



AGBU ARMENIA NEWS BULLETIN

Friday, June 20, 2008

TRANSLATIONS FROM YEREVAN NEWSPAPERS AND OTHER NEWS AGENCIES

POLITICS

1. NAREK SARGSIAN APPOINTED RA DEPUTY MINISTER OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT [Hayastani Hanrapetutiun, 06/18/08]

By the decision of Tigran Sargsian, the RA Prime Minister, Narek Sargsian has been appointed RA Deputy Minister of Urban Development. This information was provided to Noyan Tapan by the Information and Public Relations Department of the RA Government.

2. NATIONAL MOVEMENT'S JUNE 20 RALLY TO TAKE PLACE NEAR MATENADARAN [Haykakan Zhamanak, 06/18/08]

The National Movement's rally scheduled for June 20 will take place near Matenadaran. Levon Zurabian, a representative of the Movement, the former Spokesperson of the first RA President, informed journalists about it on June 18.

He said that it had been announced about holding a rally on June 20 in Liberty Square with the agenda of discussion of the process of fulfillment of the requirements of PACE Resolution N 1609 as far back as on May 12. However, the Mayor's Office rejected L. Ter-Petrosian's application with the motivation of holding an event under the title Little Citizen of Yerevan in Liberty Square on that day.

In total, as L. Zurabian mentioned, after the March 1 events the authorities have rejected 45 applications on holding a rally submitted by the National Movement. L. Ter-Petrosian's representative applied to the court with the lawsuit of invalidating the rejection of the last application, but, according to him, the court passed an "obviously unfair" resolution.

L. Zurabian said that the Movement condemns the attempt to use children for political purposes. "Keeping Liberty Square surrounded for more than three months, the administration cowardly hid itself behind the troops and police forces. Now it has gone further and has decided to take an extremely immoral step, to hide itself behind children," the National Movement's statement read.

As the Movement is not able to gather its supporters in Liberty Square, the rally will take place in the territory near Matenadaran. L. Zurabian said that the organizers have proposed the authorities appointing official representatives of Mayor's Office and Police, who, constantly keeping in touch with the Movement leaders, will ensure the natural course of the rally. Representatives of foreign Embassies and international organizations have been invited for participating in the rally and observing it.

Excluding a conflict between the authorities and the opposition, L. Zurabian said that the Movement leaders will do their best to control the process of the rally. "Unless we manage to control the people, the responsibility cannot fall on us," he stated.

3. ZHARANGUTIUN'S ATTITUDE TO NA AD HOC COMMISSION IS NOT SERIOUS AND INSULTING, SAMVEL NIKOYAN SAYS [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/18/08]

The NA ad hoc commission on study of the March 1-2 events in Yerevan and their reasons, at the June 18 sitting, will discuss the issue of approving its draft regulations revised on the basis of the proposals. The principle of election of extra-parliamentary political forces to be invited for participating in commission's work with the right of consultation vote will be also clarified. Noyan Tapan correspondent was informed about it by Samvel Nikoyan, the commission Chairman, the Secretary of the RPA faction.

The two places given to the Zharangutiun (Heritage) faction are vacant in the newly created commission for the present. Faction head Raffi Hovannisian sent a letter to NA Speaker Tigran Torosian informing him that "the delegates taking part in the ad hoc commission on the part of Zharangutiun are Myasnik Malkhasian and Sasun Mikayelian." However, the above mentioned deputies are known to have been arrested within the framework of the criminal case instituted on the fact of the events to be studied by the commission.

S. Nikoyan noted in this connection that according to the NA Regulations, each faction has a right to nominate members to seats given to it in the commission, while M. Malkhasian and S. Mikayelian are members of the RPA faction. "I think it is, to put it mildly, not serious attitude. It is also insulting for not only other members of the commission having serious tasks, but also for the people having expectations from the commission," S. Nikoyan said.



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4. ACCORDING TO RUBEN HAKOBIAN, NATIONAL MOVEMENT COMES UP FROM POSITIONS OF TOTALITARIAN OPPOSITION [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/18/08]

"The RA authorities compel the people to pass a long and complicated way to reach elementary norms of democracy," Ara Sahakian, the former Vice-Speaker of the parliament, stated at the June 18 dispute. He affirmed that the political opposition has become "heresy" today, the members of which "should be either burnt in the fire or spend their whole life in prison." According to A. Sahakian, if during the 1988 movement the communist authorities treated the movement activists the way the current authorities treat the oppositionists, the wave of struggle would weaken, and "the Azeris would devour the Karabakh people."

Ruben Hakobian, a former member of ARFD, in his turn, said that the authorities and the President are representatives of strict authoritarian system, the resource of which is not people's vote, but force levers. According to him, the National Movement comes up from positions of totalitarian opposition denying any other opposition organization. Under the circumstance of existence of such authorities and opposition, as the former ARFD member concluded, the state will finally find itself in a complicated situation, and country's security will weaken.

A. Sahakian opposing to R. Hakobian said that "an alternative to totalitarian opposition is mincing opposition," which pushes forward its personal interest.

5. ARMENIAN AUTHORITIES HAVE NOT TAKEN ANY STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF PACE RESOLUTION No 1609, NATIONAL MOVEMENT DECLARES [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/18/08]

Until now the Armenian authorities not only have not taken any steps for implementation of the resolution No 1609 of the PACE, but they also have increased pressure on the opposition. As a result, the barrier between the authorities and the opposition, as well as the society has deepened, is said in the June 18 statement of the Center of the National Movement.

It is indicated that no decision on the March 1 events and their reasons, and on conducting an independent investigation into the disproportionate use of force by the police has been taken so far. The opposition has been offered only two out of the 11 seats in the National Assembly ad hoc commission which was set up to examine this issue, while the proposal to create an investigative body composed of the equal number of representatives of the opposition and the coalition has been rejected. The prosecutor general's office has not conducted an efficient investigation into the March 1 killings, and the authorities did not answer the questions raised in the special report of the RA Ombudsman.

