was in opposition to the country's strongman, Islam Karimov. Tajikistan's leader, Imomali Rakhmonov, does not worry about the outcome of the February 28 parliamentary elections either, having purged most of his opponents and resisted U.S. recommendations to liberalise the electoral law and allow Opposition media.

In Kyrgyzstan, by contrast, the coalition of nine Opposition parties, led by the former Prime Minister, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, and the former Foreign Minister, Roza Otunbayeva, is expected to put up a strong challenge to pro-government parties in the parliamentary election next month by exploiting popular discontent over the painful transition from socialism to capitalism in a country where nearly half of the five million people live below the poverty line.

Learning from the experience of Georgia and Ukraine, where street protests forced the Governments to buckle to Opposition demands, the Opposition in Kyrgyzstan has threatened to stage massive demonstrations if the authorities attempt to rig the February vote. It has already started picketing government offices in protest against disqualification of candidates on technical grounds.

The parliamentary election on February 25 in Kyrgyzstan may decide the fate of the October 30 presidential poll, as an Opposition

majority in Parliament will be able to block Mr. Akayev from seeking reelection. The country's Constitutional Court last year left it to Parliament to decide whether Mr. Akayev, who has served three terms, can stand again. Although Mr. Akayev promised not to run, he may still change his mind if he fails to promote a strong loyalist to succeed him. His daughter, Bermet Akayev, is an option, but she is still to prove her mettle in the parliamentary race as the leader of the newly formed party, Alga Kyrgyzstan.

Russia cannot easily allow Kyrgyzstan to fall from its orbit. With the opening of a major air base in that country two years ago Russia acquired a strategic foothold in Central Asia and balanced the presence of a NATO base on Kyrgyz territory under the international anti-terror effort in nearby Afghanistan. Russia has a growing presence in the Kyrgyz economy and Russians constitute the third-largest ethnic group in the country.

The success of a "revolution of tulips" in Kyrgyzstan may trigger a political crisis in Kazakhstan, another Central Asian nation in the sights of U.S. "democratisers." A delegation of Kazakh Opposition activists visited Ukraine at the height of the "orange revolution" to study its experience in peaceful toppling of the Government.

"Ukraine's experience has exceptional importance for Kazakhstan," a member of the delegation told the Russian *Kommersant* daily after the visit. "The ideas of the revolutions of roses and chestnuts are beginning to penetrate Kazakhstan."

As in Kyrgyzstan, the Opposition in Kazakhstan has former allies of the President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, in its ranks. They include the ex-Speaker of Parliament, Zharmakhan Tuyabai, who quit his post in protest against alleged vote rigging in last year's parliamentary election. With active encouragement from Washington, the Kazakh Opposition has recently formed a coalition and plans to field a single candidate in the 2006 presidential election. The U.S. Congress is demanding that Mr. Nazarbayev release from prison several Opposition leaders even as a "Kazakhgate" trial continues in New York against an American businessman accused of giving bribes to Kazakh officials, including Mr. Nazarbayev.

Kyrgyzstan is also a member of re-

gional groupings that will be weakened if it pulls out. These include the six-member Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, led by Russia and China, as well as the Russia-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), the Eurasian Economic Union and the Organisation of Central Asian States.

However, the biggest danger of "velvet revolutions" in Central Asia is that they may not be as peaceful as they were in Georgia and Ukraine, which have European culture and mentality. The political struggle in Tajikistan in the early 1990s erupted into a seven-year bloody civil war. Arbitrarily-drawn Soviet-era borders that cut across ethnic lines, smouldering disputes over scarce water resources, and rising religious extremism make Central Asia a powder keg. And, U.S. attempts to implant democracy may cause the region to explode.

The threat of export of revolution has pushed Central Asian leaders closer to Russia. The Presidents of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were in Moscow this month to discuss with Russia's President, Vladimir Putin, the situation and reiterate long-term strategic partnership with Russia. For its part, Moscow announced the launch of a programme to supply the armies of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and other allies in the CSTO defence treaty weapons at cut-rate prices.

Moscow has also warned the West that it will firmly defend its interests in the former Soviet Union. Russia will "sharply react to the export of revolutions to countries of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), no matter in what colours these revolutions may be draped — rose, blue or any other," the Russian Defence Minister, Sergei Ivanov, said addressing an international conference on new threats and challenges, in New York earlier this month.

The Russian defence chief did not provide any details of Russia's possible "sharp reaction" to the Western onslaught, but he stressed the importance Russia attached to strengthening defence ties with former Soviet states.

"Today we have military presence in all CIS countries, with the exception of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan," Mr. Ivanov said.

Experts said Mr. Ivanov's tough statement could be an indication Russia was reassessing its geopolitical options and assigning a bigger role to its defence muscle in upholding national interests.

"The Kremlin is determined to defend its positions in the CIS by using different methods, including military ones," said Mr. Vladimir Popov of the Academy of Military Sciences.