



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Monday, February 11, 2008

TRANSLATIONS FROM YEREVAN NEWSPAPERS AND OTHER NEWS AGENCIES

POLITICS

1. MOUSE'S NEPHEW WAS ALSO AMONG THE INSTIGATORS [Haykakan Zhamanak, 02/09/08]

Yesterday, RA Prosecutor General's Office spread a statement saying that an inspection team has been formed to investigate the recent case of provocation in Artashat during Levon Ter-Petrosian's pre-election meeting.

"The examination of videotapes showed that no one threw stones and ice blocks in the direction of those standing on the podium", the statement also says.

"What videotapes have been examined? Most probably those recorded and carefully edited by themselves. The true recording done by A1+ has not been examined yet. "Nobody applied to us for that tape", said the A1+ journalist.

If the police is unable to recognize the people on the photos taken during that act of provocation, we will help them. It is clearly seen that close relatives of several high-ranking officials are among the instigators. Among them was son of Gegham Mirzoyan, head of the social department of the Ararat governor's office. By the way, one of the Niva cars without plates belonged to Mirzoyan. Mirzoyan also manages one of the businesses of Hovik Abrahamian (known as Muk, "Mouse"). The driver of a BMW car on that same photo is a guy named Narek. Others on that photo were Artur Avakian, a famous drug addict from Arevshat village, an employee of the law-enforcement bodies Hovaness Movsissian, a certain Abgar, who is the cousin of Hovik Abrahamian, former bodyguard of Ararat governor Alik Sarkissian, who is currently a police officer. The organizer of all this was Jonik Abrahamian's son Hovaness, who is a drug addict and has undergone treatment courses.

What's the proof of this? This proves that the authorities were obliged to organize all this with their own resources, because nobody else agreed to do it.

2. FROM THE MOST UNREACHABLE SAFETY DEPOSIT BOXES [Haykakan Zhamanak, 02/09/08]

Ex-president and presidential candidate Levon Ter-Petrossian receives information and documents proving that the governmental pyramid is on the verge of destruction. Even quite high-ranking officials of certain state structures send messages and offers of cooperation to Ter-Petrossian. One of the documents recently received by Ter-Petrossian's pre-electoral headquarter proves what has been talked about for the last 10 years and what the authorities have been actively denying – the issue of handing the Meghri region over to Azerbaijan and have Lachin instead.

It was the autumn of 1999, when these talks started to be circulated widely among the public. Vazgen Sarkissian and Karen Demirjian were against this solution. ...And then happened the October 27. Certain analysts see direct connection between these events. The authorities were denying the existence of such a document. Today, the document of handing over Meghri to Azerbaijan is at our disposal.

3. SUPPORTERS OF LEVON TER-PETROSSIAN BEATEN [Haykakan Zhamanak, 02/08/08]

Members of the RA presidential candidate Levon Ter-Petrossian's headquarters Hovaness Grikorian, Gevork Zakarian and Aghvan Hakobian were subjected to cruel beating in 3rd block of Nor Nork district (Yerevan) late February 7. According to "Aravot" newspaper, the young men were putting up leaflets about the rally to be held on February 9 when a Nissan Armada (number plate 33 SS 335) pulled up and the head of the presidential candidate Serge Sarkissian's Nor Nork pre-election headquarters Melik Gasparian got out of it. Asking the young men what kind of leaflets they had put up, he together with three other persons attacked them and beat cruelly.

One of the young men, 19-year-old Hovaness Grikorian is in a grave condition. He is in the resuscitation unit of Nor Nork hospital. His two friends were also taken to hospital.



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4. VAHAN HOVHANNISIAN: ARMENIAN PEOPLE WILL NOT BE ABANDONED AS LONG AS DASHNAKTSUTYUN EXISTS [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/08/08]

In case of his victory, the candidate for the RA presidency Vahan Hovhannisian will propose that Azerbaijan sign a non-aggression agreement with Armenia. Stating this at the February 8 rally in Yerevan's Freedom Square, the candidate of the ARF said that only in case of not using force and making threats of force against each other, the sides may sit at a negotiation table.

In his words, 20 years ago people also stood in Freedom Square but at that time the Armenian people was united and aware of its common interest, which cannot be said about today. V. Hovhannisian said that outwardly the country is developing but in reality it is skidding. The economic development has no relation to the people. Along with external manifestations of democracy in the country, the people is actually deprived of freedom. The nation and the country live in two parallel worlds: in one world the Constitution and new laws are adopted, while the real life, which has nothing to do with laws and the Constitution, exists in the other world. Under such conditions, according to V. Hovhannisian, the people have been left alone with its problems. However, as he assured those present, "as long as Dashnaktsutyun exists the Armenian people will not be abandoned".

The current vicious system, V. Hovhannisian said, may be changed only by those who neither stood at its roots nor have intergrown with it later. In the words of the ARF candidate, the return of independence, for which the people struggled, does not bring justice by itself, so one should not be frightened and should achieve justice after independence. I have always been a free man, (...), now I am free too and I am not afraid of anyone, and I will bring justice back to you," he stated. V. Hovhannisian said that the first thing he will do in case of being elected is to keep constitutional order in the country, and those close to him will be the first to feel the severity of law.

About 10-15 thousand people took part in the rally that lasted for an hour and a half. As usual, the speeches of the ARF's leader were interrupted by songs and dancing.