According to the authors of the statement, as of June 18, 86 political prisoners are either under preliminary arrest or in prison. The amendments to the RA Law on Conducting of Meetings, Assemblies, Rallies and Demonstrations have not been cancelled.

The statement notes that the above mentioned requirements of resolution No 1609 were put forward to the Armenian authorities so that after their fulfillment the opposition would have trust in the authorities and a constructive dialog among political forces of Armenia would become possible.

6. ACCORDING TO TERRY DAVIS, DECISION OF EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS ON CASE OF A1+ TV COMPANY IS VICTORY OF SPEECH FREEDOM [Aravot, 06/18/08]

The decision of the European Court of Human Rights puts an end to the long saga of the Armenian authorities' refusal to grant a broadcast license to A1+ TV company, is said in the June 18 statement of Council of Europe Secretary General Terry Davis in connection with the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights on the case of A1+ TV company.

Terry Davis notes that the decision was made after the Armenian authorities had ignored numerous appeals of various bodies of the Council of Europe. According to him, all member states of the CE have a legal obligation to obey the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights, and they must do so without being reminded about their obligations by the European Court of Human Rights.

It is said in Terry Davis' statement that the court's judgment is a victory of the freedom of speech, and it should become a lesson for those governments which are inclined to interpret arbitrarily Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights that guarantees this fundamental freedom.



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7. ARMENIAN PRESIDENT CONDUCTS CONSULTATION IN JERMUK [ARMENPRESS, 06/19/08]

President of Armenia Serzh Sargsian conducted June 18 a consultation in the town of Jermuk, Vayots Dzor province, dedicated to making the town a tourism and health center. At the closed consultation present were members of parliament, government, headed by the vice prime minister, governor Vardges Matevosian, mayor of Jermuk Vardan Hovhannissian.

Economy Minister Nerses Yeritsian noted that an agreement has been reached to make Jermuk a health center. "Jermuk has all the natural conditions for it, it is just necessary to integrate in the network and present the opportunities to the investors. In that case we can build a very serious economy and a business center for the region," the minister said. The best result according to him, may be achieved in 5-7 years, before that the support of the state is necessary after which the private will continue the program.

The minister said it is also necessary to think of the development of infrastructures as well which first pre-supposes facilitation of ties with Yerevan: reaching Jermuk from Yerevan must not last long. The experience of the consolidated countries shows that the participation of the state is necessary in initial planning, ensuring infrastructures and involving investors. In the initial period the state investments may reach 20 percent afterwards they will gradually decrease.

"If we want to have a rest center of an international level the current incomes of Jermuk must increase for several times," the minister said.

Yeritsian said that the consultation was called by the president aiming to discuss a number of issues on Jermuk's current and future programs. At the consultation the main plan of the town was presented over which the work must continue.

Armenian president participated in the ceremony of laying foundation of the new hotel complex which will be built in Jermuk. Minister Yeritsian said the construction of the hotel is a serious program towards the development of the town.

The building, according to the author of the project, deputy urban minister and chief architect Narek Sargsian must be viewed in the pre-context of restoration of the center of the town. "The town has beautiful nature, buildings, but it does not have a center, the suggested project is carried out for creation of the center of the town," he said. The complex will be built in three years.

An issue has been forwarded to withdraw the airport from the territory of the town and not provide "even a meter" for the construction of houses for settlement.

The president also visited Jermuk cable way and got acquainted with the pace of construction work. The cable way has not been officially opened but it was functioning from January 1 till spring. In winter time, particularly during the New Year holidays the cable way had 1,500 visitors. In spring the cable way has been closed for continuing its renovation. For its construction 1 billion 300 million drams was released from the state budget.

8. AZERBAIJANI SIDE OPENS FIRE KILLING A CITIZEN OF ARMENIAN VILLAGE OF CHINAR [Azg, 06/19/08]

Spokesman for the Armenian Defense Ministry Seiran Shahsuvarian told Armenpress that on June 18 at about 15:40 pm the Azerbaijani side opened fire on purpose towards a resident of the Chinari village of the Armenian province of Tavush 21-year old Levon Petrosian who was working at that time in the farm. As a result L. Petrosian received heavy wound and died on the way to hospital.

9. PRESIDENT APPOINTS HAYK HARUTYUNIAN CHIEF OF STATE PROTECTION SERVICE [Azg, 06/19/08]

President Serzh Sarkisian decreed on June 18 to appoint Hayk Harutyunian chief of the State Protection Service of the Republic of Armenia.

The news was reported by the presidential press office.



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10. ARMENIA WILL NOT HAVE PROBLEM OF EMIGRATION IF IT BECOMES COUNTRY OF LAW, RESIDENTS OF YEREVAN THINK [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/19/08]

The subject of Noyan Tapan's June 19 blitz survey was Problems of Emigration in Armenia. The survey was conducted in Yerevan. Below are the respondents' answers completely and without editing: IN YOUR ESTIMATION, DOES EMIGRATION FROM ARMENIA CONTINUE, HAS IT STOPPED, OR ARMENIANS GRADUALLY START RETURNING TO ARMENIA?

- Though slowly, nevertheless emigration still continues.

- It continues and will continue.

- In my opinion, it still continues: personally I have emigrated from this country for already 10 years and I am in Armenia for a short time.

- Unless bribery and other illegal things are prevented in this country, I think emigration from our country will grow for even more.

- Until Armenia becomes a country convenient for living, no return of our compatriots to this country can be spoken about, and under such conditions, clever people, certainly, leave if they have such a possibility, and do a right thing.

CURRENTLY WHAT IS THE REASON OF LEAVING THE HOMELAND?

- I think the main reason is social conditions.

- The main reason is lack of jobs.

- People have started to realize that in other countries human rights are protected, money for daily bread is earned comparatively easily, etc., therefore, they leave this country.

- I think leaving the country people don't have much pleasure, they just go to where it is more favorable for living and surviving.

