



January 1-31, 2007

SUICIDE BOMBER CHANGES MIND AFTER LISTENING TO RADIO FREE AFGHANISTAN

A would-be suicide bomber from western Afghanistan telephoned Radio Free Afghanistan's Kabul bureau January 9 to thank the station for saving his life. He said he was offered \$10,000 and given equipment to explode himself but abandoned the project after listening to Radio Free Afghanistan. The man said he was a regular listener and had heard a series on suicide bombing that RFA began airing in December. RFA in December and January ran a weekly 10 to 15-minute feature on suicide bombing, taking a look at the history of suicide attacks, who the perpetrators are in Afghanistan and how they get trained, why some women become suicide bombers, victims of suicide attacks, religious views on suicide and what Islamic law says about suicide attacks. RFA interviewed close to 50 people for the series, including senior government officials, eye witnesses, families of victims, religious scholars and even one suicide bomber who was arrested moments before his intended explosion.

RADIO FREE AFGHANISTAN AIRS INTERVIEW WITH HERITAGE FOUNDATION ANALYST...

James Phillips, foreign policy analyst with the Heritage Foundation, gave an exclusive interview to RFE/RL's Central News Washington correspondent January 25 about U.S. policy in Afghanistan. Phillips said the decision to keep 3,200 U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan for at least four more months is "a signal to the Afghan people and to Pakistan that the U.S. is in Afghanistan to stay." But, he said also "there needs to be an increase of economic aid and reconstruction in Afghanistan to build support for the government." Phillips told RFE/RL he expects the Taliban to stage a spring offensive because "there's a rhythm for fighting in Afghanistan where the wars tend to close down in the winter, when the mountain passes are clogged with snow, and then the war lurches forward in the spring, when the snow melts. Based on experience last year, which was more intense fighting than previous years, I would expect the Taliban to try to make a move in the spring. Part of the rationale behind holding [U.S.] troops over is to preempt the offensive" (<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/1/6A9FE0E1-8FA8-4CBF-885C-D91144709442.html>).

...SCOOP ON KARZAI BABY

Radio Free Afghanistan was first to report January 25 that Afghan president Hamid Karzai's wife had just given birth in Kabul to a healthy baby boy, their first child after nine years of marriage. RFA was on the air with the news within minutes of the birth. In

(more)

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty is a private, international communications service to Eastern Europe, Russia, the Caucasus, and Central and Southwestern Asia funded by the U.S. Congress through the Broadcasting Board of Governors.

an RFA exclusive interview the next day, Afghan Health Minister Amin Fatemi said: "the baby is perfectly healthy and has no problems. By the grace of God, our country's first lady, Zinat Karzai, is perfectly healthy. She received medical care at the hospital and was discharged" (<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/1/31A5A5E8-F172-4E5D-9A4E-03D501EAE0F7.html>)

RFE/RL CENTRAL NEWS IN AFGHANISTAN

RFE/RL's Brussels-based Central News correspondent Ahto Lobjakas was in Afghanistan January, traveling in the southern Helmand province. On January 30, Lobjakas filed a report from the capital of Helmand province, Lashkar Gar about a new poppy eradication campaign to be launched there by national Afghan and local forces (<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/1/CEB31D34-81FE-496C-879C-117226A9BB6D.html>).

Lobjakas gained an exclusive interview with Mark Norton, first secretary for counter narcotics at the British Embassy in Afghanistan and the head of the Western support for the Helmand campaign. According to Norton, "Eradication is Afghan-led, so what we're doing is supporting the Afghan government in their own eradication effort. Down here they've split it in two, there's a deployment of the Afghan Eradication Force. They're already in [Helmand] province, and due to start eradicating very soon. It will be manual and mechanical eradication -- that means basically men with sticks knocking down poppies, and mechanical is tractor and all-terrain vehicle dragging harrow across the poppy and destroying it that way." Norton told RFE/RL that 80 tractors have been purchased for provincial governor Wafa and "he's already told us that he intends to conduct a vigorous and aggressive eradication campaign throughout the province." Norton noted in the interview that "there's a symbiotic relationship between the drug barons and the Taliban. The Taliban don't necessarily grow opium, but what they do is they provide a protection service for those that do. So, inevitably, there are funds coming from the narcotics industry into the insurgency, and that is obviously very bad for all of us."

*** The Director of RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan, Akbar Ayazi, may be reached by email at <ayazia@rferl.org>. Radio Free Afghanistan's website is located at <http://www.azadiradio.org/>. English-language news about events in Afghanistan can be found at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/country/afghanistan.html>; the Executive Producer of RFE/RL's Central Newsroom, Deborah Seward, may be reached by email at <sewardd@rferl.org>; RFE/RL English-language news reports can be found at <http://www.rferl.org/features/>*

RFE/RL MARKS COMMEMORATION OF HOLOCAUST...

A number of RFE/RL language services aired programs January 29, marking the annual UN International Day of Commemoration in memory of victims of the Holocaust, following a UN resolution condemning denial of the Holocaust that was adopted by all voting member states except Iran.

