

March 2016

Economy

An Amsterdam-based telecommunications company [paid](#) US\$835 million to settle Dutch and US charges that it paid large bribes to gain access to the Uzbek market.

The head of the National Bank of Tajikistan [met](#) the Iranian ambassador to discuss banking cooperation and new investments in Tajikistan. Observers warned that bilateral tensions could prove an obstacle to expanding the relationship.

Kyrgyz authorities are [thought](#) to be avoiding the repayment of US\$40 million to the Russian state energy company for the failed Upper Naryn hydro plant project.

Tajikistan is [negotiating](#) with the IMF for a potential bailout package thought to be worth as much as US\$500 million.

Reports emerged that the Tajik government could [require](#) all foreign remittances to be transferred through the National Bank of Tajikistan, charging a 1 percent commission per transaction.

The Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev [raided](#) the state pension fund to stimulate economic growth.

A test cargo train successfully [traversed](#) the China-Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway, arriving in Iran on February 10.

Tajikistan [mandated](#) that migrant remittances must be collected in the local currency (the Somoni) in an effort to boost the country's foreign currency reserves.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) [announced](#) that it would provide a US\$103 million loan for the modernisation of the Centre-South Road Corridor, which connects Kazakhstan's two major cities, Astana and Almaty.

The Afghan Chief Executive, Abdullah Abdullah, [encouraged](#) Indian businesses to invest in Afghanistan and form a trade corridor from India to Iran and Central Asia.

Standard & Poor's (S&P) ratings agency [downgraded](#) Kazakhstan's debt rating to Triple B-minus, two steps from 'junk' status.

The Kazakh government [downgraded](#) its economic growth forecast to 0.5 percent in 2016. It had previously predicted 2.1 percent economic growth.

Uzbekistan [hopes](#) to raise up to US\$437 million this year by privatising 55 state-owned enterprises.

The head of the EU Delegation to Uzbekistan, Yuri Sterk, [announced](#) that the EU and Uzbekistan will establish a council on foreign investment and trade.

Politics

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) [expressed](#) concern about the detention of the chair of the National Press Club and head of the Kazakh Journalists Union, Seitqazy Mataev.

An Almaty court [extended](#) the pre-trial arrest of Guzyal Baidalinova, the owner and editor of the Nakanune.kz online news portal, until at least March 23.

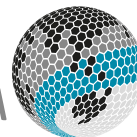
Kazakhstan's Central Election Commission [allowed](#) the Nationwide Social-Democratic Party (NSDP) to register a list in the upcoming parliamentary elections. The NSDP is the country's only genuine opposition party that has been approved to participate in the poll.

A new wave of ethnic Russians has [left](#) Kazakhstan as part of a Russian government program to resettle ethnic Russians living in the former-Soviet republics.

The Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev had a phone [conversation](#) with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, on February 8. The two leaders discussed ending the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the deterioration of Russian-Turkish relations.

The Turkish Prime Minister Ahmed Davutoglu's meeting with the Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev in Kazakhstan on February 5 [drew](#) a strong reaction from Russia.





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Kyrgyzstan began [enforcing](#) a 2014 regulation on religious schools that could see nearly all Kyrgyz Madrasah principals lose their teaching licences.

An Amnesty International report [noted](#) that human rights conditions in Central Asia have deteriorated.

Tajikistan will hold a [referendum](#) on May 22 on constitutional amendments that would allow President Emomali Rahmon to run an indefinite number of times for the presidency.

The Tajik government again [refused](#) the Russian state media conglomerate's Rossia Segodnya (Russia Today) request for a licence to operate in Tajikistan.

Turkmen state media [launched](#) a 'public discussion' on constitutional amendments that would extend the president's term and abandon restrictions that prevent candidates over the age of 70 from running for election.

The Afghan Taliban's office in Qatar [reiterated](#) that the group will not join direct peace talks with the Afghan government unless all foreign troops in the US-led coalition leave Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's President and Chief Executive both [called](#) on the Taliban to end its 15-year insurgency.

A dozen protesters [participated](#) in a street demonstration in Astana demanding the immediate release the jailed former-Prime Minister Serik Akhmetov.

Kazakh free speech campaigners [expressed](#) concern about the legitimacy of an investigation into two prominent media figures who stand accused of embezzling nearly US\$1 million.

Security

An Uzbek Court [convicted](#) five men of religious extremism, sabotage and separatism.

Afghan forces [withdrew](#) from two districts in Helmand province in southern Afghanistan.

The US Army General John Campbell [said](#) that withdrawing US troops from Afghanistan would undermine efforts to train Afghan forces.

Three people were [killed](#) in a raid on a Swedish charity clinic in the Afghan province of Wardak on February 17.

Afghan troops [killed](#) more than 40 militants linked to ISIS during an operation in Nangarhart.

Four officers were [killed](#) by a colleague who opened fire on them in the southern Afghan province of Kandahar.

The United States [increased](#) air strikes against ISIS in Afghanistan.

Five Kazakhs were [sentenced](#) to prison for being members of the Islamist group, the Tablighi Jamaat.

A local Meskhetian Turk [allegedly](#) killed a Kazakh child, triggering ethnic tensions in the country's south.

A Kazakh lawyer who was [sentenced](#) to a three-year term in 2014 for hitting a judge with a fly swatter has [allegedly](#) been on hunger strike since January 13.

Zarina Sardorova [became](#) the first Tajik woman to be sentenced for joining ISIS.

13 senior members of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) [went](#) on trial on charges of attempting to overthrow the government.

Tajik authorities [detained](#) 14 residents of Yovon district for 'liking' an Islamic extremist video published on the Odnoklassniki social network .

A suicide bombing targeting a police commander on February 22 [killed](#) nine civilians and four police officers in the province of Parwan.

20 people, predominantly civilians, were [killed](#) in a suicide bombing near the Afghan parliament building.