- They leave Armenia, as this country is not a place to live: whatever you initiate, they fail it, human rights are violated at every step, and there is no hope that it will be well in the near future.

WHY DO OUR COMPATRIOTS RATHER PREFER LIVING ABROAD MISSING ARMENIA AND FEELING ALIEN THAN RETURNING TO ARMENIA?

- I think any Armenian living abroad will return with pleasure if the social conditions are even if satisfactory here.

- I think in difference to Armenia, law operates abroad, and living in a law-abiding country, naturally, is easier: therefore, they do not return.

- For a very simple reason: in our country we do not have the conditions foreign countries have.

- Maybe it is a genetic tradition: neighbor's bread has always been tasty for us, therefore Armenians have always emigrated and never wished to return.

- As they see that they can create a future for their children abroad, why should they come to Armenia then?

WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN FOR ARMENIANS TO RETURN TO ARMENIA?

- They will return when there are jobs and high salary in Armenia.

- They will return in case they are convinced that their children will have a future in this country.

- Laws need to operate in Armenia, and people should feel completely protected in this country.

- Bribery need to be liquidated in Armenia.

- They will return when taxes are not high and people are able to quietly do business or other activity here.

AND WHEN IS IT POSSIBLE?

- We are just a 17-year-old independent country and I think that it will take us nearly two 17 years to record some positive steps.

- I am an optimist, I think Armenia will have these positive features in the near future.

- When we have a normal power and country.

- I do not have a hope that our country will have disinterested leaders.

AND WON'T ALL ARMENIANS LIVE THE COUNTRY BEFORE THAT?

- Whatever happens, in my opinion, our country will not be faced by that danger.

- I am convinced that there will always be people, who will not leave their country whatever happens, and all Armenians will not leave Armenia.

- If of course the emigration rates continue like this and it is not prevented, in a few years some of us will have to close Armenia's doors.

- I do not think that today we are faced by a danger that all Armenians can leave the country.

- Irrespective of anything, for instance, I will not leave my country, I think many people think like me in Armenia, therefore, I do not think there is such a danger in Armenia.



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11. GAGIK JHANGIRIAN CONSIDERS COURT SITTINGS AS STAGING BY SCENARIO WRITTEN BEFOREHAND [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/19/08]

The supporters of the former prosecutor general of the RA Gagik Jhangirian and members of "Special Regiment" youth opposition organization on June 18 staged a protest outside the court of first instance of Yerevan's Kentron and Nork-Marash communities. The court was to examine the investigation body's petition for extension of G. Jhangirian's precautionary measure.

To recap, G. Jhangirian was initially charged under the Criminal Code's Article 235 Part 4 (illegal keeping of weapons), but a few days ago the charge was changed, and now he is charged under Article 300 Part 1 (actions aimed at usurping state power).

The court sitting was a closed-door one, and the policemen urged those at the court building to move away. However, those present gathered at the windows of the courtroom and chanted "Free and Independent Armenia", "Jhangirian", "Victory", "Struggle, Struggle till the End". During this period, G. Jhangirian approached the window several times and welcomed his supporters with a wave of his hand, then he opened the window, saying: "People, be quiet, it is all the same, their decisions are written beforehand". Several hours later he called on the protesters to go home, noting that "he is going to participate in a long staging". At about 4 pm it was announced that the examination of the petition has been postponed until June 19.

12. AUTHORITIES HINDER HOLDING OF FIRST CONGRESS OF YOUNG OF NATIONAL MOVEMENT [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/19/08]

The RA Ministry of Education and Science banned to hold the first congress of the young of the National Movement in the Mkhitar Sebastatsi educational complex on June 18. As Narek Hovakimian, an activist of the movement, told the participants of the congress gathered in the court of the educational complex, that the policemen, who had arrived at the educational complex, told him that it is also prohibited to hold the congress in the court, as it will turn into a rally, for which the young people do not have corresponding permission. "In fact, the police do not allow us to hold the event outside and the Minister of Education and Science inside. Only Serge Sargsian and Robert Kocharian are absent to put balusters on the windows of our apartments and make us all prisoners," Narek Hovakimian said.

He told the young men that for the purpose of avoiding clashes with policemen they should move to the Northern avenue, where the congress would be held. After that those gathered in different groups, some in a march, others on buses, directed their steps towards the Northern avenue, where the supporters of the opposition go on a "political" walk every evening.

13. REGULAR ACTION OF PROTEST TAKES PLACE NEAR RA GOVERNMENT BUILDING WITH DEMAND OF RELEASING POLITICAL PRISONERS [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/19/08]

A group of participants of the National Movement and supporters of the imprisoned political figures organized an action of protest near the RA government building on June 19 with the demand of releasing the editor of the Zhamanak Yerevan newspaper, Arman Babajanian, a member of the Homeland and Honor party Board, Vardan Malkhasian, freedom fighter Vahan Aroyan, and those imprisoned on the March 1 case. The demonstrators carrying placards reading "PACE, A. Babajanian is a political prisoner!", "Two years of illegal imprisonment, how long?," were voicing "Robbers!," "Thieves!," "Freedom!" for nearly an hour.

Zhirayr Sefilian, the Coordinator of the Protection of Liberated Territories initiative, the Commander of the Shoushi special battalion, Zaruhi Postanjian and Anahit Bakhshian, members of the National Assembly Zharangutiun (Heritage) faction, also took part in the action of protest.

In his interview to journalists Z. Sefilian said that the action of protest is held for freedom of illegally imprisoned people. "We will stand until all political prisoners are released. We have political prisoners, who had been arrested before the March 1 events, and there are such who were imprisoned after March 1," Z. Sefilian said.

14. DANIEL FRIED: "APPLICATION OF 'GENOCIDE' EXPRESSION BY USA WILL NOT BE USEFUL FOR ARMENIAN-TURKISH RELATIONS" [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/19/08]

The application of the "genocide" expression by George Bush, the President of the United States, will not be useful for Armenian-Turkish relations. As the Turkish press reports, this statement was made by Danniell Fried, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs,



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during the hearings organized in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives of U.S. Congress.