5. "DASHNAKTSUTIUN HAS SERIOUS OPPORTUNITIES TO WIN," HRAYR KARAPETIAN SAYS [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/08/08]

People are rather interested in the elections and the activeness in regions makes a high percent. As Hrayr Karapetian, a member of the RA NA ARF Dashnaktsutiun faction, stated during the February 8 discussion held in the Press National Club, people readily come to the regional meetings of Vahan Hovhannisian, a candidate running for the post of the RA President.

In his words, V. Hovhannisian will make active propaganda in all the regions of the republic and if he does not visit certain settlements, empowered people of the candidate will hold meetings instead of him. "We hope that everything will pass normally and if there are infringements we, too, will express our protest," Hrayr Karapetian said. According to him, they are ready to cooperate with the representatives of all the candidates for a fair holding of elections.

Hrayr Karapetian mentioned that he is concerned with the false news, according to which the ARF Dashnaktsutiun candidate, will, allegedly, not continue the electoral struggle up to the end and will join another candidate. Denying the news, Hrayr Karapetian said: "We have no problem to join anybody. On the contrary, if they join us, we will be glad, if they do not, we will go up to the end. Dashnaktsutiun has serious chances to win."

6. EX-PRESIDENT LEVON TER-PETROSIAN ASKS CONSTITUTIONAL COURT TO ADJOURN ELECTION DATE [Haykakan Zhamanak, 02/09/08]

Former president Levon Ter-Petrosian, one of the nine contenders for the February 19 presidential election, has asked today the country's highest Constitutional Court to adjourn the ballot citing a set of obstacles which he says make his further participation in the election processes as envisaged by the Election Code impossible.

A statement disseminated by Ter-Petrosian's central campaign office says the ex-president asked the Constitutional Court to consider his complaint and rule these obstacles as "force majeure."

The former president, particularly, complained of the Hayloor news program of the Public TV, which he says has been furthering a propaganda campaign against him for three months and providing a deliberately distorted coverage of his election campaign in gross violation of the Law on Public TV and Radio.

Ter-Petrosian also complains that the Public TV provides airtime to candidates at an unfavorable time making it actually impossible for him to mitigate the aftereffects of the campaign against him.



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He says his campaign office took all legally stipulated actions to prevent this 'illegality' but with no results.

If the Constitutional Court rules that these obstacles indeed constitute 'force majeure' it will have to put off the election date by two weeks. If these obstacles remain then new election shall be held in 40 days.

7. PROSECUTOR-GENERAL SAYS NO STONES WERE HURLED AT TER-PETROSIAN AND SUPPORTERS IN ARTASHAT [ARMENPRESS, 02/09/08]

Prosecutor-general Aghvan Hovsepien has described today as 'apparent lies' allegations by ex-president Levon Ter-Petrosian and his supporters that the deputy chief of Ter-Petrosian's security service, Sarkis Hovhanesian, was attacked and beaten by a group of young men in the town of Artashat on February 6 where Ter-Petrosian was holding a campaign meeting with local people.

Speaking to reporters today the prosecutor-general said Sarkis Hovhanesian visited the local police headquarters and gave testimony about the assault after the rally and a criminal case was opened, but when he was summoned for interrogation, he said he was in Lori where Ter-Petrosian was campaigning on February 7.

The prosecutor-general said Sarkis Hovhanesian and other people who were said to suffer in the incident, including two women, underwent medical examination and bruises were found on them. But he denied reports that Sarkis Hovhanesian was taken to hospital in Artashat.

Local media reported yesterday that a group of young men hurled stones at and scuffled with supporters of Levon Ter-Petrosian in Artashat, which the former president said was an attempt to disrupt the rally and derail his election campaign.

Aghvan Hovsepien said the two women said they had been attacked by Ter-Petrosian's supporters after they demanded an end to unethical and offensive statements by Ter-Petrosian about government officials.

The prosecutor-general said also Sarkis Hovhanesian's allegations that he saw young men throwing stones at Ter-Petrosian and his supporters were not backed up by any evidence after a close look into a videotape recorded on the scene.

He said the investigation into this incident continues.

8. ARMENIAN PRESIDENT CONDUCTS CONSULTATIONS WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS [ARMENPRESS, 02/09/08]

Armenian President Robert Kocharian conducted today a consultation with the participation of heads of home security, police services, chief prosecutor, and other officials of the sector.

Presidential press service told Armenpress that during the meeting the president said "The pre-electoral process is a very responsible period. Our aim is to organize legal elections and your role and the role of the services you are heading is very important. It is clear that during the elections the inner-political situation is becoming tensed, different candidates, parties are conducting massive events. Your all work must be relevant to the created situation and in this period you must work harder."

R. Kocharian divided their main activities of law enforcers into two big groups: the first one is that they must specify the voters' lists and the second one is that they must keep order. In this respect the president said that during two big events incidents have been registered and he assigned the law enforcement officials be more attentive.

9. ROBERT KOCHARIAN SAYS CANDIDATES MUST CONDUCT THEIR CAMPIAGN IN A CORRECT WAY [ARMENPRESS, 02/09/08]

For the office of the president of Armenia the candidates must fight on a correct level and restrain from mutual insults, Armenian President Robert Kocharian said today at a meeting with the reporters, noting that if the candidates restrain from personal insults the campaign may serve as a model.

Referring to the incident which took place in Artashat during the meeting of candidate Levon Ter-Petrosian, the president noted that it is first of all the organizers who must be responsible for the meetings.

"A lot of things depend on candidates and pre-electoral headquarters. One cannot go to the birthplace of another official and try to insult him," Kocharian said, adding that in this campaign the most unacceptable thing for him is the factor of personal insults which is particularly being used by one of the candidates.



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The impression according to the president is that not a campaign is being organized for gaining votes but a campaign against the prime minister and the government.

