



### Highlights

On the face of it, nothing special seems to have happened in Uzbekistan lately. It has been business as usual in terms of both domestic and foreign policy in the country in the period March-April 2013, mirroring the stability and predictability of overall state activity.

### Internal affairs

On 21 March, Uzbekistan celebrates Navruz, a very ancient holiday that symbolizes the arrival of the New Year on the eastern calendar. This year the official holiday gala ceremony took place on 19 March in Tashkent. Members of parliament and government officials, scientists, artists, sportsmen, businessmen, veterans, representatives of foreign countries and international organizations in Uzbekistan gathered together to take part in this ceremony. President Islam Karimov gave a speech and congratulated the people of Uzbekistan.

### Foreign and international policy

Interestingly, the western thrust of Uzbekistan's foreign policy and overall Uzbekistan-West relations appears to be reasonably stable, in the form of regular and routine political consultations, discussions and exchanges of visits of diplomats. These exchanges, discussions and consultations serve as a kind of showcase to demonstrate that Uzbekistan has no problems in

its relations with western countries. A number of events have taken place in this direction, leaving this "nothing special" imprint.

On 2 March President Karimov received French foreign affairs minister Laurent Fabius. A number of issues were discussed during the meeting such as the realization of joint high-tech projects, the activity of the French development agency in Uzbekistan, trade-economic cooperation, deepening ties in the cultural-humanitarian sphere, the situation in Afghanistan and regional security in Central Asia.

On 12 March, Uzbekistan's foreign affairs minister Abdulaziz Kamilov met U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry in Washington. During the briefing before the negotiations, it was noted that the two sides would consider the state of relations between their countries and cooperation in political, economic and humanitarian spheres as well as the problem of Afghanistan. In general the results of the meeting were not publicized, creating ground for controversial interpretations.

On 24 April, President Karimov received U.S. Assistant State Secretary on South and Central Asian Affairs Robert Blake. His visit was designed to demonstrate the stable and long-term character of Uzbek-American relations. During the meeting Blake and



Karimov discussed cooperation in such spheres as business, science and education, plus the development of civil society and issues related to regional and international politics, including the situation in Afghanistan. This visit, like minister Kamilov's recent meeting with State Secretary Kerry, was not transparent and it was vague.

On 30 April Kamilov received Switzerland's State Secretary for foreign affairs Yves Rosseir who visited Tashkent at the head of the delegation from his country. During the meeting the sides discussed the state of bilateral relations, regional and international issues, investment of Swiss capital in the Uzbek economy and cooperation in the sphere of tourism. The meeting also encompassed Swiss-Uzbek interactions within the UN and the OSCE, especially in the light of the upcoming Swiss chairmanship of the OSCE. A new round of Uzbek-Swiss political consultations also took place.

### **Economy and business enterprise**

Some interesting and important trends and events mark the economic sphere. Although some of them also had a showcase effect, they nevertheless revealed important tendencies in the country's economic development.

On 25 April the Sixth Tashkent International Investment-Financial Forum took place, with the participation of 150 companies from 45 countries. The forum was organized by the information rating agency SAIPRO, the ministry of foreign economic relations, investments and trade and the Uzinfoinvest agency in partnership with the National Bank of Foreign Economic Activity of Uzbekistan. The forum programme included the sixth international conference on insurance and re-insurance as well as the second

international conference on banks, leasing and portfolio investments.

A number of issues were discussed at the Forum meetings, among which the development of investment cooperation in different spheres of the economy such as oil and gas, chemical industry, energy, machinery, electro-technical industry, information technologies and telecommunications, metallurgy and mining industry, production of construction materials, textile, leather and nutrition industry, pharmacy and production of medical equipment and tourism.

At the end of April, Uzbekistan's state statistics agency announced that GDP had grown by 7.5% in the first quarter of this year as compared to the same period last year. Industrial production increased by 6%, agricultural production by 6.2% and investments in basic capital by 8.5%. The total amount of services grew 9%. 40.5% of GDP was generated by small businesses.

On 19 April, President Karimov approved the state programme for the reclamation of irrigated lands and rational usage of water resources for the period 2013-2017. According to this document, all producers of agricultural products must shoulder investment obligations to introduce drip irrigation and other water saving technologies as of 1 May 2013.

At the initiative of President Karimov, an international conference titled "Modern housing construction as a driving force of comprehensive development and transformation of rural areas, enhancing the living standards of the population" was held



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in Tashkent on 17 April. Representatives of the UN, IMF, WB, ADB, IBD, ASEAN, UNESCO and over 300 academics, specialists and experts from 60 countries including the U.S., China, Russia, South Korea, Japan, Great Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Italy and India participated in this prestigious conference. The conference was devoted to making a deep and comprehensive analysis of the results of implementing the programme to improve services in rural areas and individual home-building based on typical projects. Housing policy in rural areas has been defined in Uzbekistan as a priority in the overall complex socio-economic development of provinces as well as increasing employment.

On 18 March President Karimov signed a decree "On the creation of the special industrial zone Jizzakh". SIZ Jizzakh has been created in accordance with the Uzbek-Chinese MoU on establishing an industrial park in Uzbekistan with the aim of ensuring favourable conditions for attracting foreign and domestic investments for the creation of modern high technological industrial productions.

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