This statement of the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State was made in response to the question of Congressmen of "why does not President Bush use the "genocide" expression?"

"The United States of America and President Bush have never refused those events. However, when speaking about those events we do not use the "genocide" expression. Its application will not be favorable either for Armenian-Turkish relations, or for Turkey, from the point of view of taking into consideration its own history," Daniel Fried stated.

15. U.S. ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE: "ARMENIA SHOULD DECLARE THAT IT HAS NO DEMANDS WITH REGARD TO TERRITORIES OF TURKEY" [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/19/08]

Armenia should declare that it has no demands with regard to the territories of the modern Turkey. As the Turkish press reports, this statement was made by Danniell Fried, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, during the hearings organized in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives of U.S. Congress.

Speaking about the Armenian-Turkish relations, Fried mentioned that they are for the settlement of the problems existing between Turkey and Armenia: "The authorities of Armenia should answer the efforts of Turkey constructively. And Armenia should declare that it has no demands with regard to the lands of the modern Turkey," Fried stressed.

Touching upon the fact of the Armenian Genocide, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of States mentioned that Turkey should reckon with its history: "It is necessary that Turkey should reckon with the dark pages of its history, however, that will not be easy," Daniel Fried declared.

BUSINESS

16. IMF WILL ASSIST WITH IMPLEMENTATION OF TAX REFORMS IN ARMENIA, IMF OFFICIAL SAYS [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/18/08]

Tax administration and policy reforms in Armenia should be made simultaneously and fully, because reform implementation in parts often becomes the cause of their failure, Marta Castello-Branco, division chief of the IMF Middle East and Central Asia Department, said at the June 17 press conference.

According to her, the RA government's program on tax administration and policy in the country is an encouraging one. The program was discussed with the Armenian government during the IMF team's visit to Armenia on June 11-17. By the conclusion made based on the visit results, the IMF agrees with the program's priorities, including reorganization of the State Tax Service, speeding up the use of value added tax (VAT), strengthening administration with respect to big taxpayers and improving the services to small taxpayers-businessmen. It is noted in the conclusion that the Armenian government shall ensure the financing of the reforms.

M. Castello-Branco stated that the tax reforms are going to be the priority of the new program of the IMF's assistance to Armenia. "The new program will focus on the problem of improving the business environment," she added, noting that the new program will also allow to improve the Armenian authorities' tools of managing the economic cycles and to reduce poverty through proportionate distribution of incomes.

At the same time, as the IMF Resident Representative to Armenia Nienke Oomes said, based on the Armenian government's goal of ensuring equal competition conditions in business, the IMF is against the use of privileged tax regimes, in particular, the introduction of tax privileges for the companies listed on the Armenian Stock Exchange, as well as, according to M. Castello-Branco, the use of the current system of fixed payments for taxation of fuel and cigarettes in the future. The use of VAT and profit tax with respect to these goods may help increase tax collection.

In response to NT correspondent's question, M. Castello-Branco said that taxes/GDP ratio is still quite low in Armenia not only as compared with the same index of neighboring countries but also with Armenia's potential. She expressed an opinion that a lot of steps should be taken to order to achieve an index corresponding to this potential. In order to reach this goal, the tax reforms program should aim to involve a greater number of taxpayers. M. Castello-Branco said that the indicated goal is difficult to achieve because of a number of tax regimes and privileges currently in force.

She informed those present that during the visit they also discussed the draft program of pension reforms, which has not yet been given its final form. Taking into account the importance of these reforms,



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we believe that they should be implemented consistently and without haste so that the opportunity to do all preparatory work will be created, she said.

17. ARMENTEL GIVEN 15 DAYS TO SOLVE PROBLEM OF RENTING PUBLIC TELEPHONE NETWORK TO PROVIDERS [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/18/08]

The RA State Commission on Protection of Economic Competition on June 18 discussed the applications of Internet service providers - Web, Arminco and Crossnet companies against ArmenTel company.

According to these applications, having a monopoly position in the market of services on the rental of connection to the public telephone network, ArmenTel provides, through this network, "Hi- Line" Internet access services with high speed and at a low price to users, but it refuses to provide such services to other licensed providers, not renting the public phone network (distribution network) to them. At the same time, the providers propose conducting a study of the market of external channels through fiber-optic communication.

The providers claim that ArmenTel has a technical possibility to rent phone lines. In their opinion, these steps of ArmenTel are aimed at gaining a monopoly in the sector of Internet access services as well. To recap, a memorandum on implementation of measures had been signed between representatives of ArmenTel and 7 providers, which was to be implemented within 10 days. According to the providers, ArmenTel has not taken any steps on implementation of the memorandum provisions.

At the sitting, the Commission has given ArmenTel 15 days to solve the indicated problem with providers, only after which the Commission will take the respective measures.

18. SHANT PLUS AND ASHTARAK KAT RECOGNIZED AS COMPANIES WITH DOMINATING POSITION IN MARKET [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/18/08]

At the June 18 sitting, the RA State Commission on Protection of Economic Competition recognized Shant Plus and Ashtarak Kat companies as economic entities with a dominating position in the market. By a decision taken by the Commission in 2005, Shant Plus was also recognized as an entity with a dominating position.

By the data presented by 14 economic entities operating in the ice cream market, 2,449,852.1 kg of ice cream was made in Armenia in 2007. Ice cream sales amounted to 2,310,332.2 kg, exports - to 130,389 kg. The following companies had the largest shares of sales: Shant Plus (30.73%), Ashtarak Kat (25.82%) and Tamara (21.64%).

19. FRENCH COMPANY SELECTED AS ADVISOR ON DESIGN AND TECHNICAL CONTROL OF ADB-FINANCED "RURAL ROAD SECTOR" PROJECT [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/19/08]

Egis BSEOM International company (France) has been announced the winner of the tender for advisory services on design and technical control of the Rural Road Sector project financed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the RA minister of transport and communication Gurchen Sargsian said at the June 19 sitting of the Armenian government.