“One must think that not always among the gathered people are associates. Each one has supporters, friends and if you are ready to making personal insults you must also be ready that one may contradict you but it does not mean that you must beat him,” Kocharian said.

Referring to the statement of candidate Arthur Baghdasarian about threats of killing him, he noted that police was trying to meet with A. Baghdasarian at once but as the latter was very busy the meeting took place yesterday.

“The Home Security Service offered to ensure security until the elections but it depends with the evaluation of the threat. After the nature of the threat is clear a relevant security will be provided. The prosecutor’s office is controlling the process,” Kocharian said.

From yesterday’s meeting it became clear that A. Baghdasarian received a letter from an American-Armenian citizen in which it tells that A. Baghdasarian must be careful and Mher Shahgeldian has received a call from an unknown person who also said that Arthur Baghdasarian must be careful.

The president said he has positive attitude towards the uniting of A. Baghdasarian and Levon Ter-Petrosian but is sure that in that case A. Baghdasarian will lose half of his electorate.

“I do not think that A. Baghdasarian who is for building “new Armenia” may be combined with embittered L. Ter-Petrosian and how many people do you know who imagine new Armenia with Levon Ter-Petrosian? It will be very difficult to explain that to electorate,” Kocharian said.

Referring to the accusations of Levon Ter-Petrosian connected with economic crimes, the president noted that the responses are being published in press.

“Levon Ter-Petrosian just showed that he does not know economic issues at all. I was prime minister during his presidency and I can say with all responsibility that he never dealt with such issues,” Kocharian said.

As to the October 27 case, the president noted that all the participants are convicted and the main organizer is in prison. He said it is immoral to speculate during the campaign the memory of the heroes, friends and relatives. “Particularly the name of Vazgen Sargsian must not be given as he was the person who had a great role in 1998 change of power,” Kocharian said.

Overall, the president positively assessed the campaign except the existing tension. “If that factor did not exist it would have been the best civilized elections in the Armenia’s history. I think one of the most correct campaigns is being carried out by the prime minister,” Kocharian said.

10. SERZH SARGSIAN CONDUCTS MEETINGS IN TAVUSH AND LORI PROVINCES [ARMENPRESS, 02/09/08]

Candidate for presidential elections, Armenian Prime Minister Serzh Sargsian continued today his pre-electoral meetings in Lori and Tavush provinces.

In Alaverdi the meeting started with the visit to St. Gr. Narekatsi church. In the central square S. Sargsian told the people that there exists opportunities for solving the social issues of the country. The people are not fully satisfied with the currently created situation but the state will gradually support the factories and at the same time will demand that the entrepreneurs participate in the solution of common issues.

“Only a strong state may behave in this way, strong not only with the army but also with the justice, backing its businessmen. With that logic we approved the functioning of Teghout mine. It is a very principle program for us and it does not mean that we must use the nature and destroy natural resources.”

In Akhtala Serzh Sargsian said that it is a place which witnesses the potential of the people, witnesses the traditions and opportunities, on the other hand it also witnesses that how an organization left the potential unused.

“We have a great potential for development and here we feel the lack of male labor force and we must only be happy for it,” S. Sargsian said.

In Noyemberian town of Tavush province the candidate said that “Our work is to move our country forward, create warm and peaceful atmosphere, and unite everyone. Together with you we must build protected more proud country so that we may turn the pride to enthusiasm, force and solve other issues. We managed to defend our land and we will also be able to move our country forward.”

In Dilijan Serzh Sargsian said that the town may become a financial center of the country as well. In spring a great construction will start there which means that the job issue in the town will be solved and it will become a better town and the children will be proud that they live in Dilijan.



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"We have all opportunities for having our worthy place among all the countries of the world. With that conviction I ask you to join our slogan so that we move forward together to better protected, prosperous Armenia," the candidate concluded.

S. Sargsian also conducted meetings in Artchis, Ltchkadzorm Ayrum, Voskevan, Baghanisr, Koti, Berekamavan, Voskepar communities. On February 9 he will continue his meetings in Tavush.

11. LORD TRIMBLE SAYS KARABAKH CONFLICT MUST BE REGULATED IN A PEACEFUL WAY [ARMENPRESS, 02/09/08]

"Armenia is a country which formed as an independent state after collapse of USSR and which ensures today economic developments. Armenia has an important location near Turkey and Georgia and this region is one of the most important regions of the world and it is not accidental that such attention is being paid to it," member of the House of Lords of Great Britain Lord David Trimble told today at the "Democratic Reforms in Armenia in Pre-Context of Geopolitical Development" international conference which kicked off in Yerevan.

Referring to the regional conflicts D. Trimble said that though he does not have a clear position over Karabakh conflict but he expressed hope that it will be regulated in a peaceful way.

"The cease-fire regime is not a stable and long-lasting solution to the conflict. The war will only make the situation harder," he pointed out.

In 1998 D. Trimble was awarded Nobel Prize for giving peaceful regulation to the Northern Irish conflict.

During the conference the results of "Mass Media in Armenia – Pre-Electoral Analysis" have been presented and a number of issues on the pace of democratic reforms in Armenia have been discussed.

12. HEADS OF YOUTH WINGS ARF AND ORINTAS YERKIR PARTIES PRESENT POINTS OF PROGRAMS OF THEIR CANDIDATES RELATING TO THE YOUTH [ARMENPRESS, 02/09/08]

The youth wing of the Orinats Yerkir party has active participation in the pre-electoral campaign. The head of the youth wing of the party Armen Harutyunian said today at a press conference that he has special duties which are being carried out by the young people with great responsibility.

