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Dear subscribers

It is with regret that we announce that due to financial constraints, this is the last issue of Central Asian News update. We thank you for your support and feedback over the past three years. The first issue was released in July 2014. All past issues will remain available on the MESF archive: <http://www.mesf.org.au/central-asia-news-update/>

Economics

A survey conducted by the Afghan government and the United Nations revealed that Afghan opium production [increased](#) by 87 percent to a “record level” of 9,000 tons this year, compared to levels in 2016.

Executive Director of the Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia Iskandar Abdullayev [announced](#) that economic losses from lack of water cooperation in Central Asia reaches US\$4.5 billion annually.

The Kazakh government [presented](#) a strategic plan for the development of Kazakhstan until 2025. The plan was published by Kazakhstan’s Ministry of Economy and details how it aims to benefit the lives of Kazakh citizens over the next 7 years.

Turkmenistan is set to use the East-West internal gas pipeline to [supply](#) its energy resources to international markets through the Caspian region.

Turkmenistan’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Rashid Meredov met with Pakistan’s Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission of Sartaj Aziz. They [discussed](#) developing ties in the fields of fuel and energy, transportation and communication.

Turkmenistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs met with acting director of the Islamic Development Bank’s regional office for Central Asia Hisham Taleb Maarouf. They discussed [increasing](#) cooperation in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, sustainable development projects in the region and additional economic agreements.

In a move set to increase bilateral [cooperation](#) between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Turkmenistan, UAE citizens are now able to make visa-free visits to Tajikistan.

Kazakhstan will [provide](#) humanitarian assistance to Tajikistan in the form of 1,000 tonnes of fuel oil worth 128, 685 million Tenge.

Politics

On November 24, 2017, Sooronbai Jeenbekov was [inaugurated](#) as Kyrgyzstan’s new President, marking the country’s first peaceful transfer of power between elected presidents.

Kyrgyz President Jeenbekov announced that his country will consider Russia as its “main strategic partner”. The President added that during his six-year term, Kyrgyzstan will [seek](#) to forge balanced relations with Russia, China and the European Union (EU).

Former Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambayev [announced](#) that he may run for parliament as the list-topping candidate for the ruling Social Democratic Party.

Kyrgyz prosecutors [opened](#) a criminal case against Omurbek Babanov, the former Kyrgyz opposition leader of the Respublika-Ata-Jurt (Republic Homeland) parliamentary faction. Babanov was runner-up in last month’s presidential election and has been accused of inciting hatred and publicly calling for the overthrow of the government. Babanov described the case against him as “a contrived, politicized criminal case”. He has since [resigned](#) from his leadership position.

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Former Kyrgyz President Atambaev signed a law to [cancel](#) an agreement with Kazakhstan. Under the agreement, Kyrgyzstan was set to receive US\$100 million in aid from Kazakhstan. However, relations between the two countries have deteriorated in recent months after President Atambaev accused Kazakhstan of meddling in his countries domestic affairs.

The United States has charged five individuals [accused](#) of bribing officials at state-run energy companies in Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and several other countries to win energy-related contracts for the Rolls Royce company.

Prominent Kazakh rights activist Makhambet Abzhan has been charged with fraud and [sentenced](#) to 3 and a half years in prison. Abzhan denounced his charges as politically motivated.

The Afghan government [ordered](#) a temporary ban on the popular encrypted-messaging services WhatsApp and Telegram, citing security issues and the need for greater oversight as justification. However, due to a wave of public backlash the government decided to [lift](#) the ban.

The Foreign Ministers of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan [signed](#) a Program on Mutual Cooperation. The document outlines joint efforts to enhance security, trade, economic investment, transportation and energy across the region.

EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini met with former Kyrgyz President Atambaev in Bishkek. Mogherini [expressed](#) Europe's eagerness to start negotiations regarding new bilateral agreements between the EU and Kyrgyzstan.

Security

Afghan officials announced that they had [rescued](#) over two dozen people from a Taliban prison in Afghanistan's southern province of Helmand.

A Pakistani diplomat was killed by a gunmen near his home in the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad. No group has since claimed [responsibility](#) for the attack.

The Islamic State [attacked](#) a popular television station in Kabul, Afghanistan. Two people were killed and 20 injured as a result of the attack.

At least 14 people were killed and 18 injured after a suicide attack was carried out during a political conference in Kabul. The Islamic State [claimed](#) responsibility for the attack.

Brother of former Kyrgyz Prosecutor-General and opposition politician Aida Salyanova was shot and killed. Several human rights activists [claim](#) that the attack was politically motivated.

Sayfullo Saipov, an Uzbek immigrant charged over committing a terrorist attack in New York that killed 8 people and injured several others, is set to face [additional](#) charges and possibly the death penalty in the United States.