The contract price proposed by the company made 1.7 million dollars, including the cost of advisory services of 1.3 million dollars.

DIASPORA

20. TURK ROBBER STABS ARMENIAN PENSIONER WITH KNIFE [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/18/08]

In the Shishli region of Istanbul a Turk robber has stabbed Armenian Turkey resident 88-year-old Maria Nadir Ohan Yancaker with knife and tried to steal the jewelry and money of the elderly woman.

As the local Turkish sources report, the 35 year-old woman has entered the apartment of the elderly Armenian woman with a false excuse, stabbed her with knife for a few times and closed her in one of the rooms. Then taking the jewelry and money has tried to leave the apartment. However, the cries of the injured woman were heard by the neighbors, who have caught the robber and handed to the police.

The health condition of the 88-year-old Maria Nadir Ohan Yancaker is considered heavy.



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21. OBAMA REAFFIRMS COMMITMENT TO U.S. ARMENIAN GENOCIDE RECOGNITION [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/19/08]

With the Senate Foreign Relations Committee set to consider U.S. Ambassador to Armenia nominee Marie Yovanovitch at a confirmation hearing on June 12 presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama restated his commitment to U.S. recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

In a letter to Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) Chairman Ken Hachikian, Sen. Obama wrote: "I share your view that the United States must recognize the events of 1915 to 1923, carried out by the Ottoman Empire, as genocide. We must recognize this tragic reality. The Bush Administration's refusal to do so is inexcusable, and I will continue to speak out in an effort to move the Administration to change its position."

Sen. Obama went on to cite his concerns about the firing of former U.S. Ambassador to Armenia John Marshall Evans in 2006 for speaking truthfully about the Armenian Genocide. "I was deeply disturbed two years ago when the U.S. Ambassador to Armenia was fired after he used the term "genocide" to describe the mass slaughter of Armenians. In a letter to the Department of State, I called for Secretary Rice to closely examine what I believe is an untenable position taken by the U.S. government."

22. HOWARD BERMAN: "TURKEY'S BLOCKADE OF ARMENIA CONTRADICTS INTERESTS OF ANKARA" [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/19/08]

"It's baffling why Ankara would want to pursue the blockade of Armenia, which also harms the economy of eastern Turkey, and is therefore clearly contrary to its own interests." This statement was made by House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Howard Berman, opening the hearings on Armenia in the Committee on June 18. He mentioned that the blockade of Armenia by Turkey holds the Armenian economy and Armenia's trade with other nations back.

During the hearing, which lasted two hours, the Chairman's statement and questions were followed by powerful remarks and in-depth inquiries by Congressmen Adam Schiff, Frank Pallone and Joe Knollenberg, as well as Committee members Brad Sherman, Diane Watson, Ed Royce, and Jim Costa, among others, who questioned U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs Daniel Fried on the U.S. position on the Armenian Genocide, the blockade of Armenia by Turkey, as well as the escalating threats of war by Azerbaijan.

23. PRIMATE OF DIOCESE OF IRAQ TO VISIT WESTERN DIOCESE OF ARMENIAN CHURCH OF NORTH AMERICA [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/19/08]

His Eminence Archbishop Avak Assadourian, the Primate of the Diocese of Iraq, will visit the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America.

The high ranking guest clergy will celebrate the Divine Liturgy and deliver the sermon according to the following schedule: St. Andrews Armenian Church, Santa Clara Valley, on June 22, 2008, St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church, Pasadena, on June 29, 2008, St. James Armenian Church, Los Angeles, on July 6, 2008.

The Primate of Iraq has previously visited the Western Diocese and on several occasions celebrated the Divine Liturgy and delivered the sermon to the faithful in a number of parishes.

It should also be mentioned that His Eminence was one of the high-ranking clergymen accompanying His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, during the Pontiff's May 2008 visit to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI.

ARTS

24. THIS YEAR GOLDEN APRICOT 5th INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL TO HAVE NEITHER OPENING NOR CLOSURE SOLEMN CEREMONIES [Aravot, 06/18/08]

This year the Golden Apricot (Voske Tsiran) 5th International Film Festival to be held on July 13-20 will have neither opening nor closure solemn ceremonies. Film director Haroutiun Khachatryan, festival's Director, stated at the June 18 press conference.

In his words, "they would rather spend these funds on bringing films than preparing concert programs," especially that all weighty festivals organize a very modest opening and closure. Haroutiun Khachatryan said that tickets of all festival films will cost 300 drams thanks to the VivaCell company, which is to transfer the rest 1200 drams of tickets' cost to Moscow and Nairi cinemas.



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25. DOCUMENTARY FILM ABOUT ARMENIA BEING SHOT [ARMENPRESS, 06/19/08]

This year Armenia will participate in 9 tourism exhibitions, particularly in Italy, France and Netherlands. The head of the tourism department of the Economy Ministry Mekhak Apresian said Armenia is participating in such exhibitions every year to presenting tourism attractions of Armenia, with the same aim video clips about Armenia are being shown on CNN and Euronews TV Channels.

According to M. Apresian currently Spanish film directors are in Armenia shooting a documentary film about Armenia. The shootings must be finished by the end of this month. It must be included in the film raw entitled "Escaping to Better Countries" telling about other 12 countries and will be shown by CNN and Euronews.

26. NEW HIGHER COUNCIL SET UP FOR INTRODUCTION OF NEW CULTURE OF REVENUES ADMINISTRATION [ARMENPRESS, 06/19/08]

Prime Minister Tigran Sarkisian will steer a new higher council that was set up for introduction of 'new culture of revenues administration.' The new body's task will be to coordinate enforcements of tax and customs reforms, to supervise the process and be in constant touch with the society and business community.

During a press briefing today the prime minister said the higher council will have a monitoring group for citizens to submit their observations and proposals which later can be discussed by the higher council.