RFE/RL's Central News New York correspondent, Nikola Krastev, went to an Austrian-sponsored panel discussion on "Human Rights and Holocaust Denial" that was part of the remembrance activities at UN headquarters. Krastev's report said panelists expressed concern that anti-Semitism is rising and that Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad is contributing to the problem. U.S. Congressman Alcee Hastings, chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki

Commission), noted that Tehran has hosted two conferences in less than a year that questioned the Holocaust, describing it as a myth and calling for Israel to be wiped off the face of the earth. Hastings said Ahmadinejad should visit concentration camp sites in Europe and meet with Holocaust survivors. German UN ambassador Thomas Matussek reminded the audience that Germany was one of the first states to swiftly condemn Ahmadinejad's statements on the Holocaust and Israel. Adviser to former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on prevention of genocide Juan Mendez said "president Ahmadinejad also deserves condemnation for refusing to cooperate with the judiciary of my country, Argentina that is trying to investigate, prosecute, and punish Iranian suspects for having participated in a very grave attack on the Argentinian Jewish community in 1994 that cost 83 lives"

(<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/1/8E11E24A-4A99-4784-B5AC-7945825238DC.html>).

RFE/RL broadcasters to Iran at Radio Farda aired a special package with exclusive interviews with a holocaust survivor, as well as the director of the Holocaust Museum in Poland. A picture gallery of museum exhibits and photographs was posted on Radio Farda's website at

http://www.radiofarda.com/Article/2007/01/27/f2_Interview-holocaust.html

*** The Executive Producer of RFE/RL's Central Newsroom, Deborah Seward, may be reached by email at <sewardd@rferl.org>; RFE/RL English-language news reports can be found at <http://www.rferl.org/features/> The Director of Radio Farda/Prague, Kaveh Basmenji, may be reached by email at <basmenjik@rferl.org>; the Director of Radio Farda/Washington, Behruz Nikzat, may be reached by email at <nikzatab@radiofarda.com>. Radio Farda's website is at <http://www.radiofarda.com/>; English-language news about events in Iran can be found at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/country/iran.html>*

...EXAMINES ECONOMIC FREEDOM INDEX

RFE/RL's Central News issued January 17 a report on the just released "2007 Index of Economic Freedom," compiled by the Heritage Foundation and the Wall Street Journal. It ranks 157 countries on ten types of economic freedom. Central News New York correspondent Nikola Krastev spoke to Daniella Markheim, a senior analyst with the Heritage Foundation, about the making of the report, which listed Hong Kong, Singapore, and Australia as the three freest economies in the world. The United States was fourth while former communist countries scored low in economic freedom. Markheim said the numbers reflect the struggle of these countries with "issues of corruption, problems with starting a business, a fairly high degree of regulation, a high degree still of government presence within the economy." She said Russia has improved in one category by lowering income-tax rates: "they have a moderate corporate-tax rate and that's helped their score, as well as managing or at least starting to reduce some of the price controls and things like that that were affecting their monetary freedom. Unfortunately, because they do have some fairly negative force in property rights, in financial freedom, in investment freedom, corruption -- those were fairly significant." Markheim said all countries of the former Soviet Union and eastern bloc suffer from pervasive corruption: "corruption is a fundamental problem. It affects all aspects of economic life [...] that's going to influence the overall score because it plays into everything whether it's just going into the store, having access to credit, being able to sell your goods, being able to get a job -- corruption can have a

high impact. And it's actually captured not only in our corruption factor, but it is also captured is some other factors as well because it influences prices, it influences all aspects of economic policy [...] the higher the corruption -- the worse the freedom score because that is affecting the ability of these countries to perform well" (<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/01/9849CAF1-B339-4DF5-B262-E1F815082DBF.html>).

*** The Executive Producer of RFE/RL's Central Newsroom, Deborah Seward, may be reached by email at <sewardd@rferl.org>; RFE/RL English-language news reports can be found at <http://www.rferl.org/features/>*

RADIO FREE IRAQ DEBUNKS RUMORS OF SADDAM MOONSHINE

On January 3, RFE/RL's Radio Free Iraq aired a report by a Baghdad correspondent, responding to a spreading public rumor that, three days after his execution, the image of Saddam Hussein was visible on the moon. According to the Radio Free Iraq report, people were going out on the streets with telescopes at night in Baghdad and other cities, including Mosul in the north, to observe the moon and catch a glimpse of Saddam's image in the night sky. Young people were exchanging photos of the moon taken by cell phones.

RFI interviewed sociology professor Fawziyah al-Atiyah, who said this kind of fantasy is not unusual for people living under totalitarian rule for long years and told their leader is forever. She said: "these are, in fact, nothing more than fantasies and illusions that someone gradually comes to believe in, there are escalated emotions that overwhelm rationality, intelligence, and sound judgment, and the person only imitates others and adopts the imaginations, fantasies, and illusions that have deceived others." Al-Atiyah said the adoration and awe from which the fantasy springs is not in keeping with Islam, adding that: "currently, nothing works properly, even schools and universities, so Iraqis only imitate and believe any imaginations, fantasies, and illusions. I urge the media to stand in the face of this challenge so that Iraq, hopefully, remains a civilized country and Iraqis retain the reputation that their society should have." In another interview aired in the program, an astronomy teacher at Baghdad University said the moon "is a passive celestial body, it only reflects the light of the sun and nothing more [...] to see the reflection of an image is absolutely impossible." RFI recalled in the program that a similar event occurred in 1963 when the Ba'ath Party ousted and executed Iraqi leader Abd al-Karim Qasim, people also claimed for months afterwards they could see his image on the moon.