A. Harutyunian assessed the pace of the campaign as normal and effective.

"The programs of Arthur Baghdasarian include a lot of points referring to the youth. Among them are provision of long-term credits to the students and young couples with a smallest percent rate, provision of big amount of money for promoting the birth in young families," A. Harutyunian said.

The head of the ARF youth wing, chairman of "Nikol Aghbalian" students' union Vahe Sargsian also assessed the campaign as effective. According to him, V. Hovhannissian is the candidate who does not give groundless promises and is able to carry out his presented programs till the end.

"The program of our candidate also includes different points relating to the youth such like ensuring jobs for the young people, solution if social-economic, apartment issues," V. Sargsian noted.

The leaders of the youth wings of the two parties expressed readiness to cooperate with each other in future as well and called on to the young people to be the owners of their own vote.

13. SIX ARMENIAN OPPOSITION PARTIES MERGE AHEAD OF PRESIDENTIAL POLLS [ARMENPRESS, 02/11/08]

The National Democratic Union (NDU) of a presidential candidate Vazgen Manukian was beefed up last week after the Union of National Democrats and the National Democratic Party, its earlier splinters, as well as some other smaller parties- the National State, the National Unity Oath Party and the Union of Constitutional Law have joined it.

According to Vazgen Manukian, the core of his party's manifesto are systematic changes related both to the constitution and changes in the political and economic systems.

"I am sure that this is inevitable, no matter what the outcome of the election is, it is inevitable.

This path will be simply imposed on us from the outside. It will be imposed from outside, because we will have challenges which we will not be able to respond to under these conditions. That is the step which we have included in our program, it is not only an issue by which we differ from other candidates, we see the future and are moving towards the future," he said.

"The six parties will establish a new party which will be based on national democratic principles, ideology and philosophy," he said.

Vazgen Manukian said negotiations are under way with other parties as well.



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14. NO PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES WITHDRAWS FROM RACE [Hayastani Hanrapetutiu, 02/11/08]

None of nine presidential candidates withdrew from the presidential race as the deadline for doing so expired on February 9, at 6.00 pm.

The candidates contending the presidency are prime minister Serzh Sarkisian, nominated by the Republican Party, Vazgen Manukian, nominated by the National Democratic Union (NDU), ex-president Levon Ter-Petrosian, Artashes Geghamian, head of the National Unity, Arthur Baghdasarian, head of the Orinats Yerkir (Country of Law), deputy parliament speaker Vahan Hovhanesian, nominated by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Tigran Karapetian, head of the People's Party, Arman Melikian and Ara Harutunian. The later is head of the National Accord party.

The official election campaign kicked off on January 21 and is to be over on February 17, 12 pm.

The voting day is on February 19. Preliminary results will be announced on February 20 morning.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) also approved on February 9 the sample ballot-paper, which do not have an 'against all' line. Overall, 2,390,000 ballots will be published, three percent more than the number of eligible voters who were on February 9 2,320, 375.

15. EX-PRESIDENT CAMPAIGNS IN GYUMRI [ARMENPRESS, 02/11/08]

Ex-president Levon Ter-Petrosian was on Sunday in the second largest town of Gyumri. Addressing a crowd on the Theater Square Ter-Petrosian presented some details of his election manifesto, saying his team comprises skilled professionals and is supported by 16 parties and many veterans of Nagorno-Karabakh war.

Top members of his team, Aram Z. Sarkisian, chairman of the Hanrapetutyun (Republic) party and Stepan Demirchian, chairman of the People's Party of Armenia, commended the former president saying Armenia under his presidency would be a country of free and dignified people.

They, particularly, singled out that several parliament members have also sided up with Ter-Petrosian, whose team has been beefed up by tens of people who quit the Prosperous Armenia party- a junior partner of the Republican party in the coalition government.

16. CEC REGISTERED 6 INTERNATIONAL AND 39 LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS TO OBSERVE THE ELECTION [Hayastani Hanrapetutiu, 02/09/08]

The Central Election Commission (CEC) has registered 6 international organizations allowing them to monitor the February 19 presidential election. They are the OSCE/ODIHR, the CIS observation mission, the CIS Parliamentary Assembly, PACE, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the European Parliament.

The CEC has permitted also 39 local organizations to monitor the election. The deadline for registration of organizations wishing to observe the ballot expired on February 9.

Local organizations will deploy a total of 14,000 observers. The biggest is called It's Your Choice which has over 4,000 observers. The smallest will have 8 observers.

17. POLICE FINDS NO EVIDENCE TO GROUND ARTHUR BAGHDASARIAN'S ALLEGATIONS OF RECEIVING DEATH THREATS [ARMENPRESS, 02/11/08]

Armenian police said today they had investigated carefully all allegations of a former parliament speaker Arthur Baghdasarian that he had received death threats and found no evidence grounding that they constitute a threat to his life.

A police spokesperson said they have examined 4 such facts. Baghdasarian said he had received death threats during a campaign rally in Yerevan on February 3. Right after his allegations police officers sought to meet with him to get extra information and ensure his personal security, but Baghdasarian refused to meet citing his heavy campaigns schedule.

The first meeting between Baghdasarian and senior police officer occurred on February 7 after the police sent an official notification.

The police said Baghdasarian refused to lodge a written complaint about receiving death threats, saying verbally (this was later confirmed in written by his election office) that during a rally in Vanadzor several people told him they would kill him. Baghdasarian said he does not recognize them.