According to him, that will be an attempt to ensure a feedback with the public at large and to carry out a comprehensive tax and customs administration improvement program. He said the feedback will help a smooth reform process.

In his words, new mechanisms will be introduced on July 15 which point clearly out how to conduct revenues administration. He said administration will be reduced to minimum for a small and medium -sized businesses with least number of inspections. He said only extraordinary cases with high risk levels will be investigated.

He said the goal is to build an environment in which contacts between small and medium-sized businesses will be implemented through specialized structures.

In a reference to big businesses he said it is not a secret that the discontent is not about the heavy tax burden but about unequal conditions. He said the society does not trust owners of big businesses questioning their tax liabilities. He said transparency will become the main tool of the government.

"We shall develop a legislative change to define punishment measures against those who violate the law," he said.

27. "GOLDEN APRICOT" FILM FESTIVAL LAUNCHES "ARMENIAN FILM PROJECT" PROGRAM THIS YEAR [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/19/08]

Within the framework of the 5th international film festival "Golden Apricot" to be held on July 13-20 of this year, the forum "Armenian Film Project" with the participation of cinematographers of Armenian origin both from Armenia and abroad will be organized for the first time. During the forum, the film directors will develop programs for a documentary and a fiction film, based on which two films will be shot by 2010.

The forum's executive official, cinematologist Davit Muradian said at the June 18 press conference that 8-9 film directors will present 10-minute film projects for a 90-minute fiction film, after which all these short fiction pictures will be edited into one of the conditional name "House". The same procedure will be used to make a documentary "Land". According to D. Muradian, it is common practice in Western countries to shoot a film in this way.

"Armenian Film Project" forum opens a unique opportunity to present Armenian cinema in the context of the world film making, and, on the other hand, to introduce the world cinema thinking in Armenia," D. Muradian noted. In his words, unlike the competition program "Armenian Panorama", which aims to bring together Armenian film directors from various corners of the world, the purpose of this forum is to create films by efforts of Armenian directors.

The documentary project will be headed by Harutyun Khachatryan, the fiction film project by Atom Egoyan.

Davit Muradian announced that invitations for project implementation have been sent to more than 50 film directors.



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28. CULTURE SECTOR EMPLOYEES SALARIES TO GROW 20 PERCENT [ARMENPRESS, 06/20/08]

The government approved on June 19 a decision to raise by 20 percent the salaries of employees of state-run cultural establishments.

The rise will apply to personnel of libraries, culture houses and centers and other cultural establishments and come into force from July 1.

The government budget has earmarked a total of 349.6 million Drams to back up the salary rise.

According to Prime Minister Tigran Sarkisian, this issue has always been in the center of the president's attention. He said during a past meeting with employees of this sector Serzh Sarkisian had promised to raise their salaries, which, he said is being implemented.

RELIGION

29. ARMENIAN CHURCH OPENS IN KARACHAEVO-CHERKESIA [Hayastani Hanrapetutiun, 06/19/08]

First Armenian church opened in Cherkesk town of Karachaevo-Cherkesia, Russia.

Representative of the "Massis" non-governmental organization functioning in Karachaevo-Cherkesia told Interfax-Yug (South) news agency that the church named St. Georgi has been built with the funds of the local Armenian community.

The official of the organization also said that the local Armenian community is also planning to built an Armenian Cultural Center in the town.

SOCIAL

30. WITH A RIGHT OF REJECTION [Azg, 06/19/08]

In response to yesterday's "Will the Azeri lecture in AUA" article published in Azg daily, the editorial office of the newspaper received AUA professors Dr. Robert Aghajinian's and Dr. Sivakumar Sivasubramaniam's letter which says that only the part of their leaving corresponded to reality. "It has been decided one year ago, before the changes in the faculty administration", the letter says. "We don't want to go into details because it was insulting and ungrounded", the professors wrote.

We want to remind that the previous information was spread by "Mitk" analytical center. Azg had only re-printed it. However, the lecturers' letter does not answer the main question – will the Azeri lecture in the American University of Armenia? Our expectation from the AUA was either a confirmation or a rejection to this question.

31. "ON MARCH 1 POLICE DID WHAT THEY COULD," RA CHIEF OF POLICE SAYS [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/18/08]

Rallies, marches, demonstrations and actions of protest are acceptable in any democratic country, however, that does not mean that mass events should change into mass disorders. This statement was made by Major-General of the police Alik Sargsian during his first meeting with representatives of media on the post of the RA Chief of the Police.

Touching upon the activities of the police during the famous March events in Yerevan, Alik Sargsian mentioned that the police, perhaps, have manifested certain sluggishness, have not appraised the moment in a right way, however, they have done, what they could. "I think that was a very serious ordeal for our system. We are making very serious analyses in that connection and henceforth doing exercises in terms of readiness and technical armedness, we are doing everything not to find ourselves in a similar situation. I mean quickly orienting at the right moment and nothing else. The police have implemented their rights, the police have found themselves in the role of defenders, I am sorry for that but that is reality," The RA Chief of the Police said.



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32. FOUR MORE CENTERS OF AARHUS ENVISAGED TO OPEN IN ARMENIA THIS YEAR [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/18/08]

The National Environmental Protection Conference held in Yerevan on June 18 was dedicated to the assessment of the implementation of the Aarhus Convention of the UN Economic Commission of Europe in Armenia, the progress of the existing challenges, as well as the discussion of the further distinct strategy. It was initiated by the RA Ministry of Environmental Protection together with the OSCE Office in Yerevan.

As Ambassador Sergey Kapinos, the Head of the Office, mentioned, the Aarhus Convention is an important link between the protection of human rights and surroundings, as availability of information is an important factor for the democratic development of society and the whole country. "I am sure that real achievements can be made only through united forces and cooperation of all the interested parties: state, regional and civil society and international community," he said.