*** The Director of RFE/RL's Radio Free Iraq, Sergey Danilochkin, may be reached by email at <danilochkins@rferl.org>. Radio Free Iraq's website is at <http://www.iraqhurr.org/>; English-language news about events in Iraq can be found at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/country/iraq.html>*

CRITIC OF KREMLIN HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD ON RUSSIAN SERVICE BROADCAST

RFE/RL's Russian Service aired an interview January 31 with Andrei Illarionov, who for five years served as Russian President Vladimir Putin's economic adviser and is now a senior fellow at the Cato Institute in Washington. Illarionov spoke with an RFE/RL Central News correspondent about the new Freedom House report which gave Russia low marks for political and civil liberties in 2006. Illarionov described current Russia as "a corporatist" state where force and violence against opponents is widespread,

saying "this is a cult of force, a cult of violence preached via official propaganda on every channel from dusk to dawn." He said: "the elimination of freedoms leads, among other things, to the elimination of institutions -- the weakening, collapse, and ultimately the destruction of public and state institutions. That's why the first victims of the death of freedom in Russia include the state itself, state institutions -- even those that were themselves created to eliminate freedom. Look at the tax authorities, the judicial system, the Prosecutor-General's Office, and even the secret services themselves. Everything that is happening in the Russian secret services lately is clear evidence of their dismal state compared to functioning secret services in normal countries..." (<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/02/F41DC9F6-FD73-42C7-856E-53E9CFC74F96.html>)

*** The Director of RFE/RL's Russian Service, Maria Klein, may be reached by email at <kleinm@rferl.org>. The Russian Service's website is at <http://www.svobodanews.ru>; English-language news about events in Russia can be found at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/country/russia.html>*

NORTH CAUCASUS SERVICE TALKS TO BICYCLING HAJJ PILGRIM

On January 26, RFE/RL's North Caucasus Service aired an unusual report about 63-year-old Chechen Dzhanar-Aliev Magomed-Ali, who made his pilgrimage to Mecca on a rusty bicycle, traveling nearly 12,000 kilometers in eight weeks. He said he set out from Urus-Martan, 15 kilometers west of Grozny, November 8 on a route that took him from Chechnya through Daghestan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, and Syria and back again. Magomed-Ali had never performed the hajj, and didn't think he had the means. But, he says, his late mother spoke to him in a dream: "Two years ago, my mother willed me to do the hajj on a bicycle. I asked, 'How am I going to go on a bike? I don't have any money. How can I get there?' She answered that it was the will of the Almighty that she would be watching over me, invisibly, during the trip. . . So I did what she asked and I left." He said he could not get a passport before leaving and made the entire journey with virtually no documents, even getting through US checkpoints in Iraq. On the return journey, he was able to hitch a ride on a bus from Azerbaijan back to Chechnya, content he had fulfilled his mother's wish (<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/1/6411A437-7FFF-4775-B554-3677539A8655.html>).

*** The Director of RFE/RL's North Caucasus Service, Aslan Doukaev, may be reached by email at <doukaeva@rferl.org>. English-language news about events in the North Caucasus region can be found at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/subregion/northcaucasus.html>*

GEORGIAN SERVICE LOOKS AT TRADE RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

On January 30, former Estonian prime minister Mart Laar, who last year became top economic adviser to Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, gave an exclusive interview to RFE/RL's Georgian Service correspondent Nino Gelashvili in Tbilisi about shifting Georgia's trade relations away from Russia. Laar confirmed that in Tbilisi Russia is no longer regarded as an important economic partner. He said in the interview that his message to Georgian businessmen is to "forget this market." Actually, it's not possible any more and you can be quite happy that this market won't exist because your exports there are low quality [and result from] low productivity. And when you really want to have a normal economy you must move toward the world

market. That's the only way. And this is happening now. In a lot of business areas the only way to [achieve] a principal change in a company is by necessity. They don't have another option. That was exactly the same as in Estonia. It worked very well. And looking at the current economic development and even the current situation, where a lot of people thought that Georgia would be on its knees in the winter, that there will be enormous problems and the budget will go down, that GDP (gross domestic product) growth will be so small, but it has not happened. You are starting the first steps to reorientation but it's only a start, of course. You must continue and don't waste time hoping that this market in Russia will be open. One moment it will be open, but when Russia sees that you will manage so well in other areas there is no way [for Russia] to boycott. Why are Russians now trying to go back on some of the steps [taken]? Because they see very well that Georgia is surviving, Georgia is doing well" (<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/2/D9872AB6-A559-45CE-B4EF-9227B7FE45C5.html>).

*** The Director of RFE/RL's Georgian Service, David Kakabadze, may be reached by email at <kakabadzed@rferl.org>. The Georgian Service's website is at <http://www.tavisupleba.org/>; English-language news about events in Georgia can be found at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/country/georgia.html>*

ARMENIAN SERVICE LAUNCHES PRE-ELECTION SERIES...

RFE/RL's Armenian Service in January began airing a daily broadcast to acquaint voters with issues and candidates in the forthcoming parliamentary elections scheduled for May 12. The 10-minute program called "Talking to Politicians" airs exclusive interviews with candidates and political analysts, and discusses the platforms of the 20 participating political parties. More than 50 candidates so far have registered for the elections.