The second fact refers to a warning from a man whom Baghdasarian does not recognize either. According to this man, when Baghdasarian was addressing the rally on Freedom square, he saw three



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people on the roof of an opposite building and one of whom was carrying something like a case for a sniper rifle.

The police said Baghdasarian refused also to produce the letter which he claimed to have received from a US-based Armenian warning him against a possible assassination attempt.

The fourth fact referred to a telephone call on Baghdasarian's ally phone warning that he and his wife who are members of election commissions should be cautious.

18. REPUBLICAN PARTY CAMPAIGN OFFICE DAMAGED [ARMENPRESS, 02/11/08]

Police said a campaign office of the Republican Party was damaged after unknown people broke its window and threw bottles with volatile flammable liquid inside.

The incident occurred in early hours of February 10 in the village of Haghtanak. The police said the fire damaged a chair and an empty box. Police are investigating the incident.

19. PUBLIC TELEVISION INSTEAD OF COVERING BECOMES ONE OF POLES, RA OMBUDSPERSON SAYS [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/08/08]

RA Ombudsperson Armen Haroutiunian is not content with the preelection process, first of all with the coverage of Public Television. The Ombudsperson said at the February 8 meeting with journalists at the Hayeli (Mirror) club that the working schedule, approach, policy of private TV companies are a little different and it is the Public Television that should be the main guarantor of pluralism. According to A. Haroutiunian, in many cases with its programs Public Television seems to become one of the poles, through its correspondents it replies to this or that politician, whereas it should only cover. Therefore, citizens' right of receiving information is violated to some extent.

A. Haroutiunian expressed anxiety about the circumstance that intolerance is dominating at present, the evidence of which are shots fired at preelection headquarters of different candidates, brawls, threats addressed to some candidates, which is condemnable. The Ombudsperson said that in connection with the call informing about the brawl, which happened in the Nor Nork community the day before the quick response group of the Ombudsperson's office in the morning of February 8 left for Nor Nork to carry out examinations on the spot.

The Ombudsperson considers inadmissible and condemnable the incidents, which happened during RA presidential candidate Levon Ter-Petrosian's preelection meetings in Talin and Artashat. A. Haroutiunian said that the quick response group of Ombudsperson's office left for Talin, met with policemen, defendants and found out that no pressure was exerted upon the detained people.

Many applications have been received by the Ombudsperson's office, in particular, on offering election bribes, attempts to hamper activity of preelection headquarters of all presidential candidates. "All this shows that really intolerance is deepening in society." Condemning the fact of threats to presidential candidates Artur Baghdasarian and Aram Haroutiunian, the Ombudsperson did not exclude that it can be also use of a preelection technology.

BUSINESS

20. CONGRESS OF UNION OF ARMENIAN IT ENTERPRISES HELD [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/08/08]

A new concept of Armenia's IT sector is being developed by the RA ministry of trade and economic development jointly with the Union of IT Enterprises (UITE). The union is the main initiator of developing this document and will be the ministry's partner in implementation of this concept. The RA deputy minister of trade and economic development Vahe Danielian stated this at the February 6 congress of the UITE.

The chairman of UITE Hovhannes Avoyan said in his speech that since the foundation of the union in 2000, the number of its members has considerably grown, as well as its role and influence have increased. At present the UITE is a full and associate member of 23 big organizations of IT and other sectors. H. Avoyan attached importance to 2007 - the year in the union's history "when during a meeting with the RA president, our important problems were outlined and prerequisites for developing a new strategy were created", as well as discussions and other events were held.

The executive director of the union Karen Vardanian pointed out in his summary report that the 2008 state budget for the first time envisaged allocations for development of the IT sector: for research, presentation of the Armenian IT sector abroad, specialized contests, and other programs. According to him, if the Armenian government adopts the indicated concept in the form of the current draft, the UITE



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must develop a new strategy of the union because the problems of the current strategy will be solved with adoption of this concept. K. Vardanian said that the appreciation of the Armenian dram against the US dollar, the imperfect customs legislation, inconsistency between the educational system and the requirements of the IT sector may be an obstacle to implementation of the ambitious goals envisaged by the draft. He considered the absence of a separate state body performing the function of the sector's management as an obstacle to development of the sector too. It was stated that proposals to create such a body and to discuss the problems hindering the sector's development have been submitted to the Armenian prime minister.

The director general of Synopsys Armenia company Hovik Musaelian and the director of the Enterprise Incubator Foundation Bagrat Yengibarian also made speeches at the congress. Then the UITE's financial report and reports of various sections of the union were presented. After discussion of the presented programs, speeches and proposals, the congress delegates took part in elections of chairman and members of the UITE board.

21. INSTITUTION ON PROTECTION OF CUSTOMERS RIGHTS TO BE INTRODUCED IN ARMENIAN FINANCIAL MARKET [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/08/08]

At the February 7 sitting, the Armenian government approved the bill on circulation of credit information and activities of credit bureaus, whose purpose is to create legal bases for activities of credit bureaus, as well as to regulate the activity of collection of credit information and preparation of credit reports on its basis. The international expertise in this sphere was used in developing this bill.

In connection with adoption of the bill, the government also approved the bills on making addition or additions to the RA Law on Bank Secrecy, the RA Law on Insurance and Insurance Activity, the RA Law on the Central Bank of Armenia (CBA). These bills will be submitted to the RA National Assembly in envisaged order.

The CBA deputy chairman Artur Javadian told reporters after the sitting that the bill envisages introduction of a new institution - credit bureau in Armenia, which will allow to expand the scope of intermediating and crediting activities in the financial market. Besides, extra mechanisms will be created for protection of customers rights.

