

Central Asia news update

April 2015

**MIDDLE
EAST
STUDIES
FORUM**
HOSTED BY THE ALFRED DEAKIN
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Recent Developments

Economics

The Kazakh Prime Minister, Karim Masimov, [signed](#) agreements worth \$23 billion during his visit to China on March 27.

Russian President Vladimir Putin [met](#) his Kazakh and Belarussian counterparts on March 20 in Astana. Putin proposed establishing a currency union amongst the three states.

Tajikistan's economy is facing [difficulties](#) because Russia has tightened regulations on foreign workers. Tajikistan is heavily reliant on remittances sent home by Tajik nationals living in Russia.

Politics

The Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev will [run](#) against two little-known candidates in the upcoming April 26 presidential election.

The ruling People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan [received](#) 65.2 percent of the vote in the March 1 Tajik parliamentary election. The country's president, Emomali Rahmon, slammed international accusations of electoral impropriety as a 'farce'.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) [announced](#) that they have unblocked banned websites in 11 countries, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Iran to mark the World Day Against Cyber-Censorship.

The Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev, who has [ruled](#) Kazakhstan for more than 25 years, has promised to achieve "important goals" for the country if he is re-elected on April 26.

RFE/RL was [blocked](#) in Kazakhstan after the website published an article about a video in which Kazakh militants called for others to join ISIS.

The Tajik president Emomali Rahmon [appointed](#) his eldest son, Rustam Emomali, as the head of the Central Asian nation's anticorruption agency on March 16.

Two Tajik activists were [sentenced](#) to long jail terms for being members of the banned Group 24 opposition movement

The top French appeals court [upheld](#) the decision to extradite a fugitive Kazakh banker to either Russia or Ukraine.

Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambaev was [urged](#) to protect human rights in Kyrgyzstan during a meeting with senior EU officials on March 27.

The Tajik President, Emomali Rahmon, [called](#) for 'secular' development during a meeting with leading scholars on March 19.

The US has [reassessed](#) its Central Asia strategy, reaffirming its commitment to the region.

Ethnic Turkmen [living](#) in north-western Afghanistan urged authorities to investigate the shooting of five people by police during a demonstration on March 16.

Security

A Kazakh Official has [urged](#) against calling ISIS "Islamists" on the grounds that the militants "have no relation to Islam".

Kyrgyz authorities [announced](#) on March 25 that security officials in the southern city of Osh had prevented three Tajik citizens from travelling to Syria.

Central Asian election calendar 2015

1 March 2015 - Tajik Parliamentary election

29 March 2015 - Uzbek Presidential election

26 April 2015 - Kazakh Presidential election

Date unconfirmed (October 2015) - Kyrgyz Parliamentary election

Date undecided (2015) - Afghan parliamentary election



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A Kazakh security official [told](#) reporters that 150 Kazakh nationals have joined ISIS.

Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov [called](#) for the SCO to counter the ISIS threat, especially in Afghanistan.

Afghan officials [reported](#) that dozens of Russian-speaking Central Asian militants were killed in an operation to free 30 hostages in southern Afghanistan on March 4.

The Kyrgyz president has [asked](#) the EU for military assistance to combat the threat of ISIS.

A Kyrgyz court [designated](#) ISIS as a terrorist organisation in February. The laws, which ban the group, came into force on March 16.

Five suspected members of Hizb ut-Tahrir were [detained](#) by Kyrgyz officials on March 2. Several females who were alleged members of the group were arrested the following day.

A Kyrgyz official claimed that Islamic radicals [linked](#) to ISIS have penetrated southern Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

Nikolai Bordyuzha, the [head](#) of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) said on March 13 that CSTO forces could reach the Tajik-Afghan border within 3 days if conflict broke out.

Sharofiddin Gadoev, was [elected](#) as leader of Group 24 on March 12, after the group's former-leader was killed in Istanbul.

Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, [said](#) on March 25 that Obama's decision to delay the withdrawal of U.S. troops will decrease the chances of peace.

Afghan security officials [announced](#) that they have foiled an assassination attempt on the First Vice President, Abdul Rashid Dostum, in the country's north.

A suicide bomber [killed](#) provincial police chief, Mattiullah Khan, in western Kabul on March 18.

Uzbek president re-elected in landslide victory

The Uzbek Presidential Election was [held](#) on 29 March with the incumbent president, Islam Karimov, winning in a landslide victory once again. Karimov, who has led Uzbekistan since 1989, competed with other three candidates from the same party. At times, the candidates were accused of openly campaigning for Karimov.

The election was widely considered a farce because most opposition members had been forced into exile, or jailed. Karimov justified these tough policies by pointing to the need for hardline counter-terrorism measures to counter Islamic radicalisation. However, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which observed the election, expressed concern that Uzbeks had not enjoyed "a real choice" in 2015.

Central Asia's economic woes look set to remain in the short term

Central Asian economies have been hard hit by international pressures in the past [year](#). International sanctions on Russia following the Ukraine crisis led to Russia's economic contraction and the collapse of the Ruble, forcing the closely-linked Central Asian countries to devalue their own [currencies](#).

Central Asia's leaders have little to look forward to. Poor nations such as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan rely heavily on [remittances](#) sent home by their own nationals living in Russia, so the collapse of the Ruble has been catastrophic. At the same time, the oil-rich states of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have been hit by the global oil price, which has halved in value over the past [year](#). This led to Kazakhstan cutting its economic forecasts, and Turkmenistan ordering an [anti-crisis plan](#). However, despite the doom and gloom, the tough economic conditions in Central Asia might have one winner: China. China has wanted to break Russia's monopoly on Central Asian hydrocarbons for decades, and now looks set to make the most of the economic misfortune.