In the first week of the broadcast in mid-January, RFE/RL interviewed deputy minister of communications Vartan Vartanian, also a senior official of the newly formed "Prosperous Armenia" party. He spoke about the political goals of the party which is pro-business and private enterprise and supports the current government. In another program, Eduard Sharmazanov, spokesman for the ruling Republican Party, discussed chances of his party gaining a parliamentary majority and remaining in power. The program also gave a platform to former parliamentary speaker Artur Baghdasarian, viewed as a leading candidate in the 2008 presidential election.

January 23, the program featured Orinats Yerkir, head of the opposition Liberal Party which favors Armenia joining NATO. He was asked to resign his parliamentary seat recently, after publicly stating that NATO membership was the party's goal. Yerkir said in the RFE/RL interview that liberals have a good chance of enlarging their current holding of 12 seats in the 131-member parliament. He also clarified that, despite heavy speculation, he has not yet joined the opposition and is discussing electoral positions with parties across the political spectrum.

...LEADS REPORTING ON KILLING OF JOURNALIST

A top story for the Armenian Service was the January 19 murder of Hrant Dink, an Armenian Turkish journalist well known to RFE/RL. Editor of the Istanbul-based weekly bilingual newspaper "Agos", Dink was a longtime source who frequently gave interviews to the Armenian Service.

Within an hour of the shooting, RFE/RL was able to air a package that included excerpts from 2006 interviews with Dink, talking about death threats he had received; an exclusive interview with Dink's friend Robert Hatejian, editor of "Marmara," the oldest Armenian language newspaper in Turkey where Dink began his career in journalism; and interviews with several Armenian Turkish colleagues.

RFE/RL's Armenian Service was the first to give listeners in Armenia a comprehensive report on the event with international reaction and was widely quoted all week by Armenian media. January 20, the service aired a special roundtable discussion in the RFE/RL Yerevan studio with four editors of opposition and pro-government newspapers focusing on the shock and outrage in Turkey and whether Dink in death could achieve his lifelong purpose in life to heal the rift between Turkey and Armenia. On January 21, regular programming featured exclusive reports from RFE/RL correspondents in Paris, Los Angeles and Jerusalem on Armenian community protests in front of Turkish embassies and consulates, interviews with ethnic Armenian community leaders in the US and live reports from a church in Yerevan and Armenian churches around the world holding special services for Dink.

A correspondent for the Armenian Service traveled to Istanbul for the funeral January 23 and reported live with recordings of Turkish citizens chanting "we are all Armenians, we are all Hrant Dink." Armenian deputy foreign minister Arman Kirakosian attended the funeral at the head of a delegation from Yerevan and gave an exclusive interview to RFE/RL during the funeral procession. He spoke about Armenian hopes for acknowledgement of the 1915 genocide on the Turkish side that would lead to diplomatic ties and an improvement of bilateral relations. RFE/RL also broadcast street interviews with Turkish citizens, all of whom condemned the murder and criticized Article 301 of the Turkish criminal code which makes insults to "Turkishness" a criminal offense. It allowed Dink and other intellectuals and writers to be prosecuted in lawsuits filed by nationalist groups and according to critics, made him a target for extremists.

*** The Director of RFE/RL's Armenian Service, Hrair Tamrazian, may be reached by email at <tamrazianh@rferl.org>. The Armenian Service's website is at <http://www.azatutyun.am/>; English-language news about events in Armenia can be found at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/country/armenia.html>*

BELARUS SERVICE AT LOCAL ELECTIONS...

RFE/RL's Belarus Service mobilized correspondents January 14 to provide comprehensive coverage of local elections to choose members to some 1,580 local councils. Only 200 opposition candidates were allowed to register for the election, out of more than 22,500 candidates.

The Belarus Service began broadcasting daily elections news reports months earlier, starting in October. The RFE/RL focus was on harassment of the opposition, beatings and detentions of candidates, imprisonment on false charges and intimidation and threats against their staffs, as well as irregularities in the signature-gathering process, establishing of electoral commissions, candidate registration and campaigning. Whenever possible, RFE/RL gave voice to campaigning opposition candidates who were not able to get equal time in local media.

On election day, in most districts, only one government-supported candidate was on the ballot and no international election monitors were present. Only a handful of opposition candidates got elected, most did not participate in the poll.

For the rest of that week, RFE/RL aired critical assessments of the election by international organizations, including the OSCE and European Union and exclusive interviews with representatives of the Belarusian Helsinki Commission, barred opposition candidates and non-governmental groups.

...FOCUSES ON OIL AND GAS CRISIS

The top story for RFE/RL's Belarusian Service in the first half of January was the row with Russia over the price Belarus should pay for Russian gas. During the bitter trade dispute, Russia demanded double and triple the original price; Belarus imposed a hefty transit fee on oil flowing through the Druzhba pipeline from Russia to Western Europe; and, at one point, the oil flow was halted for three days before the two governments reached agreement.

RFE/RL was the first media in Belarus to report the international scope and impact of the dispute in East and West. The service's correspondent in Warsaw filed a report on reaction in Poland to the oil stoppage and the Belarusian Service worked closely with RFE/RL's Russian Service on the story. A Minsk-based correspondent for the Belarusian Service spent a week in Moscow covering government talks between the two sides to resolve the crisis. The correspondent, Yuri Drakachrust, also took part in a RFE/RL Russian Service panel discussion on the issue, produced in RFE/RL's Moscow bureau.