In the words of A. Javadian, a tradition will form, by which financial organizations will also provide credits to persons who have no business or items in pledge but who have a credit history.

Credit bureaus will carry out the activities of collection, processing, formation and keeping of credit information and of preparation of credit reports on this basis. Banks operating in the Republic of Armenia, including branches of foreign banks, as well as credit institutions and insurance companies will have to provide credit information to all credit bureaus.

22. SUBSIDIES FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT TO BE PROVIDED FROM STATE BUDGET TO OVER 100 THOUSAND BENEFICIARIES THIS YEAR

At the February 7 sitting, the Armenian government approved the order of state assistance to agricultural land users. The order was worked out for efficient, coordinated and transparent organization of the implementation of the 2008 RA state budget-envisaged program of subsidizing in Armenian marzes. It was decided that the state assistance for 1 ha of cultivated land (sown lands and seed-plots) makes 35,000 drams in 2008. The adoption of the order will allow to conduct monitoring of the subsidizing process and will help introduce an efficient subsidizing system in agriculture.

The RA deputy minister of agriculture Samvel Avetisian told reporters after the sitting that a pilot program on assistance to agricultural sector was implemented in Armenia last year. By this program, about 200 million drams (about 665 thousand USD) was allocated as subsidies from the state budget to 16 communities of Aragatsohn and Gegharkunik marzes. 2,300 beneficiaries with land plots of a total of 5 thousand ha benefited from this program.

According to S. Avetisian, the allocated sum will increase almost sevenfold this year, making 1 bln 645 mln drams. It will include lands of a total of over 60 thousand ha and more than 100 thousand beneficiaries.

Speaking about imposing VAT on agricultural products (starting from January 1, 2009), S. Avetisian said that the Armenian side proposed not imposing this tax on farms with incomes of up to 8 mln drams, while the World Bank proposed not taxing farms with incomes of up to 20 mln drams. In the latter case, according to the deputy minister, VAT will be imposed on only 1% of those engaged in production of agricultural foodstuffs in Armenia.



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23. ARMENIAN PRIME MINISTER: PASSING ARMENIAN RAILWAY FOR OPERATION UNDER CONCESSION AGREEMENT PROCEEDS FROM INTERESTS OF ARMENIA [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/08/08]

At the February 7 sitting, the Armenian government approved the draft concession agreement between the Republic of Armenia (concedent), Russian Railways OJSC and South Caucasian Railway CJSC (concessionaire) on passing the Armenian railroad system to South Caucasian Railway CJSC, NT was informed by the RA Government Information and PR Department.

The RA minister of transport and communication was instructed to sign on behalf of the Republic of Armenia the concession agreement on passing the Armenian railroad system to South Caucasian Railway CJSC - he will act as representative of the concedent.

The Armenian prime minister Serge Sargsian said that passing the Armenian railroad system for operation under the concession agreement is an important decision that proceeds from the interests of our country. "There are problems in our railway, investments need to be made. The state has difficulties with making investments, and if we fail to deal with the railway problem, we will not be able to solve the problem of rapid economic development," Serge Sargsian said in connection with the draft's adoption.

24. ARMENIAN HOTEL ASSOCIATION IMPLEMENTS RETRAINING PROGRAM FOR SPECIALISTS OF HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/08/08]

The Armenian Hotel Association (AHA) was founded in 2006. 15 hotels are members of the AHA that will implement a retraining program for medium-level managers of hotels, was announced at the February 7 round table.

According to AHA chairman Hakob Hakobian, this program is a continuation of the 2007 training program on "certified courses of hospitality industry". 4 out of 20 participants of the program received certificates of managing specialists, 8 received certificates of course instructors of the American Hotel and Lodging Association. The certified course instructors will conduct a retraining program for middle-level hotel managers in February-April, which will start with courses for employees of Dilijan hotels.

The AHA executive director Lusine Minasian said that the retraining program will help improve the quality of hotel services and increase incomes.

The USAID-financed Competitive Armenian Private Sector (CAPS) program assisted with foundation of the AHA and now provides support for its activities. The CAPS director Hayley Alexander said that in the past few years about 50 hotels and over 100 restaurants have been built in Armenia, most of which are ready to receive international tourists but some hotels, especially those in marzes, need to improve qualification of their staff. In his words, 6 managers and 14 course instructors have been retrained under CAPS programs. The CAPS plans to finance retraining of up to 55 certified course instructors.

According to course advisor Jenifer Caloun, there is a necessity to implement programs on hospitality industry in all developed countries. H. Hakobian said that Armenia is the first Transcaucasian country where USAID assists with training of hospitality industry experts.

The head of the tourism department of the RA ministry of trade and economic development Mekhak Apresian said that over 70 hotel objects currently operate in Armenia. There are at least 10 thousand hotel places in Armenia, including apartments for tourists.

25. ARMENIAN DEFENCE EXPENDITURES GROW BY 22.4% IN 2007 AS COMPARED WITH 2006 [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/08/08]

Out of budgetary expenditures of 565 bln 854.9 mln drams (about 1 bln 654.2 mln USD), 95 bln 819.3 mln drams was spent in the defence sector in 2007, which exceeds by 22.4% the index of 2006. The ratio of defence expenditures to GDP increased from 2.9% in 2006 to 3.1% in 2007.

According to the RA National Statistical Service, in 2007 budgetary expenditures on public order protection, national security and justice made 51 bln 452 mln drams, exceeding by 28% the index of 2006. Their ratio to GDP grew from 1.5% in 2006 to 1.6% in 2007.

