



Narcotics, Organized Crime & Security in Eurasia

Weekly Digest: November 8-14 2004

The following are summaries of articles related to narcotics and security in the Central Asian 5 and Afghanistan. Where possible, web addresses for the entire article are provided...

Quote of the week: "the primary cause is economic - people simply can't buy healthy food like fruit and vegetables" - a Kyrgyz doctor on why 34,000 of Naryn district's 56,000 women of child-bearing age are suffering from anaemia, www.irinnews.org, 15/11/04.

HuT in Tajikistan

20 people were sentenced to imprisonment from between three and eight years in Tajikistan during the week, for involvement in Hizb ut-Tahrir activities. A lawyer for the accused claimed that some of the defendants had confessed under torture.

RFE/RL, "Tajik court sentences 20 Hizb ut-Tahrir activists", 10/11/04

Terrorist capture in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan's National Security Committee (KNB) has reported that it arrested 13 Kazakh citizens and four Uzbek citizens, who it says were part of a terrorist group linked to al-Qaeda. Four of the Kazakhs were women who were allegedly training as suicide bombers. The KNB said that the group, calling itself the Mujahidin of Central Asia, were planning to assassinate an Uzbek politician and had recruited 50 Uzbeks and 20 Kazakhs over the last two years. Police confiscated weapons, forged documents and a variety of radical propaganda from the group, who the KNB said were also involved in the terrorist attacks in Tashkent earlier this year.

RFE/RL Newswire, 15/11/04

Opium and hunger

The underdevelopment of the Panj river valley area, on the Tajik-Afghan border, is a crucial factor in the continuing flow of narcotics northwards from Afghanistan. Development assistance has had little impact on this area, and in 2003, when wheat brought in \$222 per hectare, opium brought in \$12,700 per hectare. The 2 million people living along the Panj river are some of the poorest in Afghanistan and some development agencies are now pinning their hopes on encouraging legal cross-border trade with Tajikistan. To this end, the Aga Khan Foundation and the US government started building five new border bridges last year, although residents are likely to need a great deal more help if they are to lift themselves out of hunger and a dependence on opium cultivation.

Eurasianet, "Fighting hunger and heroin on the Afghan-Tajik border", <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav111104.shtml>, 11/11/04

Proper friends now

The Tajik and Kyrgyz Presidents attended a ceremony to mark the official opening of Tajikistan's embassy in Bishkek last Thursday.

Eurasianet, "Tajikistan opens embassy in Kyrgyzstan", 12/11/04

Shootout at the border

Russian border guards and an alleged reconnaissance group of Afghan drug traffickers exchanged fire on the Tajik-Afghan border last Wednesday. During the fight, a senior lieutenant in the Russian border guards was killed, along with three of the Afghans. The Russian troops pointed out that their “ancient” communications equipment could not function in the mountainous areas and they could not therefore call in back-up.

<http://www.centrasia.ru/news.php4?st=1100256060>, 10/11/04

Trying to inspire confidence?

The deputy commander of Russia’s Border Guard Service has praised the capabilities of the Tajik troops that will soon take control of the Tajik-Afghan border. Perhaps damning by exclusion, he pointed out that the eastern Pamir section of the border is stable.

Khovar news agency via BBC Monitoring Central Asia, 13/11/04

Some mixed signals

The ongoing stand-off over the fate of three UN workers kidnapped in Afghanistan is stumbling opaquely towards a conclusion. The kidnapers claimed that they have “been given signals that the prisoners whose release we demand will be freed”, although the US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage said that no prisoners would be released under pressure. On the other hand, the Muslim holiday Eid has traditionally been a time for the release of prisoners under an amnesty, so some of those on the kidnapers’ list might be released anyway.

Eurasianet, “Afghan kidnapers claim deal was struck for hostages”,
<http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/afghanistan/hypermail/news/0016.shtml>, 12/11/04

7 km more

Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have signed off on another 7 km of their common border demarcation in the Sokh enclave on the border with Batken and Kadamzhay districts.

Eurasianet, “Kyrgyz-Uzbek talks agree over 7 km of common border”; 10/11/04

US big gun in Tajikistan

The Deputy Commander of US Central Command, Senior Lieutenant General Lance Smith, visited Tajikistan last week, meeting with various counterparts in the Tajik military, for discussions on cooperation between the two countries and efforts against drug trafficking from Afghanistan, including the transfer of the border from the Russian border guards.

Eurasianet, “US Centcom deputy commander visits Tajikistan”,
<http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/tajikistan/hypermail/news/0017.shtml>, 12/11/04

The amnesty tradition in Turkmenistan

9,000 prisoners were freed last Tuesday in Turkmenistan, including 150 foreigners, as part of what has become a tradition of leniency to celebrate the end of Ramadan.

Eurasianet, “Turkmen amnesty frees 9,000”, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/turkmenistan/hypermail/news/0005.shtml>, 10/11/04

Seizures and Arrests

A record in Almaty

Police in Almaty set themselves a new record for their largest narcotics seizure, when they found slightly over 24 kg of high-quality heroin on a courier on his way to Russia. The drugs had transited Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and the courier found with them was a 35 year-old from Ingushetia.

<http://www.CentrAsia.Ru/newsA.php4?st=1100022780>, 09/11/04

Police in southern Kazakhstan seized 2 kg of heroin hidden amongst fruit on a truck driving from Uzbekistan to Russia on Thursday. The drivers claimed they did not know how the drugs had got there and had nothing to do with them.

Komsomolskaya Pravda Kazakhstan via BBC Monitoring Central Asia, 11/11/04