On January 12, when the Russian and Belarusian government reached agreement on a new price, the Belarusian Service pre-empted regular programming to provide analysis of economic and political consequences. Drakachrust contributed with a report on reaction in Russia to the settlement. Produced in RFE/RL's Minsk bureau, a roundtable of mostly Belarusian experts commented on repercussions for Lukashenka's presidency, the Belarusian economy and a proposed union of Russia and Belarus. Most Belarusian analysts agreed in the broadcast that the union is probably dead, the economy will progressively weaken as oil and gas prices rise over the next three years, and Lukashenka, now friendless in the East, as well as West, will be maneuvering on the right and on the left, perhaps impelled to loosen some economic restrictions.

*** The Director of RFE/RL's Belarus Service, Alexander Lukashuk, may be reached by email at <lukashuka@rferl.org>. The Belarus Service's website is at <http://www.svaboda.org/>; English-language news about events in Belarus can be found at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/country/belarus.html>*

UKRAINE SERVICE TALKS TO FOREIGN MINISTER ABOUT RUSSIAN OIL...

A correspondent for RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service gained an exclusive interview with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk January 15, during Tarasyuk's visit to the Czech Republic. In the interview, Tarasyuk discussed Russia's oil policy and conflicts over pricing with Ukraine and Belarus. Tarasyuk said, "United Europe and every country for that matter should work to reduce its dependence on a single energy source. First of all, we need to diversify energy supplies and, secondly, we must develop and adopt common rules, which are the same for all, whether it is Russia, Ukraine, and Germany." Tarasyuk also noted that, "The very same oil pipeline, which goes through Belarus, continues through Ukraine. This is one pipeline. In this instance, our sympathies should be with a single set of rules, a single set of standards, which are dictated by the European Energy Charter. Ukraine is a part of this charter. If all

countries abided by the provisions of this charter, we wouldn't have such critical situations" (<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/1/9A06383C-6EB9-46F5-B995-D4235A88835C.html>)

...REPORTS HIS RESIGNATION

RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service has followed the political controversy embroiling Ukrainian Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk since it escalated last December with the decision of Ukraine's parliament to dismiss him from office. Tarasyuk, a political ally of President Viktor Yushchenko and supporter of a pro-western orientation for Ukraine, was being increasingly undermined by the government of Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych, which is supported by Moscow and wary of integration with the West. President Viktor Yushchenko signed a decree in December bringing Tarasyuk back into office, but Tarasyuk resigned January 31.

The Ukrainian Service interviewed European Union member of parliament Charles Tannock January 31, who said Tarasyuk's resignation "is a signal, I think politically, that Ukraine is now in a kind of multipolar foreign policy situation again, where it is not really clear whether it is heading towards eventual European Union membership or just [trying] to get closer to us in terms of political and commercial relations but wishing to maintain an equal distance from Brussels as from Moscow."

On the other side of the political spectrum, the Ukrainian Service aired a telephone interview January 31 with Sergei Markov, the director of the Institute for Political Studies in Moscow, who said that "Borys Tarasyuk was the chief organizer of provocations against the Russian [Navy stationed on the Crimean peninsula]. One cannot call Tarasyuk a pro-Western politician. He is a typical Russophobe whose main task is to cause maximum damage to Russia and Ukraine's unity. His departure is a good sign."

*** The Director of RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service, Olga Buriak, may be reached by email at <buriako@rferl.org>. The Ukrainian Service's website is at <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/>; English-language news about events in Ukraine can be found at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/country/ukraine.html>*

US AMBASSADOR TO SERBIA GIVES EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW TO RFE/RL

US ambassador to Serbia Michael Polt gave an exclusive interview to RFE/RL's South Slavic & Albanian Languages Service (SSALS), focusing on controversial issues, including the UN plan for Kosovo, the non-surrender of indicted war criminal general Ratko Mladic to the Hague Tribunal and negotiations to form a new Serbian government. In the wide-ranging conversation, Polt also spoke about the U.S. role in the Balkans. The interview aired January 27 on several platforms -- in addition to RFE/RL radio broadcasts to the Balkans, it was also carried by TV Studio B during prime-time, posted on the SSALS' website (in Serbian, <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/article/2007/01/27/e59589d1-18a7-4806-be64-a3f593f6e09e.html>), and an excerpted version was published in the Sunday edition of the Serb daily newspaper "Danas".

The interview with Ambassador Polt continues a pilot project launched in November, for a partnership between RFE/RL and local television stations in the region. Called "An Hour with Radio Free Europe," it is produced by SSALS' Belgrade bureau, which sets the topic and provides a moderator and guest for the talk show,

while the television station is responsible for the studio, equipment and technical requirements.

RFE/RL COVERS PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN SERBIA

RFE/RL's South Slavic and Albanian Languages Service (SSALS) provided comprehensive coverage of Serbia's parliamentary elections January 21, which offered voters a choice between a future in Europe and a possible return to the dark days of the 1990s, when Serbia was a pariah state under Milosevic's rule.