Expenditures on education and science made 87 bln 355.2 mln drams (23.8% growth on 2006), their ratio to GDP grew from 2.7% to 2.8%. 62 bln 285.1 mln drams was spent in the social insurance and social security sector (17.4% growth), their ratio to GDP remained unchanged and made 2%; 44 bln 942.2 mln drams was spent on health care (25% growth), the ratio of these expenditures to GDP did not change and made 1.4%.



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39 bln 418.9 mln drams was spent in transport, road and communication sector in 2007 (29.2% growth on 2006). The ratio of these expenditures to GDP grew from 1.1% in 2006 to 1.3% in 2007.

DIASPORA

26. SECOND ANNUAL ANCA / GENOCIDE INTERVENTION NETWORK CAPITOL HILL ADVOCACY DAYS SET FOR MARCH 12-14 [ARMENPRESS, 02/09/08]

The Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) and Genocide Intervention Network (GI-Net) said they have teamed for the second annual Capitol Hill advocacy campaign to encourage Congressional action to end the cycle of genocide.

The expanded program, titled the "End the Cycle of Genocide: Grassroots Capitol Campaign," will take place March 12th through 14th in Washington DC, beginning with a special breakfast briefing on the morning of March 12th and followed by three days of Congressional visits to encourage U.S. action to stop the genocide in Darfur, the adoption of the Armenian Genocide resolution (S.Res. 106 / H.Res.106), and the strengthening of U.S. resolve to act against all instances of genocide.

Activists will be able to share their experiences, exchange ideas, communicate with Members of Congress, and add new connections to the growing national anti-genocide coalition at a special Capitol Hill reception on the evening of Wednesday evening, March 12th.

The need for continued and expanded advocacy to end the cycle of genocide was never more stark than earlier this year when Sudanese President al-Bashir completed a three-day state visit to Turkey, at the invitation of President Gul. As the rest of the world tries to isolate Sudan's genocidal regime, Turkey continues to embrace it, signing a memorandum of understanding to strengthen military relations and expanding cooperation on military technology transfers and training. Turkey's Minister of Trade projects that Sudan will soon be Turkey's largest trading partner in Africa.

Despite calls from human rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, Turkish President Gul did not pressure Sudan to end the atrocities in Darfur, but instead claimed that it was merely a "humanitarian tragedy" that "is not only a matter of politics, but also stems from poverty and environmental conditions."

"Al Bashir's red carpet welcome in Turkey starkly illustrates that the cycle of genocide must be confronted," said Genocide Intervention Network Executive Director Mark Hanis. "The world's continued failure to unequivocally fight against genocide, in all its forms, encourages future despotic leaders to resort to genocide. For this reason, we are organizing to demand an end to this cycle in the halls of Congress."

"We are looking forward to joining forces once again with the Genocide Intervention Network to strengthen the anti-genocide constituency in the country," said ANCA Executive Director Aram Hamparian. "Coming in a year when Turkey seems to be instructing Sudan in its denial tactics and providing political cover for its genocidal policies, our partnership with GI-Net could not be more important."

RELIGION

27. HIS HOLINESS KAREKIN II CONGRATULATES NEW ARCHBISHOP OF GREECE [ARMENPRESS, 02/11/08]

On February 9, His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, congratulated the newly elected primate of the Greek Orthodox Church, His Beatitude Ieronymos II, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, Information Services said.

His Holiness' letter states in part, "We were happy to learn...of Your Beatitude's election as Archbishop of Athens and All Greece. We congratulate you on this joyous occasion, and extend to you our best wishes and fraternal love in Christ from the spiritual center of all Armenians – the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

"As a faithful laborer in the Lord's vineyard, Your Beatitude has served in high and responsible positions of the Church, being a champion of instruction and giving special emphasis to Christian education and the theological edification of young clergymen.

"For continuous centuries, the virtuous work of education and illumination has been at the source of the friendship between our two nations, which today is reinforced by the presence of the Armenian community and Armenian diocese in the Hellenic Republic, and through warm collaboration in inter-state and inter-church spheres. We are hopeful that throughout the years of Your Beatitude's primacy, these



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important ties will be greater enriched with many more God-pleasing and successful works and achievements.

"We congratulate you once again and pray for our Lord Jesus Christ to decorate Your Beatitude with heavenly graces, bestowing you with many long years of reign to realize all of your good aspirations and beneficial plans..."

SOCIAL

28. EXAMINATION OF APPEALS IN SEDRAK ZATIKIAN MURDER CASE POSTPONED [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/08/08]

The February 7 sitting of the Criminal Appeal Court to examine the case of murder of Sedrak Zatikian (son of the former head of Yerevan's Malatia-Sebastia community Vahan Zatikian) did take place due to absence of Marieta Badalian, defence lawyer of defendant Arsen Arushanian. The next court sitting is scheduled for February 15, NT correspondent was informed by the Criminal Appeal Court. Like in the court of first instance, the trial in the appeal court is closed-door.

The appeal court examines the case based on appeals of the above mentioned lawyer and all the three defendants. They filed a petition to mitigate the punishment imposed by the December 29 sentence of the Malatia-Sebastia community court: A. Arushanian was sentenced to life imprisonment, while Artur Hovhannesian and Lusine Ghevondian accused of aiding the murder were sentenced to 11 years' and 8 years' imprisonment respectively.

Sedrak Zatikian was killed in Malatia-Sebastia community on June 22, 2006. Karine Sargsian, a passer-by, was also killed by a shot.