S. Kapinos mentioned that at present 10 centers of Public Environmental Protection Information of Aarhus are functioning in Armenia. He stated that four more centers are envisaged to open this year in Stepanavan, Eghegnadzor, Eghvard and Aparan.

Simon Papian, the RA Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection, expressed hope that the discussions related to environmental protection and government problems will have a positive impact on making society aware of the commitments of Armenia concerning the Aarhus Convention.

33. ONE SHOULD NOT TREAT EUROPEAN COURT'S DECISIONS FROM POINT OF VIEW OF VICTORY OR DEFEAT, RA DEPUTY JUSTICE MINISTER SAYS [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/18/08]

According to the June 16 decision of the European Court of Human Rights, depriving of air the A1+ independent TV company contradicts Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights, which regards the right of free expression. However, as Gevorg Kostanian, the RA Deputy Justice Minister, the representative of the RA government in the European Court of Human Rights, said at the June 18 press conference, one should not treat the European Court decision from point of view of victory or defeat. According to him, the goal of any judgment and decision is to bring the RA legislation and its use in line with the European Court standards.

According to G. Kostanian, the opinion that A1+ was not given a license of broadcasting by political motives was not confirmed during the examination in the European Court. At the same time, according to the Deputy Minister, European Court's decision mentions that the National Commission of Television and Radio did not clearly present the reasons of rejecting the license.

G. Kostanian said that the lawsuit introduced by A1+ to the European Court demanded material compensation of 1m 350 thousand USD and non-material compensation and compensation of judicial expenditures of 50 thousand USD. However, by European Court's decision, the Armenian government is to pay 20 thousand euros to A1+ as a compensation of moral damage and 10 thousand euros for judicial expenditures. At that, 10 thousand euros is envisaged for giving it to the London juridical organization. It was mentioned that the European Court decision, according to the Convention, comes in force three months after the publication, and within three months the RA government is obliged to make the payment.

34. HENCEFORTH ALL EDUCATIONAL EXPENSES OF ARMENIAN STUDENTS AT BEST FOREIGN UNIVERSITIES TO BE COVERED BY ARMENIAN GOVERNMENT [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/18/08]

Henceforth the Armenian government will cover all educational expenses of Armenian students studying at best foreign universities, the prime minister Tigran Sargsian stated at the June 17 meeting with graduates of the Armenian State University of Economics (ASUE).

In his words, the government must create such conditions for educated young people that they can receive positions in Armenia. He said that "it is everybody's wish that ASUE would become one of the best universities in the world, and it depends both on the teaching staff and students," he stated.

According to the rector of the ASUE Yuri Suvarian, 1,924 students are graduating from the university this year, 927 of whom have completed a 5-year course, while the rest have received bachelor's degrees and 500 of them are going to apply for admission to the master's programs at ASUE.



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35. ARMENIA REGAINS ITS IMAGE OF SAFE TOURIST DESTINATION [ARMENPRESS, 06/19/08]

Head of an economy ministry department in charge of tourism issues, said on June 18 that the negative repercussions of the March 1-2 events in Yerevan on the number of foreigners visiting Armenia are fading gradually away.

Mekhakh Apresian, head of the department, said to a news conference that the negative effect of the events lasted for about 45 days, 'fortunately, less than we predicted.'

According to him, 83,000 foreign tourists visited Armenia in the first quarter of the year, 15 percent up from a year before. He said forecast are that their overall number will grow by yearend by 20 percent.

Along with this the geography of foreigners visiting Armenia is expanding too, but still the majority are Diaspora Armenians from Russia, Georgia, USA, France and other countries.

An average foreign tourist spends during a week or two stay here from \$700 to \$1000. Last year the sector earned a total of \$400 million in profits, up from \$299 in 2006.

36. FIRST BIO TOILETS INSTALLED IN YEREVAN [ARMENPRESS, 06/19/08]

Some 21 blue colored bio toilets have been installed in different locations throughout Yerevan in the last two weeks.

Fifty more such toilets will be installed later. Gagik Khachatryan, head of Yerevan municipality department in charge of public utilities, said to Armenpress that the toilets were manufactured in Russia according to European standards. Their import and installment is handled by Sekash Ltd.

Gagik Khachatryan said also seven stationary toilets will be built soon in Yerevan and their number will gradually increase.

37. UNEMPLOYMENT RATE DROPS 12 PERCENT FROM A YEAR BEFORE [ARMENPRESS, 06/19/08]

Some 91,600 Armenians were seeking jobs as of June 1. According to Labor and Social Affairs Ministry's state employment service, the unemployment rate dropped 12.3 percent (11,100 people) from a year before.

The state employment service said 83.4 percent or 76,400 people were registered as jobless. Women continued to make the bulk of jobless people, making 74.8 percent of all registered unemployed.

The share of unemployed people aged 16-30 was almost 20 percent (18,146 people). Almost 10,000 of them were first-time job seekers. The official unemployment rate dropped from the start of the year 0.3 percent to 6.4 percent.

38. PRESIDENT SERZH SARKISIAN MEETS WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF AYB CLUB AND EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION [ARMENPRESS, 06/19/08]

President Serzh Sarkisian met today with representatives of Ayb club and educational foundation.

The presidential press service told Armenpress that representatives of Ayb told the president about their activity, which is aimed mainly at educational reforms, creation of an exemplary educational environment and helping gifted children.

Speaking about their future plans, they presented Ayb Educational Juncture, which, if realized, will become the first school campus in Armenia with all facilities-school, church, gyms, workshops, dormitory and so on.

Saying that the government had allocated a land plot for implementation of this project, the representatives said they would welcome also private sector's assistance.

The president guaranteed the government's involvement and support for the project saying although the idea seems kind of utopian now, he nevertheless believes strongly that it will succeed.

Serzh Sarkisian said also he welcomes all initiatives aimed at raising the level of public education and society's consolidation.

By agreeing that Armenia has limited natural resources the participants of the meeting said that Armenia's mayor resource is its intellect which should be developed to maximum. As a results instead of physical values Armenia will give the world ideas.