SSALS' 10:00PM program, produced in Prague, started with breaking news of the first vote total estimates made by the Belgrade-based Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CESID). During its one-hour midnight program, aired from its Belgrade bureau, SSALS reported live from the main parties' headquarters, giving unofficial results and providing analysis from an expert who was a studio guest. Listeners were able to call in comments and thoughts about the outcome of the election. SSALS was the only broadcaster in Serbia to give regional reaction. Four analysts from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Croatia were available during the show to comment on the results reported live from SSALS reporters at the main sites.

The following day, January 22, RFE/RL aired an interview with RFE/RL Balkans analyst Patrick Moore about likely post-election scenarios in forming the new government. Moore noted that while the ultranationalist Serbian Radical Party won a plurality of votes, the parties of President Boris Tadic, Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica and liberal reformers could keep the current reformist coalition in power. Moore said that "Kostunica, for all of his shortcomings, is wise enough to realize that unless Serbia wants to go into some weird partnership with Russia, its only real future as a country that is geographically part of Europe is within the EU and that the only way he's going to achieve this is by going into some sort of partnership with more democratic parties" (<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/01/B1734CC9-B33E-4806-B42A-7071B438CB49.html>).

*** The Director of RFE/RL's South Slavic and Albanian Languages Service (SSALS), Omer Karabeg, may be reached by email at <karabego@rferl.org>. The SSALS website in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian is located at <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org>, in Albanian at <http://www.europaelire.org> and in Macedonian at <http://www.makdenes.org>; English-language news about events in Bosnia-Herzegovina can be found at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/country/bosnia-herzegovina.html>, in Macedonia at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/country/macedonia.html>, in Serbia and Montenegro at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/country/serbiaandmontenegro.html> and in Kosovo at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/subregion/kosovo.html>*

KAZAKH SERVICE DRAWS ATTENTION WITH REPORT ON CZECH MINISTER

RFE/RL's Kazakh Service drew national attention with a story aired January 23 and 24 about Kazakh-born Dзамила Stehlikova, recently appointed minister in the Czech government in charge of minority issues and human rights.

Stehlikova visited RFE/RL's broadcast operations center in Prague January 23 where she gave an exclusive interview to the Kazakh Service, as well as to RFE/RL's Tatar-Bashkir and Kyrgyz Services and Central News. Her recollections in the RFE/RL broadcast of life as a young girl in Kazakhstan in the 1960s made news on Kazakh television and was quoted in all major dailies, including a Russian language newspaper that asked RFE/RL for translation rights.

Stehlikova said: "For me, it was very important every year to visit a small village, Karakorum, which is in the border area of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan... My roots are there. I was born in Alma-ata, but I remember my friends [in Karakorum], riding on horseback, and playing childhood games there. So if we speak about where the path of my life began, it was at this village on the border of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan." Stehlikova's family sent her to Moscow at a young age to study to be a doctor of medicine. She also worked as a psychiatric researcher -- living among minorities from across the Soviet Union -- until 1988.

At the age of 26, she married a Czech man and moved to the northern, coalmining regions of then communist Czechoslovakia. Stehlikova says it was her work as a psychiatrist that gave her direct exposure to the psychological impact of large-scale coal mining on the people of northern Bohemia, and combined with her grassroots activism, brought her into local politics as part of the country's fledgling Green Party: "Even after the Velvet Revolution, the villages were still being destroyed. Churches and houses were destroyed. People were moved to other towns. Then I understood that if I wanted to influence what happened around me, it was necessary to go into politics." She became a member of the municipal council and joined the Green party: "Our voice became louder. People could hear us. They followed us. People don't want to move and see the houses of their ancestors torn down. They don't want to abandon the cemeteries where their ancestors lie." Stehlikova credited Czech voters' environmental concerns for her rise to a government ministry post (http://www.rferl.org/features/features_Article.aspx?m=01&y=2007&id=715289EB-74F9-4A5E-A2CC-C569A6D507B2).

*** The Director of RFE/RL's Kazakh Service, Merhat Sharipzhan, may be reached by email at <sharipzhanm@rferl.org>. The Kazakh Service's website is at <http://www.azattyq.org/>; English-language news about events in Kazakhstan can be found at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/country/kazakhstan.html>*

KYRGYZ SERVICE FIRST WITH NEWS OF CABINET CHANGE

RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service closely followed the moves and turns of the young Kyrgyz government in January during latest tensions between president and parliament over the appointment of a new prime minister. During the process, which started in mid-January, Radio Azattyk aired exclusive interviews with Kyrgyz politicians of all shades, posting transcripts on its Internet site.

Four parliamentarians from different parties appeared on the Kyrgyz Service's weekly "Inconvenient Questions" TV show January 17 to debate the policies of president Bakiev and his nominee for Prime Minister Feliks Kulov. Parliament twice rejected the Kulov nomination and later, January 29, approved Azim Isabekov as new prime minister.

Kyrgyz Service correspondents were inside parliament and in front of the building and were the first media to get an interview with Isabekov after the vote. Asked about his political priorities, Isabekov told RFE/RL: "there is a huge bloc of draft economic laws. There is a draft law on the government [...] we need to pay attention to the economy and again to the economy. All the first steps will be connected with economic issues" (<http://www.azattyk.org/rubrics/politics/ky/2007/01/F66659B1-2296-4E32-A239-63325E7FF12B.ASP>).