29. FIRE DESTROYS JUSTICE MINISTRY PREMISES [ARMENPRESS, 02/09/08]

A fire has destroyed today the roof and two upper floors of a building in downtown Yerevan that houses the ministry of justice. The building is believed to have caught fire at about 5 am.

President Robert Kocharian has told law-enforcement bodies to make a swift inquiry into what might have caused it. He also told the government to find a new building for the ministry not to disrupt its work.

A press release by Kocharian's press office said the president commended firemen for prompt response and localization of the fire preventing it from spreading to neighboring buildings which house the office of prosecutor-general and Court of Cassation.

The fire is said to have destroyed the room of the minister and his deputies. Part of computers and documents have been saved by employees who were in the building, but the damages are said to be great.

The building was built in early 20-th centuries and had wooden ceilings. One of the preliminary theories blames the fire on short circuit.

30. GEF TO CARRY OUT SMALL GRANTS PROGRAMS IN ARMENIA [ARMENPRESS, 02/09/08]

The Global Ecological Fund (GEF), the Armenian government and the UNDP Armenia Office will launch in two months a Small Grants nature protection projects to address such issues as fighting against climate changes, preservation of biodiversity and international water basins and preventing desertification.

Delphin Ganafin, a coordinator managing Small Grants Programs, said yesterday during a meeting with journalists that local scientific potential will be employed to help carry out these projects that will result also in creation of new jobs. The aim is to gradually lessen rural poverty.

By promoting improvement of social security and agriculture development Small Grants Programs unite farmers to form new public organizations. Grants from \$2,500 to \$50,000 will be available within next 8 years. In the first stage Armenia will get \$150,000.

31. NO SUICIDE REPORTED IN ARMENIAN PRISONS LAST YEAR [ARMENPRESS, 02/09/08]

Prison crime rate in Armenia was low last year with only 45 crimes reported from all correctional facilities involving 54 persons, according to deputy prosecutor-general Aram Tamazian.



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He said the majority of these crimes were related to use and sale of drugs. Forty-three were convicts, 3 were from the prison staff and 8 people were from outside. Tamazian said no case of suicide occurred in Armenian prisons last year.

Last year Armenian low level courts heard 2,173 cases and issued verdicts on 2,837 people. The share of guilty verdicts decreased against 2006 by 1.5 percent, another deputy prosecutor-general, Gagik Jahangirian said.

He said 64 percent of all crimes registered last year were against individuals. He also said 116 low instance court rulings were appealed year, up from 76 in 2006, but few were commuted by higher courts.

32. HAYASTAN FUND TO OPEN STEPANAKERT OFFICE [Hayastani Hanrapetutiun, 02/09/08]

Nagorno-Karabakh president Bako Sahakian received February 7 Vahe Aghabekians, the executive director of Hayastan pan-Armenian Fund.

The foreign ministry of Nagorno-Karabakh told Armenpress that they discussed the pace of implementation of a set of projects there funded by Hayastan Fund, as well as some issues related to opening of the Fund's office in Stepanakert.

Nagorno-Karabakh prime minister Ara Harutunian was present too.

33. ARMY CRIME RATE DOWN TO 881 [ARMENPRESS, 02/09/08]

A total of 750 crimes were registered in the army last year, down from 881 a year before. The number of accidents decreased by 267 or 17 percent, chief military prosecutor A. Khachatrian said today.

Some 530 crimes or 70 percent were military crimes and 221 were classified as common. He said 88 crimes were rated as grave and serious, including 37 very serious crimes. Twenty-seven of serious crimes were committed by the enemy. He said also 41 army deaths were reported, down from 39 in 2006.

Ten of the deaths were murders, 7 were killed by Azeris and three by co-servicemen, two more deaths occurred because of the wrong use of weapons, 5 were suicides, three servicemen were killed in road accident, eight in hospitals and 6 in emergencies.

34. SWEDISH-FINISH COMPANY WINS TENDER TO INSTALL SCADA SYSTEM IN ARMENIA [ARMENPRESS, 02/11/08]

The Swedish-Finnish ABB AB&Etel Networks that has been recognized the winner of a tender for installment of SCADA data collection and management system into Armenia's power grid and the Armenian ministry of energy signed an agreement today in Yerevan to that effect.

The cost of the system installation is about \$11 million. It will be covered by the Armenian ministry from a credit which it received from the Japanese International Cooperation Bank to upgrade electricity distributing networks.

Deputy energy minister Ara Simonian said the tender was held last year in compliance with all requirements. He said five companies made bids and after protracted consideration the Swedish-Finish company was chosen.

SPORTS

35. ARMENIAN FOOTBALL NATIONAL TEAM FINDS SATISFACTION IN SECOND PLACE IN MALTA INTERNATIONAL TOURNAMENT [NOYAN TAPAN, 02/08/08]

On February 6 the International Football Tournament finished in Malta. In the last game the Armenian national team was defeated by the team of Iceland with the score of 0:2. The Belarus-Malta game finished with the 1:0 score.

The team of Belarus was recognized winner of the tournament with 6 points and was awarded the cup. The team of Armenia earned 6 points, which took second place because of the difference in the goals. The football players of Iceland and Malta took the following two places with three points.

36. ARMENIA COMES SECOND IN IRAN WRESTLING EVENT

Turkey and Armenia came second and third respectively in an international Greco-Roman wrestling competitions in Iran.



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Iran took the first place. That was the fourth international Greco-Roman wrestling competition which took place in the Iranian city of Qom, known as the Yadegar Emam trophy.

One hundred wrestlers from six countries participated in the competitions. The first place in each category came with \$5,000 in prize money, silver with \$3,000 and bronze with \$2,000.

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