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39. GOVERNMENT SESSION APPROVES PRIMARY HEALTH CARE STRATEGY FOR 2008-2013 [ARMENPRESS, 06/19/08]

The government session chaired by Prime Minister Tigran Sarkisian approved today the national strategy of primary health care designed for 2008-2013 and a plan of actions to carry it out. The strategy calls for improvement of primary health care services.

The government also decided to raise by 60 percent the average retirement pensions of firefighters and members of their families. To that end it decided to release 137 million Drams from its reserve fund to Labor and Social Affairs Ministry's socials security service for payment of recalculated pensions and one-time payments. The decision enters into force on July 1.

The government also decided to release 4.8 million drams from its reserve fund to Syunik governor's office and 3. 4 million drams to Gegharkunik governor's office for restoration of damages sustained to school buildings in Goris and Tsovasar by a strong wind on March 21-22.

40. "JUDGEMENT OF EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS ON "A1+" CASE CAN HAVE SOBERING EFFECT ON AUTHORITIES OF ARMENIA," YEREVAN PRESS CLUB DECLARES [NOYAN TAPAN, 06/19/08]

According to the judgment the European Court of Human Rights published on June 17, an interference with the right of the TV company to freely impart information and ideas, as enshrined by Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, was made.

Thus, as is mentioned in the June 18 statement of the Yerevan Press Club with regard to the judgement of the European Court of Human Rights, the failure to grant a broadcast license to the Deltex LLC ("A1+" TV company), taking part in numerous competitions since 2002, is thus recognized to be a violation of international commitments by Armenia.

In this regard the authors of the statement urge the competent bodies of Armenia not to confine to the monetary compensation, stipulated by the ruling of the European Court, but to adopt, in accordance with the legislation of the country, prompt measures to enable the TV company to come back on air as soon as possible. "Only the acknowledgment by the Armenian authorities of the injustice that was made with regard to "A1+" and the practical steps aimed at its elimination can be a sign of our state's respect towards democratic values and international legal norms," is mentioned in the statement.

According to the Yerevan Press Club, the ruling of the European Court was an obvious proof of the incomppliance of the RA broadcasting legislation with the standards of the Council of Europe, which was repeatedly stated by the Club over the past years. Taking into account the recommendations of Resolution 1609 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe of April 17, 2008, the demands of the journalistic community of the country, as well as the circumstance that already this year new broadcast licensing competitions will be announced, Yerevan Press Club calls on the RA National Assembly to immediately take up the reformation of the RA Law "On Television and Radio", adjacent laws and normative acts.

"We hope that the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights on the "A1+" case will have a sobering effect on Armenian authorities, will help them realize that it is impossible to live in a civilized community and ignore its norms, endangering the international reputation of the country and its people," is said in the statement of Yerevan Press Club.

41. HIGHER COUNCIL COMPOSITION ESTABLISHED [ARMENPRESS, 06/20/08]

The Higher Council for Introduction of New Revenues Administration Culture, set up by Prime Minister Tigran Sarkisian's decision for discussion and coordination of tax reforms and tax administration improvement comprises economy minister Nerses Yeritsian, chief advisor to the president on economic issues Vahram Nersisiantz, chief of the government affiliated state taxation service Vahram Barseghian, chief of the government affiliated state customs committee Gagik Khachatryan, first deputy chief of the state taxation service A. Chilingarian and deputy chief of the state customs committee A. Shaboyan.

The government press office told Armenpress that the Higher Council is chaired by Prime Minister Tigran Sarkisian.



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42. FIVE NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS FROM GEORGIA, AZERBAIJAN AND ARMENIA ESTABLISH SOUTH CAUCASIAN CENTER [ARMENPRESS, 06/20/08]

Five non-governmental organizations from Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia signed early in June an agreement for creation of South Caucasian Center.

Georgy Vanian, head of the Caucasian Center for Peaceful Initiatives, which signed the agreement, told Armenpress that the South Caucasian Center will organize regular discussions on issues of concern for all three republics.

"Our goal is to make the society a participant in discussions over issues which should be solved by combined efforts," he said.

He said the discussions will focus on human rights and freedoms, democratic processes and gender issues. Representatives of these organizations will meet in early July to specify their short-term projects.

The South Caucasian Center comprises Armenia's Caucasian Center for Peaceful Initiatives, the Women Union for Civil Society from Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijani National Center for Helsinki Civil Assembly, the International Georgian Association of Handicapped Women and the Organization of People Sentenced for Defense of Human Rights.

43. 1,100 FOREIGNERS SEEK REFUGE AND ASYLUM IN ARMENIA IN LAST 6 MONTHS [ARMENPRESS, 06/20/08]

Speaking at a news conference today dedicated to International Refugee Day, marked on June 20, Gagik Yeghanyan, chief of the Armenian refugee and migration agency of the Territorial Administration Ministry said some 1,100 foreign citizens applied to Armenian authorities in the last six months to seek refugee and temporary asylum status.

He said they are mainly from Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, including ethnic Arabs, Turkey, Cuba and other countries.

Gagik Yeghanyan said Armenia has all tools to ensure their protection. There is a relevant legislation and government agencies assigned to consider their applications and offer solutions.

He said there is no official statistics about the number of Armenians emigrating to other countries because people go abroad without knowing how long they may stay there. He added that according to some estimates, some 900,000-1 million Armenians leave the country since 1992. The majority's destination was Russia and other former Soviet republics.

He said a new website was developed at www.sma.am/migrant for Armenians abroad to seek information and help on how to cope with difficult situations they frequently get in.

He said also some 500 cottages and houses have been built for Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan by UNHCR and other international organizations and foreign governments.

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Established in 1906, AGBU (www.agbu.org) is the world's largest non-profit Armenian organization. Headquartered in New York City with an annual budget of \$36 million, AGBU preserves and promotes the Armenian identity and heritage through educational, cultural and humanitarian programs, annually touching the lives of some 400,000 Armenians on six continents.