RFE/RL Bishkek-based correspondents conducted informal polls on the streets of Bishkek, as well as Arashan, Isabekov's native village in the northern Chui region to

get public reaction to Isabekov's appointment. Fellow Kyrgyz politicians told RFE/RL that, in his former position as agriculture minister, Isabekov maintained a low profile as a young and personable colleague not likely to oppose decisions made by President Bakiev. His native villagers praised Isabekov as an upright, industrious student "who lives his life with integrity"

(<http://www.azattyk.org/rubrics/politics/ky/2007/01/461B18DE-5BE8-407B-9E38-E04D6DF958CC.ASP>)

*** The Director of RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service, Tyntchtykbek Tchoroev, may be reached by email at <tchoroevt@rferl.org>. The Kyrgyz Service's website is at <http://www.azattyk.org/>; English-language news about events in Kyrgyzstan can be found at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/country/kyrgyzstan.html>*

TURKMEN SERVICE MONITORS PREPARATION FOR ELECTIONS...

The main story in January for RFE/RL's Turkmen Service was preparation for the February 11 presidential election of a successor to president-for-life Saparmurat Niyazov, who died in December. The service reported the January 21 announcement by Turkmen foreign minister Rashid Meredov that international monitors will be allowed, for the first time in history, to observe the elections.

RFE/RL regional analyst Daniel Kimmage took a look January 19 at prospects for a calm succession and the likelihood of economic reform. He said Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, a former dentist and longtime Niyazov insider, appears to be stepping into the vacancy in smoothly choreographed moves, in spite of signs of public discontent in the presidential campaign. Kimmage concluded that "despite the probability of limited reforms to reduce latent social tensions -- any significant relaxation of the country's numerous restrictions on civil society -- including access to information -- appears, for now, less than probable"

(<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/01/24ea45cc-62fb-4b5d-80ae-c7d61203a29a.html>).

...AIRS U.S. CONGRESSMAN'S LETTER

In a January 12 report, the Turkmen Service aired the text of a letter in which U.S. Congressman Christopher Smith (R - New Jersey) urged Turkmenistan's Acting President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov to carry out his promises of educational and information reforms and called for a free and fair election in the former Soviet-Bloc nation. In the letter, Rep. Smith wrote that he hopes "President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov will chart a new path for his country, as the Niyazov regime represented one of the most repressive governments in the world," and ensure that "The upcoming presidential election meets OSCE standards to give the new government much-needed legitimacy." Rep. Smith expressed concern at the disappearance of Nurberdy Nurmammedov of the Agzybirlik People's Democratic Movement on December 23, noting that "reportedly, he was arrested when leaving his home after giving an interview to Radio Liberty," and urged Nurmammedov's immediate and unconditional release, as well as the release of other political prisoners including Sapardurdy Khajiev, Annakurban Amanklychev, Mukhametkuli Aimuradov, Geldy Kiarisov, Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah, and Andrey Zatoka.

*** The Director of RFE/RL's Turkmen Service, Oguljamal Yazliyeva, may be reached by email at <yazliyevao@rferl.org>. English-language news about events in Turkmenistan can be found at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/country/turkmenistan.html>*

UZBEK SERVICE FOLLOWS HUMAN RIGHTS CASE...

RFE/RL's Uzbek Service has been following the case of 32-year old Uzbek rights activist and journalist Umida Niyazova, who disappeared January 22. It was later learned that she was in jail and her lawyer told RFE/RL that she is being accused by authorities of having ties to Akromiya, a banned Islamic group.

Niyazova's lawyer, Abror Yusupov gave an exclusive interview to RFE/RL's Uzbek Service about the charges January 30, saying the authorities had confiscated Niyazova's computer in December after she visited neighboring Kyrgyzstan and were now charging her with "violation of a contraband law -- Article 246, section 1 [of the criminal code]." He said that on the confiscated computer there was allegedly information about Akromiya and interviews with family members of Akromiya supporters." The service also aired an interview with a representative of U.S.-based Human Rights Watch, which issued a statement January 29, expressing concern about Niyazova (<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/1/961E4119-F848-4621-AEF0-C5E4CC46B509.html>).

...ASKS WHY VOTERS AREN'T ELECTING NEW PRESIDENT

The Uzbek Service drew attention in the last week of January to a fact ignored by Uzbek media -- that Uzbek President Islam Karimov's term of office expired on January 22, 2007. Karimov was elected to his second and final five-year term in 2000. A contested referendum two years later -- on January 27, 2002 -- extended his term from five to seven years. January 22 marked the end of that disputed seven-year term.

In an exclusive RFE/RL interview, Shahida Yakub, head of the Uzbek Initiative Group of London and a member of the Committee for the Salvation of Uzbekistan said that "from January 22 [...] every single decree or law issued by the government and the president is illegitimate".

RFE/RL's Uzbek Service also spoke with the Deputy Chairman of Uzbekistan's Constitutional Court, Bakhtiyor Mirboboev. According to Mirboboev, parliament adopted a decree that "...says the elections are held on the first Sunday of the [last 10 days] of December in the year that the president's term expires. So the elections will be held on the first Sunday of the [last 10 days] of December 2007 -- which is December 23, 2007."

The service noted in the broadcast that Karimov has twice before extended his term of office through referendums and could easily do so a third time (<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/1/E7172F07-E795-4F9E-A78B-C895C1A59ADF.html>).

