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Korean President visits Azerbaijan

On May 10, on the invitation of President Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Korea Roh Moo-hyun paid a three day official visit to Azerbaijan. On May 11, after the official welcoming ceremony, President I. Aliyev and Korea's President R. Moo-hyun held a private meeting. Right after the one-on-one meeting, the delegations headed by the Presidents held a summit meeting. The discussions focused on political, economic and cultural relations between Azerbaijan and Korea. The Presidents agreed to promote substantial cooperation between the two nations, especially in the fields of information-technology, construction, as well as energy and resources. President I. Aliyev emphasized that the relations between the two countries will develop more speedily after the meeting. "Azerbaijan attaches great importance to bilateral relations. A strong economic foundation is needed for strong political relations," I. Aliyev said. President R. Moo-hyun said there is great potential of the relations between the two countries. "Korea and Azerbaijan have greater cooperation opportunities than we expected. During the talks, I was reassured that Azerbaijan will have bright future," Korean President underlined.

Following this, Azerbaijan's State Oil Company and Korea's Oil Company signed a memorandum of mutual understanding (MOU) to conduct a joint petroleum development project in the Caspian Sea. Azerbaijan's Communication and Information Technologies Ministry and Korea's Information and Telecommunication Ministry signed a memorandum of mutual understanding, the Emergencies Ministry and Korea's Building and Transport Ministry also signed a MOU. Besides, the Azerbaijani and Korean governments signed treaties on cultural cooperation, as well as treaties on air service. The two presidents signed a joint declaration on principles of cooperation and the relations between the two countries.

On May 12, President Roh Moo-hyun also met with Speaker of Azerbaijani Parliament (Milli Majlis) Ogtay Asadov.

Foreign Minister meets his Korean counterpart

On May 11, Foreign Minister E. Mammadyarov met with South Korea's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Pan Ki-mun. The Ministers expressed confidence for successful results of the negotiations between the Presidents of two countries and intensification of bilateral relations. The visit of the Korean President will give an impetus to the expansion of bilateral ties, Azerbaijan's FM underlined. Pan Ki-mun congratulated his Azerbaijani counterpart on Azerbaijan's election as a member to the UN Human Rights Council, stressed the necessity of coordination of activity within the UN structures. He marked the importance of bilateral cooperation in the energy, transport, construction, medicine, technology and other fields. During the meeting, reforms within the United Nations, improvement of the organization's structures and other issues of mutual concern were discussed.

FM meets OSCE chairman-in-office

On May 11, Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov met with special envoy of the OSCE chairman-in-office Pierre Chevalier to discuss Azerbaijan-OSCE cooperation, negotiation processes on Armenia-Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, socio-political reforms in the country, large-scale energy projects in the region and other issues. Speaking of Armenia-Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the E. Mammadyarov noted that the trade turnover between the two countries is below the potential, adding that section 907 of the Freedom Support Act hampers the progress of the relationship. Asked by the delegation members, the Minister spoke of the economic achievements in Azerbaijan, Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, OSCE Mink Group's activity and called for the resolution of the conflict based on international law and the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. The Minister answered the visitor's questions concerning major projects such as Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline and Kars-Akhalkalaki-Baku railway. The sides also shared their views on a number of issues of mutual concern.

President received “Best Governed Muslim State” award

On May 8, President Ilham Aliyev met with the delegation of the Pakistan Observer led by Senator S.M. Zafar. Editor of the paper Faisla Zahid Malik was also among the delegates. S.M. Zafar said that the President has been awarded with this prize for his contributions to great achievements in national development, modernization of country's economy, state management, education, as well as the development of human resources. The President expressed his gratitude for the award. He underlined that, Pakistan is one of the closest allies of Azerbaijan and the two countries enjoy high level of bilateral relations. President highly appreciated Pakistan's full support for Azerbaijan's fair position regarding Armenian's aggression against Azerbaijan.

FM meets a delegation from Council of Europe

On May 8, Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov met with a delegation led by Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner Thomas Hammerberg. Foreign Minister and the guest stressed the importance of Ombudsman institution for Azerbaijan. T. Hammerberg said that he will visit both Azerbaijan and Armenia again to become familiar with the problems of human rights in these countries. Drawing attention to the fact that Armenia is an aggressor and has occupied Azerbaijan's land, the Minister said that Azerbaijan and Armenia shouldn't be treated equally in human rights sphere. E. Mammadyarov noted that about one million Azerbaijanis have become refugees and IDPs as a result of Armenian aggression and this fact should not be forgotten. T. Hammerberg stated that as a commissioner, he not only gives recommendations to governments on human rights but also investigates violation of human rights in armed conflicts.

President receives Norwegian delegation

On May 8, President I. Aliyev met with a Norwegian delegation headed by the State Secretary of this country Kjetil Skogrand. The President expressed his satisfaction with the successful development of Azerbaijan-Norway relations and particularly stressed the active participation of Norway's Statoil Company in Azerbaijan's energy sector. President I. Aliyev expressed hope for further strengthening of bilateral links between the two countries. K. Skogrand marked the rapid development of economy in Azerbaijan and pointed at the some common grounds between Norway and Azerbaijan stressing that both countries play an important role in the European energy system. Speaking of the Norwegian companies functioning in Azerbaijan, K. Skogrand said that they make important contributions to all-round development of bilateral relations.

The President chairs the Cabinet sitting

On May 8, President I. Aliyev presided the Cabinet's sitting dedicated to the economic results of the first quarter of 2006. The President appraised the general socio-economic development of the country in the first months of 2006. President I. Aliyev said that over the first quarter of 2006 the volume of GDP in Azerbaijan grew 39%, industrial production 47%, amount of average monthly wage 20%, income of population 18 % and average monthly pensions 19%. The rapid economic development of Azerbaijan is highly assessed by international financial structures, the President added. Azerbaijan's dynamic development positively influences the processes in the region and strengthens the position of the country. President I. Aliyev noted the necessity for strengthening the control over inflation, acceleration of the work over launching a program on the development of industrial potential, revival of activities of the state investment company and the conduct of measures stimulating the development of non-oil sector.

ADB allots \$179 mln. Credit

On May 10, Asian Development Bank (ADB) loaned \$179 mln. to Azerbaijan in accordance with the Country strategy and program update. The fund will cover the reconstruction of roads, creation of social infrastructure for IDPs and provincial cities. ADB is also expected to allot another \$2 mln. for national poverty reduction strategy paper.

Azerbaijan takes a seat in the new Human Rights Council of the UN

On May 10, the United Nations elected 44 of the initial 47 members of its new Human Rights Council in a first round of voting. After the second round of voting, Azerbaijan also took a seat in the new Council.