*** The Director of RFE/RL's Uzbek Service, Sojida Djakhfarova, may be reached by email at <djakhfarovas@rferl.org>. The Uzbek Service's website is at <http://www.ozodlik.org/>; English-language news about events in Uzbekistan can be found at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/country/uzbekistan.html>*

RFE/RL in the News

RFE/RL AZERBAIJANI RADIO DEBUTS ON FM WITH VOA IN BAKU

The Azerbaijani language service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, known locally as Radio Azadliq, has joined with Voice of America to broadcast on a new FM station 24 hours daily. The new station, called "Baku 101.7 FM," went on the air January 1 and is heard in the capital city of Baku and its suburbs. At least 40 percent of Azerbaijan's total population lives in this area. Five and a half hours on the new frequency is original programming produced by RFE/RL's Azerbaijani service in Baku and in Prague. RFE/RL's contribution includes daily 14 live, 5-minute newscasts at the top of the hour. VOA's Azerbaijani-language service provides daily one hour of original programming and two 5-minute newscasts; along with VOA's popular Music Mix, Special English, and English language teaching programs. More than half of the RFE/RL programming for the 24-hour stream is produced locally in RFE/RL's Baku bureau, including a one-hour, live early morning show that airs daily.

RFE/RL (<http://www.azadliqradiosu.az> and <http://www.rferl.org>) and VOA Azerbaijani-language programming (in the Latin alphabet at <http://www.voanews.com/Azerbaijani> and the Persian alphabet at <http://www.voanews.com/Azeri>) is available via the Internet and AM; RFE/RL broadcasts are also available on satellite in Azerbaijan, as are VOA radio broadcasts on shortwave frequencies and VOA television programs on Azerbaijan TV (AzTV).

RADIO FREE AFGHANISTAN CELEBRATES FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

On January 30, Radio Free Afghanistan, the Dari and Pashto language service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty celebrated five years on the air, broadcasting 12 hours daily to millions of regular listeners nationwide. In Washington, RFE/RL Acting President Jeff Trimble said Radio Free Afghanistan is to be congratulated for firmly establishing itself as the leading broadcaster in Afghanistan with an audience close to 60 percent of the population. People also regularly tune in to Radio Free Afghanistan from across the border in Iran and neighboring Central Asian countries.

In the run-up week to the anniversary, Radio Free Afghanistan aired special programming with historical audio clips, including highlights of exclusive interviews with First Lady Laura Bush, President Hamid Karzai, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Afghan cabinet ministers and other dignitaries. The Afghan Communications Minister came to Radio Free Afghanistan's Kabul studio January 30 to present an Award of Appreciation to the station for excellence in broadcasting.

In Kabul, Radio Free Afghanistan has 35 reporters and nationwide has built a network of correspondents, covering ten major cities and key areas in every province of Afghanistan. More than half the broadcasts on Radio Free Afghanistan are produced locally in the RFE/RL Kabul bureau. In addition, seven seasoned journalists report for the service from Pakistan, Iran, Russia, Egypt and the United States.

Programs produced in Prague and the service's Kabul Bureau are transmitted to listeners via shortwave, satellite and AM and FM signals provided by the International Broadcasting Bureau. Radio Free Afghanistan programming is also available via the Internet, at the service's trilingual website www.azadiradio.org and at www.rferl.org

RFE/RL BROADCASTS PUBLISHED IN MOLDOVA SPECIAL FOREIGN POLICY ISSUE

The Foreign Policy Association of Moldova in January published a special 2007 issue, containing twelve RFE/RL Romania/Moldova Service programs broadcast as 2006 summaries of major news stories and previews of 2007. They included a review of relations with Russia, prospects for Moldova integration into the European Union, analysis of deteriorating ties between Romania and Moldova and foreign investment in Moldova. The Foreign Policy Association publication is translated into Russian and English and is considered a prestigious political magazine in Moldova.

NATIONAL PUBLICITY FOR BOOK LAUNCH BY GEORGIAN SERVICE

Politicians, writers and celebrities packed a reception held by RFE/RL's Georgian Service in Tbilisi January 23 to launch a book based on "Liberty Diary" broadcasts of 2006. The event drew national attention in next-day media coverage with rich quotes of excerpts from the book. Titled "Liberty Diaries," it is a compilation of the Georgian Service's weekly program in which someone is invited to read on air what they wrote for seven days that week in their diary. The volume of 336 pages includes 52 weeks of the programs with a factual daily news summary for each period. Thus, it presents the reader with a personal, often intimate perspective together with a historical record of what was happening in Georgia and in the world that day.

WASHINGTON POST INTERVIEWS RUSSIAN SERVICE BROADCASTER/AUTHOR

Russian Service broadcaster Ivan Tolstoy was quoted in a January 27 Washington Post review of his forthcoming book "The Laundered Novel"

(<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/26/AR2007012601758.html>). Capping more than a decade of research, it will be published later this year on the 50th anniversary of the publication of Boris Pasternak's "Doctor Zhivago." Tolstoy's book offers details of how "Doctor Zhivago" came to be published in Russian in Italy in 1957 with the help of the CIA, despite Soviet attempts to block it. It is the first factual and documented account of Soviet and American intrigue and how Pasternak's Nobel Prize-winning work saw the light of day. An article about Tolstoy's research can be accessed at www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/12/eeo10665-4a7b36-b4f6-204e8edc6235.html

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